"Fighters I've Met" by Tom Sharkey
(By line: These are 11 articles written in installments of "the life of Tom Sharkey, one of the greatest heavyweight boxers the game has known. There has been no more picturesque character in the boxing game than Tom Sharkey, and Evening Herald readers will find this big story one of the most interesting features that has been published in the The Evening Herald's sport columns")
Collector's Description: Sept, 1917. 11 complete clippings from The Evening Herald
Item number: 6946049623
Winning Bidder - stockbook (Pember Rocap) - stockbook@hotmail.com, (Pem Rocap)
Seller - jake_wrestler - Positive Feedback: 100% - Member since Sep-12-03 in United States
Item location: Venice, California
Winning bid: US $58.29
Ended: Feb-09-05 15:38:11 PST
Start time: Feb-06-05 15:38:11 PST
History: 4 bids (US $15.00 starting bid)
Description - Item Specifics - Antiquarian/Collectible Books - Binding: Clippings Special Attributes: 1st Edition
Category: Americana Printing Year: 1917
http://cgi.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=6946049623 - Ended 2/9/2005

Article (in full?) also found in:
http://www.lulu.com/sciwrestling
The Classic Pugilism & Bare-Knuckle Boxing Companion Vol. 2
More Bare-Knuckled brutality from the very same publisher that brought you the acclaimed Authoritative Encyclopedia of Scientific Wrestling. History, technique, photos; you will find it all here! Included in Volume 2: 1) 'Boxing Made Easy' by Pupil of Mendoza and Humphries - "Clearly explained and illustrated in a series of easy lessons, together with some important hints about wrestling" 2) 'Scientific Boxing' by Champion "Gentleman" Jim Corbett (he beat Sullivan!!) 3) 'The Art of Boxing' by Prof. W.F. Lee 4) 'Fighters I've Met' by legendary tough guy and champion boxer Tom Sharkey. Don't be fooled, everything that is old is NEW again. From: $34.99

*************BEGINNING OF ARTICLE***************

Fighters I've Met
By Tom Sharkey

These are the installments of the life story of Tom Sharkey - one of the greatest heayweight boxers the game has known. There has been no more picturesque character in the boxing game than Tom Sharkey, and Evening Herald readers will find this big story one of the most interesting features that has been published in The Evening Herald's sport columns.

Chapter 1
I was born in Dundalk, Ireland, in 1873, and was one of nine children, three of whom, including a twin brother, are dead. Of those alive two are boys and three girls. My twin brother was killed by a runaway horse when he was about 8 years old.

My early boyhood can be disposed of in a very few words. I was always husky, was never quarrelsome, and if my schoolmates suspected I could fight they conceded the point without seeking actual demonstrations.

Like most boys at school, I had a nickname, and the only times I wanted to fight was when some fresh kid hid around a fence and yelled at his companions to come and see "The Badger". I did not like to be reminded that my face was covered with white fuzz.

GOES AROUND WORLD
The first work I ever did as a boy was aboard a ship. I used to run on small coaling vessels between my home town and ports in Scotland. I took my turn at the wheel and often went ntneteen and twenty hours at a stretch without sleep.

Later I shipped on larger vessels, and before coming to New York from Buenos Aires in 1892 I had travelled over the world - to Alaska through the Indian Sea and to ports where no white man had ever set foot.

I could tell a very interesting story of adventures in foreign lands and seas. I was shipwrecked one time and spent many days in an open boat without a drop of water to drink. But that story will keep for some other occasion.

JOINS U. S. NAVY
Upon my arrival in New York I joined the navy. I spent six months on the receiving ship Vermont and was then transferred

to the cruiser Philadelphia.

I liked to box and it was not long before I was putting on the gloves and trading punches with the other sailors.

These bouts, however, were all of a friendly nature, between fe1Iows who never expected to shine in the ring, and it was not until I was riled up one day that my mates learned I might fight if forced into it.

There was a fellow on board named "Reddy" O'Neill, a tough guy from Boston.

"Reddy", for some reason, never liked me, and when I jostled him one morning while unlashing our hammocks he became abusive.

"Get away from here," he said, "or I'll swing on you."

