

From the Front Lines to the Capitol: WWII Nurses Should be Honored



Coalition for WWII Nurses Congressional Gold Medal

Coalition for WWII Nurses Congressional Gold Medal Co-Chairs



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The Impact of Army and Navy Nurses in WWII



A Case for Congressional Gold Medal Recognition



The Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award bestowed by Congress, **has never been awarded to the military nurses** who saved tens of thousands of lives during WWII.

This Award would honor all nurses who served in the Navy and Army Nurse Corps during WWII, including Filipino, Chinese, Chinese-American, Japanese-American, and African-American nurses.

Army & Navy Nurses in WWII

More than **59,000 Army** nurses and **11,000 Navy** nurses answered the call to serve across Europe, North Africa, the Pacific, China-Burma-India, and the continental United States.

As members of the Army Nurse Corps and the Navy Nurse Corps, they provided lifesaving care in combat zones, aboard hospital ships, on evacuation aircraft, and in field hospitals often within range of enemy fire.

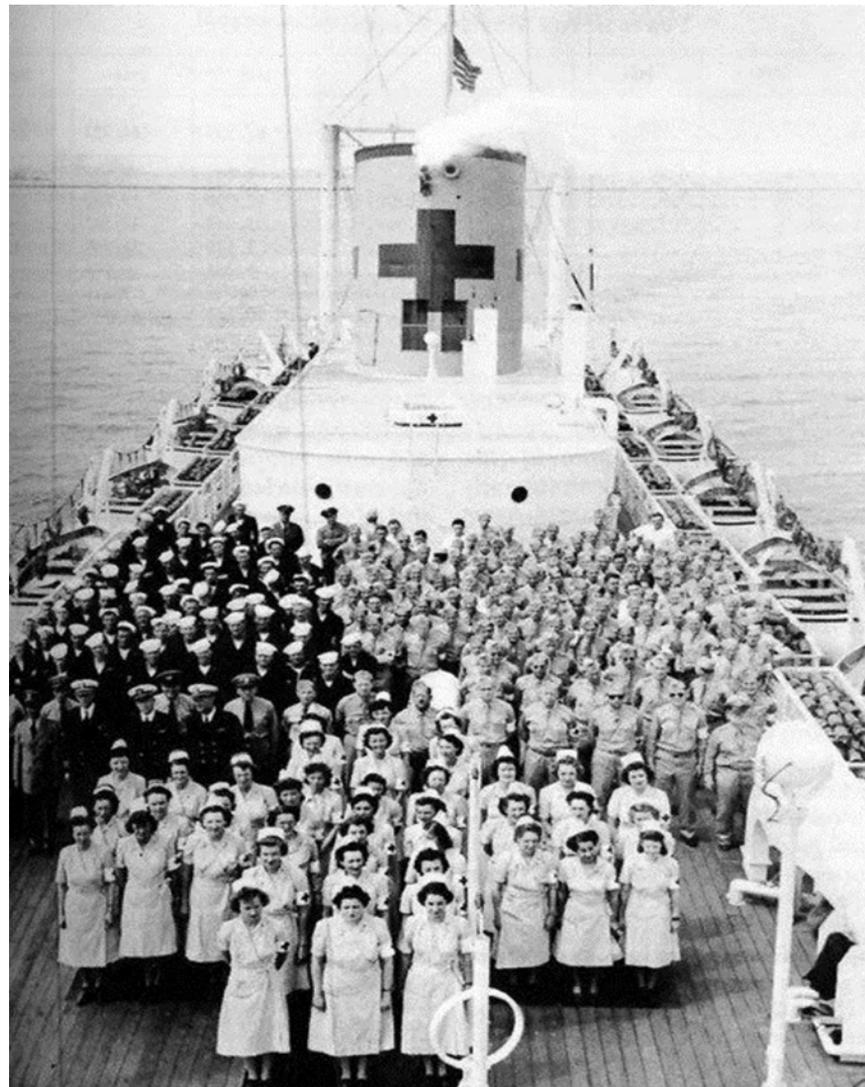


An Army nurse slithers under barbed wire during basic training for medical personnel heading for the European Theater.

