



THE EXTINGUISHED FLAME

OLYMPIANS KILLED *in* THE GREAT WAR



The Extinguished Flame

*For Emily and Oliver on their engagement.
May your lives be long and full of love and interest.
No greater love do two people share.*

The Extinguished Flame

Olympians Killed in
The Great War

Nigel McCrery



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MILITARY

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*Sing we now the glorious dinner
Served in grand Freemason's Hall;
Welcome loser, welcome winner,
Welcome all who've rowed at all:
Oarsmen, steersmen saints and sinner,
Whet your jaws, and to it fall ...*

*Thus in generous emulation
Cam and Isis both are one;
Thus each passing generation
Earns the meed to duty done;
Thus the glory of OUR NATION
Shines wherever shines the sun.*

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Forums

Great War Forum, a superb research tool, which everyone interested in the subject should be a member of; **Medals Forum**, a first class online research tool, well worth joining.

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Websites

The Blue and Gold Trust Website – www.thelinnets.co.uk

To anyone who I may have forgotten a big apology, and please let me know I will put it right in the next edition.

Nigel McCrery,
July 2016

Preface

'The Extinguished Flame'

For this book I have chosen to examine, be it briefly, those Olympic athletes who died during World War One. It is difficult to read into the lives of these extraordinary people and their breathtaking achievements, lives that were so sadly cut short by war. Their drive, their tenacity, their will to win. Not just that but their will to get up again and again no matter how many times they get knocked down. The sheer pleasure they take in what they do. Imagine, if you can, waking up almost every day for over four years to discover that yet another champion sportsman had been killed. Someone you had shouted for from the stands, applauded as they walked in from a record innings or having taken several wickets for few runs, run a mile in a record time, swum through choppy waters, jumped, or thrown a disc or a javelin or shot-put an impossible height or distance, or scored a remarkable goal.

I have only been able to draw a brief sketch of the lives of these Olympians and we need to know so much more. To try and help remedy this I'm going to set up a web page dedicated to sportsmen who died during the First World War One. I hope to have this up and running by next year, so watch out for it and any contributions will be gratefully received.

I have tried to add photographs to go with each of these Olympians, but this has not always been possible as, after so many years, many have been lost and destroyed. Many countries' archives were destroyed by war and political upheaval, and entire families and their records have vanished. Where I have found a photograph, I have included it, my motto being, better a poor photograph than no photograph at all. I have also, in some cases, included team photographs, where I know the person concerned is in the picture even if over the years the names have been lost and I have no idea which one he is.

This has probably been the hardest of the books I have written due to the various languages I have had to read through. Also finding and ploughing through foreign archives is never easy. If with my poor grasp of these languages I have made a mistake in interpretation I apologise. Please do feel free to point out my mistakes and I will correct them in the next publication of the book. The same goes for the research. If I have made any errors – and my experience is that despite my best efforts I will have made a few – please feel free once again to point them out (as long as you are not rude about it!). If I feel you are correct I will alter and acknowledge in following editions. Although I hope I haven't missed anyone out, if I have please make their case and I will add them to further editions of the book. I have gone as far as early 1919 in allowing for Olympians who died of wounds received in the war to be included. Again if you can make a case for others I will add them to future editions.

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I want *The Extinguished Flame* to be an ongoing work. I want each edition to contain new and fresh information, new and better quality photographs, and I rely on my readers to help provide that and keep this work as up-to-date as we can.

My biggest thanks have to go to all the people who have helped and supported me in writing my books. To all of them a very big 'thank you' for taking the time and trouble to make them as good as I can make them. Books like this are a labour of love; any money you are paid is quickly spent buying photographs, travelling to various sites, telephone bills, ink and, most of all, time. However, despite all this, it's worth it. As the poem says, 'At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.' People are not numbers on some casualty list, so many lost on this day, so many on that, they are people who had jobs and lives, and who loved and were loved. I do not want their lives or their extraordinary achievements to be forgotten. It is something my father Colin George McCrery, who served with the RAF for over twenty-five years, taught me, and a lesson I have never forgotten. Most of all, I hope you enjoy the book and it helps you remember some of the men who for a moment in their lives were Olympians and reached the very pinnacle of their chosen sport.

