

Observations.

Introduction.

Wellington's retreat towards the position of Mont Saint Jean fitted in the very basic starting point of his grand strategy: to take up a position *in front of* Brussels and at the same time in such a way that cooperation with the Prussian army was possible. What mattered for Wellington within this strategy - and this was typical for his approach - was to be ready for as many contingencies as possible.¹ This not only applied to any possible French lines of attack, but also to his own means for a safe retreat towards his line of operations, through Antwerp.

Wellington and the position of Mont Saint Jean.

What strikes first in looking at the general outline of Wellington's order of battle is the massive concentration of forces in the centre, the weaker left wing and the right wing as bent north towards Merbaine.²

If Napoleon would attack Wellington's left flank, and Wellington would be able to keep his position, the Prussian army was expected to fall from the Bois de Paris upon the French right towards midday. However, in case Wellington would have to give way to the French here, he hoped to be able to pull his frontline along the Brussels road thereby securing a retreat along Braine l'Alleud towards Alsemberg; at the same time the Prussian army could fall upon the French right after it had wheeled to the west to pursue Wellington.

In the same way, if Napoleon pressed home on Wellington's centre (i.e. between the high-roads) the same scenario would be the option the go for. Yet, in case Wellington would have to yield for Napoleon here, his army would be almost cut in two and at least his left wing virtually lost.

For Wellington, as long as the French deployment on the morning of the 18th of June hadn't fully crystallized, a French offensive along the Nivelles road, as well as one through the low ground which ran from the French position along Braine l'Alleud, was still a possibility. It was for this reason that this village was entrenched and that forces were placed between Goumont and Merbraine, forming the right wing of the position.³

The massive concentration of forces in his centre allowed Wellington to move them either to his left or right, according to circumstances.

In relation to the cooperation of the Prussian, time was evidently one of the most important determining factors for the success of the allies. When it came to sheer superiority in numbers, it was the trick to gain time for them in order to build this up at the decisive moment.

First of all, this would of course depend upon the moment Napoleon would actually start his attack upon Wellington; the later the better. More importantly, success was of course also dependent on how Napoleon would attack Wellington, either by bluntly attacking from the front or by manoeuvring, or by a combination of them.

In the third place, it of course depended upon the strength of Wellington's position, not only in the quality of his forces but also in the physical sense of the ground itself. For Wellington, what made the difference was that it was one of *his* and not Napoleon's choosing. As has been stated

before, he had his eye upon the position of Mont Saint Jean already in 1814 and, as a result, had it studied before the campaign of 1815.⁴

In several ways, on a tactical level, the position met the demands of the duke in the way he was used to fight a defensive and successful battle.

The key element in Wellington's tactics was in this context to make it impossible for the attacker to prepare his attack with artillery; in this way Wellington could maintain a maximum level of freshness of his own forces. Additionally, what helped was to have the disposal of strongholds in front of the frontline to break the speed of the French attacks, which further had to take place without further cover through open terrain, i.e. in full visibility of the enemy.

To achieve this, Wellington placed his forces in rear of a natural cover, in this case the ridge of Mont Saint Jean, to protect them from French fire and to obscure them from any view by the enemy. Having the artillery in front upon the crest of the ridge and skirmishers in its front, these were the only forces the French could see in approaching the enemy's position. Additionally, they had to climb the slope of the ridge, which on the 18th of June – by chance – was muddy and slippery.

All these factors contributed to the unsteadiness of the enemy the moment it actually approached the ridge. Having reached the crest of the ridge, it was only then that Wellington's units became fully visible for the French, who right then had suffered from gun- and skirmisher-fire and fatigue from the advance. Timing was vital, as it was just then that the allied units gave a volley of musketry fire on a short distance creating a moment of hesitation and possibly confusion of the enemy. That was the moment to have the infantry to rush forward in a bayonet attack, of which the success could then be further exploited by the cavalry charging at the hesitating French columns. For the defender then it was crucial not to get carried along too far off the front-line, making himself vulnerable for any French counter-attack.

At Mont Saint Jean, the chateau of Goumont and the farm of La Haye Sainte were suitable as breakwaters as they were situated just in front of Wellington's frontline.⁵ On the extreme left, the broken terrain of the valley of Smohain and the enclosures of the farms of La Haye and Papelette made access difficult for the enemy, thereby protecting the flank of the army there.

Further, the undulating fields in rear of the ridge of Mont Saint Jean allowed Wellington to place his reserves in covered positions which could easily be changed in all directions. Two high-roads further facilitated communication and logistics in rear of the main front-line.

