

The evening and night of the 17th of June.

The positions of the Anglo-Netherlands-German forces in the position of Mont Saint Jean.

During the afternoon and evening of the 17th of June Wellington's army arrived in the position of Mont Saint Jean. The division of Perponcher had arrived in the position early that afternoon. Initially, it took up a position east of the Nivelles-road, leaning with its left on the hamlet of Mont Saint Jean and to the right on Merbraine. Here it stood in line, with on the height on its right (which is about 900 metres north of Gomont) two guns and two companies of flankers for cover. The remaining guns were in the second line. It was here that the troops had started to cook their meal.¹

The intention was that the division of Chassé would prolonge the right flank of the division of Perponcher. However, at 6 p.m. Perponcher was ordered by colonel De Lancey to lead his division towards the left wing of the army.² The division moved out to the left, while crossing the position of the Foot Guards and the Brunswickers. It did so in column, with sections to the left, and led by the brigade of Van Saxon Weimar towards the crossroads north of the farm of La Haye Sainte. Here it took the Ohain-road. However, while the brigade of Saxon Weimar proceeded over this road, the brigade of Van Bijlandt turned right and took a position in line on the southern slope of the ridge, having its right flank near the farm of La Haye Sainte.³ It was during this operation that the French vanguard was developing and the French bombardment started (see below).⁴

The brigade was covered by a chain of 400 skirmishers about 150 to 200 paces in front, in the low ground. On the right of the brigade was the battery of Bijleveld, covering the Brussels-road and the adjoining fields. In marching into this position, the section led by 2nd captain Koopman had led the way.⁵

The units of the brigade of Saxon Weimar took their bivouacs to the north of the farms of Papelotte and La Haye and the village of Smohain. One company of the 2nd battalion Oranje-Nassau stood in Smohain that night.⁶

On the 16th of June most of the men of the Nassau Volunteer Jäger company had expended all of their ammunition and all these were sent back to Brussels by their commander, captain Bergmann on the evening of the 17th of June. They were led there by 1st lieutenant Von Bierbrauer. Bergmann kept 10-12 of his men, as well as 2nd lieutenant Schnabelius, and it were these men only who fought during the battle the next day.⁷

On a height approximately 500 metres north-east of La Haye the section Winssinger of the foot-battery Stevenart (two guns) took up a position.⁸

The cavalry brigade of Van Merlen probably arrived in the position shortly after the 2nd infantry division of the army of the Netherlands. Its bivouac was established west of the Brussels-road, near the farm of Mont Saint Jean.⁹

The brigade of Von Kruse was in rear of the division of Alten, between the roads leading to Nivelles and Brussels.¹⁰ The Brunswick contingent had a bivouac between Merbraine and the Nivelles-road, having the advance guard battalion to the right, on the other side of Merbraine.¹¹ The 2nd and 3rd battalions of light infantry, having formed the rear-guard, spent the night near

the 3rd division of Alten and rejoined the corps the next morning. ¹² It was near La Belle Alliance that the 1st British division left the great road to take a small track which led to the left to the fields north of Gomont.

Initially, the division took up a position in rear of the hollow road which ran immediately in rear of Gomont. Shortly after, however, the division proceeded to a position in rear of the Ohain-road, east of the Nivelles-road. ¹³

It was around 6 p.m. that the four light companies of the division got the instruction to occupy Gomont and its enclosures, with strict orders to bring the post into a state of defence. ¹⁴

Supported by a few sections of sappers (like those of the 2nd battalion of light infantry KGL ⁽¹⁵⁾) the buildings were entrenched, platforms erected, loopholes cut and entrances barricaded. ¹⁶

These activities were all carried out under the protection of the pickets of the 1st regiment Foot Guards and of the 13th regiment Light Dragoons, led by lieutenant Drought. The door at the west side of the complex, as well as the north-gate, were kept open.

