

## Edith Elizabeth Appleton Diaries - Volume 2 (25 July 1915 to 25 April 1916)

### September 1915

**1 September.** Practically no work – only one abdominal in ward. Had the half day off. Went to Bailleul to have lace making lesson - & then on to No. 8. made more lace (bad weather). Capt Shepherd came to tea, he is Aide de Camp to the General commanding 8th Div. He & the General were both nearly killed y[ester]day – they were up at the trenches when a German mine blew up. Luckily no one was killed – they saw one of our aeroplanes brought down in the German lines – both airmen killed – I stayed to dinner at No. 8. Very black walk back – no light at all from Heaven above or Earth beneath – to show up the irregularities & holes in the road. I was terrified of a man whom I heard but could not see – keeping pace with me whether I went fast or slow – at last he struck a match & I saw it was one of our own airmen & I gratefully walked the rest of the way with him. I have lost my Black Cat charm - & I had white heather sent me – both today – bed time.

**[September] 3rd.** 1 a.m. Three Sisters got their marching orders today – Tully & Coulter for No. 8 Gen – Rouen – Charlesworth for No. 3. Gen Letrepore [*No 3 General Hospital at Le Tréport*]. Very sorry they are going – I have been here months longer than they have but am very glad it is not I being moved. Drenching night. I came off duty at 2 to take Miss Tully's place on night duty. We are taking in - & so far have taken 2 Officers – 3 stretcher men - & 2 cars of "sitters". We may get a heavy convoy at 5. "Sick" after all this rain - & "wounded" after the firing that has been going on - There was a heavy bombardment by our guns this afternoon & evening – I should think easily 40 shots a minute – it just kept on – bang – whirr – whiz – bang – whiz – so loud - & for such a long time. This place – simply rattled with it. The Germans have been shelling our trenches too – shells looked to be bursting right in them this evening. Search & star lights – were very busy too.



#### Illustration of observation balloon

The R. N. D. [*Royal Naval Division ?*] have charge of these things & the men sometimes stay up for 20 hrs at a time. When there is wind it lurches & wobbles horribly & makes them seasick.

There is a man in the ward down below too well for the base – who is going back to duty tomorrow. He may be well as far as his wound is concerned but he is very nervy – He shouts out in his sleep - & thinks this place is surrounded by Germans.

The three who are leaving at 8 a.m. this morning had a joy ride to Pop[eringe] yesterday – they say the big church is a good deal knocked about - & on an average – 1 in 3 houses - smashed. There are still a few shops open & people about. It is getting colder & colder – & I sleepier & sleepier – only 7 hours & a bit more before the others come on.

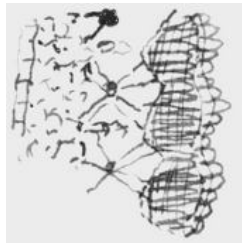
4:15am: Dawn is breaking & there is another big bombardment going on. I have been watching the flashes as they dart up many at a time & it is just a thunder of bangs & whirrs of shells all the time. The guns are big - & close – even the brickwork of this building shivers when they are firing.

[From loose sheets of notes for: **Sept 3.** Tully-Coulter & Charlesworth's orders came - [~~I am going on n~~] Appleton goes on night duty. Taking in day - Heavy bombardment by our guns.]

**[September] 4th.** 5 a.m. Last night 2 abdominals & 1 head case dying in ward 2. Others doing all right - No post - Saw 5 Sisters off to the Base yesterday - three from here - 2 from 8. There are only 4 of us now - until our 3 new ones come. Had a lace lesson y'day morning & brought my pillow back in the pouring rain - no joke - with a huge German umbrella & a wind as well - I have been making lace in my spare time tonight - had to unpick 3 times - but I think it is all right now. No guns tonight - but there were German shells bursting along the horizon & I could see flashes of guns - but heard no noise.

[From loose sheets of notes for: **4<sup>th</sup>**. The three left by the 8.8 a.m. - also - 2 from No 8. [~~I saw~~] Heavy guns - pouring rain.]

**[September] 5th.** 5 a.m. Very quiet night. The 3 who were dying last night still are - & the rest are getting better. Guns have been very loud again tonight. Since we have had these big ones round us - we have had torrents of rain - perhaps the firing causes it. When they started at 6 last night I was asleep - & woke with a tremendous jerk. I thought my own door had banged with all its might, but it was only the guns. I have made about 7 inches of lace tonight.



