As part of the exhibition *Activism-Forces for Change in Canberra*, curated by Rowan Henderson, Gail Radford gave a floor talk at the Canberra Museum and Gallery on Women Against Rape in War and Dianne Lucas talked about her experiences as a member of the organising collective for the 1982 march.

**Women’s liberation**

The background to Women Against Rape in War was the arrival of Women’s Liberation in Canberra. The first Women’s Liberation meeting was held on 6 June 1970, under the watchful eyes of ASIO officers. They were parked in a van across the street, photographing the women as they arrived to attend the meeting, recording it for posterity. ¹

Women’s Liberation members set about studying feminist history, reading literature on women’s liberation from overseas and discussing how this related to their own lives. In March 1972, the advertisement for a street stall set out Women’s Liberation demands:

- The right to work,
• Equal pay,
• Equal opportunity for work and education,
• Free child care and pre-school,
• Free, safe contraceptives, and
• Safe, legal abortion on request.²

Two months later the action group in Women’s Liberation set up the Women’s Electoral Lobby of the ACT. These were women who were not prepared to wait for a revolution but wanted action now and wanted to work in the system. They wanted legislative and policy changes by the federal government. What they wanted was much the same as the Women’s Liberation demands but usually expressed more tactfully.⁴
Memorabilia from these two organisations are in the display cases on the right. You can learn more about both of them from two videos that are on the video stand in the centre of the exhibition.  

"Beryl", the first women's refuge in Canberra, opened in 1975.

Women Against Rape Groups
In 1977 Women Against Rape groups, known as WAR groups, started to appear in Australia and overseas. Some say that these groups formed as the result of reading the book Against Our Will that was published in 1975. Written by the American feminist Susan Brownmiller, the book made a significant contribution to the awareness of the power men have over women with the threat of rape. Others say that these WAR groups formed as a result of the women’s personal experience of working with rape victims. It was probably some of each.

**Influence of Federal governments**

In Canberra the WAR group concentrated on drawing attention to the rape of women in war by marching on ANZAC Day. For them to choose ANZAC Day was considered appalling by many. It struck at the heart of nation-building myths and legends and historical narratives about masculine valour. In particular, it was seen as an attack on “the Diggers, those “tall bronzed ANZACs” who are the heroes of our national day”.

Their first four marches were held in the period of the Fraser Government. The last was held in 1983, shortly after the election of the Hawke Labor Government.

The Fraser Government was a Liberal-National Party Coalition and a conservative government when compared to the heady days of the reforming Whitlam Labor Government.
Why did this matter? The ACT did not have self-government then and the Federal Minister for the Territories made laws for the ACT. Two of these were introduced to stop the women marching on ANZAC Day.

Today, when I tell students at the ANU that the women who marched on ANZAC Day, to protest about the rape of women in war, were arrested they cannot believe it. “Why”, they ask?

Let’s pause and see what the situation was like at the time of these marches.

**Spoils of war and break the silence**

Two phrases stick in my mind here “legitimate spoils of war’ and “Break the silence against rape”.

A United Nations report on “Sexual Violence in War” stated that, prior to the 1990s, sexual violence in conflict had been considered as unavoidable. For centuries armies considered rape as one of “the legitimate spoils of war”.

“When World War 11, all sides of the conflict were accused of mass rapes, yet neither of the two courts which were set up by the victorious allied countries to prosecute suspected war crimes – Tokyo and Nuremberg – recognized the crime of sexual violence.”\(^{11}\)
“Break the silence about rape” was the central demand of the WAR groups. They said: “

Rape, especially as a weapon of war, is condoned by the silence that surround it, that silence must be broken. 12

You all will have heard of the case of Nurse Vivian Bullwinkle. She was one of a group of Australian army nurses who were working in Singapore when the city fell to the Japanese. The nurses were captured on Bangka Island in Indonesia, told to walk into the sea and shot. Only Nurse Bullwinkle survived by pretending to be dead.

When questioned closely by the Tokyo war crimes tribunal Nurse Bullwinkle said that she and the other nurses had not been raped before they were shot.

