

In the Field and On the Field **A Highlight History of the Australian Army Rugby Union**

Army Wallabies and Wallaroos of the Post WWII era

Over the many years since the great AIF rugby union team of 1919, and the AIF team of 1941, there have been Wallabies who have served in the Army through to 1945. Names like 'Weary' Dunlop and Stanley Bissett from the WWII period often come to mind when Wallaby and Army are put together in the one sentence. In a more recent conflict, Wallaby John Bromley (1949-53) served in Vietnam as a reservist on full-time duty. There have been other Wallabies too who served – and died – in the service of their country through WWII.

Others, like Pat B. Harvey, Ron M. Harvey (no relation to Pat Harvey), and Jim Williams, played rugby while in the Army and went on later to become Wallabies, and in William's case, a Wallaby coach as well. This report, however, will focus on personnel who were chosen to be Wallabies while serving rather than on those Wallabies who were called up or volunteered to serve before or after their selection.

In the post-WWII period there have been four Army representatives in Wallaby teams. They were Charles Roy 'Chilla' Wilson, Malcolm Van Gelder, Robert Cyril 'Danny' Kay and, and Robert Charles Brown. In this report, pioneering Army rugby player Angelina Fairweather, selected for the first Wallaroo international, also 'gets a guernsey'.

Charles Roy ('Chilla') Wilson (1931–)

Born in Brisbane, Wilson lived at Wacol and trained as a doctor, graduating from the University of Queensland in 1956 with MB and B.Sc. Later he worked at Mater Hospital in Brisbane. A brother, also a doctor, had joined the Army, and in December 1957 Wilson followed him by enlisting as a captain in the RAAMC on a one year short service commission. He was posted to 1st Camp Hospital as a medical officer, attached to 11th National Service Battalion. His commission was later extended by a further year and then again after service with 1st Field Regiment. Wilson left the Army in May 1959 and returned to medical practice, but stayed in the special reserve until 1976.

A flanker, Wilson joined the Wallaby tour of New Zealand in 1958. He had played rugby continuously through Grammar School and University and like Malcolm Van Gelder, was selected as much on the back of his University track record as anything else. His test debut was against New Zealand in

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Sydney in March 1957 and he played again in New Zealand as captain, culminating in the match against New Zealand in Auckland in September 1958.

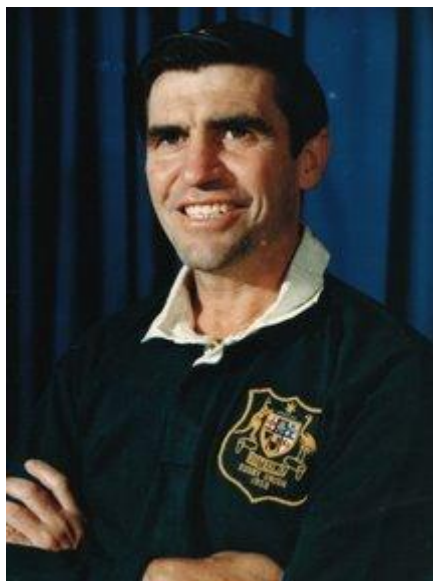
Wilson went on to be manager of the Wallaby tours of France and Britain in 1976 and 1984 respectively. Mark Ella said of Wilson: 'I couldn't think of a better manager. I played for Australia for six years. Thank God I had Chilla Wilson for three of them...He was quiet, unobtrusive and didn't make a lot of noise. In fact, you wouldn't know Chilla was the manager until the time came for somebody to get up and say the right thing'.

Malcolm Montague Van Gelder (1933-2008)

A member of the 1958 Wallabies team to New Zealand, back rower Malcolm Van Gelder was born in Gunnedah, NSW, grew up in Warwick and entered RMC Duntroon in 1951. He graduated into RAE in 1955. He later served in Vietnam from February 1968 to February 1969 as the officer commanding 17th Construction Squadron RAE. Leaving the Army after Vietnam service, Van Gelder became a lawyer in Canberra, participating very actively in public life. A brother was a navy pilot who was killed in a plane crash in 1956.

