

Eugene Criqui
French WWI War Hero
Won World Title After Having Jaw Shattered By Sniper's Bullet
By Bobby Franklin

Bobby Franklin's Boxing over Broadway

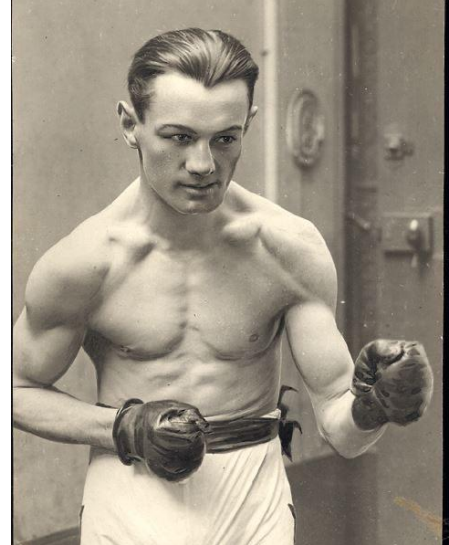
Eugene Criqui was born in the Belleville neighborhood of Paris, France on August 15, 1893. Belleville was a working class village that was later used as the backdrop for a number of motion pictures, including the Oscar winning short *The Red Balloon* in 1957.

Criqui worked as a pipefitter before becoming a professional boxer in 1910 at the age of 17. From 1910 until 1914, he compiled a record of 68 fights with 45 wins, 9 losses, and 14 draws. Of his wins, 14 came via knockout.

In 1914 Eugene joined the French military and fought in WW I. While serving guard duty during the Battle of Verdun, he was shot by a German sniper. The bullet struck him in the face shattering his jaw. Criqui would spend two years in the hospital recovering from his wounds. During that time surgeons rebuilt his face using wires, plastic, and pieces of sheep's bone to repair the damage. Given this was in the early part of the 20th Century, it was amazing what the doctors were able to accomplish. After a long and painful recovery, Criqui returned home.

His family and doctors were stunned when he told them he had decided to resume his boxing career. It seemed he must have gone a bit mad to be even considering returning to such a brutal profession after suffering serious injuries. But return he did and what a second career he had.

In his first four years of boxing he had 68 fights but scored just 14 knockouts. In his comeback after the war he had another 68 fights, but this time he scored 42 knockouts in 60 wins. Clearly, he had changed his style. I have read that prewar Eugene had been a slick boxer who was content to go the distance.

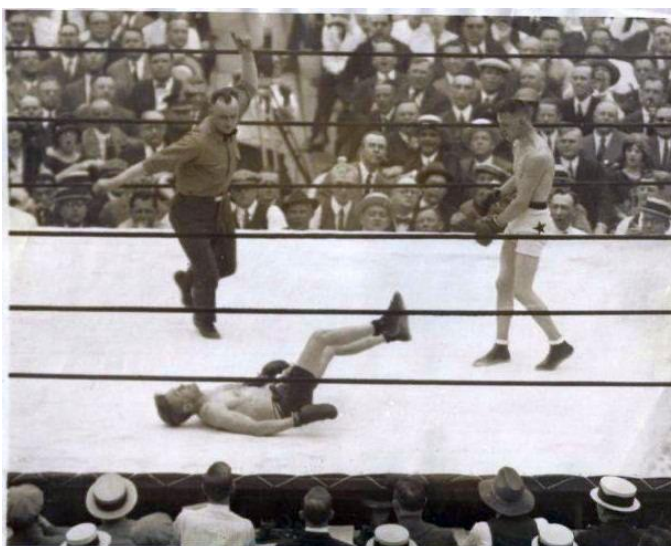


After the war, his style turned much more aggressive, and he developed a powerful right hand.

Why the change? Well, for one thing, he had grown from a flyweight to a featherweight. But I theorize he was greatly influenced by another great French champion who was also a war hero. If you watch films of Eugene Criqui in his fights after the war you can see his style is clearly patterned on that of Georges Carpentier. The way he holds his left and sets up his opponents for his lethal right hand is right out of the Carpentier playbook.

