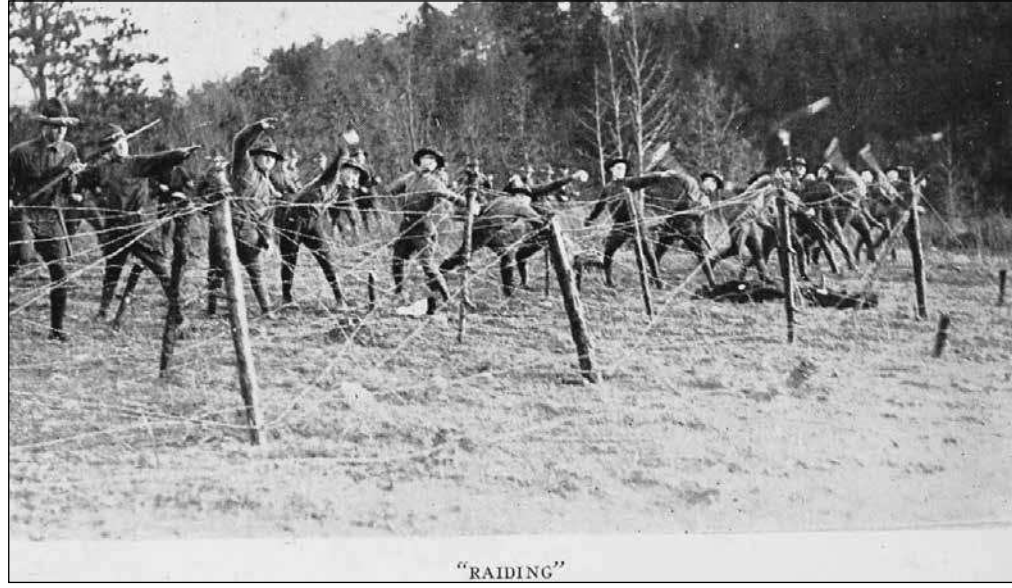


# WWI Profile: Commodore Clarence Chinnis, 1899-1960



"RAIDING"

Photos contributed

Raiding picture on campus.

By NORMA ECKARD AND AMY ECKARD  
GUEST COLUMNISTS

Commodore Clarence Chinnis was born in Northwest, Brunswick County, the son of Augustus Marion Chinnis and Nellie Brew. A previous post introduced the multiple draft registrations that occurred in 1917 and 1918, and the Students Army Training Corps (SATC). Commodore did not become eligible for the draft until the registration of Sept. 12, 1918. His draft registration was actually dated Sept. 7, 1918, and shows he had already started his SATC training at Plattsburgh Barracks, N.Y., but the SATC program did not officially begin until Oct. 1, 1918.

To determine the reason behind this discrepancy, college yearbooks were used. The North Carolina University at Chapel Hill (now known as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) yearbook Yackety-Yack provides the sequence of events.

The UNC Department of Military Science training and the Students Army Training Corps at UNC were two different programs. Commodore participated in the military training in 1917 when it first became available, then volunteered for the SATC in 1918 when it became available. The following shows Commodore's activities in chronological order:

According to The Wilmington Dispatch (1916, May 27; p. 5), Commodore graduated from Wilmington High School on May 26, 1916.

He was a freshman in the 1916-1917 year at UNC Chapel Hill, according to the 1917 yearbook, Yackety-Yack. The 1918 yearbook, page 262, indicates that Commodore was in the Class of 1920. He is included in the list of sophomores. Page 168 begins with the description of the formation of the Department of Military Science at the school and the enthusiasm in which the students responded. Several excerpts are shown below.

Photos of the military training in Chapel Hill are located in the 1918 yearbook. Pvt. Commodore served in Company B.

The following summer (1918), 125 students, including Commodore, trained at the camp at Plattsburgh Barracks, N.Y. This explains why Commodore registered for the draft on Sept. 7, 1918, from Plattsburgh Barracks.

Photos from the summer of 1918 at Plattsburgh are shown in the 1919 Yearbook. This section of the yearbook is also located online at docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/yack1919/yack1919.html.

When the SATC became active in October 1918, Commodore, along with William Asbury Rourk Jr., met the physical and educational admission requirements and volunteered. Both were accepted and ordered to report for duty on Oct. 5, 1918, at the Uni-

versity of North Carolina, a Collegiate Section from NC.

