

NATIONAL WINNER
YEAR LEVEL 11-12



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**THE ONE DAY OF THE YEAR: THE WOMEN
WHO CHALLENGED ANZAC**

NATIONAL HISTORY CHALLENGE 2020

The One Day of the Year: The Women Who Challenged Anzac

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ABSTRACT:

The Anzac Day protests of the 1980s was the response by Australian feminists to the stigma of rape in war. While controversial at the time, they are now an obscure event in recent history, the impact of which a contestable story of the role of Anzac Day in modern Australia.

Word Count: 1997

“...how do I view our protests of thirty years ago? In retrospect, we were amazingly intrepid and actually quite brave... Despite our courage, we didn’t properly set out our issues about Anzac Day but what protest movements ever do?”¹

For over a century, the Gallipoli landing of 1915 has been seared into the collective Australian psyche as the birthplace of the immortal Anzac legend. The values embodied on April 25th would be extended to define a nation, its annual commemoration viewed as a cornerstone of modern Australia, indoctrinated into our history and culture as a day of sacred remembrance. Anzac Day has long remained untouched in its illustrious glory, but in the latter half of the 20th century, amid rising social change and the onset of second - wave feminism, many active feminists began to raise questions surrounding the role of sexual violence in war, and more broadly, the exclusion of women in the Anzac legend. The Women Against Rape in War Collective, established in the early 1980s, was the response by Australian feminists to the stigma of women as passive onlookers in war and to legitimise the fact of sexual violence in war, met with immense controversy by the public. The role of this movement brought the question of rape, into the national conversation, yet their role in changing the perception of rape globally and the response they garnered is debated with much contestability, even within the group itself.

The beginnings of opposition to Anzac Day occurred amid the second wave of feminism in the 1960s, triggered by the release of Betty Friedman’s *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* in 1970². Rising tensions surrounding sexual assault and violence against women in society collided with anti-war sentiments from the Vietnam War, leading to many active Australian feminists to critique the traditional gender stereotypes surrounding women in wartime, and of rape as a tool of war³; *“...critiques of rape in war existed amid the growing feminist scholarship on the issue of rape, which now understood rape as a weapon used by men against women, in both “peace” and wartime, to reinforce constructed gender roles⁴”*. Simultaneously, the release of Alan Seymour’s play *The One Day of the Year* in 1958⁵ reinforced the idea of Anzac Day being one of *“...old guys sitting around reminiscing about the glories of war”*, rather than a day of mourning and

¹ Burgmann, M. 2014. Memoir delivered at ‘Women Against Rape in War: Gallipoli to Coniston’ Conference. 29 August, University of Technology. Available at: <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/mcs/article/view/4222>

² Turner – Graham, E. 2009. The Women’s Movement. [online]. Museums Victoria. Available at: <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/2829>

³ Way, A. 2013. Best We Forget: Excluding Women, Rape and Protest From the Anzac Myth and Memorial. [online]. Macquarie University. Available at: <https://makinghistoryatmacquarie.wordpress.com/2013/11/18/best-we-forget-excluding-women-rape-and-protest-from-the-Anzac-myth-and-memorial/>

⁴ Shute, C. 1995. Heroines and heroes: Sexual mythology in Australia 1914-18. *Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth century*, edited by Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, pp.23-42

⁵ Seymour, A. 1958. *The One Day of the Year*. Angus and Robertson.

remembrance⁶. The glorification of the Anzac legend and the exclusion of women in these accounts fuelled feminist discontent surrounding the image of women as; *“that of desperate mothers rather than as victims of sexual assault”*⁷. By the early 1980s, this discontent manifested itself in a series of demonstrations, taking place on Anzac Day, with the aims of mourning women raped in war and to expose the truth about women in war.

