

'It's Been a Long Time Coming'

Florida's first all-female Honor Flight took more than 100 vets on a tour of the nation's capital, with a combined military service of 1,950 years

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Cheers rang out through the Baltimore/Washington International Airport last May as an Allegiant Airlines flight out of Orlando, Florida, deplaned more than 150 women – 109 of whom were veterans.

They were headed to the nation's capital as guests of Villages Honor Flight in the "Sunshine State." Honor Flight is a national network which flies veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit memorials free of charge.

According to Liza Diana Walters, flight director for Villages Honor Flight, this was the first time an all-female flight embarked from Florida. Tri-County Women Veterans contacted Walters about the possibility of a flight in 2019. Walters said COVID-19 delayed it a few years, but it was worth the wait.

"The reception at the Baltimore airport was amazing," she said. "An incredible number of people showed up to greet our veterans, who were shocked by the reception."

The veterans ranged in generation from those who served in WWII to others who discharged from the military in the early 2000s. A number of female chaperones or "guardians," as they are known, accompanied the veterans on the trip.

For Vietnam vet Connie Plotkin, the welcome her flight received was "unbelievable" and appreciated.

"It's been very emotional, coming in and having people clap for you," Plotkin told *Stars and Stripes*. "I served in Vietnam, and at that time, it wasn't the same as it is now. It's been a long time coming. It really feels good."

Walters said she had a bio for each of the veterans, and after doing the math, the 109

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women had a combined 1,950 years of military service.

“I really think that is amazing,” Walters said. “I am hopeful that this flight will raise awareness among other female vets who will step forward to be on a future flight. Some of them on this particular flight had been told by their male counterparts that Honor Flights were for men only.”

In addition to the memorials on the National Mall, the women also toured the Military Women’s Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. They were among the first to visit after it reopened a few days earlier, having been closed for six months for renovations.

For more information on the Honor Flight network, visit <https://www.honorflight.org>.

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