

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

November 1915

1.11.15. All Saints Day. Pouring without ceasing all day. There was a service held in the Soldiers Cemetery this afternoon - for all our Tommies who were lying there. It was quite impressive. They had made a mound nicely done with paths round & flowers in & a flag staff in the middle flying the Union Jack & tricolour flag half mast high - Four chaplains took the service - & the Earl of Cassilis & several Staff Officers were in the middle round the flag staff - then all along the paths by the graves were lines & lines of Tommies & in another patch officers & Sisters (9 from the 3 hosps). First we sang two hymns - "For all the Saints who from their labours rest" & "Through the night of doubt & sorrow" - then some prayers - & a splendid short address. Hymns were - 1st "Oh God our help in ages [*past*]" then "For all the Saints who from their labours rest". Then after the sermon "Through the night of doubt & sorrow" & after the Blessing - "God Save the King". It was a simple little service - but I don't think one could forget it. The whole crowd of us - standing there & singing & joining in the service in the pouring rain & thick mud - with the guns booming away to Eastward of us & these pathetic graves marked by a simple wooden cross. Just outside - in the ordinary town cemetery crowds of French civilians stood watching.

[Very faint pencil sketch of this scene between the text here but not clear enough to reproduce.]

The chaplain gave a sensible address - not one to make the Tommies weep - as they so easily do. He said we had come "to rejoice over the loyalty & devotion of the men who had died - not to mourn over their death" - & he felt sure if they could have had it otherwise they wouldn't & it was quite true that "we faintly struggle - they in Glory shine." We took wreaths to the graves of our four orderlies & the young Officer who died the other night & to two other Officers. Bought lace in the town for Capt. Hey. Tea at No. 8. back in a luxurious car - of a Canadian. He picked up & said "These roads are bad for you girls" & gave me a lift. Nice of him - He was in from the trenches & says they are terribly wet. The poor Canadian is still dying but not dead. We have only two patients left in Ward 2.

[November] 2nd. Saw some reinforcements going up yesterday with some such tired hobbly old men amongst them. I did wish they could have been taken out of it & sent back. Went to town this afternoon to do shopping for the mess - 2 cauliflowers 2 lb. sausage (none for me thank you) 1 lb. tomatoes 1 lb. grapes - a huge bundle of leeks, ointment envelopes etc etc. & I was going to carry them all back - in the pouring rain - and wondered how. Mr. Stragnel FC Officer - kindly settled it by taking me in, in his car an F.C. lorry - he got out at his billet and lent me his car to do my shopping in - then we picked him up on the way back. We have not taken in much today. The poor Canadian died at 3:30 a.m. & the abdominal has been operated on and I think will die. One charming man I was writing a letter for tonight - told me he could not write very well as his education hadn't been looked after much. His father was killed when he was one year old and his mother died from the shock. He was passed from farm to farm until he was seven when he ran away and joined a circus - then his good days began - before that he was sometimes short of food and had only a little shirt & breeches & no shoes and socks. His brother was through here a month ago with one eye shot out - he is back in Canada now. I hear there has been a big row amongst the M.Os & that we are to have another O. C. - wonder what it is all about. A biggish convoy is arriving - or at least it sounds big - but it all seems to make more fuss at night than in the daytime - Guns not much in evidence today. Miss McC. Not come yet. Capt. M. R. T. on leave tomorrow. Mr. Leach has gone to his regiment R. Scots. Hutchinson on night duty visa [*sic*] Miss Middleton now ward 1. German shells have been bursting very audibly today & our guns are taking their turn tonight. The Canadian who died this morning was so much worried all day - he said he had to go on "Sentry" that night & did not feel well enough. After much careful explanation I got him to understand that he was not to go on duty but that he was going to his Mother (dead) & he was delighted - He was off his head poor man. I don't think I ever told you that the Mayor of Pop[er]inghe] was had up for a spy after we left.

