

“J” Special Company RE
Appendix No 12

ARRAS 22/5/17

DETAILED REPORT ON OPERATIONS WITH 29TH DIV^N ON 22ND MAY 1917

It was arranged on 11th May with 29th Divⁿ that 275 projectors should be installed at O.8.a.5.7., 250 of which were to be layed on the N W corner of BOIS DU VERT O.9.a.7.9. (the BOIS DU VERT is reported to contain many dug outs about this point) and 25 on a strong point at O.3.c.4.7. The position of the projectors was selected by 2/L^T G C ALLCHIN RE in the open 20-30 yds in front of SHRAPNEL TRENCH. Carrying parties were provided for carrying projectors and drums by 29th DIV^N. Carrying arrangements for projectors went rather badly as sundry carrying parties did not turn up at the rendezvous or went astray. On one or two nights this was excusable to a certain extent as the weather on these nights was very bad. An altogether inexcusable fault however was the fault of carrying parties leaving projectors along the route. Altogether 38 projectors went astray in this manner. These were probably dumped in shell holes along the route. These faults necessitated two extra nights work, but by the 18th 266 projectors were in position. On the night of the 18th 266 drums were placed in position and electrical connectors made & tested. A guard of INCO and 2 men was left over the position in case of accident. At 4 pm on the 19th firing parties under L^T TAIT and 2/L^T ALLCHIN proceeded to the line and stood by in readiness to discharge at 9 pm. Wind was then (at 4 pm SE. I proceeded to 87th Bde H.Q. and kept the 29th DIV^N informed of the wind conditions. At 8 pm wind was ENE, about 6-8 MPH. Our part of the operation was therefore cancelled and the exploder parties returned to 87th Bde H.Q. where they were accommodated in a trench until 5 am the next morning when, as the wind was still unfavourable (being NE) they returned to billets. The 29th DIV^N infantry assaulted at 9 pm on the 19th but were driven back, and by 2 or 3 am reports came through to Bde H.Q. that they were back on their original line again. The enemy appeared to be holding the line in strength. On the 20th the G.O.C. VI Corps decided to take the drums out and 29th DIV^N issued orders for carrying out the drums on the night of the 21st MAY. I accordingly got into communication with CSC RE Third Army to try to get this decision revised, but could not do so at that time. At 5 pm on the 21st wind conditions appeared likely to be favourable for discharge on the night of 21st-22nd and CSC RE Third Army saw the BGGS VI Corps to get permission to discharge the drums instead of carrying them out.

Permission was obtained to discharge drums at 3.15 am 22nd. L^T TAIT and 2/L^T ALLCHIN were informed of Zero time and the artillery cooperation at 8 pm 21st. Firing parties proceeded to the line about midnight and I proceeded to 86th Bde H.Q. (86th Bde had relieved 87th Bde in the line) about 10 pm on the 21st. Wind was 5 degrees or so W of NW at 3.15 am with a little rain, and circuits were all tested and found to be ready for firing. The firing parties waited 5 minutes for a burst of artillery fire which should have come over their heads at 3.14 to cover the noise of the drums but as nothing unusual was observed up to 3.20 am drums were discharged then. The first shot fired 226 drums the remaining 40 having their circuits broken by the discharge. L^T TAIT then left the position with the majority of the personnel and reported to me at BDE H.Q. at 4.35 am, whence he returned to billets with these men.

2/L^T ALLCHIN with his section sergeant and 2 pioneers then attempted to repair the broken circuits and discharge the remainder of the drums. This was very difficult as there was a little rain at the time and everything was wet and splashed with mud. Ten more drums were discharged in all and it was impossible to find out where the short circuiting was occurring in the remainder. The party carried on until nearly 5.0 am & then owing to sniping had to return to the trench having 30 drums undischarged. These will be removed & returned to our stores tonight and the position cleared up to some extent. We had no casualties during the action & our only casualty for the whole operation was one O.R. slightly wounded while carrying and digging in. The Officers NCOs & men carrying out this operation worked splendidly throughout, several nights in positively awful weather, & other nights being kept out much longer than should have been necessary owing to the bad work of the carrying parties.