**My lace pattern**

[From loose sheets of notes for: **5<sup>th</sup>**. Miss Clement arrived in exchange for Charlesworth.]

**[September] 6<sup>th</sup>.** We are taking in tonight - only about 50 patients in so far. Got up at 6 p.m. & went for a walk with Miss Congleton - am paying for it now - by being abnormally sleepy. Miss Clements who came y'day - thinks I ought not to have been at a C.S. so long - "doesn't give other people a chance." Sorry I have not the distribution of Sisters - & am afraid I cannot do much in the matter.

[From loose sheets of notes for: **6<sup>th</sup>**. Taking in - not too busy.]

**[September] 7th.** Our 8 patients tonight all comfortable - Did shopping with Miss C yesterday morning... bought fruit & flowers in a charming old garden. We had to wait for some of the things, & to be truly rural - sat on a round white stone which we thought was the well cover - & admired the sunshine - & general beauty of colouring - sky etc., until we became aware of a horrid smell - and tumbled to the truth! We were sitting on an open cesspool!! I saw a gaudy & pathetic sight in the town - the funeral procession of a child. First walked the acolytes carrying a mace & incense, then a Priest - the 3 children - with a huge cross - one carrying it - & the other two one on each side holding ribbons that streamed from it. Behind that was the coffin borne on the shoulders of 4 little boys - still in socks - about 10 yrs old. The coffin was covered with a blue satin pall - & on it stood 3 silver (or tin) crowns - After all these came a long line of women and children. No men perhaps they are all away at the war.



Glorious day. I am going to market, then a lace lesson - then a walk if all be well. I made a stationary [*sic*] cabinet - & about 7 inches of lace in the night.

**[September] 8<sup>th</sup>.** Very quiet night. A Zeppelin was reported to be passing over us at 2 a.m. but I neither heard nor saw it. I went to market then a walk & bed. Latham called.

[From loose sheets of notes for: 8<sup>th</sup>. A Zepp reported passing over.]

**[September] 9<sup>th</sup>.** It was a Zeppelin overhead last night - have not heard where it went. Went for a lovely walk y'day morning through the fields towards Neuve Eglise - Weather was hot sunny still & perfect - in the far distance somebody's guns were booming. German I think - they were not very near. Nearer - a regimental drum & fife band was practising - & close round me the birds were singing - & the hops smelling strong. I stayed & enjoyed it until I was so sleepy - that I had to march in time to the music - to get myself along - coming back. This has been our taking-in day & we have only taken about 40, including 4 officers. Am dreadfully afraid of going to sleep - so will make a little lace now.

[From loose sheets of notes for: 9<sup>th</sup>. Took in only 40 including 4 officers -]

**[September] 10<sup>th</sup>.** Did some shopping & then went for a walk with Martin (No 2.) I am afraid she is a pessimist. Work slack - Guest night in Officers' Mess. 1 a.m. they are just going.

**[September] 12<sup>th</sup>.** Busy night. Some quite badly wounded people in.

Got up at 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon & went to tea with Miss Congleton in the fields - also learnt another stitch in lace making, a half stitch - not very difficult I think. May I be forgiven [*if*] it is wrong, but I made about 6 inches of lace in the night (Sunday) - as the only means of keeping myself awake between times of working in the wards. I had a letter from Miss Coulter y'day. She & Tully are loathing being at Rouen & a General Hospital, but we must all be prepared to take our turn at everything. Saw three small French boys who pleased me very much yesterday - the biggest one was drilling the other two - & giving all his commands in English. The two drilled smartly - just as correctly as any full blown soldier too - it was quaint to hear the two small objects ordered to "form fours" "right wheel" "quick march" "on guard" "point" "as you were" "attention" "Halt" "Stand at ease" "Dismiss" Some Tommies who were watching them were delighted with them. I am sitting in a field close by a garden of ripe hops - & the day is perfect - I wish the war were over. Our heavy guns are making a great noise pummeling away - & a German aeroplane is being fired out, so the outlook is not dull.

