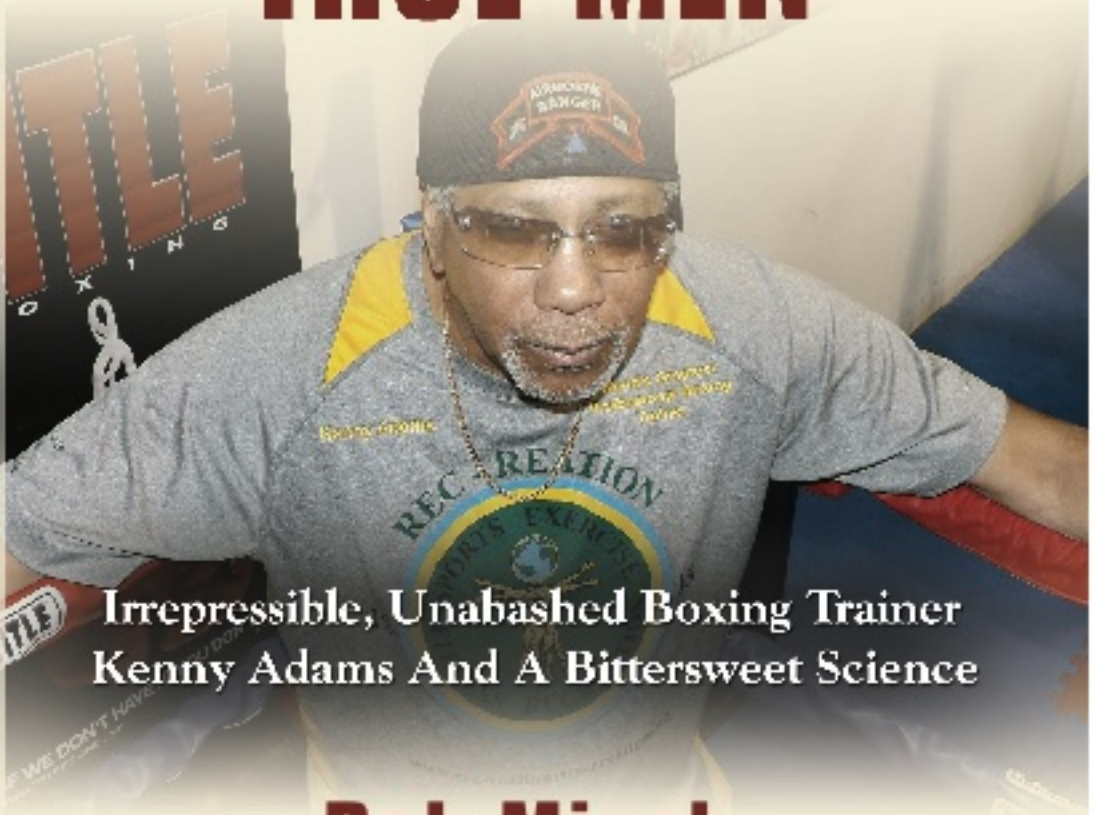
"Kenny taught me to stay dedicated. Don't work till you're tired; work till you're done. And stay alert; stay alive."

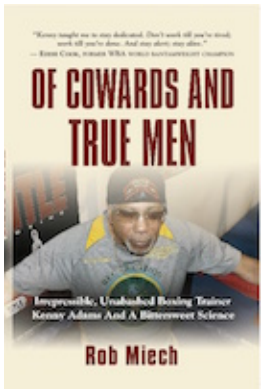
— EDDIE COOK, FORMER WBA WORLD BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMPION

OF COWARDS AND TRUE MEN



Irrepressible, Unabashed Boxing Trainer Kenny Adams And A Bittersweet Science

Rob Miech



Kenny Adams survived on profanity and pugilism, turning Fort Hood into the premier military boxing outfit and coaching the controversial 1988 U.S. Olympic boxing team in South Korea. Twenty-six of his pros have won world-title belts. His amateur and professional successes are nonpareil. Here is the unapologetic and unflinching life of an American fable, and the crude, raw, and vulgar world in which he has flourished.

Of Cowards and True Men

Rob Miech

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I

URINE SPRAYS ALL over the black canvas. A fully loaded Italian Galesi-Brescia 6.35 pearl-handled .25-caliber pistol tumbles onto the floor of the boxing ring. Just another day in the office for Kenny Adams.

Enter the accomplished trainer's domain and expect anything. "With Kenny, you never know," says a longtime colleague who was there the day of Kenny's twin chagrins. First off, there's the favorite word. Four perfectly balanced syllables, the sweet matronly beginning hammered by the sour, vulgar punctuation. Grandmas and nuns, choirboys and girl scouts would be wise to walk on by. Adams is callous and direct and merciless, with scant filters between the mind and maw. The temperamental and tentative need not apply. Many aspiring pugilists have left him. He has sacked many. He toiled for decades in the U.S. Army to bask in the professional luxury of training whomever he chooses, however his whims dictate, never needing to rely on a fraction of their prize money to survive.

It has evolved nicely, for what Kenny Adams has achieved in the amateur and professional ranks is nonpareil, as if he's experienced two lifetimes. He did it all his way, coarse and scurrilous. Confront him, cross that line, and the verbal can turn physical in a flash. Men in prominent positions to strangers on the street have felt his wrath, his grip on their throats. He neither forgets nor forgives. Adams became a Screaming Eagle and a Ranger. He quashed his own combat exemption—an eardrum had been damaged on the shooting range—to exact revenge in Vietnam for the wounds suffered by a dear friend. He declined to receive a prestigious peacetime honor from a superior because, well, he

just didn't like the damn colonel who was going to present the medal to him. Send it to the house, Adams told a clerk.

How Kenny Adams transformed Fort Hood into the boxing superpower of the military is legend. Espousing distance and range, and the vital pivot maneuver, he turned the raw into Olympic gold medalists. Other men rave about Kenny Adams, swear by him, adore him unconditionally. A guy from the Navy—a former *middie*—wrote Adams long after he had fought for him in a tournament in South America and called Adams a maker of men, a leader of warriors, his hero. A *marine* would pen a seven-stanza poem about the coach—"The Ballard [*sic*] of Kenny Adams." He would wean amateurs into professional world champions.

Scribes in gilded circles with reined-in vocabularies and sensitive editors of family publications only allude to a style and method that is *blunt, direct, demanding, no-nonsense* and *persuasive.* They call him a *true disciplinarian*.

I sought the unvarnished reality of an American fable. With all that Kenny Adams has achieved, he has never been honored as professional trainer of the year. Of more concern, he does not have a plaque in the boxing hall of fame that matters. It vexes the retired master sergeant but he tries not to let on.

Occasional recognition, however, would be nice. When the September 20I5 issue of *The Ring* magazine that features Terence Crawford on its cover is delivered to his home, Kenny Adams is eager to flip inside to find his name in the six-page feature about the sterling junior welterweight; Adams tutored Crawford for his first three bouts. Alas, he hands ownership of the periodical to me and says, "Not one word!" The edition also contains a profile on mitts work, of which Adams might be considered something of a pioneer, and a comprehensive piece about the International Boxing

Hall of Fame Class of 20I5. To Adams, this particular issue is the treble of taint.

"He paid his dues," says John Vaughn, who fought at light heavyweight for the Air Force in the mid-I970s and has known Kenny Adams for more than forty years. "A man like that has to be recognized. What he did in the amateurs can't be overlooked, and what he's done with professionals … if anyone should be in the hall of fame, it should be Kenny." Terence Crawford says Adams can take a bum, from scratch, and make him a champion. "That defines a great coach."

In that introductory scene, Kenny Adams had just undergone three operations, back-to-back-to-back, all within a week of each other near his Las Vegas home at the end of 20I0. In one procedure ten polyps were removed from his bladder, the others dealt with a prostate issue and an anal fissure. His kidneys were failing. He was seventy. Many were saying prayers for you, says a fellow trainer. "Needed 'em," confides a sullen Adams years later.

Convalescence would have challenged a man half his age, but he owns irascible blood, a resolute soul, and Little Sugar for a nickname. And if a member of his stable has a fight on the docket, it will take a company of men or a rendezvous with Saint Peter to keep Kenny Adams from working that corner. So he jab-steps left and right, tossing the red leather mitts at lightweight Sharif Bogere to instill tactics and sharpen his instincts for an upcoming bout at Mandalay Bay.

Then it happens. The violent manner in which Adams flashes those thick mitts mean his oak-knot elbows will inexorably batter the urostomy bag, the consequence of those delicate surgeries, right there in his midsection. The Italian handgun goes flying. The ileal conduit loosens. The canvas inside the Pound For Pound gym on the west side of Las Vegas springs urine puddles.

No matter. Kenny Adams drops the mitts. He reconnects the delicate contraption. He slips the gun into a backpack. He finds a mop, cleans the mess, disinfects the canvas. He jokes with others. He crawls back onto the canvas. Lying on his left side, he yells up to Bogere—who pivots, bobs, and hooks per Adams's instructions—for an hour.

It's impressive, maybe even incredible, that Adams not only possesses the backbone and resilience to prep Sharif Bogere in the immediate aftermath of those surgeries but he works the corner for Sharif in that subsequent fight and, in the middle of 20I5, he continues to ply his trade with Bogere in his stable. Kenny Adams had crowed publicly, in I996, about an imminent retirement from the fight game. Too much bullshit and too many bullshitters had irrevocably sullied the sweet science, he admitted then in borrowing a bit from renowned sportscaster Howard Cosell, who left boxing for good after the Larry Holmes-Tex Cobb *débâcle* in December I982. "I'm past the point where I want to be a part of it. I don't want to be a party to the sleaziness. I'm worn out by it all."

That was vintage Cosell, but Kenny Adams knew the tune. Too frequently, he was too uptight, too irritable. He waded in sleaziness. But he couldn't resist, couldn't exit. The squared circle had been sanctuary for too long, the heavy bags that hang like sausages in a smoker providing him with succor for decades.

He vowed to keep his stable to a minimum. He'd trim the disquiet and misery by retaining fewer boxers on his roster. He's seventy-four when a young buck in the gym executes one-fingered pushups. For Adams, that's tantamount to a duel. He gets down and lifts his horizontal five-foot-seven, hundred-sixty-five-pound frame off the red-rubber floor on only the proximal inter-phalangeal joints of the index and

middle fingers of each hand. He did not think he could do it; he had to try. "I had to make an adjustment, but I told myself, 'I'm doin' it,' " Adams says. "Freak of nature, I guess."

Those who know him best would not be jolted to learn of Kenny Adams eventually succumbing in a boxing gym, amid the Vaseline and Zen ointment and witch hazel, rolls of gauze and tape, bloody knuckle pads and Everlast gloves and Adidas high-top shoes and slimy spit buckets, rap's angry thump, the heavy bags and wrecking balls and speed bags, between the red, white, and blue ropes of the ring. Nowhere else is he as comfortable and in his element.

He took to scrappin' in his youth in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, perhaps in plucky response to his parents peddling him off on relatives before his first birthday. He developed a toxic tongue by noting the power of curse words around a Bermuda Triangle of incubating menace on deceptively labeled Good Hope Street. Those who swore made others pause, gaining vital ticks to either flee or fight. Adams kept score. Friends gave him dimes and quarters for the honor of having his salty wrath aimed at them; he wasn't even ten years old. He says he was "probably the baddest cursor in town, those gestures that will save you sometimes. In those days, you could out-talk a motherfucker. Woof 'em, that's what it was. Today they shoot you."

His great-aunt beat him. Toughened him. He carried a switch. On discordant Good Hope he saw men get shot and slashed; he watched one get clubbed to death. He entered the Army and kept seeking challenges. A thirty-year military man, he honed a rigid training regimen that produced four consecutive armed-service boxing championships, at Fort Hood, Texas, from I984 through '87, earning him cachet with his superiors. Under his guidance, Fort Hood smashed perennial powers Fort Bragg and Fort Lewis, ruling Army

boxing for ten years. That he also became the first active military man, and first minority, to coach the U.S. Olympic boxing team—in I988, in South Korea—earned him additional *éclat*. He added luster to that lore in the professional ranks.

