The course of the Battle of Waterloo – 18 June 1815

The British troops have taken possession of the château-farm of Hougoumont and spend the night fortifying the position in order to be able to defend themselves in the case of a French attack.

As the hours pass, the farm becomes a real stronghold with the buildings and walls occupied by the elite troops, whilst the light regiments cover the woods and the surrounding area.

The Emperor has probably spent the night thinking about the battle: planning to send his brother, Jerome Bonaparte and his troops to create a diversion, taking out the left wing of the allied troops in order to be able to strike at the very centre of the Duke of Wellington’s troops.

A fierce battle begins ... this fighting will conjure up the most repulsive horror scenes imaginable ... with the carnage giving way at the end of the day to a furnace and the deluge of the dead and the wounded ...

The French attack led by General Drouet d’Erlon’s 1st Corps is the biggest movement of troops to be undertaken on 18 June 1815 in Waterloo.

11h30: The French artillery batteries of the 1st, 2nd and 6th Corps, gathered together into one, single grande batterie of 80 cannons, open the infernal proceedings ...

The allied positions reply with similar heavy fire, the battle wages between thunder and lightning ...

Jerome Bonaparte’s infantry division leads the attack on the Hougoumont Farm, driving the allied light troops back and, at the same time, taking possession of the land and the woods around the farm.

In the light of this initial success the French now surround the entire defensive position and blockade the north and south gates of the farm. They prepare for a major attack with the aim of taking the North gate ...

hardly has it been broken down than the troops succeed in entering the property itself.

However, the British resistance is very strong ... the French are finally pushed back on the northern side.

A fight to the death is taking place in both camps ... a battle within the battle.

Explosions from the artillery fire resonate on all fronts ... the Hougoumont Farm burns under French
cannon fire ... After so many unsuccessful attempts the French pull back their advance, leaving the British victorious in their temerity.

**12h30**: The French *grande batterie* takes its place to the left of the allies. The entire front line erupts as they all take fire and everyone is drawn into the combat.

**13h30**: The 1st infantry Corps of General Drouet d’Erlon attacks the allies. The French advance towards the ridge at Mont-Saint-Jean, but are pushed back by the allied infantry. The British heavy cavalry charges as far as the French *grande batterie* and succeeds in taking two of their eagles, symbols of the Imperial army. The French cuirassiers and lancers mount a counter-attack.

The French manage to take both the Papelotte Farm and La Haie-Sainte Farm, thanks to the 4th division led by General Durutte.

The Emperor Napoleon sends the order to Marshal Ney to attack using General Drouet d’Erlon’s 1st Corps, along with the four divisions of Quiot, Donzelot, Marcognet and Durutte. These form four, compact phalanxes, each made up of 18,000 men, taking up their positions from the Belle-Alliance Farm to the Papelotte Farm, with sloped arms and shouting ‘Long live the Emperor! Forward!’ Beating the charge they set off to attack the allied ridge.

The Belgo-Dutch forces of the brigade of General Major van Bylandt take up the assault on the ridge in order to hide the presence of the allied troops, who are lying in ambush waiting for the attack.

The charges become heavier and heavier ... followed by a dreadful fray when the hidden allies finally reveal themselves ... and shoot down the French.

The 1st French Corps finds itself under bayonet attack with two French flags being captured by the British heavy cavalry, which has managed to penetrate on all fronts. Then, spurred on by victory, the cavalry finds itself face to face with the 80 cannon French *grande batterie*, which it is convinced can be taken with the greatest of ease.

The Emperor takes advantage of the situation and despatches his lancers and cuirassiers. They attack on the flanks, inflicting heavy losses and succeeding in pushing the cavalry back to the ridge.

However, heavy fighting is raging on the Mont-Saint-Jean ridge as well, and the struggle starts once more ... **16h00**: The heavy charges of the French cavalry, with Marshal Ney at the front, come face to face with the defensive square formations of the British troops between the Hougoumont and Haie-Sainte Farms. Some eight thousand horses charge again and again for nearly two hours ... but without success. The allied objective: to cut down the horses and thus form a cruel barrier, preventing the French from reaching the allied square formations.
16h30: The Prussians join the fray and arrive on the Battlefield, coming to the aid of the Duke of Wellington, who finds himself in a weak position.

As for the French, the 6th Corps of General Mouton, Count of Lobau, reinforce the right front and the village of Plancenoit.

17h00: The Prussian troops join the action on the Battlefield on the allied left flank.

18h00: After many attempts the French troops manage to take the Haie-Sainte Farm on every side ... the Prussian Major Baring orders his men to retreat.

The farm is taken but the allies come back in greater numbers and launch a counter-attack ... finally regaining possession of the property.

The French reach the Haie-Sainte Farm ... but it is too late.

The village of Plancenoit is in Prussian hands. The Emperor once again sends out the Young Guard under the command of General Pelet-Clozeau. With fixed bayonets and without firing a single shot, these soldiers venture again and again into the village on the counter-attack ...

19h30: The Prussians and the allies form a united front, pushing the French army far in front of them. Collapse is at hand!

The French Imperial Guard attacks the allied right flank. It is met with relentless artillery fire from the allied artillery. The allied infantry, lying in ambush, surges up suddenly to take fire ... the shots are unremitting and devastating ... the Guard retreats.

According to legend, it was General Cambronne who said « The Guard dies, but will never surrender » ... allowing Napoleon to flee to Paris.

21h00: The end of the Empire!

The Duke of Wellington and Field Marshal Blücher meet to celebrate their victory near to the Belle Alliance Farm.

Together they agree that the Prussians alone should continue to pursue the French.