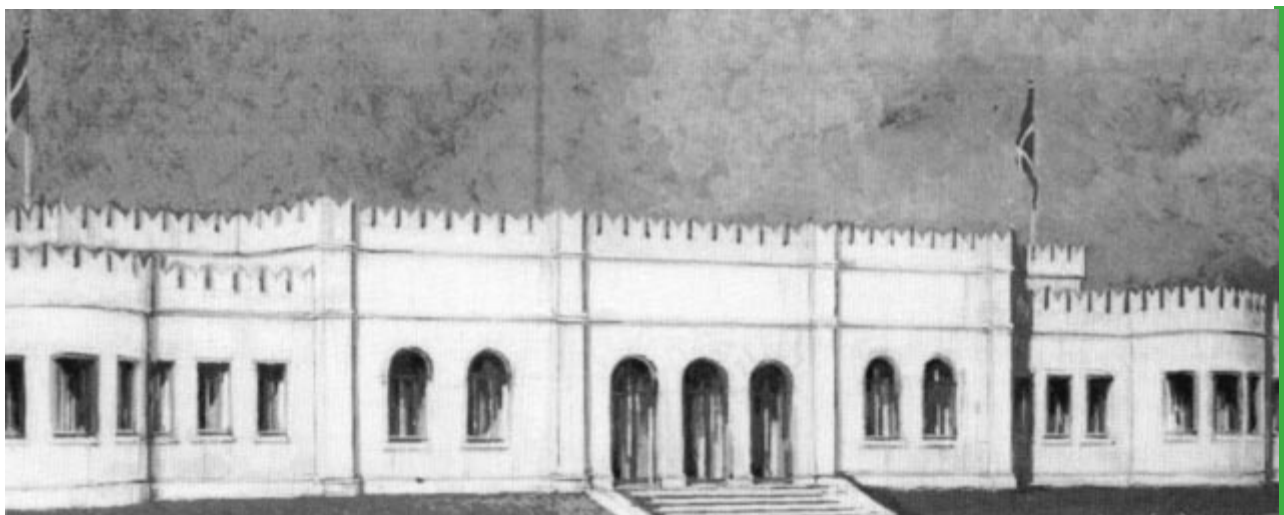


SHOOTING AT THE FIRST OLYMPIC GAMES

On 25th March 1896 the Games of the 1st Olympiad of the modern cycle were inaugurated with due ceremony by the King of Greece in the splendid Panathenian stadium, packed to capacity with enthusiastic spectators. The Games lasted ten days, from 25th March to 3rd April and the official report records participation by three hundred and eleven competitors from thirteen nations in 9 sports with 43 events. The inclusion of shooting in the programme may have been at Coubertin's behest, since he was a competent pistol shot.

By Bryan Kett



The shooting range in Kallithea in Athens, which was inaugurated by the Queen of Greece on 27th March 1896. From a photo by Mrs Sumner Paine which appeared in "Shooting and Fishing" in May 1896.

Common standards for international shooting events did not exist. The UIT had not yet been established and it is probable that the Greeks decided on a series of competitions with which they were familiar. Thus the programme comprised 300m Rifle, 200m Army Rifle, 25 m Duelling Pistol, 30m Target Pistol and 25m Army Pistol. With one exception, there are virtually no details of the event conditions, targets, method of calculating results, weapons permitted or first-hand accounts of the individual competitions. The exception is the lengthy report written by the American Sumner Paine and published in the May 28th 1896 issue of 'Shooting and Fishing'.

