

NOTES ON D'ERLON'S FIRST ATTACK AT WATERLOO, PART II.
by John E. Koontz

5. The Attack through British Eyes

In this section I will examine the French attack, or part of it, as it is described in the Waterloo Letters. I will restrict my attention to the letters from Kempt's 8th and Pack's 9th Brigades, for the infantry; from Somerset's 1st and Ponsoby's 2nd Brigades, for the cavalry; from Rogers's and Whinyates's batteries, for the artillery; or from superior officers for these forces. This policy has the effect of limiting our attention to (from French left to right) Bourgeois's 2nd Brigade/Alix's 1st Division, Donzelot's 2nd Division, and Marcognet's 3rd Division. Alix's 1st Brigade, under Quiot, attacked La Haie-Sainte, which was occupied by Baring's 2nd Light Battalion, KGL, from Ompteda's 2nd KGL Brigade, while Durutte's 4th Division was directed against Best's 4th Hanoverian Brigade, Saxe-Weimar's 2nd Brigade/2nd Netherlands Division, and (inadvertently) the British 4th and 6th Cavalry Brigades behind them.

From Locket's summary in EEL 74:30-35, we know that French secondary sources leave us no reason to doubt that Quiot used only three of his four battalions in his attack on La Haie-Sainte, leaving the fourth, presumably the last one in the original brigade column, in his rear as a support. Similarly, Locket shows that Durutte left one of his regiments, the 85e (from his second brigade) in reserve [Hous-saye 1921:357nl]. In addition, the fact that Durutte directed his forces against Best's 4th Hanoverian Brigade and Saxe-Weimar in Pape-lotte at least suggest that his force was divided into two smaller forces. If the two flanking attacks, Quiot's and Durutte's, both left supports in their rear, we might well expect the same thing of the intervening forces of Bourgeois [2nd/1st], Donzelot [2nd], and Marcognet [3rd]. What I hope to do in this section is show that the accounts of British eyewitnesses make sense only in light of this assumption. I hope, furthermore, to show that there is some basis for the common report in early British sources that the French 2nd Division was to the British right of the French 1st Division. Looking ahead, this can be most reasonably explained by assuming that Bourgeois's 2nd/1st Brigade came up somewhat later than Donzelot's 2nd Division, and that it had crossed the track of the 2nd Division, either deliberately, or accidentally. However, this interpretation can only be adopted if it is assumed that the 2nd and 3rd Divisions advanced in more than two columns, since otherwise we are left with fewer columns than the British eyewitnesses report seeing.

I will begin with an extract from a letter by the only infantry staff officer to shed much light on the subject, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir William Gomm, Assistant Quartermaster General to the 5th Division. Gomm, writing in 1837, says "Have you it clearly substantiated [emphasis in original] that the Enemy sent three Columns of attack against our front to the left of the Great Road? My decided impression is that they did. The extract you give me from the report of the Officer of the 79th would seem to favor the opinion of there having been only two." [29] The published Letters, unfortunately, contain no letter which could supply the extract that Gomm mentions receiving, though, as we will see, the 8th Brigade, to which the 79th belonged, did meet only two columns of however many the French sent forward.

From the staff we proceed to the artillery, who might be supposed to have had the first view of the French, after the infantry's skirmishers. It appears that Whinyates's battery which was ordered forward at the same time as the two British cavalry brigades, did not come up until the French were in retreat, so, although the battery's letters are invaluable for an understanding of the early stages of the cavalry's advance, they shed no light on the number of French columns, or their formations. Rogers's battery, however, was positioned in front of Kempt's 8th Brigade from the beginning of the attack. Captain and Brevet-Major Thomas Rogers writes February 9, 1837 [236-237]

"During the attack on our left, by the Count D'Erlon's Columns, the position of the 5th Division [i.e., the 8th and 9th Brigades] under Sir Thomas Picton, to which my battery was attached, must be too well known to you to need repetition. During the formation of those Columns, and of numerous Batteries of Artillery, the latter occasionally opened their fire upon the Artillery of the Division, by which we lost some horses, but were restrained by Sir Thomas Picton from returning it."

It appears, to our regret, that Rogers saw the columns formed, and saw them advance as well, but was not inspired to elaborate on the subject!

From the artillery we proceed to the infantry, beginning with Kempt's 8th Brigade. As a summary of the experience of this brigade we may use, appropriately enough, a letter of Major-General Sir James Kempt to Sir Hussey Vivian [commanded 6th British Cavalry Brigade at Waterloo]. This letter is undated [347].

"On the 18th, the 95th Regiment was in front of the other Regiments of my Brigade, occupying a knoll and some broken ground as Light Troops, and in line with a considerable Corps of Belgian and Nassau Infantry [i.e., Bijlandt's 2nd/1st Brigade]. All these retired as the head of the Enemy's mass of Infantry approached them, at which critical moment, and just as the French Infantry were gaining the road and hedgerow which runs all along the crest of the position, I met it at the charge with the 28th, 32nd, and 79th Regiments in line, and completely repulsed the Enemy's Column, driving it in a state of the greatest confusion down the slope of the position."

"This was completely effected, and I was in the act of restraining the men from the pursuit (having no support whatever), when General Ponsonby's [2nd] Brigade of Cavalry charged a separate Column that had come up on our left where Pack's [9th] Brigade was stationed. ..."

It can be seen that Kempt reports two columns, which might be presumed under the standard modern view to have been those of Bourgeois [2nd brigade/1st Division], and Donzelot [2nd Division], from British right to left, respectively. In fact, as we will see below, there are significant difficulties with this view.

