

# HOW A PHOTOGRAPH SAVED HERMAN VAN KARNEBEEK'S LIFE

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*The biography of Herman Adriaan van Karnebeek, IOC-member from 8 October 1964 to 18 June 1977; Member of the Executive Board from 1968 to 1975 and vice-president from 1970 to 1975.*

**H**erman Adriaan, Jonkheer van Karnebeek was born 11 November 1903 in The Hague, the Netherlands. After spending his early youth in the city where he was born, he started studying economics at the Netherlands Economic University in Rotterdam. For sports, he participated in football in the first team of the famous club HVV in The Hague and even made it to team-captain. He also played cricket and hockey, liked to fence, and played tennis. Horse-riding was also one of his favourite pastimes.

Herman came from a prominent Dutch family. His father Jonkheer Mr. Dr. H.A. van Karnebeek was the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1918 to 1927.

In the year 1921, to be precise, on 3 March 1921, the then Crown-Prince Hirohito from Japan (born 29th April, 1901) departed Japan on board the Japanese Imperial Navy cruiser 'Katori' for an orientation-visit to Europe. He arrived 8 May 1921 in the British Naval port and basis of the British home fleet, Portsmouth.

On Wednesday, 15 June 1921, the distinguished Japanese party arrived by train at the Central Station in Amsterdam, for a four day visit to the Netherlands. Arriving in Amsterdam, Crown-Prince Hirohito was wearing the uniform of a Major in the Imperial Army of Japan, and wore the Grand-Cross of the 'Nederlandse Leeuw' (a high Dutch order).

This high award had been accorded Crown-Prince Hirohito on May 3rd, 1919 in Japan.

The Crown-Prince was received by Prince Hendrik of the Netherlands, wearing the full uniform of a Grand Admiral in the Royal Netherlands Navy with all paraphernalia, including the highest Japanese order of the Chrysanthemum, on his chest.

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Thursday, 16 June 1921, Crown-Prince Hirohito departed for a visit to The Hague, where he was received for an official dinner at the palace of the Queen-Mother Emma, with Queen Wilhelmina and Prince Hendrik attending.

Immediately afterwards, the Japanese party departed for the official residence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Dr. H.A. van Karnebeek (Senior) to attend a soiree.

It was during this evening-soiree that the son, Herman A. van Karnebeek (Junior) met with the Japanese Crown-Prince Hirohito, spoke with him, and even exchanged a hand-shake with him at the departure of the Japanese guests.

A photograph was made, where both Van Karnebeek's, Senior and Junior, were immortalized together with the later Emperor Hirohito.

However strange it may be, this soirée (and that photograph) made the difference between life and death for the later IOC-member Herman van Karnebeek, as will be told in this story later.

After his economic studies in Rotterdam, young Van Karnebeek departed for Oklahoma in the United States to get some experience in the oil industries.

In 1927, he joined the N.V. STANDARD VACUUM PETROLEUM MAATSCHAPPIJ (STANVAC) and was stationed in the Netherlands East Indies, first on locations in Borneo (Kalimantan) and Sumatra. Later he became its Managing-Director in Batavia (now called Djakarta, Indonesia).

His sports career was limited to an occasional round of golf, but he became president of the South Sumatra Football Association, and later president of the Batavia Sportclub and president of the local golf-club in Batavia. It was to the beginning of a career in sports-administration!

He still was a reserve-officer in the Royal Netherlands Army (Field-Artillery); and was nominated commander of the local 'guard' in Batavia; a semi-military organisation.

**D**uring the Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies, in February 1942, reserve-officer Herman van Karnebeek was ordered to Sumatra to lead the sabotaging and destruction of the oil-installations, which task he performed very well.

Purely by accident, the Japanese invasion forces came to know the name of the perpetrator, and Van Karnebeek was immediately captured and put in prison. The Japanese had few qualms about sentencing to death anybody interfering with their war-machine.

Of course, for his actions on Sumatra, Herman van Karnebeek received that same sentence: 'the death-penalty' (usually the Japanese beheaded their military victims).

He was put away in the death-cell, and while waiting for his sentence to be carried out, the Japanese commanding officer in Bogor (West-Java) was informed about the sentence, but also about the existence of a photograph where the condemned 'victim' was standing next to the Japanese emperor during the soiree in The Hague, on June 16, 1921.

The death-sentence was immediately revoked and Van Karnebeek was taken from the death-cell and brought over to prison Struiswijk I in Batavia.

The sentence was nullified because of the fact that any person who had 'beholded' the Emperor of Japan had to be a very special person and could not be killed in the name of that same Emperor.

Immediately afterwards, Herman van Karnebeek was nominated to be the representative of the 3500 internees of the Struiswijk-prison. Soon it became evident that the Japanese could not have chosen a better one for the job.

