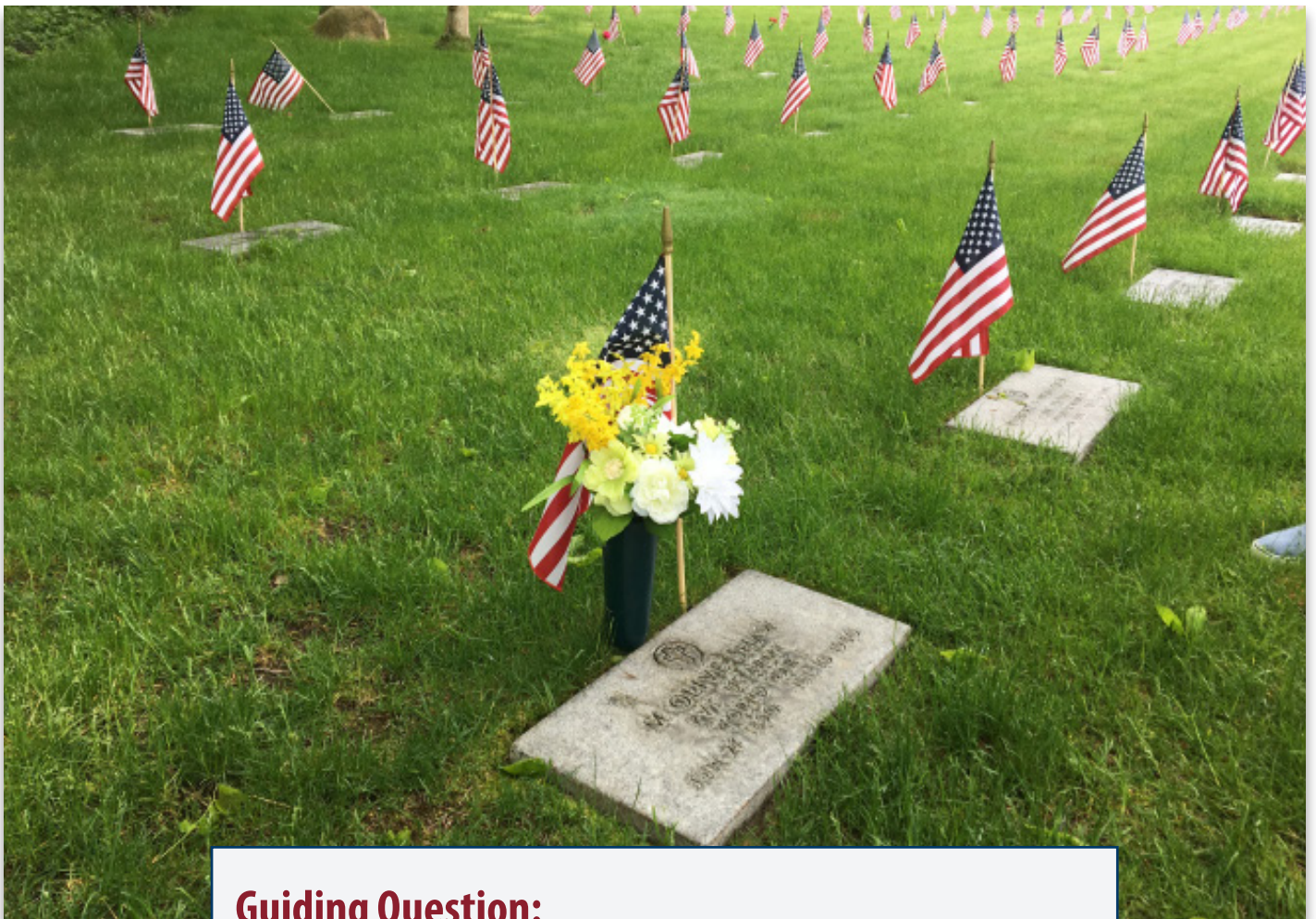




What is a Veteran?

DEVELOPED BY CHRISTINA O'CONNOR



Guiding Question:

What makes someone a veteran?



Overview

Students will consider what it means to be a veteran. Using primary source analysis, students will assess how the U.S. Army made this determination in the case of the Hello Girls during and after World War I.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify attributes of military service;
- Analyze primary source documents and artifacts related to the Hello Girls; and
- Evaluate the impact of the U.S. Army's determination about the post-war status of the Hello Girls.



Private M. Olive Shaw and her fellow Hello Girls served in the U.S. Army during World War I. Despite their contributions, they were not recognized as veterans for 60 years. Their service and their post-war fight to gain veteran status challenges us to ask, "What makes someone a veteran?"

— Christina O'Connor

O'Connor teaches U.S. history and U.S. government at Hingham High School in Hingham, Massachusetts.

Spotlight: Massachusetts National Cemetery

During the mid-1970s, when the National Cemetery System was looking to expand, it determined that the largest veteran population in the northeast was centered in the Boston area. A search soon commenced to find a suitable site for a national cemetery, nearby. The difficult task of locating land which would be available to the government at no cost eventually led to the identification of a 749-acre tract on the 22,000-acre Otis Air Force Base as the most likely site.

The Massachusetts National Cemetery was dedicated on October 11, 1980 and became the third new national cemetery to open in nearly 30 years. The site was officially named the Veterans Administration National Cemetery of Bourne, Mass., but over time the lengthy appellation changed in practice, if not in fact, to simply, Massachusetts National Cemetery.

