

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

October 1918

Oct 1st Weather cold & stormy – I thought even this hotel would be blown away last night but after all it has stood 6 years – perhaps it will manage one or two more. It was built by the Germans – I think I told you – I expect they thought it would be a good observation place for when they took Le Tréport.

We are very busy all the time & they keep taking from our staff – to reinforce up the line. News A.1. up to date & the men say the newspapers do not exaggerate it! The casualties are the sad, tragic part – whatever the papers say in that direction the men say we have lost a terrible lot killed and wounded.

Poor old Sgt Chitty died two nights ago – that frac. skull I told you about.

My second spine case I had in ages ago went to England - & is now marked for Australia – his home.

Leave is still being granted – quite right too because if fighting goes on all the winter we should never get any leave at all if we waited for a calm period.

47 Gen. Hosp. – a hut & tent camp – beside us was all blown down last year. I wonder if it will fare better this year! All the same I have a sneaking regard for this hurly burly weather. I went to the end of the pier yesterday – it was glorious although very difficult to stand. We had one man brought in dying two days ago but something is very good to the dying. He laughed & seemed delighted to see us, & said “Oh it’s good to be here” & he died smiling. He must have thought we were his home people.

I have just taken a poor old Irishman from the mental hut, one leg off at the top of the thigh - other foot wounded - one hand wounded - one eye - & his throat, badly cut. He did that himself - as he lay on the field - he had lain there a long time - couldn’t move on account of his wounds & heard a creeping barrage coming towards him. He couldn’t bear it - groped for his razor - cut his throat, & knew no more. I don’t blame him & nobody would, but of course he is under arrest. He is getting on well now.

2 Oct. Many happy returns to Guy! I am enjoying myself very much this morning. It is still grey dawn, the clouds as yet have not a tinge of colour, but soon they will be putting on little dabs of gold & heliotrope & all sorts.

A brig has taken the lucky chance of high tide, & no one looking, & has quickly left the harbour & is speeding out to sea FREE - Two men, looking very friendly - walking in step - & rubbing shoulder to shoulder have just passed. When they were opposite my window I saw one was a Bosche & the other his guard — so in the darkness even enemies may be friends! In daylight the Bosche walks in front - & the guard behind, carrying a fixed bayonet. There was no bayonet this morning. Dare we feel that there is one small chip of Peace? Yesterday’s paper talked about the Bulgarians unconditional surrender - Peace on Allies terms - armistice to be arranged at once! Thank God for Peace in one small part. And now - of course - Turkey will not be able to get ammunition for her big guns through from Germany - so perhaps she also will sue for Peace. Peace deserves a capital letter every time it is written.

Our last load of wounded - are very badly wounded - half mine were either D.I. or S.I. & some will die – poor, poor mothers. It is not as bad for the boys themselves, they die happy - but the relatives are left unhappy. Now I must get up - the clouds are burnished copper.

Oct 6th We are living through stirring times. Three mornings ago “Bulgaria has asked for Peace at our price” was on every one’s lips. Yesterday - “Turkey is going to give in” - & today - “The Central Powers have asked President Wilson for a 2 months armistice.” They must not be granted it! Oh I do hope no one will be in favour of it!

Think how they would prepare & dig in & then at the end make our task twice as heavy as it would be - if we keep straight on. No! for all sakes - & tired as every one is - I do hope we shall keep on until he asks for Peace - in a rather less arrogant tone than appears in today’s paper. A Jew Padre - from 24 General - called on me two days ago. He was most interesting. He said the Jews would still be in mourning in spite of Jerusalem being taken, until the Temple was rebuilt. The Jews have already a vast amount of money for the rebuilding of it.

When a Jew dies he has to say three times - in Hebrew - "Christ did reign - Christ is reigning, & Christ shall reign" (something like that). An English Jew & German Jew were in hot conflict trying to kill each other - when they both thought their last hour had come - they both repeated the three lines of verse in Hebrew - heard each other - stopped killing - & saved each other. Part of the Jewish creed is that a man must repent the day before he dies, but as he never knows the day of his death he must repent every day.