Herman van Kamebeek could and would indeed stand up for his fellow-sufferers.

In 1944 he was transferred to, and put in charge of the camp Tjikoedapateuh in Bandoeng, which would finally grow to become one of the largest internment-camps in the Netherlands East Indies, with about 10.000 men of all ages, and 800 boys. He was assisted with this immense task by Mr. Johannes Dirk Thijs, an interpreter, who originally came from the Adek-camp. Together the two men formed a formidable duo. Mr. Thijs had already shown himself to be a very fine interpreter of the Japanese language, when he had to translate for the Dutch military authorities during the negotiations of the surrender of all Dutch and Allied Forces in the Netherlands East Indies. These negotiations took place on Sunday, March 8th, 1942, at the airport of Kalidjati, near Bandoeng.

On April 1st, 1944, all civilian internees came under the jurisdiction of the Japanese military forces and were no longer regarded to be civilians, but POWs (prisoners-of-war).

In June/July 1944, following this change of policy, the Japanese authorities ordered that all military personnel, hiding in the 'civilian' camps should turn themselves in. And thus, Herman van Karnebeek went to the Japanese commandant, Sergeant Tachibana, and told him that he was supposed to come under military jurisdiction. But Tachibana immediately told Van Karnebeek that he had-to remain in the camp

as the representative of all the internees. It is almost certain that Tachibana must have received his orders from a higher quarter.

**I**t has been ascertained that most of the military that had been discovered to be hiding among the civilians, were transported to the barracks of the 10th Battalion in Batavia, to be shipped to the infamous railroad-camp at Pakan Baru, Sumatra in the Japanese vessel Yunyo Maru in July 1944. This Pakan Baru railroad-camp can be compared to the Burma-railroad, where so many allied POW's died.

Unfortunately, the Yunyo Maru with its load of POW's on board was discovered by a British submarine and was sunk by torpedo on September 18th, 1944 in the Indian Ocean, near Benkoelen. Out of 6500 persons who had originally been embarked, 5620 were killed.

Herman van Karnebeek was not among them. For the second time it is almost certain that his life was again saved

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the 1921-photograph!

In 1944 the brutal terror of the Japanese military occupation forces increased substantially. In the camp 'Tjikoedapateuh' it was especially the acts from the Korean non-commissioned officer Yoshitake which were appalling. Regularly, on Sunday-evenings, he walked through the camp armed with a bayonet, and drunk with sake. Many of the internees became victims of his brutality. Even Herman van Karnebeek could not end this terror, and one fateful day it was he himself who became the victim of Yoshitake's drunken atrocities!

Yoshitake's bayonet hit Van Karnebeek near his heart, but fortunately the stab was not a fatal one.

The Japanese commanding officer of the camp immediately took all possible measures to save Van Karnebeek's life. And with success!

Yoshitake himself was punished and had to submit a bodily punishment by a caning with a large stick, because the Japanese made no exception with regard to such mistakes by their own troops.

With his bayonet, Yoshitake had wounded a person, who had spoken and shaken hands with the Emperor in 1921, and thus that drunken act of his was unforgivable in Japanese eyes.

It was the third time, the 1921 happening in The Hague, culminating in the famous 'photograph', had saved - Van Karnebeek's life!

For two years this brave man, together with his interpreter Mr. Thijs stood firm and served the 10.000 inmates (including the 800 boys in the age between 12 and 14 years) to their best abilities.

For his exemplary behaviour and bravery, he later received the Resistance Star East-Asia from a grateful Dutch Government.

After the war, he was reunited with his family, who had been interned in one of the women-internment-camps on Java.

He returned to the Netherlands via Australia and the USA, to resume his duties for the STANVAC Oil Company. He became general manager for the STANVAC Oil Company in The Hague.

He also renewed his interests in sports and was elected president of the golf club in The Hague, which he remained from 1950 to 1960. In 1959 he was nominated to the Board

of the Netherlands Olympic Committee and in 1961 assumed its presidency.

He held on to this post until 1970, when he was chosen by the IOC as one of the vice-presidents.

He had already selected his own successor, Kees Kerdel, for the presidency of the Netherlands Olympic Committee and prepared Kerdel well for taking over the responsibilities. In his opinion, the combination of the NOC-presidency and IOC-Vice-Presidency was not possible and the two posts should not interfere.

In 1972, Herman van Karnebeek was once again submitted to a great moral problem. As vice-president of the IOC, he had been awarded a high Japanese decoration at the Sapporo Olympic Winter Games. In spite of his horrific experiences during the Second World War, he accepted this decoration with grace, disregarding all personal injuries sustained during those terrible years.

