

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. _____

To award a Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the brave women who served in World War II as members of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps and U.S. Navy Nurse Corps.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Ms. BALDWIN introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the brave women who served in World War II as members of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps and U.S. Navy Nurse Corps.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “WWII Nurses Con-
5 gressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 The Congress finds the following:

1 (1) On December 8, 1941, the United States
2 declared war against the Empire of Japan, followed
3 by declarations of war against Germany and Italy on
4 December 11, 1941. In 1935, there were fewer than
5 600 United States Army nurses and 1,700 United
6 States Navy nurses on active duty. By the time
7 World War II ended, more than 59,000 Army nurses
8 and 14,000 Navy nurses had volunteered to serve.

9 (2) The Act of June 4, 1920 (41 Stat. 759;
10 chapter 227), granted women in the Nurse Corps
11 “relative rank”. This gave them the right to wear
12 the military insignia, but did not confer military sta-
13 tus or privileges. This arrangement meant women
14 serving throughout World War II received 50 per-
15 cent of the pay as compared to their male counter-
16 parts, and none of the veteran benefits. Because
17 they did not receive military status, they received no
18 orientation or training before being deployed to hos-
19 pitals near the front lines.

20 (3) Nurses served under fire in field hospitals
21 and evacuation hospitals across 6 continents, on hos-
22 pital trains and ships, and as flight nurses on med-
23 ical transport planes. Several nurses were killed in
24 action when their ships were torpedoed or field hos-
25 pitals were bombed. Some even entered into combat

1 areas as flight nurses to retrieve the wounded, and
2 2 groups were captured as prisoners of war by the
3 Japanese.

4 (4) General Douglas MacArthur ordered Amer-
5 ican and Filipino Army Corps nurses and other med-
6 ical personnel to the Bataan Peninsula to prepare 2
7 emergency hospitals for United States and Filipino
8 forces. General Hospital #1 received casualties di-
9 rectly from the front lines and occupied an old Army
10 barracks in Limay, Bataan prior to implementation
11 of War Plan Orange 3 on December 24, 1941. The
12 hospital received more than 1,200 battle casualties
13 requiring major surgery within a month. General
14 Hospital #2, a makeshift open ward hospital, was
15 set up in Cabcaben, Bataan to receive discharged
16 patients from Hospital #1. Hospital #2 accepted
17 patients strong enough for evacuation, as it was out
18 in the open, with no tents or buildings, and only tree
19 canopy to conceal them from Japanese aircraft. Due
20 to constant bombing, Hospital #1 was transferred
21 to Little Baguio in Mariveles, Bataan on January
22 25, 1942. Hospital #1 was bombed on March 29,
23 1942, and again on April 7, killing or wounding
24 more than 100 patients, but the nurses carried on
25 with their duties as well as they were able. Fifty-

1 three American and 31 Filipina nurses were ordered
2 to move from Bataan to Corregidor Island on April
3 8. Ten of the American nurses were transferred suc-
4 cessfully to Australia prior to the fall of Corregidor
5 on May 6, 1942. Sixty-seven American nurses were
6 eventually moved to Santo Tomas University Intern-
7 ment Camp where they were liberated in February
8 1945 while 31 Filipina nurses were moved to Bilibid
9 Prison where they were conditionally released in
10 July 1942.

11 (5) On December 10, 1941, Sangley Point
12 Navy Yard was bombed by Japanese planes. Amer-
13 ican and Filipino Navy Corps nurses, medical per-
14 sonnel and patients of Cañacao Naval Hospital were
15 transferred to the Army Sternberg Hospital in Ma-
16 nila. During the first week of January 1942, the
17 Japanese Army occupied Manila and the Navy
18 nurses were transferred to St. Scholastica's College
19 with their patients and eventually to Santo Tomas
20 University Internment Camp on March 12, 1942.
21 Eleven American and Filipino Navy Corps nurses
22 were transferred to Los Baños Prison Camp on May
23 14, 1943, where they stayed until their liberation in
24 February 1945. Following the United States Army
25 surrender of the Philippines to the Japanese on May

1 6, 1942, 67 Army nurses were taken to Santo
2 Tomas Internment Camp in Manila, where they re-
3 mained until February 1945. During the 37 months
4 in captivity, these women endured primitive condi-
5 tions and starvation rations, but continued to care
6 for the ill and injured in the internment camp hos-
7 pital.

8 (6) Chinese, Chinese-American, and Japanese-
9 American nurses served in Army Hospitals in China,
10 Hawaii, and in the mainland United States under
11 the Army and Navy Corps. Despite the internment
12 of many Japanese-American families during World
13 War II, Japanese-American women joined the Nurse
14 Cadet Corps to serve the United States. Chinese and
15 Chinese-American nurses were recruited by the Fly-
16 ing Tigers, serving both in dangerous missions over
17 the Himalayas as well as in U.S. Army hospitals.

18 (7) Early in the morning of November 8, 1942,
19 60 nurses attached to the 48th Surgical Hospital
20 landed off the coast of North Africa. The nurses
21 wore helmets and carried full packs containing med-
22 ical equipment. Without weapons, they waded ashore
23 amid enemy sniper fire and ultimately took shelter
24 in an abandoned civilian hospital, where they began
25 caring for invasion casualties. There was no elec-

1 tricity or running water, and the only medical sup-
2 plies available were those the nurses had brought
3 themselves.

