

The build up to the battle south-east of Arras on 23rd April 1917

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The 4th Yorks Battalion moved to Arras, arriving there on the 12th April. The journey involved 9 marches, each one of 12 to 15 kilometres. In harsh weather with a 60 pound back-pack. Haig and Nivelles, the respective British and French commanders had planned a two pronged attack on the German lines, designed to break through and cut them off. The Germans had largely pre-empted this by withdrawing to the heavily defended Hindenberg line. In the South the French attacks were to be thrown back with such losses as to cause a mutiny in the ranks. At Arras, the Battle had begun on the 9th April with shelling of the German lines that surpassed the ferocity of the Somme in the previous year. The German front lines were shattered and the Allies at first advanced, most notably the high ground of Vimy Ridge was taken by the Canadians. A halt was called to consolidate and this gave the Germans time to counter-attack by bring forward Divisions that had been held in the rear. When the Battle* was rejoined on the 23rd heavy losses were to be suffered. Losses on average per day of this offensive were nearly twice as bad as those on the Somme.

* This battle was known as the Second Battle of the Scarpe, 23rd-24th April 1917.