We will continue with the 95th Rifles, who formed the extreme right of Kempt's [8th] Brigade, as well as supplying an outpost in the Sand Pit between the main position and La Haie-Sainte [to the left of the Charleroi road; see figure 4.2]. Lieutenant-Colonel and Brevet-Colonel Sir Andrew F. Barnard, writing November 20, 1834, reports of the company of the 95th in the Sand Pit, under Captain and Major Leach, that:

"When the enemy made their first attack, this Company was soon obliged to join the others, and although they maintained their ground sufficiently to change the direction of the Enemy's Column, they were obliged eventually to retire as it passed their left flank, and to join the Companies [two, according to Barnard] at the hedge [one in front of that lining the road], to which the Enemy approached so close that there could not have been above two yards, if so much, between their front rank and that of the Corps opposed.

"A fire ensued, which was very heavy, but of short duration, as they began to move off as soon as it was possible for such a mass to effect it (N.B., Sir Thomas Picton was killed at this moment), and the charge of General Ponsonby's Brigade, which took place on our left, completed their rout."

From this account it appears that Barnard was aware of only one column from his perspective. [I am ignoring the issue of whether or not he was able in 1834 to recall everything that happened. I am not, however, unaware of it.] It appears that the column that Barnard remembered came up more or less directly on the 95th's skirmishing line, to the British left and in rear of the Sand Pit. The course of Barnard's narrative is more or less confirmed by an undated memorandum of Captain and Brevet-Major Leach, who, however, corrects the number of companies with him in the Sand Pit to two. He also indicates that it was after the 95th as a body had retired on the 32nd that the French were driven off by the Division [i.e., the 8th Brigade's main line], and only then that the cavalry materialized [363-365].

The writers of the 32nd, not surprisingly, say nothing of use on the nature of the first French attack. They were at that time the most sheltered of the regiments in the brigade, and must have had no contact with the body of the column.

The 79th, in the center of the brigade must have a better view. A letter from the ranker A. Cruikshank, dated September 1839, says [361]

"When the 79th were deploying into line at the commencement of the Action (they having been previously in column) the Light Company, to which I then belonged, were ordered out and extended. On our reaching the hedge (or nearly so), where the Guns (I think Rogers's Brigade) [correct, JEK] were stationed, we passed through the Belgian Infantry, who were retiring [i.e., to the road, cf. section 3, JEK], and pushed down the slope in front of the hedge into the valley, where we were for some time engaged with the French skirmishers; but a strong Column of the Enemy appearing on the top of the opposite ridge immediately in our front [i.e., on the ridge where the French artillery was positioned, JEK], and a second Column was at that moment seen advancing along the valley to our left, which must have come in contact with the 28th Regiment, we were consequently obliged to retire, and joined the Regiment on its reaching the hedge, when a tremendous conflict ensued between our Line and the opposing Columns, which, it has been said, pushed themselves so far forward as to reach the hedge [along the road]; but I can positively assert that the French did not reach that point, if I except indeed some few of their sharpshooters which came up the hill with the Light Infantry, but were quickly driven back.

"At this time I saw, but certainly very imperfectly, a forward movement of the French Cavalry on our right, and some of the

Cuirassiers had actually reached the point of the hedge on the main road (and the scene was altogether extraordinary), but they were charged I think from the right of the road [i.e., by Somerset's 1st Cavalry Brigade], at, or about the same time that our Brigade charged down the slope, and completely routed the Enemy's Columns, when the Cavalry came up, and completed what had been so gloriously begun, by gallantly charging the flying Infantry and making a great number of prisoners.

"At the time the Dragoons [i.e., Ponsonby's 2nd Cavalry Brigade] passed the line to charge the Enemy's Columns as above, the 79th were in the act of re-forming on the French side of the hedge, but not in any unusual degree of disorder. ..."

Cruikshank's account is particularly clear in giving the relative order and position of the events transpiring, and checks in all respects with other testimony, e.g., with respect to the moves of the Dutch and of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, the terrain, etc. He clearly reports that two columns approached the front of the 8th Brigade, and that both were engaged before the 2nd Cavalry Brigade came up. Evidently, at least the column on the British right was defeated completely before either cavalry brigade materialized.

Our final testimony from Kempt's 8th Brigade is from the 28th, which held the extreme left of Kempt's line. Lieutenant J.W. Shelton says, in a letter of September 29, 1839 [349]:

"About half past one o'clock, the Enemy's Column, which I believe to have consisted of four Battalions, advanced nearly in front of the 79th, but rather to its left, and to the direct right of the 28th. Kempt's Brigade was then moved up to the hedge, gave a very steady volley into the Enemy's Column, and charged (after having crossed the hedge) while the Enemy, who were in great confusion, attempted a deployment to their right, but which they were unable to complete, and got into great irregular bodies.

"It was at this moment that the Heavy Brigade came up [i.e., Ponsonby's 2nd Brigade], when the 28th wheeled by subdivisions to its right and made way for the Dragoons, who passed through the intervals; but as the latter came up in most regular order, there was in some cases not room for a Troop to pass through, and I perfectly recollect a squadron of the Royals inclining considerably to its left to clear our left wing, which, after crossing the hedge, became separated from the right, and some way down the slope encountered a Column of the Enemy on its own left; but whether this was a reserve Column or a portion of the Division which was beaten at the hedge and re-formed again, I am unable distinctly to say. My impression is that it was some of the beaten Column, as the Dragoons passed on to engage a large reserve Column which was coming on, but still lower down the hill, leaving the left wing of the 28th closely engaged with the Column in its own immediate [front HTS].