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Standards Connections

Connections to Common Core

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Documents Used

Primary Sources

American Legion Letter, January 27, 1921

National WWI Museum & Memorial

M. Olive Shaw's DD-214 form indicating her honorable discharge and World War I Victory Medal, August 27, 1979

National Archives and Records Administration - St. Louis

Order letter of appreciation from CSO Brigadier General Russel, November 12, 1918

National Archives and Records Administration

Overseas Telephone Operators, July 22, 1937

National Archives and Records Administration

VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

Photograph, *Capturing St. Mihiel Salient*, October 15, 1918
National Archives and Records Administration (21981)

Photograph, *M. Olive Shaw in uniform*, c. 1918-1919
Women In Military Service For America Memorial Foundation Historical Files

Photograph, *M. Olive Shaw's grave at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne, Massachusetts*, May 28, 2018
Courtesy of Christina O'Connor

Signal Corps Telegram to M Olive Shaw, April 26, 1919
National WWI Museum & Memorial

"Six Hello Girls Help First Army," *Omaha daily bee*, October, 27, 1918
Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Library of Congress.
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1918-10-27/ed-1/seq-16/>

War Risk Insurance Certificate, March 23, 1918
National WWI Museum & Memorial

Secondary Sources

Veteran Profile, Private Melina Olive Shaw
National Cemetery Administration
<https://www.cem.va.gov/legacy/>

Materials

- Primary Source Documents packet
- Student Graphic Organizer
- *What Makes Someone a Veteran?* Assessment
- *What Makes Someone a Veteran?* Rubric
- Poster board/markers (for use in the cemetery) or whiteboard/markers (for use in the classroom)

Activity Preparation

- Make one copy of the Primary Source Packet for each student.
- Make one copy of the Student Graphic Organizer for each student.
- Make one copy of the DD Form 215 for each student (or set up a projector to show this document later in the lesson).
- Make one copy of the *What Makes Someone a Veteran?* Assessment for each student.
- Make one copy of the *What Makes Someone a Veteran?* Rubric for each student.
- Gather markers and poster board.

Procedure

Activity One: Introduction (15 minutes)

- Distribute the Student Graphic Organizers to the students.
- Tell students they are going to begin by considering their personal opinions about the essential question: What makes someone a veteran? Give them two or three minutes to individually answer question one in the graphic organizer.
- Solicit student responses in group discussion. If you are in a classroom, write these on the board. If you are in the cemetery, consider a using poster board, or complete this orally.
- Work with students in a group discussion to put their responses into categories.
 - *Is being a veteran about actions someone took?* (fought in a war, served in the military, drafted, etc.)
 - *Is being a veteran about demographics?* (men, young, American, etc.)
 - *Is being a veteran about dates?* (during wartime)

Activity Two: Primary Source Analysis (45 minutes)

- Distribute the Primary Source Documents packets to the students.
- Have students look at the photograph of Melina Olive Shaw in uniform. Give them a few minutes to complete question two of the graphic organizer.
 - Is this person a veteran?
 - What would make her a veteran? (Possible answers: uniform, insignia, official photograph)
 - What would make her not a veteran? (Possible answers: she's a woman, skirt, not in combat, too long ago – women not in the military so long ago)
- Debrief student answers in a group discussion.
- Explain that M. Olive Shaw was a Hello Girl in the U.S. Signal Corps during World War I. She and the other Hello Girls worked as switchboard operators in the field to assist with communication. They connected calls between troops in the field, their commanders who developed strategy and oversaw multiple companies from behind the front lines, and the supply depots.
- Tell students they will examine seven of the primary sources in the packet.
 - American Legion Letter
 - Order letter of appreciation from Chief Signal Officer Brigadier General Russel
 - Overseas Telephone Operators
 - Photograph, Capturing St. Mihiel Salient, Signal Corps, USA
 - Signal Corps Telegram to M Olive Shaw
 - "Six Hello Girls Help First Army", *The Stars and Stripes*
 - War Risk Insurance Certificate
- Direct students to use the Primary Source Section on page two of the graphic organizer to record their thoughts about whether each of the seven sources suggest that M. Olive Shaw and other Hello Girls were veterans after the end of World War I.
- Debrief the documents in a group discussion. Ask: *How did you come up with your conclusions?*
- Walk to M. Olive Shaw's grave, Section 1, Site 1. If you are in the classroom, ask students to look at the photo of her gravestone that is included in the Primary Source Document packet. Does the fact that she is buried in Massachusetts National Cemetery mean she is a veteran?

Teacher Tip: *You can have all students look at all documents, or you could break students up into smaller groups, asking each group to analyze one or two documents.*

- According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, “Burial in a national cemetery is open to all members of the armed forces who have met a minimum active duty service requirement and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. A Veteran's spouse, widow or widower, minor dependent children, and under certain conditions, unmarried adult children with disabilities may also be eligible for burial. Eligible spouses and children may be buried even if they predecease the Veteran. Members of the reserve components of the armed forces who die while on active duty or who die while on training duty, or were eligible for retired pay, may also be eligible for burial.”
- Distribute copies of M. Olive Shaw’s DD Form 215. If you are in the classroom, consider using a projector to show the form to the class. Ask students to consider the meaning of this form. If they do not notice the date on their own, point it out to them and ask them why it would be dated 1979.

Teacher Note: *At the end of World War I, Olive Shaw and other Hello Girls were surprised to learn they were considered civilian employees and therefore ineligible for veterans benefits. They began the fight to be recognized as veterans that would last for 60 years. They finally receiving their honorable discharges in 1979, when most of the Hello Girls had already passed away. To learn more, read the Veteran Profile, Private Melina Olive Shaw.*

- Give students time to walk through Section One of the Massachusetts National Cemetery.
 - Ask students to choose another grave and consider: *What made that person a veteran?*
 - Students may either write up their responses, small groups of students could present to each other, or the whole class might stay together to share their responses.

Assessment

- Assign the *What Makes Someone a Veteran?* Assessment to students.
- The *What Makes Someone a Veteran?* Rubric can be used to score the essay.