1914

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Lieutenant Henri Edmond Bonnefoy

1908 London

France

Shooting (small-bore rifle) team, 50 and 100 yards

Bronze Medal (Team)

133rd Regiment

Died 9 August 1914 aged 26

‘The First Olympian to Die’

Henri Edmond Bonnefoy was born on 17 October 1887 at Le Tremblois, Haute-Saône, France. A crack shot and director of the Henri Bonnefoy School of shooting in Chalons.

He was selected to shoot individually and in the team events during the 1908 Olympic Games in London. The French team finished third in the lagskyting rifle 50 and 100 yards team shooting event behind Great Britain and Sweden, winning a team bronze. Bonnefoy scored 166 points, the weakest score in the French team. The other team members were as follows. Paul Colas, who went on to win two gold medals in Stockholm in 1912 and a silver medal in the 1924 games in Paris. He died in 1956. Leon Lecuyer, who also took part in fencing events. He died in 1915, but not as a result of the war. And André Regaud who died in 1945. Bonnefoy also took part in the individual stationary target and small-bore rifle event finishing nineteenth.

He enlisted into the 85^e RI (Sdt 2 Cl) on 9 October 1906. A year later, on 17 October 1907, he was posted to the Special Military School at St Cyr. He was promoted corporal on 19 October 1907 and sergeant on 19 March 1908 before being commissioned six months later on 1 October 1908. He transferred to the 133^e RI on 11 July 1909 and was promoted to Lieutenant on 1 October 1910. Mobilized on 2 August 1914, he was killed with his regiment (133^e RI) on 9 August 1914 during the battle of Alsace. For his bravery during the battle he was later mentioned in despatches for his ‘remarkable qualities in the campaign’. He was the first Olympian to die in the war. Originally buried at Thann, his remains were eventually buried in Cernay, Haut-Rhin, France.



Chef de Bataillon, Félix Lucien Roger Debax
Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, médaille
Militaire, Croix de Guerre avec Palme, Chevalier
de l'Ordre du Dannebrog du Danemark
1900 Paris
France
Fencing
240th Infantry Regiment
Died 25 August 1914 aged 49

A Hero of France

Félix Lucien Roger Debax was born on 28 September 1864 in Toulouse. He was the son of Gervais Achille Francois Alexandre Debax and Blanche Chemineau. After leaving school at 18 he decided on a career in the army enlisting on 24 October 1882 on an initial five-year commission, becoming an officer cadet at the École Speciale Militaire de Saint-Cry. The Militaire de Saint-Cry is France's foremost French military academy, established by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802, and it was considered an honour to go there. He became a corporal-cadet on 3 November 1883, eventually commissioned as a sub-lieutenant into the 83rd Regiment in October 1884 before being promoted to lieutenant into the 57th Regiment in February 1888. Promoted to Captain he joined the army gymnastics school in 1889 (École Normale de Gymnastique) and became a gymnastics instructor. After two further years with the infantry he returned to his college and resumed his duties as an instructor until 1901. During this time Debax was appointed an officer of the Danish Order of the Dannebrog on 19 March 1898 and an officer of the French Order des Palmes Academiques on 22 January the same year. He also became a knight of the Swedish Order of the Sword on 2 May 1900 and an officer of the Turkish Order of Osmanieh. It was during this time that Debax also took part in the 1900 Olympics in Paris.