Not long after the bladder mishap, Adams coached from a worm's-eye level on the canvas to protect the stoma bag, keeping it stationary so as not to repeat the accident. He was gaunt and pale, which told others in the gym that perhaps, just maybe, he shouldn't be here. He informed nobody that he felt weak, unsteady. In fact, a doctor had wanted to keep him in a hospital for further observation. (The re-insertion of a catheter into his penis, for emergency relief, became such a painful issue that he finally blurted to a nurse, *Just cut it off!* Claudia Adams convinced the nurse that her husband was just being dramatic, that he did not mean what he was yelping.) But he was hardly docile as he hollered orders at Sharif Bogere from the floor. "Distance and range, motherfucker! And pivot. Pivot!"

Battling his own hunger and desire, Sharif Bogere had been sidelined, too. Supposedly. A pioneering platelet-replacement procedure to promote the healing of an Achilles' tendon injury confines the promising Ugandan lightweight, who might be a few millimeters above five-feet-five, to the apron of another ring. The left leg throbs; he can barely stand on that booted limb.

So he drops to his knees on the ground. He gimps to the bottom of a heavy bag. He throws a right. He adjusts his stumps. He flicks a one-two, left-right combination. He shifts his knees. He unleashes a right hook, a left jab, a right uppercut. He wails on the two-hundred-pound bag, encased in red vinyl and beginning to split—horizontally, in some spots—for an hour. The perspiration that flies around Bogere

makes it appear as if a bladder bag of his own has ruptured. The eyes of the gym owner become glassy. Tears threaten to dribble down a cheek, so he slips out of the room before the boxer becomes embarrassed or he misconstrues his own position as subservient. Powerful, the witness says. "Unforgettable."

The union of Adams with Bogere (pronounced bo-guh-RAY) was more serendipity than happenstance, if ardor and fervor and mania, and absolute damn necessity laced with utter desperation, are factored into the bond. Both thirsted for validation.

Adams yearned to mold another world champion, or four, during the homestretch of a remarkable run as one of the country's most accomplished—yet largely unknown and unheralded—trainers in the dulcet art. Eminent author A.J. Liebling had coined that term in many boxing articles for *The New Yorker*. He also called it *La Dolce Scienza*. But the sweet spot of the sport represents a narrow window, as much in terms of a boxer's peak performance age as the optimal angle in which he can zap a foe with a check-jab or slick counter uppercut, or be clocked senseless.

Adams drilled the pivot maneuver, and the minute calculating of distance and range, into Bogere in his usual ferocious manner. *Never seen an African with no rhythm!* Kenny Adams could be downright cruel. So what? How much do you want it? Words? They mean nothing. But most everything he uttered had a point. The game within the game. Bogere manager Jimmy Alex appeared to be more offended by that previous line than Sharif, who becomes inured to Adams through the years.

His in-your-face methods and total lack of inhibition have probably cost the trainer millions, in lost income due to the severing of ties with promising boxers too hard-headed to

digest orders but who would go on to experience some success, anyway, on brawn and circumstance. As many of those independents have left him as have been sacked by the trainer—the Adams Axe. That missed revenue aggravated and frustrated Claudia Adams. But Kenny can sleep—sometimes aided by a shot of Sambuca and the mask of an apnea-reduction machine—at night; so can Claudia, who has snoozed in another room for years due to his severe snoring.

For his part, Adams would not alter how he tackles life, and every pupil and opponent, head on. One night in South Africa, arc lights showered weak yellow beams from poles a hundred yards apart as he strode through an alley. Two guys approached him. He went into full shadowboxing mode, dipping and jabbing and pivoting and hooking against a diabolically talented, but invisible, foe; the mesmerized interlopers seemed to hug the brick wall as Adams passed.

On multiple occasions, Kenny Adams nearly gave the axe to Sharif Bogere, whose own strong convictions propelled him, in 2007, to leave the Uganda national boxing team at a tournament in Chicago. If not for an unlikely series of events, the lightweight would still be training inside the Kampala Boxing Club. Bogere boarded a Greyhound bus bound for Las Vegas, where it was a given, to him, that a true professional should call home. He rolled past fields of corn and wheat, on the undulating asphalt of Middle America, into the desert of his destiny.

Adams and Bogere constantly tested each other's linguistic, pugilistic, and religious capabilities and understandings. A devout Muslim, Bogere would ultimately, finally, capitulate to Adams's demanding methods and unapologetically acidic bearing. The Achilles injury sidelined Bogere for chunks that added up to more than a year, further enlightening him of assiduity, forcing him to his knees not

solely for the sake of working out, and testing the very faith that he had found so preposterously in Las Vegas.

Others would float in and out of Kenny Adams's stable after I slipped into his orbit for eighteen months of daily observation starting in May 20I4. A day to survey the environment, and players—primarily, Sharif Bogere—soon led to ritual in a quest to experience the game's crude, cruel, and reckless underbelly. Joyce Carol Oates was onto something when she noted that this is not a true game, to be played; you don't *play* at boxing. *La Dolce Scienza* tempts the haughty, teases the curious. It is cold. It leaves its practitioners starving, their memory banks with insufficient funds. There's no room for the craven. Colum McCann wrote that boxing's language "is all cinema and violence … the burst eye socket, the ruined cartilage, the dolphin punch coming up from the depths."

It begged for an audience.

A bona fide understudy would also be allowed onto the scene, owing as much to Kenny Adams coming to terms with his own transience as to a desire to pass along a wealth of fundamentals and experience, grace and style that might otherwise evaporate in the ether of an unforgiving art. It blended in with the pugnacious, tragicomic air of a gym and a sport that, contrary to decades of forecasts, had not withered away, crawled into an infectious, dishonorable corner, and expired.

Kenny Adams and his outcasts would not allow it to pass away. Either that or it would always grip the less fortunate, the hopeless and foolhardy and desolate, and wring their naïve necks with belligerence for trespassing into its web of perfidy, into an abyss filled with managers and trainers and promoters and matchmakers and combatants all too eager to screw each other—once in a while literally—in the name of

self-promotion or currency or vainglory, often all three. Prices are always, always paid. "Everybody's got to get it sometime," says Jerry Doyle, a trainer and narrator of Hemingway's "Fifty Grand" short story, to Danny Hogan about his boxer finagling to throw a bout.

I approach Miguel Díaz, a savvy seventy-something cutman and trainer from Buenos Aires, Argentina, and inquire about his many years in this brutal, deceitful industry, the shadowy lures and unscrupulous figures and frauds, its paucity of ethics or morals. The red-light district of sports because of its shady flesh peddlers, wrote New York sports columnist Jimmy Cannon. I ask Díaz what it takes to participate in such a barbaric environment, to step into the ring and spar regularly, acclimating the cerebrum to skull rattling so when the bell rings and a belt or advancement—or rent—is on the line the violence becomes second nature, allowing moments of clarity in a world of blur.

I tell Díaz to take his time, that I could revisit with him in a few days, or next week, when he has properly reviewed and considered all that he's witnessed. He doesn't pause. He doesn't require one more second to ponder. "I don't have to," Díaz says. "I know. I can answer you now. You have to be a little *fuckeeen* crazy!"

Kenny Adams knows crazy. He has invested an abundance of his time, energy, and headaches into Sharif Bogere, who owes his escape from the tin-roofed shanties and muddy byways of Kampala to the ring. Where would it lead him? Them? Neither could trump the other in obstinacy or tenacity. Their relationship would teeter, and nearly fracture, in their odyssey to prove that both belonged among the elite of a savage, venal business. Crabs in a bucket, is how one of Adams's pupils described it. Said another, No Harvard lawyers around here. "This isn't *The Brady Bunch*." Someone

else in the gym quoted George Foreman comparing pugilism to jazz, saying that the better it is the less people appreciate it.

So it is apropos that jazz composer and musician David Amram is such an aficionado of pugilism. "I love the science, the psychology, and the drama," he said in I968, "… and when a cat gets in the ring he's in there alone. Nobody can help him—no musicians, no accountants, lawyers, agents, or friends …"

To be sure, Adams and Bogere were cats of an extraordinary breed, to which no coward could possibly relate.

2

CAPE GIRARDEAU sits on the western bank of the Mississippi River in the southeast corner of Missouri, not far from where Illinois and Kentucky smack into each other and T-bone into the Show Me State. Born in Springfield, Missouri, Kenneth R.C. Adams was six months old in March I94I when his parents left him at 4I5 North Middle Street in Cape, how locals refer to their gritty city. That was the home of Erma and Rufus Burgess, the boy's great-aunt and -uncle on the side of his mother, Rosemary Abernathy.

The Abernathy name, once upon a time, was widely known as the area's largest slave-owning family. In another chapter of misfortune, Rosemary, when she was young, was jettisoned on Erma's doorstep; Rosemary's mother did not want a man she had just met, and would date, to know she had a child. Erma put Rosemary through Lincoln University, a historically black college in Jefferson City, Missouri, where she would meet, and eventually marry, Kenneth Adams. Kenneth R.C. Adams was born on September 25, I940, when Tommy Dorsey's "I'll Never Smile Again" topped the pop charts. A bottle of Hires root beer cost a nickel, Chicago & Southern Airlines had just started one-way flights between St. Louis and Chicago for $I2.95, and the Germans were bombing London. Willkie was gambling on a line of isolationism that would ultimately ambush the corporate lawyer's chances of keeping FDR out of the White House for a third term.

Before their tot's first birthday Adams's parents would leave Cape without the boy who would always be called Kenny. The most popular song in the country the day he was born could have served as his anthem. "Irresponsible," he says of his parents as he slowly shakes his head. They would

bolt for California, have more kids, get divorced, marry others, and have more children.

In May 20I0, an extended family of more than one hundred people would surround Kenny Adams upon his induction into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame. He shared that stage with, among others, football lineman Dan Dierdorf, baseball pitcher Mark Gubicza, and football coach Marty Schottenheimer.

Early on, however, it was only Kenny. He quickly learned self-reliance and spurned hokum. He was in grade school when he first met his father; Kenny yanked his arm away. With indignation, Erma told the man, Excuse me, where have *you* been? Kenny told his dad, You ain't raised me! "And he never tried that shit no more." When the old man appeared at the house on North Middle, Erma didn't answer the front door. Boy, she whispered to Kenny, you better not go to the window or say shit. She said, "Look at that damn fool out there, lookin' silly." Erma twice sent Rosemary train fare to visit Kenny, but she never showed at the station. On both occasions, Kenny flopped to the dirty concrete floor, rolled around, and bawled.

Erma tried to explain it all to Kenny when he reached a certain age in high school, but he told her it wasn't necessary. He had always considered Erma his mother and Rufus his father, and nothing else in his young life was as immutable. Kenny would eventually reunite with his biological parents, and he would keep in touch with his mother and her nine other children. He was at Rosemary's bedside, in Palo Alto, California, when she died in I989. Her March I94I abandonment of him at Erma's was never broached. Kenny thinks his bossy and controlling father, whom everyone called Sonny, might have passed away in I992.

In his smart phone today, Kenny does keep a black-and-white photo of his parents—she wearing a plaid winter coat with a furry collar, a package under one arm and a handbag under the other, gloved hand in gloved hand, a pork pie hat with a thin dark band, and a somewhat furrowed brow that conveys irritation at the joker behind the camera; he in a topcoat, packages under left arm and in left gloved hand, black turtleneck or scarf, trim mustache, and sharp Panama hat with a dark band. The debonair couple is in mid-stroll on a city sidewalk on a cold day, probably in the run-up to the holidays. Kenny glances at it and pauses. With perhaps half a pang of regret, he says, "Life changes, I guess."

He and friends would swipe bikes from kids in one section of Cape only to race them to the Mississippi and launch them over the bank and into the gushing water. In the I730s, French soldier Jean D. Girardot had established a trading post on a promontory overlooking the mighty river. The town that sprouted would be named after him, with a slight spelling twist, and is the world's lone inland cape. The imposing boulder that marked the post would be obliterated in the name of progress, or railroad construction, but a red memorial would carry the Cape Rock designation. That's where, in the I950s, motorcycle toughs and other gangs gathered to rumble, but Kenny describes the dustups as nothing more than Sharks vs. Jets rehearsals.

