

THE GUARDS REMEMBER:

Hougoumont Farm - a peaceful Belgian homestead, going about its daily business much as it has done for generations past. Yet this is a special day; men of the 2nd Battalion The Scots Guards are here, for a ceremony which means a great deal to them. The Battalion have been here before - 143 years ago - for one of history's greatest battles.

Yes, it was here - on a battlefield barely three miles by two - that 140,000 men decided the fate of nations. This painting recalls that bloody day in 1815. The Duke of Wellington, with 68,000 men and 156 guns, fought 72,000 Frenchmen and 246 guns, under Napoleon Buonaparte - that great and terrible leader whose memory still haunts Europe.

An eagle with broken wings marks the spot where Napoleon watched his last tragic battle. Not far away, a huge mound with a lion at its peak marks where Wellington's ally, the Prince of Orange, was wounded. French memorials, too, honour their thousands who died in vain.

Here, in Waterloo village, Wellington spend the night before the battle, finalising plans with his Dutch and Hanoverian allies.

And here, a mile or two away, at Le Caillon, Napoleon Buonaparte - with the generals whose mistakes were to cost him dear - prepared to meet his Waterloo.

And here, at Hougoumont Farm, the fighting started. Throughout the day, six French regiments wore themselves out trying to dislodge the British guardsmen and their Dutch comrades. Hundreds died in the bitter struggle, with the French breaking in more than once; but the Allies stood firm. A century and a half later, the British Ambassador to Belgium unveils a plaque at the gate, while Scots Guardsmen of the 2nd Battalion remember their forbears who defended a bloodstained farmyard and helped to change history. Their other memorial - the words of Wellington, when he explained his victory with the simple phrase: "You see, the Guards held Hougoumont!".