

= Battle of Waterloo =

The Battle of Waterloo was fought on Sunday, 18 June 1815, near Waterloo in present-day Belgium, then part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. A French army under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated by two of the armies of the Seventh Coalition: an Anglo-led Allied army under the command of the Duke of Wellington, and a Prussian army under the command of Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher, Prince of Wahlstatt. The battle resulted in the end of Bonaparte's reign and of the First French Empire, and set a chronological milestone between serial European wars and decades of relative peace.

Upon Napoleon's return to power in March 1815, many states that had opposed him formed the Seventh Coalition and began to mobilize armies. Wellington and Blücher's armies were cantoned close to the north-eastern border of France. Napoleon chose to attack them in the hope of destroying them before they could join in a coordinated invasion of France with other members of the coalition. Waterloo was the decisive engagement of the Waterloo Campaign and Napoleon's last. According to Wellington, the battle was "the nearest I ever saw in your life". The defeat at Waterloo ended Napoleon's rule as Emperor of the French, and marked the end of his Hundred Days return from exile. Napoleon abdicated 4 days later, and on 7 July coalition forces entered Paris.

After the Battle of Quatre Bras, Wellington withdrew from Quatre Bras to Waterloo. After the simultaneous Battle of Ligny the Prussians withdrew parallel to Wellington, drawing a third part of Napoleon's forces away from Waterloo to the separate and simultaneous Battle of Wavre. Upon learning that the Prussian army was able to support him, Wellington decided to offer battle on the Mont-Saint-Jean escarpment, across the Brussels road. Here he withstood repeated attacks by the French throughout the afternoon, aided by the progressively arriving Prussians. In the evening Napoleon committed his last reserves to a desperate final attack, which was narrowly beaten back. With the Prussians breaking through on the French right flank Wellington's Anglo-allied army counter-attacked in the centre, and the French army was routed.

The battlefield is located in the municipalities of Braine-l'Alleud and Lasne, about 15 kilometres (9.3 mi) south of Brussels, and about 2 kilometres (1.2 mi) from the town of Waterloo. The site of the battlefield today is dominated by a large monument, the Lion's Mound. As this mound was constructed from earth taken from the battlefield itself, the contemporary topography of the battlefield near the mound has not been preserved.

= = Prelude = =

On 13 March 1815, six days before Napoleon reached Paris, the powers at the Congress of Vienna declared him an outlaw. Four days later, the United Kingdom, Russia, Austria, and Prussia mobilised armies to defeat Napoleon. Critically outnumbered, Napoleon knew that once his attempts at dissuading one or more of the Seventh Coalition allies from invading France had failed, his only chance of remaining in power was to attack before the coalition mobilised.

Had Napoleon succeeded in destroying the existing coalition forces south of Brussels before they were reinforced, he might have been able to drive the British back to the sea, knock the Prussians out of the war, and then turn his armies towards the Austrians and Russians. An additional consideration was that there were many French-speaking sympathisers in Belgium and a French victory might trigger a friendly revolution there. Also, the British troops in Belgium were largely second-line troops; most of the veterans of the Peninsular War had been sent to North America to fight in the War of 1812.

Wellington's initial dispositions were intended to counter the threat of Napoleon enveloping the Coalition armies by moving through Mons to the south-west of Brussels. This would have cut Wellington's communications with his base at Ostend, but would have pushed his army closer to Blücher's. Napoleon manipulated Wellington's fear of this loss of his supply chain from the channel ports with false intelligence.

By June, Napoleon had raised a total army strength of about 300,000 men. The force at his

disposal at Waterloo was less than one third that size , but they were nearly all loyal and experienced soldiers . He divided his army into a left wing commanded by Marshal Ney , a right wing commanded by Marshal Grouchy and a reserve under his command ( although all three elements remained close enough to support one another ) . Crossing the frontier near Charleroi before dawn on 15 June , the French rapidly overran Coalition outposts , securing Napoleon 's " central position " between Wellington 's and Blücher 's armies .

Only very late on the night of 15 June was Wellington certain that the Charleroi attack was the main French thrust . In the early hours of 16 June , at the Duchess of Richmond 's ball in Brussels , he received a dispatch from the Prince of Orange and was shocked by the speed of Napoleon 's advance . He hastily ordered his army to concentrate on Quatre Bras , where the Prince of Orange , with the brigade of Prince Bernhard of Saxe @-@ Weimar , was holding a tenuous position against the soldiers of Ney 's left wing . Ney 's orders were to secure the crossroads of Quatre Bras , so that , if necessary , he could later swing east and reinforce Napoleon .

Napoleon moved against the concentrated Prussian army first . On 16 June , with a part of the reserve and the right wing of the army , he attacked and defeated Blücher 's Prussians at the Battle of Ligny . The Prussian centre gave way under more heavy French assaults but the flanks held their ground . Ney , meanwhile , found the crossroads of Quatre Bras lightly held by the Prince of Orange , who repelled Ney 's initial attacks but was gradually driven back by overwhelming numbers of French troops . First reinforcements and then Wellington arrived . He took command and drove Ney back , securing the crossroads by early evening , too late to send help to the Prussians , who were defeated at the Battle of Ligny on the same day . The Prussian defeat made Wellington 's position at Quatre Bras untenable , so the next day he withdrew northwards , to a defensive position he had reconnoitred the previous year ? the low ridge of Mont @-@ Saint @-@ Jean , south of the village of Waterloo and the Sonian Forest .

The Prussian retreat from Ligny went uninterrupted and seemingly unnoticed by the French . The bulk of their rearguard units held their positions until about midnight and some elements did not move out until the following morning , ignored by the French . Crucially , the Prussians did not retreat to the east , along their own lines of communication . Instead , they too fell back northwards ? parallel to Wellington 's line of march , still within supporting distance and in communication with him throughout . The Prussians rallied on Bülow 's IV Corps , which had not been engaged at Ligny and was in a strong position south of Wavre .

Once he had intelligence of the Prussian defeat , Wellington organised a retreat from Quatre Bras to Waterloo . Napoleon , with the reserves , made a late start on 17 June and joined Ney at Quatre Bras at 13 : 00 to attack Wellington 's army but found the position empty . The French pursued Wellington 's retreating army all the way to Waterloo , however due to weather and the head start that Napoleon 's tardy advance had allowed Wellington , apart from a cavalry action at Genappe there was no other substantial engagement .

Before leaving Ligny , Napoleon ordered Grouchy , commander of the right wing , to follow up the retreating Prussians with 33 @,@ 000 men . A late start , uncertainty about the direction the Prussians had taken and the vagueness of the orders given to him meant that Grouchy was too late to prevent the Prussian army reaching Wavre , from where it could march to support Wellington . By the end of 17 June , Wellington 's army had arrived at its position at Waterloo , with the main body of Napoleon 's army following . Blücher 's army was gathering in and around Wavre , around 8 miles ( 13 km ) to the east of the city .

= = Armies = =

Three armies were involved in the battle : Napoleon 's Armée du Nord ; a multinational army under Wellington ; and a Prussian army under Blücher .

The French army of around 69 @,@ 000 consisted of 48 @,@ 000 infantry , 14 @,@ 000 cavalry , and 7 @,@ 000 artillery with 250 guns . Napoleon had used conscription to fill the ranks of the French army throughout his rule , but he did not conscript men for the 1815 campaign . His troops were mainly veterans with considerable experience and a fierce devotion to their Emperor . The

cavalry in particular was both numerous and formidable , and included fourteen regiments of armoured heavy cavalry and seven of highly versatile lancers .

Wellington claimed that he himself had " an infamous army , very weak and ill @-@ equipped , and a very inexperienced Staff " . His troops consisted of 67 @,@ 000 men : 50 @,@ 000 infantry , 11 @,@ 000 cavalry , and 6 @,@ 000 artillery with 150 guns . Of these , 25 @,@ 000 were British , with another 6 @,@ 000 from the King 's German Legion ( KGL ) . All of the British Army troops were regular soldiers but only 7 @,@ 000 of them were Peninsular War veterans . In addition , there were 17 @,@ 000 Dutch and Belgian troops , 11 @,@ 000 from Hanover , 6 @,@ 000 from Brunswick , and 3 @,@ 000 from Nassau .

Many of the troops in the Coalition armies were inexperienced . The Dutch army had been re @-@ established in 1815 , following the earlier defeat of Napoleon . With the exception of the British and some from Hanover and Brunswick who had fought with the British army in Spain , many of the professional soldiers in the Coalition armies had spent some of their time in the French army or in armies allied to the Napoleonic regime . The historian Barbero states that in this heterogeneous army the difference between British and foreign troops did not prove significant under fire .

Wellington was also acutely short of heavy cavalry , having only seven British and three Dutch regiments . The Duke of York imposed many of his staff officers on Wellington , including his second @-@ in @-@ command the Earl of Uxbridge . Uxbridge commanded the cavalry and had carte blanche from Wellington to commit these forces at his discretion . Wellington stationed a further 17 @,@ 000 troops at Halle , 8 miles ( 13 km ) away to the west . They were not recalled to participate in the battle but were to serve as a fallback position should the battle be lost . They were mostly composed of Dutch troops under Prince of Orange 's younger brother Prince Frederick of the Netherlands . They were placed as a guard against any possible wide flanking movement by the French forces , and also to act as a rearguard if Wellington was forced to retreat towards Antwerp and the coast . According to Hofschröer , the best Dutch troops were at Halle and he questions the reasons for their placement .