However the story begins in Boston in January 1896. The Boston Athletic Association accepted the Olympic invitation, the only US association to do so, and on March 2nd a group of 13 self-appointed, haphazardly financed young men from Harvard and Princeton universities set out for Athens on the liner 'Fulda'. Amongst them was John Paine, member of the prominent New England family, son of noted yachtsman General Charles Jackson Paine. On arrival in Europe, Paine left the group and travelled to Paris to meet his elder brother, Dr Sumner Paine, who was working at the Gastinne-Renette galleries in the city. The brothers were both accomplished pistol

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shots. And Sumner Paine needed little persuasion to agree to go to Athens. In his report to 'Shooting and Fishing' Sumner Paine describes their preparations. In ignorance of the programme and the conditions (none had been provided), they made ready for every eventuality. Each took a Colt New Army revolver, a Smith & Wesson Russian revolver, an unspecified pocket pistol and John a Stevens .22 target pistol, Sumner a .22 Wurfflein. Fearing re-entry events, they took a total of 3500 rounds of ammunition. For the full bore weapons Sumner had hand loaded a quantity of ammunition using 21cg (3.234 grains) of nitro powder and round cast bullets by G. Russell of Boston.

COMPETITION

On arrival in Athens on March 28th they were asked to obtain certificates of amateur status from the US Consul. This they did and reported to the range the following morning, still ignorant of competition conditions. They submitted their weapons for approval. The rules stated "any weapon of usual calibre with a trigger pull limited to 4,5lbs". All .22 pistols were disqualified, not being a "usual calibre". The sole pistol competition for March 29th was Army Pistol at 25m. Two sighting shots and five strings of six shots. The scoring system was not to the Paines' liking. Each string was scored and the result multiplied by the number of hits. The five totals were added together, giving the final score. The targets were marginally smaller than the 7 ring of the Standard American target scaled to 25m and scoring rings were 1 to 6 with a White centre zone, mounted on a gray " board. They found the picture dazzling in the bright light of the Athens sun, a further complication being the need to hold off target, as the Colts were sighted for 50 yards. At the close of the match John had a total result of 442 points with a true score of 85 and Sumner made 380 with a true score of 79. He mentions a Dane as third man, followed by several Greeks and an Englishman, a total of 18 in all, although a number withdrew from the event. Sumner Paine described the range building as "the prettiest shooting house in the world, 200

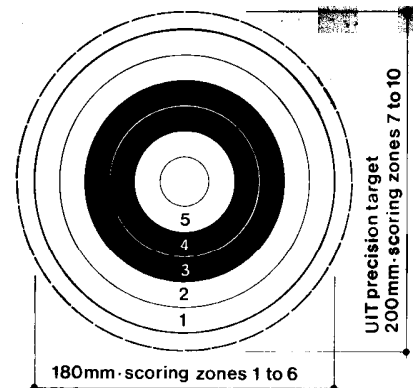


Some of the Harvard University participants. Sumner Paine (seated left, foreground) holds his S. & W. Russian model. His brother John (seated, foreground right) has his Colt.

feet long, build entirely of snow white marble." The range, up to 200m, had 30 firing points and was fully baffled and protected with embankments. Prior to the first competition the brothers had agreed that if one should win he would abstain from the second event, thus John Paine did not compete in the 30m Target Pistol match on the following day, March 30th. Target Pistol had similar conditions to Army Pistol, with the same number of shots, target and method of calculating results. Six contestants took part and Sumner Paine, using his S&W Russian model, was a comfortable winner, making a true score of 92 for an overall result of 442. The Danish competitor, Viggo Jensen, was placed second with 285 points. A remarkable sportsman, Jensen also competed in the 300m rifle event, making a first place and came fourth in Rope Climbing.

Having each won an event, the Paines decided not to compete in the third pistol competition, 25m Duelling Pistol, a sport-

Reconstruction of the army and target pistol target, based on Sumner Paine's description.



ing gesture unlikely to be seen today. Sumner Paine offers no description of this final competition and the official report states only that it was shot at 25m with thirty rounds to count. It may have had a similarity with 'Pistolet au commandement', using an early design of silhouette target. The records show an entry of four and the winner to be Jean Phrangoudis of Greece with 344 points.

