

# THE MISSING SHOOTER (OR 'THE GENESIS OF LEGENDS REVISITED')

BY ANTHONY TH. BIJKERK

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For about 38 years, I have been searching for the still missing name of a bronze-medal winner in the International Free Pistol Match for Teams, during the Games of the IIInd Olympiad, in Paris 1900.

It all started, when in 1960 I became the owner of Dr. Ferenc Mezö's book, titled: *Sechzig Jahre Olympische Spiele*. In that book, I found the first indication that the Netherlands had participated in the Games of the IIInd Olympiad, in Paris 1900, a fact that, until that moment, was not known by the Netherlands Olympic Committee, (which was founded September 11, 1912).

Since that moment in 1960, I, through my research, was able to recover almost all of the names and other personal data of the participants from my country in those early 'Olympic' Games, and they are now published and preserved for posterity in Ruud Paauw's and my own: *Gouden Boek van de Nederlandse Olympiërs*.

As far as I have been able to recover, from the 1900 participants in Paris only the four participating swimmers have ever known that the race they swam in Paris in 1900 was called 'Olympic'.

In 1897, the Dutch notary Solko Johannes van den Bergh (04.JUN.1854-25.DEC.1916), together with his friend Henrik Sillem (12.AUG.1866-13.JUL.1907) and the Frenchman François Monod from Lyon, initiated 'international shooting matches (actually world championships in shooting)' which were to be held every year, both with rifle and pistol. These championships, which for the first time were held in 1897, in Lyon, France, were in fact the forerunners of the matches that were held in Paris, in 1900, and are now decided to be of an "Olympic" character.

In the Netherlands, in those days, existed a very active Dutch Sharpshooters Association, which organized matches all over the Netherlands almost every week. Each member of one of the 'shooting clubs' had to go through an

extensive ballot and only people of irreproachable conduct could become a member and own a weapon.

The Association published a magazine of its own, titled: "De Scherpschutter" (the Sharpshooter), which came into existence even before the 1880's.

The teams that were entered in the international shooting matches consisted of the one in Paris 1900, existed solely of members selected by the Board of the Netherlands Sharpshooters Association, although it must be stated, that some well-to-do members coopted themselves for these teams, by paying for their own journey and stay.

But every person who wanted to participate in international competitions had to be a member of the Netherlands Sharpshooters Association!

This was made very clear to me, when I found out that the Dutch team that participated in the 1924 Olympic shooting events in Paris, whose members mostly came from the military, were accepted as members in the N.S.A. in early 1924 and were registered all together in one 'new-members-list in the magazine!.

In a correspondence with the "Societe Suisse des Carabiniers" (the Swiss Shooting Association) in 1963, I received information about the 1900 international shooting matches, which were held in Paris. The SSC even mailed me a copy of the book, published and edited by Hermann Bouverat in 1957, titled: *Schweizer Matcheure im Banne der Schützen-Weltmeisterschaften 1897-1957*, in which the author himself mentioned the names from Mr. S.J. van den Bergh, and his companion H. Sillem as the true initiators of these matches.

The book also contains the results of the "Stutzermatch in Paris am 31. Juli 1900" and the "Revolvermatch in Paris am 2. August 1900". Only the names of the Swiss shooters are mentioned at great length, no representatives from

other nations come to the front. But, the result from the team and individual matches are given, which for my country meant being fifth in the 'rifle team'-competition, and third in the 'revolver team'-competition.

In a letter, dated '24 avril 1963', the "Société Suisse des Carabiniers" gave me the names of the Dutch competitors in the 'revolver-team-competition' from Paris 1900, as follows:

Van Haan	437 points,
Sillem	408 points,
Boumens	390 points,
Van den Bergh S-J	331 points,
Sweys	310 points.

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1876 points,

which brought the team the third place.

For the first time, the names of the full team were known to me (although not quite correct). Sillem, Bouwens, Van den Bergh and Sweijs, (note the differences) had already been entered in my files before and were known and respected members of the sharpshooters society of that period. Mr. Van Haan was yet the unknown shooter.

In a correspondence with the Royal Netherlands Association of Sharpshooters, (as the Association now was called) from April 1963, I was told that the longest living participant from Paris 1900: Antoine Hubertus Maria Bouwens (22.MAY.1876-28.MAR.1963), had died the previous month, but shortly before his death he was asked about the research, but then could unfortunately no longer remember the composition and the names of the team that had participated in Paris in 1900.

**F**or many years, my knowledge nor my files could not be added to! Until one day, many, many years later, my good friend Peter Diamond got me the set of the books, that described in great detail the 1900 sports events. These books, which in fact form the official report of the 1900 Games, are titled: *Concours internationaux d'exercices physiques et de sport: Rapports publiés sous la direction de M. D. Mérillon, délégué général, volumes 1 et 2.* Paris Imprimerie Nationale, 1901/1902.

In volume I, on page 207, I found the same team-result as mentioned earlier in the Swiss letter, but with one major difference! The name of the best Dutch pistol(or revolver)-shooter was now spelled: Van Laan.

For me, this made an enormous difference, although neither the name Van Haan, nor the name Van Laan are very

common names in the Netherlands.

