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**CYCLING
IN THE GREAT
WAR**

LANNOO

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PROLOGUE

On 28 June 1914, two more or less simultaneous shots ring out. On precisely the same day that the 12th edition of the Tour de France starts in Paris, Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand of Austria is assassinated in Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist. At first glance, these two events might seem to have nothing to do with each other. Not yet. However, the tension in the Balkans leads to a game of political bluff and counter-bluff with very high stakes. Before any one quite knows how or why, the game gets out of hand and suddenly all Europe is at war. The shot in Sarajevo is the starting shot for a conflict that will change the world forever.

The First World War is also destined to change the face of cycling forever. Its effect is almost immediate. Look at the list of winners for many of the world's great races — the Tour de France or Paris-Roubaix, for example — and you will see that there is often a gap from 1914 to 1919. Most sporting history books will tell you that this is because the war on the Western Front is fought over a region — Belgium and northern France — that is at the heart of the newly emerging but already highly popular sport of bike racing. As a result, no racing is possible until the war is over. What's more, nearly all the members of the peloton of 1914 are serving at the front, where many of them are among the nine million victims claimed by the war, symbols of a promising but lost generation. How could there be any thought of racing in these circumstances? Surely, cycling, so important in peacetime, becomes an irrelevance in time of war?

But is this true? Was there no bike racing anywhere in Europe during the years of the Great War? Did the occupying Germans allow no races in Belgium for four long years? Did soldiers on leave organize no competitions behind the front, if only to alleviate their own boredom? And what happened to the many velodromes that existed in 1914? After this difficult period in cycling history, very little research was carried out to answer these and other similar questions. It just seemed easier to assume that for four years professional riders had no option but to let their bikes gather dust.

Whoever takes the trouble to look will find a very different story. And the more you dig, the more it becomes apparent that there are interesting and informative connections to be made between the world at war and the world of cycling. In particular, approaching the war from the

perspective of cycling makes it possible to understand the impact of the first global conflict at a more personal level. At the same time, the trials and tribulations of individual racers, both great and small, allow us to see the 'big picture', to understand what a world war truly means in social, political and economic terms. This is the aim of the 'Cycling in the Great War' exhibition, organized by the Tour of Flanders Centre (Centrum Ronde van Vlaanderen or CRVV) in Oudenaarde in 2018. The exhibition not only looks at each of the four war years, but also sheds light on the evolution of the sport before 1914 and its recovery after 1918. In addition to a virtual-reality experience based on the career of Paul Deman, winner of the very first Tour of Flanders in 1913 and later a spy in occupied Belgium, there is also a double time line that positions developments at the front and behind the lines against the cycling activities that were still possible during the war years. It makes for a fascinating comparison. In this way, supplemented by a series of artefacts that also make the link between the war and cycling, it is possible to survey the entire period between 1914 and 1918 in all its many different aspects: war, sport, social life, the economy, art and culture.

With this exhibition, 100 years after the signing of the Armistice, the CRVV is not only aiming to appeal to cycling fans, but also people who have a more general interest in the First World War. That applies equally to this book, which is published to coincide with 'Cycling in the Great War'. The book tries, like the exhibition, to answer a number of different questions. How seriously was the well-established pre-war cycling infrastructure damaged by the fighting? How was the bicycle used by the armies of both sides? Were cycling events organized in the unoccupied parts of Belgium and France? What happened to the racers? Which of them died on the battlefield and how did the others emerge from the worst conflict the world had ever seen?

What you can read in the following pages is not designed to be an 'erudite', scientific and highly detailed work of reference, but rather a chronicle of the years between 1914 and 1918 and how they affected cycling, in ways both great and small. Or as the French writer Jean-Paul Bourcier once said, it is the story of how the peloton went 'from flowers on handlebars to bayonets on cannons'.



PART I

**THE PRE-WAR
PIONEERS**

Before 28 June 1914

THE BIKE HAS ONLY JUST ARRIVED

The high bicycle — a two-wheeler for acrobats.



When the First World War breaks out, the bicycle — or bike — is still relatively new. As a result, bike racing — or cycling — is still a young sport. The modern two-wheel safety bicycle, with the diamond-shaped frame made from straight steel tubing that is still familiar today, only made its appearance in the years after 1885. This is surprisingly late, certainly in an era otherwise typified by remarkable scientific and technological advances, which sees the arrival of the steam locomotive, the telegraph and the telephone, the dynamo and the gas lamp, the automatic loom and balloon flight, photography and even the tin can!

