

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

October 1916

Oct. 1 It was a fishing boat in distress the other night. A big lugger – She was water logged – & blew her siren until some of our Étretataise went to her assistance. They brought her ashore here. We had a Convoy of 347 in yesterday – badly wounded – only a dozen walking cases amongst them, so although numbers were not high, work was much & we are all going on after first breakfast. I only took 43 patients German prisoners. They always fall to my share. 6 were slight cases, but the rest! were shot to rags & putrid! Really the smell of gangrene added to always unpleasant German smell – was a trial to one's stomach – & as I was the only trained person I had to do the dressings – which meant – doing dressings all the morning until dinner time finishing them after dinner, & then starting a most necessary second round – the minute they had finished their tea – & keeping on until ?

Most of them are Prussian Infantry, some Württembergers some Saxons – & some – something else.

One poor Saxon youngster got his wounds from his own bomb – he held it too long after the pin was out. As before when I had the Germans – the whole population of Étretat turned out to see them carried in – 37 were on stretchers – & made themselves such a nuisance, that I shut the ground floor shutters. The youth of Étretat have been parading in front of the house whistling & singing the Marseillaise, for the benefit of the Germans. Our own people are as bad. I find bunches of strange orderlies gazing at them – make myself thoroughly unpleasant – & banish the lot. I'm not going to keep a peep show. If they want to see Germans – I tell them to join an Infantry Reg. & they will get what they want.

One man gives me the creeps to look at. He is so like Beelzebub – caused by a scar on the outside & an evil spirit inside.



Our boys do their work very thoroughly judging by the wounds. They are not at all a brave set this time – they whimper & cry over their dressings before they are touched. The early daylight bill leaves off today – & I am beginning to feel – that I must have slept through the calling bell. but no – There it goes – Sunday morning – no service.

[October] 2nd. Many happy returns to Guy! Rampant day yesterday I sent 16 of the least bad Germans to the Canadian Hos. at Havre. They did look quaint! dressed in funny old brown civilian caps! & tweed caps – they really looked like robbers – & yet some poor cringing creatures amongst them. They were not pleased to go. Those remaining are stinking with gangrene – & ought all to be operated on – but they must wait until our own Tommies have had their turn in the theatre – & even now there are quite 30 urgent English cases still not done – & the theatre people are working night & day as it is. I gave each V.A.D. 1 hour off duty & the orderlies a short spell I can't get off as I have no one to leave in charge. Must get up now for early breakfast.

[October] 3rd. Many happy returns to Syd. The Port of Havre has been closed for about 4 days – so I am having to keep my Alleman prisoners. 6 are too ill to travel – & one of them is going to die – The whole street smells worse than a bad drain of him – & two very gangrenous ones – I expect will be struck off the list too. A Sgt Major among them, told us the War would not go on through the Winter, he thought it would end next month – we asked who would win – & he said – “Not us.” I expect he thought he was throwing sand in our eyes – but on principal – I don't

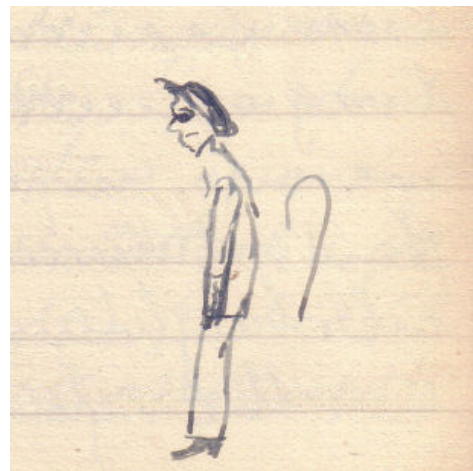
believe a word they say. There was a report of a Zepp having been brought down over London - One of the orderlies told them about it - The Saxons rejoiced - One Prussian said - Das ist nix - & so I said - "Ya - das ist nix" - & explained to him, that it happened too often for it to excite us any more. One speaks English & has to interpret for us. Another Prussian asked if it were true - & when & where - & went to sleep on the facts without commenting. Some of them are very young. Two say they are 18, but don't look it & some say they are 20 & 21 - & look - 18 & 19. I am sad to say a Petrol boat has been sunk - with loss of life. I fancy their adversary must be dead too, as the Port is to be opened today, & that would not be - with a submarine at large. The Germans are very lousie & we who are looking after them have to hunt carefully every night. We go on duty louse free - but regularly after a few hours feel things chasing up & down our spines etc, & the remainder of the busy day they rest not, if only they would have their game & go to sleep for a time - but no - either they never rest, or they take it in duties to keep us well paraded.

