

by Tony Bijkerk

## Introduction:

The text underneath is an edited version of an article written in 1920 by a Dutch participant, Cornelis van ALTENBURG, which I translated because of its historical value. This is, as far as I know, the only existing eye-witness account of the shooting events which took place at Camp Beverloo, but it does not include the trap-shooting events, which took place at another place. The account is a primary example of how competitive shooting took place immediately after the First World War, with great differences in the approach by the non-belligerent countries and those who



**Cornelis van ALTENBURG**

took an active part in the great struggle between the nations. For the information of our readers I should add that Cornelis van ALTENBURG and the other members of the Dutch team belonged to a nation that remained neutral during World War One.

Cornelis van ALTENBURG [Shooting Competition 1920]:

*"The matches took place from 28 July to 4 August at a Belgian military base, Camp Beverloo, situated about 50 kilometres east of the host city of Antwerp. The following countries took part: the United States; Belgium, Brazil; Canada; Denmark; Spain; Finland; France; Greece; the Netherlands; Italy; Norway; Portugal; South-Africa;*



**The Dutch Team**

*Sweden; Switzerland and Czecho-Slovakia. Great Britain was not represented. However, the South-African team contained one English soldier and a couple of English officers. These were born in South-Africa and thus eligible to participate for that country (The soldier had even won the King's Prize in 1920 in England). The representatives from the Netherlands were: C. van ALTENBURG<sup>1</sup>, G.A. van den BERGH<sup>2</sup>, P.J. BRUSSAARD<sup>3</sup>, A. H. BOUWENS<sup>4</sup>, H.M. BOUWENS<sup>5</sup>, C.M. van DALEN<sup>6</sup>, K. PEN<sup>7</sup> and K. WOLDENDORP<sup>8</sup>. Mr. van den BERGH was the delegate.*

*Camp Beverloo consists of stone buildings, originally housing approximately 150,000 soldiers, while at the same time several large buildings offer possibilities for relaxation, like canteens, cinemas and theatres. Many wooden barracks, still in existence, had served for a greater number of soldiers during the German occupation of Belgium. The shooting ranges were built at a distance of about one hour walk from the Camp, the various ranges lying about 150 metres apart.*

*During the matches, at parts of the heath,*

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- <sup>1</sup> Cornelis van ALTENBURG: [\* 24.07.1871 Dordrecht - † 02.08.1953 Dordrecht]; Van ALTENBURG also took part in [rifle] shooting events in 1908 in London.
  - <sup>2</sup> Gerard Anne van den BERGH: [\* 19.11.1882 The Hague - † 22.10.1949 The Hague]; in 1900 in Paris Gerard van den BERGH won the military rifle contest for youth during the shooting events of the 1900 Paris World's Fair [unfortunately for him this was a non-Olympic event]; in 1908, Van den BERGH also participated in the shooting events in London, both in rifle and in pistol.
  - <sup>3</sup> Antonius Hubertus Maria BOUWENS: [\* 22.05.1876 in Hunsel - † 28.03.1963 Beverwijk]; "Antoine" BOUWENS was a three times world champion in shooting. In 1914 he became world champion rifle shooting in three positions, in Viborg, Denmark; in 1924 he became world champion again in rifle shooting, standing position, in Reims, France; and he repeated this championship a year later in St. Gallen, Switzerland. Bouwens already participated in the shooting events of the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris, where he was a member of the bronze medal team in the 50 metres free pistol event and also participated in the rifle team event.
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**van den Bergh, van Dalen, H.M. Bouvens, A.H.M. Bouvens**

the whole day. At the shooting range there was no shelter, not for the shooter whose turn it was, nor for the range-official, nor for the waiting shooters. One had to accept all that came from above... Each country had three targets, all fixed. The

lying about 4 kilometres from the shooting stands, the Belgian Corps of Engineers was still busy detonating German grenades. A whole bunch of grenades were exploded, sometimes at the same time. Watched from a respectable distance it was quite a sight, and with an enormous bang!