The Prussian army was in the throes of reorganisation . In 1815 , the former Reserve regiments , Legions , and Freikorps volunteer formations from the wars of 1813 ? 1814 were in the process of being absorbed into the line , along with many Landwehr ( militia ) regiments . The Landwehr were mostly untrained and unequipped when they arrived in Belgium . The Prussian cavalry were in a similar state . Its artillery was also reorganising and did not give its best performance ? guns and equipment continued to arrive during and after the battle .

Off @-@ setting these handicaps the Prussian Army had excellent and professional leadership in its General Staff organisation . These officers came from four schools developed for this purpose and thus worked to a common standard of training . This system was in marked contrast to the conflicting , vague orders issued by the French army . This staff system ensured that before Ligny , three @-@ quarters of the Prussian army concentrated for battle at 24 hours notice .

After Ligny , the Prussian army , although defeated , was able to realign its supply train , reorganise itself , and intervene decisively on the Waterloo battlefield within 48 hours . Two and a half Prussian army corps , or 48 @,@ 000 men , were engaged at Waterloo ; two brigades under Bülow , commander of IV Corps , attacked Lobau at 16 : 30 , while Zieten 's I Corps and parts of Pirch I 's II Corps engaged at about 18 : 00 .

= = Battlefield = =

The Waterloo position was a strong one . It consisted of a long ridge running east @-@ west , perpendicular to , and bisected by , the main road to Brussels . Along the crest of the ridge ran the Ohain road , a deep sunken lane . Near the crossroads with the Brussels road was a large elm tree that was roughly in the centre of Wellington 's position and served as his command post for much of the day . Wellington deployed his infantry in a line just behind the crest of the ridge following the Ohain road .

Using the reverse slope , as he had many times previously , Wellington concealed his strength from the French , with the exception of his skirmishers and artillery . The length of front of the battlefield

was also relatively short at 2 @. @ 5 miles ( 4 @. @ 0 km ) . This allowed Wellington to draw up his forces in depth , which he did in the centre and on the right , all the way towards the village of Braine @- @ l'Alleud , in the expectation that the Prussians would reinforce his left during the day .

In front of the ridge , there were three positions that could be fortified . On the extreme right were the château , garden , and orchard of Hougoumont . This was a large and well @- @ built country house , initially hidden in trees . The house faced north along a sunken , covered lane ( usually described by the British as " the hollow @- @ way " ) along which it could be supplied . On the extreme left was the hamlet of Papelotte .

Both Hougoumont and Papelotte were fortified and garrisoned , and thus anchored Wellington 's flanks securely . Papelotte also commanded the road to Wavre that the Prussians would use to send reinforcements to Wellington 's position . On the western side of the main road , and in front of the rest of Wellington 's line , was the farmhouse and orchard of La Haye Sainte , which was garrisoned with 400 light infantry of the King 's German Legion .

On the opposite side of the road was a disused sand quarry , where the 95th Rifles were posted as sharpshooters . This position presented a formidable challenge to any attacking force . Any attempt to turn Wellington 's right would entail taking the entrenched Hougoumont position . Any attack on his right centre would mean the attackers would have to march between enfilading fire from Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte . On the left , any attack would also be enfiladed by fire from La Haye Sainte and its adjoining sandpit , and any attempt at turning the left flank would entail fighting through the lanes and hedgerows surrounding Papelotte and the other garrisoned buildings on that flank , and some very wet ground in the Smohain defile .

The French army formed on the slopes of another ridge to the south . Napoleon could not see Wellington 's positions , so he drew his forces up symmetrically about the Brussels road . On the right was I Corps under d'Erlon with 16 @, @ 000 infantry and 1 @, @ 500 cavalry , plus a cavalry reserve of 4 @, @ 700 . On the left was II Corps under Reille with 13 @, @ 000 infantry , and 1 @, @ 300 cavalry , and a cavalry reserve of 4 @, @ 600 . In the centre about the road south of the inn La Belle Alliance were a reserve including Lobau 's VI Corps with 6 @, @ 000 men , the 13 @, @ 000 infantry of the Imperial Guard , and a cavalry reserve of 2 @, @ 000 .

In the right rear of the French position was the substantial village of Plancenoit , and at the extreme right , the Bois de Paris wood . Napoleon initially commanded the battle from Rossomme farm , where he could see the entire battlefield , but moved to a position near La Belle Alliance early in the afternoon . Command on the battlefield ( which was largely hidden from his view ) was delegated to Ney .

= = Battle = =

= = = Preparation = = =

Wellington rose at around 02 : 00 or 03 : 00 on 18 June , and wrote letters until dawn . He had earlier written to Blücher confirming that he would give battle at Mont @- @ Saint @- @ Jean if Blücher could provide him with at least one corps ; otherwise he would retreat towards Brussels . At a late @- @ night council , Blücher 's chief of staff , August Neidhardt von Gneisenau , had been distrustful of Wellington 's strategy , but Blücher persuaded him that they should march to join Wellington 's army . In the morning Wellington duly received a reply from Blücher , promising to support him with three corps .

From 06 : 00 Wellington was in the field supervising the deployment of his forces . At Wavre , the Prussian IV Corps under Bülow was designated to lead the march to Waterloo as it was in the best shape , not having been involved in the Battle of Ligny . Although they had not taken casualties , IV Corps had been marching for two days , covering the retreat of the three other corps of the Prussian army from the battlefield of Ligny . They had been posted farthest away from the battlefield , and progress was very slow . The roads were in poor condition after the night 's heavy rain , and Bülow 's men had to pass through the congested streets of Wavre and move 88 artillery pieces . Matters

were not helped when a fire broke out in Wavre , blocking several streets along Bülow 's intended route . As a result , the last part of the corps left at 10 : 00 , six hours after the leading elements had moved out towards Waterloo . Bülow 's men were followed to Waterloo first by I Corps and then by II Corps .

Napoleon breakfasted off silver plate at Le Caillou , the house where he had spent the night . When Soult suggested that Grouchy should be recalled to join the main force , Napoleon said , " Just because you have all been beaten by Wellington , you think he 's a good general . I tell you Wellington is a bad general , the English are bad troops , and this affair is nothing more than eating breakfast " .

Napoleon 's surprisingly dismissive statements should not be taken at face value , given the Emperor 's maxim that " in war , morale is everything " and that praising the enemy is always wrong , as it reduces one 's morale . Indeed , he had been seen engaging in such pre @-@ battle , morale @-@ boosting harangues on a number of occasions in the past and on the morning of the battle of Waterloo he had to deal with his chief of staff 's pessimism and nervousness and had to respond to several persistent and almost defeatist objections from some of his senior generals .

Later on , being told by his brother , Jerome , of some gossip overheard by a waiter between British officers at lunch at the ' King of Spain ' inn in Genappe that the Prussians were to march over from Wavre , Napoleon declared that the Prussians would need at least two days to recover and would be dealt with by Grouchy . Surprisingly , Jerome 's overheard gossip aside , the French commanders present at the pre @-@ battle conference at Le Caillou had no information about the alarming proximity of the Prussians and did not suspect that Blücher 's men would start erupting onto the field of battle in great numbers just five hours later .

Napoleon had delayed the start of the battle owing to the sodden ground , which would have made manoeuvring cavalry and artillery difficult . In addition , many of his forces had bivouacked well to the south of La Belle Alliance . At 10 : 00 , in response to a dispatch he had received from Grouchy six hours earlier , he sent a reply telling Grouchy to " head for Wavre [ to Grouchy 's north ] in order to draw near to us [ to the west of Grouchy ] " and then " push before him " the Prussians to arrive at Waterloo " as soon as possible " .

At 11 : 00 , Napoleon drafted his general order : Reille 's Corps on the left and d 'Erlon 's Corps to the right were to attack the village of Mont @-@ Saint @-@ Jean and keep abreast of one another . This order assumed Wellington 's battle @-@ line was in the village , rather than at the more forward position on the ridge . To enable this , Jerome 's division would make an initial attack on Hougoumont , which Napoleon expected would draw in Wellington 's reserves , since its loss would threaten his communications with the sea . A grande batterie of the reserve artillery of I , II , and VI Corps was to then bombard the centre of Wellington 's position from about 13 : 00 . D 'Erlon 's corps would then attack Wellington 's left , break through , and roll up his line from east to west . In his memoirs , Napoleon wrote that his intention was to separate Wellington 's army from the Prussians and drive it back towards the sea .

= = = Hougoumont = = =

The historian Andrew Roberts notes that " It is a curious fact about the Battle of Waterloo that no one is absolutely certain when it actually began " . Wellington recorded in his dispatches that at " about ten o 'clock [ Napoleon ] commenced a furious attack upon our post at Hougoumont " . Other sources state that the attack began around 11 : 30 . The house and its immediate environs were defended by four light companies of Guards , and the wood and park by Hanoverian Jäger and the 1 / 2nd Nassau .

