Chapter 4

‘What kind of democracy is this?’

Conscientious objectors to the National Service Schemes, 1950–1972

Bobbie Oliver

Introduction

Involvement in overseas wars has impacted deeply upon Australian ideas of heroism and ‘nation’, and embedded within these concepts, the notion of sacrifice. This chapter examines a different kind of sacrifice – that made by young men who went contrary to the tide of popular opinion to make a stand against conscription for military service, and in particular, conscription for active service overseas in the Vietnam War. Historians have often portrayed Australians as a nation eager to go to war, especially on behalf of ‘a powerful ally’ such as Britain or the United States of America.¹

This perception was gained partly from the thousands who willingly enlisted in both world wars, and the public scorn directed at those who stayed home. Such men not only received white feathers and other tokens of cowardice during the course of the conflict, but also were marked in later years as those who ‘didn’t go’, whereas those who had served gained a special status in their community as ‘returned men’.² Despite this perception being challenged by Australia’s involvement in an increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam, conscientious objectors still suffered social stigma, loss of employment and economic hardship as well as long periods in prison.

Today, the veneration of ANZAC³ – to which some give a much broader application than a title for Australian active service personnel – seems overwhelming. Anyone who offers critical comment or analysis of Australian military activities past or present in a public forum risks being subjected to severe chastisement, including personally abusive language, questioning the
right of the individual to express his or her opinion, even when it is based upon years of research. Yet, concurrent with the much-publicised history of Australia's military exploits in overseas wars, there exists a lesser-known history of resistance, either to conscription or to involvement in war per se. Parts of this history have been researched and published, mostly in the 1960s and 1970s, during or just after the Vietnam conflict when a more questioning spirit pervaded Australian research of our military past. Mostly, these studies have concerned the world wars and the conflicts in Vietnam and South Africa, with little attention given to the National Service scheme in the 1950s.

This chapter uses interviews and court records to examine individual cases in the resistance to the compulsory National Service Scheme of the 1950s and its successor from 1964 to 1972. While discussing the historical and legal context to each scheme, the chapter uses previously unpublished case studies to focus on the individual experiences of some of the men who challenged the government's right to conscript for military service. In order to preserve the privacy of individuals, where the information is from private papers rather than published sources, only the objector's first name and the first letter of his surname have been used. The chapter explores how resisters were often cast as 'the other' – aberrant, cowardly, and self-interested – who felt no duty to their country. Lastly, the chapter examines the impact of resistance and whether resisters had any appreciable influence upon more recent anti-war protestors.

In this chapter, a 'conscientious objector' is defined as someone who has a philosophical and/or ethical objection to undergoing military training and service, usually based on an abhorrence of killing one's fellow human being. Some objectors felt able to perform non-combatant duties: support work for the military, such as clerical, kitchen, stores, medical and other duties which did not involve carrying arms and going into battle. Others believed that to perform non-combatant duties was as immoral as to be a combatant, for all such roles assisted in the war effort. During the Vietnam War, there some draft resisters who refused to comply with the system believing that in registering as conscientious objectors they would be giving legitimacy to the system. Hence, rather than being conscientious objectors, they were 'non-compliers'.

**The National Service Scheme 1951–59**

Prior to the 1950s, Australian military conscripts had never been deployed outside of the Australian mainland except in New Guinea and surrounding islands during the most crucial period of the Pacific War. The Labor Prime Minister John Curtin had achieved this change of policy only after carefully manoeuvring it through the Federal Labor Conference. In 1949, the Liberal Party, led by Robert Menzies, won government and shortly afterwards began
planning for the institution of a new compulsory National Service scheme. Menzies’ government introduced compulsory military training in 1951, with the stated aim of developing and maintaining a 100,000-strong Army Reserve. If required to defend Australia, these reservists would have to undergo further training, as, under the Scheme, they served less than six months, divided into full-time and part-time segments over several years. Opting to train with the Navy or the Air Force involved an obligation to serve overseas. It is difficult to ascertain whether any National Servicemen were involved in overseas conflicts during the 1950s. The Australian Defence Association’s Discussion Paper on National Service merely states that:

Very few, and probably none, saw actual war service overseas during their national service undertaking. Some serving with the Navy are believed to have been on ships visiting Korean waters before hostilities ended in 1953. Some from all three Services certainly assisted with British nuclear tests in the early and mid 1950s in the Monte Bello Islands and at Maralinga respectively.

The primary aim of the 1951 National Service Scheme was to build up an Army Reserve in response to a perceived gathering threat from Asia; however, even in its first year of operation, the Scheme drew criticism because national servicemen were not obliged to serve outside of the country. Within the military, in particular, there was resentment against the Scheme for “increasing the strengths of personnel who had no obligation to serve overseas at the expense of regular forces who might be required for Cold War commitments”.

The victory of the Communists in mainland China and the commencement of civil war in Korea, together with the absence of security pacts – ANZUS was signed in 1951 and operated from 1952, while the Manilla Pact was not signed until 1954 – were factors contributing to the government’s decision to introduce compulsory National Service legislation. The Government claimed that, in order to meet its existing and estimated defence commitments, the Australian Defence Forces [ADF] must increase substantially from an existing total of 57,000 men. Although all three branches of the armed forces were deployed in Malaya for 13 years during the period known as the Malayan Emergency, when the newly independent regime was under threat from Communist insurgents, the army commitment was very small, consisting of one battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, supported by artillery and engineers.

The National Service Act, which received bi-partisan support, became law on 17 March 1951 and appears to have been well received in the media. In May, the Courier Mail boasted that Queensland had more recruits in the scheme than NSW, and that Queenslanders made up 24 per cent of the intake. The Mercury (Hobart) reported in October that the Chief of the General Staff was
pleased with the success of the scheme, and declared the following month that anyone who saw the first group of trainees parading at the end of their course of compulsory training would be "impressed"; but, while the training scheme was achieving its object, people must not believe that Australia was now secure. It would take several years to build up a sufficient body of trained men to defend the country. But there was early opposition, too. The Act was sub-titled 'An Act to provide for National Service in the Defence Force and for other purposes.' The pacifist newspaper, *The Peacemaker*, which had been founded in 1939 by the Anglican priest Frank Coaldrae to provide an alternative voice in World War II, was a powerful mouthpiece for opponents to National Service. Soon after the Act became the law, *The Peacemaker* speculated on what exactly the unspecified "other purposes" might mean.15

*The Peacemaker* drew upon material from around the world, enabling Australian pacifists to read about the activities and ideas of pacifists in the United Kingdom, the USA, Europe and Asia. It also assisted pacifist groups around Australia — most of whom had been active during World War II and had maintained their vigilance during the early 'Cold War' period — to keep in contact with one another. Each month, *The Peacemaker* listed the contact addresses of six peace organisations: the Federal Pacifist Council, the Christian Pacifist Movement, the Australian Peace Pledge Union, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Tasmanian Pacifist Fellowship. There was also the Australian Peace Council, which was deemed by other pacifist groups to be 'a non-pacifist body', possibly because of its connections with the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). Other groups such as the Democratic Rights Council of NSW, while not specifically pacifist, objected to conscription as an abuse of personal civil liberties.

But *The Peacemaker's* most valuable role was to provide information for potential or actual conscientious objectors. Soon after the *National Service Act* passed into law, the newspaper detailed its stringent requirements in clear, easily understood language. Males aged 17, who lived in Australia, were obliged to register within 14 days of a date determined by the government, and to keep the Minister for Labour and National Service informed of their whereabouts until they either completed their service or reached the age of 26 years. If they failed to register they were liable to a fifty-pound (£50) fine, whilst lesser penalties applied for not notifying the authorities of a change of address. The required 176 days of National Service training (or 192 days for Air Force trainees) had to be completed in five years, after which trainees remained in the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) until the age of 26, although they were not obliged to undertake further training. Under the law, a National Serviceman was 'enlisted' as soon as he presented himself with his call-up notice. Penalties for failing to enlist ranged from a fine to imprisonment, in either a civilian prison or a military detention
centre, for a period equal to the period of service. In some cases, offenders were both fined and imprisoned. Any parent or guardian who prevented a young man registering or enlisting could also be fined £50. Even more controversially, employers had to dismiss employees who refused to register, or face a £100 fine. Yet, these controversial aspects appear to have been ignored by the mainstream press, which continued to stress the 'advantages' of the scheme and the wonderful opportunity it would provide for young men. In January 1952, as the scheme entered its second year, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the second intake of 3,500 NSW recruits was commencing training, living in huts or canvas marquees, equipped with "beds, lockers and electric light". On the same day, the *Adviser* featured a story about a Scottish immigrant and apprentice jockey whose National Service call up for three months training meant that he avoided a one month's suspension from racing. The *Advertiser* reported that he was "looking forward to his experience as a trainee. 'The early reveille won't worry me', he said".