The shooters were lodged in the barracks for officers. The quarters consisted of a square room with four bare, blank walls, a bunk, a coat-rack, table, chair, cupboard with an indispensable piece of furniture, a washbasin and an electrical lamp, nothing else. So, no mirror, no water-jug, no carafe or waterbottle, no towel, nor soap. The door could not be locked, the windows were covered with paper to prevent anyone looking in. The toilets mocked at any form of hygiene., brrr...

Each morning we rose at 6; breakfast at 7, of course no tea, but black coffee. No milk available, chocolate even less. The milk for the coffee looked much like starch-water. No cheese, cake or jam, meat or sausages, only eggs. However, these were sold out the first morning. A quick breakfast to be able to catch the tramway at half past seven, which was going in the direction of the shooting stands.

The Americans fared rather better. These gentlemen were picked up and brought back by army vehicles.

The other shooters and especially those who were assigned to the farthest ranges, among them the Dutch, had to remain at the heath

pasting of the targets was accomplished with a little stick. Much time was lost through the pasting of new match targets, because one had to wait for the other stands. Because the targets were fixed [could not be taken up or down, Tony B.], the serving men had to climb from the pit regularly.

At around 6 in the evening marching off, an hour's walk, back home refreshing oneself and then dinner. In the Netherlands we are used to a better dinner. Only two times during our stay we had fair eatable meat. The remainder of the time we got, according to one of ours, reindeerskin, imported by the Fins.

However, the spirit among the shooters was great; nothing left to be desired. Pity that the shooting results were not quite in proportion to that.

The programme for the matches was as follows:

*Military weapon:*

300 metres, 10 shots, standing position: 2 trial shots.

300 metres, 10 shots, prone position: 2 trial shots.

600 metres, 10 shots, prone position: 5 trial shots.

300 and 600 metres, 10 shots, prone position, both distances; trial shots as before.

30 metres, 30 shots, with pistol or revolver.

*Free rifle:*

300 metres, 40 shots standing position, 40

<sup>4</sup> Hermanus Michiel BOUWENS: [\* 29.10.1868 Velden - † 22.07.1955 Rijswijk]; the older brother of Antonius Hubertus Maria BOUWENS.

<sup>5</sup> Pieter Johannes BRUSSAARD: [\* 30.01.1875 Delfshaven - † 28.12.1940 Rotterdam]; Jan BRUSSAARD also participated in the 1908 London Olympic [rifle] shooting events.

<sup>6</sup> Cornelis Marinus van DALEN: [\* 14.03.1885 Monster - † 22.05.1953 Vlaardingen].

<sup>7</sup> Klaas Johan PEN: [\* 02.10.1874 Kuirre - † 21.04.1932 The Hague]; Klaas Johan PEN only stayed two days in Camp Beverloo and then had to return home because of his job, as is mentioned in the article above.

<sup>8</sup> Klaas WOLDENDORP: [\* 12.02.1871 Delft - † 28.02.1936 Rotterdam]; Klaas WOLDENDORP was a member of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps and used to work as a armourer.

*kneeling position, 40 prone position; 10 trial shots each position.*

*50 metres, 40 shots with small-bore rifle (Winchester).*

*50 metres, 60 shots with pistol or revolver, weapon of free choice; 10 trial shots.*

*Everyone was free in his choice of the military weapon. The Belgians also used the American rifles, which according to them were perfect with their ammunition. I saw on those rifles foresights like those on a small-bore rifle. Shooting binoculars were allowed, when not telescopic. Paul van Asbrouck<sup>9</sup> was shooting with a small tube.*

*Instead of using the "kneeling" position, it was permitted to sit with both bottoms on the earth; the legs whether or not crossed, the elbows supported on the knees. Straps were not allowed on the rifles during the shooting. It was not allowed to seek shelter against the air or the wind.*

*The American rifles had special beads which were protected against the sunshine by two curved wings. The supervision was bad. The rifles were not checked. In the French team one shooter used a broad linen cloth band around his middle in the standing position. Before bringing the rifle in the 'ready' position he worked his left elbow between the linen band and his body*

