

Observations on the cooperation of Blücher and Wellington.

Introduction.

Before entering into the subject as referred to in the title of this chapter, I would like to summarize its strategic background first.

As I have entered into before, both commanders each had their main areas of concentration in case of a French offensive on one or the other army. These areas were applicable to situations that Napoleon would attack between the Scheldt and the Sambre.

By mid-June, in case of a main French offensive against the Anglo-Netherlands-German army, Wellington would choose for the triangle Enghien – Braine le Comte – Halle as his ultimate concentration area, while Blücher would do so, in the event of a main French offensive on his army (either through Charleroi or Namur) in the sector to the east of Fleurus, towards Gembloux and beyond, towards Hannut.

In case the main French attack would take place upon Blücher (at least through Charleroi), Wellington would initially concentrate his forces around Nivelles. If this attack would take place against Wellington, then Blücher would do so between Fleurus and Gembloux. The crossroads of Quatre Bras, as a major point of concentration, as supposedly fixed before the war started, is in this respect a product of hindsight.

Within these geographical and strategic dimensions, arrangements set by both commanders about the way they wanted to cooperate were built upon the presumption of the enemy using a double line of attack (a feint and a real one), and at the same time for both allied armies upon a combination of offensive and defence respectively and in which these actions would have a mutual influence resulting in a decisive, victorious battle. This cooperation could be either by a direct junction just before a battle or an indirect one during a battle, wherein one army would be on the defensive while the other would move in the flank or rear of the enemy. It is the scenario as caught by Von Müffling in the expression “fourches caudines.”¹

I would like to emphasize the importance of this last element in the defensive arrangements of the allied commanders.

As far as cooperation between the rivers Scheldt and the Sambre was concerned, what mattered for both armies was that each of them had its flank to the partner army open to either receive or to give support to the other. What mattered was a realistic prospect of cooperation, so as to avoid each army having to fight a major action alone.

In other words: the basic formula was that both armies would concentrate in time on one point or two points arranged in such a way that both would be able to cooperate.

That was the basic agreement success depended upon, and all further resulting arrangements were dependent on the specific situation regarding time and space.

The question is: how was this defensive concept applied in the campaign and what conclusions can be drawn from it ?

What I would like to do in this chapter is to test it to different elements like the course of the campaign, the Prussian reports as written on the 17th of June and later theories as developed by historians on the way both commanders cooperated. Resulting, some final observations and conclusions will be made.

The course of events.

A main condition for a proper cooperation was a parallel concentration of both armies, at least as parallel as could be in the sense that the one army, being attacked, would inform the other

of its resulting concentration. As I have shown, it was a most serious omission from the Prussian side that a communication about their concentration of the army left Namur some twelve hours later as could have been done.² This fact alone gave them a headstart of about 18 hours. One can ask what Wellington would have done with this information, but it becomes more of an interesting fact in relation to the information the duke received at 3 p.m. as something to which he did not react right away.³

After Wellington had learned about the hostilities during the afternoon of the 15th of June, he kept a very strong eye upon the sector of Mons and Binche, and this continued during the 16th of June.

This almost obsessive approach with this sector was the result that since March 1815 onwards strong French forces had been concentrated between Valenciennes and Maubeuge. This continuous presence on the direct line from Paris to Brussels was the main cause of the duke's fear right from the beginning. Wellington's axiomas in handling his army towards Napoleon, plus his cautious and methodic character, can only have added to the situation as it developed on the 15th and 16th of June.

The Prussians, in their turn, were paralysed in their role in a decisive battle, either a defensive or an offensive one, by their uncertainty about Napoleon's intentions until deep into the morning of the 16th of June.

In fact, taking the situations of both commanders together in respect of what they knew about the enemy's presence and intentions by noon on the 16th of June, my conclusion is that it was only by the time that the meeting at Bussy took place that *both* commanders had become fully aware of the fact that it was through Fleurus that Napoleon was marching in force *upon Blücher*.

The French advance from Fleurus had started at about 11 a.m. and developed in the following hours until after 1 p.m., the moment that Wellington joined Blücher for the meeting at Bussy. Until the moment Wellington left the crossroads of Quatre Bras the French movements had insufficiently developed to give an idea about their intentions, while at Fleurus they were masked by the terrain until the French forces started to debouch from the village and woods in its rear to positions in front of this village and opposite the Prussian army

The only thing Wellington was certain about by 10.30 a.m. was that Napoleon had no forces in front of his sector around Binche, Mons and further to his right, while at Frasnes they showed very little or no activity.

The parallel initiative of both Blücher and Wellington to discuss the situation in front of Sombreffe, and which resulted in an actual meeting at Bussy thanks to the initiative of Wellington, should be seen against the background of the idea that both commanders only now became aware of the French intentions in their full extent.

Similarly to the battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras being most often taken for granted in the historiography of the campaign, the same usually also happens with the meeting at Bussy. It is often being portrayed as a last, logical step of two commanders discussing the last in and outs before the battle would start, as if it was inevitably what was about to happen.

Yet, the overall context and meaning of the meeting are different and much less self-evident as it is usually described. Basically, it was the initiative of Wellington; if he hadn't taken the initiative, it would probably only have emerged after colonel Hardinge's arrival at Quatre Bras and the meeting might have taken place until about 2 p.m. but this is mere speculation.

Based upon this situation, in the late morning at Ligny, it was clear for both allied commanders that in line with the arrangements which had been made before that it was up to the Prussians to take a defensive stand, while Wellington was supposed either to support them by moving into the actual position of the Prussian army and join it, or to attack the French army in the rear or flank, thereby giving indirect support.

Although both commanders regarded the last option as the most decisive, they yet decided at Bussy for the first one, and then only with regard to the Anglo-Netherlands-German forces at or nearest to Quatre Bras. This choice meant that the defensive concept of the allied armies was compromised, as now only a part of Wellington's forces was supposed to get engaged and this meant a disruption of a single and powerful concentration of the whole British-Netherlands-German army.

The fact that this applied only to those forces at and nearest to Quatre Bras was caused by the fact that the basis from which the duke's support with the majority of his army was arranged to be coming from - the area around Nivelles - was too far away in case the French would attack that afternoon.⁴

The arrangement was also a conditional one, in the sense that it was left up to Wellington to decide what he would do, depending on the situation at Quatre Bras in respect of the strength of his own and the enemy's forces there.

In this way, the meeting of Bussy could only be one of last compromises in the situation which had arisen, as the initiative was with Napoleon.

It has been claimed that the Prussians made the final and actual decision to accept a battle near Sombreffe only after both commanders had met at Bussy.

To accept a battle is one thing, but to have the enemy there where you want it to be for this battle is another. In this sense, this claim completely ignores the *double* purpose of concentrating the army around Sombreffe: it contained not only a defensive, but also an *offensive* element, depending on what the enemy would do.

Let alone all the problems which arose during the process of concentrating the Prussian army near Sombreffe - and these have extensively been described - I have entered into the uncertainty the Prussian leadership suffered from during the morning of the 16th of June in terms of what the French were up to. The more this became clear - the advance of the main part of the French army against Blücher and not against his partner Wellington- the more pressing the need became for a proper defence of the position of Sombreffe as an imminent battle became ever more likely. In that sense there was a kind of "definitive Entscheidung" to accept the battle and taken at Bussy, but this should not be understood as the basic decision to accept a battle there, but as the certainty the allies then had about Napoleon's intention instead.

The very basic decision to accept a battle in the vicinity of Sombreffe had been taken long before the war started as an option in case Napoleon would fall in strength upon Blücher through Charleroi, thereby making it possible for Wellington to move in as a support either by directly joining the Prussian army or by falling upon the French rear and / or flank.

