



That Knock at the Door: The History of Gold Star Mothers in America

Holly S. Fenelon

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A blue star for each family member serving in America's military . . . a gold star if that life was lost in defense of the nation's freedom. IN WORLD WAR I, the American tradition of the service flag began. Families displayed a simple fabric banner with a blue star for each family member serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. If a family member died in the nation's service, a gold star covered that individual's blue star on the family service flag. Not a symbol of mourning, the gold star represented the family's pride and the honor and glory accorded to that individual for making the supreme sacrifice in defense of the America's freedom. Soon, the term "gold star mother" came to be used to identify and honor women who had lost a son or daughter in wartime military service. Following the war, as the nation focused its attention on those veterans who had returned whole in mind and body, gold star mothers served as a constant reminder of the true cost of war. In 1928, a group of these women formed American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., an organization created to honor those who had died by being of service to veterans and their families in need, supporting gold star families, and caring for veterans who had returned with physical, emotional and psychological wounds. From that humble beginning, American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. has become an icon of national service, opening its membership time and again to gold star mothers of later wars and conflicts, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Their amazing legacy of service is an important yet largely unknown chapter in American history. This book presents the story of gold star mothers in America and the first comprehensive history of American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., drawn from nearly a century of archival materials. The fascinating story of the strong women who honored their fallen sons and daughters by dedicating themselves to the service of veterans and peace is both compelling and inspiring.

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