

Notes on  
The Hello Girls  
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## 1 America's Last Citizens

The book begins with a ceremony to honor *The Hello Girls*.

**Merle Egan:** One of the last living Hello Girls, she had been trying to get them recognition for a very long time. She once was skeptical of feminism but is now a member of NOW. She had a doll with a sewn on uniform of the Signal Corps (which the Hello Girls were part of).

**Grace Banker:** She was the Chief Operator of the 1st unit of WW I telephone operators in the battlefields of France. There is an entire book about her *Grace Banker and Her Hello Girls Answer the Call: The Heroic Story of WW I Telephone Operators*. [I am surprised there is another book on *The Hello Girls*.] She was the only women operator in the Signal Corp to be awarded the Army's Distinguished Service Medal (that was in 1919). She died in 1960, so way before the Hello Girls were honored (are they honored yet?)

**Mark Hough:** In 1978 he lobbied for Congressional recognition for the Hello Girls service, nearly 50 years after they did it. He is a lawyer. (Not on Wikipedia, darn.)

**Clifford Alexander:** First black Sec of the Army. Mark says he might come to the ceremony. He did help pave the way for eliminating barriers for women and racial minorities in the army.

Then the book goes back in time.

**Is 'Girls' a demeaning term?** This came up later in the book. The answer is NO. Soldiers were Dough-boys. *Boys* and *Girls* were terms that everyone used and liked. It was indicative that American would take care of them.

## 2 Neutrality Defeated and the Telephone in War and Peace

America tried to stay neutral in WWI but BOTH SIDES destroyed their ships. Only 3% of the Merchant vessels sunk (about 20) were American, but it was a pride thing and also against international treaties. [Since we ended up going on the side of Britain the fact that the British sunk some of our ships is left out of Textbooks.] The British mined the north sea. Germans attacked ships with U-boats and submarines which somehow seemed worse than the British mining since it was intentional. But the main thing is that American trade was being restricted. This is against treaties that say any neutral country can trade non-military goods with any country at war.

**Side Note:** Whose fault was the war? One big mark against Germany is that Belgium was neutral and not to be invaded by treaty but Germany invaded Belgium anyway. The German leaders referred to the treaties as *scraps of paper*.

Germany was brutal to the citizens of Belgium. (Germany didn't really want Belgium—they invaded to get to Austria-Hungary.) Germany was also the first country to bomb another country from the air [This might have been legal but only because it was new.]

I am surprised we did not get into the war sooner. The *US Lusitania* was sunk in 1915 and people were sad and outraged, but we did not go to war. The Kaiser promised to restrict attacks on neutral vessels but (a) that seems like a weak promise, and (b) he didn't keep it. What finally got us into the war was the Zimmerman Telegram—Germany was negotiating with Mexico to help Mexico attack and regain territory if America entered the war. SO why the delay. Speculation:

1. Some people thought we were not prepared for war. This may be true. Our last wars were *The Civil War* in 1861-1865 and *The Spanish American War* from April 1898 to Dec 1898, perhaps too short to really count. We had never fought a war in Europe which is hard to even get to.
2. George Washington had warned about Foreign Entanglements.
3. There was no obvious bad guy.

When America did enter they had many handicaps. One was decentralization—other countries had *national* governments but the only national entity in America was the post office. The Federal gov did not oversee sanitation, education, transportation, police, communication. (The book does not mention the FBI which were essentially federal police, starting in 1908. But the main point that America was mostly decentralizes is true.) Other countries had Food Rationing. America had Herbert Hoover (private citizen? cabinet?) urging Americans to eat less so the troops would have more. That was 1917. [That would never work today.] The Red Cross and Salvation Army and other NGO's also helped.

Telecommunications was a private enterprise. There was great collaboration between them and the Signal Corp—the army counterpart. Actually the Gov nationalized the tele industry-but only for the duration of the war.

The telephone (and other devices) were revolutionary in terms of having the troops be in contact with the officers and with each other. Radio's did not carry voices, Morse code had limited range, Field radios were heavy. So the telephone was much better.

