

118<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
2<sup>D</sup> SESSION

# S. 815

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## AN ACT

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the female telephone operators of the Army Signal Corps, known as the “Hello Girls”.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Hello Girls Congres-  
3 sional Gold Medal Act of 2024”.

4 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

5 Congress finds the following:

6 (1) On April 6, 1917, the United States de-  
7 clared war against Germany. As a historically neu-  
8 tral nation, the United States was unprepared to  
9 fight a technologically modern conflict overseas. The  
10 United States called upon American Telephone and  
11 Telegraph (referred to in this section as “AT&T”)  
12 to provide equipment and trained personnel for the  
13 Army Signal Corps in France. AT&T executives in  
14 Army uniform served at home under the provisions  
15 of the Act entitled “An Act for making further and  
16 more effectual provision for the national defense,  
17 and for other purposes.”, approved June 3, 1916  
18 (referred to in this section as the “National Defense  
19 Act of 1916”), which allowed for the induction of in-  
20 dividuals with specialized skills into a reserve force.

21 (2) When General John Pershing sailed for Eu-  
22 rope in May of 1917 as head of the American Expe-  
23 ditionary Forces (referred to in this section as the  
24 “AEF”), he took telephone operating equipment  
25 with him in recognition of the inadequacy of Euro-  
26 pean circuitry and with the understanding that tele-

1 phones would play a key role in battlefield commu-  
2 nications for the first time in the history of war.

3 (3) From May to November of 1917, the AEF  
4 struggled to develop the telephone service necessary  
5 for the Army to function under battlefield condi-  
6 tions. Monolingual infantrymen from the United  
7 States were unable to connect calls rapidly or com-  
8 municate effectively with their French counterparts  
9 to put calls through over toll lines that linked one  
10 region of the country with another. The Army found  
11 that the average male operator required 60 seconds  
12 to make a connection. That rate was unacceptably  
13 slow, especially for operational calls between com-  
14 mand outposts and the front lines.

15 (4) During this time, in the United States, tele-  
16 phone operating was largely sex-segregated. Hired  
17 for their speed in connecting calls, women filled 85  
18 percent of the telephone operating positions in the  
19 United States. It took the average female operator  
20 10 seconds to make a connection.

21 (5) On November 8, 1917, General Pershing  
22 cabled the War Department and wrote, “On account  
23 of the great difficulty of obtaining properly qualified  
24 men, request organization and dispatch to France a  
25 force of women telephone operators all speaking

1 French and English equally well.”. To begin, Gen-  
2 eral Pershing requested 100 women under the com-  
3 mand of a commissioned captain, writing that “All  
4 should have allowances of Army nurses and should  
5 be uniformed.”.

6 (6) The War Department sent press releases to  
7 newspapers across the United States to recruit  
8 women willing to serve for the duration of the war  
9 and face the hazards of submarine warfare and aer-  
10 ial bombardment. These articles emphasized that pa-  
11 triotic women would be “full-fledged soldier[s] under  
12 the articles of war” and would “do as much to help  
13 win the war as the men in khaki who go ‘over the  
14 top.’”. All women selected would take the Army  
15 oath.

16 (7) More than 7,600 women volunteered for the  
17 100 positions described in paragraph (5), and the  
18 first recruits took the Army oath on January 15,  
19 1918.

20 (8) Like nurses and doctors at the time, female  
21 Signal Corps members had relative rather than tra-  
22 ditional ranks and were ranked as Operator, Super-  
23 visor, or Chief Operator. When promoted, the  
24 women were required to swear the Army oath again.

1           (9) Telephone operators were the first women  
2 to serve as soldiers in non-medical classifications,  
3 and the job of the operators was to help win the  
4 war, not to mitigate the harms of the war. In pop-  
5 ular parlance, they were known as the “Hello Girls”.

6           (10) Signal Corps Operators wore Army uni-  
7 forms and Army insignia always, as well as stand-  
8 ard-issue identity disks in case of death, and were  
9 subject to court martial for infractions of the mili-  
10 tary code.

11           (11) Unbeknownst to the women operators and  
12 their immediate officers, the legal counsel of the  
13 Army ruled internally on March 20, 1918, that the  
14 women were not actually soldiers but contract em-  
15 ployees, even though the women had not seen or  
16 signed any contracts. Military code allowed only for  
17 the induction of men, and the code remained un-  
18 changed despite the orders of General Pershing.  
19 Nevertheless, legal counsel also recognized that the  
20 National Defense Act of 1916, which allowed for the  
21 induction of members of the telephone industry of  
22 the United States into the Armed Forces, imposed  
23 no gender restrictions.

