



Battle of Saint-Mihiel, 1918

November 25, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker,

The hour of the Hello Girls is now. Two months ago, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed S.815 to grant them the Congressional Gold Medal. Five weeks have elapsed since the requisite 290 Representatives became co-sponsors of H.R. 1572. Now there are 300. We wonder why the measure has not gone to the Floor. The clock is running down, and these women soldiers should not be left behind *again*, as they were after World War One.

The eight of us are professional writers: two historians, including a winner of the Pulitzer Prize; two authors of historical fiction; two playwrights; a children's nonfiction author; and a documentary filmmaker. We have all produced major works on the War and are deeply familiar with the unique contribution to victory made by America's first women soldiers.

The "Hello Girls" connected over 26 million urgent telephone calls in wartime France, linking Army command with front line trenches, foreign allies, and supply depots. These Signal Corps soldiers connected calls five times faster than trained men, which is why General John Pershing originally cabled home: "*On account of the great difficulty of obtaining properly qualified men, request organization and dispatch to France a force of woman telephone operators.*" He dictated that such bilingual recruits must "*be uniformed*" and take the Army oath. The Hello Girls made a transformative difference: the ability of the bilingual female operators to pass critical tactical information calmly and seamlessly between two allied armies that spoke different languages was a fundamental breakthrough in rapid tactical communications. The service of the Hello Girls helped bring the fighting to an end in the Allies' favor as much as one year earlier than it might have taken without them, according to General Pershing.

These pioneers braved German submarines. Some served under bombardment. Two died and were buried in France. Yet when these veterans were discharged, Congress and the War Department denied them the Victory Medals, cash bonuses, and veterans benefits granted every eligible man. It took a 60-year fight to win simple recognition in 1977, and even then they received no benefits other than military burial. Sadly, most were already in the ground.

The World War One Centennial Commission and a group of descendants have led the effort to obtain the Congressional Gold Medal. As historians and authors, we believe that doing so honors not only these trailblazers, but every woman in uniform who has followed them.

Mister Speaker, this rests in *your* hands now. Please get these valiant women to victory.

With deep appreciation,

Elizabeth Cobbs

The Hello Girls: America's First Women's Soldiers (Harvard)

"These pioneering women answered the call. The question is, will we?"

Claudia Friddell

Grace Banker and Her Hello Girls Answer the Call (Calkins Creek)

"It has been my honor to share with readers of all ages, especially schoolchildren, the heroic story of the World War I Signal Corps operators who endured the sacrifices of war to speed battlefield communications, only to return home to a 60-year struggle."

Aimie Runyon

Girls on the Line (Lake Union)

"The historical importance of women in World War I is something that is incredibly understated in our American history curriculums. Women have been deliberately written out of history in many cases, and the story of the intrepid women who served as phone operators in World War I is one of them."

David M. Kennedy

Over Here: The First World War and American Society (Oxford)

"These women were valiant patriots who played an indispensable role in one of America's greatest undertakings. They richly deserve this recognition."

James Theres

The Hello Girls (Lincoln Penny Films)

"The impact of the women military telephone operators during WWI has been sadly forgotten. But no more. By honoring the Hello Girls with the Congressional Gold Medal, we can permanently write them into American history, where they belong."

Peter Mills and Cara Reichel

The Hello Girls, A New American Musical (Off-Broadway)

"It has been a privilege to share the story of the "Hello Girl," and see the hundreds of young women perform these characters in their own communities. To date, the show has been performed in 25 of America's 50 states and five foreign countries. This is an important story to keep telling, and we urge you to join us in honoring the example of patriotic engagement set by the first women of the U.S. Army Signal Corps."

Shanna Hatfield

Molly (Wholesome Hearts Publishing)

"The sacrifices and contributions of the Hello Girls deserve formal recognition, as their legacy continues to inspire and influence us more than a century after their service."