

= Battle of Arras ( 1917 ) =

The Battle of Arras ( also known as the Second Battle of Arras ) was a British offensive on the Western Front during World War I. From 9 April to 16 May 1917 , British troops attacked German defences near the French city of Arras on the Western Front . There were big gains on the first day , followed by stalemate . The battle cost nearly 160 @,@ 000 British and about 125 @,@ 000 German casualties .

For much of the war , the opposing armies on the Western Front were at a stalemate , with a continuous line of trenches stretching from the Belgian coast to the Swiss border . The Allied objective from early 1915 was to break through the German defences into the open ground beyond and engage the numerically inferior German Army in a war of movement . The British attack at Arras was part of the French Nivelle Offensive , the main part of which was to take place 50 miles ( 80 km ) to the south . The aim of this combined operation was to end the war in forty @-@ eight hours . At Arras the British were to divert German troops from the French front and to take the German @-@ held high ground that dominated the plain of Douai .

The British effort was a relatively broad front assault between Vimy in the north @-@ west and Bullecourt in the south @-@ east . After considerable bombardment , Canadian troops of the First Army in the north fought Battle of Vimy Ridge and captured the ridge . The Third Army in the centre advanced astride the Scarpe River , making the deepest penetration since trench warfare began and in the south , the Fifth Army attacked the Hindenburg Line and was frustrated by the defence in depth , making only minimal gains . The British armies then engaged in a series of small @-@ scale operations to consolidate the new positions . Although these battles were generally successful in achieving limited aims , these were gained at the price of relatively large numbers of casualties .

When the battle officially ended on 16 May , British Empire troops had made significant advances but had been unable to achieve a breakthrough . New tactics ( embodied in SS . 135 , Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action and SS.143 Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action ) and the equipment to exploit them had been used . The platoon had become the principal tactical unit , in four sections : Lewis gun , rifle grenade , bomber and rifle . Artillery creeping barrages , firing shells with the new graze fuze and counter @-@ battery fire had great effect , particularly in the first phase , showing that the British had absorbed the lessons of the Battle of the Somme and could mount set @-@ piece attacks against fortified field defences . The Arras sector then returned to the stalemate that typified most of the war on the Western Front , except for attacks around Lens , culminating in the Canadian Battle of Hill 70 in August .

= = Background = =

At the beginning of 1917 , the British and French were still searching for a way to achieve a strategic breakthrough on the Western Front . The previous year had been marked by the costly success of the Franco ? British offensive astride the river Somme , while the French had been unable to take the initiative because of intense German pressure at Verdun until after August 1916 . Both battles consumed enormous quantities of resources while achieving virtually no strategic gains on the battlefield . Nonetheless , the cost to Germany of containing the Anglo @-@ French attacks had been high , and given that the material preponderance of the Entente and its allies could only be expected to increase in 1917 , Hindenburg and Ludendorff decided on a defensive strategy on the Western Front for that year . This impasse reinforced the French and British commanders ' belief that to end the stalemate they needed a breakthrough ; while this desire may have been the main impetus behind the offensive , the timing and location were heavily influenced by a number of political and tactical factors .

= = = Politics = = =

The mid @-@ war years were momentous times . Governing politicians in Paris and London were under great pressure from the press , the people and their parliaments to bring the war to a

victorious close . The casualties from the battles of Gallipoli , the Somme and Verdun had been high and there was little prospect of victory in sight . The British prime minister , H. H. Asquith , resigned in early December 1916 and was succeeded by the " Welsh wizard " , David Lloyd George . In France , premier Aristide Briand , along with General ( later Marshal ) Hubert Lyautey as Minister of Defence , were politically diminished and resigned in March 1917 .

The United States was close to declaring war on Germany ; American public opinion was growing increasingly incensed by a long succession of high @-@ profile U @-@ boat attacks upon civilian shipping , starting with the sinking of RMS Lusitania in 1915 and culminating in the torpedoing of seven American merchantmen in early 1917 . The United States Congress finally declared war on Imperial Germany on 6 April 1917 , but it would be more than a year before a suitable army could be raised , trained , and transported to France .

= = = Strategy = = =

Although the French and British had intended to launch a spring offensive in 1917 , the strategy was threatened in February , when the Russians admitted that they could not meet the commitment to a joint offensive , which reduced the two @-@ front offensive to a French assault along the Aisne River . In March , the German army in the west ( Westheer ) , withdrew to the Hindenburg line in Operation Alberich , which negated the tactical assumptions underlying the plans for the French offensive . Until French troops advanced to compensate during the Battles of Arras , they encountered no German troops in the assault sector and it became uncertain whether the offensive would go forward . The French government desperately needed a victory to avoid civil unrest but the British were wary of proceeding , in view of the rapidly changing tactical situation . In a meeting with Lloyd George , French commander @-@ in @-@ chief General Nivelle persuaded the British Prime Minister , that if the British launched a diversionary assault to draw German troops away from the Aisne sector , the French offensive could succeed . It was agreed in the London Convention of 16 January , that the French assault on the Aisne would begin in mid @-@ April and that the British would make a diversionary attack in the Arras sector approximately one week prior .

