

## Von Steinmetz' retreat.

It was the commander of the post at Lobbes, captain Von Gillhausen, who, after being forced out of Lobbes, informed Von Steinmetz of the french offensive here.

He collected his troops in the wood north of Lobbes and started his retreat the moment the post at Hourbes had gone back too towards its battalion, the 3rd battalion of the 1st Westphalian landwehr. Also the post at Aulnes was taken in by this battalion.

Gillhausen started his retreat from the wood towards Anderlues and Fontaine l'Evêque between 8 and 9 a.m.<sup>1</sup>

Having received the information of Von Gillhausen, Von Steinmetz decided to concentrate his brigade at Fontaine l'Eveque.<sup>2</sup> By 9 a.m. he received the order of Von Zieten to march through Fontaine l'Evêque towards Courcelles and from there, if necessary, to a position in rear of Gosselies.

It was around the same time that he received the following note from Pirch II:

*Das 2. Bataillon des 1. Westpreussischen Regiments hält Marchienne besetzt, bis die 1<sup>ste</sup> Brigade sich nach Gosselies zieht, und mit ihm in gleicher Höhe ist. Deshalb schicke Ich einen Offizier zu Ew. Hochwohlgeboren, den Sie zum Bataillon zurückzuschicken die Güte haben wollen, wenn es Zeit zum Abzug ist. So eben wird mir gemeldet dass die Feldwache von Nalinnes angegriffen ist, weiter hört man vorne nichts.*

*Von Pirch II*

*Den 15. Juni*<sup>3</sup>

Because of the distance and the atmosphere (there was practically no wind) the troops at Steinmetz' extreme right flank were relatively late informed about the retreat as they wouldn't have heard the alarm guns.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, Von Steinmetz had informed general Van Merlen (at Saint Symphorien) about the events and his situation by sending out his chief of staff, major Arnauld de la Périère.<sup>5</sup>

On his way to Saint Symphorien, Arnauld de la Périère called back the outposts at Bonne Espérance and Binche, led by the major Engelhardt.

Von Steinmetz pulled back his outposts which were lying towards Mont Saint Aldegonde (six and a half kilometers of Fontaine l'Eveque) and those towards Anderlues ( four kilometers from Fontaine l'Eveque).

For their retreat these outposts were supported at Forchies la Marche by a soutien consisting of the 1st and 2nd battalion of the 24th regiment as well as half of the horse battery no.7<sup>6</sup>

After taking back his outposts on the line Mont St. Aldegonde, Anderlues and Fontaine l'Evêque and concentrating his remaining troops, Von Steinmetz started his further retreat around 10 a.m.<sup>7</sup>

In all probability, the troops at Buvrinnes, Vellereille, Epinois, Waudrez and Ressaix will have gone back to Anderlues. Those at Carrières might have gone back to Mont Saint Aldegonde, so that the troops in the centre and on the right wing of the brigade eventually came on the line Mont Saint Aldegonde - Anderlues - Fontaine l'Eveque.

In addition, there were troops in a more northern direction, at Courcelles, Trazegnies, Viesville and Odomont.

Von Steinmetz would have gone back to Gosselies in two columns: one, of the main body, through Courcelles and the other one through Roux, in order to cover the flank of the main body and to secure the communication with the brigade of Pirch II.<sup>8</sup>

The main body consisted of the troops coming from Mont Saint Aldegonde, Anderlues, Fontaine l'Eveque, Courcelles and Trazegnies.

The 6th uhlans at Viesville concentrated at Gosselies around 9 a.m.<sup>9</sup>

The flank column would have consisted of the 2nd and 3rd battalion of the 1st regiment Westphalian Landwehr (coming respectively of Lobbes and Leernes, Landelies, Hourbes and the abbey of Aulne) and the 3rd and 4th company Silesian sharpshooters under the command of major Von Neumann (the battalion commander of the sharpshooters), all under the command of colonel Von Hoffmann (2800 men).<sup>10</sup>

