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WOMEN'S HEALTH

War crimes of the 90s: Rape as a strategy*

Mary E. Guinan, MD, PhD



Historically, only men went to war. The winners took the losers' women and could rape, enslave, or kill them. As we moved into

a more modern civilization, the rights of the winner over the women of the loser became less clear and were only vaguely documented. Even for modern war historians, what happens to the men on and off the battlefield is the main preoccupation. After all, women do not face combat and what happens to them seems unimportant. The rape of women by conquering armies has continued through all wars, but has rarely been considered a war crime, especially if the rapists were part of the ultimate winning forces. Rape committed by the losers has occasionally been punished by war tribunals.

In her landmark work, Susan Brownmiller reviewed the history of rape in war and observed that rape has often been viewed as "an unfortunate but inevitable by-product of the necessary game called war."¹ The details of wartime rape were rarely documented until World War I, when the use of propaganda was developed as a new war strategy. The Allies successfully used the rape of women by German forces in Belgium as a propaganda tool. Details of brutal, wide-scale rape were promulgated as uniquely German crimes and this propaganda was effective in mobilizing world opinion against the Germans. In fact, Brownmiller states that this propaganda was key in bringing the United States into the war. A general rule for effective propaganda is: in order to arouse hate, highlight

an atrocity. However, because propaganda often involves disinformation, historians ultimately question the validity of the claims.

Rape is difficult to prove and claims of mass rape are relatively easy to dismiss as exaggerated. During World War II, German soldiers systematically raped Jewish women, often enslaving them in brothels, and Japanese soldiers raped Chinese and Korean women. Only recently has Japan acknowledged that thousands of Korean women were taken to Japan for the pleasure of the Japanese military. Japanese soldiers raped an estimated 20,000 Nanking women within one month of the occupation of that city. Russian soldiers en route to Berlin at the end of the war raped thousands of German women. Therefore, the rape of women was well recognized as systematic and widespread during World War II, but was never acknowledged as a planned strategy. In all the war crimes tribunals after World War II, no commander or political leader was charged with rape.²

Pakistan was charged with making rape a part of war strategy during the war with Bangladesh in 1971, when Pakistani soldiers raped Bengali women in such overwhelming numbers that an estimated 25,000 unwanted pregnancies resulted.¹ Most of the women were Muslim, as were the Pakistani soldiers. The rapes were so systematic and pervasive that they were believed to be conscious Pakistani army policy.¹ The massive rape of Bengali women and the aftermath in unwanted pregnancy, venereal disease, and social ostracism received serious international attention, and for the first time, rape of women was condemned as a serious war crime.

In January 1993, a series of reports emerged from war-ravaged Bosnia-Herzegovina that Serbian forces planned and implemented a policy of widespread rape of Bosnian and Croatian women.²⁻⁵ The preliminary

findings of a European Community investigation estimated that about 20,000 Muslim women may have been raped by Serb fighters as part of a plan to drive Muslims from their homes. The investigating team described a pattern of abuse perpetrated with the conscious intention of demoralizing and terrorizing communities.⁴ One member of the team stated that rape had "become an instrument and not a by-product of the war."⁵

These reports are prompting a reappraisal of the way governments and human rights groups view the abuse of women in wartime.² What is new, is the understanding that rape is an act of violence against women and functions as a method of warfare. Wartime rape is an act of violence carried out by armed men against unarmed women and children. It is a demonstration of power over the victim. The United Nations is apparently considering the inclusion of rape as a war crime for which Serb political and military leaders may be held responsible, even if they didn't personally commit the act. Three factors support the case for rape as a Serbian war crime: 1) the magnitude of the number of victims; 2) reports that Serb officers ordered their men to rape and used the threat of rape to force people out of their communities; and 3) Bosnian women and girls report that their rapists wanted to impregnate them with Serb babies and refused to release pregnant women until it was too late for legal abortion. The alleged purpose was to repopulate Muslim-dominated Bosnia with Serbs.

Acceptance of the fact that rape is used as an instrument of war is similar to the recent legal acceptance of rape as a crime of power rather than one of passion. Women's rights organizations have been a strong factor in this change of thinking. A report by Americas Watch and the Women's

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*Statements made in this column reflect the opinions of the author only and not of the Centers for Disease Control.

NEWS OF WOMEN IN MEDICINE

Nancy C. Andreasen, MD, PhD, has been appointed as the eleventh editor of *The American Journal of Psychiatry* by the American Psychiatric Association Board of Trustees. Previously *AJP* deputy editor and book forum editor, Dr. Andreasen brings unique capabilities to her new position. Originally a professor of English, she changed career paths and earned her MD in 1970 from the University of Iowa. Dr. Andreasen is the author of the highly regarded *The Broken Brain* as well as seven other books and more than 230 papers.

AMWA Past President **Doris G. Bartuska, MD**, has been chosen to serve another two-year term as the delegate of the Pennsylvania Medical Society to the American Medical Association. Dr. Bartuska is director of the Division of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism at the Medical College of Pennsylvania.

Anne Carter, MD, was honored by AMWA Branch 14 (New York City) with its first Outstanding Service to Women Medical Students Award. Dr. Carter received the Award for her work in building up the Branch's Financial Assistance Fund, which makes loans to third- and fourth-year women students at the seven medical schools in the New York area.