= = = Tactics : British Expeditionary Force = = =

Three armies of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig , the commander of the British Expeditionary Force ( BEF ) were in the Arras sector , the Fifth Army ( General Hubert Gough ) in the south , the Third Army ( General Edmund Allenby ) in the centre and the First Army ( General Henry Horne ) in the north and the plan was devised by Allenby .

= = = Division attack training = = =

In December 1916 , the training manual SS 135 replaced SS 109 of 8 May 1916 and marked a significant step in the evolution of the British Expeditionary Force ( BEF ) into a homogeneous force , well adapted to its role on the Western Front . The duties of army , corps and divisions in planning attacks were standardised . Armies were to devise the plan and the principles of the artillery component . Corps were to allot tasks to divisions , which would then select objectives and devise infantry plans subject to corps approval . Artillery planning was controlled by corps with consultation of divisions by the corps General Officer Commanding , Royal Artillery ( GOCRA ) which became the title of the officer at each level of command who devised the bombardment plan , which was coordinated with neighbouring corps artillery commanders by the army GOCRA . Specific parts of the bombardment were nominated by divisions , using their local knowledge and the results of air reconnaissance . The corps artillery commander was to co @-@ ordinate counter @-@ battery fire and the howitzer bombardment for zero hour . Corps controlled the creeping barrage but divisions were given authority over extra batteries added to the barrage , which could be switched to other targets by the divisional commander and brigade commanders . SS 135 provided the basis for the BEF 's operational technique for the rest of 1917 .

== = Platoon attack training == =

The training manual SS 143 of February 1917 marked the end of attacks made by lines of infantry with a few detached specialists . The platoon was divided into a small headquarters and four sections , one with two trained grenade @-@ throwers and assistants , the second with a Lewis gunner and nine assistants carrying 30 drums of ammunition , the third section comprised a sniper , scout and nine riflemen and the fourth section had nine men with four rifle @-@ grenade launchers . The rifle and hand @-@ grenade sections were to advance in front of the Lewis @-@ gun and rifle @-@ grenade sections , in two waves or in artillery formation , which covered an area 100 yards ( 91 m ) wide and 50 yards ( 46 m ) deep , with the four sections in a diamond pattern , the rifle section ahead , rifle grenade and bombing sections to the sides and the Lewis gun section behind , until resistance was met . German defenders were to be suppressed by fire from the Lewis @-@ gun and rifle @-@ grenade sections , while the riflemen and hand @-@ grenade sections moved forward , preferably by infiltrating round the flanks of the resistance , to overwhelm the defenders from the rear .

The changes in equipment , organisation and formation were elaborated in SS 144 The Normal Formation For the Attack of February 1917 , which recommended that the leading troops should push on to the final objective , when only one or two were involved but that for a greater number of objectives , when artillery covering fire was available for the depth of the intended advance , fresh platoons should " leap @-@ frog " through the leading platoons to the next objective . The new organisations and equipment gave the infantry platoon the capacity for fire and manoeuvre , even in the absence of adequate artillery support . To bring uniformity in adoption of the methods laid down in the revised manuals and others produced over the winter , Haig established a BEF Training Directorate in January 1917 , to issue manuals and oversee training . SS 143 and its companion manuals like SS 144 , provided British infantry with " off @-@ the @-@ peg " tactics , devised from the experience of the Somme and from French Army operations , to go with the new equipment made available by increasing British and Allied war production and better understanding of the organisation necessary to exploit it in battle .

== = Tactics : German army == =

In a new manual of 1 December 1916 , Grundsätze für die Führung in der Abwehrschlacht im Stellungskrieg ( Principles of Command for Defensive Battle ) , the policy of unyielding defence of ground regardless of its tactical value , was replaced by the defence of positions suitable for artillery observation and communication with the rear , where an attacking force would " fight itself to a standstill and use up its resources while the defenders conserve [ d ] their strength " . Defending infantry would fight in areas , with the front divisions in an outpost zone up to 3 @, @ 000 yards ( 2 @, @ 700 m ) deep behind listening posts , with the main line of resistance placed on a reverse slope , in front of artillery observation posts , which were kept far enough back to retain observation over the outpost zone . Behind the main line of resistance was a Grosskampfzone ( battle zone ) , a second defensive area 1 @, @ 500 ? 2 @, @ 500 yards ( 1 @, @ 400 ? 2 @, @ 300 m ) deep , also sited as far as possible on ground hidden from enemy observation , while in view of German artillery observers . A rückwärtige Kampfzone ( rear battle zone ) further back was to be occupied by the reserve battalion of each regiment .