The two light companies of the brigade of Maitland eventually occupied the orchard, while those of Byng (led by lieutenant colonel Wyndham and Dashwood) came into the buildings and the garden. ¹⁷ By the time the Foot Guards entered and occupied Gomont, there was a brief skirmishing action with the French, but the post was secured by the British and kept all night, the wood included. ¹⁸

In taking the Ohain-road, the division of Picton and the brigade of Best took up a position north of the ridge, their right leaning on the Brussels road and having pickets on the southern side of the ridge. ¹⁹ The artillery was on the ridge in rear of the Ohain-road, but exact positions are unknown. ²⁰

As the brigade of colonel Von Vincke approached the hamlet of Mont Saint Jean (and only after repeated requests for instructions of its commander) it was ordered to take up a position on the extreme left wing of the army. ²¹ The 5th British division was placed per brigades. ²²

Immediately to the east of Cooke's division came Alten's 3rd division. Its bivouacs were most probably placed just south of the Ohain-road on the brow of the ridge and reached up to the Brussels road. ²³

Later that evening, the 2nd battalion of light infantry KGL was ordered to form the garrison in the farm of La Haye Sainte and when it got there it immediately started to entrench it. ²⁴

On orders of the duke of Wellington, the grenadier-company of the 5th line battalion KGL was detached from its battalion to assist to keep open the Brussels road to the rear and therefore didn't participate in the battle. ²⁵

After having reached the ridge of Mont Saint Jean, the different infantry units of the extreme rear-guard (except for those of the Brunswickers – see above) re-joined their respective divisions.

1. Journal of Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25
Diary of Van Saxen Weimar. In: ThHStAW,Grossherzogliches Hausarchiv A,XXIV 30, p.192-194

General major Van Bijlandt in a letter dated 31st May 1841. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

Bernard van Saxen Weimar in a letter dated 29th August 1841. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

The fusilier S.A. of the militia battalion nr.7 mentions a position towards Braine l'Alleud and Lembeek [!].Cf. Herinneringen uit mijn tienjarige militaire loopbaan

2nd lieutenant Koopman of the horse artillery led by captain Bijleveld claims he had a position at about 800 paces from the Brussels-road, with a section led by him in front and which was covered by a company of chasseurs.

Cf. his letter to captain Van Löben Sels. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

2. Cf. journal of Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

It was major Van Gorkum, an officer of the general staff, who actually led the division to the left wing and who placed the battalions there. He did so in accordance of orders as issued by sir Charles Broke. Yet, he claims Perponcher had initially even passed the village of Waterloo. Cf. his account (memoirs, p.78-81 in private collection).

The veteran called Rem (7th battalion of national militia) says it was at 4 p.m.

2nd lieutenant Koopman (horse battery Bijleveld) claims it was in the late in the afternoon.

Cf.his letter. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Bernard van Saxen Weimar claims the troops had their bivouac here for 2-3 hours, but this was at least 4 hours. Cf.his letter dated 29th August 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

3. Journal of Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: NA, nr.2.13.14.01 nr.8
Scheltens

J. Rem (7th battalion of national militia). In: Aantekeningen van een veteraan dato 16 Augustus 1815

Fusilier S.A. (7th battalion of national militia). In: Herinneringen uit mijn tienjarige militaire loopbaan

Lieutenant Pronk (8th battalion of national militia). He mentions the vicinity of the enemy to his own bivouac. Cf. his diary. In: The family-prospectus "Pronkstukken"

4. Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: NA, nr.2.13.14.01 nr.8

J. Rem (7th battalion of national militia). In: Aantekeningen van een veteraan etc.

It was between 6.30 and 7 p.m. - Rem claims it was about 5.30 p.m.

⁵ Account of 2nd lieutenant Koopman. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijevelt. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: NA, nr.2.13.14.01 nr.8
One of the companies put out as skirmishers in front was the one of the 7th battalion of national militia led by captain Van Bronkhorst. Cf. his letter dated 9th July 1815. In: Ons leger (1983) nr.6 p.32-38
J. Rem (7th battalion of national militia). In: Aantekeningen van een veteraan etc.

⁶ Cf. 1st lieutenant Eberhard of this battalion. In: Nassauische Erinnerungen an Waterloo. In: Der Uhrturm. Heft 27, July 1940 p.552

⁷ Cf. Account of captain Bergmann. In: Domarus, M. - Die Oranien-Nassauische Freiwillige Jägerkompagnie etc. In: Nassauische Heimatblätter, 1915 p. 19
Odd enough, it is captain Bergmann himself who claims in a report dated 20th of July 1815 that his unit was ordered into the front line on the evening of the 17th of June. In: former www.1815.ltd.uk Original in: HSA, Abt.202 nr.1163