24           (12) Four days later, on March 24, 1918, the  
25 first contingent of operators began their official du-

1 ties in France. The operators arrived before most in-  
2 fantrymen of the Armed Forces in order to facilitate  
3 logistics and deployment and spent their first night  
4 in Paris under German bombardment.

5 (13) After the arrival of the operators, tele-  
6 phone service in France improved immediately, as  
7 calls tripled from 13,000 to 36,000 per day.

8 (14) The Army quickly recruited, trained, and  
9 deployed 5 additional contingents of female Signal  
10 Corps operators. With these personnel, the number  
11 of calls increased to 150,000 per day.

12 (15) In addition to standard telephone oper-  
13 ating, bilingual Signal Corps members provided si-  
14 multaneous translation between officers from France  
15 and officers from the United States, who were com-  
16 municating by telephone.

17 (16) The AEF fought their first major battles  
18 in the last 2 months of the war. By that point, the  
19 Signal Corps considered the contributions of women  
20 to be so essential that, in telephone exchanges clos-  
21 est to the front line, the Army exclusively used  
22 women, in rotating 12-hour shifts. In the rear, the  
23 Army established rotating 8-hour shifts and gave  
24 male soldiers the overnight shift when telephone  
25 traffic was slower.

1 (17) Seven bilingual operators—

2 (A) served at the Battles of St. Mihiel and  
3 Meuse-Argonne under the immediate command  
4 of General Pershing;

5 (B) staffed the Operations Boards through  
6 which orders to advance, fire, and retreat were  
7 delivered to soldiers in the trenches, to artillery  
8 units on alert, and to pilots awaiting orders at  
9 French airfields; and

10 (C) were awarded a “Defensive Sector  
11 Clasp” for the Meuse-Argonne operation.

12 (18) The Chief Operator supervising the Hello  
13 Girls, Grace Banker of Passaic, New Jersey, was  
14 awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. Out of  
15 16,000 eligible Signal Corps officers, Banker was  
16 one of only 18 individuals so honored.

17 (19) Thirty additional operators received special  
18 commendations, many signed by General Pershing  
19 himself, for “exceptionally meritorious and con-  
20 spicuous services” in “Advance Sections” of the con-  
21 flict.

22 (20) The war ended on November 11, 1918. As  
23 of that date, 223 female operators served in France  
24 and had connected 26,000,000 calls for the AEF.

1           (21) The Chief Signal Officer of the Army Sig-  
2           nal Corps wrote in his official report 2 days after  
3           the date on which the war ended that “a large part  
4           of the success of the communications of this Army  
5           is due to . . . a competent staff of women opera-  
6           tors.”.

7           (22) After the war ended, some women were or-  
8           dered to Coblenz in Germany for the occupation of  
9           that country and to Paris for the Paris Peace Trea-  
10          ty of 1919 to continue telephone operations, some-  
11          times in direct support of President Woodrow Wil-  
12          son.

13          (23) Two operators, Corah Bartlett and Inez  
14          Crittenden, died in France in the service of the  
15          United States and were buried there in military  
16          cemeteries with military ceremonies. Those operators  
17          died of the same influenza pandemic that killed more  
18          soldiers of the Armed Forces than combat oper-  
19          ations.

20          (24) Women of the Army Signal Corps were in-  
21          eligible for discharge until formal release. Because of  
22          their role in logistics, those women were among the  
23          last soldiers to come home to the United States. The  
24          last Signal Corps operators returned from France in  
25          January of 1920.



1           (25) Upon arrival in the United States, the  
2 Army informed female veterans that they had per-  
3 formed as civilians, not soldiers, even though opera-  
4 tors had served in Army uniform in a theater of war  
5 surrounded by men who were similarly engaged.

6           (26) Despite the objections of General George  
7 Squier, the top-ranking officer in the Signal Corps,  
8 the Army denied Signal Corps women the veterans’  
9 benefits granted to male soldiers and female nurses,  
10 such as—

11                   (A) hospitalization for disabilities incurred  
12                   in the line of duty;

13                   (B) cash bonuses;

14                   (C) soldiers’ pensions;

15                   (D) flags on their coffins; and

16                   (E) the Victory Medals promised them in  
17 France.