Around 10 a.m. Von Steinmetz sent captain Von Goschitzky to general Von Zieten that he intended to go back and at the same time Von Hoffmann got the instruction to reach the crossing over the Piéton at la Motte as soon as he could; in case he would reach this crossing before the main body, he had to take up a position to be able to defend the bridge as long as he could.<sup>11</sup>

To cover this retreat, Von Steinmetz pushed forward a few detachments, like the one consisting of the skirmishers of the 1st battalion under captain Bennert, a detachment of skirmishers of the 3rd battalion under captain Von Sandrasky (to the left) and one under lieutenant Busch towards Marchienne-au-Pont.<sup>12</sup>

This evacuation of Marchienne-au-Pont had probably taken place between 11 a.m. and noon.<sup>13</sup> It may have been that Von Steinmetz halted his units at Courcelles until news came from this evacuation. The distance between Marchienne-au-Pont and Courcelles is about eleven kilometers.

Von Steinmetz had started his retreat from the line Mont St.Alegonde – Anderlues - Fontaine l'Evêque around 10 a.m. and reached La Motte (this is the point where the road from Courcelles to Gosselies crosses the Piéton) around 1.30 p.m.<sup>14</sup> The distance between Fontaine l'Eveque and Gosselies (through Courcelles) is eleven kilometers. This means that it took the brigade three and a half hours to cover this distance (the possible halt at Courcelles included).

The distance Courcelles - Piéton is about three kilometers; his speed must have been about three kilometers per hour, as the troops arrived at the Piéton around 1.30 p.m.

Taking into account this speed the brigade must have arrived at Courcelles around noon (the distance Fontaine l'Eveque to Courcelles is six kilometers and the brigade left at 10 a.m.).

With this speed the brigade could have arrived at Gosselies around 2.30 p.m.

Whether the flank column under Von Hoffmann also left Fontaine l'Evêque at 10 a.m. is not known. The 2nd battalion of the 1st regiment Westphalian Landwehr had to cover seven kilometers coming from Lobbes. Leaving this post at 7.30 a.m. it must have arrived at Fontaine l'Eveque around 10.00 a.m.

The 3rd battalion could also have arrived at Fontaine l'Evêque around the same time; it came from Aulnes and had to cover five kilometers, leaving Aulnes around 8.30 a.m.

In case these troops left Fontaine l'Evêque right after their arrival, they too could reach Roux

around noon. It was here that they met the 4th company of the 1st battalion of the 2nd regiment Westphalian Landwehr (Pirch II); this company had its post here till the moment Charleroi fell into french hands.

All in all, Von Hoffmann would have reached la Motte just before Von Steinmetz did with his main body. It was here that the brigade was assembled and took up a position, having the Piéton in front. From here it was that a post was pushed forward towards Jumet to reconnoitre the french, which had crossed the Sambre at Marchienne-au-Pont.<sup>15</sup>

Though Von Steinmetz didn't have his brigade completed, he started his crossing over the Piéton around 2 p.m., having the Silesian hussars and the footbattery nr.7 in front. As soon as the fuseliers of 1st Westphalian Landwehr had crossed the stream, they were ordered to take up a position on the east-bank to protect the other units against possible enemy actions while crossing the stream.<sup>16</sup>

During this march from the Piéton towards Gosselies Prussian flank-patroles must have been engaged with french patroles in some skirmishing fire.<sup>17</sup>

It must have been during the action at Gosselies that the company of the 1st regiment Silesian hussars under the command of lieutenant Sellin (in former outposts near Mont Saint Geneviève) was threatened to be cut off from its unit and lieutenant Sellin decided to fall back further to the north, towards Nivelles.<sup>18</sup>

Revised: 14th May 2011 - Copyright © Pierre de Wit

<sup>1</sup> In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.39

<sup>2</sup> Jonkheer Vrijthoff, general commissary of the inspection between the Lys and the Sambre claims that he would have informed Von Steinmetz on the 14th of June about the presence of french lancers at Binche [?]; he would also have been informed by a custom-officer at Thuin about the imminent french offensive. It would have led Von Steinmetz to concentrate his brigade. In: Geusau, baron Von Eene onuitgegevene bijdrage etc. p.192-194  
Vrijthoff may have informed Von Steinmetz about what he heard about a possible french offensive, but I do not believe this led him to concentrate his brigade.