But the evolution of the bike is much slower. True, at the start of the 19th century there is already the *draisine*, named after its German inventor Karl von Drais. However, this is no more than a heavy, cumbersome conveyance with two wooden wheels and a saddle. It is not powered by pedals, but by ‘running’ with your feet along the ground from a seated position, rather like toddlers do on their first bike today. For many years, the early ‘experts’ are convinced that it is impossible to maintain your balance on two wheels positioned one behind the other, as opposed to two (or more) placed alongside each other. This question of balance continues to plague bicycle development. How else can you explain that it is as late as 1861 before the first pedal bike appears?

The next major step forward is the invention of the two-wheel *vélocipède* — anglicized to

Charles Terront wins the 1891 Paris-Brest-Paris race on a safety bike with two wheels of equal size.

velocipede — by the Frenchman Ernest Michaux, who attaches pedals to the axle of the front wheel and handlebars that are directly connected to the front fork. A short while later, across the Channel in England, James Starley develops a further new variant. He reasons logically — or so he thinks — that if one rotation of the pedals is equivalent to one rotation of the front wheel, it makes sense to make this front wheel as large as possible. This should make it easier to cover greater distances and achieve higher speeds with just a few turns of the pedals.

This leads to the arrival after 1867 of the high bicycle, with a very large front wheel and a much smaller back one (known in England as a ‘penny-farthing’, because of the respective size of these two coins). The rider of this contraption is expected to sit high on top of the front wheel, which demands a degree of bodily suppleness that not everyone possesses. The imposing appearance and high degree of risk turns cycling from something ordinary into something spectacular. As a result, the popularity of the high bicycle is short-lived. As an alternative, the tricycle is developed for those with less athleticism (or more sense). However, their production is complex and expensive, so that just a few years later the tricycle also passes into history.

It is not until 1885, following the introduction of the bike chain, so that the bottom bracket and the pedals no longer need to have the same rotational speed as the wheels, that the safety bike becomes possible. The first model with a low frame and two wheels of equal size is designed by the British engineer Thomas Humber. Humber’s design is transformed into a comfortable and easy-to-use means of transport by the further invention of the pneumatic tyre by John Dunlop in 1888. Their combined efforts result in one of the most important and most influential inventions in the history of mankind: the modern bicycle.



IF YOU CAN RIDE A BIKE, YOU CAN RACE A BIKE

There is cycling and there is cycle racing. The latter evolves from the former. New inventions automatically lead to competition, the desire to be fastest, furthest, longest, highest... It is no different with the bicycle. The high bike is largely a question of daredevilry. But the safety bike makes racing much more possible for many more people. Short races and demonstrations give way to competitions over longer distances. The newspapers quickly see the interest this might generate among their readers and encourage the riders to undertake ever greater challenges. Circulation figures are to the 19th century what viewing figures are to the 21st century: the be-all and end-all of everything. As a result, the press whips up excitement for the new sport. Certainly in France.

In 1891, the sports paper *Vélocé-Sport* organizes a race of no fewer than 572 kilometres from Bordeaux to Paris, won by the British cyclist George Pilkington Mills, in a time of 26 hours and 34 minutes.

The race excites so much popular enthusiasm that other newspapers are quick to follow. In the same year, *Le Petit Journal* comes up with the idea for an even longer race, from Paris to Brest and back again: a total of 1,200 kilometres.

The winner of this cycling marathon is Charles Terront, who needs almost five days to complete the

course. In 1896, the textile manufacturers Théodore Vienne and Maurice Perez launch their idea for a race between Paris and Roubaix. The first editions are simply viewed as training for Bordeaux-Paris, because the course distance is 'only' 250 kilometres long! However, the harsh conditions of the race mean that it is soon regarded as the 'queen of the cycling classics'. Until 1914, the finish is on the Vélodrome Roubaisien in the Parc Barbieux, which was built at the suggestion of Vienne and Perez especially for their event.

But it is not only the newspapers that do their best to promote the new sport: the bike manufacturers are soon jumping on the bandwagon as well. They want to tie the best racers to their brands and for a real champion are prepared to pay as much as 3,000 French francs per month, which in those days is higher than the salary earned by a minister of state! Everyone is curious to find the limits of human endurance on a bike. How far can they go? And how fast? What is the ultimate challenge? In 1903, *L'Auto* newspaper puts forward the most ambitious plan to date: why not send a group of adventurous souls on a journey around the entire country — a distance of 2,428 kilometres divided into six separate stages? And so the Tour de France is born. Most people think it is pure madness. Surely it will never catch on?



Report of the very first edition of Paris-Roubaix in the *Journal de Roubaix* on Tuesday, 21 April 1896.



Report of the fourth edition of Paris-Roubaix in the *Journal de Roubaix* on Tuesday, 4 April 1899.