The initial attack by Bauduin 's brigade emptied the wood and park , but was driven back by heavy British artillery fire , and cost Bauduin his life . As the British guns were distracted by a duel with French artillery , a second attack by Soye 's brigade and what had been Bauduin 's succeeded in reaching the north gate of the house . Sous @-@ Lieutenant Legros , a French officer , broke the gate open with an axe . Some French troops managed to enter the courtyard . The 2nd Coldstream Guards and 2 / 3rd Foot Guards arrived to help . There was a fierce melee , and the British

managed to close the gate on the French troops streaming in . The Frenchmen trapped in the courtyard were all killed . Only a young drummer boy was spared .

Fighting continued around Hougoumont all afternoon . Its surroundings were heavily invested by French light infantry , and coordinated attacks were made against the troops behind Hougoumont . Wellington 's army defended the house and the hollow way running north from it . In the afternoon , Napoleon personally ordered the house to be shelled to set it on fire , resulting in the destruction of all but the chapel . Du Plat 's brigade of the King 's German Legion was brought forward to defend the hollow way , which they had to do without senior officers . Eventually they were relieved by the 71st Foot , a British infantry regiment . Adam 's brigade was further reinforced by Hugh Halkett 's 3rd Hanoverian Brigade , and successfully repulsed further infantry and cavalry attacks sent by Reille . Hougoumont held out until the end of the battle .

I had occupied that post with a detachment from General Byng 's brigade of Guards , which was in position in its rear ; and it was some time under the command of Lieutenant @-@ Colonel MacDonald , and afterwards of Colonel Home ; and I am happy to add that it was maintained , throughout the day , with the utmost gallantry by these brave troops , notwithstanding the repeated efforts of large bodies of the enemy to obtain possession of it .

When I reached Lloyd 's abandoned guns , I stood near them for about a minute to contemplate the scene : it was grand beyond description . Hougoumont and its wood sent up a broad flame through the dark masses of smoke that overhung the field ; beneath this cloud the French were indistinctly visible . Here a waving mass of long red feathers could be seen ; there , gleams as from a sheet of steel showed that the cuirassiers were moving ; 400 cannon were belching forth fire and death on every side ; the roaring and shouting were indistinguishably commixed ? together they gave me an idea of a labouring volcano . Bodies of infantry and cavalry were pouring down on us , and it was time to leave contemplation , so I moved towards our columns , which were standing up in square .

The fighting at Hougoumont has often been characterised as a diversionary attack to draw in Wellington 's reserves which escalated into an all @-@ day battle and drew in French reserves instead . In fact there is a good case to believe that both Napoleon and Wellington thought that holding Hougoumont was key to winning the battle . Hougoumont was a part of the battlefield that Napoleon could see clearly , and he continued to direct resources towards it and its surroundings all afternoon ( 33 battalions in all , 14 @,@ 000 troops ) . Similarly , though the house never contained a large number of troops , Wellington devoted 21 battalions ( 12 @,@ 000 troops ) over the course of the afternoon in keeping the hollow way open to allow fresh troops and ammunition to reach the buildings . He moved several artillery batteries from his hard @-@ pressed centre to support Hougoumont , and later stated that " the success of the battle turned upon closing the gates at Hougoumont " .

= = = First French infantry attack = = =

The 80 guns of Napoleon 's grande batterie drew up in the centre . These opened fire at 11 : 50 , according to Lord Hill ( commander of the Anglo @-@ allied II Corps ) , while other sources put the time between noon and 13 : 30 . The grande batterie was too far back to aim accurately , and the only other troops they could see were skirmishers of the regiments of Kempt and Pack , and Perponcher 's 2nd Dutch division ( the others were employing Wellington 's characteristic " reverse slope defence " ) . Nevertheless , the bombardment caused a large number of casualties . Though some projectiles buried themselves in the soft soil , most found their marks on the reverse slope of the ridge . The bombardment forced the cavalry of the Union Brigade ( in third line ) to move to its left , as did the Scots Greys , to reduce their casualty rate .

At about 13 : 00 , Napoleon saw the first columns of Prussians around the village of Lasne @-@ Chapelle @-@ Saint @-@ Lambert , four or five miles ( three hours march for an army ) away from his right flank . Napoleon 's reaction was to have Marshal Soult send a message to Grouchy telling him to come towards the battlefield and attack the arriving Prussians . Grouchy , however , had been executing Napoleon 's previous orders to follow the Prussians " with your sword against his back " towards Wavre , and was by then too far away to reach Waterloo . Grouchy was advised by

his subordinate , Gérard , to " march to the sound of the guns " , but stuck to his orders and engaged the Prussian III Corps rear guard under the command of Lieutenant @-@ General Baron Johann von Thielmann at the Battle of Wavre . Moreover , Soult 's letter ordering Grouchy to move quickly to join Napoleon and attack Bülow would not actually reach Grouchy until after 20 : 00 .

A little after 13 : 00 , I Corps ' attack began . D 'Erlon , like Ney , had encountered Wellington in Spain , and was aware of the British commander 's favoured tactic of using massed short @-@ range musketry to drive off infantry columns . Rather than use the usual nine @-@ deep French columns deployed abreast of one another , therefore , each division advanced in closely spaced battalion lines behind one another . This allowed them to concentrate their fire , but it did not leave room for them to change formation .

The formation was initially effective . Its leftmost division , under François @-@ Xavier Donzelot , advanced on La Haye Sainte . The farmhouse was defended by the King 's German Legion . While one French battalion engaged the defenders from the front , the following battalions fanned out to either side and , with the support of several squadrons of cuirassiers , succeeded in isolating the farmhouse . The King 's German Legion resolutely defended the farmhouse . Each time the French tried to scale the walls the outnumbered Germans somehow held them off . The Prince of Orange saw that La Haye Sainte had been cut off and tried to reinforce it by sending forward the Hanoverian Lüneberg Battalion in line . Cuirassiers concealed in a fold in the ground caught and destroyed it in minutes and then rode on past La Haye Sainte , almost to the crest of the ridge , where they covered d 'Erlon 's left flank as his attack developed .

At about 13 : 30 , d 'Erlon started to advance his three other divisions , some 14 @,@ 000 men over a front of about 1 @,@ 000 metres ( 1 @,@ 100 yards ) , against Wellington 's left wing . At the point they aimed for they faced 6 @,@ 000 men : the first line consisted of the Dutch 1st " Brigade van Bylandt " of the 2nd Dutch division , flanked by the British brigades of Kempt and Pack on either side . The second line consisted of British and Hanoverian troops under Sir Thomas Picton , who were lying down in dead ground behind the ridge . All had suffered badly at Quatre Bras . In addition , the Bijlandt brigade had been ordered to deploy its skirmishers in the hollow road and on the forward slope . The rest of the brigade was lying down just behind the road .

At the moment these skirmishers were rejoining their parent battalions , the brigade was ordered to its feet and started to return fire . On the left of the brigade , where the 7th Dutch Militia stood , a " few files were shot down and an opening in the line thus occurred " . The battalion had no reserves and was unable to close the gap . D 'Erlon 's troops pushed through this gap in the line and the remaining battalions in the Bylandt brigade ( 8th Dutch Militia and Belgian 7th Line Battalion ) were forced to retreat to the square of the 5th Dutch Militia , which was in reserve between Picton 's troops , about 100 paces to the rear . There they regrouped under the command of Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijvelt . A moment later the Prince of Orange ordered a counterattack , which actually occurred around 10 minutes later . Bylandt was wounded and retired off the field , passing command of the brigade to Lt. Kol . De Jongh .

D 'Erlon 's men ascended the slope and advanced on the sunken road , Chemin d 'Ohain , that ran from behind La Haye Sainte and continued east . It was lined on both sides by thick hedges , with Bylandt 's brigade just across the road while the British brigades had been lying down some 100 yards back from the road , Pack 's to Bylandt 's left and Kempt 's to Bylandt 's right . Kempt 's 1 @,@ 900 men were engaged by Bourgeois ' brigade of 1 @,@ 900 men of Quiot 's division . In the centre , Donzelot 's division had pushed back Bylandt 's brigade . On the right of the French advance was Marcognet 's division led by Grenier 's brigade consisting of the 45e Régiment de Ligne and followed by the 25e Régiment de Ligne , somewhat less than 2 @,@ 000 men , and behind them , Nogue 's brigade of the 21e and 45e regiments . Opposing them on the other side of the road was Pack 's 9th Brigade consisting of three Scottish regiments : the Royal Scots , the 42nd Black Watch , the 92nd Gordons and the 44th Foot totaling something over 2 @,@ 000 men . A very even fight between British and French infantry was about to occur .