The Act provided for exemption on the grounds of conscientious objection, but this was confined to four classes of personnel: conscientious objectors to all forms of military service (providing that they could prove their objection to a magistrate); theological students; ministers of religion, and members of religious orders. As in World War II, the lawmakers assumed that Christian religious scruples were the only valid reason for objecting to military training. Some objectors were exempted only from 'combatant' duties. By the mid-1950s, the nature of 'non-combatant' duties, and exactly how the training of a 'non-combatant' National Serviceman differed from the regular training presented problems for the military. As the Army Departmental Secretary admitted to his Defence counterpart, it was "an embarrassment to the Army to be allocated a trainee whom a magistrate has directed must be employed in non-combatant duties only". It was difficult to separate non-combatant from combatant duties because, in wartime, any Army personnel, including medics, might be required to bear arms. Thus, from their point of view, there was little value in training a 'non-combatant', and they would have preferred the court to grant complete exemption to anyone with a proven objection to undertaking combatant duties.

The pacifist movement also faced a dilemma. Should it encourage young men to be conscientious objectors to National Service or should it merely support those who already held such beliefs? The first mention of support for young men who wished to register as objectors was published in the June 1951 issue of *The Peacemaker*, along with instructions for how to register. It merely stated that "those liable for service who want to talk it over, may contact the secretary of their local pacifist group whose name will be found in the list on page 2". Those who wished to acquire exemption had to register "in the usual way" and then apply for registration as a conscientious objector as soon as they received
their certificate of registration. Forms were available from District Employment Offices. The Office forwarded them to the appropriate magistrate who was granted "the power to direct either that you be employed only on duties of a non-combatant nature or that you be exempted from all training.\(^{23}\) This implied that the judgement would be either for non-combatant status or complete exemption, whereas often the application was dismissed and the applicant had no right of appeal against the Magistrate's decision, as many soon discovered.

Around the world, pacifists debated their role as active peacemakers. A notable participant was one of Australia's foremost nuclear scientists, Professor Marcus Oliphant, who had worked on the Manhattan Project that created the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After witnessing the terrible destruction made by the atomic bombs he had helped to create, Oliphant declared that, "only madmen or devils would contemplate the use of cobalt bombs or other weapons designed to spread long-lived radioactivity over the earth.\(^{24}\) Oliphant did not relish from using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, in which he was supported in the press. Early in 1952, the *Argus* reported that "our own Professor Oliphant" shared the attitude of British scientists in pioneering peaceful uses of atomic energy.\(^{25}\) In London, early in 1954, scientists debating the morality of atomic warfare all opposed the use of the hydrogen bomb. Even those who argued that the bomb was "a preserver of the peace" thought it was "too large and indiscriminate a weapon for use on military targets.\(^{26}\)

Meanwhile, pacifists in Australia and overseas debated an idea from the USA of a 'third camp' of countries committed to non-violent methods of negotiation which would stand between the major power blocs.\(^{27}\) In the 1950s, however, the peace movement in the US was isolated and insignificant, and according to historian Lawrence Wittner, undergoing a "mid-century nadir" when "rarely had the prospect seemed so bleak and their witness so hopeless" in the face of the rampant anti-Communism of the McCarthy era.\(^{28}\) In Europe and elsewhere, however, peace movements thrived. The World Peace Council, founded in Warsaw in 1950, circulated the Stockholm Peace Appeal, calling for an "absolute ban on atomic weapons and weapons of mass destruction". Over 500 million people around the world signed the Appeal, including two million in the United States – so great was the desire to avoid a nuclear holocaust.\(^{29}\)

Within Australia, opposition to the *National Service Act* grew quickly. In April 1951, the Democratic Rights Council of NSW wrote an open letter to Prime Minister Menzies, signed by the organisation's President, the Reverend E.E.V. Collocott, an Anglican priest who had been an active campaigner against conscription during World War II. The Democratic Rights Council took issue, firstly, with the title 'National Service'. The fact that the nature of the service was not specified, together with Menzies' emphasis on producing more war
goods and the placing of the national economy on a ‘semi-war’ footing, and his government’s demands for “more effective ways of dealing with strikers”, gave the legislation a ‘sinister’ aspect. The Democratic Rights Council objected to the legislation on a number of specific grounds: it was perceived as an underhand way of introducing conscription; certain statements made by Menzies suggested that a conscripted army would (or at least could) be used offensively – “you have said that ‘an Australian Army raised for service in Australia would in all probability be raised for no service at all’” – and the Government had not made any “determined and sustained efforts to settle international differences [peacefully]”. The Council urged the government to use methods advocated by the United Nations for settling international disputes. Furthermore, even if the government went to the people and a referendum was passed, it was “immoral for electors to obligate youths under 21, who are devoid of electoral rights, to train and prepare for war and death before they have had the opportunity to train and prepare for life and the pursuit of happiness”.

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) wrote to Menzies in September 1951, deploiring the extent to which governments were placing their faith and reliance on armed force. The letter contained a resolution passed by the WILPF International Executive Committee, stating that “everyone shall have the right on [the] grounds of conscience to refuse military service whether in time of peace or war, as well as of all work connected with the production, transport and distribution of armaments”. The resolution advocated “special international protection” for all objectors. WILPF received a non-committal acknowledgement.

Although the mainstream Christian churches did not oppose the policy of compulsory military training, individuals within their ranks did and were often active in the executives of the above-mentioned pacifist groups (the Reverend Collocott being an example). But the Christadelphians, the Quakers, the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses preached either absolute non-compliance or limited compliance with the Regulations. The Quakers were some of the first objectors to fall foul of the new Act. As one example, Ronald W., from Perth, had his application for total exemption dismissed in 1952, and was ordered to enlist in a non-combatant unit, the Ambulance Corps. Ronald questioned the lack of a right of appeal in a higher court and took his case to his Federal Member, Paul Hasluck, the Minister for Territories. When called up, he failed to report for service. The Minister for Labour and National Service, Harold Holt, could “see no alternative but to proceed against him.” Ronald was imprisoned in a military detention centre.

Other examples from the 1950s include the protest of the South Australian Quakers and the Women’s Peace Crusade against the imprisonment of Quaker
Brian M. in who had been sent to Holsworthy Military Barracks in NSW. They claimed that Brian’s case revealed “a violation of what is accepted as British justice” as he had not been granted right of appeal against the Magistrate’s decision. He had not sworn military allegiance yet was “taken against his will to a destination some thousand miles from his home”. The Quakers urged the Acting Prime Minister, Sir Arthur Fadden, to investigate Brian’s case, and to amend the Act to allow for a right of appeal and protect civilians against “arbitrary military law”. The Gospel Publicity League of Epping NSW also expressed alarm that exemption was not granted as a matter of course to any sincere objector. They cited the case of a Jehovah’s Witness, Norman T., who was refused exemption by Stipendiary Magistrate Solling. Apparently, Solling was prejudiced against the applicant and did not make a decision on the basis of the evidence presented to him, given his view that, “You people obey the laws as much as it suits you. Explain that away”.

The Australian Council of the World Council of Churches also protested to Menzies about the lack of “sufficient provision for appeal against the decision of the court”. The dismissal of the applications of two Christadelphians, Colin H. and Keith B., from Rockhampton, Queensland, and Keith’s subsequent detention at Holsworthy, added the voice of the Australian Christadelphian Central Standing Committee to the protest. Their Secretary, A.E. Davies, informed Menzies that, during the century of its existence, his sect had been “conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms, or taking part in warfare as combatants or non-combatants”, on the ground that the Bible commanded them “to refrain from killing or doing violence of any kind to their fellow men”. Davies urged Menzies to amend the Act to include the right of appeal. Despite this, and further evidence of the bias of Stipendiary Magistrate Solling, collected by the Christadelphians, the Cabinet decided not to amend the Act.