*The Americans, clothed in military uniforms, had during the shooting in the standing position a bandoleer with cartridgepouches around the body. All cartridgepouches were empty except one, which was situated before the left side of the body. This pouch was filled in a very special way and because each coat of the shooters was also provided with thick padded elbows, the cartridgepouch and the padded elbows gave the shooter good support in the standing position. Some Americans had a leatherpadding of about 5 centimetres thickness in the right shoulder; with a small shallow gap showing the place where the rifle should rest.*

*With my friend Woldendorp I pointed out to the officials and referees the unlawfulness during the shooting in the standing position, but our complaints met not with success.*

*"One does it this way and an other does it that way; with the one it can be seen and with the other not", was the answer and in fact those people were right, because there were those who had something inside of their shooting vest, that looked like a dictionary or something like that.*

*The Dutch competitors took part in all events except those with the Winchester [small-bore rifle] and parabellum.<sup>10</sup>*

*With the military rifle at 300 and 600 metres the numbers 12 and 14 were reached. Not once we had trained on the distance of 600 metres.*

*That day there was a strong irregular wind and through the fact that almost all other countries used a better kind ammunition, we were set back in advance.*

*The Americans were supplied with ammunition that was "especially made for the Olympic Games 1920". We found boxes for cartridges with that particular inscription.*

*A Swiss shooter, who exchanged a cartridge with me, said, pointing at our cartridges: "you cannot compete with these against us".*

*Almost all other countries used a pointed bullet and a heavier calibre.*

*The American bullet seems to have an initial velocity of 1030 metres.*

*In spite of the fact that the results with the military rifle had been far from successful, we kept hope that the 120 shots with the free rifle, because of our training, would succeed better.*

*Shooters had luck with the weather that day, no wind and a covered sky. Now and then the sun would show itself.*

*Our shooters used Martini and state ammunition, with one exception Mr. van den Bergh who used a pointed bullet.*

*Our team consisted of Messrs van den Bergh, the Bouwens brothers, Brussaard and van Dalen. My friend Woldendorp and the undersigned had a restperiod and used the opportunity to take a look around at the various shooting stands. Mr. Pen only had a two days leave, and had already left.*

*As a matter of course our first walk was to our*

<sup>9</sup> Paul van ASBROUCK, Belgium: [\* 01.05.1874 - † 1959]; won a bronze medal in military rifle three positions in 1900 in Paris; won a gold medal in Free Pistol and a silver medal in Military Pistol teams at the 1908 London Olympics.

<sup>10</sup> It is not understood what the original author meant with the "Parabellum".

*own friends and when we arrived after a small hour's walk they had all shot a series of ten.*

*We looked at the results, and then looked at each other rather doubtful. It didn't go as it should. No, we didn't understand much about it. They spluttered; the one said this and the other said that, they walked around angry, etc. Every shooter knows how this goes when one does not get what one wants; and especially when the obtained results are not in the least expected. And what was the reason? Nobody knew the answer to that question.*

*The two of us thought it wisest to continue on our way; so we couldn't be blamed for the bad results.*

*A bit further we came to the Spaniards, and after them the South-Africans. These last ones were very nice guys.*

*If one could not express himself well enough in English, they understood you well enough. Later came to light that most of them spoke excellent Dutch.*

*The South-Africans used for shooting in the standing position a cartridge, with a lower initial velocity as in the usual cartridge. This was done to lower the recoil of the rifle.*

*Something that immediately took our attention during our visit to the Spaniards was the absolute silence at the stand. When we came a bit close to the shooting stands itself, we were politely requested to go back a little and a moment later even the table with the registering officials was moved further backwards.*

*Even that made a lot of difference with the hustle and bustle we had witnessed at our compatriots... No witnessed I should not say, because we are all used to this boisterous atmosphere too much.*

*The heavy silence at all the other countries that was what took our attention and the ultimate silence we witnessed at the... of course Americans.*

*Maybe it is a bit strange to talk about deathlike silence with shooting matches, but when no shot was fired, one heard absolutely nothing there at the American stand.*