Army & Navy Nurses in WWII

They were commissioned officers, they were not auxiliary personnel, serving under military authority in austere, dangerous conditions.

USS Comfort (AH-6) crew and medical staff pose on deck prior to departing for the war zone on 29 May 1944 from San Pedro, California.



Military Medicine in WWII

Established modern triage and forward resuscitative care models

Developed large-scale aeromedical evacuation systems

Standardized infection control and trauma nursing protocols

Formalized advanced psychiatric and rehabilitation nursing for combat casualties



Nurses care for amputee soldiers at Letterman Hospital

Military Medicine in WWII

Survival rates for wounded U.S. service members in WWII reached unprecedented levels compared to previous wars due in large part to rapid evacuation and skilled nursing care.

Their work laid the foundation for modern combat casualty care and remains the basis of today's joint trauma systems.



USS Benevolence (AH-13) <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhnc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nara-series/80-g/80-G-490000/80-G-490452.html>

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Where Nurses Served in WWII

Forward surgical units and evacuation hospitals during major campaigns

Deployed on 12 hospital ships and on medical evacuation planes

Endured bombardment during the Battle of the Bulge and Pacific island invasions

Evacuated wounded by air — pioneering aeromedical evacuation doctrine

Captured and held as prisoners of war in the Philippines



Where Nurses Served in WWII



Navy Nurses held as
Japanese prisoners of
war

Luzon internment
camp March 1945

Where Nurses Served in WWII

Captured and held as prisoners of war in the Philippines

The “Angels of Bataan and Corregidor” survived imprisonment following the fall of the Philippines in 1942, demonstrating extraordinary resilience and professional dedication under brutal conditions.



Feb. 3, 1945. Nurses recently liberated from Santo Tomas internment camp where they were held for three years.

Breaking Barriers

WWII marked a turning point in:

- Permanent commissioning authority for military nurses
- Equalization of rank and pay status
- Expanded leadership opportunities for women in the Armed Forces

Their wartime service directly influenced the passage of the Army–Navy Nurses Act of 1947, granting permanent commissioned officer status.

Many decorations were awarded for heroism while under direct enemy attack — a rare distinction for medical personnel at the time.



Military Recognition of Nurses During WWII

1,619 medals, citations, and commendations awarded during the war

Sixteen medals awarded posthumously to nurses who died due to enemy fire:

- Anzio: 6 nurses
- Attack of hospital ship USS COMFORT by a Japanese suicide plane: 6 nurses
- 4 flight nurses



Elise Ott receiving first Air medal in WWII

Military Recognition of Nurses During WWII

Thirteen other flight nurses died in weather-related crashes while on duty.



Gerda Bouwhuis, Seraphine Petrocelli, and Regina Brown receive Air Medal, Bowman Field, KY, 1944 (USAF Photo)

Most Decorated – WWII Nurses

Ruby Bradley was one of the most decorated women in US military history being awarded 34 medals and citations, serving in both WWII and the Korean War. While imprisoned in Manila, she provided medical help to the prisoners and sought to feed starving children by shoving food into her pockets whenever she could, often going hungry herself.

In November 1950, during the Chinese counter-offensive, Bradley refused to leave until she had loaded the sick and wounded onto a plane in Pyongyang while surrounded by 100,000 advancing Chinese soldiers. She was able to jump aboard the plane just as her ambulance exploded from an enemy shell.



Most Decorated – WWII Nurses



Elise S. Ott was the first woman awarded with the Air Medal. In 1943 she became the first flight nurse to evacuate wounded soldiers from a combat zone by air, transporting 30 critically injured patients from India to the United States. At the time, air evacuation was new and untested, and aircraft were not equipped for medical care, making her mission groundbreaking.

Her success helped prove that long-distance aeromedical evacuation was possible and effective, shaping the future of military and civilian air medical transport. Her work opened doors for women in military aviation and nursing.

Highest Individual Decorations

Annie G. Fox was a U.S. Army nurse stationed at Hickam Field in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, when Japanese forces attacked. As bombs fell during the surprise assault, she calmly organized medical care and treated wounded service members despite limited supplies and ongoing danger. Her leadership and courage under fire helped save lives during one of the most devastating attacks in American history.

