

18th of June: the hour at which the battle of Waterloo started.

Sources mentioning the moment at which the battle of Waterloo started range in time from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

These hours derive from direct observations of those who witnessed the first French attack, or from those who didn't and for instance took the commencement of a serious cannonade as this start. For this reason, the hours given should be considered with caution.

Taking it for granted that the actual French advance against Goumont can be considered as the start of the battle, a number of participants in the battle can be disregarded as they were no direct observers of the event, while in case they were, in numerous cases their accounts are of a late date relative to the battle.

The precision should therefore be sought in a combination of those accounts written immediately after the battle by direct observers, official documents and other circumstantial evidence.

First of all, the letter written by Soult at 10 a.m. to Grouchy. From this document it becomes clear that Napoleon then was about to attack Wellington, a fact which is corroborated by the general order for the attack which was written at 11 a.m. These documents make it therefore impossible that the battle started before at least 11 a.m., as claimed by important eye-witnesses such as Wellington himself and the prince of Orange.¹

The moment in question can also be framed in relation to the increasing gunfire which culminated in the first period of the battle at about noon.² Taking into account the time needed for the preparation of the attack, this means that the moment the battle started must have been between roughly between 11.20 a.m. and 12 o'clock.³ From this, noon as this moment should be omitted from the possibilities as well.⁴

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¹ Nine o'clock is given by:

Report of lieutenant Von Müller (2nd battalion KGL line infantry line). In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.152.p.51-53

Prince Bernard van Saksen Weimar in his letter dated 29th August 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. Family-archive. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.265

10 a.m. is given by:

Wellington's report to count Bathurst, dated 19th June 1815. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 aux Pays Bas Vol.III.p.474

It remains a mystery how Wellington could have come to this conclusion, while he was an eyewitness of the start himself. In another document, yet, he states he believes it was 11 a.m. Cf. his letter to an unknown person, dated 17th August 1815. In: WSD, Vol.XII p.609

Cf. The official Prussian report of the battle. Cf. Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 aux Pays Bas Vol.III.p.485-499

Account of lieutenant colonel Von Strube (battalion Hameln, brigade Von Vincke).In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.151.p.104-105

Ensign Howard (33rd regiment). Cf. his letter dated 8th July 1815. In: A Waterloo shako p.175

Lieutenant Winckler (battalion Osnabrück). In a letter dated 20th June 1815 In: Hannoverschen Geschichtsblätter nr.18 (1915). Cf. former www.1815.ltd.uk

Captain Gardiner (RHA). Cf. his letter dated July 1815 to lieutenant general Sir Th. Graham. In: former www.1815.ltd.uk Original in: NLS, MS3615

Others give an hour between 10 and 11 a.m:

Captain Powell (1st regiment Foot Guards) claims it was 10.40 .a.m. In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.143-148

Major general Best believes it was 10.30 a.m. Cf. Hann.41.XXI.nr.152.p.82-88

Sir G.Wood states it was 10.30 or 10.45 a.m. Cf. his notes in Papers relating to the battle of Waterloo. British Museum, Department of manuscripts.Add.mss.19.590

For 11 a.m:

Major Büsgen (1st battalion 2nd regiment Nassau). In: VPH nr.75

Captain Cleeves. In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.151.p.139-146

Major general Von Vincke. In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.152.p.90-103

Lieutenant Eyre (2nd battalion, 95th regiment), in a letter to his mother dated 28th June 1815.

General Von Dörnberg. In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.152.p.1-4

Lieutenant Packe (13th regiment of light dragoons) in a letter dated 20th of June 1815. In: www.1815.ltd.uk Original in: Leicester, Leicester and Rutland Record Office, DE 1346/419-427 (DG18)

The journal of the 3rd battalion KGL line infantry. In: Hann.38D.nr.816.p.22-25

The journal of the 1st regiment KGL light dragoons. In: Hann.38D.nr.231.p.15-16

Lieutenant Lane (15th regiment hussars). In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.95-98
 Colonel Sir J.Colborne (52nd regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.708 p.40-49
 Captain Drewe (27th regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.417-419
 General Von Knesebeck in the report of the general allied headquarters at Heidelberg, dated 21st June 1815. In: VPH, nr.125
 Captain Bourdon de Vatry (aide de camp of Jérôme Bonaparte). Cf. Grouchy, G.de - Mémoires du maréchal de Grouchy. Vol.IV p.106
 Report of the prince of Orange to his father dated 22nd June 1815. Cf. KHA, nr.A 40 VI A.10
 Letter of captain Wildman to his mother dated 19th June 1815. In: NAM, nr.1981-12-53-557
 Diary of captain Gardiner (battery Gardiner). In: RAI, nr.MD 1178
 Von Gneisenau in a report to fieldmarshal Wrede, annexed to a letter of count Rechberg. In: Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv München. Published by: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Archivalische Beiträge etc. Jahrbücher für die Deutsche Armee und Marine 1906 p.517
 Sir Carmichael Smyth. In: Chronological epitome of the wars etc. p.397

² Cf. The account of the battle and of the situation of Grouchy at Walhain.

