

FEATURES



The heroism of rugby rivals will live on

Players from Scotland and France killed in the First World War will be honoured tomorrow with a new trophy. *Joe Shute reports*

Fittingly, for one of Scottish rugby's greatest ever scrum halves, Eric Milroy was a difficult man to pin down. A

on the sporting field who competed with a ferocity that belied his short stature. Milroy, nicknamed "Puss" by his friends at Edinburgh's George Watson's College, was also the apple of his mother's eye. Whenever he left the family home for a rugby match she would always proffer the same advice: "Don't get hurt today. Remember - keep well back."

Between 1910 and 1914, Milroy played 12 times for Scotland and captained the team in the last international before the Great War - a narrow 16-15 defeat to England at Inverleith. By the end of the war in 1918, 11 of the players on the field for Scotland that day had been killed. In total, 31 Scottish rugby internationals died during the First World War - the largest number of any of the Five Nations.

Milroy joined the 9th (Highlander)

and attached to the 8th Battalion Black Watch as Lewis gun officer.

During his time on the Western Front, Milroy regularly wrote to his mother, Walteria, and sweetheart Helen Urquhart. His last letter home to his mother was sent on July 17 1916, the day before an assault on Delville Wood - which was to become one of the bloodiest encounters of the entire war.

"We are in for some slight trouble tomorrow," he wrote. "So I am just warning you that there is to be no 'keeping well back then'."

The following day, the Germans launched an artillery barrage so fierce that only a single tree was left standing - a hornbeam, which remains today. Milroy was killed at the age of 28.

Like thousands of others who died in the battle that became known as "Devil's Wood", his body was never recovered. Instead, his name is inscribed on the memorial to the missing at Thiepval cemetery.

For a year following his death, his mother would visit Edinburgh Waverley Station every night, watching the troop trains disembark in the faint hope her son would be among them. For the rest of her life, she left the porch light on before going to bed.

"She certainly never got over his death," recalls Milroy's great-niece Jean Ross, whose mother was brought up by Walteria. "I don't think she ever accepted it."

Tomorrow, before the Six Nations match between Scotland and France at Murrayfield, the sacrifice of the fallen rugby players from both nations will be honoured with a new trophy called The Auld Alliance - after the ancient pact agreed between the two countries to back each other in times of war.

The trophy - cast in solid silver and

Rivals: Marcel Burgun (above left: front row, second from left) and Eric Milroy (above: back row, second from right)

captain Marcel Burgun, and will be carried on to the field by two 11-year-old descendants of the men. On the Scottish side will be Jean Ross's grandson, Lachlan. "He is excited and very proud," says the 74-year-old, who runs a sheep farm in Galloway.

"I told him, 'You do realise you will be walking out in front of 60,000 people', but he said that wasn't a problem."

"The family are absolutely thrilled to bits. It just means Eric will not be forgotten. He is the missing link in our family and it's wonderful he will be remembered."

Even among the carnage of the First World War, where whole villages were wiped out in a single charge across Norman's-land, rugby players comprised a disproportionately high number of the fallen. Over the course of the war, a total of 129 British, French and Commonwealth rugby internationals lost their lives.

Following the declaration of war in 1914, it took just nine days for the Rugby Football Union to urge every player across the land to enlist. So enthusiastically did players heed the call to fight for their country that the RFU even momentarily considered

forming its own battalion, before realising that most had already signed up.

At first, other professional sportsmen - footballers and cricketers - proved rather less willing. A propaganda poster was even distributed nationwide reading: "Rugby Union footballers are doing their duty. Over 90 per cent have enlisted. British Athletes! Will you follow this glorious example?"

Milroy signed up with as much patriotic pride as anyone else, although his letters home shielded his

'The remarkable thing is how many players volunteered and how many were killed'

family from the true horror of what he faced. According to Jean Ross, Milroy became engaged to Helen Urquhart during the war. "In one of his letters home to his mum, he said he had sent Helen a ring he had bought," she recalls. "I remember Eric's brother going up there to visit her when I was younger."

Despite being cut down in his prime, before he could father any children, Milroy was one of four siblings, and his nieces and nephews

grew up well aware of the shadow his death cast over the family - even if it was rarely discussed.

"They didn't talk much about him," says Ross. "It was a real sadness in the family. He was so young when he was killed."

His great-nephew is Sir Eric Kinloch Anderson - a former Gordonstoun teacher and headmaster at Eton, who counts Prince Charles, David Cameron, Boris Johnson and Tony Blair among his former pupils.

