

General headquarters.

Having visited the ball of Richmond, Wellington returned to his headquarters at the Hotel Royale where he slept for a few hours.

Between 4 and 5 a.m. Von Dörnberg arrived from Mons reporting to the duke that there was no enemy's presence there, at least the moment he had left early that evening before. At least, he must have reported about Mons being in a state of defence and that the French had taken Lobbes and Thuin.¹

This information, plus the report he had as delivered by captain Webster, must have led Wellington to leave the city and see for himself about the situation in the sector of the road leading to Charleroi. Before he left Brussels however, he had Delancey issue the following orders:

16th June 1815

To general Lord Hill, G.C.B.

*The Duke of Wellington requests that you will move the 2nd division of infantry upon Braine le Comte immediately. The cavalry has been ordered likewise on Braine le Comte. His Grace is going to Waterloo.*²

And:

To general Lord Hill, G.C.B. 16th June 1815

*Your Lordship is requested to order Prince Frederick of Orange to move, immediately upon the receipt of this order, the 1st division of the army of the Low Countries, and the Indian brigade, from Sotteghem to Enghien, leaving 500 men, as before directed, in Audenaarde.*³

Wellington must have left Brussels around 6.15 a.m.⁴⁻⁵ In this chronology it would mean that the above mentioned orders were drafted somewhere between 5 and 6 a.m.

While riding out from Brussels Wellington must have been escorted by a small group, of which at least baron Von Müffling and the duke of Brunswick must have taken part.⁶

During the morning Wellington and Von Müffling learned again about the intention of the Prussians to accept a major battle in the position of Sombreffe. They had already done so by Blücher's letter of the 15th of June (noon), but it was probably when they were heading south that Von Müffling received the letter which was sent out around 11 p.m. by the Prussian general staff, indicating this intention again and asking for Wellington's intentions at the same time.⁷

After passing parts of the reserve in the forest of Soignes near Waterloo, it must have been somewhere between Mont Saint Jean and Plancenoit (it must have been towards 9.a.m.) that Wellington met the messenger who carried the report which the prince of Orange had put on paper at 7 a.m.

It led the duke to order the reserve to proceed their march to Genappe, while he ordered the cavalry to Nivelles most probably at the same time (see below).⁸

It was near Genappe that Von Müffling met his adjudant Wucherer, whom he had sent out to Blücher around midnight. Yet, due to the French presence on the Namur-road, Wucherer had not been able to push through to Sombreffe and had returned where he had come from.⁹

It was also at or very near Genappe that Wellington sent orders to the division of Picton, the

Brunswickers and the Nassau units of Von Kruse to proceed to Genappe.¹⁰

Wellington himself arrived at Quatre Bras around 10 a.m.¹¹ He visited the outposts, reconnoitred the French position (¹²) until about 11 a.m. (¹³) and approved of the position the prince of Orange had taken up.¹⁴

Having done so, Wellington wrote to Blücher as an answer to the letter (dated 11 p.m. of the 15th of June) he had received some time earlier, asking him about his situation and his intentions.

It reads:

Sur les hauteurs derrière Frasne le 16me juin 1815 à 10 heures et demi.

Mon cher Prince,

Mon armée est situé comme il suit:

Le corps d'armée du Prince d'Orange a une division ici et à Quatre Bras; et le reste à Nivelles.

Le reserve est en marche de Waterloo sur Genappe; où elle arrivera à midi.

La cavalerie Anglaise sera à la même heure à Nivelles.

Le corps de Lord Hill est à Braine le Comte.

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.

Rien n'a paru du côté de Binch, ni sur notre droite.

Votre très obéissant serviteur,

*Wellington*¹⁵

Taking the information as he had received it the other day, the letter must have been written in the presumption that Blücher was at Sombrefe.

It may have been just before or after he wrote this letter that the duke spoke to major Von Brunneck (cf. chapter on the Prussian headquarters).¹⁶

Though he had written him one and half hour before, it was towards noon that Wellington decided to go over to the Prussian general staff. What triggered him to do so remains unclear, however. It might have been the contact with Von Brunneck and / or the information he may have got from a Prussian patrol which had got as far as where the Anglo-Netherlands-German forces were.¹⁷

At Brussels, meanwhile, information about the situation must have dropped in to others who were connected to Wellington's headquarters, like general Tindal, the Netherlands liaison officer at Wellington's headquarters. He wrote somewhere that day, probably in the morning, to king Willem I:

“Sire !

