# Joseph Kernan

## *Honored Warrior/Civic Leader*

At 4:30 on the sunny afternoon of May 7, 1972, naval flight officer Joseph Kernan and pilot Ron Polfer lifted off in an RA-5C Vigilante from the aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk* stationed off the coast of Vietnam. It was Kernan's twenty-sixth reconnaissance mission. Their assignment was to take pictures of the target objective after the last bomber had dropped its load.

Kernan observed the damage below from 4,500 feet as the Vigilante flew at a speed of 563 knots (just under 650 miles per hour.) Suddenly, the plane was hit by antiaircraft fire—right up the rear end. The nose pitched down. Polfer leveled the wings and turned toward the safety of the water. Just ten miles from the beach, less than a minute away, the jet began to plunge to earth. Polfer struggled with the controls as the plane dropped below 3,200 feet. The altimeter was unwinding but it could not keep up with the dive.

Kernan had to bail out. He braced himself and pulled the ejection handle on his seat. The cockpit filled with light as the canopy jettisoned. He blacked out from the force of the ejection. At the descent speed of the disabled jet—a mile every five seconds—a delay of one more second would have meant certain death.

Joseph E. Kernan III was born April 8, 1946, the oldest of nine

*Photo courtesy of Joseph Kernan*

children and one of only two boys. He was raised in Chicago by his father, Joseph E. Kernan Jr., who was a naval aviator during World War II and later enjoyed a career in government service. His mother, Marian Powers Kernan, worked a number of jobs but was most proud of her tenure with C&P Telephone, where she ascended to communications representative. One of her important accounts during that time was the Pentagon. She was particularly proud of her top-secret security clearance.

The family moved to South Bend when Joe was ten. Kernan played all sports in high school, but he loved baseball and dreamed of wearing the blue-and-gold varsity uniform of the University of Notre Dame. After a season as a walk-on on the freshman team, he accomplished his goal when he made the varsity squad as a sophomore utility infielder. He was used sparingly—not enough for young Kernan.

By the time Kernan was a junior, he realized he was not going to crack the infield as a starter. He beseeched Coach Joe Kline to grant him permission to switch to catcher. Kernan began winter practices that year as third-string catcher, but he had a plan that included good friend and neighbor Jim Gibbons, who had played and coached basketball and baseball at Notre Dame and was an outstanding student of the game. Gibbons had earned a World Series ring in 1960 as a member of the Pittsburgh Pirates coaching staff. Every night after practice, Gibbons and Clay High School coach Jim Reinbold worked with Kernan on footwork, getting rid of the ball, blocking pitches, and all the other skills that a varsity catcher needed to perfect. By the time the season began, Kernan was squatting behind home plate. He earned a scholarship his senior year.

Kernan majored in government, since those were the classes he enjoyed the most. He had no idea how important that decision would be to his future career. When Kernan graduated in the summer of 1968, the United States was embroiled in the Vietnam War. Kernan knew that he would be required to serve his country. He had already passed his preinduction physical and his draft orders were imminent. Kernan wanted to fly, perhaps because of the influence of his father. He applied to the navy for acceptance as an aviation officer. His admis-

sion tests were administered at Andrews Air Force Base in Washington, D.C., where his family had moved during his sophomore year at Notre Dame. He was confident that he would be accepted into the navy but in early December 1968, while waiting for those orders to come through, he received a notice to report to South Bend for induction into the U.S. Army.

About to surrender his dream of flying, Kernan had a serendipitous discussion with First Class Petty Officer Nickelson, the sailor who had administered his tests at Andrews Air Force Base. Nickelson suggested that Kernan inform his draft board in South Bend that he was living with his family in Washington, D.C., and that his records should be sent there. Nickelson calculated that the delay would give Kernan enough time to join the navy. The ploy worked. Kernan's army induction was rescheduled for January 20, 1969, but he was sworn into the navy at 4 p.m. on January 19. The navy had gotten him first.

Kernan wanted to be a pilot, but he knew that he could not because of his poor eyesight. He settled for becoming a naval flight officer, which he said was the next best thing. He went to officer candidate school and the initial phases of flight training in Pensacola, Florida. After flight school, Kernan was assigned to Brunswick, Georgia, the final stop in jet training where he was attached to the RA-5C Vigilante reconnaissance aircraft. Kernan was responsible for radio, radar, navigation, and other equipment, including a viewfinder that enabled him to see the ground and a television camera that transmitted images from the front of the airplane. Originally planned as a nuclear-weapons platform, the Vigilante was a highly advanced supersonic bomber that was modified to fill a reconnaissance role and redesignated the RA-5C. Because the aircraft's hollow fuselage was designed to hold bombs, there was plenty of room for the vast array of reconnaissance equipment. At school, naval flight officers were not taught to land the airplane in an emergency. Navy protocol stated that if the pilot was disabled, eject and hope for the best. Kernan earned his wings in February 1970 and was assigned to the Replacement Air Group, a training squadron for Vigilantes in Albany, Georgia. After training, Kernan was reassigned to Reconnaissance Heavy Attack Squadron 7, also based in Albany. That

squadron was comprised of some Vietnam veterans who were preparing to return to sea duty.

