

BIJLANDT'S BRIGADE DURING THE MORNING

Dawn and early morning

It was still raining in the morning of 18 June, when the troops awoke after a terrible night, if they had been able to take some sleep at all. Since the previous evening the troops had been positioned about 60 metres in front of the hollow road, with a further skirmish screen ahead. Captain Van Bronkhorst of the 7th Militia wrote: "The night of 17 on 18 was very awful. The rain poured. We were up to our calves in mud and water – it was limeground – the fires went out, we were exhausted by hunger."¹ Lieutenant-Colonel De Jongh, commanding the 8th Militia had similar experiences: "From the 17th in the afternoon until the morning of the 18th at 10 o'clock, continuous heavy rain; those days, being the 17th and 18th no food, straw or fuel received."² It is the brigade's commander Major-General Bijlandt himself, who shortly described the position in front of the hollow road: "The right wing of my Brigade at Waterloo was leaning against the chaussee."³

After Constant-Rebecque had taken breakfast around 2.30 a.m. and left from Le Chenois, a tiny hamlet where he had spent the night in a small house together with the Prince of Orange, and after inspecting Chassé's positions at Braine la Leud, road behind the main line of troops to end up with Bijlandt's brigade: "I continued along the position in front of Merbebraine, and on to Mont-Saint-Jean and arrived with the 2nd Netherlands division, where one was busy preparing meals for the troops and the munitions. The Prince rejoined me here. The enemy appeared to make no movement in front of us; the rain was continuous. Having understood that the road from Brussels was still very much blocked so that our munition could not arrive at us, I sent Major van Gorcum by order of the Prince, giving him the commission to take an officer and 30 men of our cavalry, to clear the road.... The Prince was then occupied with the positioning of our artillery, and gave them some instructions. The expected cartridges for the 2nd division didn't arrive, I went myself around 8 o'clock to Waterloo, to inform on the measures taken by Major van Gorcum to deblock the road, and found him giving instructions to the cavalry officer and the pioneers charged with these measures. I found my horses at the

¹ Letter dated Péronne 9 July 1815. Published in: *Ons leger*, June 1983, p. 32-38. From here on in this study referred to as Bronkhorst, 9 July 1815.

In various studies on the battle of Waterloo it is mentioned that the battlefield was covered with fog during the morning, but given the fact that it rained very hard it is almost impossible that this was in combination with fog.

² Jongh, W.A. de. *Veldtocht van den jare 1815, historisch verhaal*. Published in: *Nieuwe Militaire Spectator*, No. 1 Vol. 20, 1866. Furthermore in this study referred to as Jongh, Veldtocht.

³ Stads- en Streek archief Zutphen; collection Ernst van Löben Sels. Furthermore referred to in this study as Zutphen, Van Löben Sels.

Bijlandt's letter is one of the examples for Netherlands officers describing the brigade's position at Waterloo, without making any clear distinction between the position in front or behind the hollow road. It is only through careful and comparative investigation of the primary sources, that such subtleties have been made here in this study. Above all, the few sources that date immediately from 1815 are those of De Jongh, Van Bronkhorst, Van Zuylen van Nyevelt and Perponcher.

inn of Waterloo and took a fresh horse (the black mount) and returned to the position, where around 9 o'clock there still was no movement.”⁴



The forward slope of the Ohain road. Photo collection author.

The Prince must have left a little later that morning from Le Chenois and although it is unknown where he was as until his chief of staff arrived, he had also joined the troops of General-Major Bijlandt.

While Constant-Rebecque had left to Waterloo, the Prince of Orange remained with the men of the 2nd Division and together they enjoyed breakfast. On this soldier Rem, 7th Militia, tells the following: “Towards nine o'clock in the morning, the prince spoke to us: *“keep courage, young men! He said. The night has been rough and cold, I will take care you will receive flesh, bread and drinkingwater.”* And he kept his word, because we were soon resupplied.

“Young men, he continued, it will be tough the coming day.” [...] The bread and drinkingwater revitalised us, and saved the life of more than one of us, who had been numbed with the cold and dampness. We have also cooked the meat. I even went away to search for a bunch of branches in order to cook, and I saw that the Prince, just like us, pulling through. He

⁴ National Archive, The Hague. 2.21.008.01 Family archive Constant-Rebecque; diaries Jean Victor Baron de Constant-Rebecque; inventory nr. 25. Diaries October 1813 – July 1817. From here on in this study referred to as NA, 2.21.008.01; 25.