At the city's courthouse, water fountains and bathrooms were designated WHITE and COLORED. Joe Woods, the only black man on the local police force, could arrest only blacks. Minorities were restricted from Lowe's Theater, on Broadway, but Kenny and his fellow minority classmates were allowed admittance to attend a showing of *The Ten Commandments* his first year at a Catholic high school. Blacks could only enter a Chinese restaurant and the Rialto

Theater, on Good Hope, from side doors, and they could only sit in the Rialto's balcony. Grinning white friends in a pool hall would taunt Adams—*Come on in, Kenny*—knowing he couldn't. At a track meet in Joplin, Kenny and two black friends were barred from eating in a diner with the rest of their prep teammates.

He pondered *why?* But that was only a vague and infrequent thought about the pervasive bigotry of his youth.

Seven blocks south of Kenny's home, Rufus operated American Legion Post 452 across Good Hope from People's Café. Kenny sometimes purloined a case of beer from the Legion storage unit to share with his pals. Maso Meacham ran the Blue Front Café, at 404 Good Hope, next to People's. Tyler's Barber Shop occupied a corner of the street and an alleyway. It was the rough part of town, but mayhem on Friday and Saturday evenings excited Kenny. Most of it brewed in and around Meacham's place, where patrons played poker and rolled dice in the middle room, and shot nine-ball on the billiards table in the back. Knife and fistfights were common. "Stabbin' each other, knockin' motherfuckers out," Adams says.

He'd prowl around bushes and trash bins, alert to escalating arguments and confrontations in the vicinity. A Meacham chef once drew a short wooden bat on a man, who owed him a gambling debt. The fracas spilled outside. The chef's loose pants fell to his knees, causing him to fall backward and drop the bat. His adversary grabbed the bat and slammed it on the chef's head. Kenny was seven or eight, and he'll never forget the dull and lethal *Crack* and *Pop* of birch connecting with skull.

Adams heard everything and was always eager to test new vulgarities, which he mostly culled around the Legion post, on friends. He became something of a local pint-sized

celebrity as those friends paid him coins to curse at them. "You mother-fucking, cock-sucking son of a bitch! Your dick is frozen! Fuck you! What, motherfucker. *What*?" In a shoe Adams carried a small razor; he never used it, but he'd flash it to incite further fear. A tall friend of his always shook his head at Kenny, telling him, *You crazy motherfucker, always stalkin' pussy or fighting*.

When I ring Adams to inquire if he wants company to watch a fight on TV, he says, "Come on up, motherfucker." In describing his elation about purchasing a slick new lavender Cadillac Coupe de Ville, not long after having moved to Las Vegas in I989, he says, "I drive that motherfucker up to Caesars, and that motherfucker was clean as a motherfucker." Nearing his seventy-fifth birthday, and likely having dispatched a million f-bombs in his life, he receives a phone call from Uncle Burt. The older man has just viewed a YouTube clip of his nephew dropping those four symphonic syllables over and over. "Boy, don't be cussin' all the time!" To which Kenny Adams responds with hearty laughter. Ain't cursin', he says, if you don't use the Lord's name in vain. Sometimes, after all these decades, he even shocks his wife. "Heathen! You got a nasty mouth," Claudia Adams says before heading upstairs.

A heathen with a heart that has no protective sac, but we'll get to that.

With no formal training, Kenny Adams boxed and beat a few boys in the hood. Erma blew a fuse when she discovered he was stepping inside the ring. She forbade him to box. In fact, she forbade Kenny to even listen to the boxing matches on the cumbersome radio in the living room. However, he'd sneak a smaller model under the back porch on Friday nights to hear bouts being broadcast from Chicago Stadium, Madison Square Garden and Yankee Stadium in New York,

and the exotic-sounding Orange Bowl in Miami. Today, he flashes his patented devilish grin and sings, "… *to be sharp, use Gillette Blue Blades ... it's the quickest, slickest shave of all!*" Those were some of the words to the radio ad—kind of a collegiate fight song with a driving rhythm, and, in another version, a regular bell toll, as if it were starting or ending a boxing round—from the *Gillette Cavalcade of Sports*, whose success would transfer to the small screen.

The clever kid also conjured a surreptitious path to local boxing tournaments. He'd sneak away from home and hook up with a coach, waiting along the roadside of Route 34, or 55 or 6I, in his car. They'd trek to Jackson or Sikeston, where Kenny would win Missouri Golden Gloves championships. He'd hide trophies under the front stoop so Erma wouldn't discover his wily ways. At fifteen, in Sikeston, he went up against a big black kid with the epicanthic folds of a native of Asia. "We called him Jap, 'cuz he looked like a Japanese; one of the baddest cats around. I had tennis shoes; he had no shoes. He fought barefoot. Those cats were poor. I whooped Jap's ass. That just put me on the map. It was all over Missouri. 'He beat Jap!' I just blossomed from then on."

Kenny strode softly when he was home. Nearly an invalid with debilitating arthritis, Erma rarely budged from a cloth recliner, in which she often slept, in the living room. When she did make it to her bed she'd remain there for days. Emptying her *slop jaw*, or chamber pot, in the backyard outhouse was one of Kenny's chores. She once sliced Rufus's arm with a knife when she became inflamed about his penchant for carousing with younger women. Kenny wrapped his great-uncle's arm above the wound, near the shoulder, to stanch the bleeding with a kitchen towel. A taxi hustled Rufus to a hospital. Kenny dropped to his knees before a glowing

cross on a ledge in the living room to pray that Rufus would be okay.

The only time Rufus raised his voice in ire at the boy he treated like a son was when he sought the day's baseball scores. Ha ha, the kid would bleat, your Cubs lost again! Kenny favored the St. Louis Cardinals, but he'd devote his allegiance to the Brooklyn Dodgers when they added Jackie Robinson, the game's first black player, to their roster in I947.

As a foreman at the Marquette Cement Quarry and Plant, on the southern edge of Cape, Rufus lost part of a leg when he slipped, got caught in a belt, and was slung into an industrial-size blade. A wooden stump replaced that ankle and foot. Kenny knew Rufus was tough, but he rattled off Hail Marys to be safe. Rufus survived the teeth of the saw and his wife. When police visited they didn't cross Erma, who kept firearms in a cupboard and warned them that she had the "same stuff"—weapons—that they had. They apologized for the disturbance and left the premises.

About the only people Kenny feared were Erma and the scowling nuns at Notre Dame Regional High School where, muddled among a long list of rules, it was forbidden for boys and girls to walk hallways hand in hand. He transferred to Central Senior High, where he could sneak an occasional smoke, for his junior and senior years. Around this time a relative slipped him a Roi-Tan cigar. Rufus howled at Kenny's blanched face, and the lad became sick. But after one day at Central and dancing to Elvis Presley at The Lion's Den, Kenny took a liking to Winston cigarettes. Years later he would switch to bull's-eye-labeled Vantage, which boasted of less tar and nicotine than the average cigarette but didn't spare flavor, all courtesy of a conical hole in its filter. Adams

quit a pack-a-day habit in October I986, when he started to chew gum, any gum—and still does—"like a motherfucker."

Central had boxing classes, taught by the same instructor who oversaw the school's track and field program. That guy always chafed whenever Kenny talked about himself, which was just about every day, out on the quarter-mile dirt oval. Kenny had defeated nearly every opponent in the ring, so the teacher thought he'd inflict a life lesson by matching him against a kid who weighed two hundred pounds, almost twice Adams's weight. Kenny rained hooks and uppercuts on the poor giant, finishing him with a jab to the snout. "He started bleeding and that was it," Adams says. "I told the instructor, 'Who else ya got? Who you got now? *You* want some of me?' From then on, nobody fucked with Kenny. Really and truly, I just never felt like I was a poor guy. I never wanted for anything. And, really and truly, I just had no problem fighting all the time."

Having impregnated two girls, with little money and even fewer discernible skills, Adams sat with some trepidation as he listened to Rush Limbaugh Sr. give the commencement address at Central High in the spring of I958. That was the Cape-revered grandfather of the Limbaugh that has levied his political opinions on the radio airwaves for decades. The elder practiced law until he was I02, passing away three years later in I996.

A few weeks later Kenny Adams drew the wrath of Erma when he enlisted in the Army. "You just like your mama," she said. "She wasn't shit, and you won't be shit." To support the mothers-to-be and his offspring, Kenny deduced the military to be his lone option. And since the Marines wanted an initial commitment of four years, he believed he was using

supreme sagacity by picking the Army, which required only a three-year hitch.

He breezed through basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He aced the first stress test of thirty push-ups, thirty-pull-ups, and a three-mile run within a time limit. Upon induction he could not fathom, and would have been hard-pressed to believe, that he was beginning a career that would last more than thirty years, land him in remote corners of the world, teach him about terror and make him smell death, and instill in him an indomitable passion for pugilism.

(A daughter, Denia, and son, Jack, would also serve the country, in the Army, for fourteen and twenty-five years, respectively. An embezzlement scheme at a shoe store, that she helped manage, landed Adams's eldest child, Gail, in jail for about eighteen months. "They all did their time," says Adams, his grin slight and serious. Moreover, Eric, a strapping six-foot-two grandson in his early twenties, has served several years in the Army and, at the time of publication, is a supply specialist in South Korea.)

Kenny Adams would always be quick with a retort. At Leonard Wood, drill sergeants demanded he drop down and give them twenty; he'd snap, One hand or two? He'd detect a wry grin. He was on guard duty late one night in I959 when a fellow soldier, clearly inebriated, returned to the barracks. Adams made a tame inquiry. The man exploded. "Nigger, *you* don't tell *me* what to do!" Adams dropped the man in a hail of hooks and crosses. The prostrate numskull could barely lift his head. But he looked at Adams and mumbled, "You still a nigger!" To which Adams replied with more fists of fury. He cleaned his hands with a kerchief and returned to his post. It was the last time anyone called Adams such an epithet at point-blank range.

His service was shortened by two months when he formally declared his intention to attend college. From his home on North Middle Street, Kenny Adams could walk two blocks west to the campus of Southeast Missouri State College (now Southeast Missouri State University). He discovered quickly he wasn't college material. He scored well on an initial IQ placement examination, but he speaks of the classroom in claustrophobic terms. "Geography and 'rithmetic, fuck that shit," he says. Plus, once again, his pockets were empty.

Honorably discharged as a corporal, he'd lose that status if he remained out of the Army for ninety days. On the eighty-ninth, Adams re-enlisted, retaining those two stripes. He returned to Leonard Wood for training. He requested an assignment with the I0Ist Airborne, for its stature as well as the extra fifty-five monthly dollars of hazard pay associated with jumping out of an airplane. But he created his own danger when he prematurely purchased a pair of Corcoran boots, reserved exclusively for members of the I0Ist. His bunkmates immediately sliced them down to low quarters; only when a soldier actually becomes a Screaming Eagle can he own a pair of Corcorans, much less wear a pair of the spiffy, shiny-as-a-mirror, reinforced jump boots whose black leather wrapped ten inches up each calf. Until he became an Eagle a soldier was known as Cherry or Leg. "Hey, Leg. What're *you* doin' with Corcorans!?"

Adams fancied the entire I0Ist accouterments; the camouflage neck scarf, the blue trim of the U.S. flag and Infantry patches, the French fourragère—a cord braided in red, blue, and green, with a silver tip, around the right shoulder—the gleaming gold belt buckle, the Sterling silver parachutist badge, or "jump wings," pinned onto a uniform's left breast. The wings exuded class and courage to Adams,

who had the symbol tattooed onto his right forearm; by 20I5, the artwork more than fifty-five years old had largely blotched, although wings on each side and the eagle's crown could still be deciphered. Upside down, it looked like a runaway bull and its horns.

The I0Ist jumped behind enemy lines in France, in the dark hours leading to D-Day, to clear paths for the boots on Omaha and Utah beaches. The Eagles helped liberate Holland, defended Bastogne, Belgium, in the Battle of the Bulge, and captured Hitler's mountain retreat at Berchtesgarden.