When it came down to the entrenchment of the position of Mont Saint Jean in a general way, Wellington refrained from erecting actual earthworks and other major entrenchments. In his mind, these would only show his intentions, and it was just to trick to take the enemy by surprise in defence.⁶ Entrenchments were limited to the village of Braine l'Alleud, the farm of La Haye Sainte and the chateau of Goumont.⁷ Other than that, barricades were placed on both high-roads. Wellington chose for the natural strength of the position in combination with his usual way of beating French attacks as he had done in many other occasions before.⁸

The cooperation with the Prussian army.

Before entering into this scenario, it is necessary to say something about the information

Wellington had about the Prussian army on the morning of the 18th of June. This comprised the promise of Blücher to march off with two army-corps towards the duke by daybreak. In taking into account the distance and the fields between Wavre and Mont Saint Jean, as well as the state of the roads due to the rain, it can be assumed that Wellington must initially have counted that the first Prussian units could possibly reach the field of battle between 11 a.m. and noon.⁹

The way Wellington looked upon the cooperation of the Prussian army is reflected by the disposition as it was written by Von Müffling for Blücher on the morning of the 18th of June. It is an important document of which the significance has been rarely recognized. By sketching the conduct of the Prussian army in the different scenarios, it also throws additional light on the way how Wellington intended to fight the battle in general and what role he assigned to the Prussian army in this design.

In this, again, the principle ruled which had ruled for the allies all the time: to avoid a battle in which one of both allied armies would face Napoleon alone and at the same time to manoeuvre in such a way that the principle of the *fourches caudines* could be applied. For that reason even the possibility of Napoleon turning against Blücher and thereby having Wellington to fall upon Napoleon's rear and flank was included as well.

Of course, all depended on the course Napoleon would take in his offensive as it was presumed he was the one to take the initiative. If he wouldn't, then both allies would fall upon him in a joint way on the 19th of June.

But if Napoleon would attack according to one of the three options as sketched by the disposition, Wellington had arranged his forces at Mont Saint Jean in such a way that he thought he could meet them, and this of course in cooperation with the Prussian army, as it was described in the disposition written by Von Müffling by 8.30 a.m.

This disposition was the result of an intense communication which ran between both headquarters since the moment Von Müffling announced to Blücher the intention of the duke to fight at Mont Saint Jean, provided he would receive his Prussian support. By dawn, Wellington had a formal promise for this support (i.e. of at least two Prussian army-corps). After that, Von Müffling developed the disposition on army level, but which he worked out on corps level some time later, after Von Bülow had reported about his situation by 11.30 a.m. The coordination of arrangements on these two levels eventually shaped the way the Prussian army would intervene at Waterloo.

Wellington's precautions in case of a retreat.

Throughout the historiography of the campaign of 1815, the grand strategic dimensions for a possible retreat of the Anglo-Netherlands-German as coming from the position of Mont Saint Jean have never been properly elucidated. Traditionally, they confine themselves to considerations about the presence of the forest of Soignes in the immediate rear of the army, the detachment at Halle and Wellington's preoccupation with his communication towards England. These elements all have their significance but they mean nothing without a total context and which was set way before the campaign took place.

As has been made clear several times before, it was through Antwerp that the line of operations for Wellington ran. Yet, the choice to move there was not so much dictated by its logic, but first

of all by what the Prussian army would do in connection to the Anglo-Netherlands-German army. This meant that it would either attempt to make a stand in conjunction with Wellington immediately south of Brussels or that it would move away from him, towards the Meuse.

In the first case, the ultimate one was a position on the line of Uccle (right wing), Vleurgat (centre) and Ixelles (left wing, thrown back). By taking up a position here, three high roads were covered: the one coming from Alsemberg, the one from Waterloo and the third coming from La Hulpe. While Wellington could get there through the roads running from the field of Waterloo and from the position of Halle, Blücher could use the ones as coming from La Hulpe and Wavre, this last one reaching Ixelles from the east.¹⁰

But in case Wellington was left on his own, he would be forced – by moving west around Brussels - to retire to an intermediate position deeper into the Netherlands, near Antwerp in rear of the Nethe and Dyle.¹¹ Here, Wellington could delay Napoleon's advance and then fall back further to the positions near Breda in Holland. There, it was supposed, a new communication line could be established with the Prussian army, being further north in a position near Grave and Nijmegen on the river Meuse, places Blücher could move to by falling back along this river.