As the Netherlands heavy cavalry brigade were positioned in front of the hamlet Mont-Saint-Jean, it might well be that Constant-Rebecque meant that the road was blocked between that place and the main battle line. The artillery reserve park of Wellington's army was positioned behind the hamlet, including the Netherlands caissons which also held ammunition for the infantry.

sat on the same ground as us to eat, he was hungry just as us [...]. A soldier likes it when his superior shares the same fate as he does.”⁵

Van Bronkhorst continued his account: “There we stood, the eighteenth, as soon as it was possible to lit the fires, we began making soup. The entire army needed that and our generals would have to have compelling reasons to deploy us into line, before we could have taken the necessary food to us.”⁶ This is corroborated by another soldier in the 7th Militia, Allebrandi: “... the expanding dawn – that of the unforgettable and decisive 18 June – smiled upon us; the sky cleared and promised a beautiful day; we felt our strength, our courage and our faith revive, and prepared everything for the coming battle with a cheerful hart.”⁷

The chief of staff of the 2nd Netherlands Division, Colonel Van Zuylen van Nyevelt, reported how the troops prepared themselves for the battle: “The missing cartridges and flints were replenished and the weapons made to function.”⁸ Soldier Rem mentions this as well, before any food was consumed: “Patrols were made here and there, and the weapons were tested, which for the most part didn’t function due to the rain that had fallen and had soaked everything.”⁹

After the men had their meals, the French army showed some activity, as Van Zuylen van Nyevelt mentioned: “With the arrival of dawn one comes under arms and spots some enemy flankers on the heights lying in front of us; beyond that one sees almost no other troops; during the night also only a few fires were seen because of the heavy rain or, because the enemy had left the bulk of his troops in the environment of Genappe.”¹⁰ Captain Van Bronkhorst advanced his company in the morning, most likely to relieve the skirmishers posted either during the previous evening or night: “With my company I was deployed in skirmishformation to observe the enemy. Around 7 or 8 o’clock I noticed some movement. Enemy skirmishers threw themselves towards a small thicket on my left. I reported about this. These were only the preliminaries of a movement that the French had to execute, as we later learned.”¹¹ What thicket of wood Van Bronkhorst referred to is unknown, as in the immediate

⁵ Rem, J. Aanteekeningen van een veteraan. Purmerend, 1863. Futhermore in this study referred to as Rem, Aanteekeningen.

⁶ Bronkhorst, 9 July 1815.

There is a general misunderstanding in the Dutch historiography that the troops were without food because the civilian contractor(s) went bankrupt at this time. It is obvious that this was not the case, but instead their situation was caused by the still chaotic scenes behind the main battle line, as many carts and wagons still blocked the roads.

⁷ Allebrandi, S. Herinneringen uit mijne tienjarige militaire loopbaan. Amsterdam, 1835.

From here on in this study referred to as Allebrandi, Herinneringen.

⁸ National Archive, The Hague. 2.13.14.01. Archive of the fieldcampaigns. Quartermaster-General de Constant-Rebecque, 1814-1816. Inventory nr. 8. Letters received by Constant-Rebecque April 1814 – January 1816. From here on in this study referred to as NA, 2.13.14.01; 8. The title of Van Zuylen van Nyevelt’s reports was “Historiek der 2^e Divisie” and is amongst the quatermaster’s papers.