Phones needed an operator when they first came out. American phones still needed an operator for long distance calls until the 1970's [I do not remember that.] Early on they had no dial. They also did not need electricity since that came from the call center.

80% of the telephone operators were female. Women were preferred since they were polite on the phone. This became a self-enforcing thing since mostly women were trained for it. The book claims women are better at multitasking.

**Side Note** By the 1960's America was still using operators when the technology no longer needed them. Not sure why. Odd since in other ways America was way ahead—we had more phone coverage and people using them early.

Operator was one of the few jobs open to women and it paid well. [One of the few not open to men?]

### **3 Looking for Soldiers and Finding Women**

The phone company AT+T cooperated with the Gov both out of patriotism and for their own benefit—it headed off the Gov nationalizing them. [I could not tell—did the Gov nationalize them?] Many other countries regarded the phone as a public utility. AT+T put out a 3-volume tome named

(unintentionally ironically) *Brief Arguments Against Public Ownership's*.

Going into the war America was understaffed. The Navy began taking women. The sec of the Navy Josephus Daniels was (a) an unapologetic racist, and (b) for women getting the vote and holding office and being in the army. This may sound odd now, but it wasn't then. He insisted on equal pay for women. He didn't like them being called *Yeomenettes* since they were to be treated as equals. (Later Women themselves liked the term since they wanted to retain their femininity.)

The recruitment of women into the Navy initially had a mixed reaction in the public but the Army did lots of publicity-including posters showing attractive women serving their country. They were attractive to emphasize that working for the Army you can still be feminine. This was important both for the public to accept them and also for recruiting them.

In Britain women who sought equal rights and the vote changed in the Governments and publics perception from hooligans to hero's as they joined the military to prove that they could and would help their country.

In both Britain and America the acceptance of women was also because there was a shortage of men. This also filtered down to other non-military jobs—with men on the battlefield, jobs on the home front had to be filled. But British still treated women in the military as second class. They were often still civilians, could not be saluted, were paid less. Some thought only women of low morals would be in the Military.

In Britian, before 1917 only MEN who OWNED PROPERTY could vote. A year later Female Property Owners and Females over 30 were given the vote. Later than that the property requirement was dropped.

I was reminded of the Civil War book—Lincoln has impressed with blacks in battle and this was part of why he signed the Emancipation. Proc, but also why he changed his mind about Blacks being inferior.

Germany did not use any females in the Military (prob except Nurses).

Russia used women in WW I. However, Russia signed a separate peace treaty and left the war early, so they didn't use women much.

In America, in 1917, the army began recruiting women for switchboard duty. This was diff than other Military work in that here the assumption was that women were BETTER at it than men. This was true since Women had been trained and had done it before. (Whether or not Women are BORN better at it is a hard question.)

There was a lot of pushback on this both from the public and from some of the Generals. The Generals knew the women were qualified and the public

either knew or didn't care. The objection was philosophical: (1) single women in the same proximity as men is immoral, (2) unladylike, (3) Will they take away jobs from men in the long run, (4) if they earn money then they can't divorce husbands who abuse them (they prob didn't put it that way). But over time the need for them overcame any philosophical objections. That's common in history—pragmatic concerns overcome philosophical ones. [I've heard it said that the Catholic Church may allow married priests or female priests if the priest-shortage gets more serious.]

There was a shortage of Hello Girls who could serve in France because they had to also know French. Hence a bold idea: RECRUIT bilingual women and train them. That worked.

General Pershing was a key figure in this. By temperament he was rigid, but this was overwhelmed by practical considerations. He pushed for women to be Hello Girls. Earlier in his career he was involved with recruiting black soldiers. Originally nicknamed *N-word Jack* it was changed to *Black Jack* (So PC even then.)

The status of the Hello Girls with regard to are-they-military? was murky.

## 4 We're Going Over

When the Hello girls went over to the Europe their status: Military or Civilian? This was unclear. This continued to be a problem even into 2024 when deciding things like pension and how to best honor them. Why the confusion?

