

**DURHAM**  
AT **WAR**



**MY EXPERIENCES & IMPRESSIONS SINCE THE  
DECLARATION OF WAR (volume 1)  
by Hubert Horatio Shirley Morant**

The Story of the 10th Battalion Durham Light Infantry  
in the First World War  
by its commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Morant

**PART 8: Pages 123-131**

**August 1916**

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# H.Q. 43<sup>rd</sup> BRIGADE.

I beg to forward the following account of the operation of clearing Edge Trench from about S 18 b 75.80 to S 18 b 10.7 - as well as the New German Trench running about North from Edge Trench about S 18 b 8.7.

**1.Objective.** In accordance with para 3 Bde.operation order No 59- 26<sup>th</sup> Aug the 10<sup>th</sup> D.L.I. were ordered "to establish themselves on the edge of the wood placing a block up ALE ALLEY and in the new C.T. leading from about point S.18 b 8.8."

**2.Front held by 10<sup>th</sup> D.L.I.** The 10<sup>th</sup> D.L.I. prior to the attack held INNER TRENCH - from COCOA LANE to S.18 b 8.75. with one Coy(Capt Parr) -with two Coys in support DEVILS TRENCH - Coy in Reserve YORK TRENCH.

**3.Plan of Attack.** The attack was originally ordered (Bde Op.Ord.59) to take place at 7.30.p.m.,26<sup>th</sup> Aug-The time was subsequently altered to 5.a.m. 27<sup>th</sup> Aug.The orders were that the assault would be preceded by one hour's bombardment of the objective by 43<sup>rd</sup> I.B.Stokes M's & Z/7 Medium Mortars during the last 5 minutes of which the 43 Stokes Batt: would fire Rapid. This Bombardment,however ,never took place the assaulting parties therefore did not leave their Trenches.

The Trench Mortars having proved their inability to effectively co-operate it was necessary to formulate a new plan of attack.I decided,therefore,to try a Surprise Attack and to rush over the open into the New German Trench and at the same time to attack the German Barrier in Edge Trench from the trench itself - without previous bombardment - but at Zero(5.p.m.) jumping off time for assault the 18 pdrs were to put up a barrage from about S.12.d.10.7. to T.13.b.10.4.

The General idea for the Assault - was as follows :2 sections of Bombers with blocking parties were to leave Edge Trench near our barrier

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(2)

at Zero & rushed into the New German Trench - One section to work to left, clear & block it - the other section to work to right & attack German Barrier in Edge Trench from the rear.

Another section of Bombers to go over our Barrier in Edge Trench & attack the German Barrier opposite to it. A fourth party of Bombers under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Parie was to crawl through the wood from Devils Trench & be in position to bomb Edge Trench at Zero - about S.18.b.75.90 Capt Parr's Coy was to support the Bombing Attack, the details of which I entrusted to the Batt: Bombing Officer, Capt Todd - who carried out his duties in a most intelligent & efficient manner to my entire satisfaction. - the supply of bombs never failing for a moment.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt E.E.Canney led the two sections of bombers over the open into the German Trench & the success of the attack was very largely due to his gallant leading, fine example, & energy in organizing the erection of the Barrier in Ale Alley. Sergt E.Chicken(D.C.M.) led the assault on the German Barrier in Edge Trench - & to him & L/cpl Sherrif of the same party the elan & dash of the attack is largely due. The former though suffering appreciably from a wound in the leg continued to show the greatest activity & offensive spirit throughout the operation whilst all ranks agree that he enjoyed every moment of it. L/cpl Sherrif who it is universally agreed was only second to Chicken had to be abandoned when wounded at the furthestest point(T.13.a.4.8.)reached by our bombers in ALE ALLEY.He is therefore now together with Bomber Corrigan a wounded prisoner in enemy hands.

Meanwhile Lt J.R.Paris' party which according to order had crept up to the wire in front of German Edge Trench(about S.18.b.9.7.)in side the wood harassed the enemy by throwing bombs - Rifle Grenades & Lewis Gun

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(3)

Fire - though they were unable to enter the trench owing to wire they did valuable work in distracting the enemy's attention from the attack from the West & suffered heavy casualties from fire from both flanks.\*

Capt Parr the officer Commanding the Coy in support of the Bombing attack who with Lt Todd arranged all details of the attack is an officer of the very best type & performed invaluable service displaying untiring energy throughout the day & night generally controlling affairs in the front line- sending me accurate information & in organizing the work of consolidation & the digging of a new line in front of the captured trench

I cannot speak too highly of this officer who is one in whom the greatest confidence can be placed.