Sir Eric's son, David Anderson QC, a London-based barrister who for six years was this country's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, was contacted last year by a man called Patrick Caublot from the Amiens Rugby Club, which is based near the Somme.

To mark the centenary of the Great War and honour the fallen, the Frenchman suggested a tournament and new trophy, which the two nations will be able to compete for every year. Anderson agreed. "The remarkable thing is just how many players volunteered and how many were killed," he says.

Like Eric Milroy in Scotland, Marcel Burgun was a leading light of French rugby. Born in Russia to a French clockmaker and his Norwegian wife, he initially served in the artillery when war broke out. But following the death of his elder brother in action in March 1915, he applied for a transfer to the air force - the most dangerous role of the Great War.

He was described as a "remarkable pilot of rare intrepidity" and was triumphant in numerous dogfights, before being shot down and killed in September 1915. The 26-year-old was



Two nations: the Auld Alliance Trophy at Murrayfield ahead of the Six Nations match between Scotland and France tomorrow. With, from left, business

with a new trophy.

Joe Shute reports

Fittingly, for one of Scottish rugby's greatest ever scrum halves, Eric Milroy was a difficult man to pin down. A first-rate scholar and trained accountant, he was also a terrier

played 12 times for Scotland and captained the team in the last international before the Great War – a narrow 16-15 defeat to England at Inverleith. By the end of the war in 1918, 11 of the players on the field for Scotland that day had been killed. In total, 31 Scottish rugby internationals died during the First World War – the largest number of any of the Five Nations.

Milroy joined the 9th (Highlander) Battalion Royal Scots. At the beginning of the Battle of the Somme, in July 1916, he was promoted to lieutenant.

Jean Ross, whose mother was brought up by Walteria. "I don't think she ever accepted it."

Tomorrow, before the Six Nations match between Scotland and France at Murrayfield, the sacrifice of the fallen rugby players from both nations will be honoured with a new trophy called The Auld Alliance – after the ancient pact agreed between the two countries to back each other in times of war.

The trophy – cast in solid silver and entwined with designs of poppies and cornflowers – features the names of Eric Milroy and the 1914 French

RFU even momentarily considered

siblings, and his nieces and nephews



Two nations: the Auld Alliance Trophy at Murrayfield ahead of the Six Nations match between Scotland and France tomorrow with, from left, bagpiper Ryan Steele, Romain Cabanas, a descendant of Burgun, and Lachlan Ross, a descendant of Milroy

in the artillery when war broke out. But following the death of his elder brother in action in March 1915, he applied for a transfer to the air force – the most dangerous role of the Great War.

He was described as a "remarkable pilot of rare intrepidity" and was triumphant in numerous dogfights, before being shot down and killed in September 1915. The 26-year-old was posthumously awarded the Croix de Guerre for his heroism.

Despite their two converging lives, according to his family, Milroy only played rugby against Burgun once, in Paris in 1913. A Scottish victory ended with the French supporters pelting the players with stones. Consequently, the 1914 fixture was called off.

The two men belonged to an era when great rivalries, like great lives, could be snuffed out in an instant. But as their countrymen march out to the Murrayfield roar a century on, it will be in the knowledge and pride that their memory endures.

Telegraph Financial Services

Are you paying too much for your travel insurance?

For many, the decision to book that dream holiday of a lifetime is met with both excitement and caution. The average two-week holiday costs on average £4,800, so choosing the most suitable trip can take months, or even years to plan.

When the location has been decided and booked, there is the important question of what travel insurance to take out. For some, the correct policy could make or break that dream trip.

Being refused travel insurance can cause more headaches than you might expect. If you have any pre-existing medical conditions and purchase a holiday, you might find that your options are limited when trying to buy a suitable policy to cover your trip.

Your circumstances can affect what you may be quoted and, in some cases, insurance can be almost as expensive as the holiday. If you have already booked your trip, but find you are unable to travel due to lack of insurance, you may lose all or part of your money.

Many people with pre-existing medical conditions are often perfectly fit to travel but some insurers deem them to be a risk and can charge high premiums for the duration of their trip.

It some cases, travellers may decide not to disclose their medical conditions if they think they're unlikely to have any problems while away. However, should anything happen, they will be uncovered and liable to spend tens of thousands of pounds to rectify the situation. It really isn't worth the risk.



Chris Pannell, travel insurance expert from The Telegraph's travel insurance service Payingtoomuch.com said: "We are finding that people with pre-existing medical conditions are calling us, asking if they will be covered for specific conditions and what the cover will cost them before they book their trip."

