

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1558

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

MAY 11, 2023

Ms. BALDWIN (for herself, Mr. DAINES, Ms. WARREN, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mrs. BLACKBURN, and Mr. BRAUN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

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 Army
5 nurses to the Bataan Peninsula to prepare 2 emer-
6 gency hospitals for United States and Filipino
7 forces. General Hospital 1 received casualties di-
8 rectly from the front lines, and more than 1,200 bat-
9 tle casualties requiring major surgery were admitted
10 within a month. General Hospital 2 accepted pa-
11 tients strong enough for evacuation, as it was out in
12 the open, with no tents or buildings, and only tree
13 canopy to conceal them from Japanese aircraft. Hos-
14 pital 1 was bombed on March 29, 1942, killing or
15 wounding more than 100 patients, but the nurses
16 carried on with their duties as well as they were
17 able. Following the United States Army surrender of
18 the Philippines to the Japanese on May 6, 1942, 67
19 Army nurses were taken to Santo Tomas Internment
20 Camp in Manila, where they remained until Feb-
21 ruary 1945. During the 37 months in captivity,
22 these women endured primitive conditions and star-
23 vation rations, but continued to care for the ill and
24 injured in the internment camp hospital.

1 (5) Early in the morning of November 8, 1942,
2 60 nurses attached to the 48th Surgical Hospital
3 landed off the coast of North Africa. The nurses
4 wore helmets and carried full packs containing med-
5 ical equipment. Without weapons, they waded ashore
6 amid enemy sniper fire and ultimately took shelter
7 in an abandoned civilian hospital, where they began
8 caring for invasion casualties. There was no elec-
9 tricity or running water, and the only medical sup-
10 plies available were those the nurses had brought
11 themselves.

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

1 nurses took part in the Anzio campaign, caring for
2 more than 33,000 patients behind enemy lines.

3 (7) Army and Navy nurses acclimated quickly
4 to difficult and dangerous conditions with a min-
5 imum of complaints, and were essential members of
6 the field armies.

7 (8) The presence of nurses at the front im-
8 proved morale because soldiers realized that they
9 would receive skilled care in the event they were
10 wounded.

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

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

24 (11) Nurses received 1,619 medals, citations,
25 and commendations during the war, reflecting the

1 courage and dedication of all who served. Sixteen
2 medals were awarded posthumously to nurses who
3 died as a result of enemy fire, including 6 nurses
4 who died at Anzio, 6 who died when the hospital
5 ship Comfort was attacked by a Japanese suicide
6 plane, and 4 flight nurses. Thirteen other flight
7 nurses died in weather-related crashes while on duty.

8 (12) In 1944, Congress passed a bill that
9 granted Army and Navy Nurses actual military rank
10 and benefits, approved for the duration of the war
11 plus 6 months.

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

17 (14) In 1948, all military branches were inte-
18 grated and female doctors were finally admitted to
19 the Army Medical Corps.

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

1 (16) As the Army Nurse Corps began expand-
2 ing its recruiting process, thousands of Black nurses
3 who wanted to serve their country filled out applica-
4 tions.

5 (17) While the Army did eventually integrate
6 African-American nurses in 1941, it did so
7 unwillingly and placed a quota on the number of Af-
8 rican-American nurses that they would accept, cap-
9 ping the number allowed to join at 56.

10 (18) Many of them had hardship tours and
11 were sent to segregated camps to take care of Afri-
12 can-American soldiers and would rotate and allow
13 White nurses reprieve in taking care of German pris-
14 oners of war. As the war progressed, the number of
15 Black nurses allowed to enlist remained low, al-
16 though the quota was officially lifted in July 1944.

17 (19) The extraordinary efforts of these women
18 are deserving of belated official recognition.

19 (20) The United States is eternally grateful to
20 the nurses of the Army and Navy Nurse Corps for
21 their bravery and dedication to their patients
22 through World War II, which saved lives and made
23 significant contributions to the defeat of the Axis
24 powers.

1 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

2 (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the
3 House of Representatives and the President pro tempore
4 of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the
5 award, on behalf of Congress, of a gold medal of appro-
6 priate design in honor of World War II Army and Navy
7 Nurse Corps members, in recognition of the critical mili-
8 tary service and devotion to duty of those nurses.

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

14 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
16 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal
17 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where
18 it shall be available for display as appropriate and
19 made available for research.

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

24 (A) appropriate locations associated with
25 the Army and Navy Nurse Corps of World War
26 II, including—

- 1 (i) the U.S. Army Medical Center of
2 Excellence;
- 3 (ii) the Women in Military Service for
4 America Memorial;
- 5 (iii) the U.S. Army Women's Museum;
- 6 (iv) the National Naval Medical Cen-
7 ters; and
- 8 (v) the National World War II Mu-
9 seum; and
- 10 (B) any other location determined appro-
11 priate by the Smithsonian Institution.

12 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

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

17 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

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

21 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections
22 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals
23 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic
24 items.

1 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
2 **SALE.**

3 (a) **AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.**—There is
4 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
5 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-
6 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under
7 this Act.

8 (b) **PROCEEDS OF SALE.**—Amounts received from the
9 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
10 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
11 Enterprise Fund.

○