



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES ARMY HERITAGE AND EDUCATION CENTER
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Hello Girls: America's First Women Soldiers

The Hello Girls is the untold story of how America's first female Soldiers helped win World War I, earned the vote, and fought the U.S. Army for recognition. In 1918, the U.S. Army Signal Corps sent 223 women to France. They were masters of the latest technology: the telephone switchboard. General John Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, demanded female "wire experts," when he discovered that inexperienced doughboys were unable to keep him connected with troops under fire. Without communications for even an hour, the Army would collapse. While suffragettes picketed the White House and President Woodrow Wilson struggled to persuade a segregationist Congress to give women of all races the vote, these competent and courageous young women swore the Army's oath.

Join the USAHEC on August 23, 2019 for our Women's Equality Day lecture starting at 1:00 PM. We are pleased to welcome Dr. Elizabeth Cobbs, *New York Times* bestselling novelist, documentary filmmaker, and historian. She holds the Melbern G. Glasscock Chair in American History at Texas A&M University. She is the author of eight books and a winner of the Allan Nevins Prize. Dr. Cobbs uncovered the hidden story of the Hello Girls when searching for a topic to honor the centennial of the Great War. When she discovered no book had ever been written about these remarkable heroines, she began a journey that took her from Seattle to St. Louis to Washington and New Hampshire to find lost government records and personal diaries still packed away as family heirlooms. In 2018, she was appointed an honorary member of the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

Dr. Cobbs fascinating book reveals the challenges these volunteers faced in a war zone, where male Soldiers welcomed, resented, wooed, mocked, saluted, and ultimately, celebrated them. They received a baptism by fire when German troops pounded Paris with heavy artillery. Some followed "Black Jack" Pershing to battlefields where they served through shelling and bombardment. Grace Banker, their 25-year-old leader, won the Distinguished Service Medal.

The U.S. Army discharged the last Hello Girls in 1920, the same year Congress ratified the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote. When the Soldiers sailed home, the Army unexpectedly dismissed them without veterans' benefits. They began a sixty-year battle to be awarded benefits that a handful of survivors carried to triumph in 1979.

As always, the USAHEC's exhibits, to include *The Making of an American Army* art exhibit, "*Where the Hell is Korea,*" "*Good-Bye Broadway, Hello France,*" and the Soldier Experience Gallery, will be open. Prior to the lecture, feel free to browse the Museum Store. Parking is free, and the USAHEC facility is handicapped accessible. For more information about this and all other events, please visit the website: www.USAHEC.org.

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