

General Cambronne is taken prisoner.

It was during the action against the three squares of French infantry of the Imperial Guard that lieutenant colonel H.Halkett got in front of the 71st regiment and took general Cambronne prisoner.

French and Hanoverian versions of the event, however, differ. General Hew Halkett himself says: "After having received our fire with much effect, the column left their general with two officers behind, when I ordered the sharpshooters to dash on, and I made a gallop for the general. When about cutting him down he called out he would surrender, upon which he preceded me, but I had not gone many paces before my horse got a shot through his body and fell to the ground. In a few seconds I got him on his legs again, and found my friend, Cambronne, had taken French leave in the direction from where he came. I instantly overtook him, laid hold of him by the aiguillette, and brought him in safety and gave him in charge to a sergeant of the Osnabrückers to deliver to the Duke; I could not spare an officer for the purpose, many being wounded." ¹

And: " I was fortunate enough to take general Cambon [sic] prisoner from among his tirailleurs in front of the imperial guards." ²

Some further conclusions can be drawn from the file in the Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv at Hannover entitled "Das Landwehrbataillon Osnabrück und die Gefangennahme des Franz. Generals Cambronne". ³

The moment his battalion started to go to the rear, Cambronne left behind with two officers in order to collect his skirmishers. This was after the 2nd battalion of the 1st regiment of chasseurs had fired a volley on the Osnabrück battalion and that the skirmishers of this battalion had charged. Then the French yielded. ⁴ In this situation, Cambronne was about 50 meters ahead of his men. Right then, his horse was wounded and now Cambronne was on foot.

Hew Halkett saw what happened and dashed forward on horseback through his own and the enemy's skirmishers and now threatened Cambronne with his pistol. What happened then is not entirely clear, but then Halkett would have hit him with the gun on the head, after which Cambronne surrendered. ⁵

Cambronne had a bleeding wound on his head, but Halkett dragged Cambronne along, until his own horse was hit as well and just then Cambronne tried to escape. Halkett, however, was able to have his horse get up again and he also could grab Cambronne again and lead him towards his battalion. At that moment, Halkett was about 150 meters in front of his men of whom some came to him. Now, Halkett handed over Cambronne to sergeant Führung, to whom Cambronne offered his sword. Sergeant Führung, with three men, escorted Cambronne and led him from the battlefield out of the firing line to Brussels. On the road, Cambronne offered him his purse and watch, and some time later his epaulets and cords (probably from fear of being recognised). ⁶

No matter how detailed Hew Halkett is in his description, an important detail is not mentioned and which is mentioned by Cambronne himself, i.e. that, after he had got this wound on his head, he fell off his horse, lost conscience and was left for dead.

In fact, during the court-martial held on the 29th of January 1816, Cambronne said: "Blessé et laissé pour mort à la bataille du 18 Juin, je fus fait prisonniers par les anglais et conduit en Angleterre."

And on the 25th of July he wrote from his prison to his uncle Waubert de Genlis: "J'ai été blessé d'une balle à la tête, et suis tombé de cheval, sans connaissance, au pouvoir de l'ennemi." ⁷⁻⁸

The fact as that Cambronne would have been taken prisoner during the night is contradicted by the account of sergeant Führung who says he delivered Cambronne between 11 p.m. and midnight at Brussels to some British hussars. ⁹ Additionally, Sir G.Scovell tells us that Cambronne was led to Wellington's headquarters at Waterloo on the evening of the 18th of June. ¹⁰

Apart from these witnesses, the watch and the seal taken from Cambronne and which ultimately came in the hands of the family of the duke of Cumberland (and thereby the family museum at Gmunden, Austria) prove that there had been a contact with the enemy that evening (as is stated by the several German eye-witnesses).¹¹

Finally, a letter written by general Berton in defence of Cambronne in 1818 states that Cambronne, after being wounded, fell to the earth but soon came back to his senses and surrendered.¹²

And this sums it up as it took place: that Cambronne, in front of his battalion, was hit on the head by a ball fired by Halkett or another weapon, lost conscience, recovered, was taken prisoner by Halkett and dragged to the rear, from where he was carried to Brussels on the 19th of June.¹³

One of the most famous legends of the battle of Waterloo is that Cambronne would have uttered the famous words: "La garde meurt et ne se rend pas !" the moment he was taken prisoner.

There is no doubt that a lot of words have been spoken at the very end of the battle, but it suffices here to state that these words are mere legend and that he probably uttered another, more logical, expression for the situation he such as: "Merde!" or " Merde, je ne me rends pas !".¹⁴

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¹ In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.402-403

His account in another publication is very similar. Cf. Dehnel, H. *Erinnerungen deutscher Officiere* etc. p.374

² H.Halkett in his report to count Alten, 24th June 1815. In: VPH, nr.46

It is this report upon which Alten based his own, dated 8th of July 1815, to the duke of Cambridge.