"The Column which was charged by the Royals was broken, and the greater part of both taken prisoners.

"I do not recollect that the Dragoons charged the Column (it was a small one, apparently of not more than two Battalions) which the left wing of the 28th encountered after its separation from the right wing, but I distinctly saw them charge the heavy Reserve Column and break it."

Shelton's account can be supplemented with a letter from Ensign Mounsteven to Major Riach of the 79th, dated August 19th, 1839 [350-351].

"... we were moved up to the hedge, and on our reaching it found a French Column attempting to deploy at probably thirty or forty yards on the other side.

"In advacing in pursuit of them the wings of the Regiment separated, and I, carrying the King's Colour, went on with the right wing. When we had proceeded a little way we perceived through the smoke another body of troops in column immediately in our front, which we mistook for some Corps of the Allies, and many of the Officers (I amongst the rest) cried out to the men, 'Don't fire, they are Belgians.'

"... the Enemy [made] off with all speed in the direction of the French position.

"Immediately after this, ..., the Regiment was ordered to halt and re-form, and almost at the same instant, as well as I can recollect, I saw a Regiment of Dragoons charge a Column or Square - for which it was I really cannot tell - and instantly break it.

Figure 5.1.c 28th: Shelton

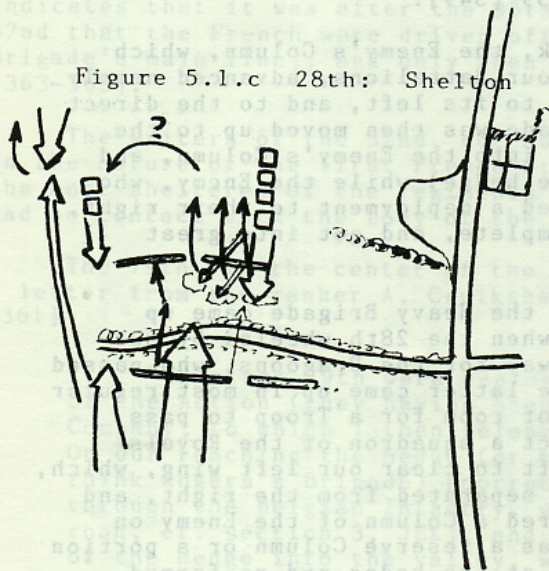
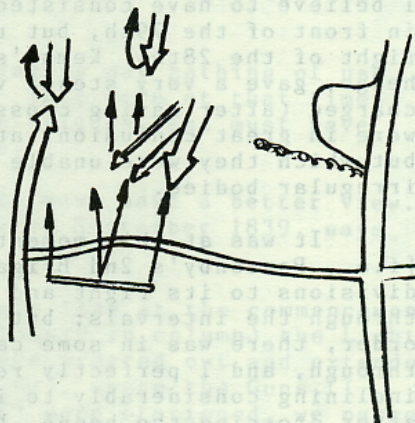


Figure 5.1.d 28th: Mounsteven

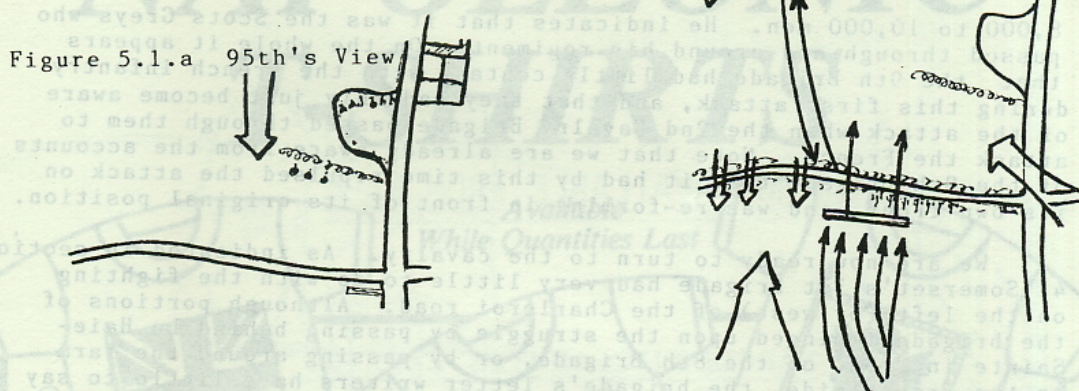


"I can well remember the intense anxiety we felt when we saw some of the gallant, but over-rash fellows, without stopping to form again, ride on headlong at what appeared to me an immensely strong Corps of support in perfect order, but which I do not see marked down in the Plan. On this Column they, of course, made no impression, but suffered some loss, although, as far as I could see, a fire was opened upon them from only a small portion of it."

While the accounts from the 28th certainly have some faults, such as the inclusion of information on the initial advance of the French, a detail which the ridge would have hidden from members of the 28th, they are extremely interesting, in depicting at least a regimental consensus that there were more than two columns on their front. Figure 5.1 depicts the arrangement described by Shelton and Mountsteven.

Figure 5.2.b 79th's View

Figure 5.1.a 95th's View



We can at least say, conservatively, that the 28th as a regiment experienced contact with two distinct French forces, one of which was opposite the juncture of the 28th and the 78th, to its right, and the other of which was opposite the left of the 28th. This latter force or column came up somewhat later than the former. In addition, the members of the 28th report encountering, or at least seeing, some supporting forces in rear of the first columns, one or two of which they saw attacked by British cavalry.

