

The French pursuit.

The units which had moved from the battlefield of Ligny towards Quatre Bras were led there by the emperor himself. Having reached the Bois des Censes, they were put in a battle-order on both sides of the road. The centre was formed by the artillery, the 6th corps and the imperial guard. To the right of the road was the corps of Milhaud, having the division of Subervie in front. To the left might have been the divisions of Domon and Jacquinot.¹

Meanwhile, Napoleon had seen that Ney's forces were not moving and now he immediately issued direct orders to Reille and d'Erlon to advance to Quatre Bras.² Shortly after, the French cavalry collided with the British pickets, driving them back slowly over both great roads.

Jacquinot advanced to the Brussels road as well, and it was this division which advanced north of Quatre Bras over the Brussels road.³ It was accompanied by two batteries of horse artillery.

⁴At the same time, Subervie advanced to the right of this road.⁵ Further to the rear were the emperor, with his escort and the duty squadrons, two batteries of horse artillery of the guard (⁶) and the corps of Milhaud. During the pursuit, Piré's division had no role as it had expended much of its strength during the action at Quatre Bras. The fact that the division was ordered at 2 p.m. to advance towards Quatre Bras, proves that it marched with Reille's corps, the corps it belonged to.⁷

While Subervie was chasing up Vivian, and Jacquinot the platoons of British hussars and the troop of captain Mercer, the other corps advanced. The emperor himself was some distance to the rear to speed up the pursuit. The column which came from the Namur road halted for the one coming from Frasnes. In this column, the advance guard was formed by the 1st corps of infantry and this was joined by the division of Domon as well as by the horse artillery of the guard.⁸ The time d'Erlon left his positions was around 2 p.m.⁹ As soon as d'Erlon had passed the crossroads of Quatre Bras, the corps of Reille, Lobau and the imperial guard filed in.¹⁰ The imperial guard did so around 5 p.m.¹¹ The 1st infantry corps marched without its 4th division, the one of Durutte. On the 16th of June it had been left by d'Erlon near the Roman road and it had been in its vicinity that it had spent the night. However, during the night Durutte received the instruction to leave early morning for Villers-Peruin. Having done so, it halted there for a few hours, when the order came to join its corps on the Brussels road. It would only do so in the early evening.¹² There are no details available about the exact movements of the cavalry corps of Kellermann and the cavalry division of Lefebvre Desnouettes.¹³

Concluding, the sequence of the units on the Brussels road was: the division Jacquinot, Napoleon himself with the duty squadrons and some horse artillery, the 1st corps, the 2nd corps, the 6th corps and finally the Imperial Guard. To the right, about 500 metres east of the road, the division of Subervie, followed by the corps of Milhaud, flanked the central column. The division of Domon was in all probability with the 1st corps to the left of the road.¹⁴

It was south of Genappe that the units of Subervie, as well as those of Milhaud, wheeled towards the Brussels road. The brigade of Colbert (1st and 2nd regiment of lancers, of the division of Subervie) had given up the pursuit just in front of Thy and had now ridden through the fields towards the Brussels road, while probably leaving behind the 11th regiment of chasseurs à cheval in front of the bridge of the Dyle at Ways (Thy).¹⁵

The lancers reached the road just in front of Genappe and also in front of the horsemen of

Jacquinet. ¹⁶ It was here that the lancers, the 2nd regiment in front, had a short but successful confrontation with some enemy infantry and the British hussars: the 2nd regiment of lancers, led by colonel Sourd entered the village, but had to return to their fellow 1st regiment in order to assist it and to get into the village both at the same time. ¹⁷

The corps of Milhaud may have entered the road between the rear-guard of Jacquinet and Napoleon, as later these cuirassiers preceded the emperor further to the north. Not far south from Genappe, the emperor posted some of his artillery to fire upon Wellington's rear-guard, posted immediately north of Genappe. ¹⁸ Having ordered the cavalry of Jacquinet and Subervie as well as the 1st and 2nd corps of infantry forward the emperor halted briefly at or very near to Quatre Bras. ¹⁹ It was here that he had a short conversation with marshal Ney and d'Erlon. Impatient, the emperor ordered d'Erlon to advance with his cavalry immediately.

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1. Gourgaud situates the division of Domon (as well units of the artillery of the imperial guard) with the 1st corps, but provides no further details.

Napoleon situates light cavalry (but not the division of Subervie) to the left, but provides no further details either.

Both are unanimous however that Milhaud was on the right flank of the infantry.

Mémoires pour servir etc. p.107-109

Gourgaud - Campagne de dix-huit cent quinze p.65

There are references that the brigade of Vivian was about to enter a fight with the French chasseurs à cheval and lancers. These were in Subervie's division, and not in Domon's.

