

## Abstract Background

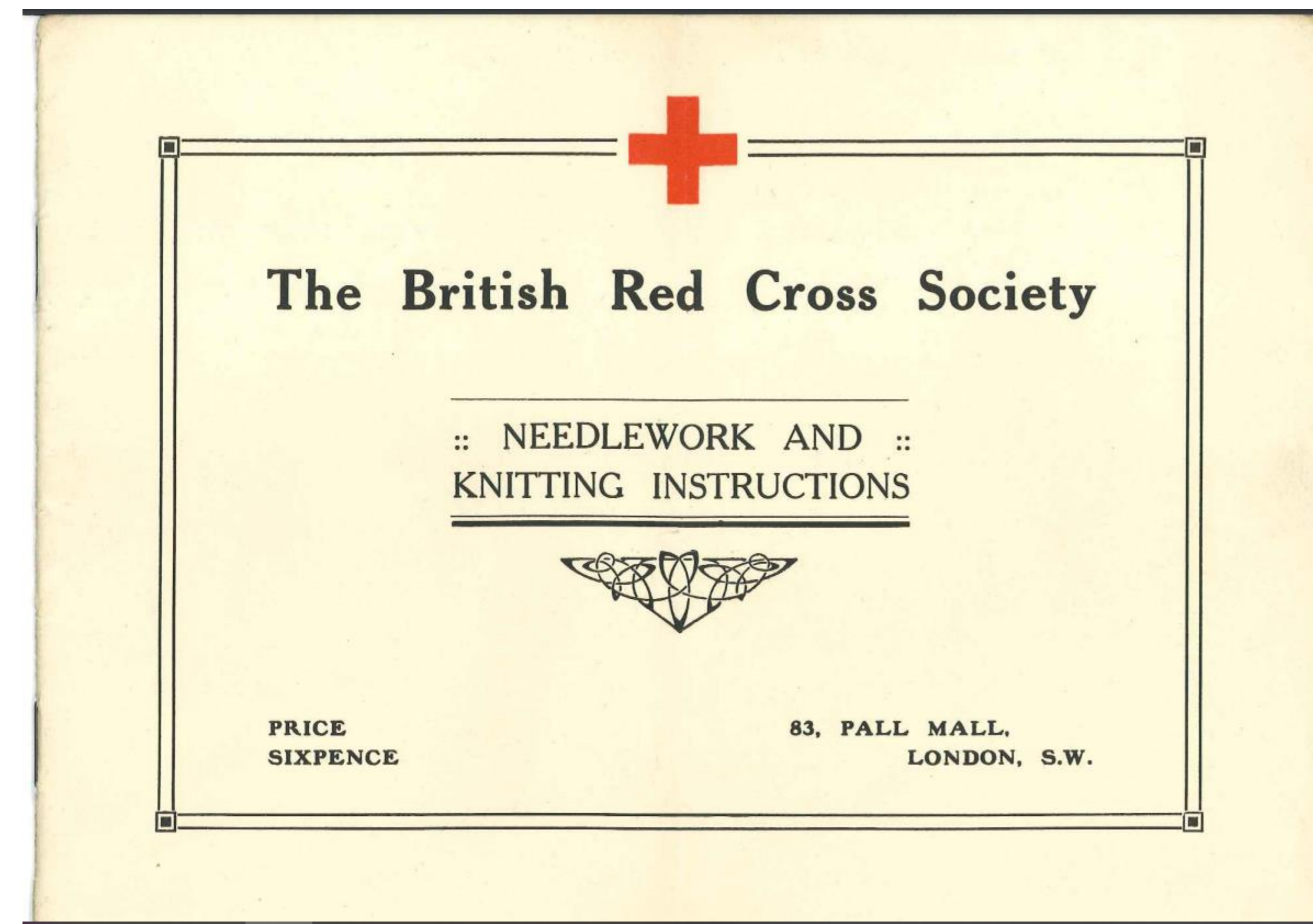
In the First World War in Europe, the wet and cold conditions in trenches caused a medical condition known as trench foot, and the Allies looked for solutions. One of the solutions was handmade socks. With thousands of soldiers in trenches, there was an urgent need to produce millions of pairs of socks. Committees were created to accomplish the task of creating those millions of socks. In 1914, Queen Mary's Needlework Guild was created, and even the Queen herself was known for picking up her needles in Buckingham Palace. Knitting was a great equalizer with no class boundaries, and those societies and committees created their own army to fight the Germans. The 'Knitting Army' greatly affected the men on the front lines, and letters home emphasized gratitude for the 'comforts' received.

## Research Question

What was the origin of the Kitchener stitch, and did it lead to increased knitting in the First World War? The Kitchener stitch is a grafting technique to seamlessly combine two edges of a sock to make a seamless sock, supposedly named after Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of War during the First World War. While no chain of evidence led to a reliable conclusion of the origin of the Kitchener stitch, the question of its origin did lead to the discovery that trench foot was more of a leading incentive for the mass amounts of knitting during the War.

