



QUARTERMASTER

Lesson One: Introduction and Cordage 1

Introduction

Welcome! Over the next 13 weeks, we will learn about many aspects that as a Quartermaster you need to have knowledge and understanding in. Each week, we will discuss a particular topic, think about one or two things relating to the topic and do a practical exercise – which may be a multiple choice test, or something more complex.

The plan for the course is listed below:

April	25	Cordage 1	Hanking, coiling and Safety
May	2	Cordage 2 / Record Keeping	Whipping and Splicing care of ropes; record keeping
	9	No Lesson	
	16	Axe, Saw, Knife	Knowledge and care, safety rules for usage
	23	Balanced Menu	What is a balanced menu; food hygiene and storage
	30	No Lesson	
June	6	Fuel	Types, storage, care, handling
	13	Specialist Equipment	Looking after and maintaining
	20	First Aid Kits	
	27	Tents	Care, storage
July	4	Repairs	Simple Emergency repairs
	11	Cooking Equipment	Care and Cleaning

You may find that one or two of the Scout evenings will also deal with some of these lessons also and this will give you further knowledge in being a Quartermaster.

At the end of the course, in order to get the badge you will need to:

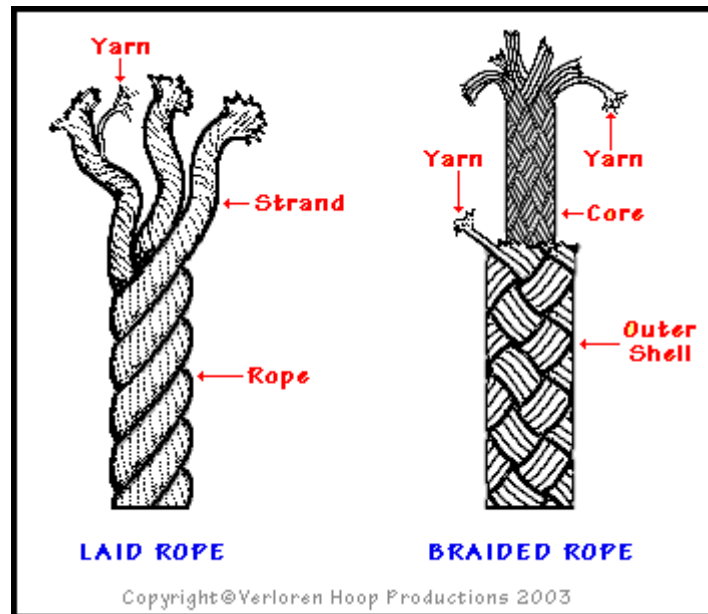
1. Hand in your Equipment Inventory Record Card
2. Return a completed balanced weekend menu
3. Demonstrate a simple whipping on some rope
4. Obtain your Knife certificate
5. Successfully complete an undertaking as Quartermaster at a Scout camp.

But don't worry about that now; each item will be explained to you so you can complete the exercise without too much trouble.

Cordage – 1

Cordage means any form of rope – from whipping twine to thick, heavy rope.

Types of Rope



Laid rope is built up from strands twisted ("laid") together. It's relatively inexpensive, widely available, simple to splice, and easy to inspect. Twisting the rope "against the lay" opens the strands up for close examination. This is the type of rope we would most likely use for pioneering use.

Braided rope — the best is braid-and-core, or "kernmantel" — is more complex than laid rope. It's more expensive, too. It's also harder to splice, and it's usually less stretchy. You can't inspect the inside fibres without cutting the rope, either, but at least it resists tangling better than laid rope. That's why it's frequently used in throw bags and climbing ropes.

Laid or braided, a rope is only as good as the stuff it's made from. Nylon, polyester, and polypropylene (polypro) are the usual choices, though if price is no object there are other options including Kevlar. Nylon is inexpensive, strong, and stretchy, but the sun's rays will weaken it over time. Diameter for diameter, polyester is usually a little bit less strong and a lot less stretchy, but it holds up better in the heat of the sun. Polypro has a Jekyll and Hyde personality. Cheap hollow-braid polypro is weak, nasty to handle, and almost impossible to tie, but good polypro kernmantel is supple and strong. Polypro also floats. For that reason alone, it's ideal for rescue lines.

Rope Storage

No one wants to spend hours untangling ropes before they can use them – they just want to grab a rope and go. That's why it is so important to store ropes correctly (as well as the fact that a well-stored rope will last longer).

So what options are there?

Probably the simplest is to “hank” the rope. Folding the rope into quarters and tying a simple “overhand” or “thumb” in the centre is quick and simple. However, whilst this is the easiest option, there are Scouts who will just fold the rope in half and tie a knot – which still leaves enough rope flapping about to get tangled with others.