In late I96I someone else landed at Fort Campbell who also coveted the I0Ist, someone who was on the brink of world fame, although Adams can't recall ever running into him. Adams even patronized the Pink Poodle, a club sixty miles from Campbell in Clarksville, Tennessee, whose clientele was almost exclusively black. Adams, who sometimes played bouncer at the joint with buddies from the barracks, had never heard of the soldier who would drop by to jam with friends and play his right-handed guitar upside down, with his left hand.

"What's his name?" Adams says as he squints his eyes and snaps fingers. Jimi, I say. "Yeah. Hendrix! I didn't really know him. Of course, he wasn't famous then." He did recall the Suggs brothers—Charles, Paul, and James—who occasionally joined Billy Cox, a serviceman who played bass, and Hendrix to form a band they would dub the Kasuals. Hendrix rarely cut his guitar strings, which forced his mates to dip and dive when Jimi would swing his instrument around with wild flourishes. Those wires acted like antennae, too, picking up radio calls of passing taxicabs.

According to *Room Full of Mirrors*, Charles R. Cross's definitive biography of Jimi Hendrix, the Seattle native had

exulted when he earned the right to wear the Screaming Eagles patch—a left-side view of the white crown of a bald eagle, open yellow beak, dangling red tongue, and narrow eye against a dark background—on the left shoulder of his uniform. The camo scarf and fourragère and gleaming Corcorans, to Hendrix, were all secondary to the *élan* of that patch. He sent them to his father, brother, and friends back home. To an aunt he wrote that he was in the sharpest outfit in the world; if trouble sprouted anywhere, the Eagles would be among the first into the fray.

However, the euphoria didn't last long as Hendrix focused his affinity on his guitar—he'd even sleep with it on his chest in the barracks—and stardom. In May I962, Hendrix was discharged when he claimed to have homosexual tendencies. "I know he left by claiming he was a fag," says Adams, who has not had a soft day in his life and has no time, or patience, for political correctness.

(With that terse tongue Adams, through his Army years, shared more than a firm Afro and mustache with the late comedian Richard Pryor. Gray overran and occupied his dome and tight goatee in his late sixties and into his seventies, which gave Adams the visage of actor Morgan Freeman minus the freckly cheeks. To which he snapped, "No! I'm one hundred percent better lookin' than that motherfucker." In fact, he is asked often, sometimes multiple times a day, if he is Morgan Freeman.)

Adams endured three weeks of Recondo School, for reconnaissance-commando training, at Fort Campbell, under the distinguished Major Lewis L. Millett. The maneuvers and conditions were difficult, but the humiliation suffered by those who quit was much more severe; those perceived weaklings were forced to stand, at parade rest—hands cupped behind back, legs shoulder wide, eyes locked straight ahead—

all day outside the commandant's quarters. They were pelted with insults. *Quitter! Pussy! Traitor!* Only when Millett prepared to call it a day did he finally tend to the vanquished and sign releases to either relocate them or dishonorably discharge them back into civilian life.

Kenny Adams, already a Screaming Eagle, sought more prestige and persevered through Ranger School. That required two weeks at Fort Benning, Georgia, followed by three weeks of mountain training in Dahlonega, in north Georgia, and three weeks of jungle maneuvers in the swamps of the Florida panhandle. The eight hundred eighteen total hours of instruction in Ranger training—course 7-D-F-4, in military parlance—were designed to "develop a superb infantry soldier with exceptional endurance, skilled in the techniques of fieldcraft, survival, mountain, jungle, air/land and amphibious operations," as detailed in author Rick Atkinson's epic *The Long Gray Line*, about the West Point Class of I966. On average, a third of those who attempted the rigors of Ranger either didn't make the grade or quit.

Kenny Adams considered ceasing the torturous routine. "Oh yeah, you always get to a point where you want to quit," he says. "But I said, 'I ain't gonna let that happen.' We had a buddy system, to help you along and keep pushing each other. The first two days are the motherfucker, jumping off a bridge, making a buoy out of your pants to get equipment to land, learning how to read a map to call in artillery, quick repels out of a helicopter at two hundred feet, [instructors perpetrating] the enemy … making you talk if you're caught, living off the fat of the land [snakes and other wild creatures] for a couple of days with only a canteen of water."

He weighed only a hundred twenty-two pounds, and he owed a strong constitution to boxing, which he had pursued from those ruffian days at Cape to Golden Gloves and other

amateur tournaments while in the Army. "My metabolism benefited me," Adams says. "I'd take licks and keep on tickin'." Adams became "Little Sugar," due to his tight ties with Ray Owens, who would become a I964 Olympic alternate widely known as "Big Sugar." Both were ardent fans of middleweight Sugar Ray Robinson, who began a Hall of Fame career ten days after Kenny Adams was born. In the last paragraph of a roundup of that Madison Square Garden card in *The New York Times* the following day, it was announced that "Ray Robinson, I34 I/2, Harlem Negro" had dropped Joe Echeverria fifty-one seconds into the second round. Robinson ended his splendid career at I75-I9-6, with I09 knockouts, in I965.

Adams claimed all-Army and all-service boxing championships, at a hundred nineteen pounds, in I962, '64, and '65. In the early I960s he had fared so well in Amateur Athletic Union events in Florida that officials, decades later, considered him for its Hall of Fame. A marriage of more than three years, to Bernice Gold, ended in divorce in I966. Insatiable carnal appetites were all they shared, which is not, Kenny Adams learned, the foundation for a lasting relationship.

His peers would call Adams "Machine Gun" for his *rat-a-tat-tat* ring style. Against Marshall Crisp, at the European championships in Germany, Adams met his match. He was on the ropes and sizin' up Crisp, showboatin' like Ali, and had just about figured out how to send Crisp into next week when Crisp launched a bazooka of a right hook into Adams's left cheek. "I saw birdies; tweet, tweet," says Adams, who toppled onto the canvas. "He snapped my neck." He got caught *playing*, the pitfall against which author Joyce Carol Oates warned when she posited that boxing is not a sport; "You play baseball, you don't *play* boxing." Kenny Adams

would make that distinction to his underlings the rest of his life.

Germany, however, is where he would meet the love of his life. Claudia Carol Campbell—Triple C, Kenny calls her—introduced herself to Adams after a bout; her father was a career Army man. (Kenny had recalled having seen her as a statuesque majorette in a parade back in Tennessee.) When Kenny fought again a few weeks later, Claudia was right there. Upon being relocated to Campbell, Adams beamed the day he steered his candy apple red Mustang convertible—a special model released in the middle of I964 (known to enthusiasts as the I964½) that featured an 8-track player, the newest technology, and a two hundred eighty-nine cubic-inch engine that would appear in the James Bond film *Goldfinger* in September to boost record sales—beside Claudia; her father had also been reassigned to Campbell. They married in May I967.

Late in life Kenny Adams would drive a bluish-purple Grand Am with the driver's sideview mirror flimsily attached to the body thanks to wide black electrical tape, and weathered Screaming Eagles and Ranger stickers on the rear bumper. He'd stroll into a gym with a bit of a hunch and seem to strut a bit more, back straighter, when he wore his dark Ranger Kangol backward. "I went through hell to get [those]," he says of the decals and cap, and what they represent. "Ain't no joke. No joke."

Adams discovered abject fear during a tour of Vietnam, from I967 through I968, in which the paramount objective became evening the score for close friend Joe Garrett. They were so tight, their physiques so similar, that they'd borrow each other's shoes, pants, and shirts. Adams had sustained enough damage to his right eardrum, on the firing range at

Fort Campbell, to exempt him from combat duty. However, he overruled that exemption once he learned what had happened to Garrett.

Garrett had mistakenly triggered, with the business end of his rifle, a butterfly mine hidden in jungle undergrowth near Da Lat. The stock had strategically guarded Garrett's groin from injury, but shrapnel pocked the rest of his body; nearby soldiers had fingers sliced off. One of many operations left Joe with a plate in his head. Kenny landed in the same company and platoon as Joe, and he offers a narrow grin about evening an unwritten slate, on Joe's behalf, in Southeast Asia. "He was supposed to get the guy who shot me up," Garrett tells me in May 20I5. "The platoon sergeant didn't want him to go, but he came in and wanted to find the guy. That's a buddy for you!"

Adams estimates that he killed ten Viet Cong soldiers, with his M-I6 rifle or in hand-to-hand combat. He likely was responsible for many more deaths, since he was part of an elite five-man unit that crept behind enemy lines all around the A Shau Valley and Lam Dong Province to determine coordinates for mortar strikes, and napalm strafes and bomb drops by F-4s and F-I00s and Phantom jets. Locals spooked Adams and every American, he says, every minute of every day. "The same motherfuckers serving you in the mess hall, who cleaned your huts, shit, these [seem like] the same motherfuckers I killed the other night; didn't know who is who, 'cuz everyone looks alike." He and his platoon stole chickens from one hut, and blew away anything that moved or breathed when an L-shaped ambush worked to textbook perfection. "It becomes second nature," Adams says. "A girl was in there, and we ended up shooting her, too."

He also served in a platoon, Charlie Company of the I87th, under William Carpenter Jr. Known as "the Lonesome

End" when he played split end on the football team at the U.S. Military Academy, an athletic career that would land him in the College Football Hall of Fame, Carpenter entered military eminence when he called in a napalm strike on his own enemy-infested position near Dak To. Carpenter has enjoyed a long life.

Elsewhere, Kenny Adams became apocalyptic in a blown-out foxhole. He quick-checked his fingers, toes, and genitals. He could write. He scribbled a note to his wife, that *this might be it*. The *crack-crack-crack* of AK-47s exploded all around him as he was hoisted into a medical evacuation helicopter. He handed the letter to a co-pilot. "I was really afraid then. Didn't think we'd make it. You get into a situation in which you think you're finished. You're surrounded. Eighty-one-millimeter rounds goin' off all around you, rockin' your hole, bustin' your eardrum."

Further ear damage sidelined him. He had not been shot or lost a digit, but Kenny Adams did leave Southeast Asia with wounds. For a long while after he returned to the States, he would find himself peeing in a closet at home in the middle of the night; the stress and trauma of Vietnam often pit him, in his dreams, back in Da Lat and Phan Thiet and Bien Hoa.

Queried about the lies and duplicity that went into the tragedy that is Vietnam, about how presidents were fed such fiction by military leaders and other powerful figures to satiate their voracious appetites for war, about the fifty-eight thousand Americans who paid the ultimate price to supposedly snuff Communism—all of which David Halberstam had documented so profoundly in *The Best And The Brightest*—Adams says, "You just follow orders. Do what you're told. You're in the Army now! You're a soldier, and you just do what you're told. It's all you can do. And you

prepare yourself to be the best you can be and to stay out of harm's way, which was never easy."

It takes more than a year of observing Kenny Adams before he gets comfortable enough to reveal his other missions in the Army, which included participating in actions and conflicts in Grenada, Haiti, Lebanon, Libya, Panama, and Somalia. Those were all of a clandestine nature. "Classified," Adams says. But I press him. He was part of four platoons—about one hundred ten men—that parachuted into the Iranian desert in I980, not long after American hostages were released from four hundred forty-four days of captivity in Baghdad. A show of force, Adams says of his second visit to Iran that calendar year. (More on the first one later.)

Trepidation raced through his system, however, sometime in October I962, when he was on a cargo plane full of Screaming Eagles en route to Cuba, ostensibly for a major action. He had just slipped the straps of a parachute over his shoulders—they were close—when the pilot received orders to abort and bring the aircraft home. The Soviet Missile Crisis, ignited when Premier Nikita Khrushchev installed nuclear-tipped warheads on Cuba, was averted on Wednesday, October 24, I962, when Soviet ships bound for the island failed to cross a Caribbean quarantine line established by U.S. President John F Kennedy; Khrushchev had backed down from JFK.

"Can't talk about that," says Adams, who becomes mute. "Classified." That has been his reaction to family members, too, who have inquired about details of his service over the decades.

A Yuletide sweater that appears to be made of blue cotton balls has the Kenny Adams touch, with two large, red-leather boxing gloves dangling over his stomach and a patch of dark leather swathed from the middle of the collar to his left

shoulder. It belies severely the raw nature of Adams's language as we sit in a McDonald's just before Christmas 20I4. Kids and mothers and the elderly chatter and move about in the restaurant. Jubilant holiday music pipes through ceiling speakers. Coffee and biscuits and bacon and sausage waft through the air. But those sounds and visions and smells are muffled and skewed in the tunnel of Adams's unflinching words and demeanor.