The French advance drove in the British skirmishers and reached the sunken road . As they did so , Pack 's men stood up , formed into a four deep line formation for fear of the French cavalry , advanced , and opened fire . However , a firefight had been anticipated and the French infantry had

accordingly advanced in more linear formation . Now , fully deployed into line , they returned fire and successfully pressed the British troops ; although the attack faltered at the centre , the line in front of d'Erlon 's right started to crumble . Picton was killed shortly after ordering the counter @-@ attack and the British and Hanoverian troops also began to give way under the pressure of numbers . Pack 's regiments , all four ranks deep , advanced to attack the French in the road but faltered and began to fire on the French instead of charging . The 42nd Black Watch halted at the hedge and the resulting fire @-@ fight drove back the British 92nd Foot while the leading French 45e Ligne burst through the hedge cheering . Along the sunken road , the French were forcing the Allies back , the British line was dispersing , and at two o'clock in the afternoon Napoleon was winning the Battle of Waterloo .

= = = Charge of the British heavy cavalry = = =

Our officers of cavalry have acquired a trick of galloping at everything . They never consider the situation , never think of manoeuvring before an enemy , and never keep back or provide a reserve .

At this crucial juncture , Uxbridge ordered his two brigades of British heavy cavalry ? formed unseen behind the ridge ? to charge in support of the hard @-@ pressed infantry . The 1st Brigade , known as the Household Brigade , commanded by Major @-@ General Lord Edward Somerset , consisted of guards regiments : the 1st and 2nd Life Guards , the Royal Horse Guards ( the Blues ) , and the 1st ( King 's ) Dragoon Guards . The 2nd Brigade , also known as the Union Brigade , commanded by Major @-@ General Sir William Ponsonby , was so called as it consisted of an English , the 1st ( The Royals ) ; a Scottish , 2nd ( ' Scots Greys ' ) ; and an Irish , 6th ( Inniskilling ) ; regiment of heavy dragoons .

More than 20 years of warfare had eroded the numbers of suitable cavalry mounts available on the European continent ; this resulted in the British heavy cavalry entering the 1815 campaign with the finest horses of any contemporary cavalry arm . British cavalry troopers also received excellent mounted swordsmanship training . They were , however , inferior to the French in manoeuvring in large formations , cavalier in attitude , and unlike the infantry some units had scant experience of warfare . The Scots Greys , for example , had not been in action since 1795 . According to Wellington , though they were superior individual horsemen , they were inflexible and lacked tactical ability . " I considered one squadron a match for two French , I didn 't like to see four British opposed to four French : and as the numbers increased and order , of course , became more necessary I was the more unwilling to risk our men without having a superiority in numbers " .

The two brigades had a combined field strength of about 2 @, @ 000 ( 2 @, @ 651 official strength ) ; they charged with the 47 @-@ year @-@ old Uxbridge leading them and a very inadequate number of squadrons held in reserve . There is evidence that Uxbridge gave an order , the morning of the battle , to all cavalry brigade commanders to commit their commands on their own initiative , as direct orders from himself might not always be forthcoming , and to " support movements to their front " . It appears that Uxbridge expected the brigades of Sir John Ormsby Vandeleur , Hussey Vivian and the Dutch cavalry to provide support to the British heavies . Uxbridge later regretted leading the charge in person , saying " I committed a great mistake " , when he should have been organising an adequate reserve to move forward in support .

The Household Brigade crossed the crest of the Allied position and charged downhill . The cuirassiers guarding d'Erlon 's left flank were still dispersed , and so were swept over the deeply sunken main road and then routed . The sunken lane acted as a trap , funnelling the flight of the French cavalry to their own right and away from the British cavalry . Some of the cuirassiers then found themselves hemmed in by the steep sides of the sunken lane , with a confused mass of their own infantry in front of them , the 95th Rifles firing at them from the north side of the lane , and Somerset 's heavy cavalry still pressing them from behind . The novelty of fighting armoured foes impressed the British cavalymen , as was recorded by the commander of the Household Brigade .

The blows of the sabres on the cuirasses sounded like braziers at work .

Continuing their attack , the squadrons on the left of the Household Brigade then destroyed Aulard



's brigade . Despite attempts to recall them , they continued past La Haye Sainte and found themselves at the bottom of the hill on blown horses facing Schmitz 's brigade formed in squares .

To their left , the Union Brigade suddenly swept through the infantry lines ( giving rise to the legend that some of the 92nd Gordon Highland Regiment clung onto their stirrups and accompanied them into the charge ) . From the centre leftwards , the Royal Dragoons destroyed Bourgeois ' brigade , capturing the eagle of the 105th Ligne . The Inniskillings routed the other brigade of Quoit 's division , and the Scots Greys came upon the lead French regiment , 45th Ligne , as it was still reforming after having crossed the sunken road and broken through the hedge row in pursuit of the British infantry . The Greys captured the eagle of the 45th Ligne and overwhelmed Grenier 's brigade . These would be the only two eagles captured from the French during the battle . On Wellington 's extreme left , Durutte 's division had time to form squares and fend off groups of Greys .

As with the Household Cavalry , the officers of the Royals and Inniskillings found it very difficult to rein back their troops , who lost all cohesion . Having taken casualties , and still trying to reorder themselves , the Scots Greys and the rest of the Union Brigade found themselves before the main French lines . Their horses were blown , and they were still in disorder without any idea of what their next collective objective was . Some attacked nearby gun batteries of the Grande Battery . Though the Greys had neither the time nor means to disable the cannon or carry them off , they put very many out of action as the gun crews were killed or fled the battlefield . Sergeant Major Dickinson of the Greys stated that his regiment was rallied before going on to attack the French artillery : Hamilton , the regimental commander , rather than holding them back cried out to his men " Charge , charge the guns ! " . Napoleon promptly responded by ordering a counter @-@ attack by the cuirassier brigades of Farine and Travers and Jaquinot 's two Cheveau @-@ léger ( lancer ) regiments in the I Corps light cavalry division . Disorganized and milling about the bottom of the valley between Hougoumont and La Belle Alliance , the Scots Greys and the rest of the British heavy cavalry were taken by surprise by the countercharge of Milhaud 's cuirassiers , joined by lancers from Baron Jaquinot 's 1st Cavalry Division .

As Ponsonby tried to rally his men against the French cuirassiers , he was attacked by Jaquinot 's lancers and captured . A nearby party of Scots Greys saw the capture and attempted to rescue their brigade commander . However , the French lancer who had captured Ponsonby killed him and then used his lance to kill three of the Scots Greys who had attempted the rescue . By the time Ponsonby died , the momentum had entirely returned in favour of the French . Milhaud 's and Jaquinot 's cavalrymen drove the Union Brigade from the valley . The result was very heavy losses for the British cavalry . A countercharge , by British light dragoons under Major @-@ General Vandeleur and Dutch ? Belgian light dragoons and hussars under Major @-@ General Ghigny on the left wing , and Dutch ? Belgian carabiniers under Major @-@ General Trip in the centre , repelled the French cavalry .

All figures quoted for the losses of the cavalry brigades as a result of this charge are estimates , as casualties were only noted down after the day of the battle and were for the battle as a whole . Some historians , Barbero for example , believe the official rolls tend to overestimate the number of cavalrymen present in their squadrons on the field of battle and that the proportionate losses were , as a result , considerably higher than the numbers on paper might suggest . The Union Brigade lost heavily in both officers and men killed ( including its commander , William Ponsonby , and Colonel Hamilton of the Scots Greys ) and wounded . The 2nd Life Guards and the King 's Dragoon Guards of the Household Brigade also lost heavily ( with Colonel Fuller , commander of the King 's DG , killed ) . However , the 1st Life Guards , on the extreme right of the charge , and the Blues , who formed a reserve , had kept their cohesion and consequently suffered significantly fewer casualties . On the rolls the official , or paper strength , for both Brigades is given as 2 @, @ 651 while Barbero and others estimate the actual strength at around 2 @, @ 000 and the official recorded losses for the two heavy cavalry brigades during the battle was 1 @, @ 205 troopers and 1 @, @ 303 horses .

Some historians , such as Chandler and Weller , assert that the British heavy cavalry were destroyed as a viable force following their first , epic charge . Barbero states that the Scots Grey were practically wiped out and that the other two regiments of the Union Brigade suffered comparable losses . Other historians , such as Clark @-@ Kennedy and Wood , citing British

eyewitness accounts , describe the continuing role of the heavy cavalry after their charge . The heavy brigades , far from being ineffective , continued to provide valuable services . They countercharged French cavalry numerous times ( both brigades ) , halted a combined cavalry and infantry attack ( Household Brigade only ) , were used to bolster the morale of those units in their vicinity at times of crisis , and filled gaps in the Anglo @-@ allied line caused by high casualties in infantry formations ( both brigades ) . This service was rendered at a very high cost , as close combat with French cavalry , carbine fire , infantry musketry and ? more deadly than all of these ? artillery fire steadily eroded the number of effectives in the two brigades . At 6 o 'clock in the afternoon the whole Union Brigade could field only 3 squadrons , though these countercharged French cavalry , losing half their number in the process . At the end of the fighting the two brigades , by this time combined , could muster one squadron .