The National Service Scheme was reduced in scope in 1957 and ceased in 1959, as it had exceeded its aim of training and maintaining a 100,000-strong Army Reserve to be called upon to serve in a time of national emergency. Official figures show that by the end of 1959, over 500,000 trainees had been registered, 227,000 had been trained for military service, and 3,679 had applied for exemption. The last intake of trainees was released on 30 June 1960. Given the success of the Scheme and the readiness with which most young men accepted the call to enlist, the government’s effort and expense over the few who rebelled may seem curious, especially in peace time when the nation was not under a direct threat. Elsewhere, it has been argued that the government’s insistence on imprisoning objectors who refused to abide by the decision of the court (and re-imprisoning repeat offenders ostensibly for the same crime) suggests a strategy to deter would-be objectors, rather than dissuade those with a sincere commitment to pacifist beliefs. That circumstance, however, occurred during
wartime. The National Service Scheme of the 1950s more closely resembles the 'boy conscription' scheme of compulsory military service that operated from 1911 to 1929, both in its universality and its trajectory. In both the former and the latter, all within the age group were called up, with few exceptions, and after a number of years, the schemes were reduced before being either suspended in the case of the first or ended in the case of the second. In both schemes, the penalties were severe – apparently more so in the former scheme as the cadets were so young. The similarity of the 1911–29 and 1951–59 schemes may indicate that Australian values had undergone little change in half a century, especially when it came to believing that a period of military service 'made a man of' a teenaged youth. While the penalties in both schemes may seem to have been unnecessarily severe in peacetime, however, when the Australian government did commit the nation to war once more, and to yet another scheme of compulsory military service, the stakes were higher and the sentences were much harsher.

**The Second National Service Scheme and the Vietnam War**

After a four-year interval, the Menzies administration re-introduced National Service in 1964, effective from 1965, the year that it committed Australian troops to the war in Vietnam. While it has always been associated with the Vietnam conflict, the Scheme was founded in response to the political situation much nearer to Australia, in Indonesia and Malaysia. During the early 1960s, the Australian government anxiously watched the Indonesian government's increasingly belligerent stance towards the emerging nation of Malaysia, including territorial disputes over the northern part of the island of Borneo. The scheme, which was controversially selective rather than universal, was introduced hurriedly and agreed to in principle before the legislation was drafted. The National Service Act 1964 required trainees to serve a period of 24 months continuous service – more than four times as long as the previous Scheme – followed by three years in the Army Reserve. This meant that imprisonment for non-compliance involved a proportionately lengthy prison term of up to two years. In 1965 the Defence Act was amended to permit conscripts to serve overseas, and the first of them arrived in Vietnam in April 1966.

Between 1965 and 1972, over 804,000 20-year-old men registered for the Scheme, of whom 63,735 were conscripted by the infamous twice-yearly 'birthday ballot', which was conducted in much the same way as modern day lottery draws, with numbered balls (representing birth dates) being drawn randomly from a barrel. Within a month, those whose birth dates were selected were advised whether they were required to participate in the Scheme. Of those conscripted, 19,000 (or almost one third) served in Vietnam, mostly in Phuoc Tuy province. They
comprised 44 per cent of the 42,700 serving soldiers, and 45 per cent (200) of the 442 who were killed in action during the six years of Australia’s involvement in the conflict. The scheme was terminated after the ALP won government in December 1972.

Despite the numerically small commitment of troops and relatively few fatalities compared with the World Wars, Vietnam became Australia’s longest and most divisive external war of the 20th century. Major controversies, coupled with graphic television footage of actions in Vietnam – the first televised war – changed the Australian public’s perception of the ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’ of the conflict. But the war attracted protests months before Menzies’ successor, Harold Holt, announced in March 1966 that Australia would more than treble its troop commitment to 4,500 and that 500 of these would be conscripts. Thus, from the beginning there was a significant minority among the population who protested against Australia’s troop commitment either because they objected to all wars or because they objected to this particular war. Others would protest specifically against conscription, of whom the most aggressive stance was taken by the Draft Resistance Movement who formed “not … to oppose conscription but to wreck it”. The Movement stated its intention to “resist the draft by all available means”, including staging demonstrations and providing information about how to fail medical examinations. The Movement reminded potential members that this action would cost money – “legal costs, fines, etc., for those we will be supporting in resisting the draft”.47 Ann Mari Jordens points out that the “anti-war movement” was “far from monolithic”, consisting of Trotskyists, ALP members, Humanists, Anarchists, Christians, pacifists and non-pacifists among others. Some demonstrations were peaceful, but others were not.48 This chapter is primarily concerned with those conscripts who refused to enlist.

Two events in 1966 helped in creating the nucleus of a protest movement. The first death of a conscripted soldier, South Australian Errol Noack, on 24 May 1966 – barely a month after conscripts began arriving in Vietnam – made headlines and sparked anti-war conscription demonstrations around Australia. The futility of his death was emphasised by the fact that Noack was probably killed by ‘friendly fire’ from another Australian company.49 In October, US President Lyndon Johnson became the first American President to visit Australia. While vast numbers turned out in Melbourne to welcome him, the motorcade had to be diverted to avoid a 1,000-strong crowd of student demonstrators, some of whom managed to splash his car with red and green paint bombs.50

By 1968, there was a rising tide of opposition to Australia’s involvement and a growing sympathy for the Viet Cong. When the ABC screened a powerful Canadian documentary on the war, Mills of the Gods, in 1966 the demand to see it necessitated a repeat screening. The film, which was shot on location, using
neither narration nor archival footage, depicted the horrors of war in graphic detail. The Western Australian ALP State Secretary, Joe Chamberlain, a strong opponent of the war, wrote of *Mills of the Gods*: “The camera hasn’t lied when it has shown crude hospitals jammed with little children, blinded and burnt with napalm; children legless and armless; children alone in their world of war; the sightless eyes of their parents facing the skies from whence shattering death had come.”

The protest movements grew from the silent, peaceful vigils of the mothers who formed the Save Our Sons Movement in 1965, and sporadic demonstrations by university students, to the increasingly radical and violent street protests culminating in the moratorium marches of May and September 1970 and June 1971, in each of which an estimated 50–150,000 took part.

Objectors (or draft resisters as they were known) included more than 1,000 conscripts who applied for exemption – representing about 1.6 per cent of those called up, but (perhaps more significantly) a number that was equivalent to 5.3 per cent of the conscripts, and 2.3 per cent of all servicemen who served in Vietnam. The number of objectors, compared with active service personnel, therefore, though small, was proportionately much greater than in World War II. There were other significant differences: for example, many objectors had no religious convictions and many opposed this particular conflict rather than all wars. Part of the ‘immorality’ of the war, as many objectors saw it, was that the Australian Government had never declared war on North Vietnam. Initially, it appears that the United States Government neither invited nor expected Australia to contribute troops. Peter Edwards, the official historian of Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War, writes that although “in December 1964, the United States made its first approach to the Australian government over the possibility of a substantial Australian military commitment in Vietnam”, at that time, President Johnson asked only for a further 200 military advisers to supplement the 83 already engaged in South Vietnam. Only after the first contingent of US Marines arrived in Vietnam in March 1965, did the President and his advisers express the wish to see “more flags” from Allied nations before they would make a larger military commitment. Moreover, as late as April 1965, the US government asked both Australia and New Zealand for “instructors” and merely “hinted at a possible request for a battalion”. But the Australian cabinet rejected the request for instructors, and indicated it was willing to instead provide a battalion, if the Government in South Vietnam stated “publicly that the battalion had been committed at its request”. A reluctant South Vietnamese government was persuaded to comply. When this became known, together with Menzies’ late afternoon announcement to Parliament of the troop commitment, in the absence of both the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, it cast the government’s actions in a suspicious light. Journalist Gerald Stone, writing soon after these events took place, suggested that there
was a mercenary aspect to the government's decision to commit troops. At the time of Menzies' announcement in Parliament, Harold Holt, then Federal Treasurer, was in Washington holding talks with the US Government to avoid threatened cuts to US investment in Australia. This provoked the charge, which the government emphatically denied, that it was a case of "diggers for dollars".  

