

The prince of Orange at Quatre Bras and the order of battle of the 2nd division of the army of the Netherlands.

Prince Bernard van Saksen Weimar had been around at least before 3 a.m. but must have taken a short meal and a short nap at Quatre Bras, before he woke up by 4 a.m. to have the 1st battalion Orange Nassau move to the front.¹

General Perponcher showed him the position while Constant rode to the front over the Brussels road just south of the farm of Gémioncourt. Here, captain Bijleveld had two guns led by lieutenant de Vincy. Every now and then, these guns fired into the enemy's line.²

It was around 5.30 a.m. that the prince of Orange arrived at Nivelles. He had left Braine le Comte just after Constant.³ From here he rode to Quatre Bras where he got towards 6.30 a.m.⁴

De Perponcher explained him the situation and now the prince took over the command. Apparently having approved of the arrangements De Perponcher had taken he inspected the outposts which were north of Frasnes, in front of the Bois de Bossu, in front of the farm of Gémioncourt and resting on the left upon the farm of Piraumont and the Etang materne. Additionally, he placed a line of skirmishers in the high corn and ordered to stop the skirmishing fire.⁵ Since dawn several skirmishes occurred in front of the position.⁶

Soon after his visit to the advanced posts, the prince had the skirmishing being brought to an end by sending out major count Van Limburg Stirum.⁷

Having now seen the situation himself and having heard the report of what had happened the other night at Frasnes, the prince sent out some orders from these outposts.⁸

One of them was to Van Merlen to bring his brigade to the crossroads. The other was sent to Alten to proceed with his division to Nivelles and to take up a position there on a ridge on its other side, while having one brigade on the height in rear of Arquennes. At the same time he ordered Cooke's division from Braine le Comte to Nivelles.

Then, he wrote a report to the Duke of Wellington of what he had seen and done. By then it was 7 a.m. It reads:

near Frasnes, june 16 1815, 7 o'clock a.m.

My dear Duke,

I am just arrived. The French are in possession of Frasnes near 3 Bras with infantry and cavalry, but not as yet in force. Our troops are near the village and a sharpish tirailleur fire was going on when I came, but I ordered our firing to cease and the French fire has diminished. I ordered a cavalry brigade over here, the other two are to remain at Arquennes. A brigade of the British 3rd division is to occupy the height behind Arquennes, the rest to be in position on the ridge behind Nivelles and that town to be occupied. I ordered the first division to Nivelles from Braine le Comte.

Sincerely,

*(signed) William P. of Orange*⁹

In reading this report it is clear how the situation was at Quatre Bras the moment he had arrived and what he did afterwards. The fact that the prince was at the advanced posts is confirmed by Von Brunneck in his report dated 6.30 a.m.¹⁰

Around 8 a.m. Piré sent out some platoons to reconnoitre the enemies position.¹¹ Around noon, also a party of lancers also must have made a reconnaissance towards the extreme Dutch right wing (where the section Winssinger was) but it was repulsed by the fire of a Nassau battalion here.¹²

The prince of Orange now ordered the troops to cook.¹³ He remained on the heights in front of Frasnes for quite some time, but finally Constant was able to persuade him to go further back to a safer position as the French lancers fired their occasional shots.¹⁴ Having dismounted near the advance posts, he was all but taken prisoner as a squadron of Piré's men tried to cut him off. These horsemen, however, were driven off by the fire of a battalion of Nassau infantry, which was concealed in a low ground.¹⁵

Being uncertain about the French intentions, and fearing the action at Quatre Bras may be a feint for a main thrust at Brussels through Nivelles, the prince of Orange exchanged his view with colonel Bernard van Saksen Weimar, general De Perponcher, general Constant Rebecque and colonel Abercombry. Finally, the prince decided to have Nivelles occupied by the 3rd Dutch and the 3rd British division. Having decided to do that, he sent Constant Rebecque and Abercombry there to choose defensive positions for Chassé and Alten respectively.¹⁶ Now it was 9 a.m.¹⁷ Having got there around 10 a.m., they found both divisions just there: they both had arrived there at approximately the same time, which had resulted in a confusion. The situation was that right at the time the division of Alten passed through the small town, the one of Chassé arrived from the road leading to Mons. For this reason, this division was forced to wait as long as the division of Alten was passing. After that, Chassé placed his units northwest of Nivelles, on the heights of St.Roch. To make things even worse, the road from Braine le Comte was choked with bagages of Alten's division, while those of the prince of Orange as well as of the general headquarters of the army of the Netherlands were at Braine le Comte itself.

