

VISIT OF THE ACWRTUK

by *Gerald Hawkins*

At the end of the year 2001, Peter Lockwood, president of the ACWRTUK (American Civil War Round Table United Kingdom), asked Hubert Leroy and Gerald Hawkins of the CHAB (Confederate Historical Association of Belgium) to plan and organize a visit of the Waterloo battlefield for members of the British association. This was programmed for June 2002 in the framework of the yearly activities of the UK Round Table. Some six months later, in the evening of May 31, 2002, a small group of British specialists in military history, led by Peter, arrived in Brussels under a beautiful sunshine. Gerald joined them early the next morning and, after a pleasant breakfast in their company in the Aris Hotel, he guided their bus out of town, through the forest of Soignes, on to the road to Waterloo. During the journey, Gerald made a brief historical review of the Napoleonic wars so that the group could better understand the reasons why the French Emperor came to Belgium in 1815.

The bus first stopped at Quatre Bras, south of Waterloo, an important crossroad in the 1800's that was the site of the first clash between the French divisions of Marshal Ney and the Belgo-Dutch vanguard of Wellington's forces. After a pause at the monuments dedicated to the allied cavalries, we continued to the small village of Ligny where our friend and member Alain Arcq was waiting for us. Alain had specially arranged for our hosts the projection of a recently made slide and sound show that perfectly described the movements of the opposing armies that resulted in the French Grand Army defeating the Prussians and forcing them to retreat towards Wavre. The morning ended with a brief tour of the small but interesting museum of Ligny, a frog leap to the site of the bygone windmill from where general Blücher viewed the battle, and a stop at an old farm bearing a plaque honoring the French soldiers that died during the fighting of June 16, 1815. The bus then turned back in the direction of the Lion Mound to unload its starving and thirsty sightseers at the restaurant *Bivouac de l'Empereur* where a cold lunch, booked in advance, was speedily served.

The afternoon begun with the visit of the Wellington Museum, headquarters of the Iron Duke just before the main battle. Charles Godart, a CHAB member and official Waterloo guide, was waiting for us there, as planned. He immediately gave Gerald a break by taking charge of the group. The actual tour of the battlefield started at the visitor's center, next to the Lion Mound, where in front of large maps, Charles described the movements of the French, English and Prussian troops on June 18, 1815. He then took the party to an excellent observation point from where one could clearly see the former positions of the opposing armies as well as the disputed farms of the *Haie Sainte* and the *Belle Alliance*. The sun being particularly hot, part of the group decided to walk to the *Hougoumont* Farm while the bus collected the stragglers.

At the farm, Charles helped relive the heroic British defense of the position that, despite the devastation caused by the French attacks, has miraculously well survived the erosion of time. After a brief halt at the monuments dedicated to the Belgian and Hanovrian soldiers, and to General Gordon, aide de camp of general Wellington, the bus got under way for the ultimate destination of the day, the village of Plancenoit, where we viewed the monument erected to the Prussian soldiers that died during the campaign. Charles then took leave of the group under a wave of applause and the bus journeyed back to Brussels where it arrived at 6.30 PM. The day was however not over.

To celebrate the visit of the ACWRTUK members to Belgium, the CHAB had decided to organize a small cocktail in their honor. At about 8 PM, the group disembarked at the Woluwe St Lambert communal museum where the full committee of the CHAB was impatiently waiting. Once the presentations over and the glasses of our guests filled by our devoted “barman” Dominique De Cleer, our president Daniel Frankignoul addressed a few words of welcome to our British visitors, which were immediately echoed by those of Peter Lockwood. As a token of appreciation, Peter presented to the CHAB a beautiful, limited edition of a book describing the odyssey of the CSS *Virginia*. At about 9.30 PM, our guests left for dinner after having posed for the traditional group photograph.



Daniel Frankignoul, president of the CHAB and Peter Lockwood, president of the ACWRTUK



Members of the ACWRTUK at the CHAB club house



Serge Noirsain, vice president of the CHAB, browses through the book offered by Peter Lockwood



Peter Lockwood in conversation with CHAB committee member Hubert Leroy



The CHAB and ACWRTUK members gather outside the club house for a group photograph



Our British guests about to depart from the CHAB club house after the cocktail given in their honor