

The positions of the duke of Wellington during the battle of Waterloo.

In comparing the available eyewitness-accounts on the positions of the duke of Wellington during the battle of Waterloo one has to conclude that he never left the sector between the roads leading to Charleroi and Nivelles. ¹ Within this sector, he was mobile though. ²

Between 10.30 and 11.00 a.m. the duke visited Goumont and during this inspection he went as far as the extreme eastern edge of the wood. At 11 a.m. he left Goumont [³] and took up a position in front of the left flank of the brigade of Maitland. ⁴ It was until about 2 p.m. that the duke was somewhere to the left rear of Goumont, from where he then departed to his left to witness the outcome of the first French offensive. In doing so, he did not push further though as to a point some distance to the right of the Brussels road to convince himself of the results of the British cavalry charge on the French. ⁵ In all probability Wellington remained here as he was there when De Lancey was killed, just before the outbreak of the French cavalry charges at about 4 p.m.

In the period from about 4 p.m. till about 6.30 p.m. the duke was in all probability stationed near the Foot Guards again. ⁶ Around 6.30 he was further to the left, to re-establish the situation of the units of the Brunswickers and those of Colin Halkett. ⁷

Shortly before the attack of the imperial guard, around 7 or 7.15 p.m., the duke was near Bolton's battery (⁸), but soon after he had found his position near Maitland's Foot Guards to await the final attack of Napoleon on his front line. ⁹ After the column of the guard was repulsed by the Foot Guards, the duke went towards the brigade of Adam to witness the flank attack carried out by the 52nd regiment. ¹⁰ From here, he launched the 2nd battalion 95th regiment. ¹¹

About 8.15 p.m. Wellington had gone to the right rear of Adam's brigade (52nd regiment) to direct and follow it in its advance towards La Belle Alliance, after having given the signal for the general advance of his line. ¹²⁻¹³ The duke kept his position while advancing in rear of the 52nd regiment until he reached the farm of Rossomme (¹⁴), from where he returned to Waterloo. It was towards 10 p.m. that he met with Blücher near Trimotion, from where he returned to his headquarters at Waterloo.

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1. Sir Augustus Frazer confirms that the duke, like himself, never went to the left wing, east of the Brussels road. Cf. Sabine, E. - Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer. Letter nr.XXV, p.560

2. Legend has it that the duke had his command position near an isolated elm-tree near the Brussels road but this is not correct. The tree stood on a little elevation, on a rising bank in the immediate south-west corner of the crossing of the Brussels road and the Ohain-road, about 10 metres from the first road. Cf. Craan, W.B. - Plan du champ de bataille de Waterloo dit de la Belle Alliance etc. Bruxelles

Raffles, Th. - Letters during etc. p.326

Raffles (having seen the tree in 1817) not only enters upon the location of the tree, but also states about the alleged station of Wellington here: "if he can be said to have had any station at all, for he was perpetually riding about."

Adjutant Buhse (1st battalion of light infantry KGL) states the tree stood on the north-side of the hollow road. In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.264-267

For pictures of the tree, see:

Anonymous sketch of the farm of La Haye Sainte. In: Gloucestershire Record office nr.D1833/Z5

Stevenson, S.W. - Journal of a tour through parts of France, Flanders and Holland, made in the summer of 1816. Norwich, 1817

Navez, L. - Le champ de bataille et le pays etc. p.42

Butler, Dr.S. - Tours abroad.1816-1822. In: BL, Add.ms.34.598

Charles Turner (based upon a drawing made by George Jones) erroneously depicts it on the east side of the Brussels road. In: Waterloo1815. L'Europe face à Napoleon p.78

Jonkheer Reneke de Marees van Swin speaks of an oak. He visited the battlefield on 29th of June 1818. Cf. his account in: Mededelingen van de Vereniging Officieren Cavalerie - December 1966

By the summer of 1816, the tree had been deprived of its lowest branches by numerous tourists. Cf. Stanley, E. - Before and after Waterloo p.268

According to Butler the damage had been caused by gunfire. In: Manuscript "Tours abroad.1816-1822". In: BL, Add.ms.34.598

In 1818 the tree would have been purchased by a man called J.Children for the sum of 200 francs. From the wood he produced (apart from canes, napkin rings and snuffboxes) two arm-chairs. One he offered to queen Victoria for her coronation in 1838; it would still be in the collection of Windsor Castle.

The other he offered to the duke of Wellington; this one would still be in the library of Apsley House. The chair was accompanied by a tablet stating: "To field marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington K.G. This chair made of the elm which, on the glorious field of Waterloo witnessed his triumph ... presented by His Grace's faithful servant J.C.Children, 18 June 1838." Cf. Longford, E. - Wellington, pillar of state p.24

Since 1958, another tree (a plane-tree) has been planted by the "Fédération Touristique de Brabant" on the same spot where once the elm stood.

