

Setting The Record Straight

*What actually happened at the funeral of
Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, President of the International Olympic Committee
from 1925 to his death in 1942.*

By Anthony Th. Bijkerk

In the *Olympische Rundschau - Revue Olympique/Olympic Revue*, number 17 from April 1942, Dr. Carl Diem, editor of the magazine, devoted a whole issue to commemorate the death of the then IOC President Count Henri de Baillet-Latour. The IOC President had passed away in his home in Elsene, Brussels, during the night from 6 to 7 January 1942.

The world, at that moment was in the middle of an unprecedented World War, which had just been extended to the Far-East, drawing Japan and the United States into the world-wide conflict. Dr. Carl Diem belonged, there can be no doubt about it, to the Nazi-German side of the belligerents, and it is therefore understandable that his review of the Count's funeral is, to say the least, somewhat distorted.

I will restrict myself to the actual happenings at the funeral itself, because otherwise I would be repeating facts that have been reported about in several books, such as the 1994 IOC-publication: *1894-1994 The International Olympic Committee - One Hundred Years/The Ideas - The Presidents - The Achievements*.

I will start reproducing Dr. Diem's account of the funeral ceremony, because his story is the most distorted one.



Karl Ritter von Halt, IOC member for Germany, laying down Adolph Hitler's wreath on the bier of Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, IOC President.

Dr. Diem wrote:

"The body of the late President had been laid out in state in the reception room of his residence. The coffin had been covered with the five-ring Olympic flag while to the left and right of it cushions with the orders and decorations had been placed. At 10 o'clock in the forenoon a memorial service was held at the house of mourning, at which the IOC was represented by Dr. von Halt in his capacity as a member of the Executive Committee, by Baron de Laveleye and Baron Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, the latter making a short address in memory of Count de Baillet-Latour and depositing the wreath of the IOC. Werner Klingeberg, Secretary of the IOC, had arrived from Paris; Dr. Diem represented the International Olympic Institute and the German Olympic Committee.

"Dr. von Halt had been commissioned to deposit the wreath dedicated by the Fuhrer and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler; Minister Plenipotentiary von Bargaen expressed the condolence of, and deposited the wreath dedicated by, the Reich's Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop, whilst Major Dr. Gerhardus, Dr. von Halt, Colonel Froitzheim, Chief of the Administrative Section with the Military Commander, and Dr. Diem deposited the wreaths dedicated by Reich Minister Dr. Goebbels, the Reich Sport Leader, General von Falkenhausen, and the German Olympic Committee respec-

tively. Subsequently there appeared the representatives of the Belgian sport, the now officiating Vice-Presidents Seeldrayers and Loicq; Secretary General Verdyck; M. Boin, President of the International Association of Journalists; M. Collignon, President of the International Cycling Association; M. Anspach, President of the International Fencing Association; and M. De Raeve, Vice President of the International Swimming Association. Following the conclusion of the memorial service, the coffin was transferred to the near-by St. Jacques-sur-Goudenberg Church where Prebendary Cochetoux, acting for Archbishop Van Roey celebrated the mass for the dead. In addition to the relatives, there were representatives of the Belgian Authorities and of the Authorities of Occupation, as well as leaders of the Olympic and Belgian sports. Also many of the Belgian active and Olympic contestants could be noticed. When the last sounds of the Requiem had died away and the mourners had paid their last respects to the demised, the coffin was transferred to the van Laeken Cemetery whence at the proper time it will be placed in the family tomb on the estate of the House of Baillet-Latour near Antwerp."

(Note: ISOH-member Dr. Roland Renson from the K.U. in Leuven pointed out to the author that the name of the mentioned Cemetery should be 'Laeken Cemetery' and not 'van Laeken Cemetery'. I decided to leave the text of the



Attending the funeral ceremony were from left to right, Rodolphe-William Seeldrayers (IOC member from Belgium); Prince Albert de Ligne; Victor Boin (famous Belgian sportsman who took the oath at the 1920 Olympics); Baron Alphert Schimmelpenninck van der Oye (IOC member for The Netherlands, and representing the IOC); Prof. Dr. Carl Diem; and Karl Ritter von Halt (IOC member from Germany).

quotation in its original form.)