¹² Meanwhile, by pulling in their forces, valuable time would be gained for the other allied main armies to approach the French frontiers, thereby forcing Napoleon to open a second front.¹³

It has been suggested that Wellington had another option in case the Prussian army would fall back towards the Meuse: to fall back over the river Scheldt and to await succour from England there.¹⁴ Being in position at Mont Saint Jean it would have meant that Wellington would have to pull back his left wing, and to use Goumont as a turning point. In this way he would be able to pass the Senne downstream Halle for a safe crossing, thereby using the position of Halle as a flank cover. The main crossings were in 1815 at Loth, Huyssingehm and Ruysbroeck. Once across the Senne, the area here towards the Dendre contained a series of favourable positions to face the French, as coming from the south-east.¹⁵

During the night of the 17th of June, in case the French would penetrate through Halle, it was also Wellington who advised to the court of Louis XVIII to move towards Antwerp and not some place west of Ghent. For these reasons, Wellington never contemplated to move west, towards the coastline of Ostend.

Far more important, however, was that this last option would not generate what the other one would: a potential renewed cooperation with the Prussian army, deeper down in the Netherlands – and this was the only chance to prevail: by gaining time so as to build up allied superiority, not only in the Netherlands, but also in the north-east of France as the Austrian and Russian armies were approaching.

For a retreat towards Brussels, in theory, several major roads were available to Wellington. First of all, there was the high-road running from about Mont Saint Jean through the forest of Soignes. On its north side, it left it at the hamlet of Vleurgat. From there it continued to Brussels. Yet, due to the presence of massive baggages and provisions, this road was fully blocked and not suited as a line of retreat.

From Braine l'Alleud smaller roads led to the forest of Soignes further north and these converged at its northern edge at Alsemberg; from there – and west of the forest of Soignes - a high-road ran through Uccle towards Brussels.¹⁶

Another, but for Wellington an even more excentric high-road, ran from La Hulpe through the forest along Groenendael and Boitsfort to Vleurgat, and from there to Brussels.¹⁷

What these roads had in common - in a higher or lower degree - was that they all ran through the vast forest of Soignes which lay as a huge screen in front of Brussels.

The forest has attracted attention in the subject described here as Napoleon wrote about it: “la position de Mont Saint Jean était mal choisie. La première condition d’un champ de bataille est de n’avoir pas de défilés sur ses derrières. Pendant la bataille, le général anglais ne sut pas tirer partie de sa nombreuse cavalerie; il ne jugea pas qu’il devait être et serait attaqué par sa gauche, il crut qu’il le serait par sa droite. Malgré la diversion opérée en sa faveur par les trente mille Prussiens du général Bülow, il eût deux fois opéré sa retraite dans la journée si cela lui eût été possible. Ainsi, par le fait, o étrange bizarrerie des événements humains ! le mauvais choix de son champ de bataille, qui rendait toute retraite impossible, a été la cause de son succès !!”¹⁸

What Napoleon means to say here is that Wellington, due to his miscalculations and despite the aid of Blücher, would have gone back twice that day if he had had the chance to do so, but that his actual position right in front of the forest of Soignes prevented him from doing so, thereby actually aiding the duke in gaining his victory - a bizarre reasoning, used with the aim of taking away part of the load of Napoleons responsibility of the French defeat.

In order to justify Wellington’s choice for the position of Mont Saint Jean in relation to the presence of the forest of Soignes in its immediate rear, several historians have pointed to the very open character of the forest of Soignes, in the sense that it afforded ample means for an orderly retreat.¹⁹

There is no discussion that indeed the forest had a very open character: it contained virtually no undergrowth and numerous large lanes were cut through it. In case of a partial defeat there is also no doubt that parts of the army would have found shelter there against enemy’s action. Yet, in general, it cannot be denied that it would seriously have disrupted Wellington’s forces in case of a precipitate retreat.

In the discussion, however, two important elements should be emphasized. First of all, Mont Saint Jean was for Wellington *the* ultimate and pre-studied position which gave him the opportunity to stop Napoleon in conjunction with the Prussians south of Brussels.²⁰ In this way, he must have taken the presence of the forest in his immediate rear for granted.

More importantly, in case of a retreat, he would direct it towards Alsemberg and beyond with the eventual goal of either establishing another position between the forest and Brussels, together with the Prussians, or – if these would have moved further east – to fall back upon the Nethe and Antwerp.

The detachment at Halle.