Major Martyn has a long extension of leave, & I very much doubt if he ever will come back. I am very sorry. The present Company Officer is too slow for the job. He is M.O. of my Division - very good hearted - but is as slow as a funeral. He was at Dover College - same time as Sydney - but did not know him - Billing - in Priory House. A very charming lad of 18 died at Officers 2 days ago - badly wounded - His Mother was here - poor thing, she has lost her husband killed in action - & this boy - & I think one other & now has only one son left. He is in the Navy - & she knows not where. There is a Sergeant attached to this Unit who has lost 6 brothers killed in action - a child - & both parents - since the beginning of War. I think leave will be started soon...ish. My German prisoners - are as happy as sandboys. They sing & laugh & talk & some seem to be really nice men. They are most grateful for all that is done for them - & their stinking wounds are cleaning up wonderfully.

[October] 4. Still no sign of shifting my prisoners, day after day I hope for a boat - but no boat comes - & still the Port is closed. I shall be glad to pack them off - one of the 7 too ill to travel, is going to die I think - The rest are doing well.

I took 2 hrs off yesterday & sat on the beach & watched the bathing - & drank in clean sea air. It was such a glorious sunny afternoon.

I am missing my own M.O. very much. He is so practical & helpful. My present one is like this



It is raining this morning & very muggy & warm.

[October] 5th. Just where I left off the night super came to me - & said there was going to be an evacuation soon after 6.30. I dressed & went with great joy - & fixed up 20 of my Bosches for England. 21 were to have gone but one was too ill. I am left with 7. Five shot through the lungs. 1 with his whole shoulder joint removed & many other wounds & very gangrenous & one trephine, who has fits. After getting those 20 really heavy cases away - we were much lighter. The orderlies had a busy day - ridding us of the creepy crawlies - 36 beds - mattresses - pillows blankets - all had to go to be baked. Of the men who went to England - some were pleased to go - some would rather have stayed here - & one old man was shaking with fright. He thought they were being taken to be shot. They were all profuse in their gratitude. One poor old Saxon stopped his stretcher by clinging to the seat in the hall as he passed, & seized my

hand & shook & shook it. Quite a fierce black - bolt-on-end haired person - made me quite a long speech - of thanks etc - & presented me with his identity disc - for a souvenir. Last night when I was doing their dressings they were roaring with laughter at a Cartoon of the Kaiser in the Tatler. I told them they ought not to laugh at their own Kaiser. They said even people in Germany considered him very eccentric. They were with great pride telling me - that the Kaiser's Mother was the King's (Edward's) own sister - I don't know why they should - but they do all seem to envy England & the English. One of those who went to England yesterday - left a note book in his locker with much German writing that no one could understand - & a map of Metz - showing where barracks were - & a list of the names of barracks - It was most interesting - & looks as if - airmen would catch military buildings in whatever part they might drop bombs - The place - was almost covered with them. The map - & notes have been sent to the Intelligence Department. I only hope our young feather pates think to tear up - or otherwise destroy - maps or notes they may have on them when they are captured. The Hospital is still heavy - 6 of the last convoy are dead - & others dying.

[October] 6th. Much more peaceful day yesterday. Gave Schreiner the 1/2 day. She has one bad ear like my two - funny thing. Bosches quite happy. The one I think is going to die - is quite off his head - & wanders. I don't know what he is talking about - just catch odd words - like Infantry - Metz - so I suppose he came from there. Off yesterday afternoon - unpacked Red + stores for Wilson. She is looking tired. Letter from Matron - Am glad to say she is better - hope she will soon be back again.

