



HALE
CENTER
THEATER
OREM

Soon to be

THE
RUTH

THE
HELLO GIRLS

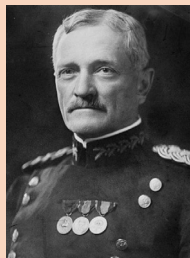
2024
SEASON

MUSICAL

PRODUCTION NUMBER 253

Apr. 26 — THROUGH — Jun. 01

◆ INTERESTING FACTS ◆



◆ GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING ◆

November 8, 1917

“On account of the great difficulty of obtaining properly qualified men, request organization and dispatch to France a force of Woman telephone operators all speaking French and English equally well.

Before women had the vote in the United States, they went to war.

When General John J. Pershing arrived in France with the American Expeditionary Force in June 1917, communications were a significant wartime issue. The telephone was in common use in America, but all calls required a human operator to connect the calls. An operator sat facing a panel of wires, jacks, and lights. When a light turned on, they would connect a

wire to the associated jack and ask the caller for the number they were connecting to. They would then plug another

wire to the jack associated with that number, which would connect the calls.

Shortly after the invention of these switchboards, it was determined that the young boys who had found such success as telegraph operators had neither the discipline nor the patience for telephones. The field quickly became primarily staffed by

women. However, in a wartime operation, these switchboards were being operated by male soldiers who proved to be a bad fit for the task at hand. It could take a minute for a male operator to make a connection as opposed to the 10 seconds it took a woman: an inconvenience in civilian life but a literal difference between life and death in wartime.

General Pershing called for female operators to be brought into service, even



66 Every order for an infantry advance, a barrage preparatory to the taking of a new objective, and, in fact, for every troop movement, came over the 'fighting lines', as we called them.

◆ **BERTHA HUNT** ◆
Operator, U.S. Signal Corps

though the War Department forbade women from being employed in the war effort in any other role but nurse. Looking for women who were experienced with switchboards and fluent in French, the Army received over 7000 applicants, finally selecting 223. The women were issued military uniforms and took the Army oath, and after the war thirty of them received special commendations from General Pershing. The operators were often near the front lines and faced many of the same dangers as their male counterparts in the trenches. In the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the operators worked 24-hour days coordinating troop movements. When German shelling shattered the windows of their building, the operators kept working without pause. Later in the war, a German prisoner started a fire in the telephone exchange,

and the operators refused to leave their stations as the fire grew. They only finally abandoned their stations when threatened with court martial by their commanding officers.

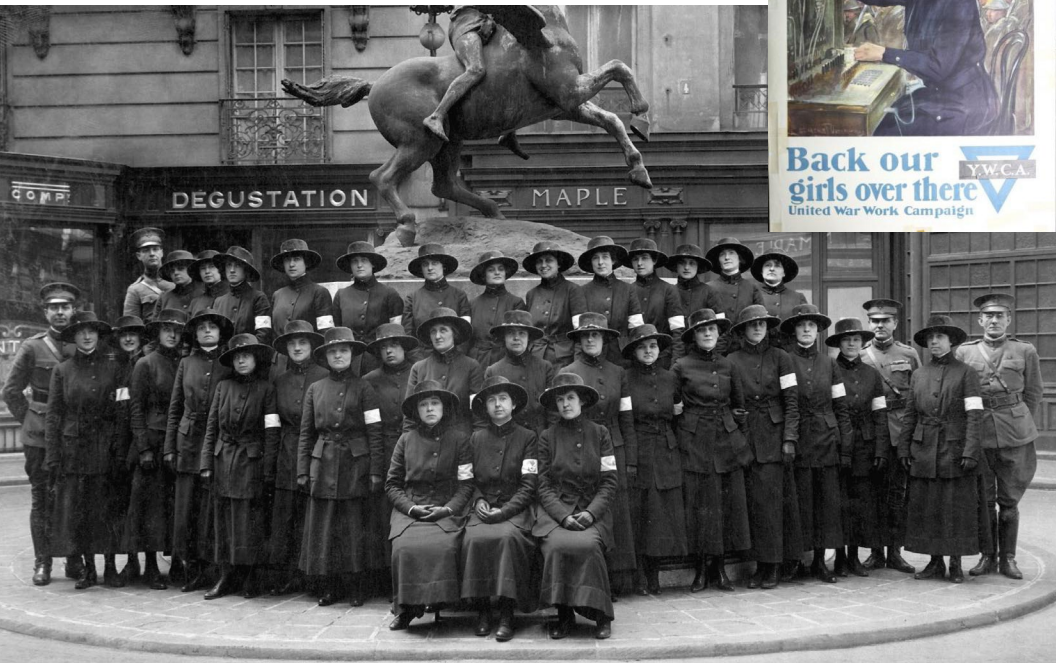
The chief signal officer for the First Army stated in his official report "a large part of the success of the communications of this Army is due to...a competent staff of women operators", and their leader was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

However, when these women returned to the United States, they were told that they had never been soldiers and were not now veterans. They were told they had been civilian contractors, though no contracts were ever produced. They were not honorably discharged, and they were not eligible for any veterans' benefits.

The legal and political battle over the recognition of their service lasted for decades. At least 24 bills were put before Congress between 1927 and 1977. Despite



Back our girls over there
United War Work Campaign





Learning more about the Hello Girls?

.....◆.....
The Hello Girls: America's First Women Soldiers by Elizabeth Cobb is the 2017 nonfiction book which sparked a modern interest in the story.

The Hello Girls is a 2018 documentary available on streaming services such as freevee, tubi, and The Roku Channel

Girls on the Line by Aimie K. Runyan is a 2018 historical fiction novel about a young woman who joins the Hello Girls after her brother is killed in battle

Grace Banker and Her Hello Girls Answer the Call: The Heroic Story of WWI Telephone Operators by Claudia Friddell and Elizabeth Baddeley is a picture book for ages 7-10 covering the history of the Hello Girls.

opposition by the Army, the Veterans Administration, and even the American Legion, the campaign by former Hello Girls and others finally resulted in a bill passing and being signed into law by President Jimmy Carter in November 1977. Only eighteen of the original Hello Girls who had left for France in 1918 were still living, but after almost 60 years they were finally honorably discharged from their service. ◆



KEEP UP WITH OUR
STORY

◆.....◆.....
CLICK EACH ICON



OR SEARCH #HCTO
◆.....◆.....