Let us now consider the letters of Pack's 9th Brigade, to the right of Kempt's troops. This brigade has very little to say, which is perhaps not surprising. Of 169 British officer casualties at Quatre Bras, this brigade suffered 78, or nearly half. On the morning of Waterloo, it had 4 field officers and 12 captains for four battalions [Siborne 1894:555; Wood 1904:448-449]. Two comments seem applicable. The first, from Captain and Brevet-Major R. MacDonald, of the 1st, written February 14, 1839, reads [374]:

"Respecting the grand attack of the 18th on Picton's Division when that General was killed, I am of opinion (but I did not refer to my watch) that it took place at an earlier hour than about two o'clock. The 3rd Battalion [3rd/1st was the battalion present] was in close column, and I, being Captain of the Light Infantry Company, was with it at my post in the rear, the Column being right in front, therefore could not distinctly see whether the Regiment was at all covered in its front; but I believe it was the Royal Dragoons and the Scotch Greys [*sic*, George Jeffrey!] who passed (I think) by the left of our Column to charge the French Infantry, which they did most gallantly, and on their return, with a large number of prisoners, we cheered them."

The second letter is from the 92nd, two regiments to the left, written by Lieutenant R. Winchester on November 24, 1834 [381-382]:

"... After this [the flight of Bijlandt's Brigade] the Enemy made several severe attacks on [Picton's] 5th Division. About two or three o'clock in the afternoon a Column between 3,000 to 4,000 men advanced to the hedge at the roadside which leads from the main road near La Haye Sainte [to] beyond the left of our position. ..."

In evaluating Winchester's account it is important to know that he has just before this reported that Bijlandt's Brigade contained from

8,000 to 10,000 men. He indicates that it was the Scots Greys who passed through and around his regiment. On the whole it appears that the 9th Brigade had little contact with the French infantry during this first attack, and that they had only just become aware of the attack when the 2nd Cavalry Brigade passed through them to attack the French. Note that we are already aware from the accounts of the 8th Brigade that it had by this time repulsed the attack on its own front, and was re-forming in front of its original position.

We are now ready to turn to the cavalry. As indicated in section 4, Somerset's 1st Brigade had very little to do with the fighting on the left (or west) of the Charleroi road. Although portions of the brigade impinged upon the struggle by passing behind La Haie-Sainte in front of the 8th Brigade, or by passing around the farm on the French side, the brigade's letter writers have little to say of the French infantry attack. What little they do say is best summed up by Lieutenant S. Waymouth, who wrote Siborne November 18, 1834 to say [44]:

"My ignorance of the tracks of the French Columns, and the little I know of the formations of our own Army, are chiefly owing to the circumstance of our being posted in such low ground that the view of the Enemy was intercepted by the high ridge of La Haie Sainte."

This statement is the more significant coming from a man who also indicates that he commanded the left half-squadron of the left squadron of the 2nd Life Guards [the leftmost regiment in the brigade] [43]. What is useful in the 1st Brigade's accounts is that they confirm the report of Cruikshank of the 79th [8th Brigade, see above] that some of the 2nd Brigade passed behind La Haie-Sainte. In addition, Waymouth informs us that he saw the 2nd Brigade advancing at the same time he advanced, so that we can synchronize the advance of the two cavalry brigades, considering them to have begun at roughly the same time.

Considerably more information is available from Ponsonby's 2nd Brigade's letters. We begin with an extract from one by Major Sir De Lacey Evans, Extra ADC to Sir William Ponsonby. Writing September 1, 1839, he says [61-62]:

"You have placed the Inniskillings in your plan in advance of the Royals and Greys. I incline to think the three Regiments charged nearly in line. I myself was with the right of the line, ...

"The Brigade was in a hollow in order to screen them from cannon fire before the charge. As the Enemy advanced up to the crest of the position on their side, the Heavy Brigade [Ponsonby's] was also moved up on ours. Our Brigade came up to 100 yards in rear of the little sunken road and hedge. I communicated the order for this movement myself. We waited for a few minutes till the head of the Enemy's Column had just crossed the sunken road - as I understood - to allow our Infantry to pass round the flanks of Squadrons, and also that the Enemy should be a little deranged in passing the road, instead of our being so, had we charged across the road.

"The Enemy's Column, near which I was, on arriving at the crest of the position seemed very helpless, had very little fire to give from its front or flanks, was incapable of deploying, must have already lost many of its Officers in coming up, was fired into, close, with impunity, by stragglers of our Infantry

Figure 5.2.a DeLacey Evans

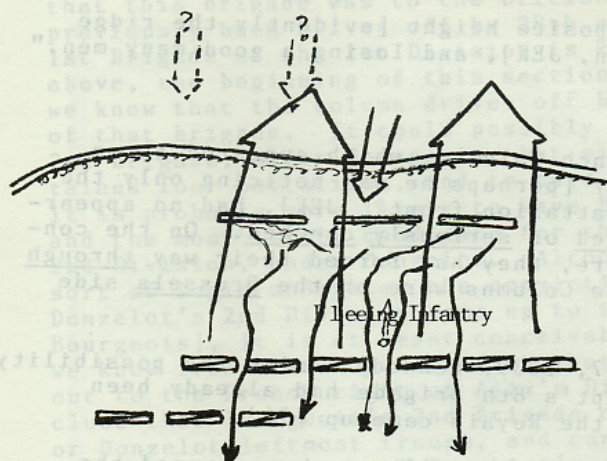
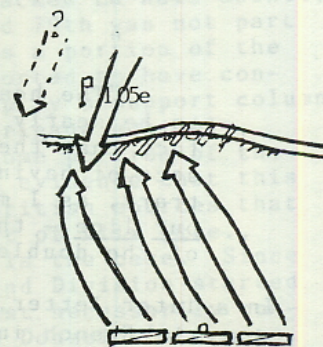


