

**WOMAN IN WAR  
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(TASMANIA BRANCH)**



*Books are the anchors  
Left by ships that rot away. The mud  
The anchors lie in is one's recollection  
Of what life was, and never, late or soon,  
Will be again*  
From 'The River In The Sky' by Clive James



## INTRODUCTION

Throughout time women have experienced war in a number of roles. They are often civilian victims, generally of savage sexual violence and slavery. However, there have been liberating experiences such as when women replaced men in many occupations during WWI and WWII. Women have served as spies, non-combatant members of defence forces and increasingly as combatants.

Ancient civilisations generally restricted the combatant role to men. However, archaeology, myth and legend provide evidence of women warriors both individuals and as groups. Famous individuals include the warrior 'Camilla' who fought in battle against Aeneas at Troy. Also well known is Boudica, the queen of the Iceni who led a rebellion against the Roman army in Britain. A group of women warriors, the 'Amazons', fought in the Trojan wars on the side of the Trojans. Women in ancient civilisations had no say about whether to prosecute a war. However, the role of women in war was not always docile. Famously, among ancient Athenian plays, there is the comedy *Lysistrata* in which the women of Athens and Sparta withhold sexual favours in order to stop the Peloponnesian Wars. In ancient times bereavement due to war was the least of a women's worries; the women of the vanquished were sold into slavery.

In medieval warfare the role of women was not limited to the hearth. There is widespread evidence of women warriors and women spies from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Joan of Arc is considered a heroine of France for her role in the Hundred Years War fighting English and Burgundian troops.

It was at the Crimean War in 1857 that Florence Nightingale introduced women to nurse wounded British soldiers. A tradition of women in war zones that continues with members of the Australian Women's Nursing Service sailing to the Boer War in 1899 and serving until 1902. The privation of Boer women forced into concentration camps was generally better than most women conquered in war.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century world wars demanded huge national armies. The need for male soldiers left insufficient men to run emergency services, agriculture and industry, so women replaced men in many roles. Other women joined their defence force as non-combatants or played a part in unconventional operations as spies and saboteurs.

In Australia, women joined the Australian Army Medical Women's Service, the Australian Women's Army Service, the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service, the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force and the Australian Women's Land Army. It will ever be a mark of disgrace that Japanese troops murdered and mistreated captive Australian nurses. We honour them all for their: endurance, devotion, bravery and self-sacrifice. Since 2012 women can serve in any ADF role for which they can qualify.

Famously, women served as warriors in the Russian Army. In the revolution there was a female Death Battalion. During WWII the Russian air force had a number of all female bomber regiments though in general women made up a small percentage of the armed forces (largely as infantry snipers, the medicals services and as partisans). Most women worked in industry, transport and agriculture. Today female participation in the military is low but they no longer serve in units segregated by gender. However, women are not allowed in combat roles.

Israeli has mandatory military service for men and women. During the 1947-49 Palestinian War women were withdrawn from frontline combat as a result of incidents involving the abuse of dead female soldiers. Until 2001 women served in the Women's Corps filling non-combat roles. Today women can serve in any role for which they can qualify. Many advanced nations have integrated women into their defence forces, in both non-combatant and combatant roles.

Follow WWII international law expanded to provide for the protection of women, for example, articles: 76 and 77. In 2000 the Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security which was a milestone in addressing violence against women in situations of armed conflict. Now compliant nations are changing their military law to punish violence against women by their armed forces.

Regrettably, the collection only has a small number of books on the experiences of women in war. The subject areas include:

- Australian Military Forces;
- ancient history;
- pioneers of aviation;
- World War I;
- World War II including POW & unconventional operations, and
- the Japanese Occupation of China.

**LTCOL PETER HODGE RFD RAA (RTD)**

Hon. Librarian

Royal United Services Institute

Hobart Branch, Tasmania

Mob: 0472 799 544

Email: [pandjhodge@bigpond.com](mailto:pandjhodge@bigpond.com)

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