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6 speakers (Theo Mayer, Mike Schuester, Patri O'Gan, Dr. Edward L, Zachary Austin, Dr. Elizabeth C)

[0:00:07]

Theo Mayer: Welcome to World War I Centennial News, Episode number 115. It's about then, what was happening 100 years ago in the aftermath of World War I, and it's about now, how World War I is being remembered and commemorated, written about, and discussed. And importantly, the podcast is about why and how we'll never let those events fall back into the abyss of obscurity. So join us as we explore the many facets of World War I, then and now. This week on the show, we explore the headlines of the newspapers 100 years ago in the third week of March. Mike [Schuester] continues his recounting of the disintegration of post-war ideals into post-war grabs for the spoils to Woodrow Wilson's great humiliation. You'll meet Patri O'Gan to talk about doughnuts. The doughnut lassies and the only two African American women to serve as YMCA volunteers in France. Doctor Edward Lengel tells of another strong American woman, a suffragette turned into World War I government agent. The commission's own Zachary Austin introduces us to the Valor Medals Task Force. What is it and what's it doing? Which is a direct lead into educator and author of the "Hello Girls" book, Doctor Elizabeth Cobbs, as she recounts her current activism on behalf of these remarkable women. All this week, on World War I Centennial News, which is brought to you by the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission, the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, the Star Foundation, the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, and the Richard Lounsbery Foundation. I'm Theo Mayer, the chief technologist for the commission and your host. Welcome to a jam-packed episode. 100 years ago this week, the headlines in the newspaper continue, of course, to be filled with the blow-by-blow, back and forth of the Versailles Peace Conference, with the Italians insisting on getting the newly minted Yugoslavia's only deep water port as part of their spoils of war. An interesting California reaction to the Japanese proposal for equality. Without question, the scariest story is the Bolshevik revolution in Hungary, threatening to reignite the whole war, seriously. We have a huge welcome home parade in New York that turns a little too enthusiastic. The government projects concerns over returning veteran unemployment, an account of dough boys missing in action and more. So with that as a setup, let's jump into our Centennial time machine and go back to the third week of March, 1919, to the aftermath of the war that changed the world. Dateline, Saturday March 22nd, 1919. And from the Peace Conference at Versailles, headline, "Italians vote to quit conference unless claim to Fiume is granted. Acute crisis over Adriatic. Colonel House hopes to present plan that will settle the Italian/Slav dispute." And in California, the immigration fear isn't from Mexico, but from Asia. Headline, "Senator Flagan of California charges design by Japan, fears oriental California. Japan proposal of race equality in Paris is called preposterous." And the story reads, "San Francisco, March 21. The associated press reports the demand of Japanese representatives in Paris that the constitution of the League of Nations recognize the rights of foreigners and that the Japanese be accorded equal and just treatment. This would require the United States to grant citizenship, the voting privilege, intermarriage, and ownership of land. California and the Pacific Coast region is not only the most exposed territory, but has had actual experience with what it believes to be a great national danger. It therefore devolves upon the western United States to make protest and to inform the east of the nature of its objection. Oriental immigration has flowed in this part of the country until Congress and the State Department have, by exclusion laws and by the gentleman's agreement, set up a barrier. Recent developments have shown an apparent attempt to circumvent the Federal Laws and agreements and the California laws forbidding ownership of land by oriental aliens has been discovered." And the next day back in Paris. Dateline, Sunday, March 23, 1919. Headline, "Fiume decision left to Wilson. Conference delegates believe way can be found to end difficulties. Italians feelings intense. Fear serious trouble at home unless they obtain Fiume as a port in the peace treaty." Now, you may remember the problem is that if the Italians get the Port of Fiume, then the new state of Yugoslavia has no deep water port. Meanwhile, the next day, the red scare is alive and well and the subject is Hungary. Dateline, Monday, March 24, 1919. Headline, "Hungary turns to Bolshevik rule. Defies on taunt to take territory. Makes offer of armed alliance with red government of Moscow. Said to have 70 thousand troops. Rumor that big army of Russian Bolsheviks is marching on Budapest." On the next day, the headlines are still about Budapest. Dateline, Tuesday, March 25, 1919. Headline, "Budapest reds hail Lenin as chief. Czechs reported moving on Hungary. French forces in Budapest. Several Serb divisions at Belgrade ready to take field. Monitors set up at Danube. Hungarian Soviets using theater and music halls for propaganda. Austrians hold back." But back home, things are a little bit more celebratory. Headline, New York, "City to turn out today in 27th division's honor. 500 thousand come to see parade. All ready for spectacle. Men back at armories where they had first war lessons. Starts at 10:00 sharp. City never so elaborately decorated or its people so enthusiastic." And the next day, we get a report on what actually happened. Dateline, Wednesday, March 26, 1919. Headline, "Veterans march for five miles as throngs acclaim. Fifth avenue lined with unbroken masses while 20 thousand pass in review. Crowds break restraint, surge on paraders in Madison Square, forcing change in formation. Two die, many are injured. Celebration of New York soldiers return from war surpassed all in city's history." And another headline clarifies those two deaths. Headline, "Crowds overrun the police lines, swarms upon roadway of many points to compel changes in parade formation. Two dead, 32 injured. Dead, man trying to see parade falls from roof and police captain dies of heart disease." And appropriate to the soldiers coming