"What's that you'll do?" I asked.

"I'll break your jaw," he said.

The next time I met "Reddy" on the spar deck I called him.

CALLS BLUFF
"You're going to break my jaw," I said, "Here's your chance to do it."

The fellow stopped, came toward me, and then, seeing me double my fists, whirled on his heel and walked away. He was never regarded as a tough guy after that.

That run-in with "Reddy" gave me a great deal of confidence. I knew that he wasn't exactly a coward; he had engaged in a number of fist fights on shore and had built up a reputation as a bad man to mix with. I figured that if "Reddy," who should know a fighter, was afraid of me, he must have seen something about my work with the boxing gloves which caused him to hesitate about hitting me.

I boxed more than ever. I put on the gloves every chance I had - tackled five or six men one after another.

When the Philadelphia put in at Honolulu I has established my position as its champion pugilist.

FIRST BIG MATCH
The information that the sailors of my ship had a man whom they thought could fight was not long in spreading to other ships in the harbor and through the sporting resorts ashore.

As luck would have it, there happened to be in port at the time the steamer, "Australia", and aboard it, as chief steward, was Tom James, a rabid fight fan, who brought to America Bob Fitzsimmons and many other noted fightersfrom Australia.

On the steamer with James was Nick Burley, a professional fighter, who had met Peter Maher and other famous heavyweights.

James at once busied himself in the work of bringing about a fight. He sent word to the Philadelphia that if our sailors thought their "champion" could fight, he would take the keenest delight in having Mr. Burley show them they were wrong in their opinions.

ACCEPTS CHALLENGE
My shipmates were up against it. They didn't want to be bluffed, and, knowing that I had never engaged in a professional fight, they did not like to ask me to tackle a seasoned man like Burley.

They approached me gingerly. "Tom," said one, "there's a man over on the Australia who has a fighter he thinks can whip you. The fellow wants you to fight as a professiona1.

"Well," I asked, "what of it?"

"Nothing," said the sailor, "only it isn't fair for him to be asking you to tackle such a tough game."

"Tough game," I said, "who told you this fellow was tough?"

The sailor nearly jumped out of his a shoes.

"Will you fight him?" he asked.

"Fight him?" I said. "I'l1 fight anybody."

I will not trouble the reader with an account of how the fight was arranged.

WINS BY KNOCKOUT

It is quite sufficient to state that several nights later I stepped into a ring in Hono1ulu to engage in my first professional fight.

I have heard fighters tell, and good fighters, too, how frightened and nervous they were in their first fight. But I must stick to the truth and state that I was neither frightened nor at all nervous when I crawled through the ropes to meet Nick Burley. Perhaps I didn't have sense enough to be. But, anyhow, I wasn't.

Burley gave me a good taste that night of what I might expect of if I kept at the fight game. In the second round, I believe it was, he whirled on the balls or his feet and pasted me squarely on the face with a La Blanche swing. The blow broke my nose and covered me with blood.

But it also did something else. It woke me up. It made me want to kill the fellow. I rushed in and began swinging punches as fast as I could.

I could hear by shipmates around the ring yelling like crazy Indians. I couldn't stop. Between rounds they had to drag me to my corner. The end came in the eighth round.

I felt my fist collide with Burley's jaw and I saw him drop to the floor. Next thing 1 knew I was being carried out of the building on the shoulders of a bunch of yelling, wildly excited sailors. That night there was a great jollification on the good ship Philadelphia.

Chapter 2

The way I knocked out Nick Burley made me quite a man on the good ship Philadelphia. Even the officers, who had scarcely noticed me before, seemed anxious to give me a pleasant word.

One month after I disposed of Burley I was matched to fight a fellow named Langley. This fight was for $100 a side, winner take all the gate receipts, and was held near the beach of Waikiki, which is a part of Honolulu. I knocked out Langley in two rounds.

Then came a man named Pickett. He was easy. They packed him out in two rounds.

By that time, as may be imagined, I was thinking pretty well of myself. I asked them to get me a real man - one who could take a wallop.

The Honolulans dug up Jim Barrington. He was no better than either Langley or Pickett and lasted about as long.

