

Gas Victim

William Ganson Williams of York marched on Bowman Field before Clemson Agricultural College reached its twentieth anniversary. Williams was a member of the Class of 1914 and served as a sergeant in Company L of the Cadet Regiment. He was a member of the Junior Electrical Club.

Ganson Williams entered the Army in the spring of 1918. He sailed for France in June and was assigned to the 331st Ambulance Company. Upon arrival in France, Williams and his comrades were likely issued gas masks and trained in their use by transiting a gas chamber in which tear gas was released.



Once committed to the front, Sergeant Williams and his unit worked to move wounded soldiers from front line dressing stations to aid stations farther removed from the fighting. Four-man teams of stretcher bearers would carry one wounded man. If the terrain allowed, wheeled carts or even mules would be used to transport the wounded.



World War I was the first time that chemical weapons were used on a large scale. Germany launched the first successful large-scale attack in April 1915 against French colonial units. Although the use of such weapons had been outlawed by the Hague Convention in 1907, all the major combatants in the War employed chemical weapons, including the United States.

Armies were quick to respond with countermeasures, including their own chemical weapons, but the most ubiquitous of these was the gas mask. Issued to front line soldiers, the proper use of these masks quickly reduced the effectiveness of lethal gases. Even so, more than 90,000 fatalities were attributed to the use of gas, including more than 1,400 Americans.

In October 1918, Sergeant Williams was the victim of a gas attack. He was hospitalized but developed pneumonia. He died on October 26.

William Ganson Williams was survived by his mother. He is buried in York's Rose Hill Cemetery.