THE ACATÈNES OF FN HERSTAL

Thomas Humber's safety bike is such a success that in 1890 he is able to start his own company in Nottingham. He later moves to a larger factory at Beeston, which also produces motorbikes, motor cars and even aeroplanes during the First World War. Thomas leaves the company as early as 1892, but the Humber name carries on, even after the sale of the cycling branch to Raleigh in 1928.

England is destined to lead the way in cycle construction for quite some time, but France quickly becomes the leading country for bike sales and the mecca for professional bike racing. The Frenchman Armand Peugeot first develops an interest in bike design during his engineering studies in England. When he returns to his home village just outside

Besancon, he starts to manufacture his own two-wheelers. In 1890, Edmond Gentil does much the same in one of the outlying suburbs of Paris, where his factory produces the Alcyon bike — a legendary brand that begins sponsoring professional cyclists from 1906 onwards. Paris is also the home of the Société La Française, which later becomes La Française-Diamant, another of the great pre-1914 names in bike construction. But the heart of the French bicycle industry is in Saint-Etienne, which is also the centre of the country's metal-working and weapons industries. The city in the Massif Central is responsible for launching several successful brands, such as Mercier, Automoto, Ravat and Panel.

During this period, there are also a number of bicycle makers in Belgium, but on nothing like the same scale as their French neighbours. The only manufacturer of any size is the Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre at Herstal near Liege — more popularly known as FN Herstal. Here from 1889 onwards they produce the so-called *acatènes*. These are shaft-driven, chainless bikes, where the power generated by the pedals is transmitted to the central axle of the back wheel by a system of interlocking rods. Also known as cardan bicycles after the name of their Italian designer, Girolamo Cardano, they are compact and require little maintenance, which makes them ideal for poor roads. However, the frame and axle construction makes them heavy, which means they need more pedal power to ride. More crucially, this also makes them much less suitable for the increasingly popular sport of cycling, especially as their more complex gearing makes changes in pace more difficult to achieve. As soon as modern production techniques are able to significantly reduce the cost and improve the quality of chain-driven transmission systems, the cardan bike quickly and quietly disappears from the scene.

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FN, a trendsetting name during the pioneering years of cycling.



LUDWIG OPEL – A RACER WITH HIS OWN BRAND

Another producer of shaft-driven bikes is Dürkopp. The company is based in the German town of Bielefeld but soon has many distributors in Belgium and the Netherlands. One of their local rivals in Frankfurt am Main is Adler Fahrradwerke AG, which starts with the production of typewriters and bicycles in 1886. A third well-known German brand of two-wheelers is Opel. The company started by Adam Opel in Rüsselsheim initially specializes in sewing machines. Adam's five sons — Carl, Wilhelm, Heinrich, Friedrich and Ludwig — later make bikes and cars. The youngest sibling, Ludwig, is also a talented cycle racer. As an amateur, he wins silver at the world sprint championships in Vienna in 1898. At the same time, he studies law at the universities of Giessen and Freiburg. He eventually becomes manager of the Opel factory in Berlin, but only after enjoying a seven-year career as a professional cyclist. When the First World War breaks out, he is called to serve *Kaiser und Vaterland*. Ludwig Opel becomes a lieutenant in the 24th Regiment of Dragoons and fights on the Eastern Front. On 16 April 1916, he dies at the Russian town of Hoduzischki. He is just 36 years old.



The five Opel brothers on a 'quintuplet'.
Ludwig, the youngest brother, is at the front.

Carl, the oldest of the Opel brothers, poses with one
of his first bikes, made at Rüsselsheim in 1899.

