

= James Graham (British Army soldier) =

James Graham (1791 ? 1845) was an Irish non @-@ commissioned officer (NCO) in the British Army during the Napoleonic wars , recognised as the " bravest man in the army " . Serving in the Coldstream Guards , he was commended for his gallantry during the defence of Hougoumont , at Waterloo . Graham saved the life of an officer , and his own brother , and was among the small group responsible for closing the North Gate at Hougoumont after a French attack ? an act which won the Duke of Wellington 's encomium . He was rewarded with a specially cast gallantry medal and an annuity . Graham continued to serve with distinction , and was credited with saving the life of Lord Frederick FitzClarence during the arrest of the Cato Street conspirators . After later serving in the 12th Royal Lancers , Graham was discharged in 1830 for ill health , and died at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in 1845 .

= = Early life and service = =

James Graham was born in 1791 , in Clones , County Monaghan , Ireland . One of three brothers to serve in the British Army , Graham enlisted in the 2nd Battalion of the Coldstream Guards in 1813 , which was then stationed in England . Almost all soldiers at the time signed on for life in exchange for a " bounty " of £ 23 17s 6d , a large portion of which was absorbed by the cost of outfitting " necessities " . Graham was assigned to the battalion 's light company , and by 1815 had been made a corporal . It was not unusual for Irishmen to join English or Scottish regiments after the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland . Most battalions during the Napoleonic wars had a proportion of Irish soldiers . The Coldstream Guards were a regiment of Foot Guards , a group of elite infantry regiments of the British Army . In background and natural attributes , recruits to the Foot Guards differed little from those recruited into other regiments , but they received superior training and were expected to maintain rigorous discipline . Wellington considered Guards NCOs to be among the best in the army .

= = The road to Waterloo = =

The United Kingdom and her Allies had been at war against Napoleon 's French Empire since 1803 , but by early 1814 Wellington 's army had fought its way through the Peninsula to France , and the eastern Allies were threatening France 's eastern borders . On 31 March 1814 , allied armies entered Paris , and Napoleon abdicated on 6 April . Within a month of Napoleon 's abdication , he had been exiled to Elba . It appeared that the war was over , and arrangements for the peace were discussed at the Congress of Vienna . But on 26 February 1815 , Napoleon escaped from Elba and returned to France , where he raised an army .

The Allies assembled another army and planned for a summer offensive . The combatant Coldstream companies had been garrisoned in Brussels and Ath , where they were joined by the 2nd Battalion 's remaining four companies in early 1815 . In preparation for the coming offensive , Graham 's battalion joined with the 2nd Battalion of the Scots Guards to form the 1st Division 's 2nd Brigade . Basing themselves in Belgium , the Allies formed two armies , with the Duke of Wellington commanding the Anglo @-@ Allies , and Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher commanding the Prussians . Napoleon marched swiftly through France to meet them , and split his army to launch a two @-@ pronged attack . On 16 June 1815 , Napoleon himself led men against Blücher at Ligny , while Marshall Ney commanded an attack against Wellington 's forward army at the Battle of Quatre Bras .

Wellington had received news of Napoleon 's position on the night of 15 June , and issued orders to his army to hold the ground at Quatre Bras . Graham 's battalion , along with the rest of the 2nd Brigade , left Enghien , where they were quartered , at 3 a.m. on the morning of the 16th , for a twenty @-@ five mile march to Quatre Bras . They reached Quatre Bras at 4 p.m. , by which time the battle had been engaged for two hours . The Coldstream Guards immediately deployed into position to support the 1st Foot Guards , who were engaged with the enemy at Bossu Wood . Once

the wood was cleared of French , Lieutenant @-@ Colonel James Macdonnell led the 2nd Brigade 's light companies (including Graham 's) in a counter @-@ attack against Jérôme Bonaparte 's Frenchmen , with other Guards companies in support . The various Guards battalions sustained heavy losses , but by 6 @. @ 30 p.m. Wellington 's position had strengthened . By 9 p.m. , Ney had withdrawn his men , and Wellington held the field . The French had lost 4 @, @ 000 men , the Allies 4 @, @ 800 .

Wellington held Quatre Bras , but the Prussians were not so successful at Ligny , and were forced to retreat . Hearing of Blücher 's defeat on the morning of 17 June , Wellington ordered his army to withdraw level with his ally ; they took position near the Belgian village of Waterloo . Graham 's company , and the Scots Guards ' light company , masked the retreat from the right , and did not leave Quatre Bras until mid @-@ afternoon .