³ An hour between 11 and 11.30 a.m. is therefore not logical. Cf.

General Constant Rebecque mentions in his journal 11.15 a.m. Cf. his journal. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

Also see ensign R.Batty (1st Foot Guards). In a letter dated 23rd June 1815 p. In: www.1815.ltd.uk Original in the Harrington Collection

John Sperling (British engineers) claims the battle started after 11 a.m. Cf. Letters of an officer etc. p.133

Lieutenant Martin (45th regiment of line infantry, division Marcognet) believes it was somewhere between 11 a.m. and noon. Cf. Martin, J.F. Souvenirs d'un ex-officier 1812-1815 p.285

Captain Ross (battery Ross). He also believes it was between 11 a.m. and noon. Cf. his journal. In: H.D.Ross, Memoir of field-marshal Sir H.D.Ross p.60

Cf. lieutenant Sandilands (battery Ramsay). Cf. Notes. In: RAI, nr.MD 638

Private Green (3rd battalion 1st Foot Guards) believes it was 11.50 a.m. In a letter to his brother dated 12th July 1815. In: www.1815.ltd.uk Original in Regimental Headquarters Grenadier Guards nr. H07/004

11.30 a.m:

Major general De Ghigny in his report. In: Bas, F.de. La campagne de 1815 Vol.III.p.416-417 CvW. Geschichte des Feldzugs etc.Stuttgart.1817.p.25

Major general Trip in his report. In: Bas, F. de. Ibidem.Vol.III.p.402-407

Major Van Gorkum of the Dutch general staff. Cf.papers cited by W.E.A.Wüppermann in: Engelse beoordelingen etc. In: Verslagen krijgswetenschap.1894-1895.p.397 ev.

Captain Walcott (battery W.Smith) mentions the attack on Goumont. WL,nr.704.54

General Alava in his report to the secretary of state P.Cevallos, dated 20th June 1815. In: Kelly,

Chr. - A full and circumstantial account etc.London.1817.p.65
Chef d'escadron Lemonnier-Delafosse. In: Souvenirs militaires p.216

4. For 12 o'clock, see:

Captain Bowles (Coldstream Regiment of Foot Guards), in a letter to Lord Fitzharris, 19th June 1815. In: A series of letters of the first earl of Malmesbury, p.443

Major Von Groeben (3rd regiment hussars). In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.152.p.11-15

Captain T.Wildman in his letter of the 19th June 1815 to his mother. In: NAM, nr.1981-12-53-557

The diary of Lord Edward Somerset (brigade Somerset). Archive NAM, nr.

Cotton cites from a conversation he would have had with Lord Edward Somerset him in 1842 and in which he said it was then 11.50 a.m. Cf. Cotton, E. A voice from Waterloo p.

This corresponds to a letter written by Lord E.Somerset on the 23rd of June 1815 in which he refers to the same hour. Cf. Bodleian Library nr. MS Eng.hist.d ff.49-60

The diary of the 1st Nassau regiment. In: VPH, nr.71

Report of major general Von Kruse. In: VPH, nr.72

Captain Logan in a letter to mr. Sylvester, Paris 18th July 1815. In: Miscellany, 1934. p.86-87. BL, Add.mss.43.830

E.Heeley, assistant of general Scovell, at Brussels, claims to have heard the cannonade from noon till 1 p.m. Account in NAM, nr.8409-98

The official Brunswick report of the battle. In: VPH, nr.68

General Drouot's speech dated 24th June 1815. In: Additional particulars to the battle of Waterloo etc. Vol.II p.112

General Hartmann (lieutenant colonel of the artillery of the KGL). In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.151.p.129-131

Journal of the 1st battalion line KGL. In: Hann.38D.nr.236.p.27-28

Report of major Rettberg (1st battalion line KGL). In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.152.p.49-50

The official French bulletin about the battle. In: Bas, F.de - La campagne de 1815 aux Pays bas. Vol.III. p.551-557

Captain Von Rettberg (battery Von Rettberg). In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.151.p.159-163

Surgeon Lauprecht (brigade Von Vincke).In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.151.p.111-114

Report of general Pozzo di Borgo (dated 19th June 1815) to king Wolkonsky. In: VPH nr.123.p.286-288

Captain Von Scheuch (battalion Bremervörde). In: Hann.41.XXI.nr.151.p.65-68

Journal of the 4th battalion KGL battalion line infantry (brigade Duplat). In: Hann.38D.nr.236.p.118-119

Letter of private John Abbott (51st regiment, brigade Mitchell). In: NAM, nr.

Letter of major Radcliffe (1st regiment Royal Dragoons) dated 7th July 1815. In: www.1815.ltd.uk Original in: Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, 413/382

Sir J.Shaw Kennedy (cited from a conversation of 1842 with sergeant major E.Cotton). Cf. Cotton, E. – Une voix de Waterloo p.54

As the sole witness, it is marshal Ney who claims the battle started at 1 p.m. This very late hour can only be explained by the fact - although he was in tactical command of the battle - that the attack on Goumont was not one in which he was not directly engaged. Cf. his letter to the duke of Otranto, dated 26th June 1815. In: LMB, As.1301