Gray Line resuscitated a World War II line from George Patton's diary, in which he wrote "War is very simple, direct, and ruthless. It takes a simple, direct, and ruthless man to wage war." That describes Kenny Adams, too, and he applies the maxim to boxing. A leech, which he picked up in a Vietnamese creek, left permanent marks on the pinkie of his left hand. The rest of the war's wounds are internal. As he details what he did, and saw, in Southeast Asia, he constantly rubs the finger, occasionally glancing at it darkly.

His dream of becoming an Olympic boxer evaporated. In Vietnam, Kenny Adams had been granted leave to return to Missouri to visit Erma and Rufus, both of whose health were failing. He had also hoped to remain in the States to participate in trials that would determine the U.S. boxing team for the I968 Olympics. There had been speculation, which Adams believed to be serious, about his moving from one hundred nineteen pounds to "twelve," or one hundred twelve, for the Olympic tryouts. Instead, his superiors sent him back into the jungles and rice paddies on the other side of the world. Platoon leaders were being extinguished at an alarming rate, so Adams was perched where his experience had been most needed.

He returned to the States after his tour to carry out his soldierly duties. He flourished as a drill instructor, turning

some mice into men, mortals into warriors. *Come here, shithead! Fuckwad! You must be what dribbled down your daddy's leg! You afterbirth!* He would despise today's Army, whose new recruits can only be referred to as *trainees*. He was a formidable sight confronting a tough in a lineup, snapping the brim of his hat into the bridge of the man's nose. Others were scared straight after Adams tossed a malcontent into a barracks, where he'd be given the business. Lockers exploded, walls were slammed, glass was broken, the medic's ambulance would arrive to apparently ferry the defeated to the infirmary. It was all a ruse, but the skittish lineup never figured that out.

Greenhorns cycled in for eight weeks, then there were two weeks off, eight weeks on, two weeks off; not one cycle passed without a group learning that Adams was about to celebrate a birthday or anniversary. He'd be showered with gifts. *Every cycle*. They'd discover, too late, that he couldn't be bribed into mellowing on them. One soldier, upon spotting Kenny Adams amid a throng in the Love Field airport terminal in Dallas, dropped down and started giving Adams twenty-five push-ups before Adams had even seen the man. Sir!

When Erma passed away, shortly after Rufus, it was revealed that they had left their home and the VFW post and the rest of their earthly possessions to Kenny, but their kin swindled him out of everything. Sign here, they pressured him. He did. He disassociated with them forever. And after two hundred twenty-two amateur bouts Adams would call it a boxing career—or, more accurately, have it called for him—when he was admitted into Walter Reed Army Medical Center, in Bethesda, Maryland, for heart surgery in I972. Tests confirmed he had pericarditis; the protective sac around

his heart was crumbling, threatening a lung, other organs, and his life.

The sac was removed. He began officiating boxing matches, hoping that might satisfy his competitive drive and provide an avenue to the Olympics. But the bureaucracy and politics drained him. A year later, Adams took to coaching while again stationed in Germany. Perhaps that would punch his ticket to a Summer Games? Failing to become an elite athlete would manifest in, if not haunt, Adams every single day in the professional career to which he would be directed. Only on a rare occasion would he explain, in a hushed tone, that that emptiness is what pushes him to demand the absolute best in everyone he coaches. "Life is hard, but it's fair," he says decades after heart surgery.

Stationed at Leighton Barracks in Würzburg, Germany, a U.S. Army installation for more than sixty years before it was closed in 2009, Adams relished tutoring soldiers in the ring, but he learned humility when he took those troops south near the Austrian border.

Sonthofen, tucked into the magnificent Bavarian Alps, had been the site of a former Hitler youth camp. After World War II, West Germans used the complex and its vast amenities to train a variety of its Olympic athletes, including pugilists, who were some of the best in the world. They excelled under national coach Dieter Wemhöner in the mid-I960s. Regular workout routines with small weights—a third of a boxer's poundage, at most—interval running, and hiking were part of the Wemhöner regimen, as were cold showers and hot spa treatments, capped by rolls in the snow outside. That'll toughen you, says Adams.

In Mainz, Germany, Wemhöner's work with the mitts first caught the attention of Carlton Brooks, a coach on the Army staff. He relayed his findings to Kenny Adams. They

fashioned their own mitts, albeit crudely, by placing pads in the middle of baseball catchers' mitts. They perfected those exercises in Sonthofen and elsewhere in Germany.

At Fort Hood, in Killeen, Texas, where Elvis Presley went through basic training in I958, Adams impressed Major General Stewart C. Meyer with his acumen and energy, and he was granted permission to coach the base's boxers. Adams sought to conquer the premier Army boxing units at Fort Bragg, in North Carolina, and Fort Lewis, in Washington. Adams did not just want to make something out of nothing; he wanted Hood to own every other Army post and dominate the other armed services, too. So did Meyer, whom friends knew as Stew.

Adams would toy with the rules. If Benny needed to pass his sharp-shooting drill to be eligible to box, but he couldn't aim straight, he'd find himself in sickbay; Billy, lethal with a rifle, would don Benny's uniform and nail every target. Benny would box. "Anything I did," Adams says with a sly half grin, "I did a little cheatin'."

Boxing got those soldiers out of certain mundane jobs, like guard duty and peeling potatoes. But they weren't on holiday. Decades later, many of them recall those ten-mile runs that started at dawn. Just when some thought about taking shortcuts, damn if that wouldn't be the very moment that Adams would appear on their heels, checking up on them and kicking up dust in his midnight blue 280Z.

One would sometimes be called into Adams's room at night. Adams would ask, Want a drink? They'd feel kinda special and relax. Adams would lower the boom, informing the man that he'd be sparring against everyone—a dozen or so boxers, in every weight division—the following day. Adams says, "Know where I learned that? A motherfucker did that to me in Germany." He had an accomplice play

McFadden & Whitehead's "Ain't No Stopping Us Now" over the speakers before bouts; afterward the vanquished heard Queen's "Another One Bites The Dust" ringing in their ears. Decades later, Adams and an Army buddy laugh uproariously about the team T-shirts Adams had printed that read KMFO—KNOCK MOTHER FUCKERS OUT.

Adams would nickname his squad World Beaters. Others described the team as "those professional Army guys." The *Fort Hood Herald* ran an INTIMIDATING headline to describe Adams's difficulty in scheduling dual meets, and even less-organized "smokers," when the World Beaters went six years without losing a dual meet and had defeated boxers from every other military branch for a fourth consecutive year.

At seventy-four, Adams would dance and slide around a Las Vegas gym wearing the dilapidated seat cushion from a beige couch between his chest and a large black and gold chest protector as he refined boxers' jabs to his sternum and hooks to his sides. With a black Sharpee, he had scrawled WORLD BEATERS—the logo drapes across a white globe, with red countries and red gloves dangling, on his blue laminated business card—shakily on the protector. That part of the regimen would send him to his knees, and into an ambulance, one day, inciting a strong prospect to flee from his supervision.

The first Army champion to thrive under Adams was Clayton Hires, at one hundred fifty-four pounds. Hires didn't pack a powerful punch, but he relied on quickness to dodge hooks and jabs, and to slip away from trouble. He'd be good enough to become a professional. Men would walk tall into the gym, wanting to try out for the World Beaters. Adams would pit them against Hires. "There was always a guy who had been a Golden Gloves champ somewhere," Hires says.

"After I got through with 'em they wouldn't come back, and most were bigger guys." Decades later, Hires recalls Adams always moving, always doling out smack. "Talking shit, like now," says Hires, laughing. "He'd say, 'You motherfucker,' and I'd be laughing. I was gung-ho, anyway."

Hires fooled around in one fight, all but Ali-shufflin' against a hapless foe. Feeling larger than life when the bell dinged to end the round, Hires returned to his corner to find … no Adams. Ticked about Hires's clownish antics, his *playing*, Adams had strolled fifty feet away from the ring. He gawked in the opposite direction, way up at the ceiling, at nothing. He wanted no part of his boxer's shenanigans. Hires got the message. Lightweight David Sample once returned to his corner to find Adams perched on the stool, looking away, saying nothing. Sample raised his palms to the sky, wanting his stool, which prompted Adams to say, "You ain't gonna listen to me, you don't need me." Adams relaxed. Didn't budge. Sample got blistered in the ensuing round, returned to the corner, and beseeched Adams for advice. Says Adams, "He got the message."

Al Cole, on his way to a Hood gym for a pick-up game, saw a NO VICE BOXING sign outside another gym and inquired within. Adams doubled over. "*Novice* boxing, you dumb motherfucker!" Adams shooed Cole away, but Cole returned the following day. He became one of Adams's signature projects, someone who knew nothing about boxing but ingested his coach's lessons to become an Olympian as an amateur and a world champion as a professional. "Those rivalries between the bases, they were like actual fights; not competition, where you win, lose, or draw," says Cole. "It was true hatred."

Eddie Cook had quit boxing for good, he thought, in St. Louis after impregnating a girl when he was eighteen. "I was

done. Finished," he says. He had been a splendid amateur, at a hundred twelve pounds, so good U.S. Olympic Committee officials were familiar with him. When an executive investigated Cook's disappearance from the amateur scene, he discovered the boxer had enlisted in the Army and was in boot camp at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Kenny Adams had known about Cook and also became intrigued about his whereabouts, talked to USOC contacts, and rang Fort Dix. Here's what you do, Adams told Cook, and explained how he should go about requesting to be stationed at Fort Hood.

Done deal. Cook spent only twenty-one days at Hood before being added to the boxing squad. Cook, like many, flourished under Adams. "Consistent and transparent, been like that ever since," Cook says. "You always know where he's comin' from. He'd always say, 'Let's go! Time to go!' "

Fort Hood boxers won the all-Army tournament in Adams's second season as head coach. But his incredible string of victories and trophies and accommodations almost never materialized. In I980, Adams was included on a list of alternate coaches for a U.S. contingent scheduled to compete against the Polish national boxing team in Katowice, on March I6, and Krakow, on March I8. But Coach Tom "Sarge" Johnson did not require any alternates. LOT Polish Airlines Flight 007 crashed into the ice-covered moat of a nineteenth-century castle, less than a mile from the threshold of the Okecie Airport in Warsaw, late the morning of March I4.

All eighty-seven people aboard the flight, including fourteen boxers and eight officials on the American team, perished. Investigations determined that defective materials and engine-design weaknesses created the catastrophic scenario. Identical triangular bronze statues, topped with a fallen boxer, stand in memory of the tragedy on the grounds of the Warsaw sports club Skra Warszawa and at the U.S.

Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Adams says, "I was on stand-by."

The World Beaters rattled off eight consecutive inter-Army championships. Armed-service crowns from I984 through I987 punctuated the stellar run. Major General Stew Meyer, Lieutenant General Walter F. Ulmer, and other Army brass showed great pride in Adams's accomplishments; they would boast about him and, at times, come to his rescue. The Amateur Boxing Federation twice named Adams coach of the year.

Moreover, he had been guiding armed-service contingents in tournaments in Finland and other outposts, including Ciudad Victoria, Mexico, the hometown of longtime World Boxing Council president José Sulaimán. Some of those ventures didn't qualify Adams's teams as world dominators. An insider gave Adams a stern prognostication when he arrived in Ciudad Victoria in I982. Revered guest Muhammad Ali had reviewed the host talent, surveyed the participants, and accounted for the officials. He sauntered over to Adams and said, "These Mexicans gonna kick yo asses!" The U.S. lost seven of twelve bouts, a narrow defeat to most but one that stung Adams for months. His room had been broken into on that trip, but all the thieves nicked were two pairs of jeans; jewelry, money, and other valuables were untouched.

In May I980, Kenny Adams took the all-military boxing team to the Conseil International du Sport Militaire (CISM) championships competition in Baghdad, Iraq. As James Broad, two months after winning the all-Army heavyweight title at Fort Bragg, was busy claiming that crown in Baghdad, Adams glanced into the balcony. He noted Saddam Hussein discussing the bouts, presumably, with his henchmen. Adams turned away before Hussein made eye contact.