home, we found an interesting article in the official bulletin. Headline, "War Department asks U.S. Chamber of Commerce to help find employment for discharged soldiers. Letter sent to all. Assistant to Secretary Wood outlines a general plan by which commercial bodies may render in valuable aid. Patriotic help of all is urged." And on the next day, it feels like it's all flaring up again. Dateline, Thursday, March 27th, 1919. Headline, "France is ready for sending a large army to Hungary. Czechs seize a Hungarian town with a gun plant. Want war upon Hungary. French say 500 thousand troops could be available at once, would bar red peril. Combined forces of Poles, Czechs, Romanians, Serbs, and allies suggested. Conference is blamed. Foreign office official criticizes leaders for a lack of policy towards Bolshevism." Yikes. And as we close the week, it's looking kind of week. Dateline, Friday, March 28th, 1919. Headline, "Irritation grows at peace delay. Many complaints made but boundaries disputes to be chief cause. Even big four affected. Lloyd George angry at Paris press attacks, insists on greater secrecy." And finally, a headline from the official bulletin begins to lay out the missing in action. Headline, "5,500 American soldiers still counting as missing and may be among the dead. General Pershing cables names already set. Reburials resulting in identification of many heretofore listed as missing. British missing, 161 thousand, and those of France, 290 thousand." And those are some of the headlines from 100 years ago this week in a world that felt like it might be heading back into war, trying to find a new normal after the global cataclysm that was known as World War I. With that, we're joined by Mike Schuester, former NPR correspondent and curator for the Great War Project blog. Wow, Mike, your post this week continues to track the disintegration of Woodrow Wilson's postwar vision for a new world order, based on self-determination, as it devolves into some kind of neo-imperialism. And now it seems like the man himself may also be disintegrating. What a sad and even humiliating moment for this very well-intentioned vision and man.

[0:11:39]

Mike Schuester: It really is, Theo. And so our headline reads, "Mandates colonies by another name, continue dividing up the spoils. Wilson is sickened, takes to bed." And this is special to the Great War Project. Mandates and self-determination, these are the lofty keys to President Wilson's goals for the peace talks in Paris a century ago. Mandates is a concept President Wilson and the other victors created to respond to the many demands made by the new or small state spawned by the war. They emerged from the former colonies of Germany, and from Balkan states left behind, such as Yugoslavia. "Some are too primitive to govern themselves and would have to be administered as if they were part of the state to which they were assigned," writes historian Thomas Fleming. The British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, told Wilson that if he refused this compromise, he might break up the Peace Conference. The trouble with this compromise is that the mandates system is beginning to look a lot like colonies themselves, seized by the victors after the war. Although Wilson opposes this, he capitulated, agreeing to let a League of Nations commission decide the disposition of the spoils. In the first week of its deliberations, the Peace Conference thus undermined the principle of no more annexations, as well as the principle of self-determination. Fleming reports, "No wonder the watching Germans grew cynical. A German newspaper remarked on Wilson's impotence. It appear more and more as if the western imperialists were playing nothing more than a charade." According to Fleming, overall thanks go to the reduction of the mandates to the status of hypocritical fiction. The British Empire acquired an additional eight million people and more than two million square miles. Neither in the Middle East, nor in Africa was there the slightest attempt to apply the principle of self-determination. Historian Thomas Fleming reports, "The president was shaken to the core of his being by these and other defeats. More and more it became apparent that Wilson never should have come to Europe and exposed himself and America's prestige to this kind of treatment." On April third, a century ago, in the midst of arguing about the large chunk of Yugoslavia's Adriatic Coast that Italy was trying to purloin, Wilson becomes violently ill. He took to his bed, Fleming reports, complaining of acute pain all over his body. During the night, he was wracked by fits of coughing that seemed to threaten him with strangulation. Next came a fever of 103, prompting fears among those few who were aware of his condition that he was poisoned. For three days, Wilson was a very sick man, according to Fleming. Others feared he was having a stroke or a severe case of influenza. The cynics at the Peace Conference believed it was all a ruse on the president's part to seek more leverage in the negotiations. He asked how soon he could ready his ship for the Transatlantic crossing home. He leaked this news to the New York Times, suggesting there may have been some truth to the cynics' belief, but there is another explanation. Wilson is sickened by the collapse of his hopes for the treaty and its high principles disintegrating before his eyes. That's the news these days a century ago from the Great War Project.