[November] 3rd. Quite the muddiest day I have known. Miss Middleton & I went for a walk this afternoon – & found the roads so deep in mud – we tried a different way coming back – through St Jans Capelle but to our dismay they were worse – so bad, that we had to give up – & simply walk through deep mud – our whole feet were hidden when they were down. At last we met a man & asked if we had better go back or keep on – He said “go on – it is shorter – but you have not come to the worst bit.” So on we went & found the worst bit was where a lorrie had quite broken up the road & it was a pond – but by that time we didn’t care – & just waded through it – The traffic was constant, lorries & cars – & motor bicycles & each one sent a wave of filthy mud right up to our heads. We decided not to go for a walk again after so much rain. We evacuated all but 4 of our *p/atient*s this morning, but they are a sad 4. two abdominals – dying – 1 man hit in the lungs - thank God – I think will get better – & perhaps the saddest of all – a man with a bullet wound through his big toe “self inflicted” at least that is why he is being detained on suspicion. They are the sad people poor things perhaps when shells are bursting all round them they feel they must do something, to save themselves for the wife & children at home & in a moment of madness shoot themselves. He has told 3 different tales of how it happened – the last one to his wife. Dear Wife – I hope this finds you & the children quite well – I am slightly wounded – so don’t send any more letters & parcels until I am back in the trenches. I think I shall be all right again soon. I was cleaning my rifle & being greasy another man pushed me & mine went off. Yr. loving husband, William. The first tale was that it was done by shrapnel, then that a shell made him jump so that his own rifle went off. Poor thing – he has my sympathy.

Guns have been very noisy & tonight the star shells are many – & very bright.

[November] 4th. Lovely day. Heavy firing by the batteries near us – the taubes have been trying to find them but I hope have not succeeded. Off this morning drove to town in the car of a man who passed through this hospital in June – he remembered me but I did not him. He & six other Officers are under orders for Servia [*Serbia*] – so is Maj. Ormrod. Stopped in town – visited No. 8 & got a lift all the way back in an ambulance. I tried to get a lift, because the roads are the worst I have ever seen once you are off the pavé – which is clean of course. Two abdominals still very ill indeed – we take in tomorrow.

[November] 5th. We have had rather a busier taking in day – but fortunately not many very bad cases. 1 (smashed head) was found dead in the ambulance & two died soon after admission also heads – 1 abdominal much better – 1 worse – they were equal y’day. An aeroplane was brought down a mile off – within sight of us – don’t know Eng. or German. No letters fairly fine - cold.

I simply CANNOT write my diary on taking in night the ambulances make such a horrible noise under my window - & sound so many - & I am wondering all the time what they have brought - 20 - have fizzled up & turned round under my window & gone - already. & they are still coming.

[November] 6th. I am writing this beside my poor little abdominal boy. He is quite off his head today & when he does rouse up & talk asks me if he is being punished that he has all this pain to bear. I have tried hard to make him understand that he has done splendidly & it is an honour to be wounded like he has been - Went for a lonely walk to Mt. Noir in the mist & mud for autumn leaves.

Major Ray came back to the OC, Maj Mc— has gone - & we don’t ask why. Capt Collard came to lunch. 4 of the Sisters are going to a whist drive at No 2. Miss D was distinctly (?) because I refused to go. We evacuated 36 from this ward. 3 to heaven - 1 to a place where the less fortunate ones go to - who are marked “S.I.” which means self-inflicted & the rest towards England. Some big explosions a mile or so off & heavy gun firing.

[November] 7th. Little abdominal boy died quite peacefully at midnight. Quiet day. Went to 7o’c but not parade service. Weather foggy - cold -

[November] 8th. Very heavy day indeed - an extraordinary high per centage of seriously wounded - out of 28 admitted to my ward - all except 4 were very bad indeed - 3 or 4 have been to the theatre - & more are to go - & still they come - 10 p.m.

[November] 9th. A very busy day, with intakings - & evacuations by train & by death - & the 15 who stayed are extremely ill. The day's work feels like walking miles quickly being bombarded right & left with requests for water - morphia, to be lifted up, turned over, etc, etc. & all the time we are trying to get the routine work done - dressings, feedings, etc. & if one were divided into 6 - all the bits would be busy.