While the tide of dissent rose slowly in Australia, in May 1970, a well-organised 'moratorium' movement brought thousands onto the streets of Australian cities to protest against continued military involvement in Vietnam. The first moratorium was inspired by the success of moratorium rallies that had taken place in cities across the United States in 1969, and other international events, including the revelation of the massacre of up to 500 Vietnamese civilians, perpetrated by US troops at My Lai in March 1968, but which only became public knowledge in November 1969. The size of the street protests and the lack of violence confounded criticisms that this was merely the communist-inspired, lunatic fringe giving vent to their opinions. In 1971 the Draft Resistance Movement declared its belief in "the basic right of the individual to act according to his conscience and oppose the authority of the state to conscript for any purpose". Conscription, the Movement's manifesto asserted, must be seen "not as a form of home defence" but as "a necessary part of Australia's participation in the systems of Imperialism". Michael Matteson, one of the highest profile draft resisters, explained that the Draft Resistance Movement saw conscription and war as two separate issues. In Matteson's opinion, anti-conscription strategies "based on crippling the Act solely by mass refusal to register" were unlikely to succeed, because this action did not deprive the government of troops. The government needed "only to keep enough prosecutions going to answer attacks that they are doing nothing". Many draft resisters, he claimed, did not receive a warrant and were not arrested. Consequently, an entirely new strategy was needed to defeat the Government's purpose; Matteson advocated "mass refusal" that would lead to "mass jailing", but, for this to happen, the government had to issue warrants to arrest all of those who defied the Act.  

Whereas objectors in earlier wars had aimed to convince the authorities of an individual's sincerity in not wishing to kill his fellow man, many anti-war activists of the Vietnam era employed offensive tactics aimed at embarrassing the government. The high percentage of National Servicemen who served in Vietnam suggests that Matteson may have underestimated the importance of the scheme — politically if not numerically. Would his strategy have succeeded? In the pre-World War I years, magistrates sometimes heard up to 100 cases in a day of boys convicted of failing to attend military drills. They were sent through in batches, undefended, and convicted. Yet these mass arrests and trials did not inhibit the carriage of the compulsory military training scheme.
RIGHT: Michael Mattisson believed that "mass refusal" resulting in "mass jailing" of draft resisters was the only strategy that would succeed in defeating the Government's policy of military involvement in Vietnam (Courtesy of *The Peacemaker*).

**Draft resisters in the courts**

While many Vietnam draft resisters were middle-class, articulate, well-educated young men who understood political strategy, others caught in the fateful lottery were much less capable of expressing themselves or defending their beliefs. They knew they did not want to be trained to kill; they did not want to go to war, but they had difficulty in conveying these beliefs with sufficient clarity to convince skeptical magistrates of their sincerity. The following cases exemplify the experience of objectors who were not out to make a political point; they did not always fully understand the laws, nor did they seek the assistance of support groups that objectors had set up in the capital cities. These were not theorists or thinkers; they were just ordinary young men caught up in the unfortunate circumstances of their time.

Max B. was a farmer from Liston, NSW. In 1965, he became a vegetarian because he did not want to be responsible for causing cruelty to animals by his eating habits. Max registered for National Service in July 1966 and passed a medical examination. He was reluctant to enlist, but thought that, as he had "obeyed the
other laws of the country” he should comply, although he felt that it “would be wrong” for him to take part in military service. After he applied to be exempted from all forms of military training, his case was heard at Tenterfield Magistrate’s Court in September 1967 and dismissed. For financial reasons, and because he thought he had little chance of proving his case, Max decided not to appeal. His application to defer his National Service, because his father needed him to help run the farm, was also refused; however, he did not receive his call-up until July 1968. In court in December, with no legal representation and none of his family present, he pleaded guilty to having disobeyed a call-up notice and was fined. The Magistrate told him that if he agreed to be called up, he could then apply again for exemption as a conscientious objector. Max refused to “have any part of the army” and was sentenced immediately to two years’ imprisonment and sent to Glen Innes Prison Farm. He became very depressed at the prospect of two years in prison, especially when informed that he might be transferred from the Prison Farm to Grafton Prison, a much harsher environment for hardened re-offenders. The Prison Governor told him that he might be released if he agreed to do his National Service, so he decided to apply.

Although he had never contacted any pacifist group, soon after his arrival at Glen Innes Prison Farm, Max received a visit from three members of the NSW Peace Pledge Union: Vivienne Abraham, a law graduate, and Ian and Louise McIntyre. Max told them that he was against the Vietnam War and all war, killing and violence. He believed that he could not undertake combatant duties in the army, and he wanted to do “some humanitarian work”. Although Max was willing to serve the two-year sentence that he knew would be imposed if he refused to pay his fine and ignored a further call up notice, he was ill prepared for prison. After he accepted the call up, he was allowed to go home for Christmas, prior to formal enlistment, and then sent with other recruits to train at Kapooka, near Wagga. Despite his preference for non-combatant duties, the Army authorities informed him that he must do the same basic combat training as every other recruit. This included bayonet drill, using dummies, where the recruits were told to twist their feet about on the dummies as they withdrew their bayonets. Max was told that it was “likely” that he would be placed in Ordinance, Catering or Service – all non-combatant units – after training, but he was so sickened by the bayoneting of dummies that he decided not to return to Kapooka after his first leave. He made this decision without seeking advice from Abraham or his legal counsel, Mr. Dew.

Abraham later met Max in Canberra and took him to several conscientious objectors’ meetings, including an Orientation Week presentation at the Australian National University, entitled ‘Register or Resist’. She persuaded him to rejoin his unit and make the application for exemption through his commanding officer. Max was sentenced to seven days detention for going absent without
leave and afterwards given leave without pay to prepare his case, which was heard in the Liverpool Street Court of Petty Sessions in Sydney on 31 March and 1 April 1969.

Under cross-examination by Mr Carruthers, Counsel for the Crown, Max was questioned about the veracity of answers that he had given in court at Tenterfield. Carruthers attacked Max's claim that, before he went to Kapooka, he was unaware of the existence of the Army Medical Corps. He argued that Max knew the Australian Army Ambulance Service was a military unit because he had refused to serve in it. Max was also questioned about a violent incident at a dance several years previously, where he claimed that he had not defended himself when set upon by two other men; he said that they had soon desisted, possibly because he would not fight. Carruthers also asked what would Max would do if a female, whom he might be expected to protect, was threatened with violence. He answered that he would try to "talk them out of it or get her out of the road or to hold them off". These questions occupied several pages of court transcript. Carruthers tried to prove that Max was "influenced" by Abraham's letters and actions, and questioned him on whether he had "attended meetings of the pacifist defence". Throughout the hearing, Max appeared to be calm and in control of the situation. He gave brief answers, insisting that he had not discussed his application for conscientious objection with anyone except Mr Dew, his legal counsel. His application for exemption from military service was successful. On 12 April 1969, he received a telegram informing him that he need not return to his battalion after his leave without pay ended.

Others were less successful. Danilo C., a trawl net and cray pot manufacturer, appeared before the Supreme Court of Western Australia in September 1966. He was appealing a magistrate's rejection of his application for exemption, on the grounds that Danilo "did not hold either a religious or personal belief" that prevented him from undertaking "military duties of a combatant or non-combatant nature". This case is interesting because it is difficult to ascertain whether or not the applicant did have a genuine conscientious belief. Originally, he had sought to defer his military training because his business was very busy and, if his National Service commitments prevented him fulfilling the large number of outstanding orders, his livelihood would be ruined. He had stated that he could train his brother in the business, and he was granted a deferment until July 1966 to enable him to do this. Before the deferment expired, Danilo wrote to the Minister for Labour and National Service requesting a transfer to the CME. His rationale was that, although the CME underwent the same training, including exercises "designed to destroy the enemy", he would not be obliged to serve in a battle zone and therefore would not be called upon to kill anyone. Unfortunately for Danilo, the Chief Justice took his willingness firstly
to defer his National Service and then to serve with the CMF as evidence that he did not hold a genuine conscientious belief and dismissed his case. The extent to which this decision impacted upon his business or himself is unknown.

Gavin G., a welder from Moama, NSW, who appeared in court in May 1968, demonstrated that he held Christian views and attended church on a weekly basis, but the magistrate was unimpressed. When Gavin mistook the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” for one of Christ’s teachings, counsel corrected him, but Gavin retained his dignity. When counsel jeered, “You don’t know much about the Bible”, he responded, “I read it often. It’s what I live that counts. It’s not a matter of knowing a lot about the Bible”. The magistrate decided that “the applicant was confused” and had not convinced him “that he [Gavin] had a conscientious belief that disallowed killing”, and rejected his application. Gavin belonged to a small, non-denominational house church. Historically, magistrates had shown bias against members of so-called ‘cults’, yet there were sufficient cases of individual members of sects such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Christadelphians being granted total exemption to indicate that bias was neither consistent nor uniformly held across the legal profession.

