

# THE MISSING SHOOTER.....FOUND!

By Anthony Th. Bijkerk

**I**n the *Journal of Olympic History*, Volume 6, number 2, Summer 1948, I published an article under the title **THE MISSING SHOOTER (Or The Genesis of Legends Revisited)** in which I took a firm stand against the 'use of unresearched historical information'.

The article was about the name of a Dutch bronze medal winner in the International Free Pistol Match for Teams, during the Games of the II<sup>nd</sup> Olympiad, in Paris, in 1900.

The name which, in the French official report by Daniel Merillon, 'Délégué général' of the 1900 organizing committee for the various sports activities especially organized for the Paris World Exposition in 1900, has been mentioned as "M. van Laan", could never be confirmed from other sources.

Another report, from a Swiss source, gave the name as Mr. Van Haan, and this name too could never be confirmed by any other source.

The late Swedish Olympic historian Lennart Dahllöf himself 'fabricated' a Christian name to go with the family name van Haan, and called the shooter: **Gerardus van Haan**.

From that moment the name **Gerardus van Haan** began to live a life of its own. All Olympic historians took this name over from the Dahllöf lists and mentioned it in their own publications.

This taking over of 'unresearched' information is a habit, which too often finds its place even among respected Olympic historians.

Karl Lennartz from Germany in an article once called this habit: "The Genesis of Legends".

In the conclusion, with which I finished my former article, I wrote: "It also means that most likely the complete name and other data of that shooter will remain a mystery forever!"

That was little over one and a half year ago!

Last winter (1998/1999), I started another effort to find the names and other personal data from the six Dutch participants in one of the 1900 archery events, which event was supposed to be part of the Olympic programme<sup>1</sup>.

Although I had been in contact with the official historian of the Dutch Archery Association for many years, he also had never been able to find a trace of these mysterious persons.

Last February (1999), that same official archery historian called me over the telephone again and advised me to contact another archery historian, who specialized in another very special form of archery called in English: POPINJAY. (In Flemish and Dutch: schieten op de wip).

Upon his advice, I wrote a letter to the new man and with return-mail received his answer, that he would gladly try to help me finding the names.

Less than two weeks later, we struck 'gold'!

My new associate indeed found an article containing the names of the six Dutch archers, all

members of an old and no longer existing archery-club in Tilburg, called: NOOIT VOLLEERD (Never proficient!).

Even more surprising (especially for me) was the fact, that he also found an article in the same newspaper, giving the names of the two Dutch shooting teams going to Paris to compete in the revolver-, and the rifle shooting events.

It completely overthrew any ideas I might have had up to that moment.

This newspaper, called: the PROVINCIAAL NOORDBRABANTSCHE 'S-HERTOGENBOSCHSE COURANT, was published in the Province of Noord-Brabant, and especially in the city of 's-Hertogenbosch.

One of the Dutch shooters, a later world-champion, Antoine Hubertus Maria Bouwens (1876-1963, participant in the 1900 and 1920 Olympic Games), lived



in the city of 's-Hertogenbosch in 1900. That is very likely the reason why the paper published this article on the shooting teams in the first place.

Through my personal relations in 's-Hertogenbosch, I obtained a photocopy of both articles, which confirmed the information I had received from my archery-friend.

The article runs as follows: (translation by me):

“In the international shooting match, to be organized in Versailles this week, will participate from our country:

Revolver: Messrs: Mr. Sillem, Amsterdam; P. Boers Gips, Sweijs and Vuurman, Rotterdam; Van den Bergh, The Hague.

Rifle: Messrs: Mr. Sillem, Amsterdam; Max Ravenswaaij and Vuurman, Rotterdam; Van den Bergh, The Hague and H. Bouwens, 's-Hertogenbosch.

The following countries will take part in the match: France, Italy, Switzerland, Netherlands and Argentine.

Mr. Bouwens is one of the five, who will participate for The Netherlands here.<sup>2</sup>

This article gave me a completely new and until that moment completely unknown name to look for, i.e.: P. Boers Gips.

Then luck left me again. I did not find anybody with that name in the 1902 official memberships-list of the Netherlands Sharpshooters Association, which I carefully kept in my files.

However, under the N.S.A.-members from Rotterdam, I suddenly nod a slightly different name: D. Boest Gips.

This was then confirmed by the information I received from another source: an official genealogist, who has been helping me many times in my research for the personal information on all Dutch Olympians.

He found the information that the family name should have been BOEST GIPS, and that the family originated from the city of Dordrecht. The original family name had been GIPS, but in the late years of the nineteenth century, one of the family-elders decided to add BOEST to the familyname.

There still was one hitch, I now had a name and several family-members, but all with almost the same name. Which now was the real one?

There was only one way to find out.

The real participant in the 1900 Olympics came from Rotterdam, since that was explicitly mentioned in the 1900 newspaper article.

I wrote a letter to the Official City Records in Rotterdam, and asked them to look in their records for a Dirk BOEST GIPS, who should have lived in their city,

I then had to wait several months, before the answer finally came.

The person involved was indeed:

Dirk BOEST GIPS, born 30 July 1864 in Dordrecht; died 11 November 1920 in The Hague.

He was a broker, who lived in Rotterdam for only a few years, and then finally moved to The Hague in 1905, where he died in 1920.

So, the mystery was finally solved and the name of the last Dutch entrant (and supposedly bronze medal-winner) found.

However, one mystery still remains: “Why did the names 'Van Laan' and 'Van Haan' ever pop up in all those early publications?”

I can find only one possible solution for this mystery.

In those early days of ‘gentlemen-sport’ it was a regular custom for sportsmen to use a pseudonym.

We had, for instance, Dutch cyclist Gerard Dagobert Henri BOSCH VAN DRAKESTEIN (1887-1972; participant in three Olympic Games, 1908, 1924 and 1928), who as a 'Jonkheer' belonged to the lower Dutch aristocracy, and who quite often participated in races under his pseudonym of "ULYSSES" (another name for Odysseus of 'Iliad'-fame).

Others, when asked for their name often called themselves 'NN'.

I think it is possible that our shooter, when asked for his name, answered with 'NN', and that the French officials not knowing about this Dutch custom wrote it down as 'Van Laan'.

I can think of no other reason how this name 'Van Laan' could ever have been inserted for so long in Olympic history.

However, it put me and with me many others, completely off track for almost a century!

The name has now been found and order has been restored. It was the only name of a Dutch Olympic 'medal-winner' still missing and I am truly glad the search is over!

<sup>1</sup>. See Bill Mallon's THE 1900 OLYMPIC GAMES: page 33, note 8, which says: It is possible that some of the Dutch archers competed in this event, although no definite evidence to that effect can be found.

<sup>2</sup>. See the shown copy from the original newspaper-clippings, which, of course, are in the Dutch language.