Methods for Extension

- Students may wish to research the demographics of the military today.
- To consider the role of women in World War II, teachers might use this lesson on the Women’s Army Corps, available at <https://abmceducation.org/understandingsacrifice/activity/congressional-debates-over-women%E2%80%99s-army-corps>
- If you are at the Massachusetts National Cemetery, you can guide students to the row of memorials across the street and ask them to find the dedication to the Women’s Army Corps. Ask students to consider the connection(s) between the Hello Girls and the WACs.

Student Graphic Organizer

1. What makes someone a veteran? List as many qualities as you can.

2. Look at the photograph of Melina Olive Shaw. Is she a veteran?

| What in this photograph would indicate that she is a veteran? | What in this photograph would indicate that she is NOT a veteran? |
|---|---|
| <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |

Primary Source Analysis

| What is the document? | Does it suggest the Hello Girls would be/were veterans? | Why/why not? Use evidence from the document to support your answer. |
|--|---|---|
| American Legion Letter, January 27, 1921 | | |
| Order letter of appreciation from Chief Signal Officer Brigadier General Russel, November 12, 1918 | | |
| Overseas Telephone Operators, July 22, 1937 | | |
| Photograph, <i>Capturing St. Mihiel Salient</i> , October 15, 1918 | | |
| Signal Corps Telegram to M. Olive Shaw, April 26, 1919 | | |
| "Six Hello Girls Help First Army," <i>Omaha daily bee</i> , October, 27, 1918 | | |
| War Risk Insurance Certificate, March 23, 1918 | | |

Credit: National Cemetery Administration

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What Makes Someone a Veteran? Assessment

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,

“Burial in a national cemetery is open to all members of the armed forces who have met a minimum active duty service requirement and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. A Veteran's spouse, widow or widower, minor dependent children, and under certain conditions, unmarried adult children with disabilities may also be eligible for burial. Eligible spouses and children may be buried even if they predecease the Veteran. Members of the reserve components of the armed forces who die while on active duty or who die while on training duty, or were eligible for retired pay, may also be eligible for burial.”

Considering these eligibility requirements and the contributions of M. Olive Shaw and the Hello Girls during World War I, **what makes someone a veteran?**

Write a thesis-driven paragraph and support your argument with specific evidence from the primary sources and from outside sources.

What Makes Someone a Veteran? Rubric

| | Advanced | Proficient | Basic | Emerging |
|-----------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Thesis/Argument | You have taken a stand and included a clearly defined argument. | You have taken a stand and included a mostly defined argument. | You attempt to take a stand yet have an only somewhat defined argument. | Your memo is more summary than analysis and has a largely unclear or unidentifiable argument. |
| Historical Evidence | In your memo you have included at least four identifiable and well-integrated references to the primary source documents and/or outside sources. | In your memo you have included at least three identifiable and integrated references to the primary source documents and/or outside sources. | In your memo you have included at least two identifiable references to the primary source documents and/or outside sources. | In your memo you have not included sufficient textual evidence from the primary sources and/or outside sources to support your argument. |
| Accuracy | Your paragraph contains no factual errors or major omissions. | Your paragraph contains a few factual errors and/or significant omissions. | Your paragraph contains some factual errors and/or omissions. | Your paragraph contains includes several factual errors and/or omissions. |
| Professional Product | Your paragraph is coherent and convincing with no spelling or grammatical mistakes. | Your paragraph is coherent and convincing with few spelling or grammatical mistakes. | Your paragraph is generally coherent and convincing with some spelling or grammatical mistakes. | Your paragraph lacks coherence and may not support an argument. There are several spelling or grammatical mistakes. |

VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

Primary Source Packet: Source 1

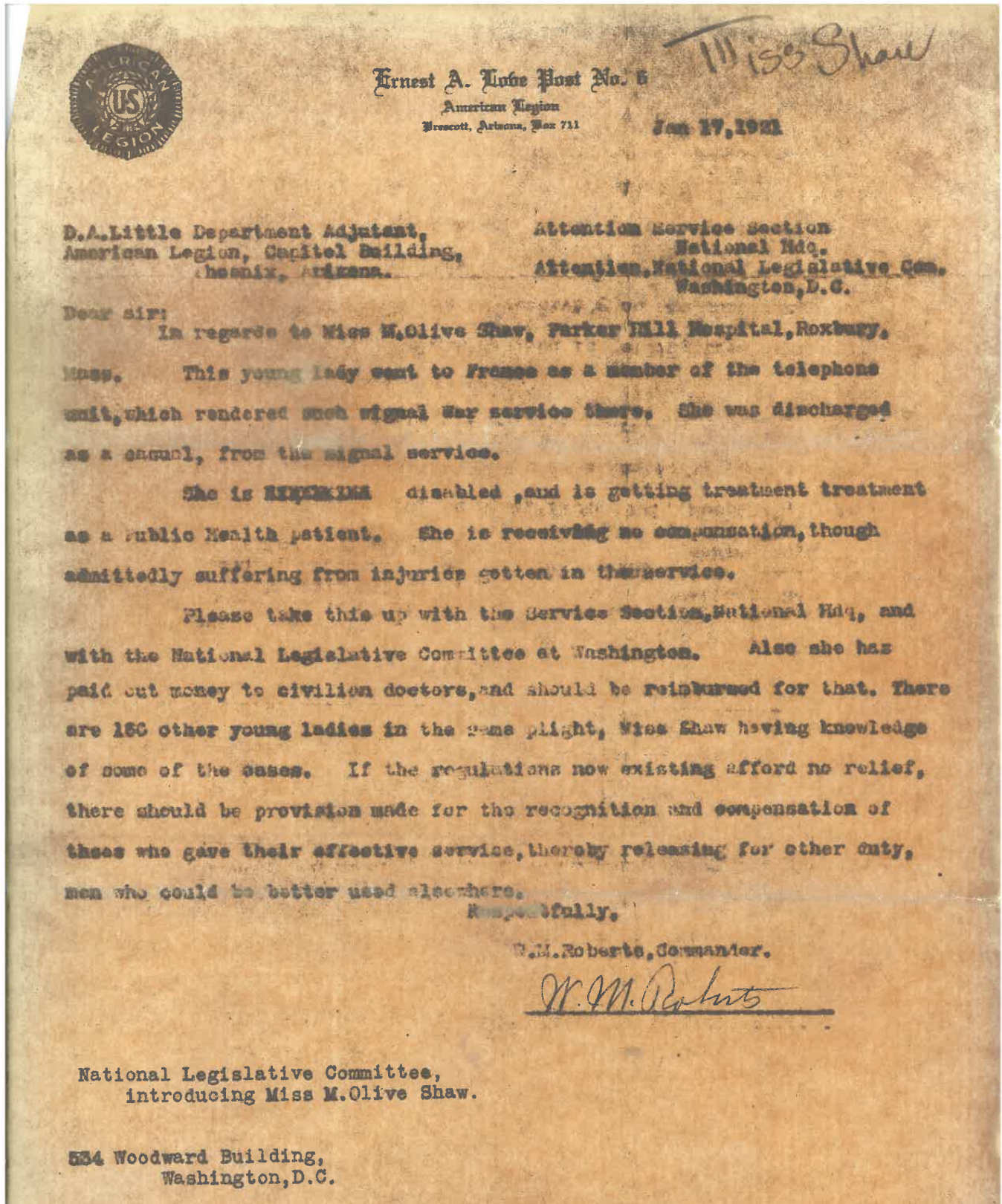
Photograph, M. Olive Shaw in uniform, c. 1918-1919



VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

Primary Source Packet: Source 2

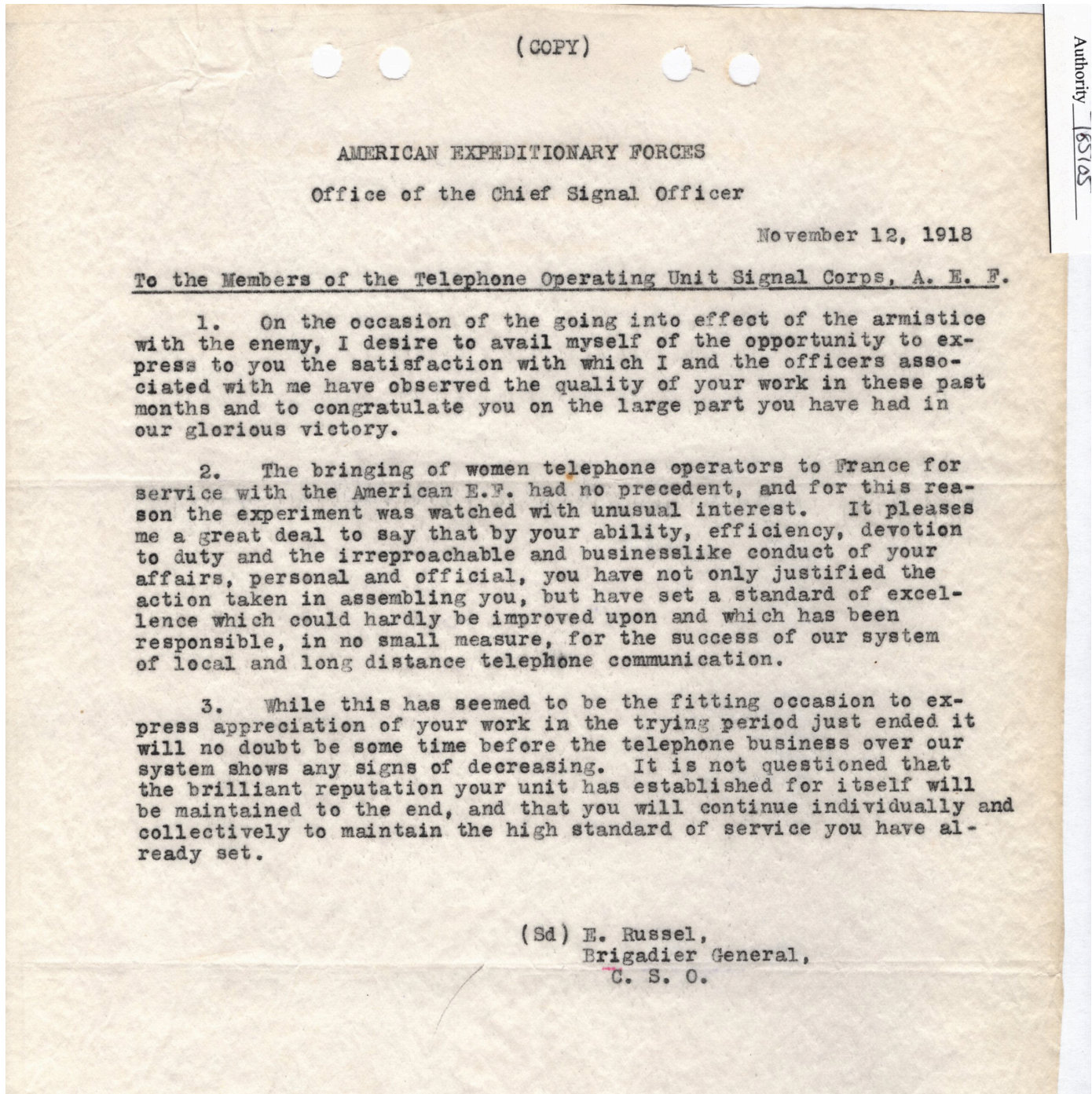
American Legion Letter, January 27, 1921



VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

Primary Source Packet: Source 3

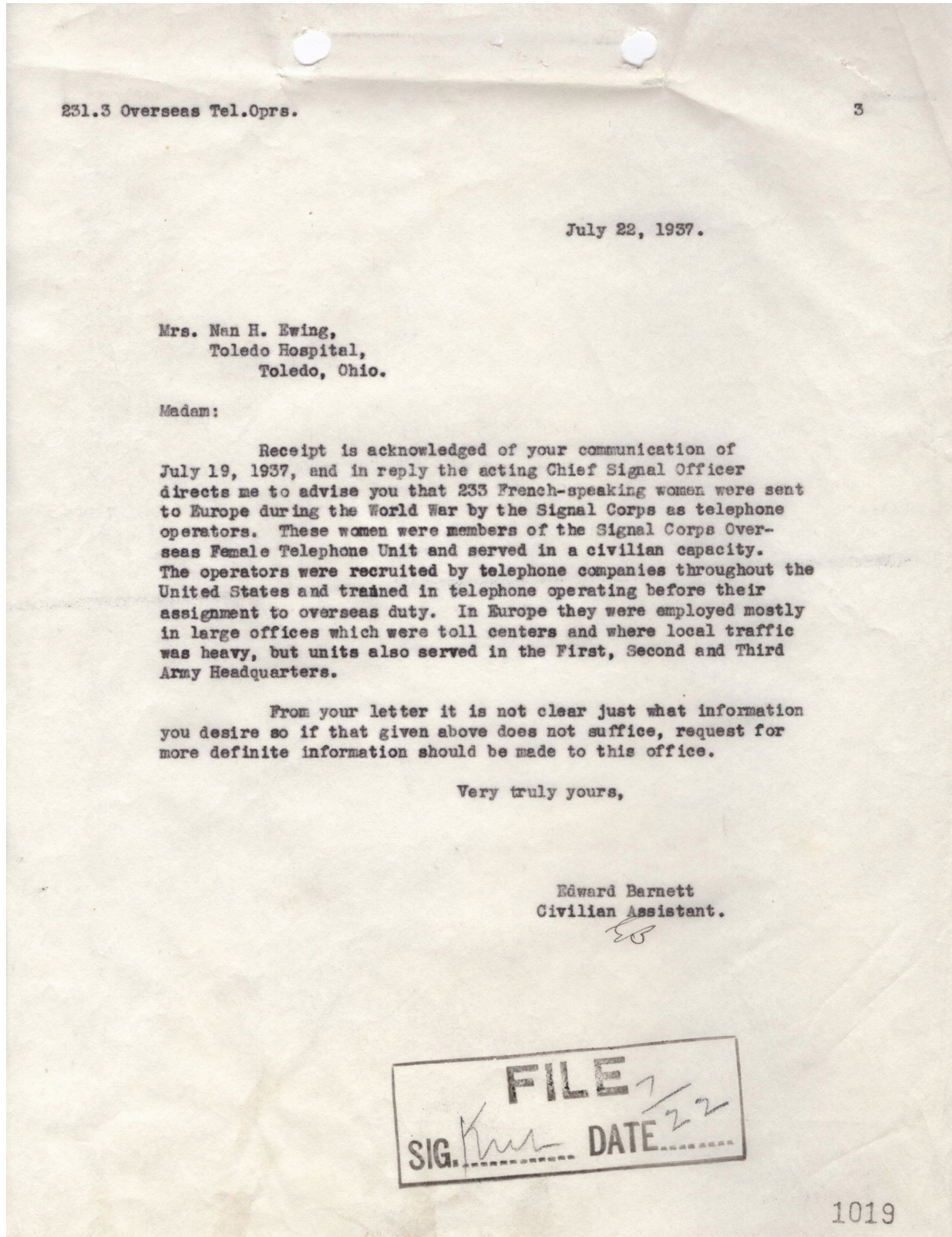
Order letter of appreciation from CSO Brigadier General Russel, November 12, 1918



VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

Primary Source Packet: Source 4

Overseas Telephone Operators, July 22, 1937



VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

Primary Source Packet: Source 5

Photograph, *Capturing St. Mihiel Salient, October 15, 1918*



VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

National Cemetery Administration | American Battle Monuments Commission | National History Day | Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media

Primary Source Packet: Source 6

Signal Corps Telegram to M Olive Shaw, April 26, 1919

POSTAL TELEGRAPH - COMMERCIAL CABLES
CLARENCE H. MACKAY, PRESIDENT

RECEIVED AT _____ DELIVERY NO. _____

TELEGRAM

The Postal Telegraph-Cable Company (Incorporated) transmits and delivers this message subject to the terms and conditions printed on the back of this blank.

This is a fast Day Telegram unless otherwise indicated by signal after the number of words:—"N. L." (Night Lettergram) or "Nite" (Night Telegram). Form 16

406W P 345P 61 GOVT 559

FC WASHN DC APL 26 19

M OLIVE SHAW

THROUGH: DEPT SIGNAL OFFICER 10 BRIDGE ST NYC

PURSUANT AUTHORITY SECRETARY WAR APRIL SEVENTH NINETEEN SEVENTEEN YOU WILL PROCEED AT ONCE FROM NY CITY TO WATERTOWN MASS THERE AWAITING FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS PERIOD TRAVEL QUARTERMASTER DIRECTED NECESSARY MILITARY SERVICE PERIOD SECURE TRANSPORTATION NEAREST QUARTERMASTERS PERIOD WHILE ENROUTE PER DIEM ALLOWANCE FOUR DOLLARS IN LIEU SUBSISTENCE AUTHORIZED

SQUIER CHIEF SIGNAL OFFICER

APR 26 1919
10 04 PM
NYC

Primary Source Packet: Source 7

"Six Hello Girls Help First Army," Omaha daily bee, October, 27, 1918

Six Hello Girls Help First Army

Six women operators of the signal corps—six American girls who jumped at the chance to be there—were in at the start of the St. Mihiel push of September 12, at the headquarters of the First American army, according to the Stars and Stripes of September 26.

