

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

January 1916

Jan 1.1.16. Happy New Year to all. We had a childrens party last night. About 50 of us - the M.O.s & Sick Officers.

[January] 2nd. Went to church tonight - this morning early too. Our Padre is not a success. He has no brain poor dear. He prays & reads & preaches on one doleful note. Tonight he took as his text "Spare me - that I may brighten up" - which everyone thought he should apply to himself, but he never once even included himself in it. When he was at our New Years party, he was seen, absent minded sitting, directly under the mistletoe. When by people's glances he noticed it, he was too shy to move away at once, so did it by edging inch by inch away, & then making a bolt for it.

Have had half a day off. Hear that 4 of our orderlies are wanted higher up the line - that they are to be replaced by ward maids - do not look forward to the change. I forgot to tell you what we did at the "party" - musical chairs - bumps - all sorts of tricks - and one competition game every one had the name of a well known person pinned on their back - & had to guess who they were by asking questions - Like "Am I still alive?" "Do I write books?" till they guess right. Then they have another name pinned on. When the bell rings the one who has guessed most times - right - wins the prize - it was a little pig - & an Irish girl won it. Hear rumours that I am to go on night duty - & I don't want to. Capt Martyn has been promoted to Company Officer - in place of Major Franklin who has been made D.A.D.M.S. to the 3rd army. Have Capt Billing in the ward now.

2nd. Miss Rentzsh has just been to my room to tell me my name is in Despatches.

[January] 3rd. I know it is unnecessarily conceited of me, but I do wonder if you saw your daughter's name in Despatches & do hope you are pleased - I am if you are, otherwise I don't care. Off this afternoon went for long walk alone until I met a little girl carrying a bundle of clothes - she was very small - & 9 years old. I carried her bundle for a bit & enjoyed a chat with the creature, she was rather nice. I am hoping to have breakfast in bed - & the day off tomorrow tho' what to do with it - is a quandary, but sufficient unto the day... and tomorrow we shall see.

4th. Letters from the twins dear things I don't think they are growing up very fast. I have had the day off - & much enjoyed it - breakfast in bed - (always a joy) got up about 10 bathed & went for a long walk alone - to the lighthouse & home by the Havre Rd. It is a wonderful walk for scenery, the most beautiful little peeps of sea, over the "downs" in the cliffs - The hills are all colours & shades - of purple mauve, blue, green brown, red, with dashes of bright yellow gorse - The sea & sky were both a cold blueish greenish grey. The sea smooth, sky covered with rough clouds. It rained in the afternoon (I missed dinner - had 2 pieces of Lil's most excellent plum pudding instead) so I took my lace pillow into the sick Sisters' room & made lace & had tea beside her. Miss McCarthy came today & is staying the night.

[January] 5th. Miss McC was much pleased with the hospital & went off in a very good temper. Off in afternoon - did not "Go for lovely long walk by myself" etc. Sat indoors & read most of the time & went for very short walk.

Letters from Madge & HG. Have only 29 patients on my floor - so are slack at present. I thanked Miss McC for sending me to such a nice place, & she said she thought people who had been long at the front - needed it.

[January] 6th. Letters from Mother & Miss Congleton. Hear I have to go on as "Night Super" on Saturday.

[January] 7th. Large convoy in. I had 64 patients.

[January] 9th. 3 very charming V.A.D.s asked me for a little jaunt with them in what they call the "buss". It really is quite a good "Ford" car. We went for a glorious 2 1/2 hours spin & went

through pretty villages & country to Harfleur & saw the damage done by the explosion they had at the bomb factory on the 11th of last month. The church was a good deal broken & the windows of houses smashed. At some place dead in the country we passed a real old French chateau with a moat round it - quaint very old towers & lovely grounds belonging to it. We stopped just to gaze at it for a little while. We halted at a place called Gonville [*Gonneville-la-Mallet*] - at the famous old inn - with old French china on all the outside walls - plates, dishes, mugs - jugs - all stuck on with cement or mortar. The lunch is intensely interesting, too. Kitchen, a wonderful array of highly polished brass & copper. Upstairs is quite a museum of curious [*curios ?*] of the war - & some older. In the dining Hall are many panels - beautifully painted by different artists who have spent holidays at the Inn. Everyone has been asked to paint a panel while he is there - They are loose panels - church door shape - dark work - some fastened to the wall - some just standing there. Well worth a visit. As this is to be my last night in bed - here goes to make the most of it. I did not go on night duty y'day - but am tomorrow. 11th 1.30 a.m. On filthy night duty - & by way of celebrating my first night - I hear our convoy are to go off at 6 a.m. 3 from here - 1 from there, 20 from some where else - Oh! we shall be all right.

