

Olympic Casualties of War



The short life of the long-distance runner Jean Bouin

By Volker Kluge

The legend of Jean Bouin: the French post office dedicated a stamp to him, issued at the time of the Olympic Games in Rome 1960.

Photos: Volker Kluge Archives

Some people maintain that Jean Bouin died on 29 September 1914 with the cry "Vive la France!" on his lips. Others believe that his short life ended in the fire of his own artillery. The definitive truth will probably never be established.

Bouin, a "Marseillais", was born on 21 December 1888, and was a robust type: At 1.68 metres tall and weighing 70 kilos he didn't look like a long distance runner. His upper body was muscular, his legs relatively thin. His chest was broad and shaped like a wrestler's – a big target for the grenade splinter that killed him.

Early on, Bouin had had to learn to make his own way in life. His father, a trader from Marseille, died when he was still a child. His teacher was Joseph Pagnol, whose son Marcel, seven years younger than Bouin, later became a well-known French writer, dramatist and film director.

Bouin, who trained at a college for ship's engineers in Marseille, found his niche in sport. He was a swimmer, gymnast and fencer. It was only in running, said teacher Pagnol, did he allegedly have no talent. But Bouin did not allow himself to be discouraged by this assessment. He founded a school sports club and took France's best

marathon runner Louis Pautex as a role model, to whose heels he stuck.

His first major successes were as a cross-country runner. In 1906 and 1907 he finished fourth in the French championships. At the 1907 International Cross Country Championship in Glasgow he was thirteenth.

Bouin was not yet twenty when he was chosen for the 1908 Olympic Games in London, where his first race was the 1500 m. In his heat he was second behind the Briton Harold Wilson. Only the winners of the eight heats went through to the final so Bouin was eliminated.

The proof that he had better prospects over the longer distances came the next day in the heat of the 3 mile team race, in which he recorded the fastest time of all participants.

But when he visited a bar in Soho with friends in the evening, he got into a fight, was arrested, and spent the night in a police station in Piccadilly. By the time he was released, it was too late for the final which started at 11.30 a.m. As Alexandre Fayolla had also dropped out, the French team, reduced to three runners had no chance against the strong Britons and Americans. Five runners were permitted in the race.

In 1910 Bouin joined the Paris Athletic Club of the Société Générale. As a quid pro quo the bank gave him a job as a messenger so that he could sometimes train twice a day. He set great store by massage. He changed his diet and gave up smoking, replacing it with toothpicks. Even in

As a prelude were the Libya war of 1912 which Italy fought against the Osman Empire, as well as the two Balkan wars. Greece's Olympic champion of 1912 in the standing long jump Konstantin Tsiklitis (photo), who volunteered and died in 1913 of meningitis.



Remembering the Fallen

Among the 9,340,916 soldiers from some 40 countries and regions who fell in the First World War, there were around 160 men who had competed in the Olympic Games. The toll might well be even higher for the exact details of many sportsmen are not available. The highest number of casualties came from Germany with 2,037,700 killed, followed by Russia (1.7 million), France (1.2 million), Austria-Hungary (1.2 million), Great Britain (710,386), Italy (650,000), Serbia (450,000), Romania (335,706), the Osman Empire (325,000) and the USA (126,000). More than 21 Million soldiers were wounded, among them many sportsmen and many with injuries that affected them for the rest of their lives. In addition are those who through the consequences of the war never had the chance to take part in Olympic Games. This list contains as many as possible but is necessarily still incomplete. It is derived from the researches of the OlyMADMen group and Volker Kluge.

some races he had one in his mouth. Arthur Gibassier, the sports columnist of the "Petit Provençal" newspaper, became his adviser and manager. Bouin published his experiences in 1912 in a book entitled *How to become a running champion*.¹

After his second place in 1909 Bouin won the International Cross Country Championship (effectively the World Championship) three times in a row from 1911 to 1913. In 1911 – the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) had not yet been founded – in Colombes he recorded unofficial world records over 3000 m (8:49 3/5 min) and 10,000 m (30:58.8 min). That same year another star rose in the runners' heaven: Hannes Kolehmainen. The Finn, one year younger, took the English four mile championship on 1 July at Stamford Bridge in London (20:03.6).

