

The march of the corps of Von Zieten on the 18th of June 1815

At 2 a.m. general Von Zieten received the following orders from Blücher: ¹

Hauptquartier Wavre, den 17.Juni Nachts 12 Uhr

Ew.Excellenz wollen morgen mit dem frühesten Ihre Truppen abkochen lassen, damit sie auf den ersten Wink aufbrechen können. Das zweite und vierte Armeekorps brechen morgen mit Tagesanbruch auf und marschieren über Wavre in der Richtung auf Chateau St.Lambert [sic], um in die rechte Flanke des Feindes zu operieren, im Fall dieser, wie es wahrscheinlich ist, morgen den Herzog von Wellington in seiner Stellung angreifen sollte. Die Bagage, die Trains usw. werden nach Louvain dirigiert und zwar die ersten Korps auf dem linken Ufer der Dyle, damit ein Durchzug durch Wavre vermieden werde.

Blücher ²

Between 11 and 12 a.m. Zieten also received the order to leave his positions immediately. ³ It was issued by Blücher shortly before he left Wavre.

As a result of this, Zieten wrote this disposition for the movements of his troops:

Das Vierte, zweite und erste Armeekorps marschiren in zwei Kolonnen dergestalt vor, dass sie den Herzog Wellington, der wahrscheinlich noch heut von den Franzosen angegriffen wird und mit seinem rechten Flügel bei Braine l'Alleud, mit dem linken bei Mont Saint Jean steht, unterstützen und Bonaparte eine Diversion in seine rechte Flanke und Rücken machen zu können. Das vierte und zweite Armeekorps bilden die Kolonne des linken Flügels; sie marschiren über Neuf Cabaret bis St.Lambert.

Das erste Armeekorps hat die rechte Flügelkolonne, es marschirt über Froidmont gegen Ohain. Die Marschordnung des Korps ist folgende:

Die Avantgarde: die 1te Brigade nebst einer Fuss und einer reitenden Batterie. Zur Unterstützung der Avantgarde die Reserve-Kavallerie, dann die 2te, 3te und 4te Brigade und zuletzt die Reserve-Artillerie. Das 1te Armeekorps marschirt rechts ab.

Ich bitte so viel wie möglich in Sektionen, und da wo es das Terrain gestattet in Zügen zu marschiren.

Zu dem glücklichsten Tage meines Lebens werde ich es rechnen, wenn der 18te Juni eine eben solche preussische Tapferkeit, wie am 16ten, jedoch einen bessern Erfolg zeigt. Unter den Befehlen solcher Brigade-Chefs und Oberoffiziers wie sie das 1te Armeekorps zählt, bin ich im voraus der Erfüllung meiner heissen Wünsche gewiss.

Der Major Von Dedenroth vom Generalstabe wird die Tete der Kolonne des 1ten Armeekorps führen.

Das Westphalische Landwehr-Kavallerie-Regiment wird in die Brigaden eingetheilt, und zwar nach der bereits bekannten Ordre de bataille.

Die Reserve-Kavallerie unterhält die Verbindung mit der Kolonne des linken Flügels.

Gezeichnet Von Zieten

*Füt gleichlautende Abschrift der Chef des Generalstabes Obristlieutenant Von Reiche.*⁴

Thielmann felt too weak to stretch his position even beyond Bierges and therefore requested Zieten to support him.

Zieten therefore decided to leave a detachment of three battalions and three squadrons at Bierges, with the instruction to cover the right flank of the 3rd corps and to keep up a communication with the 1st corps to cover its rear while it would be on its way towards the battlefield of Waterloo.⁵

The units which Zieten reserved for this detachment were the 19th regiment of infantry (brigade Von Henckel) , two squadrons of the 6th regiment of uhlans and one squadron of the 1st regiment of Westphalian Landwehrcavalry, led by major Von Stengel.⁶ Its total strength (excluding the losses on the 16th) was 2475 men.