The spirit of the men - though subjected to the heaviest barrages & bombardments in the wood- was splendid. Not the slightest hesitation was evident either in charging intact trenches or barriers in daylight or in carrying messages or munitions through the heaviest of barrages.

In conclusion I wish to mention the excellent work & readiness to do anything of B.Coy 6/ Somerset Light Infantry - placed at my disposal in Reserve - Any call on their services were instantly & willingly met.

#### 4. General Remarks.

(a) It appears futile to count on Trench Mortars to bombard a particular trench unless they have been already in position against it, at short notice. They are useless unless previously registered & this without telephones & direct observation from position, is a very lengthy process. The construction of the emplacements & carriage of ammunition also takes comparatively much time & labour.

In the present Warfare the Germans do not appear able to use them. If they are to be counted upon they must have a very energetic commander.

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(4)

(b) Now that there is little or no wire surprise attacks over the open . seem to have good chances of success - as long as the enemy is not put on the "qui vive" by previous bombardment.

(c) The fighting 56<sup>th</sup> Div<sup>s</sup> did not appear to act up to its reputation. Although there was no nerve-racking bombardment men charged our men with "Hands Up" & pushed their way passed them in the trench in their anxiety to surrender - & no men looked more cheerful than they after being made prisoners.

(d) The German bombers are said to have out thrown ours & to have utilized platforms or steps from which to throw their Bombs - exposing their heads & shoulders. Lewis Guns were found useful in keeping them down.

(e) A great drawback to short notice of orders for making an attack under present conditions - is the difficulty of ensuring that Supplies of S.A.A. Grenades of all kinds etc are adequate prior to attack. In the present class of Warfare there is no Trench Store List - & it is difficult to ascertain accurately what supplies are actually available. Because 500 Grenades have been sent up there is no certainty that number reaches the firing line. During heavy shelling stores are often dumped by carrying parties anywhere. The 220 S.A.A. carried by the men soon gets used up or lost.

(f) The necessity for more than the ordinary Oil Bottle Supply of Rifle Oil was at once evident - during operations in heavy rain - both for Lewis Guns & Rifles as well as Grenades.

5. Conclusion. The Barrier we erected in ALE ALLEY was about 50 yds further than the objective ordered. About 12 p.m. on the 27<sup>th</sup> I received orders to clear ALE ALLEY up to BEER TRENCH but by the time orders for a further attack could have reached the front & the troops have been reorganized for further attack the men would have been too tired to respond & orders to

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(5)

renew the attack were deferred till all ranks had rested.

6. I attach the following

(i) Plan showing trenches attacked.

(ii) Report from O.C. Assaulting Parties as to reasons for not attacking at 5 a.m. 27<sup>th</sup> inst.

(iii) Report by O.C. B.Coy 10/ D.L.I.

(iv) Report of O.C/o Bombers attack.

7. I wish to record my appreciation of the assistance rendered, & the excellent digging work done, by Coy, K.O.Y.L.I. which was on my immediate left.

