

WWI Profile: William Asbury Rourk Jr., 1898-1948

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Many records and photos were found for William Asbury Rourk and his family, along with unique details. As a result, this snapshot became lengthy. We hope readers will appreciate becoming acquainted with the many details as well as honoring the family sacrifices and commitment to their communities.

William Asbury Rourk Jr. was born in Wilmington, son of William Asbury Rourk Sr. and Sarah Helen Stone. The 1900 and 1910 Census shows the family remained in Wilmington. His father was described as a merchant of groceries.

According to The Wilmington Dispatch (1917, June 1; p. 6), William graduated from Wilmington High School on May 31, 1917. He was a freshman in the 1917-18 year at North Carolina University at Chapel Hill (now known as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), according to the 1918 yearbook, Yackety-Yack, p. 112. His residence was Wilmington and his area of study was science. A later yearbook referred to him as "Bill."

During military training at Chapel Hill, Bill served in Company D, which is documented in the 1918 yearbook beginning on page 180. The photo shows the university battalion. Recall that military training was offered at Chapel Hill before the Students' Army Training Corps (SATC) was created.

Previous posts on the website introduced the SATC and his fellow corps member from Brunswick County, Commodore Clarence Chinnis.

Like Chinnis, Bill did not

become eligible for the draft until the registration of Sept. 12, 1918. His draft registration shows he was a student at North Carolina University at Chapel Hill. He and his family resided in Shallotte, Brunswick County.

When the SATC became active in October 1918, William and Chinnis met the physical and educational admission requirements and volunteered. Both were accepted and ordered to report for duty on Oct. 5, 1918, at the University of North Carolina, a collegiate section from NC.

Photos of the SATC in Chapel Hill can be found in the 1919 yearbook. Pvt. Rourk served in Company D.

The Nov. 11 Armistice ended their training and the SATC was demobilized. Pvt. Rourk was honorably discharged on Dec. 10, 1918. Unlike Commodore Chinnis, Bill remained in college.

In the 1919 yearbook for the school year of 1918-1919, Wilmington was listed as his residence. Presumably, this was his residence when he re-enrolled at Chapel Hill in the spring of 1918. But recall that when he registered for the draft in September 1918, his address was Shallotte.

He was a junior during the 1919-1920 school year. The yearbook shows his residence as Shallotte.

He played basketball his first three years of college. He was a starting guard at 5 foot, 8-1/2 inches. The photos were taken during his junior year. In the team photo from 1920, he is seated at the far right in the front row.

Bill entered medical school his senior year, graduating a year later in 1922. He can be seen standing second from the left in the front line.

The description under his senior photo (shown here) includes his residence as

Shallotte, followed by mention of Mecklenburg County, which is the county of Charlotte. Confusing these two cities is a common mistake found in historical records at the time, as mentioned in Harvey T. Chadwick's WWI Profile.

His photo is displayed in the 1922 yearbook when he graduated from Medical School. Below his photo, the following words are printed:

"He had the reputation of being the scrappiest basketball player on the floor last year, and we were disappointed when medicine intrigued his interest this year. There is nothing of the artificial about him, for his friendships and work are both genuine. Carolina is proud to own him whether on the courts, in the classroom, or in life."

The 1930 Census shows he was married to Gertrude, a woman from Pennsylvania. They had a son, William Jr., age 1. His wife's mother was living with them. She had remarried and was widowed once more.

Curiosity about how he came to marry a woman from Pennsylvania led to some interesting information about her and her mother.

Gertrude Berg McDonnell was born in York, Pa., on March 5, 1903, to Emory Clair McDonnell and Gertrude Neal Fitzgerald McDonnell [Source: Baptism Record from Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Church and Town Records in Ancestry; Marriage License].

In 1910, her father was a salesman for an electric vacuum cleaner company. He passed away in 1912 at age 40. [Source: Death Certificate in Ancestry; obituary: The York Dispatch, August 16, 1912, p.2]

According to The York Daily, Oct. 6, 1915, p.3, her mother, Mrs. Gertrude

McDonnell, was appointed the new superintendent of the Christian Home and the House of Detention by a unanimous decision of the board of directors of the York Society to Protect Children and the Aged Persons. She would hold this position until April 1, 1921, as noted in The York Dispatch, March 2, 1921, p.10.

Daughter Gertrude (Bill's future wife) is listed as a resident of the home with her mother Gertrude the superintendent in the 1920 Census. Daughter Gertrude was 16 years old.