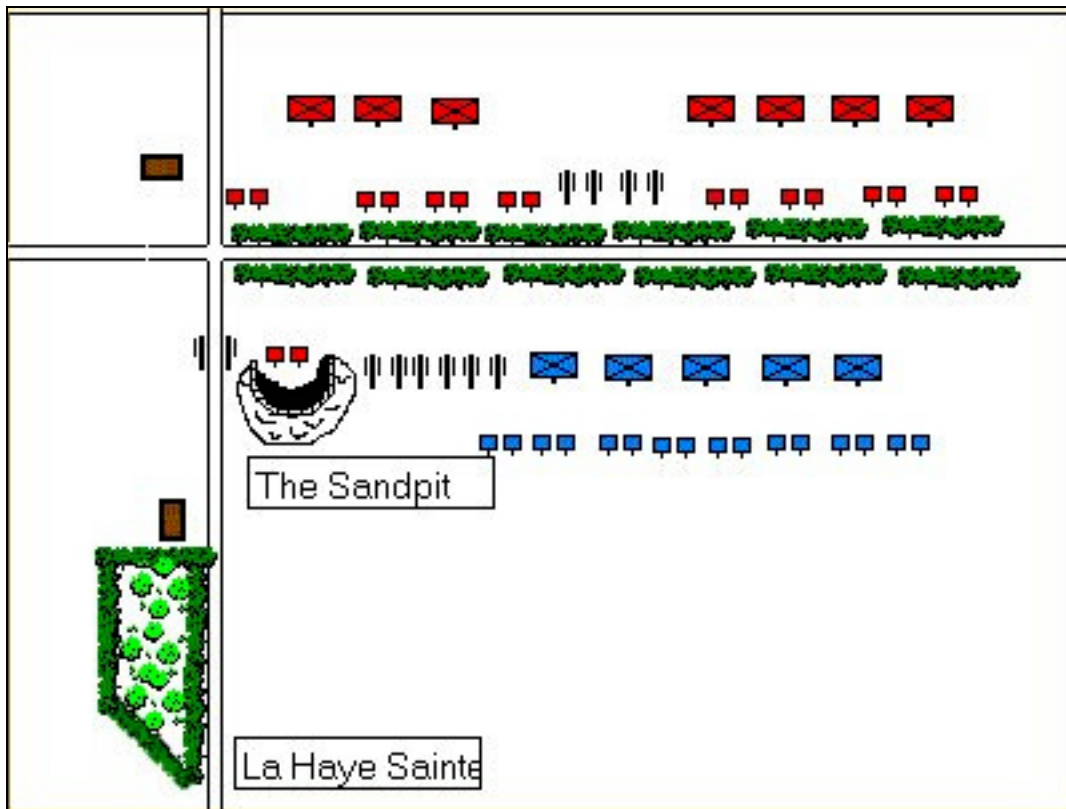
The chronology within both Van Zuylen van Nyevelt’s and Rem’s account present a problem with munitions being replenished *before* breakfast was taken, as Constant-Rebecque at that time took care of making free the road from Waterloo so that this could actually happen. Perhaps there was still some ammunition available to the 2nd Division after the fighting at Quatre-Bras.

⁹ Rem, Aanteekeningen.

¹⁰ NA, 2.13.14.01; 8.

¹¹ Bronkhorst, 9 July 1815.

front of his skirmish line there were no such objects, when one studies the maps of that time. Perhaps he meant the wooded areas towards Papelotte.



Schematic map of Bijlandt's brigade in front of the hollow road with skirmishers in front, aligned with the 95th Rifle companies in the Sandpit, while Picton's division is placed in two lines behind behind the hollow road, skirmishers in front and Rogers battery inbetween the two brigades of Kempt and Pack (based on Netherlands accounts and that of Captain Kincaid).

After nine o'clock in the morning Constant-Rebecque left the 2nd Division, where regarding the enemy he remarked: "...there is still no movement. I rejoined the Prince and the Duke; the last was surrounded by a number staff officers, and saw he was accompanied by commissioners of the allied powers, attached to his headquarters. We went with him along the line to reconnoitre the position, and descended to the Hougomont farm..."¹² The presence of Wellington behind Picton's 5th British Division is also corroborated by an officer in Picton's division, who wrote the following on this matter: "About ten o'clock the Duke of Wellington, followed by a large Staff, passed along the line, and was cheered with loud huzzahs. [...] About half an hour afterwards we got the word, "*Stand to your arms.*" I went with some officers to the brow of the slope, where we had an excellent view of the whole valley, and we could see distinctly our own videttes, far away in front, prancing about, and on that moment on the very ground chosen by our adversary on which to fight us."¹³

¹² NA, 2.21.008.01; 25.

Among these foreign commissioners Major-General Van Reede was present, who sent some short notes this day to the Secretary of State Van der Capellen, to keep him informed about the events during the battle. These will be dealt with in the following chapter of Bijlandt's involvement of D'Erlon's attack in this study.