START BETTING

"Rough" Thompson I also disposed of in two rounds for a $500 side bet. They were beginning to plunge a little on the Philadelphia.

But the ending of the fight did not suit Thompson's friends. They said I won with an accidental punch. I gave "Rough" another fight and stopped him in the fifth round.

Shortly after that fight there put into port an English man o' war, and aboard it was Gardner, heavyweight champion of the British navy. I
deprived him of his title by stopping him in four rounds.

It should not be imagined, however, because I am rattling these fights off one after another, or because each fight was so short that I didn't take any punishment.

The way I fought I had to take punches. I didn't know then that there was such a thing as a side step, a feint or an uppercut, and the idea that a man could guard himself by holding up an arm never entered my head.

PRIDE GETS JOLT

A man, named George Washington, a colored boxing instructor of Honolulu, told me one time that if I would call on him he would show me how to box.

I called and we put on the gloves. He started to tell me that I did not know how to put up my bands. That made me mad.

"I know just as much about holding up my hands as you do," I said.

He said that I had the swelled head - and perhaps I did. But anyhow I was game enough to offer to fight him.

"Look here," said George Washington. "Ah got nothin' 'gainst yo'. Get 'long now 'fore I disfigure yo."

And I am satisfied now, when I come to think how quickly that negro jumped at the chance offered to meet me in a fight, that he actually
thought be would chop me to pieces.

SHARKEY OUTBOXED

We met in a small hall, the ring being pitched on a stage and with ropes on three sides only.

I will say for George Wazhington - it may give the old fellow some satisfaction - that he certainly made me look foolish in that first round.

I just couldn't hit him. When I rushed he slipped aside and made me bump the ropes. And when I stood in the center of the ring and dared him to come on and fight he poked my head and hopped away.

I was furious when I went to my corner. I had been thinking I could fight and here was a boxing instructor - not a regular fighter, just a plain every-day instructor -showing me I didn't know a thing about it.

I wouldn't even sit down. During the minute rest I kept digging my toes into the canvas in my anxiety for the bell to ring.

When it finally did ring I jumped ten feet and landed in the center of the ring on the dead run.

MANY KNOCKOUTS

The negro saw me coming and tried to side step. I struck him with my arm and shoulder and slammed him against the wall. As he bounced back I swung and landed on his chest. He went plumb through a window in the back of the stage.

Before leaving Honolulu I had several other fights. One fellow I whipped was Bill Tate, who, so he told me after the fight, was a great friend of the renowned Spider Kelly of San Francisco.

Tate did twice as well as did Jim Dunn, Jack McAuley, Jack Marks and Sailor Brown. Each of them lasted one round.

Then the Philadelphia set sail for California. The reader will by this time have probably reached the decision that when I left Honolulu I was badly puffed up - a victim of the swelled head.

And had it not been for one thing I certainly would have been some what puffed. It was some trick for a green sailor like I was to knock out so many men right off the reel.

One day while in Honolulu I met Tom James, the steward from the steamer Australia, who had got me to fight Nick Burley.

GOOD ADVICE

"Tom," he said. "you've been doing some good flghtlng."

I agreed with Mr. James that I had. I expected him to tell me that some day I would be a champion.

"Let me give you a word of advice, Tom," he said, "You think you've done very well in the ring, and, to be truthful you have. But, Tom, all you don't know about fighting would make a cargo for a ship.

"You've been meeting bums. The only man you've whipped worthy of mention is Nick Burley, and he doesn't figure one, two, three with the champions.

"You are a big man in Honolulu. In California they've never heard of you. They have real fighters there.

"Go see some of them fight. Then, if you're still game, go to it. The champions need strong, husky fellows like you to practice on. If you can stand the gaff we may hear something of you in a few years."

I had plenty of time to think over what Mr. James told me on the trip from Honolulu. The Philadelphia dropped anchor at Vallejo in June of 1895.

Chapter 3

When the Philadelphia put in at Vallejo it was not my idea to get into the ring at once. I remembered what Tom James told me about there being great fighters in California, and I wanted to see some of them in action before I tried my hand.

