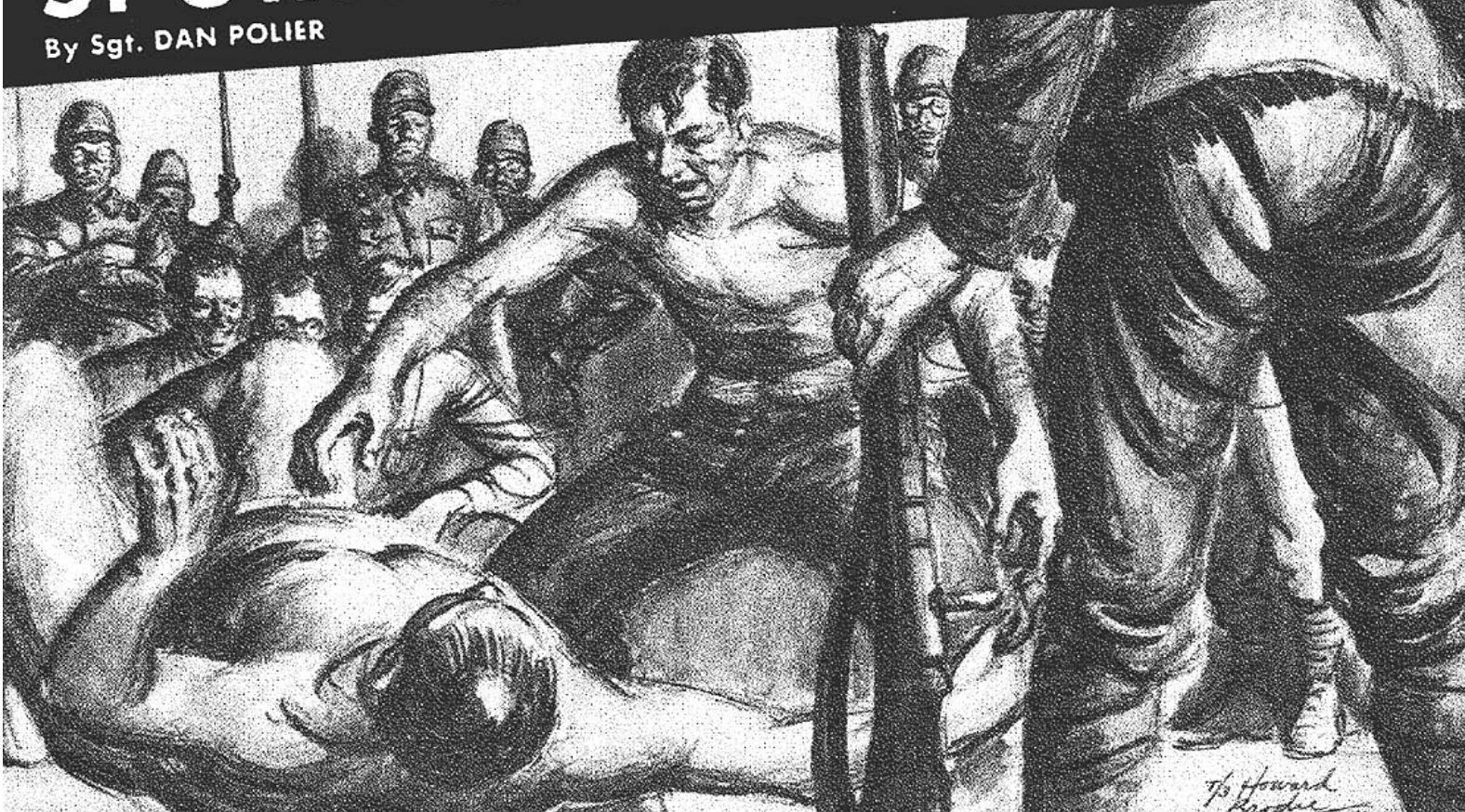


SPORTS: EX-PRISONER TELLS OF SPORTS IN JAP CONCENTRATION CAMP

By Sgt. DAN POLIER



WE WENT TO THE GUARDHOUSE WITH BELL, PREPARED TO BRING AWAY THE PIECES. BUT DARNED IF THEY COULD PIN HIM. HE THREW THE SUMOS ALL OVER THE MAT.

As far as I know we played the Japanese in the first softball game between enemy teams in this war. The captain of the guard at the Shanghai camp was nuts about softball, and he watched us play every time he had the opportunity. One day he came over to me and said: 'Hey, Gun San, someday we play softball?'

"We stalled and tried to prevent the game, because we knew so many things could go wrong. But he kept insisting, so the game was scheduled. Everybody turned out including all the big shots from the Embassy and the Army.