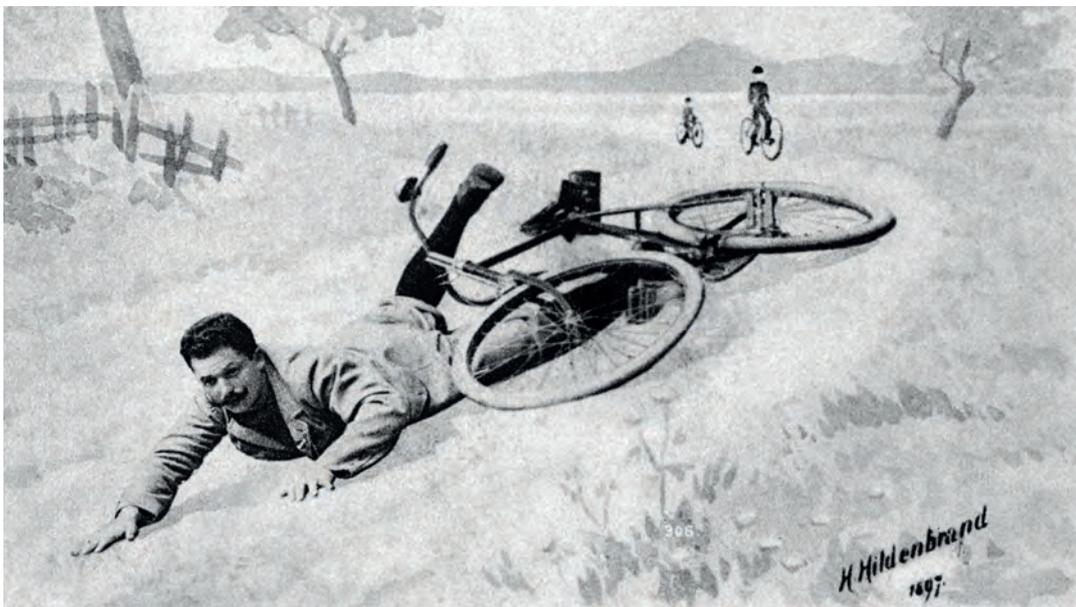
FOR POSTMEN AND POLICEMEN

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Thanks to the invention of the safety bike, the breakthrough of the bicycle is unstoppable. In a matter of years, the bicycle becomes both a popular pastime and an important mode of transport. It also becomes big business. Small-scale local workshops are replaced by modern bike factories. Mass production reduces the price of a two-wheeler dramatically. First introduced as a plaything for the sons of the rich and the famous, bikes are now an essential part of the everyday life of ordinary men and women. People are amazed by the wonderful sense of mobility it brings and, above all, by its tremendous practicality. It offers labourers the chance to find work further away from home. It offers children and young people the opportunity to seek education away from the church tower. The safety bike makes it possible to travel considerable distances quickly and even to carry loads. Errand boys or 'runners' are replaced by bike couriers. People who could never dream of owning a horse, cart or carriage are now able to make journeys of 20 or 30 kilometres with relative ease. The bike also revolutionizes a number of jobs. The Belgian government quickly decides to introduce the use of the bicycle in the postal service and in 1895 the first bikes are issued to village policemen working in rural areas. Firemen also rush to their stations on bikes and cycle units begin to make their appearance in the army. Between 1893 and 1900 the number of bicycles in Belgium increases from 20,000 to 115,000, with the *vélo* being seen with increasing frequency in the countryside as well as the towns.



The first cycling postmen and village policemen make their appearance in the years before 1900.



In spite of its name, the safety bike is not always that safe!

THE BICYCLE FINDS ITS WAY INTO THE ARMY

Italy is the first European country to experiment with bicycles in its armed forces. The safety bikes are a fast and easy means of transport and in many types of terrain are quicker than the infantry and even the cavalry. The first troops to use them are the *Bersaglieri*, the elite unit of the Piedmont (and later Italian) army. Even on the worst roads or in the deepest forests, the new bikes with two wheels of equal size are quick and manoeuvrable. At first, the army uses its cyclists as couriers and later for reconnaissance tasks. They are soundless and so do not betray their approach, as horses do with their hooves. They can also operate perfectly well at night, which is much more difficult for horsemen.

The Italian experiment is soon copied by other armies: Austria in 1884, France and Germany in 1885, and the Dutch and Swiss in 1886. In 1887, the English create the London Cyclist Corps, based on an idea by Lieutenant-Colonel A.R. Savile. The Belgium government also considers the introduction of military cycling units, although the high command is initially reluctant: the cavalry units, with their fine horses and glittering uniforms, are still seen as the pride of the army. Even so, the advocates of bikes continue to emphasize the potential advantages they can bring and in 1888 the Minister of War, Charles Pontus, asks a number of volunteers from the *Fédération Vélocipédique Belge* (Belgian Cycling Federation) to take part in that year's annual military manoeuvres.

This first test is a success and is repeated again in 1889, with equally satisfactory results. In 1890,



The Italian *Bersaglieri* are the first troops to experiment with bikes for military purposes.

Minister Pontus gives his permission for the setting up of a cyclists' section in the regimental school of the Carabineers at Waver, under the leadership of Captain-Commandant Hubert Soleil. The *vélocipédistes militaires* are selected on the basis of their physical and intellectual capacities. They must become the fast messengers of the army. Each year, 25 soldiers will be sent for special training. In a one-week course, they first learn how to ride a bike, following which they are sent on a series of rides to familiarize themselves with all the conditions and all the difficult terrains they are likely to face. As the training progresses, so the distances they are expected to cycle increases.

In the spring of the following year, the unit is ready to become operational. The first section sets off — by bike, of course — to Beverlo Camp, for further technical and tactical tests. The results are again more than satisfactory, so that soon afterwards the foundation of the *Korps der militaire Wielrijders* is confirmed by law. The regiment organizes its own final test ride of 350 kilometres, spread over three days. Again, all goes well and the cycling corps is finally given the green light.