Some magistrates, however, showed overt bias against protestors. In Canberra in June 1968, following a mass demonstration where about 100 arrests were made, the Stipendiary Magistrate, K.M. Dobson, who wore his RSL badge during proceedings, fined 67 of the demonstrators $10 each. He told the demonstrators who were prepared to go to jail, that the “only heroes” were in Vietnam, and he was not about to make heroes or martyrs out of dissidents. As shown elsewhere in research relating to World War II, whether or not an objection was upheld often depended as much on the magistrate’s individual bias as on the evidence presented.

By mid 1968, the alternative press was publishing accounts of prison life as experienced by objectors. The cases of Simon Townsend and Denis O’Donnell, who served sentences at Holsworthy – O’Donnell was also imprisoned at Puckapunyal – revealed that the military used solitary confinement and torture tactics such as sleep, food and water deprivation, confinement in darkness and constant surveillance. Police brutality at demonstrations also featured in the alternative press. Farrago, the University of Melbourne’s student newspaper, published complaints of assault against Anti-Conscription demonstrators in March 1966. The Tribune published photographs of police, many of whom had removed their numbers from their uniforms to avoid identification, grabbing demonstrators around the neck, forcing them to the ground to handcuff them and dragging them along the street.
The resister as the aberrant ‘other’

Traditionally, objectors or draft resisters have been cast in the popular press as a self-serving and cowardly, tiny minority. One cartoon from the World War II era depicted objectors (“conshies”) as rabbits running into a hollow log. Did the relatively high number of objectors compared to the number of soldiers engaged in active service in the Vietnam War influence public opinion, and if so, in which ways? The government did not impose censorship on the media during the Vietnam War, so there was scope for much freer discussion. Perhaps because of this, as well as the growing public unease about Australia’s role, the press published a number of sympathetic responses to the dissidents. For example, in July 1968, the Melbourne Herald published a letter from Nan Lasry of North Brighton, expressing her “incredulity” at reading that the Premier of New South Wales, Robert Askin, told a policeman to “run over the bastards” during an anti-Vietnam demonstration in Sydney. Lasry pointed out that the demonstrators were “the ones most likely to be called up to fight for a cause in which they have absolutely no belief” and that “we cannot produce a race of ‘thinking people’ and then simply ‘run them over’ because what they think may not agree with us.” Others argued for a “flexible system” of national service that conscripted both men and women and gave conscripts the choice of serving in the military or undertaking “rural, welfare or development work.”

The press was varied in editorialising the actions of demonstrators. The Australian criticised both the “stupid and immature” demonstrators and the “over-reaction and brutality” of the police when a demonstration in Sydney got out of hand and Prime Minister John Gorton’s safety was threatened. When a protestor commented that “lives are still being lost in Vietnam” after a police officer died from a heart attack while dragging protestors off the street in Sydney, the Border Morning Mail railed against “student stupidity and lack of logic”, and claimed that:

... [Probably] many [lives] are being lost by demonstrations of this sort, staged by possibly well-intentioned, but certainly irresponsible groups here, in America and other countries, [which] are prolonging the war by encouraging Hanoi to doubt the Allies’ determination to continue the struggle against its efforts to conquer South Vietnam and the neighbouring States.

When a pamphlet, titled How not to join the Army, which advocated acts of sabotage by enlisted individuals, appeared in Hobart, the Burnie newspaper The Advocate, branded it as “treason.”

Accounts of objector prisoners also suggest they were singled out for “special” treatment, possibly because of a conviction on the part of the guards that they
were cowardly and deserved to be punished. Such instances occurred even during the 1950s when Australia was not involved in a war, as is demonstrated in the following case – publicised only during the Vietnam War. A National Serviceman who was sentenced to 90 days imprisonment at Holsworthy in 1955 – perhaps inspired by frankness of the Vietnam era protestors – wrote a letter to the ANU journal National U, recalling that the treatment of 'nasho' conscientious objectors was designed to “break the kids’ hearts, making them run everywhere, forcing them to sleep under a spotlight, keeping them in solitary confinement for long periods on bread and water, broken only by a meal every three days”.

Similar treatment was meted out to Dennis O'Donnell, who applied to become a conscientious objector after he had enlisted in the army in 1967. After both his application and his appeal were rejected, O'Donnell went absent without leave. He was arrested, court martialled and sentenced to 48 days imprisonment at Holsworthy, where he was placed in solitary confinement in cell described as being “an 8 foot by 10 foot concrete room” and fed “on bread and water only”. Apart from solitary confinement, deprivation of sleep, light and food, O'Donnell spoke of “psychological brain scrambling exercises” used on objectors to break their spirit. He was also denied bathing facilities for several days and when he was permitted to shower, he had to change back into his dirty clothes as no others were provided. A leaflet issued jointly by Melbourne University's Labour and Pacifist Clubs c. April 1968 stated that O'Donnell was being “treated as though he were a dangerous criminal. Water is brought to him by guards with fixed bayonets, and food is handed to him through a slot in the door”. The leaflet criticised the pacifist movement for standing by O'Donnell until he was arrested and then doing nothing.

When he was imprisoned there were no large demonstrations; nor was there any mention in the press of his actual removal to Holsworthy. We supported him but only to extent that was necessary to keep him out of gaol. Then we left him on his own. Most people would feel bitterly disappointed if they were in Dennis’ place and received this sort of support.

Western Australian John Poole-Johnson was another conscript who had willingly enlisted but who, like Max B., was sickened by the training. At Puckapunyal, trainees were required to shoot at targets dressed to look like soldiers with rifles. Unknown to the trainees, a “4-gallon metal drum filled with red fluid and jelly” was concealed in the clothing of the dummy. Poole-Johnson recalled that:

The effect of the single bullet hitting the target was horrible. The whole of the lower part of the clothing was torn away by the bullet, which penetrated the drum. The hole caused by the bullet entering the drum
was only a small one but there was a huge gaping hole left at the back of drum by the bullet passing through. In addition, there was a large cascade of the red fluid and jelly, which was a terrible shock to me.80

The trainees were then taken up to the targets and one of the NCOs “pointed to the back of the drum and said, ‘Imagine what that would do to a man’s guts.’” Nor did Poole-Johnson’s squeamish reaction solicit any sympathy from his fellow recruits. One, a primary school teacher in civilian life, said to him, “If I was up in Vietnam and you were there, too, I’d shoot you first before a Viet Cong.” He deserted from the army, was arrested and taken to Karrakatta Barracks, where, instead of a court martial and solitary confinement, he was given another medical and classified unfit for military service. Although the Pelikan, which reported his story, cynically suggested that the army did this to avoid publicity,81 it may have been the intervention of a military officer sensible enough to realise that such punishment would not force Poole-Johnson back into military service – or that if it did, he would not be an effective soldier.

Civilian prisons, such as Long Bay, also used solitary confinement on bread and water as a punishment,82 but objectors feared more intensely the psychological effects of being the victims of petty violence and discrimination by prison guards and the possibly of being attacked by their fellow inmates. Michael Matteson expected to be “destroyed” by his jail experience, and he was certainly changed by it. Sentenced to 30 days in Long Bay, he determined that he would defend himself “with a brick or a club but not a knife” if assaulted in the prison. He admitted that he was “shaking” as he entered the prison to serve his first sentence, but became so appalled by the treatment of prisoners that, on release after his second term, he used his high public profile to bring attention to jail conditions.83

Yet, draft-resisters received encouragement from some sections of society that might traditionally have supported the war effort. As early as March 1966, the Commission on Peace of the Methodist Church of Victoria and Tasmania opposed the government’s decision to send conscripts to Vietnam. In May, the Victorian Congregational [Church] Union similarly opposed both the “use of chance” in selecting National Servicemen, and the principle of sending conscripts to fight overseas unless they volunteered for active service.84 The Catholic Church was divided on the issue. Two Catholic newspapers in Victoria, the Catholic Worker and the Melbourne diocesan publication, The Advocate, spoke out against conscription, leaving some readers “astounded” and “disgusted”. The Catholic Worker labeled ardent pro-conscriptionists as supporters of the Democratic Labour Party. Possibly they had in mind the Bishop of Bendigo, who claimed that the war in Vietnam was a “holy war against Communism; therefore conscription was justified”.85
A different tone of debate was raised by the Anglican bishop, J.S. Moyes, who attracted national attention by preaching on the theological implications of Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War. He argued that the war could never be termed “just” because it was a war of aggression, it was instigated by the CIA rather than the US government, and its purpose was not to right wrongs and rescue the poor from the hands of evil doers. While this may have been the lead that some Anglicans sought from Australian bishops, the bishops were certainly not united. The Archbishop of Perth, George Appleton, regretted the government’s decision to send troops to Vietnam, a move that he felt had “lessened Australia’s ability to influence neighbouring Asian nations and enlist their help in efforts to bring about a peaceful settlement”, and the Dean of Brisbane, W.P. Baddeley, regarded Australia’s entry into the war as “a grave mistake”, and mentioned the lack of a declaration of war. But three Sydney bishops, in the absence of their Archbishop, published a letter calling for parishioners to exercise “sober thinking and calm judgment”. According to the bishops:

We are bound to recognize that the decisions of the Federal Government are based on knowledge and information to which ordinary citizens have not access ....The Church of England has always taught that it is lawful for Christian men to engage in war for a just cause, and that it is their duty to do so when the Government of their country calls upon them ....It is a reasonable corollary of this doctrine to say that it is essential for the safety and welfare of a country to maintain its defence forces at an adequate level. And if the armed forces cannot be maintained at the necessary level by voluntary recruitment, some form of conscription becomes necessary.