8. For all these positions – cf.

Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijevelt. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: NA, nr.2.13.14.01 nr.8
Bernard van Saxon Weimar. Cf. his letter dated 29th August 1841. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

2nd lieutenant Koopman of the battery of Bijleveld. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Colonel Sattler. In: HHW, VIII Nassau, Kriegsdepartement nr.532

Major Van Gorkum (Nagelaten papieren). In: private collection

Report of Von Kruse. In: HHW, VIII Nassau, Kriegsdepartement nr.532

Report of lieutenant colonel Grunebosch from 1841. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

According to major Von Rettberg the 2nd battalion Nassau was to the right of the 3rd battalion; the 1st battalion Oranje-Nassau was further to the left. In: HHW, VIII Nassau, Kriegsdepartement nr.532

According to major general Von Vincke the farm of Papelotte would not have been occupied during the night, as this one was plundered by as the allies, as well as by the French. In: NHH, Des 41 E, XXI k, nr.3

For the one company at Smohain, cf. 1st lieutenant Eberhard of the 2nd battalion Oranje-Nassau. In: Nassauische Erinnerungen an Waterloo. In: Der Uhrturm. Heft 27, July 1940 p.552

Lieutenant Winssinger himself states he was sent to the extreme left flank via the Ohain-road – however, as a result of the bad road, it was only between 11 p.m. and midnight that he took up a position there. In: Eenens, A. - Dissertation sur la participation etc. p. 52

Lieutenant Hay (12th regiment light dragoons) mentions the presence of a battery of artillery of the army of the Netherlands (of which the members were clothed in dark uniforms) which would have been directed against the arriving dragoons of Vandeleur that evening. In: Reminiscences under Wellington p.172

Captain Von Rettberg (Hanoverian horse artillery) also mentions the presence of the Netherlands artillery further to his left. In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.229-234

9. Norden, J. - Het leven en de lotgevallen van de gebroeders Jan en Anthonie Norden p.396. Jan Norden was a brigadier in the 6th regiment of hussars.

10. Major Lautour (23rd regiment light dragoons). In: BL, Add.Ms.34.706 p.316-320
Diary of the 1st Nassau regiment. In: KA, Sekt.II, Kap.XII, nr.3663

11. Schneidawind, F. - Der letzte Feldzug etc. p.83
Cf. Wachholtz, F.von - Geschichte des herzoglich Braunschweigischen Armeekorps etc. p.37

Colonel Von Herzberg, of the Brunswick staff. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.23-55
According to major Von Dreves, member of the battalion Osnabrück of the brigade H.Halkett, Merbraine was occupied during the night by a unit of [Brunswick] uhlans and that two battalions of Brunswick line-infantry as well as some artillery were to the east of the village. In: NHH, Des 41 E. XXI k, nr.2

¹² Cf. Wachholtz, F.von - Geschichte des herzoglich Braunschweigischen Armeekorps etc. p.39

Report of major Von Wachholtz, dated 16th September 1841. Here he adds that both these battalions had reached Mont Saint Jean together with the brigade of Von Dörnberg. In: former www.1815.ltd.uk Original in: NSA, VI HS.18 nr.8

Colonel Von Herzberg, of the Brunswick staff. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.23-55
Captain Von Dreves of the Osnabrück battalion (H.Halkett's brigade) claims Brunswick uhlans were at Merbraine, with 2 battalions of line-infantry and artillery of the same contingent to the right of this village. In: NHA. Hann.41.XXI, nr.151 p.70-72

Major Meijer (4th battalion of the line KGL) confirms Brunswick cavalry was in his rear, while his unit stood near Merbraine. In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.270-273

13. Lieutenant Powell (1st Foot Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.143-148

Lieutenant Pratt (30th regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.88-94

Ensign Short (2nd battalion of Coldstream Guards). Cf. his letter dated 19th June 1815. In: NAM, nr.7702-5

Ensign Ch.Lake (3rd Foot Guards) confirms a position above Gomont. Cf. his journal in former www.1815.ltd.uk Original in Regimental Headquarters Scots Guards.

Ensign Tighe (1st regiment of Foot Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.83-86

He depicts in his plan the 2nd and 3rd battalion in column near the Nivelles-road.

