

# Illustrated History of BSA Square Knot Evolution

George Crowl

## Part 3 – General Information

There are some general observations about BSA square knots. The design has remained remarkably stable over about 60 years. There are two major varieties of knots, what I call normal and symmetrical. Normal knots are slightly different at the two ends, with the left end (as observed) tilting up and the right end slanting slightly down. Symmetrical knots are symmetrical from the center up and down, with the inner side of the rope longer than the outer side of the rope. The Silver Award II was the first symmetrical knot, and for many years the only one. Additional symmetrical knots are the Tiger Coach/DL Award, the Professional Training Award, and Silver Award III. All except the Professional Training Award have also been produced in normal style, usually recently. I have been unable to ascertain a pattern of use for these two varieties. In addition, some knots have a very flattened, run together look, often with a wide border of fabric around the edges. I call these computer-produced.



Normal, Symmetrical, Computer



William D. Boyce New Unit Organizer Award

In 2005, a new design was introduced with the **William D. Boyce New Unit Organizer Award**. This new design is apparently based on the long-standing illustrations of the square knot that have been used in the various insignia manuals for many years. However, it is unique to the early editions of the Boyce award at this time. The Boyce award knot has returned to the standard format.



Rough Twill

Fabric has gone through three primary varieties. First, beginning in 1946, is rough twill, which matches the rough cotton twill of the shirts of the time. These lasted until 1965, when the wash and wear uniform was introduced. Then fabric changed to fine twill. Rough twill has about 22 lines per inch, fine twill has about 40 lines per inch. An examination of the green, white and blue knots produced beginning in 1966 shows fine twill. In about 1983, shortly after the shirt was changed to tan in 1979-80, the fabric color was changed, and so was the fabric itself, to a plain weave, square with the knot.<sup>54</sup> Since the mid-90s both plain weave and a different variety of fine twill have been issued, with no discernable pattern.



Fine Twill Plain Dark Border Plain Light Border

Plain (no) Backing



Gauze Backing



Plastic Backing

There are at least seven different kinds of backs, and some varieties of backs are harder to find than others. Some of my oldest knots have no backing of any kind, just thread sewn into cloth. The first stiffener was gauze backing, threads perhaps a millimeter apart. According to Reis, this occurred about 1950. Then knots were backed with plastic, which helped them keep their shape. Some of the plastic was designed to iron on, but that seldom worked satisfactorily. It appears that several clear and white plastics were used at various times. Sometimes the coating was thin, sometimes thick enough to fill in and make a flat back. There is also a variety that has both gauze and plastic backing. In 2002, new plastic and gauze-plastic backings including the BSA logo were introduced, probably to prevent counterfeiting. There are also white plastic backs, both old style and a new, opaque, logo style. Both white backs are identified as white plastic.



**Gauze-Plastic Backing, Logo Backing, Logo Gauze Backing**



**White Plastic Logo White 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**



Four Background Colors

From 1966 to 1979 several knots were produced in four background colors: khaki, green, blue and white. The knots were Silver Beaver, Eagle, Quartermaster (except green), Scouter's Key, and Scouter's Training Award. The background on these knots did not normally have meaning. However, there are seven situations where the background color does have meaning. They are:

1) Red knot—khaki/tan background is the Honor Medal, white background is the Heroism Award, on yellow is the Philmont Training Center Master Track.



**Honor Medal Heroism Award PTC Master Track**

2) Blue and yellow knot—dark blue on khaki/tan is the Medal of Merit, lighter blue on blue is the Cub Scouter Award (old Den Leader Coach Training Award).



**Medal of Merit Cub Scouter Award**

3) White knot—on red is the OA Distinguished Service Award, on tan is the old Scoutmaster/Advisor Award of Merit, on navy blue is the old Quartermaster.



**OA DSA                      Scoutmaster AofM                      Quartermaster**

4) Silver knot—on red/white/blue is Silver Award II, on green/white is Silver Award III, on red with silver border is Distinguished Commissioner, on red with gold border is Doctor of Commissioner Science, on green/red/blue is Venturing Leadership Award.



Silver Award II



Dr Commissioner Science



**Silver Award III                      Distinguished Commissioner                      Venturing Leadership Award**



Spurgeon



Commissioner Award for Excellence in Unit Service

5) Gold knot—on dark green or black background with gold border is Spurgeon Award, on blue background with blue border is Den Leader Training Award/[Den Leader Award](#), on yellow background with yellow border is old Webelos Den Leader Award, on purple with gold border is Community Organization Award, and on red with gold border is the Commissioner Award for Excellence in Unit Service.



**Den Leader                      Webelos Den Leader                      Den Leader                      Community Organization**

6) Dark blue knot—on white or khaki is Quartermaster, on red and white is old George Meany Award.



**Quartermaster                      Quartermaster                      Meany**

7) Light blue knot—on yellow is old Cubmaster Award, on blue was old Den Leader Coach Award.