I hear there is a man about who tries to get in at the Sisters Qrs. & now they have a guard outside the house. I hope I shan't meet him on my next round. The streets are very dark, but they are cold too so perhaps he won't be there.

[January] 12th. Quiet night, moved into quieter bedroom in the Annex. It was very dirty so I spent the morning helping to clean it, then bathed & went to bed. It does seem a pity about some things although I suppose what does happen is meant to. A man was telling me about the battle of Loos tonight. They had a short fierce battle of 2 hrs & had the Germans fairly on the run - & if our re-inforcements had been there we should have kept them going. We had about 5 corps of cavalry - 2 English 1 Indian & 3 French all ready to gallop straight on & in to Lille - but our infantry men were too dead beat to follow them up. The re-inforcements were nowhere to be got for all the telephoning - & the German observation balloon reported that we were short of infantry & told the Germans to make a counter attack which they did with great effect.

The man telling me this was at Ypres while that fierce battle for Calais was in process. Stationed high up in a wood - he could see the whole battle. The British line was very thin almost broken - & the Germans seethed! Goose stepped up the Menin Rd. by the 1000. Sir Douglas Haig saved the situation. He brought up machine guns & maxims from everywhere & men from wherever he could get them. Placed the guns in a close formation line - & when the Germans got near enough - fired - each gun delivering about 600 shots a minute - & mowed them down again & again. They lost frightfully heavily - & of course did not break through. There is supposed to be a big attack at Hallock [*Hulluch*] tonight bombs trench mortars etc. Good luck to the attackers.

Went for a walk with Scott this morning. Bed at 12. Did not sleep more than a little. Feel I could now. Letters from Miss Congleton & Old Hutch. No. 3 C. C. S. is leaving Bailleul! Why was I ever moved! The Orderlies have had fur coats served out to them - so perhaps they are for Servia.

[January] 14th. Quiet night - in a way - Col. Moore is in the Honours List. Has been made C.M.G. 5 matrons & 36 Sisters have got R. R. C. Am sorry Miss Denne has not. [*Ed: Well she did in 1917; see: <http://rcnarchive.rcn.org.uk/data/VOLUME058-1917/page007-volume58-6thjanuary1917.pdf>*] Being night super is not all honey when an Orderly gets drunk "Send for the night Super". Give your advice that as the ward is slack - let him sleep it off - & blow him up in the morning. Then the Ward Master comes along - finds him drunk & sleeping & wants to run him straight in to the guard room, but first comes to ask the "Night Super" about 3 different people have three different opinions (strong ones) as to what ought to be done, but all end up with 'but of course you are night super you must decide.' So you do - & pretty quickly too being sick of them all. Went for lovely walk to Benouville with Raper & Scott. Home & to bed in decent time. There was a Lena Ashwell concert but I told them on pain of death to call me for it.

[January] 15. The nights are very lovely now - rough & moon shiny & big stars They look well setting. I never knew so little of the War anywhere as in this quiet corner Étretat.

[January] 16th. Quiet night. The boy who was supposed to go mad and need a "special" slept soundly so thank Goodness – all went well.

[January] 17th. Quiet night – the only excitement being – a man in for quite a different thing suddenly found both legs paralyzed. The M.O. can't understand it - & thinks he may be hysterical – I don't agree. Had a lovely day y'day. Skipped my walk & bath & all such wholesome things - & went straight to bed & slept all day. It was glorious only I wanted to go on sleeping when they called me. One poor little V.A.D. was pathetically sleepy & very funny. Her ideas of night duty, when she is sleepy are worth hearing. She is a clever little wretch & has a sketch book in which she has caricatured V.A.D.s in all circumstances, the C.O. etc. Tonight is freezing cold, blue moonlight, very calm. The reflection of the moon in the sea was so beautiful. I made the Sisters come & look at it. The sight of the cliffs in the moonlight is past description – Now for my 3rd round.