However, towards the end of her life she said they had been raped first but senior Australian army officers told her to deny this, as it would upset the nurses’ families. “They wanted to protect the grieving families from the stigma of rape. Rape was seen as shameful and known as a fate worse than death.” 13 14

This year the war historian Lynette Ramsay-Silver published a book that addresses these issues and contains further evidence that the nurses had been raped before being killed. 15

Women Against Rape marches in the 1970s
These attitudes to rape remained unchanged in the 1970s when the women’s marches started. The Anzac Day parades were predominantly all male affairs with only a few returned service women. It was not until much later that families joined the parades. 16

Around Australia groups of women marched in 1977 to protest against rape in war but draw little comment. In Canberra on ANZAC day 1978 twenty women carried their banner “Women Against Rape” at the edge of the passing march. Once again attracting little attention. In 1979 no banner was raised. 17

**ANZAC Day 1980**

But things changed in Canberra in 1980 when 16 women marched on ANZAC day and attempted to lay a wreath on the stone of remembrance. Fourteen were arrested.

Their cases came before a magistrate, who had been a member of the air force and was a member of the RSL. He gave some of the women goal sentences of one month and fined the others. He told them that, “You as a group have to be told that a protester has no divine right.” 18

Today, in October 2019, there might well be magistrates giving similar advice to members of Extinction Rebellion. In a number of cities its members have been taking what some people consider to be extreme measures, to protest about lack of government action on changes in the climate.
The cases of the 1980 marchers were appealed to the Supreme Court. Here the police said that they had arrested the WAR women as they had feared that the onlookers would become violent. The court found that there was insufficient evidence of this and the women were acquitted in January 1981.\textsuperscript{19}

There had been criticism in the community about the arrest of the women from women’s groups, civil liberties’ groups and unions.

Jack Waterford from the Canberra Times interviewed senior police about the arrests. He reported that the police considered that the Women Against Rape women were really “way out” and had no real support in the community. Thus, a senior officer conceded that individual policemen might be inclined to give them a hard time.\textsuperscript{20}

This was certain to be the case again in 1981. But the WAR women were not deterred by the arrests or the attitudes of the police. They said that this year “more women will show that we will not be silenced or intimidated by past attempts to prevent us expressing our feelings about rape. Our society honours the soldiers but for too long the women victims of war have been forgotten.”\textsuperscript{21}

**1981**

By autumn 1981 the campaign had drawn large numbers of women. Wild rumours were being circulated by the RSL, for example the women would spay paint soldiers, pour porridge down tubas, slash
drums and throw themselves in front of marchers. The reverse was true the women wanted it to be a dignified remembrance.

Prior to Anzac Day 1981 the Minister for the ACT amended the ACT Traffic Ordinance of 1981, inserting Section 23A, so that anyone taking part in the ANZAC day observance “likely to give offense or cause insult” to other people would be guilty of an offence.

This had the effect of turning the impending Women Against Rape march into a protest about the right to march as well. 22

**ANZAC Day 1981**

The poster advertising the 1981 march has respectable looking older women raising not so respectable fists. It is on the left under the long
black banner with white letters reading “IN MEMORY OF ALL WOMEN OF ALL COUNTRIES RAPED IN ALL WARS”. This banner was carried in the 1981 and 1982 marches and was lent to CMAG by the Jessie Street National Women’s library in Sydney. The Jessie Street library also provided three videos of the marches.

The display cabinet underneath the poster has a moving account of the 1981 march written by Bluse Wood in her diary. There is also a copy of the statement that the WAR women gave the media. I will read it, as it is a good summary.

We women are here to mourn women of all countries who have been raped in all wars.

Rape, especially as a weapon of war, is endorsed by the silence that surrounds it- we are here to break that silence.

This non-violent action is part of our continuing struggle against the use of rape to oppress and intimidate women.