[0:14:53]

Theo Mayer: Mike Schuester is the curator for the Great War Project blog. The link to his post is in the podcast notes. To lighten the mood a bit, let's talk doughnuts. Well, not Krispy Kreme exactly, but World War I doughnuts. They were more than just a tasty confection. They could have been considered a secret weapon. Consider the doughnut, simple, delicious, made only with flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, eggs, and milk, but shamelessly dusted with powdered sugar after being fried. Sounds like the very definition of comfort food, and it was. One American World War I soldier, whose letter was reprinted in the Boston Daily Globe, commented, "Can you imagine hot doughnuts and pie and all sorts of stuff? And served by mighty good-looking girls, too." The doughnut, and the brave American women who brought them to our boys fighting in France, the Doughnut Lassies. They were an important asset to our fighting forces in France, but don't ask the generals. Just ask the lads. With us today to talk about this

American secret weapons the Germans didn't know about is Patri O'Gan, a researcher with the Smithsonian, where she focuses on African American women's roles in the war. And before that, she was with the National Museum of American History and happened to dig up some interesting stories about women's service for the YMCA and on the Doughnut Lassies. Patri, welcome to the podcast.

[0:16:25]

Patri O'Gan: Thank you.

[0:16:26]

Theo Mayer: So Patri, let me start with a question about you. Your professional focus has been on the era and the women of the era. How did you get started on that?

[0:16:35]

Patri O'Gan: I was hired to work in the Women's Military History Archive, actually to found the archive at the National Museum of American History, and that was seeing women in the military broadly interpreted. So not just as soldiers as we know them starting in World War I and World War II in military organizations, but pre-World War I, even in antiquity, women were laundresses and were cooking with the military. So looking at women's roles in the military in that view. That's how I got started. And then with the centenary of World War I, got to work on a number of exhibitions, particularly on women's various roles in World War I, both in the military and in civilian voluntary organizations.

[0:17:19]

Theo Mayer: Yeah, so let's talk about one of those. The YMCA canteen girls, and specific, the Doughnut Lassies. How prominent was the doughnut in American culture before World War I?

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Patri O'Gan: It actually was pretty prominent. It was, by the time of World War I, very well known and it was seen of kind of as American as apple pie, if you will. So it was part of the culture.

[0:17:38]

Theo Mayer: What made it such a successful morale booster for the troops? Was it the comfort food or the Doughnut Lassies?

[0:17:43]

Patri O'Gan: Well, I think it was both, in a way. I think the women who were with the welfare service organizations, the YMCA, the Salvation Army and others like that, they really strove to be positive, to be comforting, to provide the comforts of home in very difficult situations. A lot of times they were embedded with the troops, even up on the front lines. So they experienced the deprivations that troops did. They had trench foot, they had lice, but they knew that they were there to help the soldiers, to be a respite in the middle of war. So I think it was who they were and what they represented, and I think it was also just having a tasty doughnut and a nice cup of coffee.

[0:18:28]

Theo Mayer: Well, so we've had numerous accounts of what incredible morale boosters just having a sense of home with the soldiers there. Did any of the other forces do similar things?

[0:18:41]

Patri O'Gan: Oh yeah, women from the Allied Nations, they did their part in the way that society at that time allowed them to do it, which was things like serving food and beverages, running canteens to sell products, mending uniforms, writing letters, things like that.

[0:18:58]

Theo Mayer: Well, I know that everybody who delves into the World War I subjects in detail always winds up with favorite stories. I know that your recent focus has expanded to African American women who served as YMCA canteen girls. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

[0:19:12]

Patri O'Gan: There's a really wonderful book that probably many of you know about, called "Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces." It's written by Addie Hunton and Kathryn Johnson and it's available on the internet archives, so it's free and publicly available. During the war, there were only three African American women who were allowed to serve in a voluntary organization overseas, and those three women were with the YMCA. And if you think about that, that's really crazy that three women served 200,000 black soldiers and men. And in comparison, there were 3,000 white women with the YMCA. So it's pretty crazy to think that basically 1% of the YMCA served 16%

of the AEF. And their accounts of what happened, they don't just talk about their work. They worked at a leave station in France and they also traveled around after the war, but their account really is a fascinating story and it's really interesting to see what life was like for these women, not only being women overseas, but being African American women overseas. They experienced a lot of racism that the African American soldiers did, and then a lot of the sexism that the women faced. So they were doubly hindered, in a way, but they really saw themselves as representatives of their race, as bringing their race up. And they actually both had been involved with the end of LACT before the war, and then became somewhat radicalize, as many people did, after the war, in fighting for equal rights and suffrage.

