

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

### March 1916

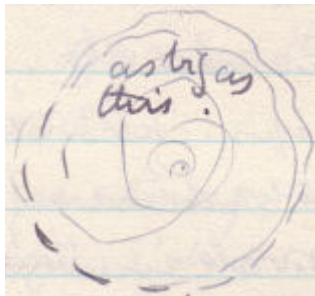
**March 3<sup>rd</sup>.** English mail in – we are really very busy – Convoys in & out constantly, & we are very much under our complement of Sisters (about 20 short) V.A.D.s the same - & 40 Orderlies short. Went for a short walk last night first for a long time – Delightful!

**[March] 4<sup>th</sup>.** Have a good old fashioned cold – went straight to bed - & Madame brought me Bengers with brandy in.

**[March] 5<sup>th</sup>.** All things have conspired to make the day seem long. Convoy – cold - & horrid headache – but oh! Joy – it did end - & I found home letters awaiting me.

**[March] 6<sup>th</sup>.** Busy day – poor Kerr (Pneumonia etc – etc). I am afraid will not weather the storm, & poor old Sgt. Middleton is as bad as he can be & so is Rudman, poor dears – I do wish they could get better. Was off duty in afternoon – walked up cliff, caught in snow storm, back early – bathed - tea with Madame. Very tired – don't know why?

**[March] 7<sup>th</sup>.** Slept through the first bell - & woke at the second – to find my room aglow with a beautiful pink light. The outside world was a foot deep under snow. Telephone wires looking like those fluffy bell pulls about 3 inches round in snow & all glittering in the early morning sunshine. Truly beautiful & unwarlike.



#### Telephone wires covered in snow.

Now I must quickly dress or I shall be late for breakfast, but by tonight – if the snow thaws – I may forget what the morning was like – as there is plenty every day to drive out all thoughts but patients – wards – etc lists, & Convoys.

**[March] 8<sup>th</sup>.** I want to write to you today – but whether I shall or not is a different matter. We have a big Convoy to get off to England - & another arriving – supposed at 10 a.m. so we shall not be slack – but – the difference – here we have about 12 hrs. notice of a Convoy coming - & up the line they just tumbled in at all hours of the day & night. My heart is very sore for one poor boy, or for his Mother – We have had him 10 days – & he is no better & is in a state to die at any moment. I am writing to his Mother & telling her so, she is evidently a refined old lady – writes back to say she is “so glad to hear Charlie is with us – the rest & good food will do him good”. Have my letters not reached her? Or won't she understand that the boy is dying. I think he must have been gassed – he is purple & just like a gas patient.

Étretat is beautiful – this is Ash Wednesday - & I ought to be at the 6:45 service but some horrid crank always takes me in Lent. I miss more services & eat more nice things & smoke more than any time of the year. Étretat is really beautiful now. Yesterday's snow, thawed a little in the sunshine, but is still deep & frozen again with the night's frost. My Western horizon is just tinged with pale pink which suits the soft clouds & pale blue sea to distraction & the cliffs are a picture in themselves all snow covered & rugged – No letters from England last night. Now I must get up! If only I could sketch I would make the most lovely little pictures in this diary.

**[March] 9<sup>th</sup>.** I was to have been called at 2 a.m. to help in with a heavy convoy, so went to bed & to sleep at 9 p.m. & the next thing I knew it was 1/4 past 6 – broad daylight - & no one had called me & even now - here I sit in my night attire - 7 a.m. trusting it is all right & that the convoy has been held up somewhere & that we are to go to second breakfast as usual. The morning is as yesterday, the sea perhaps a trifle calmer & more shimmering - tide further off, & the brown rocks glowing red in the light of the rising sun. Yesterday was a delightful day of calm between the storms, of despatching a large convoy & receiving the one that didn't come. My pneumonia boy benefited from the quiet & perhaps... the creature has a chance, & feel he must get better - for his Mother, poor thing, she wrote to me - & said she was heartbroken - however, it was no good for me to pretend he was not dangerously ill. He was - & is. I must get up now, for Matron Miss E. M. Denne - [see <http://rcnarchive.rcn.org.uk/data/VOLUME058-1917/page007-volume58-6thjanuary1917.pdf>] had sudden orders to go to Havre to relieve Miss Steen invalided home. She was sorry to go - & we to lose her, although it is a great promotion. She will be Principal Matron of the Havre district soon. Get up.

