

**THE WATERLOO DIARY OF  
LIEUTENANT WILLIAM BATES INGILBY, RHA**  
Edited by General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall, KCB, CBE, DSO, MC

Extracts from this diary were published 88 years ago in Vol XX of the Proceedings of the Royal Artillery Institution. The diary has now been revised from the original manuscript, preserved in the Brotherton Library, Leeds. Lieutenant Ingilby had previously served in the Peninsular War. His diary for that period was recently published in the September 1981 edition of the Royal Artillery Journal.

When war again broke out after Napoleon had escaped from Elba and landed on French soil in March 1815, Lieutenant Ingilby was serving at Colchester in Captain C Mercer's 'G' Troop, RHA. On 26th March 'G' Troop received orders to embark for the Netherlands. The troop left Colchester on 9th April and embarked at Harwich next day. On the 13th it disembarked at Ostend, whence it marched via Bruges and Ghent to Strytem, 13 miles west of Brussels, where it was comfortably billeted. On 3rd June Ingilby, who seemed not to serve very happily under Mercer, his Troop commander, exchanged with Lieutenant Breton into Sir Robert Gardiner's 'E' Troop. He had previously met Gardiner when serving in the Peninsula.

Napoleon surprised the Allies by crossing the Sambre at Charleroi on 14th June and defeated the Prussians. Lord Uxbridge's Cavalry Division, billeted with its attached Horse Artillery Troops in the area west of Brussels, was then hastily alerted and marched south-eastwards to Quatre Bras, arriving there on the evening of the 16th, too late to take part in the battle. On 15th June Ingilby recorded that he had ridden into Brussels from Ternath, where 'E' Troop was billeted, to buy a pack-saddle for his baggage mule, returning to his Troops by 10 p.m. On the following day his diary continues.

**WE** MARCHED this morning before day-light, orders having arrived in the night to place ourselves on the great road between Ninove and Alost, the French Army, we understood, being in motion. My baggage was left to be brought on by some Commissariat waggons. A fresh order arrived directing us to proceed through Grammont and then to Enghien. Here we found the main force of the Cavalry and we became permanently attached to Sir H. Vivian's Brigade of Hussars—the 10th and 18th English and the 1st German, and our Troop of six 6-pdrs. We halted and bivouacked for the night near Braine-le-Comte. There was heavy cannonading, apparently at some leagues distance in our front, and some of the Regiments of Cavalry still pushed forward. A drizzling rain came on. We had travelled during the day between 50 and 60 miles, With only one halt sufficiently long to feed with corn.

*17th June 1815*

Marched before daylight and proceeded through Nivelles, meeting many wounded on carriages and some on foot, and arrived at Quatre Bras, where there had been a serious affair yesterday at the time we heard the cannonade. The Duke of Brunswick-Oels was killed, and though a great many dead had been buried, the ground was still strewn with the bodies of our Highlanders and the French cuirassiers and their horses. The Cavalry which had continued to push on last night failed to arrive in sufficient time to be used, and there had been a deficiency of Artillery, but notwithstanding, the Infantry had repulsed the French and were masters of the position when we arrived this morning. The whole army gradually and successively arrived, and the French appeared in tolerable force (but at a considerable distance) in front.

At about 12 o'clock I saw one of the Commander-in-Chief's *aides-de-camp* and heard him say to Sir R. Gardiner that the Prussians had been beaten with the loss of 12 cannon and a great many men, and that their army had retreated. In the afternoon our infantry seemed to be gradually moving off, as I understand, to a position a few miles in our rear. The Cavalry formed in three lines, the Hussars facing towards the enemy, the Light Cavalry in the second line, and the Heavy in the last line.