The detachment was left near Bierges. Of the 19th regiment the 1st and 2nd battalion were posted to the right and the 3rd battalion was in reserve behind its sharpshooters which were posted in the south-east edge of the village. Some small units were placed in the immediate vicinity.⁷

The other regiment of the 4th brigade of Von Henckel, the 4th regiment of Westphalian Landwehr infantry, plus the foot battery nr.15 were detached by Zieten towards a position in the vicinity of Froidmont. The purpose of this detachment was to observe the enemy while this was approaching Limale as long as the battle at Mont Saint Jean had not been decided.⁸

Before leaving, Zieten pulled back the 12th regiment towards his corps again.⁹

Zieten's advance guard comprised the brigade of Von Steinmetz, the reserve-cavalry and a horse and foot battery. In rear of them would follow the brigades of Pirch II, Von Jagow, Von Henckel and the reserve-artillery.¹⁰ All these brigades were ordered, as soon as they had crossed the low ground of the Lasne, to collect and immediately follow the advance-guard.

¹¹The reserve-cavalry was instructed to maintain the communication with the columns of the 4th and 2nd corps.

The advance guard of the 1st corps probably left its positions towards 2 p.m.¹²

In their march the units turned northward and then, about one kilometer north of Bierges, to the left. Here the road carries towards the Bois de Rixensart, then in a straight line right through this wood and to turn south at its exit towards the hamlet of Fromont.¹³ From here the road turns west for about one and a half a kilometer, to turn southwest from Bourgeois towards the Lasne.

Near the Lasne, the 1st brigade halted for a while in order to let the 2nd brigade come up, and then to resume its march. The other brigades followed further to the rear.¹⁴

The road continues further south and west along the farm of Delbrire towards Ohain, which is in the hollow ground to the left, and then on to the Chapelle Notre Dame de Bon Secours.¹⁵ From there the road led in a straight line along the Chapelle Jacques to the battlefield of Mont Saint Jean.¹⁶

The roads and grounds where the 1st corps had to pass through must have been very tough.

Chief of staff Von Reiche writes: " Der Marsch zum Schlachtfelde war äusserst beschwerlich. Grundlose, durch tiefe Defileen durchschnittene Wege mussten passirt werden; das Terrain war zu beiden Seiten fast durchgehends waldig, daher an kein ausweichen zu denken war und der Marsch nur sehr langsam von Statten gehen konnte, um so mehr als Menschen und Pferde an vielen Stellen nur einzeln und die Geschütze nur höchst mühsam durchzubringen waren. Die Kolonnen kamen dadurch sehr auseinander, und wo es das Terrain gestattete, mussten die Teten derselben Halt machen, damit die Abtheilungen sich wieder sammeln konnten.[...] Die ganze Kolonne geschlossen zusammen zu halten, musste aufgegeben werden, und man war befriedigt, wenn nur die Brigaden und Regimenter in sich zusammen blieben. " ¹⁷

The route from Bierges to Chapelle Saint Jacques covers about 17 kilometers.

The advance guard got north of Ohain around 6 p.m. ¹⁸ Around 6.30 p.m. the advance guard reached at Chapelle Notre Dame de Bon Secours. ¹⁹

The reserve-cavalry was followed by the 2nd, the 3rd and the 4th brigade. The reserve-artillery formed the rearguard.

The moment Pirch II reached the Lasne he took the opportunity to collect his brigade and then he proceeded towards Ohain and it was on its other side, at the crossing with the road which runs from Haut-Ransbeek to Cheval de Bois, that he turned left to join the forces of Von Bülow. Pirch II now led his regiments into the valley towards the stream of Smohain until his brigade had almost entirely left the Ohain-road, when he received the contra-order to march towards the battle-field along the Ohain-road. The 3rd brigade, which was under his orders as well, being the senior commander, was about to turn left too, but now Pirch II took the opportunity of collecting this brigade. He decided to have the 3rd brigade continue its march towards the battle-field while the 2nd brigade now followed, also in close column. ²⁰ As soon as both these brigades were about to reach the battlefield, Pirch II formed them and he sent his 1st regiment of Westphalian Landwehr cavalry (three squadrons) forward in a trot. The infantry also accelerated its march but both units reached the battlefield too late to take a share in the fighting.

