

George De Lacy Evans

The National Library of Scotland: Adv.46.9.19. Report, no date is given, from Brevet Major George De Lacy Evans, Extra Aide-de-camp to Major-General the Hon. Sir William Ponsoby, to Sir George Murray:

The states of Europe, represented in Congress, were yet employed in re-establishing the basis of public order, when Bonaparte suddenly appeared upon the shores of France. In a few days, after a march of unexampled triumph, this daring usurper being again seated on the throne of the Capets, the descendents of that royal line were once more fugitives in a foreign land.

Thus was a revolution effected, the truth of which will be questioned by posterity; almost incredible to contemporaries and resembling less the course of political events than the illusory transitions of the stage, or the improbable catastrophies of Romanov.

Europe, but a moment before agitated only by the bloodless conflicts of diplomatists, became at once, by common impulse, the theatre of warlike preparation. The several parts of the great coalition flew together with magnetic force. All the nations armed, and assembled their levies round the territories of France. Of these, the Anglo-Prussian armies occupied the line between the fortresses of Tournai and Namur.

Bonaparte, resolving to strike a blow before the Allies had completed their preparations, had on the 14th June, by a well combined movement, concentrated between the Sambre and the Meuse, five corps and the Imperial Guards; the élite of the French army and consisting of 140,000 men.

The left of the British line of cantonments reached the great road to Brussels; the right of the Prussian army touched it. On this line it was that Bonaparte designed to penetrate to the capital of the Netherlands, thus interposing between the armies of Wellington and Blücher, anticipating their destruction in detail; with the consequent revolution and possession of the various resources of the Belgian territory.

The 15th, the French army cleared the frontiers, moving by the lines of Marchienne and Charleroi.

On the 16th were fought the sanguinary battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras. In both cases, the enemy possessed a vast numerical superiority. The 4th Prussian Corps being yet absent, as was the whole of the British cavalry, besides a large portion of artillery and infantry.

Towards the close of the day, the front line of the position of Ligny and St. Amand was carried. The mass of the Prussian army retired in the night on Wavre; the extreme left [at] Sombreffe, with the rear of the right [at] Brye, were sustained till the morning of the 17th. The contest was severe. Some guns which could not be extricated in the night were lost, and thus the trophies of the day remained with the enemy. Marshal Blücher, while endeavouring to restore the battle, charged at the head of his cavalry and, having had his horse shot, was for a moment in the power of the enemy; the dusk of the evening fortunately facilitated the escape of this veteran warrior.

The battle of Quatre Bras terminated otherwise. The enemy was repulsed at all points with immense slaughter, and being in the evening forced to assume the defensive, could with difficulty maintain the

position of Frasnes. It was on this day, that the Duke of Brunswick fell, while displaying a brilliant courage.

On the 17th, Marshal Grouchy, with about 20,000 men, followed up the Prussians on Wavre; whilst the main body moved on Quatre Bras. The Duke of Wellington's army, now nearly concentrated, was in a state to advance; the ensemble of the operations, however, requiring a corresponding movement with that of the Prussians, it retired in the afternoon of this day, into the position of Mont St. Jean or Waterloo.

This operation, masked and executed in good order, was covered by the British cavalry, under the Earl of Uxbridge, with characteristic gallantry.

The British and Prussian armies covered Brussels, distant from it about twelve miles, and being within a few hours' march of each other, were enabled to afford mutual co-operation.

In this sketch, the Allied forces under the Duke of Wellington are termed, for distinction's sake, the British army. It amounted, in position, to about 65,000 men, of which 9,000 were cavalry, with a train of 150 pieces of artillery. Two thirds of this force consisted of excellent troops. The remainder were new levies and that part raised in the Netherlands even of doubtful loyalty.

The French army consisted of 110,000 men, of which 15,000 were cavalry, with 300 pieces of artillery. It was composed solely of veterans; enthusiasts in the cause for which they fought; and stimulated at once by the suggestions of interest, the recollections of treason, and the memory of victories.