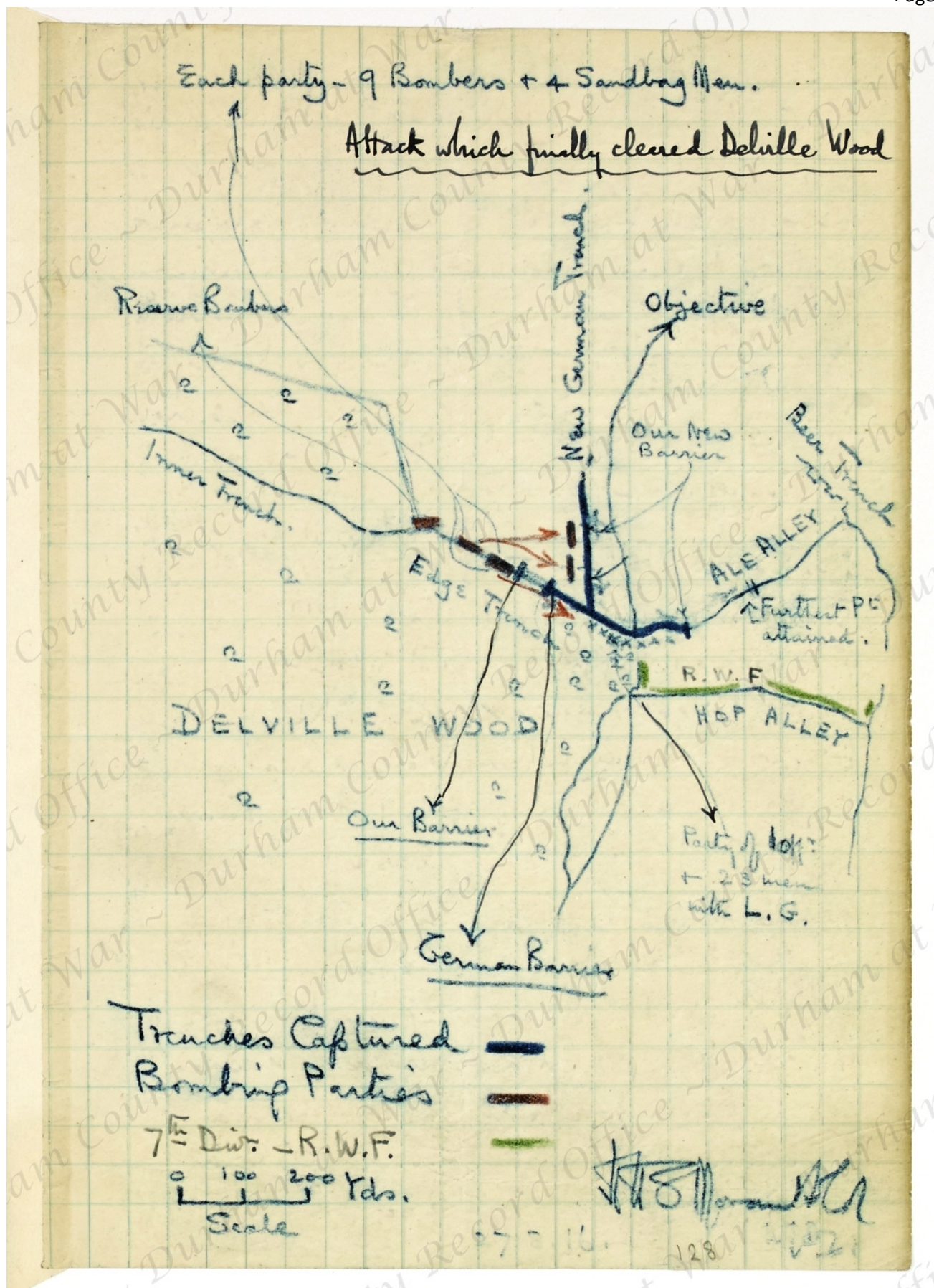
8. My recommendations for immediate reward will be forwarded later.

29.8.16.

(signed)

H.H.S. Morant. LT.Col.  
10/ D.L.I.







# Bde Orders for Abortive Attack.

SECRET.

43rd LIGHT INFANTRY BRIGADE.  
\*\*\*\*\*

Copy No. 4

OPERATION ORDER No. 59.  
\*\*\*\*\*

26th August 1916.

(1) During the afternoon our Heavy and Field Artillery will bombard the enemy trenches BEER TRENCH N.W. of ALE ALLEY and ALE ALLEY from a point about T.13.a.4.8. to PINT TRENCH.

At the same time the 43rd Infantry Brigade Stokes Mortars and Z/7 Medium Mortars will fire at that portion of the German line on edge of DELVILLE WOOD near T.13.a.0.7. still held by the enemy.

The 41st Infantry Brigade will also co-operate by firing on ALE ALLEY.

(2) At 7.25.p.m. the 43rd Trench Mortar Battery will open rapid fire on the objective - ceasing fire punctually at 7.30.p.m.

(3) At 7.30.p.m. the 10th Durham.L.I. will attack the enemy trench using bombs and rifle grenades and establish themselves on the edge of the wood placing a block up ALE ALLEY and in the new Communication Trench leading from about point S.18.b.8.8.

