

Edith Elizabeth Appleton Diaries - Volume 3 (8 May to 15 November 1916)

September 1916

SEPTEMBER 8th. I have not written my diary since Aug 24 because my ears have been bad & I have been a very miserable person - just creeping out of bed in time for breakfast - & spending all my free time in my bed with head poultices on my ears. On the 6th we saw a dis-abled submarine pass in company with a torpedo boat - I don't know what nationality it was. Yesterday I had a half day - from 2-4 took Matron in the car - to Yport - & other pretty little places along the coast. After that Marcey & I walked to Miss Wallen's hut for a bathe. Unfortunately she was giving a tea to large number of French people - so we quickly changed our plans & trudged along the beach to some huge rocks - The tide was rough & high - We undressed into our bathing gowns - & played the mermaid in the rock pools - & over the rocks - it was great fun & we had a good buffetting - Then we sat on the rocks & got dry in the wind.

September 9th. The Col. is away on urgent family affairs. Major Martyn on sick leave for 3 weeks - Matron off duty. Truslove went sick yesterday - & our staff is far under number - so heaven help us - when the expected rush does come. Off duty last night - Gathered & skinned mushrooms for breakfast.

September 11th. We had a convoy of 399 in yesterday, only 70 wounded - Far the most of the sick were suffering badly from shell shock. It is sad to see them, they dither like palsied old men, & talk all the time about their mates who were blown to bits, or their mates who were wounded & never brought in. The whole scene is burnt into their brains & they can't get rid of the sight of it. One rumped - raisin faced old fellow said - his job was to take bombs up to the bombers, & sometimes going through the trenches, he had to push past men with their arms blown off - or wounded anywhere - & they would yell at him - "Don't touch me," but he had to get past, because the fellows must have their bombs. Then he would stand on something wobbly & nearly fall down - & see it was a dying or dead man - half covered in mud. Once he returned to find his own officer blown to bits - leg in one place - body in another. One man told me quite calmly, "Our Div was terribly cut up - because we had to be a sacrifice to let the others advance - & they did advance all right." A Canadian said to me yesterday he didn't know how the British Tommies had done - what they had - advanced up hill & taken dug outs - like underground fortresses - some as much as 60 ft deep - & well fortified. They all think the next advance will be less difficult than the last - also - that Fritz's number is up. May they be right.

September 12th. I sent 17 of my shell shocks off to Havre yesterday - where they are to receive special treatment - Should have liked to keep them here - treating them will be very interesting. I got very sick of hospitals - rules - people in clean aprons etc yesterday, & in my off time 2 -5 - took Toby for a walk over the cliffs to Miss Wallen's hut. I was quite alone there - & enjoyed it immensely bathed, sat with not much on - & my hair loose & read - then a heavy rain shower came - & we sheltered in the hut - I must do that again quite soon - while I was there an aeroplane flew past - so low over the water, that the man on board waved. A mine sweeper - put a boat load of men ashore for provisions. Such a relief - to see the blue uniforms! The sailor boys - looked such young clean creatures. They went off again during the afternoon. No letters.

Lena Ashwell came with her party yesterday and gave us a most excellent concert, quite the best so far. She is a true artist in the way of reciting and acting. The men loved it. There were two short acts, one something about - a bathroom at 8.30 - funny one - & the other "The £12 look" in which Lena took chief part. As I was really on duty I was back in the ward before it was over. The men were like great children when they came back - trooped after me - all talking at once - One boy knew Mr. Ben Field - the principal actor - he had taken boys' parts with him before his voice broke - Very measley English mail. New Sister (stripes) arrived - The tales the men from the Somme tell are terrible. How some poor fellows go mad - & some die - from fright or shock - & all swear terribly - One very quiet man told me - swearing was not his habit, or any joy to him - but he swore as much as any man when shells were coming over - it helps one to bear it - wonderfully, he said. One time they were following the 1st Warwicks &

the Black Watch - & had to advance over no man's land - strewn thick with our own dead - not a square yard without a dead body on it. The Warwicks had been almost entirely wiped out - & the Black Watch nearly as bad, they - as they always say "Took what we had to."