The position of Waterloo consists of an elevation of ground, which crosses rectangularly, near their junction, the roads from Nivelles and Charleroi to Brussels. The line occupied did not exceed one mile and a half; one of the most concentrated dispositions of battle known of in modern warfare. A sort of valley from six to eight hundred paces in breadth, reached along the front on both sides of the most easy and gradual ascent; terminated by the heights of La Belle Alliance, on the brow of which were formed those tremendous batteries, that poured forth destruction for hours; covering these solid masses of attack, so often urged forward to the charge and as repeatedly repulsed by British valour. The ground was in cultivation and perfectly unenclosed, but from the torrents of rain which had fallen, extremely heavy, for the movement of troops.

The Dutch, Flemish, Nassau, Brunswick, Hanoverian and British forces were organised together, so that a proportion of brigades from each formed a corps d'armée.

The 1st Corps, under the Prince of Orange, formed the centre, the right of which rested on the Nivelles road, in rear of the farm of Hougoumont; the left on the Charleroi road, in rear of La Haye Sainte.

The Reserve, under Sir Thomas Picton, occupied the left of the position, the right of which communicated with the left of the centre, while a part of the 2nd Corps under Lord Hill, formed the right, thrown back from the right of the centre, en potence, and occupying Merbe Braine and Braine l'Alleud, for the security of that flank. A few cavalry were in observation, on the high ground, to the right of Hougoumont. A brigade of light dragoons extended on the left towards La Haye, the remainder of the cavalry being in reserve, in rear of the left and centre. The artillery was advanced along the line to the brow of the ridge.

The morning of the 18th threatened a continuance of bad weather. The French, who had already anticipated the flight and embarkation of the British army, are said to have been at once surprised and delighted to find it still in position, while the latter, confident of the result, with calm and undaunted

breasts, awaited the onset. The soldiers, quickly forgetting the severity of the preceding night, were seen busily employed in drying their muskets; the note of preparation resounded on all sides.

The day cleared up; the hostile columns appeared, forming on the opposite heights; the troops stood to their arms; skirmishing commenced along the line. Cannon fire gradually opened, till it became an incessant roar, and at noon, the corps of Jérôme Bonaparte discovered itself moving in several columns on Hougoumont, covered by a heavy discharge of artillery.

The farm of Hougoumont, occupied by the English Guards under Colonels Macdonnell and Home, was the key of that part of the position. A few shrapnel shells, fortunately directed, piercing the heads of some of those columns, threw them into disorder; they fell back under cover of a swell of ground, reformed, and again pushed forward to the attack.

This point was disputed with a firmness at once commensurate with the object, and doing honour to the gallant defenders and soon, being nearly enveloped by the enemy's troops, the enclosures of the garden and orchard, became the scene of a variety of conflicts, in which the soldiers on either side displayed a thousand instances of courage and address.

Fresh troops continually replacing those fatigued, or appalled by the obstinacy of the combat, the enemy succeeded, by reiterated attacks, after a long and sanguinary struggle, in penetrating the enclosures. The Guards retreated into the houses and out-offices, the walls of which were loop-holed. Here the conflict was maintained with various success and unabated fury. Still the enemy (repeatedly forcing this barrier, but always driven out with the bayonet), made no impression and now, resorting to shells, a part of the building caught fire. The conflagration spread with rapidity; the scene became terrific. In the momentary intermissions of smoke and flames, the soldiers thus braving even the elements were seen contending hand-to-hand and in many parts of this dreadful arena, friends and foes, the dead, the wounded, and they dying were alike consumed.

The post was now reinforced; the Guards again quickly occupied the enclosures. The enemy fell back, dismayed by the failure of so many heroic efforts, but repeatedly renewing the attack (though with inferior force) throughout the day; always with similar success and without any other result than a mutual carnage.

