

Edith Elizabeth Appleton Diaries - Volume 4 (21 June to 27 December 1918)

August 1918

Aug 2nd. I wonder how Fred is getting on. I think he will like it. I have had glorious bathes yesterday & the day before. Yesterday – a non bathing friend & I walked to Mesnil Val – where is a huge Con. Camp & Rest Camp. The water there was thick with bathers – but we turned sharp to the right & walked along to where there was not a soul on the shore - & lovely little cliff caves to undress in.

On the way we passed three Canadian Sisters sitting on the beach – two non bathers & one pining to go in but not liking to alone. So we went together – I was meaning to bathe alone – but vastly prefer some one beside me in the water. The sea looked calm – but it was a very strong current - & we were out of our depths long before we thought, a delightful dip – must try to go there again soon.

The day before – braved the crowded room – but I loathe it. We are busy – have had a convoy down every day for the past 12 days.

News in the paper still good – Von somebody – a big German in Moscow – has been assassinated. As one of my men says – he does not like murder, but thinks it quite a good thing for some of these influential Germans to be put aside.

Aug 3rd. I heard yesterday that Boulogne had been badly raided the night before – The Bosche got through the barrage & did pretty much as he liked – Hotel Devereux (D.M.S. – H.Q.) burnt to the ground – a Food Store - & a Detail Camp – luckily very little loss of life – which is a great thing to be grateful for.

This morning looks like being a fine day.

[Aug] 5th. I had a very pleasant half day on Saturday. Sister Payne & I took tea to Mesnil Val – walked there over the cliff – then came back – under it – until we found a quite deserted spot. The tide was at its lowest, but after walking – for what seemed like 1/2 a mile over sand & rocks & pools I came to a deep basin into which every wave dashed. I bathed there - & had a thorough swirling – it was lovely – I did not go out to sea as I was alone – sea strong – rocks unknown. We thought as it looked to be working up for a storm – the S. W. sky was deep violet & spreading – we would walk home by the coast as a short cut. We found our mistake – when every inch was over rocks & pebbles - & it was somehow much further. The storm raced us - & gave us a drenching before we got home. My coat now looks like nothing on Earth. We still feel like holding our breath about the news - up to yesterday - it was still excellent! Long may it last. Soissons has fallen to us - & we are near Reims! All the Allies seem to have fought splendidly, including the Americans - who of course ought to, they are using the cream of their men - & they are fresh.

We are getting a convoy of wounded down every day now - Etaples is not being used. I suppose it is still out of action from it's last bombing raid. Wish I could hear of or from Taff [*Edie's youngest brother*] - am wondering very much where he comes in, in all this.

On the cliff - behind where we had our picnic is a big Rest Camp - Australians are there just now, & we much enjoyed their band - which was just a right distance away to sound pretty.

Aug 4th. Since the last entry we have been fairly evenly busy - a convoy every day but one - I heard that a million men were to go over the top, & I am deeply wondering if A.J.A. will be one - good luck to the boy! He will be sorry if he does not go - & with Tommy I say - if there is no bullet with his number on - he won't get it. Good luck - to them.

The Dining Hall - gave a huge tea the other day - to their boys - & kindly invited all who were able of mine - to go. They had an excellent tea - salad - cakes - jellies – fruit.

After tea - there was an impromptu concert got up by a Sick Officer who when he is not fighting composes music. Judging him by his appearance & the way he sings & plays - his peace time occupation suits him better than his present one. Two or three of our staff contributed - one a violin solo - one played the 'cello & one sang. That officer - Mr. Vernon Lee - has gone back to duty now - we were all sorry - while he was in, he used to borrow the piano from the M.O.'s mess - & give a concert somewhere - nearly every night.

Yesterday - I went out with a sister who plays golf - she wanted to practise, so I did too! My. It

is not a bit like it looks! You wouldn't believe how hard it is to hit the ball! & when you do - it goes & hides itself so cleverly - that it takes ages to find, but I can quite realize the fascination of the game to one who can play. I may try again one day.

A very funny thing for about 10 days - I have felt positively ill, like influenza - with a stiff neck - & left arm - & nothing has done it much good - rubbing, applications, all have failed. So I sort of settled down to calling it "chronic rheumatism" & letting it take its chance. It is like a bad toothache - mine is a good bit better now - but I can't look sideways very well. Well - that is not the funny thing. Two days ago - I met a sister on the stairs looking about 100 years old - & stiff. She had it just the same - was having the day off next day - & felt so seedy was going to spend it in bed. Last night I heard of another with it - & another with a stiff back - & another with stiff legs. I believe it is some sort of a germ going round.