On Anzac Day, 1981 in Canberra, a group of women marched down Anzac parade, gaining national attention, soon to be repeated across the country. Their actions led to the formation of the Women Against Rape in War Collective, whose aims were to mourn all women raped in war, and to publicly raise the issue of women as primary victims in armed conflict; *“...[it was] not my purpose in marching to decry the service of those men and women who died fighting for this country. It was simply to remember those who had not previously been recognised.”* wrote one woman who marched in Canberra⁸. Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne would hold similar demonstrations over the coming years⁹, the most well-known of these protests in Sydney 1983, where over 300 women marched and 161 were arrested¹⁰. The connection between rape and Anzac Day was met with horror by NSW Police and the Returned and Services League (RSL), who rejected the application for permission to march by the women, believing that the protests implied that the men marching were guilty of rape. The women were blocked by police and arrested and charged with causing serious alarm and affront, but none would be prosecuted¹¹. Along with Sydney, similar demonstrations occurred across Australia, with 7 arrested in Melbourne and some in Canberra, and these marches would continue (though less publicised) until 1986.

The Women Against Rape in War Collective was only one branch formed with the aims of reclaiming Anzac Day as one of mourning and remembrance. Protests against rape and Anzac Day began in Canberra in 1978, lasting until 1986, spanning across 5 cities¹², the vast majority of these protests concerned that rape had become ‘part

⁶ Burgmann, M. 2014. Memoir delivered at ‘Women Against Rape in War: Gallipoli to Coniston’ Conference. 29 August, University of Technology. Available at: <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/mcs/article/view/4222>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Walmsley, R., 1982. Women Against Rape in War and the Anzac Day March. The Canberra Times, [online] p.2. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/126913155?searchTerm=Women%20Against%20Rape%20in%20War>

⁹ 1982. Papers Of The Women Against Rape Coalition (WAR). [typescript; handwritten; textile (banner)] State Library of South Australia, Adelaide Women's Liberation Movement Archives Collection. Adelaide.

¹⁰ Summers, A. 2015. Lest we forget ... the women who marched against war rape. [online]. Sydney Morning Herald. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/lest-we-forget--the-women-who-marched-against-war-rape-20150430-1mxaxu.html>

¹¹ Erika, S., 1986. Patriarchy and the State. Australian Journal of Law and Society, [online] 3. Available at: <http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AUJLLawSoc/1986/3.pdf>

¹² 1982. Papers Of The Women Against Rape Coalition (WAR). [typescript; handwritten; textile (banner)] State Library of South Australia, Adelaide Women's Liberation Movement Archives Collection. Adelaide.

of the legitimate violence of war¹³. The exception to this was in Melbourne in 1984, which saw the formation of the Anti-Anzac Day Collective. Unlike their peaceful counterparts, the women disrupted the march and chanted loudly, with 17 women arrested. The women were not protesting the exclusion of rape in wartime accounts, but against the patriarchal system Anzac Day and war enforced¹⁴. This protest has since been the most intense challenge to Anzac Day, and created a new sphere of criticism surrounding the previous Anzac protests, as well as within feminist circles who contested the women who marched. Many women, including those in the Women Against Rape movement, criticised the group, claiming they sought to; *“demystify and unravel too much of the Anzac myth at once”* and were also seen as disrespectful to the feminist tradition of non-violent action¹⁵. While the Anti-Anzac Day Collective lasted only a year, they were the first major opposition to the patriarchal subjugation Anzac Day encapsulates, but were condemned by those from all sides, for their aggressive action and liberal views. The protest of 1984 only created a new perspective on the growing issue of women (and rape) in war, with the necessity of their founding still questioned and contested amongst feminists today.

The response by the Australian public to the protests was generally one of horror, the marches were viewed as a threat to the traditional meaning of Anzac. Across Australia, women who marched on Anzac day would be subject to continuous degrading comments and threats from the press and onlookers, *“You’d be lucky to be raped”* a frequent comment spat at the women by bystanders¹⁶, the president of the RSL in Victoria saying of the women; *“If one looked at them, I wonder how rape would be possible”*¹⁷. One of the most degrading comments made of the women, this time of the Canberra march in 1982 was; *“this foe is just as real as that on the battlefields of Flanders”*¹⁸. The overwhelmingly negative response to the protests of the 1980s was seen as proof to Australian feminists that the role of women in war is seen as a passive bystander, rather than a primary victim; *“The clearest evidence that Anzac Day and the mythology it encapsulates privileges celebration over mourning and men over women is to be gleaned from the experiences of those who have challenged the*