<sup>3</sup> In: Beleuchtung etc In: MWBL, Vol.30 p.43

<sup>4</sup> Account major Von Hofmann (commander ad interim of the 1st brigade). In: MWB, 1846 p.84  
According to another account in the Militär Wochenblatt, alarm guns at Fontaine l'Evêque would have been fired around 3.30 a.m., but by then the offensive hadn't even started.  
Vol.31. p.180

<sup>5</sup> This was oral information. Cf. Account of Arnauld himself. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.39

<sup>6</sup> In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.39

7. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.39

Account of an adjudant of Von Steinmetz. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.180  
According to this adjudant Von Steinmetz sent his captain Goschitzky to Von Zieten to inform him of this retreat.

Account of major Von Hofmann. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.84

The diary of the 1st corps claims Von Steinmetz started his retreat after 9 a.m. In KA. VI.E.13  
In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.51

The distance between Lobbes to the point between Fontaine l'Eveque and Anderlues is about seven kilometers. Von Gillhausen left Lobbes around 7.30 a.m. and marched to the Bois de Sart-de-Lobbes and from there to the point between Fontaine l'Eveque and Anderlues.

<sup>8</sup> Account of major Von Hofmann. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.84  
Cf. J.von Pflugk Harttung in: GSA, VPH-HA,VI, nr.II.12.p.43

<sup>9</sup> Cf. account of an officer of that regiment. In: Minerva 1840. Cited in: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.38

10. Aerts, W. In: Etudes etc.p.296

<sup>11</sup> Account of an adjutant of Von Steinmetz. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.180 Cf. Hofschröer, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.173-174

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Harkort, F. Die Zeiten des ersten Westfälischen Landwehrregiments p.40

<sup>13</sup> According to another source Von Steinmetz learned about the evacuation of Marchienne-au-Pont between 10 and 11 a.m. but this is too early. Cf. Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.43

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lettow Vorbeck, O. von Napoleon's Untergang p.261 According to another source it was 12.30 p.m. Cf. Beleuchtung etc. In: Militär Wochenblatt, 1846 p.44 Both Von Steinmetz as Von Hoffmann crossed the Piéton at la Motte (about 500 meters north of the abbey of Sart le Moine), that is the place where the road leading from Courcelles to Gosselies crosses the Piéton. Account of an adjutant of Von Steinmetz. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.180

The fact that the brigade crossed there is also confirmed by major Von Engelhardt of the 1st regiment of Silesian hussars. In: KA, VI.E.7.II.53 p.15 In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr. VII, nr. 3B. p.15

<sup>15</sup> Account of an adjutant of Von Steinmetz. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.180 Report of major Von Götz (fuselier battalion 2nd Brandenburg regiment of infantry nr.12). In: KA, VI.E.7.I.36 In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr. VII, 3B p.1

<sup>16</sup> Report of captain Von Gillhausen (2nd battalion 1st regiment of Westphalian Landwehrinfantry). In: KA, VI.E.7.II.35 In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr. VII, nr. 3B p.8 Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J. von In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr. II.2. p.22 He reports that it took a long time before the brigade had been completed. The 4th company of the 2nd Westphalian landwehr (brigade of Pirch II) was near the bridge of Roux, but fell back to Gosselies, to the 1st brigade. Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J. von In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr. II.2. p.20

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Otto, F. von Geschichte des 2. Schlesischen Jäger Bataillons nr.6 p.78

18. Report of major Von Engelhardt (1st regiment of Silesian hussars). In: KA, VI.E.7.II.53 In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr. VII, nr. 3B p.15

Report of lieutenant Sellin (1st regiment of Silesian hussars) himself. In: KA, VI.E.7.II.53 In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr. VII, nr. 3B p.25

According to Von Reiche, Sellin was sent there (to Quatre Bras) in order to keep up the communication with the Anglo-Netherlands-German army. Though he doesn't mention the name of Sellin, this cannot have been another detachment than his. It returned to its unit on the 16th. See: Reiche, L. von Memoiren etc. p.168