That same year, 1972, he was witness to the Munich massacre and never wanted to talk with anybody about what happened that night in the bosom of the IOC-Executive Board. "We remain silent. If anybody will have to say anything about this, it will be President Killanin. That is what we have decided", was his standard answer on requests from the journalists.

Herman van Karnebeek was conservative in his opinions; he made no bones about that. His integrity, his high moral standing and his organisational talents

were recognised by many.

As vice-president of the IOC, he was among other things involved in redrafting Rule 26 (the 'famous' Amateur-rule) of the Olympic Charter. Van Karnebeek had much appreciation for IOC-President Avery Brundage and admired him for his tenacity. 'Except for the last few years, Brundage had a strong grip on the IOC', said he.

Famous is the story about how Van Karnebeek and Count Jean de Beaumont, after a long and strenuous day at an Olympic Congress, and wanting to have a drink with Brundage, invited Brundage to celebrate Van Karnebeek's imaginary 'birthday' at a small party. Brundage came down and celebrated that birthday' with the two other IOC-members. But a few weeks later, a package arrived at the house of Van Karnebeek, containing a silver chalice with inscription, saying: "For Herman Van Karnebeek, who 'invented' a birthday to have a small party". Apparently Brundage had studied the birthday-calendar!

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Because of many subsidiary functions for which he was chosen, like the presidency of the American-Netherlands Chamber of Commerce and the presidency of the International Chamber of Commerce, he decided to retire from the IOC in 1977, and then was nominated an Honorary Member.

It was very sad, that only a few years later, when he visited the 1981 Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden as an honorary guest, his last appearance in the circle of the IOC became an acute small tragedy. He had arrived in Baden-Baden, together with his charming wife, who had accompanied him many times during his travels for the IOC and had shown herself to be a wonderful ambassador for the Netherlands. During this last Olympic visit, she fell down a stairs and broke a hip, from which accident she unfortunately never fully recovered.

**H**erman van Karnebeek had married A.J. Th. Pauw van Wioldrecht on 17 November 1937. Like her husband, Mrs. Van Karnebeek was interned during the Second World War in the infamous women's-camp 'Tjideng' in Batavia. Together with her son Dick (today Jonkheer Mr. J.D. van Karnebeek), she survived the war. Herman Adriaan, Jonkheer van Karnebeek died on 13 July 1989 in The Hague, the city of his birth!

#### Author's Note:

I was one of those approximately 800 boys, who arrived in the boy's-camp 'Tjikoedapateuh' on May 5th, 1945, and on that day I 'saw' Herman van Karnebeek for the first time in my life. I was then 14 years of age and very much impressed and tired by the walk from the women's camp 'Tjihapit' where we came from, to the new men's camp (which before the war were originally the barracks for the 15th Battalion of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army).

We had to walk while carrying our luggage in our hands, all luggage that a boy of that age could carry over a distance of about five kilometres!

Later, as an Olympic hobbyist and collector, I came to be better acquainted with Mr. Van Karnebeek, and told him once that I had had the 'honour' of being in the same camp under his leadership.

My last meeting with him was, when, together with his

successor Kees Kerdel, he visited my office in Leeuwarden to take a look at my Olympic collection. We were then already discussing the possibilities for an Olympic and Sports Museum in the Netherlands, about which both Kees Kerdel and he were very positive.

#### Sources:

This biography was made up in close co-operation with Herman van Karnebeek's son, Jhr.Mr. J.D. van Karnebeek.

Further information was found in the article on Mr. Van Karnebeek in the book: "KRONIEK OLYMPISCHE SPELEN" (1987), which article, written by Ruud Paauw, was based on an interview with Mr. Van Karnebeek himself.

The story about the 1921 meeting with Crown-Prince Hirohito was found and researched by one of the many authors of the book: IN NAAM VAN DE KEIZER (In the name of the Emperor), about the boys-camps in Bandoeng and Tjimahi. This book was published in 1997. The researcher and author of this specific piece of history was A.M. (Dolf) van Millingen de Wit, who unfortunately died before the book was published.

I later contacted Mr. Van Karnebeek's son again, who confirmed the story of the photograph, as told in the book.

Herman van Karnebeek's drawing was made by C.L. Crawford in 1945, and was also taken from the book IN NAAM VAN DE KEIZER and then 'scanned' for inclusion in the Journal.

Herman van Karnebeek in 1955 wrote a report about his experiences in the Japanese camps, with an addendum from his associate Mr. Thijs. This report is in full reproduced in the book, mentioned above.

#### Note:

Unfortunately, no trace can any longer be found of the mentioned photograph of the 1921 soiree in The Hague, where 'the twain had met'! Not even Van Karnebeek's son Dick could find that photograph. Maybe a trace can still be found in one of the contemporary newspapers, who followed Crown-Prince Hirohito's visit with much interest, or in the Rijksarchief in The Hague.

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