Ik heb de eer Uwe Majesteit hiernevens aan te bieden een extract uit de bij mij op heden ontvangen confidentiële rapporten, waaruit het aan Hoogst Dezelve zal blijken, dat de Franschen op gisteren, den 15en dezes, de voorposten van de Pruisen bij Charleroy hebben gesurpreneerd en ten gevolg van dien tot Charleroy zijn doorgedrongen.

Uit deze rapporten moet ik opmaken, dat de ligne van de Pruisische [sic] armee aan die kant niet zeer op hare hoede is geweest; dan de mouvement welke ik heden in de troepen van de geallieerde mogendheden heb bespeurd, doen mij gelooven, dat onze positie wel haast weder hernomen zal zijn.

*Ik vermeen dat de maarschalk hertog van Wellington heden naar de armée is vertrokken.”*¹⁸

Apparently, Tindal wasn't still yet informed by the time he wrote this report about the fact that the French had in fact penetrated as far as Frasnes. The reports he refers to are those mentioned and summarised in an annex, which comprises the reports from Basslé (3 a.m. 16th of June), those of Behr from Mons (see above) and one from the commanders at Ghent and Menin.¹⁹ Whether Tindal had the chance to / did report to Wellington on these reports, before he had left from Brussels, remains unclear.

From his position, the Austrian colonel Vincent wrote to prince Schwarzenberg that evening:

“Hier, 15, à cinq heures du matin, la ligne Prussienne sur la Sambre a été attaquée par les Français sur les points de Lobbes et de Thuin; l'ennemi a repliée les postes Prussiens sur Charleroi. Le général Ziethen qui commandoit ce corps s'y est rassemblée, mais pressé par l'ennemi, il a repassé la Sambre en y laissant un bataillon qui on a été délégué avec assez de perte; l'ennemi a suivi dans la direction de Bruxelles jusqu'à Quatre Bras où se croisent les chaussées de Charleroy à Bruxelles et celle de Namur à Nivelles. L'ennemi a poussé des patrouilles jusqu'à Genappe et à Sombreff [sic], ce qui a intercepté la nuit derrière la communication directe avec l'armée du maréchal Blücher, celui-ci a rassemblé depuis une partie de ses forces en avant de Sombreff [sic].

Les circonstances déterminèrent le duc de Wellington de faire marcher sa réserve en avant de la forêt de Soignes et a rapproché de lui le corps du prince d'Orange, qui était à Braine le Compte [sic]; la matinée d'aujourd'hui a été tranquille, mais après midi vers 3 heures et demie s'est engagée dans la direction de Fleurus une affaire, qui à en juger par la vivacité du feu a été considérable et meurtrière, vers la fin du jour il s'est rallenti sensiblement; en s'éloignant sembloit-il vers la Sambre. Cette nuit je me transporterai vers les lieux parceque vraisemblablement la bataille s'engagera de nouveau. J'expédierai le comte de Saar en raison de ce qui aura lieu.

²⁰

And, colonel Von Washington, Bavarian representative, wrote at 5 a.m. to prince Wrede [?]:

“Votre Altesse doit être informé par le prince Taxis que les hostilités ont commencées hier à 5 heures du matin.

On avait appris que Napoleon se trouvait à l'armée depuis le 12 et plusieurs mouvements que l'ennemi fit dans la journée d'avant hier en concentrant un nombre considérable des troupes à Bavay firent croire qu'il allait commencer ses aspirations; il s'en suivit une attaque générale sur les avants postes Prussiennes qui se replièrent en bon ordre sur les différents points qui leurs avaient été assignés. On dit Napoleon à Thuin, et qu'il a fait passer la Sambre à 40.000 hommes. On s'attend qu'aujourd'hui l'attaque sera renouvelé et menera à des résultats plus considérables. Ce ne fut qu'hier soir très tard que ces nouvelles me parvinrent, j'appris en même temps que le duc de Wellington [...] quitter Bruxelles dans la journée d'aujourd'hui. J'ai été d'abord chez le commandant du quartier général pour m'en avertir afin que je puisse suivre le duc là où il jugera à propos de se rendre. La réserve qui se trouvait ici, est parti cette nuit. Il y avait hier du soir un grand bal chez la duchesse de Richmond où le duc et un grand nombre de généraux se trouveraient encore. Le général Wurtembergeois de Hügel m'a dit qu'il n'a pu obtenir qu'un mois dans le traité de subsides qu'il vient de signer.