This not-self-evident status of the meeting at Bussy throws a completely different light upon any promise Wellington might have made for the Prussians to accept a battle there and then.

The appearance of Reille's corps in force in front of Frasnes between 1 and 2 p.m. on the 16th of June forced Wellington in a concentration of a part of his army right in front of the enemy. Both these elements were not only dangerous in themselves, but also fully contrary to the duke's principles of war.

Whether it was Wellington himself, through the prince, or the prince himself who did so on his own account is unclear, but the fact is that the appearance of the French in force (at least in relation to those units of Wellington's army present) led Wellington here in an improvised action. Ney, from his side, in this way neutralised any possible assistance the duke might give to Blücher, while Wellington did so towards Ney in relation to those under Napoleon's direct command at Ligny.

Even though it was an improvised action on a field not of the duke's choosing, the action was one fought in a balance thanks to the timely arrival of the units of the 1st corps. Yet, in the overall situation as it had developed, I cannot avoid adhering to the statement as done by Chesney, as "De bonne foi, si le grand général anglais en sortit à son honneur ce jour-là, il le dut quelque peu à la fortune."⁵

While Wellington was fighting Ney, the battle of Ligny was fought in an ambiguous way by the Prussians, compared to the defensive concept of the so called "fourches caudines." While on the one hand Blücher was supposed to be on the defensive in relation to the role of Wellington, the Prussian leader yet tried to come out offensively on his right wing most probably in an attempt to throw Napoleon into the valley of the Sambre. At the same time, however, it was clearly seen by the Prussian staff that holding out till the 17th of June was the only way of gaining a victory as by then the 4th corps and parts of Wellington's army would be available to decide the balance in favour of the allies.⁶

It was on the 25th of June that Gneisenau wrote to Von Boyen:

"So eben hatten wir uns Glück gewünscht, dass wir einen rühmlichen Tag erfochten hätten und für den anderen konnten wir Hilfe erwarten, durch Bülow und die nun gewiss zu erwartende Concentrirung der Wellington'schen Armee, als unsere Cavalerie des Centrums vor wenigen Schwadronen floh, deren Anblick sie nicht ertragen konnte."⁷

In this context also fits the mission as sent out by the Prussian leadership to Wellington telling him by 6 p.m. that it was expected to hold out for the remainder of that day, and to be reinforced the next by Wellington and Von Bülow. Yet, it was by the continuous reinforcement of his right wing that Blücher weakened his centre and it was on this tactical level that the battle was lost some two to three hours later.

The Prussian reports of the 17th of June.

In former chapters I have dwelled upon details of these documents several times.

Here, I would like to deal with two elements related to them.

First of all, what they tell us about the way the Prussians saw the role of Wellington in the battle of Ligny and, secondly, the way these documents have been phrased by their authors and how later historians have used them.

Before entering into the first element, however, I would like to summarize a theory as developed by Julius von Pflug Harttung.

In the framework of the cooperation of Wellington and Blücher on the 15th and 16th of June, Von Pflug Harttung believes that the Prussians, Gneisenau more in particular, had the strong wish to beat Napoleon without his support from Wellington whatsoever.

For him – though he admits he has no proof for that – there was in that sense basically even a wish to be attacked by Napoleon. It involved risks, but it was worth the gamble as there was much to be gained from it. A victorious battle would enable the Prussian army, not only to render Prussia a more dominant role in the political arena in Europe, it would also make it possible for the Prussian army to leave the Low Countries where its cantonments put a heavy

financial burden upon Prussia. Additionally, it would enable the Prussians to move the war into France.

In the campaign, for Von Pflugk Harttung it started with the fact that the concentration of the Prussian army wasn't communicated towards Wellington right away. Some time later, the decision was taken to accept a battle in the vicinity of Sombreffe and this intention was communicated towards Wellington as a mere fact, while there was no compelling reason for the Prussian high command to accept this battle at all.

The core of Von Pflugk Harttung's theory is that the Prussians decided to accept a battle there without taking a role of Wellington's army into account. Von Pflugk Harttung supports this idea by stating that there was no case whatsoever during the campaign in which Gneisenau actually asked Wellington with so many words for help; the only thing he did was asking for his intentions and current situation. In Von Pflugk Harttung's idea it would have been logical if both commanders had set things straight right away of how their cooperation should look like, as by asking for their intentions and plans. In the situation of the campaign as it evolved, it was irresponsible if the Prussians counted upon Wellington.

The only role Wellington could possibly play was in case things would not turn out the way they should, and to prevent the Prussian army from being destroyed.⁸

As the battle of Ligny was about to start, I do not doubt for a minute that the Prussians hoped they would be able – without the support of Wellington- to beat Napoleon or at least drive him back into the valley of the Sambre so as to initiate a full French defeat. Indeed, this would have had a strong impact on the status of Prussia at Vienna.

Yet, Von Pflugk Harttung is taking things here beyond their actual value.

The fact that Gneisenau did not ask Wellington for support right away was the fact that such a request was not necessary as the basic agreement for support in case one of both armies would be attacked had been made long before the campaign.

What mattered was the way this support could be worked out in the current circumstances and this is what the Prussians asked for, no more. In this sense, Von Pflugk Harttung is running ahead of the events and falls in the trap of hindsight, in this case the battle of Ligny, as if all was directed towards this single "inevitable" event taking place, no matter what. But reality, as I have shown, was that the Prussians may have wished a confrontation near Sombreffe, time was yet to prove whether this would be the case. For some time the Prussian high command hung between a potential defensive or potential offensive role of their army and this is what Von Pflugk Harttung doesn't take into account.

In his theory, he also ignores the very basic formula for the allies of the campaign and that was cooperation: only in this way there was a reasonable chance of crushing Napoleon's army.⁹

As I have shown this cooperation - in case Napoleon would attack between the Sambre and the Scheldt rivers - was coordinated in areas of operation of both armies, of which the one around Sombreffe was the Prussian one. So, the decision to accept a battle there was not a *fait accompli a priori* and therefore fully new for Wellington: it was an option within the former arrangements for the defence of the country.

The initial fact that the Prussian leadership failed to inform Wellington of the concentration of the Prussian army is not to be understood as an argument for the theory as Von Pflugk Harttung describes it, but as a most serious omission.

The caution with which the concentration of the Prussian army near Sombreffe was carried out, by having a covering front and no French threat on the right flank contradicts the rashness to face Napoleon on the one hand, while it enhances the importance of a possible

communication towards Wellington on the other. These are elements as well which do not support the claim as done by Von Pflugk Harttung.

This also apparent from the letter sent at 11 p.m. by the Prussian leadership to Von Müffling in which the importance of an open line towards Wellington is considered as a most important condition for the acceptance of any confrontation with the French near Sombreffe at all.

I have explained the reasons why there was a compelling reason for the Prussians to make a stand near Sombreffe: to make it possible for them to cooperate with Wellington in the scenario as it took place, either defensively or offensively. Again, that was the very basic link which could make it possible to prevail at all and the Prussians were well aware of that.

In general, for me, Von Pflugk Harttung ignores too much the concepts and resulting arrangements for the defence of Belgium as laid out long before the campaign. As a result, he uses the events of the campaign itself, which are in his version here - however – in their turn completely obscured by the battle of Ligny, an event everything is written to as being inevitable.

As a last point , the theory has a tinge of half-heartedness as in case things might go wrong between Blücher and Napoleon, Wellington was supposed to play a role to prevent a Prussian defeat after all.

