

**ATTACK: AN INFANTRY  
SUBALTERN'S IMPRESSION  
OF JULY 1ST, 1916**

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Attack: An Infantry Subaltern's Impression of July 1st, 1916 by Edward G. D. Liveing

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TORONTO

# ATTACK

AN INFANTRY SUBALTERN'S IMPRESSIONS  
OF JULY 1st, 1916

BY  
EDWARD G. D. LIVEING

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
JOHN MASEFIELD

New York

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1918

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TO  
THE N. C. O.s  
AND  
MEN OF No. 5 PLATOON  
Of a Battalion of the County of London  
Regiment, whom I had the good  
fortune to command in France  
during 1915-1916, and in  
particular to the  
memory of  
REV. C. N. DENNISON  
My Platoon Observer, who fell in action  
July 1st, 1916, in an attempt  
to save my life



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## INTRODUCTION

THE attack on the fortified village of Gommecourt, which Mr. Liveing describes in these pages with such power and colour, was a part of the first great allied attack on July 1, 1916, which began the battle of the Somme. That battle, so far as it concerns our own troops, may be divided into two sectors: one, to the south of the Ancre River, a sector of advance, the other, to the north of the Ancre River, a containing sector, in which no advance was possible. Gommecourt itself, which made a slight but important salient in the enemy line in the containing sector, was the most

northern point attacked in that first day's fighting.

Though the Gommecourt position is not impressive to look at, most of our soldiers are agreed that it was one of the very strongest points in the enemy's fortified line on the Western Front. French and Russian officers, who have seen it since the enemy left it, have described it as "terrible" and as "the very devil." There can be no doubt that it was all that they say.

The country in that part is high-lying chalk downland, something like the downland of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, though generally barer of trees, and less bold in its valleys. Before the war it was cultivated, hedgeless land, under corn and sugar-beet. The chalk is usually well-

covered, as in Buckinghamshire, with a fat clay. As the French social tendency is all to the community, there are few lonely farms in that countryside as there would be with us. The inhabitants live in many compact villages, each with a church, a market-place, a watering-place for stock, and sometimes a château and park. Most of the villages are built of red brick, and the churches are of stone, not (as in the chalk countries with us) of dressed flint. Nearly all the villages are planted about with orchards; some have copses of timber trees. In general, from any distance, the villages stand out upon the downland as clumps of woodland. Nearly everywhere near the battlefield a clump of orchard, with an occasional dark fir in it, is the mark of some small village.