**[March] 10<sup>th</sup>.** Very big day Convoy arrived 7.40 - 590 men chiefly sick - only about 30 badly wounded. I had in a few wounded - but the greater part - fully all my beds - & extra mattresses on the floor were such things as trench foot. 1 CT & one advanced Ø. The day was very busy & poor Kerr worse - I am sure that boy has been gassed & will die. Shouldn't be surprised to find his cot empty when I go on duty. Poor Mother - how will she take it? No letters - no off duty - weather - I hardly remember - not so cold - I think.

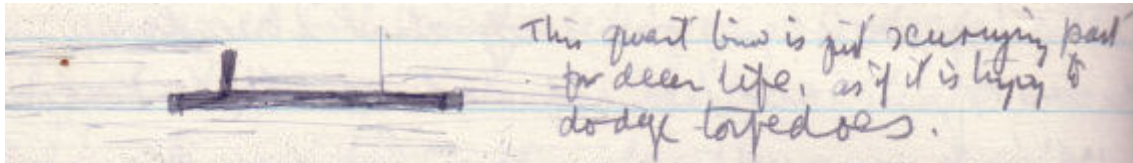
**[March] 12<sup>th</sup>.** Too much sadness to write about, besides being dead beat.

**[March] 13<sup>th</sup>.** My poor little boy Kerr died yesterday, he had been in 15 days suffering from gas - pneumonia, bronchitis & has been extremely & dangerously ill all the time, but only the day before yesterday he realized that he was not going to get well. I am glad to say we never left him night or day & he was fond of us all. Yesterday was a difficult day to be "Sister" - He kept whispering all sorts of messages for home & his fiancée - then he would call "Sister" & when I bent down to hear - "I do love you" "when I'm gone, will you kiss me?" - & all the time heads would be popping in "Sister - 20 No - so & so - to - - - ." "The S. Sgt wants to know if you can lend him a couple of men to..." This & that - but in spite of all - I did kiss the boy first for his Mother & then for myself - which pleased him - then he whispered "but you still will when I'm gone." The night before he asked me what dying would be like - & said it seemed so unsatisfactory - he felt too young to die - & not even wounded - only of bronchitis. Then another time he said, "They wouldn't let me go sick every time they said it was rheumatism & would wear off - & marching with full pack & dodging the shells was dreadful. Thank Goodness - what I told him dying would be like happened - exactly - a clear gift of Providence. I told him it would be - that little by little his breathing would get easier - & he would feel tired & like going to sleep - & then he would just sleep - & with no morphia - that is exactly what did happen - without a struggle. He was quite conscious up to 20 minutes before he died. I just asked him now & then if he knew I was still with him. "Yes" - & you're quite happy - aren't you? & he distinctly said "Yes, quite" Then the last & very trying part for the Sister was to walk along to the other end of the village - beside the poor dead thing - to see him decently put - in the mortuary. With hundreds of French eyes turned "full on". Our own people always clear out of the way when they see it coming. We sent 13 to England yesterday & are getting a new convoy in today, so I must dress quickly. This is really the only time I have for my own writing, every day is busy - & at night I am too tired - now I must get up.

**[March] 14<sup>th</sup>.** View perfect, sea dead calm & reflecting the deep rose-yellow & blue of the Western sky. The sun will soon be up. 6.30 a.m. A bugle has just gone - which means an ambulance train in - & I expect we shall be called for early breakfast! 7 a.m. instead of 7.45. We have much to be thankful for that many patients went to England the day before yesterday, & Convoy did not arrive yesterday - 3 more Sisters went down with measles, making our staff about 26 under number. The rest of us have been spread out to the best advantage but it has meant precious hard work - & no off duty times.

Imagine my joy - when I was in Constable's room - telling her - she must report her rash - out of fairness to other people etc. - to see - 8 beautiful fully trained Sisters arriving at the Quarters - all in the pink of health. (Three fishing boats have just launched - & look like an old Bible picture - with their dark red sails - & making a long reflection.) Dear things - we nearly fell on their necks with joy. They have just come home - from a slack time in Egypt so ought to be good for work now. (Another boat just off - the four of them are racing.) As is always the way - everything in the way of relief happens at once - my three heavy cases died - the Convoy did not come - & 8 new Sisters did. Did I say Sgt Middleton died the same day as Kerr - & they were buried together, & chose a glorious sunny afternoon for it - both had been in about the same time.

The third was an abdominal - poor creature came in in an agony - & remained in it till he died - having been operated on - & all things possible done. P.M. exam showed it was typhoid. No new Matron yet & poor Miss R. not at all well - & worked all yesterday with a T. of 102.4.



