

Louis B. Clark



# THE MAN THE FLY LIT ON

By GORDON H. CILLEY

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IT WAS the murk from a far-off jungle fire that hung, a half-choking haze, between land and sky, but the sun pierced through from the brazen heaven overhead and beat down with relentless rays till heat-waves danced from the parched and dusty earth. To the wounded man out in front it brought, first, indescribable agony that was told in moans. Then the dry and swelling throat choked back even the expression of pain. Now, perhaps, a merciful God had given him unconsciousness—perhaps he was dead.

The three men in the dried-out water hole had few words for each other. There was nothing to say until some one of them should evolve a plan for safety. And what plan could there be? Less than one hundred yards out in front was the bamboo clump and within it was a Filipino sharpshooter and a wary one. Over and over had each of the three held aloft his service hat on the point of his cleaning rod, but the only fire it drew was a chuckling mocking laugh. It would not work. The little brown disciple of Aguinaldo held cartridges precious. It had sounded like an old Springfield when he shot the corporal—probably that was what it was. If so, then he had but one cartridge in his gun. He could be shot or there might be time to escape before he could reload after that was fired. But that one cartridge was one death. Who's should it be?

There was but one solution, and as each of the three eliminated all other possible chances, that one remained in his mind. And each of the three knew that the others knew. So, when Adams passed around his canteen with an indication that they should drink each a third of the little water that remained, they knew he was about to propose the one plan possible. He waited until the canteen lay empty by his side, and then he whispered:

"It's got to be one of us. It's probably a sure thing, for he won't miss at that range. But the man that does it can get up shoots, and maybe I'll strangle him. And the other two can jump up and shoot the minute his gun cracks. Shall we draw straws?"

There was no reply. The others looked at each other searchingly. Then they looked down again. Adams went on, his voice hard: "If either of you fellows has got a wife and kids back home, that makes it different." Again he stopped and waited. Then Welch spoke:

"Jim Carney here's got a girl back in Boston. She promised to wait for him."

"Stow your gab," said Carney, roughly. "I'm here to take my chances."

"That's white talk," said Adams, with just a tinge of admiration. "Fee got a girl back there, too. But that ain't like 'bel' married, with kids."

"How're we going to choose?" asked Carney, impatiently.

Adams reached up to the edge of the water hole and carefully detached a long, dry blade of reed grass. This he began to break into pieces of different lengths. A droning fly buzzed before his face and he slapped it impatiently. He watched it as it rose, slowly circling, and then he dropped the straws. "Let's leave it to that cussed fly," he said. "It's been fussin' around here ever since we slid into this hole. The man it lights on first."

He looked at the others. Carney nodded his head. Welch watched the fly with a gathering frown and made no reply.

"Let's all lie still and see who he picks out," said Carney. "We can't waste time."

The men lay on their backs, their aching eyes following every movement of the fly. The soldier Welch sat up, pulled his haversack forward from his hip, rummaged in it with his hand, apparently found what he was seeking, and, lying down again, put his hand to his mouth. The others watched him with suspicious interest.

"Well, you are a queer one," said Adams, "waiting at a time like this."

Welch said nothing, and the three resumed their vigilance of the fly. It rose, a black speck in the air, darted in parabolic curves back and forth, then slowly began to spiral downward. The test was at hand. The men lay alongside with practically facing distance between them. Welch was in the center. The fly descended deliberately, swung back and forth and seemed to still its flight just over the face of Carney. In the breathless silence the faint chord of its wings was distinctly audible. Incontrollably, the soldier's face twitched. The fly darted away. The others looked on without comment while a flush spread over the man's neck and up to his ears.

Then the insect returned and leisurely hummed back and forth and then in a swinging circle above the hand that Adams had stretched out upon the ground. It settled within an inch and the man laughed. The fly mounted upward again.

Again it came back. Flies have no long flight, and already it was weary. This time it would seek a resting place. Its tired wings grew slower in their vibration and the noise of their buzzing deeper and more distinct. It circled twice about the dusty shoes of Adams, and this time he did not move.

