

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 3272

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 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 11, 2023

Ms. STEFANIK (for herself, Ms. SHERRILL, Ms. HOULAHAN, and Mr. CARL) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services, and in addition to the Committee on House Administration, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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”.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 The Congress finds the following:

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

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

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

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

4 (4) General Douglas MacArthur ordered Army
5 Nurses to the Bataan Peninsula to prepare 2 emer-
6 gency hospitals for U.S. and Filipino forces. General
7 Hospital 1 received casualties directly from the front
8 lines, and more than 1,200 battle casualties requir-
9 ing major surgery were admitted within a month.
10 General Hospital 2 accepted patients strong enough
11 for evacuation, as it was out in the open, with no
12 tents or buildings, and only tree canopy to conceal
13 them from Japanese aircraft. Hospital 1 was
14 bombed on March 29, 1942, killing or wounding
15 more than 100 patients, but the nurses carried on
16 with their duties as well as they were able. Following
17 the U.S. Army surrender of the Philippines to the
18 Japanese on May 6, 1942, 67 Army Nurses were
19 taken to Santo Tomas Internment Camp in Manila,
20 where they remained until February 1945. During
21 the 37 months in captivity, these women endured
22 primitive conditions and starvation rations, but con-
23 tinued to care for the ill and injured in the intern-
24 ment 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) Enlisted nurses acclimated quickly to dif-
4 ficult and dangerous conditions with a minimum of
5 complaints, and were essential members of the field
6 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 enlisted nurses supervise commu-
17 nicable disease measures as former enemy countries
18 were reorganized. In Hiroshima, these officers cared
19 for victims of the atomic bombs. In Munich, they
20 prevented mass epidemic in refugee camps. Enlisted
21 nurses even provided prenatal, infant, and mental
22 health care in other former-enemy territories.

23 (11) Nurses received 1,619 medals, citations,
24 and commendations during the war, reflecting the
25 courage and dedication of all who served. Sixteen

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

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

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

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

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

1 (16) As the ANC began expanding its recruit-
2 ing process, thousands of Black nurses who wanted
3 to serve their country filled out applications.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

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

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

1 (A) appropriate locations associated with
2 the Army and Navy Nurse Corps of World War
3 II, including—

4 (i) the U.S. Army Medical Center of
5 Excellence;

6 (ii) the Women in Military Service for
7 America Memorial;

8 (iii) the U.S. Army Women’s Museum;

9 (iv) the National Naval Medical Cen-
10 ters; and

11 (v) the National World War II Mu-
12 seum; and

13 (B) any other location determined appro-
14 priate by the Smithsonian Institution.

15 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

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

20 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

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

1 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section
2 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck
3 under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

4 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
5 **SALE.**

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

11 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
12 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
13 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
14 Enterprise Fund.

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