Debax competed in the Men's Foil, individual competition. Fifty-four fencers took part in the competition from nine different countries. In 1900 the first round, quarterfinals, and repêchage, skill and art with the foil was more important to advancing than actually winning the bout. The first bout was held on 14 May 1900. Debax faced the experienced Spanish fencer Mauricio de Ponce de Leon. Both Leon and Debax fought well and

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impressed the jury and, with thirty-seven other fencers, passed through to the quarter final stage of the competition. In the quarterfinals Debax faced fellow Frenchman Jean-Joseph Renaud. Once again both men acquitted themselves well and passed through together with ten other fencers to the semi-finals. Of the fourteen that were sent to the repêchage, six eventually went through to the semi-finals. The semi-finals were the first round of the foil tournament to use actual match results in determining advancement. The sixteen fencers were divided into two pools. Each fencer then faced each other fencer in his pool once. The four fencers with the best record in each pool moved on to the finals, with the other four competing in the consolation. Once again Debax did well and fought his way through to the final. The final was held on 21 May 1900. The top four fencers in each of the two semi-finals competed against each other, each fencing the other seven once. Debax managed to win four of his competitions and lost three making him fourth overall, missing out on a bronze medal by one place. Of the eight top places, seven were French including the gold medal winner Émile Coste.

On 12 October 1901 Debax was transferred into the 18th Infantry Regiment. He was further appointed a knight of the Spanish Order of Isabella the Catholic and a first class member of the Order of Military Merit. In October 1902 he was attached to the Gymnastics Institute in Stockholm. He later published books on the teaching of gymnastics and fighting with the bayonet. In June 1906 Debax returned to the 18th Infantry Regiment becoming their adjutant. In May 1907 he was appointed Chevalier of the Legion of Honour and the French Medaille Militaire.

He became chef de bataillon for the 19th Infantry Regiment in June 1908 before transferring to the 14th Infantry Regiment in 1909. He was mobilized on 2 August 1914 while stationed in Nîmes and transferred to command the 240th Infantry Regiment. He was killed in action at Saint-Maurice-sous-les-Côtes, Meuse on 25 August 1914. According to an account of his death he was 'killed by rifle fire emanating from German infantry under the cover of a talus to the west of the village of Boinville [Boinville-en-Woëvre] – 2 miles SE of Etain – at 05:15 am'. He was one of 881 casualties, 58 dead, 518 wounded, and 305 missing, between 24 and 25 August 1914.

He is commemorated on the war memorial at Falga not far from where he was born, and the Rue Félix Debax in Blagnac near Toulouse is named after him.

1914

Leutnant Robert Merz
1912 Stockholm
Austria
Football
Reserve Infantry-Regiment Nr.28
Died 30 August 1914 aged 26

'Fastest Feet in Austria'

Robert Merz was born on 25 November 1887 in Vienna, Austria. He began his footballing career for the team Währing in 1902. In 1904 he joined the Schwerathletik Wiener Sportvereinigung, a predecessor of today's very prestigious Wiener Sports Club. Playing alongside the legendary Austrian footballer and later journalist Willy Schmieger, Merz won the Challenge Cup defeating Magyar AC 2-1 (a team from Budapest). In 1907 Merz began to play for the Jewish club DFC Prague and it was



Merz is pictured here although it is unknown which of these footballers he is.

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while playing for them that he made his first international appearance. He made his debut against England playing inside right on 6 June 1908, a match played to celebrate the Jubilee of the Emperor Franz Joseph. In front of a crowd of 3,500 at Vienna's Cricket Platz, England beat Austria 6–1. Merz scored his first international goals against Hungary on 7 May 1911, when he knocked in two of three goals in a 3–1 victory over the Hungarians. England went on to win the gold medal.

Selected to play in the national side during the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, he turned out in four of their five matches, scoring two goals against Germany in the first round in Austria's 5–1 victory. Austria then went on to defeat Norway 1–0 before losing to Hungary 3–0 and the Netherlands 1–0. Merz also managed to score two goals in a consolation tournament.

