

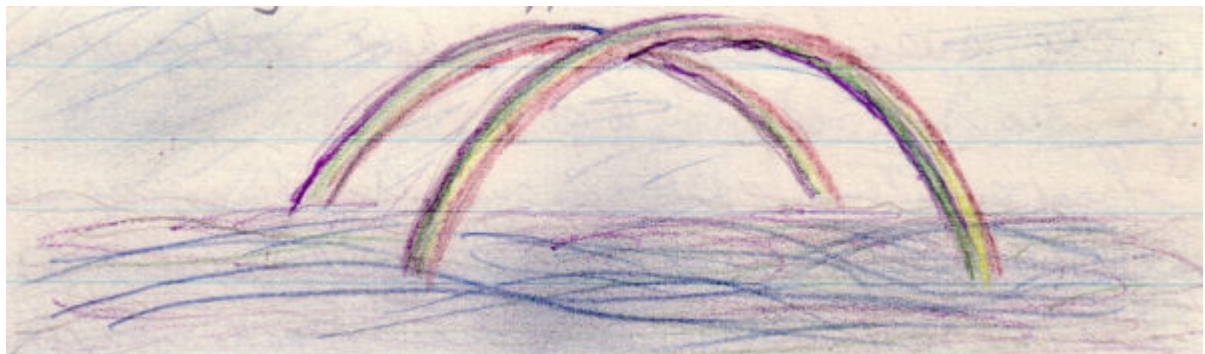
## Edith Elizabeth Appleton Diaries - Volume 2 (25 July 1915 to 25 April 1916)

### December 1915

**[December] 6<sup>th</sup>.** I had the day off yesterday - spent half in bed - & went for a walk. Have had cracking neuralgia which evidently means to spend the rest of the winter with me - it is making me loathe the place & everything else - There is nothing at all to write a diary about, so shan't try to keep it up - I would ten thousand times rather be busy & have no headache. Have written no letters for a long time - not much use to when there is nothing to say. There is a legend of this place, that many years ago a poor suffering woman & her child went to a mill - & asked the miller for help. He refused - & she turned away - cursing him. Next morning his mill was dry - & the whole stream was found pouring down the beach into the sea - Whether the legend is true or not I don't know, but there the stream is pouring in full force down the beach & tumbling into the sea. The women of the place make good use of it - & it is a quaint sight to see many of them every day - spade under one arm bundling a heavy wheelbarrow of wet clothes down to the beach to "rinse" the clothes having been washed & boiled at home. They dig deep holes in the beach which become their wash tubs - with a river of water running swiftly through them so it is always perfectly clean -

**[December] 7.** A true story of Étretat is that once an Indian Prince came here to visit his father. The father died & the son said his body must be cremated that night according to his religion - & asked the Town Prefect's permission to have it done. He would not give his consent - but as the Prince said it must be done that night - the Prefect telegraphed to the Chief Prefect in Paris - & asked his permission & said "If I get no reply - ceremony will take place this evening." No reply came - & the ceremony was performed on the beach. Half way through the body fell off & had to be lifted on to the pile of logs again - with poles. Next morning a telegram was brought to the Prefect. "On no account allow ceremony." The P[refect's] office had closed at its usual early hour - & the message was there all night. No evil consequence happened. One Sister wants some of us to get up a play for the men for Xmas! I told her I would help if needed - but oh help! I can't seem to see me acting. Perhaps they will find enough without me. No letters received or written - my head has been like a battered pumpkin - & that is not much use for letter writing. Matron & Sister Thomas back from leave - both looking very ill - the sea does not look inviting! The patch of beach where the body was burnt is just opposite the Roches Hotel - where my ward is.

**[December] 12<sup>th</sup>.** Since I last wrote everything has been very quiet indeed except the weather, which has been rampant all the time on & off. Wind so strong that it nearly blows the windows in - rain to match - & the sea! a sight to behold when it is high tide. On the **8<sup>th</sup>** there was the most perfect rainbow I have ever seen, vivid in colouring - & it dipped in the sea at both ends.