¹⁴ Ensign R.Batty (1st Foot Guards). Cf. his letter dated 22nd June 1815. In: private collection.p.10

According to MacKinnon it was 7 p.m. In: Origin and services etc. Vol.II p.214

15. Major Graeme (2nd battalion of light infantry KGL). In: BL, Add.ms.34.707 p.497-508

16. Captain Fairfield (3rd regiment Foot Guards) was in the vegetable-garden of Gomont and says that the platforms were supported by stones which were taken from the wall between the farm and the garden. Also, a window had been cut in the southern wall of the house of the gardener in order to have a passage into the garden. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.129-131, plus sketch.

Sir A.Woodford adds here that the platforms had been erected with planks, panels, shutters and doors. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.478-479

In another account he states that the platforms did not extend all the way as in some cases the bank was high enough to enable the men to fire over the walls of the garden. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.490-493

On the other hand, major Büsgen (commander of the 1st battalion 2nd Nassau) remains silent about any platforms; he mentions the presence of loopholes in the wall and the south-gate, which was barricaded as well. In: VPH, nr.75

Thomson speaks of "several regulations of holes perforated through a high brick wall." In: A journal during a visit to Paris and a tour through part of Holland etc. p.117 Manuscript in: NLS, MS6334

The fact that Gomont was entrenched is confirmed by the Spanish general Alava in his report to the Secretary of State, P.Cevallos, dated 20th June 1815. In: Kelly, Chr. - A full and circumstantial account of the memorable battle of Waterloo etc.p.64-67

According to an anonymous witness the loopholes in the garden wall were only cut on the morning of the 18th of June, around 10 a.m. Cf. Note in: Papers relating to the battle of Waterloo, BL Add.ms.19.590 f.31

A.White claims that the loopholes visible today are not the original ones dating back to 1815 as the wall would since somewhere in the 19th century almost have entirely been rebuilt, and that they would have been installed much later. This would also have to do with their locations and design. In: Of hedges, myths and memories. An interpretive report concerning the historical reappraisal of the chateau / ferme de Hougoumont p.29-30

Cotton, however, claims there were two types of loopholes: those already present and those made by the British during the 17th and 18th of June, and of which many had been completely finished. He also adds that platforms for some part were installed upon buttresses of the wall, which for this purpose had been partly broken down. In: Une voix de Waterloo p.31-32

17. Lieutenant Ellison (1st Foot Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.1-2

Colonel Woodford (Coldstream Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.490-493

Ensign Gouch (light company, 2nd battalion Coldstream Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.708 p.299-302

According to captain Fairfield (3rd regiment Foot Guards) the light company of the 3rd regiment led by captain Evelyn occupied the vegetable-garden. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.129-131

In reading the account however of private Clay (light company of the 2nd battalion of the 3rd Foot Guards) one can conclude that this company was posted in a shallow ditch at the southern hedge of the orchard. Account In: former www.1815.ltd.uk Original in Regimental Headquarters Scots Guards.

MacKinnon is somewhat unclear about the situation of the light companies. Initially, he places those of Byng in the orchard where they were soon relieved by those of Maitland. He then situates them in the wood, but also in and on the right of the chateau. In: Origin and services etc. Vol.II p.214

18. Cf. Mackinnon - Origin and services etc. Vol.II p.214

Lieutenant colonel Woodford claims it to have been logical that the French were in the possession of the wood all night. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.490-493

According to private Clay (of the light company of the 2nd battalion of the 3rd Guards, at the southern hedge of the orchard) the enemy was "close at hand". Cf. Private Clay (2nd battalion 3rd Foot Guards). In his recollections etc. In: former www.1815.ltd.uk Original in Regimental Headquarters Scots Guards.

Chambers claims the wood was in Anglo-Netherlands-German hands during the night. In: The men of the 1st Foot Guards p.21

According to Adkin, there was a clash between the Foot Guards and a French patrol around 7.30 p.m. and another incursion at 2 a.m. into the wood which was driven off by a piquet under captain Evelyn - this would mean the wood was not in French hands during the night. In: The Waterloo companion p.337

Lieutenant Ellison (1st Foot Guards) states he was on picket that night, that the French posts were near to those of the English, but that no molestation occurred.. In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.1-2

19. Journal of sergeant Robertson. In: With Napoleon at Waterloo etc. p.150

Reports of major general Best, indicating that his troops advanced on the early morning of the 18th of June. So this means they had a more rearward position on the night of the 17th of June. This also was the case for the units of Von Vincke. In: HstA. XXI k nr.2