However the team failed to progress and missed out on a medal. Merz was capped thirteen times for Austria and scored five goals. His final match was against the old enemy Hungary on 3 May 1914, a match Austria won 2–0. On the declaration of war Merz was commissioned as a lieutenant into the Infantry Regiment Nr.28. He was killed in action on 30 August 1914 while fighting in Poturzyn, Tomaszow, Poland.

1914

Private Oszkár Demján
1912 Stockholm
Hungary
Swimming
Breaststroke 200 and 400 metres
Nr.43 Infantry Regiment
Died 4 September 1914 aged 22

‘A fine swimmer but not a fine competitor’

Oszkár Demján was born on 28 December 1891 in Budapest, Hungary.

In the 1912 Olympics he competed in the 200 and the 400 metres breaststroke. In the 200 metres he was eliminated, and in the 400 metres he was disqualified because he touched the wall with only one hand at the second turn.

In the First World War he was wounded while serving with Nr.32 Infantry Regiment. Later while serving with Nr.43 Regiment he was killed in action in Sianky near Lviv in the Ukraine.



Opening ceremony of the 1912 Olympics.

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Captain Jean Marie Pierre Xavier de Mas Latrie
Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, Croix de guerre
1908 London; 1912 Stockholm
France
Fencing (1908) Modern Pentathlon (1912)
15e Chasseurs à Cheval
Died 5 September 1914 aged 34

'Two different Olympics two different events'

Jean Marie Pierre Xavier de Mas Latrie was born on 23 November 1879 in district VII, Paris, France. He was the son of René Mas Latrie and Marie Dawans. On 23 November 1905 he married Margueritte of Canolle at St-Louis des Invalides, Paris VII.

A well-known and established fencer he was selected to take part in the 1908 London Olympics as part of the French fencing team specializing in the sabre. Knocked out during the qualifying events. Jeno Fuchs of Hungary took the gold with fellow Hungarian Béla Zulawszky taking the silver, and the Bohemia fencer Vilém Goppold z Lobsdorfu Sr the bronze.

Four years later, in 1912, he was selected once again to compete in the Olympic Games, this time being held in Stockholm. However this time it wasn't as a fencer but in the modern pentathlon. He came fifteenth in the shooting, twenty-seventh in the swimming, second (not surprisingly) in the fencing, tenth in the riding and nineteenth in the running. He came sixteenth overall.

Deciding on a career in the army and rising to the rank of captain he served with distinction with the 15^e Chasseurs à Cheval, being decorated with both the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur and the Croix de guerre. He was mortally wounded on a reconnaissance whilst on attachment to the British Army on 5 September 1914 (the first day of the Battle of the Marne) dying of wounds the same day at Rebais (Seine et Marne).

He is buried in the cimetière militaire of Signy-Signets, Seine et Marne (grave number 47).

1914

Lieutenant Carl Heinrich Goßler (Gossler)

1900 Paris

Germany

Rowing (Coxed Four)

Kaiser Wilhelm 2nd Grand Ducal Hessian No 116 in Gießen

Died 9 September 1914 aged 29

‘One of the youngest men ever to win an Olympic Gold Medal’

Carl Heinrich Goßler was born on 17 April 1885 in Hamburg, Germany. He was the son of Carl Oscar, a lawyer and chairman of the Hamburger Seeamts, and his wife Elizabeth. He had two brothers, Oskar Goßler (1875–1953) and Gustav Ludwig Goßler (1879–1940) both Olympic rowers. Both his brothers became merchants but this wasn't for Carl and he decided on a career in the army taking a commission on 27 January 1907.

As helmsman of the German coxed four, being rowed by his two brothers Gustav and Oskar, together with Walther Katzenstein and Waldemar Tietgens, he took part in



Goßler is seated on the far right.