"Before the game started we noticed that the Jap pitcher was warming up with an overhand delivery. Since I was one of the prison committeemen, the fellows said it was my duty to go over and tell him this was a softball game not baseball. I got the interpreter and we both tried to show the pitcher how to throw the ball with an underhand motion. He tried it once or twice and then said in Japanese: 'The hell with it.'

"As it turned out it didn't make any difference whether this Jap threw overhanded or not. We walloped the daylights out of him and scored 27 runs in the first inning. After the inning was over I got the team together and told them we had better throw the game and let the Japs save face.

"Well, it got so funny that everybody on the side lines, except the Japs of course, nearly choked while trying to keep from laughing. We dropped balls, muffed easy grounders and stumbled all over ourselves. But they still couldn't make it an even ball game. We even tried applauding every time one of them hit the ball or scored a run. We only applauded twice, though, because after the seventh inning the score was 28 to 2.

"Then the captain of the guard called time. He came over to me and said: 'Hey, Gun San, I think more better we do not keep score. I think more better we play for sportsmanship.' That saved face for everybody including the umpire who was a Dutchman. This Dutchman was sweating plenty. He knew, if he called a close one wrong, the Japs would ask his name, number and nationality, and when they discovered he was Dutch they would give him hell. The Japs really hate the Dutch.

"That softball game was practically the only contact in sports we had with the Japanese except for a wrestling match. We had a big fellow with us, a guy named Chris Bell, who was 6 feet 2 and the rocky sort. He used to be a lumberman in Shanghai. The Jap guards were having a wrestling tournament at the guardhouse and they wanted Bell to come down and wrestle one of those huge sumo men. These sumos weigh about 300 pounds and are very agile. We tried to duck the challenge, but it was no use. They insisted. Anyway, Bell said he would like to take them on. We went to the guardhouse with him fully prepared to bring away the little pieces. But darned if they could pin him. He threw the sumos all over the mat. In fact, it became so one-sided that Bell had to make it look good and let them save face.

"After that the Japs always treated Bell with great respect. Every time they saw him they would pat him on the back and say: 'Bell, you plenty big man.'"

LATE one afternoon in 1942 at the Japanese concentration camp at Santo Tomas University, Manila, the imprisoned Americans gathered around the playing field to watch a soccer game between the American and British men. Suddenly there was a big commotion at the gate. The Jap guards, who had been leaning on their rifles watching the game, popped to attention and presented arms. A whole company of Jap soldiers marched onto the playing field and proceeded to drill alongside of the soccer players.

"We were so stunned at first we didn't know what to do," said Royal Arch Gunnison of the Mutual Broadcasting System, who returned on the *Gripsholm* after spending almost two years behind barbed wire at Manila and Shanghai. "But we decided we had to save face. You know how important that is out there. So we continued to play. The Jap officer deliberately marched his company as close to us as he could. In fact, he got so close that the soccer ball got tangled up in the feet of his men. You never saw such confusion. The Japs were stumbling and falling over each other. Then to make things worse, this officer gave the command: to the rear march. Honestly, it was just like a Bob Hope comedy, only funnier.

"You know how the Jap carries his helmet on his back. Well, when these guys started bumping into each other their helmets fell off, and every time one tried to pick up his helmet he would pick up the soccer ball instead. Finally the officer saw he was losing more face than we were, so he marched his men off the field. We were afraid of how the Japs might take that embarrassment, so we quit playing. When we stopped the Americans were leading. It was the first time we had beaten the British. But they kept insisting we had to bring in Jap ringers to do it.

"That incident might sound funny to you, but actually it was serious business. If we had laughed, as most of us wanted to, they would have punished us severely. The Jap humiliates easily.

"They were always doing things like that if they thought we were enjoying ourselves too much. Sometimes they would come out to a softball game and pick four or five men from each team and cart them off somewhere to dig ditches until the game was over."

Gunnison continued:

"Sports were practically our only form of entertainment at Santo Tomas. Everybody from the little children to the women played some sort of game. We even built special fields for them. We held our own Golden Gloves boxing tournament and one for the children, too. The Japs let us organize softball leagues, and we had 30 teams playing. Each community in the camp had its own team. Some of the names were funny, like East Shanty Town, Frog Bottom, Room 13 (that room had about 30 fellows crammed into it), the Manila Polo Club and the Pan-American Airways. They were divided into the American and National League and, of course, we had our own World Series. As I remember it, the Pan-Americans won the series.

"Speaking of the World Series, we got full reports on the 1942 series through our underground system in Manila. The people on the outside would pick up the game on the short wave and slip us the batteries and inning-by-inning scores through the fence. Somebody put up a blackboard behind the lost-and-found department and kept it up to date. The Japs never did catch on. They thought it was the score of one of the games we were playing.

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By the men . . . for the
men in the service