September 14th. We had a sudden hurried order - to clear the hospital yesterday - So we have. I have only 20 patients left. Should have had 19 - only a sergeant threw himself into the water - & is now a prisoner patient. It was sad to send so many to Con Camp [*Convalescence Camp*] - who have only been in 4 days. They were not well - but too nearly well to go to England - & they will be wanted back - up the line as soon as possible. No letters.

September 15th. Hospital reduced to 13 patients - awaiting the great push - Took Constable to Miss Wallen's hut to tea - Matron is supposed to come on light duty tomorrow. I fell down last night - & cut my knee & broke my watch. Calm morning.

September 17th. Had the day off yesterday. I think about half the Staff had - we have so very few patients in. Stayed in bed to breakfast - went for a walk with Wood & Marcey over the - other cliffs. Lunched with Madam - at 12 - Crab - roast mutton, grilled potatoes & salad - a delicious sort of cheese - that is eaten with sugar - cider - & coffee. At 1 o'clock Matron, Ritchie T., Marcey & I - started off for Caudbec en Caux - you have got some p.c.s of it. We broke down - 5 minutes after we started & put back for a fresh car. The journey was a joy of beauty bathed in sunshine. The Seine was most picturesque - all the trees & hills along its banks - just beginning to turn to Autumn & there were some big steamers going to Rouen. We looked all about Caudbec - & much enjoyed the oldness of it all - specially the church - then had tea at the Hotel de Marine & left again before 6 o'clock. We were not knocked up early for a convoy - so I don't know whether we shall get one or not. Yesterday's communiqué was the best I have seen for a very long time. Today is cold & calm & bright - a blessed relief from the stifling weather.

September 19th. We were called at 4 a.m. yesterday to admit a heavy convoy - of wounded from the *last action* [*? hard to read*] only 115 walkers - all the rest badly wounded. Amongst mine there is one boy - with his leg in such an awful state that I think it will have to come off - His chest with a deep wide - wound - 8 inches long - & both arms wounded. The two beside him have wounds right through the chest - & another man in the same room has his intestines sticking out through his ribs! etc - etc. They all seem very cheerful about things - A C. S. M. told me that these new guns that go in the advance with them - are a tremendous help - they crash along over German trenches in everything - & the Germans fear them. The Germans have been giving themselves up in groups - They come over - & help any stretcher bearers - & do anything they can - to not be killed. They are quite right not to expect mercy, because they have been doing the despicable thing of killing our wounded! The C. S. M. has an excellent photo of the Kaiser & some of his Officers - given him by an old old man to spare his life - He need not have given it. The Sgt. Maj - said he could not have killed such an old man. They say the numbers of German dead are appalling! So far they seem to be living right well - & the Tommies have found - wine - cigars - soda water & other comforts in their front line trenches. Evidently they considered their dug outs absolutely safe - because they had their wives & families to stay with them there - & often our people have found women's bodies amongst the dead. They are wonderful underground hotels! bathrooms, h. & c. electric light etc. The C.S.M. told me about one very young & ardent Tommy who yelled down a dugout "How many of you"? They hoping to be spared said "Five Camarad" "All right" says Tommy "Here is one each for you" & sent down 5 bombs! One would have done it - & the stink & smoke was awful - but the Sgt. Major could not help laughing. We were supposed to get another train load in last night (including 15 stretcher Germans for me) but the last we heard of it it was derailed & as we were not called up - I suppose it still is. We are living through one of Étretat's special storms - Sea where it shouldn't be - Things blowing about - all we can do is to batten the windows & hope for the best. The theatre was going all day - & probably all night.

September 20th. Our train met with a second accident - the engine went wrong - so all on board were put off at Rouen - & we were left - not lamenting as we had quite enough to do already.

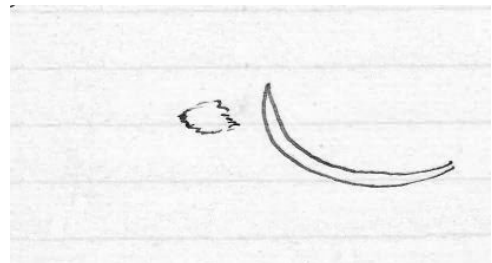
Mrs. G. Jones came to day Goodbye forever – she is going home for good - & it is very meet & right & her bounden duty that she should. I was locked in the one & only ---- lavatory in this house yesterday afternoon for quite a long time with not as much as a pair of scissors on me – after thumping & banging until I was tired – (the wind had broken the connection between handle & latch) – I bespied a hook in the wall – in desperation took it out - & with it as my tool – picked my way out – the door immediately banging behind me – fast as before – So in the evening I had my own back - & went for the door - & finally got it open with the kitchen poker – a hefty 3 foot one – with a chisel end – It is no ordinary lock – it is not in a line with the crack of the door – well the door side of the crack – which made it well nigh impossible from the outside. A shout of joy & triumph went up from all present, when they saw the last signs of resistance give way. Getting up time so *au revoir*.