[January] 18th. Night as before quiet. The night staff have broken into the habit of inviting me to supper. Last night I supped with I. Thomas – over in the Officers'. Tonight I am invited to the Casino to partake of crab & apricots & cream. Perhaps tomorrow will be the Roches, but I am very content with my own headquarters – La Plage – where I feed with one V.A.D. The moonlight on Étretat, sea, country cliffs & hills is most blue & bright & wonderfully beautiful.

[January] 19th. Many Happies to Taff. I did write to him about 6 wks ago – hope he has got the letter. I am sure you know that the Moon & Sirius & Castor & Pollux & Capella & Auriga & Deneb – all look beyond description, lovely, shiny brightly on a cold night and beyond that there is nothing to say. The man who suddenly became paralyzed the other night – has lost all use up to the hips now. Changed one night nurse last night. 2 more are being changed in a day or two. I am sorry to say.

[January] 20th. 4 of the night people hired the "bus" & went to Fechamp [*Fécamp*] yesterday morning – but not I. I don't like being late. They had a glorious drive through pretty country. Saw all over the French Hosp. & the Benedictine Convent – where the world famed Liqueur is made, & the famous old Abbey, I want to go some day. Quiet night – only 1 man at all ill – poor old B. Birrell died at 4 p.m. yesterday.

I talk to the men most nights & hear all sorts of interesting stories about when they have been at close quarters with the Germans. Once when they were billeted on a farm at Kenmel [*Kemmel*] they were much worried every night by a hidden sniper – they hunted but could not find him. One day their Major told the farmer he wanted hay for the horses – the farmer was most unwilling to give it, but at last told them to take it from the hay loft. The men went up & began dragging the hay down from the highest stack of it, the farmer came & told them very sharply not to take from there – but he was too late & they had pulled it down - & left exposed a trap door that led into a big pigeon cote & sitting in the pigeon cote surrounded by empty beer bottles etc - sat "my sniper" – a German – in German uniform. They shot him. Another time they (5th D.Gs) were in the ditch at the side of the Road - & the Germans were in the one on the other side – He said it was most exciting – they would see the nozzle & barrel of a rifle stealthily be pushed up & leveled down towards their ditch, then slowly appeared the spike of a German helmet, then was the moment of their lives for the one who shot first & true. At one place, where the village was being taken alternately by us & the Germans - our police found 2 spies, Inn keepers, who had been most jovial with the men, gave them beer & took no money. They were German soldiers in disguise - & when they were taken to be shot marched & right wheeled in a most soldierlike way. Their Inn was looted - & all the furniture - chests of drawers, etc. counters - tables - taken out to make a barricade across the road. In the same village another spy was discovered by one of our airmen. He alighted & said he had seen signalling. The Major said - all inhabitants had been cleared out except one old bed ridden man, who had been a cripple for 4 years - & an old woman who looked after him. The airman was so certain of what he saw, that he asked to see the invalid. When they got there, he recognised it as the house where signals had shown from - went in - & said he had a fancy

that the invalid could beat him in a race for life - flung back the bedclothes & found the man fully dressed in uniform. They shot him - & her too.

Another spy in that place they never did catch - one day a little shockheaded man - looking like a little wild animal ran out - quickly looked up & down & round & round - & darted back into the house - they at once made search for him - but never found him - the little devil!

[January] 21. Quiet night - Main & Palmer on in place of Scott & Raper. Went for walk toute seule. Very rough sea - high spring tide - full moon - misty, sea glorious dashing up over the cliffs & rocks.

[January] 22d. Six of our heaviest cases went to England today. All quiet. Started new lace pattern.

[January] 23d. Same old game - walk, bath, bed - letters from Turnbull & Wallace -

[January] 24th. Went to early service y'day morning, then early to bed - Thomas & MacFarland having nights off tonight - I have one tomorrow with luck.