Trench with the 41st Infantry Brigade will be established at T.13.a.0.7.

*[Signature]*  
Captain,  
Brigade Major,  
43rd Light Infantry Brigade.

Copy 1. to 4th Somerset L.I. B.G.  
2. 6th D.O.L.I. *7th D.O.L.I.*  
3. 6th K.O.Y.L.I.  
4. 10th Durham.L.I.  
5. 43rd MachineGun Coy.  
6. 43rd Trench Mortar Battery.



H.Q. 43rd Brigade      Delville Wood

I beg to forward the following account of the operation of clearing Edge Trench from about S 18 6 75.80 to S 18 6 10.7 - as well as the New German Trench running about North from Edge Trench about S. 18. 6 8.7.

1. Objective &c. In accordance with para 3 Bde operation order No 59 - 26<sup>th</sup> Aug - the 10/D.L.I. were ordered "to establish themselves on the Edge of the Wood placing a block up ALE ALLEY and in the new G.T. leading from about point S. 18. 6 8.8."

2. Front held by 10/D.L.I. The 10/D.L.I. prior to the attack held INNER TRENCH - from COCA LANE to S. 18 6 8.75. with one Company (Capt Parr) - with 2 Companies in Support Devils Trench - 1 Company in Reserve YORK TRENCH.

3. Plan of Attack. The attack was originally ordered (Bde op. ord 59) to take place at 7.30 p.m. 26<sup>th</sup> Aug - The time was subsequently altered to 5 A.M. - 27<sup>th</sup> Aug. The orders were that the assault would be preceded by one hour's bombardment of the objective by 43rd I.B Stokes M's + 2/7 Medium Mortars

130(1)



during the last 5 minutes of which the 4<sup>th</sup> Stokes Battalion would fire Rapid. This Bombardment, however, never took place the assaulting parties therefore did not leave their Trenches.

The Trench Mortars having proved their inability to effectively cooperate it was necessary to formulate a new plan of attack. I decided, therefore, to try a Surprise Attack and to rush over the open into the New German Trench and at the same time attack the German Barrier in Edge Trench from the Trench itself - without previous bombardment - but at Zero (5 pm) jumping off time for assault the 18 Pns were to put up a barrage from about S 12 d 10.7 to T 13 b 10.4.

The General idea for the Assault - was as follows: 2 Sections of Bombers with blocking parties were to leave Edge Trench near our barrier at Zero and rush into the New German Trench - One Section to work to left, clear & block it - the other Section to work to right and attack German Barrier in Edge Trench from the rear.

130(2)



Another Section of Bombers to go over our Barrier in Edge Trench and attack the German Barrier opposite to it.

A fourth party of Bombers under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut Parri was to crawl through the wood from Devils Trench and be in position to bomb Edge Trench at Zero - about S. 18 to 75.90.

Cap<sup>t</sup>. Parri's Company was to support the Bombing Attack - ~~and~~ the details of which I entrusted to the Batt<sup>y</sup> Bombing Officer Lieut Todd - who carried out his duties in a most intelligent and efficient manner to my entire satisfaction - the Supply of Bombs never failing for a moment.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt E.E. Canney led the two Sections of Bombers over the open into the German Trench and the success of the attack was very largely due to his gallant leading, fine example, and energy in organizing the erection of the Barrier in Ale Alley. Serg<sup>t</sup> E. Chicken (D.C.M.) led the assault on the German barrier in Edge Trench - and to him and 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Sheriff of the same party the

130(3)



Elan and dash of the attack is largely due. The former though suffering apparently from a wound in the leg continued to show the greatest activity and offensive spirit throughout the operation. Whilst all ranks agree that he enjoyed every moment of it. Lt Sheriff who it is universally agreed was only second to Chicken here to be abandoned when wounded at the furthest point (T. 13 a 4.8.) reached by our bombers in ALE ALLEY. He is therefore now together with Bomber Corrigan a wounded prisoner in Enemy hands.

Meanwhile Lieut J.P. Paris' party which according to orders had crept up to the wire in front of German Edge Trench (about S. 18 b 9.7.) inside the Wood harassed the enemy by throwing bombs - Rifle Grenades & Lewis Gun Fire - though they were unable to enter the trench owing to wire they did valuable work in distracting the enemy's attention from the attack from the West and suffered heavy casualties from fire from both flanks (report attached).