However, I got into the ring quicker than I figured on. On board the Philadelphia there was a fellow, whose name I cannot now recall, who had taken a violent dislike to me. He wanted to see me whipped in Honolulu, and when on our arrival at Vallejo he was transferred to the ship Olympic he grew more bitter than ever. He kept telling everybody that before he finished he would see Tom Sharkey knocked cold.

MEETS OLD-TIMER

This fellow kept nosing around and finally dug up a man called Sailor Brown. This Brown, so we learned, was no "sucker". He had been at one time the heavyweight champion of the American navy, one of the first it ever had, and was good enough to have boxed Peter Jackson, when the great negro first came to America.

Brown, who had just come in from a long cruise in the Arctic ocean, was spoiling for a fight, and when my friend"on the Olympic approached and asked him to take me on he just jumped at the chance.

WINS IN SECOND

We met in Vallejo, at Armory hall, which was rented for the occasion by Tim Sheehan.

Brown didn't give me much trouble. I busted him so hard in the first round that I thought he would snap the ropes. In the second round I gave him a few cuffs and it was all over.

Then the friend over on the Olympic dug up Jim Dunn to fight me. Jim was as big a man as Jess Willard, six foot four, a fine looking big fellow. His friends wanted to bet $1000 on him.

I will stop here and explain that my backer-in-chief from the start was Paul Herman, chief boatswain's mate on the Philadelphia. He put up his own money and collected that which the other sailors wanted to bet on me - ten and twenty dollar pieces.

The $1000 was made up and placed in Herman's hands to cover that of Dunn's friends. We met at Armory hall.

WORLD'S RECORD

Several fighters claim the world's record for quick finishes. But that affair of mine with Dunn was pretty near the limit for brevity. It lasted 26 seconds flat.

When the bell tapped I took a hop, step and a jump. A right-hand overhead swing which I'd started from my corner landed flush on the chin. Persons who were holding watches told me that it was exactly sixteen seconds from the time the gong sounded until the referee began counting. The other ten seconds were consumed in counting Dunn out.

My quick win over Dunn created quite a little talk in San Francisco. About that time there was a big, tough fellow hanging around named Martin Mulvihill. Mulvihill hailed from Hayward, Cal., and he had told certain friends that if he got the fights it was only a matter of a short time when he would be world's champion.

SHARKEY CHALLENGED

These friends told Mulvihill about me, but they told him also that I was rather backward about going against men of

reputation, and that he would have to trick me into a fight.

One day when a crowd of us from the Philadelphia were standing in Tim Sheehan's saloon, the door opened and in walked a fellow in a blue shirt and overalls. He looked like a rube just out of the hay field, and, we soon saw, was looking for trouble.

"Say," he said, addressing one of the sailors, "you from the Philadelphia?"

The sailor said that he was.

"Well," said the fellow, my name is Mulvihill - Martin Mulvihill - and I can lick anything on two legs."

The sailor began looking toward me. It was just like the man had come in and slapped me.

"I understand," the fellow continued, "that you've got a duffer named Sharkey on that tub o' yours. He's my meat. Trot him out and watch me maul him up."

MATCH IS MADE

"Look here, my friend," I said, stepping up, "my name is Sharkey, but this no time to have trouble. If you are a fighter we can meet and have it out in the ring."

"That's my idea exactly," roared Mulvihill, "but I don't think you're game to meet me in the ring or any other place. Sailors are a lot of bluffs. Never saw one of 'em yet who could fight. They're all full of soup and potatoes."

Mulvihill never knew what a narrow escape he had from being seriously injured that day. Those fellows in Sheehan's wanted to "rough house" with him. But he was finally got out of the place with the understanding that I would meet him in the ring.

The old Armory was hired again, and it took me nine rounds to convince Mulvihill that he was no champion.

GAINS PRESTIGE

Mulvihill was a scrapper of the barroom order, covering his face with one arm and lashing out with the other when he got in close. I had to beat him down with main force, slamming him on the back and trading punches with him when I could.

When Mulvihill left the ring he had changed his mind about sailors all being full of soup and potatoes.

Several of Mulvihill's friends who bet on him did not have the money to pay their fares back to San Francisco. They had to walk around the bay to get home.