[0:20:43]

Theo Mayer: Let me ask you, if I wanted to google the book, what's a good search term?

[0:20:47]

Patri O'Gan: Two colored women usually does it. And I know that's an old-fashioned term, not great, but that's the title of the book.

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Theo Mayer: Okay, Patri, in closing, I have a riddle for you. How do you close off a great interview that includes doughnuts?

[0:21:00]

Patri O'Gan: Well, I would do coffee, for sure, or cocoa. In the Salvation Army, they did cocoa too.

[0:21:06]

Theo Mayer: Well, thank you. Patri, thank you for joining us.

[0:21:09]

Patri O'Gan: Thank you.

[0:21:10]

Theo Mayer: Patri O'Gan, a researcher with the Smithsonian, where she focuses on African American women's roles in World War I. To learn more, follow the links in the podcast notes. Regular contributor, historian, Doctor Edward Lengel, continues his theme of bringing us inspiring stories of incredibly strong American women for Women's History Month. And I especially like this account of Vira Whitehouse, who went from being a woman suffrage leader to becoming a government agent working for George Creole during World War I.

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Dr. Edward L: Vira Boarman Whitehouse was among the most outspoken and successful leaders of the campaign for women's suffrage in the United States. Her leadership and hard work played major roles in securing votes for women in New York State in November 1917. Little did she expect the United States government to ask her to serve as a diplomatic agent in Europe with responsibilities that included fencing with German spies, but she happily took on the challenge. Born in New Orleans in 1875, Vira Boarman attended Newcomb College and married New York stockbroker, Norman Whitehouse, later a member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage in 1898. As a popular society woman, she learned early on about living in the public eye, and as a lifelong advocate for women's rights, she recognized the power of the media in defining public perceptions. In 1913, she began working for the women's political union, earning plaudits for her abilities as a public orator. Two years later, she became chairman of the New York State Women's Suffrage party, showing her strength as a publicist and manager by, for example, organizing one of the first ever political telephone polling campaigns. Most important from the standpoint of her colleagues, Vira Whitehouse was a phenomenally successful fundraiser. By early 1917, she had, through her own efforts, raised several hundred thousand dollars to support the suffrage campaign in New York. When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, Whitehouse, like Alice Paul of the National Women's Party, refused to abandon the campaign for women's suffrage. Unlike Paul though, Whitehouse cultivated friendly relations with President Woodrow Wilson, meeting with him just before New York State voted to extend suffrage in November 1917 and campaigning in support of the war effort. For Vira Whitehouse, public service in support of the war effort offered an opportunity for women to take responsibility and authority in new roles throughout government and society. "One of the great stumbling blocks to the advance of women is our very general reluctance to accept responsibility," she wrote. "Since the beginning of the world, we have been hypnotized and have hypnotized ourselves into a doubt of our ability." War work, especially in unconventional fields, could help break the spell. Whitehouse was attending a National American Women's Suffrage Convention in Washington D.C. When George Creole, head of the committee on public information or CPI, asked her to go to Switzerland as an American diplomatic agent. Her job in that neutral country would be to oversee the flow of pro-allied information, actually propaganda in the midst of very active efforts from the opposite side by agents of the Central Powers. Creole believed that the skills Whitehouse had demonstrated as a

suffrage leader would prove effective in this new environment. He was right. The job was far from easy. Whitehouse arrived in Buren, Switzerland in January 1918 and immediately set to work. Allied and Swiss officials at first refused to take Whitehouse seriously, however, simply because she was a woman. Espionage was common. Some thought there were more spies in Switzerland than ordinary citizens. German agents strove to undermine her reputation and authority and sow division between her and Swiss officials. Worst of all, American bureaucratic ineptitude and rivalries between the CPI and the state department resulted in uneven support of Whitehouse's efforts as an official public information officer. Thanks in part to the direct intervention of President Wilson on her behalf, however, Whitehouse eventually set her office working efficiently and in good terms with the Swiss government. By the summer of 1918, the CPI's Swiss office, under Whitehouse's direction, was taking a dominant role in forming public opinion in Switzerland in Central Europe in newspapers, radio, and even movies. One of the things Vira Whitehouse enjoyed most, ironically, was hiring suspected German spies and getting them to carry out the drudge work of her office, while keeping them well-separated from sensitive information. Whitehouse continued her work in Switzerland and then in Paris at and after the Armistice, helping to define public opinion throughout Europe on the peace negotiations. When she departed for the United States in February 1919, she was celebrated as a pioneer who had achieved a major breakthrough concerning the role of women in public service.