In the frustration which reigned on the 17th of June in the Prussian staff, both Von Bülow and Wellington, as expected to be present, were blamed for the defeat as it had taken place the day before. As Gneisenau wrote to Von Kleist: “Dies ist das Resultat der Schlacht, die mit einem vollständigen Siege geendigt haben würde, wenn das 4.Armeekorps oder der Herzog von Wellington an der Schlacht Theil genommen hätten, wie solches in der Verabredung lag.” Here, the suggestion is made as if it was either Von Bülow *or* Wellington who could have tipped the balance in favour of the Prussians. That means that the idea for the Prussians was they could defeat Napoleon without the assistance of Wellington or with his assistance and without Von Bülows. The first option is in line with the theory as I have sketched as coming from Von Pflugk Harttung.

At the same time, however, it is Blücher who writes to his king as an excuse for the defeat of Ligny: “So unangenehm der Vorfall ist, so kann er doch von keinen bedeutenden Folgen sein, da ich mich bis morgen vormittags mit allen vier Korps hier vereinigt haben werde un der Herzog Wellington mit seiner ebenfalls vereinigten Macht mir so nahe steht, dass keine geteilte Schlacht mehr vorfallen kann.”

This passage is a vital one as it shows that the Prussian staff was very well aware that the most realistic chance they had for beating Napoleon was through the cooperation with Wellington. In this, the use of the word “geteilt” is crucial as this refers for 100% to the underlying defensive concept of both commanders.

This approach does not necessarily have to exclude the fact that the Prussians wished for a pure Prussian (initial) victory over Napoleon if they could attain this.

Instead, what I want to say is that it would be absurd to presume that they actually steered the situation such as Von Pflugk Harttung describes it for the reasons mentioned above.

As I have indicated before, the Prussian reports of the 17th of June are influenced by the deception caused by the defeat at Ligny and should therefore be handled with care. In the preceding chapters I have spelled them out concerning the promises of support as given by Wellington.

What matters now is that in the documents covered here, it is important to note that a clear distinction should be made between basic promises as done by Wellington *before* and more specific ones *during* the campaign.

An example of this is the use of the words “wider Vermuten und Zusage” in Blücher’s report to the Prussian king in which he writes: “Ebenso war die Armee des Herzogs von Wellington wider Vermuten und Zusage noch nicht konzentriert genug, um gleichmässig gegen den Feind mitwirken zu können.”

The sheer use of the word “Vermuten” is another indication that arrangements as set before the campaign were of a far more general character as is often portrayed. At the same time, this is the difference between the two words: while “Vermuten” refers to a more general and basic arrangement for the concentration of the army so as to be able to support the other as set before the campaign, the word “Zusage”, though be it a conditional one, here refers to the one actually done during the campaign, i.e. the one through Von Müffling in the letter of 7 p.m. 15th of June.

In the next passage, as coming from Gneisenau, this principle returns: “Er [Wellington] hatte diese Konzentrierung zu wiederholten Malen und namentlich noch am 15ten Juni auf das bestimmteste, und zwar binnen zwölf Stunden, zugesagt, und mit uns verabredet, der Feind möge die von beiden Armeen, welche er wolle angreifen, so solle die andere ihm in den Rücken fallen.”¹⁰

In a wider sense, what the reports of the 17th June do not tell is for instance the Prussian headstart in the concentration of their army compared to that of Wellington, their optimism towards Wellington about this concentration, their dependence on the French movements on the morning 16th of June, the conditional element in Wellington’s promises, its underlying principle, the meeting at Bussy etc. – in all, matters were more complicated as the Prussian general command wanted to convey, especially when it came down to elements which had played a role in their army (except for the delay of Von Bülow).¹¹

Taking all the aspects of these reports together, it has become more complicated to assess them at their proper value. Later, in the historiography of the campaign, this has been enhanced by the fact that claims as done by writers - for example in relation to any promises as done by Wellington - have not always been properly checked to the actual moments where they would have come from. And this, in turn, again has to do with the fact that in most cases historians have not paid a proper attention to the preambles of the campaign and the application of the arrangements as set in this period during the campaign.

Wellington’s deception of Blücher.

This theory comprises the idea that Wellington *deliberately* misled Blücher as to induce him into fighting a battle at Ligny in unfavourable circumstances and in the knowledge that he could not offer Blücher adequate assistance.¹² By providing the Prussians with false information, in the sense that all was running to plan, the deception was meant to have the Prussians tie down the bulk of the French forces to give Wellington the time to effect the concentration of his own army.¹³

It was Lehmann who wrote in a similar sense, without actually being very explicit about the deception though, as Delbrück was later (see below).¹⁴

Lehmann’s presumption is that the Prussians would not accept a battle at Ligny without any contact with Wellington and what he attempts to prove is that Wellington made an *unconditional* promise for support at least during the conversations at Bussy.

In doing so, Lehmann skips the preambles of the campaign and with them, their importance in understanding the meaning of the promises of support as done by Wellington during the campaign.

Lehmann is suspicious towards Wellington's silence about his unconditional promise (as done at Bussy) in his memorandum of 1842 which he wrote as a reaction to Von Clausewitz' book. By doing so, Lehmann draws the conclusion that Wellington in this way recognized the fact that he had made this promise which he knew he was unable to meet.

At the same time, for Lehmann the reasons for Wellington to make such an unconditional promise are obscured by clouds. He tries to explain this contradiction by making three statements, in which Lehmann strays in his own ideas.

First of all, he claims as if Wellington may have felt ashamed towards Blücher about the lack of concentration of his forces. For me, this was not the way Wellington saw it at that moment: he presumed there would be enough time left on the 16th of June to complete his concentration that day, so as to be ready to move against the French rear or towards Blücher if this would prove necessary, and therefore a promise for support was not an issue as Lehmann sees it.

In another possible argument, Lehmann mentions a British coarseness, i.e. the idea of: let the Prussian have a battle and suffer a defeat, as long as the concentration of Wellington's army could be completed. And in a last explanation, Lehmann takes into account that by about 1.30 p.m. on the 16th of June Wellington might not have been fully aware of the geographical dimensions of the moment.

The second argument fully surpasses the elementary principle of the defensive concept of the allies: the ability to cooperate – I can only stress again that it was in this very element that the full chance of a decisive victory over Napoleon could be attained. By leaving the other army on its own for the benefit of the other would be completely the opposite and there is nothing which indicates that this was the intention of both armies.

For the last argument I can only add that the duke was a military commander, who, with the experience he had, was well aware of the dimensions of the strategical situation.

In the same year as Lehmann wrote, 1877, it was Hans Delbrück who went a step further in his assessment of the cooperation of Wellington and Blücher on the 15th and 16th of June.¹⁵

He claims Wellington intentionally deceived Blücher to accept a battle in the position of Sombreffe in order to prevent them from retreating. Wellington's reasoning would have been that a Prussian retreat would bring him into a perilous situation: if Blücher would fall back further east, he would be left on his own opposite Napoleon.

And for Wellington, the possession of Brussels and Ghent were very important. For that reason it was for him of the utmost importance that Blücher would pin Napoleon so that he would have the time to complete the concentration of his army after all.

For that reason he decided to deceive Blücher by 7 p.m. - through Von Müffling's letter – by promising Blücher to have his army ready at Nivelles by the 16th of June.

In fact, what happened according to Delbrück was that Wellington, from then on, got into an untrue situation, which became worse as time went by and which he was not able to correct the moment it became clear that Napoleon stood at Frasnes. By then, Wellington had made a promise he knew he couldn't fulfill.