1. The concern was getting them over there, so some skipped these sort of details.
2. Unapologetic, honest, Sexism.
3. If they were military they would be eligible for war-insurance which costs money. So the Gov wanted to say CIVILIAN. But one of the attractions of the job for recruiting was that they were helping our country so MILITARY.

Sec of war Newton Baker believed in Women getting the vote, very strongly, yet did not want to consider the Hello Girls as Military. The book speculates that its because Baker himself was not a big strong man and he wanted the Army to project big strong men to compensate. I am skeptical of this.

The number of Hello Girls was 223.

Some women lied about their age to apply.

Some women lied to their parents about what they were doing since their parents might object to the danger. But unmarried women needed their parents consent (even if they were not living at home). In one case the mother gave the consent for her two daughters, but asked they not be split up. The army promised the daughters would not be split up, but then split them up on the second day.

The women who applied also had to submit photograph—some women submitted a photograph of someone more glamorous than they were. The women needed FOUR recommendations attesting to their patriotism as well as some attesting their ability (could they be the same letter?). Note that the women would be hearing classified information. Women of German ancestry were looked at more carefully but some were admitted. Women of Jewish ancestry were also looked at more carefully (unapologetic, honest, anti-semitism) They wanted women between the ages of 23 and 33, though this was not public.

Why did women want to do this?

1. Patriotism—so love of country.
2. A personal connection to the war such as a relative in the army.
3. A personal connection to the war such as having your roots in (say) France.
4. A sense of adventure

I wonder if they realized how dangerous it would be.

## 5 Pack your Kit

Before going to France the recruits got medical examinations, vaccines, lots of training. Those that knew French but not about being a telephone operator, they had to teach how to be a telephone operator. Those that were telephone operator but didn't know French, they had to teach French. I do not know if they recruited girls who knew neither. They lived at the YMCA (later the YWCA) or found other housing.

They didn't get officer training. They used the ranks Operator, Supervising Operator, Chief Operator. Some of the higher ranks had trouble giving orders with authority especially to operators who they knew personally.

They lived at the YMCA (later the YWCA) or found other housing.

They also got training in the military way of life—not just taking and giving orders, but how to dress, being polite and prompt, respecting your fellow officer. Some of this was confusing—who should salute who? How did their ranks mesh with the ranks of the men?

West coast girls were not as good at taking orders as East coast and Middle girls.

Only 11 of the Hello Girls were married. Formally it was illegal for the wife of an officer to serve, though some managed it anyway. [Did the army know but turned a blind eye since they needed the Hello Girls, OR did they just not know?]

The Hello Girls had to buy uniform coats, skirts, blouses, hats, high-top shoes, and other stuff from their own money. AT+T loaned them the money, but they only made \$60.00 a month, so half a years salary went to buying these things. Women loved the uniforms which meant full membership in the American Expeditionary forces [or so they thought—later wars-risk-insurance and pensions were denied].

Social expectations: in that era there was no dating (that began in the 1920s). There was courting. And in the roaring 20's even more conventions were broken. The Hello Girls were serious and did not do that; however, how they should interact with the men was ambiguous.

The Hoboken Incident [this is so minor I could not find any other source on it] was the following: The women were having a dance (just women) and men heard the music and joined them— which the women were happy with. THATS IT. As a 21st century man I have a hard time seeing what the problem is. They didn't get into trouble, but it lead to more strict rules on proper fraternizing. If a man is interested in a women he must ask Mrs. Crittendon's (The Chief Operator) superior officer (a man) and that officer may vouch for the man or not. [This mirrored courting.] The policy was confusing. Though they did know to not dance with men if Mrs. Crittendon would see them.

The House of Rep passed a bill allowing women who were in the Army to buy war-risk-insurance, but the Senate turned it town. Pure Chauvinism.

## 6 Wilson Adapts Suffrage and the Signal Corp Embarks

This chapter is on two very diff topics so I split them.

### 6.1 Wilson Adapts Suffrage

During WWI other countries were giving women the vote (earlier than the USA). England gave the vote to Female property owners and college graduates over the age of 30 (progressive at the time, seems odd to us). In Oct 1917 Wilson suggested that Women in the USA have the right to vote.

