

# IHAGEE: Its history until 1945

by Hugo D. Ruys

The Dutch original of this article was published in 1984 in *Photohistorisch Tijdschrift*, the journal of the Dutch Society of Photographic Collectors. On essential points the text has been updated, based on current knowledge.



JOHAN STEENBERGEN IN DRESDEN.

Vorrichtung zum Ausdrücken des Anschlages für die Unendlichstellung des Objektivträgers.

Patentiert im Deutschen Reiche vom 25. September 1910 ab.

Bei den gebräuchlichen Handkameras wird der Objektivträger beim Herausziehen aus der Kamera in der Unendlichstellung durch einen Anschlag festgehalten. Sobald man das Objektivträger beim Herausziehen aus dem Kameragehäuse angehalten wird, sobald das Objektiv auf Unendlich steht. Dieser Anschlag befindet sich auf einem um den Punkt  $\delta$  drehbaren

Patent of Johan Steenbergen, two years before he founded Ihagee.

The Exakta is by far the best known product of the Ihagee company in Dresden. However, this company already existed for over 20 years before the first camera with the name Exakta was produced. Even now (1984!), when the Exakta must be seen as deceased, the factory still exists and is in use by Pentacon, the company that produces the Praktica. The cameras that have been sold later under the name Exakta, are not from there; they have been built in Japan.

This article describes the history of Ihagee and of its founder Johan Steenbergen until 1945. In the descriptions, only a few product details will be mentioned. They will have to wait for later articles.

## Dutchman



Why was the Exakta so popular in the Netherlands? One of the reasons may have been that it appealed to us that the company was founded by a Dutchman. It was Johan Steenbergen, born on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 1886 in Meppel. His father, Jan Steenbergen was "draper" (trader of cloth and clothing) and his son should have become the same. He was so entered in the Register of Population before he left the country.

From his mother Sophie Brümmer he inherited his commercial spirit. As a boy he bought a box of pencils at an auction and sold them with considerable profit to family and friends. During his

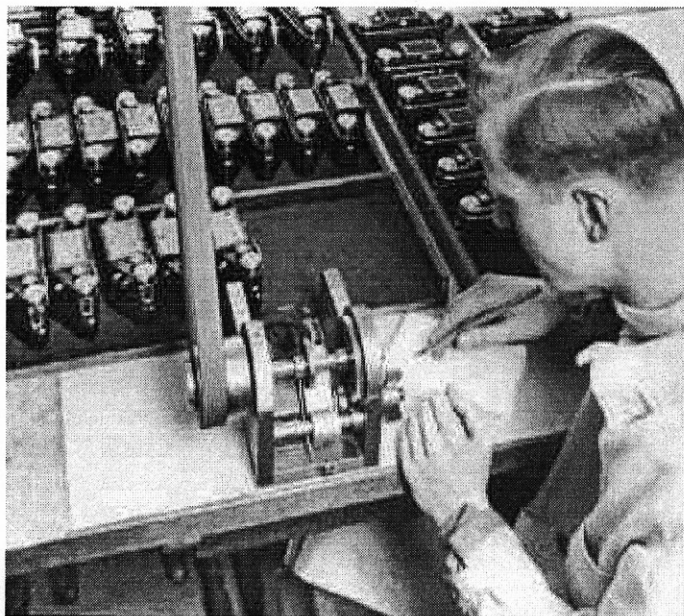
Secondary School time he became interested in photography products, chemicals and gramophones, which he sold in his own business in Meppel. After his father's death and given his disinterest in drapery, it was decided to close down the business in Meppel. His commercial talents came in handy at the spectacular winding-up sale. Before he left for Dresden, he already had designed a trade mark: a setting moon with rising sun; this was to be used by Ihagee for many years.

## Dresden

On recommendation from his uncle and guardian Johan was sent to Dresden, where a tailor academy as well as a flowering precision-mechanical industry existed. The importance of Dresden for photography at the time is supported by the fact that an international photography exhibition was held there in 1908. Steenbergen couldn't be sympathetic to the job of tailor and was almost immediately working as an apprentice for H. Ernemann K.G., one of the dozens of photographic companies active in Dresden. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1910 the Imperial Patent Register has registered patent no. 262624 about a "construction to disable the infinity stop of the lens carrier" on Steenbergen's name. In 1911 Steenbergen had his name removed from the Register of Population in Meppel.