Kernan sailed in January 1972 out of San Diego on the USS *Kitty Hawk*, an aircraft carrier named after the North Carolina town near where Orville and Wilbur Wright flew the first successful, controlled powered aircraft. The *Kitty Hawk* was the last of the nonnuclear fleet. En route to Vietnam, the *Kitty Hawk* made port in the Philippines to take on provisions, then sailed to the Gulf of Tonkin in the South China Sea and prepared for battle.

The orders were routine for Kernan's twenty-sixth reconnaissance mission. He was responsible for taking photographs of the target after the last of about thirty-three bombers had dropped its load, waiting at least thirty seconds to give the smoke time to clear, but no more than sixty seconds because after that the enemy would be crawling out of foxholes, literally shooting mad. The target that day was a truck park, a staging area located on the main drag of North Vietnam's Highway 1 at the beginning of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Each reconnaissance flight was escorted by an F-4 Phantom jet. The Phantom was not quite as quick as the Vigilante, but it could keep up. The Phantom's role was to fly above and slightly to the side and behind the Vigilante during its reconnaissance work in order to protect it from antiaircraft and surface-to-air missiles. If the Phantom crew detected a missile launch, it broke radio silence and transmitted a warning. When he got the message, the Vigilante pilot usually turned into the direction of the missile and veered left, allowing the projectile to hurtle by. Antiaircraft artillery typically consisted of four or five weapons in a radar-controlled battery. Normally the first round missed but as the Vigilante flew straight and level, the radar automatically calculated adjustments and locked in on the aircraft's tail. The Phantom's responsibility was to advise when the lock was set so that the Vigilante could break left or right. The violence of that motion fractured the radar lock, and the Vigilante could then return and finish its mission. With such advance notice, the Vigilante was a difficult target.

Something went awry on that May afternoon. The Phantom that was supposed to be on the tail of Kernan's Vigilante was actually flying

ahead. Knowing that out of formation his Phantom was useless, the pilot waggled his wings to reduce the jet's speed and fell back in formation. But he was unable to regain visible contact with the reconnaissance plane. The Vigilante continued on its mission down Highway 1 but had lost its protection. As Kernan took pictures of the truck park that the strike team had just annihilated, he and Polfer were unaware of their vulnerability.

After taking pictures of the target, Kernan's orders were to proceed along the main highway to the Thanh Hoa Bridge in order to gauge the flow of traffic. It was a dangerous area. In many previous runs over a period of seven years, the United States had lost more than forty aircraft around the bridge—said to be the heaviest defended turf on the planet, second only to the Kremlin. When the United States dispatched more airplanes, the Vietnamese installed more antiaircraft batteries. One might question the wisdom of his assignment, but Kernan never did. While flying to the bridge, Polfer did not make any evasive maneuvers because the Phantom never told him he should.

When the Vigilante was hit by an antiaircraft round, its nose pitched down, flinging loose equipment into the air. Kernan noticed the fire-warning light in the cockpit. He was trained to disregard that signal without confirmation. His hopes rose briefly as the pilot leveled out and turned toward the water and possible rescue. Then the nose pitched down again.

Kernan broke radio silence, declaring, "Flare 4 has been hit." The only person who heard that fervent message was Kernan himself. The regular radio, the auxiliary radio, and the emergency radio had all been disabled. The plane was pointing to the ground and the altimeter was spinning. Kernan had no recourse. He ejected and immediately blacked out. A little more than a one-second delay and there would not have been enough altitude for his parachute to deploy. Polfer also ejected after the hydraulic system failed, rendering the control stick nonoperational. The pilot did not have the chance to properly position himself in the seat, and as a result broke his back, his shoulder, and his arm rocketing out of the airplane. Kernan's seat worked as advertised.

Kernan awoke on the ground late Sunday afternoon, just a half-

dozen miles from the beach, surrounded by hundreds of women and children. His uniform consisted of a helmet with the visor down, a G-suit and vest, and a thirty-eight-caliber revolver loaded with flares but no bullets. He was stripped to his skivvies and a T-shirt. Kernan understood that for the first twenty-four to forty-eight hours after a traumatic event such as an emergency ejection, he would be in shock whether he realized it or not. He remained quiet and outwardly calm.

Three men in uniform appeared and tied him to a stick behind his back. An argument ensued with the local citizenry about who had custody of the prisoner. Kernan was pleased that the men in uniform won the altercation. As they ran him toward a river, a child threw a rock that hit him in the back of the head. Kernan remembers turning around, looking at the young man and thinking, "What a good toss. Could have used him at Notre Dame."

Kernan was taken by boat to a small village. The "imperialist" had his picture taken with the mayor and president of the town council. He was put on display for a brief time, after which he was confined in a dark and damp basement with a dirt floor. Nursing cuts and bruises including the gash on his head, Kernan wondered if he had ejected from a plane that Polfer had somehow brought back to the *Kitty Hawk*. He thought that perhaps Polfer was back in the chow line while he was a prisoner of war. His thoughts were interrupted by a voice somewhere in that basement, complaining profanely in very clear English. It was Polfer.