Earlier in his career Wilson did not think women should vote. His change of mind seems to have been because of woman's work in WW I (the Hello Girls, Nurses, Women in the Navy) and out of genuine conviction. This reminds me of Abe Lincoln's view of blacks since black soldiers fought in the Civil War. While I am sure there was also a political calculation its great (and rare) to see people in politics act on actual conviction. LBJ and the civil rights bill is similar.

Some historians argue that it was more of a political calculation for Wilson—there were already states where women can vote, and in those states an anti-suff candidate may suffer. However, I give him the benefit of the doubt.

Indeed—when he proposed women suff in 1919 it was politically risky—he risked upsetting southerners since black women would be able to vote. I wonder about this—the south was already very good at preventing black men to vote so why worry if they have to extend their efforts to black women. One factor: Black men knew that if they voted they may get lynched. Would southern white men really lynch a black women? Maybe not.

**Side note** The South was very racist and very liberal. Wilson was himself very racist and somewhat liberal. The south helped him pass many bills that helped working white men (min wage, child labor laws, banking regulation, tariffs to protect jobs). Later Wilson championed international cooperation via the League of Nations. This is why it is so hard to compare politics then to politics now. [I've read that whites were FINE with a government that gives out goodies, but when whites were told that blacks would get goodies also, thats when whites became more anti-gov.]

Wilson never mentioned black women and never mentioned the women's



movement which may be seen as radical (some of them were also for civil rights for blacks).

Reasons for and against, but mostly for.

1. Wilson publicly:
  - (a) International opinion. This surprised me—“If we don’t give women the right to vote then the Europeans will think badly of us”—this argument would not work today.
  - (b) Women’s War time service.
2. Wilson privately: To shut up those darn suffs. Might help him politically.
3. Recall that one reason Lincoln wanted the country to stay together is that it was the only democracy and would perhaps be a beacon to others. In 1860 America was way ahead of other countries in terms of democracy. But by 1917 other countries had given women the right to vote and America hadn’t, so we were falling behind. (And we didn’t give blacks the right to vote, though other countries treated their minorities badly as well. indeed—one of the causes of the war was large minorities in countries wanting to form their own country.)
4. We are fighting WW I for democracy so we darn well better have it here as well.
5. Women should not have the vote since they can’t bear arms (what if they can arm bears?). Dem Congressman Cantrell thought this before the war (did he really, it seems so stupid since many men also don’t bear arms, though I am a 21st century person so perhaps I just can’t understand the importance of this) but once he saw women helping the war effort he changed his mind. Thats what the book says. But I wonder if there were also political calculations here.

For Wilson and others I wonder how much is genuine conversion to the cause OR political calc. While its a bit of both, I give them all the benefit of the doubt.

## 6.2 The Signal Corp Embarks

Getting over to Europe was dangerous. In April 1917 the Germans sunk 155 ships killing 1125 lives. Some ships had escorts which helped.

Submarine attacks were somewhat new so the ships the Americans had were not the kind that could fight submarines. (Trivia: the first was that used submarines was the American Revolutionary war, though the subs were for only 1-person and did not help.) Weather was also an issue. Illness was also an issue—the Spanish flu. Quote:

*On the seventh day of that month (COULD NOT FIND WHICH MONTH) one soldier at camp Devens reported ill. By the 18th day 6,674 had been hospitalized with the worst influenza ever seen in the United States. Five days later the number rose to 12,604 in a military camp of 45,000 soldiers. Some states suspended the draft.*

*Antiviral drugs and antibiotics did not exist. Careful nursing and luck were the only cures.*

Crowded ships made disease spread fast.

The people on the ships did not know where they were going—England or France—for security reasons. They also (unlike us) did not **did not know when the war would end!**. WE know and it colors our view. They really didn't know. (The same is true today of the Ukraine war—once it ends we will all say in hindsight that it had to end the way it did and when it did, but we really don't know.)

The chapter is mostly tales of hits and near misses and how miserable everyone was- though the danger did lead to some gallows humor and I assume the crews grew close.