While Von Jagow left its bivouacs around 3 p.m. Henckel must have left Bierges between 3 and 4 p.m. ²¹

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¹ Pflugk Harttung, J.von In: Das I.Korps Zieten bei Belle Alliance und Wavre p.197
Cf. Hofschröder, P. 1815 The Waterloo campaign. The German victory p.57

2.Reiche, L.von Memoiren etc. p.206

Ollech, Von - Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 etc. p.193

Pflugk Harttung, J.von In: Das I.Korps Zieten bei Belle Alliance und Wavre p.197-198

3.Ollech, Von – Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 p.193

It was towards noon according to the diary of the 1st corps. Cf. Tagebuch des Königlich etc.

In: Hafner, D. Hans Carl Ernst Graf von Zieten p.322

Von Reiche claims it was at noon. Cf. Reiche, L.von Memoiren etc. p.208

Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von In: Das I.Korps Zieten bei Belle Alliance und Wavre p.198

Lieutenant colonel Lehmann says it was at 1 p.m. In: Former KA, VI.E.7.II.199 in GSA,VPH-
HA, VI nr.VII.5.p.3

4.Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das I.Korps Zieten bei Belle Alliance etc. p.198 The original was
kept in the former KA, nr.VI.E.15.II.

Plotho, Von - Der Krieg des Verbundeten Europa gegen Frankreich im Jahre 1815 p.63

Ollech, Von Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 etc. p.193-194

Reiche, L.von Memoiren etc. p.208-209

⁵ Cf.Diary of the 1st corps. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das I.Korps Zieten bei La Belle
Alliance und Wavre p.202

⁶ Cf.Tagebuch des Königlich etc. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das I.Korps Zieten bei La Belle
Alliance und Wavre p.202 and in GSA, HA VI,nr.V.8.p.2 and in Hafner, D. - Hans Carl Ernst
Graf von Zieten p.322

Cf.Harkort, F. Die Zeiten des ersten Westphalischen etc. p.67

Henckel von Donnersmarck, count Erinnerungen etc. p.359

Gottschalck, M. Geschichte etc. p.91

Reiche, L.von Memoiren p.209

7.Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das Gefecht bei Limale p.37

⁸ Cf.Diary of the 1st corps. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das I.Korps Zieten bei La Belle
Alliance und Wavre p.202 and in: Hafner, D. Hans - Carl Ernst Graf von Zieten p.322
Report of Pirch II (VI.E.7.II.94) In: In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das 1^e preussische Korps bei
Belle Alliance p.226

Henckel himself doesn't mention this movement at all. Cf. Henckel, Erinnerungen etc p.358-

359

Von Pflugk Harttung cites a report of a captain Von Glasenap (2nd battalion 19th regiment) who states it was between 3 and 4 p.m. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Aus den Tagen des 17. Und 18.Juni 1815 p.195

⁹ Cf. Reiche, L.von Memoiren etc. p.207-209

10. Cf. references to the reports of Von Pirch II and Von Jagow. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.227 (originals in Kriegsarchiv.VI.E.7.II)

Lieutenant colonel Lehmann. In: Former KA, VI.E.7.II.199 in GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.5.p.3
Henckel himself claims his brigade formed the rearguard. Cf. Henckel von Donnersmarck, count - Erinnerungen etc. p.358

Also see: Wider Napoleon ! p.324 This statement can be explained by the fact that the brigade was the rearguard of the infantry.