[October] 7th. Same story. Still have my 7 Bosches - but 4 of them are fit & marked for England. One looking at the Daily Mail yesterday - was trying hard to understand the headline - BRITISH EXHAUST 256000 GERMANS IN - ? I forget how many - DAYS. He could understand British & German - & the numbers - but was much worried over the "exhaust" - & much surprised when I told him what it meant. Apparently they get no news of failures of any kind in the trenches. He is a clever keen boy of 19. very polite & quite happy. We have taken a new house for Sisters' Quarters instead of a dirty little pig sty in the slums - that some had to sleep in.

[October] 8. All my Englishmen left yesterday - so now all we have in the way of patients is 7 Bosches - I feel they will never go - are here for "duration". Gloriously rough day. high sea strong wind. It is very beautiful to see the sunshine on clouds of spray - as it was yesterday when the sun was setting.

9th There is a patient in Casino V. called McLaughlan (please excuse this roughness [*erasure of writing*] as I was telling you again - that I had not an Englishman left - but I see I told you that yesterday & now I have to get up.)

[October] 10th. who was brought in so badly wounded across the shoulders - that both arms were entirely paralised. The story of him is pathetic. He was servant to their Major. At the attack they were both wounded - they were together getting over the parapet - quite soon the major was hit in the lungs. Mac carried him to the nearest shelter - a shell hole - but soon found that unsafe - then he carried him further back - & put him in a little nook - & sat to shelter him. After a bit Mac got hit - & found he was unable to do anything with his arms for the Major - but stayed on, he might quite well have walked to the dressing station - had his own wounds attended to - but he stayed on, doing what he could for the Major - by nosing round him like a dog & using his teeth - After 12 hrs the stretcher bearers came - & took the Major first where he was caught by another shell & killed. When the stretcher bearers went back they found "Mac" unconscious - having been hit again. When he reached here - he asked if his Major had come down on the same train - & asked Constable to write to a Lieutenant, whom he liked to ask about him. He wrote back & told Constable the whole story of it - also he wrote to Mac - such a nice letter - you would like to read it. "Dear Mac - I have heard from your nurse & am glad to hear you are getting on well, though I am afraid the Bosches made a bit of a mess of you. Still you mustn't mind that. I'm afraid though I can't send you cheerful news in return. Major Sands was killed at the Aid Post, either by the shell that laid you out - or one

immediately after. We all knew what you did for him & are grateful to you. Such bravery will not go unrewarded. You must not worry too much about Major S. He was too great a man to be stopped by a little thing like Death - & is carrying on somewhere - although we don't know how or where. Yours... Yoxall".

I sent 3 of my Bosches to England yesterday - & have about 160 empty beds - ready for the next convoy. Went to Havre yesterday to get the pay - 12064 - or 120064 francs I forget which - a big lot - because the V.A.D.s are being paid up - all their Field allowance since June - when it was stopped.

[October] 11th. Went for a lantern lecture on Lourdes last night given by the R.C. Padre - in his chapel. Most interesting pictures were shown - of the little shepardess Bernadette - seeing the vision - & scratching the ground - where the Spring of healing waters came up - & of people who had been cured there. I expect you know more about it than I do.

[October] 12th. We had a convoy of about 400 in yesterday. Many very bad cases - one was dead & one dying on the train. I had 53 English - & 2 Allemans, who were sent to the Can[adian] Hosp at Havre - as they were slight cases. They were standing & laughing at our badly wounded - so got short shrift from me. I bundled them into bed at once - & told them they were not going to stay with us - they were to go to the Canadians. It made them jibber - the cowards - because they are terrified of the Canadians. Am getting up to first breakfast to see my English patients off - so au revoir.

[October] 13th. Sent 12 patients to England & my remaining Bosches are marked "E" so will go soon - Some of my men were very bad with shell shock - One poor child looking not a day older than 14 - but who said he was 18, was very bad - too conscious & could not forget for a moment what he had seen. 3 new staff nurses arrived.

[October] 14th. Quiet, busy day. Still have 44 patients - chiefly surgical & 4 Allemans. Off in afternoon - went with Wood to put the big church in order & to arrange flowers there & in our little chapel in case I have no time today. Warm muggy, damp weather. I learnt yesterday that a "barrage" is when all the batteries fire as fast as they can - at the same time. It is used to stop the enemy's advance often. Where these men came from, there were two "Tanks" out of action - in one the bodies of two men - apparently burnt to death. Letter from Eve.