During the continuance of the operations near Hougoumont, movements of troops were observed in front of our left and centre. The sinuosities of the ground concealed the formation of columns. The glistening of bayonets was seen at intervals, above the undulations which form the features of this country.

Simultaneous attacks were organised: one of cavalry against the centre; the other of infantry against the left of the British line. The former came on with all the impetuous audacity displayed throughout the day by that army, charging the batteries which lined the brow of the plateau. They were met in full onset by the Household Brigade (Life Guards, Blues, and 1st Dragoons, under Lord Edward Somerset), completely overthrown, and driven in utter confusion into the centre of the French line. Nothing could surpass the imposing effect of this affair. It was the shock of the best cavalry of Europe and executed with equal rapidity and resolution. The clashing of swords and armour re-echoed through the field and the ground over which they fled was in a moment covered with wounded or dismounted cuirassiers.

In the meanwhile was going on the attack on the left, consisting of 20,000 infantry (the whole of the 1st Corps, under Comte d'Erlon), in contiguous close columns of three or four thousand each; covered by the fire of a battery of more than a hundred pieces, playing on that part of our line.

In this order of battle, they suddenly appeared on the opposite heights, instantly rushed forward, and such was the rapidity of their course, that scarcely seeming to traverse the valley, they had already ascended the position and penetrated the British line.

The 5th Division (under Sir Thomas Picton, Sir James Kempt, Sir Denis Pack) lined the crest of the height, with at about forty paces in advance a brigade of Belgians; and at an equal distance in rear, the British Brigade of Heavy Cavalry (Royals, Scots Greys, Inniskillings, under Sir William Ponsonby).

They quickly overthrew the Belgians and, advancing with admirable resolution and celerity, unshaken by a shower of grape and musketry, presently crowned the summit, the parts of our line immediately opposed to them becoming unavoidably broken. Here, individuals and small parties were seen to precipitate themselves, *l'épée à la main*, into the centre and flanks of these immense bodies, thus nobly sustaining even in momentary defeat, the honour of the national arms.

The French soldiers, fatigued and out of breath, made no attempt to deploy. The heavy cavalry (though not twenty paces distant, still nearly masked by the smoke and its situation on the inner declivity), now charged in line. The shock was irresistible. The firing at this point ceased; the smoke cleared away; those masses, a moment before so menacing and conspicuous, and on which all eyes were turned, had disappeared; or left only the traces of a dispersed rabble, flying over the plain. Vast numbers, unable to escape the cavalry, abandoned their arms, and threw themselves on the ground. Here were seen horses trampling down whole ranks, and plunging with difficulty through the bodies; there, a crowd of French soldiers surrendering as prisoners; many defending themselves to the last, yet terrified and scarcely knowing what they did. Others, again, rising up after being rode over by the dragoons, firing their pieces and making off, while the slope of the position appeared literally strewn with dead.

Our cavalry, broken in the advance, animated and borne away by this tide of success, could not be re-formed, and pursuing its advantage too far, passed the valley, carried a battery, and went through the French line. The enemy, now observing the weakness and want of support of this small corps, and recovering from the panic with which that whole wing had been seized, fell upon it with fresh troops, from which it extricated itself with much difficulty, after a most severe loss.

In this onset, Sir Thomas Picton, led by his ardent spirit into the thickest of the battle, fell at the head of his troops; a consummation worthy of his glorious career; as did the gallant and ingenuous Sir William Ponsonby. His was the peculiar honour of leading a charge as important in its nature as it was unparalleled as a brilliant exploit of arms, in the annals of cavalry warfare.

These attacks, simultaneous as has been said, on the left and centre, were the second grand effort of Bonaparte, and cost him at least 15,000 men, dispersed without arms, or hors de combat, two Eagles, one of these of the regiment once called the Invincibles, and 2,000 prisoners.