In 1885, the German Army sets up its first *Radfahrer-Kompanie*.

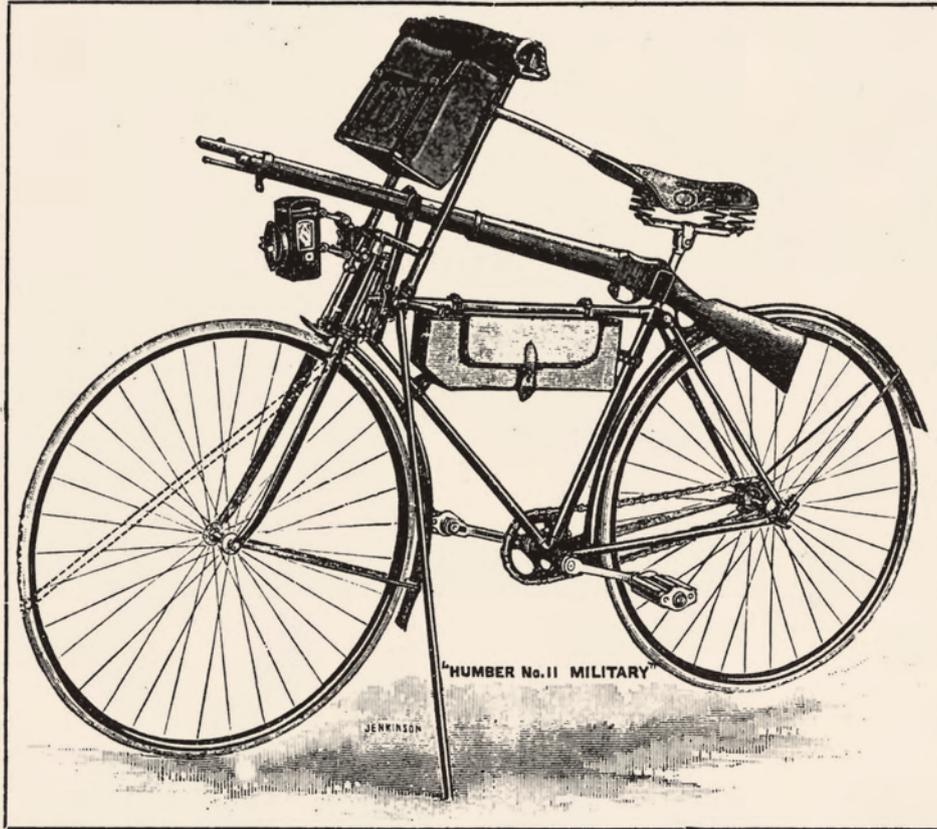


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De Beste Safety voor Militaire Wielrijders is de



HUMBER SAFETY

The British engineer Thomas Humber designs the first safety bike and immediately focuses on its possible military uses.

LEOPOLD II WANTS BELGIUM TO BECOME A CYCLING NATION

Like France, Belgium also quickly develops a great interest in cycling as a sport. As early as 1883, the cycling clubs in Ghent, Antwerp, Verviers, Leuven, Mons and Brussels come together to form the *Fédération Vélocipédique Belge* (Belgian Cycling Federation). Five years later, a rival *Union Vélocipédique Belge* (Belgian Cycling Union) is set up. In 1889, they merge to create the *Ligue Vélocipédique Belge*, the forerunner of today's Belgian Cycling Association. The safety bike makes it possible to race on public roads and over much greater distances. Following the Italian and French examples, the Belgians also begin to organize events of 100 kilometres and more. On 29 May 1892, the *Pesant Club Liégeois* hold the first edition of a race from Liege to Bastogne and back again – a bold undertaking for its time.

It is no coincidence that the first major cycling races take place in the province of Liege. The region has numerous cycling clubs and is home to some of the country's best racers, such as Léon Lhoest, Charles Van den Born and the track rider Robert Protin. In 1895, Protin even becomes the first ever world professional sprint champion. His duels with Hubert Houben from Brussels fill velodromes with thousands of enthusiastic fans. Above all, cycling is popular with the poorer sections of the population. By 1900, the country has almost 200 cycling clubs and the number of competitions and racers is steadily on the increase.

In 1893, the Paris newspaper *La Bicyclette* launches the idea of a race between the capitals of France and Belgium. The Belgian Cycling Association immediately sees the possible promotional benefit of the proposal and gives its full support. The Belgian press is also full of articles about the coming confrontation between the Belgian and French riders. The first winner of Paris-Brussels is André Henry, a bricklayer from Verviers, who immediately becomes a public hero. Five days later, he is even invited to an audience with the king! In his palace at Laken, Leopold II declares that he wants to make Belgium a sporting centre that will be attractive for international cyclists of all nationalities.