3. Ensign Standen (3rd Foot Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.705. p.268-269

4. Account FitzRoy Somerset. In: NAM, nr.6507-1

5. Cf. Lord Uxbridge. In: BL, Add.ms.34.707 p.152-156 and Add.ms.34.707 p.546-548 He thinks the duke was then at about 180 metres west of the road.

Lord F.Somerset says Wellington was in rear of Goumont for about one and a half hour and to take position before 2 p.m. in the center to the right of the road to Charleroi. In: NAM, nr.6507-1

The fact that Wellington didn't see the charge of the heavy cavalry against d'Erlon is confirmed by captain Clark Kennedy (Royals). In: BL, Add.ms. nr.34.707 p.76-78

During the attack of the 1st French corps, Houssaye believes the duke took shelter for the enemy fire in the hollow road near the tree. This is pure fantasy: the fact that a commander would take shelter for enemy fire and in a place right between the frontlines is simply absurd. Other than that, no witness of the actions here speaks of any presence of the duke and members of his staff. Cf. Houssaye, H. - 1815.Waterloo p.349

Captain Von Scriba (battalion of Bremen, Kielmanssegge) claims that the duke rode from the left to the right wing, passing his battalion, around 12.30 o'clock and the way back, not long after. Cf. Scriba, C.von - Das leichte Bataillon etc. p.89

6. Gronow, R.H. - The reminiscences and recollections etc. p.70

It is lieutenant Gawler of the 52nd regiment (brigade Adam) who claims that the duke passed the regiment (while it stood on the ridge) when he was heading to the right and that some time later he returned again and proceeded further to the left. In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.88-97

It was in this period of the battle that Wellington issued orders for the brigade of Adam and for the Brunswickers to cross the ridge and to take up a position on the other side.

It may have been that the duke took a short shelter in the square of the 73rd - 30th regiment during the grand cavalry charges of the French. Cf. major Kelly. In: BL, Add.ms. 34.703 p.345-347

Major Calvert (32nd regiment) believes Wellington deployed his regiment around 5 p.m. but there are no witnesses of the duke's presence there at that time of the day. In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.169-170

The presence of the duke near the Foot Guards during the cavalry charges is also confirmed by ensign R.Batty (3rd battalion 1st Foot Guards). Cf. His letter dated 23rd June 1815 p.23 (private collection).

7. Cf. major D.Kelly WL. In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.345-347

Captain Rudyard (battery Lloyd). In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.167-170

Captain Garland (73rd regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.1-2

Captain Mercer (battery Mercer). In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.347-354

Major Hunter Blair (brigade Adam) confirms that Wellington was further to the right the moment the French officer announced the attack of the imperial guard to him. In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.354-357

Lieutenant Cathcart (aide de camp of Wellington) saw Wellington observing the action in and around the farm of La Haye Sainte from a position south of the Ohain-road; the moment the French skirmishers advanced too near, he withdrew through the road. In: BL, Add.ms., nr.705 p.146-150 In all probability, this must have occurred at this stage of the battle.

8. Lieutenant Sharpin (battery Bolton). In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.15-19

9. Lieutenant general Maitland. In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.331-334
Captain Powell (1st Foot Guards). In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.181-187

10. Lieutenant Gawler (52nd regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.88-97
Captain Budgen (2nd battalion 95th regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.704 p.56-62

¹¹ Captain Logan (2nd battalion 95th regiment). Letter dated 18th July 1815 to Mr.Sylvester. In: BL, Add.ms.43.830 p.86-87

12. Major general Adam. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706. p.404-405, 406-413
Major Hunter Blair (brigade major Adam's brigade). In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.225-227
Lieutenant colonel Colborne (52nd regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.708 p.40-49
Count De Sales. In: BL, Add.ms. 34.707 p.525-530
General Clinton to Wellington, 19th June 1815. In: WD, Vol.X p.545

13. Wellington would also have been for a short time in the vicinity of the brigade of Vandeleur so as to encourage the brigade of d'Aubremé. Cf. lieutenant Sleight (11th regiment light dragoons). In: BL, Add.ms.34.707 p.302-305

Captain Taylor (10th hussars) in his diary says the Duke was near his regiment for a while, after their charge, exclaiming: "By Gad [sic], well done, 10th !" In: Carew, P. - Combat and carnival p.32

Captain Tomkinson (16th regiment light dragoons). In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.131-132

14. It was at this stage that the duke in all probability crossed the Brussels road beyond La Haye Sainte.

According to lieutenant Bacon (10th regiment hussars. WL, nr.707.130 he saw the duke, accompanied by lord Lennox, during the advance of the brigade of Vivian to the *east* of the Brussels road and south of the farm of La Haye Sainte. In: BL, Add.ms.34.707 p.332-335

It may have been in this situation that the 40th regiment met with the duke during its advance. Cf. captain Bishop. In: BL, Add.ms.34.705 p.213-216