Figure 5.2.b Royals



who remained behind. As we approached at a moderate pace the front and flanks began to turn their backs inwards; the rear of the Columns [sic] had already begun to run away. The Brigade you speak of under Sir T. Picton (and afterwards Sir J. Kempt) were successful, as your letter states, but the Infantry in our front had, I think, been obliged to yield. At all events it passed around our flanks [perhaps Bijlandt's troops?].

"...

"...We ascended the first ridge occupied by the Enemy, and passed several French cannon, on our right hand towards the road, abandoned [on, HTS] our approach by the gunners, and there were some French squares of Infantry in rear."

It is evident that Sir De Lacey was aware of at least one column, and perhaps several. What is interesting is that he fairly clearly indicates that there were some formed French units in rear of the French artillery. Unless he is speaking of a distant view of the comte de Lobau's VIth Corps, or has become confused, these units can only have been a portion of d'Erlon's Ist Corps, left behind in reserve from the very beginning of the attack.

We will consider the letters of the regimental officers by regiments in order from the right, as before. The first extract is from Captain A.K. Clark Kennedy, of the Royal Dragoons. [This is the man who took the Eagle of the 105e de ligne.] He made a number of lengthy contributions to Siborne's research. In a memorandum dated, coincidentally, June 18, 1838, he reports the following [70-72]:

"... The Infantry that, I presume, had previously lined the hedges, were wheeled by Sections to their left, and were firing on the left flank of the French Column, the head of which had at this time passed both hedges unchecked, as far as I could perceive, and were advancing rapidly. From the nature of the ground we did not see each other until we were very close, perhaps 80 or 90 yards. The head of the Column appeared to be seized with a panic, gave us a fire which brought down about twenty men, went instantly about and endeavored to regain the opposite side of the hedges; ...

"We continued to press on, and went a little further than we ought to have done, perhaps, getting under the fire of fresh

troops stationed on the opposite height [evidently the ridge with the artillery position, JEK], and losing a good many men."

"...

"The heads of the French Columns, which appeared to me to be nearly close together [perhaps he was noticing only the fact that they were on a battalion front? JEK], had no appearance of having been repulsed or seriously checked. On the contrary, as I mentioned before, they had forced their way through our line - the heads of the Columns were on the Brussels side of the double hedge. ..."

In a later letter, dated July 27, 1839, Kennedy admits the possibility that the French in front of Kempt's 8th Brigade had already been defeated by the brigade before the Royals came up [76].

As indicated above, Kennedy was the officer who captured the Eagle of the 105e. His account of this is in his letter of July 14, 1839 [75]:

"I did not see the Eagle and Colour (for there were two Colours, but only one with an Eagle) until we had been probably five or six minutes engaged. It must, I should think, have been originally about the centre of the Column, and got uncovered from the change of direction [the retreat]. When I first saw it, it was perhaps about 40 yards to my left and a little in my front. The Officer who carried it and his companions were moving in the direction O [evidently indicated on a sketch not included in Letters], with their backs toward me, and endeavoring to force their way into the crowd."

Note that Kennedy commanded the center squadron [Letters, 69]. Since he states that the right squadron outflanked the column, and "the centre one (which I commanded) also did to a certain degree" [71], we can deduce that the column from which he took the Eagle was the one that was encountered by the left wing of the 28th and the Royals together, or the second column behind that one, at worst, and that he came in on the Eagle from the British right of the column. Because the Eagle was that of the 105e de ligne, belonging to Bourgeois's 2nd Brigade, Alix's 1st Division, we can deduce, in turn,

Figure 5.2.c Inniskillings

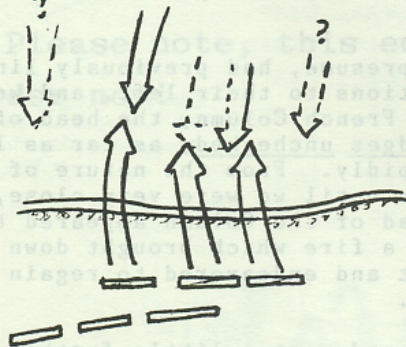
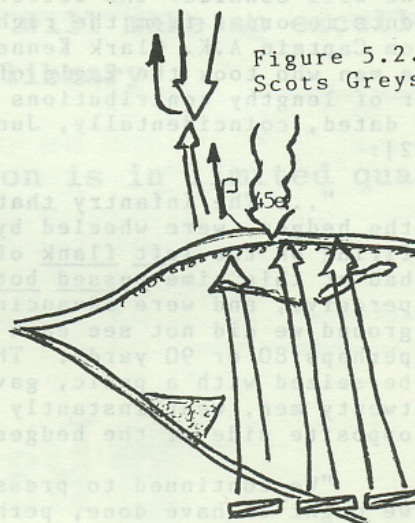