Oh - I do wish the fighting could stop! We are all wondering if Turkey will stand with Germany whatever happens or if she will sue for a separate Peace - in the event of us not granting the 2 months armistice.

We put our clocks back an hour last night & now - 18 o'clock (army time) it is getting quite appreciably dark.

I have never known the men so absolutely buoyant over the news - as they have been this week.

11th Oct. We had some cavalry men down with our last batch. One was telling me what a surprise they gave the Germans - at the turn of the tide of War on the Amiens front. There were four Divisions of Cavalry following the Infantry & as soon as a breach was made - through they went - & had a clear run of nearly 9 miles. Then they dismounted & dug themselves in - The Germans apparently ignorant of them having broken through. They saw three Fritz bicycling towards Amiens & took them & found out from them where their Bgde [*Brigade*] H.Q. was. They found it & captured it. They found a "Leave" train full of men going on leave - Shot the engine driver - made all the men prisoners. Also they found an Ambulance train - again - shot the driver & took the complete train - apparently there were chiefly sisters on board - no wounded - the sisters were sent down the line & subsequently returned to their own land. Another man I had in - with a knee so bad that he will most likely lose the leg - told me that he was a prisoner with the Germans for a few days & he was never given even a drink of water the whole time & his wound was not dressed - hence its badness. That I forgive them - they probably do as we do - our own first - & God help them! do they ever get to the end of their own? They have enough - & judging by the ones we have - each badly wounded man is enough to get on with. Whether they left their worst for us or not I don't know - but they are blown to bits - & torn to ribbons - inside & out.

We had an unusually busy day. I have only one staff nurse - & two V.A.D.s at present. On that day my staff nurse & one V.A.D. went sick & two blue boys - whom we have taught to help us with the dressings - had to be kept in bed - high temperatures & sore throats, but the 2 G.S. [*Girl Scout ?*] girls - which were all I had of them, turned up trumps & we got through all right - by the end of the day.

Our whole hospital is very understaffed - only 20 trained people for about 2,000 beds is not enough. Thank Goodness my V.A.D.s are good in fact splendid. I don't know if I told you - Nicol [*?*] - a 45 C.C.S. friend of mine - is now on night duty here - which is fine - & yesterday I heard that Hamilton Watts - another of our 45 staff is at the hospital adjoining ours - I am glad. Sad - I have taken my beautiful winter coat to be made hideous & regulation. (silly fools). I went for a walk along the sea front at Mers [*Mers-les-Bains*] yesterday - & saw a French hydroplane - broken - on the beach. How it came by its trouble I don't know - but it came down at sea - & evidently sent word for help. It was towed in here at about 3 in the afternoon - It looked pretty badly smashed - but it was very interesting to see it - No wonder they shine like silver birds when they are high up. The car was of shining aluminium.

I thought the sea front quite a respectable place to walk alone in the evening, but evidently it is not. Every Frenchman - who was by himself - cooed me - at least I don't know what you call it - a sort of "tweet tweet" noise - so there you are - I can't walk alone at night now the clocks are put back. I suppose they thought I was on the lookout for a companion! Not much! They evidently don't realize the bliss & joy of being quite alone - when you live in a hum of many voices always.

Oct 14th. Great excitement yesterday over the newspaper heading "Kaiser's Cabinet gives in" & we are all wondering just what it means. The Hun is no more sorry for what he has done now - than he was 4 years ago. Of that all are certain - and as to saying he agrees to vacate Belgium - The fool! agrees! There's not much "agrees" about it. He is being made to do it - every minute of his life - and at top speed. Dirty dogs every one of them. They want an armistice &

time to prepare some foul new device of Satan to launch at us. An arrogant Prussian officer here was saying yesterday - boastingly - "It has taken the whole world to move us." They are dirty dogs every one of them (Prussians). We had an airman officer to dine with us last night. He says there are no first class Germans now & their planes are made of bad material - propellers of coarse rough wood - instead of polished mahogany! He was a gentleman & not an evil speaker of his kind but he did say that in the early war days the German flying men showed considerable chivalry but that now that was sadly lacking - & they did very ill tricks in the air.