[0:26:10]

Theo Mayer: Doctor Edward Lengel's blog is called "A storyteller hiking through history," and it's filled with stories that provide nuanced insights into the era. We have links to Ed's posts and his author's website in the podcast notes. Well, now it's time to fast forward into the present with World War I Centennial News now. This part of the podcast is about now and how World War I is being remembered, commemorated, written about and discussed, taught, and learned. Listen on as we spotlight the surprisingly numerous and significant remembrances and commemoration activities surrounding World War I and World War I themes. This week in commission news. I'd like to introduce you to a colleague of mine, Zachary Austin. Zach leads a series of initiatives for the U.S. World War I Centennial commission about the honors given for valor in World War I and shedding light on honors that may still need to be bestowed. Zach, welcome.

[0:27:20]

Zachary Austin: Hi, Theo. Thanks for having me. It's a pleasure to be on.

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Theo Mayer: So, Zach, you're organizing and supporting something called the Valor Medals Review Task Force. Tell us about that. What is it and who all is involved?

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Zachary Austin: Yeah, that's right. So my title at the commission is the adjunct director of the Valor Medals Review Task Force, what's actually a pretty simple idea. So the commission has three overarching missions. That's to honor and commemorate our World War I veterans and to tell their story and educate the American public today about their stories and service and sacrifice. I think the podcast, in particular, and the education mission [inaudible] has been very successful in showcasing that World War I is really an All-American war. I think a lot of times, folks have this image of just a man standing in a trench for four years if they really don't know that much about the war. And we've been able to pull back the onion there and show that there's all sorts of different stories. There's a huge role for women to play in this war. All sorts of troops from various different backgrounds, rich or poor, different racial and religious groups, and obviously the war in the air and the sea. And our task force is established mostly as a way to capitalize on the commission's status as a legislative branch organization to serve as a resource, really, while members of Congress were seeking to commemorate the service of all Americans in World War I. So we're trying to take that message that we've created in our educational materials and translate that into action and steps we can take forward for really bestowing some of these honors and shedding light on some stories that have not really seen the light of day over the last hundred years, but deserve to be told.

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Theo Mayer: So Zach, what are some of the initiatives the task force is working on?

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Zachary Austin: Right now there's two major ones. One where we're playing more of a supportive role and one that we're working on more directly. The more direct project is a medal of honor review that we're establishing. Essentially, for World War II and all later conflicts in American military history, there have been a series of congressionally authorized reviews that enable minority veterans and service members, who have performed certain valorous acts, to be reconsidered for the medal of honor, which they might have been denied owing to mistakes or even discrimination within their chain of command. So far, those initiatives have resulted in the upgrade of 49 individuals to the medal of honor for their service in World War II all the way through the Vietnam War. The law, as it stands right now, ensures that if you were the same veteran who performed the same deed, you would be eligible for

this reconsideration if that deed was in 1941, 1951, 1971, even 1991 or 2001, but not in 1918. So right now we're working with our partners on Capitol Hill to expand that authority. The last one of these reviews was started in 2001. I think research in general has changed a lot since then, so we're working on some innovative ways that we might be able to change the research into the records that would go into that.

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Theo Mayer: It's pretty important that they roll that date back because in 1917 and 1918, the services were segregated.

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Zachary Austin: That they were. And there were over a million African Americans who served in World War I and World War II combined. About 300,000 in World War I. And up until the 1990s, not a single one had received a medal of honor. That's kind of what sparked this series of reviews, beginning in the 1990s. It was actually a World War I veteran, who was reviewed as an individual who was the rallying cry for the entire series of reviews that follow. His name was Corporal Freddy [Stalwars] and if you read his story of heroism, it just goes on and on and it's one of the most deserving cases that you can imagine for receiving the nation's highest individual military decoration. And his story came to life eventually. The army chose to review it on their own and then a Medal of Honor upgrade was issued. And at that point, World War I was sort of forgotten. The systematic projects, where they said, "We're going to take every African American veteran, for example, who meets a certain criteria. That starts with World War II and there have been a couple individual reviews for some very famous cases or cases where there's been very active family, but for those veterans who might have died without any children or who through some stroke of history, their stories have been forgotten, there's never been that official order from up top to turn the page on them and give them their chance for reconsideration. And that's what the Medal of Honor Review is going to be working not give them, that second look.

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Theo Mayer: What's the other initiative?