Both prisoners were placed in a truck bound for Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi. Hoa Lo, commonly translated, means "Hell's Hole." The prison complex was sarcastically nicknamed the "Hanoi Hilton" by the American prisoners of war. When Polfer and Kernan arrived, they were again separated. Kernan spent four days at the Hanoi Hilton before being transferred to a nearby prison called The Zoo, where he remained for most of his captivity. At The Zoo, Kernan was held in solitary confinement for a month, then shared his cell with one other prisoner for another month. For the rest of his imprisonment, his cell was occupied by eight to twelve prisoners at a time. They had cards and Kernan played bridge every chance he got. In the last two months of his internment, he was allowed to receive a package from the Red Cross. At that

time most of the prisoners were treated humanely, a change in philosophy since the death of Ho Chi Minh on September 2, 1969.

Peace agreements were signed on January 27, 1973, and within sixty days Kernan was released. The injured were released first and then other prisoners on a first-in, first-out basis. As a late arrival, Kernan was among the last group to be set free. While a POW, Kernan ate pumpkin soup twice a day—every day. It is no wonder that Kernan dislikes anything to do with pumpkins: pumpkin pie, pumpkin seeds, pumpkin anything.

Kernan received the Navy Commendation Medal, two air medals, a combat action ribbon, two Purple Hearts, and a Distinguished Flying Cross. After a few days of debriefing and physical examinations at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines and Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland, Kernan was granted ninety days' leave. Before long, he flew to Atlanta to rekindle a romance with his college sweetheart, Maggie McCullough. They married in April 1974. Kernan mustered out of the navy eight months later.

The Kernans moved to Cincinnati, where he worked for Procter & Gamble, making Zest and Camay soap. He hated it. It did not take long for the young couple to return to South Bend. After more than four years in South Bend—first working for the South Bend Community Schools and later in sales—Kernan's good friend Pete Mullen suggested that he inquire about becoming the city controller. Kernan was ready to try something new, and he was curious. Although not a bean counter, Kernan talked to the recently elected mayor, Roger Parent, and landed the job. It was his first taste of public service and he enjoyed it. He held the job of city controller for a full term before returning to a business career as vice president and treasurer of Mac Williams Corp. But Kernan missed public service.

In December 1986, after learning that Parent had opted against running for a third term, Kernan decided to run for mayor. He secured the nomination in the Democratic primary with 51 percent of the vote and won the November election by a slim 53 percent to 47 percent margin. In 1991 he was reelected with 76 percent of the vote and four years later captured a third term by a record 82 percent of the popular

vote. Kernan was pleased and gratified in the job, and obviously the city of South Bend returned that affection.

As the newly elected mayor of South Bend, Kernan had rejected advice to unlist his telephone number to avoid being pestered to death. A year and a half later, the phone rang at his home on a Saturday morning. Maggie answered the call from a South Bend resident who explained that her son was in the army in Germany and that he was very sick. The army advised her to come see him right away, but she had no passport, no birth certificate, and no proof of citizenship and, therefore, could not leave the country. The frantic mother did not know where to turn. Maggie, with the help of her husband's aides, put the paperwork together for a voter's registration. With that certificate in hand, the mother was able to board an airplane that same afternoon. She arrived at her son's bedside five hours before he died. "We have an extraordinary capacity to do good things. It doesn't have to take years to accomplish, to involve complicated negotiations or demand an advanced degree," Kernan said. "It's most often just a simple act of kindness." His telephone number is still in the book.

In 1990 Kernan and other Indiana mayors joined Lieutenant Governor Frank O'Bannon on a seventeen-day trade mission to Poland, Russia, the Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. Kernan had known O'Bannon through politics, but not well. On the trip, he and O'Bannon established a friendship. In 1996 O'Bannon was the odds-on favorite to win the Democratic nomination for governor. He needed a running mate, but Kernan made it known to mutual friends that he did not want the job. He loved South Bend and wanted to finish his term as mayor. Kernan said he would rather that O'Bannon not ask him to run because he did not want to be put in the position of saying no to a good friend. By the end of May, O'Bannon still had not made his choice. Kernan and a persuasive O'Bannon met. Before he left, Kernan attempted to make his position clear. "I love what I do. I'm happy," he said. "If you ask me to do it, I'll do it. I'll give it everything I've got, but you know how I feel." When he got back to the hotel, he told Maggie what had happened and she said, "Thank God it's finally over." The following Monday, Memorial Day, the phone rang and it was O'Bannon. He

asked. That November the O'Bannon/Kernan ticket was elected in a close vote.

In 1998 Lieutenant Governor Kernan was chosen as Notre Dame's commencement speaker and was awarded an honorary doctorate. In his address he cited an incident on the Notre Dame campus in 1922, when the Ku Klux Klan rallied in South Bend to show contempt for the Roman Catholic nature of the community and the university. Advising the graduates to confront this form of hatred, Kernan shared his belief that bigotry is the greatest barrier to living a life recognizing that we are all God's children, equally, every day.

The O'Bannon/Kernan collaboration worked well. As lieutenant governor, Kernan's assignments included commerce and agriculture. He also administered veteran affairs and played a meaningful role in a tax-restructuring initiative. In 1999 Lieutenant Governor Kernan launched the Veterans Outreach Initiative, which encouraged veterans to take advantage of the state and federal benefits they earned by serving their country.