Cf. Captain Taylor (10th hussars). BL,Add.Ms.34.703 p.80-90

Sir H.Vivian. BL.Add.Ms.34.703 p.44-45

The fact that Milhaud rode through the fields to the right of is confirmed by colonel Michel Ordener, of the 7th regiment of cuirassiers. In: Lot, H. Les deux généraux Ordener p.90

2. Cf. Lieutenant Martin (45th regiment of the line) (1st corps) In: Souvenirs etc. p.279-280

3. Sir H.Vivian. BL.Add.Ms.34.703 p.44-45

⁴ General De Salle. In: Souvenirs et correspondance etc. p.51

5. Sir H.Vivian. BL.Add.Ms.34.703 p.44-45

Captain Mercer. In: Journal of the Waterloo campaign Vol.I p.273

The fact that the brigade Colbert participated is confirmed by colonel Levavasseur. In: Souvenirs militaires d'Octave Levavasseur p.293

6. Aerts W. - Etudes etc. p.112-124

His source remains unknown.

Cf. Histoire du 1er régiment de cuirassiers p.162

7. Lieutenant Henckens (6th regiment chasseurs à cheval, brigade of Piré). In: Mémoires p.230
Aerts, W. Etudes etc. Livre IV (manuscript) p.142

⁸ Gourgaud - Campagne de 1815 p.65

9. Captain Duthilt (1st division). He states the division of Donzelot left around 2 p.m. and his half an hour later. In: Duthilt, captain, Les mémoires du capitaine Duthilt p.300

Canler, member of the 28th regiment of the line (division Quiot) says it was 1 p.m. In: Mémoires de Canler p.25

According to lieutenant Martin (45th regiment of the line, division Marcognet) it was towards the middle of the afternoon. In: Souvenirs d'un ex-officier 1812-1815 p.280

General Schmitz, commander of a brigade of the division of Donzelot, claims his division left

at 5.30 p.m. but this is incorrect. Cf. Historique des marches etc. In: Brouwet, E. Mémoires et documents sur la campagne de 1815. In: Revue des études Napoléoniennes. (1932) p.360-365

10. Gourgaud, C. - La campagne de 1815 etc. p.65-66

Chef de bataillon Jolyet claims his regiment marched off at 4 p.m. Cf. Chef de bataillon Jolyet (1st regiment of light infantry, division Jérôme). In: Souvenirs et correspondance etc. p.76

11. Mauduit, H.de - Les derniers jours etc. Vol.II p.215

12. Account of major general Durutte. In: Sentinelle de l'Armée p.24

Chef de bataillon Rullière (95th regiment) claims the division joined the 1st corps near Quatre Bras at 9 a.m. Cf. his account dated 1856. In: Largeaud, J.M. - Napoleon et Waterloo p.372

13. Lieutenant Chevalier (member of the regiment chasseurs à cheval of the Imperial Guard) isn't very specific; in his statement his regiment arrived in front of Quatre Bras around the time a heavy rain took place. This must then have been around 2 p.m. (and not 11 a.m. as he claims).In: Souvenirs etc.p.322

There is a state dated 17th of June at Mellet written by Roussel d'Hurbal of Kellerman's corps with the strengths of his division; it might be an indication that at least his division was there. In: SHD, C.15-35

14. For this sequence, also see:

Mémoires pour servir etc. p.109-110

Gourgaud, C. - La campagne de 1815 p.65

Béraud - Histoire de Napoléon p.273

Béraud was a captain in the 4th regiment of grenadiers in the Imperial Guard.

Cf. also footnote nr.1

On the 17th of June, colonel d'Avranche de Kermont (9th regiment of chasseurs à cheval, division of Domon) deserted, but where and when is unknown.

15. According to baron Petiet (officer of the staff of marshal Soult) Colbert was ordered to reconnoitre the enemy which had taken up a position north of Genappe. While entering Genappe, both regiments of lancers (the 1st and the 2nd) got separated by some horse artillery, but some time later, colonel Sourd would have been able to reach the 1st regiment with his élite company. In: Mémoires p.205

16. According to Petiet, it was Napoleon himself who would have ordered the lancers forward. In: Mémoires p. 205

¹⁷ Cf. Pascallet, M.E. Galerie militaire. Sourd, le général baron. p.14-17

Rousselon, M. – Biographie du général baron Sourd p.14-16

18. According to Gourgaud there were 24 guns. In: La campagne de 1815 p.66

It may have been the two batteries of horse artillery of the guard which accompanied Napoleon, plus those of Subervie and Jacquinot.

A gunner of the 10th company, 6th regiment of artillery (division Donzelot, 1st corps), Veillard, claims that his battery – after having made a detour around Genappe because of the narrow and blocked road - fired some rounds north of Genappe [which he calls Charleroi] to chase away the allied cavalry. In: Un canonnier de Napoleon p.370

19. It was 2 p.m. according to Delloye. In: Napoleon dans sa dernière campagne. Special issue of the bulletin of the SBEN. 1996 p.43