## Methods

The first step was to look at the World War One Museums' collections to see if they had any letters or documents concerning trench foot or knitting while searching for scholarly articles about these topics. Inside the collections, several letters from Allied forces on the front lines showed the gratitude of the soldiers receiving socks and the awfulness of constant wet feet. The 'Knitting Army' emerged while looking at pattern booklets and propaganda material from the First World War era, especially ones from the Red Cross.



British Red Cross Society, *Needlework and Knitting Instructions* (London: Harrington, Jehning & Co., LTD, n.d.) n.p.

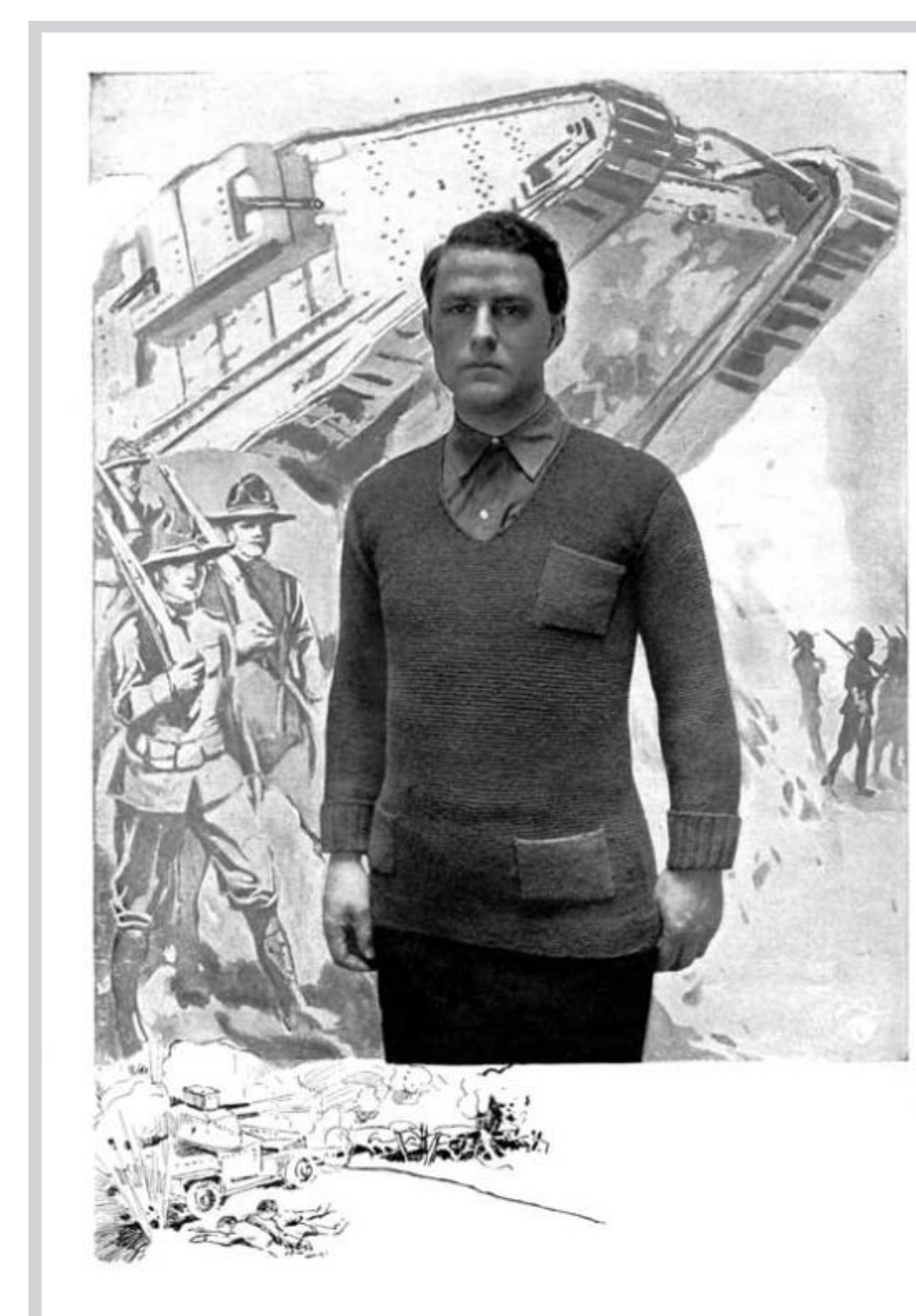


Wladyslaw T. Benda, "You can help—American Red Cross / W. T. Benda," United States, 1918, photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002708897>.