Very suddenly it became extremely sultry with the sun obscured with a very black cloud. At this time a very thick cloud of dust showed the march of some cavalry which seemed to be approaching to reinforce the French from a direction in rear of their right, and at the same time there was a considerable battle amongst those immediately in our front. It was known to many (and I had heard it from the same before-mentioned ADC) that Lord Uxbridge had the most positive orders to avoid an affair with his Cavalry, but such was not known to all, and as the French approached, the utmost silence prevailed along the whole of the lines, who evidently expected momentarily to be engaged. The French advanced very boldly until their skirmishers, preceding the columns, fired upon

our line of videttes, which were engaged about 200 yards in front of our first line, which was flanked on the left by our Troop, and on the right by Lieut-Colonel Webber-Smith's Troop of Horse Artillery. They then pushed forward some artillery and immediately commenced to deploy. The first discharges from our artillery had scarcely been answered before the cloud which was hanging over us burst with the loudest clap of thunder I had ever heard, and the rain instantly commenced, as it were in torrents, and at the moment the whole of the Cavalry received the order and commenced a rapid retreat.

The scene was now completely changed; a few minutes before, our three lines, with sabres drawn, were watching with breathless interest the approach of the French Cavalry, all, excepting superior officers, having no doubt they were going to be in personal conflict, and now we were retiring literally at a gallop in three separate columns by different roads. We followed the left column. We were pushed by a few light cavalry, and on one occasion a squadron formed to repel some skirmishers who seemed inclined to make a dash at the rear of our Troop of guns, but the very heavy rain caused the ground and roads to be so poached and cut up, they soon ceased to follow us altogether after that demonstration, and I deliberately halted the rear gun of my division and had the wheel horse shod, under the protection of a few Dragoons, while the rest of the Brigade and the Troop were still galloping and trotting off in retreat. This enabled me to look about a little, and I then saw that the regiments to our right on the *pavé* road were engaged. There was much charging and cheering, but I could not distinguish which had the best or the worst of it.

At dusk we came up on the Infantry, who had already reached their bivouac, and were on the positions assigned them. The Troop took up its quarters in the hamlet of Conconbert. On our right a cannonade was kept up till dark, and I imagine the French continued their pursuit of the centre column until they felt our Infantry in position. We soon after heard that the 7th Hussars had suffered severely in the charge on the *pavé* road and had been brought out of difficulty by the Household Troops.

It continued to rain, but, as in a hovel the officers got into we found plenty of potatoes

and a barrel of beer, we did very well. The only inconvenience I suffered was from having lent my cloak to the Doctor, who was ill and had none; by which I got so thoroughly soaked I could get nothing dried, having no change, and my feet began to swell so that I was afraid to take off my boots, fearing I might not be able to get them on again. All this made me so feverish that I could get no sleep, and became so thirsty I could do nothing but suck the beer barrel with a straw to try and allay the parching of my mouth. I was, however, instructed to set off betimes in the morning and find a practicable road from our bivouac, through the Forest of Soignes to Brussels, by which to conduct the Brigade in case of a further retreat.

Ingilby therefore set off before dawn on the 18th to reconnoitre a road through the forest for Vivian's Cavalry Brigade to cover the left flank of the Army which would follow the main highway. He had no map or guide, but he found a suitable track, and on reaching Brussels had a good breakfast at the Hotel d'Angleterre. After procuring a cooked cold chicken for his Officers' Mess, Ingilby returned by the track he had reconnoitred to the Brigade headquarters by 10.30 am and reported to Sir Hussey Vivian. His diary continues.

Sir William de Lancey (Wellington's Quartermaster-General) was with Sir Hussey Vivian, delivering what I understood to be the Commander-in-Chief's instructions for the position of his Brigade and the objects which he was to keep in view. Sir William de Lancey pointed to a direction to our left by which the Prussians would come, and, that Sir Hussey Vivian was on no account to move his Brigade from the position assigned to it until he had put himself in communication with the Prussians, and they, the Prussians, had joined or reached his left. Sir William de Lancey showed a dark spot on a hill by a plantation, and said if they were troops, it was certainly a Prussian picquet. I made the remark that they certainly were troops.