Figure 5.2.d Scots Greys



that this brigade was to the British left of the column that had previously been driven off by 28th and 79th. However, since the 1st Brigade of the 1st Division is known from French sources [see above, the beginning of this section] to have attacked La Haie-Sainte, we know that the column driven off by the 28th and 79th was not part of that brigade. It could possibly be regarded as a portion of the 2nd Brigade, under Bourgeois, but since it is reported to have contained four battalions, and to have been backed up by a support column, it is probably more likely to have been another brigade entirely, and the most likely candidate for this would be some portion of the 2nd Division, under Donzelot. Although I have no evidence that this sort of logic underlies the conviction in early British sources that Donzelot's 2nd Division came up to the French left of Alix [i.e., Bourgeois], it is at least conceivable that such is the case. Since we know from French authorities that Donzelot's 2nd Division started out to the French right of Alix's Division, we must necessarily conclude that Bourgeois's 2nd Brigade crossed behind Donzelot's troops, or Donzelot's leftmost troops, and came up either Donzelot's right, or actually between two of Donzelot's columns, presumably two brigade strength columns.

There are two witnesses for the Inniskillings. Lieutenant-Colonel and Colonel Joseph Muter reports in a letter of June 17, 1839 that [85-86]:

"The Inniskillings came in contact with the French Columns of Infantry almost immediately after clearing the hedge and (I should call it) chemin creux [sunken road]. We all agree in thinking that the French Columns had nearly gained the crest - perhaps twenty or thirty yards down the slope. We think there were three French Columns.

"...

"The right and centre Squadrons of the Inniskillings certainly came in contact with a French Column. The left Squadron may have had to bring up its left shoulders to come on the flank of the Column, but I rather think the French Column extended as far as our left."

Major and Brevet-Lieutenant-Colonel F.S. Miller commanded the left squadron of the Inniskillings. In a letter of June 18, 1839 to Muter, forwarded to Siborne, he makes the following statement [89-90]:

"You may remember that when we advanced, and the men began to fall from the fire of the Artillery, we dismounted and marched up the hill on foot, and on reaching the top we mounted, and I then perceived the enemy's close Columns advancing near the hedge.

"... From our scattered state in getting over the hedge, I do not conceive we should have made any impression on our opposing Column had they not been inclined to retire, and had they reached the hedge, we could have done nothing with them.

"So you will perceive it was at the top of the hill that my Squadron came in contact. They were in square when I first saw them. I saw no skirmishers. The Square fired at us very irregularly, after we got over the hedge. ...

"My Squadron certainly completely broke one Column, and I always understood, took a number of prisoners, ...

"[P.S.] ... I conceive there were three or more Columns or Squares charged by the Brigade, one by my Squadron, supported by the Greys."

The general import of Muter and Miller's letters is that there were three columns visible to their regiment, perhaps including one on either flank of their field of view, and one in the center, opposite them. Muter indicates that the column or columns were rather wide, wide enough, perhaps, to offer a front against several squadrons or portions of squadrons. Very significantly, Muter and Miller agree fully that they only encountered the enemy on the far side of the hedges. This is in contrast with the experience of the Royals, but agrees with that of the Greys [see below]. It should be noted that it is rather clear from the Letters, and even in the extracts above, that Muter and Miller compared notes extensively, over the years and at the time of the extracted letters. Consequently, their report is probably to be seen as a joint one, the result of much regimental discussion. This is probably true to a great extent of all of the accounts in the Letters.

The experience of the Greys, on the extreme left of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, is given by Lieutenant C. Wyndham, in a letter of April or May 13, 1839 [78]:

"I cannot have a doubt but what it was a Column on the other side the hedge in irregular order trying to arrive at the hedge to command us, after the Highlanders [probably 92nd and 42nd] had fallen back a little; there must have been a strong body of French opposed to this Brigade, or why did they fall back? I can recollect the circumstance by having got my first wound a few yards the other side of the hedge. We sabred a good many going down the hill; it is possible that I may not be correct with regard to the distance from one Column to the other of the French, but I know it was not many minutes afterwards going into the second Square or Column I got shot through the foot and disabled.

"... The prisoners I have mentioned which were taken came from both Columns from the hedge onwards."

Wyndham supplements his first report with a memorandum accompanying a later letter, of March 14, [1839? HTS] [81-82]:

"In descending the hill, about three or four hundred yards from the hedge, the Greys came in contact with a 2nd French Column or Square, regularly formed, the fire from which they received [and which, HTS] did great execution. The loss at this moment in men and horses was most severe. This Column was nearly destroyed, and the remainder of it were taken prisoners.

"The Eagle was taken from the leading French Column by the Greys, and sent to Brussels. [This was the Eagle of the 45e de ligne, Martin's regiment, in Grenier's 2nd Brigade, of Marcognet's 3rd Division. JEK]"

From the circumstance that the Greys took an Eagle from the 45e, it is evident that they contacted Marcognet's 3rd Division. The report of Wyndham is quite clear that the Division was found on the far side of the edges, and that it was made up of both (1) a leading column, containing the 45e, and particularly its 1st battalion, which would have had the Eagle, and (2) a secondary column, at some distance in the rear. It is, of course, suppositional that the second

was part of the same Division, but the conclusion is a plausible one.

The length of the testimony of the 2nd Brigade, and its complexity, convince me to supply a summary, in the form of figure 5.2. The general import of the brigade's testimony is that each regiment faced at least one, sometimes two or three columns, and that the additional columns in most cases were some distance further down hill. Since the total number of columns needed to explain the eyewitness reports of this brigade is in excess of the number of French Divisions thought to be opposite them, it is a logical conclusion that the Divisions were actually subdivided at the time of contact into a greater number of columns. From the fact that the extra columns were often downslope, we can guess that they were support forces, made up of the rear regiments or brigades of the upslope columns.