The day was far advanced. Napoleon had failed on both wings and now resolving to bend all his efforts against the centre, moved down a strong body of infantry on La Haye Sainte. This point, held by a battalion of Hanoverian jägers, was disputed, notwithstanding the immense disparity of numbers, with determined obstinacy. At length, the walls were breached in every part; the interior exploded throughout to the fire of grape, round and musketry, augmented by the splinters of the building. A large portion of the little garrison hors de combat, and all its ammunition expended; when (the assailants breaking through the now feebly defended barriers), the chief part of the brave survivors fell victims to the fury of the conquerors.

The difficult access of La Haye Sainte, its entrances being on the opposite side, and in possession of the enemy, alone prevented its succour or recapture. Before and during the latter affair, a succession of charges were executed along the centre, by regiments or brigades of cavalry, without combination, and less apparently the result of plan, than of the impetuosity or emulation of particular corps or commanders.

The whole army now formed squares of battalions, and reserving their fire with admirable steadiness, till the near approach of the enemy, our troops invariably dispersed or overthrew them, with immense slaughter. The batteries along the brow being repeatedly carried by the enemy were, at each successive retreat, reoccupied by our artillery, pouring forth again almost instantaneously their destructive fire.

While the soldiers, in square, exposed at once to the furious, but unavailing assaults of cavalry, and the dreadful havoc of artillery, were seen closing their ranks over the dead bodies of their comrades, and suffering no other apparent effect, than a gradual diminution of front. So dense was the smoke, that the noise of arms was frequently heard before the enemy discovered itself. The shining helmets and polished mail first became discernable; presently, the adverse squadrons were seen charging across those spaces, where the atmosphere had comparatively cleared and quickly merging again into the same dim obscurity.

Following up, however, the success at La Haye Sainte, heavy columns of infantry were observed continually moving on that point; sheltered by which, they endeavoured to renew their formations.

The cavalry attacks became every moment more serious, large bodies coming down in support; infantry at the same time approaching the brow of the plateau; while the fire of all arms continued with tremendous execution. Dragoons, lancers, cuirassiers, now came on in masses, with unequalled audacity, threatening to overwhelm everything which presented itself; masking at times in line the advance of infantry, again carrying the batteries, precipitating themselves on the immovable squares. Attacked by our dragoons, sallying through the intervals, quickly re-forming and chasing those in turn, even into the rear of the British line, receiving as they passed and re-passed volleys of musketry, then halting in range of fire, confounded by repulse, and suffering whole ranks to be mowed down by close and unerring discharges, leaving the ground covered with men and horses, and charging repeatedly over their own dead or wounded; at other times, deliberately searching round our invincible battalions for an opening, by which to penetrate; while individuals, or small parties, spurred on by a blind fury and despair, often rushed forward, attempting to grasp the unfurled standard, or hew themselves a passage, and usually perishing at the muzzle of the piece, or transfixed by bayonets.

During this arduous struggle, the presence of their chief sustained and animated the spirit of the soldiers and in this manner was the contest maintained, glorious to the vanquished and the victors, until nearly the whole of the French cavalry was annihilated.

In the meantime, a corps of French infantry succeeded in gaining the level of the plateau, immediately above La Haye Sainte, forcing a part of the 3rd Division, consisting chiefly of Hanoverian Landwehr, to recoil in disorder. These, however, being rallied by the Duke of Wellington in person, threw themselves into the sunken bye road, or formed line along it, and on reopening their fire, effectually checked this advantage.

The British army now excessively diminished, scarcely mustered sufficient troops to line the position and these so exhausted by continued exertion as to render the possibility of maintaining our ground much longer, a subject of anxious consideration. On the other hand, the French infantry, which had slowly urged its way towards the position, preferring it would appear the effect of fire, to that of

the bayonet, became at length evidently appalled as well, by the unceasing destruction hurled by our batteries amidst their ranks, as by the unalterable and undaunted countenance of the British infantry. The attack seemed to relax. The general fire of musketry decreased, or confined itself to that of skirmishers who, however, preserved with unabated vivacity, entrenching themselves frequently behind the bodies of the dead or wounded.