[October] 15th. Many happy returns of the Day to dear old Bud.

[October] 16. Calm & peaceful day yesterday, capped by an agreeable surprise. At 5 p.m. my M.O. told me the Germans would leave at 5.30. So with great joy I fixed them up - & had them ready. We are having much more bracing weather now - bright sunshine sharp showers - & a blustering wind - all very welcome - after the weeks of mug. Went to early service - but none other. This morning the sea is a clean blue green - with salmon coloured waves - the reflection of the clouds. Sky - baffles description of beauty - Poor old Daly who went sick a few days ago - was dispatched to England on Saturday much against her will. 4 more men have died - 1 an officer since I last wrote this two days ago.

[October] 17. 2 more patients to England. Condensed all but 8 into [Annexe] D. & am hoping for the best. It is too much for 2 orderlies to keep 4 large homes clean. Off in afternoon walked along Criquetot Rd. with Wood & Marcey. Morning calm, fishing boats all going off.

[October] 18th. Saw a thing that interested me much & of which I still do not know the explanation. Marcey & I were walking through the valley - towards the sea - I was ahead - looking at the sea. Suddenly my slow working brain said to itself - "Funny - that wave seems to be staying up in spray. It is not spray - it looks like steam" - Then I waited to show it to Marcey, & by the time I had her vision on the spot, flames were leaping out of the water - just one at a time leapt up - & went down. Quickly 7 mine sweepers came from the north - & placed themselves round the spot - like people playing rounders. I dashed up the cliff to the

French sentry box - for information - found both men - the worse for drink cooking a rabbit in a shed - hadn't seen anything of it. I should like to show you what it was like -



[October] 19th. Convoy arrived at 10.30 p.m. last night - I got to bed before 2 a.m. & must get up now for first breakfast. I took only 19 men - but they are rotten with gangrene & German

[October] 20. Very busy day yesterday. The Germans - some at least are very badly wounded - 4 on the D.I. list. They all belong to the 111th Baden Rgt - except 1 Prussian. Were their consciences tender - if they have such things, that made them such terrified creatures when they were admitted? They are settling down now. After all they might know - we don't want the nasty job of killing them - one man is simply entered as "German prisoner name unknown" he has a bullet in his brain & has been unconscious all the time probably does not even know that he is a prisoner. Another arrived with both legs badly gangrenous, one has been amputated high up - the other - may clean up - or - may be taken off. Another has the flesh torn off his thigh so deep - one can see the femoral artery, he is lying dead still in the hope it won't bleed - if it does there will be little chance of stopping it - as the wound extends to his stomach. The 4th D.I. has three gaping wounds across his back - into the lung. Five of the less bad ones were sent to the Canadian hosp - at Havre - Amongst my English patients I have a young thing of about 17. Short - baby faced creature. He makes us laugh - with his stories of the trenches. He said "Fancy a big fellow - putting up his hands to me - & crying "Mercy Kamarad" but they do - to a little fink like me, but he was so big - I was frightened too - but when I saw he was frightened - I wasn't any more. & then some one else shot him." It is better than a story to listen to the men's conversation.

Lena Ashwell's concert party came yesterday. A most unfortunate day - only a few patients & no sisters were able to go. We were all much too busy. This morning is calm - cold, beautiful.

[October] 21st. Very busy day. When I went on duty I received a message that English patients were to go in 1/2 an hour - I said they would be quite ready, knowing quite well that their half hour would be more like 1 1/2 hrs, but even so - we had to chase to get 10 badly wounded men - wounded each one in many places - wounds - dressed - clad, & on to stretchers in the time - We were ready all right. It is an extraordinary thing that the Germans rejoice to go to

England, & may talk of Colonizing in England - after the War. I think they won't. One of the slightly wounded - marked for the Can. Hos. at Havre - was left behind as the hos. was full. He asked me where he was going & I told him 'Havre' - he was very grumpy about it - & tried to be very ill to get marked England - but to Havre he will go, some even have asked if their wound is a "Blighty" one. Of this last lot not one speaks French or English - which sometimes makes it a little awkward - For instance one man asked me for a cushion under his buttocks (probably because I had just put the man next him an an air ring), from his pantomime description of asking - I sent the orderly to him with a bed pan!! much to his disgust - as he did not want it. This morning is beautiful - sky all colours of pale blue - pink & salmon - & all the boats & my verandah are white with hoar frost. & now the warmth of the day is making itself felt, a cloud of steam is rising from the sea, just like it does over the marshes - If - for one short week - there could be no war - & all the men were well, what glorious walks - picnics we could have.