During the six days that followed the Twelfth's initial heave they kept on their jobs, handling an average of 40,000 words a day over the eight lines they operated, and working any hours that were asked of them, day or night.

To Give Everyone Chance.

The lucky half-dozen—Chief Operator Grace D. Banker and Operators Esther V. Fresnel, Helen E. Hill, Bertha M. Hunt, Marie Large and Suzanne Prevot—were chosen of a total of 225 girl operators all just dying for the chance to go forward. It was a hard job to pick out the ones who were to go, so anxious was the whole force to get a crack at the big show at close range.

The six American girls, while up front, rough it with the best of the army, billeted, to be sure, but subject to all the discomforts and dangers that come with being billeted in the forward area over which the boche avions fly when they can.

According to their superior officers both in the signal corps and on the general staff, they have shown remarkable spirit and utter absence of nerves. And, needless to say, they have filled every one of the 500-odd male soldier operators in the A. E. F., toiling away further down the line and answering the calls of the telephone sextette, with a green and rankling envy.

Before the outbreak of the war it was computed that altogether there were some three thousand women earning their living as sailors along the wild Breton coast of France. They must each and every one of them obtain official permission before taking up their hazardous and laborious calling, but this once obtained, they rank, as regards wages and work, exactly as do the other members of the crew.

Princess Mary of England is an expert on the typewriter and King George frequently dictates letters to his daughter.

Primary Source Packet: Source 8

War Risk Insurance Certificate, March 23, 1918

The United States of America

TREASURY DEPARTMENT
BUREAU OF WAR RISK INSURANCE
WASHINGTON, D. C.

CERTIFICATE No. 1624058

Date insurance effective Mar 23 1918


This Certifies That Melina Olive Shaw

has applied for insurance in the amount of \$ 10,000, payable in case of death or total permanent disability in monthly installments of \$ 57.50

Subject to the payment of the premiums required, this insurance is granted under the authority of an Act amending "An Act entitled 'An Act to authorize the establishment of a Bureau of War Risk Insurance in the Treasury Department,' approved September 2, 1914, and for other purposes," approved October 6, 1917, and subject in all respects to the provisions of such Act, of any amendments thereto, and of all regulations thereunder, now in force or hereafter adopted, all of which, together with the application for this insurance, and the terms and conditions published under authority of the Act, shall constitute the contract.

Wm C. De Lanoy
Director of the Bureau of War Risk Insurance.

W. McAdoo
Secretary of the Treasury.



Countersigned at Washington, D. C., A. M. Peitz Registrar.

FORM 711 2-4175

original

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Photograph, M. Olive Shaw's grave at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne, Massachusetts, May 28, 2018



VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

M. Olive Shaw's DD-214 form indicating her honorable discharge and World War I Victory Medal, August 27, 1979

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| DATE OF CORRECTION 27 AUGUST 1979 | | CORRECTION TO DD FORM 214, REPORT OF SEPARATION FROM ACTIVE DUTY | | DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS ARMY SC | |
| IDENTIFICATION DATA | | | | | |
| LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME SHAW M OLIVE | | SERVICE NUMBER NA | EFFECTIVE DATE OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE (Day, Month, Year) 21 03 18 | SELECTIVE SERVICE LOCAL BOARD NUMBER (City, and State) NA | |
| | | SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER 011 14 8164 | | | |
| HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE (Street, RFD, City, State and ZIP Code) 331 HUNTINGTON AVENUE BOSTON MASS | | | PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING GIVEN ON ORIGINAL DD FORM 214 LITTLETON HOUSE FOSTER STREET LITTLETON MASS 01460 | | |
| CORRECTIONS | | | | | |
| The original DD Form 214 for the above-named individual is corrected as indicated below: | | | | | |
| ITEM NO. | CORRECTED TO READ | | | | |
| 9d | 19 05 08 | | | | |
| 18a | 01 01 18 | | | | |
| 18c | 01 01 18 | | | | |
| 18e | 01 01 18 | | | | |
| 26 | ADD: WORLD WAR I VICTORY MEDAL WITH SERVICE CLASP FOR FRANCE WORLD WAR I VICTORY LAPEL BUTTON (BRONZE) | | | | |
| J. C. PENNINGTON Major General, USA The Adjutant General (Signature of Authenticating Officer) | | | | | |

DD FORM 215
1 NOV 72

PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE.

2

VETERANS LEGACY PROGRAM

Private Melina Olive Shaw

RESEARCHED BY CHRISTINA O'CONNOR

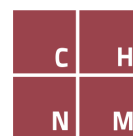


June 27, 1890 - July 10, 1980

Hometown: Adams, Massachusetts
Entered Service: 1918
Unit: Signal Corps
Rank: Private, U.S. Army
Awards: World War I Victory Medal
Cemetery: Section 1, Grave 1
Massachusetts National Cemetery
Bourne, Massachusetts



NHD
NATIONAL
HISTORY DAY



ROY ROSENZWEIG
Center FOR
History AND
New Media

Before the War

Born in Adams, a small town in the Berkshires region of western Massachusetts, Melina Olive Girard, known as Olive, was the youngest of four children born to Dr. George and Mrs. Adele Girard. Her father was born in Quebec, Canada and her mother was from Champlain, New York, a town just south of the Canadian border. Likely, they spoke French, and though they died young - her father of "heart trouble and paralysis" just before Olive turned two, and her mother of tuberculosis just after Olive turned 12 - Olive grew up with these roots.

