

Rowan in the World presentation highlights historical relevance of chemical warfare

--by Chloe Smith

On Tuesday, Dec. 4, 2018, students gathered in the Chamberlain Student Center for a presentation by Glenn McDorman on the use of chemical warfare throughout history.

Glenn McDorman is a Psi Iota Fellow at Princeton University. In his presentation, he brought individual experiences of chemical weapon victims to life with emotional first-hand accounts and vivid historical photos.

McDorman also highlighted the cultural significance of chemical warfare. World War I was a turning point in how war was conducted. Suddenly civilians were being greatly affected by the horrors of war, whether it be through seeing soldiers come home with grotesque wounds from mustard gas, or the moral uncertainty of civilians producing the deadly weapons in factory jobs.

Psychologically, many soldiers also struggled. For example, phosgene gas would take two days to kill victims, leaving those who were subjected to the chemical agonizing over their own mortality for 48 hours following an attack. Years after returning from war, casualties also added up when veterans developed cancer from the chemicals introduced to their systems.

The Geneva protocols were made to set new guidelines following the war, making any use of these weapons a war crime, with less room for loopholes.

McDorman reminded students that chemical warfare is still significant today, used as recently as the war in the Middle East. A former soldier himself, he recalled a frightening memory during basic training, in which the army members were placed in a room and subjected

to gassing. Despite it being a controlled environment, the reasoning was lost on him in the moment, “I thought I was going to die, and so did everyone else.”

Students in attendance appeared fascinated with the presentation, many participating in the question and answer session that followed. This talk was a part of the Rowan in the World series. To find out more about upcoming speakers, check out the College of Humanities and Social Sciences’ Events page.