The field at Waterloo was 5 @. @ 5 km wide , with two parallel ridges running west to east , creating a shallow valley 1 @. @ 4 km across . On the allied right lay the chateau of Hougoumont , a collection of walled farm buildings lying closer to the French line than the Allies ' line . Recognising its defensive importance , Wellington ordered Hanoverian and Nassau troops to occupy the farm . In allied hands , it would provide cover for flanking fire against any French assault of the main allied line ; in French hands , it would provide a bastion from which they could launch attacks . Since it defended the Nivelles road as well as the Allies ' right flank , Wellington ordered that it was to be held at all costs .

= = Hougoumont = =

The day 's battle began on 18 June 1815 at about 11 a.m. with a French attack on Hougoumont from the south @-@ west , led by Napoleon 's brother Jerome . The French gained control of much of the chateau 's park , but the Allies retained possession of the farmhouse and courtyard surrounds . Jerome continued his attempts to take the farmhouse throughout the day , making four or five assaults , most of which were repulsed by the defenders , who fired through loopholes , windows , and doorways . One assault at about 12 @. @ 30 p.m. breached the north gate , which had been left open to allow allied troop and supply movements . Sous @-@ Lieutenant Legro , of the French 1st Light Infantry , broke through the wooden doors with an axe , allowing French soldiers to flood the courtyard . Graham 's commanding officer , Lieutenant @-@ Colonel James Macdonnell , led his men through the melee in the courtyard to the gates , in an attempt to shut them against the pressing French . This was done with the help of three officers (Captain Wyndham , Ensign Hervey , and Ensign Gooch) , Corporal Graham , and a few other soldiers including Graham 's brother Joseph . James Graham was the one to slot the bar in place . Flagstones , carts , and debris were then piled against the gates to hold them secure . The Frenchmen trapped within the courtyard were all killed , apart from a young drummer @-@ boy .

Wellington monitored the action at Hougoumont until about 1 p.m. , by which time he was content enough with the position 's security to concentrate his own attention on the allied centre . With the chateau secure , the 3 @, @ 500 British and German troops in the vicinity were able to defend the strongpoint against an estimated 14 @, @ 500 French soldiers . About 8 @, @ 000 French soldiers died attacking Hougoumont over the day .

During the battle , Graham also saved the life of Captain Wyndham ? one of those who had shut the gate ? by shooting a sniper whose musket was trained on the officer . Mid @-@ afternoon , a fire broke out in one of the farm buildings following a bombardment of incendiary shells . Graham 's brother Joseph was lying wounded within , and Graham requested permission to fall out , so he might rescue his brother ; given permission , he retrieved his brother and returned to his post . Joseph Graham died of wounds five days later .

At 7 p.m. the defenders at Hougoumont were still resisting , despite the burning buildings and their own dwindling ammunition . Within a couple of hours , the action in the rest of the field had resulted in a victory for the Allies : the French were in retreat . Afterwards , Wellington declared that " the success of the battle turned upon closing the gates at Hougoumont . " It seems likely that if the gates had not been shut so quickly the men holding the perimeter at Hougoumont would have been

killed . It was a costly defence : the Coldstream Guards lost 8 officers , with 300 casualties among the men . James Graham was promoted to sergeant for his bravery at Hougoumont , and received a special medal for gallantry .

= = " The bravest man at Waterloo " = =

Wellington 's respect for those who served in Hougoumont was well known . After the battle he wrote : " You may depend upon it , no troops could have held Hougoumont but the British , and only the best of them . " But among those " best soldiers " , Graham stood out as being exceptional . In August 1815 , John Norcross , the Rector of Framlingham , sought to make over the income from a freehold farm to the " most deserving soldier at Waterloo " ; he approached the Duke of Wellington , who nominated Graham . Graham received an annuity from the farm of £ 10 a year for two years until the vicar became bankrupt . Wellington 's Supplementary Dispatches (Vol . 11) make mention of Graham :

[He] assisted Lieutenant @-@ colonel Macdonnell in closing the gates , which had been left open for the purpose of communication , and which the enemy were in the act of forcing . His brother , a corporal in the regiment , was lying wounded in a barn , which was on fire , and Graham removed him so as to be secure from the fire , and then returned to his duty . He had been 3 2 / 12 years in the regiment .