Of the 6th regiment of uhlans (brigade Von Lützow) two squadrons marched towards Mont Saint Jean; the other two were in the detachment of Von Stengel and had a few wounded horses during the action of Limale. Cf. Report of captain Von Petersdorff (6th regiment of uhlans). In: Former KA, VI.E.7.II.177 in GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.3 E.p.30

¹¹ Tagebuch des Königlich Preussischen etc. In: Hafner, D. p.323

¹² Cf. Report of Pirch II (VI.E.7.III.94) In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das 1^e Preussische Korps bei Belle Alliance p.226

Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das I.Korps Zieten bei Belle Alliance und Wavre p.199

State of the movements of the 2nd brigade. In: GSA, VI HA, NL Gneisenau, Kt.19 p.11

Cf. Tagebuch des Königlich etc. In: Hafner, D. - Hans Carl Ernst Graf von Zieten p.323

Lieutenant colonel Von Reiche in his report says it was 1 p.m. In: Former KA, VI.E.7I.1 in GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr. VII.5.p.60

Henckel von Donnersmarck states his brigade left “gegen Mittag” and that a short time later he heard heavy gunfire. This incorrect, as his brigade left much later as did the vanguard and the gunfire he heard was most probably the bombardment directed upon Wavre which started at about 4.15 p.m. Cf. Henckel von Donnersmarck, count Erinnerungen etc. p.358-359

According to Von Leszczyński the 4th brigade left around 3 p.m., being delayed by the intervention of the 9th brigade (see below). In: 50 Jahr Geschichte des Königlich Preussischen 2.Posenschen Infanterie-Regiments nr.19 p.169

The words “gegen Mittag” are also being used by an anonymous captain of an anonymous regiment of landwehr cavalry attached to the brigade of Henckel of the 1st army corps. Cf. Wider Napoleon ! p.324

For the same description, see Von Damitz. In: Geschichte etc. p.260

Major Von Gröben reports it was “um Mittag”. Cf. his account in: Pflugk Harttung, J.von

Belle Alliance. Die Schilderung der Ereignisse vom 16.-18.Juni 1815 durch einen mitbeteiligten Generalstaboffizier p. 11

Reiche, L. von – Memoiren etc. p.209

Others claim it was noon.

Charras. Histoire de la campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.43

Cf. Ropes, J.C. The campaign of Waterloo p.262

Siborne, W. History of the war etc. Vol.I p.311

Die Geschichte des 28. Regiments. In: Special ABN, nr.65 p.25

¹³ The fact that the corps moved through the defile of Fromont is confirmed by Pirch II in his report (VI.E.7.II.94). In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das 1^e preussische Korps bei Belle Alliance p.226

¹⁴ Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von Das 1^e preussische Korps bei Belle Alliance p.144-145

15. This chapel originally dates from 1673, but was rebuilt in 1859. Cf.Uffindell, A. On the fields of glory p.231

¹⁶ The actual chapel did not exist in 1815; at that time there must have been a tiny chapel instead.

The tablet of the current one bears: “Cette chapelle est bâtie à la gloire de Dieu et de la Vierge du Saint-Rosaire [...] par Jean-Jacques Vandeveld.” Cf. Navez, L. Le champ de bataille p.180

17.Reiche, L.von Memoiren etc. p.209-210. The fact that the march was extremely slow by the state of the roads and the narrow defiles is confirmed by captain Von der Osten of the 4th regiment of Westphalian Landwehr. Cf. Wider Napoleon ! p. 324 And in: Souvenirs d’un hussard prussien p.371

Cf. Tagebuch des Königlich etc. In: Hafner, D. Hans Carl Ernst Graf von Zieten p.323

18.Ollech, Von – Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.193-194

Houssaye, H. 1815.Waterloo p.399

19.Aerts, W. & L.Wilmet. Waterloo. L’attaque de la garde etc. p.20

²⁰ It would have been count Nostitz who was sent out by Blücher to speed up Zieten’s march and who met Pirch II while doing so and then to re-direct him back to his original track, having deviated too far left. Having done that, Nostitz proceeded to the advance guard, where Zieten was. Cf. Nostitz, Von Das Tagebuch etc. p.43

²¹ Wellmann, R. Geschichte etc. p.129

Captain Von Glasenapp (2nd battalion, 19th regiment). Report in former Kriegsarchiv. (II.M.213) In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Aus den Tagen des 17. Und 18.Juni 1815 p.195

Report of the 4th regiment of Westphalian Landwehr-infantry. In: Henckel von
Donnersmarck, count - Erinnerungen etc. p.658