

# H-Net Reviews

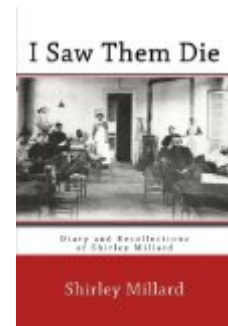
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Shirley Millard. *I Saw Them Die: Diary and Recollections of Shirley Millard*. New Orleans: Quid Pro Books, 2011. 100 pp. \$16.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-61027-023-6.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



American nurse Shirley Millard's wartime account, originally published in 1936 and now reprinted by Quid Pro Books for wider distribution, provides an important contribution to the primary source accounts of the First World War. Millard arrived in France on March 24, 1918, only days after the beginning of the First German Spring Offensive. She served as a volunteer in a French hospital ten miles from Soissons, France, and the periods of increased hospital activity recorded in her account parallel the First and Third German Spring Drives and the Battle of Chateau Thierry.

Of interest to readers will be the juxtaposition of Millard's diary entries with her reflections written at the time of publication in 1936. The diary entries are short. Only occasionally are names mentioned and often no details are given. Millard's reflections, published directly below each diary entry, add colorful detail to her original entries. Her diary entry on March 28, for example, only mentions that she is "Terribly busy" and has "no time to write" (p. 5). Her reflection details her inability to work fast enough to care of all the soldiers. She describes undressing a stomach wound and finding gangrene; seeing streaks left by tears on the face of a young, deceased sol-

dier; and hearing the continual "stabbing cries of pain" of hundreds of soldiers (pp. 6-8). Now a mother herself, her reflections also suggest a newfound awareness of the war's deep sacrificial meaning for the mothers of Europe and America. In her account young, innocent boys die gruesomely tortured deaths, and even medics and hospitals become vulnerable to war's indiscriminate destruction.

Foreword contributor Elizabeth Townsend Gard places Millard's work among the famous war generation writers and describes it as adding insight into the experience of women in the war. In addition, it will prove a valuable contribution to the history of medicine, as it examines the wartime hospital and its international atmosphere. Millard's prose is not as elegant as Erich Maria Remarque's or Robert Graves's, and little information about the author is available. However, her stories of hospital care have an immediacy that readers may appreciate. The language is clear and the book's short length makes it accessible for students. The defined dates, detailed events, and descriptions of hospital life also make this a valuable resource for scholars.

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