Kernan, a reluctant candidate, was elected lieutenant governor of Indiana with the expectation that he would run for governor after O'Bannon had served his maximum eight years. It was therefore a surprise when Kernan announced in December 2002, midway through O'Bannon's second four years in office, that he would not be a candidate for governor in 2004. Instead, he would return to South Bend when his term was completed.

On September 7, 2003, Kernan and O'Bannon were in Chicago for a convention of Japanese businesses that had invested in the Midwest. O'Bannon was to attend the opening ceremonies the following day. But that Monday morning, Kernan received a call from O'Bannon's aide asking him to stand in for the governor. She said, "He's fine. They can hear him snoring, but he's got the door bolted. We're having trouble waking him up." Kernan felt something was wrong and went directly to O'Bannon's room. He got there just after hotel security personnel had called 911 and gained access to the room. O'Bannon was on the floor, having suffered a stroke. Although he was still alive, he never regained consciousness. O'Bannon died on September 13.

The world had changed for Kernan. On September 13, 2003, after being sworn in by Indiana Supreme Court justice Theodore Boehm, the man who did not even want to be lieutenant governor became the state's forty-eighth governor. Once again Kernan enjoyed public service. He relished using the office of governor to help others. His love of community stretched from Lake Michigan to the Ohio River. Shortly thereafter he announced that he would, in fact, run for governor in 2004.

Kernan had precious little time to establish his administration before he was faced with an election campaign in 2004. One of the decisions he is most proud of was the appointment of his lieutenant governor, Kathy Davis, the first woman to hold that office in Indiana. Davis had earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a master's degree from the Harvard Business School. She had served in the administrations of both O'Bannon and his predecessor, Evan Bayh, and had worked closely with then Lieutenant Governor Kernan to set up the 21st Century Research and Technology Fund to provide an economic incentive to fledgling companies. Her appointment was unanimously confirmed by the Indiana General Assembly in October 2003.

After losing a hard-fought election to Mitch Daniels and completing O'Bannon's term, Kernan returned to his beloved South Bend in 2005 with a new cause: Save the Silver Hawks, the Single A professional baseball team in his adopted hometown. The former owner had arranged to move the team to Marion, Illinois, before Kernan convinced him to sell to local ownership. Kernan formed an investment group to purchase the team, which he serves full time as president—a return to his lifetime love, baseball. He is also an adjunct professor in the political science department at Notre Dame.

Although no longer an elected official, Kernan returned to public service in June 2007 when Governor Daniels asked him and Indiana Supreme Court chief justice Randall Shepard to cochair a commission to examine the state's current system of local government and to make recommendations on reforming and reshaping it. The governor and Kernan agreed that Indiana needed to break the shackles of redundant

government entities and emerge with an efficient plan to carry out the responsibilities of government. In making the appointment, the governor cited Kernan as a "distinguished and respected Hoosier." After hearing testimony and weighing various options, the commission made recommendations to streamline government that were heartily endorsed by the governor. If they had been enacted by the Indiana legislature, the proposals would have significantly reformed state government. But political reality is such that most of these reforms have not passed.

Kernan has always been willing to serve his fellow man. Although initially reluctant to enter political life, he has enjoyed it and is proud of his accomplishments. He advises our youth to find something they love and do it. "People are good at things they like to do," he said. Always in good humor, Kernan added, "smile when you are not laughing." Kernan, the warrior turned civic leader, loves America and Indiana. The feeling is mutual.

# Marvin Johnson

## *A Fighter and a Gentleman*

Market Square Arena was rocking on Sunday afternoon, February 9, 1986. Spectators had turned out for the fight of the year, a battle for the World Boxing Association light-heavyweight championship of the world. It had snowed the night before and earlier that morning, and travel to downtown Indianapolis was a treacherous journey. No matter. A near-capacity crowd of more than ten thousand braved the winter chill. Seven bouts were scheduled, but few fans really cared about the undercard. They came to cheer hometown hero Marvin Johnson in the title bout. And cheer they did. Boxing fans are like no others, howling, jostling, and draining Budweisers. It warmed up quickly in MSA.

Twice before Johnson had reigned as light-heavyweight champion, only to lose each time in his first title defense. Johnson hungered to regain this championship and at age thirty-one—old for a boxer—he knew this could be his last opportunity. "That was the most important fight of my career," he recalled decades later. Johnson was ranked number one by the WBA and his opponent, Leslie Stewart, known as the Tiger from Trinidad, was ranked second. The title had been vacated by Michael Spinks in September when he had upset previously undefeated Larry Holmes to become the first light-heavyweight champion to win a heavyweight title.