14 @,@ 000 French troops of D 'Erlon 's I Corps had been committed to this attack . The I Corps had been driven in rout back across the valley costing Napoleon 3 @,@ 000 casualties including over 2 @,@ 000 prisoners taken . Also some valuable time was lost , the charge had dispersed numerous units and it would take until 16 : 00 hours for D 'Erlon 's shaken corps to reform . And although elements of the Prussians now began to appear on the field to his right , Napoleon had already ordered Lobau 's VI corps to move to the right flank to hold them back before D 'Erlon 's attack began .

= = = The French cavalry attack = = =

A little before 16 : 00 , Ney noted an apparent exodus from Wellington 's centre . He mistook the movement of casualties to the rear for the beginnings of a retreat , and sought to exploit it . Following the defeat of d 'Erlon 's Corps , Ney had few infantry reserves left , as most of the infantry had been committed either to the futile Hougoumont attack or to the defence of the French right . Ney therefore tried to break Wellington 's centre with cavalry alone . Initially Milhaud 's reserve cavalry corps of cuirassiers and Lefebvre @-@ Desnoëttes ' light cavalry division of the Imperial Guard , some 4 @,@ 800 sabres , were committed . When these were repulsed , Kellermann 's heavy cavalry corps and Guyot 's heavy cavalry of the Guard were added to the massed assault , a total of around 9 @,@ 000 cavalry in 67 squadrons . When Napoleon saw the charge he said it was an hour too soon .

Wellington 's infantry responded by forming squares ( hollow box @-@ formations four ranks deep ) . Squares were much smaller than usually depicted in paintings of the battle ? a 500 @-@ man battalion square would have been no more than 60 feet ( 18 m ) in length on a side . Vulnerable to artillery or infantry , squares that stood their ground were deadly to cavalry , because they could not be outflanked and because horses would not charge into a hedge of bayonets . Wellington ordered his artillery crews to take shelter within the squares as the cavalry approached , and to return to their guns and resume fire as they retreated .

Witnesses in the British infantry recorded as many as 12 assaults , though this probably includes successive waves of the same general attack ; the number of general assaults was undoubtedly far fewer . Kellermann , recognising the futility of the attacks , tried to reserve the elite carabinier brigade from joining in , but eventually Ney spotted them and insisted on their involvement .

A British eyewitness of the first French cavalry attack , an officer in the Foot Guards , recorded his impressions very lucidly and somewhat poetically :

About four p.m. , the enemy 's artillery in front of us ceased firing all of a sudden , and we saw large masses of cavalry advance : not a man present who survived could have forgotten in after life the awful grandeur of that charge . You discovered at a distance what appeared to be an overwhelming , long moving line , which , ever advancing , glittered like a stormy wave of the sea when it catches the sunlight . On they came until they got near enough , whilst the very earth seemed to vibrate beneath the thundering tramp of the mounted host . One might suppose that nothing could have resisted the shock of this terrible moving mass . They were the famous cuirassiers , almost all old soldiers , who had distinguished themselves on most of the battlefields of Europe . In an almost incredibly short period they were within twenty yards of us , shouting " Vive l 'Empereur ! " The word

of command , " Prepare to receive cavalry " , had been given , every man in the front ranks knelt , and a wall bristling with steel , held together by steady hands , presented itself to the infuriated cuirassiers .

In essence this type of massed cavalry attack relied almost entirely on psychological shock for effect . Close artillery support could disrupt infantry squares and allow cavalry to penetrate ; at Waterloo , however , co @-@ operation between the French cavalry and artillery was not impressive . The French artillery did not get close enough to the Anglo @-@ allied infantry in sufficient numbers to be decisive . Artillery fire between charges did produce mounting casualties , but most of this fire was at relatively long range and was often indirect , at targets beyond the ridge . If infantry being attacked held firm in their square defensive formations , and were not panicked , cavalry on their own could do very little damage to them . The French cavalry attacks were repeatedly repelled by the steadfast infantry squares , the harrying fire of British artillery as the French cavalry recoiled down the slopes to regroup , and the decisive countercharges of Wellington 's light cavalry regiments , the Dutch heavy cavalry brigade , and the remaining effectives of the Household Cavalry . At least one artillery officer disobeyed Wellington 's order to seek shelter in the adjacent squares during the charges . Captain Mercer , who commanded ' G ' Troop , Royal Horse Artillery , thought the Brunswick troops on either side of him so shaky that he kept his battery of six nine @-@ pounders in action against the cavalry throughout , to great effect :

I thus allowed them to advance unmolested until the head of the column might have been about fifty or sixty yards from us , and then gave the word , " Fire ! " The effect was terrible . Nearly the whole leading rank fell at once ; and the round shot , penetrating the column carried confusion throughout its extent ... the discharge of every gun was followed by a fall of men and horses like that of grass before the mower 's scythe .

For reasons that remain unclear , no attempt was made to spike other allied guns while they were in French possession . In line with Wellington 's orders , gunners were able to return to their pieces and fire into the French cavalry as they withdrew after each attack . After numerous costly but fruitless attacks on the Mont @-@ Saint @-@ Jean ridge , the French cavalry was spent . Their casualties cannot easily be estimated . Senior French cavalry officers , in particular the generals , experienced heavy losses . Four divisional commanders were wounded , nine brigadiers wounded , and one killed ? testament to their courage and their habit of leading from the front . Illustratively , Houssaye reports that the Grenadiers à Cheval numbered 796 of all ranks on 15 June , but just 462 on 19 June , while the Empress Dragoons lost 416 of 816 over the same period . Overall Guyot 's Guard heavy cavalry division lost 47 % of its strength .

= = = Second French infantry attack = = =

Eventually it became obvious , even to Ney , that cavalry alone were achieving little . Belatedly , he organised a combined @-@ arms attack , using Bachelu 's division and Tissot 's regiment of Foy 's division from Reille 's II Corps ( about 6 @,@ 500 infantrymen ) plus those French cavalry that remained in a fit state to fight . This assault was directed along much the same route as the previous heavy cavalry attacks ( between Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte ) . It was halted by a charge of the Household Brigade cavalry led by Uxbridge . The British cavalry were unable , however , to break the French infantry , and fell back with losses from musketry fire .

Uxbridge recorded that he tried to lead the Dutch Carabiniers , under Major @-@ General Trip , to renew the attack and that they refused to follow him . Other members of the British cavalry staff also commented on this occurrence . However , there is no support for this incident in Dutch or Belgian sources . Meanwhile , Bachelu 's and Tissot 's men and their cavalry supports were being hard hit by fire from artillery and from Adam 's infantry brigade , and they eventually fell back . Although the French cavalry caused few direct casualties to Wellington 's centre , artillery fire onto his infantry squares caused many . Wellington 's cavalry , except for Sir John Vandeleur 's and Sir Hussey Vivian 's brigades on the far left , had all been committed to the fight , and had taken significant losses . The situation appeared so desperate that the Cumberland Hussars , the only Hanoverian cavalry regiment present , fled the field spreading alarm all the way to Brussels .

= = = French capture of La Haye Sainte = = =

At approximately the same time as Ney 's combined @-@ arms assault on the centre @-@ right of Wellington 's line , rallied elements of D 'Erlon 's I Corps , spearheaded by the 13th Légère , renewed the attack on La Haye Sainte and this time were successful , partly because the King 's German Legion 's ammunition ran out . However , the Germans had held the centre of the battlefield for almost the entire day , and this had stalled the French advance . Ney then moved horse artillery up towards Wellington 's centre and began to pulverise the infantry squares at short range with canister . The 30th and 73rd Regiments suffered such heavy losses that they had to combine to form a viable square .

The possession of La Haye Sainte by the French was a very dangerous incident . It uncovered the very centre of the Anglo @-@ Allied army , and established the enemy within 60 yards of that centre . The French lost no time in taking advantage of this , by pushing forward infantry supported by guns , which enabled them to maintain a most destructive fire upon Alten 's left and Kempt 's right ...

The success Napoleon needed to continue his offensive had occurred . Ney was on the verge of breaking the Allied centre .

Along with this artillery fire a multitude of French tirailleurs occupied the dominant positions behind La Haye Sainte and poured an effective fire into the squares . The situation was now so dire that the 33rd Regiment 's colours and all of Halkett 's brigade 's colours were sent to the rear for safety , described by historian Alessandro Barbero as , " ... a measure that was without precedent " . Wellington , noticing the slackening of fire from La Haye Sainte , with his staff rode closer to it . French skirmishers appeared around the building and fired on the British command as it struggled to get away through the hedgerow along the road . Alten ordered a single battalion , the Fifth KGL to recapture the farm . Their Colonel Ompteda obeyed and chased off some French skirmishers until French cuirassiers fell on his open flank , killed him , destroyed his battalion and took its colour . A Dutch ? Belgian cavalry regiment ordered to charge , retreated from the field instead , fired on by their own infantry . Merlen 's Light Cavalry Brigade charged the French artillery taking position near La Haye Sainte but were shot to pieces and the brigade fell apart . The Netherlands Cavalry Division , Wellington 's last cavalry reserve behind the centre having lost half their strength was now useless and the French cavalry , despite its losses , were masters of the field compelling the allied infantry to remain in square . More and more French artillery was brought forward .