At the same time, Constant Rebecque made sure the cavalry of Collaert was in front of Nivelles observing the roads leading to Arquennes, Buzet and Rêves.¹⁸

That morning, the 1st brigade of Van Bylandt must have gone through some changes in positions before the action of Quatre Bras started by 2 p.m.

Initially, the 27th battalion of chasseurs had been to the left of the Brussels road, in front of Quatre Bras. By 5 a.m. however, the battalion moved forward and two of its companies, the 1st and the 6th were sent forward to drive off the french skirmishers with their fire. They drove the french as far as near to the Bois Delhütte and then took up positions near Piraumont and the farm of Lairalle, about 700 meters in front of the remainder of the battalion, thereby taking over the outposts of the 3N.¹⁹

At 1 p.m., the third company under 1st lieutenant Croes, advanced to a position to the left of Bijleveld's battery, as a support. Around the same time, the 2nd company had moved forward to support the 1st and the 6th to their left. So, in the first line Grunebosch had his 1st, 2nd and 6th companies led by captain Eichholtz, Burleux and De Crassier. In his second line, southwest of the Etang Materne, immediately south of the stream of Gémioncourt were the 4th and 5th company, led by captain De Nave and captain Heekeren van Waliën. Lieutenant colonel Grunebosch himself was present with these two companies.²⁰

After the 8th battalion of national militia had reached Quatre Bras around 4 a.m. it was placed by prince Bernard van Saksen Weimar to the left of the Brussels road. Later, the battalion was assigned another position, north of Quatre Bras, to the west of the Brussels road.²¹

The 5th battalion of national militia came in a position in close column in rear of the buildings

of Quatre Bras, to the left of the Namur-road. ²²

The 7th battalion of national militia got into a position near Quatre Bras, west of the Brussels road, in rear of the Bois de Bossu. ²³

The 7th battalion of the line marched that morning per platoon over the Namur-road up to the Bois de Bossu. ²⁴ It must have got there around noon. ²⁵ It came in rear of the wood in a close column.

During the morning hours, the prince of Orange changed the position of the horse battery of Bijleveld. Initially, the battery had two guns on the road which leads to Namur, four south of Gémioncourt and two in the vicinity of Quatre Bras, but now he arranged the guns in the following way: five guns about 500 meters south of the avenue which leads to the farm of Gémioncourt, on the Brussels-road, near the bifurcation of the track leading to the farm of Grand-Pierrepont. Of these guns there were two howitzers led by lieutenant F.W.Dibbetz, to the right of the road, and three 6-pounders, led by lieutenant A.F. Wasserot de Vincy, a bit more to the rear and to the immediate left of the road. The three remaining 6-pounders, led by 2nd lieutenant W.Koopman, stood south of the Namur-road, at a few hundred meters from Quatre Bras, having their front towards the south-east.

All guns had their caissons from the first line with them; the reserves of the battery were all drawn up in rear of the farm of Quatre Bras. ²⁶

Of the 2nd brigade of De Perponcher's division, the company of Nassau voluntary chasseurs was placed in four units along the (probably southern) edge of the Bois de Bossu. ²⁷

The 1st battalion of Nassau infantry was at 2 p.m. in line somewhere in front of the Bois de Bossu and had launched two of its companies, those led by the captains Werneck and Trittler as skirmishers. ²⁸

It must have been that morning that Perponcher sent forward two companies of the 2nd Nassau battalion as well as the 50 Prussian hussars of the 1st regiment of Silesian hussars led by lieutenant Sellin. These hussars successfully charged the French outposts of the light cavalry of the guard twice. ²⁹

Both the Nassau companies as well as Bijleveld fired and the french posts were forced back. Now the battalion advanced up to the heights near Frasnes: four companies established themselves here while two other ones spread out as skirmishers. The prussian hussars placed outposts. ³⁰

By 11 a.m. the battalion moved back to a position directly southwest of Quatre Bras, as it had spent almost all of its ammunition. Here it came in a close column. ³¹

However, later that morning, or in the beginning of the afternoon, the company led by captain Wirths, plus the 4th company and the flanker-company were detached to the Bois de Bossu, in which skirt they took up positions. ³²

The 3rd battalion of Nassau must have relieved the 2nd battalion Nassau in its outposts in front of Frasnes, until it was taken back to a position at the south eastern edge of the Bois de Bossu, where it had two companies; the four remaining companies must have been deeper into the wood. This may have been around 1 p.m. ³³

The 1st battalion Orange-Nassau was southwest of Quatre Bras during the night of the 15th and the morning of the 16th of june. At 4 a.m. it must have advanced towards a position probably somewhere between the Bois de Bossu and the farm of Grand Pierrepont, in front of the

southern side of the wood and to the right of the 8th battalion of National Militia (later).³⁴
The 2nd battalion of the same regiment probably stood north-east of Quatre Bras.³⁵