### Admission requirements

Registrants who are graduates of standard four-year secondary schools or have equivalent educational qualifications are eligible for Collegiate Sections and will be inducted at the institutions to which they secure admission. The admission requirements into the colleges, and hence into the SATC, have been left substantially as they were. Young men seeking information as to how to join a Collegiate Unit of the Corps should apply not to the War Department, but to the Dean or Registrar of the college of their choice. Members of both sections will attend courses on the Issues of the War.

These excerpts are taken from the description of the SATC at Carolina:

From the first days in October, when the system was started, it seemed that fate was against a speedy organization of the units into efficient, spirited bodies. Equipment was hard to secure, personnel of the staffs were slow in assembling, and upon everything that scourge of scourges, the flu descended. The men were compelled to keep a strict quarantine, pleasures and freedoms were cut off. Sickness is a breeder of slow inertia and lack of spirit. Morale was hard to maintain, on the campus, when the atmosphere was full of dread.

Just as the training went into full swing, the Nov. 11, 1918, Armistice ended it.

In the days of disappointment that followed the signing of the armistice, when the urge of the desire for service overseas was suddenly removed, every student soldier felt that the Students, Army Training Corps was of no value.

The SATC was demobilized. Pvt. Chinnis was honorably discharged on Dec. 9, 1918.

The government did a very wise thing when it created this Students, Army Training Corps, and could the experiment have been carried out its benefits would by now have been too obvious to point out.

Commodore did not complete his junior year in college. He is not listed among the juniors in the 1919 yearbook. This is confirmed by the 1940 Census, which shows he had completed two years of college education.

The 1920 Census shows that he was living at home in Northwest. He and his sister Lila were clerks at a bank. His father was a merchant of groceries. The family home was on Wilmington and Charlotte Road, near Leland Road.

Commodore married and was the father of two sons who served in World War II, Carter Cabell Chinnis, whose findagrave entry includes an impressive obituary, and Hobson D. Chinnis.

Commodore Clarence

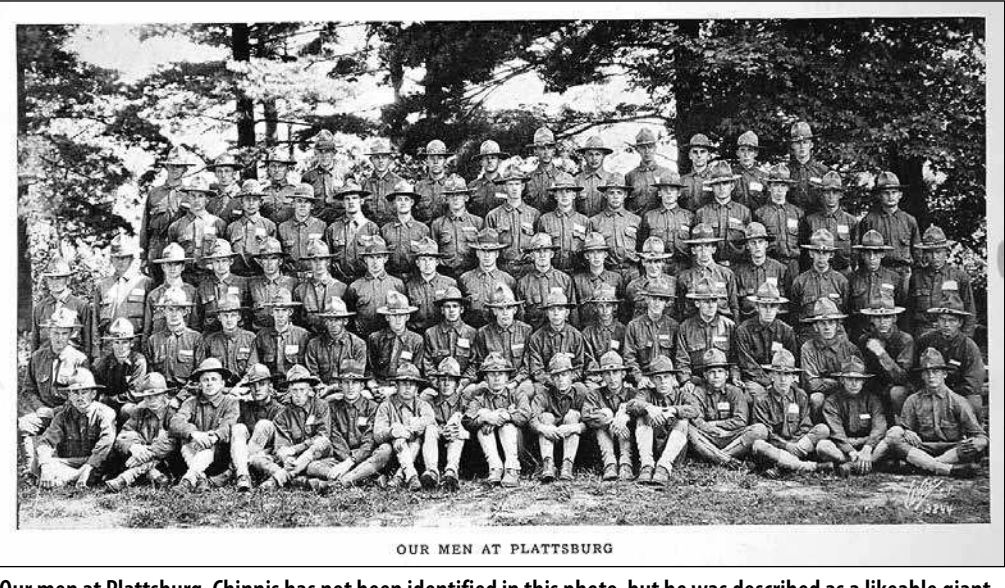
Chinnis passed away on July 8, 1960. He was laid to rest in New Hope Baptist Church Cemetery in Leland. No military marker is shown.