September 21. One of my D.I.s died yesterday. He was one mass of very putrid rottenness long before he died - & oozing everywhere. The smell was so very terrible I had to move him right away from every one - & all one could do was to dress & redress – Happily I don't think he smelt it himself – But never have I breathed worse poison. We sent 6 to E. Not off duty – Dodged supper & went straight to bed – Everything smelt the same. One of my D.I.s has the D.C.M. & Le Croix de Guerre avec Palme, both won at Loos. The French took a fright & our boys rallied them & helped them to gain their objective. Calm morning.

22nd. Another D.I. (not of mine) died yesterday. I spent the morning in Matron's Office writing to the relatives of men of the S.I. & D.I. lists – we did 60 before lunch. In the afternoon I walked to Benouville with a Sister whose name I will not mention – because I want to tell you the story of a great experience she had.

23rd. Spent most of yesterday in the Office, writing letters & doing pay sheets. Matron invited Wilson, Marcey & me for a motor drive in the afternoon – we went through tiny country lanes – so small that all donkey carts even – had to turn into the fields to let us pass. We came home by Yport & the coast.

When I went down at 6 to make my tea – it was quite dark - & the old Moon & Venus were looking very beautiful.



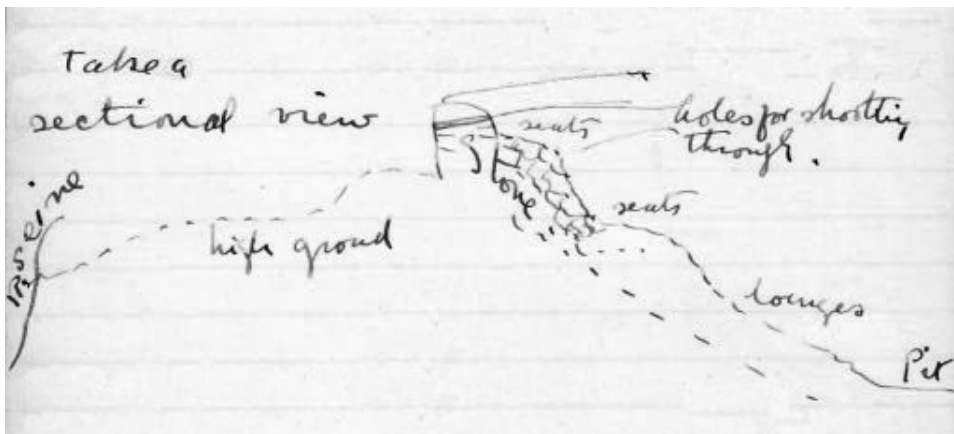
Would it bore you to hear the experience that Sister had. She was in charge of a train at the time which was held up for a few days for repairs at St Pol. My lady heard that Arras was only 33 kilometres away, & thought it & thought it would be short sighted to miss seeing it. One night she told her C.O. not to worry if he did not see her for the whole day she was going for a tramp. She left at 6 a.m. & walked where she had to - & got a lift where she could - & considered herself lucky in riding the last few miles in an Ambulance - which was going up to fetch wounded. She alighted in the town of Arras & was nearly petrified with fear, at an awful rumbling, indescribable noise - as if an earthquake was in progression. She asked the officer of the Car what it was, but he was nervy & frightened & said "I don't know - one never does know what is happening." She left him & asked a Tommy the way to the Square & Cathedral - noticing all the way - what a dead city it was - not a soul about - except on-duty Tommies, who were hurrying to do their job & get back. The Tommy told her she mustn't mind that noise, it was only our own guns (Don't I know it!). She much enjoyed the sight seeing & picking up - souvenirs of the interesting ruins; when a new & terrible noise alarmed her. A sickening shrieking whistle overhead - then an explosion & the rattle of falling masonry. She knew it was a shell - & thought she would go. On her way a nun saw her from a cellar & called her down - She lunched with them & went out to find some way back - Shells occasionally falling somewhere - At last she was promised a lift on an ambulance - which had to go to the trenches