We in the Netherlands are acquainted with names like: De Haan, or Haan, but not Van Haan! We also know the names: Van der Laan, or Laan, but not Van Laan! In 1908 we had an Olympic participant in shooting in the Olympic Games in London by the name of Jacob Adriaan Laan, who participated in trapshooting, which is, as well-informed people know, a completely different kind of sport compared to sharpshooting!

Even more so, because the trapshooters in my country were in 1900 joined in another association altogether! They had their own 'club called NIMROD, which weekly organized matches on their own trapshooting ranges.

The then IOC-member in the Netherlands, Frits van Tuijll van Serooskerken was one of its members, which were mostly recruited from the 'old' and aristocratic families in the Netherlands.

Contrary to that, the members of the Netherlands Sharpshooters Association were mainly recruited from the "militia's", which mostly consisted of the well-to-do citizenry, and the middle-classes.

In my contacts with the Royal Netherlands Association for Sharpshooters, I had found out, that they still had available a complete set of their magazine: *De Scherpschutter* of those days. I asked, and received permission to study the available volumes, especially those of the period around the turn of the last century. In spite of days and days of research, I found no trace whatsoever of the team that went to represent the Netherlands in Paris in 1900! The 1900 match was mentioned nowhere in the magazine *De Scherpschutter*, because it so happened the magazine was not published for two years, starting around April 1900 until mid-1902!

Apparently, the Association had run into financial troubles in 1900, because of organizing a major event during the summer of 1900, to commemorate their own jubilee!

When they finally resumed publishing the magazine, nothing at all was mentioned of the 1900 international (Olympic) shooting match in Paris!

Before I returned the magazines, which I had received on loan, my eye fell on a list with members in 1902, and my brain must have made a note of that.

For many years, my attention was not focused on the missing Olympic sharpshooter and bronze medal winner from 1900.

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In 1990 I retired and started working on the statistics for what finally would become *Het Gouden Boek van de Nederlandse Olympiërs* (The Golden Book of the Dutch Olympians), which was published in 1996.

Through my good Swedish friend Wolf Lyberg, I had obtained copies of the famous Dahllöf lists, which contained all 'active' Olympic participants from each country that participated in the Olympic Games. It must have been a tremendous work to compile these list and for that we owe Lennart Dahllöf a lot of thanks and praise.

But soon, I found out that his lists were far from perfect and sometimes not even correct. They contained 'fabricated' Christian names, which gave me many problems, because they did not tally with the archives in the various communities I consulted. Sometimes, I simply had to gamble with Christian names to see if the final outcome would be the correct one!

**B**ack now to our missing shooter! Lennart Dahllöf mentioned in his list as the name for this shooter: Gerardus van Haan, and where he obtained the information will never be known, because unfortunately, Lennart Dahllöf is no longer among us.

From this moment onwards, the Genesis of Legends began!

Volker Kluge took over the name of Gerardus van Haan in his volume: *OLYMPISCHE SOMMERSPIELE - DIE CHRONIK I*; from the Dahllöf lists;

Dr. Karl Lennartz did the same in his fabulous book: *II Olympische Spiele, 1900, Paris*, a co-production with Walter Teutenberg, (Lennartz himself told me that he had used the Dahllöf lists) and finally,

Dr. Bill Mallon, M.D. did it also in his latest book: *The 1900 Olympic Games - Results for All Competitors, in All Events, with Commentary*. (This very fine and beautifully edited book will be reviewed by David Wallechinsky in the next issue of the Journal).

Whatever the name of this missing shooter may be, it certainly is not the name invented by Lennart Dahllöf!

Last year, when again visiting the offices of the Royal Netherlands Association for Sharpshooters, I suddenly remembered the lists I had seen in the 1902 edition of the magazine: *De Scherpschutter*.

I then was permitted to look into that old book again and soon found what I was looking for.

The list contained the names of all members of the Association in 1902, made up according to the place where they were living.

With all the varieties for the name of the missing shooter mentioned over the years in my memory, I went through that memberships-list and found not one, who could have been the one and only revolver shooter either Van Laan or Van Haan!

However, there was one name in the whole list coming real close!

It was the name of a certain Mr. H. van Loon, who lived in The Hague.

This certainly looked like a distinct possibility, because in writing the letters 'a' and 'o' can sometimes be quite similar, and so I decided to return to the period, before the 1900-1902 gap-in the magazine.

In the years previous to 1900, I found another five people with the name of Van Loon; and all were, or had been, members of the Association. This in fact meant a final 'death-stroke' for my researching efforts, because

nowhere in the Dutch contemporary newspapers anything at all had been mentioned about the 1900 Paris shooting matches, which would enable me to pursue the research.

It also means that most likely the complete name and other data of that shooter will remain a mystery forever! Maybe, when someone would find the special French shooting publication from 1900: *Le Tir National*, a clue could still be found, but I doubt it!

But I am sure of one thing: the name must be something ending with Van Loon, because only one of those five Van Loon's was both a member of the Association, and thus able to compete in Paris! The correct one may never be found, unfortunately!

**A**sad ending of my story! Yes, but also a lesson: that we should always be careful in using material given to us by others! We must be sure that it only contains historically correct information and not trust without checking, the material others give us!

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