**This quaint liner is just scurrying past for dear life, as if it trying to dodge torpedoes.**

**[March] 15<sup>th</sup>.** We were all called for early breakfast & got on duty just before the Convoy arrived. Not a big one, only 300 odd - we filled right up in 3 - & 5 fractures in to 4. 3 are on the S. I. list but I think there are good hopes for all of them. Sam Murphy has both legs broken & his left eye shot out - Burke one leg badly broken - & Moules - in 3. gas gangrene of shoulder - badly wounded. It was a great relief having these 8 new Sisters & I was able to give 3 of my people off duty time. No mail last night. The morning is blue grey today. We were all struck with wonder at the change & glory of our sea view from the Casino - Colours! sunset reflected in the water - lights on cliffs perfect!

**[March] 16<sup>th</sup>.** 3.15 Quiet day yesterday - Off evening - raining - short walk - bath, odded about - morning misty.

**17.3.16.** The orderlies of this Unit are chiefly Irish & we shall have a glorious time with them today - St. Patricks Day. They have started by marching down to Parade WITH A BAND! & such a band - whistles & drums - playing Irish airs - at 2 p.m. there is to be a football match England v. Ireland. After that we will draw a veil!

The sea is angry about something this morning, can't imagine what - there is no wind at all - may be because the fishing boats are late in getting off. The men are chasing round now - & won't be long, but when they heard our Irishman's band it was too much for them - they ran to see the excitement.

Yesterday it rained incessantly all day - In the afternoon Constable and I walked along the beach - the only clean place & watched the fishing boats come in. The fishermen live a very sporting life - they race to get off in the morning & race back in the afternoon. First boat ashore sells its fish first. There is a salesman who goes from boat to boat as the fish is unloaded - & sells the haul by auction. It takes the men about 2 mins to arrange the fish, all cod together soles - plaice - dogfish crabs - all separately. Then the salesman - & crowds of women with baskets follow on & hold the sale. It is most entertaining to watch.

Before the war they used to throw dogfish away now they get 10d each for them. One of my V.A.D.s has been taken to go to another ward - as 2 more folk - a Sister & a V.A.D. have gone sick, so we are under staffed again. However we won't cry out till we are hurt - Leedam -1/2 day yesterday.

**[March] 18<sup>th</sup>.** It suddenly struck me at breakfast y'day - that I might take a half day myself - so asked for it & did. At Sisters' breakfast we fermented a plan - Allen, Wilson, Marcey & I to hire the old Ford & go to Caudebec en Caux - The morning was wet with fine rain falling, but it was a chance in a hundred. Car rolled up at 2 sharp & off we went. Wilson had been in the theatre all morning & did not come to either lunch - so the other 3 of us flew along - hoofed

her out to get some food – cleaned the place & instruments for her & all were ready to start punctually. The rain cleared after we had gone a few miles – Sun shone brightly & all went “merry as a marriage bell.” The scenery was glorious, first part through pretty country lanes carpeted with primroses. (I threatened to get out at every fresh patch, but was not allowed to.) & small villages, & old villages, all interesting Criquetot, Bolbec – Colbec, Gon – I can’t remember the names. Then through a long & wonderful stretch of country overlooking the Seine. The lights & shades on the river & country on the right, & high cliffs on the left, overgrown with beautiful vegetation, gave us much to do to realize. We drove slowly & silently through it all, at one place nestled in the cliffs, we saw a homestead, well kept with an aviary of rare birds, peacocks & creatures whose names I don’t know who squawked & strutted about, & looked very pretty. The wild birds were singing beautifully but not showing themselves much. The next village – Lillebonne – very old – was interesting for its old Roman ruins – of which I will send you p.cs – much more good description than I could give of the Theatre & Palace. It was evidently an open air Theatre. We drove slowly all round & about the place & then on through equally pretty scenery in Caudebec en Caux. The Seine is navigable here - & we saw 6 quite big steamers on their way to Paris. It is a very favourite place of English visitors in the Summer. Our driver told us the winter population was 2,000 – summer – 6,000. We put up at the Hotel de la Marine – ordered tea – omelette – toast & tea – then looked about the place – Cathedral, shops - & town itself – all very interesting – some of the streets are very narrow - & one street is a canal – It is very pretty to look down it, with its very old houses on either side. Then back to tea, over which we lingered – the view was so pretty – across the Seine to dim hills beyond - & right in front of us the Ferry boat, which was busy. We on-loaded at 10 to 6 & returned by Ivetot [*Yvetot*]. A few miles out the engine stopped dead, the other three sat tight, but as I had to get down – being in front, I stayed down - & went for a ramble in the woods. After tinkering about for some time our man discovered that we had run out of Petrol. So back to C en C we went - ran down hill with no engine working, bought up all one man’s petrol – on to another village – bought all we wanted & then started again - & had a fair run home – through pretty scenery & old villages all the way – first in twilight then in bright moon & star light, having had a glorious feast of fresh air - & pretty country. The football match ended in a win for us – England 2 to 1. Patients who were able were allowed to attend the match & 12 Irish men – in their hospital blues – faces blacked & gay turbans – got up a wonderful band – of whistles & drums - & headed them. Such a procession of the maimed the sick the halt & the blind! & men in wheel chairs – you never saw. No home letters. Must get up.

