

Marlinspike Seamanship

By Ted Walsh

Junk and Rope Mats

Junk: ORIGIN late Middle English (denoting an old or inferior rope): of unknown origin.

All of us have to replace lines from time to time. One of the byproducts of this evolution is a coil of rope that is no longer safe to use for its originally intended purpose, but which has usually attained a softness and worn quality that is nice to the touch, aesthetically pleasing to the eye, and too nice to throw out. Traditionally, sailors of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries called this spent rope “junk”, and they put it to work.



Worn, soft, old rope that is no longer structurally sound is the very best material for making rope mats.

The illustrations below are for making a “thump-mat”. A thump-mat is placed around a ring bolt or eye in the deck where a block is hanked and where that block has the potential to “thump” on the deck causing wear to both deck and block. It is a pretty simple item to make and will use up some of that old junk and give it a second life protecting deck and block.

There are a number of ways to tie this knot; you can go on the internet and find videos that might help you understand the process, but here are a few tricks to make the mat easier to tie.

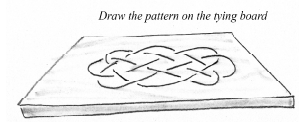
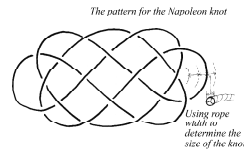
The mat described below is an oblong shape based on a knot known as a Napoleon, and is triple passed, or “three strands”.

What you will need:

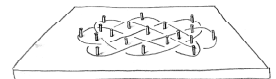
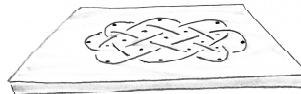
- A flat board
- The actual width of the line you are using.
- Some small pegs approximately 2” long and 1/8” to 1/4” thick. (You can use pieces of dowel or whittle pegs out of sticks.)

Tip #1. Make a tying board. Take a scrap piece of wood and diagram out the knot as I have here. This will not only ensure that the knot is tied and dressed correctly, but if you need two matching mats, say one for a starboard block and one for a port, they will be the same size and match. As you diagram out the board you will need to decide whether you are tying a two strand,

three strand, or four strand knot. The diagram here is for a three strand.



Tip #2. Drill holes for the pegs and place them in your tying board.



Tip #3. Most books and videos will start the Napoleon knot in the center and work out with both ends. It is easier to teach the knot that way if you are not using a board.

What I have found is that the whole knot is easier to tie if you start at one end of the line and lay out as much of the knot as possible by laying rope bight on top of rope bight on a board. The longer you can put off the process of pulling the bulk of the rope under bights in the knot, the less tangled things get. Therefore, these illustrations show a method that starts at one end of the rope and lays out 2/3rds of the knot before you have to pass the working end under any part of the knot (see #2).

As you start to tie the mat follow the diagram on the board going around the pegs until you have completed following the diagram one full time around (see #3).

Start your second time around following the path of the first and parallel to it (see #4).

By the time you start the third time around, you will need to pull out the pegs, from here on in they are just going to get in the way.

Dress the finished knot. Make sure the bights are even and take up any slack by opening up the middle of the mat so that it can pass over the ring-bolt or deck eye.

There you have it!!