## Industry and Trade

In April 1912 Steenbergen founded the Industrie- und Handelsgesellschaft m.b.H. Kamerafabrik mit Kraftbetrieb (Industry and Trade Company Ltd. with Power Drive) at the address Marcolinstrasse 8, Dresden-A.5, supported financially by the Dresdner Bank and his family. Originally the company aimed at a broad program: wholesale trade of photographic products (equipment, accessories and chemicals) and the production of equipment, probably mainly by assembling parts acquired elsewhere. Not long after this, the activities were limited to the construction and trade of equipment. The name of the company was shortened to Ihagee Kamerawerk G.m.b.H. Ihagee is the pronunciation of the abbreviation IHG (eehahgáy); G.m.b.H is comparable to Ltd.; werk means factory.

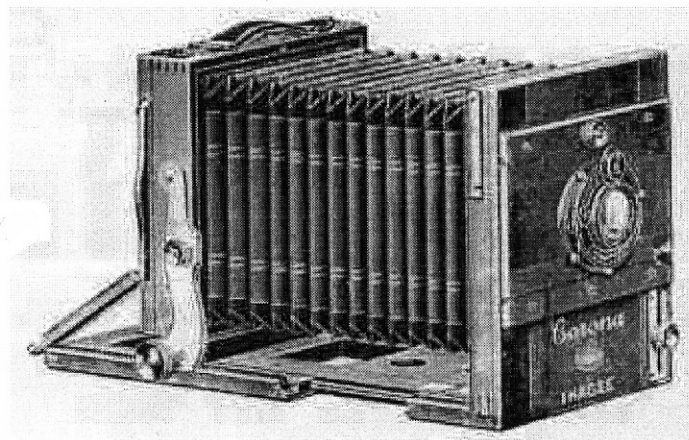


Testing the VP Exakta

From the first period up till about 1918 we actually know very little about the company, except that it was growing. The first camera was the Photorex, a folding camera with compound shutter and, of course, the patented invention from 1910.

During that time, there must have been some relationship with Monowerk Rudolf Chaste, because there is a version of the Mono Minax from about 1914 with the name Ihagee on it. At the beginning of the year of 1914-1918 so many employees were drafted that the factory had to close down, but in February of 1915 production was resumed. Steenbergen in the mean time had moved to The Hague in The Netherlands, from where he continued to run his business.

In 1919 the factory clearly was too small, so it was moved to the Gottfried Kellerstrasse 85 in Dresden-Cotta. In the spring of 1922 a separate office in the Grillparzer Strasse was added. In the pioneer years, Steenbergen worked very hard in financially difficult circumstances. Sometimes his only good meals were those with customers. From that time he liked to tell the story that he sold a batch of bad lenses, he nearly got stuck with, as close-up lenses with "artistic blur".



Reisekamera (travel camera) Corona

After the first world war Steenbergen decided to take up the production of the wooden camera frames himself. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1918 the "offene Handelsgesellschaft Ihagee Kamerawerk Steenbergen & Co" was entered in the Commercial Register of Dresden. The "Co" was a group of trusted woodworkers, namely Otto Diebel, Emil Englisch, Hugo Frauenstein, Emil Kirsch, Konrad Koch and Herman Schubert. Englisch brought in his little factory of studio and travel cameras, where he at that moment already had been producing the travel camera Corona, later to be called Ihagee Corona. Steenbergen himself was general manager and sales manager, Frauenstein was technical manager, Englisch was production manager. Diebel later took over sales.

### Mirror reflex



The factory at Schandauer Strasse

Ihagee became famous with the mirror reflex Exakta, but that wasn't by far the first mirror reflex from this company. Already in 1920

Ihagee produced the Paff, a single lens mirror reflex box camera. Many other mirror reflexes have been produced before the Exakta era. Because of the success of amateur photography and the quality of the Ihagee products, soon the factory was too small again and had to be moved in 1923. In the Dresdener district of Striesen, where Ernemann and Ica also had their works, a large and extendable building was constructed on Schandauerstrasse 24. On one side was the Bergmannstrasse.

