

S.L.C.
Jerry Beldi

117TH CONGRESS
2D 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

_____ (legislative day, _____), _____
Ms. BALDWIN introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

*for herself and
Senators Daines,
Gillibrand, King,
Warren, Blumenthal,
Braun, and Blackburn*

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 U.S. Army Nurses and 1,700 U.S. Navy Nurses
6 on active duty. By the time World War II ended,
7 more than 59,000 Army Nurses and 14,000 Navy
8 Nurses had volunteered to serve.

9 (2) The Army Reorganization Act of 1920
10 granted women in the Nurse Corps "relative rank."
11 This gave them the right to wear the military insign-
12 nia, but did not confer military status or privileges.
13 This arrangement meant women serving throughout
14 WWII received 50 percent of the pay as compared
15 to their male counterparts, and none of the veteran
16 benefits. Because they did not receive military sta-
17 tus, they received no orientation or training before
18 being deployed to hospitals near the frontlines.

19 (3) Nurses served under fire in field hospitals
20 and evacuation hospitals across six continents, on
21 hospital trains and ships, and as flight nurses on
22 medical transport planes. Several nurses were killed
23 in action when their ships were torpedoed or field
24 hospitals were bombed. Some even entered into com-
25 bat areas as flight nurses to retrieve the wounded,

1 and 2 groups were captured as prisoners of war by
2 the Japanese.

3 (4) General Douglas MacArthur ordered Army
4 nurses to the Bataan Peninsula to prepare 2 emer-
5 gency hospitals for U.S. and Filipino forces. General
6 Hospital 1 received casualties directly from the front
7 lines, and more than 1,200 battle casualties requir-
8 ing major surgery were admitted within a month.
9 General Hospital 2 accepted patients strong enough
10 for evacuation, as it was out in the open, with no
11 tents or buildings, and only tree canopy to conceal
12 them from Japanese aircraft. Hospital 1 was
13 bombed on March 29, 1942, killing or wounding
14 more than 100 patients, but the nurses carried on
15 with their duties as well as they were able. Following
16 the U.S. Army surrender of the Philippines to the
17 Japanese on May 6, 1942, 67 Army nurses were
18 taken to Santo Tomas Internment Camp in Manila,
19 where they remained until February 1945. During
20 the 37 months in captivity, these women endured
21 primitive conditions and starvation rations, but con-
22 tinued to care for the ill and injured in the intern-
23 ment camp hospital.

24 (5) Early in the morning of November 8, 1942,
25 60 nurses attached to the 48th Surgical Hospital

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

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

1 (7) Enlisted nurses acclimated quickly to dif-
2 ficult and dangerous conditions with a minimum of
3 complaints, and were essential members of the field
4 armies.

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

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

13 (10) After the war, broad public health mis-
14 sions required that enlisted nurses supervise commu-
15 nicable disease measures as former enemy countries
16 were reorganized. In Hiroshima, these officers cared
17 for victims of the atomic bombs. In Munich, they
18 prevented mass epidemic in refugee camps. Enlisted
19 nurses even provided prenatal, infant, and mental
20 health care in other former-enemy territories.

21 (11) Nurses received 1,619 medals, citations,
22 and commendations during the war, reflecting the
23 courage and dedication of all who served. Sixteen
24 medals were awarded posthumously to nurses who
25 died as a result of enemy fire, including 6 nurses

1 who died at Anzio, 6 who died when the Hospital
2 Ship Comfort was attacked by a Japanese suicide
3 plane, and 4 flight nurses. Thirteen other flight
4 nurses died in weather-related crashes while on duty.

5 (12) In 1944 Congress passed a bill that grant-
6 ed Army and Navy Nurses actual military rank and
7 benefits, approved for the duration of the war plus
8 6 months.

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

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

17 (15) Although African American nurses were
18 fully qualified and prepared to serve as nurses at the
19 onset of World War II, racial segregation and dis-
20 crimination made it difficult for black women to join
21 the ranks of the Army Nurse Corps (referred to in
22 this Act as the "ANC").

23 (16) As the ANC began expanding its recruit-
24 ing process, thousands of black nurses who wanted
25 to serve their country filled out applications.

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

6 (18) Many of them had hardship tours and
7 were sent to segregated camps to take care of Afri-
8 can American Soldiers and would rotate and allow
9 White nurses reprieve in taking care of German
10 POWs. As the war progressed, the number of Black
11 nurses allowed to enlist remained low, although the
12 quota was officially lifted in July 1944.

13 (19) The extraordinary efforts of these women
14 are deserving of belated official recognition.

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

21 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

22 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
23 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
24 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
25 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a gold

1 medal of appropriate design in honor of World War II
2 Army and Navy Nurse Corps members, in recognition of
3 the critical military service and devotion to duty of those
4 nurses.

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

10 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
12 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal
13 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where
14 it shall be available for display as appropriate and
15 available for research.

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

20 (A) appropriate locations associated with
21 the Army and Navy Nurse Corps of World War
22 II, including—

23 (i) the U.S. Army Medical Center of
24 Excellence;

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

10 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

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

15 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

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

19 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section
20 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck
21 under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

22 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
23 **SALE.**

24 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is
25 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint

1 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-
2 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under
3 this Act.

4 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
5 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
6 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
7 Enterprise Fund.