



# Flanneries

*YOU have never had it. Gunner Percy had. And the story of how he came into notice on a bucking broncho in Toronto, and ended up with Flanneries and immortal action in Flanders, is one of the heroic comedies of the war.*

By ERNEST G. BLACK

**F**LANNERIES is by no means a new complaint, but it has sprung into anything like prominence only since the war, as never before was there such an opportunity to study its symptoms, or such need to devise a remedy as there is to-day. In peace time it was given scant consideration, and was called by the somewhat unsympathetic and decidedly uneuphonious name of Malingering. The origin of the word is a matter of considerable mystery. The largest school of casuists in "Our Battery" maintains that it is a corruption of a term in common use in veterinary circles. This contention our veterinary sergeant absolutely refuses either to corroborate or refute, deeming it beneath his dignity, no doubt, to participate in philological controversies.

It may be said here, for the benefit of possessors and students of "The Physician in the Home," and other kindred works, that while the symptoms of Flanneries are almost identical with those of Crud—known as the Somme fever, or the Yellow fever—it is not to be confused with that dread and pernicious disease. Somme fever is to be found only among those who are afraid of their skins; the Flanneries affect all and sundry who have a disinclination for physical exertion.

The "skinnners," which is the name to which artillery drivers answer in the war zone, appear to be most susceptible to Flanneries. Perhaps it is in the air of the horse lines. I should say, off-hand, that nine out of ten of the victims are drivers.

The most interesting specimen we had in "Our Battery" was Archibald Percival McCosh, R.R. Driver McCosh was the direct antithesis of all that his given name implies. He joined us at Exhibition Camp in Toronto in "civvy" clothes, his peaked cap pulled down over one eye, and a dark stain, testifying eloquently to the succulence of the tobacco he favored, besmearing the corners of his mouth. The most exacting task our officers ever undertook was to teach Percy to wear his service cap straight. That task is not yet completed.

We called him Percy, partly because it was really his name, but mostly in appreciation of his many good points. The "R. R.," signifying Rough Rider, was an honor accorded him by the personnel of the battery, in admiration of his horsemanship.

Somewhere in this wide world there may be a horse that Percy could not ride, though I doubt it; for he rode the worst we had, and there was an impression in "Our Battery," not entirely unsupported by the facts, that all the equine iniquity in the entire universe, outside the Central Empires, was gathered together by the kind Canadian Government and assigned to us.

As long as there was war material Percy was happy and worked with zeal. When all the horses were broken to the saddle, or so nearly broken that the other drivers could handle them, the Flanneries set in. The unhappy victim withdrew himself expertly from all parades as soon as roll was called, and retired to the bunk-house, where he was found by the officers, on the one or two occasions on which he was discovered, in an agony with a sudden attack of cramps, sick headache, or some similar complaint.

The battery was young and enthusiastic. We decided to take drastic steps. At a special conclave of the gunners and drivers, it was decided to withdraw the degree of "R. R." we had conferred upon him, and to reduce him to the ranks as an ordinary, everyday, garden variety driver. A committee was selected to inform Percy of this drastic step. They performed their task with suitable ceremony, and the culprit seemed much affected.

Then Angel came to us from Remount. She was little, she was piebald, and she was bad—B-A-D.

We first found it out when young Rose took her out on a "numnah" ride—that is the army name for mediaeval torture on a bare-back horse. Rosie rather fancied himself as a rider, and since the fall of McCosh, was aspiring to the title made vacant by the said fall. Angel put an end to his ambitions by wiping him off her back on the fence in front of the grandstand at Exhibition Camp.

The next day was Sunday, and I was on stable piquet. Stable piquet is bad enough at any time; but when you add the fact that it was Sunday, which is supposed to be our day off, and the last Sunday in our home town before going overseas at that, it is not to be wondered at that I was sore.

Then came our Captain and asked me to saddle a horse for him. His own horse was on the sick lines and I told him so. "Is there any other horse you would prefer sir?" I asked him, with all due deference, but with a fiendishly gleeful hope in my heart. The Captain, I knew, had spent all his time in the orderly room engaged with matters of detail and routine, and knew next to nothing of our horses.

"O, no," he said; "any horse that can move will do."

The Captain is really a very decent fellow, and I had nothing against him personally. But I was on piquet, and it was Sunday, and—well, you know just about how I felt. So I saddled Angel for him.