[November] 10th. Very busy day - of lifting very heavy men - poor dears. I'm afraid they don't know how heavy they are, or they would not ask to be lifted up so often. I really do not know what the weather has been like, because there has been no time to notice it. One of our own aerodrome machines had a nasty accident today - in coming down the wind blew it into some high trees, where one plane caught & the engine & men fell to the ground - luckily the officers on board her were not killed - both were concussed, & 1 had his shoulder dislocated & a rib broken - both were brought to Ward 2 where we sorted them out - & after they had been examined they were sent to the Officers Ward

[November] 11th. A very busy day - admitted some very serious cases - amongst our lot, some are dying - Raining & cold second half of day. A huge convoy has just come in & I can hear the Theatre is in use - it is under my bedroom. My arms are really too tired to write tonight.

[November] 12th. Very busy in Ward 2, until after evacuation - then handed over to Wheatley - & took on the Officers Ward. It is the first time since I joined the unit, that I have not been in theatre or heavy surgical ward - & I just don't know what to make of it. Went to town in the pouring rain after lunch. Hear that our artillery has smashed the German H.Q. at St. Quinton [*St. Quentin*] - & an ammunition train.

Am quite pleased to have a light ward for a time but should like to go back to "2" again.

[November] 13th. Taking in day - No patients in Officers Ward. This afternoon Gen. Porter & Col. Geddes came to inspect the place. They want a Rest Camp for a regiment & think of lending them us - until something else can be arranged. Fancy being a rest camp! Gen. Porter says we are losing 1,000 men a week - for the want of resting them in time. Tonight the Bishop of Kartoum [*Khartoum*] held a confirmation in the Chapel of "No 2." Eight of our orderlies were confirmed - Miss D, Miss M & I went.

He gave them a very good - simple little address.

[November] 14th. Bishop Gwynne took Parade Service here today. I did not go - but believe it was appreciated by those who did. I had 6 officers in tonight - not at all bad - Freezing hard.

[November] 15th. Chiefly remarkable for the concert held to get some money for the Fund for British prisoners in Germany.

We evacuated all 6 officers & took two more in who stayed. They belonged to our aerodrome - & had a nasty accident. Their machine would not rise & would have rammed into the fence full force, but the pilot had the presence of mind to steer so that the engine made for our gateway. The planes smashed into the gate posts & were broken up. One man was only shaken - the other had a nasty scalp wound as well.

One dear old officer was very charming - He told me last night it was such a long time since had talked to women & today the poor old thing wept & said "God bless you" when he went - I suppose it was his long abstinence of not talking to our kind upset him. Went for a walk to Mt. Noir with M. Mud filthy & about a foot deep in places - & I lost one of my fur gloves & am disgusted. I loathe the mud of this filthy place. The sky tonight is wonderfully beautiful with planets, stars & moon all shining brightly.

Mr Gregory & Mr Howe took us to the Concert in a funny old motor thing that had been under fire fairly often & was not improved thereby. The 13th Batt. Canadian Scottish pipers played in the Interval - 10 minutes without a stop. It was a glorious noise of bagpipes & drums - they

brought their regimental mascot - a goat, with them & while they were making that deafening noise, it walked calmly amongst them - sniffing them - & eating little bits of dust. It wore a handsome silver collar. The first half was the Canadian Minstrels - after the interval "The Casualties" did the rest. They were excellent - a troop consisting chiefly of orderlies & got up by Capt McKenzie - at No 2 Casualty Clearing - at the end we sang the Marseillaise - & then God Save the King - As soon as the beginning chord for our National Anthem was struck - every man in the place stiffened & stood at attention - & we all sang it with great gusto - The place was packed with all sorts of troops - Padres - Staff Officers & about 9 Sisters, so I hope they took a fair amount of money.