At about 11 o'clock Sir H. Vivian moved forward his whole Brigade. Here we remained in advance of the British position, and so much so that when the French advanced their columns previous to commencing the battle at a very quick pace, we became first abreast of them, and they then passed our right flank and we were in their rear and could distinctly see their immediate movements to advance to attack the troops in their front without regard

to us. Our Brigade then retrograded into line with the other troops and became the extreme left of the Allied Army when deployed and extended. The Prussian picquet still remained where Sir W. de Lancey had first perceived it. Some Nassau light troops occupied the hedges in our front near Papelotte, and had some very little field pieces which they occasionally fired and attracted now and then the fire of the French much heavier guns. The German Legion was on our right and appeared to extend to the *pavé* road, and was on the face of a round hill called Mont St Jean. We could see further on to our right a considerable way along the front of our army. From the continued fall of wet since yesterday afternoon the ground had become very deep and did not bear the guns well.

It was about noon (when, as I have said, we were in advance of the British position with our Brigade) that the French columns crowned the opposite heights, and they now again got into motion and, making a rapid and simultaneous push forward, both infantry and cavalry, neared our whole line and instantly the battle was commenced. The artillery of both armies maintained a terrible cannonade. At the centre right the French brought into action a line of 70 or 80 guns. Supported by this battery a column of Infantry advanced with loud shouts of *Vive l'Empereur* and drove back one of our divisions from its position. They were then charged by our Cavalry and completely routed with great loss of life. The same Cavalry then advanced against a body of French Cavalry, which approached, supported by another column of their Cavalry, to save or sustain their broken and retiring Infantry. As the two lines of Cavalry neared each other the French rather hesitated or at least slackened their pace. The English increased theirs. They met and the French were instantly overthrown, and the ground, which had before been clear, was now covered with wrecks of the charge.

Some of our Dragoons we could see individually or in small parties pushing on, and they had actually possession of the right of the large battery of French guns, while on the left their guns continued to fire. Sir H. Vivian was extremely anxious to do something with his Brigade at this charge, but I know that he was restrained by his instructions, which were by no means to quit his position and expose the left flank of the army. As both Cavalries

charged obliquely to the left and the French Cavalry was part of their centre right, and did not move, it brought the charge nearly opposite the position of our Brigade. Sir H. Vivian therefore took a couple of guns of the Troop and proceeded with them to assist General Ponsonby and his Cavalry. These were my division (section), but we became so completely within range of the enemy's numerous battery of superior calibre that one of the first shots directed against us blew up a limber, killed the sergeant, and passed through the shoulders of my charger exactly above my knees, and Sir H. Vivian immediately withdrew them, lest, knowing his orders, he might attract the notice of the Commander-in-Chief. The French, on seeing the limber blow up, gave some loud cheers, but that could not compensate for defeat with great loss of both attacks by the Infantry and Cavalry. General Ponsonby was killed and Colonel Ponsonby very badly wounded and left on the enemy position.

The French supporting column of Cavalry, on seeing the overthrow of its leading columns, instantly put about and retired at a trot to its original ground on the extreme right of the French position; they were clothed in red. In these charges (excepting at the great charge between the two large bodies of Cavalry) and repulses, the sight was perpetually interrupted by the smoke of the cannon and musketry, and it was difficult at the distance to affix to each Corps or Regiment the part or share it took in them. Our Infantry that appeared driven back were the Highlanders, and the Cavalry that immediately charged were the Scotch Greys. The great charge was made by Heavy Cavalry supported by Light.

The battle appeared now to rage at every point, and though the day continued drizzling wet and the dullness of the atmosphere was increased along the line by the smoke of the musketry and cannon so as occasionally to render everything momentarily invisible or obscured, yet as the wind blew fresh and rolled it away, one could clearly distinguish other continual charges of the Cavalry of both sides, and the alternate formations of the troops into squares and lines or masses.