On the **9<sup>th</sup>** Lena Ashwell's concert party came & gave us a good selection of songs. All the voices were good & there was a clever conjuring man - but to me the cream of the whole thing was the 'cello - the girl who played it was a very musical person - & she seemed to forget all about us - & it was fine. On the 9<sup>th</sup> I bought a cheap umbrella. On the **10<sup>th</sup>** my longed for mack arrived - so now it may go on raining if it likes.

**11<sup>th</sup>.** There was a big explosion at a munition factory outside Havre - & I am afraid a great many women injured - Some of our orderlies were sent to help - & 8 Sisters - of whom I was one - had orders to stand by - which meant we packed our hand bags & went on with our ordinary work. We were not needed- & today is Sunday. I went to the early service as usual - & found my self the whole congregation. Up at No 3. 5 of us supported our Padre at the early service every Sunday - & here out of about 50 - no one seems to go.

**[December] 16<sup>th</sup>.** Great excitement prevails over Christmas preparations - each ward is secretly doing its utmost to outshine the rest. My men have made some lovely paper flowers & chains - & the orderlies have stolen quite a lot of greenery - & I hope they will steal more before the 25<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile we have had to be like yeast in the dough - & make every one rise - & have been planning what we will do on Christmas day - We think of joining forces with the other "Roches" floors - & having games for the men - & a short act by 3 of mine - & a clog dance by another of mine - & of course the other floors will raise some talent too. We had a convoy in on the 12<sup>th</sup> no serious cases - I only had 47 to my floor - some have already gone to England some will go to C.C. before Christmas poor beggars, they don't want to.

**[December] 17<sup>th</sup>.** The men have been very busy - making decorations & now we have yards & yards of red white & blue paper chains - roses - purple & white irises & lots of green stuff ready to put up & poinsettias too - all made of paper.

**[December] 18<sup>th</sup>.** Too tired to write much - busy day - went for lovely country walk by myself. now both V.A.D.s both Orderlies - & 12 of the patients have gone to the concert so I have got everything my own way for a time.

**[December] 19<sup>th</sup>.** Letters from Lil & Hilda - to say their parcels arrived safely. Had the ½ day off. Went with Wood & Burnett to Benouville [*Bénouville*]- had tea there - pretty walk charming place. The sky was wonderful & splendid all the time, first clear & intensely blue like Switzerland, making an excellent background for the hills & fir trees. Then the sunset & afterglow were really almost too beautiful not to stand & watch - changing from gold to red - to purple to green - to slate. Sea calm. Another C.C.S. came y'day.

**[December] 20.** Very busy getting civilian clothes for 3 men who are getting up a little sketch for Xmas - also have started thinking out feeding arrangements.

**[December] 21.** Même chose. News of convoy coming - during the night. If it does come we shall be called - I shall put my light out & get some sleep first if possible. Fearfully rough day. One door slammed so hard it broke a panel right out. No letters. No nothing.

**[December] 22<sup>nd</sup>.** Very busy day - Convoy of 300 odd came in at midday. 41 to me. With settling them in & seeing about decorating of course there was no time off but it was great fun doing the decorations with 70 men in various states of health helping - only a few were in bed. We have carried it out in red white & blue as far as possible. The wall facing the way up has a huge Union Jack - opposite that two French flags crossed - 3<sup>rd</sup> wall - or at least archway that would be a wall if it were a room instead of a huge square landing, red twill drapery - with "Merry Xmas" - & ornaments done in white wool to look like snow our artist Wynn has painted some pictures (Xmas ones) and they are on various parts of the walls & framed in snow & ivy. The ceiling is done with red white & blue streamers - & ivy too. They are all very proud of their work.

**[December] 24<sup>th</sup>.** Last night I went to sleep with never a thought of my diary I think the concert & other arrangeings had full possession of my brain. Very busy day. 72 patients take quite a lot of keeping pace with added to Xmas preparations. However - we have their stockings filled & ready for distribution by the night nurse. We also have large stores of cake - dessert - crackers - mince pies etc. - so I hope they will be happy. They have decorated beautifully.