That fight was the last I had in Vallejo. I had acquired considerable local prestige and my shipmates were urging me to go after some of the better known fighters.

Chapter 4

The defeat of Mulvihill did not make me any friends among those San Franciscans who had bet against me. And particularly bitter were those who had their troubles getting back from Vallejo. These fellows started to look around for some other fighter who would be sure to whip me, and finally hit upon Australian Billy Smith, who had fought Joe Goddard, the Barrier Champion; Frank Childs, a good negro heavyweight, and many other prominent men of his time.

Paul Herman, my backer on the Philadelphia, when he heard what I was being steered up against, became a little nervous.

'Tom,' he asked one day, when the match was just about made, 'don't you think you are going up against a pretty tough game? This Australian Billy Smith, I hear, is about the best heavyweight in San Francisco.'

'No!' I snapped. 'I'll fight him if he's the champion.'

It made me just a little bit sore that Herman should think I would sidestep any man. I had fought them all, just as they came, and though I'd been hit, good and hard sometimes, I can truthfully say that I had never been really hurt.

BIG MATCH MADE

I was beginning to think that I could not be hurt with a sledgehammer. So the match was made. The fight took place at Colma, below Barney Farley's place, just across the San Mateo county line.

I did my training, as usual, on the Philadelphia, running around the deck in the morning and in the evening around the Vallejo navy yard.

The officers on the ship were very kind to me. Many of them were rabid boxing fans and I got all the time I wanted off regular duty to condition myself.

The day of the fight I came over in the morning. I was accompanied by Paul Herman and a few personal friends from among the sailors.

OPPONENT FAVORITE

People with whom I had made friends in Vallejo chartered a steamer, and this came over in the afternoon, loaded down with sailors and civilians. Among the latter were a number of wise gamblers. These fellows, not satisfied with picking up whatever bets they could in the hour or so it took to make the trip, purposely had the boat delayed in order to get additional bets.

The betting in San Francisco was 7 to 1 against me.If you wished to back me you could almost write your own ticket. Smith was considered the biggest cinch bet that ever came over the pike.

And those sailors, with their ten and twenty dollar pieces, fairly gobbled up the bets offered. If I had lost most of them would have had to swim back to the ship.

Herman was still nervous when it came time to enter the ring.

'Now, Tom,' he said. 'Don't get scared. This Smith may have nothing more than his reputation. Go after him just like you have all the other fellows. If you hit him he'll drop.'

HERMAN SCARED

I didn't answer. It made me sore to have Herman advise me not to get scared when he was the worst scared of the two.

I cannot quite remember some of the details of that fight with Smith. I am unable to recall, for instance, who promoted the fight. But I think it was Jim Gibbs and Jim Groom.

The referee was Alva King, a well known bookmaker of that period, and who was a very close friend of Al Herford, the manager of Joe Gans.

The fight lasted seven rounds, ending with the knockout of Smith, but he gave me the hardest fight up to the time that I met Jim Jeffries. Smith was an accurate and strong hitter, and as I came in, with my head down on my chest and my arms swinging, he measured me and planted a right on the chin that very nearly lifted me off my feet.

SLUGGING MATCH

In later years, when I had learned a little about boxing, that punch would have served me as a warning that it was dangerous business to tear into a man who could hit like that.

But in those days I was young and foolish and strong as a bull. The punch merely made me mad. I wanted to get in close and give him a good one in return.

I sunk my head in my shoulders and went after the Australian. When we got together there was the finest little slugging bee in the center of the ring that you ever saw.

Smith didn't back an inch and neither did I. We just put our heads together and smashed away while the sailors outside the ring yelled at me like crazy men.

One round was very much like another, with the exception that, toward the end, I began knocking Smith down.

The end, as I said, came in the seventh round. It was a happy bunch of blue jackets that returned to the Philadelphia. And not one of them was happier than I.

LEAVES NAVY

The fight with Smith was the last I had as a member of the crew of the Philadelphia. My time of service was nearly up and, as the day for leaving drew near, the officers and my pals among the sailors began urging me to re-enlist, to remain with them as their champion.