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Zachary Austin: So the second initiative is working in a supporting role with a group of senators who have introduced legislation that would award the Hello Girls a Congressional Gold Medal. And the Hello Girls were the first American female soldiers outside of the nursing corps. And the Congressional Gold Medal is the highest decoration that you can receive from the United States Congress and you can receive it as an individual, you can receive it as a group. Often they're bestowed on military members, but sometimes scientists, pioneers, really groundbreaking individuals in any field could be eligible. It's the thanks of a grateful nation materialized and turned into a physical object.

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Theo Mayer: Well, Zach, thank you. That's a great setup for our next guest. Now there's going to be a lot of stuff happening over the coming weeks about this. Will you come back and guide it through it as the events unfold?

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Zachary Austin: I'd be happy to.

[0:32:45]

Theo Mayer: Zach Austin is the adjunct director for the Commission's Valor Medals Review Task Force. The program's website is at ww1cc.org/valor. All lower case, or follow the link in the podcast notes. Well, as Zach mentioned, one of the initiatives is about getting a Congressional Gold Medal awarded to recognize the service of the Hello Girls. And with us is educator and author of the book called, "The Hello Girls," someone who joined us on the show just over a year ago in Episode number 62, Doctor Elizabeth Cobbs. With her book, "The Hello Girls," Doctor Cobbs has been instrumental in inspiring a huge awareness about a group of American women who served in the U.S. Army in World War I, though the army denied them for many years. Elizabeth, welcome back to the show.

[0:33:39]

Dr. Elizabeth C: Thank you, Theo. Glad to be back.

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Theo Mayer: You have been a very busy person over the last 18 months. "The Hello Girls" has become one of the iconic stories of the World War I Centennial. How are you and what have you been doing?

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Dr. Elizabeth C: Oh, I'm very good. Very excited. I'm working very hard to be supportive of efforts to get the Congressional Gold Medal for the Hello Girls. Their story is an amazing story. It connects the past with today. It tells women veterans that their story started somewhere. And I've just been very moved by all the people I've met who said, I didn't know where my story began. I'm a Staff Sergeant." "I'm a Brigadier General. I'm a Lieutenant Colonel, and I had no idea who came before me.

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Theo Mayer: Well, your book was catalytic in creating an awareness for the Hello Girls, period. Tell us a little bit about what all's been going on, and maybe you want to just review what happened with the Hello Girls, and particularly their denial of service.

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Dr. Elizabeth C: Yeah, so this was this very interesting group of young women, mostly, who volunteered when the U.S. Government sent out a call saying, "We need women to go to France and to run the telephone lines." And the telephone lines were the pivot point between troops in the field and commanders behind them and you needed somebody to be there to get the call through. And when the women got to France, they were told, "You must wear your uniforms and your dog tags at all times. The only moment where you cannot be in uniform, ready to go, is literally when the door is closed and you're in your barracks." So that's why they were so surprised when they got home and they had served, many of them, longer than the men served because they were in logistics so they had to get there ahead of time and they had to stay past the end to get everyone else home. And they were very surprised to find out that they were told, "No, you actually weren't soldiers at all. And you will get no wartime benefits. You will not get victory medals. You will not get a membership in veterans' organizations. You will not get your discharge papers." And it was heartbreaking. And for some of the women, they also came back with quite serious disabilities from wartime medical problems, particularly tuberculosis, which they had gotten in France, and they had to pay for their own hospitalization because they could not get veteran's benefits. So it was really a real insult, as well as a real heartbreak for them.

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Theo Mayer: Well, they didn't stand for that, did they?

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Dr. Elizabeth C: Oh, well, no, mostly they did not. Some of them were good soldiers and they had been told, "You're in the army now and put up and don't question," but there was a handful of women who just could not take that lying down, especially because, by the way, the marines and the navy had recruited 11,000 women, used them almost entirely at home in safe positions, whereas the army had recruited a few hundred, sent them overseas, exposed them to submarine warfare and to bombardment in some cases, and the women in the other forces got full recognition. So this small group of army women were really peeved and some of them just petitioned for years, decades, that went on. They wrote to Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy and Richard Nixon and LBJ and Jimmy Carter and for 60 years, persevered until they finally got recognition along with the group of women who had been dissed in World War II, the women's air service pilots, the WASPs. So it was one of those things where it was kind of two for one, but it took them 60 years to get their victory medals.

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Theo Mayer: You've had couple of op-eds run recently in the Washington Post and the New York Times about this Congressional Gold Medal. What's the essence of the op-eds?

