

26) 19293 Lance Corporal Walter **CRIPPS**  
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

**Kia** 30/04/17, **Age** 22  
35th Coy Machine Gun Corps  
formerly 10287 Royal Berks Berkshire Regt

**Born** Tadley  
**Enlisted** Reading  
**Residence** Basingstoke

**Awarded:** 1914-15 Star  
British War Medal  
Victory Medal

**Date arrived in theatre of war:** France, 30/5/15

Walter Cripps almost certainly joined the Royal Berkshire regiment prior to, or at the outbreak of the war in August 1914. His date of arrival in France would coincide with the arrival of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion which would tie in with what was to come. The 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Berkshire was one of four battalions of 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade (the others being 7<sup>th</sup> Suffolk, 7<sup>th</sup> Norfolk and 9<sup>th</sup> Essex) of 12<sup>th</sup> Division.

It is practically certain that Walter Cripps also fought with the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Berkshire at the Battle of Loos on 13/10/15. However, at some stage after this point he would become part of 35th Brigade Machine Gun Corps.

Towards the end of 1915, it was finally realised that, although the inadequate numbers of machine-guns in the British Army since 1914 had been increased, their organisation within a battalion structure was no longer satisfactory. This led to the formation of a separate Machine Gun Corps to be set up at Belton Park near Grantham in Lincolnshire. Units were asked to forward the names of good men within their ranks, with a technical aptitude, to be sent for training with the new the Machine Gun Corps. Although most units would comply with this, others with an eye to keeping some of their best men for themselves, offered 'alternatives'.

For Walter Cripps, this would mean a return to England for approximately six months of additional training upon completion of which, he would be promoted and received extra pay. On his return to France, much of the drudgery of being an infantry soldier could well be behind him, ideally so too would be going 'over the top' during an attack. However, the Machine Gun Corps was not also better known as the 'Suicide Club' for nothing. Infantry units of both sides hated machine-gunners given their capability for mass-killing. Should an attack succeed and a machine-gun team become surrounded, there would be very little chance of them being allowed to surrender and thus save their lives...

Both the British and German armies used essentially variants of the same 'heavy', water-cooled (US invented) Maxim machine-gun. This gun was adapted by the British to become the Vickers machine-gun and the Germans, the Spandau MG08. The Vickers machine-gun itself weighed approximately 30lb and the associated tripod nearly twice that. A machine-gun team consisted usually six men: No 1 carried the gun and fired it, No.2 carried the tripod and loaded the gun. The other four men carried the ammunition (though all men could in fact do each other's job should casualties arise). 'Portability' was a problem and the machine-gun could only be fired essentially from a fixed position (usually under concealment) and could not be 'fired from the hip'. The barrel was water-cooled and given a supply of replacement barrels and unlimited ammunition, a 'heavy' machine-gun could fire at a rate of approaching 500 rounds a minute practically indefinitely. Using elevation, the range could be usefully extended in excess of two miles. Using multiple machine-guns with overlapping fields of fire, their effect on an advancing enemy would be devastating, as was found on the Somme.

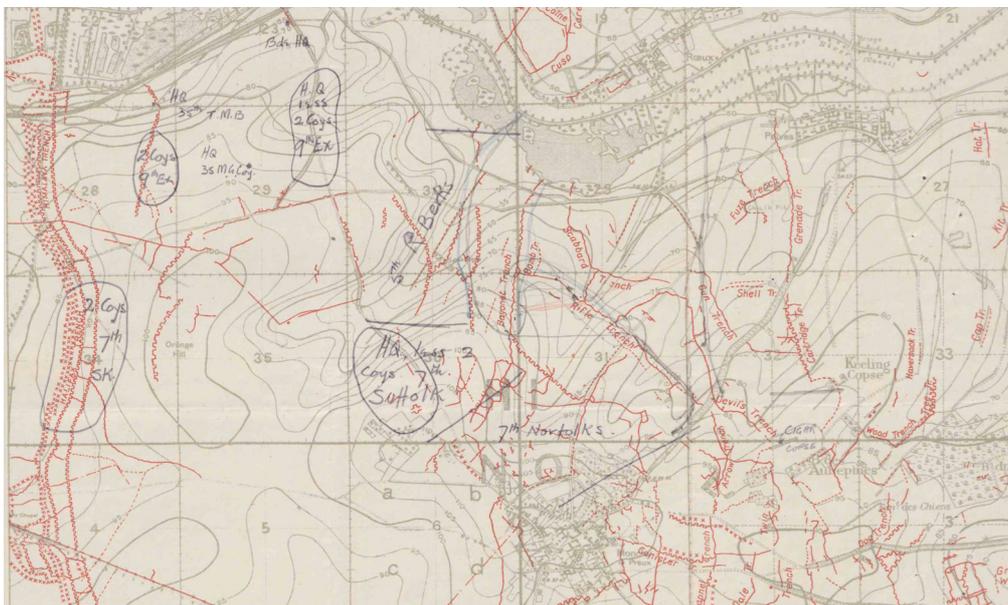


These two classic photographs show the Vickers machine gun in action. The upper photograph shows the gun in an elevated position. This gun is being used in an 'offensive' manner, i.e. the gun is firing at long range over the heads of the attacking infantry. In the lower photograph, the gun is horizontal, this gun is being used in a 'defensive' manner with the No.1 not requiring the ranging sight to be raised – he is ready to fire into a mass of infantry attacking at close range.

The first trained units of the Machine Gun Corps made their debut on the Somme in 1916. Senior officers still were learning the best way to use these troops, initially placing the Vickers machine-gun teams together with the attacking infantry. Carrying such loads, slowly in a tight group across No-man's land made them very easy targets and casualties were high losing the advantage of such guns.