In this theory, Delbrück claims Wellington would have made the impression upon Blücher as if he had issued orders for the concentration of his army at Quatre Bras, while we know that most of these orders in fact were only issued during the afternoon of the 16th of June.

In 1894 Delbrück added - in his discussion with Wolseley - as it had become clear that Von Bülow would not be able to show up in time at Ligny that Blücher had become uncertain whether to accept the battle or not. In this, it would have been Wellington's unconditional promise done at Bussy which actually triggered him to do so after all.

Yet, at the same time, Delbrück shades his theory by recognizing that Gneisenau later wrote about Wellington's insufficient concentration, but that this was not to abandon Blücher in his confrontation with Napoleon.¹⁶

Von Lettow Vorbeck's analysis (1904), how detailed it may be, is a contradictory one in several issues. While on the one hand Von Lettow Vorbeck clearly points out that there was no specific scenario agreed upon between Wellington and Blücher before the campaign started, later on the other hand he states that the Prussian general staff expected Wellington would concentrate his forces at Quatre Bras, after he had received Blücher's letter of the 15th of June (noon). For this expectation, however, Lettow Vorbeck gives no proof and in fact it is nonsense.

It fits into the theory of the intentional deception of Blücher by Wellington, in order to push Blücher to maintain his ground and accept a battle, so that Wellington would gain time for the concentration of his own forces.

Within the same context, Lettow Vorbeck also sees a contradiction between Wellington's intention to concentrate at Quatre Bras - as supposedly expressed in the letter written by Von Müffling on the evening of the 15th of June - and his actual orders. However, as I have shown, this letter was no promise for a concentration at Quatre Bras and with that, the contradiction falls apart. Especially while Von Lettow Vorbeck agrees that the same letter suggests that Wellington thought he had *all day* on the 16th of June to concentrate his forces etc., with a battle the next day.

Von Lettow Vorbeck as well argues it was Wellington who made an unconditional promise at Bussy; a promise he knew he could not keep for the full hundred percent.¹⁷

At the turn of the 19th century, as a reaction, the theory was opposed to in two works published in English, but both these works only touched upon it very briefly.¹⁸

It was in 1998 that the theory was published for the first time in English in its full extent by Peter Hofschröder.

For him, the arrival of the news of the outbreak of the hostilities (as coming from Zieten) at Brussels at 9 a.m. forms the keystone of the reason for Wellington to deceive Blücher later that day, as Wellington failed to react to this news for hours.¹⁹ The result was that "[...] after he [Wellington] realized he had made a major error of judgement, the duke continued to give the Prussians the impression that all was running to plan. What would seem to have happened is that once he realized he had made this mistake, Wellington was on the horns of a dilemma. If he had admitted to the Prussians Napoleon had humbugged him, then the chances are they would have fallen back, leaving Wellington to bear the brunt of Napoleon's assault. Without Prussian support, Wellington would have suffered the first defeat of his career and Brussels fallen to the French. He could not allow that to happen. Keeping his cool in circumstances in which a lesser man would have gone to pieces, the Great Duke decided to bluff and muddle his way through, hoping that things would work out in the end."²⁰ What then followed was the deception of Blücher in Von Müffling's letter of the 15th of June of 7 p.m. After that, one thing led to another, and once it had started there was no going back.

Through time, a combination of events and so-called promises from Wellington have been used to support the theory.²¹ I have gone through most of these in detail in the preceding chapters. Before going into more general observations on the theory as it is, I briefly would like to enter upon three of these "promises."

First of all, the letter which was written on the 15th of June by Von Müffling.

Apart from the fact that this letter could never be a promise of support for the battle of Ligny as it actually took place in the time-frame as we know it and that it contained a *conditional* promise, I would like to remark here that if Wellington did not know where the French would strike with their main force (a fact which becomes evident from this letter), how could he then have deceived Blücher ?

The second document I would like to elaborate on a bit more in this context is the letter which Wellington wrote to Blücher from the heights of Frasnes on the morning of the 16th of June.

Although the letter contains most optimistic calculations and a resulting incorrect impression of the situation, I do not feel Wellington did so as to attain a “further” deception of Blücher.

What Wellington does is giving a very brief outline of the positions of his forces; if one would like to read some kind of promise in it at all it would have been in the passage: “Je ne vois pas beaucoup de l'ennemi en avant de nous; et j'attends les nouvelles de votre Altesse, et l'arrivée des troupes pour décider mes opérations pour la journée.”

The way Wellington describes it, it could include his support for a future action, but as he puts it, it is that he describes his situation at that particular moment: one of being dependent in his further operations on Blücher's news and on the movements of his own army. In that sense it is the continuation of the concept as laid down in the letter of the 15th of June, 7 p.m.

If any promises of support would follow they could only be given as long as both these things would have been cleared.

It could simply not be a realistic promise for an action which was about to start about 4 hours later and one of which Blücher was not fully certain yet, let alone the duke of Wellington. Other than that, why would Wellington deceive Blücher if he thought there was still plenty of time for his own concentration and for the one of the Prussian army ?

Other words used to prove that Wellington deceived Blücher are those as coming from the prince of Orange and mentioned by major Von Brunneck in his report of the morning of the 16th of June. They read: “Der Prinz von Oranien glaubt, dass in Zeit von 3 Stunden die ganze Belgische und der grösste Teil der englischen Armee bei Nivelles concentrirt sein kann. 17 englische Bataillons sind von Brüssel aus zur Unterstützung des Punkts von Quatre Bras in Marsch gesetzt worden.”²²

Concerning the first part of these words, the prince must have known of Wellington's intention to concentrate his forces in the area around Nivelles on the 16th of June, and as it was formulated in the letter Von Müffling wrote at 7 p.m. the evening before. Indeed, it is a highly optimistical estimate of the prince, which is not Wellington's – but to state that this estimate was part of an intentional deception is taking things too far out from their context. It is the impression of the prince, and not necessarily the one of Wellington.

That 17 bataillons would be on their way to Quatre Bras was, strictly speaking, also not true. By the time the prince had left Brussels, by 1 a.m., he must have known that Wellington was intent upon having the reserve march out by daybreak to Waterloo. And by the time the prince spoke to Von Brunneck he could consequently presume they would be on their way, but not towards Quatre Bras. I do not exclude the possibility that the prince projected the front-line of the moment he spoke with Von Brunneck into this march. Whatever may have happened, this detail is for me no proof that Wellington actually deceived Blücher as this theory in general owns up in the total context of the situation.

Above all, the duke of Wellington could not know that Von Brunneck would be sent to Quatre Bras to inquire about the situation. And last but not least, if the prince would have been aware of an imminent action at the crossroads, he would in all probability have moved more forces there to support De Perponcher's division.²³

The theory not only hinges on promises which were not made the way they have been described or which in fact have never existed and that it is based upon an – in several details - incorrect chronology [²⁴], it also halts between two opinions when it comes down to Wellington's idea about the presence of the bulk of the French main army.

If the deception was meant to have the Prussians tie down the bulk of the French forces to gain Wellington the time to effect the concentration of his own army, how could this deception be necessary as the very cause of this concentration as it took place was caused by the fact that Wellington took into account that the bulk of the French forces would fall upon him ?

Other than this, the theory is too much of a projection of later events into a situation in which this could not be known the moment the promises would have been done. As such, it projects too much into the battle of Ligny as it took place, and this is obviously something both commanders could not be sure about in the way it would run, especially as to the actual moment the battle started.