18           (27) For the next 60 years, female veterans, led  
19 by Merle Egan from Montana, petitioned Congress  
20 more than 50 times for their recognition. In 1977,  
21 under the sponsorship of Senator Barry Goldwater,  
22 Congress passed legislation to retroactively acknowl-  
23 edge the military service of the Women’s Airforce  
24 Service Pilots (referred to in this section as  
25 “WASPs”) of World War II and “the service of any

1 person in any other similarly situated group the  
2 members of which rendered service to the Armed  
3 Forces of the United States in a capacity considered  
4 civilian employment or contractual service at the  
5 time such service was rendered”.

6 (28) On November 23, 1977, President Jimmy  
7 Carter signed the legislation described in paragraph  
8 (27) into law as the GI Bill Improvement Act of  
9 1977 (Public Law 95–202; 91 Stat. 1433).

10 (29) The Signal Corps telephone operators ap-  
11 plied for, and were granted, status as veterans in  
12 1979.

13 (30) Only 33 of the operators who had returned  
14 home after the war were still alive to receive their  
15 Victory Medals and official discharge papers, which  
16 were finally awarded in 1979.

17 (31) One of the women, Olive Shaw from Mas-  
18 sachusetts, returned to the United States after the  
19 war, where she worked on the professional staff of  
20 Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers. Shaw lived to  
21 receive her honorable discharge and was the first  
22 burial when the Massachusetts National Cemetery  
23 opened on October 11, 1980. Shaw’s uniform is on  
24 display at the National World War I Museum and  
25 Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri.

1           (32) Upon receipt of her honorable discharge at  
2           a ceremony in her home in Marine City, Michigan,  
3           “Hello Girl” Oleda Joure Christides raised the paper  
4           to her lips and kissed it. The only thing Christides  
5           ever wanted from the Federal Government was a  
6           flag on her coffin.

7           (33) On July 1, 2009, President Barack Obama  
8           signed into law Public Law 111–40 (123 Stat.  
9           1958), which awarded the WASPs the Congressional  
10          Gold Medal for their service to the United States.

11          (34) For their role as pioneers who paved the  
12          way for all women in uniform, and for service that  
13          was essential to victory in World War I, the “Hello  
14          Girls” merit similar recognition.

15 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

16          (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the  
17          House of Representatives and the President pro tempore  
18          of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the  
19          award, on behalf of Congress, of a single gold medal of  
20          appropriate design in honor of the female telephone opera-  
21          tors of the Army Signal Corps (commonly known as the  
22          “Hello Girls”), in recognition of those operators’—

- 23                  (1) pioneering military service;
- 24                  (2) devotion to duty; and
- 25                  (3) 60-year struggle for—

1 (A) recognition as soldiers; and

2 (B) veterans' benefits.

3 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the  
4 award described in subsection (a), the Secretary of the  
5 Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Secretary”) shall  
6 strike the gold medal with suitable emblems, devices, and  
7 inscriptions, to be determined by the Secretary.

8 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—After the award of the gold  
10 medal under subsection (a), the medal shall be given  
11 to the Smithsonian Institution, where the medal  
12 shall be available for display, as appropriate, and  
13 made available for research.

14 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of  
15 Congress that the Smithsonian Institution should  
16 make the gold medal received under paragraph (1)  
17 available elsewhere, particularly at—

18 (A) appropriate locations associated with—

19 (i) the Army Signal Corps;

20 (ii) the Women in Military Service for  
21 America Memorial;

22 (iii) the U.S. Army Women’s Museum;

23 and

24 (iv) the National World War I Mu-  
25 seum and Memorial; and

1 (B) any other location determined appro-  
2 priate by the Smithsonian Institution.

3 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

4 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in  
5 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3 at a price  
6 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,  
7 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

8 **SEC. 5. NATIONAL MEDALS.**

9 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—Medals struck under this  
10 Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title  
11 31, United States Code.

12 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections  
13 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals  
14 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic  
15 items.

16 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**  
17 **SALE.**

18 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is  
19 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint  
20 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-  
21 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under  
22 this Act.

23 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the  
24 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section

- 1 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
- 2 Enterprise Fund.

Passed the Senate September 24, 2024.

Attest:

*Secretary.*



118<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
2<sup>D</sup> SESSION

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To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the female telephone operators of the Army Signal Corps, known as the ‘Hello Girls’.