

In the Wake of the News.

David Condon

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SOMETIMES WHEN THEY call the roll in that great eternal arena up yonder, Kid Gabriel bugles for his candidates by the wholesale.

That's the way it has been, in recent months, when the final summons went out for that old gang of mine: Charley Goldman, Allie Colombo, Rocky Marciano, and finally, on Monday night, for The Vest himself, Al Weill.

Within less than a year, the entire Rocky Marciano crew has answered the final bell.

Goldman, Rocky's trainer, died last November. Colombo, the pal who put Marciano in the stewardship of Goldman and Weill, perished in a traffic accident in January. Rocky was killed in a plane crash only a few weeks ago. Finally, it was Weill, who had been on the eternal ropes for more than two years.

For a long while many of us in boxing called Al Weill "The Vest" because he caught all the



Al Weill

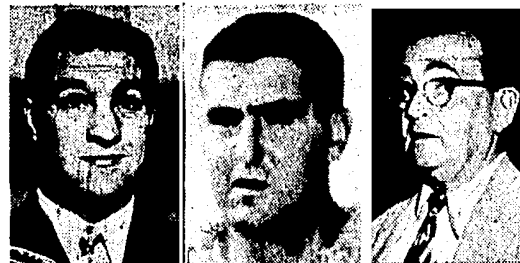
gravy. Yet, when all was said and done, Al was the guy who died broke and alone. None of the old gang died lonelier, or more broke.

It wasn't nice for anyone to see, even for those of us who didn't particularly care for Al Weill and his foghorn voice. Particularly if you admired the way Al advanced his fighters, including Marciano, Lou Ambers, and Marty Servo.

Al Weill died a legend onto himself. In his salad days, Al liked to wear a yacht captain's hat, with a dollar cigar poked between his teeth. Then he'd peer between thick spectacles and thunder to us: "You, Mr. Gordon, you from Chicago. Don't you try none of that interviewing Rocky Marciano alone. You interview me. I'm The Vest, and I get all the gravy."

CHARLEY GOLDMAN originally was a carnie — he ran a baseball game in a carnival—when he first ran into Al Weill, a former ballroom dancer who also had taken up with the carnival crew, Goldman even then had a stable of fighters, and Weill became interested in the game. Al had a natural talent.

Eventually Weill became matchmaker for the late Mike Jacobs' 20th Century Sporting club and subsequently, for



Rocky Marciano Allie Colombo Charlie Goldman

Madison Square Garden. It was Rocky Marciano who was to change Weill's life, as The Vest changed Marciano's. This was after the days of Ambers, Servo, and Joe Archibald.

Colombo originally spotted the talent of Marciano, the Brockton [Mass.], Blockbuster. Colombo, tho, realized he couldn't take Rocky to the top. Allie decided that Al Weill and Goldman were the men.

Allie and Rocky hitch-hiked to New York to see Weill. Al's

original appraisal of Marciano: "The guy's got two left feet. Glad we didn't pay him no fare up here."

Goldman's response: "Let Rocky stick around a couple of days until I look at him. They say he can punch his way thru a concrete wall."

Two days later, Goldman told Weill: "That Marciano don't look bad at all. He can hit, but he needs a lot of work."

Weill to Goldman: "You mean that Marciano's still here? We don't pay him no expenses, understand. I got enough broken down fighters. This guy ain't even broken down yet. He ain't got enough talent to be broken down."

Goldman got Marciano some early matches, with the stipulation that Rocky pay his own transportation (hitch-hiking was easy) and stay in flea-bag hotels. Always, Goldman was after Weill: "Take a look at this guy. He's the next champeen."

AFTER GOLDMAN'S CONTINUAL urging, Weill realized he did have something. He carefully took charge of Marciano, arranging trial matches the way a mother prepares formula for her first baby.

"If they listen to me, they got a chance, and I always get 'em top dollar," said Weill to Goldman. He was speaking of Rocky Marciano, as well as of Ambers and Servo.

Weill finally arranged for Marciano to fight Jersey Joe Walcott for the heavyweight title. Walcott floored Rocky in the first round and was far ahead when Rocky gave him the take-out punch in the 13th. No one thereafter ever came close to Rocky.

Marciano wasn't decked again until the last fight of his career; a successful defense against Ageless Archie Moore. Rocky clambered off the floor to whip Moore. Then Rocky prepared the story of his retirement. This led to his final break with Weill, who thought that The Rock had at least two more big money victories in him.

To emphasize his dislike for Mr. Gordon of THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE (that's Condon), Al Weill leaked the story of Rocky's retirement to another newspaper.

That angered Rocky even more. He had a good bust-up with Weill. Yet, until death summoned, he argued that all he had he owed to Weill.

Rocky always had a 50-50 contract with Weill, which meant that he and Al split the purses down the middle, with Al paying all the expenses. More important, Rocky always insisted that Weill had taught him the value of his talent. More than once, Rocky reminded that it was canny Weill who had told him:

"You're the heavyweight champeen. No one in sport is as famous. You tell 'em that if they want you, they gotta pay for you. If they want you to walk across the street, charge 'em for shoe leather."

Tuesday morning, when we telephoned Ben Bentley with the sad news, Ben said: "An era certainly has ended. Harry Mendel went first. Then Doc Kearns and Jim Norris. Finally, within the last few months, Goldman and Colombo and Rocky and Al.

"Say, it must be one helluva card they're lining up somewhere out there in the sky."