~~Commanding~~ Captain Parr the officer Commanding the Company in Support

130(4)



of the Bombing attack who with Lieut. Todd arranged all details of the attack is an officer of the very best type and performed invaluable service displaying untiring energy throughout the day and night in generally controlling affairs in the front line - sending me accurate information and in organising the work of consolidation and the digging of a new line in front of the captured trench. I cannot speak too highly of this officer who is one in whom the greatest confidence may be placed.

The spirit of the men - though subjected to the heaviest barrages and bombardments in the Wood - was splendid.

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In conclusion I wish to mention the excellent work and general readiness to do anything of B Company 6/ Somerset Light Infantry - placed at my disposal in Reserve. Any call on their services were instantly and willingly met.

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130(5)



- trench  
 unless they have been already in position against it, at short notice. They are useless unless previously registered & this, without telephones & direct observation from position, is a very lengthy process. The construction of the emplacements and carriage of ammunition also takes comparatively much time and labour. In the present Warfare the Germans do not appear able to use them. If they are to be counted upon they must have a very energetic commander.
- (b). Now that there is little or no wire surprise attacks over the open - seem to have good chances of success - as long as enemy is not put on "qui vive" by previous bombardment.
- (c). The fighting 56<sup>th</sup> Div<sup>n</sup> - did not appear to act up to its reputation. Although there was no nerve-racking bombardment men charged our men with "Hands Up" and pushed their way past them in the trench in their anxiety to surrender - and no men looked more cheerful than they after being made prisoners.
- (d). The German bombers are said to have (a) outthrown our's and to have utilized platforms or steps from which to

130 (6)



throw their bombs - exposing their heads to shoulders. Lewis Guns were found useful in keeping them down.

(E). A great drawback to short notice orders for making an attack under present conditions - is the difficulty of ensuring that Supplies of S.A.A. Grenades of all kinds are adequate prior to attack. In the present class of warfare there is no Trench Store list - and it is difficult to ascertain accurately what Supplies are actually available. Because 500 Grenades have been sent up there is no certainty that number reaches the firing line. During heavy shelling stores are often dumped by carrying parties anywhere. The 220 S.A.A. carried by the man soon gets used up or lost.

(F). The necessity for more than the ordinary Oil Bottle Supply of Rifle Oil was at once evident - during operations in heavy rain - both for Lewis Gun Rifles as well as Grenades.

5. Conclusion. The Barrier we erected in ALE ALLEY was about 50% further than the objective ordered. About 11 pm on the 27<sup>th</sup> we received orders

(130(7))



to clear the trench up to Beer Trench  
but by the time orders for a further attack  
could have reached the front and the  
troops have been reorganized for further  
attack the men would have been too  
tired to respond and orders to renew  
the attack were deferred till all ranks  
had rested.

b. I attach the following.

- (i). Plan showing trenches attacked.
- (ii). Report from O.C. Assaulting Parties  
as to reasons for not attacking at  
5 A.M. 27<sup>th</sup> inst.
- (iii). Report by O.C. B. Company 10/02/1
- (iv). Report by O. C/Bombers attack.

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8. My recommendations for immediate reward  
will be forwarded later.

29.8.16.

J.H.S. Moran  
10/02/1  
130(8)



OC. 6 KOYL  
OC 10 SLIV

SECRET



The following instructions  
have been received from  
the 14<sup>th</sup> Division: —

- ① With reference to forthcoming operations in the near future the C-in-C desires to impress on all ranks the necessity of the greatest exertion. —
- ② It is absolutely essential that the line BEER TRENCH, from FLERS RD to ALE ALLEY be secured on or before 29 August.

With reference to above: —

The line of BEER TRENCH as above must be reconnoitred by patrols - <sup>where</sup> ~~the~~ found unoccupied by the enemy - posts will be established therein preparatory to connecting it up into one general line. Reports to be forwarded if remains are found holding this line <sup>by any strength</sup> 131(1)



In Connection with this operation  
 your close attention is directed  
 to XV Corps memo No 19/18 GX  
 of 24<sup>th</sup> inst (copies distributed  
 to units this day) for the strictest  
 observance both in the letter  
 & the spirit.

27/8/16

J Wood KS  
 Jandy W B of Bde

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