

Testimony given before a Sub-Committee on Veteran Affairs on May 21, 2009

My name is Elizabeth Yeznach. I am here on behalf of the 180,000 women of all races and ethnicities who served our country during WWII as members of the United States Cadet Nurse Corps [USCNC]. I, myself, served as a Cadet Nurse from 1943 to 1946 at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut.

First, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Congresswoman Nita Lowey, for consistently introducing the United States Cadet Nurse Equity Act through the years. You kept our hopes alive that someday the US Cadet Nurse Corps would be recognized as veterans. This hearing brings us one step closer, and I am grateful to the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs for holding this hearing. I would also like to thank all the other Congresspersons who co-sponsored this legislation year after year including Chairman of the Committee on Veterans Affairs Bob Filner.

During World War II, our nation faced a desperate shortage of nurses on the home front and a decline in nursing school enrollment. Nurses who enrolled in the military left a dearth of nurses in civilian facilities and as the war continued, the shortage of nurses became acute both at home and overseas. The Federal Government established the US Cadet Nurse Corps in 1943 to recruit young women to become nurses, 180,000 of whom provided 80% of the nursing care in our country during the war.

The United States Cadet Nurse Corps offered an innovative solution to the pressing shortage of nurses during World War II. Without us, our domestic health care system could have collapsed and resulted in a sick and demoralized nation. We were deployed to Army, Navy, Public Health Facilities, and Indian health agencies. We abided by all the rules that were applicable to military such as wearing uniforms and were required to pledge 36 month of service. Yet, our contributions and commitment during a tense time in our country's history remains virtually unknown.

We, the Cadet Nurses, worked tirelessly to care for sick civilians and injured troops. We were exposed to infectious diseases and death; worked 12-hour shifts, six and a half days a week; and cared for as many as fifty patients simultaneously.

As a Cadet Nurse and student at that time, I remember the stress of providing emotional and physical support to multiple patients and their families who faced major trauma in tragic events. For example, the Hartford Barnum and Bailey Circus Fire of 1944, cadet nurses were charged with providing complex care and attention to the many injured while they endured painful and prolonged treatments. During my time as a Cadet Nurse, I gained strong clinical experience and skills in providing complete care-both physical and emotional-in challenging settings.

Other women in WWII military services-the Women's Army Corps [WACS], the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service [WAVES], and the Women Air Force Service Pilots [WASP]-have rightfully been granted veteran status and benefits. Despite our historic and patriotic contributions, we, the women of the US Cadet Nurses Corps are consistently dismissed and forgotten. We are not seeking special recognition, just equal recognition!

Many former Cadet Nurses have already passed away and unfortunately, I don't know how many remain. What I do know is that we are passing on at the same rate as those of that generation, with all former Cadet Nurses now more than 80 years old.

Passing this legislation is more important now than ever before as 66 years have passed since the inception of the US Cadet Nurse Corps yet our service remains unrecognized.

We came forward to help our country through a difficult time and are proud to know that as part of a uniformed service, we contributed to America's victory in World War II. Therefore, after all this commitment and contribution, if we are not veterans, can you tell us what we are?