

CHAPTER SIX:

“I REALLY WONDER WHAT THIS ANTAGONISM IS ALL ABOUT.”



A. Williams

My next assignment was actual intercollegiate boxing—Clemson versus North Georgia Teachers College. My opponent was Terry Shanahan. I envisioned a mean Irishman with powerful lefts and rights. He turned out to be a nice person and a terrible boxer. Bantamweights fought first so that we were first in the ring. The first observation was that they didn't furnish the powder that boxers rub on their shoes so as not to slip on the canvas. They wore tennis shoes, so that didn't bother them but was terrible for us. This was brought to my attention when I touched gloves with Shanahan, then threw a tremendous right hand. Unfortunately, I slipped and did a complete flip and landed on my back. The judges were kind enough to call this a slip, not a knock down. There was no count and the fight contin-

ued. In spite of the first-round slip, I won on points. The account of the fight in *The Tiger* omitted my landing on my back in round one.

My most difficult fights were in the Clemson gym, and every afternoon was a repetition of one before. First we had our run, then calisthenics, and then boxing against a bantamweight, a welterweight, and a heavyweight.

The bantamweight was usually Milton Berry, our first string 120-pounder who hit very hard and fast and didn't seem to mind getting hit. He constantly moved forward, and I tried to counter this with clever footwork that wasn't very effective. He didn't mind missing if he could just keep moving forward constantly swinging. The next scheduled afternoon sparring was against a welterweight or lightweight. The welterweight was usually Lauren Driesbach, a much better than average boxer. I was surprised to knock him down once with a blow that would not have bothered Berry. He was later asked to leave the boxing team because he couldn't remember his father after a knockout, and there was concern about future permanent injury.

The heavyweight was always Warren Wilson, the best fighter on the team and the conference champion. I usually warned him before we started, “Watch your step, baby. My right hand is going good, but I'll be careful and try not to hurt you too much.”

His usual response was, “I'm terrified, but I'll try and stick with you.” After the preliminary remarks, he tattooed my face with jabs, never threw a hard right, used his feet better than a man 65 pounds lighter, and outclassed a little guy because he was faster and better.

Joe Sherman was the faculty advisor, and his office was *The Tiger's* headquarters. While I was typing an article about Warren Wilson and his chances of making the transition from amateur to pro in boxing, Joe walked in and asked how things were going in the sports world.

“Everything's great. I'm getting to know the guys on the boxing team and the rest of the teams as well, living in the barracks with them. But at times it's hard to keep focused on sports. With England and France apparently about to go to war with

Germany, it's hard to think of anything else as relatively important, but Mr. Roosevelt continues to tell us that we'll stay out of a European war. All we can do is believe him and carry on in our world as usual. There's nothing else to do. Milton Berry's giving me a shellacking every afternoon is unimportant when compared to merchant ships sunk by German subs all over the ocean. The President says they can't sink civilian ships in our part of the Atlantic. What's our part of the ocean? I can't believe him when he says we'll not fight. Sitting on the sidelines watching friends being murdered is not possible."

Earl Mazo came in, his hands full of papers mostly about campus activities to publish in the *The Tiger*. "You philosophizing again? My old man runs a delicatessen store. He spends his time selling Mr. Rudich's kosher bread, lox, and dill pickles to eat with herring and onions. Mrs. Garfinkel or Mrs. Applebaum might care about a British ship torpedoed by a sub, but when they deal with my old man, they care more about cheese and bologna. Ain't a thing they can do about the war, but they can keep their husbands from raising hell if the food's not kosher or the pickles too small. If the sports writers wouldn't try to run the world from Clemson and pay more attention to people getting their asses kicked here, we'd have a better paper. For now, I suggest you think more like Mrs. Applebaum."

"Mazo, you're as full of bologna as your father's delicatessen, but I'll try to concentrate more on how not to get hell beat out of me and less on English strategy in the Atlantic."



"Hey, Hertz," I called when I saw him in front of the canteen. "What about bumming a ride with you to the state fair next week?" It was hard to believe that the time for the fair and the great football game, South Carolina versus Clemson, was almost here.

"Yeah, man. There's always room for one more."

The passengers were the same friends who rode with him at the holidays who were going to celebrate the big game. A foot-

ball coach’s reputation rested on the outcome regardless of the rest of the season. A team was a success or a failure depending upon the outcome of the athletic, alcoholic, let-your-hair down riot.