6. Suppositions Regarding the Order of the French Regiments

Before attempting to make further sense of the British eyewitnesses' accounts of the French columns, let us consider the issue of the order of the French regiments in these columns. It was stated in section 2 that a column consists of identically formed, similarly sized units, one behind another. In the case of d'Erlon's columns we have French testimony that the identical formations were deployed lines, and that the unit size was the battalion [see figure 2.1]. Thus, each column consisted of a series of deployed battalion lines, one behind another. In the conventions of the time, we would expect the order of battalions in a column, front to back, to be the same as the order of the battalions from flank to flank in a completely deployed Division, a Division with all its battalions deployed side by side. There are obviously two alternatives, namely that the right end of the hypothetical Divisional line can appear at the front of the column, and the left at the rear, or the inverse. The former alternative is called right in front; the latter, left in front. The order of the battalion in the column then was probably not random, but a reflection of what their order would have been in line.

One might expect that the only way in which to determine the order of battalions in a line or in a column formed from the line would be to have eyewitness reports on the order, and, in principle this is true. However, it turns out that armies of the Napoleonic Era had a strong tendency to order units in line according to a principle of seniority inherited from 18th Century armies. The basic principle was that the order from right to left in the line must be the order of decreasing seniority. The left flank, though, was nearly as honorable a post as the right flank, and it was common to alter the order of the units slightly, in order to put a senior unit on the left of the line. This was either the second most senior unit (the most senior being on the right), or, if there was some reason for keeping certain units together on the left, the most senior of those units being kept together. For example, if the line was a brigade made up of two regiments of two battalions each - call them the 1st and the 2nd regiments, with their 1st and 2nd battalions present - then the 1st regiment would ordinarily be together on the right, and the 2nd regiment together on the left, but the 1st battalions, being senior within the regiment to the 2nd battalions, might be on the extreme flanks of the line, with the 2nd battalions between them.

Weak illustrations of this principle of seniority ordering at work can be found in figure 4.1 or 4.2, the diagrams of the British

deployments to the left of the Charleroi road. In the first place, the 1st Cavalry Brigade is to the right of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, and the 8th Infantry Brigade is to the right of the 9th. Within each brigade, the orders are also largely by seniority, with the most senior regiment on the right, the next most senior on the left, and the remainder in descending order in the center, right to left. There are various exceptions to this. The Blues, for example, are the third most senior regiment in the 1st Cavalry Brigade, and ought to be between the 1st Life Guards and the 1st Dragoon Guards, but have been pulled out of line as a reserve instead. Similarly, the 95th Rifles are out of line in the 8th Infantry Brigade, because they are being used as outpost troops. The most serious exception is the one which exchange the 42nd and 44th in the 9th Brigade, over the order to be expected by seniority. I am not sure, but I am inclined to suspect that the explanation for this peculiarity is that the 42nd was decimated at Quatre Bras, and the 44th escaped relatively unscathed. According to the morning state for the 18th, the 42nd had 220 rank and file in the hospital, and only one officer above the rank of lieutenant present, while the 44th had 32 rank and file in the hospital, and 6 officers present above the rank of lieutenant [Wood 1902:449]. It is also true that the 8th Brigade is in an inverted order, with its most senior regiment on the left, and next most senior on the right.

One possible explanation for the inverted order of the 8th Brigade is that it was opportunistically deployed in inverse order during the deployment by Wellington of his army. Another is offered in passing by Sir William Gomm, Assistant Quarter-Master General to the 5th Division, which contained the 8th Brigade [Letters:28-29]:

"You are aware that at Quatre Bras our 8th Brigade was posted on the left [out of order, JEK] (arriving first on the ground), and the 9th Brigade on the right. At Waterloo this was reversed, the 8th Brigade had its appui upon the road to the right, and the 9th upon the wooded knoll to the left, or thereabouts.

"I think the order of the Regiments is correctly noted in your enclosed sketch, No. 1; there was no reason why they should not stand as in parade order.

"The 95th then (as Light Troops) would be on the right of the 8th Brigade (and so they were, in advance of it), and the 28th on its left. This agrees with my report of the Enemy's right and centre Columns, excepting as regards the position of the 44th."

Note that Gomm implicitly verifies my description above of the conventions of ordering regiments by seniority; indicates that at least this order was not uncommonly adopted; and notices two of the discrepancies I have noted, one of which, the apparent inversion of the 8th Brigade, he attempts to explain away, by claiming that the 95th was effectively the senior unit in the brigade.

For the French 1st Corps, I lack any statement of the order of the regiments in the Divisions as deployed. Note, however, that the Divisions are in inverted order, running from most senior (1st) to least senior (4th), but from left to right, not from right to left, as would be expected. Since we know that the attack was ordered to commence with the left, we might conceive that the several Divisions advanced left-in-front, too consistent with the fact that the Corps as a whole was left-in-front, at least nominally. In this

event, we would expect the second brigades (the least senior) to be at the front of the Divisional columns, with the first brigades following. Within each brigade, the junior (highest numbered) regiment would lead, followed by the senior regiment (lowest numbered). Within regiments, it is likely that the senior battalion (lowest numbered) would be outermost. For example, we would expect the order in the 1st Division, front to rear in the column, to be 2nd Brigade (in the order 1er/105e, 2e/105e, 2e/28e, 1er/28e), then 1st Brigade (in the order 1er/55e, 2e/55e, 2e/54e, 1er/54e). The equivalent order in the 3rd Division would have been 2nd Brigade (1er/45e, 2e/45e, 2e/25e, 1er/25e), then 1st Brigade (1er/46e, 2e/46e, 2e/21e, 1er/21e).