¹³ Operations of the fifth or Picton's division in the campaign of Waterloo, by an officer of

Between 9 and 10 o'clock nothing else happened for Bijlandt's troops, but during this hour Wellington must have taken a final decision on the positioning of his troops and who were to command these during the battle that would now surely commence this day. From his position at the right centre, behind the Guards division of General Cooke and the Württembergers, the Duke must have sent a courier to the Prince of Orange, as Constant-Rebecque told: "Towards 10 o'clock the Prince told me that the duke had ordered, that the 3rd Division would be under the orders of General Hill this day. The 2nd division under the orders of General Picton, and all cavalry under the orders of lord Uxbridge."¹⁴

It cannot have taken very long before all subordinate commanders were informed of this and ordered their troop to take their positions in the battle line, as is described by Captain Kincaid in the 95th Rifles: "About ten o'clock an unusual bustle was observable among the staff-officers, and we soon after received an order to stand to our arms. The troops who had been stationed in our front during the night were then moved off to the right, and our division took up its fighting position."¹⁵ Kincaid clearly corroborates that all troops that had been positioned in front of the main line were now taken back, which means that shortly after 10 a.m. Bijlant's brigade was also repositioned.

Bijlandt's brigade repositions behind the hollow road

It still is uncertain who actually ordered the repositioning, but at least the initiative must have come from Wellington himself after he had divided the commands of both his wings and center around 10 a.m. It may well have been Constant-Rebecque himself who brought the order to General Perponcher, as he rode out to do so, and it is therefore that Perponcher may have *assumed* it was the Prince himself who ordered Bijlandt's brigade to reposition. Perponcher later himself reported his vision of the event: "On the 18th Your Royal Highness having replaced the Division, I will refrain from repeating the positions of the troops."¹⁶

This repositioning was also observed by Corporal Dickson of the Scotts Greys, who according to his own account that morning was "... sent forward to picket near the road [...] to observe

the division. Published in: United Service Journal (1841), part II, p.170-203

¹⁴ NA, 2.21.008.01; 25.

¹⁵ Adventures in the Rifle Brigade. John Kincaid; London, 1997.

Kincaid described how Picton's division had been positioned behind the hollow road prior to them being joined by the Netherlands troops and thus partly making place for them: "Our battalion stood on what was considered the left centre of the position. We had our right resting on the Namur road, about a hundred yards in rear of the farmhouse of La Haye Sainte, and our left extending behind a broken hedge which ran along the ridge to the left. Immediately in our front, and divided from La Haye Sainte only by the great road, stood a small knoll with a sand-hole in its farthest side, which we occupied as an advanced post with three companies. The remainder of the division was formed in two lines; the first, consisting chiefly of light troops, behind the hedge, in continuation from the left of our battalion reserve; and the second about a hundred yards in its rear. The guns were placed in the intervals between the brigades, two pieces were in the road way on our right and a rocket-brigade in the centre."

The chief of staff of the 2nd Netherlands Division, Van Zuylen van Nyevelt, only reported that around 10 a.m. the French made a : "... movement of concentration [...] took place on the opposing heights of us." [NA, 2.13.14.01; 8. "Historiek der 2^e Divisie"]

¹⁶ NA, 2.13.14.01; 8

the enemy.”¹⁷ Dickson watched the brigade pass: “Then a strong brigade of Dutch and Belgians marched up with swinging, quick step, and turned off at a cross-road between high banks on to the plateau on the most exposed slope of our position. They numbered at least three thousand men, and looked well in their blue coats with orange-and-red facings.”¹⁸ This means that Bijlandt’s battalions first entered the Charleroi road, marched towards the intersection with the Ohainroad and then turned right to take their new positions.

De Jongh of the 8th Militia confirmed this: “In the morning at nine o’clock, I received orders to take position behind the hollow road, in the first line of battle, leaning with my right wing against a battery of horse artillery [and] with my left to the battalion infantry of line no. 7, the left flankercompany detached *en tirailleur* in front of the line of battle, the right flankercompany was detached to the center of the English troops.”¹⁹ Captain Scheltens of the 7th Line, serving as battalion adjutant, remembered: “We were *en bataille* in the first line on the earth road which, left of Mont-Saint-Jean in front of Brussels, leads to La Hulpe. The order of battle was two closed rows, according to the English principle. The voltigeurs company, deployed *en tirailleur*, covered our front. To the right of us were the 27th jagers on foot, a battalion of volunteers, who formed a brigade with us. After that battalion, a battery complete with field pieces formed the extreme right of our line, on the Mont-Saint-Jean, there where it intersects the great road.”²⁰ It was Captain van Bronkhorst of the 7th Militia battalion which was placed on the left, who gave a some vague comment as well as his skirmishing company fell back: “It was 10 or 11 o’clock. I had gone back with my company, ...”²¹ This way the three largest and thus strongest battalions after the battle of Quatre-Bras made up the first battle line of the brigade.

