

# 826th Squadron Sports

By Orville M Steward

With the all-American pastime of baseball setting the pace, an unforeseen galaxy of stars and an extravaganza extraordinary, featuring such talent and organizers as Lew Bekeza, Murray Austein, the immortal "Shoes" Zamek, "Windmill" Day, and "Gabby" O'Leary of Ordnance, laid on a diamond hewn from an ex-sheep pasture. They worked it into a top-flight stadium. They were aided by the patient and unrelenting efforts of Lt McGregor, Captain Sheppard, and a host of GI's too numerous to mention. Special Service, who did a remarkable job of keeping equipment circulating and lending with a smile what they had. The ball field now in the shape of a small circuit was formed from different sections of the squadron. The Big 5 would be Engineering, Communications, Armament, Ordnance and a team composed of different members of combat crews. But it wasn't restricted to enlisted men.

More than once the "Wheels" took off their bars to pick up a mitt when the umpire shouted "Play Ball" If I may be so informal I will call them by their diamond names. Some of the favorites were "Lefty" Ewen, in the well, "McGregor", and the officers pitcher, the late Major McDaniel. A squadron bristling with such talent but an accurate record was never kept and today it is debatable to reveal who did win it.

When cooler days sent fellows running for jackets and abandoning their baseball gloves a more invigorating and stimulating sport came in. Yep, they converted the elliptical, ball diamond into a grid-iron. The sight of much hip-shifting and fleet footed athletes streaking and slashing facilitating the real McCoy, the knights of a grid-iron.

An attempt to organize a circuit put forth by "Big Boy" Bekeza, met practically the same fate as the baseball league, One powerful team developed, one that played the 451st to a 0-0 tie in one game time and two overtime periods. Along with players already mentioned came "Big Elmer" Benham". Jack Fuller, Joe Glenn, Johnny Zimma, and yours truly, Sgt Seward.

At the close of the football season and the setting in of true winter found the sporting blood of good "ole" 826th cropping out along other lines. Following the re-establishing and renewing of club and dayroom facilities, and the outbreak of such strenuous parlor games as bridge, chess, cribbage, checkers, pinochle, and ping-pong, a hot and fast moving tournament developed as a trip to Paris was offered to the winners. The lucky lads to win out were Clements and Rosenzweig taking bridge, Captain Sheppard winning chess, cribbage went to Monteith, Frank walked away with checker honors. Bekeza and Winslett were no surprise when they copped pinochle. All these retired from the group, except Filipek, and that boy is still going.

When spring air blew across the old sheep pasture and the

Big Wigs got together they produced a field day and what a gala event, an expose, a scintillating and exotic jamboree if I ever saw one, with humor and its more serious sports and pastimes, competition strong and real, and a milestone in our overseas career; an anniversary,

Lt, Gross was the only member of 826th to place in softball throw for distance, The only man to place in the crab race was Winslett, a late entry running a close third. In the event to follow, a three legged race, Constabile and Surret finished a beautiful second, giving us so far two places and a show, Until the combat shuttle race we were strictly in for second best, but we took that event, springing one of the greatest surprises yet, off "Bob" Moh's gain and Lt. Bodah's finish, (who incidently took the 50 yard event in grand style). We uncorked an undefeatable congregation of

exuberant talent. They were feats of deft footwork.

Following this track event came volley ball. Going into this event with untried talent we ended up a great second and that was a second that is not to be frowned upon by anyone, With a game apiece the boys started a rally that carried them from behind into a duce game, although uncertain winds marred the playing slightly, it was still the game of highest caliber and true sportsmanship.

Polishing off the headquarters outfit in a tug of war wasn't a walk-away, I'll tell you that, but

with effort they acquired powerhouse determination to drag and slide and pull their way into the semi-finals where that powerhouse was to meet the highly tutored 825th aggregation.

At the sound of the gun when the two powerful teams hauled into opposite directions, the whine and creak of the rope gave the necessary tell-tell of fiber under strain. Slowly but surely the effulgence of sport gave way to grit and brawn and plain beef, slowly but definitely our strength was ebbing away giving a little but still fighting, Ole Red Jones and Clyde Jones, "Shoes" Zamek, Zeke Bekeza, Earl Shrack, and anchorman Eicher, along with "Hefty" Enos & Fuller, Bell and Lt Vance, straining and fighting till the sinews and muscles of their chest and arms gave definite signs of their total effort.

Slowly they halted their opponents advance and then at a slight sign of the possibility of their regaining lost ground, ebullience ran through the crowd but again and again they lost foot-hold until finally anchor man Eicher made a stand on the line. He only poised there momentarily and then he was across. It was another great second, 826th finishing the meet three wins, three second place, and one third place, as Lt Browne shoved the slashing of his great mule dust in the mule race that followed. Not a bad day, and not a bad year either. Yep, it took a year.



*Tug of War as described in text*