He looked on with his features drawn in agony and teeth sinking into his lip. Then the fly rose three or four feet in the air, circled slowly and descended like a bullet upon the face of Welch. It alighted on his chin and crawled toward his mouth.

For a long minute the other men looked on in silence. The fly stopped at the man's lip and began to feed. Carney suddenly swept his hand above it and the insect darted off. Both Carney and Adams rose to sitting postures and looked inquiringly at their prostrate comrade. Another minute passed, and a glance shot between them. Carney shifted uneasily and whispered: "Well, Welch, old man?"

Still the man did not move. His eyes were closed and a sort of smile hovered about his lips. Adams seized his arm and shook him. The arm dropped limply back into place.

"Well, by G—d!" exclaimed Carney, and then, placing a finger on the man's eyelid, he roughly pushed it back. Only the white of the eye showed.

"Well, by G—d!" he muttered again and reached for Welch's wrist. He held it for a little time between his thumb and forefinger, while Adams looked on with a puzzled stare. Carney dropped the wrist and bent his ear to the man's nostrils. Then he drew back, settled himself in his sitting posture and turned to Adams from whom a question burst:

"Fainted?"

Carney shook his head. "Dead—scared to death—well, by G—d!"

For full five minutes the men were silent. Then Adams spoke dully: "He took his chance with us, and it fell to him. He faded out without makin' good. But we can make him do it. We can hold him up and let him get shot. Then we can get that sneaking little devil that shot the corporal."

Carney sat up. "Right you are; I was a fool not to think of it, but it knocked me all in a heap to think of Welch turning yellow. It's just what he's good for now. I will hold him up and you can be ready for the little devil."

He seized the body and, hugging it about the hips, strove to raise it so that the head would show above the water hole. But it was still limp; it would not hold erect. With a muttered oath, Carney seized the dead man's rifle and jammed it down the back of the dead man's blouse. The device served and, holding by the lips and keeping his own head well bent down, he hoisted the corpse erect and upward. There was a moment of agonizing suspense, and then rang out the booming roar of a Springfield. The sound was hardly complete before Adams leaped up and began pumping his Krag at a patch of powder smoke in the bamboo. At the third shot there was a yell and a crashing of branches. Adams dropped his rifle, and ran toward the corporal, while Carney sat weakly down and propped up the body of his friend. There was a yawning hole in the dead man's forehead, where the snub-nosed Springfield bullet had crashed through, and a stream of blood trickled away from it.

"If you'll stay here by the corporal, I'll hike back to the column and get the ambulance," said Adams.

Carney replied with a nod, and, when the soldier was gone, he turned to a closer examination of the body of Welch. "H—d of a hole that old Springfield makes," he muttered. He untied the handkerchief from about his neck and started to wipe away the blood. Then he saw something that made him stay his hand. He looked close at the dead man's face and then sprang to his feet and swore aloud. For about the lips of his friend, and spread all over the lower half of his face were—grains of commissary brown sugar!

Just before taps that night Carney stood within the flap of the major's tent and saluted. He averted urgent business. The major looked up wearily from his writing and listened. Carney, with more strength of language than was usual to the major's ears, begged that a recommendation would be made for a medal of honor for the dead man, to be sent to his relatives, as is customary when a soldier has died a hero.

"I thought he had turned yellow," said the soldier, "and, God forgive me, I held up his body and let that little hellion shoot a hole in his head. And then I found that he had fixed it all up. He'd baited himself with sugar out of his haversack, and that d—d fly lit on him just as he figured it would. Physically, sir, it was more than he could stand, and the heart failure killed him when he felt the fly on his chin. But I've heard you say, sir, that the real heroes are the men who do their duty and more than their duty when they are most afraid. You see, sir, he knew Adams and I had sweet-hearts at home, and he didn't."

"You are right, Carney," said the major, "the moral heroes are the greatest of all. I will make the recommendation for the medal of honor."

**Explained His Absence**  
The recruit was a tall, lanky man, and he had very large feet. In fact, it was rumored in the regiment that he took size 13, and those who had seen his extremities saw no reason to doubt it. One night he happened to be included in a party that had to do a job several miles from the barracks, and on their return and the roll being called he was found to be absent.

