

Report of Female Combat Veterans Retreat April 2017

*"I was able to [talk through] some things during the retreat. Talking about them freed me up."
(Former USAF Nursing Officer)*

Sixteen women came to the all-female combat veteran's retreat in April. Seven women came from Long Island, NY. They are connected with a vibrant new ministry called Women in the Military (<http://womeninthemilitary.net>). Six women came from the local area, the remaining three women came from around the country.



Some of the Veterans were happy to show off their quilts

This was the first time Noel led an exclusively female Welcome Home Initiative (WHI) retreat. He intended to remain in the background and had asked an experienced female team member to take the lead. In the end, it became a shared leadership and seemed to work well. Three men in addition to Noel took part, a priest (who heard several confessions), another worship leader and the third an older man with the ministry of a Godly father. The remainder of the 22 member team was women.

It was evident that most of the women had suffered at the hands of one, or more, men/women with authority over them. These were often but not always officers, NCOs, Soldiers who were peers, parents, especially fathers, husbands or partners, teachers, pastors, priests and more. Some of the retreatants had the determination not to let the past spoil their future. Other women were not as resilient, remaining in bondage from the past catastrophic events in their lives, even though they desired to be free. This retreat gave the participants encouragement to be resilient and hope. Many burdens were given to Jesus.

"The team had a spirit of unity, love and peace that made the retreat a time of healing and breakthrough for many."

*"The retreat gave me time to be still and hear the voice of God."
(USMC Veteran, Desert Storm, '90-91)*

It was evident that most of the women had suffered at the hands of one, or more, men/women with authority over them. These were often but not always officers, NCOs, Soldiers who were peers, parents, especially fathers, husbands or partners, teachers, pastors, priests and more. Some of the retreatants had the determination not to let the past spoil their future. Other women were not as resilient, remaining in bondage from the past catastrophic events in their lives, even though they desired to be free. This retreat gave the participants encouragement to be resilient and hope. Many burdens were given to Jesus.

This retreat gave the participants encouragement to be resilient and hope. Many burdens were given to Jesus.

Two stories of courage, hope and healing

One veteran, who had been to the November WHI in Virginia Beach, drove 8-hours alone from south-west Pennsylvania to get to Christ the King for this retreat. She said, "The day before I started out, my mind was in turmoil. Several times during the drive, I came close to deciding not to come. Eventually I got to Greenwich and was so happy to make it. By the time I returned home at the end of the retreat I felt so blessed and glad that I had made the effort and also found a bit of healing by being able to conquer my fear for once."

Another lady arrived thoroughly unhappy, with a baseball hat firmly pulled over her face. Unsmiling, she looked at the floor almost continuously. She eventually plucked up enough courage to share a little bit of her difficult story with the others. She'd served on active duty in the Middle East but was now homeless. When the quilts were presented this lady was the first to jump out of her chair to accept the first quilt. Amazing! She was very moved when two of the leaders asked if they could pray for her and said that the quilt represented transition from being a Wounded Warrior to a Healed Veteran, thanking her for her service. She cried. At the Mission and Commissioning closing service at the end of the retreat she gave a moving testimony. Without prior warning, she was asked to tell her story. A team member linked her up with an addiction resource at her church and another team member will visit her where she lives to offer more healing prayer as she is unable to get to the Spiritual Life Center.



This US Air Force Veteran was delighted with her quilt, presented at a previous retreat



Quilt presented to speaker at worship service at end of retreat

A final indication of the significant blessings that took place was that almost every Veteran said they wanted to come back for another retreat in the future. Every one of them specified that it should be a women-only retreat as they have different needs than male Veterans. This was evident by the needs that were expressed during the retreat. Layers of hurt were removed and discarded as the women grasped that they could put Jesus between them and the trauma and that He takes the trauma onto Him, replacing it with grace, peace, mercy, blessing and more.

Quotes

- *“The prayer team was wonderful and the support staff very caring.”* (US Army Veteran, Desert Storm)
- *“Will be back!”* (US Navy Veteran, Operation Iraqi Freedom)
- *“Everyone showed the love of Christ through their testimony and Prayer, a simple touch, [or] a word of encouragement. The retreat has opened me up to want to do more for others.”* (US Army Veteran, Iraq)

PS: The team appreciates your ongoing prayers. Please keep praying for the next WHI Retreat: November 13-15. Several registrations have already been received. \$300 provides one scholarship for a veteran. Would you consider sponsoring a Veteran in need of healing?