In Volume I of the series: *1894 - 1994 The International Olympic Committee - One Hundred Years* the text about what happened at the funeral ceremony is somewhat different. This text was provided by Prof. Dr. Karl Lennartz, leader of the 'Carl und Liselott Diem - Archiv' at the German Sporthochschule in Cologne (Köln). Dr. Lennartz wrote on page 218/219:

"At the memorial service in Baillet-Latour's house, only three IOC members were present in the persons of von Halt, the Belgian Gaston de Trannoy and the Dutchman Alphert Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, who laid the IOC's wreath and spoke a few words of remembrance, all three from the German sphere of influence.

Diem, who was officially representing the International Olympic Institute, described in his diary the mood of the members of the Belgian NOC in their discussions concerning the memorial service as follows: "We sensed their concern that we were making ourselves too obvious and seeking to make some kind of propaganda".

About a decade ago, my good friend Wolf Lyberg, Executive Committee member of the ISOH, asked me for information about the lives of the Dutch members of the IOC.

I happened already to be in contact with Mrs. Gratia M.M. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, who at the 4th Olympic Winter Games in Garmisch Partenkirchen in 1936, represented the Netherlands in the skiing events. She is one of the daughters of the late Baron Alphert Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, President of the Olympic Organizing Committee for the Games of the IXth Olympiad, Amsterdam 1928, President of the Netherlands Olympic Committee and Member of the International Olympic Committee from 1925 until his death in 1943.

I then requested her assistance in writing the Baron's biography.

She gladly gave me the requested help, but did not write it herself. She left it to her elder sister, who wrote the biography in English on my behalf.

Upon reading the biography, I found to my surprise that this sister had accompanied her father to Count Henri de Baillet-Latour's funeral. In the biography she gave a different description of the events which happened at the funer-

al. Because this can be regarded as an eye-witness report, I will reproduce that part of the biography verbatim. She wrote:

"His last activity for the IOC was his attendance at the funeral of the Count De Baillet-Latour, President of the IOC, at Brussels in 1942.

"The Baron received a message from IOC Vice-President Edström from Stockholm in neutral Sweden, requesting him as member of the IOC to go to Brussels and attend the President's funeral and place a wreath in the name of the International Olympic Committee.

"Accordingly he travelled to Brussels, an hazardous adventure as international travel was prohibited during the Nazi-occupation. On the day of the funeral he went to

Count De Baillet-Latour's house, where he was confronted with a German deputation, which included a number of high-ranking Nazi's in uniform, bearing a huge wreath adorned with the swastika and further Nazi regalia. A long loud German speech followed and the wreath was deposited in the name of the Fuhrer and . . . the International Olympic Committee!

"It was sad to see the appalled faces of the bereaved family.

"After an embarrassing silence, the Baron came forward and, ignoring what had occurred, holding a normal size wreath, with a quiet dignified speech in French (which the Baron spoke fluently), told the family that he had been requested by the Swedish Vice-President, who was at that moment the Acting President of

the I.O.C., to present the wreath in the name of the International Olympic Committee. Thereafter, he commemorated the deceased President and expressed gratitude for all he had done for the I.O.C. and for the protection and furtherance of its aims, thereby restoring the occasion to the necessary decorum."

Some additional comments are necessary. First of all, I want to point out that what Karl Lennartz said in his historical IOC-publication might be mis-interpreted, especially by those people who lived during those terrible times in 1942. Lennartz wrote: "that all three IOC-members who attended the funeral came from the German sphere of influence". If he meant that to be the 'occupied countries' of Belgium and the Netherlands, then what he says is correct. But I want to stress the fact that the intended 'influence' was certainly not a free choice for the two IOC members from

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Belgium and the Netherlands. As indicated in the story from Schimmelpenninck's daughter, to travel around freely was only permitted to people with a German nationality. All others had to have special permissions, sustained by travel-documents.

Of course, it remains a matter of dispute, whether the wreath deposited by the Germans in the name of Adolf Hitler, had, indeed, been deposited in the name of the International Olympic Committee too.

As a matter of fact, this incident has also been reported on page 117 of Volume 11 from *The Olympic Century* series, as published by World Sport Research & Publications Inc. in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.

It could certainly be a possibility that the story actually happened as described by Schimmelpenninck van der Oye's daughter, and that Carl Diem later adapted his article for the *Olympische Rundschau*, to have it fit with the actual fact that the Dutch IOC-member really had deposited the wreath in the name of the IOC. But then, please do not forget that the Germans, as the occupying country, in 1942 certainly would have claimed to be the 'first in line' to pay tribute to the late IOC-President.

I haven't been there, but I thought it appropriate to let our readers know about the other side of the story, compared to as it had been told originally by Dr. Diem.