### NEW TOPIC

The women had to be concerned with the following:

1. They had to fit into the military. Wear the uniform properly, follow orders.
2. They had to make clear they were not taking away a man's job. The Hello Girls probably had that easy as it was understood that women had the skills and men didn't. Being a Nurse was also understood to be a woman's job.
3. Maintain their femininity thus making the jobs more attractive to other women.

4. This one I made up but its prob true: make clear that this is for the countries good and NOT some statement about Suffrage or women-in-the-workplace or other crazy ideas.

This reminds me of when I was in fourth grade girls had to wear dresses but they were getting colds, so the rule changed to allow them to wear pants. I wondered what the counter-argument would be. IF the movement to allow girls to wear pants was seen as making girls more like boys THEN there could be a counter-argument, but if its just *the are catching colds* then there really can't be.

## NEW TOPIC

George Washington warned of getting involved in Foreign Entanglements. And until WW I the USA really did stay out of European wars (we were attacked by England in 1812, not our choice, and we declared war on Mexico in 1830? and on ourselves in 1861, but did not get involved in European wars).

WW I really broke this tradition big time!

Wilson tried to soft-pedal this by calling us *Associated Powers* and not *Allies*.

Early on there were no (or few) American Troops. General Pershing wanted to wait until we had a large force and then BAM—thinking it was better than some thinly spread out troops. Of course this meant that England and France had to last until we had our BAM.

On March 21 (I think 1918) Germany had a great moment: Russia had already surrendered and the Americans were not really fighting yet so they did a massive assault: Advanced 40 miles, took 70,000 prisoners, killed 200,000. The book does not say how England and France recovered—I doubt it was the Hello Girls.

## 7 Americans Find Their way Over Their

Initially America was not at the front lines. The strategy was to, when the USA goes in, go in HARD. But when would that be? The British and French were skeptical of this approach.

1. Britain lost twice as many soldiers in WW I then in WW II.
2. France lost six times as many soldiers in WW I then in WW II.

3. Russia and German losses were also greater in WW I then WW II (the book does not give solid stats on).
4. All of the countries in Europe has severe property damage.
5. Very few Americans Died.
6. No American Property damage.
7. Technology (tanks, machine guns) made WW I far deadlier than prior wars.

SO WW I was more brutal and had more deaths than WW II. I am surprised this is not better known. WW II is far more talked about then WW I. I suspect its because there is a clear bad-guy in WW II. If Hitler had not done the Holocaust would Germany be seen as the clear bad guy in WW II? If they had won then how would Germany be viewed? I suspect they would be looked at as right since the winners right the textbooks. Just look at the American History of the Mexican-American War.

The Hello Girls had a daunting task and only one month of training, compared to Soldiers who had 4-6 months of training.

The army had to set up phones and lines much faster than AT+T had, but they had AT+T's technology and help to do so. They used

**Taylorism:** Named after Fred Taylor. He insisted that on an assembly line each person does the exact same thing over and over again. This results in better, cheaper products. (I wonder if the workers go crazy. That happened in Charles Chaplin's movie *Modern Times*.)

The Hello Girls had a script and key phrases hey would use. They of course had to speak clearly and enunciates. There was a conflict between courtesy and efficiency. The Hello Girls were not allowed to give their names. They often talked in code (they might not have understood it themselves) in case the Germans were tapping the line.

There were cultural conflicts as the French were more chit-chatty.

Some of the men working with the Hello Girls were not happy to have women giving them orders, or even being treated as equals But the Hello Girls competency and seriousness won them over. [THIS IS A THEME OF THE WHOLE BOOK BUT ITS A LITTLE TO CLEAN A STORY.]

General Pershing was ALWAYS there to appreciate them and make sure that other men appreciated them. He is really the star of this book. He was

very protective of them—his own wife and three daughters had died in a fire which might have an affect here.

The YWCA helped with housing and parties. Some romances started during the war that lead to marriages. Pretty women were used to the attention, but for plainer women it was novel to have men want to dance or talk with them (the Hello Girls were sometimes the only Women around).