Twice or thrice a Prussian officer appeared to announce the approach of their army, and at his request we actually cleared the road on which we were standing in order to have firm

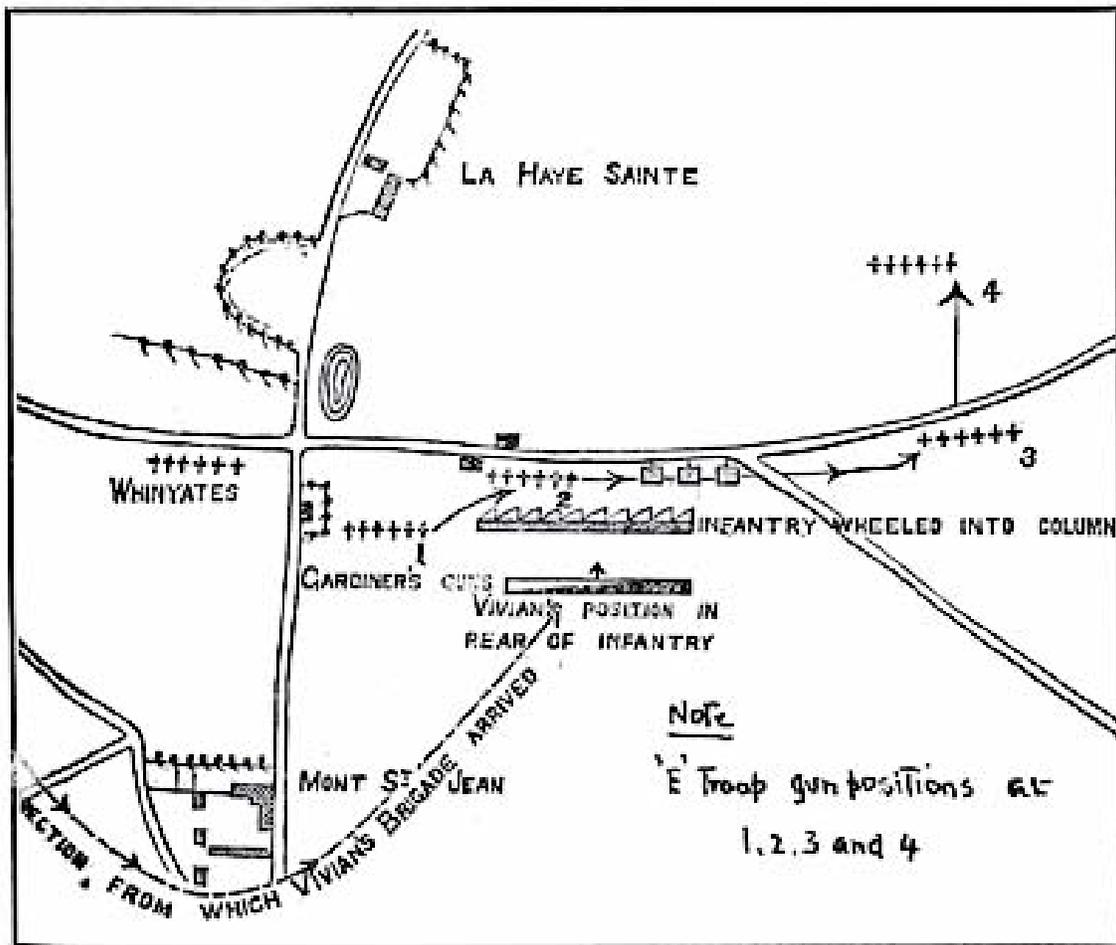
footing for our horses and guns, to make way for them. The Duke of Wellington on the other hand sent more than once to ascertain if they had arrived, or to enquire if they were in sight, but we could give no account whatever of them.

The French were at length formed on a sort of plain or flat, below and in front of the height from which they had commenced their attack, but though nearer, had acquired no part of our position, and they were evidently greatly reduced in numbers, while at the same time the ranks of our Infantry immediately on our right were thinned, as was apparent from the increased space caused by closing the files, between its left and our right.