Allgemeines über Stellungsbau ( Principles of Field Fortification ) was published in January 1917 and by April an outpost zone ( Vorpostenfeld ) held by sentries , had been built along the Western Front . Sentries could retreat to larger positions ( Gruppennester ) held by Stosstrupps ( five men and an NCO per Trupp ) , who would join the sentries to recapture sentry @-@ posts by immediate counter @-@ attack . Defensive procedures in the battle zone were similar but with greater numbers . The front trench system was the sentry line for the battle zone garrison , which was allowed to move away from concentrations of enemy fire and then counter @-@ attack to recover the battle and outpost zones ; such withdrawals were envisaged as occurring on small parts of the battlefield

which had been made untenable by Allied artillery fire , as the prelude to Gegenstoss in der Stellung ( immediate counter @-@ attack within the position ) . Such a decentralised battle by large numbers of small infantry detachments would present the attacker with unforeseen obstructions . Resistance from troops equipped with automatic weapons , supported by observed artillery fire , would increase the further the advance progressed . A school was opened in January 1917 to teach infantry commanders the new methods .

Given the Allies ' growing superiority in munitions and manpower , attackers might still penetrate to the second ( artillery protection ) line , leaving in their wake German garrisons isolated in Widerstandsnester , ( resistance nests , Widas ) still inflicting losses and disorganisation on the attackers . As the attackers tried to capture the Widas and dig in near the German second line , Sturmbattalions and Sturmregimenter of the counter @-@ attack divisions would advance from the rückwärtige Kampfzone into the battle zone , in an immediate counter @-@ attack , ( Gegenstoss aus der Tiefe ) . If the immediate counter @-@ attack failed , the counter @-@ attack divisions would take their time to prepare a methodical attack , provided the lost ground was essential to the retention of the main position . Such methods required large numbers of reserve divisions ready to move to the battlefield . The reserve was obtained by creating 22 divisions by internal reorganisation of the army , bringing divisions from the eastern front and by shortening the western front , in Operation Alberich . By the spring of 1917 , the German army in the west had a strategic reserve of 40 divisions .

= = = = German 6th Army = = = =

Experience of the German 1st Army in the Somme Battles , ( Erfahrungen der I Armee in der Sommeschlacht ) was published on 30 January 1917 . Ludendorff 's new defensive methods had been controversial ; during the Battle of the Somme in 1916 Colonel Fritz von Loßberg ( Chief of Staff of the First Army ) had been able to establish a line of relief divisions ( Ablösungsdivisionen ) , with the reinforcements from Verdun , which began to arrive in greater numbers in September . In his analysis of the battle , Fritz von Loßberg opposed the granting of discretion to front trench garrisons to retire , as he believed that manoeuvre did not allow the garrisons to evade Allied artillery fire , which could blanket the forward area and invited enemy infantry to occupy vacant areas . Loßberg considered that spontaneous withdrawals would disrupt the counter @-@ attack reserves as they deployed and further deprive battalion and division commanders of the ability to conduct an organised defence , which the dispersal of infantry over a wider area had already made difficult . Loßberg and others had severe doubts as to the ability of relief divisions to arrive on the battlefield in time to conduct an immediate counter @-@ attack ( Gegenstoss ) from behind the battle zone . The sceptics wanted the Somme practice of fighting in the front line to be retained and authority devolved no further than battalion , so as to maintain organizational coherence , in anticipation of a methodical counter @-@ attack ( Gegenangriff ) after 24 ? 48 hours , by the relief divisions . Ludendorff was sufficiently impressed by Loßberg 's memorandum to add it to the new Manual of Infantry Training for War .

General Falkenhausen , commander of the 6th Army arranged his infantry in the Arras area according to Loßberg and Hoen 's preference for a rigid defence of the front @-@ line , supported by methodical counter @-@ attacks ( Gegenangriffe ) , by the " relief " divisions ( Ablösungsdivisionen ) on the second or third day . Five Ablösungsdivisionen were placed behind Douai , 15 miles ( 24 km ) away from the front line . The new Hindenburg line ended at Telegraph Hill between Neuville @-@ Vitasse and Tilloy lez Mofflaines , from whence the original system of four lines 75 ? 150 yards ( 69 ? 137 m ) apart , ran north to the Neuville St. Vaast ? Bailleul road . About 3 miles ( 4 @.@ 8 km ) behind , were the Wancourt ? Feuchy and to the north the Point du Jour lines , running from the Scarpe river north along the east slope of Vimy ridge . The new Wotan line , which extended the Hindenburg position , was built around 4 miles ( 6 @.@ 4 km ) further back and not entirely mapped by the Allies until the battle had begun .