¹³ Walmsley, R., 1982. Women Against Rape in War and the Anzac Day March. The Canberra Times, [online] p.2. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/126913155?searchTerm=Women%20Against%20Rape%20in%20War>

¹⁴ Way, A. 2013. Best We Forget: Excluding Women, Rape and Protest From the Anzac Myth and Memorial. [online]. Macquarie University. Available at: <https://makinghistoryatmacquarie.wordpress.com/2013/11/18/best-we-forget-excluding-women-rape-and-protest-from-the-Anzac-myth-and-memorial/>

¹⁵ Howe, A. 1995 Anzac Mythology and the feminist challenge. Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth century, edited Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, pp.302-310

¹⁶ Summers, A. 2015. Lest we forget ... the women who marched against war rape. [online]. Sydney Morning Herald. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/lest-we-forget--the-women-who-marched-against-war-rape-20150430-1mxaxu.html>

¹⁷ Mathews-Drew, F. 1984. Reactions to women and Anzac march. The Canberra Times. [online]. pg. 2. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/126836033>

¹⁸ Walmsley, R., 1982. Women Against Rape in War and the Anzac Day March. The Canberra Times, [online] p.2. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/126913155?searchTerm=Women%20Against%20Rape%20in%20War>

exclusivity and nature of the day"¹⁹. Groups protesting against rape in war appear to 'vanish' after the late 1980s, many believe due to; "*being constantly rejected, misrepresented, and abused*", adding to the contested nature of the role of these women in Australian feminist history²⁰.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of supporters behind the Collective were female, often members of feminist groups or followers of the writings of Mary Daly and Germain Greer²¹. Based on the widespread media coverage, it can be assumed the women had little male support, yet this is not the case. The protests gained several male supporters, who supported, encouraged, and in some cases, marched with the women. Prior to the Sydney march in 1983, the women held a phone in at the Sydney Rape Crisis centre, where they received calls of women who had been raped by Australian soldiers. The women also received calls of fathers whose daughters had been victims of rape, with one father wanting to march alongside the women in remembrance of his daughter, who had been raped and murdered, and he and several other men with similar stories marched with the women in Sydney²². Another show of support for the collective was written by Ken Morris, a retired NSW teacher who wrote; "*I am affronted by rape, but not by a protest against it...The men and women whom we honour on Anzac day sacrificed their lives in defence of our freedom, including, presumably, the freedom to protest. The members of the WAR Collective are to be commended.*"²³. The spectrum of male response was vast, spanning from the denial that rape in war occurred, to the veterans who walked with the women every year in memory of their daughters. The fact men – or anyone besides the protesters - supported the marches was suppressed, found in back pages of newspapers and late - night radio broadcasts, possibly to further the narrative the women were opposing a sacred day of remembrance. The contesting accounts of how Australians responded to this movement shows the sacred nature Anzac Day holds, with any challenge against it met with confusion, aggression, and omission in contemporary records.

As the Women Against Rape in War movement, diminished, so did their presence in Australian history. However, the issue of sexual violence in war has not. Reports and acknowledgment of the use of rape in war

¹⁹ Davies, S. 1997. *Women, War, and the Violence of History: An Australian Perspective*. *Women's Encounters With Violence: Australian Experiences*, edited by Sandy Cook and Judith Bessant. California: Sage Publications, pp.159-176

²⁰ Way, A. 2013. *Best We Forget: Excluding Women, Rape and Protest From the Anzac Myth and Memorial*. [online]. Macquarie University. Available at: <https://makinghistoryatmacquarie.wordpress.com/2013/11/18/best-we-forget-excluding-women-rape-and-protest-from-the-Anzac-myth-and-memorial/>