For her bravery, she became the first woman to receive the Purple Heart during World War II. She was later retroactively awarded the Bronze Star Medal in recognition of her service. Annie G. Fox's actions at Pearl Harbor highlighted the critical role of military nurses in combat situations and set a lasting example of dedication and heroism.



Highest Individual Decorations

Mary Roberts Wilson was a U.S. Army nurse who served in the Philippines during World War II. After the fall of Bataan and Corregidor in 1942, she became a prisoner of war, enduring harsh conditions while continuing to care for sick and wounded soldiers. Despite severe shortages of food, medicine, and supplies, she remained dedicated to her patients throughout her captivity.



For her bravery and leadership, she became one of the first women to receive the Silver Star. Her courage as a POW at Bataan and Corregidor highlighted the strength and resilience of military nurses under extreme circumstances, leaving a lasting legacy of service and sacrifice.

Highly Decorated

Ann Bernatitus was a U.S. Navy nurse who was on the front lines of defense in the Manila-Bataan Area, on two separate occasions, forced to evacuate to a new position after the Japanese bombs wrecked the Surgical Unit. She courageously withstood the dangers and rigors of tropical combat rendering efficient and devoted service during tense days of prolonged siege and evacuation.

Her courage and dedication earned her the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, Navy Unit Commendation, and American Defense Medal. Bernatitus is remembered as a symbol of resilience, selflessness, and unwavering commitment to service under extreme adversity.



Congressional Gold Medal Standard

The Congressional Gold Medal recognizes contributions that shape American history.

WWII Army and Navy nurses meet this threshold through national service, documented heroism, doctrinal transformation, and generational influence on military healthcare.

The Congressional Gold Medal is:

- National in scope
- Transformational in consequence
- Enduring in legacy



The Military Nurses of WWII Met the Standard!

1. Served in every theater of WWII
2. Saved tens of thousands of American lives
3. Advanced military medical doctrine permanently
4. Broke structural barriers for women in uniform
5. Demonstrated valor under combat conditions
6. Influenced generations of military healthcare professionals

Their collective service changed the course of military medicine and strengthened the fighting force of the United States during one of its most consequential wars.

Support S.2195 and H.R. 4901 to ensure the legacy of these life-saving heroes!

The Military Nurses of WWII Met the Standard!

Leadership



Clinical Impact



Lasting Legacy

The Military Nurses of WWII Met the Standard!

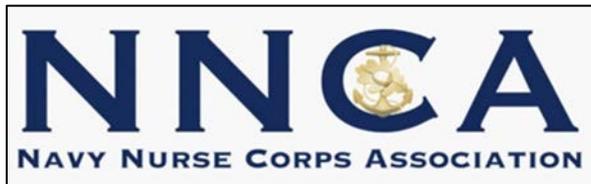
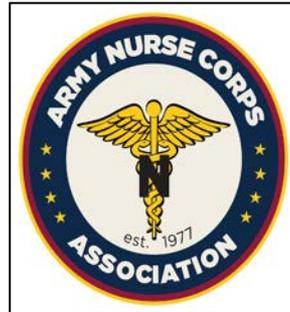
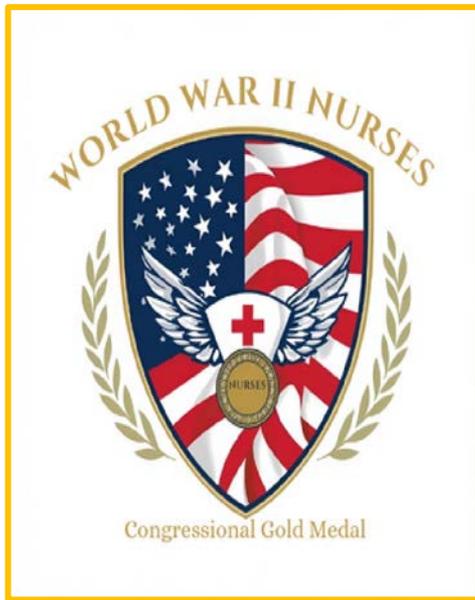


What Next?

The Legislative Process to Get It Done!



Our Proud Coalition of Military Nursing Organizations



For more information scan this QR code or go to <https://wwiinursescgm.org>