



Battle of Saint-Mihiel, 1918

April 22, 2024

Esteemed Senators and Representatives,

In company with the national American Historical Association, we are 55 professional historians of the United States, including six winners of the Pulitzer Prize, who urge you to co-sponsor **S.815** and **HR 1572** awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to America's first uniformed female combatants. **Memorial Day 2024** would be a fitting opportunity.

The "Hello Girls" were U.S. Army Signal Corps switchboard operators who connected calls between front line trenches and Army command in World War One. General John Pershing found that trained men needed a full minute to patch through a telephone call, so he cabled Washington for help.

"On account of the great difficulty of obtaining properly qualified men, request organization and dispatch to France of force of woman telephone operators all speaking French and English equally well," General Pershing wrote in 1917. All women "should be uniformed" and take the Army oath.

During the fiercest months of fighting, women operated switchboards twenty-four hours a day. The Army found they connected five calls per minute. Nicknamed the Hello Girls, these female combatants patched through 26 million urgent messages to aid troops under fire. Had "Doughboys" still manned the boards, the number would have been closer to 5 million. Untold lives would have been sacrificed.

Two women died and were buried in France. When survivors sailed home in 1919, the Army informed them that their dog-tags and dedicated service did not entitle them to the same Victory Medals, cash bonuses, or hospitalization for disability granted other soldiers. Congress finally awarded them basic recognition in 1977 (along with the Women's Airforce Service Pilots of World War II), but most had already died.

A group of descendants and the World War One Centennial Commission have spearheaded an effort to obtain the Congressional Gold Medal on their behalf. Doing so would not only honor these pioneers, but every woman in uniform since.

Can you please help make this happen by this **Memorial Day**? Your co-sponsorship is essential.

With sincere regards,

David Kennedy, Stanford University
Over Here: The First World War and American Society

Elizabeth Cobbs, San Diego State University
The Hello Girls: America's First Women Soldiers

And:

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