

The injury of the prince of Orange.

It was probably between 6 and 6.30 p.m. that the prince of Orange was hit by a musket-ball in his left shoulder. ¹ At the same time, his horse Vexey got hurt by musketry fire as well.

The situation was that the prince had a brief conversation with some officers of the 73rd / 30th battalions of the brigade of Colin Halkett. Right after that, he moved along the ridge and at several hundred paces distance from the enemy's cavalry skirmishers (cuirassiers) to the battalion of Von Kruse's brigade which stood in the first line with the intention to drive the French off. It was just at that time that he was hit by a bullet in his shoulder. The prince, dazed, immediately descended from his horse and instinctively walked towards the unit which was just in rear of the interval between both above-mentioned brigades, the one of De Ghigny.

An officer of the Nassau brigade stepped forward from the ranks of his battalion in an attempt to talk to him but he apparently did not recognize the prince and went back to his unit right after. By now, the prince had lost quite some blood, had got pale and instable and found some support against a horse of another officer who had come forward.

Captain Jules de Constant Rebecque de Villars, adjudant in the staff of De Ghigny's brigade, and baron Van Heerdt, chief of staff of the same brigade, which stood to the rear of the interval between both infantry brigades had witnessed the situation and now came to the prince rescue, as the French cuirassiers seemed as if ready to charge. De Constant Rebecque de Villars dismounted and offered his horse to the prince, from whom he did not get a reply as he was by now almost passing out and it did not take long as that the prince sank with his head against the captain's chest. In the urgency of the situation, the accompanying officers now got the prince, despite his daze and pains, to climb onto the adjudant's horse. While doing so, he still attempted to have his thoughts with his units.

By now, the cuirassiers actually did advance and the prince, aided by several British and Netherlands officers around him, was led away from the danger. Additionally, lieutenant colonel baron Van Heerdt, chief staff of De Ghigny's brigade, dismounted and some Nassau skirmishers were also at hand to help out. Eventually, covered by some cavalry, the prince was led from the front-line to the rear by lord March and several other officers. ²⁻³

The prince was carried by the small group (amongst whom the prince's adjudants Du Caylar, Wauthier, Croukenbourg, Van Hoff and Ambt) as far as the hamlet of Mont Saint Jean, where he was laid upon a door. From there he was carried to the Bodenghien inn at Waterloo. Here he received his first medical attention. ⁴ It was also here that baron Van Reede, representative of the Netherlands at Wellington's staff, rejoined the prince who by now seems to have come back to his senses. It was at Waterloo that baron Van Reede [..], wrote to baron Tindal [?]:

Le prince d'Orange a été blessé à l'épaule gauche la balle [sic] a passé d'outre ce [..] j'assiste dans ce moment à son pansement & me trouve d'autre [..] que celui [..] ayant perdu [..] cheval de suite pour rassurer entièrement leurs Majesté sur l'état du Prince qui des l'aveu des chirurgien et de tous ceux qui l'entourent est sans aucun danger. Le prince va être transporté à Bruxelles.

Waterloo, le 18 Juin 1815 8 heures

Van Reede ⁵

From Waterloo, the prince was then conveyed to Brussels in a carriage, as well as two other wounded high officers, lord Fitzroy Somerset and general Alava. They were accompanied by surgeon Gunning. Their goal was the royal palace at Laeken, where the small group arrived at 1.30 a.m. ⁶ Apparently, he had regained some of his spirits as he wrote from there to his parents about the victory he was informed about:

Victoire ! Victoire !

Mes très chers parens [sic]

Nous avons eu une affaire magnifique ce jour contre Napoleon qui est venus [?] nous attaquer dans notre position en avant du bois de Soignies, c'est mon corps qui a principalement donné et à qui nous devons la victoire, mais l'affaire a été entièrement décidée par l'attaque des Prussiens ont fait sur la droite de l'ennemi. Je suis blessé d'une balle qui m'a traversé l'épaule gauche mais c'est peu de chose.

A .. tout à vous.

Guillaume

2 de la nuit

Bruxelles ⁷

At Brussel, the prince was under treatment of John Gunning, surgeon in chief to the army. He wrote on the 23rd of June about the prince's wound:

Statement of the wound of His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange received on the 18th June 1815.

The ball struck His Royal Highness on the left arm anteriorly immediately above the articulation of the shoulder joint - fracturing the acromion [=tip of the shoulder] of the scapula [=shoulder-blade] - it then passed under the skin and integuments and at its exit at the back of the shoulder fractured again the scapula and leaving a considerable wound. Small portions of bone have been removed from both the anterior and posterior wounds - and more will soon come away. A small portion of the dress of H.R.Highness has been also extracted at the posterior wound.

John Gunning, surgeon in chief to the army & D.H.R.H.

Brussels, 23rd June 1815 ⁸

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¹ Cf. the report of the prince, dated 22nd of June 1815 to his father. In: KHA, nr.A40 VI A.10 and in: WSD, Vol.X, p.555-557

Letter of the prince to his father, dated 2 a.m. 19th of June. In: KHA, A40 VI A.10

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

The pélicette worn by the prince, bearing the trace of the wound, is still kept in the museum of the Koninklijk Huis Archief, The Hague, the Netherlands.