Some of my own patients were on the Warilda when she was torpedoed. I was very thankful to get a letter from one of them yesterday - a boy who had been on the D.I. for some time & whose Mother came. I think I mentioned him.

Aug 10th. Many happy returns of the day to Fred.

The times are stirring - & of an exciting week - I think yesterday was top day.

When I went on duty at 8, I was met by a patient half way - & asked if I had heard the news? we had broken through at Albert & in front of Amiens & had advanced 9 miles - a little later my Yankee M.O. arrived - flushed & excited. Had I heard - we had taken prisoner two Divisional Generals - lots of big guns, 2 complete C.C.S. (or as he said 2 C.C.s in to-to). Our tanks had done wonders & we had taken lots of German tanks. The ward is full of men who had taken part in it. Some had got only as far as the German first line - some to the 2nd & some to the 3rd - & they were perked up - & longing for more to arrive to know - if the wood ~~in front of~~ *[words crossed out]* - behind - - no - well anyway the German side of the 3rd line trench had been taken.

Of course - we only had the slight cases down so early on - during this night - more trains were to arrive - & today more again - & will probably bring the severely wounded. The spirit & cheer of the men is unbounded. You hear them talking about it - as excitedly as if it were a game of football & once the tale is told they, many of them - go off into such a sleep, there seems no wakening them for anything. Just sometimes I wish I were up at a C.C.S. but I don't think I really do. They say - British - by that I mean all English speaking troops including Americans - have done it so far - The French - are held in readiness, resting with their very best cavalry - & when we are tired out - the French are going to make a dash & carry on - that is the plan - let us only hope it will carry out all right.

Also - they say - that our Casualties are light - one serious to 5 slight wounded, & not a heavy toll of killed. Thank God for that. Our tanks did good work - they went over 5 to a battalion, & when they got to the German front line - they turned & paraded up & down the line - firing all the time - which made a good protection for our Infantry. The weather was misty two days ago - & our big bombing planes could not take part. Yesterday was clear - & I expect they did.

[Aug] 11th. Yesterday was a good old time busy day. Convoys in, convoys out - patients going to the theatre - others to be X-rayed. It was for a time, a whirl of men with stretchers. We had some very badly wounded in - those who were left behind in C.C.Ss. or F.As. when we got the slight ones yesterday.

There is one youngster with his leg off above the knee who says - when the doctor comes round to mark them for Blighty - he wishes to be sent to Brighton. The bad ones were all very exhausted - poor dears - tired from the fight - as well as having in most cases lost a lot of blood, & what a quantity they drink! The very best thing for them & their natures evidently demand it - what an agony of thirst a wounded man - out of reach of water must suffer.

My neck is still frightfully stiff, & some other people have it now. Out of my window - is such a pretty "Peace" Sunday picture - hazy morning - pink sunshine - lots of little fishing boats, with coloured or white sails - to & fro on a nearly mill pond sea.

The reading in the Daily Mail was thrilling yesterday, especially where the Cavalry & Whippets charged ahead of the Infantry. The Infantry opening out to let them pass. The Tanks! really did marvels - some of them went so far into the German lines - they paraded the streets of a village occupied by the enemy & fired their guns - point blank into rooms where Officers were feeding or dressing or working - truly a great surprise for them! Surely the Germans cannot

stand long of such treatment. Letter from Taff yesterday written on the 3rd – held up by way of censoring probably.

[Aug] 14th. This “push” is a very steady going one. We have had 3 & 4 trains a day in since it began. Everywhere is crowded out. Those fit to travel go almost straight on to Blighty, but we are accumulating a heavy residue of those “unfit”. In my ward I have 10 D.I. & S.I. 3 bad spine cases, one fractured skull & so the work if anything becomes heavier.

We have a great number of very badly wounded Germans - & I hear from Major Martyn that 24 Gen. is full of them.

By what the men say as well as by the paper the enemy resistance is stiffening considerably, & our casualties less light in consequence. I wonder how long they can keep up this pitch of warfare!

The weather I think has favoured us.

The Theatre has been busy all day & the greater part of the night lately.

