

The prince of Orange at Quatre Bras and the order of battle of the 2nd division of the army of the Netherlands.

Prince Bernard van Saxe-Weimar had been around at least before 3 a.m. but took a short meal and a short nap at Quatre Bras, before he woke up by 4 a.m. to have the 1st battalion Orange Nassau move to the front.¹

General Perponcher showed him the position while Constant rode to the front over the Brussels road just south of the farm of Gémioncourt. Here, captain Bijleveld had two guns led by lieutenant de Vincy. Every now and then, these guns fired into the enemy's line.²

It was around 5.30 a.m. that the prince of Orange arrived at Nivelles. He had left Braine le Comte just after Constant.³ From here he rode to Quatre Bras where he got towards 6.30 a.m.⁴

De Perponcher explained him the situation and the prince took over the command. Having approved of the arrangements De Perponcher had taken, he inspected the outposts which were north of Frasnes, in front of the Bois de Bossu, in front of the farm of Gémioncourt and extending to the left upon to the farm of Piraumont and the Etang maternelle. Additionally, he placed a line of skirmishers in the high corn.⁵ Since dawn several skirmishes had occurred in front of the position.⁶ Soon after his visit to the advanced posts, the prince had the skirmishing being brought to an end by sending out major count Van Limburg Stirum.⁷ Having now seen the situation himself and having heard the report of what had happened the other night at Frasnes, the prince sent out some orders from these outposts.⁸

One of them was for Van Merlen to bring his brigade to the crossroads. The other was for Alten to proceed with his division to Nivelles and to take up a position there on a ridge on its other side, while having one brigade on the height in rear of Arquennes. At the same time he ordered Cooke's division from Braine le Comte to Nivelles. By 7.30 a.m., he wrote a report to the Duke of Wellington of what he had seen and done. It reads:

near Frasnes, June 16 1815, 7 o'clock a.m.

My dear Duke,

I am just arrived. The French are in possession of Frasnes near 3 Bras with infantry and cavalry, but not as yet in force. Our troops are near the village and a sharpish tirailleur fire was going on when I came, but I ordered our firing to cease and the French fire has diminished. I ordered a cavalry brigade over here, the other two are to remain at Arquennes. A brigade of the British 3rd division is to occupy the height behind Arquennes, the rest to be in position on the ridge behind Nivelles and that town to be occupied. I ordered the first division to Nivelles from Braine le Comte.

Sincerely,

*(signed) William P. of Orange*⁹

Around 8 a.m. Piré sent out some platoons to reconnoitre the enemies position.¹⁰ Around noon, also a party of lancers also made a reconnaissance towards the extreme Netherlands right wing (where the section Winssinger was) but it was repulsed by the fire of a Nassau battalion here.¹¹ The prince of Orange now ordered the troops to cook.¹² He remained on the heights in front of Frasnes for quite some time, but finally Constant was able to persuade him to go further back to a safer position as the French lancers fired their occasional shots.¹³ Having dismounted near the advance posts, he was all but taken prisoner as a squadron of Piré's men tried to cut him off.

These horsemen, however, were driven off by the fire of a battalion of Nassau infantry, which was concealed in a low ground.¹⁴

Being uncertain about the French intentions, and fearing the action at Quatre Bras may be a feint for a main thrust at Brussels through Nivelles, the prince of Orange exchanged his view with colonel Bernard van Saxon Weimar, general De Perponcher, general Constant Rebecque and colonel Abercomby. Finally, the prince decided to have Nivelles occupied by the 3rd Netherlands and the 3rd British division. Having decided to do that, he sent Constant Rebecque and Abercomby there to choose defensive positions for Chassé and Alten respectively.¹⁵ Now it was 9 a.m.¹⁶ Having got at Nivelles around 10 a.m., they found both had arrived there at approximately the same time, which had resulted in a confusion. The situation was that right at the time the division of Alten passed through the small town, the one of Chassé arrived from the road leading to Mons. For this reason, this division was forced to wait as long as the division of Alten was passing. After that, Chassé placed his units north-west of Nivelles, on the heights of St.Roch. To make things even worse, the road from Braine le Comte was choked with baggages of Alten's division, while those of the prince of Orange as well as of the general headquarters of the army of the Netherlands were at Braine le Comte itself. At the same time, Constant Rebecque made sure the cavalry of Collaert was in front of Nivelles, observing the roads leading to Arquennes, Buzet and Rêves.¹⁷

That morning, the 1st brigade of Van Bylandt went through some changes in positions before the battle of Quatre Bras started by 2 p.m. Initially, the 27th battalion of chasseurs had been to the left of the Brussels road, in front of Quatre Bras. By 5 a.m. however, the battalion moved forward and two of its companies, the 1st and the 6th were sent forward to drive off the French skirmishers with their fire. They drove the French as far as near to the Bois Delhütte and then took up positions near Piraumont and the farm of Lairalle, about 700 metres in front of the remainder of the battalion, thereby taking over the outposts of the 3rd battalion Nassau.¹⁸