² Account of captain Jules de Constant Rebecque de Villars, dated 28th July 1817.

Original in: Oracle, dated 2nd August 1817.

A (Dutch) copy can be found in the Staatscourant, dated 4th August 1817

Cf. Letter of captain Jules de Constant Rebecque de Villars to lieutenant colonel Van Heerdt, dated 12th April 1817, dated 28th July 1817.

Oral account of baron Van Heerdt, dated 1850, as noted by Bosscha for Willem III. In: KHA, nr.A40, XIII-35

Written account of baron Van Heerdt. In: family-archive Van Heerdt. In: CBG

Letter dated 2nd May 1817 to captain De Constant Rebecque de Villars. In: CBG

Captain J.Somerset, aide de camp of the prince. He states he escorted the prince after he was wounded. In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.199

Lieutenant H.Webster (general staff) confirms the prince fell to the left of Colin Halkett's brigade. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.161-162

According to F.de Bas, lieutenant colonel count L.B.J.Le Hardy de Beaulieu, commander of central headquarters of the army of the Netherlands, was there too to assist the prince. Cf. his conversation with M.P.Verhaegen, a descendant of him. In: La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.244

Baron Van Reede claims the prince was carried off the field on a blanket by 8 to 10 Hanoverian soldiers; further to the rear he was put upon a door. Cf. his letter dated 10th July 1816. In: University of Amsterdam, Manuscript collection (De la Fonatine Verweij hall), nr.Ay 104b As cited by: Muilwijk, E. – Standing firm at Waterloo p.190

For the incident, an hour of 7.30 p.m. is given by:

Captain Jules de Constant Rebecque de Villars, dated 28th July 1817

W.B. Craan. In: Gore, A. An historical account of the battle of Waterloo p.24

Scheltema, J. – De laatste veldtocht etc. p.167

This hour is impossible though as by then the imperial guard was engaged on Wellington's front and it also does not match with Van Reede's communication from Waterloo before 8p.m. The distance between the Bodenghien inn and the spot where the prince was wounded is about 4.5 kilometres (which was covered in about one and half hours).

³ There is a claim of a private of the 1st carabiniers, Wouter Schalkwijk, as told to and written down by two gentlemen (Uttewaall and Leemans) that he, as well as sergeant Balken, would have played a role in rescuing the prince. Schalkwijk's superior, captain Heshusius, would have received the order from Wellington to liberate the prince. The two men stepped forward as Heshusius had asked for volunteers to do so and they were able to liberate the prince from the hands of four cuirassiers.

The claim is circumstantial and could be dismissed as lacking sufficient proof, yet the fact is that both men – for some reason - were honoured with the MWO 4th class on the 11th of

August 1815 for their behaviour in the battle.

If there is any truth in this, it could be possible that - somehow - both men acting as skirmishers formed part of the cavalry covering the prince against cuirassiers the moment he was led to the rear. The man marked as Wellington could have been a British adjudant of the prince asking people around for assistance in the process. The carabineers stood to the immediate left of De Ghigny and to the rear of Von Kruse's battalions.

Cf. J. Bosscha. In: KHA, KHA, nr.A40, XIII-35

Köffler, G.C.E. - De Militaire Willemsorde, 1815-1940. Den Haag, Algemene Landsdrukkerij, 1940

Lieutenant Warin (3rd regiment of carabineers) confirms the prince fell in front of his brigade. Cf. his undated letter. In: Rijksarchief van de Provincie Utrecht. Family-archive Van Ortt, 74 inv.nr.157

The same is the case with the account of carabineer Bosma (3rd squadron 3rd regiment of carabineers) who claims the prince fell in the immediate vicinity of his unit. Cf. his letter to W.Eekhof, Tresoar Leeuwarden, Collection Fries Genootschap. Taken from: Muilwijk, E. – Standing firm at Waterloo p.190

⁴ Cf. Doren, J. van – Strategisch verhaal etc. p.180

According to Evrard, the prince received his first treatment at Mont Saint Jean from surgeon Hyde and in Waterloo from surgeon Hume. He refers to F.de Bas as a source, but he says nothing about this. In: Waterloo. 1815 p.163

⁵ In: NA, nr.2.02.01 nr.6585

⁶ Cf. Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815. Vol.II, p.245

Sir G.Scovell. Cf. his account. In: PRO, WO 37, nr.12/84

Scheltema, J. – De laatste veldtocht etc. p.201-203

Lieutenant S.F.Klijnsma, of the engineers of the army of the Netherlands, confirms how he was informed that the prince passed by on his way to Brussels. At that time, Klijnsma was involved with his unit in opening the road, by removing all material which obstructed it. In: De nagelaten aantekeningen van Sent Foppes Klijnsma. In: De Beweging 1910, I-249, II-1

⁷ In: KHA, nr.A 40 VI A.10

Its messenger was lieutenant colonel Wauthier, who arrived at the house Den Bosch in The Hague at 11 p.m. on the 19th of June. Cf. Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.368

Scheltema, J. – De laatste veldtocht etc. p.203

⁸ In: KHA, nr.A40 XIII nr.10