Four years later, Adams, his assistants, and American boxers received another type of treatment at the CISM championships in Jinja, Uganda. Toilets only flushed once a day, the water was barely fit to wash with much less drink, and their diet was reduced to bananas, pineapples, and warm soda. Adams also claims to have watched buzzards swoop in on umbilical cords in a hospital dumpster. The U.S. embassy rescued Kenny and his team with potable water, but it was too late; four boxers became too sick to fight. Diphtheria, Adams says. Americans won only four medals. Only when it was time to return to the States did most of the group become accustomed to the disgusting conditions of the most remote outpost on which the globetrotting Adams has ever set foot.

The trip home, however, included a treat, as former heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson, who had had a speaking engagement in Kenya, shared their flight across the Atlantic to New York. Adams recalled Patterson on that flight but didn't recall conversations. At that time Cus D'Amato, who had trained Patterson, was molding a young Mike Tyson into a fearsome heavyweight. Adams once met D'Amato, at a tournament in the Catskills, and was struck by the obdurate trainer's quiet manner but forceful presence. "An absolute reasonable activity," D'Amato once said of boxing. "A contest of wills, not of abilities."

Adams could be persuasive, too. He had elevated himself to a position of prominence in the Army due to boxing, not unlike the environment created by author James Jones's fictional Dana E. Holmes, a captain and commander of G Company in Hawaii, in *From Here to Eternity*. He was also known as "Dynamite" Holmes, the regimental boxing coach. When Robert E. Lee Prewitt, played by Montgomery Clift in the big-screen version of the novel, declined to box for Holmes—Prew had blinded a man in a bout—he caught all

kinds of hell for the indiscretion. A climax of the famous film—not in the book—involved a new company commander relegating framed photographs of celebrated boxers from the HQ walls to storage and declaring that boxing would be de-emphasized, immediately, as an avenue to promotion and prestige.

When queried, generally, about the movie, Adams waxes sentimental about Prewitt getting gunned down on a golf course by friendly fire. "It almost chokes me up," Adams says, "how sometimes some people work so hard … that guy gets killed. It's a helluva dance for some people."

I press Adams, inquiring specifically about boxing in the Army, how it could become such an immense source of veneration within a company and hold such sway with superiors. He said General William Westmoreland, Brigadier General John "Doc" Bahnsen, Meyer, Ulmer, and other principals championed boxing as personal reflections upon themselves, in particular, and the Army, as a whole. Without such support, Adams admits, he could not have achieved such military stature or sporting glory.

Bahnsen once entered a gym, sought Adams, found him, and said, Adams, *my man*, haven't heard from you? When Adams explained that a colonel had forbidden him from going above him, to a general, to discuss anything, the general shifted his crosshairs on the colonel. Don't you *ever* restrict *him* from calling *me*! Got it? The colonel muted a nod. Bahnsen retired in I986 as one of the country's most decorated combat soldiers. He told the *Austin American-Statesman* that it's astounding how a master sergeant could do as well as Adams did "in this damn Army." They matched each other in outspokenness. Said Bahnsen, "Kenny's got fire in his belly. Deep down in his gut he's got that desire to win, and he projects that."

When Stew Meyer entered another gym and went out of his way to greet Adams, Adams watched that poor colonel's face turn beet red. *Does that motherfucker know everybody?* is how Adams interpreted his immediate superior's countenance. "That guy never fucked with me anymore," says Adams.

"Like Echo Company of the one eighty-seventh, these units had so much *esprit de corps* and morale," Adams says. "They'd want to beat other units on the post, [then] beat other bases in the country. That's why it was so important. And that's why it was so important, also, [to win] the all-service championships. Generals have made bets, the Marines and Navy and Air Force and Army, that 'my team will whip your team's ass [*sic*].' That's why I got over, being on the Army team my last ten years. I was winning every year. That's what they wanted. Everybody loves a winner."

The U.S. Amateur Boxing Federation had been watching. Twice an assistant at the U.S. Olympic Trials, Adams served as a deputy coach for the American team that earned nine gold medals, a silver, and a bronze at the I984 Summer Games in Los Angeles. The Soviet Union and Cuba had boycotted those Olympic Games, Communist reciprocity for the U.S. skipping Moscow's playing host to the sports spectacular four years earlier, so the caliber of competition wasn't exactly world class.

That is putting it mildly. Before the Summer Games in I988, in Atlantic City, the U.S. and Cuba renewed their somewhat annual boxing challenge. In all of the previous fourteen duels, the Americans failed to win a majority of the matches in the twelve weight divisions. In one, Kenny Adams assisted Coach Pat Nappi when the Cubans blanked the U.S. twelve to nothing. Another time, it was ten to two. In I988,

with Adams coaching the Americans, Cuba again won ten of the twelve bouts. Cuban coach Alcides Segarra and Adams shared such a friendly, competitive relationship they called each other "Papi."

Kenny Adams would not have such a pleasant association with someone who had, by I988, become a superstar. Sugar Ray Leonard, an Olympic gold medalist in Montreal in I976, had been hired as a special advisor to the boxing team, and he clashed with Adams in and around Atlantic City. Leonard worked with the boxers on ring movement, but that was about the extent of his assistance. He bristled about his limited role. "If I don't give these kids what I know, it's an injustice to them," the hubris-prone Leonard told *The New York Times*. Adams had no issues with Leonard helping, but there would be no equivocation about the hierarchy. "As far as the overall training," Adams said, "I'll do that."

Back in I984, in Los Angeles, Kenny Adams met Sugar Ray Robinson, his idol, before the Olympic boxing program began at the Sports Arena. There he was, right in front of Adams, who descended several stairs rapidly. He beamed as he shook Robinson's hand, but it was not firm, and his words were nearly indecipherable; the sixty-three-year-old legend's health had been failing and his final years would be difficult.

A few days later Kenny Adams nearly tangled with Mike Tyson. The feisty eighteen-year-old heavyweight was an Olympic alternate since he had lost to Henry Tillman in the trials. Outside the Sports Arena, Adams happened to observe Tyson calling after a cute girl—*Yo, bitch!* Adams approached Tyson, telling him not to talk to women like that. "You're right, Kenny." Iron Mike apologized to the woman.

Longtime U.S. amateur boxing boss Pat Nappi directed that squad and chafed when professional trainers intruded on his practices; Nappi even packed his bags and bolted for Los

Angeles International Airport in protest. What set Nappi off, Kenny Adams says, was when Manny Steward took a clump of fighters to see Muhammad Ali in Santa Monica.

Short and gruff, Nappi chomped on stubby cigars. He bristled that his fighters wanted to use mitts, twenty years after Carlton Brooks and Kenny Adams had learned about them and weaved them into their training programs. "What people don't know," Adams says, "is that all the fighters wanted them." And they got their mitts.

Adams became so proficient with them he participated in one of a series of instructional videos, displaying his paw techniques, produced by John Brown. Archie Moore starred in another one for Brown. Around 2000, Adams had a bum left wing but still insisted on putting a boxer through a mitt session. Employing only a right mitt, the intense and precise workout that Adams put the kid through that day is still the stuff of lore for those who witnessed it.

Pat Nappi feuded frequently with others, so Kenny Adams tried to stay out of the head coach's way. He bided his time. Adams never wanted Nappi to view him as ultra efficient. "Show too much perfection, there could be problems," Adams says. When he failed to ship crates of apples and oranges to their proper workout site, Nappi again fumed. "Forgot," Kenny said. "Adams, you don't know shit!" Nappi said. He was just warming up. "You forget everything! I'll send them. Leave it alone!" Adams had done it on purpose, to remain under Nappi's radar so he wouldn't be perceived as a threat.

Brass that mattered, though, had been watching Kenny Adams operate. When Nappi retired, Adams became the first active serviceman, and first minority, to be selected—not appointed, as had been the custom—as head coach of the U.S. boxing team for the I988 Olympics in Seoul, South Korea. He

qualifies that second designation by saying he was actually the first *other* to be so honored; he often boasts about his mixed Irish and Choctaw Indian heritage.

He would nearly lose the august gig when he assaulted J. Kersten Dahl, the federation's controller, at the Olympic training center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on May I2, I988. Adams was inquiring about meal tickets for Ralph McCoy, an Air Force boxer, when Dahl told him he was busy, to return in ten or fifteen minutes. Adams returned, he says, to find Dahl on the phone—Adams says Dahl cussed at him and raised the receiver in a threatening manner. Adams's innate defensiveness kicked in. He grasped Dahl's neck. Security officials would escort Adams off the premises. Officially, he went on report saying he grabbed Dahl's collar. Adams took out a second mortgage on his Tennessee home to retain a lawyer for an initial fee of ten thousand dollars. Three months later, a U.S. Olympic Committee-appointed arbitrator reinstated Adams to his position as head boxing coach.

Five weeks remained until the start of the Summer Games. Team Turmoil, how some media pundits referred to the U.S. boxing squad, got its soul back for Seoul. Adams would admit that he did choke Dahl. Decades later, Adams says he told the "collar" version of the story so frequently that he began to believe it himself.

But he will always confront an immediate threat directly. When a fellow McDonald's patron accused him of parking his Lincoln MKZ illegally in a handicapped space—no blue placard hung from the car's rearview mirror—Adams played rope-a-dope for only so long. "Listen, motherfucker," Adams said as he stood, "ever think to look at the license plate?" The man, peeved that he couldn't park in his usual spot, raised his voice and stepped closer to Adams. A switch flipped. Adams placed both hands around the man's neck. Police came.

Adams received a ticket for battery, and he paid fifteen hundred dollars in fines and legal fees. He was given six months' probation and ordered to report to an anger-management class—"on a fuckin' Sunday!" he says—where Adams almost came to blows with another attendee. He had just turned seventy-four.

Kenny Controversy. During an ABC *Wide World of Sports* telecast from Cuba, in I983, a high-ranking military officer caught a glimpse of Adams and his Afro in full bloom. When Adams returned to the States he was dressed down for the tonsorial transgression. Higher-ups believed, erroneously, it would not meet regulations to fit inside a helmet. He promised he wouldn't do it again. Another officer lambasted Adams for donning dark sunglasses. One finished a rebuking of Adams by asking him if he had anything to add. Well, as a matter of fact, yes, sir, Adams said; he requested to be left alone—no witnesses—in the room with the person. Adams somehow escaped without a reprimand, visit to the stockade, or demotion.

"When it comes to politics," Adams told the *Southeast Missourian*, "I'm always going to be in trouble because I say and act on what I feel, not what I'm supposed to say and feel."

Adams might have barely reclaimed his Olympic gig, but another tempest awaited him in South Korea. He was involved in a heated confrontation, which he alleged had been sparked by racist comments from a South Korean official. Adams reciprocated. Again, he kept his job after an investigation. But widespread corruption at those Games obfuscated any side drama. Olympic boxing in I988 is recalled, in many annals, as the epitome of five-ring corruption. Fittingly, Kenny Adams found himself inside the

eye of yet another hurricane. "You know, you may be right. Maybe I wouldn't be happy," Adams once laughed to a reporter who had inquired about his penchant for finding himself in the thick of a battle somewhere.

Boxing in Seoul is mostly remembered as the Ripoff of Roy Jones Jr. He had battered local hero Park Si-Hun, who had landed nearly ten and a half punches in each of the five rounds of the light middleweight championship bout compared to an average of twenty-eight by Jones. Jones had eighty-six scoring punches to Park's thirty-two, according to NBC's computer tally. Yet Park was given the victory, in a three-to-two verdict, by the five judges.

Adams had spotted Anwar Chowdhry, a professor from Karachi, Afghanistan, who was elected President of international amateur boxing in Bangkok in I986, and yelled, "You wouldn't dare give the decision to the Korean!" (Chowdhry would play a role in altering the course of Sharif Bogere's life.) At the medal ceremony, Park reached down, grabbed Jones around his waist, and lifted him high. As detailed in *The New Lords of the Rings*, Andrew Jennings's splendid I996 account of Olympiad irregularities, Park would tell a South Korea newspaper that Jones had in fact beaten him. Fifty thousand residents of South Korea called the national TV station to protest the ungentlemanly manner in which one of its native sons had "won" gold.