Just before the battle , Falkenhausen had written that parts of the front line might be lost but the five Ablösungsdivisionen could be brought forward to relieve the front divisions , on the evening of the

second day . On 6 April , General von Nagel , the 6th Army Chief of Staff , accepted that some of the front divisions might need to be relieved on the first evening of battle but that any penetrations would be repulsed with local immediate counter @-@ attacks ( Gegenangriffe in der Stellung ) by the front divisions . On 7 April , Nagel viewed the imminent British attack as a limited effort against Vimy ridge , preparatory to a bigger attack later , perhaps combined with the French attack expected in mid @-@ April . Construction of positions to fulfil the new policy of area defence , had been drastically curtailed by shortages of labour and the long winter , which affected the setting of concrete . The 6th Army commanders had also been reluctant to encourage the British to change their plans , if they detected a thinning of the front line and were inhibited by the extent of British air reconnaissance , which observed new field works and promptly directed artillery fire on them . The 6th Army failed to redeploy its artillery , which remained in lines easy to see and bombard . Work on defences was also divided between maintaining the front line , strengthening the third line and the new Wotanstellung ( Drocourt ? Quéant switch line ) further back .

= = Prelude = =

The British plan was well developed , drawing on the lessons of the Somme and Verdun the previous year . Rather than attacking on an extended front , the full weight of artillery would be concentrated on a relatively narrow stretch of 11 mi ( 18 km ) , from Vimy Ridge in the north to Neuville Vitasse , 4 mi ( 6 @.@ 4 km ) south of the Scarpe river . The bombardment was planned to last about a week at all points on the line , with a much longer and heavier barrage at Vimy to weaken its strong defences . During the assault , the troops would advance in open formation , with units leapfrogging each other to allow them time to consolidate and regroup . Before the action could be undertaken , a great deal of preparation was required , much of it innovative .

= = = War underground = = =

Since October 1916 , Royal Engineer tunnelling companies had been working on the Western Front . The Artois region is chalky and easily excavated and under the city of Arras , there is a vast network of boves ( caverns , underground quarries , galleries and sewage tunnels ) . The Third Army at Arras planned to use the old underground quarries in the city in the offensive planned for April 1917 . The quarries were to be linked by tunnels so that they could be used as shelters against German artillery @-@ fire and to convey troops to the front in secrecy and safety . Assault tunnels were also dug , stopping a few metres short of the German line , ready to be blown open by explosives on Zero @-@ Day . Conventional mines were laid under the German front line , ready to be blown immediately before the assault . ( Many were never detonated for fear that they would churn up the ground too much . ) German sappers ( military engineers ) also conducted underground operations , seeking out Allied tunnels to assault and counter @-@ mine .

Of the New Zealand tunnellers , 41 were killed and 151 were wounded by German counter @-@ mining . The tunnelling effort was enormous and in one sector , four Tunnelling companies of 500 men each , worked around @-@ the @-@ clock in 18 @-@ hour shifts for two months . The tunnellers dug 20 kilometres ( 12 mi ) of subways ( foot traffic only ) , tramways ( with rails for hand @-@ drawn trolleys , to take ammunition to the line and bring casualties back ) and railways ( a light railway system ) . Just before the assault , the tunnel system had been enlarged sufficient to conceal 24 @,@ 000 men , with electric lighting provided by a small powerhouse , kitchens , latrines and a medical centre with an operating theatre . The bulk of the work was done by the New Zealand Tunnelling Company , which included Maori and Pacific Islanders from the New Zealand Pioneer battalion and Bantams from the coalfields of northern England .

= = = War in the air = = =

Although the Royal Flying Corps ( RFC ) entered the Battle with inferior aircraft to the Luftstreitkräfte , this did not deter their commander , General Trenchard , from adopting an offensive

posture . Dominance of the air over Arras was essential for reconnaissance and the British carried out many aerial patrols . Trenchard 's aircraft , acting in support of ground forces , carried out artillery spotting , photography of trench systems and bombing . The reconnaissance activities were coordinated by the 1st Field Survey Company , Royal Engineers . Aerial observation was hazardous work as , for best results , the aircraft had to fly at slow speeds and low altitude over the German defences . It became even more dangerous with the arrival of the " Red Baron " , Manfred von Richthofen , with his highly experienced and better @-@ equipped Jagdgeschwader 1 ( Richthofen 's Flying Circus ) in March 1917 . Its deployment led to sharply increased losses of Allied pilots and April 1917 was to become known as Bloody April . One German infantry officer later wrote " during these days , there was a whole series of dogfights , which almost invariably ended in defeat for the British since it was Richthofen 's squadron they were up against . Often five or six planes in succession would be chased away or shot down in flames " . The average flying life of a RFC pilot in Arras in April was 18 hours . Between 4 and 8 April , the RFC lost 75 aircraft and 105 aircrew on operations . The casualties created a pilot shortage and replacements were sent to the front straight from flying school : during the same period , 56 aircraft were crashed by inexperienced RFC pilots .