It is not surprising that some of these people are spies - walking through their horrid pavé slums - the dirty, undergrown - badly nourished creatures stare at us - as much as to say - "You in your clean clothes! What have we got." I fancy a good dinner means more than who wins the war to them & they would do anything for money & live equally miserably under the Government of any nation - Some of course are clean & charming, but some are bad!

[From loose sheets of notes for: 12<sup>th</sup>. Busy night. some quite badly wounded people in.]

**[September] 13.** Very quiet night - chiefly washed stockings & made lace & tried not to feel sleepy - Glorious sky all night and lovely sunrise this morning. A German aeroplane is being shot at - at the moment - but of course won't be hit.

[From loose sheets of notes for: 13<sup>th</sup>. Exciting air duel - between a German & Egh [*English?*] aeroplane - we won - brought the G down - not very far from here - the 2 Germans were not hurt - but they turned their maxim on to the Canadians - who were coming to take them prisoner - & were shot by the other Canadians who fired 2 volleys at them. One [~~was a~~] German was an officer of high rank - wearing all sorts of medals etc.]

**[September] 14<sup>th</sup>.** That's just where I was wrong - the German aviator was hit - not by shell - but by the maxim of the aeroplane who was duelling with him - it was one from our own Squadron piloted by Capt Miles - We watched the duel - it was most exciting. Our aeroplane was tilted right over on its side - to work its maxim & had to shoot straight upwards to hit the G[erman]. When he was hit he fell like a stone & grounded at Steenwerck in a Canadian Camp. The two G[erman] officers fired their maxim on the Canadians to give themselves time to start off before being taken prisoner. One Canadian was killed - & the rest were so infuriated - they

fired two volleys & killed both officers - One was a very smart person wearing all sorts of decorations including the Iron Cross. Our airmen are sorry they were shot, they think the Germans will make it an excuse for shooting our airmen when they are brought down in German territory.

I was watching 5 nuns - & 3 orderlies washing soldiers' shirts in the courtyard of the Convent at No. 8. The men were working the washing machines & mangle - & the nuns - 4 washing in one huge tub - & one rinsing in another. They were all chatting happily together - when a bell rang - the men stopped talking - one nun said prayers - & the other 4 asked the Virgin to hear them - at the end of each sentence - they went on with their washing just the same. It was quite picturesque to hear & see them. The garden is old fashioned & rather suited the nuns with their clogs & quaint head gears.

We hear that a big push is to be made this month and all along our lines - we three hospitals are putting up 50 marquees each - to be prepared for a rush.

**[September] 15th.** Nothing fresh. 3 concerts in town - I went to none from choice -

[From loose sheets of notes for: 15th. 3 concerts in town - some went to one. Heavy firing for 1/2 an hour in the night.]

**[September] 16th.** Quiet day & night - one very very ill man - & two very ill - the rest comfortable. Letter today saying Fred has offered his services as Army Chaplain - I think he will like the work very much.

There has been tremendously heavy firing tonight. It only last[ed] 1/2 an hour - it made such a noise & rattled the place so much that some of the Sisters got up to see if it was the Germans coming. They must have been tight asleep to think that because we could hear the whiz of the shells - after the explosion.

Have been trying a new lace pattern tonight.

**[September] 17th.** The town is to be closed from the 20th - no civilian to enter or leave it - & no market to be held - business at last I suppose. Perhaps after all I am lucky to get my night duty over before I am really due to begin it - the penalty of being the only old hand left. As I expect next month will be much busier than this - I wonder - wonder - what we are going to do - let's only hope it will be a successful push -

[From loose sheets of notes for: 17th. Town to be closed for 10 days - for the passage of troops.]

[From loose sheets of notes for: 19th. Miss McCarthy came

Capt Bell Irving had a nasty accident but cleverly did not hurt himself much.

Weather clear sunny cold.]

**[September] 20th.** Miss McCarthy came yesterday - she told Miss Denton she was going to move me soon - I had been here a very long time. I wish she would mind her own business & let me mind mine.

Quiet night. An aeroplane has just shot up in pursuit of a German one - the A. A. guns are shooting at it too. Capt. Bell Irvine had a nasty accident yesterday - his engine went wrong & he fell smash to earth. Luckily he is a splendid pilot & saved himself all injury except a scratch & the machine will be repaired all right.