Sometimes it is necessary "to restore Olympic history to its necessary decorum" too!

By the way, Dr. Diem made another strange historical mistake in his 1942 review of the funeral ceremony in Brussels. In his elaborate article, as reproduced above, he mentions the attendance of the Belgian IOC-member Baron Edouard de Laveleye.

This could not have been possible, because Baron De Laveleye already died on November 25th, 1938.

Prof. Karl Lennartz corrected this mistake in his 1994 review.

Sources:

1. George Constable: in *THE XI, XII, & XIII OLYMPIADS, Berlin 1936, St. Moritz 1948*, World Sport Research & Publications Inc.,

Los Angeles, Volume 11, page 117.

2. Dr. Carl Diem: in *OLYMPISCHE RUNDSCHAU / REVUE OLYMPIQUE / OLYMPIC REVIEW*, Heft 17, April 1942, Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, Berlin, page 24.

3. Prof. Dr. Karl Lennartz: in 1894-1994, *THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE - ONE HUNDRED YEARS*, Volume I, Lausanne 1994, The International Olympic Committee, pages 218 - 219.

4. Prof. Dr. Roland Renson: in an article in *SPORTIMONIUM*, the magazine of the Flemish Sportsmuseum, Number 3, 1998, pages 53-59.

5. Mrs. G.M.M. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, written biography of her father Alphert Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, document written by her elder sister; personal files of the author.

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the mood of the members
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Notation: I started this article many years ago, in 1995, when upon a request from ISOH President Ian Buchanan, I wrote the biography from the late IOC-member in the Netherlands, Alphert baron Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. Of course, for that purpose I used the biography I had received a decade before from his eldest daughter, in which the story about the funeral of Count De Baillet-Latour had been described in detail. I then thought the story to be of interest and I still do.

When I finished the article, I mailed a copy to Prof. Dr. Roland Renson in Leuven, Belgium, with the request to look at the contents

and, if possible and necessary, add to its contents. After all, Count Henri De Baillet-Latour was a Belgian.

Renson contacted me, informing me that he was trying to trace the actual burial place of Count De Baillet-Latour, because the "Laeken Cemetery" mentioned in the article was no longer the final resting place of the late IOC-President.

In 1997 and 1998, our contacts about the article continued, especially so because in the mean time Renson had indeed found the final resting place of the Count in the municipal cemetery of the small village of Latour and wanted a photograph of this to be added to the article.

Early in 1998 my computer crashed, and I lost most of my material, including the current article.

Fortunately, Dr. Renson still had his copy and I requested his help in returning a photocopy to me, which he did.

In the mean time, he himself had written an article of his own, with completely new and interesting historical material, in the regular publication *SPORTIMONIUM* of the Flemish Sportsmuseum. For this article, he used recently discovered photographic materials made at the funeral ceremony in 1942 and kept in the Belgium Study and Documentation Centre SOMA in Brussels.

The photographic materials were discovered by David Vander

Elst in 1994, during the research for his thesis at the University of Leuven.

I also contacted the Study Centre SOMA and received official permission to use these photographs in our Journal too!

However, there is one thing that still bothers us (both Dr. Roland Renson and myself).

Why is it that the burial place of this President of the International Olympic Committee, which played such an important role in the destiny of this organization, is now looking so forlorn and neglected? The tombstone is frayed and the letters can hardly be seen or read. Maybe, there still is a task left for the IOC to 'restore the necessary decorum' and at the same time pay tribute to its late member and president!

Count Henri de Baillet-Latour (1 March 1876 - 6/7 January 1942).



The very much uncared for tombstone of Count Henry de Baillet-Latour, who was President of the International Olympic Committee from 1925 until his death in 1942.

- ž Elected IOC-member for Belgium in 1903;
- Co-founder of the Belgian Olympic Committee in 1906;
- ž Chef de Mission of the Belgian Olympic team in 1908 in London, and in 1912 in Stockholm;
- ž President of the Organizing Committee for the Games of the VIIth Olympiad, Antwerp 1920;
- ž Elected Resident of the Belgian Olympic Committee in 1923, which office he kept until his death;
- ž Elected on the Executive Committee of the International Olympic Committee in 1921; Elected President of the International Olympic Committee, to succeed Baron Pierre de Coubertin, in 1925;
- ž Re-elected to this office in 1933.



The churchyard in which the former IOC President is buried is the municipal cemetery of Latour, a small Belgium village. St. Martin Church is in background.