This is confirmed by captain Von Dreves (Osnabrück battalion) who mentions Cambronne's attempts to stop his men from running, and the moment at which general Halkett got forward through the French skirmishers to grab him. He managed to do so despite the fact that Cambronne resisted and the men around as well. In: NHA, Hann.41.XXI, nr.151 p.70-72

Captain Chr.Heise cites from H.Halkett himself, describing the capture. Here he says he learned from Cambronne himself that he was Cambronne and there was nothing peculiar about the way he behaved. He also adds that Beamish would have given a correct description of what happened. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706 p.438-439

³ In: NHA, Hann.41 XXI nr.157

⁴ Cf. account of lieutenant Richers (Osnabrück battalion). In: NHA, Hann.41.XXI nr.157

⁵ Cambronne was wounded on the head, but sources are contradictory. Some say it was from the hit on his head, while others – including myself - believe it was from a ball.

First of all, it is Cambronne himself who already wrote in 1815 to his uncle (see below) that he had been hit on the head by a ball.

In fact, on 13th December 1816 the surgeon, Loran, who had treated Cambronne certified: “Je certifie avoir eu soin de la blessure de M.le général Cambronne, reçue à Waterloo et dont j’ai tiré six esquilles.”

And in 1820 another surgeon, Zandick, wrote: “Une cicatrice profonde avec perte de substance osseuse, située au-dessus de l’oeil gauche et répondant à la partie externe et supérieure de l’arcade orbitaire du coronal. Cette blessure, résultat d’un coup de feu reçu à la bataille de Waterloo, occasionne des céphalalgies intenses qui se renouvellent à des époques très rapprochées.” In: *Sérieyx, W. - Cambronne* p.127, 241

Post-1815 portraits of Cambronne also confirm the mutilation on his head, caused by this wound.

⁶ Cf. Cambronne file. In: NHA, Hann.41.XXI.nr.157. Here we find the accounts of lieutenant Richers, sergeant Führung and lieutenant Lyra, all of the Osnabrück battalion.

Also see: The account of Hugh Halkett in: Dehnel, H. *Erinnerungen deutscher Officiere* etc. p.375

Sergeant Führung later sold the watch to lieutenant luitenant Lyra.

⁷ In: *Procès de Cambronne*, p.5

Houssaye, H. - *Waterloo* p.419

Boterf, H. - *Le brave général Cambronne* p.342-343

Sérieyx, W. - *Cambronne* p.126

Halkett, Frhr.Von In: *Gefangennahme des Generals Cambronne* etc. In: *Militär Wochenblatt, Beiheft*, 1912 p.211

According to the family-tradition, Cambronne would have been left unconscious on the battlefield, to awake during the night and then to be taken prisoner. By then he would have been stripped from most of his clothes and possessions. Cf. Brunschwig - Cambronne p.157

⁸ General Petit says about Cambronne: “ Le général Cambronne est blessé. Renversé de son cheval, on le croit mort.” This statement is used to confirm Cambronne’s statement but this does not imply the same: in all probability Petit himself, due to his position, couldn’t have seen Cambronne at all.

Cf. general Petit. In: Moore Smith, G.C. General Petit’s account of the Waterloo campaign. The English Historical Review, Vol.XVIII, 1903 p.325-326

⁹ In: NHA, Hann.41.XXI nr.157

¹⁰ Sir G.Scovell. In: PRO, WO 37 / 12, fol.2

¹¹ The seal was later identified by the historical museum at Nantes to be the original seal dated 1815 of general Cambronne. Cf. Halkett, Frhr. Von - Gefangennahme des Generals Cambronne etc. In: Militär Wochenblatt, Beiheft, 1912 p.213-214

Halkett also cites from a statement of general Poret de Morvan saying: “ Le général Cambronne fut atteint à la tête et tomba; un sergent anglais le releva et reçut pour récompense la bourse de prisonnier.” His source remains unknown.

¹² Cf. Halkett, Frhr.von - Gefangennahme des Generals Cambronne etc. In: Militär Wochenblatt, 192 Beiheft, p. 215

¹³ Wellington's report to Lord Bathurst, Brussels 19th June 1815. In: WD, Vol.X, p.489

¹⁴. Apart from the fact that Cambronne always denied having spoken the legendary words, Houssaye has thoroughly dealt with the legend in the sense that the words are an invention of a journalist, called B.de Rougemont. Cf. Houssaye, H. La garde meurt et ne se rend pas, histoire d'un mot historique

Also see:

Sérieyx, W. - Cambronne p.205-244

Tondeur, J.P., P.Courcelle, P.Meganck, J.J.Pattyn La Belle Alliance (1) - L’attaque de la Moyenne Garde. Waterloo 1815. Les Carnets de la campagne no.7 Editions de la Belle Alliance, 2005 p.58-70

The papers in the Hannoversches Haupt-Staatsarchiv relating to Cambronne explicitly state that he would have said: “Je me rends !” In: NHA, Hann.41 XXI nr.157

In some documents, general Michel is mentioned as the one who would have spoken these words, but Michel fell on the slope of the ridge of Mont Saint Jean during the attack of the Imperial Guard. Michel’s fall is confirmed then by his aide de camp captain Berthelot. In: Boterf, H. = Le brave général cambronne p.207

Also see: Sérieyx, W. - Cambronne p.210-211