[November] 16th. Received orders to proceed on arrival of relief to Gen. Hosp No 1, Etretat. Constable & Bond from No 8 are going too. A tremendous bombardment is going on tonight - sounds like continuous heavy thunder.

[November] 18. "Abancourt" 9 p.m. We left Bailleul at 8:08 - got to Boulogne in time for lunch - Miss Congleton met us & took us to the Louvre fed us & saw us off at 2:19. Then we crept here - & were turned out at 8:30 - decided to go no further & put up at this Buffet. Very comfortable - room each - ripping bed - two mattresses - which I can tell you is lovely - after none. We had lunch early & meant to get tea in the train but there never was any to get - we asked at every station but had no luck - lots of times French Red Cross ladies popped a money box for collections but that didn't refresh us much - So we waited till we got here then we did all drink tea & ate fruit until we didn't feel thirsty any more. Can't remember all the places we came through - Wimmereux [*Wimereux - near Boulogne*], Fontanette [?], [*Calais - but crossed out*], Boulogne, Le Trepore, Le Touquet, Abbeville, Etaples (swarming with hospitals) - in huts houses, hotels - under canvas - etc.

Lady Gifford's place - that she has lent to tired nurses looks lovely - all wild & sandhills. I think I must be liverish my eyes will not keep open. If you were to guess for a month - you would still be surprised at where I slept last night - In the Officer's ward. My room leads out of it. I wanted to pack my bed - there were no patients in & I didn't care a straw if the orderlies came so I put a screen round bed no. 9 and slept there. The Orderly Officer came in at 11:30 - & said he was going to sleep there it was too cold on the stretcher downstairs & when the night Sister tried to put him off he said - "what are you so fussy about there is no one here is there?" & buzzed his torch up the ward - she little fool said "oh no". So he slept in bed 2 quite a long way off - but there it was - & I lay stiff as a mackerel until I heard him snore - before I dare move & I was up at 6 - & away before anyone else was the wiser. Miss Hutch[*inson*] & I went along to the Night Sisters' Bunk at 2 a.m. for a farewell tea fight.

In the train between Abancourt & Rouen. We spent a very comfortable night at the Buffet; a room each - most comfortable bed. I had no watch nor matches, so there was nothing for it but to sleep. Constable left her suitcase in our last train & it has gone on to Paris. We hope to recover it. I left my mackintosh somewhere, so I am afraid it is a gone-er. Madam made us an excellent omlette this morning - the rolls & butter were good too.

The whole life at the Inn reminded me of the Scarlet Pimpernel. All the time French officers & soldiers were in & out - sitting down at the tables & banging until they were waited on. Some dressed in most glorious uniforms & fur coats & the suave French people serving everyone so attentively & politely.

There is a thick white fog this morning & the snow that has been falling the last 4 days is still unthawed - We are going through pretty bracken covered woodland & ploughed fields white with snow.

[November] 20th. In the train between Rouen & ?. I had a most amusing time at No. 8. Miss Clements the Matron came out with us (No 14) on board the "Palm Branch" which you know all about. I called on her in her office & had a little chat - & she invited me to spend the night there instead of putting up at a Hotel. So after taking the others to town & fixing them up at the Hotel Dieppe & after doing a little necessary shopping & seeing the place, returned & was made welcome by Gascoigne - an old Bart'site whom before I only knew by name. We Tully Coulter & Matthews dined with Matron - & later minus Matron - we had a tea party in Tully's hut. At 10:30 I went to bed - Sick Sisters' ward - & was much entertained & amused there. A

V.A.D. took care of us - warmed my bed (first bed - after Abancourt for over a year) not counting the mattressless camp variety. At 6 a.m. she brought me tea & filled my bath - a proper big one. Sisters can be just as exacting fussy old patients as any one else - I find. Went to 7.30 breakfast then walked to town to gather the others.

Went to the Cathedral for a short time alone - & enjoyed it.

