

The death of Sir Alexander Gordon

Sir Alexander Gordon (member of the 3rd regiment Foot Guards and aide de camp of Wellington) got wounded while he was rallying a Brunswick battalion not long before the attack of the imperial guard. ¹

Gordon was treated by Dr. Hume, to whom he was brought between 6 and 7 p.m. At that moment Hume was working at the farm of Mont Saint Jean. According to Hume Gordon was brought to him by a sergeant major [²] and some soldiers. ³ The wound Gordon was suffering from was a wound on the inside of his right thigh and which was caused by a musket-ball. The wound made an amputation of the leg necessary. ⁴ Gordon lost a lot of blood and was in pain. Hume decided to amputate the leg immediately and very high. ⁵

After the amputation, Gordon rested for a while and then asked to be brought to Waterloo, which was accordingly done. ⁶

Gordon was brought into the Bodenghien inn just at the moment one of the arms of Lord Fitzroy Somerset was being amputated by Dr.Gunning. Then Gordon started to get very restless; he was in pain and sighed frequently. However, the moment he could lay down and got some wine he became calmer.

Shortly after, Hume was called away for the amputation of one of the legs of Lord Uxbridge. Gordon now started to lose a lot of blood and Hume instructed Dr.Cartan (15th regiment hussars) to check Gordon's situation. When Hume returned to Gordon the bandage appeared to be drenched with blood but was still in place. Hume now treated the wound with cold water. After calming down a bit, he became restless again at 1 a.m. Now he sat in bed, then he lay down again; he called for Hume and while holding his hand he died. It was 3.30 a.m. ⁷ Gordon became 29 years old.

On the 19th of June his body was transferred to Brussels and was buried in the small churchyard of St.Gilles near the Porte de Hal. The service was attended by Dr.Briscall, Lord A.Hill, colonel J.Waters, colonel C.Campbell and lieutenant G.Cathcart. ⁸ In 1889 his remains were reinterred in the british grave at Evere. The epitath reads:

“Beneath this stone are deposited the remains of lieutenant colonel the honorable Sir Alexander Gordon Knight Commander of the Most honorable order of the Bath Aide de camp to the Duke of Wellington and third brother to George Earl of Aberdeen who was killed in the battle of Waterloo aged 29 years.

Ici reposent les cendres de l'honorable Sir Alexander Gordon Lieut.colonel Chevalier Commandeur du très honorable Ordre du Bain Aide de camp du Duc de Wellington et troisième frère de George Comte d'Aberdeen. Il périt glorieusement à la bataille de Waterloo le 18 juin 1815 à l'age de 29 ans. Restored by Admiral the Hon.John Gordon his last surviving brother in 1865.”

In his official report to Lord Bathurst Wellington writes about the death of Sir Alexander Gordon. He writes:

"Lieut.Colonel the Hon.Sir Alexander Gordon, who has died of his wounds, was a most promising officer, and is a serious loss to His Majesty's service." ⁹

Gordon's family erected a monument to the memory of their relative in the summer of 1816. ¹⁰ It still stands west of the Brussels road between the farm of La Haye Sainte and the crossroads of this road with the one which leads to Ohain.

The monument consists of a channelled, freestone column on a square socle, which is inscribed with text and family weapons. The whole is surrounded by an iron fence. The text reads:

"Sacred to the Memory of / Lieutenant-Colonel the Honourable Sir Alexander Gordon / Knight Commander of the most Honourable Order of the Bath/Aide-de-Camp to Field Marshal the

Duke of Wellington / And also Brother to George Earl of Aberdeen / Who in the twenty-ninth year of his age / Terminated a short but glorious career / On the 18th of June 1815 / Whilst executing the orders of his great Commander/In the battle of Waterloo / Distinguished for gallantry and good Conduct in the Field / By the illustrious Hero / With whom he shared the Dangers of every Battle / In Spain Portugal and France / And received the most flattering proof of his Confidence / On many trying Occasions / His Zeal and activity in the Service obtained the reward / Of ten medals / And the honourable distinction of the Order of Bath/He was justly lamented by the Duke of Wellington / In his public Despatch / As an Officer of high Promise / And a serious Loss for the Country / Not less worthy of record for his Virtues in private life / His unaffected respect for Religion / His high sense of Honour / His scrupulous integrity / And the most amiable Qualities / Which secured the attachment of his Friends / And the love of his Family/In Testimony of Feelings which no language can express /A disconsolated Sister and Five surviving Brothers / Have erected this simple Memorial / To the object of their tenderest Affection / Repaired in 1863 by his brother admiral the Honourable J.Gordon / Repaired in 1871 and 1888 by his grandnephew John, 7th Earl of Aberdeen / Repaired in 1857 by his family." ¹¹