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Dr. Elizabeth C: Well, in essence, I'm trying to say that it's really time to honor these women. It's a time to honor, not only these very specific women, but in doing so, to honor the story of women in our armed services. Women often feel marginalized today. Women are 15% of the armed forces, and so it's easy to be off to the side, for people to not really recognize heroic and important contributions that women make. So going back to the Hello Girls and saying, "Yes, we see our women. We see what they have done, the important role. In fact, the very critical role that they played in World War I in particular." So in my op-eds, I'm essentially trying to say, "I think this would be great for our country. It'd be great for both parties. It's a bipartisan effort. It would be great for the administration. It'd be great for our people and it would be great for women." So I know we're looking for ways to honor our heritage and build a consensus of support for America today going forward, and I think this would be a great step.

[0:38:01]

Theo Mayer: What do you hope happens next?

[0:38:02]

Dr. Elizabeth C: My great hope is that, not only will we get 67 senators to sign on to the bill that Senator John Tester and Marsha Black bring and put forward as a bipartisan effort, I am also hoping, of course, that Congress will come through with its own bill for the Hello Girls.

[0:38:19]

Theo Mayer: Now, our listeners have been following this story with your interviews, Jim Ferris has been on, the man who did the documentary. Cara [Rickett] and Peter Mills, who did the stage play, have been on. We've had interviews with AT&T. How could our listeners help with this current Congressional Gold Medal initiative?

[0:38:36]

Dr. Elizabeth C: I know it sounds terribly old-fashioned, but it's really true that if each listener got on their computer or opened up their stationery kit or picked up the telephone, of all things, and called their senator, it makes a real big difference. That's what Senator Tester was just telling me last week. To get the bill through the Congress, we really need to have individual listeners say, "I think this is important. Let's do this. Let's do this for the women of World War I. It's time."

[0:39:03]

Theo Mayer: It is time. Elizabeth, we just got a question in from our live audience. Frank Crone just texted, "Our Idaho Commission discovered that two Hello Girls hailed from Idaho and we're planning several events this year to bring local attention to the hard work of these switchboard soldiers." Oh, I like that, Frank. He asks, "In your research, Doctor Cobbs, did you find out if any of these women were also supporters of the suffrage movement?"

[0:39:30]

Dr. Elizabeth C: Yes, some of them were. We don't have extensive records on any individual person, but there was a woman who had helped to campaign for the suffrage amendment in New York, which did pass before the Federal Suffrage Amendment, and she went from that into the Hello Girls. So there was a real overlap, I think. And certainly, once ... When the bills were up in Congress to pass this legislation to give women the vote, there were many, many references to the contributions of women in World War I. And I think it really changed men's ideas about what women could do and what it entitled them, most notably Woodrow Wilson, who said, "Are we going to be the last major country to ask for and to take all that women can give and say that we still cannot see what this entitles them to in the way of rights?" So there was a big conversion in people's points of view, and the Hello Girls really helped make that real.

[0:40:22]

Theo Mayer: But also maybe worth pointing out, Elizabeth, is that many of the Hello Girls stayed through the Peace Conference so they weren't home as the actual legislation started to pass Congress, is that right?

[0:40:34]

Dr. Elizabeth C: Yes, many of the Hello Girls stayed well into 1919 and some stayed as late as 1920, so actually, by the time they got home they could vote, but they were not present in the country while the legislation was coming up for a final vote in Congress.

[0:40:49]

Theo Mayer: Elizabeth, thank you. You're not only a great author and historian, but you're also becoming an activist, so bless you.

[0:40:56]

Dr. Elizabeth C: Thank you.

[0:40:57]

Theo Mayer: Doctor Elizabeth Cobbs is an award-winning historian who brings fresh, unexpected perspectives to our understanding of the past and the present. She's also the author of Harvard University Press's, "The Hello Girls," the defining account of the first women who served in the U.S. Army for the signal corps during World War I. Follow the links in the podcast notes to learn more. This week for remembering veterans. Now, Doctor Cobbs was talking about the Congressional Gold Medal that we're working on to get awarded to the Hello Girls, but this week and every March 25th is designated as National Medal of Honor Day. Let me focus on the difference for a moment. The Medal of Honor is awarded only to military members and it's awarded by Congress, so it's also known as the Congressional Medal of Honor. The official website says, "The Congressional Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force, which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the armed forces of the United States. Now, the award dates back to 1862 during the Civil War. And in the history of our nation, just over 35 hundred Congressional Medals of Honor have been awarded for valor, but only 121 were awarded during World War I. In the fall of 1918, as our dough boys got heavily into the fighting in France, Congress passed a new law about military