This is corroborated by the account of adjutant Von Berckefeldt (battalion Münden) who states his brigade was on the slope of the ridge, in rear of the Ohain-road, in a line of columns about 480 metres east of the Brussels-road. In: Geschichte des Königlich Hannoverschen Landwehr p.223

Lieutenant Kincaid (1st battalion 95th regiment) states that his battalion came in the second line, to its right leaning on the Brussels road. In: Adventures etc. p.328

Captain Caddell (28th regiment) places the bivouac of his battalion in the north-east corner of the Brussels road and the Ohain-road. In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.217-222

20. According to captain Von Rettberg it was not easy to get a position due to the fact that the

enemy was harassing the rear-guard. Cf. his report in HstA 41 E, XXI k. nr.2
According to lieutenant Heise of the same battery, it had left two guns in the rear-guard; these guns rejoined the battery later that day, but before it took up its position of Mont Saint Jean.
In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.375-376

21. Cf. the report of colonel Von Vincke, dated 7th January 1825. In: VPH, nr.26
In all probability, the brigade had the instruction to go to Waterloo.

22. Cf. report of major general Best. In: VPH, nr.23

23. Captain Von Scriba (battalion Bremen, brigade Kielmansegge). In: NHH, Des 41 E, XXI k, nr.2

Von Scriba adds that his battalion set out a sentry of 2 subalterns and 40 men, led by lieutenant Büttner. In: Das leichte Bataillon etc. p.87

Note about the KGL and Hanoverian troops in the battle of Waterloo. In: NHH, Des 41 E, XXI, k nr.6

Sergeant Morris (2nd battalion 73rd regiment of foot). Recollections p.73

Journal of the 5th line-battalion KGL. In: NHH, Des.38 D, A.1. nr.7

According to lieutenant colonel Von Linsingen this battalion was in rear of the farm of La Haye Sainte, near the Brussels-road. In: NHH, Des.41 E. XXI k, nr.3

The fact that the brigade of Von Ompteda was on the right of and close to the road is confirmed by captain Von Brandis, aide de camp of Von Ompteda. In: Dehnel, H. - Erinnerungen Deutscher Officiere etc. p.285 He asserts von Ompteda himself spent the night in the farm of La Haye Sainte.

Lieutenant Pratt (2nd battalion, 30th regiment). BL. Add.Ms.nr.34.705 p.88-94

The 2nd battalion / 33rd regiment was placed as a picket in front of the division of Picton to the east of the Brussels road. Its sentries were down the valley, near the French ones. Cf. lieutenant Hope Pattison (2nd battalion, 33rd regiment). In: Recollections etc. p.16

Also in: BL. Add.Ms.34.707 p.509-512

Ensign W.Thain (33rd regiment). In his diary, in: Duke of Wellington's regiment archive, Halifax. Lieutenant colonel Elphinstone (2nd battalion, 33rd regiment. BL. Add.Ms. 34.703.86

The battalion of Bremen (brigade Kielmansegge) had a picket composed of lieutenant Büttner with two NCO's and 40 men in the hollow near the farm of La Haye Sainte. Cf. Report of lieutenant colonel Von Müller. In: NHH, Des.41 E, XXI k, nr.2

For the fact that the division was most probably placed in front of the Ohain-road and on the brow of the ridge, cf.

FitzRoy Somers's account. In: NAM, Book of manuscript copies of Waterloo letters. Nr.6507-1

Ensign Wheatley (5th battalion of the line KGL). In: Hibbert, Chr. (ed) - The Wheatley diary;

a journal and sketchbook kept during the Peninsular war and the Waterloo campaign p.64

24. Cf. Major Baring. In: Erzählung der Theilnahme des 2ten leichten Bataillons der Königlich Deutschen Legion an der Schlacht von Waterloo p.72

That night, all the hay from the barn was used by the men to establish their bivouacs; wood was also removed to get fires going and cattle was slaughtered.

Lieutenant Biedermann (2nd battalion light infantry KGL). In: Von Malta bis Waterloo p.181
Two companies were placed in the orchard that evening. Cf. Lindau, F. - Ein Waterloo-Kämpfer p.129

25. Journal of this battalion. In: NHH, Des.38 D, A.1. nr.7

Ompteda, L.Fr. von - Ein Hannoversch-Englischer Offizier vor hundert Jahren etc. p.285