An example is the letter as written by Wellington at 10.30 a.m. on the 16th of June. The hour mentioned here – noon- has been linked to the battle which started a few hours later, as if these hours perfectly matched in the sense of forces being available by noon, so still right in time before the battle of Ligny would start. But, as I have stated before, the moment Wellington wrote these lines he was not aware of the presence of the bulk of the French army, let alone of an imminent battle starting at 2.30 p.m.

If Wellington would have “known” of “the battle” right along, he would never have written the report, but he would most probably have gone straight down from Quatre Bras to Sombrefe to discuss the situation with Blücher himself.

Also, if Wellington would have used Blücher for his own ends, he would have gambled in two ways: in relation to the outcome of the war and – with that - in relation to his own professional and personal integrity.

The theory fails to appreciate the very basic principle of the only realistic chance the allies had in defeating Napoleon and that was cooperation. For me it is unacceptable to believe that Wellington could “afford it” to have Blücher alone facing the French, while both commanders knew that this was asking for serious trouble. A defeat of Blücher would leave Wellington alone to face Napoleon (and vice versa) and it was just this element which prompted Gneisenau to move towards Wellington’s army in April as he realised the same would happen if he wouldn’t do so.

To defeat Napoleon, it was upon cooperation alone that all depended. In this sense, the theory is too much fixed upon its own preoccupation and almost tends to forget the presence of an enemy army.²⁵

Secondly, if Wellington would have deceived Blücher deliberately and the outcome of the confrontation he asked of him would have been catastrophic (i.e. the destruction of the Prussian army), and this deception would have come out, the duke’s reputation would be ruined possibly during his lifetime and that is something which is which is for me –again – unacceptable.²⁶

The deception, in this sense, also doesn’t fit to one of Wellington’s military axioms either as it was highly untypical for the duke to carry out a partial concentration just in front of the enemy, as it happened at Quatre Bras.²⁷

Eventually, the theory seeks to find a scapegoat for the Prussian defeat at Ligny and at the same time tends to neglect the most important Prussian serious errors of judgement during the campaign.

Taking all together, in conclusion, the theory of the deliberate deception of Blücher by the duke of Wellington does not reflect the situation as it actually took place in the campaign in any way whatsoever. In fact, if there is anybody being deceived it is its reader.

Concluding observations. The attenuation of the allied defensive concept.

In the overall observations relating to the cooperation of Wellington and Blücher on the 15th and 16th of June 1815, three elements play a key role: calculations, concepts and communication.

In the preceding chapters of the preambles of the campaign I have shown the dimensions of the cooperation of both armies. They were a compromise of where both commanders had been willing to place their armies to both serve their own interests and their common interest: the defeat of Napoleon.

In this, Wellington had been the dominant factor as the Prussians moved up to his army and not the other way around. While Wellington was more political in his approach (the preservation of Brussels and Ghent) as well, the Prussians approached the situation more from a strict military point of view, while at the same time they were well aware of the fact that they needed Wellington for their own safety in case of war on Belgian soil.

Eventually, it resulted by mid-June in the operational areas as I sketched them before:

in case of a main French offensive against the Anglo-Netherlands-German army, Wellington would choose for the triangle Enghien – Braine le Comte – Halle as his ultimate concentration area,

In the event of a main French offensive on his army (either through Charleroi or Namur) Blücher would do so in the sector east of Fleurus, to Gembloux and beyond, towards Hannut.
28

In this last case, at least in the scenario of an attack through Charleroi, Wellington would then concentrate his forces around Nivelles, while as this attack would take place against Wellington, then Blücher would do so between Fleurus and Gembloux.

In comparison with the situation as it has existed in March, these dimensions of the operational area were a great leap ahead in the distances involved, but what happened is that the allied intentions and calculations of mutual support - as they had been expressed and drafted before the campaign - suffered from attenuation during these first two days of the campaign.

Since the arrival of Napoleon at Paris a strong French force had been placed at the axe Paris – Brussels and which runs right through the sector Valenciennes - Maubeuge. This element caused the prince of Orange and later the duke of Wellington to be fixed upon this sector. Napoleon was of course well aware of the importance as attached to Brussels by the allies. By keeping these forces in this sector, he was binding Wellington's army there, while at the very last moment before he made his actual strike against Blücher he moved part of these forces – the armée du Nord – suddenly to their right, towards Beaumont, and to fall from there upon Blücher.²⁹

This worked particularly well when it came down to the fixation of Wellington within his own sector as this obsession lingered on until well into the 16th of June.

In the concept of the cooperation, a simultaneous concentration of both armies was vital.³⁰ It was, however, already in this preliminary stage of further events that was Wellington put behind by the Prussians by not informing him of theirs in the late evening of 14th June right away. The very fact that Blücher concentrated his army so near to the enemy was a highly courageous – and dangerous – decision in itself, this lack of communication towards Wellington could only potentially enlarge the danger.

In the communication between both armies, in some cases a certain degree of optimism, coupled to a tendency to suppress private imperfections, reigned. This optimism could be seen

as part of a way in which both commanders were intent upon mutual support as being more realistic as it had been in March 1815, but at the same time overstretching it as a result.³¹ In other cases, communication simply stagnated.

A particular case was the crossing of information on the evening and night of the 15th of June. By the moment the Prussians had learned about the conditional promise of support of Wellington on the very early morning of the 16th of June, they had already asked for Wellington's intentions again by 11 p.m.

Wellington's reply to this request, in turn, did not reach Prussian headquarters until about noon, as it had appeared that lieutenant Von Wucherer had not been able to reach Prussian headquarters.

From the Prussian side, the impression of the concentration around Sombreffe was communicated to Wellington not in the way as it was actually planned, i.e. some eleven hours after the Prussians had informed Wellington about it.

Apart from this, within both armies, the marches for their concentration suffered from logistic, physical and communication problems.

The allied defensive concept attenuated further by the uncertainty of the allies on the French whereabouts on the morning of the 16th of June. While Wellington was still in the dark about them, the Prussians were unsure to whom Napoleon would turn: against them or against Wellington. This, in turn, paralysed them in what was expected of them: to act defensively or offensively.

By the time this became apparent, during the very late hours of the morning of the 16th of June there was in the way as the situation had developed not a lot to arrange when it came down to a full scale battle as the allies had intended to have. The Bussy conference, as a result, could only be a negotiation about compromises of what both parties originally had had in their mind in the sense of cooperation. By this very compromise – and therefore the lack of time - the Prussians asked Wellington to support them in their rear in stead of moving into Napoleon's rear. From the situation as it had come about – and the resulting hurry - this can be understood, but also this element added to the attenuation of the original concept.

It could probably have been stretched out into the 17th of June had the Prussians “sat down deep” into their defence during the battle of Ligny (as Wellington did at Waterloo two days later), with the sole purpose to maintain their position as to gain the necessary time for Wellington and Von Bülow to join for a full-scale and decisive battle as it had designed long before the war had started. Yet, the Prussians didn't do so. Instead, they compromised the situation even further by attempting to come out offensively on their right wing, in detriment of their centre, which resulted in the outcome of the battle as we know it.

Another factor which broke down the original concept was that by the resulting circumstances Wellington, from his side, was forced into a situation which was completely contrary to his axioma's of war.

In the stagnating communication between both armies, the Prussians were facing a situation in which they knew during the night of the 15th of June that Wellington had a sharp eye upon his own sector as long as he wasn't sure about the exact direction of the French main attack. Obviously, they knew the extension of his cantonments as well as the arrears of Wellington for the concentration of his army.