It was now about half-past seven in the evening. The Prussians at length arrived upon the field, menaced the enemy's right rear and line of communications. Napoleon, infuriated by successive failures, and resolving on a last, desperate effort, ordered to the front the whole of his reserve, consisting of the Imperial Guards; who joined in contiguous columns of regiments, supported by the remains of their formidable cavalry. By simultaneous attacks on either flank, with heavy columns of infantry of the line, and by the fire of a battery of 250 pieces, [he] advanced against the centre of the British line, the theatre of so many previous conflicts. Bonaparte harangued the troops as they passed, while Marshal Ney threw himself at their head, inspiring all that devotedness, the power of which he had so often displayed on similar occasions. Those warlike bands, not unaccustomed to decide the fortune of battles evinced, in this last onset, their characteristic boldness. The ardour of the contest was renewed; all was committed; everything announced an approaching termination. The assailants literally marched over heaps of slain and the valley and brow of the position became again covered by clouds of smoke, through which might be discovered with difficulty, the glittering of arms, the waving of crests and standards; the terrific confusion, being broken at every instant by sudden flashes or sheets of fire, the roll of musketry and the thunder of an immense artillery continuing incessantly to rend the air.

It was the struggle of enthusiasm and despair, on the one hand, of courage and duty on the other. The fate of the world being hung upon the moment; Victory even wavered in her choice, but the hostile columns confounded by the horrible ravages of our artillery, seemed at length to falter. The hour of destiny had struck. The combination of circumstances was complete and the Field Marshal now made his final dispositions.

The squares successively wheeled up into line. A brigade of cavalry (under General Vivian) moved from Hougoumont on the French rear. The Light Infantry Brigade (under General Adams: this brigade, with others of the right wing, had been brought up from potence, in support of the centre, during the previous attacks on that part of the line) threw forward its right shoulder, presenting an oblique front to the enemy's left flank, at the same time forming an angle with the 1st British Brigade (under General Maitland), directly opposed to the Imperial Guards; while on the plateau, yet further to the left, was concentrated in columns, the main body of the British cavalry, headed by the remains of the Household and Heavy Brigades, and led by the Earl of Uxbridge. In this order of battle, the word was given to advance. It circulated along the line with the rapidity of lightning, restoring at once the strength and reanimating the valour of our unconquerable soldiers.

The wings of the army threw forward their outward flanks, thus threatening to envelope the enemy. The infantry of the centre discharged a volley and rushed forward to the charge, while the cavalry precipitated themselves from every quarter on the adverse columns.

The firing now died away. The smoke gradually dispersed. At this moment, the setting sun, hitherto darkened by clouds and mists, burst forth with unusual majesty, disclosing to our transported view, all the triumphant scene. At first and uncertainty appeared to pervade the enemy's ranks. Soon, the previous formation of lines and columns could barely be traced, some presenting a front, ignorant of the extent of the disaster and hoping to stem the torrent, others recoiling, breaking through, and

overthrowing their more resolute comrades. Now the artillery were seen rushing with incautious haste, from the various batteries to the roads, jamming them up and defeating their own object; others again cutting their harness and ignobly abandoning their charge. Presently, all semblance of order was lost, and the remains of this great army, which had meditated only rapine and conquest, now reduced to about 50,000 men, compressed within an extraordinary small space, cuirassiers, dragoons, infantry of the line, Guards, all arms, were seen flying in one vast, indistinguishable mass; while the Allied squadrons, giving them no respite, poured on their broken flanks and rear.

Night had already covered the plain. The British army bivouacked on the heights of Belle Alliance, surrounded by its ensanguined trophies. The Prussians comparatively fresh, urged incessantly the pursuit, and all that the imagination can picture, will fall short of the wild tumults, panic, alarms and disastrous route, which befell the miserable fugitives.