It has been made clear that in Wellington’s concept the position of Halle evolved from what was to be a major position to receive the major French attack as coming from Mons into one serving as a cover of his right flank, to oppose a secondary French action as coming from Nivelles. It was not, however, the principle as it guided Wellington on the 15th and part of the 16th of June in the sense that what he thought was a secondary action (the attack upon Charleroi).

In this case he took a real threat upon his right flank into account in two ways: forces in this position would not only be able to prevent Napoleon to turn Wellington's army as it fought at Mont Saint Jean, but more importantly they would afford the vital cover necessary in case of a retreat towards a position behind the Nethe, near Antwerp.²¹

There is no need to explain why the protection of the line of retreat of an army is an absolute necessity. But to start with the first element, the question rises whether Wellington's idea about Napoleon manoeuvring around his right flank was realistic. In other words: was this something which could be expected ?

Horsburgh already pointed out that Wellington must have had very good reasons to put and leave his forces at Halle, while he fought Napoleon at Mont Saint Jean. In itself, this is most correct and in that sense the subject of the detachment of Halle has never been explored in its full extent.

Taking Napoleon's mobility and speed in former campaigns in account, Wellington could indeed have good reasons to protect his right flank.²² On the other hand, throughout the historiography of the campaign, others often criticize the duke for leaving the detachment at Halle unemployed. In general, the issue is too often approached from a position in which – again – hindsight has played a major role.

Yet, the issue of the detachment at Halle goes beyond this statement. What counts first is what Wellington actually did to find out about Napoleon's intentions on his right flank, and second, how he used this intelligence in relation to his forces at Halle.

Wellington himself indicates that he sent out patrols towards Nivelles on the 16th and 17th of June to find out whether the French moved along this point.²³ It is not more than logical to suppose that these patrols have reported back to Wellington.

Additionally, prince Frederik moved from Enghien to Halle and general Colville towards Braine le Comte on the 17th of June and also both these commanders could also have reported back upon their movements and situation. However, there is no indication that they were asked to do so, specially in relation to any intelligence on the enemy.²⁴

All these sources together could have informed Wellington that by the late evening of the 17th of June no French were to be seen in the area between Enghien, Braine le Comte, Nivelles, Braine l'Alleud and Halle.

Whether they actually did so is uncertain, but fact is that up to the last moment previous to the attack of the French at Mont Saint Jean, Wellington still did not exclude that Napoleon would endeavour to turn his right flank by a march upon Halle.²⁵ Eventually, it was most probably around noon that Wellington was informed by Colville through colonel Woodford about his situation, and this must without a doubt have included information about the absence of the enemy in his sector altogether.²⁶

Whatever may have taken place, the phenomenon has a striking resemblance with the obsession Wellington displayed on the 15th and 16th of June with his sector further west, even though there were no reports on any actual enemy presence there.²⁷

¹ This approach is reflected in the following anecdote. Uxbridge, being second in command, would have asked for Wellington's plans, to which the duke would have said: "Bonaparte has not given me any idea of his projects; and as my plans will depend upon his, how can you expect me to tell you what mine are ? There is one thing certain, Uxbridge, that is, that, whatever happens, you and I will do our duty." In: Fraser, W. – Words on Wellington p.1-2

² The terms "left wing, centre and right wing" are used as Wellington used them. These designations were based upon possible directions Napoleon could take. For Napoleon, however, an attack along the Nivelles road was no option and he regarded the area around the crossing of the Brussels road and the Ohain-road, north of La Haye Sainte, as the centre of Wellington's line. Cf. Lenient, E. - La solution des énigmes etc. p.410-411
Houssaye, H. - 1815. Waterloo p.311

³ Here, colonel Carmichael Smyth refers to Jourdan who encircled the allied army in this way in 1794. In: Chronological epitome etc. p.393

⁴ Cf. preambles.

⁵ Some historians assign a special importance to Goumont from its prominent position in the immediate front of the right of Wellington's line and also because of the heroic resistance performed by the allies there during the battle.

The latter argument, however, is a product of hindsight and also says more about the way the French executed their attacks as it does about the importance of Goumont for Wellington in the strict sense of the word.

The first argument would only have some specific value in case Napoleon would have decided to attack over his extreme left wing and / or in case Wellington would have to fall back upon Brussels along his right wing. In reality, both cases did not materialize.

In that general sense, Goumont was not of any more significance as for instance La Haye Sainte. Cf. Siborne, W. – History of the war etc. Vol.I p.343

⁶ Major Van Gorkum. In: Neuf jours de la campagne de 1815

Van Gorkum took this from colonel Carmichael Smyth who had spoken with Wellington on the entrenchment of the position of Mont Saint Jean at some point before the campaign.