The moment the foot-battery of captain Stevenart reached Quatre Bras it was put, awaiting further orders, northwest of the crossroads, in column and facing westwards.³⁶

At what time this took place is not known but it must have been from this position that two 6-pounder guns under lieutenant Winssinger were sent to the right flank, probably to a position somewhere south of the Bois de Bossu.³⁷

At what time the remainder of the battery advanced is not known as well, but it came in a position between the farm of Gémioncourt and the Bois de Bossu, in rear of a slope, west of the Brussels road and to the right of the right-hand guns of Bijleveld.³⁸

As the action started at 2 p.m. the whole 2nd Dutch division was present: about 7900 men and 16 guns.

First version: 25th May 2005 - Last revised: 30th July 2012 - Copyright © Pierre de Wit

¹ Prince Bernard van Saksen Weimar. Diary. In: THW, Grossherzogliches Hausarchiv A XXIV 30 p.192

² Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

3. Major count Van Limburg Stirum says he left at 4.30 a.m. Cf. letter of him to captain Van Löben Sels. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.265

4. Some sources or historians claim it was at 6 a.m. Cf.

Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

Aerts, W. Etudes etc. p.413

Bas, F.de and T'Serclaes de Wommerson, La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.455

Von Pflugk Harttung thinks it was shortly before 6.30 Cf. Pflugk Harttug, J.von In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, II.12.p.136

Scheltema thinks it was before 6 a.m. Cf. Scheltema, J. De laatste veldtocht etc. p.

Captain Von Gagern, being at Quatre Bras from the early morning hours of the 16th, thinks he came in at 10 a.m., but this is not right. Cf. letter dated 14th december 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.265

Bernard van Saksen Weimar states it was between 5 and 6 a.m. Cf. his letter dated 29th August 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.265

5. Cf. letter of Bernard van Saksen Weimar. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.265

Constant Rebecque. In his account. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25
Van Saksen Weimar himself joined the prince for the (for him second) inspection of the outposts. Cf. Diary of Van Saksen Weimar. In: THW.Grossherzogliches Hausarchiv A, XXIV 30, p.192

6. Cf. captain Von Gagern in a letter dated 14th december 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302, inv.nr.263

Prince Bernard van Saksen Weimar. Diary. In: THW. Grossherzogliches Hausarchiv A XXIV 30 p.192

Constant Rebecque claims the prussian hussars of Sellin charged the french lancer-posts in front of Frasnes several times successfully. In his account. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

7. Cf. letter of count Van Limburg Stirum to captain Van Löben Sels d.d. 5 august 1841. In: In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

⁸ Cf. the report of the prince, dated 17th of june 2 a.m. In: WSD, p.497

9. Cf. copy in KHA, nr.A 40 VIC W 10

10. Von Brunneck mentions the presence then of seven battalions: these were those of Saksen Weimar, as well as the 27th battalion of chasseurs and the 8th battalion of national militia.

11. Mauduit, H.de Les derniers jours etc. Vol.I p.137

¹² Major Von Opstall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

13. According to Aerts at 8 a.m. In: Etudes etc. p.415
14. Cf. Account of Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25
15. Cf. Letter of captain Von Gagern to captain Van Löben Sels dated 14th december 1841. In: nr.II.3.nr.3
16. Account of Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25
17. Account of Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25
18. Account De Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25
- ¹⁹ Lieutenant colonel Grunebosch. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265
Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.III. p.310
Cadet sergeant Welter (27th battalion of chasseurs). In his letter dated 1st july 1815. In: family archive Volkorsz.
According to Welter both companies were detached around 3.30 a.m.
20. Lieutenant colonel Grunebosch. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262
Colonel van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.III. p.310
Erroneously, colonel Van Zuylen van Nijeveld places the 3rd company near the battery of Stevenart.
Cadet-sergeant Welter confirms his battalion was about 1500 meters south of Quatre Bras, which is south-east of Gémioncourt. In his letter dated 1st july 1815. In: family archive Volkorsz
Major general Van Bylandt states the battalion also occupied the farm of Gémioncort. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262
F.de Bas incorrectly places one company in Piraumont itself and the two companies of the second line south east of Etang Materne, which should –of course- be south-west. In: La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.480
- ²¹ Colonel De Jongh. In: Nagelaten papieren etc. 1866
22. Captain Mollinger. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265
Captain Van Toll. In: Knoop, W.J. Quatre Bras en Waterloo p.144
23. Fuselier S.A. In: Herinneringen etc.
Account of fusilier Rentenaar (7th battalion of national militia). In: Private collection.
24. 1st lieutenant Scheltens. In: Souvenirs etc. p.198
25. Colonel van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.III. p.308
- ²⁶ 2nd lieutenant Koopman. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262
Koopman himself speaks about a distance of 200 meters from Quatre Bras.

