



The Crafter:

words from the craft world



WAW campaign leader Jaine in a sea of pink



A part from the obvious 'using needles as swords' angle – or is that just me? – you wouldn't have thought that war and knitting have much in common. I have been looking into knitting during the **First World War**. It was a large part of the war effort, and I have upturned all kinds of knitting that went on in other wars too. Reading about the **Battle of Balaclava** in the 1850s was uncanny as news was unfolding about the recent crisis on the borders with Russia. Winters in the Ukraine are fierce and the British forces there as part of the **Crimean war** were ill-equipped for the weather. Volunteers knitted



Women knitting woollen jackets for 'sticky bombs' during the Second World War



PHOTOGRAPH: © IWM (ID 14762)

helmet liners that rolled down to cover the face. This was not a new invention but probably an evolution of the Monmouth Cap, though the new name, Balaclava, has stuck.

Other knitting names that we recognise come from this time too. A layer without lapels was permissible under the uniform in Lord Cardigan's Crimea regiments to stave off the cold, as long as it did not show. The Raglan sleeve comes from the eponymous Lord who lost an arm at Waterloo. It is heartening to think of all those 100-year-old patterns that are being re-written and re-made for all the costume dramas and re-enactments that are taking place this year.

During the **Second World War** people still knitted socks, but women were also enlisted to knit covers for **sticky bombs**. The knitted covers were tied with a drawstring to the grenade, a glass flask, and then soaked in adhesive so that they would stick to their targets before detonating.

Knitting has also taken a role as a tool of protest too. From the pink-covered tank of Marianne Jorgensen in Denmark in 2006, the softness and domestic nature of knitting has been used as a foil to the horrors of war. Lisa Anne Auerbach's knitted mittens 'Body Count' counted the number of dead in the Gulf War. Famously the numbers had to be updated from one glove to the next.

Wool Against Weapons is a campaign led by Jaine Rose against the replacement of the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system. I came across this when a friend raided my stash to filch every rose-tinted yarn she could find. Thousands of people from the UK and around the world knitted pink 'peace scarves' which were stitched together to stretch the seven miles between Britain's nuclear bomb factories in a protest on Saturday 9 August (Nagasaki Day). So many people contributed their knitting that in the end it exceeded that length and had to be doubled up. Hey, Mr Government, I think that says something, don't you?



Wool Against Weapons Peace Scarf song

*Every knit and purl is out of hope for the world
We made this scarf for peace
Every knit and purl is out of love for the world
Peace is what we need*

*So we knit and purl to protect our world
And all living things
Every knit and purl holds a vision for the world
For peace we sing*