Travel was rare for most people so traveling was both a novelty, a thrill, and terrifying. Same with being away from home, so far away.

Some male army people were uncomfortable or didn't like having the Hello Girls because they were women and their status was unclear. MORE surprising is that the female NURSES didn't like them. Very curt, didn't socialize. We don't KNOW why that is but here are some of the authors speculation.

1. The nurses thought they were above *working girls*—so a class thing. This would be odd since many of the Hello Girls were upper class or educated.
2. The nurses envied the privilege the Hello Girls got—better accommodations.
3. The nurses were possessive of their status as the only women in the army.
4. The nurses did hazardous work—who were these H-girls to snatch the glory?

Signal Corp supervisors were like commanders but they also lived with and socialized with the H-girls, so it was hard to have authority. The whole system was not thought out.

Letters saying where they were were censored. On the phone they could not give some information to people unless those people were verified. This lead to some threats of court martial but the signal corp supervisor (Grace Banker) would rather discipline them than break them.

## 8 Better Late Than Never On the Marne

For the H-Girls, and for others (men and women) who did supportive roles they felt far from the war. Some wanted to be closer to the front (I think

they are crazy but I am a 21st century person). When they were far from the front some thought that They were (philosophically) closer to the war when they were in America giving to scrap drives and such.

SOS means Services of Supply. These are PEOPLE who do those things—so supportive roles.

General Pershing made sure that the SOS people knew they were appreciated and an important part of the war effort.

Once the America troops were in Europe there was a question of if they would be an ind. unit (which General Pershing wanted) or be folded into the English or French units. He wanted a victory to *count* as an American victory. This wasn't just ego—at the wars end it would matter who-did-what. Some compromise was reached but the Americans pretty much got what they wanted.

More important—the attack was a success. Part of France was freed. Some of the civilians had not seen a French newspaper since 1914.

## 9 Wilson's Fight for Democracy at Home

Arguments for and against Women's Suff. Note that some are disingenuous—someone might say its for states rights, but its really because they think women shouldn't vote.

### Arguments Against

1. States Rights. Its a matter of principle. This was mostly in the south. Some explicitly linked it to the Federal gov post-civil war wanting to give blacks the vote. I wonder if anyone really believes in the States Rights principle.. (Note in modern day when some pro-forced-birth people said to give it back to the states, but now want a federal ban.)
2. Explicit racial prejudice. This took several forms.
  - (a) If we disturb the status quo then we might end up having to give blacks vote. The counterargument was never *yes, and that would be a good thing*. It was always *no, that won't happen*.
  - (b) More black WOMEN will be able to vote and they will be harder to stop at the polls. They didn't quite say why-maybe because lynching black women is more objectionable.

I almost admire the honesty of the explicit racist arguments. Also, the people arguing that it's not a valid argument were also racists (including Wilson) so the claim *that won't happen* was honest. Feminists never tried to argue against racism (at least prominent ones didn't.) *Question*: Did Woman's Suffrage eventually lead to black suffrage? I really don't know.

3. Women are not capable of voting intelligently (hmmm—a way around that would be to have a fair intelligence test at the polling place). They will never vote to start a war (tell that to Margaret Thatcher). Leaders of pacifist organizations were largely women. It's a good question: would women be less likely to vote for war?
4. It's unladylike! It's not the sort of thing women can or want to do. This is an argument that has no intellectual merit.
5. (For politicians) The people who voted for me don't want it. (Reminds me of when, on 30 Rock, Liz Lemon got an award for Followership.)
6. Since Women can't defend our country or hold a weapon, they can't vote. This one seems odd today since (1) so many people help out the army far from battle, and (2) physical strength is less and less important. However *even then* point (1) was true. Also, this sounds absurd even then since many men can't fight either (disabilities, old, weak) and we don't deny them the vote. We don't deny conscientious objectors the vote.
7. I am surprised the book did not mention Prohibition, which some suffragettes were for. But more generally, Women's Suffrage was tied to other issues: Pacifism and perhaps others.
8. Women taking men's jobs.
9. Women becoming less feminine, and perhaps Men becoming less masculine. (This is a current concern with the Trans movement, though I don't see that Woman's Suffrage caused that to be an issue 100 years later.)

