

**Chris Minns**

Premier of New South Wales

**David Harris**Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Minister for Gaming and Racing,  
Minister for Veterans, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for the Central Coast**Jodie Harrison**Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors  
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault**Media Release****Women's service to Australia's military honoured this International Women's Day****Friday, 8 March 2024**

The NSW Government is commemorating the military service of Australian women in conflict and peacekeeping, and as part of military families, with a series of special events at the Anzac Memorial this International Women's Day.

Premier Chris Minns, and Minister for Women Jodie Harrison attended a special commemorative ceremony in the Hall of Memory paying tribute to the service and sacrifices of women who have served, as well as defence spouses, family members and women in civilian organisations that support the defence and veteran communities.

NSW is home to 14,923 veterans, according to the 2021 Census, which for the first time asked questions relating to military service. Currently 3,876 women serve in the regular Australian Defence Force and 1,183 in military reserves. Australian War Widows NSW estimate there are 14,000 war widows in NSW.

The stories of servicewomen from across the decades were explored at the Anzac Memorial through live readings, a talk on women in aviation, a presentation by the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps Association and the recently launched *HERstory*, exhibition. An annual networking event evening event for female veterans is connect face-to-face is being hosted by the Minister for Women this evening.

The *HERstory* exhibition is artist Carla Edward's personal thank you to the women who have served in the Australian Defence Force. Carla grew up in Australia but in a European-focused home with English as her second language. Her parents largely socialised with other Dutch and German post-war immigrants, so Carla's early understanding of the Second World War centred on the conflicts in the Netherlands, Dutch East Indies and Germany.

In time, Carla came to learn more about Australia's own military tradition but realised she was only hearing about the men who have served. *HERstory: Remembering Australia's Military Women* is Carla's attempt to change that tradition and to ensure women's contribution is recognised.

The exhibition features the photos and digital stories of 24 New South Wales women whose military service spans from 1942 up to the present day. The women served in the Air Force, Army and Navy as well as the Australian Army Medical Women's Service, Australian Women's Army Service, Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, Women's Royal Australian Air Force, Women's Royal Australian Army Corps and the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service.

Two veterans who feature in the exhibition, Ms Robyn Harrison and Ms Judith Walker, also attended the International Women's Day events at the Anzac Memorial.

Ms Harrison enlisted in the Women's Royal Australian Air Force in 1972 at the age of 19, and was soon posted to RAAF Base Williamstown, discharging in 1974 to start a family. Following a successful employment discrimination case, Ms Harrison became the first married woman to enlist in Australia's Defence Force history after enlisting with the Royal Australian Air Force in 1981.

Ms Walker grew up in a defence family. Her two great uncles and grandfather served in the First World War, her father was in the Army during the Second World War, and her mother was in the Air Force. Ms Walker enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps initially for a period of three years, but in 1985, the women of all services were disbanded and merged with the men and she changed to Australian Army Ordnance Corps and has served for a total of 20 years.

The HERstory exhibition is open until 1 April 2024. For more information on the veterans and to read their stories go to

<https://www.anzacmemorial.nsw.gov.au/event/herstory-remembering-australias-military-women>

**Quotes attributable to the NSW Premier, Chris Minns:**

"Wherever Australians have served, women have been there alongside their comrades.

"Women are playing an increasingly central role in the modern Australian Defence Force.

"On International Women's Day, we honour every woman who has served this nation, in wartime and in peace."

**Quotes attributable to Minister for Veterans, David Harris:**

"Women have played an important role assisting in the defence of our country for over a century, beginning in 1899 when the NSW Army Nursing Service Reserve and we salute each and everyone.

"Women continue to make an important contribution to the defence of our nation, making up over 20 percent of the current serving defence force personnel. It is great to see them coming together on International Women's Day to share their stories with us and each other.

**Quotes attributable to Minister for Women Jodie Harrison:**

"Women have served in the military since 1899 and held vital roles in the Air Force, Army and Navy, demonstrating that women could fill 'traditionally' male posts.

"Women have always played a significant role in the defence of the nation. From carrying out nursing duties on frontlines and undertaking war work on the home front, to serving as members of the Australian Defence Force and making invaluable sacrifices as military spouses and family members. I would like to thank and acknowledge all women who have contributed to the defence of our nation."

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