According to their argument, the Government should be given the benefit of the doubt in making decisions that affected the lives of thousands of young Australians, because it was privy to information that was not available to the public. Therefore “Christian men” should do their “duty” to Government and God by registering to be conscripted.

This brief survey of a range of media suggests that, even early in the war, there were divided opinions among and within various groups, such as the Christian churches, as well as newspaper editorials, parliamentarians, and public opinion expressed through letters to the editor. But perhaps a more accurate barometer of public opinion may be obtained from the results of Gallup polls during the period. In September 1965, shortly after 1 RAR was established at Bien Hoa base in South Vietnam, 56 per cent of Australians polled believed that the Australian government had made the right decision in committing Australian forces to the conflict, while 28 per cent favoured withdrawal and 10 per cent was undecided.
By May 1967, the percentage favouring involvement had increased to 62 but thereafter the percentages for and against began to be reversed. In August 1969, 55 per cent of Australians polled favoured withdrawal.90

A more qualitative impression may be gained from the views that were expressed to objectors themselves. Bill White, a schoolteacher who lost his position in the NSW Education Department because of his stance against conscription, said that he had received 500 letters of support and only three anonymous letters criticising him. His supporters ranged from school children to a Gallipoli veteran.90 As White waited to be arrested following his refusal to obey his call-up notice, a band of up to 30 supporters kept a round-the-clock vigil outside of his home to avoid the possibility of his arrest in the middle of the night with no cameras present. They nailed placards to the front fence, one of which said: “Brave enough to say ‘No’” – a reference to the charge that objectors were cowardly. Following White’s forcible removal to serve his Army training, eight other young men declared that they would go to jail rather than enlist if their applications for complete exemption failed.

Prime Minister Holt was forced to defend the Government’s handling of the White case, at a rowdy demonstration at the Rockdale Town Hall, on Sydney’s north shore, where the crowd both “hooted” and “cheered” him (see image overleaf).91 White’s arrest, with photographs appearing in the press, provoked outraged letters, including one from 15-year-old John Briot, who asked, “What kind of a ‘democracy’ is this where actions of conscience are so treated?”92 The Sydney Morning Herald’s political correspondent expressed an opinion that “conscription” would be an issue in the November 1966 federal election, but that Arthur Calwell’s unpopularity would cancel out “the great public unhappiness over the William White case”.93 The Sydney Morning Herald, editorialised on the morning of the election, 26 November, that Holt’s threat to amend the Electoral Act to outlaw rowdy demonstrations was being unnecessarily heavy-handed, because, “Rowdiness is not new in Australian politics”. The newspaper remarked philosophically that, to some extent, the fault lay with the “political parties in Australia, which have failed these young people by not appealing to their idealism” but also claimed that the instigators of the demonstration at Rockdale were Communists, who had “exploited the anti-conscription and anti-Vietnam demonstrators during the present campaign”.94 The Bulletin was more outspoken in support of White, whom its correspondent stated, was “not a coward. He is determined not to give up his stand; that killing is wrong, that war is wrong, and that he cannot take part in any organization whose purpose is to kill”.95 White was released from the Army on 23 December 1966, after his appeal for complete exemption from military service succeeded. But he had considerable difficulty in getting his job back in the Education Department, and a Gallup Poll conducted in February 1967 revealed that, of 1700 people
polled, only 23 per cent believed that he should have been granted exemption. Of the 72 per cent who believed he should have been made to complete his military service, however, only 15 per cent thought that he should have served as a combatant.98

Influence on later generations of anti-war protestors?

To return to the last question posed at the beginning of this chapter: to what extent did earlier resisters influence the later generations of anti-war protestors? After World War II, objectors were better prepared to resist when necessary, because of their experiences during the war. The movements that formed or re-formed in the 1950s in opposition to National Service introduced a new generation to concepts of civil rights and what that meant in connection with a citizen’s duty.

The groundwork had already been laid in establishing a philosophy of the right of the individual versus the right of the state. By the late 1960s, Australian scholars such as D.H. Monro and Glen Withers were concluding, respectively, that conscription was an unjustifiable abuse of civil liberties, and that when conscription is unnecessary (as it arguably was in the 1960s) it is “unjust”.99 Despite the differences between the Vietnam draft resisters and their predecessors, it is possible to trace a common heritage among all conscientious objectors of the 20th century. They stood up for their principles when those principles were not merely unpopular but completely untenable to a majority. In wartime, objectors were accused of cowardice and of conspiring with the enemy; in peacetime they were despised as being ‘soft’ and ‘unmanly’ because they did not relish military training. Their sacrifices and heroism went unrecognised by a society wedded to the notion that ‘sacrifice’ and ‘heroism’ necessarily involved active service overseas, fighting wars that were sometimes only marginally strategic for Australia. Ultimately objectors won the victory initially sought by the Australian Freedom League in 1912: no Australian has been conscripted for military service since 1972. A 1992 amendment to the Defence Act provides for the recognition of “selective conscientious objection” to particular conflicts and requires prior parliamentary approval before conscription can be introduced.98 Conscription in wartime requires the approval of both Houses of Federal Parliament.99 Selective conscientious objection was unheard of before the Vietnam conflict.

Clearly, too, those who stayed true to their principles believed they had achieved something by doing so. Michael Hyde, a student protestor and later a teacher, who “invested 15 years” of his life in the anti-war movement, believed “we did actually help stop the war in Vietnam. We also got people to look at the issue of US bases and how these things are interconnected”90
Holt punched, car attacked at night rally

Despite a five-deep shield of police around him, the Prime Minister, Mr Holt, was punched as he emerged through an angry crowd outside South Melbourne Town Hall last night.

The police beat people inside and outside, together with the Howards' end of the road and all the other avenues. It was the biggest demonstration ever seen against a Prime Minister in Australia.

Calwell denies split in Labor Party

From AANTONIN

I've been the head of the Labor Party since 1947, and I have never agreed with Mr Calwell's views on the Vietnam war. We are at loggerheads over this issue.

White fined on two charges

African to be released, Commonwealth Court rules

Silence, please, these are matters of public interest.

Holyoake Vietnam talks bid

ABOVE: The Sydney Morning Herald claimed that a violent attack on Harold Holt outside Rockdale Town Hall on 23 November 1966 was, "The wildest demonstration ever seen against a Prime Minister in Sydney." Holt was physically assaulted as police and anti-war demonstrators punched and kicked one another (Sydney Morning Herald, 24 November 1966, courtesy Fairfax Syndication).
Melbourne University student Garrie Hutchinson, who became a media adviser to Bob Hawke, reflected that he “would not like to say the Australia we have now is the result of what the anti-war movement did then, but we would not have the Australia we have if it had not happened”. Sadly, however, as in previous wars, the divisions continued in its aftermath, except that where once ‘returned men’ had been the heroes and those who, for whatever reason, did not serve were despised and regarded as having shirked their duty, post-Vietnam, “if you didn’t go to war, the experience had a positive, liberating effect ….If you went to the war, the whole period had a traumatic result. The tragic thing is that a lot of kids went because they didn’t think they had a choice”.