The two remaining battalions were probably considered too weak and therefore placed in the second line. Lieutenant-Colonel Westenberg of the 5th Militia wrote about the position of his battalion being: “... only a few hundred men left when the other day I was posted on the height of Mont-St. Jean and in the morning, as I was so little strong, was placed *en bataille* between a battalion of English to the left of me and one or two battalions of Scotts to the right of me, and that being in a second line.”²² Grunenbosch also corroborated the position of the 27th Jagers in the second line of the brigade: “... in the morning of the 18th having been shown a position behind the same [hollow road, EM] having to the right a dutch battery which was leaning against the mentioned streetroad, and left forward (about 20 paces) the 8 battalion Nat Militia, which had its position immediately against the hollow road and to whose support the battalion Jagers N° 27 should serve; while this hollow road itself served for the positioning of the reserve for the skirmishers which the different battalions had posted forward up the slope (being a height).”²³

Grunenbosch had also commented on the position of the 27th Jagers earlier in 1836 in a letter to Colonel Nepveu: “... so that the battalion at the battle of Waterloo was only 6 officers and 250 to 300 noncommissioned officers and men strong, taking position in the line to the left of

¹⁷ Dickson’s account is published in: Scots Greys at Waterloo, p. 23-34. Furthermore referred to in this study as Dickson, Waterloo.

¹⁸ Dickson, Waterloo.

¹⁹ Jongh, Veldtogt.

²⁰ Scheltens, C.H. Souvenirs d’un vieux soldat belge de la garde impériale. Brussels, 1880
Further on in this study referred to as Scheltens, Souvenirs.

²¹ Bronkhorst, 9 July 1815.

²² Zutphen, Van Löben Sels.

²³ Zutphen, Van Löben Sels.

the highway to Charleroi and leading our line and about twenty paces behind a landroad leading across the height of Mont St. Jean against which to the right a battery and to the left of the battalion the 8th Battalion Militia had immediately taken position, while behind the battalion itself a regiment of Scots was placed.”²⁴

Bijleveld’s battery²⁵ took up a position immediately right of the 8th Militia, and this is described by Lieutenant Koopman: “In the morning of the 18th we received orders to position ourselves behind this hollow road. [...] When we left our first position after the beginning of the Battle of Waterloo, to take one more rearward, this was done with towinglines. 1st Lt. De Vincy commanded the 4 left pieces, and I the 3 of the rightwing. I brought my pieces in the 2nd position without harm, although the terrain was very difficult. On one of the pieces of the 1st Lt. De Vincij the line broke during this movement and the limber had to be moved by the crew on its own, leaving the piece behind. The mentioned Lt. De Vincij thereupon asked several volunteers, among which I only remember one being Gunner Glas, and he recollected this piece, despite the enemy fire and while even several cavalrymen of the charging French Cav[alry] were not more than 50 paces away and who had to return because of a countercharge. These Gunn[er]s were decorated for this and later the 1st Lt. De Vincij as well.”²⁶ I have been unable to find any reference in primary sources on such a French cavalry charge; it may well have been only a detachment of videttes. Koopman’s account might indicate that the infantry of Bijlandt had left the forward slope before the guns were pulled back. Another important fact is that Koopman’s account clearly reveals the limbertteams of the battery were probably already with the artillery reserve park behind the Mont St Jean hamlet. When Bijleveld’s guns were repositioned Lieutenant Koopman tells of his satisfaction of the new place behind the hollow road, which “... had a secured position in every way, behind a sort of earth bank and a hedge, in which openings were made, so as to have a free line of sight as through loopholes.”²⁷

Besides all this firm evidence of Bijlandt’s brigade being behind the hollow road, there are even other witnesses to this. Captain Charles Gore, 85th Foot, and aide-de-camp of General Kempt at Waterloo has left several sketches in his letters to Siborne, in which he clearly places them behind the hollow road. Captain Kincaid of the 95th Rifles in his memoirs also confirmed the position: “On our left there were some Hanoverians and Belgians, together with a brigade of British heavy dragoons, the Royals and Scotch Greys.”²⁸