Boxing shenanigans in Seoul ran rampant, supposedly due to South Korean ill will from the Los Angeles Games four years earlier. Chowdhry, Karl-Heinz Wehr, and Seung-Youn Kim were the master manipulators, according to Jennings. Wehr was a career man in the Stasi, or East German secret police, and had been elevated to general secretary of international amateur boxing when Chowdhry won the presidency—with Wehr's influence. Wehr kept notes which

traced fifteen thousand dollars given to two boxing officials by "Korean organizers" that was then dispersed to judges, documentation that Jennings later unearthed from Stasi vaults.

The wealthy Kim was known as "Dynamite Kim," relating to the munitions company run by his family. He believed Park had deserved the victory. "Today's decision is very, very fair," Dynamite was quoted in *New Lords*. "There is no scandal today." He said he could not understand why foreigners "have such prejudice against Koreans."

Gold crowns, inlaid with jade and encased in glass bearing a Dynamite Kim label, were doled out as gifts, as well as money, to more than one hundred officials, according to Jennings. Kenny Adams is adamant that he had witnessed some of those exchanges—cash in envelopes and gold, not in the form of a crown—from officials to judges. Others said Adams only witnessed key chains being gifted to judges for jobs well done, but Adams sticks by his version of the events. Wehr dodged a *USA Today* inquiry when Jennings's book was published. To this day Adams is miffed why American officials, politicians, and journalists never adequately followed up on those leads and allegations.

American middleweight Anthony Hembrick lost a second rounder, in a technical "walkover," to Ha Jang-Ho when Hembrick failed to appear for the match on time; forget that the start of the bout had been changed or that Hembrick had shown only a few minutes tardy for it. Justifiable or not, Kenny Adams takes full responsibility for not getting his guy to the show on time.

Canadian super heavyweight Lennox Lewis's stoppage of American Riddick Bowe in a gold-medal bout was also viewed as a farce. East Germany finished the Olympics with thirty-seven medals, with the U.S. a notch back at thirty-six.

The Soviet Union led everyone with fifty-five. Eighteen officials would receive suspensions, to varying degrees, after the damage had been inflicted, but the penalties were viewed as minor compared to the crimes.

Boxing received a further black eye when Bulgarian bantamweight Alexander Hristov edged South Korea's Byun Jong-il for gold, which caused a small riot. New Zealand referee Keith Walker had twice penalized Byun for head-butting Hristov, which ended up giving the Bulgarian the narrow victory. South Korean coaches and trainers entered the ring and beat on Walker, who finally retreated from the canvas and Chamshil Students' Gymnasium, and caught the first flight back to New Zealand. Byun sat in the ring and sulked silently for sixty-seven petulant minutes to protest his perceived injustice.

Many view boxing at the I988 Summer Games as a grand pox on the Olympics, an international incident of the highest order. And Kenny Adams was right there in the middle of the circus. It is not insignificant, either, that he is one of the few links to the U.S. teams of I984 and I988 that accumulated the most American boxing medals in consecutive Olympics while winning multiple golds in each.

After South Korea, Adams received an honorable discharge, with the rank of master sergeant, from the Army and took his wife on a one-way trip to Las Vegas, starting the professional chapter of his life. On Friday, November 4, I988, before the start of a card that would be highlighted by bouts involving Thomas Hearns and Michael Nunn, the spotlights glared on Bob Arum as he invited several visitors onto the canvas inside the Las Vegas Hilton.

The president of Top Rank Promotions called out Kenny Adams from the audience, waved him up, and the trainer was

summarily showered with boos; the fight crowd still had fresh memories of the scheduling snafu that had led to Anthony Hembrick's disqualification in Seoul two months earlier. Arum rattled off the names of fighters who were going to join Adams at the newly formed Las Vegas Gloves, Inc.—who would likely be doing business with Top Rank; Al "Ice" Cole, Ray Mercer, Michael Carbajal, Kennedy McKinney, and Vince Phillips each slipped between the ropes, as did Hank Johnson, Adams's assistant in South Korea, to wave to the crowd.

Cole, however, had initially bristled when Arum recommended that Adams train him as a pro. Cole knew zilch about the fight game, only of royalty like Sugar Ray Leonard and Muhammad Ali. He did not know what he did not know, but he did believe he would never again want to be guided by the tough master sergeant. Cole's mangling of *novice* notwithstanding, Adams knew him to be one of the smartest human beings Adams has ever met. On the Army SQT, or Skill Qualification Test, upon induction, Cole had scored a I39 on a scale of I50. A II0 is considered officer material. (Kenny Adams had tallied a I05.)

That moxie would prevail. Ice Cole would understand the prudence in sticking with Adams. Nobody knew Cole's weaknesses as well as Kenny Adams. "Plus, I was fighting for my life, my livelihood," Cole says. "I needed someone to press me, to push me. I couldn't relax. I didn't need someone who would allow me to slack off. I knew [being trained by Adams] would be better for my future."

Ice had his first pro bout at the Hilton (now Westgate) in March I989. He most often fought in his home state of New Jersey. He went 35-I6-4 during a career in which he won the International Boxing Federation world cruiserweight championship in I992 and successfully defended it five times.

Cole would become a trainer, and a prominent pupil is seven-footer Marcellus Brown, who was 27-I8-I through April 20I5. Cole finds no small irony in hearing the same admonitions, demands, and frustrations spilling out of his mouth that he had heard, for so many years, booming from Adams.

In Las Vegas, Kenny Adams would align himself with various companies and figures. He'd operate Las Vegas Gloves, with Freddie Glusman, the gravelly voiced Vegas legend and restaurateur who started Piero's Italian Cuisine in I982. Opera tenor Luciano Pavarotti and basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian are some of the luminaries who have savored the osso buco, as do crooners Wayne Newton and, every Thursday, Steve Lawrence. Adams ran Executive Boxing, with wife Claudia as a consultant, for a stretch. Many promises fell short. Associations splintered. Adams moved on.

He has always worked, extolling distance and range, balance, and the pivot move, which had been so expertly executed by Arnold Raymond Cream. Best known as Jersey Joe Walcott, at nearly thirty-seven and a half years of age, in I95I, he knocked out Ezzard Charles to become the oldest man to win a heavyweight championship, a distinction Walcott would hold for forty-three years.

By his own accounting, in the spring of 20I4, Adams has played a role in the development of twenty-six world champions. Ice Cole might have steered Adams west, but Rene Jacquot became the coach's first professional champion. Adams would train the six-foot-one Frenchman in the Alps. Jacquot won a unanimous decision over Donald Curry for the World Boxing Council super-welterweight belt in France in February I989. *Ring* magazine tabbed it as the upset of the year. Jacquot became the first Frenchman to hold a world boxing title since bantamweight Alphonse "la Petite Terreur"

Halimi in I959. Jacquot lost his first defense of the belt, and he failed in his lone chance to reclaim it, against Terry "Terrible" Norris, in July I990. Jacquot finished his career, at 26-I2-I, with a defeat to Gianfranco Rosi in Sicily in November I990. Terry Norris would play a profound role in the life of Clayton Hires, too.

Adams had shepherded Kennedy "King" McKinney, Eddie Cook, Ray Mercer, and Ice Cole from amateur status at Fort Hood to the pro ranks, where they would log a combined thirteen hundred ninety-seven rounds and win twenty-two of thirty-three world-championship bouts.

Of particular accomplishment was the period from December I4, I990, through August I9, I994, when McKinney, Cole, Vince "Cool" Phillips, Freddie "Lil Hagler" Norwood, and Frankie "Fabulous" Liles—with whom Kenny Adams once earned fifty grand, his biggest single payday—combined to win fifty-one of fifty-four bouts, with two defeats and a tie; twelve of those victories were for belts, and McKinney claimed half of them. That quintet fought a total of thirty-eight times, in a sterling run from mid-December I990 through early July I992, without losing.

Throw bantamweight Eddie Cook into that last timeline and the record is forty-four wins, one defeat; Cook developed back issues in a fourth-round technical-knockout loss against Dadoy Andujar in September I99I, in Phoenix, but Cook rebounded to win three months later, and three months after that he won the World Boxing Association world bantamweight belt by knocking out Israel Contreras in the fifth round in Las Vegas.

Two fights later Cook yielded that crown to Jorge Eliecer Julio in what Adams calls a questionable unanimous decision in a bull ring in Cartagena, Colombia. Kenny Adams exaggerates the trill of the city's name in an attempt to bring

some levity to the memory. As the national anthems played, Cook saw sand on the canvas in the Plaza de Toros. Uh oh. His footing would be compromised, he thought. He and Adams had studied tape of Julio and noticed he always grazed his groin after sustaining a hard hit. So Cook pounced on Julio after such telltale taps, knowing his foe was hurting and the opportunities would be there. Adams is annoyed that referee Isidro Rodriguez gave Julio an inordinate amount of time to recover after one decking. Julio would nurse five facial wounds and two bruised ribs, and require thirty-five stitches, despite Cook's inability to anchor his rear foot. If he had such stability? "Murder," says Cook.

The three judges somehow scored Cook losing by two, four, and three points. He'd fight two more times, lose his final bout to Marco Antonio Barrera, and finish I9-3. Today Eddie Cook teaches world history, from I500 to today, at Thomas Jefferson High School in Richmond, Virginia. That has myriad challenges, Cook confirms, but he lives by the same guidelines he learned so long ago in the Army and boxing for Kenny Adams. "Same fundamentals," he says. "Stay dedicated. Don't work till you're tired; work till you're done. Stay alert; stay alive."

Such a thirty-eight-bout success streak would have to bolster any coach about what, how, and whom he's teaching. "Just pushin', pushin', pushin'," Adams says. "I came from a successful amateur career right into the pros. Put Bob Arum right back on the map. He knows it, too. One thing I had was a good routine with [those] guys over a long time; they knew me, and I knew them." At one outdoor bout in California, Freddie Roach was trumpeting about something when he heard Kenny Adams squawking about something. "Kenny, you say something?" Roach said. Adams turned to him. "All I

said is, I'm better than you!" There was no further discussion between the two men.

Vince Phillips's tenth-round TKO of Kostya Tszyu, at the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City on May 3I, I997, might have been the crowning achievement for Kenny Adams, perhaps the one bout that sticks out among all the rest in his formidable career. Tszyu hadn't lost in eighteen previous bouts. One judge had Phillips, a five-foot-eight super lightweight out of Florida, ahead by two points, another had him trailing by one, and the third had it a draw. So it was vital to avoid the precarious scorecards. "That Vince could take a shot," Adams says. "Kostya would knock motherfuckers out with that right hand. Vince showed it was about strength and will, desire and determination. You couldn't find bigger nuts, ever; they might have been a little bit bigger than Sharif's." Sharif Bogere, standing near Kenny Adams, grins and shakes his head.

Adams retains a smidgen of humility, however, to admit when he's wrong. Freddie Norwood and Juan Manuel Marquez battled from the opening bell, at Mandalay Bay on September II, 2009. In the corner, Adams repeatedly told Norwood to "step up and pivot," to knock Marquez out. Even though Norwood had dropped his foe in the first round, he had issues with the plan and the virile Marquez, and told Adams, "Gotta box this motherfucker. This motherfucker is crackin'!" Norwood knew he had to be conventional, constrained—he had to *box*—and he scored a unanimous-decision victory. "And he [Norwood] was right," says Adams.

Before that bout, Kenny Adams claims popular broadcaster Rich Marotta had boasted that a good Mexican boxer would always beat a good black boxer. On the dais after the bout, Adams spotted Marotta; *Hey, say WHAT about a good Mexican? Say what? Why? How?* It fizzled, but

Adams sought Marotta later and said, *What you say? Huh? About who?* Marotta would found, in 20I2, and preside over the Nevada Boxing Hall of Fame.

That insolence had erupted in Italy, in March 2003, when Kenny Adams filled in for Joe Goosen to train Cory Spinks, a southpaw from St. Louis, against Michele Piccirillo for the International Boxing Federation world welterweight belt. Eleven months earlier, Spinks had dropped a unanimous decision to Piccirillo near Milan at the Casinò Campione d'Italia, the largest casino in Italy, for the IBF title. Since Kenny Adams had a wealth of knowledge about Spinks, he was tapped from the bullpen to instruct Spinks for the rematch.