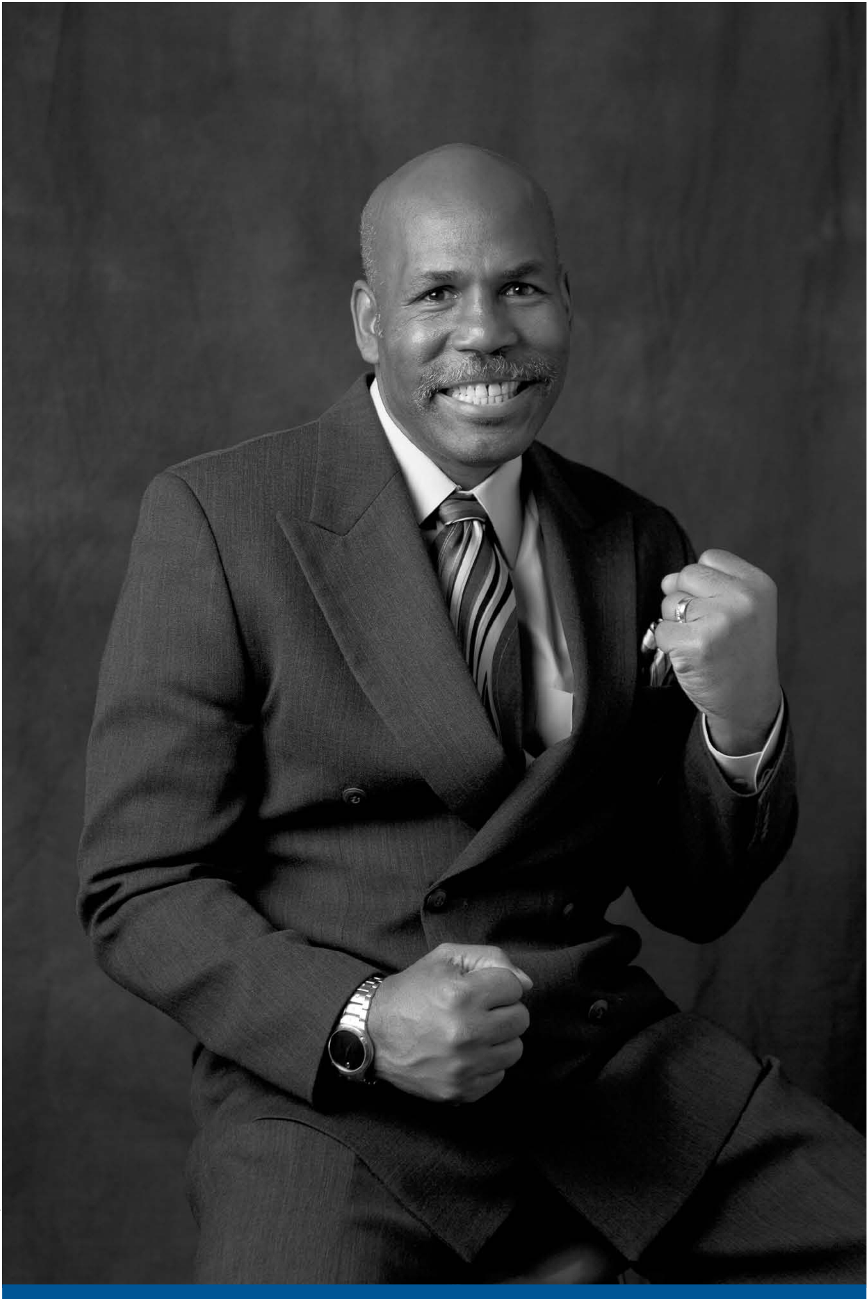
*Photo by Rich Clark*

In his dressing room Johnson went through his prefight routine, including getting rubbed down and dressed by his corner man and cousin, Willie Ray Johnson, known as Fab after a short-lived career as an entertainer. Fab began to put on Johnson's right shoe, but the southpaw stopped him. "Fab, you know how I like to do this. Put my left shoe on first: left shoe, right shoe, left glove, right glove." Fab did as he was instructed and laced it all up.

At 3:30 p.m. the fighters were summoned to the center of the ring as ABC commentator Al Michaels readied himself for the nationally televised fight. Johnson's hooded satin robe—sewn by his wife, Delores—was adorned with royal blue and white sequins, and as he moved around the ring they cast reflections of the arena lights over the partisan assemblage. The crowd rose in anticipation. The introduction of the fighters was followed by a frenzied chant, "MAR-VIN, MAR-VIN, MAR-VIN." Johnson's brother, Hank, commented that the emotion was so thick it felt like you could walk on it. The fight was scheduled for fifteen, three-minute rounds but not many expected the fight to go the distance. Of the combatants' combined sixty-four bouts, forty had ended by knockout.

Johnson, a gentleman on other occasions, was an animal in the ring. He charged out of his corner at the opening bell in search of a quick kill and pounded Stewart's face and body with numerous jarring blows that drew blood over his right eye. In the second round, Johnson used his right hand to force Stewart to the ropes, where he deployed a barrage of combination punches. Rhythmic drums from Trinidad were barely discernable over the electrified fans shouting "MAR-VIN, MAR-VIN, MAR-VIN."