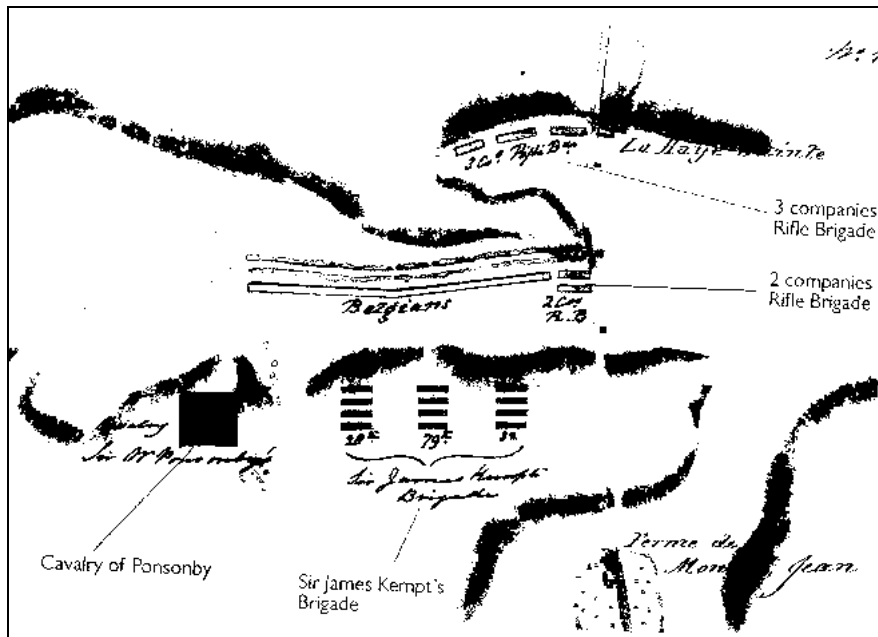
²⁴ National Archive, The Hague. 2.13.13.09. Inventory of the archive of the Quartermaster General and General Staff (1808) 1815-1844. Inventory nr. 204. Three letters to the adjutant of the General Staff (Colonel Nepveu) concerning information of the events on 16 and 18 June 1815.

²⁵ After Major Van Opstall was severely wounded at Quatre-Bras, Captain Bijleveld as oldest and only highest ranking artillery officer in the division, with the death of Captain Stevenaert, now officially commanded all of the artillery batteries left in the division. Yet, given the evidence Bijleveld himself gave in two letters to Van Löben Sels in 1841 and his original diary, it is my opinion he remained with his own battery the entire battle and left Lieutenant Winssinger in command of the three guns with Sachsen-Weimar’s brigade around Papelotte.

²⁶ Zutphen, Van Löben Sels.

²⁷ Zutphen, Van Löben Sels.

²⁸ *Adventures in the Rifle Brigade*. John Kincaid; London, 1997.



Sketch by Captain Gore²⁹

It was after 10 a.m. that the Netherlands troops witnessed how the French started concentrating in front of their position. Van Zuylen van Nyevelt even mentioned the time of 10 o'clock, when the French made a "...movement of concentration [which; EM] took place on the opposing heights of us."³⁰ He continued with: "At eleven o'clock one discovered movement in the enemy lines, who seemed to strengthen itself on its right wing and many guns were sent there, while on the height masses showed themselves advancing which and which suggested an attack on our left wing."³¹