*Accidentally, they had been appointed a part of the heath that was lying low and far away from the next country's stand on the right side. On their left side the distance to the shooting was at least a few kilometres (the part where*

*the stands with the electrically moved targets were, left of the American stand, was not used); so that one only heard shots fired at a long distance.*

*When we arrived at the stand of the Americans, the registering official, who could see through our badges that we were Dutch came to us and told us that just then a shooter had scored 88 points in the standing position.*

*We thought that to be a very good performance, but just when we had told him so or a Major (WOLDENDORP called him a Major and he should know) came walking up quite angrily and asked us for silence. Through his large pair of spectacles he looked at us as if he would look us away. WOLDENDORP became scared and wanted to leave, but I wanted to witness the shooting and especially the shooting of the one who shot those 88 points.*

*Soon we witnessed the way in which those gentlemen shot in the standing position and I thought maybe they will get a bit shy, but nothing of that!*

*Now and then, when they stood too long in the ready position and the cartridgepouch had sagged too much; they pulled up first.*

*Once again I risked a whispering talk with the registering official and this talkative Belgian told us that the Americans had especially trained for two consecutive years with 100 shots each day. For each shooter, according to our spokesman, 4000 Dollar had been made available by the American Government, but only if they would train and shoot with a rifle and ammunition from the Government.*

*The shooters had been transported to Europe with a man-of-war about one month before the actual match; they then passed the time in the occupied zone training each day on a heath that had been put at their disposal.*

*The shooters didn't lack any personal comfort. A medical officer, batmen, three motor-vehicles, this all made sure that nothing was left to be desired.*

*When we asked who had been the shooter with that series of 88 points, our spokesman pointed at a closeby car in which two shooters, who were not in turn, were resting flat out.*

*In the mean time we witnessed all by*

ourselves that the shooters after each shot sat down on a small chair for a moment of rest.

Next to each shooter sat an officer who used a pair of field glasses (binoculars?) and a small green booklet on which the "Loosduinen" target was drawn.

When the shooter standing next to him had placed a shot, the officer would use his binoculars to see where the shot had fallen and where it was pasted over, and then to the indication of the score in points.

In the mean time the shooter sat down waiting until his assistant could show him on the green booklet where his shot had landed. Thus he gave his eyes rest during the pasting of the target and the indication of the points and by sitting down his body rested too.

There was no talking between the shooter and his assistant; sometimes a whisper was lisped between the two of them.

We didn't have to wait long for our standing shooter, because soon he came out of the car to busy himself with cleaning his rifle.

A big square trunk filled up with all possible materials he had at his disposal. He began with putting a wad into the barrel and then filled the barrel with oil, which he then let flow away into the soil. Then with at least ten small flannel patches sized approx. 5 by 4 centimetres, he pulled these through to clean the barrel.

When I told friend Woldendorp that this was a bit overdone, he told me that all these pursuits were to give the shooter some sort of distraction from the job at hand.

Then our shooter went to the shooting stand to replace a colleague.

He started with sitting down, with the rifle over his knees; pulled back a small flap that had protected the sight; then removed the protection from the foresight or turned it around, I do not exactly know which; blew again over the sight and then stood up slowly. Before actually shooting he made a dry run three times and not just like that, but with

several take downs and sighing to go with it.

First shot an 8; second one a 1, say one!

Only a movement of the right arm clearly showed us that the shot had been a bad one. No sound came over the lips of our shooter. The next shot was a 10 and together with the 1, he still reached a score of 82. He could shoot!

Some of our best known international shooters might not think too high of such standing position scores, but where Woldendorp and myself had witnessed the results of our compatriots that morning and also those of several other foreign shooters, many people will not be surprised that we thought the performances of that American shooter great.

We took our leave from the friendly Belgian and took ourselves back to the stand of the Dutch. My, my, what a striking difference we could observe.

We couldn't fail to tell them about the experiences of our visit to the Americans. In order not to disturb the shooters, we strolled back to the camp for lunch.

In the late afternoon our shooters finished and the results were far below the expected results we had had in the training sessions.

