

# Lew Jenkins

Contributed by Rob Snell  
Monday, 27 April 2009

Name: Lew Jenkins  
 Career Record: [click](#)  
 Alias: Sweetwater Swatter  
 Birth Name: Verlin E. Jenkins  
 Nationality: US American  
 Birthplace: Milburn, TX  
 Hometown: Sweetwater, Texas, USA  
 Born: 1916-12-04  
 Died: 1981-10-30  
 Age at Death: 64  
 Stance: Orthodox  
 Height: 5'8"  
 Reach: 173  
 Trainer: Charley Rose  
 Managers: Hymie Caplan & Willie Ketchum

**Career Summary** Lew Jenkins was a vicious puncher, despite his lanky build. He began his boxing career in carnivals. After winning the World Lightweight Title with a knockout over Lou Ambers, Jenkins's life outside of the ring spun out of control. He drank excessively, stayed up all night, and spent money on fast cars and motorcycles--wrecking several of them and injuring himself in the process. Jenkins eventually lost his title on a 15-round decision to Sammy Angott, then he went on a long losing streak and fell completely out of the ranks of the world's top lightweights. Jenkins served in the United States Coast Guard during World War Two, participating in troop deployment, and in the thick of several enemy fires during the Allied invasions of North Africa and Europe. (He had been a member of the American troop D-Day invasion.) He attempted a comeback after WWII, but was unable to regain his status as a top lightweight and welterweight. He retired from boxing in 1950. While serving in the U.S. Army's Second Infantry Division during the Korean War, he was awarded several medals (including the Silver Star) after saving the lives of fellow soldiers from enemy fire. Jenkins died October 30, 1981 in Oakland, CA, USA. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. In 2003, he was declared one of The Ring magazine's 100 Greatest Punchers of all time.

## Whiskey, Women, and Motorcycles: The Career of Lew Jenkins

06.01.06 - By Craig Parrish: Lew Jenkins was one of the most naturally talented, tough as nails Fighters the boxing world has ever seen. He was also one of it's greatest Hell-Raisers, widely known for his infamous run-ins with Police, lack of training, womanizing, and getting in the ring so drunk he could barely stand. Lew Jenkins was born in Texas in 1916. His family was farm laborers and they spent many years living in wagons and tents, traveling from farm to farm to harvest cotton..

As a young child he was too small to carry a cotton sack and would walk the rows ahead of his Father, stacking small piles of cotton for harvest, working until his fingers were infected and bleeding. It was the Depression, and although his Father was a hard working man, the family could never seem to get ahead. After his Father died in 1932, young Lew started looking around for a better way to make a buck.

The early years of heavy farm labor had made him a tough kid, and he discovered the rough and tumble world of "Carnival Boxing". He would take on all comers, and if his opponent defeated them they would receive 25% of the ticket sales. If they failed, they received nothing "but a whipping" as Jenkins later said. Jenkins weighed 120 pounds. He fought an average of one to four bouts a night, every night.

He joined the Army but continued to fight on his leave time around Dallas. He typically made 5 or 10 dollars a match, depending on the number of rounds. In 1938 he won 18 fights but lost 5. In 1939, he was 13-3. He was starting to make pretty decent money at this point, but his bad habits were also starting to accumulate. And accelerate. Lew had a passion for whiskey and cigarettes, nightclubs, and women. He later stated "I never did go to sleep, never did eat right, never trained at all hardly. I just completely wore myself out". For the poor kid from Texas, money in his pocket was a new thing and the party would never end.

In 1940, the rough and tumble Jenkins got his shot. He had realized that he needed to slow down a bit and actually train for the bout. A longtime smoker, Jenkins actually quit for a few weeks and trained hard for the fight. However, in the week before the fight Lew "fell of the wagon" and broke all the rules. Somehow he managed to show up for his title fight with Lou Ambers, and his big right hand was still intact. He KO'd Ambers in the 3rd round and became

the Lightweight Champion of the World. Now with the Championship belt in his hand, Jenkins's bad habits and free spending got even worse. He bought cars and motorcycles. He bought a plane. He bought a racehorse. He would go out to a nightclub and spend \$1000 in a single night. He was the Champ and everything was on him. He was making Fifteen to Twenty thousand dollars per fight, and he spent it as fast as he got it.

