

Le Vigneau estate and the fighting of 1814

The grounds of Le Vigneau were the scene of heavy and deadly fighting in 1814 during the siege of Bayonne (17 February to 5 May 1814) by the Allied armies (English, Spanish, Portuguese), under the command of the Duke of Wellington and of General Hope.

The heights east of Saint-Etienne [a district of Bayonne north of the Adour river] slightly dominate the Citadel of Bayonne. In addition, they also control the roads to Bordeaux and Toulouse. It was therefore important for the French defenders to maintain control of the heights and to organize swiftly, when facing new threats, a couple of strongholds based primarily on the old Romanesque church and the Jewish cemetery.

To counter any threat from the north, three lines of defense were prepared. The mission of the third line was:

- To cover the fortress by three redoubts: Micalet, Great Vine and Moracin,
- To occupy the road junctions to Bordeaux and Toulouse around the Jewish cemetery and extend the defense up to the church of Saint-Etienne,
- To control the possible hidden approaches to the citadel by establishing a defensive line along the existing "Chemin de La Harie", based on existing homes: Lesperon, Vigneau, Duke, Basterrechea, Montaigu ...

And it was no less essential to the Allies who had crossed the Adour below Bayonne, to seize these heights. They could do so only by advancing through the ravines out of sight of the guns of the Citadel and more particularly along the bed of the "Creek of the Fountain Vigneau."

This is where some of the fighting took place twice in 1814, on the grounds of what would become the Vigneau estate:

- The first time, on February 27 at the beginning of the attack by the Allies that were able to capture the strongholds of Saint-Etienne, therefore completing the blockade of the Place de Bayonne (front line along the "Chemin de La Harie").
- A second time in the night of April 13 to 14, during the famous "Sortie de Bayonne," when the French retook temporarily the heights of Saint-

Etienne, inflicting severe losses on British and allied troops. During this action, English General Hope, commander of Allied troops besieging Bayonne, was wounded and taken prisoner in the ravine below the Vigneau house.

It was during this action that all the houses along the Chemin de La Harie, and in particular the initial Vigneau and its dependencies, was the scene of heavy fighting. These houses were burned and razed to their foundations by the French engineers before their withdrawal to the citadel.

There is therefore a very close link between the grounds of Le Vigneau and the memorials for nearly two centuries that are the "English Cemetery" in the neighborhood (the officers of the Coldstream Guards is located a few hundred meters downstream of the valley Vigneau).



"The Sortie of Bayonne April 14, 1814," extract from "Martial Achievements of Great Britain and Her Allies from 1799 to 1815".