Yet, they decided for the concentration around Sombreffe and they had a very good reason to do so as it could only be in this element that a junction of armies could be possible, either way: Wellington to Blücher or vice versa, and with that for the sake of each one of them, thereby prompting cooperation. Yet, it also could be the key for the chance that Blücher could have been defeated before Wellington could join in. The fact that – on the late evening of the

15th of June - Blücher was well aware of the dangers involved can also be taken from the letter as written by lieutenant general lord Stewart from the 19th of June: “[..] If nothing disastrous occurs on the 16th the position of the French between Wellington & Blücher on the 17th may make them bitterly repent their boldness. Blücher writes [he is] determined to attack the 17th when he is sure that Wellington will do the same.”³² It should be noted that the moment this was written by Blücher (probably around 11 p.m. on the 15th of June) he did not have any communication from Wellington or Von Müffling, so the risk as described for the 16th and the possibilities for a victory for the 17th of June clearly refer to a situation in which Blücher was well aware of the fact that he most probably had to face Napoleon alone or with just a part of Wellington’s army only. All this as a result of a simple calculation of the extensions of the cantonments of both armies and the distances between the armies.

For me, therefore, the essence of the attenuation of the defensive concept centres around the elements of time and space, i.e. calculations.

In general, the combination of all the elements mentioned resulted in a for the allies dangerous situation which could have had far worse results as they had now on the 16th of June, had they not been partly neutralised by the defects on the French side. Yet, the contradictory situation was that the French delays on the morning of the 16th of June in a way aided in fact to Napoleon’s success of the day as this very delay caused the Prussians not to use their position as a full-scale defensive one from the very beginning.

So, despite the fact that his advance had suffered delays, in this sense Napoleon had clearly outmanoeuvred his enemies.

What I have tried to do is to show the most important elements - as coming from both Wellington and Blücher - which contributed to the attenuation of the original defensive concept of the allies, and then not so much each one on its own, but more in their cohesion.

In looking back to all the events, it seems fairly easy to state what the allies should have done instead and this has accordingly been done after the campaign by numerous historians. In doing so, however, hindsight very easily slips in. As I already indicated before, in by far the most cases this hindsight culminates in the claim as if the planned concentration points of Blücher’s and Wellington’s armies were similar to the points Napoleon was aiming at on the 15th and 16th of June and thereby in foreseeing the actions at Quatre Bras and Ligny as they took place.³³

On the whole, there were four situations in which the commanders should have acted in a different way as they did, thereby enlarging the chances of success by contributing to the defensive concept as it was drafted all along.

Late April Wellington issued his secret memorandum and the resulting concentration orders. These were based upon what was considered to be important intelligence, but in a situation in which there was no actual French offensive yet.

On the 15th of June, it was Wellington who did not react to the news of the hostilities - in the sense of a concentration of his army - until he received it right from Zieten himself. Yet, it was by 3 p.m. that he had got the very first notion, though be it in a most general way, that some kind of offensive had started towards the Sambre. In comparison to the situation of late April there is a striking difference in Wellington’s reaction here: while on the 15th of June there was actual gunfire to be heard, he did *not* react right away, while in the situation that there was *no* actual offensive taking place, he did.

If he would not have ordered a general concentration of his army, he could at least have ordered the troops to be ready in their cantonments to be ready for immediate measures, depending on where the French would advance.³⁴

As I have indicated before, one of Wellington's axioma's in the defense of the Low Countries was not to abandon his own sector in front of Brussels and west of it for the sake of a grand battle with the Prussians *only*. In his view, such a battle *per se* would not outweigh the disadvantages of this abandonment, even if it would be a victorious one, as it "would not have immediately restored and replaced his magazines not located in fortresses, and which would have fallen into the enemy's hands by the supposed change of position with a view to fight this great battle."³⁵ In other words: Wellington would only abandon his sector if he really was forced to do so due to a serious reverse, and then either through Antwerp (in case the Prussians had gone back over the Meuse) or Maastricht (if they had not done so).

This viewpoint might explain the duke's obsession with his own sector which extended into the 16th of June. By 5 a.m. that day, having received news from the sectors in front of Braine le Comte, Nivelles, Mons and possibly from Menen as well, Wellington knew that there was no enemy to be found in front of his army at all, except for some in front of Quatre Bras.³⁶ At the same time, he knew that a French advance had started around daybreak on the 15th of June heading east along the Sambre. By then, 24 hours had passed and in that period of time, if there would have been any other French advance further to the west as there was now, it would since long have taken place and reported to Wellington.

At that moment (5 a.m.) the total picture of the situation in front of Wellington's sector was described in such a way that the conditional element as it had been phrased in the letter of 7 p.m. of the 15th of June was no longer valid and Wellington should have ordered his forces further east (and the reserve further south).

At least this concerned those as were then in reality planned to be at Enghien, Braine le Comte and Waterloo, (according to the orders which were issued shortly after Von Dörnberg's arrival at Brussels). It could also have meant a further shift of forces which were then supposed to be at or to move to Nivelles, to move further east, towards Quatre Bras and to be relieved at Nivelles by others.

It cannot be stressed enough that in this connection Quatre Bras should *not* be regarded in the role as it got later. It should be understood as a mere stage in a move towards the Prussian army. Criticism should be understood not in the chain of events as they were on the 16th of June, i.e. in the context of the battles of Quatre Bras and Ligny, but in the idea of bringing as large a force as possible more in the vicinity of Fleurus, i.e. more near to the Prussian army as that the Anglo-Netherlands-German forces were now around Nivelles. This in the knowledge that the French would not move against Wellington in force there, but at some point of time on the 16th - or possibly the 17th of June - in force against Blücher.

In relation to the axioma mentioned, Wellington did see the potential decisive character of a possible battle near Fleurus - so *not* in his own sector and that he was of course willing to leave his sector to have his share in this battle, but only if he would be absolutely sure that his own sector wasn't under threat. As long as Wellington considered the possibility of his own sector being under threat of the *main* French offensive, the French manoeuvre along the Sambre could - as a logical consequence - only be a feint.

On the Prussian side, two decisions stand out in the sense that if they had been decided otherwise, they would most probably have contributed to a better application of the allied defensive concept as it took place now.

The first one is about the moment Blücher informed Wellington about the time he had decided to concentrate his army, some 12 hours later as he could have informed him. This is the more serious as this decision to do so was taken some 4 to 5 hours before the actual war broke out. Whatever Wellington might have done with this information, as a fact it gave the Prussians an enormous headstart in the concentration of their army. And in case Wellington would not have given it a follow up, the situation could only get worse.

This omission was to be a major component in the lack of a simultaneous concentration of both armies, something which was already due to be incomplete simply because both armies would normally not be informed of hostilities right at the same time. The delay set an extra strong pressure upon the already strained dimensions of cooperation in the situation as it developed on the 16th of June.

As I have indicated before, the way the battle of Ligny developed could possibly have been conducted by the Prussians into what was to be the decisive battle for the 17th of June, by restricting themselves to a strict and strong defence along their whole front-line, the same as Wellington did on the 18th of June.

However, in the way the Prussian high command handled the battle, the sole chance of having a battle the next day, with Von Bülow and at least a major part of Wellington's army in the vicinity of the battlefield, now slipped away.

Within the defensive concept of Wellington and Blücher, the presumption was that Napoleon would move on one army as his main attack, while he would do so against the other in a feint one.

The very core of the concept was of course the possibility for the allies to *keep the initiative* to apply it. This could more easily be done in case the place of confrontation was sought deep into Belgium in order to gain time to concentrate both armies. Yet, at the same time, the starting point of the concept was a resistance against the enemy *south* of Brussels, an idea pushed through by Wellington and to which the Prussians had – with certain limitations – conceded.