On ANZAC Day 1981 five hundred people, mostly women, together with male supporters, gathered at 9.30 am in Geerilong Gardens, a small park in Reid. Currong Street South runs through this park and enters Anzac Parade. Bluse was handing out information when Vicky, one of the support workers, came running towards her crying. Bluse walked along the footpath and saw that the police had blocked the entrance to Anzac Parade. The blockage was three policemen deep. There must have been 70 policemen there.

The women carrying their banners walked silently up to the police who issued a directive that they were not to join the official march.
The women sat down while they were deciding what to do. It was a very tense situation. It was made clear that any of the women could leave at any stage. Approximately half moved back immediately.

The remaining women discussed the situation for about five minutes. Bluse wrote that they decided that the ordinance was not applicable to them, as they had no intention of disrupting the march.

Nor did people have any evidence that they were likely to, disrupt the march. The women had been walking silently in a very orderly manner. At the front and back of the march women were carrying the black and white banners and women at the side of the march carried placards with the words of the banners translated into different languages. They were carrying flowers and wreaths that they wanted to lay at the Stone of Remembrance.

The remaining women, 150 strong, agreed that they wanted to march on. Singing, “We shall overcome” they pressed against the police barricade for several minutes. After getting nowhere they decided to walk through to Anzac Parade individually. That was when the arrests began. From the photos in the display cases and in the videos you can see that things became violent. The media was there in force, particularly the Canberra Times, so the arrests were well recorded, as were the names, addresses and occupations of those arrested. The arrests can be seen in the video of the 1981 march.

The opponents of the march blamed the women for the violence but the women had not attacked the police, quite the reverse.
When the women were being arrested some others slipped past the police and started walking up Anzac Parade. They carried the flowers of those who were being taken away by the police. Other women walked through the trees at the side. The idea was to get as far as you could up Anzac Parade.

More than 60 women were arrested. They sang in their cells until they were released to the waiting women outside.
Approximately 200 women marched after the official ceremony was over. They were surprised that so many were left after all the arrests. These women conducted their own ceremony and laid flowers on the Stone of Remembrance.  

Public Assemblies Ordinance 1982

Prior to ANZAC Day 1982 the Public Assemblies Ordinance of 1982 was introduced. This meant those women (and others) who wanted to join the official march would have to apply to the Commissioner of Police for permission. While it aroused a certain amount of controversy, it was good news for those who had been arrested in 1981. When their cases went to the Supreme Court in 1982, the law under which they had been arrested (S 23A of the ACT Traffic Ordinance of 1981) no longer existed. This law had been replaced by the Public Assemblies Ordinance of 1982. On this basis the cases against the 1981 marchers were dismissed.

ANZAC Day 1982,

ANZAC Day 1982 was the biggest of the Canberra WAR marches but I am leaving it to Dianne Lucas to tell you how it felt to be there. Dianne was a member of the collective that organised this march.

There are two posters advertising this march. Firstly, the one that shows three women marching with a dog. Secondly, the one beside it that has an extract from a letter a woman wrote to Women Against Rape about her wartime experiences in Europe. She explained that
she was 12 years old in World War 11 “when the occupying forces took my country. No woman was safe. I was 14 when I was put in a concentration camp. Young girls, any age the soldiers could find, were raped, beaten, harassed, mauled and often finally shot.”. This letter was read out in full at the Stone of Remembrance by the 1982 marchers.

There is a very good video of the 1982 march that you can watch on the video stand. It shows some 750 women gathering at the bottom of ANZAC Parade and marching up to the Stone of Remembrance. Here they held their own ceremony before the official march, laying flowers and wreaths on the stone. They then gathered on a hill behind the War Memorial, where they watched the official march.
holding up their black and white banners. Once again they sang as they marched.

The video of the 1982 march was made to use as evidence in court in case women were arrested. However, no women were arrested on ANZAC 1982.

Watching the official march. Courtesy Di Lucas

**ANZAC Day 1983**

Prior to Anzac Day 1983 the women against rape in war had been campaigning to have the 1982 ordinance repealed. However, the election of the Labor Government in early March 1983 made this unnecessary. Tom Uren, as Minister for the Territories and Local
Government, assured the women that the offending ordinance would be repealed. \(^{28}\)

The women then turned their attention to the struggle of South American women who were facing rape as a standard tactic of war. Their poster is second from the right, with the red and blue bars across it.