4 (8) In Anzio, Italy, nurses dug foxholes outside
5 their tents or under their cots and cared for patients
6 under German shellfire. The field hospital tents were
7 marked by large red crosses and were sometimes de-
8 liberately hit with artillery shells and bombs. On
9 February 7, 1944, a German pilot being pursued by
10 British fighter planes dropped 5 antipersonnel
11 bombs on the hospital, destroying 29 ward tents,
12 killing 26 and wounding 64. The dead included 3
13 nurses, 2 medical officers, a Red Cross worker, 14
14 enlisted men and 6 patients. Troops came to refer
15 to the hospital area as “Hell’s Half-Acre” because it
16 was hit so frequently by enemy fire. At least 200
17 nurses took part in the Anzio campaign, caring for
18 more than 33,000 patients behind enemy lines.

19 (9) Army and Navy nurses acclimated quickly
20 to difficult and dangerous conditions with a min-
21 imum of complaints, and were essential members of
22 the field armies.

23 (10) The presence of nurses at the front im-
24 proved morale because soldiers realized that they

1 would receive skilled care in the event they were
2 wounded.

3 (11) Thanks largely to the efforts of these
4 nurses, fewer than 4 percent of the American sol-
5 diers who received medical care in the field or under-
6 went evacuation died from wounds or disease.

7 (12) After the war, broad public health mis-
8 sions required that Army and Navy nurses supervise
9 communicable disease measures as former enemy
10 countries were reorganized. In Hiroshima, these offi-
11 cers cared for victims of the atomic bombs. In Mu-
12 nich, they prevented mass epidemic in refugee
13 camps. Army and Navy nurses even provided pre-
14 natal, infant, and mental health care in other
15 former-enemy territories.

16 (13) Nurses received 1,619 medals, citations,
17 and commendations during the war, reflecting the
18 courage and dedication of all who served. Sixteen
19 medals were awarded posthumously to nurses who
20 died as a result of enemy fire, including 6 nurses
21 who died at Anzio, 6 who died when the hospital
22 ship Comfort was attacked by a Japanese suicide
23 plane, and 4 flight nurses. Thirteen other flight
24 nurses died in weather-related crashes while on duty.

1 (14) In 1944, Congress passed a bill that
2 granted Army and Navy Nurses actual military rank
3 and benefits, approved for the duration of the war
4 plus 6 months.

5 (15) In 1947, Congress passed legislation estab-
6 lishing a permanent Army and Navy Nursing Corps
7 and gave members permanent officer status with
8 equal pay and the same benefits as those given to
9 male officers.

10 (16) In 1948, all military branches were inte-
11 grated and female doctors were finally admitted to
12 the Army Medical Corps.

13 (17) Although African-American nurses were
14 fully qualified and prepared to serve as nurses at the
15 onset of World War II, racial segregation and dis-
16 crimination made it difficult for Black women to join
17 the ranks of the Army Nurse Corps.

18 (18) As the Army Nurse Corps began expand-
19 ing its recruiting process, thousands of Black nurses
20 who wanted to serve their country filled out applica-
21 tions.

22 (19) While the Army did eventually integrate
23 African-American nurses in 1941, it did so
24 unwillingly and placed a quota on the number of Af-

1 rican-American nurses that they would accept, cap-
2 ping the number allowed to join at 56.

3 (20) Many of them had hardship tours and
4 were sent to segregated camps to take care of Afri-
5 can-American soldiers and would rotate and allow
6 White nurses reprieve in taking care of German pris-
7 oners of war. As the war progressed, the number of
8 Black nurses allowed to enlist remained low, al-
9 though the quota was officially lifted in July 1944.

10 (21) The extraordinary efforts of these women
11 are deserving of belated official recognition.

12 (22) The United States is eternally grateful to
13 the nurses of the Army and Navy Nurse Corps for
14 their bravery and dedication to their patients
15 through World War II, which saved lives and made
16 significant contributions to the defeat of the Axis
17 powers.

18 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

19 (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the
20 House of Representatives and the President pro tempore
21 of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the
22 award, on behalf of Congress, of a gold medal of appro-
23 priate design in honor of World War II Army and Navy
24 Nurse Corps members, in recognition of the critical mili-
25 tary service and devotion to duty of those nurses.

1 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the
2 award described in subsection (a), the Secretary of the
3 Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Secretary”) shall
4 strike the gold medal with suitable emblems, devices, and
5 inscriptions, to be determined by the Secretary.

6 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
8 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal
9 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where
10 it shall be available for display as appropriate and
11 made available for research.

12 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of
13 Congress that the Smithsonian Institution should
14 make the gold medal received under paragraph (1)
15 available for display elsewhere, particularly at—

16 (A) appropriate locations associated with
17 the Army and Navy Nurse Corps of World War
18 II, including—

19 (i) the U.S. Army Medical Center of
20 Excellence;

21 (ii) the Women in Military Service for
22 America Memorial;

23 (iii) the U.S. Army Women’s Museum;

24 (iv) the National Naval Medical Cen-
25 ters; and

1 (v) the National World War II Mu-
2 seum; and

3 (B) any other location determined appro-
4 priate by the Smithsonian Institution.

5 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

6 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
7 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price
8 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,
9 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

10 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

11 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—Medals struck pursuant to
12 this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51
13 of title 31, United States Code.

14 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections
15 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals
16 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic
17 items.

18 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
19 **SALE.**

20 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is
21 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
22 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-
23 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under
24 this Act.

1 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
2 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
3 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
4 Enterprise Fund.