to get its wounded, & finally had amongst it's load - the driver & officer of the car that brought her in. She was told to walk slowly on & the car would pick her up. When she got to W. — H.Qrs of the Div. a brass hat spotted her - & questioned her narrowly as to who she was & how she came. Then she was left alone - & her ambulance arrived & picked her up - on account of being in Sister's uniform not a single sentry had challenged her. Meanwhile the brass hat, telephoned - to the O.C. of the train & told him to send out a picket to escort - an arrested Sister back - then he chased after the ambulance - arrested her - took her in his own car, until they met the picket - which escorted her home. She had much unpleasantness & was threatened to be sent to England - but in the end - she was sent here - she supposes for duration of War.

September 26th. Last two days have been quiet. No convoy, but there are still many very heavy cases in hosp. There was a case of diphtheria in No 5. so the ward was closed - & disinfected & today the Sisters are having the day off. Marcey & Constable are going a little jaunt to Rouen. I should much like to be going to.

September 27th. No news. Marcey & Constable had a joy ride to Rouen yesterday - lucky - devils as their ward is not working yet - The car went to take an Indian - to the Indian hospital there. They brought me back a fairing of 6 dainty hankies! Every one seems to know my weakness.

September 28th. Am feeling very contrite because there is a 6.30 service, & I am not going to it. Had the 1/2 day off yesterday - in company with Waite, Thomson, Marcey, & Constable. It was too wet to do what we intended to. So - we - had the Ford & went a joy ride to Caudebec. The rain stopped soon after we started, so everything was bright & beautiful, & every one in good temper. The country was looking lovely - just getting the autumn colourings. We went by all the little villages I must have told you about before - & stopped at Lillebonne to look over the ruined Roman theatre. The old man knew his story well - & made it all most interesting - The whole amphitheatre is fairly intact - all being built of thick grey stone. One thing he told us - The amphitheatre towards the theatre was stalls & seats etc - but in time of invasion, or in case of invasion from the Seine it could be used as a fort.



Take a sectional view.

I think it was in the 5th Century a complete house was discovered - underground - We saw photographs of it - It looks like a Cathedral Crypt. At one time, the Theatre was used for refugees to live in during a siege. There are beautiful Roman baths & a well in the pit of the theatre, that were built for them. They have found - from time to time - all sorts of treasures, beautifully carved ivory & bone pins used by the Roman ladies - old bits of crockery bearing Roman inscriptions, nails, lead etc - We saw them all -

There is a tiny tomb in which they found the ashes of the body of a baby - in a bottle, together with all it's possessions - a tiny bracelet - a silver spoon - & it's toys! It was a thick square - of stone - with a well - about 1 ft deep - & 1 1/2 long & 1 ft wide.



We saw the fine old (Roman) Tower - where William I stayed in 1063. After that we dashed on to Caudebec - along the banks of the Seine - very beautiful - & arrived at 5 o'clock - just time for tea - & to see the Cathedral & a shop or two before we started for home. We came back another & equally beautiful way, by the Grand Val - which was looking grand in the evening lights & shades - through Yvetot, where the Anglo American hospital (for French soldiers) is. Home at 8 p.m.

September 29th. Quiet day yesterday. Helped in the office gathering & writing up particulars of leave. Does it mean leave is going to start? I wonder!

September 30th. Quiet day. Off in afternoon - walked in the rain. At 1/2 past 9 last night there was great excitement along the front. It was pitch black darkness. A siren was being blown, about a blow a minute - at about a mile out it sounded. No light showed from the place - & the sea was very rough. A man along shore - was waving a lamp seawards - & another in a little boat 100 yds out to sea was doing the same. They thought it was a fishing boat trying to get in - poor things I hope they managed it - it was such a rough dark night. It was very weird & horrible to hear that scream of distress, repeated & repeated - in the pitch darkness - It may be that the waving lights were all they wanted to show them where Étretat was.