

Body Count Mittens





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These mittens memorialize the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq at the time the mittens are made. Since the numbers escalate daily, each mitten has a different number and date. Seen together, the pair of mittens show a span of time and the increase in killed soldiers over that time. Each pair of mittens will be different, as the numbers and dates will vary. Some of us knit faster than others, and this too will be reflected in the finished pair, since the date on the mittens is the date each one was started.

As we make these mittens, we have no idea how they will look in the future. Will the war end tomorrow and our number reflect the height of the casualties? Or will it continue, our mittens becoming a reminder of a time when the war was still in its infancy? The first pair of Body Count mittens I made was in March of 2005. Since this time, the number of American casualties has more than doubled, and the number of Iraqi dead and displaced is still unknown. At the time of this writing, there is no end to the conflict in sight. The "low" number on the first pair of mittens now appears to be from the early stages of this conflict, a reminder, perhaps, of a more innocent time, when public support of the war was high, and those yellow ribbon car magnets hadn't yet faded in the sun.

This makes an excellent project to knit in public. It's small and portable, and the intricate looking mittens attract attention and encourage conversation both about the knitting and the occupation/war.

Mittens are an ideal form for this project, since the difference between the left and right hand explores the relationship between time and the escalation of dead Americans. But there's no reason to stop with mittens! Any garment that can be knitted can be knitted with charted numbers. Hats and sweaters are also excellent choices, and because of their larger size, can accommodate larger numbers. The number of American soldiers killed in Iraq will stay in the 4-digits for awhile, but the number of American soldiers wounded is already 5 digits, which is too big for mittens, but perfect for hats. The number of Iraqis killed is a large number which varies, depending on the source. The most conservative count is found on IraqiBodyCount.net, and only includes deaths reported by the media. In September of 2007, the number was around 80,000. Another estimate, from a study published in British medical journal *The Lancet* in November, 2004, was based on interviews with a population sample in Iraq, and found the number of Iraqi civilian casualties to be around 100,000, mostly women and children. I have found no source for a number of Iraqi soldiers or insurgents killed.

You can use any mitten pattern you want. The following is an adaptation of a traditional pattern I found in one of my knitting books. Feel free to change it however you want!

Supplies:

- 2 skeins worsted weight yarn (I used Brown Sheep single ply Lamb's Pride). Choose two colors that will stand out from one another.
- A bit more worsted weight in a third color for trim, if you'd like.
- 1 set double pointed needles, #2
- Tapestry needle for weaving in ends

Gauge:

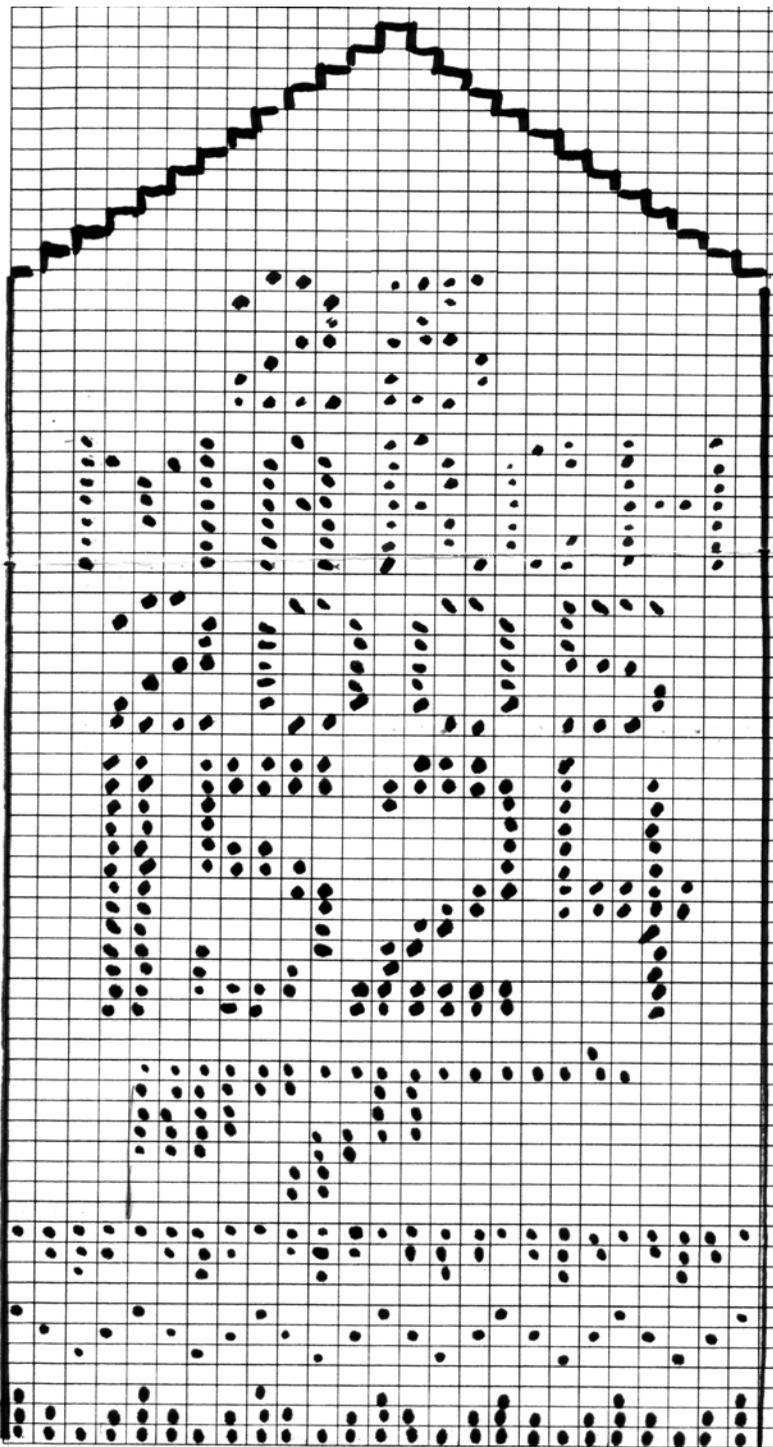
- 6 stitches/inch *

*Worsted weight yarn knit with small needles will result in a dense, thick fabric. For mittens, this makes them very cozy and will keep the snow out!

About Charting and 2-color knitting:

First of all, do not be intimidated. Switching from one color to another while knitting takes some practice, but it is relatively simple to pick up. Most knitting books have detailed instructions on various ways to incorporate two colors of yarn. One of the simplest is to knit with one strand in the Continental style, and throw the other strand as for American style knitting.

For designing, use knitter's graph



paper. The proportions are different from regular graph paper, reflecting the shape of a knit stitch, which is wider than it is tall. You can buy knitter's graph paper at a knit shop or download it from the internet.

On the right is a sample chart for March 23, 2005. Your dates and numbers will be different, so you will need to design your chart to reflect the current information. Start by marking off 25 stitches in width. The heights of the words in the sample chart worked well, so use those as a starting point. You may have to abbreviate the name of the month. Be sure to center the text. The object between the cuff and the date is an AK-47. Feel free to use whatever icon you wish.

When knitting from the chart, begin at the bottom. Since these mittens are knit in the round, use markers of some sort to delineate the edges of the pattern area.

Cast On:

54 stitches

-OR-

Make an I-cord of 54 stitches (maybe in a contrasting color) and cast on from that.

First round: Purl.

Second round: Knit

Third round: Begin cuff pattern. Choose any cuff pattern of 12 or 13 rows you'd like, design your own, or try the one I used (see illustration).

After cuff pattern is finished, knit one round plain. Purl 1 round.

Now: 25 stitches are the back of the hand.

25 stitches are the front.

And 2 stitches are on either side.

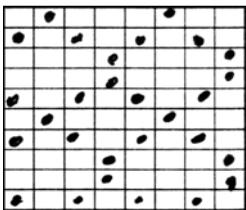
Divide stitches on 3 needles. Keep the 25 back stitches together, and split the others evenly.

For the wrist: . To give the decrease by knitting 2 stitches together on the wrist side, 12 times in the first knit row.

Knit 6-8 rounds plain, swapping colors if you want stripes

Hand: Increase 5 stitches on the wrist side in the first round.

Begin patterns.



For the palm pattern, use something small and simple. A plain lice pattern would work fine, or you might choose a small pattern.

On either side of the 25 stitch back pattern, knit one in the main color and one in the contrasting color, so you'll have foxy stripes up the sides of the mittens.

The Thumb:

Mark the 3 stitches on the palm side next to the side stripes. These stitches will be increased from 3 to 11 stitches as follows: After 3 rounds, increase in the first of the 3 stitches and last of the 3 stitches.

You will have 5 stitches marked for the thumb.

After 3 more rounds, increase in the first of the 5 thumb stitches. You will have 7 stitches marked for the thumb.

Continue in this way until there are 11 stitches between the markers.

You can knit the thumb in any way you'd like, in a contrasting color, in stripes, or in pattern.

At the same time you're working increases for the thumb, continue to knit around in pattern.

Try on the mitten to figure out where you'd like the thumb to branch out of the palm and when you get to that point, knit the 11 thumb stitches in a contrasting color before continuing on in pattern. After the mitten is knit to the top, this yarn will be removed and the 11 stitches will be picked up on dp needles and knit to make the thumb.



Continue knitting in pattern until the mitten is big enough to begin decreasing. The number of rows will vary based on hand length, gauge, etc. Don't make the mittens too short! It will take about an inch or so to decrease by decreasing 2 stitches on each side of the stripes, so factor that into your calculations. Finish the ends of the mittens with a tassel or just leave them plain.

Knit the thumb by cutting the scrap yarn and picking up the 22 stitches. Pick up an extra stitch at either side of the thumb opening by twisting the yarn at the corners and making that into a stitch. Knit til the thumb is long enough, then begin knitting 2 stitches together every other row to decrease it to a point.

Weave in ends!

Wear history sadly and thoughtfully. Let the memories and unfathomable statistics keep you warm.

—Lisa Anne Auerbach