At 1 p.m., the third company under 1st lieutenant Croes, advanced to a position to the left of Bijleveld's battery, as a support. Around the same time, the 2nd company had moved forward to support the 1st and the 6th to their left. So, in the first line Grunebosch had his 1st, 2nd and 6th companies led by captain Eichholtz, Burleux and De Crassier. In his second line, southwest of the Etang Materne, immediately south of the stream of Gémioncourt were the 4th and 5th company, led by captain De Nave and captain Heekeren van Waliën. Lieutenant colonel Grunebosch himself was present with these two companies.¹⁹

After the 8th battalion of national militia had reached Quatre Bras around 4 a.m. it was placed by prince Bernard van Saxon Weimar to the left of the Brussels road. Later, the battalion was assigned another position, north of Quatre Bras, to the west of the Brussels road.²⁰

The 5th battalion of national militia came in a position in close column in rear of the buildings of Quatre Bras, to the left of the Namur-road.²¹

The 7th battalion of national militia got into a position near Quatre Bras, west of the Brussels road, in rear of the Bois de Bossu.²² The 7th battalion of the line marched that morning per platoon over the Namur-road up to the Bois de Bossu.²³ It got there around noon.²⁴ It came in rear of the wood in a close column.

During the morning hours, the prince of Orange changed the position of the horse battery of Bijleveld. Initially, the battery had two guns on the road which leads to Namur, four south of Gémioncourt and two in the vicinity of Quatre Bras, but now he arranged the guns in the following way: five guns about 500 metres south of the avenue which leads to the farm of Gémioncourt, on the Brussels-road, near the bifurcation of the track leading to the farm of Grand-Pierrepont. Of these guns two howitzers led by lieutenant F.W.Dibbetz, were to the right of the road, and three 6-pounders, led by lieutenant A.F. Wasserot de Vincy, a bit more to the rear and to the immediate left of the road. The three remaining 6-pounders, led by 2nd lieutenant

W.Koopman, stood south of the Namur-road, at a few hundred metres from Quatre Bras, having their front towards the south-east. All guns had their caissons from the first line with them; the reserves of the battery were all drawn up in rear of the farm of Quatre Bras.²⁵

Of the 2nd brigade of De Perponcher's division, the company of Nassau voluntary chasseurs was placed in four units along the (probably southern) edge of the Bois de Bossu.²⁶

The 1st battalion of Nassau infantry was by midday ordered to advance on the Brussels road, a cannon shot in front of Quatre Bras. There it was posted to the right of the road in a hollow for some time until it was sent to the Bois de Bossu. Here it came in position in line in front of the southern half of the Bois de Bossu; from there it launched two of its companies, those led by the captains Werneck and Frittler, as skirmishers.²⁷

It was that morning that Perponcher sent forward two companies of the 2nd Nassau battalion as well as the 50 Prussian hussars of the 1st regiment of Silesian hussars led by lieutenant Sellin. These hussars successfully charged the French outposts of the light cavalry of the guard twice.²⁸

Both the Nassau companies as well as Bijleveld forced the French posts back. Now the battalion advanced up to the heights near Frasnes: four companies established themselves here while two other ones spread out as skirmishers. The Prussian hussars placed outposts.²⁹ By 11 a.m. the battalion moved back to a position directly southwest of Quatre Bras, as it had spent almost all of its ammunition. Here it came in a close column.³⁰

By 11 a.m. the 3rd battalion of Nassau relieved the 2nd battalion Nassau in its outposts in front of Frasnes, until it was taken back to a position at the south-east edge of the Bois de Bossu, where it had two companies; the four remaining companies were placed deeper into the wood. This may have been around 1 p.m.³¹

The 1st battalion Orange-Nassau was south-west of Quatre Bras during the night of the 15th and the morning of the 16th of June. At 4 a.m. it advanced towards a position in front of the south-east side of the Bois de Bossu and to the right of the 8th battalion of National Militia (later).³²

The 2nd battalion of the same regiment probably stood north-east of Quatre Bras.³³

The moment the foot-battery of captain Stevenart reached Quatre Bras it was put, north-west of the crossroads, in column and facing westwards, awaiting further orders.³⁴ At what time this took place is not known but it was from this position that two 6-pounder guns under lieutenant Winssinger were sent to the right flank, probably to a position somewhere south of the Bois de Bossu.³⁵ At what time the remainder of the battery advanced is not known as well, but it came in a position between the farm of Gémioncourt and the Bois de Bossu, in rear of a slope, west of the Brussels road and to the right of the right-hand guns of Bijleveld.³⁶

As the action started at 2 p.m. , the whole 2nd Netherlands division was present: about 7900 men and 16 guns.

