

“J” Special Company RE
Appendix No 13

ARRAS 25/5/17

DETAILED REPORT ON OPERATIONS WITH 18TH DIV^N ON 25.5.17

ARRANGEMENTS FOR OPERATION Arrangements were made on May 3rd for operations on 18th Divⁿ front. It was decided to instal as many projectors as possible to operate on CHERISY, the targets being nests of dug outs at O.32.a.5.5. & O.26.c.8.1. (Sheet 51^B) with a line of dug outs between these points. The Divⁿ did not define finally their requirements until 7th May when it was decided to instal 400 projectors at O.25.d.2.4. and to fire as soon as conditions were favourable with the possibility of recovering this number in the event of unfavourable conditions delaying the operation. Meanwhile it was arranged to transfer projectors from the GUEMAPPE position to the forward dump for the new position and L^T LAWFORD and 2/L^T SANTER proceeded with 3 sections to a bivouac in an old trench about 1000 yds E of NEUVILLE VITASSE at N.30.b.5.5.

CARRYING On the night of the 5th inst it was arranged for 8 G.S. wagons to transfer 200 light projectors from N.12.a.7.6. to the forward dump of the new position at N.30.a.6.0. Owing to heavy barrage fire the wagons failed to report, but the work was carried out on the following night. On the night of the 7th 8th and 9th 372 projectors were carried up and dug in by “J” Coy R.E. On 10th May the part of line containing the projectors was taken over from the 18th Divn by the 14th Divn. On the 10th the remaining 28 projectors were carried up & dug in making a total of 400. Weather conditions were unfavourable until 14th May but the 18th Divn decided not to carry the drums in owing to a gas shell programme arranged for that day. On the night of the 15th 397 drums were carried up to the position. One G.S. wagon lost its way between the lorry dump and the forward dump and 363 drums were placed in the projectors ready for firing. The wind became unfavourable however and it was impossible to fire the same night. The wagon with 24 drums which was lost was subsequently found & the drums brought back to Coy H.Q.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR FIRING OF DRUMS Between the 15th & 24th inst the drums remained in the guns with a guard on the position but throughout the whole of this time conditions were more favourable for the discharge of the drums. The wind limits from N.W. to S.W. by S were comparatively narrow. On the night of the 15th & 18th L^T LAWFORD and 2/L^T Santer stood to at the position, but weather conditions were unsuitable. On the night of the 21st conditions were favourable at 10 pm for which time Zero had been arranged, but owing to a Brigade relief Zero had to be postponed till 2 am by which time the wind had swung round to N.N.W. On the 22nd the section again stood to as favourable conditions were predicted in the weather forecast but the operation had again to be cancelled

On the 23rd the section returned from their bivouac to ARRAS. On the 24th conditions were more favourable and the operation was completed at 3 am on the morning of the 25th.

DETAILS OF OPERATION Zero was arranged for 3 am on the morning of the 25th as a Brigade relief was in process from 10 pm till 2 am. The wind during the night had been favourable and seemed

likely to continue so. Readings were taken by the two Officers in charge of the firing parties at this projector position, and by Capt Laycock at 55th Bde H.Q. (at point N.22.d.4.4. They were as follows:-

12 MID	1-2 MPH	W to W by S
1 a.m.	-do-	-do-
2 a.m.	-do-	-do-
3 a.m.	-do-	-do-

The wind was perfectly steady and the readings at the position corresponded with the readings which Capt Laycock took at Bde H.Q. The wind limits for this operation had been previously fixed as between NW and SW by S and the senior Officer at the projector position. L^T LAWFORD had orders that if he considered the wind was between these limits he should discharge the drums at 3 am without further orders. Capt Laycock considered that the wind was almost ideal at 3 am when the drums were discharged.

All the drums in position fired on the first shot, and the operation was therefore concluded successfully. Capt Laycock then stayed outside at the 55th Bde H.Q. to observe any signs of enemy retaliation and signals etc. At 4 am a runner from L^T LAWFORD reported to me that the drums had been discharged and that every battery had fired. It was then breaking day and there was a slight ground mist. Capt Laycock again tested the wind and found it exactly as before. At about 4.30 CAPT LAYCOCK noticed a heavy mist beyond our lines which seemed to hang very thickly in COJEUL VALLEY E OF GUEMAPPE, and towards 5 am a slight back eddy seemed to spring up from N which carried a little of this mist towards WANCOURT. A slight haze also was carried along the COJEUL-VALLEY as far as HENINEL. When the cloud arrived in the valley opposite CAPT LAYCOCK could smell that it was gas. As far as could be seen only a small percentage of the total amount was carried back over our lines by the eddy. Before the gas had time to travel any further a somewhat fresher breeze of about 3 MPH came up from SSW to S by W. The total length of time of the back eddy was 10-15 minutes and before 5.15 the cloud was travelling in a N N Easterly direction again covering GUEMAPPE with a slight haze W of GUEMAPPE travelling towards MONCHY LE PREUX. The wind was a perfectly defined wind & such a movement of the cloud was entirely unforeseen. The contours run away to the East along the COJEUL and SENSEE VALLEYS, and it was I consider quite impossible for there to be the slightest risk to our own troops with this wind. Excellent work was done by the Officers, N.C.Os & men carrying out this operation. They were in bivouacs for fourteen days, often under very trying conditions. They were frequently wet through & unable to change their clothes and the section had to stand to unsuccessfully on four occasions before the operation was completed.

The percentage of drums fired (100%) was extremely good and the operation was apparently successful.

There were no casualties.