



More than 25,000 American women between the ages of 21 and 69 served overseas during World War I. They began going “over there” in August of 1914 – at first singly or with a few companions, then later with civilian service organizations, and lastly at the request of the United States government. Although the largest number were nurses, American women also worked as dietitians, occupational and physical therapists, administrators, secretaries, telephone operators, statisticians, decoders, social workers, and small factory and warehouse operators. Many women continued to serve long after Armistice Day, some returning home as late as 1923. Their efforts and contributions in the Great War left a lasting legacy that inspired change across the nation. The service of these women helped propel the passage of the 19th Amendment in June 4, 1919 – guaranteeing women the right to vote.

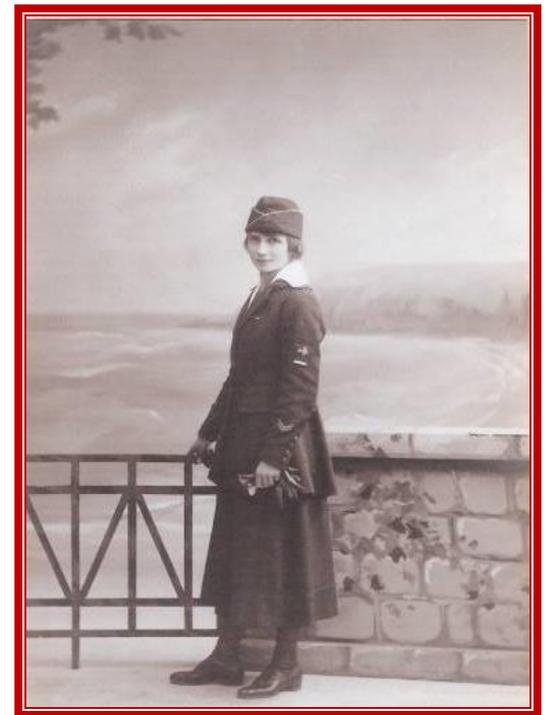


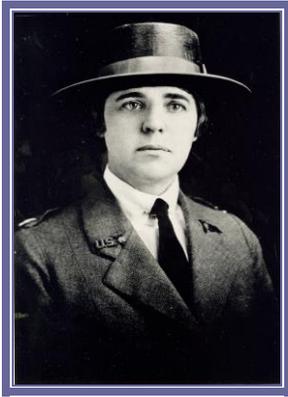
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Women's Right to Vote and the 19th Amendment

Women's Equality Day

**Women's service during the
Great War helped propel the
19th Amendment and secure
their right to vote**





Army Nurse Corps

The Army Nurse Corps (ANC) was established in 1901 to fight the typhoid fever epidemic after the Spanish-American War. There were 400 women in the ANC prior to World War I and their ranks grew to over 20,000 by the end of the war. These women served at home and overseas in whatever capacity necessary for ensuring soldiers aid and morale.

Most of the women joining the ANC had prior experience nurses in the civilian world. Many were trained through the Red Cross or college. The fact that these women already had a skill set made it easier for them to transition into helping the war effort.

By May 1917, six base hospitals, which included more than 400 nurses, sailed to France to join the British Expeditionary Force.

By November 1918, the ANC reached its peak strength of 21,480 with more than 10,000 nurses serving at 198 stations worldwide; including France, Belgium, England, Italy, Serbia, Siberia, and various United States territories. They served in field, mobile surgical, evacuation, base, and convalescent hospitals and on troop trains and transport ships.

Signal Corps

While in Europe with the Army Expeditionary Forces (AEF), General Pershing became very unhappy about the French women operating American Forces telephone lines. This caused General Pershing to ask for American women, fluent in at least English and French if not also German, who had previous experience with American telephone operations to serve as contractors in France. The women who served with the AEF as telephone operators were nicknamed the 'Hello Girls' because of their charming "Hello" response when a call was placed.

Hello Girls enabled vital communications to get through to the front lines. Over 3,000 women applied and the first 300 went overseas in 1918. Their task was not only to keep communications running smoothly for the Americans but to train male soldiers in how to operate switchboards at forward operating areas before major battles such as the Meuse-Argonne. These women, while contracted and never told that they would be near or on front lines, were stationed in many dangerous locations.

In total, 'Hello Girls' served in 75 cities and towns in France.



Service Organizations

There were numerous civilian service organizations that served around the globe during the Great War. By far the largest was the American Red Cross (ARC). The number of volunteers with the ARC rose from 20 in 1914 to 6,000 women and men in January 1919. The ARC mainly focused on hospitals and civilian/refugee relief.

By order of the United States Army, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) bore the major responsibility for the welfare of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). It was to "provide for the amusement and recreation of the troops by means of its usual program of social, educational, physical, and religious activities." The YMCA ran hundreds of canteens, recreational huts where soldiers could write letters, sing songs, play games, and buy snacks or cigarettes. The YMCA ultimately employed about 3,500 women, a total of about one-fifth of its total work force.

The Salvation Army was arguably the most loved by soldiers of the AEF. Only about 250 Salvationists served overseas, and were unique in the fact that they often followed soldiers to the front lines. The Salvation Army remained loyal to its slogan of "Soup, Soap, and Salvation" which came in the form of its now-famous doughnuts.