"By doing this, they could potentially save hundreds of pounds in cancellation fees,

not to mention the savings we can offer them for travel insurance. You will, however, need to know what part of the world you wish to travel in as cover can vary between the Americas and Europe for example."

If you have pre-existing medical conditions, we can compare travel insurance quotes to include them on the policy. Whether you are planning a short trip to Paris or a three-week cruise

to the Far East, finding the right affordable policy is easy.

To compare the available options for your insurance, contact The Telegraph's travel insurance service, which is provided by PayingTooMuch.com.

Compare quotes today regardless of age or medical conditions.

Visit telegraph.co.uk/go/travelinsurance or contact our friendly support team on 0333 222 1539.

Lines are open Monday to Friday 8am-8pm and Saturday and Sunday 9am-5.30pm.

*No cover available for travellers on a waiting list for medical investigation, treatment or surgery. Maximum age 99 years.

See how quotes compare

> Via PayingTooMuch.com	£116
> Post Office	£201
> Staysure	£228
> John Lewis	£242

Premiums based on two travellers, both aged 70, travelling to Spain for 10 nights and includes cruise cover. Traveller one has had a stroke in last four years. Traveller two has asthma. Both are on medication.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

that's my plan. Some people consider the condition as terminal. I do not."

Mendelsohn adds: "We look at it more as a chronic disease. We're both much healthier, ironically, than we ever were before. People go 'oh, you look great, you look so healthy.' Sort of!"

Unlike many cancers, follicular lymphoma – which, paradoxically, is neither rare nor well-known – grows slowly and can often be kept under control for many years. About 1,900 people are diagnosed with it each year in the UK, their average age 65; early treatment at this stage doesn't appear to help people to live longer and can cause side effects.

Diagnosed in November 2016, after finding a tiny – "less than half a centimetre" – lump in her groin, Mendelsohn has opted against treatment so far, though at some point she will need a combination of chemotherapy and immunotherapy.

In common with many sufferers, she had few symptoms (common indicators include sudden weight loss, night sweats, lumps and bumps) and continues to feel well, which has enabled her to carry on working in her demanding day job, only swapping the frequent early-morning flights for departures at less punishing hours.

Meanwhile, from opposite sides of the globe, she and Greenhalgh fire messages back and forth about new ideas for the Facebook group, which provides a vital forum for sufferers everywhere, as well as their carers.

"I had a lot of people when I was first diagnosed putting me in touch with people with non-Hodgkin [lymphoma]," says Greenhalgh. "But I could never relate to them because they were able to be cured and I'm not, which is why I started the group. I needed to speak to someone who was going to be living with this for the rest of their life, just like me."

Two years later, her group, Living with Follicular Lymphoma, which had just a few hundred members when

Mendelsohn found it, has now accrued almost 4,000. Some 500 joined this week alone, since Mendelsohn first spoke publicly about her illness.

"It took me a couple of months after my diagnosis to think to look for a group on Facebook, and it's funny because I work on Facebook," says the tech exec. "I should probably have got there a bit quicker, but I hadn't thought of it. I was in [Facebook] groups for women in business, for book clubs and local area stuff. And then I found it and was like 'oh my goodness, these people understand me, they understand what I'm going through.'"

"I think there is a difference in the way that people relate to each other that have this disease [compared with] those that don't."

So what do they talk about?

"You see people



sharing the most extraordinarily personal of things. From 'my partner doesn't understand me, do others feel like that?'; to 'I'm thinking about different treatments, what would you advise?'; to how you tell your children," says Mendelsohn. "Who else would you actually ask?"

And who else could offer the kind of emotional support those on the same path can provide. Turning to Mendelsohn, Greenhalgh says: "When you had your scans coming up and I had my scans coming up, we definitely supported each other through that."

Tomorrow, Mendelsohn, Greenhalgh and a number of other London-based group members will have their first offline get-together in the city. One sufferer, from Iceland, is even planning to fly in to join them.

Mendelsohn is excited at the prospect of uniting "all these

'I needed to speak to someone who was going through the same thing'

people that have never met before, who've only met in the digital world on Facebook."

While logistics won't allow regular meetups, the pair plan to maintain their long-distance alliance, helping each other with the disease for the rest of their lives.

Mendelsohn has also been inundated by support from those she's never met either online or offline, but who have been touched by her story, wishing her well. Even estranged former school mates of her oldest child, Gabi, have been in touch with the university student to tell her they are thinking of her.

"She's been just overwhelmed with kindness from people reaching out, going 'I met your mum at the school gates and just wanted you to know I was thinking of you.' It's really lovely," Mendelsohn smiles, at