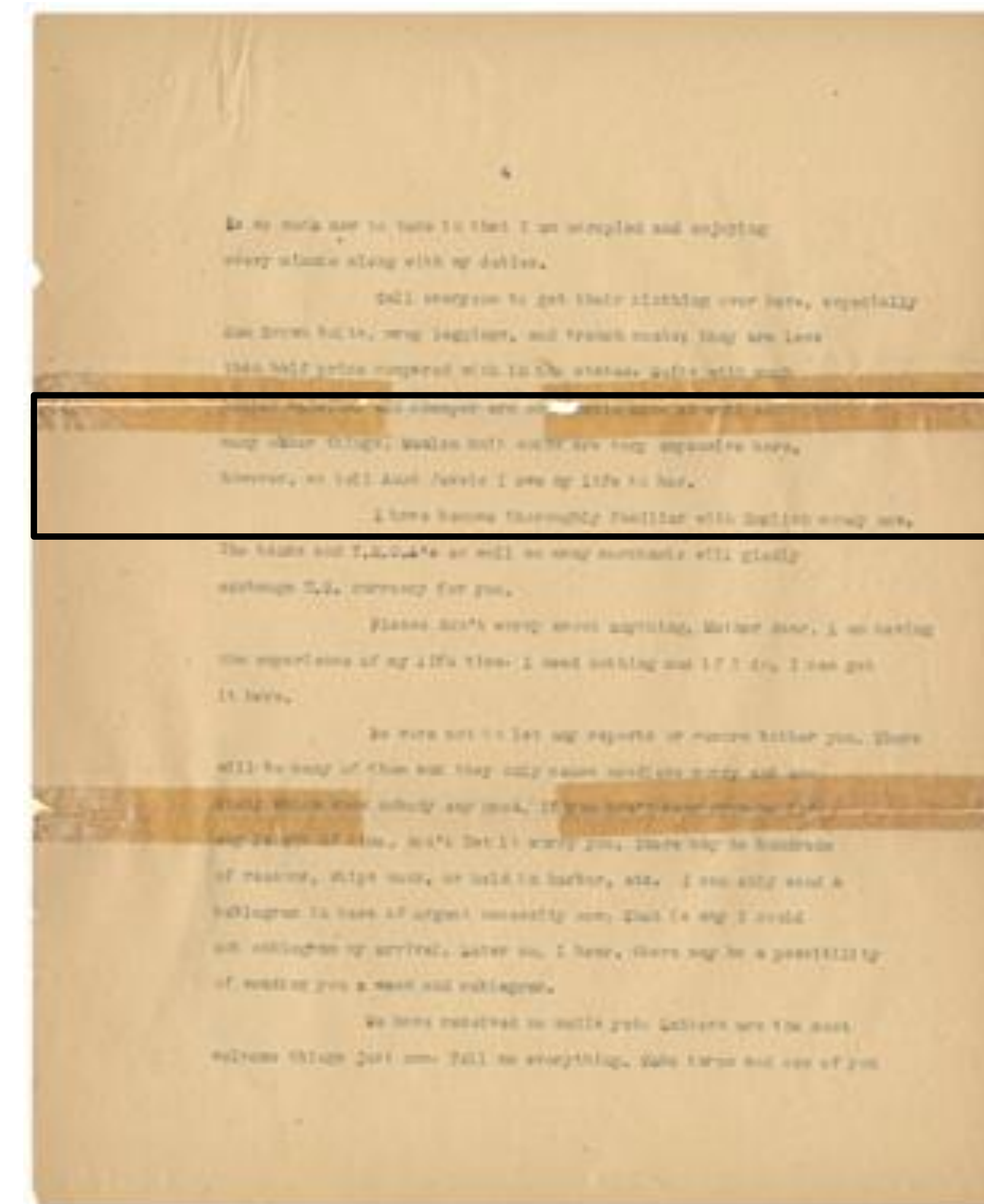
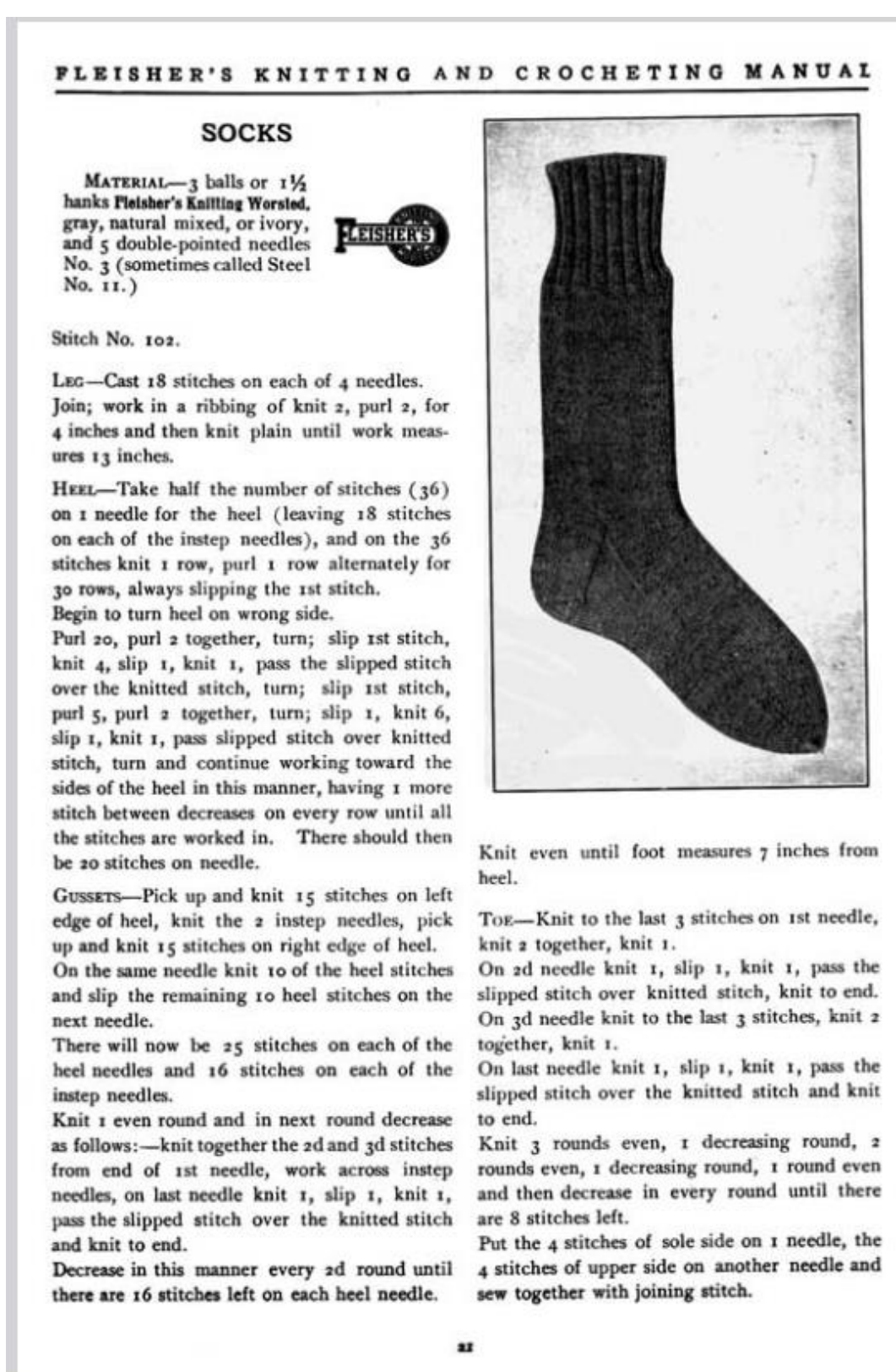