**[March] 19<sup>th</sup>.** Quiet – sent many patients to England yesterday – are now reduced to 4 in 3 & 5 in 4 – Being so empty – I turned everyone on to work yesterday & had every bed & every scrap of everything put out in the Parade - & the whole place cleaned from top to toe – It looks lovely now. We made lunch for them at 11 o’c - & made them call a halt for refreshment. They seemed to love their job better than slacking about, they are good creatures. (I mean the patients), the Orderlies are good too.

Went for a walk in evening picked primroses & watched the sun set.

**[March] 20<sup>th</sup>.** Miss Denne & the A.D.M.S. & a couple of civilian lady visitors came round yesterday. My No. 4 ward – is for – “fractures of the lower extremity.” One visitor remarked after I had shown her round – that they all seemed to have broken legs in that ward – I suppose she didn’t realize what lower extremities are. She was a charming woman - & so nice with the men. Gave all my three extra off time yesterday – if no Convoy comes – shall take some myself today.

**21/3/16.** Leedam & I both had the half day yesterday. Marcey - & Truslove too. We – Marcey Truslove & I – walked to Benouville in the rain – picked primroses – they are hanging from the banks like yellow tufts now & never seem to get any fewer – very pretty. At Benouville, we looked around peeped into the church – found service in progress – so went to the Café for tea – we had bloaters – boiled eggs – toast & tea – after tea the woman showed us her old china & pewter. Such a nice little woman her husband is at the War & she was busy making herself a coat out of an old one of his - She turned the stuff & piped it with black velvet - & made a

strap for the waist & sleeves - & it looked very smart. These people are marvels - on no money they always look smart - rather like a certain maternal relation of mine I think. Walked back through heavy rain - bathed - visited Burnett, who is better. Bed early - no letters.

**23/3/16** - The day before yesterday - I went for a walk with Marcey & Truslove - to the woods - & lost my pen case with pen & nail cleaner in - if I am off today I shall go & look for it. Now I am reduced to one of the old fashioned dip-in-each-time. Yesterday we had in a big Convoy - filling us right up - Some very serious cases amongst them. The man "Moules" in my Ward of the shoulder - had another operation yesterday. They found pus in the joint & a good deal of necrosed bone - poor man - he has a painful time between him & recovery I'm afraid. In 4 - we took only 3 fractures but filled up - to relieve other wards - one - an old man of 59 such a dear old thing has both legs badly wounded & may have to lose one - but we hope not - Letter from Miss Cong[leton].

**[March] 24<sup>th</sup>.** Busy day - y'day. Off in evening - Walked to woods to look for my pen etc - Did not find them. Heard that THIRTY FIVE new Sisters are arriving today - from a hospital in Egypt - that has been closed - They will only be here for the time being - & be sent where they are wanted - we could do with 12 ourselves. Wonder if leave will start on the strength of it.

**[March] 25<sup>th</sup>.** Lady Day. The 35 did not come y'day - although every preparation was made for them - The sitting room gutted of furniture & 20 camp beds erected & made up - the rest 15 - in bedrooms - thank goodness - not mine - at night we got a message to say only 10 were coming - they didn't turn up - so perhaps this morning we shall hear it is all a hoax - we have built such castles in air on them too! 6 or 10 to go on leave at the same time - Days off - Got wot not - Off in evening spent money - books - for my Godchild - & my foster babies - an interesting mag - & another [?] pen - a vase for Constable, & ordered a clock - 5 inches across the face - hexagonal - very old - hope it will go well - comme ça - took my fancy.



Pretty morning - white horses on a blue grey sea - bright sunshine making the rocks gleam red & green - & all colours - 1st fishing boat just gone off - won't say it looks... it would bore you - should love a life on the ocean wave at least just now I think I should - Am leaving Casino 3 & 4 today - & going to Roche D. Ritchie Thomson [*Ritchie-Thompson*] coming back - to her room from night duty. Bugle - get up.

