

During World War I, two American organisations were founded by mothers of soldiers – ***The American War Mothers*** and ***The Gold Star Mothers***. Both these organisation continued their work during World War II, the Korean War and are still going today.

American War Mothers

The American War Mothers began in Indiana with a group of women whose children were fighting in WWI. They came together through their efforts working on the Food Conservation Committee and the State Council of Indiana. The group was officially founded on 29th September, 1917 by Alice M. French (1863-1934) who's only son, Donald R. French, entered the service. On 24th February 1925, the organisation became incorporated through an act of Congress and now falls under the Department of Veterans Affairs.



Originally, membership of the group was limited to mothers of children who served between the dates of April 6, 1917 and November 11, 1918, but this was soon amended due to WWII and the Korean Conflict to include any future wars.

The American War Mothers is a non-profit, non-political, and non-partisan organisation. The goal of its members is to engage in patriotic work and provide support for service members and their families. They organise celebrations and ceremonies to honor those who served. They administer financial support, housing etc for those in need. They visit veterans in hospitals, knit slippers for some, assemble shaving kits for others, clip coupons for families stationed overseas to use in commissaries, and console mothers of deployed troops.

This often unknown and overlooked organisation of mothers has had a huge impact on the welfare of the Armed Service members and their families.



(Left - In the Tobin Center is a WW1 Memorial It is a white marble monument about six feet tall with a prayerful woman (a mother) surrounded on her right side with several "doughboys" wearing world war I field uniforms, helmets and carrying their rifles with fixed bayonets. The inscription under this massive carving reads: "Honoring The Mothers whose Sons Fought In The World War - Erected by San Antonio Chapter No. 2 - 1938".)

Gold Star Mothers

Each year, on the last Sunday in September, the U.S observes Gold Star Mother's Day. This year it is on Sunday 26th September.

In 1917 the United States entered World War I. George Vaughn Seibold, aged 23, enlisted to the aviation detachment. He trained with the Royal Flying Corps at Long Branch Aerodrome near Toronto in Canada. He received his commission as 1st Lieutenant and was sent to San Antonio, Texas to become a flight instructor to new recruits. In January 1918 George was assigned to the 148th Aero Squadron based in France. During this time, George's mother, Grace, volunteered at the hospitals by visiting returning servicemen. She even helped to found American War Mothers.



On October 11 1918 George's wife received news of Georges death with a box marked "Effects of deceased Officer 1st Lt. George Vaughn Seibold". His parents received confirmation of the same news on 4th November 1918.

Grace said that "grief, if self-contained, is self-destructive". She devoted her time and effort working in the hospitals and reached out to and supported other grieving mothers whose sons had lost their lives in military service. She formed a group consisting solely of these mothers whose purpose was to not only comfort each other but give loving care to hospitalised veterans confined in government hospitals far from home. The group was named Gold Star Mothers and it was officially established on 4th June 1928.

The name came about as families hung a banner called a service flag in their home window. The service flag had a star for each family member in the Armed Forces – blue stars for those who were living and gold stars for those who had lost their lives in combat.



Membership of the group was originally to those who lost sons and daughters in World War I then it was expanded to include those who lost children in World War II, then Korean War and now any mother whose child served in the Armed Forces and died, any place and any time is included and it includes mothers of those who are missing in action.



A mother who was famous for being a Gold Star mother was Aletta Sullivan. She was the mother of the five Sullivan brothers. Though the Navy was already working on a policy prohibiting brothers serving on the same ship, the five Sullivan brothers requested it in January 1942, and the Navy agreed. Unfortunately they were killed in action when their ship, the USS Juneau was sunk by an enemy torpedo on November 13, 1942 during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal.

On September 21, 1948, the U.S. Post Office issued a commemorative stamp, specially designed by artist Charles R. Chickering, honoring the Gold Star Mothers. Mrs. Sullivan was given the first sheet of stamps issued.



(The Sullivan brothers on board USS Juneau Joe, Frank, Al, Matt, and George)

So if you join a military function such as parades and meetings like Memorial Day and you see a woman dressed head to toe in white with gold piping and a gold star embroidered on either lapel, you will know that she is a Gold Star Mother. Being a Gold Star Mother is an honour no one wants; but because of Grace Darling Seibold, it's one that doesn't have to be borne alone.