The nights are getting very cold indeed. I made about 2 inches of lace but was kept rather busy with a dotty pneumonia. He has rather a down on me because he says he came just to see how I was getting along - & I have kept him all this time. The nights and days are glorious cold sunny & autumnally clear. Good for walks. I am sorry to leave this unit & wonder where I will go next. Rouen or Boulogne I suppose.

**[September] 22nd.** Everything is as usual & quiet still. The town is closed & hundreds & hundreds of troops are passing through on their way up - it is a sickening & heart rending sight! These long columns of fine healthy cheery men marching so gaily to the music of drum & fife bands - & they must know as we do that a great many will not come back - & a great many more - spoilt - heads smashed - or short of a limb or something sad. I had a lace lesson

this morning & was much interested in stories the little girl was telling me of when the Germans were here. A great many of the inhabitants were disloyal & cheered "Vive les Allemands" when the Germans marched in. I have made up my mind never to buy a farthingworth again at a shop I have dealt at. The people here had German soldiers guarding their house against the German soldiers. I suppose they are spies. At Méteren a place two miles out - a little boy ran in to tell his Mother the Germans were here - & went out again to look at them. When the Mother came out they jeered at her & asked her where her boy was - she said she didn't know - & they uncovered a hole in the side of the road & showed her the child lying with his throat cut - then they cut hers & put her in beside him. The inhabitants of Lille were made to nurse the German wounded - 3 girls who were there said that one day 3 German 3 English & 2 French wounded were brought to their house - the officer said the Germans were very ill & must be well cared for - then he took the French & English into the garden & shot them - & buried them - before they were quite dead.

This is a most glorious moonlight night. An aeroplane has just whirred its engine - I wonder if it is going up. I hear there is to be a bombardment at dawn today. I shall soon know - as it is only 2 hours to dawn now. The big explosion which we all thought was a shell on Sunday night was one of our own mines exploding. There was another big bang at 10 p.m. tonight that they say was one of our own big guns. It rattled this place so much - that I made a special visit to see if it had frightened any of the very ill patients. Now I must quickly write some letters while for the moment I am not feeling deadly sleepy. I wrote to you last night to thank you for so kindly sending me some bulls eyes - & clothing for the men.

4:30 a.m. Things are beginning to stir. Dawn is showing in the E & from that part of the horse shoe of guns that surround us - boomings have begun - & everything indoors that will rattle is rattling at each fresh boom. There is an engine panting in the aerodrome - waiting to be off on some business at a moment's notice I suppose. As dawn lights up more of the sky - more guns will begin I suppose - at present their flash would give away their position too badly. I can hear rifle fire in the distance when I am at the window. I wonder where those poor creatures are - the hundreds of young ones unbaptised with fire - who went up yesterday - Braveness & good luck to them now.

By the way, I forgot to tell you what a man told me. Several of them were billeted on a farm - & every night some on picket duty were shot by a sharpshooter. They could not find out where the man hid himself until one day they caught him red handed & Lo! & behold - it was their host himself - he farmed & talked to them all day - & crept out with his rifle & sniped them at night. So like them!

[From loose sheets of notes for: **22<sup>nd</sup>**. Hundreds & hundreds of troops passing through the town.]

**[September] 23.** I don't think we have ever had such a continuous "rumble" & "thump" of guns as tonight. They have been going all the time sounding like an angry woman banging at an iron door - that resounds. & now - 4.30 a.m. the nearer ones are waking up - & joining in - The windows & doors have kept up a gentle rattle all night. Received a parcel from Hilda today - bags - chocs - & books - all very welcome.

The night has been uneventful except for one patient - a mental one - who has been rather like a religious maniac all night - deploring his evil ways - & declaring he is doomed.

Got up early yesterday - & went to tea at No. 8. & made a little lace - c'est tout. An officer told me today that our whole line was ready to make the big push - they were only waiting for orders giving them the date & time.

[From loose sheets of notes for: **23<sup>rd</sup>**. Heavy bombardment by our guns all night & day. Could see German shells bursting on the horizon - through the night. Huge fire - I should think a farmhouse blazing somewhere towards the east.]