She learned conversational French from one of her father's medical assistants. In 1909, at age 19, she married James Blaine Shaw of Dexter, Maine. They lived with Olive's sister Georgine and her husband, Warner Douglass, a photographer and booking agent for Moving Picture Company, which later became Loews Theatres. James and Olive soon divorced.

A 1979 newspaper article noted that Olive studied at the Sorbonne in Paris before the war. Archives at the New England Conservatory note that she studied piano and French for four terms between 1912 and 1914. Olive wrote that she was a student at the New England Conservatory in 1917 when she heard about the need for French-speaking women to serve overseas with the American Expeditionary Force as telephone operators. Olive became one of them.

Military Experience

Women have always contributed to American war efforts. Prior to World War I, however, the United States military did not employ women in any capacity other than nursing. With the introduction of telephone communication in World War I, this policy changed.

Demand for Telephone Operators

At first Americans relied upon French women working as telephone operators to help them communicate at the front. According to historian Jill Frahm, because of "the operators' limited command of English...and the differences in the pace and efficiency of work characteristic of the two cultures," the U.S. Army turned to its own ranks, filling telephone operator positions with enlisted men. This did not improve the situation. The men were neither bilingual nor trained on the technology.

To address its shortage of telephone operators overseas, the U.S. Army Signal Corps recruited women who could also speak French. Captain E.J. Wesson, who was in charge of this effort noted, "They are going to astound the people over there by the efficiency of their work. In Paris it takes from forty to sixty seconds to complete one call. The girls are equipped to handle 300 calls an hour."

All over France, telephone lines kept front line soldiers in touch with commanders and supply depots. The process was cumbersome, the communications were coded, and the volume of calls was tremendous.

The War Department resisted recruiting American women and faced significant pressure from individuals and groups who believed that women would have negative, even dangerous, effects on male American soldiers. Historian Elizabeth Cobbs quoted correspondence from an Illinois Christian group to the War Department:

"We...respectfully petition you to help keep our boys clean; not only from the ravages of the liquor traffic, but the scarlot [sic] woman as well. We have sincerely given you our best and we sincerely trust you will not only use them, but protect them from these forces that are more deadly than the armies of Europe, inasmuch as they destroy both body and soul."

General John J. Pershing personally requested the assistance. He claimed that "the women who go into the service will do as much to help win the war as the men in khaki." As a result, 233 Signal Corps operators, known as Hello Girls, served in the American Expeditionary Force during World War I.

Shaw applied to the United States military to serve in the Signal Corps in January 1918. Applicants needed to speak French and pass exams to prove their fluency. Successful candidates received telephone training before they traveled to France.

Shaw was accepted and sworn into service with the military oath, and trained in Lowell, Massachusetts, at the New England Telephone Company. Shaw transferred to AT&T headquarters in New York City, was sworn in again, and quartered in Hoboken, New Jersey, to wait for orders to cross the Atlantic.

In New York, Shaw was fitted for her uniform. Strictly regulated, these uniforms included a blue Norfolk jacket, long skirt, Army boots, hat, overcoat, wool undergarments, and bloomers. In a 1977 affidavit, Shaw described, "We wore regulation Army Signal Corps bronze devices on our collars and overseas caps, as well as the regulation 'U.S.' on our collars. These were the same as were worn by male Army Signal Corps officers." Shaw was incredibly proud of her uniform.

Shaw sailed to France in the second group of operators, under the command of Chief Operator Inez Crittenden. They sailed on the HMS *Aquitania* and arrived in April. Shaw and her fellow operators traveled to St. Nazaire and then transferred to Brest, where Shaw worked for over four months before she was hospitalized in Tours.



Olive Shaw in uniform, c. 1918-1919. Women In Military Service For America Memorial Foundation

After her release she worked in Tours as an operator and translator. She fell ill again with a terrible cold contracted around the time she spent two hours standing in cold rain in formation for inspection by General Pershing.



Telephone operators at Barracks #66 in Tours, France, April 29, 1918. National Archives and Records Administration (111-SC-16653-ac).

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She was discharged on May 5, 1919, and returned home. Her Chief Operator, Inez Crittenden, was not as lucky. She died in Paris on the day of the armistice, likely from influenza-related complications.

The Hello Girls and Service

The U.S. War Department considered the women serving in the Signal Corps to be civilian employees, but they were never told this. Military publications referred to them as servicemembers. A March 29, 1918 article in *Stars and Stripes* discussed the first group of Hello Girls who arrived in France: "They arrived just the other day and like everything else that's new and interesting about the Army - yes, they're in it too - they were lined up before a Signal Corps camera and shot."



World War I YWCA poster featuring a Signal Corps operator, c. 1917-1919. National Archives and Records Administration (512611).

The Hello Girls were subject to military discipline, had to be approved for leave and wear their uniforms on leave. They earned less than civilian employees and could not resign. As Shaw recalled in a 1950 memo she prepared for the Armed Services Committee:

"We ate army food, slept in army barracks and worked seven days a week. Lights went out at nine and we all had to be up at seven to eat with the army personnel. Could not leave camp without a permit, and then only on rare occasions."

Some Hello Girls served near the front lines in hazardous conditions. Captain Wesson explained in a newspaper interview, "As they assist in the giving of commands concerning artillery direction and calling up of reserves, they have a tremendously responsible position. The morale of the unit is of the finest, and they did not come into it without facing the possibility of danger." During the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the building where the operators worked caught fire. The women refused to leave their switchboards at first, and returned to work once the fire was extinguished.

Veteran Experience

Back in the United States, Shaw was diagnosed with tuberculosis and pernicious anemia. She was hospitalized for two years, part of that time at Parker Hill Hospital, run by the War Department. A passenger list from the SS *Statendam* noted her travel from Boulogne-sur-Mer to New York City in October 1930. Eventually, Shaw served in Washington, D.C. as the personal secretary to Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers of Lowell, Massachusetts. Shaw's World War I experience surely influenced Congresswoman Rogers' introduction of legislation to create the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1941.