À 10 heures du matin

J'ai attendu le dernier moment du départ de la poste en cas que j'aurais eu encore quelque

*chose d'intéressant à ajouter à la présente. Tout que j'ai pu amasser est ce que suit:
Le duc de Wellington est allé à 7 heures aux avants postes pour voir ce que s'y passe. Il compte revenir cet après midi ou ce soir. Il paraît qu'il concentre une armée à Nivelles. Le maréchal Blücher en fait autant à Sombreuf [sic] où il a établi son quartier général. Tout porte à croire que dans quelques jours d'ici une bataille pourra être donnée, peut être dans la plaine de Fleurus, terrain très avantageux pour la superbe cavalerie des armées alliées. Les Français ont passés la Sambre à Lobbes et à Marchiennes au Pont et se sont portés en force sur Fontaine l'Evêque repoussant vivement un bataillon Prussien qui se trouvait sur son passage. Charleroy a été occupé par les Français en suite de ces mouvements. Napoleon avait fait venir de Mézières le corps d'armée du général Gérard pour opérer ces mouvements, un parc d'artillerie est également sorti des forteresses, preuves qu'il a une attaque en vue, il paraît que le maréchal Blücher ne s'attendait pas à être attaqué. Toute notre armée est en mouvement et des grands résultats peuvent en suivre incessamment.
Je ne manquerai pas de continuer aussi longtemps que possible de tenir Votre Altesse au courant et de l'informer de ce qui se passe pour autant que je parviendrai de le savoir.”²¹*

Revised: 6th June 2010 - Copyright © Pierre de Wit

¹ Cf. the letter as written by jonkheer L.A.B.Vrijthoff on the evening of the 15th of June; see above.

2.WD, p.474-475

3. HL, MS61 WP 8.2.4.

WD, p.474-475

Also in: Bas, F.de Prins Frederik en zijn tijd. Vol.III, 2 p.1179

⁴ The least we can safely assume is that Wellington arrived at Quatre Bras around 10 a.m. as he wrote to Blücher at 10.30 a.m. and it can be assumed that he wrote it shortly after having inspected the situation. The distance between Brussel - Quatre Bras via Waterloo is 34 kilometers.

In addition, Wellington passed Waterloo just after the 5th division had halted here; this must have been around 8.15 a.m. and the distance between Brussels and Waterloo is 16 kilometers, which must have taken him about 1 ¾ to 2 hours.

For Wellington's passage at Waterloo, cf.

Major Forbes (79th regiment). In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.1-2 and 34.706 p.314

Sergeant Robertson (92nd regiment). In: The journal of sergeant D.Robertson p.143

5.According to the assistant QMG colonel Hervey, Wellington left between 6 and 7 a.m. Cf. Hervey in a letter to Mr.Carroll (1815) in: Leeds, F. A contemporary letter on the battle of Waterloo. Nineteenth Century 1893 p.432

Colonel Von Washington, representative of Bavaria at Wellington's staff, says it was by 7 a.m. that Wellington left Brussels. In his letter [to ?] dated 5 / 10 a.m. 16th of June. In: Königliches Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv, Munich. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VIII.2.p.1-3

Baron Van der Capellen, in his report dated midnight of the 16th of June, indicates that Wellington had left Brussels towards 7 a.m. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6585

Wellington himself claims he left Brussels before daybreak (which was at 3.30 a.m.), but this cannot be true. Cf. The Croker papers, Vol.III 1885 (2nd edition) p.175

A civilian traveler, a man called N.Smith, who was at Brussels on the 15th and 16th of June 1815, states the duke left the city at 6 a.m. In: Flying sketches of the battle of Waterloo etc. p.24

Others say it was 5 a.m., but at that time Wellington must have been in Brussels. Cf.

