

Puttees: How to wear them and what they are for

Puttees are a type of leg wrap that were worn by Canadian soldiers in the First World War. They are a long strip of wool fabric that is wrapped around the lower leg covering the top of the boot. The name comes from the Hindi term *patti* meaning bandages, binding, or straps which the British military was introduced to while serving in India.

Putting puttees on is not as easy as you might think! To try wrapping them yourself, you will need a long strip of fabric or a tensor bandage (about 10 cm wide) with a ribbon or tie attached to one end. Roll the fabric up with the tie in the middle of the roll.



Step 1: Starting partway down the shin, roll the fabric down the front of the leg onto the top of the boot.

Step 2: At the ankle, turn the roll 90 degrees to the outside of the leg. The strip will have to fold onto itself.

Step 3: Wrap the fabric snugly up the leg, but not too tight! Make sure that you are comfortable.

Step 4: Use the tie at the end of the roll to secure your wrap. Wrap it around the top and tuck it in when you reach the end.



To learn more, check out our video on puttees! <https://youtu.be/NaTMucn1lck>

Please try at your own risk.

Why wear puttees?

They provided support and helped stop things like dirt and stones from getting into the boots!

High leather boots could serve the same purpose, but wool was much less expensive than leather during the war.



When to not wear puttees?

In the Trenches!

Remember how we said to not wrap your leg too tight? That is because it can limit the amount of blood flow that can get to your feet.

In 1915, the Deputy Director of Medical Services Colonel G.L. Foster recommended that men going into the trench not wear their puttees, because they could limit blood flow.

“I would further recommend that, on units going into the trenches, N.C.O.s and Men be instructed that their puttees should be removed, rolled up and carried in their pockets and not again worn until they return to their billets; the boots loosely laced and the lower end of the trouser leg tucked into the top of the sock, as this will permit of blood circulation in the feet and ankles more freely. This, with frequent changes of socks and removal of boots once every 12 hours, should diminish the tendency to develop “trench feet”. “¹

Trench Foot

Trench foot is as a result of standing in the cold water that filled the trench without being able to change into dry boots or socks. Prevention was the main response, including changes to footwear and other means to protect the feet from moisture.

Trench foot can lead to complications if left untreated. These include: severe blisters, an inability to walk on affected feet, gangrene, tissue loss, permanent nerve damage, and ulcers.

¹ 11 November 1915 G.L. Foster, Colonel D.D.M.S. taken from The War Diary of the Deputy Director of Medical Services, Library and Archives Canada <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=2005050&lang=eng>