**Cubmaster                      Den Leader Coach**



In any organization as large and complex as the Boy Scouts of America, there are occasional errors or deviations from the standards. We know of ten “error knots.” The knots below (Silver Beaver, Arrow of Light, George Meany) show where colors are reversed. Shay Lelegren dates the Silver Beaver error prior to 1954 because it has no backing. The AOL and the Meany errors were in the 80s, we believe.



**Silver Beaver**

**Arrow of Light**

**Meany**



Speaker



NESA Life Member



Doctor of Commissioner  
Science



PTC Master Trainer

The next two knots were twice produced in error, so the second lot was released for distribution. In fact, there are already two varieties of the ;Scouting Vale La Pena! knot. These are reversed also. In 2007, the Pack Trainer knot below was prematurely released to Scout Shops, and recalled very quickly. Finally, in 2008, the first edition of the Speaker, NESA Life Member, Doctor of Commissioner Science and PTC Master Trainer knots were released oversize, as indicated by the images on the left. Since the NESA knot was supposed to replace the standard Eagle knot, it was brought to the attention of the Supply Service quickly, and they all were recalled before they got very wide distribution.



**Asian-American  
Spirit of Scouting**

**;Scouting Vale La Pena!  
Pack Trainer**

In addition, there are two knots where the initial design was changed or did not work out. The Quartermaster blue-on-blue (“Blue Square Knot on dark blue,” catalog number 5021) was replaced in 1954 with 5016B, the white knot on blue. The first Spurgeon knot did not fit the standard design. You can tell by comparing the Quartermaster next to it.



**Quartermaster**

**Spurgeon**

**CURRENT KNOTS and AWARDS:**

In this history, the current state of affairs may not be clear. So, below, I have prepared a complete list of the current and obsolete knots, as of [January 1, 2015](#). These are organized by heroism, distinguished service, achievement, religious, and training. The K-system designation is included. The most current issue is shown. [Note the gaps that are developing as knots are discontinued.](#) For more information, see our publication, *Varieties of Official Square Knots*, available by contacting me or at [www.Crowl.org/George](http://www.Crowl.org/George).



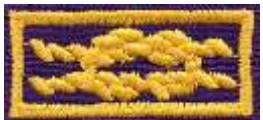
Honor Medal A01



Silver Buffalo B02



OA Distinguished Service B06



Community Organization B11



NESA Life Member C10



Hornaday C08



Adult Religious D02



Den Leader Tng Awd E10



Medal of Merit A03 Silver World B01



Silver Antelope B03 Silver Beaver B04 District Award of Merit B05



Whitney Young B09 James E. West B10



Asian American Scouting... Vale la Pena! Venturing Spirit of Scouting B12 Service Award B13 Leadership Award B14



Eagle Scout C01 Quartermaster C02 Arrow of Light C07



Silver Award #3 C09 NESA Life Mbr C10 Youth Religious D01

Summit Award



Scouter's Key E01 Training Award E02 Professional Tng E06



Distingshd Comr E13 Int'l Scouter E16 Boyce New-Unit E17



PTC Master Track E20 Unit Leader Award of Merit E21 BSA Alumni Award E22





Dr Comm Science E19



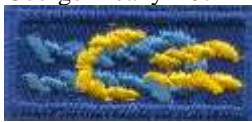
Commissioner Award of Excellence in Unit Service E23



Ace Award C03



George Meany B07



DLCTA E05



Cub Scouter E11



Pack Trainer E18



Heroism Medal A02

**AVAILABLE KNOT but NON-CURRENT AWARD**



Den Leader Awd E04

**NON-AVAILABLE KNOT and NON-CURRENT AWARD**



Ranger Award C04



Silver Award #1 C05



Silver Award #2 C06

(May be used for seven different awards.)



Spurgeon Award B08



Speaker B15



Skipper's Key

E03



Cubmaster E07



Den Leader Coach E08



Webelos DL

E09



SM Award of Merit E12



Seabadge E14



Tiger Den Leader

E15

(Note: The Skipper's Key is now a current award again, but the specified knot is the Scouter's Key green and white knot. Many of the 18 knots above are available through private issue suppliers for those who have earned them. See my monograph on Private Issue knots.)

The topics of experimental knots, authorized local knots and of "private issue" or "fake" knots are covered in a different paper, *Experimental, Locally Authorized, "Private Issue," Fake and Spoof Scouting Square Knots*.

If you are interested in specific varieties of all or a single series of knot over time, a monograph titled *Varieties of Official BSA Square Knots* is available. It covers all official knots from their first issue to the current issues with scans of each major variety. It is also available from the author.

I am indebted for help with sources to Nancy Cramer of Las Vegas, who took peer review to new heights. She provided me many additional references after she looked at an earlier version of this monograph. Gary Whitman has advised me on the rapidly changing authorized and discontinued knots. I hope this exposition has been of interest. As you can see, there are still some gaps to fill in. If you have information that would help, please contact me at [George@Crowl.org](mailto:George@Crowl.org) or 832-467-1998 or 16213 Congo Ln, Jersey Village, TX 77040-2011.

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