For their service in dangerous wartime conditions, the Hello Girls received praise from Colonel Parker Hitt, Brigadier General Edgar Russel, and General John Pershing. In General Orders No. 73 from April 30, 1919, Pershing wrote, "The part played by women in winning the war has been an important one...Whether ministering to the sick or wounded, or engaged in the innumerable activities requiring your aid, the cheerfulness, loyalty and efficiency which have characterized your efforts deserve the highest praise." Seven women received Distinguished Service Medals for their work. When they returned home, however, did not receive Victory Medals or discharge papers. Their military rescinded their war risk insurance policies. They would not be considered veterans.

When hospitalized at a military hospital after returning to the U.S., Shaw was treated as a "public health patient," and incurred personal costs for her medical treatment. In a 1921 letter on Shaw's behalf to the American Legion National Legislative Committee in Washington, D.C., a local American Legion official noted:

"Also, she has paid out money to civilian doctors, and should be reimbursed for that. There are 150 other ladies in the same plight, Miss Shaw having knowledge of some of the cases. If the regulations now existing afford no relief, there should be provisions made for the recognition and compensation of those who gave their effective service, thereby releasing for other duty, men who could be better used elsewhere."

Led by Merle Egan Anderson, the women began the fight for recognition as veterans. After 60 years, the government issued the women honorable discharges. In that time, more than 50 bills were filed in Congress to grant the Hello Girls veteran status, but none succeeded.

In 1975 Attorney Mark Hough learned of their battle after reading an article about Merle Anderson in the *Seattle Times*. He contacted her and offered to serve as their pro bono counsel. Building a case that included statements from several of the surviving Hello Girls, Hough pressured Congress to take action before he filed the case. Congress scheduled hearings and Mark Hough made a statement to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on May 25, 1977. He noted it was his "belief that a gross injustice has been done to the women of the Signal Corps Telephone Operating Units...there is no question in my mind that the Signal Corps Telephone Operators morally and legally are entitled to official recognition of their military service in the United States Army."

In November 1977, the GI Improvement Act of 1977, signed by President Jimmy Carter, officially recognized the Hello Girls as veterans. In 1979, the Hello Girls were finally recognized as having been on active duty during World War I.

Olive Shaw, 89 years old, received her honorable discharge and victory medal from Major General Hugh F. T. Hoffman, Jr. on August 23, 1979, at the Littleton House nursing home in Littleton, Massachusetts. "It took a long time," she remarked. Sadly, she was one of only 18 women still alive to receive this recognition. Reporter Renda Mott of the *Worcester Telegram* described Shaw's reaction: "While cameras clicked and the spectators applauded, Miss Shaw could only mumble 'Great, wonderful' as a few tears ran down her cheeks. The document will hang in honor over her bed, she said."

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|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| DATE OF CORRECTION 27 AUGUST 1979 | | CORRECTION TO DD FORM 214, REPORT OF SEPARATION FROM ACTIVE DUTY | | DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS ARMY SC | |
| IDENTIFICATION DATA | | | | | |
| LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE NAME SHAW M OLIVE | | SERVICE NUMBER NA | EFFECTIVE DATE OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE (Day, Month, Year) 21 03 18 | SELECTIVE SERVICE LOCAL BOARD NUMBER (City, and State) NA | |
| | | SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER 011 14 8164 | | | |
| HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE (Street, RFD, City, State and ZIP Code) 331 HUNTINGTON AVENUE BOSTON MASS | | | PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING GIVEN ON ORIGINAL DD FORM 214 LITTLETON HOUSE FOSTER STREET LITTLETON MASS 01460 | | |
| CORRECTIONS | | | | | |
| The original DD Form 214 for the above-named individual is corrected as indicated below: | | | | | |
| ITEM NO. | CORRECTED TO READ | | | | |
| 9d | 19 05 08 | | | | |
| 18a | 01 01 18 | | | | |
| 18c | 01 01 18 | | | | |
| 18e | 01 01 18 | | | | |
| 26 | ADD: WORLD WAR I VICTORY MEDAL WITH SERVICE CLASP FOR FRANCE WORLD WAR I VICTORY LAPEL BUTTON (BRONZE) | | | | |
| J. C. PENNINGTON Major General, USA The Adjutant General (Signature of Authenticating Officer) | | | | | |

Olive Shaw's DD-214 form indicating her honorable discharge and World War I Victory Medal, August 27, 1979. National Archives and Records Administration

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Commemoration

Olive Shaw died less than a year later on July 10, 1980. In October 1980 the new Massachusetts National Cemetery opened in Bourne, Massachusetts, at Otis Air Force Base. Melina Olive Shaw was the first veteran to be buried there in Section 1, Plot 1.

According to historian Elizabeth Cobbs, "Olive Shaw's uniform was the crowning evidence" that gave the Hello Girls their rightful status as veterans of World War I in 1979. Today, it is on display in the National World War I Museum & Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri.

In June 2018, Senator Dean Heller of Nevada and Senator Jon Tester of Montana introduced legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the Hello Girls of the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Senator Tester stated, "They blazed a new path for women on the front lines in France, and the Congressional Gold Medal will honor their service as well as their fight for recognition." This award is the highest honor Congress can bestow upon civilians.



Left: Section one of the Massachusetts National Cemetery, in Bourne, Massachusetts, May 28, 2018. Courtesy of Christina O'Connor.

Right: Olive Shaw's grave at the Massachusetts National Cemetery, in Bourne, Massachusetts, May 28, 2018. Courtesy of Christina O'Connor.

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