For Carolina students this was the day you needn’t act as a student but as a loud mouth provocateur saying nasty things to the enemy for the day. Of course, the coeds said girly-mean things to Clemsonites.

I told Earl, “I really wonder what this antagonism is all about. There must be something reasonable about it. Perhaps it’s because in other parts of the world their aggressive feelings are displayed by actual hatred and war against each other. There is a certain amount of murderous aggressiveness in all of us manifested in different ways. In this country, the Yanks hate the Dodgers and the University hates Clemson for a day or two at a time. But we take our aggressiveness out with rough sports. They have fun killing each other.”

“This is the day we hate Carolina, and the two teams will fight for being the big boys in the state for a year.”

The fair determined all sorts of championships. The football field was close to the fair where the best rooster, pigs, and other farm animals were judged. In Dirty Dan’s opinion, judging breeding animals was more important than football, and he didn’t go to the game, preferring to wander around the animal area, matching his view of the best animal compared to the judge’s opinions. Lucien Vane didn’t give a damn about football or cows and stayed home.

The game itself was dull, and our top-notch freshmen couldn’t play in spite of this. Quarterback Pearson led Clemson to a 19-0 win. End Walter Okurowski didn’t play exceptionally well, and I had to clean his room as a freshman and was not unhappy to see him kicked around a little.

Following the game, I elected to see Aunt Etta, my mother’s sister, who lived on Southwood Road not far from the field. I hired a taxi to see Aunt Etta and her children, Carolyn and Raymond. She was happy and cordial even though things did not go well. She told us about her latest near disaster.

“Junior,” she said, “I know that you can hardly believe this, but driving home after shopping for groceries, I saw a light flashing, a bell ringing, and a pair of black and white warnings swinging down. I wondered what the confusion was all about and continued on my way, crossing the track just under the warning signals and just before a freight train roared down the track. I had been over this route a thousand times and never seen a train on this track before.”

Shortly after this, realizing that she was too senile to drive, she admitted herself to a nursing home. Even there, she never lost her sense of humor.

After the visit, she drove me to the Jefferson Hotel, where I joined the crowd of slightly-to-very-drunk cadets celebrating the win. After all, this had been the Clemson-Carolina game, and drinking was a ritual, celebrating the fact that we were the football champions of the state.

I searched out Hertz in the mob, and we gathered his passengers and started the trip back home. The season was over, there wasn't much talk, and we spent the time mostly speculating about Europe and the chances of getting drawn into that war. News from Europe was neither voluminous nor informative, so much was left to speculation, chiefly, of course, whether or not we would be drawn into the European conflict. The majority believed that it was their problem, not ours, and that we should go on with our civilian careers. We were aware of Japanese aggression in the east, but we believed that distance negated any sort of conflict.



Formation, Bowman Field (left)

“Lucien Vane had told me he had a friend in Germany who wrote to him from time to time and told him that even in Germany he doesn’t know what is what. The only thing is that Hitler is gaining control of the country and everybody else is kissing his ass or getting shot. Hitler wants all the world to adopt Nazism. The relationships between France and England, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Austria are so complex that the future is bad but otherwise unpredictable.”

“Holy cow!” came from Sottile. “That’s the best lecture in politics and economics I ever heard. But it doesn’t help me decide whether I’ll be drinking French wine next year or getting stewed in Charleston on the same old stuff.”

Hertz opined, “I don’t mind drinking champagne, but Japanese alcohol might give you the slant eyes and I don’t know how women would like it if your eyes were Japanese and the rest of you weren’t.”

“Quit worrying,” said Sottile. “Any change in your puss would be an improvement. I haven’t seen anyone from Hollywood poking around the campus looking for a star in their next blockbuster.”

“Give ’em time,” said Hertz. “There are a lot of good-looking guys around, and, sooner or later, they’ll recognize this sexy face. At least, I hope some gal will.”

“Did you guys know that recruiting officers from the air force have been in the gym talking to all members of the boxing team about joining the air force? I guess the government is taking



Formation, Bowman Field (right)

the European mess seriously. Boselli, the Brady brothers, and Driesbach seem interested. I sure as hell am not going to be trapped in a fighter plane unless I'm drafted. The thought of going through fighting maneuvers makes me nauseated. But, thankfully, there are those guys who either haven't thought much about flying and have flown and liked it and think that we will have a superb air force once one is built. At least, we're thinking about building one."