Von Müffling. In: Memoirs p.230

And in a letter written to general Von Hofmann. In: Hofmann, G.W.von Zur Geschichte etc. p.131

Navez, L. La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.136

Müffling, C.von. In: Supplementary Despatches. Vol.X, p.510

And in: Müffling, Von Passages from my life p.230

For 7 a.m. see:

Glover, M. Wellington as a military commander p.198

Pflugk Harttung, J.von In: Vorgeschichte etc. p.125

An anonymous witness says it was after 7 a.m. Cf. Waterloo the day after the battle. By an eyewitness. In: With fife and drum p.4

Ropes claims it was 7.30 a.m. Cf. Ropes, J.C. The Waterloo campaign. p.105

Others say it was at 8 a.m. Cf.

Lord FitzRoy Somerset. In: BL, Add.ms.34.707 p.484-485 and in his account in the NAM, nr.6507-1

Eaton, Ch.A. - Narrative of a residence in Belgium during the campaign of 1815 etc. p.49

Prokesch-Osten, A.von Die Schlachten etc.p .22

According to lady H.Dalrymple Wellington left Brussels at 8 a.m. Cf. Maxwell, H.the life of Wellington. Vol.II p.13

E.Heeley (assistant of general Scovell) states that the general staff of the army left Brussel just after the first units of the 5th division had left. This may count for 5 or 6 a.m. but his words do not say that Wellington left then as well. Cf. his journal. In: NAM, nr.8409-98

According to surgeon James (1st Life Guards), being at Brussels, Wellington left at 7 a.m. Cf. his letter from Brussels of 29th June 1815 to R.James, archive of the NAM, nr. and in file nr.394 of the Royal Army medical Corps in het Wellcome Institute te London.

Wellington's cook, James Thornton, claims the Duke left Brussels at 10 a.m. Cf. Thornton, J. Your most obedient servant p.95 He also informs us that he had orders of Sir C.Campbell to send a basket of cold provisions in the afternoon to Genappe; shortly after, the butler was sent out with these provisions.

6.Müffling, C.von In: WSD.Vol.X, p.510.

Colonel Von Herzberg, of the Brunswick general staff. In: BL, Add.ms.34.706.11

Sir Augustus Frazer, commander of the Royal Horse Artillery, also must have left Brussels that morning but it is not sure whether he was with Wellington as well. Cf. Sabine, E. Letters of Sir A.Frazer (letter nrs.XX and XXI, p.536-540.

⁷ Von Müffling himself writes, having mentioned his arrival at Quatre Bras, "As the enemy remained quietly, and intelligence had meanwhile reached me that the prussians army was assembling at Ligny, etc." – it is probably here that he refers to the letter involved. In: The memoirs etc. p.230

Cf. Pflugk Hartung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.64 and in: Die Vorgeschichte der Schlacht bei Quatre Bras p.205

⁸ Cf. Colonel Von Herzberg (of the Brunswick general staff) believes he did so at or near Genappe, but this is not possible in relation to the letter Wellington wrote at 10.30 a.m. In: BL, Add.ms..34.706.11

Hofschröer believes Wellington ordered part of the reserve to Quatre Bras at 11 a.m. In: 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.233

⁹ Von Müffling in his letter to Hofmann. In: Hofmann, G. Zur Geschichte etc. p.131

¹⁰ Cf. Colonel Von Herzberg (of the Brunswick general staff). In: BL, Add.ms..34.706.11 Hofschröer believes Wellington ordered Picton to Quatre Bras at 11 a.m. In: 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.108

11.Wellington to Croker, d.d. 28 January 1845. In: The Croker Papers, Vol.III 1885 (2^e edition) p.175

Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

Lord FitzRoy Somerset. In: NAM, nr.6507-1

Cf. Hofschröder, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.223
Hamilton-Williams, D. Waterloo, new perspectives. p.190
Houssaye, H. 1815. Waterloo p.155
Charras. Histoire de la campagne de 1815 Vol. I p.192
Damitz, K.von. Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.201
Van Zuylen van Nijvelst says it was 9 a.m. In: Historisch verhaal etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.308
Cf.
Von Pflugk Hartung thinks it was between 9.30 and 10 a.m. Cf. Pflugk Hartung, J.von. In:GSA, VPH-HA VI,II.12.p.141 and in: Vorgeschichte etc. p.125
The following sources give 11 a.m.:
Von Müffling. Memoirs p.230
Müffling, C.von In: WSD.Vol.X, p.510 and as CvW, in Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.9
Colonel Oldfield (engineers) and Siborne claim it was between 11 and 12 a.m. In: NAM, nr.7403-147
Cf. Siborne, W. History of the war in France etc. Vol.I, p.92
Major count Van Limburg Stirum thinks it was 10.30 a.m. In: VLS, nr.II.3.nr.4