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the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris as coxswain of the German boat, *Germania Ruder Club, Hamburg*. Der Hamburger und Germania Ruder Club (DHuGRC) is a rowing club from Rotherbaum, Hamburg, Germany. It was founded in 1836 as Der Hamburger Ruder Club and is the fourth oldest rowing club in the world. The competition was dogged by problems from the very start involving a dispute over which boats should have progress to the final. In an attempt to resolve the controversy the Olympic Committee made one of the strangest decisions it has ever made. They decided to hold two separate finals for the same event. Each of the winners, from both finals, were considered Olympic champions by the International Olympic Committee. The coxed fours event was held on 25, 26 and 27 August 1900 on the River Seine. Ten boats, involving fifty rowers from four nations, competed. In Semifinal 3, Germania Ruder Club, Hamburg defeated two French boats, the *Cercle de l'Aviron Roubaix* and *Club Nautique de Dieppe*, and the German boat, *Favourite Hammonia* in a time of 5 minutes 56.2 seconds. In final A, the French boat, *Cercle de l'Aviron Roubaix*, took the gold medal in a time of 7 minutes 11 seconds defeating another French boat, *Club Nautique de Lyon*, and the German boat, *Favourite Hammonia*. In final B, *Germania Ruder Club, Hamburg*, coxed by Carl Goßler, took the gold in a time of 5 minutes 59 seconds defeating the Dutch boat *Minerva Amsterdam* and the German boat, *Ludwigshafener Ruder Verein*.

It was the first time a German boat and crew had won a gold medal at the Olympics. At the time of the event Goßler was still a student and only fifteen years old.

Lieutenant Carl Heinrich Goßler was killed in action serving with Kaiser Wilhelm 2nd Grand Ducal Hessian No 116 in Gieben on 14 September 1914.

1914

L/9097 Sergeant George William Hutson
1912 Stockholm
Great Britain
5,000 metres/3,000 metre team event
Two Bronze Medals
'B' Company 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment
Died 14 September 1914 aged 25

First British Olympian to be killed

George William Hutson was born on 22 December 1889 in Lewes, East Sussex, the son of George William and Frances Hutson of Heathfield, Sussex. Deciding on a career in the army, he enlisted into the ranks of the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment in 1908. In May 1914 he married Kate Elizabeth Hutson, of 19 Neville Rd, St Anne's, Lewes.

Quick on his feet his talent as a distance runner soon came to notice especially after he beat all-comers at a regimental cross-country race. Described as the 'most promising British distance runner of his generation' in 1914 he became the AAA champion of England at both 1 mile and 4 miles and set a new British record for the three-quarter



Hutson pictured third from the left.

The Extinguished Flame



Hutson is pictured third in line with the Union Jack visible on his shirt.

mile. His greatest achievements however were to come during the 1912 Olympic Games held in Stockholm, Sweden. He came in third winning a bronze medal in the 5,000 metres being beaten by the 'Flying Finn' Hannes Kolehmainen (who had won the 10,000m two days earlier) and the French runner Jean Bouin, both of whom smashed the world record. He next competed in the 3,000 metre team race together with his friends, William Cottrill and Cyril Porter once again taking the bronze medal.

On leaving school George became a gentleman's outfitter, and then, on 5 March 1908, he attested for six years' service with the Uckfield Special Reserves Royal Sussex Regiment. Deciding on a full time career with the army he enlisted on 12 August 1908, was promoted to corporal on 1 May 1912, and then sergeant on 5 August 1914. Shortly before sailing to France on 12 August 1914 he learned that his wife was expecting their first child. His daughter was born days before his death, so he might well have known of her birth but alas never got to see her. He was killed in action during the battle of the Marne on 14 September 1914. It was a bad day for the battalion, losing fifty-nine officers and men, including the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Montresor, Major Cookson, Lieutenants Daun and Hughes, the Hon Herbert Lytton Pelham, son of the 5th Earl of Chichester, and Captain Durnford-Slater. George was initially posted as being missing in action. It was known he had been wounded and left behind during his battalion's fighting retreat, so hope that he had survived and was a prisoner of the

Germans was high. It wasn't until a year later when no trace of him could be found that it was assumed he had died from his wounds on 14 September 1914. His widow was later granted a pension of sixteen shillings a week for herself and her daughter. His body was never recovered or identified and he is commemorated on the La Ferté-sous-Jouarre memorial. The *Sussex Express* wrote on Friday, 27 August 1915:

FAMOUS ARMY RUNNER. LEWES SOLDIER'S DEATH. THE LATE SERGEANT
G. W. HUTSON.