Buster Brown couldn't have disagreed with me more. "The thought of crawling through mud and burying your own stool turns me off. One thing about the air force is, it may be dangerous, but fundamentally it is clean. I can have a shower every day if I'm stationed at almost any base. I can eat meals at a table, not in a trench or mud puddle somewhere in France. The thought of flying, and I have done a little before, I find exciting."

Salvadore Sottile spoke up for the navy almost for the same reason as did Buster Brown for the air force.

"None of you guys talk about fighting in the Far East. Those guys are well-prepared, well-armed, and vicious. I would commit suicide if the threat to be captured by Japanese troops was imminent. The thought of invading the Japanese mainland frightens me. They kill for the love of killing and usually find a vicious way to do it," said Hertz.

"Well," I interrupted, "we won't have much choice as to where we want to go. Where I want to be is at a team reunion after the war, preferably in the '50s. But wherever we go or whatever we do, we'll have an armed force that will not be a set-up for anyone, no matter how well trained or armed they are. Like all of us, we might not like what we are doing, but we'll do it damn well."

I was concerned but not confident.



If you loved football and the stimulation of being with a crowd, Clemson was the place to be. As with any college, there were multiple minor activities (except fraternities, which were not allowed) but none except *The Tiger* interested me.

I was homesick for Charleston and asked my parents for a bus ticket for a long weekend. They sent the funds, and I thought it might be fun to have stimulating company such as Lucien Vane. He'd never been to my home town, and I wanted to see his reaction to a colorful but largely disheveled city. Times seemed to be getting better, but painting a house was still a major economic undertaking.

He accepted the invitation. “You know, I've always wondered why Charleston, with less than a hundred thousand population, is known around the United States as a major city. You don't manufacture much except fertilizer. There aren't many people nationally recognized except a few politicians or writers like Dubose Heyward. There aren't any major holidays like the Mardi Gras. What is your thing?”

“I'll try to show you over the weekend and hope you'll enjoy your visit even though I'm sure you'll find a lot of faults.”

So we took the bus in front of Hoke Sloan's men's store.

“Where I took history, the only thing I learned about Charleston was that your troops attacked a fort in the harbor to start the War Between the States. It always seemed ridiculous reasoning to try and split the United States and, as a matter of fact, it seemed the major reason for the war, in spite of elegant presentations before the legislature, that whites intensely worked to keep blacks from any political position of consequence, although this was never mentioned in the hundreds of bills considered by the legislature. Perhaps I'll find something other than stupidity and prejudice started the awful mess the war became.”

I said, “I hope so, but you won't find many who will agree with you.”

The bus progressed through the hills, then flat land, and finally pulled into the bus stop on Society Street where my parents welcomed us. We were taken to our home on Rutledge Avenue and settled down for the night.

My problem was how to present the city to him in two days. I elected to show him Fort Sumter and Fort Johnson last to avoid controversy during the entire trip. We started by walking to the Sword Gate house that epitomized old Charleston and was

surrounded by residences of the same vintage, many occupied by families who had lived in them for generations. Lucien Vane was intrigued by the architecture and all the porches, some running parallel to the street, others horizontal. He was most interested in the lack of paint and the middle-class appearance of Charleston's most exclusive residential section.

John Buist wandered by on Church Street and said, "Howdy."

"Where you headed, John?" I inquired.

"Just going to see a cousin on Tradd Street," he replied.

I introduced Lucien Vane, and they shook hands, with John saying, "Hope you enjoy your visit to our dilapidated homes. We are working on it, and, if you come back in ten years, we'll be prettier."

Lucien Vane thanked John for his greeting as John walked away to see his cousin.

"Many people related to each other in this part of town?" Lucien inquired.

"As a matter of fact, yes," I replied. "Most of them first settled on indigo farms. Many of them still own the land, planting cotton or something other than indigo. They then moved their commercial interests to town. 'Most everybody is related to everybody else. Their society is hard to crack unless you're a multi-millionaire from somewhere else. Most belong to St. Michael's or St. Phillip's churches. Their social year is capped by the St. Cecilia Ball attended by members of these and a few other old churches. Almost everyone else in town is excluded. Relations with each other are more important than paint on the house."