This airman said they had great fun dropping their first bomb on Lille. They floated over & over the place - & finally dropped it. The Huns saw this object descending & flew for shelter, & many were still flying when it arrived - plumb in the middle of the "Place". It bounced & bounced a few times & finally stayed still. Little by little the Huns became brave & ventured to look at this unexploded object. It was a football with the message "Love from the R.F.C." tied on. He said they did not bomb places like Lille more than they were obliged to. We English have got a diabolical new bomb which makes an unearthly syren whistle on its way down. I believe its moral effect is very far reaching.

This morning is as pretty a picture as one needs - a light emerald sea - brilliant pink clouds - bright blue sky - & six mine sweepers just swinging with the tide - a mist is rolling off to the right & a full rigged brig is making its way through it - very beautiful.

I think the Americans should give the Germans a thorough rap over the knuckles before they finish.

Oct 15th. Many happy returns of the Day to Bud.

The Peace talk seemed all fizzled out yesterday & now the popular opinion is 2 years more! It is no good going by papers or popular opinion - we must just wait & see.

It is drenching with rain & not so pretty to look at out of the window. I thought as we sent patients out the day before - & no convoy was announced - we should have a few empty beds yesterday - but the convoy came unannounced. Men from the Douai region. They say the Germans are making a bit of a stand there but that we are both sides of it.

Rogers - that man from Sandwich - who has been D.I. for such a very long time & still is - has taken a most funny turn & makes the men roar with laughter. He mimics my voice - to a T. It quite made me jump when he began it, because I recognized myself quite well. He calls the V.A.D. "nurse" - but lately it has been "Miss Welford! I want you." I suppose it is that he is only partly sensible & doesn't really know.

Oct 18th. Not using newspaper talk, or authorities ideas or thinking it out one bit in my own brain - I hope we shall not give the Germans Peace yet, for the one reason that the men, one & all are fiercely against it and it is they who bear the brunt - if they feel they can stand a little more of it, why should they be held back. They feel they have not yet hit hard enough for the dirty mean brutal tricks played by the very unhonourable enemy. Given another few months they may make a far more satisfactory job of it.

The C.C.S.s are playing a great game of leap-frog and just sometimes something stirs in my blood that I wish I were back at one - advancing every few weeks over the heads of all the others - then feeling annoyed when they get ahead again & then taking our turn to jump comes again. I love it all - except the shelling & bombing & that's horrible.

It must be very interesting just now as of course they are following up the Armies over the new battlefields - & unsalvaged battlefields do tell such thrilling tales. Yes - on the whole I believe I should welcome orders to go up - but it never pays in the Army to ask for anything at all.

My ward is full up of heavy cases - some are "residents" & likely to be - far too ill to move on - but most of the beds we fill - the man becomes fit to travel in three or four days - & he goes to make room for someone fresh. There has been an unending stream of them since August, or July - whenever we did begin.

We are glad - all the while the news is good!

No one knows the difference in nursing men from a successful & unsuccessful battle, except those who have done it. Ill as they are - these men are happy & cheerful. The German Sisters must be having a hard & sad task.

Oct 19th I was off last evening & had to go to town for my coat. It was nearly dark when I got there & there were huge flags flying! I wondered what on Earth for but I soon found! The people were rejoicing over the retaking of Lille – Ostend & Bruges – Lille especially. Little urchins were marching through the town with improvised bands – drums – voices & whistles – but it sounded joyful. Many of the inhabitants here are refugees from somewhere the Bosches invaded.

The tailor who altered my coat, & who lives in a tiny house – told me last night that he came from La Bassée. He had a big shop – tailor’s shop - & as he said “beautiful things also” & many assistants. There are, I think hundreds in this place alone the same.

News good – still busy. I hear rumours of eleven sisters coming – may it be true! We could do with double the number.

Foggy morning.

