

AMERICA'S FIRST WOMEN SOLDIERS

Frequently Asked Questions

Who were the “Hello Girls”? This term is a nickname for women who served as U.S. Army Signal Corps Telephone Operators during World War I (1917-1918). They were the first American women servicemembers who served in support of combat operations - our first women soldiers sent to fight.

What was their impact? In addition to helping win the war, these women paved the way for future generations of female service members. Furthermore, the service of women in World War I helped convince the nation that women deserved the right to vote, and directly led to the passage of the 19th Amendment granting them that right.

What exactly did they do? These women were sent overseas to run telephone switchboards in support of military operations (radios were still new, and other forms of communication were slow and unreliable). They were often in direct contact with front-line troops, coordinating infantry attacks and artillery barrages.

Was their work dangerous? Yes! They regularly worked within enemy air raid and artillery range. On one occasion, a team continued to work while their building literally burned down around them. They were also exposed to disease – including the Flu Pandemic. Two women died while in service to their nation.

What happened to them after the war? The Army disbanded the female telephone operator units and the women returned to civilian life. Soon, they discovered that they were not eligible for veteran recognition and benefits from the government.

Why were these women not recognized as veterans? It is difficult to understand or explain. They were recruited into the Army Signal Corps, wore uniforms, took orders, and directly supported combat operations. They were officially recognized by battlefield commanders, including Commanding General John. J. Pershing. Perhaps the best answer is that after the war, the country simply wanted to move on.

How did they achieve recognition? The operators and their supporters spent decades pursuing legal and legislative approaches, submitting over 50 different bills until Congress finally granted the women veteran status in 1977 - nearly six decades later.

Who is leading this Congressional Gold Medal effort? Descendants of the women, with the World War I Centennial Commission, women veterans, and volunteers! The American Legion and the VFW have also endorsed this effort.

How is a Congressional Gold Medal awarded? Two thirds (2/3) of both chambers must agree to co-sponsor this type of legislation. We are close to this threshold in the Senate; we need your help to secure the votes in the House!

What other military groups have received the Congressional Gold Medal? For World War II, the Native American Code Talkers, Women Airforce Service Pilots, Chinese American veterans, 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion and others have been recognized. For World War I, the 369th Harlem Hellfighters have been honored.

Why is it important to award the Medal now? In September 2024, the National World War I Memorial will be dedicated in Washington D.C., making this year a fitting occasion to honor the women who helped win that war. Also, since 2024 is an election year, if the current bill to award the Hello Girls the Medal does not pass, the effort will have to start all over again next year.

Where can I learn more? Visit HelloGirls.org!