It is no use for me to try to describe Rouen Cathedral it is too great a task, but it is beautiful specially the little chapel behind the altar. I saw the place to advantage - Standing at the Western end & looking up the long aisle & chancel where a dear old priest in magnificent robes was conducting a service, the organ was playing some soft chant - & the little choir boys in their scarlet & all with the sun shining on them from the side windows - was really beautiful.

[November] 21. Étretat We arrived here at lunch time yesterday & were kindly welcomed. The place is charming - cold - wild - high cliffs - rocky shores - sandhills like home - the inevitable Casino & multitudes of Hotels where the Casino followers live during the season. Found two people I knew - an old Nottingham Childrens' Hosp. Nurse & one of our batmen who was my patient at St. O. last winter.

[November] 28th. Never spent such a calm week - for a long time - not much work to do - have slept well eaten well - & walked a good deal.

Our Padre is going up the line tomorrow to Bailleul or Béthune or somewhere - lucky devil - wish I were.

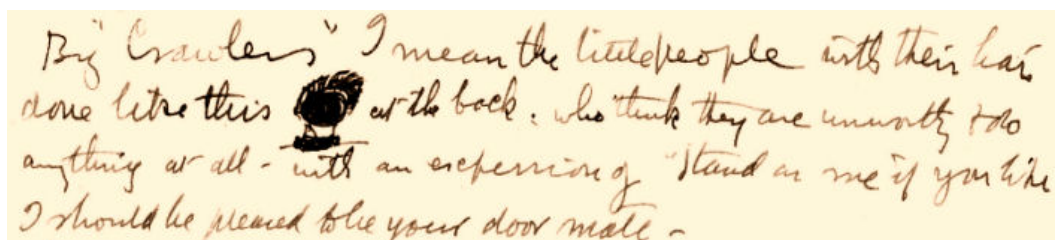
[November] 29th. 4 pts to CC 4 to England. Off for half day - could not do much as it was pouring with rain - & I have no mack - or umbrella. A torpedo destroyer & a submarine went past - quite close in this afternoon, patrolling the coast.


8 p.m. & the only thing left to do is to go to bed. I wrote a French letter to my little French girl today - she is a smart child if she makes head or tail of it. The V.A.D.s are a source of great interest to me - taking them as a bunch they are splendid. They may be roughly divided into 4 sorts - "Stalkers", "Crawlers", the irresponsible butterflyers & the sturdy pushers -

At the moment I am thinking of a butterfly one - who is on night duty in these wards & says with a light hearted laugh - "It's rippin' nursin' the men great fun, when I was in the Officers' ward I did housework all the time - great fun - but there men are really ill - great fun" - When I show her how to do anything fresh, she twitches to get at it & says "oh do let me try - I'd love to do that simply love to." She is an aristocratic little person most dainty & well groomed - & the thought of her doing scrubbing & dusting all day - makes me smile.

The "Stalkers" are nice girls very lordly with high pitched cracky voices - they look rather alarmed at some of the jobs they have to do, but do them well & with good grace.

By "Crawlers" I mean the little people with their hair done like this [see drawing and text below] at the back, who think they are unworthy to do anything at all - with an expression of "Stand on me if you like I should be pleased to be your door mate [sic]."



Big "Crawlers" I mean the little people with their hair done like this  at the back, who think they are unworthy to do anything at all - with an expression of "Stand on me if you like I should be pleased to be your door mate -"

There is little to say about the sturdy pusher ones - they are not remarkable for anything, but are quite reliable - very strong - never forget - & are always ready to do every bit of work.

There is a charming boy upstairs - just 18, he enlisted when he was 15 1/2 - & was a drummer boy. He has been in France since the beginning of the War - was bugler - all through the Retreat from Mons - He has been wounded 5 times, shot right through the chest once - in the stomach once - & arms & legs many times - He has got a bad toothache tonight & says it is worse than all his wounds - He tells the most thrilling stories of the Uhlans - & what dread of them he had - He says they are great strong fellows - with long bamboos with bayonettes at the end - & they just dig them into the men - without turning a hair.