We had a poor youngster from the last convoy with a ghastly shoulder wound. I do not expect to find him there today – it was all gas gangrene. We have an Anti gas serum now but to do any good it must be given at the earliest stages & this boy was too far advanced when he came. His Mother was told she might come but I doubt if she will arrive in time poor dear. The church bells are making a great to do – a special service perhaps.

Oct 23rd The news yesterday was good – but didn’t make such splashy headlines as usual lately.

The good thing seems to be that the French are at the Danube so that Germany cannot send to Constantinople by that way – in fact all ways except by Russia seem to be barred.

We had a very heavy convoy in yesterday – most of them from the front near Cambrai. They say that there are hundreds of civilians in the villages we are taking now – one boy was trying to tell me all about it yesterday but he was not a very fluent person.

He said the people had been told that the “Tommies” were coming. The people were delighted when they came & as this boy said “some of the chaps who speak French told me the people said the Germans made them do all the cooking & slapped them if it was not well done.” Lots of the girls & women had been taken “to work” for the Germans. One old man this boy said was very funny – he didn’t seem to know what to do – he was over 80 – he walked up & down & half cried & half laughed. Many of the civilians have been wounded - & are in our C.C.S.s – (wish I was at a C.C.S. again.).

I had a terribly sad case on the convoy before last. Such a nice cheery man – a gentleman farmer – was brought in with a very deep thigh wound. It looked fairly clean & he was so all right in himself – except for a bad headache (great symptom of gas).

He wrote to his wife saying he hoped to go to England soon & was constantly rejoicing, at soon going to his wife & child & farm. There was g.g. [*gas gangrene*] in the wound & he died in less than a day.

We still have some very very ill people whom I have not the least idea if are going to get better or not. We took 22 mostly bad yesterday – 5 S.I. I saw in yesterday’s paper that we have captured a 15” gun on the Belgian coast that was used for shelling Dunkerque.

The 4th Army are “At home” today if I can I shall go. There is an old 45 friend of mine at the next hospital & we both decide that we should like to go back to a C.C.S. but doubt whether we ever shall.

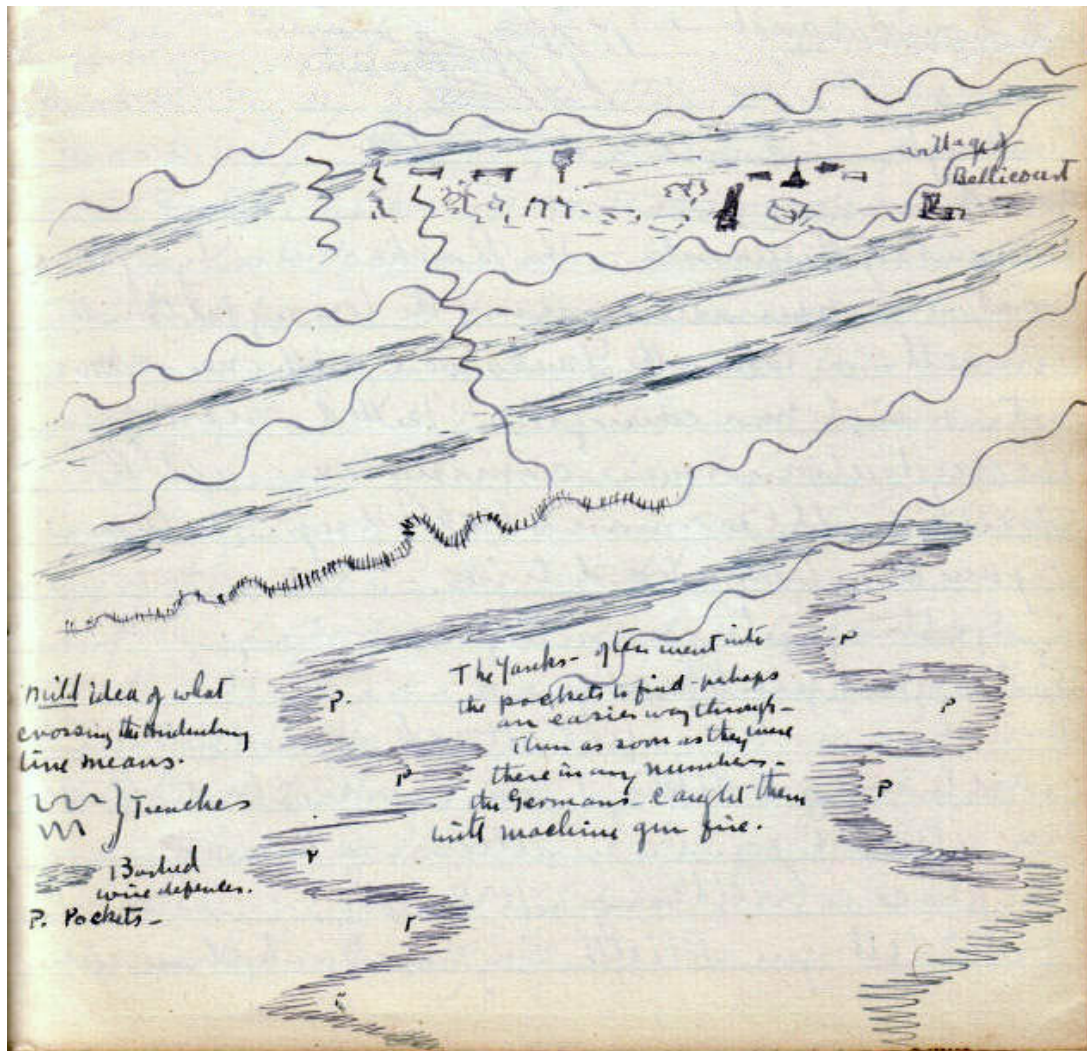
Misty morning.