medals and awards. They, the Congress, were to keep the top honor that only they, the Congress, could award, but they gave the president the power to award three lesser awards. What they called, "A pyramid of honor." Now, that included the distinguished service cross, the distinguished service medal, and the silver star. I thought that was really fascinating because of the really huge friction between the executive and the legislative branches of our government at the time, but they gave the president that ability. Two more fascinating facts for you. By September of 1919, Congress had clarified that no one could receive more than one medal of honor, but by that time, there were 19 double medal of honor recipients. After that, no more. So do you know who the 19 were? I'll give you a hint. At least 3 of them were Marines and one of them is named Dan Daly, the man. We'll do a post about that on our twitter channel, @vww1podcast. And one last factoid for you on this National Medal of Honor Day week. The Congressional Medal of Honor is the only American military award that's worn around the neck instead of being pinned to the uniform. We have links for you in the podcast notes to learn more. This week, we're going to close with articles and posts where we highlight the stories that you'll find in our weekly newsletter, The Dispatch. Headline, "To not honor these men and women for their service and sacrifice would be a discredit to their memories." Architect Joe Weishaar, designer for the National World War I memorial in Washington, D.C., will be going home April third to participate in the Honors College lecture series at the University of Arkansas, his alma mater. Weishaar was interviewed by the Northwest Arkansas Gazette newspaper in anticipation of his appearance at the university next month. Headline, "The American Legion Centennial, it all began in Paris a century ago." The American Legion organization's 55 departments and nearly 12,500 posts across the country and around the world are celebrating a century of service to community, state, and nation, and it all began in Paris March 15th to 17th, 1919. We read you the headlines for the New York Times last week. Well, when war-weary members of the American Expeditionary Forces gathered for a "Morale Conference" that led to the creation of what would become the American Legion, only 300 troops were expected to attend. Officially, 463 registered and it's estimated that more than 1,000 showed up. Headline, "Yeomenettes paved the way for women of all Navy ratings today." In order to fill severe clerical shortages caused by World War I, the U.S. Navy approved the enlistment of women in 1917. The Naval Reserve Act of 1916 made no specific gender requirements for yeomen. So either by deliberate omission or accident, the Act opened up the opportunity to enlist for women. One of the first through the door on March 17th, 1917 was Loretta Perfectus Walsh, who became the first active duty female in the navy who wasn't a nurse. Headline, "A general family World War I story, from segregation to command in 100 years." Private Walter Beagles arrived at Camp Jackson, South Carolina in 1918. He was an African American draftee in a segregated army that relegated black soldiers to labor battalions out of a prejudiced notion that they couldn't fight. More than 100 years later, his great grandson now serves as the same base's 51st Commanding General. That's Brigadier General Milford Beagle, a combat veteran who took command last June. In our article, the General notes, "It does seem pretty surreal to know that the gates my grandfather came through are the same gates I come through now, but under vastly different circumstances." Read all these amazing stories and more through the links that you'll find in our weekly dispatch newsletter. It's a short and easy guide to lots of World War I news and information. Subscribe to this wonderful, free weekly World War I news guide at ww1cc.org/subscribe or follow the link in the podcast notes. And that wraps up Episode number 115 of the award-winning World War I Centennial News podcast. Thank you for listening. We want to thank our great guests, crew, and supporters, including Mike Schuester, curator for the Great War Project blog, Patri O'Gan, researcher and historian, Doctor Edward Lengel, military historian and author, Zachary Austin, adjunct director for the Valor of Medals Review Task Force, Doctor Elizabeth Cobbs, author, historian, and now activist. Thanks to Mac Nelson and Tim Crow, our interview editing team, [Kats] [Lazlow], the line producer for the show, Dave Kramer and JL [Mishow] for research and script support. And I'm Theo Mayer, your producer and host. The U.S. World War I Centennial Commission was created by Congress to honor, commemorate, and educate about World War I. Our programs are to inspire a national conversation and awareness about World War I, including this podcast. We're bringing the lessons of 100 years ago to today's educators, their classrooms, and the public. We're helping to restore World War I memorials in communities of all sizes across the country and, of course, we're building America's National World War I memorial in Washington, D.C. We want to thank the commission's founding sponsor, the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, as well as our other sponsors, the Star Foundation, the Diana Davis Spencer Foundation, and the Richard Lounsbery Foundation. The podcast and a full transcript of the show can be found on our website at ww1cc.org/cn. You'll find World War I Centennial News in all the places you get your podcasts, and even using your smart speaker by saying, "Play WW1 Centennial News podcast." You can even do that with Siri. The podcast Twitter handle is @theww1podcast. The commission's Twitter and Instagram handles are both @ww1cc, and we're on Facebook at WW1 Centennial. Thank you for joining us and don't forget, keep the story alive for America by helping us to build the memorial. Just text the letters W W I or W W I to the phone number 91-999. Thank you for listening. So long.

[0:50:26]