Yet, captain Oldfield contradicts this in some way as he states that, for a moment, Wellington would have had the idea of erecting some cover on the plateau opposite the farm of La Haye Sainte, but that he abandoned it for some reason. In: NAM, 7403-147

⁷ According to Wellington himself, Goumont was not stronger entrenched as was the farm of La Haye Sainte. In a letter to William Mudford, dated 28th April 1816. In: WSD, Vol.XII p.507-508

⁸ On the 17th of June, three companies of royal engineers were sent for to come to the position of Mont Saint Jean and / or Waterloo, but none finally got there. Of these, one came from Halle and one from Antwerp. Of the royal engineers, 10 companies were present, totalling 782 men.

Three of them were already present at Antwerp and Ypres before March 1815. These were the 4th company / 3rd battalion and the 4th and 5th company of the 2nd battalion.

Between March and June seven others joined in – these were:

3rd and 6th company / 1st battalion

2nd and 8th company / 2nd battalion

1st and 7th company / 3rd battalion

1st company / 4th battalion

Additionally, 2 companies with pontoons were at Malines. Cf. Connolly, W.J. History of the royal sappers and miners p.230-232

The 8th company 2nd battalion, led by sub-lieutenant Johnston, was at Antwerp and must have been ordered on the 17th of June to leave for Waterloo. It did by 2 a.m. on the following day and on arrival at Brussels lieutenant Johnston, finding that the captain of the company as well as the commanding royal engineer and his staff were in the field, at once moved on for Waterloo. Though crowds of wounded soldiers, fugitives and dismantled waggons and cannons greatly impeded his march, Johnston reached Waterloo by 4 p.m. and spent the night there. In: Cf. Connolly, W.J. History of the royal sappers and miners p.235-236
Cf. Account captain Oldfield. In: NAM, nr.7403-147

On the 17th of June, Wellington ordered colonel Carmichael Smyth to fetch the 1st company / 4th battalion from Halle and to use it for the entrenchment of Braine l'Alleud. Accordingly, Carmichael Smyth sent lieutenant Sperling there. Sperling, in crossing the forest of Soignes, experienced waterways and cross paths and therefore he decided to go to Brussels. There he got a fresh horse and reached the engineers at Halle by 5 p.m. Then Sperling returned to Brussels where he spent the night. Cf. lieutenant Sperling in a letter dated 20th of June 1815. In: Letters etc. p131

The company would never reach the field of battle. Lieutenant Sperling explains this stating that the unit got lost in the forest, while captain Oldfield claims that its commander, under the impression that Braine l'Alleud had been evacuated, concluded that his unit was no longer needed at Braine l'Alleud and therefore had decided to move to Waterloo instead.

Connolly investigated the matter in more detail, instigated by the fact that he company had acquired the stigma of quitting the field without sufficient reason, and losing, in the precipitancy and confusion of the march, its baggage and field equipment.

His conclusion is that the company moved on the 17th of June from Halle to Waterloo where it was when the action commenced on the morning of the 18th of June. After a time it was ordered to the rear by major Sir George Hoste and accordingly it marched to the furthest end of the

village; there the company remained till between 3 and 4 p.m. when lieutenant Sander (Royal engineers) joined it. In the meantime, rumours reached Sanders that the French were at the other end of the village. Having corroborated this with additional affirmations of many others, he then decided to pull the unit back towards the north. But the company had not proceeded far before it was unavoidably thrown into difficulties and disorder due to the masses of fugitives and material. In the process, the unit got scattered and most of its entrenching tools, baggage and horses lost.

Connolly regards the affair as ill-understood and which deserves to be viewed more with regret as than with animadversion.

In: Sperling, lieutenant – Letters etc. p.131

Account captain Oldfield. In: NAM, nr.7403-147

Connolly, T.W.J. - History of the royal sappers and miners p.232-235

According to Oldfield, the captain of the 1st company / 4th battalion was arrested by colonel Carmichael Smyth the moment he met the other staff officers at Waterloo.

Lieutenant Sperling had spent the night of the 17th of June in Brussels, but returned to Waterloo in the early morning where he met other officers of the Royal engineer such as captain Oldfield and Sir G.Hoste. Colonel Carmichael Smyth also had spent the night at Waterloo but had been very ill that night. Yet, he left Waterloo for the front somewhere in the morning.

⁹ This is based upon the distance between Tout Vent and the Bois de Paris (Von Bülow's route) as 15 kilometers, taking the speed of the Prussian infantry as an average of 2 kilometers per hour.