Stewart, a confident fighter with fast hands and quick feet, came into the fight with a record of 18-0, including thirteen knockouts. The ordeal of the first two rounds left him undaunted. In the third round, Stewart rocked Johnson with a series of headshots that appeared to buckle the hometown hero's knees as he staggered back to his corner at the bell. Johnson said later, "He hurt me. I thought I had better start defending myself." In the fourth and fifth rounds, the boxers fought

feverishly. Michaels wondered to the national audience whether Johnson, who had acquired the nickname "Pops" in deference to the seven-year age difference of the fighters, had the stamina to keep up the pace. Johnson answered that question by resuming the more aggressive role in the sixth round. He opened up a cut over Stewart's left eye. Both cuts bled profusely. Referee Frank O. Priami of Italy, who spoke no English, signaled a halt to the round while the ring physician wiped the bloody face of Stewart and examined the cuts. He allowed the fight to continue. Both fighters were relentless—Johnson sensing victory and Stewart, with limited vision, desperately searching for a knockout. Then, fifty-six seconds into the blood-splattered seventh round, Priami stopped the fight. It was Johnson by a technical knockout. With a record of 42-5, he became the first man to ascend to the light-heavyweight throne on three separate occasions.

Marvin L. Johnson was born on April 12, 1954, in Indianapolis to R. L. and Ruthie Mae Massey Johnson. R. L. never learned to read or write and worked construction most of his life as a hod carrier. Even his family did not know his given name. In spite of the fact that he did not finish elementary school, he was bright and respected by his peers. According to his oldest son, Hank, he loved the law and could have been an attorney. On days with bad weather, he enjoyed sitting in the courtroom and listening to lawyers arguing a case. Neighbors often asked him for legal advice. Ruthie was a housewife who was fully occupied with her nine children.

Johnson, who was fifth in line, was not as much introduced to boxing as he was initiated. The teenaged Hank would get on his knees and force seven-year-old Marvin to spar with him. Three of the five boys were boxers, and all three—Hank, Marvin, and Fenton—won local Golden Gloves championships as teenagers. Only Marvin became a professional.

Johnson attended Crispus Attucks High School, an all-black school in central Indianapolis. Named for the African American who died in

the infamous Boston Massacre and became a martyr in the American Revolution, the school is most famous for its Oscar Robertson-led state championship basketball team of 1955. More importantly, Crispus Attucks earned national recognition for educational excellence and produced a number of business leaders and professionals in many fields. Johnson enjoyed Crispus Attucks and earned good grades. He wanted to play football for the high school team, but his social studies teacher, Graham Martin, discouraged him from participating for fear that he would incur an injury that would end his quest to make the Olympic boxing team.

On most afternoons after school, Johnson hung around the gym at Saint Rita's Police Athletic League Club, which adjoined the Saint Rita Catholic Church in the heart of the inner city. Johnson entered his first amateur tournament, the Indianapolis Golden Gloves, at age fifteen. Although sixteen was the minimum age for participants, they were not required to produce birth certificates. He entered in the light-heavyweight (178-pound limit) subnovice division and won. The following year he won the light-heavyweight open division, where the reward was a jacket with "Indianapolis Golden Gloves" written on the back. He proudly wore it to Attucks. That win also earned Johnson a trip to the nationals in Fort Worth, Texas, where he prevailed. Although Golden Gloves bouts consist of only three rounds of three minutes each, he won three of the five bouts by knockout. That same year he won the national Amateur Athletic Union light-heavyweight championship. He won several other amateur championships before turning professional.

After graduating from Attucks in 1971, Johnson devoted himself to the Saint Rita program under the tutelage of Colion "Champ" Chaney. Chaney was a professional heavyweight boxer during the Joe Louis era. He knew boxing and loved it. Johnson was confident that Chaney was the best fighter and the best teacher in the city. "I believed he was a man I could trust, and he had the experience to teach me all I needed to know," Johnson said. "He also had the ability to demonstrate his points, rather than just talk about them. He could teach you to slip or roll with a punch, show you why and how you got hit as you moved in

or out on your opponent, and the thing I liked best—he did not try to change any boxer's natural style. I'm an aggressive fighter, and he did not change that or attempt to. He took what I had, and added to it."

Under Chaney, Johnson began to refine his distinctive style, a relentless attack meant to wear down, dominate, and beat up the opponent. Johnson always came to fight. He was an explosive puncher who could light it up for the entire round, as Hank said, "from ding to dong." A Chaney sign in the PAL Club dressing room said, "Be nice before and after the fight—not during."

In order to prevail the Johnson way, he had to be in better shape than his opponent. He was in the gym every day punching the bag for six to ten rounds, jumping rope, boxing, and running. In the mornings he ran up to twelve miles. In preparation for a bout, his routine would be to run in the morning, eat breakfast, and rest until it was time to go to the gym at midday. In the gym he followed Chaney's regimen, which included the speed bag, the heavy bag, jumping rope, sparring, and general exercise.

Johnson fought nineteen times before he lost as an amateur. In 1971, at the age of seventeen, he was defeated by Johnny Conteh in a three-round decision. Johnson was devastated. He ached for a rematch but it was never granted. Conteh, from Liverpool, England, was one of Britain's most successful boxers. He won the World Boxing Council light-heavyweight crown in 1974 and held it until 1978. According to Conteh's own account, his high living, excessive lifestyle brought about a premature decline in his talents.