![1983 poster. Courtesy Sue Waddell-Wood](image)

On Anzac Day 1983 the women marched up Anzac Parade before the official march and conducted their own service at the Stone of Remembrance, as they had in 1982. But in 1983 they then marched on to the Australian-American Memorial known as “The Eagle”, where they stood in solidarity with the South American women.
Their handout explained that they had decided to do this when they learnt that President Reagan had just given money to the right wing government in El Salvador.

The women complained that, when they were planning the march, the police kept phoning and leaving them messages offering them a police escort. Needless to say there were no arrests. What a difference a change of government made.

**ANZAC Day 1984**

What happened in 1984? It seems that different woman were involved. Some of the 1983 ones had joined Women for Survival and gone to the Women’s Peace Camp” at Pine Gap. Others had gone to help the Women Against Rape march in Sydney. The papers in Jessie Street library show that in 1984 the women wondered if there was any point in marching any more, maybe better to draw attention to rape generally, join with rape crisis centres, support the Reclaim the Night marches, talk to schools etc.

In the end WAR decided not to march in Canberra on ANZAC Day 1984 but instead gathered at the Stone of Remembrance at 10 am to lay wreaths in memory of all women raped in all wars. In their press release they said that:

> We believe that our continued presence on Anzac Day generates public awareness and the discussion of the issues of rape.
The WAR women then went to Gorman House to attend the “women only” opening of an exhibition on rape called *Break the Silence*. The exhibition was the work of Michelle Ely, an artist from Melbourne; its aim was, “to expose the magnitude of sexual exploitation of women.” Women Against Rape and the Rape Crisis Centre had brought it to Canberra. 32

![1984 poster. Courtesy ACT Heritage Library](image)

Their poster on the far right has a collage of photos from previous marches.

While Women Against Rape marches continued to be held on ANZAC Day in other cities, 1983 was the last of the Canberra marches.
1993 and beyond—International Recognition

Attitudes to sexual violence in war began to change in the mid 1990s; this was reflected in changes to International Law and resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

1993 was the year that rape was first recognised as a crime against humanity when the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) issued arrest warrants. Its Statute “included rape as a crime against humanity, when committed in armed conflict and directed against a civilian population”. In 2001 this tribunal became the first international court to find an accused person guilty of rape as a crime against humanity. It also expanded the definition of slavery as a crime against humanity to include sexual slavery. 33

In 1994 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) also declared rape to be a war crime and a crime against humanity. Four years later it became the first international court to find an accused person guilty of rape as a crime of genocide. The Judge said in a statement after the verdict:

From time immemorial, rape has been regarded as the spoils of war. Now it will be regarded as a war crime. We want to send out a strong message that rape is no longer a trophy of war. 34

In 1998 the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, recognised rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization (or any other form of sexual
violence of comparable gravity) as a crime against humanity when it
is committed in a widespread of systemic way.  

So in summary in the 1990s:

• The silence about rape in war had been broken.
• Rape in war had been recognised as a war crime
• Perpetrators were being arrested and punished.

What about the difficult task of changing behaviour towards women
and children in wars? This was, in part, what Security Council
Resolution 1325 was designed to address.  

Issued in October 2001, it was the first formal and legal document from the Security Council
that required parties to a conflict to:

• Prevent violations of women’s rights and protect women and
girls from sexual and gender–based violence in armed conflict, and

• Support women’s participation in peace negotiations and post-
conflict reconstruction.

Over the years the Security Council has issued a number of
resolutions to support 1325. Such resolutions resulted in the
establishment of the Office of the Special Representative of the
Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.  

Another of these encouraged the development of National Action Plans with detailed
steps that member states could take to meet the objectives of 1325.  

In April 2019 the Security Council called upon, “Belligerents
Worldwide” to adopt concrete commitments on ending sexual
violence in conflict”.  

Women Against Rape in War
Conclusion

The women who marched about rape in war were prophetic in insisting that rape was a war crime as far back as the late seventies.

