

# REG GUTTERIDGE

By Mike Casey



Reg Gutteridge, who recently died at the age of 84, shared a special place for many years in the hearts of British boxing fans with his friend and rival commentator, Harry Carpenter. In the innocent days of terrestrial TV when we could watch all the big fights for free, Reg worked for the ITV network and Harry was the man at the BBC. They were like chalk and cheese, which is probably why they got along. Reg was sharp, salty and blunt. Harry was smooth, erudite and studious.

Like so many people who find fame, Reg's fine career as a boxing reporter and commentator was largely due to accidental circumstances. Sometimes forgotten in the mists of time is that he was an outstanding amateur prospect before, as he once modestly recalled, he lost an argument with a German landmine during the Normandy invasion. He was also deprived of a leg in that little battle but certainly never lost his Cockney wit. Years later, when somebody asked him if it was really true that he had lost his limb, Gutteridge replied, "Why? Have you found it?"

Reg came from solid boxing stock. His grandfather Arthur was reportedly the first professional to box at the original National Sporting Club, subsequently becoming its chief second. Reg's father and uncle, famously known as the Gutteridge Twins, were excellent boxing coaches and cornermen who handled such stars as Primo Carnera, South Africa's Ben Foord and Albert Finch.

It was perhaps inevitable that Reg's humour and his way with words would find their natural home in the field of journalism. Sharp as a tack, he was quick to rebuke anyone who came to criticise his beloved sport without first researching their facts. When somebody once referred to the Marquis of 'Queensbury' rules, Gutteridge barked, "It's QueensBERRY, I'll have you know. QueensBURY is a bloody railway station!"

Reg was the chief boxing reporter for the London Evening News for more than 30 years and also contributed regular columns to Boxing Illustrated and The Ring. His grand title of 'London Bureau Chief' for The Ring must have amused him. To all intents and purposes, Reg WAS the London bureau. In his early days of TV commentary, he partnered the much admired Eamonn Andrews and later formed a great relationship with former lightweight champion, Jim Watt, who continues to be arguably the most intelligent and perceptive observer of the boxing scene. The two men became good friends and Jim was greatly saddened by Reg's passing.

'Being there' was perhaps one of Reg's greatest knacks. He got to know people, made himself liked and always seemed to be in the right place at the right time when interesting little things were going on. Sugar Ray Robinson, Muhammad Ali and Larry Holmes became his personal friends. Following Ali around always seemed to throw up a little gem of a story that rival reporters never nailed.

In the aftermath of Muhammad's 1970 comeback victory over Jerry Quarry, Reg witnessed a humorous exchange between promoter Harold Conrad and Ferdie Pacheco: "After the fight we were in stitches trying to confirm how many Quarry required over his left eye. Helpful Conrad told us fourteen. Dr Ferdie Pacheco (who worked Ali's corner) had insisted eleven. 'But I've told the guys it was fourteen,' pleaded Conrad.

'So what do I do?' laughed Ferdie. "Go back and sew three more just to make the story stand up?"

Two years later, when Ali outclassed Germany's Jurgen Blin in the unlikely location of Switzerland, Reg observed wryly in passing that Zurich without snow looked a lot like Detroit. He got a lot of good copy from the vaudeville-like promotion, which proved to be every bit as surreal as its setting: "The promotion was something else. It made amateur night in Dixie look like the Palace. The promoters – names are not important – were 29 and 31. One was pot-bellied, owned a restaurant, frequently flashed a bankroll and fancied himself as an opera singer. The other was slightly built, had long hair dashed with red to give some affinity to the fight game, and was seen in a London registered Rolls Royce.

"Guys like Harold Conrad and the Dundee brothers just couldn't believe this was for real. Word had it that others were yodelling for their money. It's a good thing none of the 'name' fight writers from the U.S. were there. The cuckoo clocks and cow bells would have sent Jimmy Cannon up the wall."

Reg Gutteridge was an old school boxing reporter in the days when great champions could still command a share of the front page. For that reason alone, he is probably better off for having gone to a better place. Elected to the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2002, he hailed from that magical era of journalism when the gunfire of busy typewriters echoed through the soupy smog of cigar and cigarette smoke and when any self-respecting sports journalist kept half a bottle of the hard stuff carefully secreted within easily reachable distance. And you know what? They still made it to press on time.

Reg is survived by his wife, daughter and four grandsons.