**[September] 24<sup>th</sup>.** Quiet night on "take in". Two poor things with smashed heads were brought in at 10.30 - one is already dead - the other dying. Guns quieter but going most of the time - yesterday morning from 4 to 1/4 to 5 they were going at the rate of 62 a minute or more. We just counted as accurately as we could - but there were others firing at the same time which did not get counted. No lace tonight - horrid bad headache. Only admitted about 20 altogether.

**[September] 25<sup>th</sup>.** Tonight has been quite a revelation of what war can be like - I think I have told you that we are in a horse shoe shape of guns all round us - Tonight all the guns round us have been going without ceasing. It has been a panorama of vivid flashes of light from the guns - & the huge bursts of fire where shells are bursting & the rumble, thud - rumble - roar - the whole night. I shall be surprised if we are not very busy after this. Walking past every window in every direction except one - is like walking past a fence with chinks - & the sun glints into your eyes a few times every second. Just now there is a huge fire blazing - it looks like just behind the trees about a mile off, but I am sure it is further than that. It has not been a succession of starlights - bursting shells - & gun flashes - they have all been going all the time. The star lights look like so many Jupiters or Venuses thrown up into the sky - & they float down - It is quite the biggest bombardment I have seen & shall be surprised if we do not fill up after it. I think some of the shells bursting have been our own because I hear the gun & a few seconds after see the yellow burst of the shell. We are quiet so far. No. 8 are taking in - we cleared right out except 15 patients yesterday - in the intervals of watching the bombardment I am making lace & writing this.

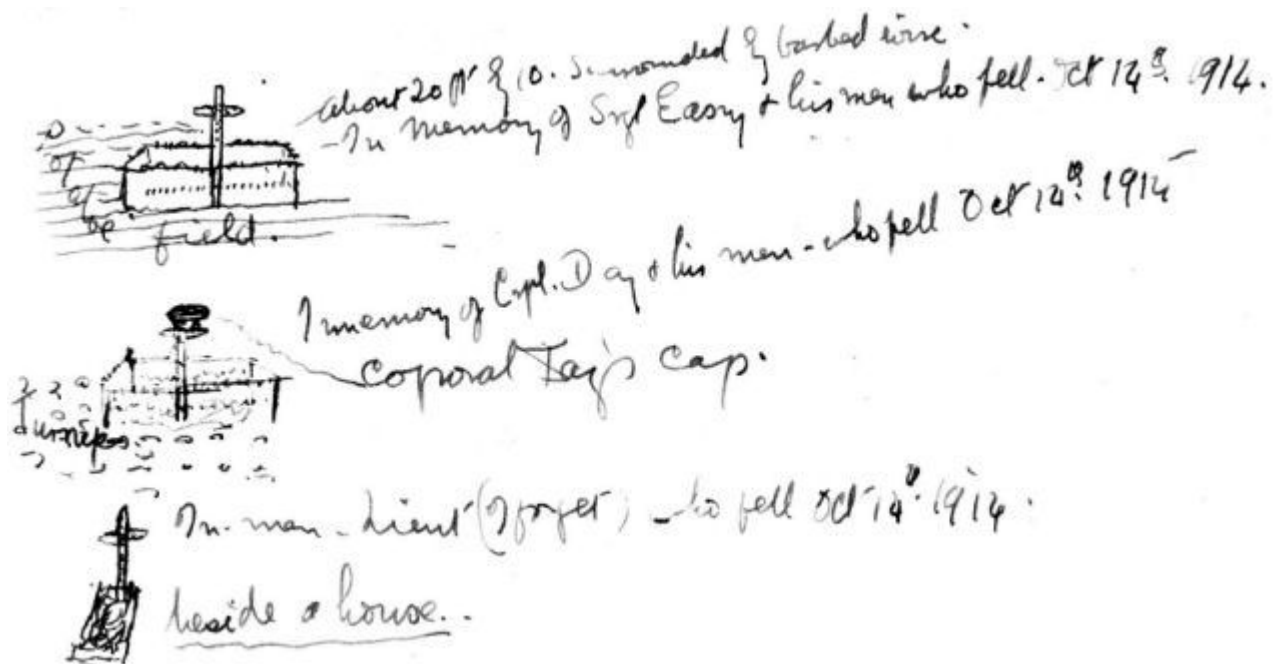
**[September] 26<sup>th</sup>.** Very busy night - extra nurse on night duty

[From loose sheets of notes for: 26<sup>th</sup>. Our Army made a push - we acted as overflow for the stations that serve the second army.

all the hospitals here were soon filled - We took about 20 Prussians in.]