[October] 22nd. My hand is too cold to write - Sunday - I have just come back from 6.30 service. Everything is white with frost, & glistening in the pinky morning sunshine - & all is very beautiful & very cold.

My head case Bosche was operated on yesterday & will die soon. Others as usual - a new stripe Sister arrived yesterday - named "Walker".

[October] 23rd. The "Unknown German prisoner" died yesterday & 1 went to Havre. of the remaining 5, 3 are D.I. & two are for England.

The Moon & Venus in the E & Jupiter in the W. are making the early morning skies beautiful.

[October] 25th. St. Crispin's Day. Many happy returns to Madge. 2 Bosches left for England on the 23rd - So now I have only the three D.I.s left - & so far - they are doing well. A great flutter was caused in the dovecote by the reenforcement of an old rule - "No meals are to be taken in the Sisters' duty room" as a rule we have a mid morning cup of tea & a biscuit, & invite our M.O. to join us - In some wards they have exaggerated it to a huge feed - that takes far too much time. There was the usual complaining & grumbling - & "we ought not to sit down under its", but in time they will get used to it. After all it is an Army rule.

[October] 26th. Had the 1/2 day off yesterday - & walked with Waite to the Lighthouse. Called at Miss Wallen's for tea. She lives in a fairly big old French house - far away from everything & everyone - except a few odd farms.

She is quite alone with one servant. The house is immaculate, beautifully polished floors, old French furniture - brasses - & bronzes. It is most refreshing to visit there, I hope to go again. We were overtaken by darkness - long before we had crossed the country between the Lighthouse & the Havre Rd & at last decided to make a straight cut - over hill or dale - ploughed or sown, & eventually we struck the Rd. It was pitch dark - & we were miles from home - when heavy rain came on - & in 2 mins we were soaked. Luckily after a bit one of our ambulances overtook us & brought us the rest of the way - there - bath - supper - bed. It is pouring with rain - & very rough this morning. One Bosche is very ill.

[October] 27th. Quiet day yesterday. Bosches still very ill. Only 23 patients all told - there is a rumour of a convoy today. Lovely blowing cold wind this morning. I feel quite weather beaten with lying in bed.

Another new stripes arrived yesterday - perhaps some of us will be moved! who knows!

[October] 28th. I got up before the break of day - & watched it come - It made all sorts of lovely colours in the effort. Yesterday was the same as usual. I am afraid one of my Bosches will lose his left foot - the right leg was amputated the day after he arrived here. I saw a beautiful shooting star last night - We had a short very sharp thunderstorm yesterday - at lunch time - It really seemed as if bricks were falling: but they weren't.

[October] 29th. Anniversary of a sad day - 19 years ago. "He is altogether lonely." [*This refers to the death of Edie's father, Edward Appleton - a Trinity Pilot, who died following a fall from a ship's ladder when embarking from a tender on 29 October 1897*] Quiet day yesterday. My very

D.I. Bosche is if anything better. A Hospital ship has struck a mine. 30 R.A.M.C. drowned. The sisters were all saved - & one at No 2 Gen. Havre. Rumour of a Naval Battle.

[October] 30th. Quiet, uneventful - wet - windy day - y'day. Off in evening - talked to Matron. No convoy in or out - no mail - people due back did not come. Port of Southampton closed. Leave started.

[October] 31st. Big storm raging. I have been hopping out & in of bed - trying to hit the happy medium between the stuffiness of my tiny room when entirely closed - & being blown out - when there is a crack of window open. Now I have cleared the decks and am letting it all come in. Had a heated discussion yesterday with my washerwoman on the treatment of ill Bosches - she thinks "kill the lot." Bought a pair of sabots yesterday - & am longing for rain to wear them. Ward 'in status quo' - We hired a good piano for the mess - the other was horrible. No mail - I am beginning to think there never will be.