I led her out, and waited to see the fun. It came rather more quickly than I had anticipated. The moment Angel felt his weight settle, she reared and then bucked. The captain is a fair rider and stayed on, though without any conspicuous evidence of overpowering pleasure. Angel, finding her preliminary efforts a failure, "carried on," and finding the stable handy, proceeded to rub the Captain off on the corner of it. She set her feet and bumped her back in much the same way that a sow does in scratching its back against a post. I have seen a gunner, after his first two months at the front, go through similar motions against a gun wheel.

**T**HE Captain was not hurt much, and was able to come overseas with us, limping with the aid of a cane. To his credit I must say that he never held it against me, although that, I believe, was mostly because I was only a poor, ignorant gunner, and as such, could not be expected to know much about horses.

Angel next day was put under Percy's charge, with instructions to break her or kill her.

When Percy saddled Angel on Monday everyone who could possibly get away was out to see. The cook-house orderlies took advantage of the temporary absence of the cook, to absent themselves from their duties, only to find on arriving at the cattle-judging ring in the east part of the grounds that the cook was there before them. The barrack-room orderlies and the "light duty" sick forsook their haunt by the stove; the officers were out in force, and the office orderlies too; all the stable piquets were there but one, and he was a Presbyterian with an over-developed sense of duty. The guard house was deserted, the guard having been unable to decide who was to stay and watch the one lone prisoner, taking him with them. The guard on duty on the quarter beat stood at one end of his course where he could watch the ring.

It was indeed a sight worth seeing. Angel was led into the ring where Percy mounted her after the gate had been closed. She reared and pawed the air;

she bucked and kicked; she ran forward and stopped quickly, bucking at the same time; but Percy stuck to her as if nailed.

She tried to bite his foot, but he kicked her jaw until she gave it up. She tried her old trick with the fence. He was prepared. The sharp spurs and wicked curbed bit punished her cruelly, and she was soon a mass of blood, lather and froth. But she never reached the fence.

Then Angel played her right bower. She got down and rolled. As she got down, Percy got off, and as she got up, he was on her

back again like a flash. The battle was won, though Angel fought on half-heartedly for some time longer. At last Percy could drive around the ring without any special disturbance, and the Major said the job was done, and "d—d well done, too."

That night there was another conclave of the gunners and drivers. Without a dissenting voice it was decided to reinstate Percy in his former degree; and moved that the rights and perquisites appertaining thereto should be perpetual and independent of the future conduct of the recipient thereof.

Of our training in England, little need be said, except that Percy suffered a great deal from the Flanneries. On our arrival in France his health improved. He had enlisted to fight and now was his chance, so he bucked up for the time.

Life at the horse lines, grooming horses, and cleaning harness, is far from exciting; and Percy soon suffered a relapse. About once in ten days he made a trip "up the lines" with rations of ammunition; and the rest of the time he waited and waited in the mud and slime of the horse lines, for the great day when the line should break, and the guns go forward with shrapnel bursting on every side; while the gunners hung on for dear life as they went bumpety-bump over the hills in front, at which they had gazed often in hopeful speculation.

**F**OR a while he went to the bad completely. Every time he went to the village behind the lines he got into trouble. The M.P.'s (military police) got to know him, and they took him to the A.P.M.'s office (Assistant Provost Marshal) so often that the fact that his initials were the same as the big red letters on the sign in front of that dignitary's office was noted. To this day the M.P.'s greet him as "A.P.M."

After a month or two of this kind of life he had a stroke of good luck. An ill-fitting shoe galled his foot, and he continued to wear it in the hope of working up a big enough sore to parade sick. It succeeded better than he had hoped. His sock poisoned the sore, and by the time he got to the doctor, his foot and leg were in a shocking state.

The doctor at once sent him to the hospital where he had three weeks of ease and luxury such as he had never experienced in the army before. It was too good to last; also it was too good to be allowed to slip through his fingers without an effort.

The night before he was to return to his unit he stole a tablespoon from the kitchen. As he started to undress he slipped it under his pillow. Dressing and undressing were very complicated operations with Percy. Like all sufferers from Flanneries he had a horror of sewing on a button. His brass but-



Percy would go to the ruined gun pits and burn flares.