²¹ Burgmann, M. 2014. *Memoir delivered at 'Women Against Rape in War: Gallipoli to Coniston' Conference*. 29 August, University of Technology. Available at: <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/mcs/article/view/4222>

²² Summers, A. 2015. *Lest we forget ... the women who marched against war rape*. [online]. Sydney Morning Herald. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/lest-we-forget--the-women-who-marched-against-war-rape-20150430-1mxaxu.html>

²³ Morris, K., 1983. *Women Against Rape*. *Education : Journal of the N.S.W. Public School Teachers Federation.*, [online] 64(7), p.6. Available at: <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-731398646/view?sectionId=nla.obj-734004834&partId=nla.obj-731444167#page/n5/mode/1up>

have increased since the 1980s, linked to the global movement against sexual assault against women, the actions of Australian Jan Ruff O’Herne in raising awareness of sexual slave system by Imperial Japan in WWII²⁴ and the definition of rape as a crime against humanity by the United Nations in 1998²⁵. The perception of rape in war, and of the women who fought against it has changed dramatically, but many of the women do believe their story has still been lost, as stated by one protester Meredith Burgmann; “...there is a real loss of the whole story of our protests about Anzac Day...that young women do not know the whole history of protest about Anzac Day, let alone the rape in war protests.”²⁶. Historical examinations of anti-war and feminist pacifism are numerous, yet little has been written about the Collective or their protests, perhaps due to the fact of when, and why, they were protesting. The link between rape and Anzac Day created by the women has lasted since the first march in 1978, with many today of the belief that the aims of the protest were just, but the day they chose was not. Unlike a multitude of societal issues Australia debates with passion, Anzac Day remains free from this debate, the mythology it encapsulates so great to the extent it is untouchable²⁷.

When asked why it took until 1998 before rape was recognised as a war crime, comfort woman Jan Ruff O’Herne states; “Perhaps the answer is that these violations were carried out against women... We have all heard it said: This is what happens to women during war. Rape is part of war, as if war makes it right”²⁸. Even in modern societies, there is much contestability surrounding the significance of rape in war, as well as if the protests of the 1980s had any success outside, or even within, Australia. The actions of the Collective were only one movement in a global protest against the acceptance of rape in both peace and war, and the impact they had is contestable and debatable, even within the Collective itself. While there is no doubt that the Anzac Day protests were – and remain – controversial, they undoubtedly placed an invisible issue into the national conversation, as well raising questions over the truth of the Anzac legend that is propagated into our culture. The story of the Anzac Day protests is certainly one of contestability, with the impact they had on modern Anzac culture unknown, but the women who challenged ‘the one day of the year’ undoubtedly changed how Australians understand rape, both in and outside the Anzac legend.

²⁴ Yoshimi, Y., 1995. *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery In The Japanese Military During World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press, pg 1.

²⁵ De Vito, D., Gill, A. and Short, D., 2009. Rape Characterised as Genocide. *International Journal on Human Rights*, [online] 6(10), p.29. Available at: <https://sur.conectas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/sur10-eng-daniela-de-vito-aisha-gill-and-damien-short.pdf>

²⁶ Burgmann, M. 2014. Memoir delivered at ‘Women Against Rape in War: Gallipoli to Coniston’ Conference. 29 August, University of Technology. Available at: <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/mcs/article/view/4222>

²⁷ Way, A. 2013. *Best We Forget: Excluding Women, Rape and Protest From the Anzac Myth and Memorial*. [online]. Macquarie University. Available at: <https://makinghistoryatmacquarie.wordpress.com/2013/11/18/best-we-forget-excluding-women-rape-and-protest-from-the-Anzac-myth-and-memorial/>

²⁸ O’Herne, J., 1994. *50 Years Of Silence*. 1st ed. Australia: Tom Thompson.

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Cover Image:

Women Against Rape in War march up Anzac Parade towards the Australian War Memorial (Image courtesy ACT Heritage Library (Canberra Times Collection), by Glen McDonald, 25 April 1981, Ref.008856)

PRIMARY SOURCES:

Archived Material:

1982. Papers Of The Women Against Rape Coalition (WAR). [typescript; handwritten; textile (banner)] State Library of South Australia, Adelaide Women's Liberation Movement Archives Collection. Adelaide.