Sarah S. Donaldson, MD, Catherine and Howard Avery Professor at the Stanford University School of Medicine, was elected Chair of the Board of the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology.

Glenda Donoghue, MD, assumed the post of Associate Dean for Postgraduate Medical Education at the Medical College of Pennsylvania on September 1, 1992. Previously, Dr. Donoghue was Assistant Dean for CME and GME at the State University of New York at Buffalo. She is an active member of AMWA.

Christine Haycock, MD, recently retired from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-New Jersey Medical School, was named Emeritus Professor at that institution. The resolution granting her this recognition noted that she had served the University with the highest distinction and brought it much honor. Dr. Haycock is a past president of AMWA.



Sheila Moriber Katz, MD, MBA, has been named interim dean of the Hahnemann University School of Medicine in Philadelphia. Dr. Katz has been a member

of the Hahnemann faculty since 1974, serving as professor of pathology and associate dean for academic coordination. She is a graduate of the Duke University School of Medicine and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Katz was one of the key scientists involved in the original investigation of Legionnaire's disease and has written a definitive textbook on it.

Lila Stein Kroser, MD, has been selected to chair the Committee for Women in Family Medicine of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Dr. Kroser was also elected President of the Family Health Foundation of Pennsylvania, the philanthropic arm of the Pennsylvania Academy of Family Physicians. Dr. Kroser is on the faculty at the Medical College of Pennsylvania and is a past AMWA president.

Joyann A. Kroser, MD, a third-year resident in internal medicine at the Medical College of Pennsylvania, was selected to serve a two-year term on the National Council of Associates of the American College of Physicians.

Mary D. Lekas, MD, of Riverside, Rhode Island, was named Woman Physician of the Year by AMWA's Rhode Island Branch. Dr. Lekas is surgeon-in-chief of the Department of Otolaryngology at the Rhode Island Hospital and an associate professor at Brown University School of Medicine.

Eleanor D. Montague, MD, received the Gold Medal for distinguished and extraordinary service to the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology. It is the most prestigious award the Society gives. Dr. Montague is a professor emeritus of radiotherapy at the University of Texas System Cancer Center M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute in Houston. She is a member of AMWA.



The Medical College of Pennsylvania has created the **Alma Dea Morani, MD**, Chair in Surgery to honor the accomplishments of Dr. Morani during

her close association with the College for more than 60 years. An internationally known plastic surgeon and sculptor, Dr. Morani is a recipient of the Elizabeth Blackwell Medal.

Karen L. Reuter, MD, has been elected president of the American Association for Women Radiologists. Associate professor of radiology and obstetrics/gynecology, Dr. Reuter is also director of obstetrical/gynecological imaging at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester. Other officers elected at the same time include: president-elect—Lynne S. Steinbach, MD; vice president—Judy M. Destouet, MD; secretary—Lori L. Barr, MD; treasurer—Ellann McCrory, MD.

Henrietta Kotlus Rosenberg, MD, has assumed the position of chair of the Department of Radiology at the Albert Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Mary P. Schatz, MD, has been named President of the Medical Staff of the Centennial Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Schatz, clinical and surgical pathologist, is the first woman to hold this post.

Katherine Schneider has been appointed to serve as Student Representative to the AMA Council on Scientific Affairs for 1992-93. She is a student in the MD/PhD program at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons and is a past AMWA national student coordinator.

Nancy L. Snyderman, MD, has assumed the post of Coordinator for Governmental Relations of the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery. Known nationwide as medical correspondent for "Good Morning America," Dr. Snyderman lives and practices in San Francisco.

Ina L. D. Tonkin, MD, will serve as Distinguished Scientist at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington, DC, for the 1992-93 term. Professor of radiology and pediatrics at the University of Tennessee in Memphis, Dr. Tonkin is a member of AMWA.

Marilyn Vaché, MD, has been named Medical Director of the El Camino Hospital Chemical Dependency Services in Mountain View, California. Dr. Vaché was most recently staff psychiatrist at the Cordilleras Center in Redwood City, California.

Joyce Wallace, MD, received the 1992 Brooke Russell Astor Award from the New York Public Library. The \$10,000 annual award, established in

1987 by a generous gift from David Rockefeller, recognizes an unsung hero who has contributed substantially to improving the quality of life in New York City. Dr. Wallace was honored for her work as executive director of the Foundation for Research on Sexually Transmitted Diseases, which provides direct social services to streetwalking prostitutes and others suffering from HIV infection. Dr. Wallace is a member of AMWA.

Kathleen M. Weaver, MD, was re-elected to her post as Secretary-treasurer of the American Society of Internal Medicine. An internist in private practice in Portland, Oregon, Dr. Weaver is a member of AMWA.

RAPE, continued

Rights Project, both of the Human Rights Project, stated that both the Peruvian government and the rebel group Shining Path have used rape and violence against female civilians as a form of tactical warfare in that nation's civil war.⁶

The documentation of a systematic campaign of rape against women by warring factions is an important step in the recognition of such behavior as criminal and punishable as a war crime. We must raise our voices in support of these women and demand an end to such atrocities. Unless these acts of war are punished severely they will not stop and are likely to escalate. We need a strategy for prevention. Rape of unarmed women and children by armed men must be defined as a heinous act of violence and cowardice. For the first step in prevention, systematic prosecution and punishment of military leaders for rape policies as well as punishment of rapists themselves must become part of international law.

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