Van den Born wins the Belgian sprint championship seven times and later becomes an aviation pioneer.



Charles Van den Born, here as winner of the *Prix des étrangers* (Foreigner's Race) in 1909.



CYCLE-RIFLE VOLUNTEERS

For the English, it is clear: 'If we want to move our troops with a maximum of speed and a minimum of fatigue, then the bicycle has numerous advantages to offer.' The military authorities are aware of the importance of having cyclists in their ranks: 'They take full advantage of their mobility.' They are used mainly for reconnaissance purposes or as messengers and/or signalmen. Some larger mobile units even serve as advanced patrols. In 1890, the British Army has four different types of bikes at its disposal: the safety bicycle, the single tricycle, the tandem tricycle and the multicycle. Important lessons are learned during the South African War of 1899 to 1902, also known as the Second Boer War. In the fighting, the British seek to counteract the horse-based mobility of the Dutch-speaking Boers of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State by using for the first time a series of rapid-response cycling sections, which together form the Cape Colony Cyclist Corps.

During this same period, two military training schools for cyclists are also opened on the home front. A large-scale poster campaign is launched to recruit as many cycle-rifle volunteers as possible. Cyclists are also used with increasing frequency in the army's annual manoeuvres. They learn how to ride in columns, how to co-operate with the cavalry (the other mobile strategic arm), how to support the infantry, and how to rush to the defence of the coast when invasion threatens.



Recruiting poster to encourage the young men of Britain to join the Cyclist Corps.

WITH THE 'BELGICA' OVER HILL AND DALE!

The bicycle is also becoming more commonplace in the Belgian Army. Following a ministerial decree passed on 10 August 1896, a first temporary cycling company is set up. The driving force behind this 120-man company is Lieutenant Gaston Beirlaen of the Brussels Carabineers Regiment, who is himself a fervent cyclist. In addition, he is also secretary-general of the Touring Club de Belgique and editor of the weekly publication *La Pédale Militaire*, which appears between September 1893 and December 1894. Many amateur cyclists will opt to join the cycling company during their compulsory national service, but the company also produces a number of promising racers.

Lieutenant Beirlaen thinks that his soldiers can be much more than just cycling messengers. He believes that they can be used to greater effect as a mobile fighting unit. When he hears that a French infantry captain, Henry Gérard, is experimenting with folding bikes, he wants to know more. Folding bikes make it easier to cross obstacles like walls and ditches and can also be carried across terrain that is too difficult for riding. In 1897, his company tests the Gérard bike and a number of other folding models. They must all weigh less than 15 kilograms, be quick to fold and easy to carry, and must not hinder the soldiers in the act of firing their rifles. For example, his sharpshooters must be able to



The Belgian High Command also wants to make use of the Gérard system of foldable and portable bikes.



French infantry troops, with the folding bike of the French captain Gérard.

take aim while still sitting on the saddle with their feet on the ground, but without the pedals or the handlebars getting in the way. Beirlaen also wants it to be possible to link two folding bikes together to make a four-wheeler! Of the 26 models he tests, the 'Belgica' proves to be the best.



A French cyclist 'in the field'.

Het opvouwbare Rijwiel

Wat is het grootste bezwaar voor de militaire wielrijder? Dat hij niet overal kan rijden, evenmin als hij overal zijn rijwiel kan meenemen. Dat is wel mogelijk met het opvouwbare rijwiel. Het frame is geheel anders dan bij onze tegenwoordige modellen en doet denken aan het kruisframe van 4 à 5 jaar geleden. Het voor- en achterwiel zijn verbonden door een stalen buis, die in tweeën is verdeeld; de beide delen worden samen verbonden door een schroef, die als spil dienst doet. Teneinde te bewerkstelligen dat deze draaibare buis volkomen vast blijft zitten, is er om de spil een gespleten buis gemaakt, die men gemakkelijk over de gehele buis kan bewegen. Deze gespleten buis wordt echter, als men de machine berijdt, bij het draaingspunt vastgezet, door drie handschroeven aan te draaien. Deze handschroeven bestaan uit ringetjes, die men zeer vast kan aandraaien. Zodra deze nu zijn aangezet kunnen de beweegbare delen van de buis niet meer heen en weer gaan, terwijl zo men de schroeven losmaakt men de gespleten stalen buis gemakkelijk kan verschuiven en het vouwen der machine plaats kan doen vinden.