This collection of primary sources from the Women's Liberation movement in Adelaide was useful as it clearly outlined when the Coalition was formed and how it connected to other movements in Australia. These sources were useful in understanding why the movement was formed and they clearly explain the goals that the Adelaide movement had for their protest.

Memoirs:

O'Herne, J., 1994. 50 Years Of Silence. 1st ed. Australia: Tom Thompson.

Newspapers:

Mathews-Drew, F. 1984. Reactions to women and Anzac march. The Canberra Times. [online]. pg. 2. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/126836033>

Morris, K., 1983. Women Against Rape. Education : Journal of the N.S.W. Public School Teachers Federation., [online] 64(7), pg.6. Available at: <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-731398646/view?sectionId=nla.obj-734004834&partId=nla.obj-731444167#page/n5/mode/1up>

The Canberra Times, 1983. Anzac Day Anti Rape Protests. The Canberra Times. [online]. pg 1. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/116381045?searchTerm=Anti-Anzac%20Day>

Walmsley, R., 1982. Women Against Rape in War and the Anzac Day March. The Canberra Times, [online] pg.2. Available at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/126913155?>

SECONDARY SOURCES:

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Davies, S. 1997. Women, War, and the Violence of History: An Australian Perspective. Women's Encounters With Violence: Australian Experiences, edited by Sandy Cook and Judith Bessant. California: Sage Publications, , pp.159-176

Howe, A. 1995. Anzac Mythology and the feminist challenge. *Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth century*, edited Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, pp.302-310

Shute, C. 1995. Heroines and heroes: Sexual mythology in Australia 1914-18. *Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth century*, edited by Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, pp.23-42

Yoshimi, Y., 1995. *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery In The Japanese Military During World War II*. New York: Columbia University Press, pg 1.

Online Journal Articles:

De Vito, D., Gill, A. and Short, D., 2009. Rape Characterised as Genocide. *International Journal on Human Rights*, [online] 6(10), p.29. Available at: <https://sur.conectas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/sur10-eng-daniela-de-vito-aisha-gill-and-damien-short.pdf>

Erika, S., 1986. Patriarchy and the State. *Australian Journal of Law and Society*, [online] 3. Available at: <http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AUJLawSoc/1986/3.pdf>

Plays:

Seymour, A. 1958. *The One Day of the Year*. Angus and Robertson.

Speeches:

Burgmann, M. 2014. Memoir delivered at 'Women Against Rape in War: Gallipoli to Coniston' Conference. 29 August, University of Technology. Available at: <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/mcs/article/view/4222>

This speech, written and delivered by a main member of the Collective in Sydney, was extremely useful in my research as it succinctly described the evolution of the movement and how even within the Collective their aims and impact are contested. The reflection on how the protests are viewed today was also insightful as it adds to the contesting nature of the movement.

Websites:

Summers, A. 2015. Lest we forget ... the women who marched against war rape. [online]. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/lest-we-forget--the-women-who-marched-against-war-rape-20150430-1mxaxu.html>

Turner – Graham, E. 2009. *The Women's Movement*. [online]. Museums Victoria. Available at: <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/2829>

Way, A. 2013. Best We Forget: Excluding Women, Rape and Protest From the Anzac Myth and Memorial. [online]. Macquarie University. Available at: <https://makinghistoryatmacquarie.wordpress.com/2013/11/18/best-we-forget-excluding-women-rape-and-protest-from-the-Anzac-myth-and-memorial/>

This essay was a useful source as it outlined the entire Women Against Rape movement in Australia, including the Anti-Anzac Day Collective. It analysed the beginnings of anti-Anzac Day sentiment and how and why the movement disappeared from existence and accounts of Anzac Day. It has a combination of both primary and secondary sources which were useful in my research as it allowed me to compare perspectives and opinions.