We Sisters had our Xmas dinner tonight quite a success. It made quite a pretty scene – the big room daintily decorated - tables too – with flowers - & ribbons - & a present in each place with the owners name on. I gave a little tea party & invited two of the M.O.s to help us fill stockings.

In orders today that I am to receive Sisters pay - & wear stripes.

**[December] 25.** Happy Xmas all!!

**[December] 26<sup>th</sup>.** Busy day. I have only just (10 p.m) remembered that it is Sunday. Y'day was a very busy day – went to early service then early to the ward – Did dressings, but gave NO medicines all day. After the M.O.s visit – each man we gave a hot mince pie & a glass of claret. At 12 they had their huge feed in the big Hall – all together. Then all hands cleared the decks & got ready for our concert which by the way the C.O. told us to postpone – so we called it a dress “rehearsal” & carried on. At five they had tea each landing feeding its own men. It was a big job feeding my 70 odd - & they did all eat. They looked rather pretty sitting under the decorations in their blue clothes & cracker caps. We iced 2 of the cakes & lit fancy candles on them. After tea they settled down to a Sing Song amongst themselves. The C.O. came & told them a few Irish stories. I joined Matron's party to go to dinner at the Officers' Mess – did not want to as I was very tired but enjoyed it very much all the same. We had a good dinner – claret, champagne & port. The toasts were King George – for which we all rose in our places – Then us the Sisters – for which the men rose - & after drinking the toast sang “For they are jolly good fellows” – Then the C.O. & his Staff - & a few more – After dinner some of the others came round & we had games & music & a Christmas tree & finally went home at 12 or soon after. **26<sup>th</sup>.** Quiet day sent 10 patients to England.

**[December] 27<sup>th</sup>.** Quiet day. No patients sent away. Concert at Casino – quite good. Capt. Johnson – one of our M.O.s who is a N. Zealander – trained a gang of Orderlies to do a Maori Haka – dance - & they & he did it splendidly – they wore just a little skirt of straw & were coloured - & had their faces made up. I expect the Orderlies felt a bit shy about it.



**Maori**

There was a hospital sketch too – taking off everyone – Colonel Major - M.O.s – us – orderlies every one – which was much enjoyed.

**[December] 29<sup>th</sup>.** We of the Roches – were “At Home” for tea - & gave a concert after it – we had a crowd to tea – Matron, C.O., Capt Martyn – Capt. Davidson, Mr. Chaplin, & Major Franklin – of the men. The concert was got up by some of my patients - & was not at all bad – some of the Sisters kindly sang for us.

**[December] 30<sup>th</sup>.** Have a man in who was in the attack against Hullock [*Hulluch – East of Bethune*] where Robert was killed & he told me all about it . Most of the Sisters have gone to the pantomime at Havre – so I am staying on for one of them & am going to have breakfast in bed tomorrow morning – since the old car that takes them generally breaks down goodness knows what time they will come back. The man who knew Robert told me lots of war stories – one is – After an attack, the S. Br. (stretcher bearers) were all tired out – having been carrying the slightly wounded through the trenches in all day light - & the seriously wounded – in over

the open ground – all through the darkness. A Corporal of the Black Watch crawled in with a wound – which had bled a lot – clean shot through the thick of the leg it was – He was faint from loss of blood. While he was being bandaged up, he heard some moanings from between our own & the enemy's lines - & recognised voices of some of his men. He shouted to them & they answered & said they were hung up in barb wire. Nothing would keep the corporal - out he flew & brought 5 of his own men in one at a time. Once he leant against the parapet & said "If only I had some of my own boys here they would help me. I hear the voice of another of mine I must get him in" & in spite of his condition went out & brought the man in. There were men in the trench who would like to have helped him, but they hadn't the pluck. There was a perfect hail of bullets round him all the time, but luckily he was not hit. The snipers were trying for the gunners working a maxim about 5 yds from the trench. What a gruesome noise there must have been.

Went for a walk alone over the golf links. Am now so sleepy don't know how to keep my eyes open.