**[September] 27<sup>th</sup>.** Our first Army made a push yesterday, which started things going - in the hospitals - We really serve the 2nd Army - but we acted as overflow - & all three of us were soon filled with the wounded - The news on the whole is good - we seem to have advanced a little, & taken a great many prisoners - the French have done splendidly. The wounded we have are not nearly so bad as those we had from Hill 60. Perhaps the worst have gone to Merville and Sillars [?] & places down South. The C. O. asked for my particulars at the office yesterday - I suppose it means a move soon.

Went for a walk with Kelsey (No. 8) this morning to Méteren - where the graves of the Warwicks - who were killed there are. Pathetic little cemeteries in turnip & potato fields or in people's gardens.



We took in about 20 Prussian wounded last night - great strong clean looking creatures they are too!

**[September] 28<sup>th</sup>.** Very sorry - I had a letter saying you had been ill again. O I do hope you will soon be better - was much pleased that you thought my first attempt at lace was not bad.

News is excellent the French & we have advanced all along the line, 5 kilometres in some places. So our casualties were not in vain this time. We have one young officer still in who was too ill to travel yesterday - suffering from a lung wound & badly from shock. He cannot sleep even with the help of morphine & keeps on muttering things like, "The men were in such horrid shapes" "Little bits & big bits of men" - "Get the men in - they will all be killed" & so he rambles on - evidently his mind has never left the battlefield. He does not look much like getting over it - but youth & a strong body can stand a good deal. Went for a lovely long walk to Mt. Noir with Wheatley (the new one) yesterday morning. We were both on duty last night, although we were quite slack. I slept from 10.30 to 12.30 then after 1 a.m. slept went off till 6. I made a little lace in the night. It is a glorious morning & the German aeroplanes are already astir & being shot at by our guns. Our aeroplanes are also out, but up to now I don't see any German shots in the sky.

[From loose sheets of notes for: **28<sup>th</sup>**. All or most evacuated.

We hear we have advanced all along the line 5 kilometres in some places.

1 officer too ill to evacuate still in]

[From loose sheets of notes for: **29<sup>th</sup>**. German aeroplanes very busy all day - none hit]

**[September] 30<sup>th</sup>**. No evacuation today, so we have the same family as last night - the man with most of his insides outside who was so very ill all night died during the day & tonight another, shot in the lungs is, I am afraid dying - anyway he is terribly ill & the funny old Daddy who was kicked in the stomach by a horse is also very sorry for himself - but I think he is doing quite well. It has been raining on & off for 48 hrs & it is like walking about in a duck pond - gum boots, mackintosh coat & skirt - meet the occasion. Very few guns tonight. They have been many & near today & an officer has warned us to be prepared for ever louder firing. I made lace at No. 8 this morning & left my pillow there as it was too rainy not to. A man in the ward was telling me tonight what an abject picture some Germans made who were giving themselves up - they looked not like men as they came across shaking & trembling like leaves - shambling along, some with hands up all more or less wounded, ragged & hungry. The news tonight is quite the best we have heard. 3 Divisions, Cavalry & all of the French have broken through, the German lines at the Champagne District & have got them on the run - long may they stay so! & the French have taken the 3 front lines of trenches at Souchez. We have done well & so have the Russians. Letter from Hilda - she is a good old dear & writes about twice at least every week. It is a cold night. I have put a towel over the mackintosh table - a blanket to sit on - & a roll of wool to put my feet on & am very sleepy. The second night Sister has gone for a doss - as we are slack again & do not really need two. In fact I prefer being on alone. Am hoping very much that you are better.

[From loose sheets of notes for: **30<sup>th</sup>**. No evacuation. It has rained all day & night. Guns quiet.]

[From loose sheets of notes for: **31<sup>st</sup>**. *[No such date! - Ed]* We hear tonight that 3 Divisions of the French cavalry & all have broken through the G lines in the Champagne district. The French have taken 3 lines of trenches at Souchez - & we have done well - & the Russians too - work slack again.]