While a proud military servant, it was in rugby that van Gelder excelled outside his commitment to the force. On the 1958 tour, Van Gelder played matches against Southland and Manawatu on a 13-game trip. He scored a try on his Australian debut against Southland in Invercargill. After retiring from rugby in 1969, he became a referee, officiating in 466 games in the ACT. His last game as referee was as a 68-year-old in 2001 between a Seoul expats' team and a US Army side.

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Wallaby Malcolm Van Gelder

http://malcolmvangelder.blogspot.com.au/2008_08_01_archive.html

Although claimed by South Australian Rugby Union as one of theirs when Van Gelder won Wallabies selection the season after playing with Adelaide University in 1956-57, he was by that time of selection in Canberra and playing with the Easts Club in the Canberra competition – so claims that he was the first ACT Wallaby and not South Australia's will always make for a good discussion among followers of rugby history. Former teammates remember Van Gelder as 'a marvellous, aggressive and attacking breakaway'. Aside from rugby, Van Gelder was the RMC middleweight boxing champion in 1952. He also excelled at tennis.

Robert Cyril 'Danny' Kay (1935–2011)

Born in the Sydney suburb of Glebe, Kay enlisted in the Army as an apprentice in the 6th intake into Apprentice's School, Balcombe; his trade calling was as a carpenter and joiner. Kay served in the RAE, at first with 21st Construction Squadron (1954). He served in Papua New Guinea in 1962-1963 and later in operations in Sabah during 'Konfrontasi' in 1965-1966. He then served in Vietnam from March 1969 to March 1970 with 17th Construction Squadron as a staff sergeant. Between 1971 and 1973 he again served in PNG. He was discharged as a WOI in 1978.

A centre, he weighed just 76kg when selected out of the blue for the 1958 tour of New Zealand, and was the first Victorian selected for Australia in 20 years. Jack Pollard wrote of Kay in Australian Rugby: 'He won his place

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in the 1958 tour of New Zealand with strong displays for Victoria in that he showed a grasp of the basic skills, proved a good link in the centres with his wingers and tackled heavily.'

Kay played as a centre for the second Test at Christchurch and noted New Zealand critic Terry McLean compared Kay's performance with a German band, for 'he popped up everywhere.' He again played in the centre in the 1958 tour for the second match against Wanganui - a match won 11-9 by Australia. Two games later, against Nelson, Kay scored a try in a 20-11 win. Kay won selection for the second Test against New Zealand. The Wallabies caused an upset, winning 6-3. Unfortunately for Kay, an ankle injury sustained ruled him out of certain selection for the final Test against the All Blacks.

In 1959 the British Isles toured Australia, and Kay played against them for Victoria which was crushed 18-53. He was then selected for the second Test against the Lions; Australia lost 3-24. Kay once again lined up for a combined Victoria-South Australia team that played New Zealand in 1960. From 1964, Kay played for the Footscray Club in Melbourne, scoring 12 tries in 29 games in 1st grade and 4 in 2nd grade. Later he played for Randwick in Sydney.

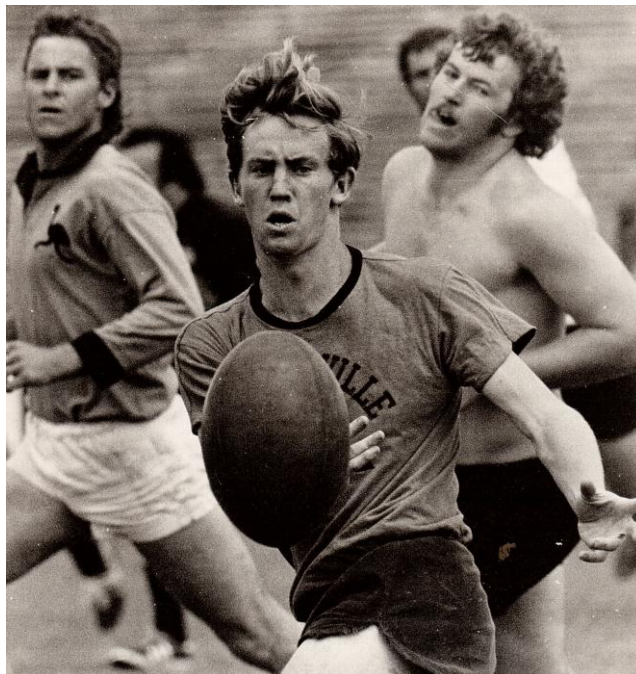
Robert 'Bob' Charles Brown (1953-)