His training habits got worse and worse, to the point of non-existent. He was knocked out in the 6th round by the legendary Henry Armstrong in July, but battled back to KO Lou Ambers again on the 7th in February, 1941. He then lost a decision to Bob Montgomery. At this time, Jenkins was involved in a serious motorcycle accident in New Jersey. He sped off the road and fell about 60 feet, landing in a tree. He received 3 broken vertebrae in his neck. He had the Doctor place a removable cast on his neck as he was preparing for a title defense against Sammy Angott. The injury was so painful he could do no road work at all, but he showed up for the Angott fight, took the brace off his neck, and went in to lose a 15 round decision. His days as Champion were over. He was 25 years old.

In 1942, the downward spiral got even worse. Jenkins lost 9 of 10 bouts, mainly to a series of unknown fighters. His drinking and nightlife were out of control and were taking their toll, and he often had a quart of whiskey stashed in his water pail in the ring corner. After a series of arrests and "beatings from cops", he went into the Coast Guard to serve during World War II. Military life did little to slow down Ambers, as now instead of fighting in the ring his fights were in the street. He was discharged in 1945. With nothing but Boxing to fall back on, Lew got back into the ring. He fought sporadically over the next five years, fighting mainly second rate fighters. His last fights of note came in 1950, his final year, when he lost a decision to Carmen Basilio and was "KO'd by Beau Jack.

Now at 34, Jenkins was desperate. His boxing career was over, and quite frankly had been for a long time. He was broke, "drank down", and at rock bottom. He had really only known two things since leaving the cotton fields of Texas, fighting and the Service. With nowhere left to go, nobody to turn to, and no other way out, Jenkins re-enlisted in the Army. And as unlikely as it seems, joining the Army with the Korean conflict looming actually saved his life.

Lew Jenkins became a decorated soldier in the Army during the Korean conflict and credited it for his salvation. Trapped behind enemy lines with all his comrades dying around him, Jenkins vowed that if he made it out he would change his ways. He was as good as his word. Jenkins became a career soldier and retired from the Army in 1963 with the rank of First Sergeant. He became a dedicated Husband and Family man, and finally seemed to find the peace that his raging spirit had been searching for so many years. The thrill of the ring was gone, the money was gone, but at the end he conquered his demons once and for all. He passed away in 1981.

Lew Jenkins's career record was 65-39-5 with 47 knockouts. Although he had quite a few losses, one has to wonder what the man's career might have been if he had actually trained properly. After his career was done, he later said "when I was through, I was just drank down and wore to a nub. And I hadn't even learned to fight". At 47 knockouts, he unquestionably had a lot of power. His is the age-old tale of a kid who came from nothing, had a huge rise, and an even bigger fall. Fortunately, this kid pulled himself back up again. He was in *The Brownsville Herald* Texas 18 July 1940

**JENKINS HOT AT START BUT TAKES BEATING Is Unable to Answer Bell For Seventh** Henry Armstrong isn't the fight machine he was a year ago, but he still is plenty good. The beating the busy little negro gave lightweight champion Lew Jenkins in a non-title bout under the Polo Grounds lights Wednesday night was a masterpiece in brutality. Every move of his brown body was calculated to lead to the climax between the sixth and seventh rounds, when Jenkins slumped senseless from his stool.

Few of the 23,000 spectators realized what a terrible going-over the slender Texan had received. Some were surprised when he collapsed, when Referee Arthur Donovan called Armstrong to ring center to lift his glove.

Lost Consciousness

But in his dressing room, Jenkins was still so dazed it took him some time to realize how his downfall had come. The battered 135 pound king continued to ask whether he had been counted out. It required all the persuasion of his manager to get him calmed down.

For the first three rounds, Armstrong scarcely laid a glove on his tense, savagely-punching opponent. But for the next three rounds he was poison, and Jenkins' doom was clearly sealed from the first terrific left hook that caught him on his sharp chin and dumped him to the floor.

In all, Jenkins was down six times: Once in the fourth, twice in the fifth and three more times in the sixth, when he was so weary he could lash out only spasmodically by instinct. The third time he went down in the sixth he wasn't hit, but simply fell from a right he aimed at Armstrong and missed. **Eyes Are Blank**

When the round ended he stood backed against the ropes, a pitiful expression on his bloodied features, his eyes blank. He was led to his corner and placed on his stool, but after a moment he tried to rise and, instead, went to his knees, bushy head, nearly touching the canvas.