The wing on the other side, on Glasshütterstrasse, was added later. The factory had a ground surface of 5580 square meters and consisted of a basement, three normal floors, an attic and a loft. Besides for machines, raw materials and stock, there was room for 500 employees. In advertisements the company used to call the building "The House of Thousand" and talk about "When thousand Hands are not Enough", suggesting a thousand employees working there. Steenbergen loved this kind of statements, nowadays considered a little overdone.

The need for the new wing was clear very soon. In 1925 capital to finance this extension was searched for (also in the Netherlands). The existing building was appraised. The value of building, foundations, appliances and equipment was valued at 305,600 Goldmark of 1914. This addition "of 1914" was necessary because the value of the German mark had been very unreliable in the past couple of years: the gigantic inflation of 1923/1924 was only just a thing of the past. An example: on a postcard sent to the Netherlands in November 1923, stamps to a value of 2,400,000,000 mark were fixed.

### Werner Wurst

In the beginning Steenbergen wrote advertisement texts and other publicity material himself. In 1928 Werner Wurst joined the company. He started as apprentice, but studied at the German Photo Trading School in Dresden and then became manager of the publicity department. Werner Wurst became well known for his book "Exakta Kleinbild-Fotografie", reprinted eleven times, and many other books and publications about the Exakta and photography in general. In 1937 he also became confidential clerk and remained in that position until 1945. After the war, he settled as an independent publicity consultant and writer.



In many advertisements from that time the name "Striesen" is to be found, together with a number. This seems to be an address, but in fact it is the name of the district where the factory stood, combined with a number to keep apart the reactions to different advertisements.

### Consul

Clearly Steenbergen did not alienate from his mother country, because in 1928 he was asked to manage the Dutch consulate in Dresden. The consulate got its rooms in the factory. Steenbergen was appointed honorary consul in 1929. On June 28, 1930 prince Hendrik of the Netherlands (grandfather of the present queen Beatrix) visited the consulate and the factory. This visit is documented in an article in the Dutch journal Wereldkroniek (World Chronicle). At this occasion, the prince was presented with a camera for his daughter, princess Juliana. Steenbergen has been consul during and after the war in various cities in the USA and West Germany.



## "Miniature size"

Over the years, Ihagee has build many camera types, made of wood and metal, with sliding and folding bellows, for plates, film pack and roll film but (with the exception of the Paff and the originally non-Ihagee camera Corona) never with the type names on them. In 1933 that changed with the appearance of the "miniature" camera Exakta with its image format of 4 x 6.5 cm (not 4.5 x 6 cm!) on roll film. The term "miniature" at the time had a broader meaning than "24 x 36 mm image on 35 mm film". The 4.5 x 6 cm size Ermanox from Ernemann in 1932 was also called a "miniature" camera.

# IHAGEE CAMERA'S



1924

\*

1925

Because Ihagee as far as we know has numbered all its cameras sequentially, and the serial numbers of the Exakta start with 400,000, the factory has probably produced 400,000 cameras in the first 21 years of its existence. In any case, the factory produced about 3000 cameras a month, with a staff of 600, shortly before the start of the second world war.

## Constructor

The Exakta has been invented, or better constructed, by Karl Nüchterlein, with the assistance of e.g. Otto Helfricht and Rudolf

Groschupf. His first design was followed in 1936, i.e. three years later, by the first single lens mirror reflex camera in the world. This was the beginning of the world success of this camera type and also of the world success of the Ihagee factory. If Nüchterlein had had his way, the Exakta also would have been the world's first camera with TTL-light measuring.

DEUTSCHES REICH



AUSGEGEBEN AM  
2. JULI 1942



## REICHSPATENTAMT PATENTTSCHRIFT

№ 722 135

KLASSE 57 a GRUPPE 9 03

I 65263 IX a/57 a

\* **Karl Nüchterlein in Dresden** \*

ist als Erfinder genannt worden.

12 JUN 1948

Ihagee Kamerawerk AG. in Dresden  
Spiegelreflexkamera mit Belichtungsmesser

Patentiert im Deutschen Reich vom 28. Juli 1939 an  
Patenterteilung bekanntgemacht am 14. Mai 1942

Es gibt Spiegelreflexkameras mit eingebautem elektrischem Belichtungsmesser, dessen Photozelle das Licht durch die Aufnahme-

nannten Art, bei der also in der Aufnahme-kammer eine den Belichtungsmesser steuernde Photozelle angeordnet ist, die über die

Patent for a reflex camera with light meter from May 1942

On November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1939, Ihagee registered a patent at the Reichspatentamt (State Patent Office) for a reflex camera with electrical light meter, with Nüchterlein as inventor. In 1943 another patent was registered, that clearly contains the TTL-principle.

