

1930s

HELEN FAIRCHILD (1885-1918) WAS ONE OF 21,000 AMERICAN WOMEN WHO SERVED AS VOLUNTEER NURSES DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR. SHE DIED IN EUROPE, PROBABLY FROM POISONING DUE TO HER WORK ON SOLDIERS WHO WERE CASUALTIES OF MUSTARD GAS. SHE REPRESENTS THE MILLIONS OF MEN - AND WOMEN - WHO VOLUNTEERED TO SERVE THEIR COUNTRIES IN THIS CONFLICT.

WHEN NELLE FAIRCHILD ROTE WAS IN FOURTH GRADE, HER TEACHER ASKED IF ANY STUDENT HAD FAMILY MEMBERS WHO HAD SERVED IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

MY AUNT WAS A NURSE, SHE SERVED IN BELGIUM.

THAT DOESN'T COUNT. SHE'S A GIRL.

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HELEN FAIRCHILD

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BUT NELLE KNEW HER AUNT'S SERVICE HAD COUNTED. SHE WAS WORKING AS A NURSE AT PENNSYLVANIA HOSPITAL IN PHILADELPHIA WHEN THE US ENTERED THE WAR, AND IMMEDIATELY VOLUNTEERED.

CASUALTY CLEARING STATION

BATTLE ZONE WITHIN FIRING RANGE

BASE HOSPITAL

ARTILLERY

FRONT LINES

TRENCHES

FEW AMERICAN TROOPS HAD ARRIVED, SO FAIRCHILD WAS POSTED TO A BRITISH ARMY BASE, HELPING IN SURGERY AND THE RECUPERATION OF CASUALTIES.

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MANY OF THE SOLDIERS WERE SUFFERING TERRIBLY FROM ILLNESS CAUSED BY MUSTARD GAS, AND THE NURSES SPENT HOURS WASHING THEIR BURNS.

SHE ALSO WORKED AT A CASUALTY CLEARING STATION, TREATING MEN WHO HAD BEEN WOUNDED ONLY HOURS BEFORE.

IN THE WINTER OF 1917, HOWEVER, SHE BECAME SICKER AND SICKER.

SHE PASSED AWAY JANUARY 18, 1918. AN AUTOPSY FOUND SHE WAS SUFFERING FROM A LIVER DISEASE COMMON TO SOLDIERS WHO HAD BEEN GASSED.

HER FINAL RESTING PLACE IS THE AMERICAN MILITARY CEMETERY IN BONY, FRANCE.

SHE IS HONORED WITH A MEMORIAL JUST OUTSIDE THE CEMETERY. SHE ALSO HAS AN AMERICAN LEGION POST AND A BRIDGE TO MEMORIALIZE HER.



WORLD HISTORY PROJECT
BIOGRAPHIES

HELEN FAIRCHILD