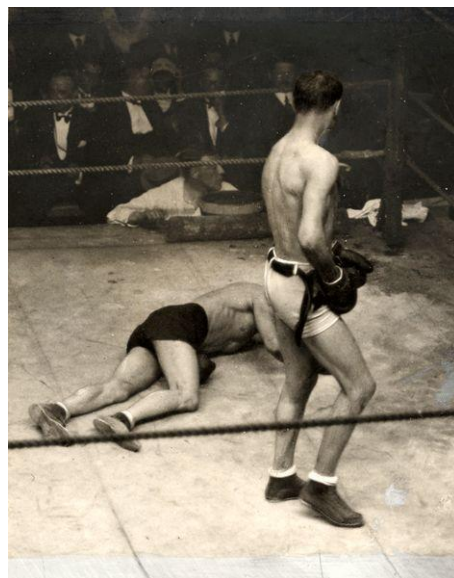
Georges Carpentier was immensely popular in the United States after the war. He was handsome and a war hero. That fact was not lost on promoters when they matched him against Jack Dempsey who had been accused of evading the draft and sitting out the war. When the two met in 1921 they drew a gate of over a million dollars.

In 1923 promoter Tom O'Rourke brought Criqui to New York to fight Johnny Kilbane for the World Featherweight Title. It could have been that O'Rourke saw some of the Carpentier magic in Criqui. The fight took place at the Polo Grounds. It would be the first time Eugene would fight in the United States, but as with Carpentier, he had a reputation as a war hero and was also known for his exciting knockout power. Because of this, the fight generated excitement, though Kilbane was installed as the betting favorite.



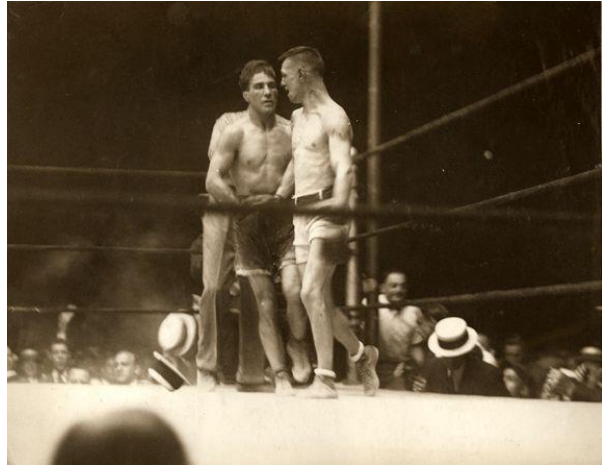
Eugene Criqui Kayoes Johnny Kilbane

Criqui exceeded expectations when he kayoed the champion in the 6th round with a solid right hand. Now the champion, Eugene was under contractual obligation to defend the title within 60 days against Johnny Dundee.



Criqui stopped Joe Fox in 12 rounds on May 29, 1922

Dundee and Criqui met on July 26, 1923, just 54 days after the Kilbane fight. Dundee dropped Eugene four times on his way to winning a fifteen round decision and the title. This was one of the shortest reigns of any world champion.



Johnny Dundee and Eugene Criqui

It would be Eugene's last fight in the United States. He would fight just six more bouts. Losing four, including one to Panama Al Brown in Paris. He retired in 1928, having compiled a career record of 136 bouts with 105 wins, 16 losses, and 15 draws. 59 of his wins came via knockout.

It's a mystery why he never fought in the States again or why he had so few fights after losing the title. It has been said he quit boxing because of injuries to his hands. His jaw certainly held up well as he was only stopped on five occasions.

Eugene went on to have a career as a boxing referee in France. He was the second French boxer to win a world championship, Carpentier being the first. It is unclear why he didn't fight more often in the United States or why he never got another title shot.

It very well may have been because he had proven himself by coming back from his wounds and attaining the title. Criqui was a courageous soldier and a fearless boxer who overcame a lot to become a world champion. On July 7, 1977, he passed away in a nursing home in Noisy-le-Grand, France. He was 83 years old.

Not a lot has been written about this very interesting champion. In 2017 a biography of Criqui was published in France but has not been translated into English. The title of the book is *Gueule De Fer*, which translated means Iron Mouth. It would be interesting to know more about his life. Just the little we do know is quite inspirational.