A year after his first defeat, Johnson qualified for the U.S. Olympic team in the 165-pound class. The team was coached by Bobby Lewis, who had coached heavyweight George Foreman to a gold medal in the previous Olympiad. The 1972 Games were held in Munich, West Germany. Johnson was housed in the Olympic Village and remembered that access was unsecured. The West German Olympic Organizing Committee had encouraged an open and friendly atmosphere in the village to help erase memories of the militaristic image of wartime Germany, and, specifically, of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, which had been

exploited by Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler for propaganda purposes. But the open access had a price. Members of the Israeli Olympic team were taken hostage and eventually murdered by Black September, a militant group of Palestinians. By the end of the ordeal, the terrorists had killed eleven Israeli athletes and coaches and one West German police officer. Five of the eight members of Black September were killed by police officers during a failed rescue attempt. At the time of the hostage-taking, the Munich Olympic Games were well into their second week. In the wake of the disaster, competition was suspended for the first time in modern Olympic history.

When the games resumed, Johnson earned a bronze medal, defeating Cuba's best fighter. He lost by a decision to the eventual gold medal winner, Vyacheslav Lemeshev of the Soviet Union. Johnson had bested the Russian six months earlier in a United States/Russian meet and was named the event's outstanding fighter. He was disappointed when he lost the rematch and had to settle for bronze, but he made no excuses. On his return home he received the key to the city from Indianapolis mayor Richard Lugar. Johnson turned pro the following May.

Family friend and fellow Attucks alumnus Hallie Bryant had been a professional athlete himself with the Harlem Globetrotters. He felt that Johnson needed mentors and referred him to Clarence Doninger, an attorney who assembled a cadre of Indianapolis businessmen to manage Johnson and support him through the early stages of his professional career. The group included Jack Appel, an amateur boxer who owned a successful insurance agency. Johnson readily accepted the arrangement.

As a professional, the first objective is to be noticed—ranked in the top fifty by a sanctioning body. In 1973, there were two, the WBA and the WBC, that performed the same function in direct competition with each other. Johnson's management group was ineffectual. They knew little of the "fight game" and failed to arrange bouts that would move their boxer up in the rankings. Doninger said, "I learned very quickly that this is the most unusual business, indeed. Some people are competent and trustworthy—many are not. It became apparent to us right away that the field was controlled by a few promoters who had

access to the top contenders and you had to have a connection with somebody who could put on fights on a regular basis. We did not have it and failed." The group disbanded after a few local fights.

Johnson spent a frustrating year fighting a few small-time "club" bouts and just punching the bag. In desperation, he drove to the training camp of his favorite fighter, Muhammad Ali, in Miami to discuss his career with him and his trainer, Angelo Dundee. Ali, a fellow Olympian, was familiar with Johnson's success in Munich. He advised Johnson to work on his opposite side—to change his stance and fight like a right hander, mastering a left-hand lead. "When you get as good at fighting with the right hand as you are left-handed, then you and me will be the baddest men in the world," Ali told him. Johnson did not take that advice. He preferred the advantage accorded to southpaws, whose opposite attack side generally befuddles opponents.

Dundee was considered one of the greatest trainers of all time. He had trained World Welterweight Champion Carmen Basilio and was in the midst of a relationship with Ali that lasted until Ali's retirement in 1981. Dundee helped Johnson forge a relationship with J. Russell Peltz, a successful promoter and boxing director at the Philadelphia Spectrum, who in 2000 was inducted in the World Boxing Hall of Fame. From the time the Indianapolis group disbanded until the end of Johnson's career, Peltz promoted or was otherwise involved in almost every one of Johnson's fights. Under his tutelage Johnson began to move up in the rankings. But he was paid just $1,000 per fight, even after he broke into the top fifty. One reason for the meager pay was that light heavyweights did not attract the interest of the heavyweight bouts, and thus few were televised. Johnson fought every two to three months and was bothered by the fact that he did not fight more often. He needed to stay sharp. He trained hard during the interim and relied on the financial support of friends and family. According to Doninger, "Johnson did not get fights because guys did not want to fight him. He was one tough guy. I did not see anyone who was tougher than Marvin." At age twenty-one, Johnson broke into the top ten of light heavyweights, but still only made between $1,000 to $2,500 per fight.

In 1977 Johnson sustained his first professional loss when he was knocked out in the twelfth round by Matthew Franklin, later known as Matthew Saad Muhammad. The following year, after winning six of his next seven bouts, Johnson earned a date with Mate Parlov of Yugoslavia, the newly crowned WBC light- heavyweight champion. The bout was staged in Marsala, Italy. Parlov, also a southpaw, had won a gold medal in the light-heavyweight division in the 1972 Olympics. He was no match for Johnson. Johnson won by a knockout in the tenth round, earning his first championship and a purse of $50,000. That same year, he married his high school classmate, Delores. They have five children—none of whom became professional boxers.

Johnson was anxious to defend his title in front of his hometown fans. He granted the opportunity to Matthew Franklin before a home crowd in 1979, making $75,000. He lost his crown by knockout in the eighth round, and "just like that I was back to fighting for chump change," Johnson recalled. Still, he maintained his position as a top-ranked fighter and later that year was offered an opportunity to fight Victor Galindez from Argentina for the WBA light-heavyweight championship. It was a close fight until the tenth round, when Johnson caught Galindez with his favorite knockout combination: a right hook followed by an overhand left. Johnson knocked Galindez to the canvas and his corner surrendered. In March 1980, again on his first title defense, he lost to Eddie Gregory, later Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, in the eleventh round by a TKO.

