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## Rorie led dispatch unit during WWI

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# Rorie led dispatch unit during WWI

By Wendy Richter  
For the Siftings

In 1924, Arkadelphia's Southern Standard newspaper included this headline: "Former Local Boy in Prominent Role in Six-Reel Movie." However, the young man described in the article remains largely unknown in the annals of Clark County history. With the nickname of "Speed," Clem Rorie commanded a unit of General John J. Pershing's dispatch riders in France during World War I. After returning home to the United States he became an "internationally famous motorcycle rider and professional daredevil."

Clem Belmont Rorie was born in 1893, the son of Rev. T. O. Rorie, a Methodist minister. As mentioned, Clem served in World War I. Clem's brother, Ben, served as a pilot in World War II and was killed in action while flying over Germany. Clem's sister, Ruth, married Claude Phillips (Ruth and Claude were grandparents of Mary Jo Mann).

General John J. Pershing commanded the American Expeditionary Force on the Western Front in World War I, and Clem Rorie was



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

**Women in Gurdon celebrate Armistice Day at the end of World War I. The end of hostilities on the Western Front in Europe took effect at 11 a.m., Nov. 11, 1918: "the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month."**

among his dispatch riders. A relatively new contraption--the motorcycle--first saw action in the U.S. military during border conflict involving Mexico and Pancho Villa. The cycle's first large-scale deployment occurred in World War I when the U.S. had about 80,000 such vehicles in service. The machines were used for multiple purposes, including delivering messages. With little telecommunication available, dispatch riders sometimes carried orders in dangerous circumstances, "through machine gun and artillery fire, far behind enemy lines, and over or around craters, debris."

After Rorie's military

service he used his riding talent in other ways. For example, he became well-known around the nation for motorcycle stunts at the World's Fair in San Francisco, riding "on the perpendicular wall in the Motordrome." According to the Southern Standard in announcing the upcoming film, he was "One of the brightest stars of the movie world, in that phase of filmdom devoted to the hazardous and thrilling." The paper reported the signing of a Classic Picture Corporation contract "for the immediate production of a six-reel 'thriller' featuring Clem Belmont Rorie, internationally famous motorcycle rider and pro-

fessional daredevil." The movie's director stated that "It is doubtful whether anyone other than Mr. Rorie would be able or willing to play the principal part, because of the innumerable chances with death the actor is called upon to take."

Clem Rorie died in 1947 and is buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in Arkadelphia.

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum ([www.clark-countyhistory.org](http://www.clark-countyhistory.org) or 230-1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library ([www.obu.edu/archives](http://www.obu.edu/archives) or 245-5332).