A French battery advanced to within 300 yards of the 1 / 1st Nassau square causing heavy casualties . When the Nassauers attempted to attack the battery they were ridden down by a squadron of cuirassiers . Yet another battery deployed on the flank of Mercer 's battery and shot up its horses and limbers and pushed Mercer back . Mercer later recalled , " The rapidity and precision of this fire was quite appalling . Every shot almost took effect , and I certainly expected we should all be annihilated . ... The saddle @-@ bags , in many instances were torn from horses ' backs ... One shell I saw explode under the two finest wheel @-@ horses in the troop down they dropped " .

French tirailleurs occupied the dominant positions , especially one on a knoll overlooking the square of the 27th . Unable to break square to drive off the French infantry because of the presence of French cavalry and artillery , they had to remain in that formation and endure the fire of the tirailleurs . That fire nearly annihilated the 27th Foot , the Inniskillings , who lost two @-@ thirds of their strength within that three or four hours .

The banks on the road side , the garden wall , the knoll and sandpit swarmed with skirmishers , who seemed determined to keep down our fire in front ; those behind the artificial bank seemed more intent upon destroying the 27th , who at this time , it may literally be said , were lying dead in square ; their loss after La Haye Sainte had fallen was awful , without the satisfaction of having scarcely fired a shot , and many of our troops in rear of the ridge were similarly situated .

During this time many of Wellington 's generals and aides were killed or wounded including Somerset , Canning , de Lancey , Alten and Cooke . The situation was now critical and Wellington , trapped in an infantry square and ignorant of events beyond it , was desperate for the arrival of help from the Prussians . He later wrote ,

The time they occupied in approaching seemed interminable . Both they and my watch seemed to have stuck fast .

= = = Arrival of the Prussian IV Corps : Plancenoit = = =

Night or the Prussians must come .

The first Prussian corps to arrive in strength was Bülow 's IV Corps . Bülow 's objective was Plancenoit , which the Prussians intended to use as a springboard into the rear of the French positions . Blücher intended to secure his right upon Frichermont using the Bois de Paris road . Blücher and Wellington had been exchanging communications since 10 : 00 and had agreed to this advance on Frichermont if Wellington 's centre was under attack . General Bülow noted that the way to Plancenoit lay open and that the time was 16 : 30 .

At about this time , as the French cavalry attack was in full spate , the 15th Brigade IV Corps was sent to link up with the Nassauers of Wellington 's left flank in the Frichermont @-@ La Haie area with the brigade 's horse artillery battery and additional brigade artillery deployed to its left in support . Napoleon sent Lobau 's corps to intercept the rest of Bülow 's IV Corps proceeding to Plancenoit . The 15th Brigade threw Lobau 's troops out of Frichermont with a determined bayonet charge , then proceeded up the Frichermont heights , battering French Chasseurs with 12 @-@ pounder artillery fire , and pushed on to Plancenoit . This sent Lobau 's corps into retreat to the Plancenoit area , driving Lobau past the rear of the Armee Du Nord 's right flank and directly threatening its only line of retreat . Hiller 's 16th Brigade also pushed forward with six battalions against Plancenoit .

Napoleon had dispatched all eight battalions of the Young Guard to reinforce Lobau , who was now seriously pressed . The Young Guard counter @-@ attacked and , after very hard fighting , secured Plancenoit , but were themselves counter @-@ attacked and driven out . Napoleon sent two battalions of the Middle / Old Guard into Plancenoit and after ferocious bayonet fighting ? they did not deign to fire their muskets ? this force recaptured the village .

= = = Zieten 's flank march = = =

Throughout the late afternoon , Zieten 's I Corps had been arriving in greater strength in the area just north of La Haie . General Müffling , Prussian liaison to Wellington , rode to meet I Corps . Zieten had by this time brought up his 1st Brigade , but had become concerned at the sight of stragglers and casualties from the Nassau units on Wellington 's left and from the Prussian 15th Brigade . These troops appeared to be withdrawing and Zieten , fearing that his own troops would be caught up in a general retreat , was starting to move away from Wellington 's flank and towards the Prussian main body near Plancenoit . Zieten had also received a direct order from Blücher to support Bülow , Zieten obeyed and marched to Bülow 's aid . Müffling saw this movement away and persuaded Zieten to support Wellington 's left flank . Müffling warned Zieten that " The battle is lost if the corps does not keep on the move and immediately support the English army " . Zieten resumed his march to support Wellington directly , and the arrival of his troops allowed Wellington to reinforce his crumbling centre by moving cavalry from his left .

The French were expecting Grouchy to march to their support from Wavre , and when Zieten 's I Corps appeared at Waterloo instead of Grouchy , " the shock of disillusionment shattered French morale " and " the sight of Zieten 's arrival caused turmoil to rage in Napoleon 's army " . I Corps proceeded to attack the French troops before Papelotte and by 19 : 30 the French position was bent into a rough horseshoe shape . The ends of the line were now based on Hougoumont on the left , Plancenoit on the right , and the centre on La Haie . Durutte had taken the positions of La Haie and Papelotte in a series of attacks , but now retreated behind Smohain without opposing the Prussian 24th Regiment as it retook both . The 24th advanced against the new French position , was repulsed , and returned to the attack supported by Silesian Schützen ( riflemen ) and the F / 1st Landwehr . The French initially fell back before the renewed assault , but now began seriously to contest ground , attempting to regain Smohain and hold on to the ridgeline and the last few houses of Papelotte .

The 24th Regiment linked up with a Highlander battalion on its far right and along with the 13th Landwehr regiment and cavalry support threw the French out of these positions . Further attacks by the 13th Landwehr and the 15th Brigade drove the French from Frichermont . Durutte 's division , finding itself about to be charged by massed squadrons of Ziethen 's I Corps cavalry reserve , retreated from the battlefield . The soldiers of D'Érlon 's Corps alongside this attack on Durutte 's division also broke and fled in panic , while to the west the French Middle Guard were assaulting Wellington 's centre . The Prussian I Corps then advanced towards the Brussels road and the only line of retreat available to the French .

= = = Attack of the Imperial Guard = = =

Meanwhile , with Wellington 's centre exposed by the fall of La Haye Sainte and the Plancenoit front temporarily stabilised , Napoleon committed his last reserve , the hitherto @-@ undefeated Imperial Guard infantry . This attack , mounted at around 19 : 30 , was intended to break through Wellington 's centre and roll up his line away from the Prussians . Although it is one of the most celebrated passages of arms in military history , it had been unclear which units actually participated . It appears that it was mounted by five battalions of the Middle Guard , and not by the grenadiers or chasseurs of the Old Guard . Three Old Guard battalions did move forward and formed the attack 's second line , though they remained in reserve and did not directly assault the allied line .

... I saw four regiments of the middle guard , conducted by the Emperor , arriving . With these troops , he wished to renew the attack , and penetrate the centre of the enemy . He ordered me to lead them on ; generals , officers and soldiers all displayed the greatest intrepidity ; but this body of troops was too weak to resist , for a long time , the forces opposed to it by the enemy , and it was soon necessary to renounce the hope which this attack had , for a few moments , inspired .

Napoleon himself oversaw the initial deployment of the Middle and Old Guard . The Middle Guard formed in battalion squares , each about 550 men strong , with the 1st / 3rd Grenadiers , led by Generals Friant and Poret de Morvan , on the right along the road , to their left and rear was General Harlet leading the square of the 4th Grenadiers , then the 1st / 3rd Chasseurs under General Michel , next the 2nd / 3rd Chasseurs and finally the large single square of two battalions of 800 soldiers of the 4th Chasseurs led by General Henrion . Two batteries of Imperial Guard Horse Artillery accompanied them with sections of two guns between the squares . Each square was led by a general and Marshal Ney , mounted on his 5th horse of the day , led the advance .

Behind them , in reserve , were the three battalions of the Old Guard , right to left 1st / 2nd Grenadiers , 2nd / 2nd Chasseurs and 1st / 2nd Chasseurs . Napoleon left Ney to conduct the assault , however Ney led the Middle Guard on an oblique towards the Allied centre right instead of attacking straight up the centre , Napoleon would send Ney 's senior ADC Colonel Crabbé to order Ney to adjust . But Crabbé was unable to get there in time . Other troops rallied to support the advance of the Guard . On the left infantry from Reille 's corps that was not engaged with Hougoumont and cavalry advanced . On the right all the now rallied elements of D'Érlon 's corps once again ascended the ridge and engaged the allied line . Of these , Pégot 's brigade broke into skirmish order and moved north and west of La Haye Sainte and provided fire support to Ney , once again unhorsed , and Friant 's 1st / 3rd Grenadiers . The Guards first received fire from some Brunswick battalions , but the return fire of the grenadiers forced them to retire . Next , Colin Halket 's brigade front line consisting of the 30th Foot and 73rd traded fire but they were driven back in confusion into the 33rd and 69th regiments , Halket was shot in the face and seriously wounded and the whole brigade retreated in a mob . Other allied troops began to give way as well . A counter attack by the Nassauers and the remains of Kielmansegge 's brigade from the allied second line , led by the Prince of Orange , was also thrown back and the Prince of Orange was seriously wounded . General Harlet brought up the 4th Grenadiers and the allied centre was now in serious danger of breaking . It was at this moment that the timely arrival of the Dutch General Chassé turned the tide in favour of the allies .