12.Captain Von Gagern. In: VLS. nr.II.3.nr.3
CvW. In: Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.9

¹³ Life of lord Raglan, p.22

14. Wellington himself mentions his meeting with the prince and the presence of the Dutch-Belgian troops. Cf. the Croker Papers, Vol.III p.173. Also see count Van Limburg Stirum. In: VLS. nr.II.3.nr.4
Cf. CvW. Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.9

15.Original in KA. VI.E.nr.3 Vol.II p. ?

It was published for the first time in the Militär Wochenblatt of December 1852 (no paging) and was published in fascimilé by Von Ollech in 1876. In: Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.124
Some people read “Je ne vois pas beaucoup de l'ennemi en avant de vous” in stead of ”nous” at the end. Apart from the fact that Wellington couldn't see anything of the French forces in front of Blücher (see below), and that his “v” is really clear in other places of this letter, I would like to refer to the word “ni” in the same letter where the “n” clearly comes out as an “n”, similar to the one here. Cf. Von Pflugk Hartung. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.II.12.p.123
In this respect, I would like to settle the issue whether Wellington could actually see what was happening on the field of Ligny once and for all: referring to the research carried out by captain White the conclusion is that this was impossible, not only because of the distance but also because of the heights and the wood of Delhütte in between. Cf. captain White to Siborne. In: BL, Add.ms.34.708 p.202-204
Cf. sergeant Cotton, In: BL, Add.ms.34.708 p.208-209 and W.Aerts. In: Etudes etc. (manuscript) p.109
According to Cotton the church tower and mill of Marbais could be seen from Quatre Bras, but the village of Marbais itself not. Further, Marbais, of course, was not a part of the battlefield of Ligny either.

The “Frasnes-letter” is regarded by Hofschröder as one of the few “missing” (and to Wellington compromising) letters. In this context, I would like to make a clear distinction between letters / documents which are “unavailable” and “missing”, a distinction which is not to be found in his list. Here, documents are listed which are actually fully unavailable in the sense that their literal content is unknown and also those of which the text is known, but their whereabouts is unknown. The Frasnes-letter clearly belongs to this second category, as the original in fascimilé is available through Von Ollech. The fact that it is missing from the files is that it simply once was in the Prussian war-archives, presumed to have been destroyed during world war 2. In that sense, the missing as such has nothing to do with any possible compromising of Wellington, as suggested by Hofschröder. He also uses the words “nous” and “notre” (in translation) as “you” and “your”. In: 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington p.233, 367

¹⁶ The reason that Von Brunneck did not report about this conversation is that by the time that he spoke to the duke, Von Brunneck had already despatched his (second) report.

¹⁷ Cf. Von Dörnberg. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.293
I do not exclude this possibility as there would have been such a patrol near Villers Peruin, and which would have been in touch with the Anglo-Netherlands-German units at Quatre Bras. Das Tagebuch des königlich etc. In: GSA. VPH-HA, VI,nr.VII nr.3a p.26-27

¹⁸ In: NA, 2.02.01. nr.6585
Also in: Bas, F.de Prins Frederik etc. Vol.III p.1164
And in: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.I nr.1

¹⁹ NA, nr.2.02.01 nr.6585
The summary of the one from lieutenant general Marthusewitz, at Ghent, reads:
“Par lettre du 15 juin, le lieutenant général Martuchewitz, gouverneur de Gand, annonce que les Francais ont coupé le pont de Wattlelos près de Roubais et ont commencé dans la matinée du 18 [?] à faire des abatis d’arbres entre Moucron & Turiving [?]; 100 pionniers ont été commandés dans cette commune autant à Roubaix.”
And the one from Menin reads: “ Par lettre du commandant de Menin on est informé que sa position est toujours la même qu’il n’a rien de nouveau à annoncer.” Whether Wellington could have taken in this information before he left Brussels can be doubted upon.

²⁰ In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VIII p.35-36 - copy files from Kriegsarchiv at Vienna.

²¹ In: In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VIII.2. p.1-3 - copy files from Königliches Bayerisches Kriegsarchiv, Munich.