At a pre-fight casino press conference, Adams itched as Piccirillo trainer Sumbu Kalambay unveiled what Piccirillo needed to do to defeat Spinks. Adams exploded. He had heard enough. He stood and yelled at Kalambay; "Hold it! Hold it! Let me tell YOU a story, about when and how you got knocked out by Michael Nunn!" At the Las Vegas Hilton in March I989, Nunn had dropped Kalambay eighty-eight seconds into their bout for the IBF world middleweight title. *The Ring* magazine called it the knockout of the year. Kalambay became mute, in the Italian casino, and took his seat. "That motherfucker turn red!" Adams says. "He was *thoo* [through]!" Spinks won the rematch with a unanimous decision over Piccirillo.

Six years later, in another twist, Kenny Adams led Deandre "The Bull" Latimore into a St. Louis bout against Cory Spinks for the vacant International Boxing Federation super-welterweight title. After his first defeat in twelve matches, Latimore and his management decided to align with Adams. Latimore won eight fights before facing the familiar Spinks, in April 2009, but the Bull lost a split decision.

Afterward, some media members were not kind to Spinks, which compelled Adams to bolt to his feet, point at Spinks, and say, "Coulda, woulda … give this man his due! He won the fight." Latimore's team found another trainer. Two years just might be the median for boxers to stick with the dynamo from Cape Girardeau.

Jacob Chavez liked his trainer's tenacity. He began his heavyweight career with Kenny Adams in 2006 and lost his first three bouts, all four-round unanimous decisions in Bellflower, California. After one, beers rained down upon Chavez and Adams from the largely Hispanic crowd. Chavez ducked between the ropes to escape, glanced back for Adams, and was stunned to see his coach standing ram-rod straight, beer dousing him and plastic cups bouncing off his shirt, daring any of them into the ring; "Let's go! Which one of you motherfuckers wants to go?!" It is never wise to prod an angry mob, but they remained at bay and Adams finally darted away with Chavez, who would finish his career with four victories and three defeats. He went into training and, early on, would assist Adams with Sharif Bogere.

Kenny Adams had the ability to sometimes irritate his own people, too. At an Olympic training session at Fort Huachuca, in Arizona, in the middle of a large group, someone kicked him in his rear. Decades have passed, but he still remembers that boot; the culprit was never discovered. "I think it was Ray Mercer," Adams says. "He really couldn't stand me for a while." Adams pauses to ponder what possibly could have irked anyone about his personality or demeanor. "I know what it is; I'm barkin' all the time."

Alcohol, drugs, women … the usual litany of vices would spiral and fell some who signed pacts with Adams. "The elements," he says. "You go through so many things." He'd

tell them he's no babysitter, that what they do on their own is their business. Do your running, eat properly, get your sleep, and follow my orders when you're on my time. His list of demands is not long.

So it was definitely out of character when Adams drove to D Street (Avenue D, he calls it) to try to pluck one of his charges from a notorious section—near a row of churches—of downtown Las Vegas. It failed. When he returned to the house of ill repute, Adams was told in not-so-ambiguous terms that a third trip to that hood would put the coach in grave peril. The head of the household bellowed, "This is MY house! Got it?" Adams understood. "I overstayed my visit," he says. He never went back.

Death met others. Robert Wangila died from injuries sustained in the ring, and Edwin Valero took his own life behind bars, although Adams doubts that verdict. "They say suicide, but I don't think so; he was too macho," says Adams. Sharif Bogere nods. "Right. A good guy." Super featherweight Diego "Chico" Corrales was killed in a motorcycle accident in March 2007. He had won forty of forty-five fights, but an IBF super-featherweight belt had been obtained just before he had joined with Adams and a WBO world super-featherweight crown was acquired just after he had parted with the master sergeant.

Still, Corrales fought most of his first thirty bouts with Adams in his corner, and Chico's pivot-left hook in the seventh round of a TKO victory over Roberto Garcia—for the IBF world super-featherweight belt in October I999 at the MGM Grand—was pure Adams tutelage. Afterward, Kenny Adams told Miguel Díaz, who had taken over training Chico, "You got *my* money!" Adams enjoyed Corrales's company, especially that the Sacramento native knew how to listen. Corrales might not have had such thick skin, though. After

beating someone, with Adams in his corner, Corrales told his manager, "I can't deal with Kenny. I won the fight and he *still* gives me shit."

Those were the seeds of Corrales's discontent with, and divorce from, Kenny Adams. Miguel Díaz reaped some of the fallout reward. Such opportune timing is the name of the game. Still, Adams never lost all respect for trainers with a penchant for "picking up guys" after they win or become known. "That's not hard," says Kenny Adams. What's challenging and difficult, he says, "is taking them from nothing to something. Now that's it." It would be a hallmark of Adams's career in the amateur and professional ranks.

Some experiments failed miserably. An ill-fated, abbreviated run with southpaw James "Mandingo Warrior" Kirkland included the light middleweight's first defeat after twenty-seven victories; a first-round TKO loss to Nobuhiro Ishida at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas in April 20II. Kirkland's management team pushed for the fight, his third in thirty-four days; Adams had wanted to wait, to give Kirkland proper recuperation and preparation. Adams says, "My most embarrassing moment in boxing." (His stint with Kirkland, however, did enlighten Adams to insert a sofa cushion between his body and the black-and-gold chest protector; "He hit *so* hard," says Adams.)

During a stint with Ruslan Chagaev, Adams became so incensed that the Uzbek heavyweight had not been following the script that, upon the fighter's return to the corner after a round, Adams began choking him. Steve Rowlands, an Aussie trainer assisting Adams, tried to pull Adams off Chagaev but instead looks as if he's choking Adams; a trainer choking a trainer choking a boxer. Rowlands laughs at the memory but frowns that it's there for eternal YouTube viewing. Rowlands becomes grim when he recalls the time

Adams pulled a pistol on a recalcitrant bastard in a gym. Rowlands was certain Adams was going to use it; he didn't.

Izuagbe Ugonoh, a promising Polish heavyweight of Nigerian descent, had ended his internship with Kenny Adams just before I arrived onto the scene. "I told him truths he didn't want to know," says Adams. A chance to train Manny Pacquiao arose, but the timing was horrible; Adams could not leave his ill wife to polish Pacquiao in Los Angeles. A dance with Floyd Mayweather Jr. disintegrated when neither would leave his side of Johnny Tocco's quaint gym, yielding "turf," or the negotiating high ground, to the other. "I [would be] your coach, not your peon," Adams told Floyd. according to a third party who was there. Multiple sources acknowledged that Mayweather always treated Adams with reverence. Upon departing the gym, Floyd nodded toward Adams. "See ya, coach!" Uh huh, see ya, said Adams, nodding back slightly.

In the pantheon of famous trainers, Cus D'Amato, Angelo Dundee, Eddie Futch, Emanuel Steward, Freddie Roach, and Floyd Mayweather Sr. and brother Roger are the warhorses. An inquirer will hear Kenny Adams mention his own name, though, when asked about the top men in the profession. "I'm a braggadocio," he says. He wears that belief on his chest; a sibling presented him with a gray dri-fit training shirt, with yellow around the collar and down each side, with his name on the right breast and WORLD'S GREATEST PROFESSIONAL BOXING TRAINER stitched across the left, for Christmas 20I4. He wears it on the cover of this book.

Kenny Adams is itchy, but not because that shirt needs a few more cycles through super rinse. The last man to win a world crown that had been tutored by Adams for even a brief spell was Edwin Valero, who became the World Boxing Council world lightweight champ in February 20I0. The

Venezuelan improved to 8-0 in title bouts. Tragically, that was his final one as, two months later, he hanged himself in a Venezuela jail cell a day after killing his wife. Adams has personal reasons why he disbelieves both scenarios. He didn't spend much time with the unruly Valero but believes Valero enjoyed the way Adams worked with the mitts. "I bust a cat upside the head if his defense [isn't] working," he told a reporter. "So when [Valero] made mistakes I'd bust him by the side of his head. I think he respected that because most people didn't stand up to him."

That represents quite a title dearth for Adams, of which he's well aware. "In a dry spell," he tells Sharif Bogere. "Need a champion!" Will there be another? I visit Adams in his home in March 20I5 to watch fights on his big screen—the first time one of the three major broadcast networks has aired boxing in thirty years—when a daughter rings him on his mobile phone. She presses him about his career, about how long he has left, how much more he has to give the sport that sucks the marrow out of so much of its prey. He tells her, "Thirty," plucking a figure out of thin air. I want thirty world champs, he says, surprising himself as much as her. A nice, round figure, he concludes. So, by his reckoning, he has four to go. Nothing about the pursuit will come easy.

Comfortable, immaculate, and inviting, the two-story stucco home sits in a quiet cul-de-sac in northwest Las Vegas. Over the large front window hang three charcoal drawings from Venice. An elegant Italian chandelier hovers over the dining-room table. Other art and statuary from Japan and Uzbekistan and Germany and Italy, as well as Zulu masks and dolls, decorate walls and nooks. A copy of the Emancipation Proclamation, in three frames, hangs on the wall that separates the living room from Kenny's tidy office,

where a framed glass encasement contains his Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, and other honors.

The Legion ribbon is purple-red—officially American Beauty Red—and is attached to a bronze medal bearing a gold-encircled central ball consisting of thirteen stars on a blue background, and five white-enameled spokes trimmed in red enamel that extend with tiny gold balls at the tips of all ten points. It is in recognition of exceptionally meritorious service. However, he so loathed the colonel who had been scheduled to present the Legion of Merit to him that Adams simply instructed a secretary to send it to his home.

A three-line letter from President Jimmy Carter, informing Adams of his decision to have America boycott the I980 Summer Games in Moscow, hangs nearby. Adams rues that letter, since it crushed many Olympian dreams. Adams half glows when he pulls from the closet, and dons, a glorious Uzbek tribal robe embroidered in gold lamé that had been presented to him from a high-ranking official of the fledgling country.

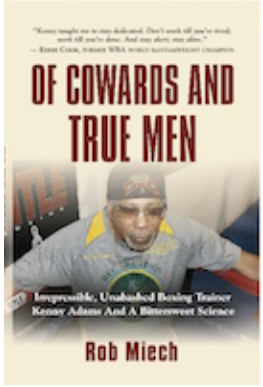
The three-car garage—protecting the Grand Am, white Lincoln MKZ (in which Kenny dodged a ticket after hitting triple digits on the freeway), and the stylish lavender Cadillac with the soft white top—is a veritable museum to the sweet science. Decades-old posters and framed photographs and memorabilia signed by some of the greats dot the walls; on work tables at each side rest gaggles of trophies, including a four-foot beast from Adams's glory days at Fort Hood.

Upstairs, Claudia Adams doesn't make a peep. Kenny and I watch bouts for more than three hours, and she never traipses downstairs for a plate of chicken Alfredo, a glass of milk or cup of tea, or to greet a newcomer. I will watch fights on two other occasions in Kenny's home and will only once, and briefly, meet Claudia; she walks in from the garage and

only stops for Kenny's introductions to three guests. She might be frowning. He elaborates to her about this project, to which she says, "Another book?" Every syllable is dubious. (Texas writer Steve Hill's I99I attempt at a Kenny Adams tome did not pan out.) She walks on.

About ten years younger than Kenny, Claudia becomes less social by the year, he says. But there's something else; the woman who became so fond of that lithe, dashing, and furious figure in the ring has come to despise the sport that dominates her husband.

"It is a nasty game. It really is. It's nasty all the way around," Kenny says during the last match. He nods to the ceiling, at the master bedroom. "She [once] liked boxing … hates it now." He points toward the television screen and shrugs. "But she knew it when she met me."



Kenny Adams survived on profanity and pugilism, turning Fort Hood into the premier military boxing outfit and coaching the controversial 1988 U.S. Olympic boxing team in South Korea. Twenty-six of his pros have won world-title belts. His amateur and professional successes are nonpareil. Here is the unapologetic and unflinching life of an American fable, and the crude, raw, and vulgar world in which he has flourished.