Aug 16th. My ward – is rather a sad place just now – so full of extremely badly wounded – plenty of gas gangrene – 2 fractured spines – dying & a room – which is very difficult to ventilate. One feels the horrible smell in one’s throat & nose all the time – poor old things! They are very good – one died yesterday – an Australian – his leg was very gangrenous & had to be taken off high up – but it was too far gone. His one cry was to get up - & go out, he was quite all right – then about 1/2 an hour before he died he settled down – said “I’m done – I’m dying fast “ & he was quite right. It is very sad for these Colonials with their people so far away – but when he was off his head – I think he thought I was his Mother – from the way he hugged & kissed my hand – Well – so long as he does not get a great disappointment in a lucid interval I do not mind. The news is keeping very good – long may it last.

There is a heavy sea fog this morning. I am getting quite blazy [*sic = blasé*] of them now but it is a funny sight - a cloudless sunny sky above us – the soft fluffy mass that looks like newly fallen snow on the sea - & from out it ship bells and steamers’ horns – no sign of the vessels themselves.

Joyce Simpson called yesterday. She is “resting” at Mesnil Val. W.A.A.C. Con Camp. She is still working at H.Q. L. of C. whose office moved from Abbeville to Dieppe a little while ago. She says Officers on the staff speak very hopefully of the progress of the War.

Aug 19th. Our last convoy was a heavy one – of gassed men. I only took eleven but eleven such as they added to my already very busy ward means a lot. The two poor spines are dying so slowly – one an old Sgt is quite happily rambling on to his wife a queer old fish who looks reproachfully & almost reprovngly at him - for dying - in broad Lancashire “I did not think he would die”!

The other is an Australian – of Danish decent really a most handsome fair lad – 24 years old yesterday. His Mother & fiancée are in Australia. I hope to get his Aunt from England to see him. He is a marvel – can’t feel a single thing below his chest – upper part is always happy & content & cheerful.

A sister of another ward, who comes from nearly the same part of Australia comes & talks to him when she can.

The gassed patients all say this is quite a new sort of gas. Their eyes are all swollen – blood shot & streaming - & their skin burnt a copper colour, the tender parts of their bodies is burnt too. The gas does not take effect at once – but comes on by degrees. They may be sick after their first meal as a preliminary symptom – then their eyes begin to prick. By the time they reach the base they are extremely ill. Breathing like a person dying from bronchitis – horrible discharge pouring from nose & mouth T[*temperature*] about 104 pulse about 140.

My own M.O. is on leave - & taking his place is a Bart’s man – Capt. Randle of my own year. I like him. He was with a Battalion until a few weeks ago - they did well - were terribly cut up - & the remnant sent to the base - to be quiet for a bit.

In talking one day - I said I thought not one person if they spoke the truth would say they want to go back to the front - he quite agreed - but said he knew just one man - who was an exception - a Major in his Battalion - a big man - very slow of speech - who was absolutely fearless. Once - when the Germans had advanced - he went back - to where the Batt[alion] had retreated from - to find out some information for his Colonel. He found out what was wanted,

& then went down to one of their old dug outs, where he knew there was a telephone back to H.Q., rang up his Col. & told his tale. The Colonel asked him where he was, & when he heard - said "Thank you very much for the information which will be most useful - & now - will you please come back as quickly as you can." The Major answered in his drawl "Very well Sir - I will if I can - but there are rather a lot of Bosches about - I can hear some talking outside the dugout." He got back all right. He was always loathe to take leave - & had to be sent.

Someone showed him an account in a home paper of some of his exploits on the Marne - no name mentioned but a Major who has won the D.S.O. & Military Cross - both with bars - & the exploits left no doubt it was he. He was extremely angry about it.

In my ward I have a sergeant with 14 years Army Service - rather a character too. He was in the Navy two years - didn't like it, because he said - "you get beaten every time you dare speak to an A.B." so he swam ashore - to Plymouth - at 1 a.m. one night, bought himself some clothes - took train to London - without a ticket, & straight away enlisted in the Army. He was caught & court-martialled two years later - at Malta, but seems to have got on all right.

This is his 6th time of being wounded - He has two bits through his lungs - but he "thinks if he starts deep breathing exercises he will be better soon - he is accustomed to doing them every day."

Etaples is still being bombed from time to time - there are 100s of Bosches there & at Abbeville & here.