Oct 24th Miss Williams – Assistant Matron – & I went to the Army School At Homedid we enjoy it?

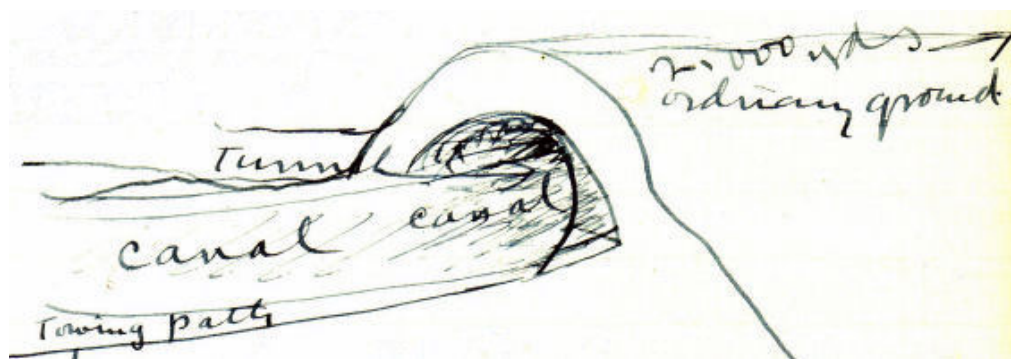
The first part was quite interesting – when they showed us the School mascot – a boar – which they had brought with them from Fliers [*unclear ?*] Wood & when they showed us all sorts of photographs of the battle areas taken from aeroplanes. Tea was all right – then ----- there was a band which played outside the mess during tea – but after tea played in the lecture hall – a large hut – with a splendid waxed floor. British nurses are not allowed to dance – Canadians & Americans are. That explains our misery in a nut shell – OUR PEOPLE DANCED. & it is Miss Williams’ duty as being in charge of the party to report it. If she reports it officially it means drastic punishment for the offender. If she does not she has not done her job.

