

# Military Sexual Trauma

No judgment, just help and support for Veterans.

Anna Morelock | Public Affairs

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Ann Thieman was a chaplain's assistant at Fort Gordon Ga., in 1982. To promote the upcoming vacation Bible school, she went to do an interview at the post radio station. Instead of an interview, she was raped.

"It happened so fast", she said. Now, 30 years after the incident, Thieman said, she wouldn't have come out of it like she did if she hadn't received help through VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

About 20 percent of women and 2 percent of men tell their VA providers they have experienced military sexual trauma. Because of the disproportionate numbers of men and women in the service, they work out to be almost equal in numbers, said Dr. Connie Logan, the Military Sexual Assault coordinator in Omaha.

Treatment for military sexual trauma—all of which is free at VA – is all about overcoming the effects of trauma. "We don't really care about anything else except we help people get better," Logan said.

While Thieman got physical exams and uncomfortable questioning during a pre-trial hearing for her attacker, she experienced numerous side effects over the next 20 years before seeking further help. "It still blows my mind today – how do you think this helped me?" she said of her experiences in the months after her rape.

The nightmares and nausea started almost immediately after her attack. She always felt like she was in trouble or being punished, she said. Then the other physical symptoms began – bowel problems, throwing up, and depression so bad she didn't want to get out of bed.

"It took everything out of me," Thieman said. "It felt like no matter how hard I tried to do right, it wasn't good enough." Thieman said she went to doctors several times for her symptoms, was given medicines to mask them and sent home. She lost weight and didn't eat much.

When she came back to the United States for college, Thieman said she still didn't get help because she didn't know what else she could do.

One weekend, while watching the winter Olympics in 1999, Thieman said, she saw a commercial about Navy Veterans who were sexually harassed. It told other female Veterans to call if they'd had similar experiences. Thieman waited until Monday and called the VA.

"It's almost like I have permission to grieve and to talk about it without being judged".  
Ann Thieman

Thieman's advice to other Veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma: "This is VA. They're here to help us, not judge us. We have the right to get the best care we can get, and if you feel like you're not getting it, then you need to go see the person who will help you. We need to support each other."

To get care for military sexual trauma, the Veteran need only ask, Logan said. "They don't have to have any kind of written record. They don't have to have any sort of proof that it might have happened. They don't have to have reported it. They don't even have to have had counseling or any contact with health care providers at the time. In order for us treat a Veteran for military sexual trauma, the Veteran only has to ask."

**To find out about treatment for military sexual trauma, call:**

Connie Logan in Omaha at 402-995-4741

Lisa Barnes in Grand Island at 308-382-3660, ext. 2145

Bev Lindell in Lincoln at 402-489-3802, ext. 6609

Ann Thieman – VFW Post 1581