After a fourth-round knockout loss to Michael Spinks in 1981, Johnson was depressed and needed to regroup. He did not fight for more than a year. Many observers thought he had quit the arena, but Johnson was not finished. He reeled off ten wins, most by knockout, through 1984 and was named comeback fighter of the year by *Ring* magazine, the so-called Bible of boxing. He won all four of his bouts in 1985 by knockout, setting up the fight with Leslie Stewart for the WBA light-heavyweight championship. Johnson tried to find videotapes to study Stewart but as he said then, "There's not much tape available on Stewart because he's not a real popular guy. I don't plan

for him to be any more popular when he leaves town." At five feet, ten inches tall, Johnson gave away two and one-half inches of height and almost as much reach to the undefeated Stewart. After his seventh-round victory, Johnson embraced the losing fighter in the middle of the ring and wished him well. Stewart was not quite so gracious, claiming his cuts were the result of head butts. Johnson replied, "The cuts were caused by a left hook and a short right. When I land those left-right combinations sometimes fighters feel like they were hit with baseball bats, hammers, trucks or pick axes and who knows what." He was paid $100,000 for his efforts.

Johnson successfully defended his title in Indianapolis later that year, a thirteen-round TKO of Jean Marie Emebe of Cameroon. On May 23, 1987, Johnson granted Stewart a rematch in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. It was to be Johnson's largest payday—$265,000. The match was staged outdoors on a hot, muggy Caribbean night. Announcing for the television audience again, Michaels confided to the eight or ten Johnson fans in attendance that he was worried that if Johnson won they would have difficulty exiting the stadium through a belligerent crowd. Johnson did not win. The fight was stopped on a TKO in the ninth round. Some commentators contend that Johnson overtrained for the bout. As Bruce "Mouse" Strauss, an All-American wrestler and nutrition expert quipped, "Strain on a young body builds; strain on an old body destroys." Indianapolis boxing promoter Fred Berns, who was in attendance at the bout agreed. "If Johnson did no training for three to six months and came off the street to fight Stewart in a six-rounder, it would be Marvin in three or less," said Berns. After the fight ended, a mob charged into the ring, threw beer cans, and taunted the ex-champion. He required a police escort to his locker room. On the Monday following the bout, Johnson met with the prime minister of Trinidad, who praised him for being a fine athlete. Johnson, the gentleman, replied that he appreciated the prime minister's hospitality and the hospitality of his people.

After that defeat, Johnson retired from boxing with a professional record of 43-6, including thirty-five knockouts. Boxing fans lamented

his decision. Johnson's bouts exhilarated fans who knew that win or lose, someone was going to get hurt. Of his six losses he was knocked out five times. Chaney, who had never boxed for a championship, lived his dreams through Johnson and was especially sad. Johnson talked to Chaney many times before his coach died of Alzheimer's disease in May 2005. Chaney called Johnson just before he went into a nursing home and tried to convince him to come out of retirement and do it one more time.

Johnson does not dwell on his past as many retired athletes do. He does regret that he did not praise God for his success, saying "I think God should have been recognized more in my life during that time and I did not do it." When he was not in the ring, Johnson was employed at the Marion County Sheriff's Department as a corrections officer and later promoted to the rank of sergeant. When he retired from boxing, he said he wanted to get out of the fight business and turn his attention toward "making Indianapolis a better place to live," as a full-time member of the sheriff's department. He did exactly that. He also has been a television spokesman for various commercial enterprises including Eastgate Chrysler Plymouth, for whom he has appeared for almost thirty years.

After more than twenty years in retirement, Johnson remains a hometown hero. The Attucks High School museum honored him with a display that includes two of his championship belts and the blue-and-white sequined robe Johnson wore when he won the light-heavyweight championship for the third time—testimonies to a champion and a role model for Attucks students. According to Berns, the Indianapolis promoter, "No fighter was ever more loyal to his people and no fighter lived a cleaner life than Marvin."

Johnson advises those who aspire to become a professional boxer to work as hard as they can to get their bodies in tip-top condition because, "once your career is over, if you have taken care of your body like you should, then your body will take care of you in your older years. But if you go out there and fight those hard fights and you are not in the best of condition, then when you get to be an older man you are

going to be a lot like those punch-drunk people who cannot half talk, cannot half walk. So be in your best condition or do not do it at all."

In 2008 Johnson received one of boxing's greatest recognitions—inclusion in the World Boxing Hall of Fame. At a ceremony in Los Angeles, he was inducted along with other boxing greats Lennox Lewis, Greg Haugen, and Parnell Whitaker. Always soft spoken, Johnson humbly accepted the honor, thanking those who helped him in his career, especially Delores. He said his wife was always there for him with encouragement and undying love and support—a love that has endured for almost forty years. It is Indiana who should thank this fighter and gentleman for representing the state with ferocity and grace.