Whether the influence of the rebellious Vietnam generation extends into the 21st century, however, is a matter for debate. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, there appeared two clear trends in attitudes to Australia’s military history and, in particular, those aspects that were encompassed by the name ‘Anzac’: the relationship to the campaign on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915; the commemoration of that campaign and in particular the initial landings, and the characteristics said to embody the ‘Anzac spirit’ of duty, heroism, mateship and sacrifice. One trend, which might be termed ‘popular’ was evidenced by increasing attendances at Anzac ceremonies, including pilgrimages to Gallipoli; the other, mainly academic, saw a return to critical debate – different from the anti-war arguments of the 1960s and 1970s in that it focused on questioning of the myths that had arisen around and obscured the facts of much of Australia’s military history, rather than presenting a case against involvement in ‘imperialist’ wars. Two books published in 2010 reflected the questioning not merely of myths surrounding the Gallipoli campaign, but of many aspects of Australian military history. Despite its somewhat sensational title, Zombie Myths of Australian Military History, edited by Craig Stockings, brought together in one collection some of Australia’s most respected military historians.

Together, they sought to demolish such evergreen populist ideas as: ‘Breaker’ Morant was a hero; Australian troops were superior to other Allied forces on the Western Front, and the Kokoda campaign saved Australia from Japanese invasion. If Dayton McCarthy’s review is an indicator, the military at least were not offended by the book, and perhaps it slipped under the radar of more extreme public opinion.

This is not surprising because, as Stockings points out, some traditions (rather like ‘zombies’) are extremely hard to kill. A particularly disturbing trend, in evidence on blogging sites, however, has been the popular tendency to assume not only that the Gallipoli campaign was a military victory for the Allies, which, of course it was not, but that anyone offering reasoned criticism of what was essentially a military disaster, or of other aspects of Australian military history,
above: ‘say no’ leaflet. Many objects were keen to tell the public why they objected to the Vietnam War and to military conscription. This pamphlet was distributed by supporters of Bill White and other NSW objects. The 9 objects included in this two-page leaflet were Simon Townsend, Ian McIntyre, Graham Mowbray, Russ Warfield, Sean Foley, Frederick May, Brian Beckett, John MacKay and Bill White.
is somehow 'un-Australian,' unqualified to comment, and deserving of abuse.105 This is explored in the second book mentioned here that exemplifies the recent trend of critical analysis, Lake and Reynolds' *What's Wrong with Anzac?* Here, five authors examine Australians' relationship with Anzac Day, including the concept that the Australian nation was born at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 and that wars have the capacity to 'make' nations, and ask: what are school children taught about Anzac Day and how did it become Australia's 'national day'?106 Reynolds has long been an advocate for indigenous rights and a challenger of 'authorised versions' of Australian history, so it is not surprising that he would similarly challenge the 'sacred cow' that the Anzac legend has become. His refusal to accept that Australia became a nation at Gallipoli, rather than at some other more significant event, is well-argued, thought-provoking and worth serious consideration in the discourse on Anzac Day. While critics of militaristic fervor and the misinformation that accompanies it may be few and seem like voices crying in the wilderness against the flood of patriotic sentiment that is building up prior to the Anzac centenary, like other dissidents before them, they offer views that indicate differing opinions on the value, the efficacy or even the necessity of going to war.

**Conclusion**

Like the Vietnam war, the conflict in Afghanistan has changed from one that had majority support, not only in Australia, but also in other combatant nations including Canada, Britain and the United States, to an unpopular war.107 This reaction is no doubt influenced by casualties, the length of the conflict and the fact that most of the recent (2012–13) Australian fatalities have been the result of so-called 'green on blue' attacks in which soldiers have been gunned down by members of Afghani forces that they were training.108 A major difference between the dissidents of the 1960s and the present day is that the latter show respect for Australia's armed forces while disagreeing with their deployment in Afghanistan or, earlier, in Iraq. But this respect, together with the veneration of Anzac Day and the generally positive attitudes to the members of Australia's defence forces, does not necessarily mean that the present generation of enlistment age would be any less opposed to conscription, if it were re-introduced, than their forebears were 40 years ago.109 This seems to indicate that protest against Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War was not an 'aberration.' The fact that increasing numbers of Australians have spoken out against sending expeditionary forces overseas since that time suggests that opposition is, if anything, on the rise. As Australia becomes a more multicultural, multi-ethnic nation, a wider divergence on what does constitute the 'national interest' is to be expected. Perhaps street marches are a thing of the past, except on May Day. Modern protests rely on different forms of communication, and
much of it is conducted via the Internet and mobile phones, but it is protest nonetheless.

Notes

1 For example, L.L. Robson, *Australia and the Great War, 1914–1918*, (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1974 edition), p. 21, wrote: "Australians had made their minds up and were terrifically willing to go to war..."; W.L. Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian soldiers in the Great War*, (ANU Press, Canberra, 1974), p. 7, wrote that: "great wars were rare, and short, and many seized a fleeting opportunity".

2 The author recalls, as a child, hearing these attitudes frequently expressed in the rural Queensland of the 1950s, for example.

3 ANZAC, an acronym for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, which served in World War I, was adopted in World War II as a generic term for Australian active service personnel, especially soldiers.

4 See Marilyn Lake, "What have you done for your country?" in *What's wrong with ANZAC? The militarisation of Australian History*, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds with Mark McKenna and Joy Damousi [hereafter Lake et. al. *What's wrong with ANZAC?*], (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2010). Also Peter Stanley, "The Myth of Japanese Invasion," *Australia-Asia-Pacific-Institute Seminar, Curtin University*, 14 June 2012. Some of the public comments aimed at Lake included: "What have you done for your country? Please, no lecturing. You haven't earned the right"; "This fool of a woman should be charged with treason. Be quiet and be grateful," and "How disgusting to call ANZAC a myth." Stanley's questioning of the idea that there was a 'battle for Australia' provoked the following comments: "I find it quite offensive, as would the majority of older Australians", and "Many would consider it good grace for a retraction to be printed. However, I personally think that you're not man enough for that".


7 Australia Defence Association Discussion Papers, 'National Service', accessed 24


Courier Mail (Brisbane), 2 May 1951, p. 5.

The Mercury (Hobart), 9 October 1951, p. 5 and 9 November 1951, p. 1.

The Peacemaker, May 1951, p. 1, my emphasis.

See, for example, The Peacemaker, June 1951, p.1, 'International Resistance to Conscription'. This article begins: "Now that Australia is again a conscript country, it is important to realise that resistance to conscription occurs all over the world".


Sydney Morning Herald, 2 January 1952, p. 2.


National Archives of Australia (ACT), Department of Defence [III] Central Office, Correspondence Files 'Defence Committee Minute No. 30/1950 of 16th March, 1950: Conscientious Objectors' in AA (ACT) Series no. A1945 T3, control symbol 182/1/12. The Act also exempted "persons subject to a prescribed physical or mental disability". See also Smith, 'Conscience, Law and the State', p. 18.

Secretary, Department of the Army to Secretary, Department of Defence, 17 January 1956 in NAA Series no. A1945 T3, control symbol 182/1/12.

The Peacemaker, June 1951, p. 1.

The Age (Melbourne), 14 April 1954; The Peacemaker, May 1954. Oliphant's "belligerent pacifism" (as he termed it) impacted upon his career. In 1951, he was refused a visa to enter the United States to attend a scientific conference. He was excluded from the atomic tests at Maralinga in South Australia, despite being Australia's foremost nuclear scientist, because his beliefs cast him as a Communist in the opinion of the American administration. See for example, Australian Academy of Sciences, Biographical Memoirs: Marcus Laurence Elwin Oliphant, 1901–2000, accessed 15 November 2012, http://science.org.au/fellows/memoirs/oliphant.html#6.

Argus, 19 February 1952, p. 2. A survey of the press from 1952 to 1957 revealed no criticism of Oliphant. Several papers criticised the US government for refusing him a visa in 1950 (see e.g. Sunday Herald, 24 February 1952, p. 2 'Candid Comment', Argus 24 March 1952, p. 2). The Argus (26 March 1952, p. 2) asked if he had been consulted prior to a decision to sell Australian uranium to the United States. There was surprise when he was not invited to the tests on Monte Bello, despite the presence there of one of his staff, the British scientist Professor Titterton (see West Australian, 23 September 1952). In March 1952, Oliphant was one of several distinguished scientists awarded...
honorary doctor of science degrees by the University of Sydney, *The Mail* (Adelaide), 15 March 1952.


31 WILPF to Menzies, 12 September 1951, and reply 16 November 1951 in AA( ACT) Series A 462/5, item 430/2/14, folios 30, 31.

32 This case is drawn from unpublished material in the Vivienne Abraham Papers, held by the author, so I have used only the first name and initial of the surname of the person concerned, in order to protect his right to privacy.