The moment we spotted 3 of ours in full swing we fled from the hut & spent the rest of the time wandering anywhere that was not near the dancing. We talked the matter inside out & came

to the conclusion – the thing to do is to tell Matron unofficially - & pretend we did not see it – but to warn them if any one dances next time, no further invitations will be accepted. Do you wonder I asked not to have a charge – in some ways it is a grizzly, policeman’s job. The photographs were most interesting, one – of the Hindenburg system looked roughly like this:



There was another interesting photograph of a part where the Americans had been holding the line. They had to advance over a canal which ran underground for about 2,000 yds. The Yanks dashed straight ahead over the canal – never thinking to guard the two ends of the tunnel. The Bosches were lying in wait – in numbers along the towing path in the tunnel - & when the Yanks were well over came out & with machine guns killed most of them. The Australians were coming over after the Yanks & the Germans bobbed up in between & gave them both a bad time.



Getting up time – misty morning.

25th Many happies to Madge.

British are making a fresh attack – round Valenciennes - & are having a stiffer job than over their last attack. Am afraid our Casualties are heavy.

The place is bristling with Bosches.

Did I tell you a little way back – about an airman who came to visit his brother – a dangerously ill patient in the Officers' ward? & who dined with us? He flew over two days ago & did some marvelous low flying & dropped a message for his Father & Mother who are visiting the other son. We thought he would graze the huts he was so low. He started back – when it was dark & difficult to see - & crashed to ground & was killed. It really is a sad thing – for us all & his Father & Mother – poor dears, who have already had one son killed & one is a prisoner in Austria – the third here – D. I. & now this 4th one killed. He had only been married a short time. He looked so young – I couldn't believe he was married.

Oct. 27th Some C.I.R. (Canterbury Inf. Reg.) came down on yesterday's convoy – Taff is with them – one of them told me they left their place of short rest last Tuesday night to be ready for the attack on Wed. They had a hard hot time. I wish he knew Taff – but he does not.

The Colonel has bought 50 Turkeys – 8 geese - & many head of chicken – a good idea.

Weather very cold indeed.

Just back from early service.

Oct 28. Sister Nicol had a letter from an Officer who passed through Achiet [*Achiet-le-Grand or Achiet-le-Petit*] a little while ago & who was a patient of hers there in 1917. I read the letter - he said "Do you know - I spent the night where the old 45 CCS used to be. It is now a scene of devastation & ruin - it made me feel very sad - the Officers Ward where I spent so many happy hours is just a tumbled ruin. I could just recognise where your little bunk used to be. And then the Sisters Mess! The only recognisable thing was the fireplace which I remember being built & the two little chimney corner seats. The Mess was also marked "Believed to be mined - Not to enter". The hut where your room was was removed bodily & a disused machine gun post had been ?busted? there." So that's that—

I often wonder if these men know how funny they are - our Ass. Matron - a charming person of whom we are all fond - amongst her many jobs brings round the bundles of magazines sent to the hospital. One day she came in looking like - I don't know what - from the huts - drenched blown - sou'wester on any way but straight. I was just thinking, she didn't mind a bit what figure she cut when a man bobbed up in bed & said "Here comes the sketch". She noticed it & enjoyed the aptness very much. I think they love the Sketch most of all the papers we get. Influenza is raging everywhere.

Oct 31st. Sister Nicol has gone back to a C.C.S. & why have not I? I wrote to Miss Wilton Smith yesterday & asked her not to let me become a shirker at the base. I have had over a year at a base now. Still it is always best to take what comes. A new Red Cape arrived yesterday with orders that she was sent here as Assistant Matron. That means the present one must go & every one will be terribly sorry.

Of yesterday's convoy most were Jocks - two of mine very badly wounded - the rest not so bad. The news seems good & I believe the heads of the Nations are conferring in Paris on the Peace Problem - good luck to them.

I have got a sailor in my ward a stoker from a collier. I was telling him something the paper had reported from Norway. "Don't believe it" - he said "Don't believe a single thing any Norwegian tells you." He says that they are the biggest lot of spies imagineable. They were caught carry[ing] letters for enemy subjects, to & fro from England - lots of times. Now when a Norwegian vessel enters the Humber, or any other port, the Pilot who boards the ship has to take all binoculars & telescopes & lock them up - not to be used until the vessel is out of port again. That is not done on a British vessel.