

## Man of Great Promise

The 1914 edition of *Taps* listed 246 freshmen in the Class of 1917. One of these new boys was Robert Roy Pearce of Columbia. Pearce remained at Clemson only one year before going to work for his family-owned C. C. Pearce & Company, a wholesale business headquartered in his hometown.

When the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, Pearce immediately volunteered for Army service. He applied for officer training, but was turned down due to faulty eyesight. Determined to serve, Pearce enlisted as a private.

Pearce was sent to Greenville for basic training. As the United States readied troops for overseas deployment, the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division trained at Camp Sevier, a 1,900-acre training post off of what is now Wade Hampton Boulevard.



The 30<sup>th</sup> was a National Guard division composed of men from the Carolinas, Georgia, and Tennessee. It sailed for England in May 1918 and went into battle as part of the British Second Army in July. Sergeant Pearce was assigned to Company G of the division's ammunition train, a logistics unit that worked to keep the division supplied with the munitions, food, equipment,

clothing, and gear needed to sustain combat operations.



*The Class of 1917 pictured its freshman year.*

After he had been in the line for about 90 days, Pearce came down with the flu. The second wave of the so-called Spanish Influenza was sweeping across the battlefields of France and on around the world.

Even as the fighting in the trenches reached a climax, young soldiers on both sides of the line were falling to the illness. More than 15,800 American soldiers died in France from the flu and its attendant pneumonia. On October 6, Pearce was added to this sad statistic. Combined with the more than 30,000 soldiers who succumbed to the flu in the United States, the epidemic was America's most deadly battle of the Great War. In all, more than 670,000 Americans, one in sixteen, died from the flu and/or pneumonia in 1918.

Pearce, according to his newspaper obituary, "was a young man of great promise and numbered his friends by the score." He was survived by his father, two sisters, and four brothers, one of

whom was an Army captain then serving at Camp Sevier. Pearce was buried in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, Romagne-Sous-Montfaucon, France. He is memorialized at Elmwood Gardens in Columbia.