Prisoners, standards, caissons, cannon without number, were amongst the fruits of victory. Seventy thousand men, killed, wounded, more than two thirds of which were French, attest the carnage and fury of the contest; while the power, and nearly political existence of that Hydra, which for years had trampled on the liberties of continental Europe, openly menacing the overthrow of social order and return of barbarism was, it may be hoped, on this day, extinguished forever.

High as have been hitherto the destinies of our country, raised at the present time to a pitch, which appears to eclipse all past glory, shall we not be excused a tribute to the genius of the great man, who has been chiefly instrumental in bringing about this splendid era. But, the simple recital of the actions of heroes, is their best eulogy; and we perform that task, in attempting to delineate the course of an event, the memory of which will survive, when the most brilliant historical epochs we know of, shall be lost in the obscurity and confusion of ages. D. L. Evans.

P.S. The 1st Corps consisted of the 1st and 3rd British Divisions, 2nd and 3rd Netherlands Divisions and Brunswick Corps. The Reserve consisted of 5th and 6th British Divisions and Brigade of Belgians attached from the 1st Corps. Only one brigade of the 6th under General Lambert joined during the action, the remainder had not yet arrived. The 2nd Corps consisted of the 2nd and 4th Divisions and 1st Netherlands Division. Only the 2nd Division and one brigade of the 4th division were present, the remainder being at Hal for the security of that line.

George De Lacy Evans was the third son of John Evans, of Lisready, County Limerick. Born on the 7th October 1787, he entered the army as a volunteer in 1806 and joined the 22nd Regiment of Foot as an Ensign, without purchase, on the 1st February 1807. Promoted to Lieutenant, without purchase, 1st December 1808, he served in the Peninsula. He transferred to the 3rd Regiment of Dragoons, by exchange, on the 3rd March 1812, and served in the war of 1812, being present at the battles of Bladensburg, North Point, Baltimore and New Orleans where, as Deputy Assistant-Quartermaster General to Major-General Robert Ross, he was severely wounded and captured. He transferred as a Captain, without purchase, to the 5th West India Regiment on the 12th January 1815, and was promoted to Brevet Major on the 11th May the same year. He was present at the Battle of Waterloo as an extra Aide-de-camp to Major-General the Hon. Sir William Ponsonby. Promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel on the 18th July 1815, and Colonel on the 10th January 1837; on the 4th March 1837 he was the subject of the following article in the London Gazette: The King has been pleased to grant unto Colonel De Lacy Evans, Lieutenant-General in the service of Her Catholic Majesty, and one of the Representatives in Parliament for the city of Westminster, His royal licence and permission, that he

may accept and wear the insignia of the Grand Cross, together with the Crosses of the third and fifth classes, of the Spanish Order of St. Ferdinand, which the Queen Regent of Spain has been pleased to confer upon him, in testimony of Her Majesty's approbation of his services at the Battle of Arlaban, on the 16th and 17th of January 1836, and before St. Sebastian, on the 5th of May following; and that he may enjoy all the rights and privileges there unto annexed; provided, nevertheless, that His Majesty's said licence and permission doth not authorise the assumption of any style, appellation, rank, precedence, or privilege appertaining unto a Knight Bachelor of these realms: And also to command, that the said royal concession and especial mark of His royal favour be registered, together with the relative documents, in His Majesty's College of Arms. Promoted to Lieutenant-General in the service of the Queen of Spain on the 13th February 1838, he was awarded the G.C.B., on the same date and became Sir De Lacy Evans. Promoted to Major-General on the 5th April 1844, he was appointed Colonel of the 21st Regiment of Foot on the 29th August 1853. He was promoted to Lieutenant-General on the 4th August 1856, and commanded the 2nd Division of the British army in the Crimea. Awarded the K.C.B., and made a full General on the 10th March 1861, he died on the 9th January 1870.

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