On August 30-31, 1921, according to The York Dispatch, p.13; and The Daily Record, p.5, a farewell party was held for Miss Gertrude McDonnell, who was leaving for Philadelphia where she would enter training at the Philadelphia General Hospital to become a public health nurse.

Interestingly, Mr. William Asbury Rourk Jr. arrived in Philadelphia in 1922 to become an intern at Philadelphia General Hospital, according to his AMA Physician File records. Presumably, medical intern Bill met nurse trainee Gertrude and fell in love.

According to The Charlotte Observer, July 25, 1924, p.7, William Asbury Rourk Jr. from Shallotte, was awarded a license to practice medicine in the state of North Carolina following examination.

On Sept. 27, 1926, Gertrude McDonnell and William Asbury Rourk, Jr. married, according to her flat marker in findagrave. Bill's AMA files indicate that they remained in Shallotte for a time, then settled in Myrtle Beach, S.C., where they remained until their deaths. He was reportedly the first physician to practice in Myrtle Beach, according to articles

(shown below) published near his death.

The 1940 Census is much like the 1930 Census, with the addition of another son, James Rodman Rourk.

On Dec. 22, 1944, Dr. Rourk's son, William Asbury Rourk, passed away from bilateral pulmonary. He was 16 years old.

On May 3, 1948, Dr. Rourk suffered a heart attack. As a long-time friend of the Myrtle Beach Air Base, which has since closed, the Air Force responded to an emergency call by flying in an oxygen tent and Air Force physician. They were unable to save him.

On May 19, 1948, Dr. William Asbury Rourk, age 50, passed away. He was laid to rest in Ocean Woods Memorial Cemetery in Myrtle Beach.

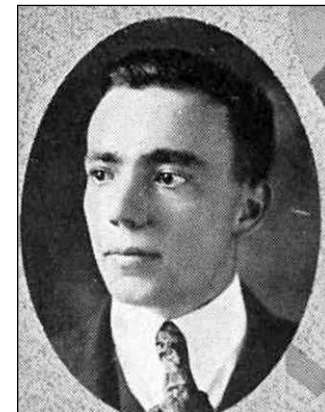
On March 6, 1964, his wife, who had since remarried, passed away.

Their only surviving son, James "Roddy" Rodman Rourk, was reportedly a teacher at Myrtle Beach High School from 1958 to 1966. He passed away at age 54 on Dec. 24, 1984. Some amazing tributes can be read on this Myrtle Beach High School alumni page. According to comments, he was a math teacher, Scoutmaster, award-winning coach, leader in his community, and "principled man providing positive leadership to everyone with whom he had contact."

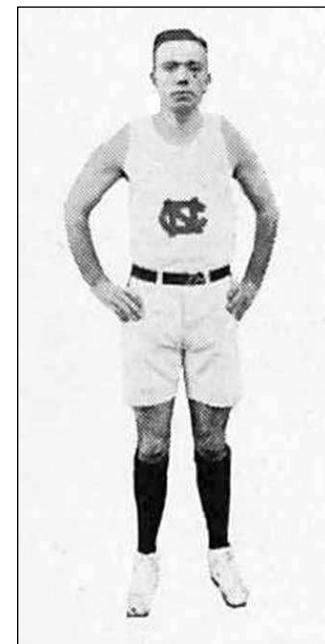
The WWI book, "Brunswick County in The Great War," arrived Oct. 22. To order a book, send a check for \$56, that includes shipping cost, to the following address: Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range, Inc., 5 Foxfire Trace, Caswell Beach, NC 28465.

Hardcopies are available on demand for \$70, plus shipping, upon request.

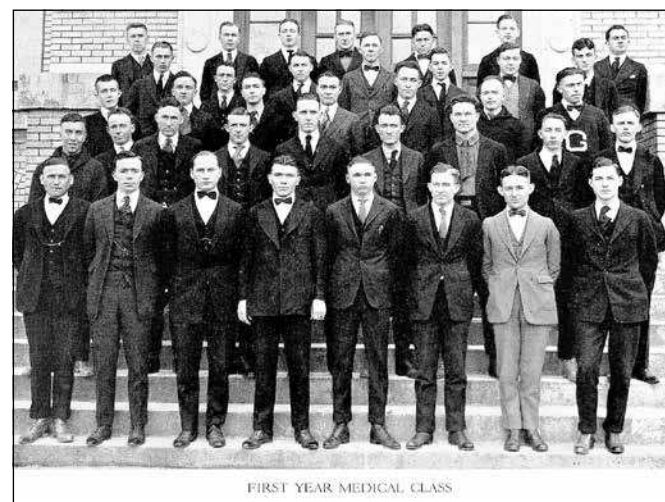
According to the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range, the publication has 584 pages and measures 8-1/2 x 11 inches and follows Brunswick County veterans through the war describing divisions, major battles, medals awarded and men who were killed in action, wounded, died of wounds or died of disease.



