

JUST A NAME

by Tony Bijkerk

In the history of the Olympic Games there are many names that have received a place on the highest pedestal of the famous; most of these because of their record in the sports arena. Only a few received such honors for other accomplishments. But in the search for details from Dutch Olympic history, I also came across a name from an ordinary Olympic participant, who, in his later years, gave an example of exemplary behavior, which was unknown for a long time!

Richard Leonard Arnold Schoemaker came to the Royal Netherlands Military Academy as a cadet in 1905, having been born in Roermond on 5 October 1886. He was accepted as a cadet for the Army of the Netherlands East Indies to serve in the Corps of Military Engineering. During his time at the Academy, Schoemaker was a very active cadet; not only socially, but also in sports. He not only rowed, but was also very accomplished in fencing and shooting. During his last year, he became a member of the Senate, a body of cadet-students who organized the social activities at the Academy. In his graduation year, 1908, he was selected to represent The Netherlands in fencing at the Games of the IVth Olympiad in London. He participated in the individual sabre competition and was eliminated in the second round.

After the games he departed as a second lieutenant for service in the Netherlands East Indies. His career went without a hitch; promotion to first lieutenant in 1910 and to captain in 1915. This was his last rank in active service because immediately after the end of World War I, he left both the Indies and the service. Just before that period, he had become a professor in constructional engineering at the Technical Academy in Bandoeng and he proceeded with this new career upon his return to the Netherlands. He was nominated as a professor of architecture at the Technical Academy in Delft. He was also promoted to reserve-major in the Army.

From his period in Delft, there is not much to tell; only that Schoemaker was involved in the building of several Army barracks all over the southern part of the country. That was shortly before World War II.

During the start of World War II, he was called up to serve in the Technical Corps of Engineering in Culembourg, but he was not involved in any fighting against the German invaders. Immediately after the surrender of the Dutch Armed Forces in May 1940, he decided to join the Underground. This was not strange as many others did the same. But in those days, the Underground was still in its infancy and quite amateurish. Most of them concerned themselves with intelligence and small acts of espionage. There were many small groups, mostly consisting of former military personnel and students. Schoemaker had his contacts in both groups.

Together with his fellow-professor of geology, Prof. Dr. Ir. J. A. A. Mekel, he commanded a small sabotage- and espionage-group. They tried to establish ammunition-depots and to construct secret codes for messages to Great Britain. But they never succeeded in establishing an official link with Great Britain. Through his work with his own group, Schoemaker came into contact with the *Ordedienst* (the OD), an organization consisting mostly of former military, and in fact a fusion of several Underground groups. Founder of the OD was the reserve Lieutenant-Colonel Johan Westerveld.

The German *Sicherheitspolizei* was hunting for these first Dutch underground fighters from early 1941. And these early fighters, with little or no experience in underground activities at that time, were as yet no match for the Germans. These Germans had problems with the many independent operating groups and, in their opinion, there were many more saboteurs belonging to the *Ordedienst* than was actually the case.

Richard Leonard Arnold Schoemaker was arrested, after betrayal, on 2 May 1941 and, unfortunately, he was regarded as belonging to the OD by his German captors. He thus became the first victim of an official *Ordedienst* lawsuit; to which all other “bosses” of the OD were condemned, including Westerveld himself. Schoemaker was regarded to be one of those prominent leaders.

The arrested persons were locked up in the state prison in Scheveningen, later receiving the honorary name *Oranjehotel*, because so many illustrious members of the Dutch Underground went through its cells. Life in this prison still remained durable; there was as yet no torture.

Between September 1941 and March 1942 all prisoners were dispatched to *Durchgangslager Amersfoort* for the official lawsuit. The German captors hardened their attitude. Life consisted in the pulling down and sawing of trees, toiling with sand, and a very poor life in the barracks. The prisoners were kept close-cropped and had little or no personal properties. The German SS was in charge of this camp.

On 27 March 1942, the lawsuit against the “Westerveld-Group” was begun in the hotel in Amersfoort and Schoemaker was included in this first batch of 85 prisoners. After the first day the prisoners were returned to the camp and put in the prison there. With great effort other prisoners could contact the separated ones and via a small window, Schoemaker learned of the charges against him. These were “espionage,” “possession of arms,” and “membership of a secret organization against the Third Reich.”

The *Feldgericht* was quickly decided about the proof of the accusations and declared that all prisoners were guilty. The lawsuit had in fact nothing to do with official legal justice and the fact that “proof” for one man was counted for “all,” says enough about this “judgment.”

On 7 April 1942 the canteen from the SS-barracks, situated immediately next to the prison, was decorated with portraits of Hitler, Himmler, and Göring, and with flags bearing a Swastika. In this area the sentence for the prisoners was announced as the same for all: the death penalty. Schoemaker was among the convicted.

The convicted were brought over to another separate barracks, under special SS-guards. On 11 April 1942 came the final session of the court. Seventy-one (71) death penalties were confirmed, among them 63 from the *Ordedienst* and eight (8) from the “Mekel-Schoemaker”

group. Of the 63, six were students from the Technical Academy in Delft, fifteen officers, and three non-commissioned officers.

From that moment onwards, everything happened quickly; after a roll-call in the camp, lasting an hour, the prisoners were loaded onto trucks that took the prisoners to Utrecht. On 1 May 1942, they were loaded on a train to Dranienburg, near Berlin, at which they arrived on 2 May. They were taken by truck to the nearby camp Sachsenhausen, where, after another roll-call, they were locked up in a bunker. In the early morning of 3 May 1942, the convicts were brought up to the *Schießstand* (shooting place) and, in groups of twelve each, they were executed by a firing squad.

On 3 May 1946 the 71 from Sachsenhausen were remembered by a grateful country. In their honor, a monument was unveiled to remember the highest sacrifice that a human being can bring to his convictions. Among these was Richard Leonard Arnold Schoemaker, in 1908 a participant in fencing at the London Olympic Games and one who was actually unknown until this story was unearthed in the past few months.

[Note: With thanks to Mr. Wim Klinken from the Royal Netherlands Military Academy for his permission to use his own article as a basis for this story.]