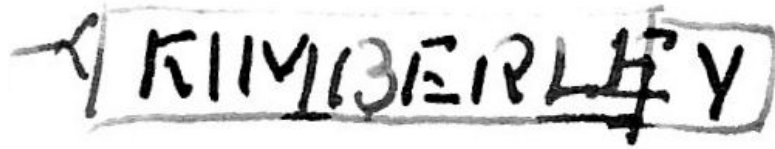
[January] 26th. Had my night off all right & enjoyed it very much - went straight to bed - called at 1 o'clock by my little landlady who brought me the daintiest little lunch imaginable - grilled steak - done with parsley potatoes nicely browned & apple jelly - cider to drink - followed by café noir. The car came at 2 & 3 others who were having days off & I went to Fécamp - the scenery was beautiful & we past some buildings & ruins of great interest - an old French chateau - & in Fécamp some old overgrown ruins of the house of the Dukes of Normandy. We went to the Abbey - which was being heavily draped for a mourning service for all the men of Fécamp who have died through the war.

The abbey is a fine old place - chiefly Gothic I think with some good old carving - & beautiful windows - old but not the deepest coloured glass I have seen. Then we went to the Benedictine Convent - part of which is being used as a Military French hospital. The rest is where the Benedictine Liqueur is made - the only place in the world - & they send to every part of the world - except to our enemies just now. We were shown all over - & it was most interesting. In peace time they had 400 work men - now many of them have gone to the war & their places are taken by women & little girls. Now it is done by Civilians: before the Revolution by monks. The men wear blue caps & long blue smocks - the women - overalls - & a belt with Benedictine worked on it round their waists. It is an enormous concern - they make 18,000 bottles full every day. First we went through many huge halls of casks of the finished stuff - casks varying in size, the biggest holding 36,000 litres each, the ends of them more than 6 ft in diameter. Then we went to where pure alcohol was being distilled & the syrup made - huge plants of machinery all about - huge wheels joined to little ones by wide leather straps! and the noise! The syrup was boiling in huge copper pans about 3 ft deep & 5 across the top. Next we went to where it was being bottled. Two women tended a filling machine - which fills about 18 at a time [-] they had to go as fast as they could - taking away & replacing an empty bottle. They hand on to 2 more who washed - & handed on to two more - who worked the automatic corking machine & handed on to two more who loaded up in trollies - took to the next department where 2 unloaded & stood on the end of a long table - girls down both sides of it - 1s cut the corks - & held wet parchment over - while 2s wired it & cut it off - 3 trimmed & stuck on labels 4s soldered metal ribbon on round the neck & down to one side



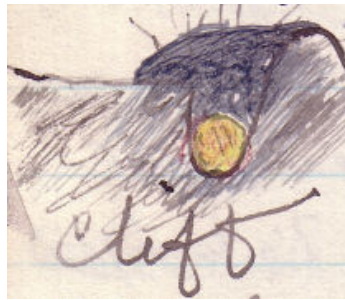
Benedictine bottle

5s sealed the top - dipping into hot wax & sealing it - 6s sealed the metal ribbon down on the side - 7s wrapped up in paper - 8s stuck another Benedictine label over the join in the paper - 9s loaded on to a trolley & took to the packing room where 3 men were at work. Stacks of cases were there, & they have division made to fix in to keep the bottles from touching each other. Each case holds about 2 doz - & in less than 2 mins, the first man - fixes the bits of wood - throws in the bottles, next layer of wood - & so on & passes on to the next man to nail the box down - who passes on to the next man to pack. There was a huge wall - with names of places - where they have to send things to, I mean. metal squares *[illustration: "KIMBERLEY"]* that they painted over - the letters are spaces. Most unheard of places amongst them.



Kimberley place name

After that we had tea & came home by the long coast route. From one point we had a good view of Étretat & in Feb. crowds of people come from Paris etc. to watch the sun set behind the Étretat cliffs - It sinks down right in the cleft & looks very quaint.