Chassé 's relatively fresh Dutch division was sent against them , led by a battery of Dutch horse @-@ artillery commanded by Captain Krahmer de Bichin . The battery opened a destructive fire into

the victorious 1st / 3rd Grenadiers ' flank . This still did not stop the Guard 's advance , so Chassé ordered his first brigade ( Colonel Hendrik Detmers ) to charge the outnumbered French with the bayonet , who faltered and broke .

The 4th Grenadiers , seeing their comrades retreat and having suffered heavy casualties themselves , now wheeled right about and retired .

To the left of the 4th Grenadiers were the two squares of the 1st / and 2nd / 3rd Chasseurs who angled further to the west and had suffered more from artillery fire than the grenadiers . But as their advance mounted the ridge they found it apparently abandoned and covered with dead . Suddenly 1 @, @ 500 British Foot Guards under Maitland who had been lying down to protect themselves from the French artillery rose and devastated them with point @-@ blank volleys . The chasseurs deployed to answer the fire , but began to waver , some 300 falling from the first volley , killing General Michel . A bayonet charge by the Foot Guards then broke them , the British losing order in their pursuit .

The 4th Chasseurs battalion , 800 strong , now came up on the flank of the British guardsmen and the two battalions of British Foot Guards lost all cohesion and dashed back up the slope as a disorganized crowd with the chasseurs in pursuit . At the crest the chasseurs came upon the battery that had caused severe casualties on the 1st and 2nd / 3rd Chasseurs , they opened fire and swept away the gunners . The left flank of the square now came under fire from a heavy formation of British skirmishers , the chasseurs drove them back , but the skirmishers were replaced as the 52nd Light Infantry , led by John Colborne , wheeled in line onto the chasseurs ' flank and poured a devastating fire into them , the chasseurs returned a very sharp fire killing or wounding some 150 men of the 52nd . The 52nd then charged . Under this onslaught , the chasseurs broke .

The last of the Guard retreated headlong . A ripple of panic passed through the French lines as the astounding news spread : " La Garde recule . Sauve qui peut ! " ( " The Guard is retreating . Every man for himself ! " ) Wellington now stood up in Copenhagen 's stirrups and waved his hat in the air to signal a general advance . His army rushed forward from the lines and threw themselves upon the retreating French .

The surviving Imperial Guard rallied on their three reserve battalions ( some sources say four ) just south of La Haye Sainte for a last stand . A charge from Adam 's Brigade and the Hanoverian Landwehr Osnabrück Battalion , plus Vivian 's and Vandeleur 's relatively fresh cavalry brigades to their right , threw them into confusion . Those left in semi @-@ cohesive units retreated towards La Belle Alliance . It was during this retreat that some of the Guards were invited to surrender , eliciting the famous , if apocryphal , retort " La Garde meurt , elle ne se rend pas ! " ( " The Guard dies , it does not surrender ! " )

= = = Prussian capture of Plancenoit = = =

At about the same time , the Prussian 5th , 14th , and 16th Brigades were starting to push through Plancenoit , in the third assault of the day . The church was by now on fire , while its graveyard ? the French centre of resistance ? had corpses strewn about " as if by a whirlwind " . Five Guard battalions were deployed in support of the Young Guard , virtually all of which was now committed to the defence , along with remnants of Lobau 's corps . The key to the Plancenoit position proved to be the Chantelet woods to the south . Pirch 's II Corps had arrived with two brigades and reinforced the attack of IV Corps , advancing through the woods .

The 25th Regiment 's musketeer battalions threw the 1 / 2e Grenadiers ( Old Guard ) out of the Chantelet woods , outflanking Plancenoit and forcing a retreat . The Old Guard retreated in good order until they met the mass of troops retreating in panic , and became part of that rout . The Prussian IV Corps advanced beyond Plancenoit to find masses of French retreating in disorder from British pursuit . The Prussians were unable to fire for fear of hitting Wellington 's units . This was the fifth and final time that Plancenoit changed hands .

French forces not retreating with the Guard were surrounded in their positions and eliminated , neither side asking for nor offering quarter . The French Young Guard Division reported 96 per cent casualties , and two @-@ thirds of Lobau 's Corps ceased to exist .

Despite their great courage and stamina , the French Guards fighting in the village began to show signs of wavering . The church was already on fire with columns of red flame coming out of the windows , aisles and doors . In the village itself ? still the scene of bitter house @-@ to @-@ house fighting ? everything was burning , adding to the confusion . However , once Major von Witzleben 's manoeuvre was accomplished and the French Guards saw their flank and rear threatened , they began to withdraw . The Guard Chasseurs under General Pelet formed the rearguard . The remnants of the Guard left in a great rush , leaving large masses of artillery , equipment and ammunition wagons in the wake of their retreat . The evacuation of Plancenoit led to the loss of the position that was to be used to cover the withdrawal of the French Army to Charleroi . The Guard fell back from Plancenoit in the direction of Maison du Roi and Caillou . Unlike other parts of the battlefield , there were no cries of " Sauve qui peut ! " here . Instead , the cry " Sauvons nos aigles ! " ( " Let 's save our eagles ! " ) could be heard .

= = = French disintegration = = =

The French right , left , and centre had all now failed . The last cohesive French force consisted of two battalions of the Old Guard stationed around La Belle Alliance ; they had been so placed to act as a final reserve and to protect Napoleon in the event of a French retreat . He hoped to rally the French army behind them , but as retreat turned into rout , they too were forced to withdraw , one on either side of La Belle Alliance , in square as protection against Coalition cavalry . Until persuaded that the battle was lost and he should leave , Napoleon commanded the square to the left of the inn . Adam 's Brigade charged and forced back this square , while the Prussians engaged the other .

As dusk fell , both squares withdrew in relatively good order , but the French artillery and everything else fell into the hands of the allies . The retreating Guards were surrounded by thousands of fleeing , broken French troops . Coalition cavalry harried the fugitives until about 23 : 00 , with Gneisenau pursuing them as far as Genappe before ordering a halt . There , Napoleon 's abandoned carriage was captured , still containing diamonds left behind in the rush to escape . These became part of King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia 's crown jewels ; one Major Keller of the F / 15th received the Pour le Mérite with oak leaves for the feat . By this time 78 guns and 2 @,@ 000 prisoners had also been taken , including more generals .

There remained to us still four squares of the Old Guard to protect the retreat . These brave grenadiers , the choice of the army , forced successively to retire , yielded ground foot by foot , till , overwhelmed by numbers , they were almost entirely annihilated . From that moment , a retrograde movement was declared , and the army formed nothing but a confused mass . There was not , however , a total rout , nor the cry of sauve qui peut , as has been calumniously stated in the bulletin .

In the middle of the position occupied by the French army , and exactly upon the height , is a farm ( sic ) , called La Belle Alliance . The march of all the Prussian columns was directed towards this farm , which was visible from every side . It was there that Napoleon was during the battle ; it was thence that he gave his orders , that he flattered himself with the hopes of victory ; and it was there that his ruin was decided . There , too , it was that , by happy chance , Field Marshal Blücher and Lord Wellington met in the dark , and mutually saluted each other as victors .

Other sources agree that the meeting of the commanders took place near La Belle Alliance , with this occurring at around 21 : 00 . However , historian Peter Hofschröer has written that Wellington and Blücher met at Genappe around 22 : 00 , signifying the end of the battle .

= = Aftermath = =

Waterloo cost Wellington around 15 @,@ 000 dead or wounded and Blücher some 7 @,@ 000 ( 810 of which were suffered by just one unit : the 18th Regiment , which served in Bülow 's 15th Brigade , had fought at both Frichermont and Plancenoit , and won 33 Iron Crosses ) . Napoleon 's losses were 24 @,@ 000 to 26 @,@ 000 killed or wounded and included 6 @,@ 000 to 7 @,@ 000 captured with an additional 15 @,@ 000 deserting subsequent to the battle and over the following



days .

22 June . This morning I went to visit the field of battle , which is a little beyond the village of Waterloo , on the plateau of Mont @-@ Saint @-@ Jean ; but on arrival there the sight was too horrible to behold . I felt sick in the stomach and was obliged to return . The multitude of carcasses , the heaps of wounded men with mangled limbs unable to move , and perishing from not having their wounds dressed or from hunger , as the Allies were , of course , obliged to take their surgeons and waggons with them , formed a spectacle I shall never forget . The wounded , both of the Allies and the French , remain in an equally deplorable state .

