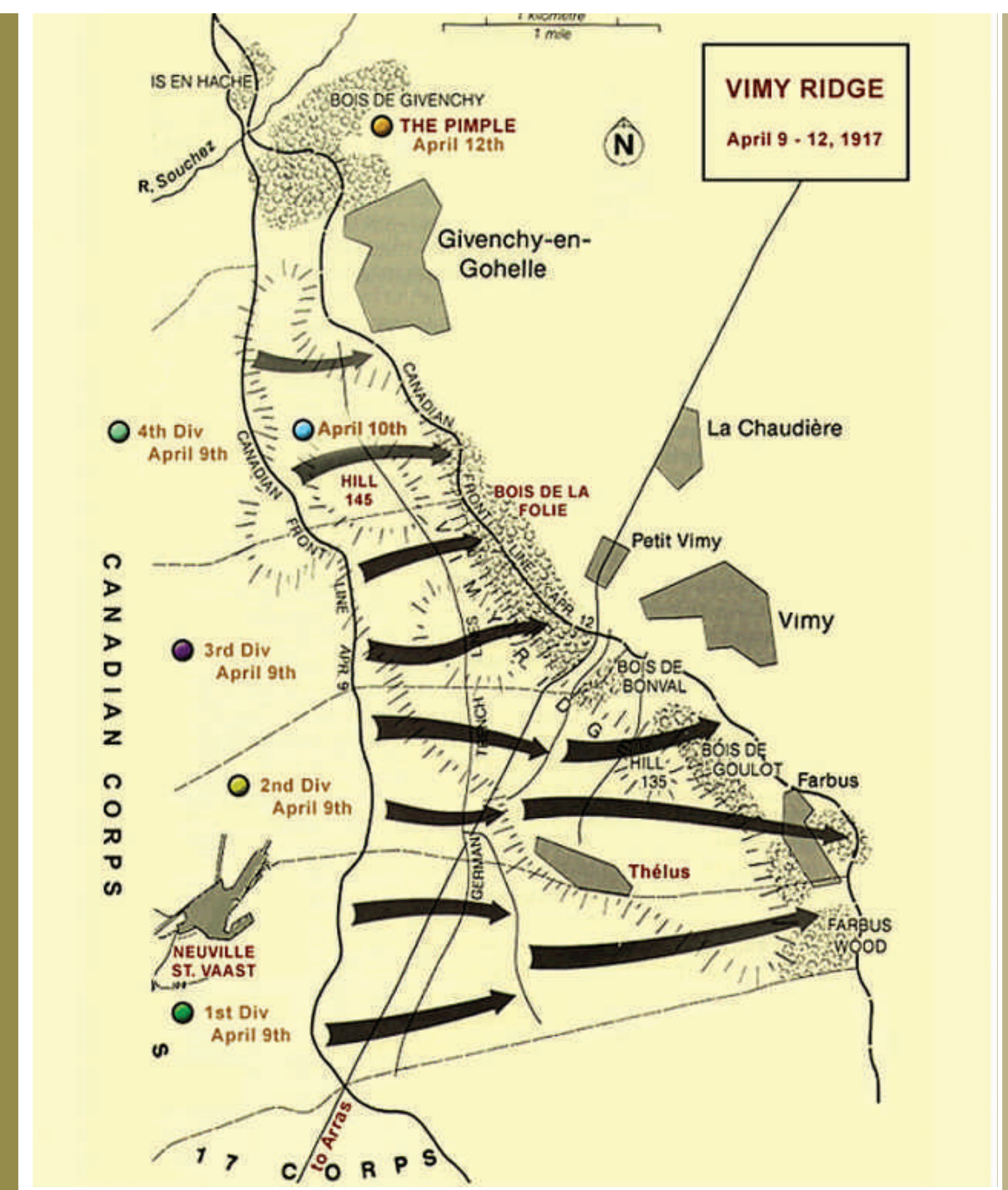


# VIMY RIDGE WW1

In 1917 Vimy Ridge was a strong point of the German defences in northern Europe. Reaching 110 metres at its highest point, and eight kilometres long, the great Ridge held such strategic importance for the Germans that they had carefully fortified it over the three years of the war. In fact, it was considered impregnable behind three huge defensive lines bristling with machine guns and barbed wire. Along it were four extra-strong fortifications: Hill 135, Hill 145, La Folie Farm and "the Pimple." Beneath the Ridge, large underground chambers (complete with electric lights) and deep dug-outs protected the defenders from the most intense shelling.



The Ridge dominated its area of the Western Front, allowing the Germans unrestricted view of the Allied positions. Behind the Ridge were captured French mines and factories that the Germans used for their war effort. Of equal importance was the fact that the Ridge covered the junction of the Hindenburg Line (the strong new defences behind which the Germans had withdrawn in early 1917) and the German defence systems which ran north to the coast of the English Channel.

*Between 1914 and 1916 the French and British had launched three massive attacks against the German position and had lost more than 150,000 men. Now it was the Canadians' turn.*

For the Canadians, together with the British who were to support them on either side, an attack on this position posed an incredible challenge. If they were to have any hope of success in attacking across open ground in the face of the German defences and artillery, that hope lay in very careful planning and preparation.



Learning from earlier battles in the war, which had resulted in casualty rates unacceptably high even by 1914-1918 standards, under the leadership of General Arthur Currie, the Canadians reorganized into platoons, each of which had rifle, rifle-grenade, bombing and machine gun sections. The platoons were trained to move forward in loose formations, giving each other covering fire, rather than in massed ranks as before. This made it easier for the officers to command, providing greater flexibility in responding to changing situations as the battle developed. (Compare changing tactics of the War of 1812.)

*General Arthur Currie*



*German prisoners of war on the march to confinement areas behind the Canadian lines.*

*Photography: Library and Archives Canada*