= = = Creeping barrage = = =

To keep enemy action to a minimum during the assault , a " creeping barrage " was planned . This required gunners to create a curtain of high explosive and shrapnel shell explosions that crept across the battlefield in lines , about one hundred metres in advance of the assaulting troops . The Allies had previously used creeping barrages at the battles of Neuve Chapelle and the Somme but had encountered two technical problems . The first was accurately synchronising the movement of the troops to the fall of the barrage : for Arras , this was overcome by rehearsal and strict scheduling . The second was the barrage falling erratically as the barrels of heavy guns wore swiftly but at differing rates during fire : for Arras , the rate of wear of each gun barrel was calculated and calibrated accordingly . While there was a risk of friendly fire , the creeping barrage forced the Germans to remain in their shelters , allowing Allied soldiers to advance without fear of machine gun fire . The new No. 106 instantaneous fuze had been adapted from a French design for high @-@ explosive shells so that they detonated on the slightest impact , vaporising barbed wire . Poison gas shells were used for the final minutes of the barrage .

= = = Counter @-@ battery fire = = =

The principal danger to assaulting troops came from enemy artillery fire as they crossed no man 's land , accounting for over half the casualties at the first day of the Somme . A further complication was the location of German artillery , hidden as it was behind the ridges . In response , specialist artillery units were created to attack German artillery . Their targets were provided by 1st Field Survey Company , Royal Engineers , who collated data obtained from " flash spotting " and sound ranging . ( Flash spotting required Royal Flying Corps observers to record the location of tell @-@ tale flashes made by guns whilst firing . ) On Zero @-@ Day , 9 April , over 80 percent of German heavy guns in the sector were neutralised ( that is , " unable to bring effective fire to bear , the crews being disabled or driven off " ) by counter @-@ battery fire . Gas shells were also used against the draught horses of the batteries and to disrupt ammunition supply columns .

= = Battle = =

= = = First phase = = =

The preliminary bombardment of Vimy Ridge started on 20 March ; and the bombardment of the rest of the sector on 4 April . Limited to a front of only 24 miles ( 39 km ) , the bombardment used 2 @, @ 689 @, @ 000 shells , over a million more than had been used on the Somme . German

casualties were not heavy but the men became exhausted by the endless task of keeping open dug out entrances and demoralised by the absence of rations caused by the difficulties of preparing and moving hot food under bombardment . Some went without food altogether for two or three consecutive days .

By the eve of battle , the front line trenches had ceased to exist and their barbed wire defences were blown to pieces . The official history of the 2nd Bavarian Reserve Regiment describes the front line as " consisting no longer of trenches but of advanced nests of men scattered about " . The 262nd Reserve Regiment history writes that its trench system was " lost in a crater field " . To add to the misery , for the last ten hours of bombardment , gas shells were added .

Zero Hour had originally been planned for the morning of 8 April ( Easter Sunday ) but it was postponed 24 hours at the request of the French , despite reasonably good weather in the assault sector . Zero Day was rescheduled for 9 April with Zero Hour at 05 : 30 . The assault was preceded by a hurricane bombardment lasting five minutes , following a relatively quiet night .

When the time came , it was snowing heavily ; Allied troops advancing across no man 's land were hindered by large drifts . It was still dark and visibility on the battlefield was very poor . A westerly wind was at the Allied soldiers ' backs blowing " a squall of sleet and snow into the faces of the Germans " . The combination of the unusual bombardment and poor visibility meant many German troops were caught unawares and taken prisoner , still half dressed , clambering out of the deep dug outs of the first two lines of trenches . Others were captured without their boots , trying to escape but stuck in the knee deep mud of the communication trenches .

=== First Battle of the Scarpe ( 9 ? 14 April 1917 ) ===

The major British assault of the first day was directly east of Arras , with the 12th Division attacking Observation Ridge , north of the Arras ? Cambrai road . After reaching this objective , they were to push on towards Feuchy , as well as the second and third lines of German trenches . At the same time , elements of the 3rd Division began an assault south of the road , with the taking of Devil 's Wood , Tilloy à lès Mofflaines and the Bois des Boeufs as their initial objectives . The ultimate objective of these assaults was the Monchyriegel , a trench running between Wancourt and Feuchy , and an important component of the German defences . Most of these objectives , including Feuchy village , had been achieved by the evening of 10 April though the Germans were still in control of large sections of the trenches between Wancourt and Feuchy , particularly in the area of the heavily fortified village of Neuville Vitasse . The following day , troops from the 56th Division were able to force the Germans out of the village , although the Monchyriegel was not fully in British hands until a few days later . The British were able to consolidate these gains and push forward towards Monchy le Preux , although they suffered heavy casualties in fighting near the village .

One reason for the success of the offensive in this sector was the failure of German commander von Falkenhausen to employ a defence in depth . In theory , the enemy would be allowed to make initial gains , thus stretching their lines of communication . Reserves held close to the battlefield would be committed once the initial advance had bogged down , before enemy reinforcements could be brought up . The defenders would thus be able to counter attack and regain any lost territory . In this sector , Falkenhausen kept his reserve troops too far from the front and they were too late for a useful counter attack on either 10 or 11 April .