Zu der Patentschrift 722 135  
Kl. 57 a Gr. 9 03

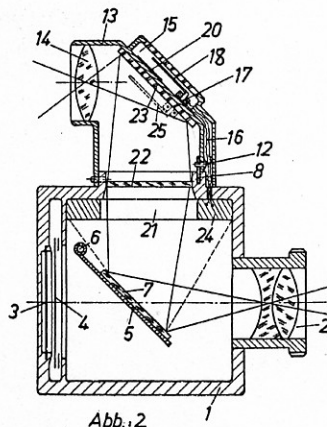


Abb. 2

The Japanese Topcon factory however has marketed the first camera with TTL-measuring. Is it only accidental that the Topcon had the same bayonet mount as the Kine Exakta? Talking about prevision: Ihagee had the name "Exakta" registered on November 25<sup>th</sup> 1929. Nüchterlein's designs have been realized by company engineers Otto Helfricht,

Willy Teubner, Rudolf Groschupf, Hans Loose and others. Nüchterlein himself was drafted during the war and later declared missing in action.

## War

The second world war has had an enormous influence on Ihagee. Already on January 15, 1940 the "Regulation concerning the handling of enemy property" was issued. This meant that citizens of enemy countries couldn't dispose over their possessions any more. That was soon applicable to Ihagee owner Steenberg. In 1941 his property and that of his wife were confiscated, and on August 26 all managers

and board members were fired and a member of the Nazi Party was appointed as Administrator. From about that time Steenbergen and other Dutch employees were not allowed to enter the premises. They don't know anymore what was produced in the factory. Now it is known that production more and more served the Wehrmacht. In Germany it was not allowed to sell cameras since the invasion of Poland in 1939. The export to the Netherlands continued until the end of 1940, but at that time sales were stagnant anyway. In 1943 Ihagee was finally put under "Control of foreign property".



Engraving the name "Exakta" on VP Exaktas

On Oktober 8, 1941 the "offene Handelsgesellschaft Ihagee Kamera-  
werk Steenbergen & Co" was split up into two separate companies:  
"Ihagee Kamerawerk Aktiengesellschaft" and "Steenbergen & Co".  
Public notary dr. Kurt Gumprecht in Dresden passed the deed. Dr.  
Alfred Erler, bank manager, dr. Erich Fürster, lawyer and dr. Karl  
Kühn, lawyer became board members. Management consisted of  
Otto Diebel, Hugo Frauenstein en Emil Englisch. With this change of  
name and structure Steenbergen wanted to safeguard his company  
and possessions as well as possible. He himself withdraw from  
management.

The share-capital was divided as follows:

- Johan Steenbergen	RM 300.000
- Steenbergen & Co	RM 315.000
- Otto Diebel, Emil Englisch, Hugo Frauenstein, Konrad Koch en Herman Schubert together	RM 135.000

The company Steenbergen & Co became owner of the site of the factory and the production machinery.



Assembling the VP Exakta 1938

In May 1940 Steenbergen and his wife have been arrested and kept prisoner for a short time in a hotel in Friedrichshafen. On May 15, 1941 he and his wife left Germany and went to the United States under an arrangement of the Swiss. Before he left, he appointed dr. Glier, the accountant of Ihagee, proxy with the exception of the sales of stock. Between April 1943 and November 1945 Steenbergen studied English and economics at San Francisco Junior College. In December 1943 he became involved in the work of the Dutch consulate in San Francisco and On March 2, 1944 was appointed honorary consul.

### Destruction

In 1943 the German "State commissioner for confiscated foreign property" appointed a different proxy, i.e. Herr Manicke, who also became general manager. This man first tried to buy the stock from Steenbergen; after this had failed he aimed at bankruptcy of Ihagee.

He nearly succeeded in 1944, although at the time Ihagee had about 700 people working for the war industry. Ihagee was considered to be "Jewish related" property, because Steenbergen's wife was of Jewish origin. Dr. Glier later has estimated the damage caused by Manicke to be 1.6 million RM. Finally, the factory was completely destroyed during the air strike on Dresden on February 13, 1945.