This honour is noted in his service record now held at the Public Record Office , with the words : " The most valorous NCO at the battle of Waterloo selected by the Duke of Wellington . "

The Reverend Norcross died in 1837 . It was reported in a number of books and newspapers in the years following that Norcross had recovered his fortunes enough to leave £ 500 in his will to " the bravest man in England " and that , once appealed to , Wellington again turned to the events in Hougoumont , selecting Colonel Macdonnell . Macdonnell apparently split the bequest with Graham , since they had shut the gate together . There remains some doubt concerning this second bequest . Graham 's entry in the Dictionary of National Biography records only the initial annuity , and states that " various apparently incorrect versions of the Norcross gift have been published . " Archibald Murray (in 1862) made reference to " the alleged sum of £ 500 " given to Colonel Macdonnell and reported investigations made by a fellow researcher who could find no proof of this bequest ; Murray concluded that the reports arose from a misrepresentation of the original annuity . In his history of Waterloo , Colonel Siborne provided a full account of Graham 's action at Hougoumont and the later annuity , but made no reference to the second bequest , despite reporting Graham 's own death at Kilmainham Hospital . Siborne had personally interviewed Graham .

= = Later career = =

Graham continued to serve in the Coldstream Guards after Waterloo . The 2nd Battalion advanced on Paris with the army , remaining there until 1816 as part of the army of occupation , after which they were posted to Cambrai . In November 1818 they returned to England . While stationed in London in 1820 , a detachment of Guards were ordered to support the police with the arrest of the Cato Street conspirators , under the command of Captain FitzClarence (later given the title Lord Frederick FitzClarence) , one of the illegitimate sons of the Duke of Clarence . The arrest was not straightforward , and a scuffle ensued . The Naval and Military Gazette (May 1845) identified Sergeant Graham as the man who saved FitzClarence 's life .

Graham was discharged from the Guards in 1821 , and enlisted in the 12th Royal Lancers as a private . When Graham joined the Lancers , they were stationed in Ireland , and returned to England in 1824 . In 1826 , two squadrons saw service in Portugal before returning to England . Graham was discharged for ill health ? " an injured chest and worn out " ? in July 1830 , and received a Chelsea pension .

James Graham died in 1845 , at the Royal Hospital , Kilmainham . He was buried with military honours . A memorial plaque was erected at the Hospital , and it was later transferred to St Tiernach 's Church , in Clones .

His obituary appeared in The Gentleman 's Magazine under the name " John Graham " :

23 April . At the Royal Hospital of Kilmainham , Sergeant John Graham , formerly in the light company of the 2nd battalion of Coldstream Guards , the individual selected by the Duke of Wellington as " the bravest of the brave " in the desperate combat at Waterloo , in order to profit by the generous offer of the Rev. Mr. Norcross , Rector of Framlingham , to confer a pension , during life , upon the soldier most distinguished in the brigade of guards on that glorious day . After the most minute inquiry , carried out by Sir John Byng 's directions , the laurel was awarded to an Irishman , John Graham , a native of Cloona [sic] , co . Monaghan .

= = Enduring legacy = =

James Graham 's exploits at Waterloo became much celebrated throughout Great Britain , and many accounts of the battle make reference to his actions , including a biography of Wellington , the memoirs of another sergeant , and Charles Dickens ' magazine Household Words . The shutting of the gate was portrayed by artist Robert Gibb in 1903 ; the painting is currently held by the National Museums of Scotland . A watercolour portrait of Sergeant Graham himself is held at the National Gallery of Ireland .

The actions of Graham and Macdonnell continue to be remembered as an iconic moment in the battle of Waterloo . In 1915 , cigarette manufacturers W.D. & H.O. Wills portrayed Graham and Macdonnell on one of the cigarette cards printed to commemorate the centenary of Waterloo . Since then , many authors of fiction concerning Waterloo have recreated the events at the gate , and even if they include their own fictional heroes they attribute the closing of the gate to Macdonnell and Graham .

The efforts of the Coldstream Guards at Waterloo , and Graham 's gallantry , remain celebrated by the Regiment . Every December the Sergeants ' Mess commemorate Graham 's bravery with a ceremonial game " Hanging the Brick " . The " Brick " ? a stone from Hougoumont ? is paraded through the barracks and hung up in the Sergeants ' Mess with all the honour due to regimental colours . Also retained by the Regiment are Graham 's Waterloo Medal and gallantry medal . In 2004 the Regiment named a new sergeants ' accommodation block after him , in Lille Barracks , Aldershot . A plaque on the building is inscribed with the words :

" In Memory of Sergeant James Graham WM , 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards , " The Bravest Man in England " , Following His Actions in Closing The Gates at Hougoumont Farm , Waterloo , 18 June 1815 . "