The first meeting of the two came on 28 April 1912 at the meeting of the SC Charlottenburg in Berlin. Kolehmainen won in a race over 7500 m. To make sure he was better prepared for the next encounter, Bouin travelled early to Scandinavia to acclimatise for the Olympic Games in Stockholm. On the third day, Kolehmainen won the 10,000m in a time of 31:20.8, later recognised by the IAAF as a world record.

48 hours later the final of the 5000 m took place. This was the race on which Bouin was concentrating. While many had believed he would rely on his strong finish, he tried instead at half-distance to destroy the Finn with a fast-paced race. His lead grew and was soon four metres.

When the bell sounded the last lap, Bouin looked like the certain winner. "But Kolehmainen, with stubborn energy, gained decimeter after decimetre, and, just on the very winning-post, flung himself before Bouin and, in this manner, won the most interesting, the severest and the finest long-distance race that has probably ever been witnessed", states the Official Report.²

The defeat was painful. One year later Bouin returned

to the Stockholm Olympic Stadium, where he set a world record for the hour with 19,021.90 metres. The next placed, the Finn Albin Stenroos, who became Olympic marathon champion in 1924, was 1293.30 metres back. Looking back it is to Bouin's great credit that his best distance could only be improved 15 years later by the legendary Finn Paavo Nurmi.³

Like millions of other men, Bouin was mobilised in August 1914. He served as a soldier of the 163rd infantry regiment, stationed in Nice. The regiment fought in the first battle of the Marne east of Paris, where the advance of five German armies was stopped by a surprising counter-offensive. After that the exhausted regiment was moved to the Meuse, where meanwhile the Germans took the Fort Champ des Romains to interrupt the supply route Toul-Verdun. In a counter-attack on Mont Sec⁴ Bouin lost his life.

Officially he died in the small village of Xivray-et-Marvoisin. He was laid to rest near the castle of Bouconville-sur-Madt. When it later burned down, his body was repatriated along with those of 39 other soldiers and taken to Marseille. A bust by Constant Roux now adorns his grave in the Saint-Pierre cemetery.

In Marseille, Bouin's fiancée waited in vain – she kept her bridal outfit in her chest. When in the early sixties Michel Jazy became the first Frenchman since Bouin to set world records for long distances, she decided to gift him the medals that had belonged to her intended.

Killed in Sarajevo where the war began

By Béla Györ and Vilmos Horváth

Béla Zuławsky was born in Töketerebes (which is in modern day Slovakia) on 23rd of October 1869. He started fencing in 1890 at the Hungarian Athletic Club. He was soon one of the leading fencers alongside Halász, Tasnádi and other successful sportsmen. He chose a



France's wonder runner Jean Bouin as a soldier (2nd class) in 1914 at the front.

Name	Sport	Olympic Games	Date of death	Place of death
AUSTRALIA				
Healy, Cecil	SWI	1906–12	29 AUG 1918	Mont St. Quentin
AUSTRIA				
Braunsteiner, Karl	FTB	1912	19 APR 1916	Tashkent
Kofler, Adolf	CYC	1912	13 APR 1915	Monte Piana
Mayer, Leopold	SWI	1906	21 SEP 1914	unknown
Merz, Robert	FTB	1912	30 AUG 1914	Poturzyn
Neralić, Milan	FEN	1900	17 FEB 1915	Sarajevo
Watzl, Rudolf	WRE	1906	15 AUG 1915	Przemysl
BELGIUM				
Donners, Herman	WAP	1912	14 MAY 1915	Calais
Salmon, Gaston	FEN	1912	1917	unknown
Willems, Victor	FEN	1908–12	1918	unknown

Name	Sport	Olympic Games	Date of death	Place of death
CANADA				
Decouteau, Alex	ATH	1912	17 OCT 1917	Ypres
Duffy, Jimmy	ATH	1912	23 APR 1915	Ypres
Molson, Percival	ATH	1904	5 JUL 1917	Avion
Powell, Bobby	TEN	1908	28 APR 1917	Vimy
Taylor, Geoffrey	ROW	1908–12	24 APR 1915	Ypres
FINLAND				
Halme, Juho	ATH	1908–12	1 FEB 1918	Helsinki
FRANCE				
Alibert, Gaston	FEN	1908	26 DEC 1917	Paris*
Bach, Louis	FTB	1900	16 SEP 1914	Servon-Melzicourt