By 1 p.m., the feeling in Wellington's staff about the Prussian arrival, must have changed to about 2 p.m. as by 1 p.m. major general Van Reede, Netherlands military commissioner at Wellington's headquarters, wrote (probably to baron Van der Capellen): "Les Français viennent nous attaquer. Notre position est belle. Bülow est en marche avec toute l'armée Prussienne, dans une heure on suppose qu'elle pourra être ici.

Du champ de bataille, à une heure – Reede." In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6585

¹⁰ Cf. Carmichael Smyth, J. – Chronological epitome etc. p.404

Siborne mentions the position of Uccle but avoids a deeper understanding by describing it as one which "will readily present itself to the minds of military men studying the dispositions and movements to which a retreat would have probably given rise; but this is a subject which, embracing as it naturally would the consequent operations of the Prussians, opens a wide field for discussion, into which it is unnecessary to enter." In: History of the war etc. Vol.I p.361-362

¹¹ Cf. Carmichael Smyth, J. – Chronological epitome etc. p.404

Carmichael Smyth refers here to the period after the battle of Rocourt (1746 – wars of the Austrian succession 1740-1746) after which the Austrian marshal Bathiani was able to detain

marshal Saxe nearly a fortnight between Brussels and Antwerp by manoeuvring successively behind the Dyle and Nethe.

¹² Cf. preambles of the campaign.

¹³ Von Müffling – Memoirs p.20

¹⁴ Cf. Carmichael Smyth, J. – Chronological epitome etc. p.404

¹⁵ Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.64

¹⁶ Captain Oldfield. In: NAM, nr.7403-147

¹⁷ Cf. Carmichael Smyth, J. – Chronological epitome etc. p.403

¹⁸ Mémoires pour servir etc. p.197-198

¹⁹ Cf. Carmichael Smyth, J. – Chronological epitome etc. p.403

Frazer, Sir A. – Letters (dated 3 a.m. 18th of June 1815) p.544

Siborne, W. – History of the war etc. Vol.I p.361

Von Clausewitz – Der Feldzug von 1815 p.80

²⁰ Cf. Denkwürdigkeiten für die Kriegskunst etc. p.100

²¹ Cf. Von Müffling. Memoirs p.19

Horsburgh, E.L.S. - Waterloo. A narrative and a criticism p.281

²² Cf. Lenient who justifies Wellington's fear for Napoleon being able to outflank him, as he did with opponents in previous campaigns. In: La solution des énigmes etc. p.407-408

²³ Wellington's memorandum of 1842. In: WSD, Vol.X p.530-531

Cf. reconnaissance of Von Estorff towards Nivelles.

²⁴ From the available documents it seems as if general Colville was better informed about the background of his orders as was prince Frederik.

Those of the early morning describe those for the prince so as to move from Enghien in the evening and to take up a position in front of Hal, occupying Braine le Chateau with two bataillons. Apparently, he was also ordered to defend his position as long as possible.

Cf. the order from Wellington to Colville of the evening of the 17th of June

Letter of the prince himself, dated 21st of June. In: Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.63, 338-339

Colville to his brother, letter dated 19th June 1815. In: Colville papers, C41283/TD 97/1 In Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh

Colville, in his turn, was informed by lieutenant colonel Torrens, the bearer of Wellington's order of the evening of the 17th of June, about the general situation late on the 17th of June in the way Wellington saw it: his own main force at Mont Saint Jean and the Prussian army around Wavre, while Napoleon's forces were most probably split in three: a minor force pursuing Blücher, his main army in front Mont Saint Jean, while another part, as coming from Nivelles, might move around Wellington's right flank

It would be logical to suppose that Colville must have shared this information with prince Frederik, but no information is available about their mutual arrangements in this, or any other sense, in their position of Halle.

²⁵ Cf. his letters written during the very early morning of the 18th of June. Wellington's memorandum of 1842. In: WSD, Vol.X p.530-531

²⁶ Colville's forces started to drop in in the position of Halle around 10 a.m. and in case Colville dispatched Woodford some time later, he had to cover about 15 kilometers between Tubize and Mont Saint Jean which must have taken him almost 2 hours.

Cf. Colville to his brother, letter dated 19th June 1815. In: Colville papers, C41283/TD 97/1 In Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh

²⁷ The discussion on the detachment at Halle in this chapter is restricted, as the shadow of hindsight easily slips into it. For that reason, the way Wellington handled the detachment that day it will be dealt with in more depth at a later stage.