If you would like to help us honor Commodore Clarence Chinnis or another Brunswick County World War I veteran, email the Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range at ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com or go to caswellriflerange.com.

We have been hard at work with Daniel Norris from SlapDash Publishing on the book we plan to offer this year, "2020: Brunswick County in the Great War: Preserving the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range and the Legacies of the Men and Women Who Served."

The book covers the history and future preservation of the rifle range, and includes profiles and Snapshots of all of the courageous men and women from Brunswick County who served in WWI. These soldiers have been featured on the website and in the Beacon for nearly three years.

All 718 Brunswick County WWI veterans have been honored with a donation by people in the community. We thank the community for the amazing support! To see the veteran list with donors, go to the donor page on the website.

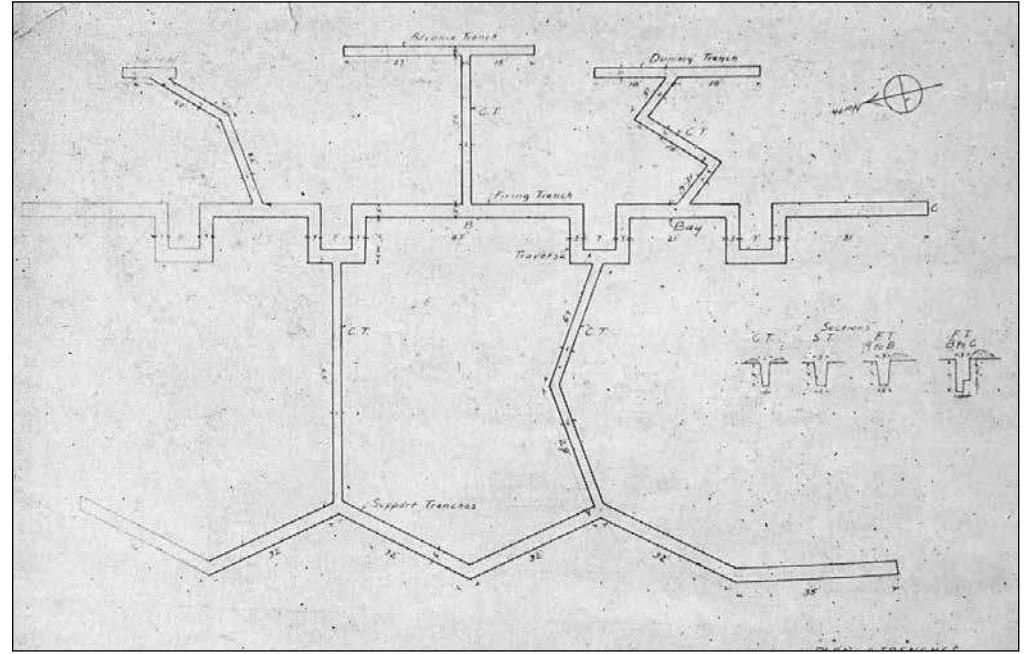


OUR MEN AT PLATTSBURGH

Our men at Plattsburg. Chinnis has not been identified in this photo, but he was described as a likeable giant in the local newspaper and stood at 6 foot, 1-inch, according to his WWI Draft Registration.

1  
Chinnis, Commodore Clarence 4,466,995 \*White \*Colored.  
(Surname) (Christian name) (Army serial number)  
Residence: Phoenix Brunswick NORTH CAROLINA  
(Street and house number) (Town or city) (County) (State)  
Enlisted to U.S. Army at [redacted] \*Inducted at LE Chapel Hill NC on Oct 5/18  
Place of birth: Phoenix NC Age or date of birth: Apr 24/99  
Organizations served in, with dates of assignments and transfers:  
Students Army Tng Corps University of N C to disch  
Chapel Hill N.C. to disch  
Grades, with date of appointment:  
Pvt  
Engagements:  
Wounds or other injuries received in action: None.  
Served overseas from None to None, from None to None  
Honorable discharged on demobilization Dec 9/18, 1918  
In view of occupation he was, on date of discharge, reported 0 per cent disabled.  
Remarks:

NC Service Card of Commodore Chinnis.



A diagram of the trenches that were created on campus.

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE  
P. M. C. O. [Signature] [Signature]  
FORM NO. 1 (Rev. 4-17)

Registration signature.