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CHAPTER V

THE 1ST CANADIAN DIVISION ENTERS THE LINE

FLEURBAIX (TO 7TH APRIL)

Map 14: Frontages 1st Canadian Division 1915

End Paper: Western Theatre 1915

THE LANDING AT ST. NAZAIRE—IN SECOND ARMY RESERVE N.E. OF HAZE-
BROUCK—ATTACHED TO 4TH AND 6TH DIVISIONS FOR INSTRUCTION—
TRENCH ROUTINE—EXCHANGE OF G.S.O. 1—RELIEF OF THE BRITISH
7TH DIVISION—THE FLEURBAIX SECTOR—TRENCH DEVICES—
THEATRES AND PLANS—THE BRITISH FRONT—PLANS FOR
NEUVE CHAPELLE—THE BATTLE—TRENCH WARFARE
RESUMED—RELIEVED BY THE BRITISH 8TH DIVISION
—THE 118TH (HOW.) BRIGADE R.F.A. JOINS—
TRANSFER TO SECOND ARMY.

THE LANDING AT ST. NAZAIRE

The port of St. Nazaire, on the Bay of Biscay at the mouth of the River Loire, had been used late in August and in September 1914 as the principal sea base of the British Expeditionary Force when Le Havre and Boulogne were threatened by the German advance on land. Equipped primarily as a French naval base, it had comparatively few commercial facilities—a shallow open roadstead and a tidal inner harbour—but the present choice was made on account of the extension of the German submarine campaign.

The first transports carrying the 1st Canadian Division arrived early on 11th February, the remainder at irregular intervals during the next four days.⁸⁵⁵ To a great extent the unloading was carried out by the troops, unassisted, and despite the delay of the storm, disembarkation was completed by 15th February. On arrival quartermasters were instructed to draw warm clothing if required—goatskin “waistcoats” (sleeved jerkins), fingerless woollen mittens and mufflers, much needed, for the weather was cold and raw. But the Ca-

nadian troops were, by the kindness of the women at home, well equipped with knitted goods; the waistcoats, however, seemed ideal and were procured and generally worn for several weeks, after which many disappeared – when wet they became heavy and smelled badly, when dry they still harboured vermin.

Pasted in his pay book, which he always carried, each man had a printed message of admonitory counsel from Lord Kitchener:—

You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common Enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember that the honour of the British Army depends on your individual conduct. It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will, for the most part, take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service than in showing yourself in France and Belgium in the true character of a British soldier.

Be invariably courteous, considerate and kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property, and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act. You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted; your conduct must justify that welcome and that trust. Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound. So keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations, and, while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.

Do your duty bravely.
Fear God.
Honour the King.

KITCHENER,
Field-Marshal.