There ended, temporarily, one of the most sensational rises in ring history. Until he met his master Wednesday night, the slim ex-soldier had won 11 consecutive fights in the short space of a year.

He still holds his lightweight title, as Armstrong came in at 130 pounds, but Lew knows now that there is a greater fighting man than he. A few hours before he met the negro, he said "Just a breeze,"

Lew Starts Hot

And as for those opening rounds, frankly, Armstrong's admirers were no so sure themselves. Those who had wagered

on the bull-chested negro at odds of 1-to-2 must have experienced a few pangs of doubt. Because, for nine minutes of fighting. Henry simply contented himself with bobbing and weaving and clinching and generally petting Jenkins goat, The first round, inwas nearly ended before Armstrong sank his first real blow into Jenkins wasp waist.Jenkins, meantime was swatting Armstrong all over the joint, laying his rights and lefts on the negro's chin and winning three rounds by wide margins. Some of them shook Henry too.

Between each round Caplin begged Jenkins to relax and quit trying to punch Armstrong's head off, because Hymie knew what was going to happen pretty soon.

But Lew, a little confused by Armstrong's bobbing, kept right on And sure enough, it happened. **FIRST ROUND** Jenkins straightened Henry up with a left hand, and landed a right to the head as Armstrong crowded in. Jenkins tossed two lefts to the body and a left to the jaw. But Henry still pushed forward. Jenkins landed a fast right cross and Henry held momentarily. Jenkins fought the round in a half crouch to match Armstrong's crowding style. Jenkins landed a slashing right to the jaw near the end of the round for the best punch of the session, Armstrong finished up belting away at the body. Jenkins' round. **SECOND ROUND**

They flailed away at each other's body for several seconds at the start. Then Jenkins exploded aleft and right off the face, but Henry still crowded In. Jenkins landed two rights to the body and another to the head and still Henry came on. They exchanged sizzling lefts and the crowd roared. Jenkins, backing away, slipped to one knee late in the round, but it was not a knockdown. Jenkins bounced two more rights off Henry's head and Armstrong peppered away at the body. Jenkins' right found its mark again but Henry's left drew blood from Lew's nose just at the bell. Jenkins' round.

#### **ROUND THREE**

Jenkins' right hand continued to find a target, but Henry just kept coming In. trying to land body punches. Armstrong was wide with most of his left hooks up to now Jenkins nailed Henry with a right to the mouth. Henry uncorked a fast left hook to the face and then connected with a roundhouse right that Lew didn't like. They stood in mid-ring for several seconds, just clouting away. This was the most vicious round so far with defense on each side tossed out the window, Jenkins round.

**FOURTH ROUND** For a full minute Jenkins held Armstrong off with straight lefts. A left hook right on the mouth floored Jenkins near Armstrong's corner. He got up at nine, and Henry tore in, trying for the kill, Jenkins backed off trying to recover Then another left hit him on the mouth and he held. Jenkins bounced left hooks off the mouth. Henry tore in. throwing swings with both hands. Another left landed on Jenkins' mouth and still he punched back. A right hand made Lew's knees buckle near the end of the round and cut Lew on the corner of the left eye. **ROUND FIVE** Jenkins tore out and threw punch after punch to Henry's head, cutting Armstrong's right eye with a swinging left. He just backed away as Henry came in and threw about 50 punches before Armstrong could get in close. Henry scored with several right swings to the body midway through the round, and Jenkins appeared tired. Jenkins went down from a body punch near his corner for a count of two. Then was floored again for a nine count from a right hand. Armstrong rushed in for the kill and was peppering Jenkins about the head at the bell. Armstrong's round.

#### **ROUND SIX**

Between rounds a doctor examined Armstrong's eye end ruled that the fight could continue. Armstrong was in close now and peppering away with both hands. Suddenly Lew backed off and they slugged away near Henry's corner. A left hand opened Henry's eye again And a right and a right uppercut straightened him up. A left hook to the chin floored Jenkins for a third count in his own corner. Henry came in throwing everything behind each punch. Suddenly Henry opened up and nailed Lew with two rights to the chin. A left dropped Jenkins in mid ring for a nine count. Henry threw both hands and Jenkins went down for another nine count. Henry came in so fast he slipped to one knee but it was no knockdown. Armstrong was throwing punches at the bell. Armstrong's round