At about between four and five o'clock in the evening the Prussians did appear, and after some delay they formed and advanced briskly to attack the French right in front of

Papelotte. We could see some columns and Artillery of the French immediately wheel to the right and repulse this attack, and these Prussians made no further progress or attempt to push on. At about half past eight o'clock more of the Prussian Army appeared, and some of their Cavalry and Artillery taking up the ground we had maintained the whole day, Sir Hussey Vivian moved his Brigade towards the right, crossed the *pavé* road and formed in line behind the Brunswick-Oels Infantry, who were in line, advancing firing. The smoke was so dense we could for a time see nothing immediately before us, while thus, at the distance of about 15 paces, supporting what proved to be at length an attack from our side, and a total overthrow of the French.

We could, however, perceive that the right of the French was engaged in, and opposed by, a heavy cannonade on their right rear,



which could only be another body of Prussians, although from the distance, and dusk, which at this time was commencing, we could discern nothing with the eye but the flashes and smoke of their cannon, and the sound even extended beyond where we could see, and it was evident that the French were engaged in rear of the heights on which they showed their front to us. About this time, while crossing the *pavé*, Sir Robert Gardiner and Captain Dyneley both expressed their distrust of present appearances; they did not like them, and, bearing in mind everything I had gathered from what Colonel de Lancey said in my hearing to Sir H. Vivian, as to the time and occasion when his Brigade would move and be brought to support the centre, I held and expressed a contrary opinion, that it was the Duke's turn and that he was now attacking their centre, his time for doing which evidently having depended upon the Prussians making their appearance in force on the right flank of the French.

A short while afterwards the Infantry on our front, which had continued steadily to advance, firing along their whole line, halted and ceased firing, and we then perceived the French, both those immediately in our front and those on other parts of their positions, scampering off in full retreat. The Brunswickers broke into open columns and Sir H. Vivian, passing through their intervals, the Cavalry pushed forward and were presently charging the fugitive masses in every direction, while we with the guns alternately unlimbered and advanced, bringing them to bear on every possible occasion, until it was too dark to fire without danger to our own Cavalry, which continued to press upon the rear of the French, and turned their retreat into a complete rout and confused flight. We then halted to bivouac near what we called the Observatory, a wooden frame erection which was conspicuous in rear of the line of battle of the French in the morning.

On being despatched to bring up our ammunition waggons, which had been left behind at our advance, I passed in rear of the

guns abandoned by the French and met another body of Prussian Cavalry, apparently quite fresh and proceeding as if to continue the pursuit. The ground and roads were strewn with the dead and wounded, the latter crawling towards the roads with the hope of meeting more speedily with assistance, and it was with difficulty the waggons could be driven clear of the living and dead bodies along a part of the Quatre Bras road, where I saw many of both mangled by the wheels, I suppose, of the French Artillery in their retreat.

In the early part of the day, when the battle was about commencing, a calf strayed in among the Troop, which having been instantly slaughtered, for the men and officers both were entirely without provisions, it served us all for a meal. Fires were made and we soon had a fresh dish of veal, which satisfied our hunger, and I for my part had a good night's rest after having been up very early and to Brussels, altogether a long and hard day.

*19th June, 1815*

Courcelles. We now began to learn and understand the extent of yesterday's victory and how hardly it had been gained, and the number of men and officers it had cost. My unlucky baggage which was left to follow the Troop on the morning of the 16th, and the pack saddle I had bought the evening before at Brussels, never came into my hands, were lost *in toto*, and my first charger having been killed, I was not likely to be much a gainer by the battle.

This concludes Lieutenant Ingilby's account of Waterloo. Few other participants have described so vividly the final stages of the battle. 'E' Troop then continued its march to Paris, which it entered on 13th July. From then until November 1818 'E' Troop formed part of the Army of Occupation, being stationed at various places in Northern France. It then returned to England. Ingilby later served in a Garrison Company in Mauritius, but in July 1825 he rejoined 'E' Troop at Athlone in Ireland. He later enjoyed a distinguished career in India, and died in 1879 as General Sir William Ingilby, KCB at the age of 89.