Paine concludes his report by describing the numerous functions and receptions they attended, the hospitality shown by the Greeks and finally the closing ceremony and prizegiving. The final formalities took place in the Stadium on 3rd April, before, Paine estimated, a crowd of 100,000 people. Each medal winner received his awards from the King, a branch of wild olive from Mt Altis, a medal of impressive design (silver for a first place, bronze for second), and engraved diploma and various special prizes donated by the business

The .22 Wurffli single shot target pistol. Sumner Paine equalled the American amateur record with one but was prohibited from using it in the Games in Athens, as it was not a 'usual calibre'.



community. Among other items the brothers each received a case of local wine and a dozen silk ties from an Athens department store.

They returned to Paris with over 3400 rounds of ammunition having used only 96! Both continued to shoot with distinction at the Gastinne-Renette galleries and

Sumner sent regular reports on these activities to 'Shooting and Fishing'. As reserve officers in the Massachusetts militia they were mobilised for service in Spanish-American war. Sumner Paine continued in the army until 1901, when he was discharged for ill health. He died in 1904. John Paine settled in the wealthy Boston suburb of Weston, becoming an investment banker. He died in 1951.

Of the other shooting events at the Athens Olympics, the 200m Army Rifle and 300m Rifle, details are vague and imprecise to say the least. They certainly attracted large entries. Army Rifle was the first shooting event of the Games and was held on the 27-28th March. Conducted under the personal supervision of Prince Nicholas, 160 competitors took part, 10 of them foreigners. Two sighters were allowed, followed by four groups of ten shots to count. The order to start firing was given by a regimental bugle call. The winner was Greek law student Pantelis Karasvdas, with 2320 points. His fellow countryman P. Pavlidis took second place with 1978 points. How these results were calculated remains a mystery. The 'Times' reported the winner as using a Mauser rifle and, according to the archivist Walter Schmid in Oberndorf, modified standard 1894 or '95 7mm rifles may have been used, possibly with target sights. Unfortunately Mauser records for the period of the Games are among those lost during the last war. Gras conversions and Gras Kropatschek rifles may also have been employed, since these were supplied to the Greek Army during the 1870s and 80s. The second rifle event attracted 25 entrants and was held on 30th March but extended to the 31st in order to accommodate additional competitors. The course of fire appears to have been the same as Army Rifle but took place at a range of 300m. Georges Orphanidis was the Olympic winner, with 1583 points and Jean Phrangoudis second, with 1312 points. No information on the weapons used was given.

RESULTS

The five shooting events in the first Olympiad of the modern cycle attracted entries from four nations: Denmark 2, France 1,

USA 2 and Greece 110 to 150 (The records are conflicting). Sumner Paine mentioned an Englishman in the Army Pistol competition but the British Olympic Association cannot confirm this. He might have been the competitor named Merlin who was attributed to France, perhaps a relation of Gerald and Sidney Merlin, the Clay Target event winners at the 1906 Athenian Games, but this is speculation. The medal distribution was as follows: Greece 6 (Three 1st place winners), USA 3 (Two 1st place winners), Denmark 1. The Americans were pre-eminent in the pistol events and would no doubt have won the Duelling Pistol had they entered. The Greeks were much impressed with their performance and the official report attributed their victories to personal weapons "fabricated on a most superior system and endowed with remarkably correct aiming power". The 'Times' special correspondent reported the closing ceremony at length, writing an eloquent description of the pageantry and jubilation of those present in the Stadium. The Greeks had achieved the near impossible in a limited time and staged the Olympiad with its accompanying festivities in an atmosphere of good order, exemplary behaviour and fair play.

B.K.

This was taken from the excellent article of Mr Bryan Kett in 'Target Gun', May 1990, which we publish with its kind permission.



Pantelis Karasevdas, army rifle match winner, next to Jean Phrangoudis (seated), duelling pistol winner and Georges Orphanidis, 300 m rifle winner.