**[March] 26<sup>th</sup>.** A day of quick change - handed over Casino 3 & 4 to Ritchie - took over D. Roche - 3 hours later - was sent off to be ready for night duty. Thomas (T.F) had an operation suddenly & I am doing night duty. She is so far doing well - & a good patient. She had a lb.2 cyst removed from her inside - not off duty yesterday - none of the threatened sisters have come. There are two tiresome little V.A.D.s in the room next this coughing their heads off - I never did like coughs - I have filled them up with glycerine, lemon - & given them hot milk - but still they bark. Yesterday was the Annunciation of the B.V.M. The R.C.s had a great time - They had a wonderful procession all round the town - & I suppose had a great time. Thomas was sensible. Colonel Gray was called in to examine her - & when he said she must be operated on at once - she trusted on him doing it. It would be too truly awful to be operated on by a man you know well & are working with.

**[March] 27<sup>th</sup>.** Second night 2/3s done. My patient is very good & doing well but sleeps very badly. She likes to lie with me in the room & the light out, so many good hours I spent sitting & doing nothing more than thinking - can't even make lace to pass the time. However - it is not wasted time.

The 10 Sisters arrived yesterday. All Terriors [*Territorials?*]. They are supposed to be a new Unit - but cannot find a place to settle. Amongst them is Hindle - a Bart's contemporary of mine - By the way did I tell you that Thomas, whom I am nursing, is a Nottingham Children's Hosp - friend of mine. I wonder if they will let us go on leave now - same old motto "wait & see".

**[March] 28.** Thomas has not had a good day - but seems inclined to sleep tonight. My 3rd night - there is a terrific storm in progress - shutters being blown down - These windows have just blown open in spite of the shutters being fastened. Tins - I can't image what sort - but they sound heavy - are racing off down the street for dear life - went for short walk bath & bed - slept rather more than the day before but is an aggravating business trying to sleep in the daytime.

The 10 new Sisters are to be made use of while they are with us. They have done no work for a long time - 8 are wards - 2 in the Qrs. 3.45 a.m. I have just been to the kitchen for my supper! Cats! Poor - mangy starved looking creatures stealing what they can find to eat - Quite 12 of them. Really one would think this was the only place in Étretat where there was food. 11 of them are for destruction today. One very mangy one - was 1/2 in the stock pot eating meat off a bone! I think I will be off soup for a bit. Local tragedy. Our hairdresser's maid stole off to the woods at 1 a.m. yesterday. Some children - plucking [picking] flowers early, saw her staggering back - & a little later found the body of a newborn baby - still warm. The girl has been taken to prison - poor thing.

**[March] 29<sup>th</sup>.** Nothing to say - Patient doing well - thank God - No tea left out downstairs, so have had milk & water for supper - nice but not refreshing as tea - Tremendous gale still blowing - more shutters down - It is quite the thing in Étretat - apparently & they don't come gently. Went for a lovely long walk to some woods to find daffodils, found carpets of primroses but no daffs. Am too sleepy to think straight & the hospital is getting very empty. People are having days off.

**[March] 30<sup>th</sup>.** Quiet night so far - (4 a.m.). Thomas is still doing well. Letter from Hilda tonight telling me Basil Blogg has been killed - How terrible for poor Mrs. Blogg - let us hope the other two will keep safe. Went for lovely walk - alone - this morning - miles along the Canteen Rd. Beautiful hilly country - both sides of me - some parts thickly wooded, some smothered in primroses & daffodils - The air was sweet with their scent - larks singing - the colouring of the whole sky & country wonderful. It would have been a perfect feast for an impressionist! How some of the sisters can spend their half days off - in going to Havre - I don't know - the car we have is an awful old broken down thing. Yesterday they got back at 11 p.m. instead of 6.30 - car had broken down on the way back - & was stranded until another car came by - & towed them in - they used blankets knotted together for a tow rope.

**[March] 31<sup>st</sup>.** My 6th night 2/3s done - not much like active Service. My patient has slept all night - & I have sat in a chair. I am looking after a sick V.A.D. too, have been to her room twice, both times the door has made a disastrous noise but she has not stirred. Marcey & I went for a glorious walk to the woods - & brought back a big basket full of daffodils, primroses, blue & white violets, anemones etc.

Children would think they were in fairy land - Elizabeth would be in her element - the sky was intensely blue & the birds singing ecstatically - No letters no news. Smith (D) has gone on leave - after measles. No news of us getting it.