The WAR groups began their marches at a time when rape was not discussed in polite society and certainly not rape during wars. The women took the behaviour of the armed forces head on by choosing to march on ANZAC Day. They were “attacked and reviled by the authorities”. But they also attracted supporters. Overtime attitudes changed and in 2019 young people could not understand why the WAR marchers had been arrested.

That is not to say that Canberra WAR and other WAR groups were responsible for all this change, but they can be credited with starting the conversation.

1981 Canberra WAR poster, courtesy Sue Waddell-Wood
Biographical notes

Dr Gail Radford AM is a Visiting Fellow in the School of Politics and International Relations at the Australian National University. Diane Lucas is Secretary of the Domestic Violence Crisis Centre in Canberra.

1 ASIO’s photos of women arriving for the first meeting of Canberra Women’s Liberation can be seen in the Women’s Liberation Photo Gallery, in the ANU website A History of the Women’s Electoral Lobby. https://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/images/gallery/womens-liberation-wels-predecessor


3 The Superwoman T-shirt in the centre of this display dates back to early 1973 when Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced he would have a woman on his staff to advise him about policies and services for women. The press said that the woman selected for this job would have to be a “Superwoman”. Women’s Liberation members rushed off to their screen-printing workshop and produced these T-shirts. Design by Carol Ambrus


5 The Hand that Rocks the Ballot Box, an ABC Four Corners program that was first broadcast in October 1972 (reproduced by permission of the ABC-Library Sales @ 1972 ABCTV). This video is about WEL’s first year. Also on the video stand was a direct link to the WEL history website at the School of Political Science and International Relations, Australian National University. This website contains information about WEL and Women’s Liberation. https://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/research/projects/gender-research/womens-electoral-lobby

6 The vase in the centre of this display is known as “The Greg” after Greg Cornwell, the Speaker of the ACT Legislative Assembly who, in 1999, was its first recipient. It was awarded annually for sexist statements made by public figures.
The winner's name was added to the “Wall of Shame” on WEL-ACT's website. The vase was made by Julie McCarron-Benson


15 Ramsay-Silver (2019), *Angels of Mercy Far West and Far East*, Booktopia


23 Records and memorabilia of the Canberra Women Against Rape in War are in the Jessie Street National Women’s Library in Sydney where they form part of the Canberra Women’s Archive. The items in this archive were collected by women’s studies students at the Australian National University and transferred to the Jessie Street library in 1993.

24 The three videos provided by the Jessie Street National Women’s Library were: (i) Women Against Rape in War, Canberra 1981 by Julia Ryan and Christine Fernon. Recording was cut short when women were arrested. (2) “Lest they recall” Canberra Women Against Rape ANZAC Day 1982, a film by Christine Fernon and Julia Ryan for the 1982 Women Against Rape ANZAC Day Collective. As they marched the women sang “Lest we” by Judy Small and “It could have been me” by Holly Near. (3) “More than one day of the year” (1983). Produced and directed by Sue Maslin and Frances Sutherland. Music and Lyrics by Sue Maslin Recorded by the rock band Domestic Dirt in 1982.


26 Dowse, Sara and Giles, Patricia (2016), pp. 4.


28 Press release by Tom Uren, dated 25 April 1983, stating that he would introduce a new Public Assemblies Ordinance, Canberra WAR records in the Jessie Street library, Box 0005, file 22.

29 1983 Minutes of Canberra WAR in Jessie Street library, Box 0005

30 Reclaim the Night marches are held in Canberra each year on the last Friday in October. They aim to raise awareness of sexual violence and the right to feel safe in public places.

31 Canberra Women Against Rape in War, Press Release, 19 April 1984. Canberra WAR records in the Jessie Street library, Box 0005, file 22.

32 In records of Canberra WAR in the Jessie Street library, Box 0005 file 22.


40 Ward, Biff (18 February 2019) "Re the display concerning the 1977-83 Canberra campaign, Women Against Rape in All Wars". Biff is a member of Canberra Women’s Liberation and was an active member of the Canberra WAR group.