## Arguments For

1. Wilson tried to tie it to the war effort since everyone wants to win the war. There were a few ways to do this.
  - (a) Our brave women are helping the war effort and proving them worthy so they deserve the vote. Wilson seems to have been swayed towards suff for this reason.
  - (b) We are fighting for democracy over there so we should have it over here. (This DID NOT apply to minorities, see next point.)
2. Many European countries have already given women the right to vote so we should to. (NONE of the other European countries gave minorities the right to vote and NONE cared that we didn't give blacks the right to vote. Indeed—one of the big problems in Europe was that there were large minorities in countries, and they wanted their own country since they didn't have the right to vote. Giving them that right never seemed to dawn on anyone.)
3. Political reasons—it will help the Dems win the house and senate.
4. (I am not sure this was public) He needed the house and senate to help shape the post-war plans. He wanted Peace Without Victor and the League of Nations.

Wilson gave a speech in front of the senate the day before the vote about the bill. This was very unusual and he had to be talked into doing it. It was a great speech. *It didn't sway a single vote.*

There are movies where a speech by a politician sways votes *My Smith Goes to Washington* and *An American President*. In real life—not so much.

SO at the end of this chapter Women did not have the right to vote. Darn. History is messier than fiction.

#### **SIDE NOTES**

While Wilson is credited with the idea of a League of Nation of *international cooperation to protect national self interest* it had actually been around decades earlier.

## **10 Together in the Crisis of Meuse-Argonne**

The Battle of Meuse-Argonne was the largest, longest, deadliest battle in American History. 25,000 killed, 95,000 injured. (Gee, I never heard of it!



That's how forgotten WW I has become.)

The H-girls had to work 21 hours days. There was noise and some buildings got destroyed. Some of the H-girls wanted to be closer to the front—and now they were. (I wonder if they now regret that wish.)

The hardship led to better relations between the girls and each other and between the girls and the boys.

#### **NEW TOPIC**

There were some American black soldiers (called Buffalo Soldiers). General Pershing wanted them to be able to fight but did not want to start a distracting controversy over it. They were not allowed to fight with the Americans. The English didn't want them. The French took them.

There were 1500 black nurses in the Red Cross. They were banned from combat duty. During the Spanish Flu they allowed 21 of them to work.

#### **NEW TOPIC**

The Americans were badly trained and made tactical mistakes. (Did the Americans really help?)

One big mistake: They used German POW's as orderlies. A fire broke out and burned 7 buildings—quite possibly sabotage.

#### **NEW TOPIC**

During all of this word came through that the Germany had agreed to peace talks. This did not lead to a pause in hostilities but that came soon. Realize—WE know when the war ended but THEY had no idea.

## **11 Peace Without Their Victory Medals**

More on the lack of Recognition and perhaps more important—lack of veterans benefits, medical benefits, etc.

The people FOR and AGAINST their recognition do not divide neatly into MILITARY vs POLITICIANS or REPS vs DEMS or anything like that.

#### **PRO Recognition**

1. They were treated like soldiers.
2. They wore the uniform.
3. They were in harms way.
4. Nurses were given benefits.

5. They were promised benefits (some debate this but it seems clear).

### **CON Recognition**

1. They weren't really in the military.
2. They didn't see combat. This is bogus—many males also didn't see combat. And some of the Hello Girls were in danger.
3. MONEY—if we give them benefits it will cost money.
4. MONEY—if we give them benefits than other civilians who worked for the military will want benefits. This is the only CON that I find intelligent, though probably still wrong.
5. Here is a quote about the money and other factors (from page 281 which is in the next chapter): *Yet even if 100,000 non-uniformed women had been added, the veterans roll would have increased by only 2%. Money alone did not motivate the War Dept. Stubborn Pride, Bureaucratic arrogance, and the belief that women simply did not merit recompense blinded senior staff officers to faceless female veterans.*

### **NEW TOPIC**

The Hello Girls themselves in Europe were treated well and appreciated. Grace Banker later received the Dist service medal. She deflected attention from herself and said that ALL of the Hello Girls deserve credit. Her getting the medal did not help others, or even her, get benefits.