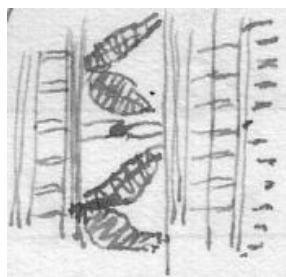


Cliff. Feb 25th

It was a glorious starlight drive home. Early to bed - raging headache most of night & this morning. Everyone does have on night or day off - Long walk - bed again at 2 - & then back to duty.

[January] 27th. Quiet night. I have sent the V.A.D. on duty in this building "La Plage" to bed for 5 hrs. She is new to night duty - & has hardly slept all day - I have thoroughly enjoyed being alone - & have seen all sorts of interesting people & things in the fire. Talking to a patient tonight - I found he was at No 10 Stationary as a patient when I was there & remembers the Prussian Guard being brought in & recognized as the man who had been killing our wounded "Black Watch" & was tried & shot for it - serve him right. Government are docking us of lodging & fuel & light allowances - in all £57-15 a year - The men are not giving up any.

[January] 28th. 18 nights done - only thing of interest - Started a new lace pattern like this:



- very dark night, raining now.

[January] 29th. Truslove off duty with Influenza – gone to sick rooms. Officers are having a Soirée tonight – about 20 Sisters have gone – only 3 from my staff. It is No. 14 Stationary not General Hospital that has been burnt down. Poor old Miss Congleton is Ass/istant/ Matron there! I expect had a bad time, she is so highly strung & has had a hard time through this war.

Went for walk toute seule to Bénouville, this morning. Weather & country very pretty & enjoyable but under a thin white mist. Henry has gone on leave & perhaps Truslove will go after flu – that gets two of them out of the way for when leave really starts. Think I will make lace now, so sleep well & au revoir.

[January] 30th. Letters from my twin foster babies – must write to them – Hardly slept at all today. Nurses are the most inconsiderate wretches under the sun – they tramped about slammed doors & pulled plugs to distraction, then the orphans were let loose to kick tins & play - & the paper man blew his horn – toot tooting - & yelling – “Petit Parisien” – now – at 1:30 a.m., I feel I shall bust if I don’t say what is truly unkind – that the V.A.D. – who sits in this room – will drive me to drink – she talks tracts – gives tracts & is bulging with saintly & innocent holiness – till I could shriek. I once met her equal at Cousin Walters, but thank Goodness – he went away by train.

Went for a walk toute seule – in a thick white, wet mist – at the top of the hills suddenly found myself – in hot bright sunshine – birds singing – blue sky - & below me – nothing – but fluffy whiteness, that I felt I could jump on to like a feather bed. After a time that cleared & the day was perfect. Sea dead calm - the fishing boats look so pretty – painted bright colours & with red sails – going out – in a long line one behind the other – making a vivid reflection in the sea – bunches of clean women standing about to see them off. Letter from Miss Congleton – she says the fire was awful – too awful to write about. No-one was hurt. They are nursing the Enterics in the “Compound” wooden huts – My V.A.D. has just threatened me – with something aloud – from the Church Times – I can’t stand it – I must make my round early. At 11 o’c. a Sick Officer lurched into the Plage - & asked “Plege ca’nyou te’ me where the shickossifers – hoshpital is?” There was nothing for it but to take my lord by the arm - & gently lead him there along two streets & up a short hill – I did not carry my lord’s alight as I did not want anyone to see me arm in arm – with the poor chap – distinctly, the worse for wear – how he got out, I don’t know.

10 a.m. Poor little V.A.D. It was horrid of me to feel irritated at her – she is such a good conscientious little soul.

[January] 31st. Quiet night. M. Parry Evans preached twice at the Anglican Church today - & was much appreciated by those who heard him. I did not go. Went for walk along the shore – found a secret passage running under the cliff towards inland went along it for some distance – then came back, bed early. News of convoy coming in today at 11 o’c. so we shall probably be much busier tomorrow.

I see by today’s paper that bombs have been dropped on Paris – causing loss of life - & material damage. That will annoy the French so should not be surprised if they did something big in the way of reprisals.

Quiet night – news of a convoy for today, supposed to be coming in at 11 a.m. but I think I said this at first.