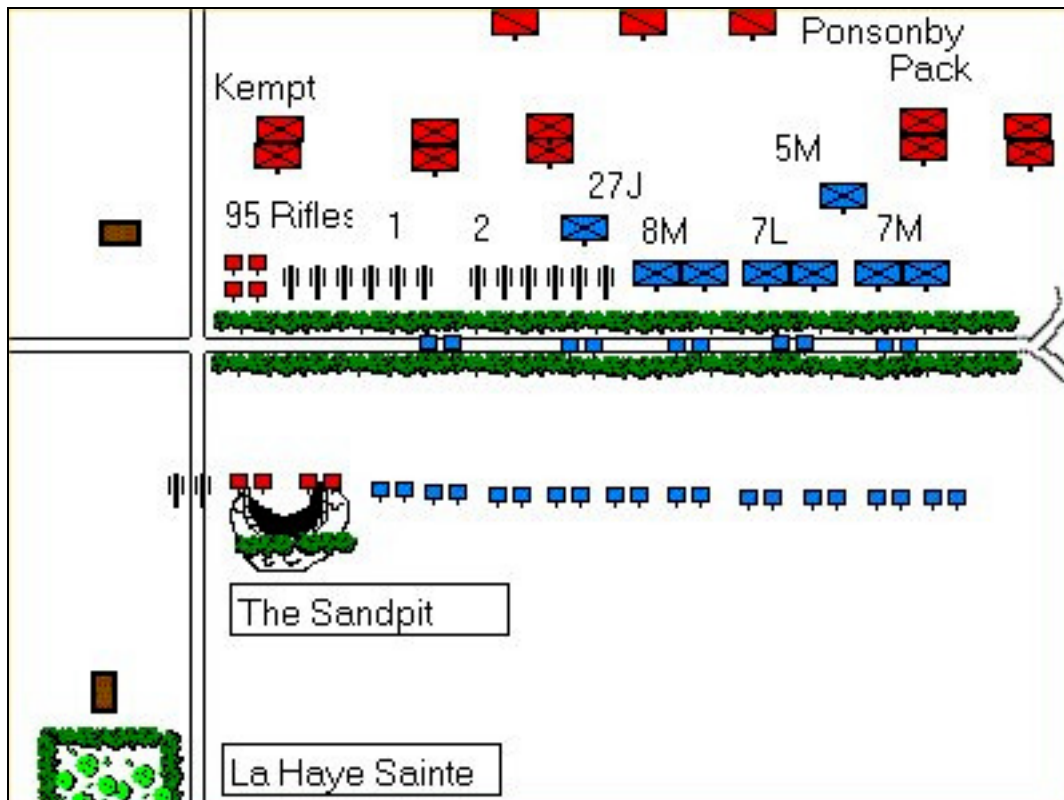
Napoleon had indeed ordered a massive concentration of artillery opposite Wellington's left flank around 11 o'clock, as the French chief of staff for the artillery of I Corps General Dessales told: "Towards 10 o'clock the Emperor aligned the 1st corps with the second, which occupied the left of the Brussels road. We occupied the right of that road, which was hollow at this point. Two divisions of the 5th corps [this must be the 6th corps of Lobau; EM] and the Guard formed the reserve. I was near count d'Erlon when Mr. De Labédoyère, general aide-de-camp of the Emperor came to tell me on his behalf that he had given me command over a battery of eighty guns [...]. I there upon had the order to place all these pieces in battery in the position we occupied, on my side, in one single line, and to commence firing immediately ..."³² It must have taken some time after 11 a.m. to complete the positioning of all these French batteries, as they had to be dragged by the limbertteams through a muddy terrain, before these would indeed open fire upon the Netherlands and British troops.

²⁹ Published in Glover's "Waterloo Letters" (Letter no. 175, pag. 264-267. BLo. ADD MS 34707, FO 426).

³⁰ NA, 2.13.14.01; 8.

³¹ NA, 2.13.14.01; 8.

³² Account of V.A. Dessales originally published in *Revue de Paris*, issue 15 January 1895. The version used for this study is taken from Coppen's "Le chemin d'Ohain", p. 16.



Bijlandt's position after 10 a.m.

Based upon the primary evidence the above map can thus be presented, giving the new positions of Bijlandt's brigade after its repositioning. From left to right there would first have been the reserve companies of the 95th Rifles, followed by Captain Roger's battery of 9-pounders (nr. 1) and Bijleveld's battery of six guns (nr. 2). Then the three largest battalions in Bijlandt's brigade would have been positioned in line formation immediately behind the hollow road, being from left to right the 8th Militia, the 7th Line and the 7th Militia. In the second line and as support would be the 27th Jagers and the 5th Militia; both battalions inbetween the British brigades of Kempt and Pack, who's battalions were all placed in column formation. The skirmishing companies of the 8th Militia, 7th Line and 7th Militia would each have taken the hollow road as operational reserve base, while sending out sections in front and aligning with the 95th Rifles companies positioned in the Sandpit.

(Version 1; June 2008)