"Has anyone seen O'Halloran?" asked the sergeant before dismissing the men.

There was silence for a moment. Then one of the privates took a step forward, came smartly to attention, and said:

"Yes, sergeant. He's just gone up to the crossroads to turn round."

# GOOD ROADS

## BETTER HIGHWAYS YIELD BIG PROFIT

American motorists cash in a yearly dividend of 10 per cent on the capital invested through federal aid in the improved highways of the country, according to a statement issued by the American Automobile association.

This dividend actually goes into the pockets of the motorists and represents the difference between the cost of motor vehicle operation over unimproved and improved highways. The differential, which is conservative, is based on extensive engineering tests of motor vehicle operation costs made in different sections of the country and for different types of roads.

A recent survey made in Kentucky shows that there is on the average a saving of 2 1/2 cents a mile in the cost of operation over improved roads and highways. Some time ago a similar investigation conducted in Iowa indicated approximately the same saving.

It has been estimated many times that the average car runs approximately 6,000 miles a year. A saving of 2 1/2 cents a mile for 6,000 miles amounts to \$150 a year. For 17,000,000 automobiles this would mean a saving of \$2,550,000,000 a year on gasoline, tires, parts, upkeep, renewals and all phases of operation.

This would be the total saving if every mile over which an automobile traveled was improved. But, of course, only 60,000 miles of highway have been improved by federal aid. This 60,000 miles represents slightly more than 2 per cent of the total highway system, which amounts to approximately 2,500,000 miles.

Two per cent of \$2,550,000,000 gives \$51,000,000 which can be legitimately credited to federal aid. The total capital expenditure for federal aid was \$300,000,000, which yields \$51,000,000 a year, or 10 per cent in saving to the user of improved highways.

The study made by the Iowa State college, the Iowa highway commission and the bureau of public roads showed that the gasoline consumed on a paved road was only approximately one-half the gasoline consumed on a dirt road per unit of traffic. Incidentally the investigation developed that the gasoline consumed per unit of traffic can be taken as an index of the other costs of motor vehicle operation.

It showed, in fact, that there is a definite relation existing between the gasoline consumption per unit of traffic and other items of cost in vehicle operation. F. R. White, chief engineer of the highway commission, estimated that through improvement of a road surface the gasoline consumption is cut in two, the cost of tires is cut in two, the same applying to other items, including depreciation and repairs.

For the first time these studies make it possible to present in terms of dollars and cents the difference in cost to the motorist and the public in general between improved and unimproved roads.

According to the Iowa study, traffic equalling 500 vehicles per day over earth roads requires an annual expenditure from both private and public funds of \$25,000 per mile, while a similar amount of transportation over a concrete surface costs \$20,050 per mile.

"This means that for a light traffic earth road carrying 500 vehicles a day there would be saved \$4,950 per mile per year if the same traffic went over a paved road surface. Assuming the cost of paving a dirt road to be \$25,000 per mile the saving in transportation cost would actually pay for the capital outlay in from four to six years. The difference between the cost of operation on a gravel road and a paved road would pay for the difference in the cost of construction in three years.

**Work on Post Road**  
It is planned to do a great deal of work on the New York state section of the Boston Post road, and contracts for part of this work have been let. Traffic on this road is very heavy. A count last season showed 50,000 vehicles passing day and night. The traffic is as heavy at night as in the day time and at times runs heavier during the night. Just when this improvement work is to be started is not known.

**Thick Roads in Oregon**  
The Oregon state highway department recently adopted a design of thickened edges for roads. The specifications call for a cross section seven inches thick at the center and ten inches thick at the edges, the increased thickness graduating to the edge from a point two feet from the edge. The cost is estimated at \$24,381 per mile.

**Different Traffic Rules**  
With 48 states and thousands of municipalities, all making their own traffic rules, the motorist is more or less at sea as to what he can and cannot do, and should not do. But when the national government builds roads for the nation, a national traffic law will be inevitable as a national police force for the national highways.

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## King Arthur's Capital.

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