Het rijwiel weegt slechts 12 kg; men heeft zonder hulp van een sleutel 25 seconden nodig om het rijwiel op te bouwen en 15 seconden om het op de rug te bevestigen.

In their advertisements, the makers of folding bikes emphasize their suitability for 'the discerning military cyclist'.

THE FIRST CHAIRMAN OF THE UCI IS A BELGIAN

The Fédération Vélocipédique Belge is not the first national cycling association. It is preceded by the British Bicycle Union (1878), the League of American Wheelmen (1880), the Union Vélocipédique de France and the Dansk (Danish) Bicycle Club (both 1881). Like the Belgians, the Dutch, the Italians and the Swiss all set up their national federations in 1883, followed a year later by the Germans with the Bund Deutscher Radfahrer. Cycling therefore already has a firm organizational structure at national level before the dawn of the 20th century. However, things go less smoothly at the international level, where early efforts to form an overarching world association all fail. The rivalries between the national associations are just too great, often reflecting similar tensions in the diplomatic and political relations between their different countries.

True, the International Cyclists Association (ICA) is set up as early as 1892. This is dominated by the Anglo-Saxon countries, led by Great Britain. Perhaps this is not surprising: with George Pilkington Mills (the first winner of Bordeaux-Paris), Arthur Linton, Jimmy Michael, Arthur Chase, Jack Stocks and Albert Walters, the British have most of the best riders. However, as time passes the British Bicycle Union becomes increasingly worried by the sport's growing professionalism. In England there is a strong belief that sport should be seen purely as a matter for exercise and relaxation, as something fundamentally different from work. Accepting money for sport is therefore 'not done'. Cycling must remain the sport of passionate amateurs, not greedy professionals!

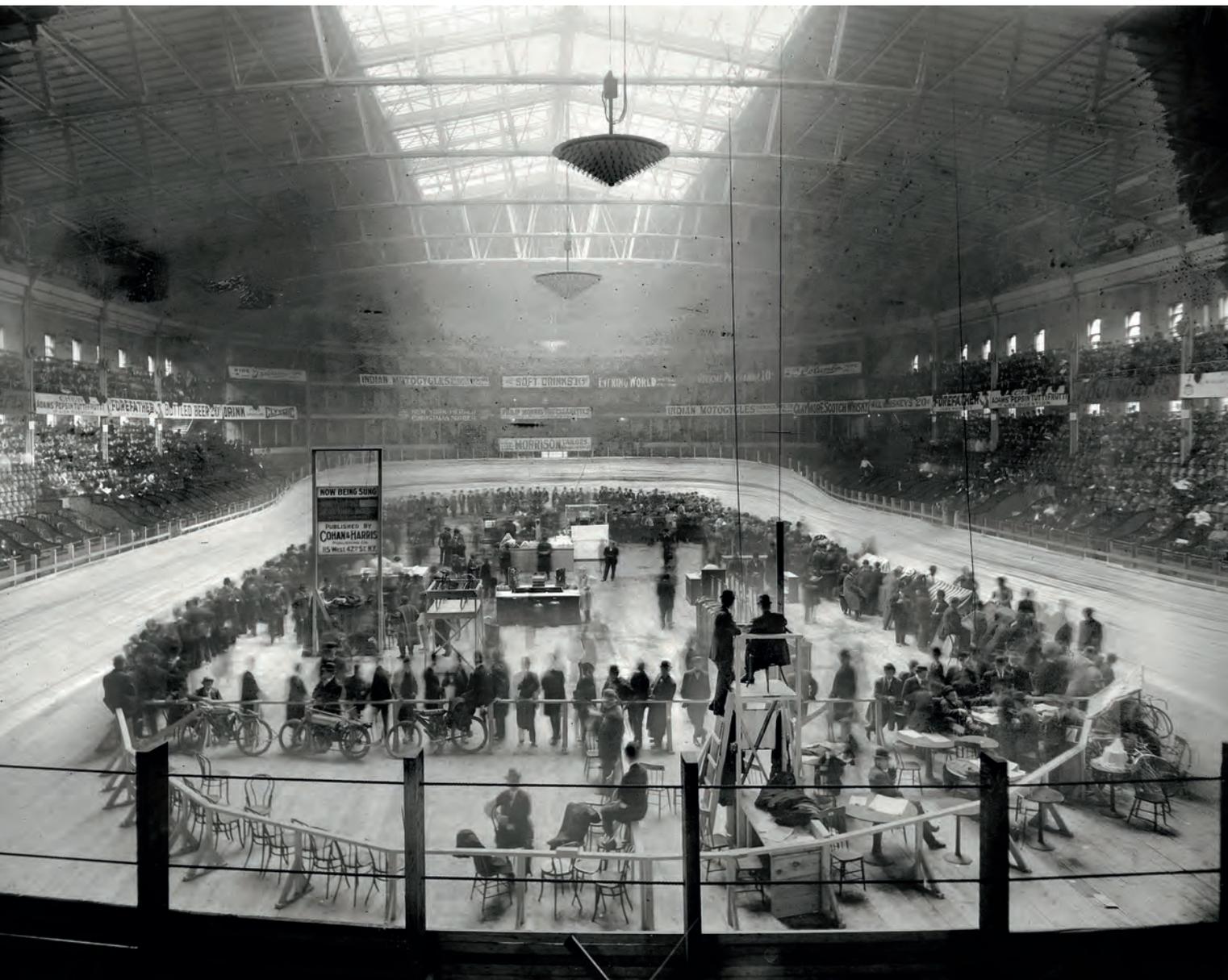
The fractious debates in international cycling persist, so that the Belgians, French and Italians eventually decide to set up an alternative body of their own. On 14 April 1900, at a hotel in Paris, they create the Union Cycliste International (UCI). The first chairman is an Antwerp businessman, Emile De Beukelaer, whose family own the company that makes the famous Elixir d'Anvers liqueur. In his youth De Beukelaer was quite a decent cyclist and he is also a board member of the Antwerp Cycle Club and the sport committee of the Belgian Cycling Federation. Other national federations soon affiliate themselves to the UCI, so that in 1903 the ICA is disbanded. Even the British Bicycle Union finally admits defeat and becomes a member of the UCI.