By 1917, tactics had improved and the Vickers machine-gunners no longer took their orders directly from infantry battalion commanders, rather they were now 'Brigade Troops' and served the needs of each of the four battalions in each Brigade. Unfortunately, the records of such machine-gun units are less detailed and their activities tend only to be found in note form in Brigade records. Such is the case with 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Machine Gun Corps.

In April 1917, 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade found themselves in the Battle of Arras, fighting just to the north of Monchy-le-Preux. This was a hill-top village with commanding views for miles in all directions. This village was to see some of the bitterest fighting of the war. A brigade, with its four battalions might be expected to fight over a period of four days, each day one of these battalions would take the lead in the fighting. For an infantry soldier, this might mean just one of these four days might be one of the worst (or last) of his life, for the machine-gunners, they would be involved in all four days risking all. They may have fought from static concealed positions and not exposed themselves by going 'over the top', but they were susceptible to shelling if spotted by aerial reconnaissance. In Spring 1917, the Germans had total air superiority.



Contemporary trench positions with locations of units of 35<sup>th</sup> Bde involved.



**Vickers Machine-gun teams setting up – Battle of Arras, Spring 1917**

In this attack, 35<sup>th</sup> Bde MGC were to:

11. 35th M. G. Company will detail 2 M. Gs to accompany the Right and Left Battalions attacking the BLUE Line. M. G. Fire will be brought to bear on the following special points:-  
VALLEY, I.32.a. - 2 Guns.  
BANK in I.25.d. - 2 Guns.  
SHELL TRENCH (I.32.a.) - 2 Guns.  
FUZE TRENCH (I.26.c.) - 2 Guns.  
The 4 M. Guns in action in the Valley Posts in H.30.b. will co-operate in covering the left flank of the advances

This attack was renewed on the night of 29-30/4/1917, no specific duties were given to 35<sup>th</sup> Bde MGC. The Brigade was finally relieved during 30/4/1917.



### **Location of 35 Bde MGC 25-30/4/1917, today**

These records also detail the casualty figures for the period 25-30/4/1917:

35 <sup>th</sup> Bde MGC 25/4/1917	10 officers	141 other ranks
Casualties to 30/4/1917	2 officers	14 other ranks.

It is not stated how many of these casualties had been killed. L/Cpl Walter Cripps had been one of these 14 'other ranks' on 30/4/1917 and had indeed lost his life. Following this action, his body was either not recovered or identified; his name is thus commemorated on:

ARRAS MEMORIAL, France, Bay 10

**SON OF THE LATE JOB AND SARAH CRIPPS**

## ARRAS MEMORIAL



### **Location Information**

The Arras Memorial is in the Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery, which is in the Boulevard du General de Gaulle in the western part of the town of Arras. The cemetery is near the Citadel, approximately 2 kms due west of the railway station.

### **Historical Information**

The French handed over Arras to Commonwealth forces in the spring of 1916 and the system of tunnels upon which the town is built were used and developed in preparation for the major offensive planned for April 1917.

The Commonwealth section of the FAUBOURG D'AMIENS CEMETERY was begun in March 1916, behind the French military cemetery established earlier. It continued to be used by field ambulances and fighting units until November 1918. The cemetery was enlarged after the Armistice when graves were brought in from the battlefields and from two smaller cemeteries in the vicinity.

The cemetery contains over 2,650 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, 10 of which are unidentified. The graves in the French military cemetery were removed after the war to other burial grounds and the land they had occupied was used for the construction of the Arras Memorial and Arras Flying Services Memorial.

The adjacent ARRAS MEMORIAL commemorates almost 35,000 servicemen from the United Kingdom, South Africa and New Zealand who died in the Arras sector between the spring of 1916 and 7 August 1918, the eve of the Advance to Victory, and have no known grave. The most conspicuous events of this period were the Arras offensive of April-May 1917, and the German attack in the spring of 1918. Canadian and Australian servicemen killed in these

operations are commemorated by memorials at Vimy and Villers-Bretonneux. A separate memorial remembers those killed in the Battle of Cambrai in 1917.

The adjacent ARRAS FLYING SERVICES MEMORIAL commemorates almost 1,000 airmen of the Royal Naval Air Service, the Royal Flying Corps, and the Royal Air Force, either by attachment from other arms of the forces of the Commonwealth or by original enlistment, who were killed on the whole Western Front and who have no known grave.

In addition, there are 30 war graves of other nationalities, most of them German.

Both cemetery and memorial were designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, with sculpture by Sir William Reid Dick. The memorial was unveiled by Lord Trenchard, Marshal of the Royal Air Force on the 31 July 1932 (originally it had been scheduled for 15 May, but due to the sudden death of French President Doumer, as a mark of respect, the ceremony was postponed until July).

ARNOLD T. R.	AYLWIN E.
BAKER C. A.	BADDELEY F. A. H.
E. BERWICK T.	BALDWINSON H.
BOWDEN M.	BALL W.
J. BURNESS J.	BARCLAY A.
CAMPBELL G. S.	BARKER H.
CLARK J. W.	BARNES T. W.
COLEMAN R. J.	BARRETT D. W.
COOK A.	BATE J. M. M.
CRIPPS W. J.	BATEMAN W. G.
CROWE J.	BAULK E.
DARNTON J. A.	BELCHER F.
B. DINGWALL D.	BENNETT A.
FAULKNER J.	BENSON W. M.
FOINQUINOS H. W.	BERRY E. R.
FOSTER J.	BETTIN F. C.