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¹ Prince Bernard van Saxen Weimar. Diary. In: THW, Grossherzogliches Hausarchiv A XXIV 30 p.192

² Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

3. Major count Van Limburg Stirum says he left at 4.30 a.m. Cf. letter of him to captain Van Löben Sels. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.265

4. Some sources or historians claim it was at 6 a.m. Cf.

Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

Aerts, W. - Etudes etc. p.413

Bas, F.de & T'Serclaes de Wommersom - La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.455

Von Pflugk Harttung thinks it was shortly before 6.30 In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, II.12.p.136

Scheltema thinks it was before 6 a.m. Cf. Scheltema, J. - De laatste veldtocht etc. p.94

Captain Von Gagern, at Quatre Bras from the early morning hours of the 16th of June, thinks he came in at 10 a.m., but this is not correct. Cf. his letter dated 14th December 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.265

Bernard van Saxen Weimar states it was between 5 and 6 a.m. Cf. his letter dated 29th August 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.265

5. Cf. letter of Bernard van Saxen Weimar. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.265

Constant Rebecque. In his account. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

Van Saxen Weimar himself joined the prince for the (for him second) inspection of the outposts. Cf. Diary of Van Saxen Weimar. In: THW.Grossherzogliches Hausarchiv A, XXIV 30, p.192

Major Von Sattler (2nd regiment Nassau) however states his battalions alternatively continued skirmishing until about 1 p.m. Major Sattler. Cf. his account In: HHA, Abt.202 inventory nr.1015

6. Cf. captain Von Gagern in a letter dated 14th December 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.263

Prince Bernard van Saxen Weimar. Diary. In: THW. Grossherzogliches Hausarchiv A XXIV 30 p.192

Constant Rebecque claims the Prussian hussars of Sellin charged the French lancer-posts in front of Frasnes several times successfully. In his account. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

7. Cf. letter of count Van Limburg Stirum to captain Van Löben Sels d.d. 5 August 1841. In: In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

⁸ Cf. the report of the prince, dated 17th of June 2 a.m. In: WSD, p.497

9. Cf. copy in KHA, nr.A 40 VIC W 10

In reading this report it is clear how the situation was at Quatre Bras the moment he had arrived and what he did afterwards. The fact that the prince was at the advanced posts is confirmed by Von Brunneck in his report dated 6.30 a.m. Von Brunneck mentions the presence then of seven battalions: these were those of Saxen Weimar, as well as the 27th battalion of chasseurs and the 8th battalion of national militia.

10. Mauduit, H.de - Les derniers jours etc. Vol.I p.137

¹¹ Major Von Opstall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

12. According to Aerts at 8 a.m. In: Etudes etc. p.415

13. Cf. Account of Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

14. Cf. Letter of captain Von Gagern to captain Van Löben Sels dated 14th December 1841. In: nr.II.3.nr.3

15. Account of Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

16. Account of Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

17. Account De Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

¹⁸ Lieutenant colonel Grunebosch. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijevelt. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de 1815 Vol.III. p.310

Cadet sergeant Welter (27th battalion of chasseurs). In his letter dated 1st July 1815. In: family archive Volkersz.

According to Welter both companies were detached around 3.30 a.m.

19. Lieutenant colonel Grunebosch. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Colonel van Zuylen van Nijevelt. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de 1815 Vol.III. p.310 Erroneously, colonel Van Zuylen van Nijevelt places the 3rd company near the battery of Stevenart.

Cadet-sergeant Welter confirms his battalion was about 1500 metres south of Quatre Bras, which is south-east of Gémioncourt. In his letter dated 1st July 1815. In: family archive Volkersz

Major general Van Bylandt states the battalion also occupied the farm of Gémioncort. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

F.de Bas incorrectly places one company in Piraumont itself and the two companies of the second line south east of Etang Materne, which should be south-west. In: La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.480

Muilwijk claims the 6th company was to the right, the 2nd in the centre and the 1st to the left. In: Quatre Bras. Perpocnher's gmbles p.68

²⁰ Colonel De Jongh. In: Nagelaten papieren etc. 1866

Lieutenant Pronk speaks of a position for the battalion behind a wall, where it prepared some soup. Cf. his diary. In: The family-prospectus "Pronkstukken"

21. Captain Mollinger. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

Captain Van Toll. In: Knoop, W.J. - Quatre Bras en Waterloo p.144

22. Fuselier S.A. In: Herinneringen etc.

Account of fusilier Rentenaar (7th battalion of national militia). In: Private collection.