=== Battle of Vimy Ridge ( 9 ? 12 April 1917 ) ===

At roughly the same time , in perhaps the most carefully crafted portion of the entire offensive , the Canadian Corps launched an assault on Vimy Ridge . Advancing behind a creeping barrage , and making heavy use of machine guns ? eighty to each brigade , including one Lewis gun in each platoon ? the corps was able to advance through about 4 , 000 yards ( 3 , 700 m ) of German defences , and captured the crest of the ridge at about 13 : 00 . Military historians have attributed the success of this attack to careful planning by Canadian Corps commander Julian Byng

and his subordinate General Arthur Currie , constant training , and the assignment of specific objectives to each platoon . By giving units specific goals , troops could continue the attack even if their officers were killed or communication broke down , thus bypassing two major problems of combat on the Western Front .

= = = Second phase = = =

After the territorial gains of the first two days , a hiatus followed as the immense logistical support needed to keep armies in the field caught up with the new realities . Battalions of pioneers built temporary roads across the churned up battlefield ; heavy artillery ( and its ammunition ) was manhandled into position in new gun pits ; food for the men and feed for the draught horses was brought up , and casualty clearing stations were established in readiness for the inevitable counter @-@ attacks . Allied commanders also faced a dilemma : whether to keep their exhausted divisions on the attack and run the risk of having insufficient manpower or replace them with fresh divisions and lose momentum .

In London , The Times commented : " the great value of our recent advance here lies in the fact that we have everywhere driven the enemy from high ground and robbed him of observation . [ H ] aving secured these high seats [ Vimy , Monchy and Croisailles ] and enthroned ourselves , it is not necessarily easy to continue the rapid advance . An attack down the forward slope of high ground , exposed to the fire of lesser slopes beyond , is often extremely difficult and now on the general front ... there must intervene a laborious period , with which we were familiar at the Somme , of systemic hammering and storming of individual positions , no one of which can be attacked until some covering one has been captured " .

The German press reacted similarly . The Vossische Zeitung , a Berlin daily newspaper , wrote : " We have to count on reverses like that near Arras . Such events are a kind of tactical reverse . If this tactical reverse is not followed by strategical effects i.e. , breaking through on the part of the aggressor , then the whole battle is nothing but a weakening of the attacked party in men and materiel . " The same day , the Frankfurter Zeitung commented : " If the British succeed in breaking through it will render conditions worse for them as it will result in freedom of operations which is Germany 's own special art of war " .

General Ludendorff was less sanguine . The news of the battle reached him during his 52nd birthday celebrations at his headquarters in Kreuznach . He wrote : " I had looked forward to the expected offensive with confidence and was now deeply depressed " . He telephoned each of his commanders and " gained the impression that the principles laid down by OHL were sound but the whole art of leadership lies in applying them correctly " . ( A later court of inquiry would establish that Falkenhausen had indeed misunderstood the principles of defence in depth . ) Ludendorff immediately ordered reinforcements . Then , on 11 April , he sacked General von Falkenhausen 's chief of staff and replaced him with his defensive line expert , Colonel Fritz von Lossberg . Von Lossberg went armed with a vollmacht ( a power of attorney enabling him to issue orders in Ludendorff 's name ) , effectively replacing Falkenhausen . Within hours of arriving , Lossberg was restructuring the German defences .

During the Second Phase , the Allies continued to press the attack east of Arras . Their aims were to consolidate the gains made in the first days of the offensive ; to keep the initiative and to break through in concert with the French at Aisne . However , from 16 April onwards , it was apparent that the Nivelle Offensive was failing and Haig came under pressure to keep the Germans occupied in the Arras sector to minimise French losses .

= = = Second Battle of the Scarpe ( 23 ? 24 April 1917 ) = = =

At 04 : 45 on 23 April , following two days of poor visibility and freezing weather , British troops of the Third Army ( VI and VII corps ) , attacked to the east along an approximate 9 mi ( 14 km ) front from Croisilles to Gavrelle on both sides of the Scarpe . The 51st Division attacked on the northern side in heavy fighting on the western outskirts of Roeux Wood and the chemical works . On their left



, the 37th Division , attacked the buildings west of Roeux Station and gained the line of their objectives on the western slopes of Greenland Hill , north of the railway . On the left of the main British attack the 63rd Division , made rapid progress against Gavrelle and secured the village . To the south of the Scarpe and east of Monchy @-@ le @-@ Preux the 29th Division gained the western slopes of the rising ground known as Infantry Hill . The Cojeul river marked a divisional boundary within the VI Corps . Guémappe on the north side of the river was the objective of the 15th Division , attacking east from Wancourt towards Vis @-@ en @-@ Artois . The objective was commanded by the higher ground on the south bank and it was not until the 50th Division captured the rise on the south side of the Cojeul that the village was taken . Several determined German counter @-@ attacks were made and by the morning of 24 April , the British held Guémappe , Gavrelle and the high ground overlooking Fontaine @-@ lez @-@ Croisilles and Cherisy ; the fighting around Roeux was indecisive .