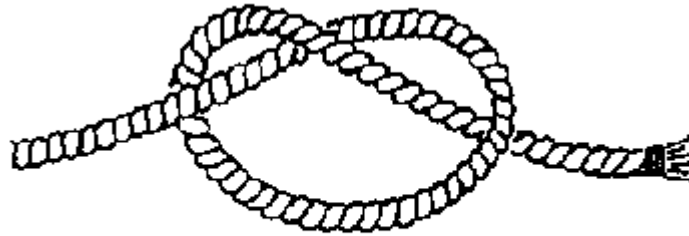
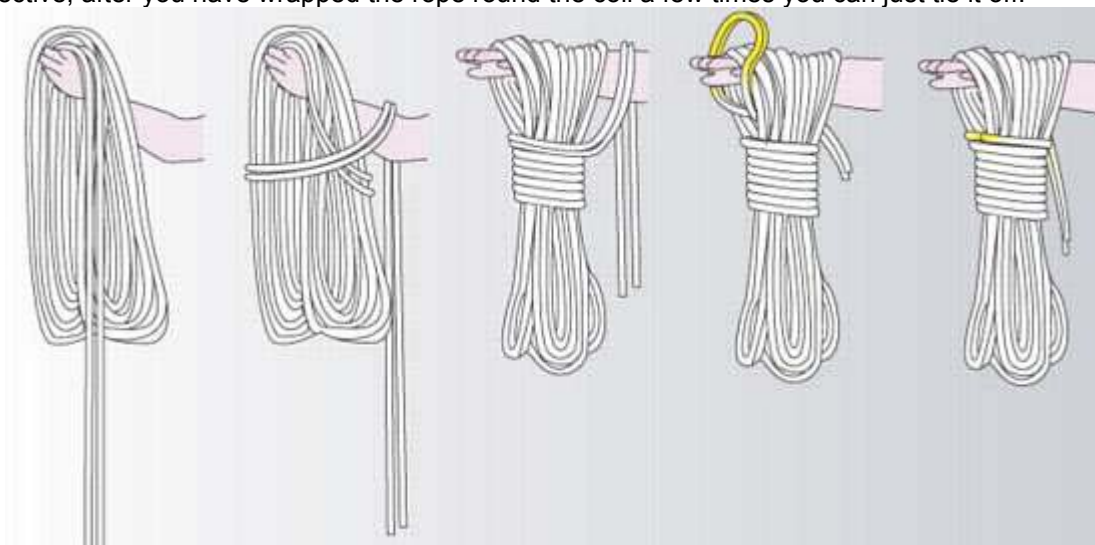


Fig. 5
Overhand Knot

A better approach (especially for longer lengths of rope) is to make use of coiling up the rope. Wrapping the rope around the arm may seem a good way of keeping the coils the same length, but it does sometime mean that if a rope is twisted the whole thing coils up when you take your arm out. The two images on the diagram below shows a coiled rope. The last two images shows one method of tying off to hold the coils in place.



Another method is known as the “Butterfly coil”. Whilst the whole process (including slipping the loop over the top) is quite effective, after you have wrapped the rope round the coil a few times you can just tie it off.



If you are on a ship, you may just be asked to coil the rope. Whilst this is a good way to let the rope dry (all the rope is flat, without kinks or any stresses) it only works when you know that the surface is clean of grit and dirt – in other words it’s rubbish at camp.



The other thing with this approach that it can take ages to get the kinks out of the rope and make it look neat and tidy!

Rope Safety

It just lies there, right? Well yes, but if a rope is looked after it can save your life (similarly, a badly looked after rope can cause the opposite). There are a few simple things to think about:

1. What rope do I need?

For climbing, you should typically make use of a modern, nylon, specialist climbing rope. These ropes have a small element of “bounce” in them – if you fall off the wall or cliff, you need the springiness in the rope to help cushion the sudden stop (but it will still seem sudden!). Without the spring, the rope absorbs a sudden pull on its fibres – and different ropes have different “breaking strains”. If you use the wrong rope here, it could break if you need to use it.

For pioneering however, you can use a more traditional rope. This is because the rope is never fully under strain when used to lash poles together (although for projects that do require this, such as ballista’s and other projectile throwing exercises, you may need different types of rope). That said, you need to consider the thickness of the rope – the thicker the rope the more threads, the stronger it is.

For work on guy lines, you can get away with a much thinner rope – partly because it will be under less strain (in the main) but also because you need to loop it round pegs – a heavy gauge rope would not be flexible enough.

For uses such as whipping you would obviously use a much thinner rope – more like string.

2. Where have I kept the rope?

If your life depends on rope, you want to make sure that it is well looked after. Rope that is just “dumped” on sand or mud will get grit in it, and that grit will slowly wear away at the fibres in the rope. This is why things like climbing ropes should be replaced reasonably frequently – even if the rope has been looked after, it is a safety item and should be treated as such.

If ropes do get wet, they should be allowed to dry naturally (rather than putting them on the fire!) If kept wet, they will eventually rot and break and will need to be replaced – so by looking after them they last longer (and the heavier weighted ropes, for things such as aerial runways, are not cheap to replace).

Ropes, suitably tied up, should either be hung on hooks, or kept (hanked up) in boxes. If they are required quickly (such on a sailing yacht), they may be coiled flat on the deck.

3. Is it safe to use?

Never an easy question to answer from just looking at the rope. If life does not depend on it – for example to make a plate rack pioneering project – then it probably is; if the rope looks worn, old and generally damaged – and life does depend on it – then you may need to think about whether YOU (as Quartermaster) – really want to let that item out of the stores; you may also want to think about how you will dispose / repair that item.

Remember – as Quartermaster it will be your responsibility to ensure that any equipment going into - and out of - “your” kit store is checked so that the next person isn’t using something potentially dangerous.

Exercise

A simple exercise to start the course for you. Find a piece of rope – about 1 metre in length and not too thick – and hank it up either as a simple thumb knot, or using one of the other techniques.