At 10 : 30 on 19 June General Grouchy , still following his orders , defeated General Thielemann at Wavre and withdrew in good order ? though at the cost of 33 @,@ 000 French troops that never reached the Waterloo battlefield . Wellington sent his official dispatch describing the battle to England on 19 June 1815 ; it arrived in London on 21 June 1815 and was published as a London Gazette Extraordinary on 22 June . Wellington , Blücher and other Coalition forces advanced upon Paris .

Napoleon announced his second abdication on 24 June 1815 . In the final skirmish of the Napoleonic Wars , Marshal Davout , Napoleon 's minister of war , was defeated by Blücher at Issy on 3 July 1815 . Allegedly , Napoleon tried to escape to North America , but the Royal Navy was blockading French ports to forestall such a move . He finally surrendered to Captain Frederick Maitland of HMS Bellerophon on 15 July . There was a campaign against French fortresses that still held out ; Longwy capitulated on 13 September 1815 , the last to do so . The Treaty of Paris was signed on 20 November 1815 . Louis XVIII was restored to the throne of France and Napoleon was exiled to Saint Helena , where he died in 1821 .

Royal Highness , ? Exposed to the factions which divide my country , and to the enmity of the great Powers of Europe , I have terminated my political career ; and I come , like Themistocles , to throw myself upon the hospitality ( m 'asseoir sur le foyer ) of the British people . I claim from your Royal Highness the protections of the laws , and throw myself upon the most powerful , the most constant , and the most generous of my enemies .

Maitland 's 1st Foot Guards , who had defeated the Chasseurs of the Guard , were thought to have defeated the Grenadiers , although they had only faced Chasseurs of the newly raised Middle Guard . They were nevertheless awarded the title of Grenadier Guards in recognition of their feat and adopted bearskins in the style of the Grenadiers . Britain 's Household Cavalry likewise adopted the cuirass in 1821 in recognition of their success against their armoured French counterparts . The effectiveness of the lance was noted by all participants and this weapon subsequently became more widespread throughout Europe ; the British converted their first light cavalry regiment to lancers in 1816 , their uniforms , of Polish origin , were based on those of the Imperial Guard lancers .

= = Analysis = =

= = = Historical importance = = =

Waterloo was a decisive battle in more than one sense . Every generation in Europe up to the outbreak of the First World War looked back at Waterloo as the turning point that dictated the course of subsequent world history . In retrospect , it was seen as the event that ushered in the Concert of Europe , an era characterised by relative peace , material prosperity and technological progress . The battle definitively ended the series of wars that had convulsed Europe , and involved many other regions of the world , since the French Revolution of the early 1790s . It also ended the First French Empire and the political and military career of Napoleon Bonaparte , one of the greatest commanders and statesmen in history .

It was followed by almost four decades of international peace in Europe . No further major conflict occurred until the Crimean War . Changes to the configuration of European states , as refashioned after Waterloo , included the formation of the Holy Alliance of reactionary governments intent on repressing revolutionary and democratic ideas , and the reshaping of the former Holy Roman

Empire into a German Confederation increasingly marked by the political dominance of Prussia . The bicentenary of Waterloo has prompted renewed attention to the geopolitical and economic legacy of the battle and the century of relative transatlantic peace which followed .

= = = Views on the reasons for Napoleon 's defeat = = =

General Antoine @-@ Henri , Baron Jomini , one of the leading military writers on the Napoleonic art of war , had a number of very cogent explanations of the reasons behind Napoleon 's defeat at Waterloo .

In my opinion , four principal causes led to this disaster :

The first , and most influential , was the arrival , skilfully combined , of Blücher , and the false movement that favoured this arrival ; the second , was the admirable firmness of the British infantry , joined to the sang @-@ froid and aplomb of its chiefs ; the third , was the horrible weather , that had softened the ground , and rendered the offensive movements so toilsome , and retarded till one o'clock the attack that should have been made in the morning ; the fourth , was the inconceivable formation of the first corps , in masses very much too deep for the first grand attack .

Wellington himself wrote in his official dispatch back to London : " I should not do justice to my own feelings , or to Marshal Blücher and the Prussian army , if I did not attribute the successful result of this arduous day to the cordial and timely assistance I received from them . The operation of General Bülow upon the enemy 's flank was a most decisive one ; and , even if I had not found myself in a situation to make the attack which produced the final result , it would have forced the enemy to retire if his attacks should have failed , and would have prevented him from taking advantage of them if they should unfortunately have succeeded " .

Despite their differences on other matters , discussed at length in Carl von Clausewitz 's study of the Campaign of 1815 and Wellington 's famous 1842 essay in reply to it , the Prussian theorist and historian Clausewitz agreed with Wellington on this assessment . Indeed , Clausewitz viewed the battle prior to the Prussian intervention more as a mutually exhausting stalemate than as an impending French victory , with the advantage , if any , leaning towards Wellington .

Many modern authors , however , share the view that Wellington faced imminent defeat without Prussian help . For example , Parkinson ( 2000 ) writes : " Neither army beat Napoleon alone . But whatever the part played by Prussian troops in the actual moment when the Imperial Guard was repulsed , it is difficult to see how Wellington could have staved off defeat , when his centre had been almost shattered , his reserves were almost all committed , the French right remained unmolested and the Imperial Guard intact . ? . Blücher may not have been totally responsible for victory over Napoleon , but he deserved full credit for preventing a British defeat " . Steele ( 2014 ) writes : " Blücher ? s arrival not only diverted vital reinforcements , but also forced Napoleon to accelerate his effort against Wellington . The tide of battle had been turned by the hard @-@ driving Blücher . As his Prussians pushed in Napoleon 's flank . Wellington was able to shift to the offensive " .

= = Battlefield today = =

Some portions of the terrain on the battlefield have been altered from their 1815 appearance . Tourism began the day after the battle , with Captain Mercer noting that on 19 June " a carriage drove on the ground from Brussels , the inmates of which , alighting , proceeded to examine the field " . In 1820 , the Netherlands ' King William I ordered the construction of a monument . The Lion 's Hillock , a giant mound , was constructed here using 300 @,@ 000 cubic metres ( 390 @,@ 000 cu yd ) of earth taken from the ridge at the centre of the British line , effectively removing the southern bank of Wellington 's sunken road .

Every one is aware that the variously inclined undulations of the plains , where the engagement between Napoleon and Wellington took place , are no longer what they were on 18 June 1815 . By taking from this mournful field the wherewithal to make a monument to it , its real relief has been taken away , and history , disconcerted , no longer finds her bearings there . It has been disfigured

for the sake of glorifying it . Wellington , when he beheld Waterloo once more , two years later , exclaimed , " They have altered my field of battle ! " Where the great pyramid of earth , surmounted by the lion , rises to @-@ day , there was a hillock which descended in an easy slope towards the Nivelles road , but which was almost an escarpment on the side of the highway to Genappe . The elevation of this escarpment can still be measured by the height of the two knolls of the two great sepulchres which enclose the road from Genappe to Brussels : one , the English tomb , is on the left ; the other , the German tomb , is on the right . There is no French tomb . The whole of that plain is a sepulchre for France .

The alleged remark by Wellington about the alteration of the battlefield as described by Hugo was never documented , however .

Other terrain features and notable landmarks on the field have remained virtually unchanged since the battle . These include the rolling farmland to the east of the Brussels ? Charleroi Road as well as the buildings at Hougoumont , La Haye Sainte , and La Belle Alliance .

Apart from the Lion Mound , there are several more conventional but noteworthy monuments throughout the battlefield . A cluster of monuments at the Brussels ? Charleroi and Braine L 'Alleud ? Ohain crossroads marks the mass graves of British , Dutch , Hanoverian and King 's German Legion troops . A monument to the French dead , entitled L 'Aigle blessé ( " The Wounded Eagle " ) , marks the location where it is believed one of the Imperial Guard units formed a square during the closing moments of the battle .

A monument to the Prussian dead is located in the village of Plancenoit on the site where one of their artillery batteries took position . The Duhesme mausoleum is one among the few graves of the fallen . It is located at the side of Saint Martin 's Church in Ways , a hamlet in the municipality of Genappe . Seventeen fallen officers are buried in the crypt of the British Monument in the Brussels Cemetery in Evere . The remains of a 23 @-@ year @-@ old soldier named Friederich Brandt were discovered in 2012 . He was a slightly hunchbacked infantryman , 1 @.@ 60 metres ( 5 @.@ 2 ft ) tall , and was hit in the chest by a French bullet . His rifle , coins , and position on the battlefield identified him as an Hanoverian fighting in the King 's German Legion .

= = Coin controversy = =

As part of the bicentennial celebration of the battle , in 2015 Belgium minted a 2 Euro coin depicting the Lion monument over a map of the field of battle . France officially protested this issue , while the Belgian government noted that the French mint sells souvenir medals at Waterloo . After 180 @,@ 000 coins were minted but not released , the issue was melted . Instead , Belgium issued an identical commemorative coin in the non @-@ standard value of 2 ½ Euros . Legally only valid within the issuing country ( but unlikely to circulate ) it was minted in brass , packaged , and sold by the Belgian mint for 6 Euros . A 10 Euro coin , showing Wellington , Blücher , their troops and the silhouette of Napoleon , was also available in silver for 42 Euros .