The hello girls in Europe were unable to get formal discharge papers which would have helped their case later.

### **NEW TOPIC**

Women getting the vote: It was embarrassing that Russia and Germany both gave Women the vote and America had not. Some of the Suffis blamed Wilson but he was going all he could and the president is not a dictator.

The bill PASSED the House easily (not sure when) but the Senate was a struggle. Some senators were bothered that the black vote was suppressed so the women vote would be also. Wilson was in Europe and could not help (more on that later).

Even so, it passed the Senate easily as well. The book does not say how or what changed.

The amendment was ratified by 2/3 of the states within the year.

Even with women getting the vote there was no change in woman's issues until the 1970's. One exception: Early on a women who married a foreigner could keep her citizenship. (The cable act.)

The theory is that major changes take a generation to go from (merely) legal impediments being removed to actual change.

### **NEW TOPIC**

Wilson, the PREZ, negotiating the peace was very very unusual—usually the prez left that to trained diplomats and negotiators.

## **12 Soldiering Forward in the 20th Century**

[More on the Hello Girls and other attempt to get them recognition.]

WW II: Did the army learn from their mistakes? They did—there was legislation passed to recognize women who served in WW II in the first place. [Later in the book this seems to have not worked that well.] These laws also allowed Black to fight (though segregated). [I wonder—were the southern senators fears about women getting benefits going to lead to black getting benefits?]

Some generals were against having black in the army. Here is a quote (not from the book) from Wikipedia about General Thomas Holdcomb.

*April 1941 the US Navy convened its General Board to discuss expansion of the Corps. Holcomb said that African Americans had no right to serve as Marines. He said, "If it were a question of having a Marine Corps of 5,000 whites or 250,000 Negroes, I would rather have the whites." In 1943, he passed Letter of Instruction 421, which restricted African-American Marines' ability to be promoted and prevented them from serving as non-commissioned officers in charge of whites.*

When I see quotes like this I always wonder which of the following is true:

- The General had reasons to think blacks would not make good soldiers (which are likely wrong).
- The General had no reasons to think blacks would not make good soldiers and hence was operating against his own interests.

Barry Goldwater championed a bill for women pilots who flew in WW II and were denied benefits [This surprised me—I thought they had avoided

this problem.] He was willing to help the Hello Girls and added them to his legislation.

Jimmy Carter signed a bill into law that gave the Hello Girls Recognition. There were only 18 left.

And STILL there were problems—like being buried in Arlington.

## 13 Epilogue

General lessons to learn from this history.

1. The people who worked with the Hello Girls may have initially not liked the idea but seeing their work pay off and how good they were, lead them to support their cause. General: Personal contact enlightens and breaks down barriers.
2. To win a cause you should focus narrowly on that cause. Many of the suffs intentionally JUST wanted the vote and DID not champion some other cause. While its been said that the suffs wanted Prohibition, they either didn't or hid that well.
3. If one group gets rights then others will demand them also. So perhaps the racist senators who feared giving women the vote would lead to blacks getting the vote were right.
4. Change takes perseverance and time..

My note: Once a change permeates through society its hard to imagine it being any other way.

1. There are very few people who in 2024 are *against* women voting.
2. There are very few people who in 2024 are *against* interracial marriage Clarence Thomas is married to a white women. This has gotten no comment. Tim Scott has a white fiance—I looked for comment on this and found none. I note that Clarence and Tim are very conservative. ONE exception: Nick Fuentes complained that JD Vance married an Indian. But this is rare and on the fringe.

3. Living together is a non-issue. When Prince William married Kate they had been living together for a while. I tried finding some commentary on this and all I found was some Church of England people saying *Thats what people do now.*
4. Gay marriage. Not quite. There are people who are still against. But any attempt to roll it back will fail.
5. Divorce. Some Reps are talking about making it harder; However, they will get resistance even from their own party.