While the orders given above are purely suppositional, they do have one intriguing feature, namely that the leading battalions of the two Divisions, the 1er/105e in the 1st Division, and the 1er/45e in the 3rd Division, are precisely the battalions to have lost Eagles, since Eagles were carried by the senior battalion, and the Eagles lost by d'Erlon's 1st Corps were those of the 45e and 105e. It involves an enormous leap of faith from this single fact to an assumption that my hypothesis of the order of the regiments in d'Erlon's Corps is correct, but, in the absence of more detailed information on the ordering of the French regiments, I will tentatively adopt this assumption, with apologies to those who are justifiably skeptical of my methodology.

We have one other piece of data which we can compare with this hypothesis, namely the report that Durutte's 4th Division employed the 85e as a reserve or support [see the beginning of section 5]. If Durutte's 4th Division were formed as a single, left-in-front column, then the 85e would be the second regiment in the column, because it was the senior regiment in the junior brigade, i.e., senior to the 95e in the 2nd Brigade. This would be an awkward position for a unit to be detached from as a reserve, and I must admit that my hypothesis only works if it assumed that Durutte had divided his Division into two brigade strength columns by the point that he detached a reserve in the form of the 85e. This is definitely not attested in material to which I have access.

7. A Tentative New Hypothesis Concerning the Formation of d'Erlon's Attack

I am now in a position to offer an alternative to the accepted modern account of d'Erlon's formations in his attack. I offer this as nothing more than a hypothesis, in full awareness of the fact that it is an over elaborate construction for the data employed, and suffers from the defect of depending on the no doubt clouded memories of those who were at the receiving end of the attack, not those who delivered it. While I am not aware that Frnace ever had any equivalent to William Siborne with respect to its own participation in Waterloo, I am certain that an examination of memoirs published by French participants would be a profitable experience, and, if I am to continue maintaining a hypothesis such as the one which follows, a necessary experience as well.

I assume, to begin with, that d'Erlon's four Divisions were first arrayed in the four massive columns of the standard modern view. There is certainly no reason to doubt the testimony of Charras and Houssaye on this, at least not without an examination of the sources which these two adduce. I assume, moreover, that the order of the battalions in these columns was that proposed in section 6. The justification for the selection of the formation is not entirely

clear to me, but I assume that d'Erlon wished to combine an attack by deployed battalions with the advantages accruing to columns for traffic control purposes. That is, he wanted to have the lead battalion in line for any firefights or melees that developed, but he wanted each Division to be easy to lead forward. This, in fact, is one of the principal advantages of a column. One man can lead it, by virtue of leading the single unit at the front. The remaining units learn what they are expected to do by following the example of the unit to their immediate front. This eliminates problems with alignments and message carrying. I might add that this is not the only advantage of columns in general, and that certain specific types of columns have additional advantages particular to themselves, such as rapid deployment or square-formation, two advantages which d'Erlon's chosen formations pre-eminently did not have.

I doubt, however, that d'Erlon expected his Divisions to remain in these massive columns either during the advance, or at the moment of contact. He simply packed the deployed battalions in close order one behind another because there was no room to do otherwise within the space assigned to his Corps, and because this would ensure that all of the battalions would step off at once. What he did expect of his Divisions is that they would keep their battalions deployed, and, perhaps, that the two or three battalions in a single regiment would stay closed up on each other, in order to create a physically imposing mass and encourage the front ranks. Aside from this, he expected that the columns would open out into echelons of regiments or at least brigades, trailing away to the right rear, as they advanced.

In the event, the flanking Divisions also detached brigades, probably the rear ones, to attack Allied strong points on the flanks of the attack, namely La Haie-Sainte and Papelotte. These two attacks are attested, and we know that it was the 1st Brigade of the 1st Division that attacked La Haie-Sainte, on the left flank of the attack. This is the brigade which I hypothesize would have been at the rear of the 1st Division, and I would suggest that it was simply dropped off, and its commander told to keep the farm's defenders busy while the rest of the Corps carried the main position. The commander of this brigade, we know, held back one battalion as a reserve, and threw the remaining three against the farm. The leading, or 2nd Brigade, meanwhile, kept on toward the main line. It may, however, have held up for a time.

My evidence for this is quite indirect, consisting of a statement by van L8ben-Sels [1849:329]:

"As to the mode of execution of this attack, we have followed the French version, for it seems to us more in conformity with the truth. Many reports of a German origin describe the course of events as if the column of the left, intended to attack La Haie-Sainte, was held back, that the one to follow it was advanced, and, having received a vigorous fire from the farm, threw itself upon Bijlandt's Brigade. But these same reports nevertheless allude to the capture of the Eagle of the 105e, which was part of Allix's [1st] Division, commanded by General Guyot(6); we must then admit some other organization for the 1st Corps than that which actually existed. For this Division [the following one?], should not have formed the left of the Corps, a fact, however, which all of the reports agree upon. It is sufficiently asserted that the intention of the Emperor was to advance upon the enemy line, with the left [Division] leading, and one cannot imagine any reason why there should have been any divergence from the original order. That this first column should recoil before La Haie-Sainte is