On the east side of the monument one can read "Tria juncta in uno. Ich dien". On the west side is written "Fortuna sequatur"

The monument is on a small height, to which a small stairs leads. Sometimes it is asserted that the level of ground the monument stands on is representative for the whole area north of the farm of La Haye Sainte, before the construction of the lion monument. Yet, this is incorrect as the piece of land where the monument stands was in 1815 already formed small knoll in the landscape.

The reason for establishing the monument there is unclear, as Gordon was hit further to the west as is suggested now. ¹² In 1830, the monument was handed over to the Belgian state. ¹³

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1. Wellington's letter to the earl of Aberdeen (Gordon's brother) of 19th of June 1815. In: WD, Vol.XII p.488-489

Report of Dr.Hume. In: NAM, nr. 7712/84.

Lieutenant Cathcart (in his letter to G.Gordon from Paris, dated 25th July 1815) believes that he got wounded during the general advance. In: NAM, nr.7712/84. In another letter he is more near the truth in stating that it was about 6.30 p.m. near the duke of Wellington. Cf. Aberdeen Papers, Vol.CLXXIX.p.264-267. BL, Department of manuscripts Add.mss.43.217.

2. Some state this was sergeant major Wood[s] of the 30th regiment (brigade Colin Halkett). Cf. Duchesne, A. à propos d'un sabre etc. In: Carnet de la Fourragère 7^e série p.489

History of the 30th regiment p.338

Speeckaert, G. Les 135 vestiges et monuments etc. p.17

3. The report of Hume can be found in the National Army Museum and is added to a letter dated 25th July 1815 of lieutenant Cathcart to G.Gordon. Also a lock of hair of Gordon has been added. Nr. 7712/84

4. According to Cathcart, Gordon was wounded by grape shot. The fact that Gordon was hit in his right leg is confirmed by the marquess of Aberdeen, in: Note on lieutenant colonel the Hon. Sir A.Gordon etc. In: Mélanges etc. p.110

5. The fact that Gordon's leg was amputated near the frontline is also confirmed by Sir G.Scovell, who was at the headquarters at Waterloo the moment Gordon was carried in there. Cf. Account of sir G.Scovell. In: PRO, nr. WO37 nr.12/84

6. Cathcart erroneously believes Gordon was brought to Brussels.

7. Wellington says he was called by Dr. Hume around 3.00 a.m. but that it was too late when he saw him. Cf. his conversation with lady Salisbury in 1836. In: Maxwell, H. The life of Wellington. Vol.II p.92

Cathcart has another version of the events. He thinks Gordon was suffering from a fever after the new bandage and that Hume comforted him and let him sleep. At 3 a.m. Hume asked a servant to make the bed and he himself went out to take a nap. The assistant was with Gordon who died after 10 minutes. Cathcart believed Gordon's death was also caused by the immense fatigue Gordon suffered from.

8. Cf. Letter of lieutenant Cathcart to G.Gordon. In: NAM, nr.7712/84

Records of the family of Sir. A.Gordon. Cf. Duchesne, A. A propos d'un sabre etc. In: Carnet de la Fourragère 7^e série p.496

¹⁰ Duchesne, A. A propos d'un sabre etc. In: Carnet de la Fourragère 7^e série p.494
Often 1817 is given, but according to Duchesne this would be incorrect.

¹¹ Cf. BL, Aberdeen papers Add mss.43224 p.268 The same text also in French.

12. The fact that Gordon was hit further to the west is confirmed by:

Duchesne, A. à propos d'un sabre etc. In: Carnet de la Fourragère 7^e série p.489

Speeckaert, G. Les 135 vestiges et monuments etc. p.17

Gore, A. - An historical account of the battle of Waterloo fought on the 18th of June etc. p.90

If it is right that it was sergeant major Wood of the 30th regiment who assisted Gordon, then it is fairly possible that Gordon then was in the vicinity of this regiment.

¹³ In: Berkeley, A. Letters from Waterloo 10th June 2006. In: The Waterloo Journal Vol.28 nr.2 p.26