Bob Brown was born in Parramatta, NSW and educated at Canberra Grammar School; he was selected for the ACT Schoolboys team in 1970. He entered RMC Duntroon in 1971 and graduated into Infantry Corps in 1974. While at Duntroon he played in Duntroon teams in two 1st Grade finals. Brown was also selected for NSW Country in 1973-74 and the ACT in 1973-1974. While in the ACT team, he played against Tonga in 1973, in the winning side against Queensland in 1974, and against the All Blacks in the same year. Selected for NSW in 1974, he toured the US, Canada, and NZ.

Brown was selected for the Wallabies in 1975 while on his first posting to 5/7 RAR, when he played for Parramatta RU Club in the Sydney 1st grade competition. Bob recalls that he played for Parramatta mainly through a friendship with dual international Ray Price, who represented the Wallabies in eight tests between 1974 and 1976. In the Wallabies, Brown played against England at Sydney Cricket Ground (when he kicked a long range field goal)

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and at Ballymore in Brisbane in May 1975. He also played for NSW against England.



Wallaby Bob Brown
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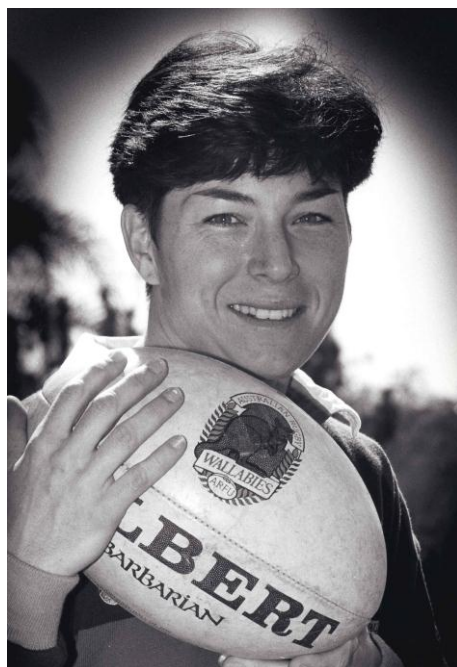
Injured in 1975, Brown chose to focus on his Army career - 1975 was still the amateur era of the Wallabies and there was little incentive to leave the Army for full-time rugby. However, he continued to play Army and Services rugby, as a fullback, through 1985. He played for the Hunter Valley representative side while on posting to Singleton for example. He also gave back to rugby, as Chairman of Services Rugby between 1999 to 2004, with a place on the ARU Board. Bob Brown is a career soldier, and currently serves in Canberra as a Brigadier.

Angelina ('Angie') Fairweather neé Visco (1967-)

Angie Fairweather was born at Ballina in north east New South Wales in 1967. She was the grand-daughter of an Italian POW, captured at Bardia in WWII and interned in northern NSW - who after the war, collected his family and with others from Italy resettled back in Australia. Her parents were both Reservists and in 1986, Angie entered ADFA, graduating into Army Intelligence Corps.

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Playing touch rugby in and around Canberra while in officer training, Angie was deeply interested in rugby union but otherwise had no other opportunity to play the game. It was not until 1993, while on posting to 1st Intelligence Company in Brisbane that Angie was able to become a foundation member of women's rugby then being established there. She began playing with Brisbane South at the old age – in rugby terms - of 27. In 1994/1995 Angie was chosen for the first Wallaroos team to play New Zealand ("they absolutely slaughtered us – 37-0"). Nonetheless, her Cap at No.15 in the Wallaroos 'hall of fame' will always sit proudly with her.



Wallaroo Angie Fairweather
Supplied

Army finally got underway with women's rugby in 1995. Angie played for Army (1996) and ASRU (1997) teams and in the national titles competition in Darwin (1998) before age and motherhood got the better of her as a player – but she went on to manage both Army and ASRU teams in 1999. Angie Fairweather was one of the pioneers of women's rugby at large and in particular was the first Army player chosen (followed closely by Corporal Veronica ('Ronnie') May) for the Wallaroos and its first international match.

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