

Meet the “Donut Lassies”



The Salvation Army in Chicago celebrated the first National Donut Day in 1938 to help those in need during the Great Depression and to commemorate the work of the “Donut Lassies,” who served donuts to soldiers during World War I.

In 1917, The Salvation Army began a mission to provide spiritual and emotional support for U.S. soldiers fighting in France during World War I. About 250 volunteers traveled overseas and set up small huts near the front lines where they could give soldiers clothes, supplies and, of course, baked goods.

Despite discovering that serving baked goods would be difficult considering the conditions of the huts and the limited rations, two officers — Ensign Margaret Sheldon and Adjutant Helen Purviance — began frying donuts. These tasty treats boosted morale and won the hearts of many soldiers.

Nicknamed “Donut Lassies,” the women who served donuts to troops are often credited with popularizing the donut in the United States when the troops (nicknamed “Doughboys”) returned home from war.

The donut now serves as a symbol of the comfort that The Salvation Army provides to those in need through its many social services programs. The Salvation Army still serves donuts, in addition to warm meals and hydration, to those in need during times of disaster.

National Donut Day is held annually on the first Friday in June, and The Salvation Army celebrates the work of the original Donut Lassies by delivering donuts to those in need and to donut lovers across the country.