23. 1st lieutenant Scheltens. In: Souvenirs etc. p.198

24. Colonel van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de 1815 Vol.III. p.308

25. 2nd lieutenant Koopman. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Koopman himself speaks about a distance of 200 metres from Quatre Bras.

Major Van Opstall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Two other sources claim both the three guns led by Wasserot de Vincy were on the road and that they were two 6-pounders and one howitzer. The other howitzer (plus one 6-pounder) would have been led by Dibbetz. Cf. Colonel van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.308

Major Van Opstall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Captain Bijleveld. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Captain Osten . In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

²⁶ Report of its commander, captain Bergman. In: Domarus, M. - Die Oranien etc. p.19

27. Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.312

J.P.Leonhard (member of the battalion). He mentions the presence of a battalion Orange Nassau [the 1st], Jäger [the Nassau Voluntary Jagers], a battery [Winssinger] and the 10th battalion of Dutch infantry to his left, towards the Brussels road. This last unit was the 8th battalion of national militia. In: private collection.

28. Report of lieutenant Sellin (1st regiment of Silesian hussars). In: KA, V.IE.7.I.61 In: GSA-VPH, VI, nr.VII nr.3B.p.25

Sellin adds he was there during the action at Quatre Bras and that he was still there on the morning of the 17th of June, but the detachment appears not to have been engaged in the action of Quatre Bras itself. It lost that day one hussar and twelve horses.

The fact that the hussars distinguished themselves that day is also confirmed by captain Van Zuylen van Nijeveld in his letter to major Van de Poll, 13th December 1838. In: NA, family archive nr.2.21.180).

Also see letter of Bernard van Saxon Weimar dated 29th August 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

De Bas claims that the cavalry as mentioned by Von Brunneck at 6.30 a.m. was Sellin's detachment, but this was not the case; these were other men of the 1st Prussian corps, who strayed along the Roman road. Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J. von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.142

It is hard to explain why Van Zuylen van Nijeveld claims that Sellin left that morning for Sombrefe. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de & T'Serclaes de Wommersom - La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.302

29. Colonel Von Sattler In: VPH, nr.18

Major general Von Kruse. In: VPH, nr.17

Neither Von Sattler, nor Von Kruse mentions the Prussian hussars.

According to colonel Van Zuylen van Nijvelt these hussars went to the field of Ligny, even before the action at Quatre Bras started. In: Cf. Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.302

30 .Colonel Von Sattler. In: VPH, nr.18

Major general Von Kruse. In: VPH, nr.17

Captain Wirths (2nd battalion Nassau). In: Aus der Schlacht bei Waterloo. In: Nassovia.1905 p.143 He claims the battalion left its former position by 10 a.m.

Cf. Schmidtborn - Antheil der etc. p.14

31. Major Sattler. In: VPH, nr.18

Captain Frensdorf (commander of the 3rd battalion Nassau). He makes no distinction between the positions of the different companies. Cf. his account dated 10th of August 1815. In private collection.

32 .Colonel De Jongh (8th battalion of national militia). In: Nagelaten papieren etc. 1866

Colonel van Zuylen van Nijvelt. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de 1815. Vol.III p.312

And In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

Prince Bernard van Saxon Weimar. Diary. In: THW. Grossherzogliches Hausarchiv A XXIV 30

Captain Büsgen (1st battalion Nassau). In: VPH-LBA, nr.75

According to F.de Bas the battalion would have had detachments in the farms of Petit and Grand Pierrepont but there is no proof for that. In: La campagne de 1815 Vol. I p.481

Major general van Bijlandt describes the position of the 2nd brigade as being mainly in the centre and skirts of the wood, with strong detachments in front and in the (hollow) roads emerging from the wood. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

33. Cf. Captain Eberhard, C.F. Nassauische Erinnerungen an Waterloo. In: Der Uhrturm. Heft 27th July 1940 p.552

³⁴ Lieutenant Van der Wall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Captain Osten. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

35 .Major Van Opstall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Lieutenant Van der Wall (battery Stevenart). In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Colonel van Zuylen van Nijvelt. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de 1815 Vol.III. p.310

The reason to do so was a specific threat from this side of the front. Cf. File of lieutenant Winssinger. In: Kanselarij der Nederlandse Orden, The Hague.

Colonel Van Saxon Weimar claims in one of his accounts that the section was assigned to him after the loss of the battery's commander, captain Stevenart. In: Letter dated 29th August 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

³⁶ Major Van Ostall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Captain Bijleveld. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Colonel van Zuylen van Nijvelt. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de

1815 Vol.III. p.310 and 312

Lieutenant Van der Wall doesn't mention the position of the battery explicitly, but adds that its reserve was left at about 500 paces in rear of the farm of Quatre Bras. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262