33 National Archives of Australia, Prime Minister’s Department, Correspondence files, Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service, to Hasluck, 8 March 1952 and Holt to Hasluck, 10 April 1952, Series no. A462/5, control symbol 430/2/11, folios 68 and 69.

34 Gare to Fadden, 10 June 1952, in Series no. A462/5, control symbol 430/2/11, folio 97.

35 Ashby to Fadden, 4 June 1952, and Drummond to Fadden, 14 June 1952, in Series no. A462/5, control symbol 430/2/11, folio 93. The Sydney meeting of the Quakers, WILPF and the NSW Peace Council also protested (see Prime Minister’s Department, Correspondence files, folios 119, 120 and 139).

36 Unidentified newspaper clipping, n.d, enclosed with letter Gospel Publicity League to Menzies, 2 August 1952, in Prime Minister’s Department, Correspondence files, folio 118.

37 Garrett to Menzies, Prime Minister’s Department, Correspondence files, 15 August 1952, folio 126.

38 Davies to Menzies, 29 April 1952, Series no. A462/5, control symbol 430/2/11, folio 133; also Davies to Menzies, 28 July 1952 (folio 144) and telegram to Prime Minister, 25 August 1952, folio 128.

39 Decision No. 519 of 19 August. See Memorandum from Department of Labour and National Service to Secretary Prime Minister’s Department, 25 August 1952. See also information about the dismissal of Arthur Wright’s application by Stipendiary Magistrate Solling on 31 July 1952, NAA Series no. A462/5, control symbol 430/2/11, folio 144.


42 Oliver, *Peacemongers*, pp 152 ff.

43 A time line of these events may be found at: http://www.gimonca.com/sejarah/sejarah09.shtml.


45 National Archives of Australia, High Court of Australia, Principle Registry, Canberra, Correspondence files, Series no. A432, control symbol 1964/1293, item 1184204, Commonwealth of Australia, National Service Bill, No. 126 of 1964, Section 16 (a), p.

46 For a description of how the National Service Scheme 1964–72 was conducted, including the 'birthday ballot', and a full list of the birthdays drawn, see Sue Langford, 'Appendix: The national service scheme, 1964–72' in Edwards, A Nation at War, pp. 355–380.

47 'Draft Resistance Movement' leaflet, n.d. [1968?], announcing formation of the movement and planned activities, emphasis in the original, in Vivienne Abraham papers, held by the author.

48 Jordens, 'Mobilising Dissent', p. 140.


53 See Oliver, Peacemongers, pp 87 ff, where it is estimated that perhaps 5,000 men expressed a conscientious objection to military service, compared with 993,000 men and women who entered the services during World War II. In percentage terms this was about 0.5% (see p. 144). Even if the number of COs is compared with the number of men on active service only (558,000) it is still less than 1 per cent. For enlistment and active service figures for World War II, see: http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/enlistment/ww2.asp, accessed 8 June 2012.

54 Edwards, A Nation at War, p. 23.


56 Edwards, A Nation at War, p. 27.


62 The following is drawn from file 'Max B... ', Vivienne Abraham Papers, held by the author. For privacy reasons, the full title of the file has not been used.
63 Vivienne Grace Abraham (1920–2003) graduated with an LLB from Melbourne University, but did not do the articles so was not admitted to the bar and could not practice as a lawyer. She was deeply committed to pacifism from early in life. She was Honorary Secretary of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Peace Pledge Union (1946–47 and 1950–52); Victorian delegate and a speaker at conferences organised by the Federal Pacifist Council, and editor of the pacifist newspaper, The Peacemaker 1953–1955 and 1964–71. She served as Acting Editor and Secretary to the Editor at other times. Abraham was also Honorary Secretary of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (1982–89). In her professional capacity she represented many conscientious objectors to military service during the Vietnam War. Abraham was known to the author, who holds a collection of her papers related to conscientious objectors. Other papers are lodged at the State Library of NSW and the Melbourne University Archives.


65 Hand-written notes by Pat Fulton, May 30, 1968, with note to Vivienne Abraham, in Vivienne Abraham Papers, held by the author.

66 Examples in Vivienne Abraham’s papers of ‘cul’ members exempted in Victoria, include: Paul Waite, (Christadelphian); Jeffrey Foley and Gordon Ames (Church of God); Martin Ernst and Melville Rowland (Jehovah’s Witnesses); Brian Gray (Christian Israelite Church).

67 National U, (the National Union of Australian University students), vol 4, no. 5, June 10, 1968.


71 Oliver, Peacemongers, p. 116.


73 ‘Conscription should include women’, Sydney Morning Herald, 15 April, 1968.

74 The Australian, July 4, 1968.


76 ‘Close to treason’, Advocate (Burnie), July 2, 1968.


80 Pelikan, University of Western Australia, 2 May 1968.

81 Pelikan, 2 May 1968.

82 Statement by Lou Christofides, n.d., Vivienne Abraham Papers, held by the author.


84 The Spectator, March 19 1966, p. 4; Melbourne Age, May 6 1966, ‘Church against conscirpts’.

85 Catholic Worker, no. 362, April, 1966, pp. 3–4; ‘Letters’, Advocate, February 24, 1966, n. p. The Democratic Labour Party formed from the Right Wing of the ALP in the 1950s,


87 See, for example, Letters to the Editor, ‘Conscription: Will Bishops Give Lead?’, The Anglican, April 7, 1966, n.p.

88 ‘Discussion grows over Viet Nam’, The Anglican, April 14, 1966, p. 3.


91 Sydney Morning Herald November 18, 21, 22 and 24, 1966; Herald (Melbourne) November 19, 1966.

92 Sydney Morning Herald, November 25, 1966. The chapter title is taken from this quote.


101 Garrie Hutchison, cited in Langley, A Decade of Dissent, p. 216.

102 Channel 10 News, Perth, June 8, 2010 reported that 50,000 people are expected to attend the 100th anniversary of the landing at Anzac Cove in 2015.


105 Lake et al, What’s wrong with Anzac.

106 Lake, et al, What’s wrong with Anzac? The contributing authors are the four named on the cover (Lake, Reynolds, McKenna and Damousi) and Carina Donaldson.

107 A 2008 survey by the Pew Research Centre in Washington found that 60 per cent of Australians surveyed believed that the troops should be kept in Afghanistan until the country had “stabilized” (Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, http://pewglobal.org/database/?indicator=9&country=, accessed 8 June 2012). In November 2011, however, 83 per cent of 1710 people participating in a Sydney Morning Herald poll asking ‘Should Australia pull its troops out of Afghanistan?’ responded in the affirmative (see: http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/the-question/should-australia-pull-its-troops-out-of-afghanistan-20111125-1nyy6.html#ixzz2vX3uv3TM, accessed 12 July
In March 2012, the results of a US Gallup Politics poll was reported on their website as 'In U.S., Half Say U.S. Should Speed Up Afghanistan Withdrawal' (http://www.gallup.com/poll/153260/half-say-speed-afghanistan-withdrawal.aspx, accessed 12 July 2013). A March 2013 US Gallup Politics poll was conducted on the 10th anniversary of the beginning of the war with the results reported on their website as 'On 10th Anniversary, 53% in U.S. See Iraq War as Mistake' (http://www.gallup.com/poll/161399/10th-anniversary-iraq-war-mistake.aspx, accessed 12 July 2012).

According to the 31 August 2012 Sydney Morning Herald article, 'Green on blue: the new face of war in Afghanistan', 14 per cent of Coalition troop fatalities in Afghanistan had, at that point in time, resulted from 'green on blue' attacks (http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/green-on-blue-the-new-face-of-war-in-afghanistan-20120830-253ib.html, accessed 29 October 2012). As at the end of October 2012, as reported in 'Battle casualties in Afghanistan' on the Australian Department of Defence (ADF) website, seven of Australia's 39 fatalities in the conflict appear to have resulted from 'green on blue' attacks in 2011 or 2012 which were listed by the ADF as 'a small-arms incident' (http://www.defence.gov.au/op/afghanistan/info/personnel.htm accessed 29 October 2012).

In a recent class, the author showed students of enlistment age the list of birthdays that were drawn in the notorious birthday ballots of the 1960s and early '70s. Some of the young men were appalled to find that their birth dates came up, not once, but several times over the period. See Sue Langford, 'Appendix: The national service scheme, 1964–72' in Edwards, A Nation at War, pp. 355–380.