William Rourk's 1920 Yackety Yack junior photo.



William Rourk's 1920 basketball photo.



William Rourk's 1921 first year medical class photo. He can be seen standing second from the left in the front line.



William Rourk's Draft Registration signature.

Rourk, William A Jr 4,467,287 *White *Caucas.	
(Surname) (Given name)	
Residence: Shallotte Brunswick NORTH CAROLINA	(Street and house number) (Town or city) (County) (State)
Religious denomination: Baptist	Inducted at: Chapel Hill N C on Oct 5, 19 18
Place of birth: WASHINGTON N C	Age or date of birth: May 18 1898
Organizations served in, with dates of assignments and transfers: Students Army Reg U Div of N C Chapel Hill N C to 1918	
Credits, with date of appointment: Pvt	
Engagements:	
Wounds or other injuries received in action: None.	
Served overseas from 1918 to 1918	
Honorable discharged on demobilization: Dec 10/18	
In view of occupation he was, on date of discharge, reported 0 per cent disabled.	
Remarks:	

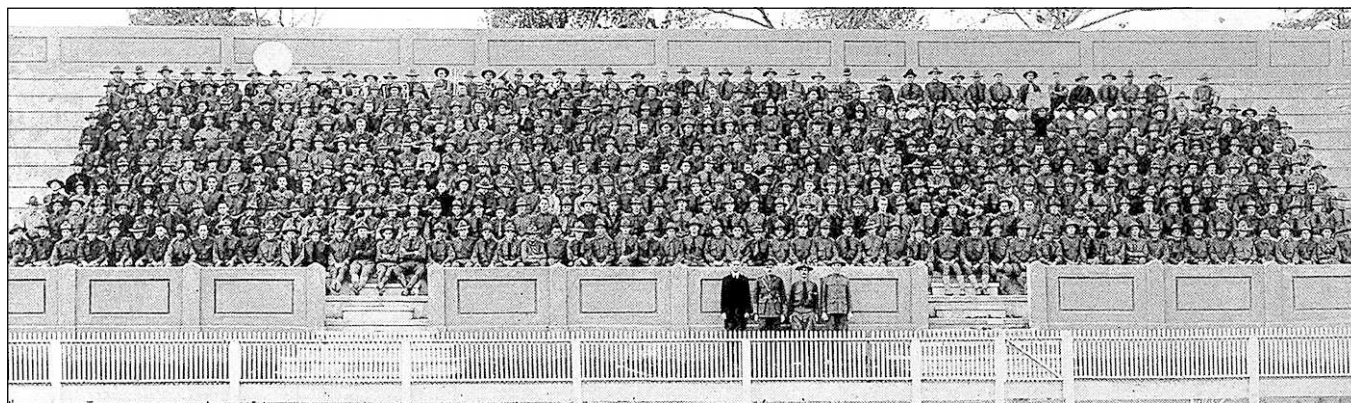
William Rourk's NC Service Card.

DR. WILLIAM A. ROURK OF MYRTLE BEACH ILL
MYRTLE BEACH, S. C., May 4.—Dr. William A. Rourk was seriously ill at his home here today after a heart attack Monday morning. He was reported somewhat better this morning. His condition worsened somewhat this afternoon. Dr. Rourk was the first physician to engage in the practice of his profession here, moving to Myrtle Beach from Shallotte, N. C., about 21 years ago. He is a member of the present town council and was a member of the first council following the incorporation of Myrtle Beach in 1908.

Charlotte Observer, May 5, 1948.

DR. ROURK DIES AT MYRTLE BEACH
MYRTLE BEACH, May 18.—(AP)—Dr. William Asbury Rourk, Myrtle Beach physician, died at his home here today after a two-week illness. He was 50.
A native of Wilmington, N. C., Dr. Rourk had been a resident of Myrtle Beach for about 25 years.
Survivors include his widow and a son, James Rodman Rourk, of Myrtle Beach, one brother and two sisters.
Funeral services will be held here tomorrow.
An air force C-47 from the Greenville air base yesterday flew an oxygen tent to Myrtle Beach for treatment of Dr. Rourk after he had suffered a heart attack.

Florence Morning News, May 19, 1948.



William Rourk's 1918 Yackety Yack military training picture.