Guilts and committees rewarded medals to those who did outstanding work providing knitwear to soldiers.

Sally Bosley Badge Shop, *Queen Mary Needlework Guild Medal*, 2023. <https://www.sallybosleybadgeshop.com/shop.php?code=62627>



Fleisher Yarn, *Fleisher's Knitting and Crocheting Manual*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed. (Philadelphia, PA: S.B. & B.W. Fleisher, 1918) 22-23.



*"Woolen knit socks are very expensive here, however, so tell Aunt Jessie I owe my life to her." - First Lieutenant James Kellogg Burnham Hockaday, 354th Infantry, 89th Division, June 23, 1918.*

James Kellogg Burnham Hockaday, *Somewhere in England, June 23rd, 1918*. Collection Database, National WWI Museum and Memorial. <https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/argusFinalPortal/Default.aspx?lang=en-US>

## Conclusion

Knitting had several benefits for the treatment of trench foot, as a well-fitting sock prevented the chafing of the wet, cold feet and, unlike fabric, knitted socks provided a wrinkle-free garment that sculpted to the foot and was not like any other textile structure. The rallying cry of 'doing your part' was more than serving overseas; it also meant doing something even though that might have seemed insignificant. Knitting socks became a way of showing patriotism and a social and national activity. Based on the letters, instruction booklets, and propaganda material, knitting positively impacted the war effort. The topic of knitting as a cultural aspect of the War is something that could be examined further on a scholarly level.

## Future Work

The Doughboy Foundation is a non-profit that aims to bring the history of the First World War to life. A submission on this topic could be given to them for material for their newsletter. A partnership with the American or British Red Cross could be made for displays at museums containing their propaganda and patterns for knitwear.

## References

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