The provisional results are as follows:

United States: 4876, Norway 4741, Switzerland 4700, Finland 4667, Denmark 4635, Sweden 4591, France 4485, Netherlands 4381, Italy 4369, South Africa 4292, Spain 4080, Belgium 3936, Greece 3910, Tsjecho-Slowakia 3542.

Worldchampion: FISHER United States<sup>11</sup> 996; Number 2 LARSEN Denmark<sup>12</sup> 985, Number 3 OSBURN United States<sup>13</sup> 979.

The three other American shooters each made an average of 967 points.

Individually our Dutch shooters made the following scores: MESSRS. Van den BERGH 939, A. BOUWENS 909, H. BOUWENS 854, BRUSSAARD 841 and van DALEN 828. An average of 874 points.

<sup>11</sup> Morris FISHER, United States: [\* 04.05.1890 - † 23.05.1968]; FISHER won three gold medals in Free rifle; Free rifle (teams); Military rifle – 300 metres prone (teams) in Antwerp in 1920; in 1924 in Paris, he won another two gold medals in Free rifle and Free rifle (teams).

<sup>12</sup> Nils Hansen Ditlev LARSEN, Denmark: [\* 21.11.1889 - † 15.11.1969]; won two bronze medals at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm in Free rifle and Free rifle (teams); in Antwerp in 1920 he won a gold medal in Military rifle – 300 metres standing (team); a silver medal in Free rifle; and in Paris in 1924 he won a bronze medal in Free rifle.

<sup>13</sup> Carl OSBURN, United States: [\* 0505.1884 - † 28.12.1966]; Carl OSBURN won a gold medal in Military rifle (teams);

*The evening of the match all shooters attended a banquet offered by the Belgian Committee. Several glowing speeches were spoken by the various delegates, while the national anthems of all attending countries were played by a band of musicians and were listened to standing by all attendees,*

*On Sunday it was resting in the morning and we could sleep a bit longer and after having cleaned up ourselves we visited the village of Bourg-Leopold.*

*When we came back to the canteen for lunch we were pleasantly surprised by a visit of our esteemed chairman. Mr. Remy de BLOCK with his wife, who had used the latest form of transport to travel from London to Brussels and next travelled by car to visit the representatives from the Netherlands. The chairman was very sorry to hear that the shooting match had already taken place and that the same day all shooters had already attended the banquet.*

*It had been his intention to be witness of the in his opinion good shooting of the team and to speak at the banquet. Our guests visited the stand that afternoon to witness our Dutch pistolshooters and our chairman could then for himself take note that due to the wind that blew right across the track it was impossible to train for the next days shooting, let alone match shooting with such a wind. And that next day it was the same wind.*

*Again the results didn't turn out as expected, in spite of the fact that due to the wind nothing could be expected.*

*I can only give the provisional results, because to my regret and in spite of several letters, I did not receive any information from Mr. van den Bergh, who stayed a full day longer and who had the full results in his possession.*

*With pistol Mr. van den Bergh shot 445, A. Bouwens 444, Woldendorp 443, C. van Altenburg 397 and H. Bouwens 394 points, in total 2123 points. The Americans, who shot with Smith and Wesson became 1st; we*

*possibly 8.*

*Our plan also to participate in the match with Parabellum (small-bore) had to be cancelled because Brussaard got a fever on Monday evening. Fortunately I had brought aspirine and Brussaard who had never in his life used aspirine now knows that it has a beneficial influence with fever.*

*We thought it better especially with regard to Brussaard's health to depart the next morning and only Mr. van den Bergh stayed behind.*

*We were happy when we arrived in Eindhoven and could get a good glass milk and the others a good cup of coffee, while at the same time we looked with open eyes at the busy hustle in front of the railway station. We again saw normal people, women, motorcars, salesmen, etc.*

*Our food was more expensive, but... it tasted and it was better digestible.*

*Before I make an end to this story, I want to tell one particular happening.*

*During the match at 600 metres in prone position the Americans were equal with the South-Africans.*