An Australian was telling me - that they were obliged to take more prisoners than they wanted, because they were too tired to bayonette any more. They came over in shoals - & the Australians - bayoneted & bayoneted until they could do no more. I sat out on the Pierhead yesterday afternoon it was gloriously breezy - & I was entertained by watching a Belgian officer, making love to a Belgian lady - who seemed far more taken up with keeping her skirts from being blown over her head than with him. As it was her little powder puff blew away & two little boys had a fine game chasing it, until it finally dodged through a port hole & flew out to sea.

A large convoy passed on it's way to Dieppe - & one of three - from Dieppe to England.

My staff nurse is going on leave today - hope she won't have a bad crossing.

Aug 22nd. St. Bartholomew's Day. I wonder if the children will get their buns - don't suppose there will be many plums in them - if any, but it is the bun - that is the joy. One spine case died yesterday. His wife was with him. Dear simple soul - it was very pathetic, & she suffered untold anguish but Grief is strange - the heart enveloped in it is constantly finding little peepholes of comfort, & occasions for rejoicing. The poor thing would weep that she was losing a good husband, then: "but his Colonel was proud of him, & is going to write to me, and then it'll all be in the paper!" Then she would be sorry again - & then - "All Accrington will know of him - it'll all be in the papers" [-] "Ah well - I'm glad I've seen the last of him - I shall be more content." He - Sgt. Partlin, was only 35, I thought from looking at him he was about 50. War does age them. I heard a good argument from that other Sgt. I told you about who ran away from the Navy - in favour - of being 2 parts drunk - when you "go over the bags." He is a man who has done well - & won medals. To begin with - if you're wounded - you don't bleed as much - 2nd - You are quite sensible enough to know what is expected of you - & you do the job - with a crest high spirit - & daring - minus fear.

He told me - in one big attack - at their first objective they found a dug out - where four German officers were lurching - ham, bread - wine in plenty - they killed the four - had lunch - themselves & had a good drink of rum - of which they found dozens of bottles in our English Bass bottles. First he & four other sergeants had it - then an officer joined them - then the Colonel - & when they had finished they sent the men down. After that they took another 90 yards in a brilliant dash. I take a good deal of notice of what this Sgt says - he is a man of fine physique - goes in for long distance running - deep breathing & all sorts of things. When he is in the line he takes 2 meals a day - & his rum issue - but when they are back for a rest he eats 3 meals a day & drinks 3 pints of stout every night at the Estaminet before going to bed!

Judging by the tramping there was a convoy in last night! We are getting rather short of staff but - who is not used to that!

My gassed men are terribly ill - every one of them the colour of a dirty penny, pulses rocky, throats raw - eyes streaming - lids swollen - & off their heads at intervals - weather, like living

in a Green house. It is all right at night, because no one cares if you have nothing on – but the day time! with correct uniform! I ask you!

27th Aug. The battles are raging – hot & strong & up to date of yesterday – there seemed to be no holding back the allies – God speed them still! Our boy [*younger brother, Taff*] is in the thick of it at Bapaume – at least so I imagine – a New Zealander I have in told me the whole Division was there – which of course includes Pte 54268. It is a difficult part of the line & I'm wishing the whole bloody war at an end - & all the boys safely home.

The ward is a shambles – of men with broken skulls – legs off – spines broken – it is also a shifting scene – of ins & outs – every day 2 or 3 train loads come in & every day those who are at all fit to travel go on. Roll on the war & why oh why – since you have to squeal for Peace – don't you wretched Bosches start about the squealing now.

We are getting 100s of Bosches in – many mortally wounded – no time for me or things as diaries... if there were I would just say how pretty the sea & sky are this morning - blue & copper!

Miss Wilton Smith is on leave - first time of going to England since the beginning.

Aug 30th. Thank God! The news keeps good – we have no breathing time between trains, & trains & more trains – how the whole British Army is not at the different Bases by now I don't know.

The New Zealand Div. is at Bapaume. God speed our boy. My ward is full to overflowing all the time & many have their relatives wired for by the War Office – really it is heart breaking – one dear old old lady came all the way alone – had never traveled in her life before – to see her youngest boy. Fathers – Fathers & Mothers – Brothers – Aunts – all kinds of relatives.

I can hardly answer for the weather nowadays – we have no time to realize what it is doing but it seems all right.

Every day more Bosches come – they are thick on the ground – many badly wounded.