Major Van Opstall. In: Van Löben Sels, nr.II no.4.nr.1

Two other sources claim both the three guns led by Wasserot de Vincy were on the road and that they were two 6-pounders and one howitzer. The other howitzer (plus one 6-pounder) would have been led by Dibbetz. Cf. Colonel van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.308

Major Van Opstall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Captain Bijleveld. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Captain Osten . In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

²⁷ Report of its commander, captain Bergman. In: Domarus, M. Die Oranien etc. p.19

28. Colonel Van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.312

J.P.Leonhard (member of the battalion). He mentions the presence of a battalion Orange Nassau [the 1st], Jäger [the Nassau Voluntary Jagers], a battery [Winssinger] and the 10th battalion of Dutch infantry to his left, towards the Brussels road. This last unit may have been the 5th battalion (or the 7th or 8th, later) of national militia. In: private collection.

29. Report of lieutenant Sellin (1st regiment of Silesian hussars). In: KA, VI.E.7.I.61 In: GSA-VPH, VI, nr.VII nr.3B.p.25

Sellin adds he was there during the action at Quatre Bras and that he was still there on the morning of the 17th of June, but the detachment appears not to have been engaged in the action of Quatre Bras itself. It lost that day one hussar and twelve horses.

The fact that the hussars distinguished themselves that day is also confirmed by captain Van Zuylen van Nijeveld in his letter to major Van de Poll, 13th december 1838. In: NA, family archive nr.2.21.180).

Also see letter of Bernard van Saksen Weimar dated 29th August 1841 to captain Van Löben Sels. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

De Bas claims that the cavalry as mentioned by Von Brunneck at 6.30 a.m. was Sellin's detachment, but this was not the case; these were other men of the 1st Prussian corps, who strayed along the Roman road. Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J. von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.142

It is hard to explain why Van Zuylen van Nijeveld claims that Sellin left that morning for Sombreffe. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de & T'Serclaes de Wommersom La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.302

30.Colonel Von Sattler In: VPH-LBA, nr.18

major general Von Kruse. In: VPH-LBA, nr.17

Neither Von Sattler, nor Von Kruse mentions the prussian hussars.

According to colonel Van Zuylen van Nijeveld these hussars went to the field of Ligny, even before the action at Quatre Bras started. In: . In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.302

31 . Colonel Von Sattler. In: VPH-LBA, nr.18

Major general Von Kruse. In: VPH-LBA, nr.17

Captain Wirths (2nd battalion Nassau). In: Aus der Schlacht bei Waterloo. In: Nassovia.1905 p.143 He claims the battalion left its former position by 10 a.m.

Cf. Schmidtborn, Antheil der etc. p.14

³² Cf. Captain Wirths (2nd battalion of Nassau). In: Nassovia, 1905 p.143-144

33. Major Sattler. In: VPH-LBA, nr.18

34 . Colonel De Jongh (8th battalion of national militia). In: Nagelaten papieren etc. 1866
Colonel van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de la campagne de 1815.
Vol.III p.312

And In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

Prince Bernard van Saksen Weimar. Diary. In: THW. Grossherzogliches Hausarchiv A XXIV
30.

According to F.de Bas the battalion would have had detachments in the farms of Petit and
Grand Pierrepont but I have found no proof for that. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.
I p.481

Major general van Bijlandt describes the position of the 2nd brigade as being mainly in the
centre and skirts of the wood, with strong detachments in front and in the (hollow) roads
emerging from the wood. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.265

35. Cf. Captain Eberhard, C.F. Nassauische Erinnerungen an Waterloo. In: Der Uhrturm. Heft
27, juli 1940 p.552

³⁶ Lieutenant Van der Wall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Captain Osten. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

37 . Major Van Opstall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Lieutenant Van der Wall (battery Stevenart). In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302
inv.nr.262

Colonel van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de
1815 Vol.III. p.310

The reason to do so was a specific threat from this side of the front. Cf. File of lieutenant
Winssinger. In: Kanselarij der Nederlandse Orden, The Hague.

De Bas puts the guns on a height west of the farm of Grand Pierrepont, but there is no proof
for that. In: La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.481

³⁸ Major Van Ostall. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Captain Bijleveld. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262

Colonel van Zuylen van Nijeveld. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de
1815 Vol.III. p.310 and 312

Lieutenant Van der Wall doesn't mention the position of the battery explicitly, but adds that
its reserve was left at about 500 paces in rear of the farm of Quatre Bras. In: NL-ZuRAZ, Van
Löben Sels, 0302 inv.nr.262