However, this put a strain upon the concentration of the Prussian army as it forced the Prussians to seek for a confrontation on their extreme right wing in case Napoleon might fall through Charleroi or further to the west. In that sense, the initiative was to a certain degree given out of hands as the time available for the concentration of the Prussian army was under pressure.

Additionally, to be faced with an enemy carrying out an offensive through a main and a feint attack is in itself unambiguous, but to distinguish these attacks as such is what it was all about. In that sense, Wellington's axioma "to wait till it should be seen in what direction the attack should be made, and then to assemble the armies as quickly as possible to resist the attack, or to attack the enemy with the largest force that could be collected" [³⁷] seems to be a logical one, but taking the duke's extreme caution for his own sector into account this could also lead to a loss of precious time and this is what happened.

Further, it is obvious that the allies considered the distances between Wellington's and Blücher's operational zones for mutual support to be practicable for realistic support.

Yet, the determining element in the application of the defensive concept was of course the *speed* of the French advance. In other words, would the French advance "allow" for the timely concentration of the allied armies in such a way that the defensive concept could be applied with a realistic chance of success ?

On paper, the allied defensive concept was something which could work, but in the presumption that Napoleon would strike swiftly - as he normally would - the concept was a fragile one. It was not only most optimistic in calculations in time and space for the concentration of the armies themselves, but also in those for mutual support when it came down to the distance between the areas around Nivelles and Sombreffe.

The allies' optimism either stemmed from the underestimation of the French speed, or, if the allies didn't underestimate it, from the expectation that they would be able to concentrate their armies in a timely fashion and in accordance with a distinction of what the French directions were and to give each other support. And all this combined with an infallible mutual communication.

In the first case, the allies would run a serious risk that Napoleon would take over the initiative; in the second case – seen in a realistic way - the allied situation was prone to lead to defects, which would eventually have the same effect.

The allies actually underestimated Napoleon's speed, but what actually happened was that this speed wasn't what it could have been and this gave the allies some air to hold the initiative. Yet, at the same time, defects on their side resulted in the situation as it arose at the end of the 16th of June: a defeat of the Prussian army and an undecided action at Quatre Bras – a situation in which the allies had lost almost all of their initiative, but whether they would lose it completely was dependent on what Napoleon would do on the 17th of June.

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¹ In: The memoirs of baron Von Müffling p.233

The expression is an allusion to the event where in 321 b.C. a Roman legion was surrounded by the Samnites at the Caudine forks (a pass, a defile) near Caudium in Italy.

In his memoirs, Von Müffling binds it to the scenario where the battle would be fought around Fleurus, resulting in a Prussian position between Charleroi and Sombreffe and for Wellington - “en dernier lieu” - between Gosselies and Marchienne-au-Pont. It is interesting to note that from this place it was more of a position to fall upon Napoleon’s rear as from Quatre Bras. The meeting at Bussy shows an advance to the south was necessary before being able to wheel to the left. Cf. Memoirs p.232

In this context, it is Von Pflugk Harttung who here in my mind misses the crux of the element of cooperation on the 16th of June by claiming that Wellington wanted two battles (one at Ligny and one at Quatre Bras), and which would influence each other in a positive way. At the same time, he portrays Gneisenau as the strategist who saw the effect of one great, decisive battle, having Wellington right at hand on the field. The fact that Wellington was supposed to advance over the Brussels road in Napoleon’s rear was in fact part of the one, decisive battle both commanders had in mind. In: Nelson, Wellington und Gneisenau etc. p.48

² Von Lettow Vorbeck didn’t find any indication either of the Prussians having informed Wellington during the night and sees the same lapse of time. In: Napoleon’s Untergang p.199, 272

³ I take it here as most realistic that the information as leaving from Namur around midnight had reached Wellington long before 3 p.m.

⁴ Von Müffling clearly describes the situation, as a fact, not as a criticism, that it was - due to the distances and hours involved - simply physically impossible for the 2nd corps and the cavalry to reach Quatre Bras on the 16th of June. He says: “How could the right wing of the English army, and its reserve cavalry (considering at what time they received the order to concentrate at Nivelles), reach Quatre Bras from Grammont before nightfall ? Wellington’s march from thence to Ligny (one German mile and a quarter farther), with his *whole* army, was consequently *quite impossible* [italics are his] on the 16th.” In: The memoirs etc. p.235

⁵ In: Waterloo. Conférences p.178

Pollio doesn’t grasp the full situation Wellington was in by stating that Wellington’s measures before the confrontation at Quatre Bras did not match this action. Here, he refers to the lack of clarity in any orders from his side for a concentration at the crossroads. In: Waterloo p.256

Pirenne states as that Wellington’s forces arrived at Quatre Bras “en temps voulu” – as if Wellington had planned it all that way. In: La stratégie de Wellington p.6

The fact that Alten’s and Cooke’s divisions, as well as the cavalry, were suddenly called up towards Quatre Bras is clearly a sign of the fact that the action at Quatre Bras wasn’t anticipated in the way as it developed and that these measures were part of the improvisation on the spot.

⁶ Von Lettow Vorbeck blames the way the battle was fought (too far forward on the Prussian right wing) to the absence of Wellington, but this criticism is unfair as it neglects the fact that the Prussians were basically well aware of the fact that, in the absence of Wellington, maintaining their position till the next day would offer the best chances of success. The trouble was that it was their initiative not to comply with this approach; for this Wellington cannot be blamed.

Von Lettow Vorbeck even claims that the Prussian position itself was too extended for the army and also blames this on the fact that Prussian high command took into account a support from Wellington up to the last moment. It is here that Von Lettow Vorbeck in my opinion completely neglects the value of the position of Point du Jour as it was studied long before the campaign took place. In: Napoleons Untergang p.312-313

⁷ In: Delbrück, H. Das Leben etc. p.540

⁸ Cf. Von Pflugk Harttung. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI, II.12. p.94-95, III.3.p.115, I.7.p.4-6
Die Vorgeschichte etc. p.65-66, 153, 167, 250
Cf. Aerts, W. Etudes etc. p.360

⁹ Cf. Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang p.273
Here, he also clearly dissociates himself of Von Pflugk Harttung's theory.

¹⁰ Cf. the letter to his friend Alexander Gibsons, consul in Danzig, dated 6th of August 1815.
In: Delbrück, H. Einiges zum Feldzuge von 1815 p.659
What happens in this letter is that Gneisenau, again, leaves out the conditional element as he clearly refers here – as speaking of the 15th of June - to the letter of Von Müffling from 7 p.m. that day. Other than that, the 12 hours can only refer to the actual march time needed for Wellington to concentrate his army upon his centre (cf. the calculations as mentioned in the last chapter of the preambles).

¹¹ The meeting of Bussy was a way of integrating Wellington in the situation as it had arisen into what was for the allies the battle into which their basic principle of cooperation could be applied. The meeting could easily have been used as well by the Prussian high command as another promise from Wellington to come to their aid, but they didn't.
This can probably be explained by the fact that *for the Prussians* he would not have had a proper reason not to come before this meeting took place, while at Bussy he had. In fact, also at Bussy he gave a conditional promise of support but which was neutralised by Ney's attack and therewith any blame would fall through.

