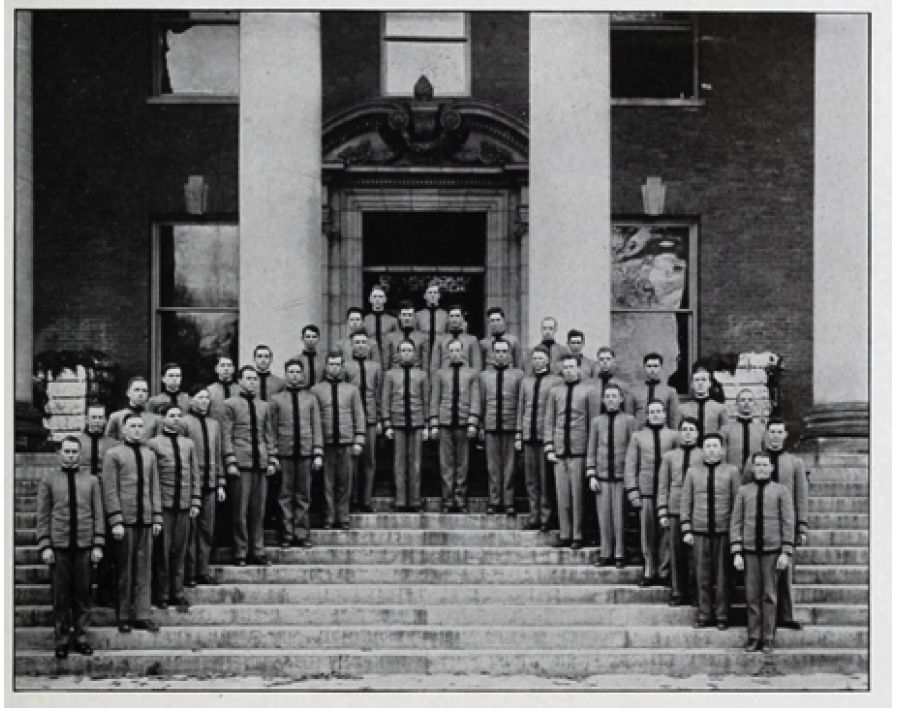


Not Your Typical Student

Willie K. Humphries was not your typical Clemson student, at least not as we would define one today. But one hundred years ago, Humphries and his fifty-six classmates in Clemson's One Year Agricultural Class blended right in with the rest of the cadets marching across the gently rolling hills of the nascent campus.

The One Year Agricultural Class was designed, according to the Clemson College Catalogue of

1914-15, "to teach the simple scientific principles upon which good farming rests. Its purpose is to take a young man already a farmer and make him a better farmer. It is not intended to train men who are without agricultural experience to become farmers, because such a task would be difficult if not impossible to attain in a brief college course. The One-year Agricultural Course is open to young men eighteen years old or over who, since they were ten years of age, have had at least five years' experience on the farm." But, the Catalogue warned, "The One-year Agricultural Course is not a substitute for the four-year degree course which is recommended to all who have time and means to take it." Classes in the One Year



The One Year Agricultural Class of 1914-15 poses on the steps of the Agriculture Building, now Sikes Hall.

program included instruction in

Parliamentary Practice, Bookkeeping, Horticulture, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Botany, Entomology and Farm Science.

Means were no doubt a serious consideration for many of the young farm boys from across the state. The costs of the year-long course were estimated at \$117, which included \$29 for cadet uniforms. Fortunately, Humphries, who was born in the Boykin community of Kershaw County in 1893, was a scholarship student. Each county in the state was entitled to send one young man to the program on scholarship and Humphries was awarded the county's \$100 scholarship for the 1914-15 session. During his single academic year on campus, Humphries participated in Dr. D. W. Daniel's Sunday School Class, likely finding fellowship and spiritual instruction from the noted faculty member.

Despite his time growing up on the farm and his agricultural training, Humphries chose a different line of work. When his parents, five brothers and five sisters moved to Sumter County in 1916, Humphries took a job with the Sumter Electrical Works. That job didn't last very long, for Humphries joined the Sumter Light Infantry, probably in 1917 soon after the United States declared war on Germany. The unit was part of the 118th Infantry Regiment and would be incorporated into the 30th Infantry Division, the "Old Hickory" Division composed of units from the two Carolinas, Georgia and Tennessee. The division trained at Camp Sevier near Greenville, South Carolina, a mobilization and training camp established to integrate National Guard units into US Army divisions. Humphries was assigned to Headquarters Company of the 118th Infantry Regiment and shipped, along with the rest of the division, to France in May 1918.

Upon reaching France, the "Old Hickory" Division joined the US Army II Corps, which served in the north alongside British forces. In late September, American forces were ordered to attack and clear German defenders from outposts along the Hindenburg line. But, there was a problem. In the twelve American companies preparing to attack, there were only eighteen officers present, the rest being absent for additional training. As a result, an attack on the 27th failed and Australian officers were brought in to provide experience and leadership. The following day, the Germans fired a gas attack on the American lines. Humphries was wounded by the attack, likely mustard gas delivered by artillery shell.

Although the use of poison gas had been prohibited by the Hague Convention on the rules of warfare in 1899, all the major combatants employed such weapons during the war. As effective countermeasures were introduced—primarily gas masks—deaths from gas weapons dropped, but the countermeasures failed to save Humphries, who died on October 5th. Of the more than 116,000 Americans who perished during the Great War, less than 1,500 were victims of poisonous gas.

Willie K. Humphries was survived by his parents and siblings, two of whom, Carlton and LeRoy, were also serving with the Army in France.