"I lived in Atlanta for a while," he said, "and social status depended on money. If you lost your bank account, invitations to parties stopped, and there was no waiting a generation or two until you recouped. One of the things that makes Charleston unique is that even though, at the moment, you are broke, social status remains the same, and if your forebears could make a fortune, you've the ability to repeat."

"Still," I opined, "these loosely bound people make life comfortable for the rest of us who pay little attention to those

sequestered down town.”

We walked to Broad Street and took a look at St. Michael’s church, beautifully designed and in good repair, and St. Phillip’s, just as well kept, the two being the center of the old Charlestonian elite.

I pointed out City Hall, the courthouse, the post office, and St. Michael’s as the four corners of the law. This made little impression on him.

We then went to the battery, the waterfront area from which Ft. Johnson and Ft. Sumter could be seen. He asked where the various forts were. I pointed to the right toward Ft. Johnson and toward the center of the harbor, the general direction of the strongholds from which the first firing of the Civil War began. The confederates struck the match on Ft. Johnson. That led to the fire that could have meant the death of the United States.

Lucien said, “I lived in Atlanta, but grew up in New York, believing that the conflagration was unnecessary and, in fact, stupid. The South had nothing to gain, except slaves to till their fields and an agricultural community inherited from their forebears and little else. There was no logical reason why they should have anticipated anything but defeat.”

“You know perfectly well that many issues including states’ rights were involved, that the Southern way of life had consolidated over the years and was uniformly supported by all Southerners.”

He replied, “No other issue superseded cheap labor as the cause of the war and the end of slavery, and the freeing of slaves would have been the end of a way of life with no possible immediate replacement. It could have been predicted that defeat of the South would end in poverty and total misery. Any animal will fight for survival, and I wouldn’t call their effort noble but a fight for a way of life that, had it succeeded, would have been a disaster for the progress of civilization.”

“I’ll tell you, Lucien, continuing this conversation can only result in bitterness between us. Let’s say we call it off for the present and perhaps continue it in the future, when I am not too angry to be completely rational.”

“Fine,” he replied, “but, believe it or not, I am as upset about the Southern attitude as you are about the Northern.”

We continued our walk down the battery, gazing across the harbor to James Island, then down Rutledge Avenue to number 11. My mother inquired, “Lucien, how did you enjoy the trip?”

“Mrs. Williams,” he replied, “the city is unusual and lovely. I can’t say as much for your loyalty to the confederacy.”

“First of all,” replied my father, “I can understand your disagreement with a war that is unnecessary and illogical. The thing that you cannot understand is civilized people trapped in a war that promoted slavery, fought by many Southerners who disagreed with the principle of slavery.

“In upper South Carolina, most of the people were at least distantly related to each other, and perhaps for that reason alone they believed that the land was theirs. Why, they reasoned, should a man born in Poland have anything to do with a foot of land in Oconee County? In the southern part of the state, it was very much the same. Charlestonians came because of land deeded to them by the King of England. Most of them were umpteenth cousins. Moreover, since black female slaves were often sex partners of the young whites, many of their children passed as whites, at least after a few generations. I suspect that most of the Southern families are in small part black but have stuck that fact in the remote hinterland of their memories.

“Moreover, the upper and lower South Carolinians mostly considered themselves Carolinians, Southerners and members of the Union in that order. States rights became an emotional issue and the firing on Ft. Sumter an irrational act. They fought for their philosophical identity, not for slavery. This is difficult for you, growing up in a different culture, to understand.

“As far as the present attitudes go, how can we denigrate our forebears who fought for their dignity and their rights as they saw them? I am proud of the fact that my grandfather rode with Stuart’s calvary and, after he was injured in an accident caused by a horse falling on him, came to James Island and acted as a nurse for the Confederate soldiers there. He did not believe in slavery. He was a farmer who had bought slaves, gave them all their free-

dom, and hired them to work on his farm in Camden.

“We did fight a good fight against a more powerful opponent.”

“Thank you,” Lucien replied, “but, the present response above the Mason-Dixon line, if they heard your arguments, might meet with a more kindly but still disapproving response.”

“Time will eventually obliterate bitterness that will be totally forgotten.”

After a fried chicken and rice dinner, we headed for the bus. No more was said about North-South attitudes.