¹² Hofschröder, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.351

¹³ In the context of this theory fits the claim that Von Müffling was used by the duke of Wellington as a dupe. I have entered into Von Müffling's position and his own versions of the events in a separate note (cf.note nr.7)

¹⁴ Lehmann, M - Zur Geschichte des Jahres 1815 etc. p.274-294

¹⁵ Delbrück, H. - Einiges zum Feldzugs von 1815 etc. p.645-680

¹⁶ Delbrück, H. In: General Wolseley über Napoleon etc. p.7-11

¹⁷ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon's Untergang p.273-311

¹⁸ In 1895, Horsburgh saw a lack of documentary evidence to prove the theory and only regarded the Frasnes-letter as a *pièce de conviction*, but he doesn't dig into the subject any deeper than that. In: Waterloo. A narrative and a criticism p.311-312

James, in 1908, refutes the theory only by stating that the flow of information to Wellington through for instance Zieten, the prince of Orange and Bernard van Saksen Weimar was insufficient or delayed. In: The campaign of 1815 etc. p.164-167

In 1915, Bleibtreu was another vigilant defender of the theory. In: England's grosse Waterloo Lüge p.52-53

In 1890, Pollio stated that he thought that either Wellington had no idea of the movements of his own forces or that he deceived Blücher intentionally. He writes he tends to the second option, but does not work it out in further detail. In: Waterloo p.196

¹⁹ There is a strong difference here with Delbrück. In fact, he also mentions such a report as being sent out at 4 a.m. and having arrived at Brussels seven hours later. He writes about it: "Da diese Nachricht jedoch schon am Morgen um 4 Uhr, wo das Gefecht kaum begonnen hatte, abgeschickt war, so musste sie noch sehr unbestimmter Natur sein. Wellington und Müffling haben daher so wenig Werth darauf gelegt, dass sie sie in ihren späteren Erzählungen ganz übergangen haben und angeben, um drei Uhr die erste Nachricht erhalten zu haben." Additionally, Delbrück has Zieten send a report to Wellington at 9 a.m. (and as having arrived at 3 p.m.), as taking this from Wellington's letter to the duke De Feltre. In: Einiges zum Feldzugs etc. p.667-668

²⁰ In: Wellington's smallest victory p.255

²¹ The most important ones are:

- the meeting at Tirlemont on the 3rd of May
- the mission of colonel Von Pfuel on the 13th of June
- the letter as written by Von Müffling on the 15th of June at 7 p.m.
- the reports as written by Gneisenau and Blücher on the 17th of June
- the promise from Wellington of midnight of the 15th of June that his army would be concentrated around Nivelles within 12 hours
- the promise of Wellington that he would have 20.000 men at Quatre Bras by 10 a.m. on the 16th of June
- the unconditional promise of support as done by Wellington during the meeting at Bussy
- the use of Delancey's disposition of the morning of the 16th of June
- the letter written by Wellington to Blücher on the heights of Frasnes at 10.30 a.m. on the 16th of June
- the words as uttered by the prince of Orange to major Von Brunneck on the morning of the 16th of June about the troops expected at Quatre Bras

For Bleibtreu, in his strong anti-British feelings, the disposition was produced specifically to mislead both Von Müffling and Gneisenau. In: England's grosse Waterloo Lüge p.52-54

²² Cf. Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon's Untergang p.273-311

Hofschröder, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.225

Hofschröder, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. The German victory p.324

²³ Von Pflugk Harttung. In: GSA, VPH-HA.VI.nr.II.12.p.118

²⁴ Cf. preceding chapters.

A very evident detail here is my refutation of the claim that Zieten sent Wellington a message about hostilities towards 5 a.m.

In this context, I would like to add two other examples which I would like to enter upon very briefly.

The first one is the claim as done by Von Lettow Vorbeck that Wellington wrote his letters of the late evening of the 15th of June to the dukes De Feltre and Berry *after* the arrival of Blücher's letter of 12 o'clock, so as to be able to blame him for concealing the real state of affairs towards them. In: Napoleon;s Untergang p.293

The other example is there where Hofschröder runs into trouble using the [non-existent] report of Von Müffling timed 11 a.m. about the fall of Charleroi. This message, in combination with the words as used by the duke in his letters to the duke of Berry and De Feltre, makes Hofschröder believe that it was "possible that Müffling did not communicate all his information to the duke." Apart from the fact that the report as referred has not existed, this is in my opinion highly improbable (cf. note on the role of Von Müffling).

²⁵ John Hussey writes in another context: "[...] there is a mindset that deems much of this campaign a struggle between "rivals", each out to damage the other. In that bizarre theory, if Wellington does not obtain the Saxons in April then he must try to stop the Prussians retaining them in May. *It is almost as though there is no Bonaparte in the field.* [my italics] By the same token the Prussians must hope to damage their rival's effectiveness by cleverly passing to him disloyal troops. This, however, simply demonstrates the paranoid nature of the mindset." In: The aftermath of Tirlemont etc. p.31

²⁶ Here I would like to add that it was of course not Wellington alone to have the flow of intelligence and information at his disposal to use whatever way for himself. It becomes clear that for instance the army of the Netherlands had its own channels for intelligence which could potentially "disturb" any possible deception of Blücher by the duke.

²⁷ Fletcher, I. A desperate business p.50

²⁸ Cf. Wellington's orders of the 15th of June.

For Hussey, depending on the circumstances, the Prussians could march over three roads to support Wellington: one through Charleroi – Binche – Mons, one through Charleroi – Quatre Bras – Nivelles and one through Namur – Sombreffe – Nivelles or Genappe.

Yet, as Wellington sought a defence deep within the country, well away from the frontier, in my mind the first one most probably didn't come into play. In: The aftermath of Tirlemont etc. p.31 (footnote nr.20)

²⁹ Cf. the preceding chapters on the concentration of the Armée du nord.

³⁰ Of course taking into account the time needed for the alarming by the one army of the other, as a result of which there would always be a difference in time.

³¹ Examples are the Frasnes-letter as written by Wellington and the impression Blücher wanted to give to Wellington about his concentration around Sombreffe for the early morning of the 16th of June.

³² Cf. The chapter on the Prussian headquarters on the 15th of June.

³³ Examples are numerous, but the most extraordinary claim in this sense is the one of Napoleon himself, who arrogates the claim involved for both allied commanders to himself, thereby distorting his own original intention into the claim as if both the allies (and Napoleon) were bent upon fighting at Ligny and Quatre Bras. In: *Mémoires pour servir etc.* p.189-193

As he is a participant as well, I also would like to mention Von Müffling who is also guided by hindsight when he criticizes Wellington by projecting the battle of Ligny as it took place into its preceding events in writing:

“The duke has been reproached with having committed an error in the disposition of his cantonments. There is no foundation for this censure; but it is true that his army reached the rendez-vous [= Nivelles] later than he intended and expected. The chief mass of his forces were posted round about Nivelles, and had he removed his headquarters thither on the 14th of June he would have had accounts from Mons early on the 15th; at 9 o'clock he would have heard general Von Ziethen's cannonade. Had the reserves moved up as far as Genappe as early as the 14th all the different corps of the english army could have bivouacked within the triangle Frasnes, Quatre Bras and Nivelles on the evening of the 15th and the entire english army would have been ready to assume the offensive at Gosselies on the morning of the 16th.”

In: *The memoirs of baron Von Müffling* p.233

³⁴ Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von – *Vorgeschichte der Schlacht bei Quatre Bras* p.213
Pflugk Harttung, J.von - *Vorgeschichte der Schlacht bei Belle Alliance* p.43,116

³⁵ Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo. In: *WSD, Vol.X* p.522

³⁶ Here, I would like to refer to the reports as handed in through the Netherlands from Braine le Comte, Nivelles (indirectly) and Quatre Bras, as well as the report from Tindal (which contained a report from Menin) and the one which Von Dörnberg delivered orally around 5 a.m.

³⁷ Cf. Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo. In: *WSD, Vol.X* p.518-519