Marshall Walter Taylor, who becomes world sprint champion in 1899, the only black man ever to hold a cycling world title.

THE 'SIX DAYS' IN AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA

With the absorption of the ICA into the UCI, England disappears from the world cycling scene for more than half a century. It is not until the emergence of riders like Brian Robinson and Tom Simpson in the 1950s and 1960s that Britain again produces racers of an international calibre, paving the way for a new generation of 'giants' like Wiggins, Cavendish and Froome. But this does not mean that professional cycling was devoid of Anglo-Saxon riders in the years before the First World War. The United States produces 'stayers' like Iver Lawson and Bobby Walthour, as well as world-class sprinters like Arthur Zimmerman, Eddie Bald, George Banker, Frank Kramer and Marshall Walter Taylor. Together, they were the 'kings of the track' and Taylor — known in those less politically correct times as 'the Flying Negro' — remains to this day the only black world cycling champion. On the other side of the world, the Australians Jacky Clark and the young Robert Spears are already making a name for themselves. The Americans seldom take part in road races, but indoor six-day events are hugely popular. Jim Morgan, Joe Fogler, Eddy Root, Charley Miller and Floyd McFarland are among the sporting superstars of their time. Their Australian counterparts are Reginald McNamara and Alfred Goulet.





Madison Square Garden, here seen in December 1908. This world-famous sporting temple gives its name to the 'madison', a two-man indoor track event that is still ridden today.

Bobby Walthour in December 1909.



CYCLO-CROSS – A MILITARY INVENTION

To say that Flanders is the birthplace of cyclo-cross is to be highly economical with the historical truth! It is the French Army that first invents this new sporting discipline. It develops out of the friendly rivalry between a number of French cycle troops. They do what people all over the world love to do: test themselves against each other. After a large-scale exercise conducted by the French military in 1900, Private Daniel Gousseau issues a bold challenge to several of his cyclist colleagues. He suggests that the following Sunday they organize a race with their bikes across fields, over streams and through woods, for no other reason than to see which of them is best at it. And so a new branch of cycling sport is born: *cross-country*. But because ‘competitors’ in the new discipline soon discover that they spend as much of their time running and jumping over obstacles as they do on their bikes, the term *cyclo-pédestre* is added to the title.

What starts as a bit of fun amongst bored soldiers soon becomes a serious sporting activity. Gousseau, supported by his superiors in the army and encouraged by the journalist Géo Lefèvre (who is later one of the initiators of the Tour de France), approaches the French Cycling Union to discuss giving *cross-country cyclo-pédestre* formal recognition as a proper branch of the cycling sport. And with success! On 16 March 1902, the first official French cyclo-cross championship is held near the Kremlin-Bicêtre military base in Paris. In the following years, the discipline receives a further boost from the participation of non-military cyclists and even a number of leading professional racers. The young Octave Lapize, the first rider to carry his bike on his shoulder across difficult parts of the course, wins the national title in 1907. Between 1909 and 1914, Eugène Christophe is French champion for six successive years. It is also in France after the First World War, in 1924 at Suresnes near Paris, that the Critérium International – the first unofficial world championship – is held.



Cyclo-cross is invented in the French Army as a way to pass the time on a Sunday afternoon!