=== Battle of Arleux ( 28 ? 29 April 1917 ) ===

The principal objective of the attack was the need to sustain a supporting action tying down German reserves to assist the French offensive against the plateau north of the Aisne traversed by the Chemin des Dames . Haig reported , " With a view to economising my troops , my objectives were shallow , and for a like reason , and also in order to give the appearance of an attack on a more imposing scale , demonstrations were continued southwards to the Arras @-@ Cambrai Road and northwards to the Souchez River " .

At 04 : 25 on April 28 British and Canadian troops launched the main attack on a front of about eight miles north of Monchy @-@ le @-@ Preux . A fierce battle continued throughout the greater part of the 28 and 29 April . The Germans delivered determined and repeated counter @-@ attacks . The British positions at Gavrelle alone were attacked seven times with strong forces , and on each occasion the German thrust was repulsed with great loss by the 63rd Division . The village of Arleux @-@ en @-@ Gohelle was captured by Canadian troops , ( 1st Canadian Division ) , after bitter hand @-@ to @-@ hand fighting , and British troops , ( 2nd Division , Major @-@ General C. E. Pereira ) , made further progress in the neighbourhood of Oppy , on Greenland Hill ( 37th Division ) , and between Monchy @-@ le @-@ Preux and the Scarpe ( 12th Division ) .

=== Third Battle of the Scarpe ( 3 ? 4 May 1917 ) ===

After securing the area around Arleux at the end of April , the British determined to launch another attack east from Monchy to try to break through the Boiry Riegel and reach the Wotanstellung , a major German defensive fortification . This was scheduled to coincide with the Australian attack at Bullecourt to present the Germans with a two ? pronged assault . British commanders hoped that success in this venture would force the Germans to retreat further to the east . With this objective in mind , the British launched another attack near the Scarpe on 3 May . However , neither prong was able to make any significant advances and the attack was called off the following day after incurring heavy casualties . Although this battle was a failure , the British learned important lessons about the need for close liaison between tanks , infantry , and artillery , which they would later apply in the Battle of Cambrai ( 1917 ) .

== Flanking operations ==

== Round Bullecourt , 11 April ? 16 June ==

=== First attack on Bullecourt ( 10 ? 11 April 1917 ) ===

South of Arras , the plan called for two divisions , the British 62nd Division and the Australian 4th

Division to attack either side of the village of Bullecourt and push the Germans out of their fortified positions and into the reserve trenches . The attack was initially scheduled for the morning of 10 April , but the tanks intended for the assault were delayed by bad weather and the attack was postponed for 24 hours . The order to delay did not reach all units in time , and two battalions of the West Yorkshire Regiment attacked and were driven back with significant losses . Despite protests from the Australian commanders , the attack was resumed on the morning of 11 April ; mechanical failures meant that only 11 tanks were able to advance in support , and the limited artillery barrage left much of the barbed wire in front of the German trenches uncut . Additionally , the abortive attack of the previous day alerted German troops in the area to the impending assault , and they were better prepared than they had been in the Canadian sector . Misleading reports about the extent of the gains made by the Australians deprived them of necessary artillery support and , although elements of the 4th Division briefly occupied sections of German trenches , they were ultimately forced to retreat with heavy losses . In this sector , the German commanders correctly employed the elastic defence and were therefore able to counter @-@ attack effectively . The Germans acquired two of the tanks which had been used , and after seeing them perforated by armour @-@ piercing bullets , believed the rifle A.P. bullet was an effective anti @-@ tank weapon , which threw them off @-@ guard .

= = = German attack on Lagnicourt ( 15 April 1917 ) = = =

Observing that the 1st Australian Division was holding a frontage of 13 @, @ 000 yd ( 12 @, @ 000 m ) , the local German corps commander ( General Otto von Moser , commanding the German XIV Reserve Corps ) planned a spoiling attack to drive back the advanced posts , destroy supplies and guns and then retire to the Hindenburg defences . Passing his plans to higher command , they assigned an extra division to his corps to further strengthen the attack . Attacking with 23 battalions ( from four divisions ) , the German forces managed to penetrate the Australian front line at the junction on the 1st Australian Division and 2nd Australian Division and occupy the village of Lagnicourt ( damaging some Australian artillery pieces ) . Counter @-@ attacks from the Australian 9th and 20th Australian battalions , restored the front line , and the action ended with the Australians suffering 1 @, @ 010 casualties , against 2 @, @ 313 German casualties .

= = = Battle of Bullecourt ( 3 ? 17 May 1917 ) = = =

After the initial assault around Bullecourt failed to penetrate the German lines , British commanders made preparations for a second attempt . British artillery began an intense bombardment of the village , which by 20 April had been virtually destroyed . Although the infantry assault was planned for 20 April , it was pushed back a number of times and finally set for the early morning of 3 May . At 03 : 45 , elements of the 2nd Australian Division attacked east of Bullecourt village , intending to pierce the Hindenburg Line and capture Hendecourt @-@ lès @-@ Cagnicourt , while British troops from the 62nd ( 2nd West Riding ) Division attacked Bullecourt , which was finally taken by the British 7th Division and despite determined effort by the Germans was held by the British 62nd Division . German resistance was fierce and when the offensive was called off on 17 May , few of the initial objectives had been met . The Australians were in possession of much of the German trench system between Bullecourt and Rencourt @-@ lès @-@ Cagnicourt but had been unable to capture Hendecourt . To the west , British troops managed to push the Germans out of Bullecourt but incurred considerable losses , failing also to advance north @-@ east to Hendecourt .

