Lumba and Mike
By Bob Crickard
(Body Platoon 1954-57)

The winning of trophies and championships was very important to the organisation. Every encouragement was given to those who took part in sports, often to the disgust of non-participating boys and instructors, and sometimes to the detriment of the education and military training of the athletes involved. The boxing team once spent a whole term devoted purely to boxing training and did not even have to go to educational classes. We had extra and specialised rations, including gammon steaks and pints of cold milk. We were also excused parades and would go back to bed after the early morning training.

Due to the way in which our treatment differed to that of the non-athletic boy soldier we considered ourselves elitist. We also thought we were very macho in the boxing team. I suppose in the eyes of the other boys we were unpleasant arrogant so and so's. The team was a very closely knit entity and with one or two exceptions we got on very well together. I had two particular friends; one called Pete Roberts, whose nickname was Lumba, and Mike Scott who played the bagpipes. In keeping with our macho image of ourselves we had a series of games and tricks that we used to play on one another. One in particular consisted of having a conversation with another boxer then without warning and in mid-sentence throwing a punch towards the other's chin stopping the punch millimetres short of the target. If the other did not flinch and carried on the conversation as though nothing had happened he had won that round. Some were better than others at that game while others did not have the correct reactions.

Once in the gymnasium, on the day of an important match against the Royal Engineer Boys, I tried it with Lumba - and came a cropper! As I threw my dummy punch towards his chin he threw a perfectly composed and solid right hand which instead of stopping short thudded into my eye. The eye swelled up immediately. Lumba panicked as he realised what he had done and I took off after him. We tore round the boxing ring, already built for the fights that evening, and as we skidded round one corner of the ring Lumba grabbed the tubular metal assembly of the stool to keep his balance and the edge of the contraption slammed into my other eye. This swelled up as quickly as the first had done. I looked like a Panda.

At that moment Staff Burdett our coach showed up before further mayhem could take place. He exploded when he saw my injuries because it was obvious that I would not pass the medical for the fights. Fortunately the weigh-ins and medical were separate activities. I went for the weigh in and Mike, who was reserve middleweight, volunteered to go in my place for the medical. Fortunately the Medical Officer suspected nothing or if he did decided to let it pass. I won my match that evening, due in no small way I'm convinced, to my opponent being intimidated and believing, from the extent of my facial injuries, that if I was in the ring despite the bruises I must be unstoppable.