But I was beginning to make a little money and couldn't see my way clear to do so.

Two months after fighting Smith I received my discharge papers and left the ship; and on it I left as good and loyal a set of friends as a seagoing man ever had.

My next fight was also at Colma, with John Miller, the "Terrible Swede". But of that fight I will tell in the next number. It was while arranging the Miller fight that I met Tim McGrath.

Chapter Five

When I said that I met Tim McGrath for the first time when he trained me for the fight with John Miller I got a little ahead of my story. The first time I saw Tim was at Vallejo. He came over there with a fellow named Vic Lazay.

I don't know whether that is the way to spell Lazay's name, but anyhow that is the way the name sounded to me. Lazay was a tall, raw-boned man and had about convinced Tim that he was the makings of a good prizefighter.

There were several good heavyweights around San Francisco who could have tried Lazay out. But Tim wanted something easier. So, having heard that I was nothing more than a rough-and-tumble fighter and that I had gained a little local prominence by whipping Australian Billy Smith, he conceived the idea of having Lazay whip me and thus establish a reputation.

MEETS MCGRATH

I was standing in Tim Sheehan's saloon with a crowd of sailors when McGrath walked in with Lazay.

McGrath promptly spotted me and walked up to make himself acquainted.

"You are Sharkey, the sailor," he said.

"Yes," I replied, "I'm Sharkey."

Tim reached in his pocket, drew out a document and began tearing it into bits.

Then he turned to Lazay and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Vic," he said, "you catch the next boat back to San Francisco as fast as you can."

"What for?" demanded Lazay. "I've signed to fight this Sharkey."

"I know," said Tim, "but you're not going to fight him under any contract you signed with me. I don't want to be arrested for murder."

Ever since then Tim McGrath has been my closest friend. Before he left Vallejo Tim had made arrangements to train me for my fight with Miller.

HIS BEST FRIEND

If a person should ask me now why I like Tim McGrath better than any other man I ever met I could easily answer the question - because he has been my best friend.

But if a person should ask me why I liked Tim the very first time I ever met him I would not be able to answer.

Maybe it was because he looked so funny. He reminded me of a rabbit, with his white hair, fuzzy face and little,

short bowlegs.

What Tim said to me, and I to him, that first time we met at Vallejo, I cannot remember.

But what I do remember that when I went into training over at "Pop" Blanken's for the fight with Miller, the "Terrible Swede", Tim was in complete charge. He just seemed to appoint himself boss. I was the hired man.

The first thing that Tim told me was that I didn't know a thing about boxing or training.

REAL TRAINING

I started to use an uppercut.

"What you trying to do?" asked Tim.

"Uppercut," I replied.

"Forget it," said Tim. "You'll never make a fancy boxer if you live to be a thousand. Just wallop, that's all."

He systematized my work - so much running, a little wrestling, some slugging with sparring partners and just so much of certain foods to eat.

That was all new to me. On the Philadelphia my training was limited to runs around the deck and an occasional bout with whatever sailors I could induce to don the gloves.

When in port, as at Vallejo, I did a little running on the roads. But I had no idea as to what constituted physical fitness. I knew that running improved the wind. But that is about all I did know.

Tim had many novel ideas about training - ideas that would never occur to any other person.

One day, for example, at Pop Blanken's, old Pop came out and found old Tim at the head of a bucket brigade dashing water against the outside walls of the gymnasium.

A MCGRATH STORY

Pop became angry. He said the water would warp the boards. Tim called him aside and explained.

"Listen, Pop," he explained. "This fellow Sharkey is just off the ocean. Never worked on land before. If we dash water against the walls he'll think he's on a ship and train his head off."

There's another little story in connection with my first training under McGrath - a story old enough to be new again.

Tim had a saloon on Ellis street which he called the "Tip". When I had a fight or two against the better class of heavyweights I became a card. People wanted to see me. Tim began to charge 25 cents admission to the gymnasium.

One day there was a big crowd on hand. The gymnasium would hold no more people and there twenty or thirty outside clamoring to get in. Tim stuck his head out the door.

"Say," he said. "I don't see you fellows trying this hard to get into the Tip."