= = Aftermath = =

= = = Analysis = = =

By the standards of the Western front , the gains of the first two days were nothing short of

spectacular . A great deal of ground was gained for relatively few casualties and a number of strategically significant points were captured , notably Vimy Ridge . Additionally , the offensive succeeded in drawing German troops away from the French offensive in the Aisne sector . In many respects , the battle might be deemed a victory for the British and their allies but these gains were offset by high casualties and the ultimate failure of the French offensive at the Aisne . By the end of the offensive , the British had suffered more than 150 @, @ 000 casualties and gained little ground since the first day . Despite significant early gains , they were unable to effect a breakthrough and the situation reverted to stalemate . Although historians generally consider the battle a British victory , in the wider context of the front , it had very little impact on the strategic or tactical situation . Ludendorff later commented : " no doubt exceedingly important strategic objects lay behind the British attack , but I have never been able to discover what they were " . In contradiction to this he was also " very depressed ; had our principles of defensive tactics proved false , and if so , what was to be done ? "

On the Allied side , twenty @-@ five Victoria Crosses were subsequently awarded . On the German side , on 24 April 1917 , Kaiser Wilhelm awarded Von Lossberg the Oakleaves ( similar to a bar for a repeat award ) for the Pour le Mérite he had received at the Battle of the Somme the previous September .

= = = Casualties = = =

The most quoted Allied casualty figures are those in the returns made by Lt @-@ Gen Sir George Fowke , Haig 's adjutant @-@ general . His figures collate the daily casualty tallies kept by each unit under Haig 's command . Third Army casualties were 87 @, @ 226 ; First Army 46 @, @ 826 ( including 11 @, @ 004 Canadians at Vimy Ridge ) ; and Fifth Army 24 @, @ 608 ; totalling 158 @, @ 660 . German losses by contrast are more difficult to determine . Gruppe Vimy and Gruppe Souchez suffered 79 @, @ 418 casualties but the figures for Gruppe Arras are incomplete . The writers of the German Official History Der Weltkrieg , recorded 78 @, @ 000 British losses to the end of April and another 64 @, @ 000 casualties by the end of May , a total of 142 @, @ 000 men and 85 @, @ 000 German casualties . German records excluded those " lightly wounded " . Captain Cyril Falls ( the writer of that part of the History of the Great War , the British official history , describing the Battles of Arras , Military Operations 1917 volume I ) estimated that 30 % needed to be added to German returns for comparison with the British . Falls makes " a general estimate " that German casualties were " probably fairly equal " . Nicholls puts them at 120 @, @ 000 and Keegan at 130 @, @ 000 . A notable casualty of the battle was actor Herbert Marshall , who was shot in the knee and had to have his leg amputated . Fitted with a prosthetic , he went on to have a film career in Hollywood . Several sources list C.S. Lewis ( 1898 ? 1963 ) as having been wounded in April 1917 but in his autobiography Lewis wrote that he did not arrive in France until November of that year and that his wounding near Arras took place in April 1918 .

= = = Commanders = = =

Although Haig paid tribute to Allenby for the plan 's " great initial success " , Allenby 's subordinates " objected to the way he handled the ... attritional stage " . Allenby was sent to command the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Palestine . He regarded the transfer as a " badge of failure " but he " more than redeemed his reputation by defeating " the Ottomans in 1917 ? 18 . Haig stayed in his post until the end of the war .

When it became apparent that a factor in the British success were the failures of the 6th Army command , Ludendorff removed the commander , General von Falkenhausen ( who never held a field command again , spending the rest of war as Governor @-@ General of Belgium ) and several staff officers . In early 1918 , The Times carried an article , Falkenhausen 's Reign of Terror , describing 170 military executions of Belgian civilians since he had been appointed governor .

Ludendorff and Lossberg discovered that although the Allies were capable of breaking through the first position they could probably not capitalise on their success if they were confronted by a mobile ,

clever defence . Ludendorff immediately ordered more training in manoeuvre warfare for his Eingreif divisions . Lossberg was soon promoted to general and directed the defensive battle of the 4th Army against the British Flanders offensive of the summer and late autumn . ( Lossberg had become " legendary as the fireman of the Western Front ; always sent by OHL to the area of crisis " ) .

= = = War poetry = = =

Siegfried Sassoon makes reference to the battle in the poem The General The Anglo @-@ Welsh lyric poet Edward Thomas was killed by a shell on April 9 , 1917 , during the first day of the Easter Offensive . Thomas 's war diary gives a vivid and poignant picture of life on the Western front in the months leading up to the battle .