

For our first **#MakeItBetterMonday** we bring you... knitting! Why might we want to talk about knitting at Fort Mifflin? While knitting has a long household history, many knitting initiatives benefitted the military.



By the time the United States entered into World War I in 1917 a robust volunteer knitting effort already supported the “thousands of suffering, destitute women” in France. As soon as American families began sending their fathers and sons to the trenches the urgency of the project took on new meaning. In fact, the US military was unable to adequately outfit the soldiers for the conditions they would encounter in the trenches. The American Red Cross stepped in to organize knitters everywhere to join the war effort, producing much needed sweaters, hats, socks, mitts and woolen helmets to keep “Sammy” warm.

Over the course of U.S. involvement in the “War to End All Wars” the American Red Cross donated *over 24 million articles of clothing* for the soldiers. The War Council required that these donated items be accounted for “as though they were government property regularly supplied by the Quartermaster.”

Wool socks were of particular importance. The soldiers’ military-issued 1917 Trench Boots frequently ripped at the seams, allowing the cold and muddy conditions of trenches and long marches to reach the wearers’ feet. Dry feet helped the soldiers avoid trench foot and frostbite, so frequent sock changes were critical.

Knitters everywhere – and of all skill levels – joined the effort. Some novice knitters struggled to turn the heel (the point in the knitting where the leg becomes the sole of the sock connected to the arch by a gusset) so they began to knit heel-less tube socks. Occasionally skilled knitters would spend their knitting time re-working poorly constructed garments for comfort and improved wear. Regardless of any minor mistakes, soldiers always appreciated the time and attention evident in every stitch.

War time knitting was not a gender-specific activity! Children, college students, recuperating soldiers in their hospital beds and anyone with a few spare moments on their hands joined mothers, daughters, sisters and sweethearts in their knitting efforts. The Comforts Committee of the Navy League organized a 3-day knitting bee in Central Park (August, 1918) featuring contests for speed and agility and photographs of the event depict a number of well-to-do gentlemen busy with their knitting needles.





As the war marched into its final months, the Red Cross confronted the devastating 1918 flu pandemic. Knitters once again began to take up personal projects but many members of the Great War Wool Brigades were the first to reach for their needles and khaki yarn in December, 1941 as the US entered into World War II.

Most of the patterns supplies by the Red Cross or Navy League require only basic knitting skills, and the scarf (sometimes called a muffler) is a perfect first project! Are you new to knitting? There are many online resources to help you cast on and get started including https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_R1UDsNOMk and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSqL9urz_Xc to show you how to finish off your project.



Knit your way through history by creating a muffler or scarf www.hjsstudio.com/redscarf.html or practice in the round by stitching a helmet or wrist warmers.

Even more patterns are available here <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=iau.31858046092270&view=1up&seq=331> Enjoy checking out the rest of the July, 1917 Delineator, a women's monthly magazine that will give you a glimpse into day to day life over one hundred years ago!

**For this is no time to be idle
And sit with folded hands
Pick up your knitting wherever you're sitting
A sock soon grows under your hand*

Learn more by reading No Idle Hands: The Social History of American Knitting by Anne L. MacDonald and Knitting America by Susan M. Strawn.

#QuarantineLife #COVID19 #homeschool #creativity #history

*Final lines of a poem included in the Allies Special Aid knitting bag.