Although so far back as last September Sergeant G. W. Hutson, of the 2nd Batt. Royal Sussex Regiment, was reported to be missing, it was only last week that his wife, who lives at 3, Roseland-cottages, Cliffe, Lewes, received an official notification of his death. It was in 1908 that Sergeant Hutson joined his Regiment, and he soon became famous in the Army as a runner, his first noteworthy event being in a regimental cross-country race whilst stationed at the Curragh, when he beat all favourites. From that time he had a very successful career as a runner. Among his chief successes were: Two third prizes at the Stockholm Olympic Games; three years in succession the four-mile A.A.A. champion of England; one mile champion (A.A.A.) of England; three-quarter mile world's record holder; two years in succession champion of Austria; three miles champion of Sweden; and twice winner of the Atlanta Cup. He was a member of the Surrey Athletic Club. Sergeant Hutson, who leaves a widow and child, with whom much sympathy is felt, was most popular among a large circle of friends. His mother and father live at 12, Harley-lane, Heathfield, and he was their eldest son.

He is also commemorated on the Lewes and Heathfield War memorials.

The Extinguished Flame



Lieutenant Eduard von Lütcken
1912 Stockholm
Germany
Equestrian Single and Team Event
Silver Medal
Royal Saxon Ulan Regiment Nr.17
Died 15 September 1914 aged 31

‘Captured a Russian general during the early months of the war’

Eduard von Lütcken was born on 26 October 1882 in Syke, Niedersachsen, Germany. He was the only son of Eduard von Hermann von Lütcken, a local magistrate and Frida (née Meding). He was educated at the University of Heidelberg where from 1903 he joined the Corps Vandalia Heidelberg where he took part in ‘student duelling’, being scarred on one cheek as a result. He later settled in Oschatz.

An outstanding rider, he was selected to compete for the German side during the 1912 Olympic Games. Riding Blue Boy, he came eighth in the individual jumping event. However in the team event, together with Carl von Moers, Richard von Schaesberg-Tannheim and Friedrich von Rochow, he came second taking a silver medal, the Swedish team taking the gold.

Shortly before the outbreak of the war he was serving as an instructor at the riding school in Dresden. On the declaration of the war he was transferred to the Royal Saxon Ulan Regiment Nr.17 serving as oberleutnant. Fighting on the Eastern Front in Szumsk in Lithuania he captured a Russian general officer, staff captain and a number of Russian soldiers during a patrol. He was killed in action on 15 September 1914 while on patrol at Szumsk (Kowno). Encountering a superior Russian force on a reconnaissance patrol on the Wilkowitzki–Mariompol road, he had his horse shot from under him and was subsequently killed in the following action. An account of his death and its interesting aftermath was reported later:

‘Whilst the Unteroffizier lay like dead with several wounds, the Oberleutnant [Lütcken] fought on with several remaining troopers against ten to 15 Russians, he with his Browning pistol and when the last round had been expended with his sabre, until finally cut down by the Russians with his two remaining comrades.

1914

The severely wounded NCO survived and managed to return to his regiment and report on the death of Eduard v. Lütcken and his lancers.'

Interestingly, through the Red Cross, the family received a post card at the end of November 1919 from a Russian Guards cavalry lieutenant by the name of Boris Genischta with the following message:

'Oberleutnant v. Lütcken found his death on 2 September 1914 (Russian calendar). Fighting to the end, he died with his weapon in his hand. He astounded us by his courage and spirit. As a witness to his death, I feel compelled to have you inform his relatives.'