*Three times they repeated the shoot and each time the results remained equal. Even the individual shots were equal, as many 5's and 6's (the target was made of two circles with 5 and 6 points)*

*It came to be that the South-Africans were not on very good terms with the Americans; because the request to shoot at the same stand, to draw lots and to shoot at 2 stands closely next to each other were all turned down by the Africans.*

*In the end the Americans won after all. And then, again at 600 metres, individually, a match had to be shot between a Greek and an American; two shots each. The Greek made 5 and 6. The American shot 6. The next shot must be a 6 too. After twenty minutes, and ten times taking down his rifle the final shot came. It was a 6."*

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two silver medals in Military rifle – 300 and 600 metres, and Military rifle 600 metres; and one bronze medal in small-bore rifle – 50 metres (teams) at the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm; he won four gold medals, in Military rifle – 300 metres standing; in Free rifle (teams); in Military rifle – 300 metres prone (teams); and in Military rifle – 300 and 600 metres (teams) at the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp; he also won a silver medal in Military rifle – 300 metres standing (teams); and a bronze medal in Running deer shooting – single shot (teams); at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris he won a silver medal in Free rifle.

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## Conclusion

The article originally came to me, many years (decades actually) ago, in the form of a contemporary typed report in the Dutch language. Much later, I discovered that the whole article had also been printed in the form of a series in the official magazine of the Royal Netherlands Shooting Association [KNSA]: *De Scherpschutter*. This magazine at the time appeared every month and as a consequence the article was split into three parts and was published over a period of three months.

However, the fact that it was published in the 'official magazine' of the KNSA makes the article much more acceptable as an official historical source. The value of the material

can not be fully ascertained, as I know of no other contemporary eye-witness accounts or reports on the 1920 Olympic shooting events, other than the pages dedicated in the Report of the American Olympic Committee – Seventh Olympic Games, Antwerp, Belgium, 1920, pages 109-127, to the participation of the American shooting teams in the Antwerp Olympics. However, the facts mentioned in that report coincides with the results mentioned in the account above.

I found the description of the shooting discipline of the various teams, as recorded by Cornelis van ALTENBURG of particular value. Anyone familiar with this sport will recognize the circumstances he described.

# OLYMPIC EXCAVATIONS

by Don Anthony

## First Excavation

In early 1892 it was reported that<sup>1</sup> the "*Grecian Games*" took place in the Liverpool Gymnasium. Both the Greek and the French consuls in that city were in attendance. There were many others from the Greek community and from the local populace.

The Greek consul, Mr. E.D. BARFF, opened the proceedings and said that as far as he could see the games were '*done correctly*' and reflected great credit, not only to the young athletes, but also on their instructor Mr. A. ALEXANDER. ALEXANDER was then presented with a "*very rare coin*" minted in the reign of Alexander the Great, "*some 2300 years old*". Alexander presented a remarkable "*athletic novelty*" in the shape of a "*renaissance of the Games by Homer, as practised by the youth of Ancient Greece upwards of 2000 years ago*". It would be remembered that "*while the Greeks were devoted to athletic exercise for the development of the body, they were always evinced of the need to improve the mind*". A procession preceded the several items on the programme:

Throwing the disc;

The Atalanta race (starting and returning from and to a starting point);

Throwing the javelin;

A halter race – feet tied at the ankles – jumps;

Throwing the spear at a target;

Leaping the barrier;

Scaling the heights;

Climbing a long smooth pole;

The Grecian Display – in which all competitors, together, depicted "*grace, speed, strength, boxing, wrestling, fighting, the heroics of Ajax, and the 'dying gladiator' in which the winning gladiator 'carries off on his shoulders his slain adversary'!*".

A chariot race was also included.

The Greek consul reminded the audience that the Olympian Games of antiquity consisted of five contests: the pentathlon: running, boxing, leaping, wrestling and chariot racing. These Grecian Games had seven contests. This was the only fault he could find!

In the gymnastic competitions wreaths for winners were in gold, silver, and bronze

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<sup>1</sup> "The Gymnasium", in: *Journal of the National Physical Recreation Society*, IV(March 1892)1.