

Wellington's headquarters at Brussels.

On the 15th of June, three written reports were sent from the Prussian army to Wellington: the one from Zieten (9 a.m.), the one from Blücher (noon) and the one from Gneisenau or Blücher (11 p.m.).

The capital question is: at what time did Wellington receive these reports and what other reports about the situation of the Prussians did he receive that day ?

Although there are accounts of some of the main persons in this issue, as well as of course the orders issued by Wellington that day – being the result of specific information – the issue is complex as the accounts are contradictory and sometimes unclear.

Before entering into the actual communication between Blücher and Wellington and Zieten and Wellington, I will discuss the information which Wellington received through the army of the Netherlands first.

First of all, it was towards 3 p.m. that the prince of Orange arrived in Brussels and there went to see Wellington right away.

By 3 p.m. he told the duke what he had learned at St.Symphorien about French attack against the Prussian army, though be it in a very general way, and what measures he had taken.

That day, three messages were sent from the sector of the army of the Netherlands and Mons to Brussels.

One was the letter of the commander at Mons, baron Behr, which was forwarded by Constant Rebecque around 2 p.m. for the prince of Orange. It comprised the information that the 2nd Prussian brigade was under attack, that there was a general alarm on the Prussian front, and that the French offensive seemed to be heading towards Charleroi. In front of Mons and of the Dutch cavalry brigade of Van Merlen everything was quiet.

The second message was the note of Berkeley for lord FitzRoy Somerset and which accompanied the report of Von Dörnberg and a copy of the report of Behr.

Taking both together, they reported on the attack on the Prussian front in general and on the attack on Thuin in particular, the evacuation of Binche and a planned Prussian retreat towards Gosselies, if necessary. In both sectors of Mons and Braine le Comte everything had remained quiet.

In his memorandum, Wellington writes about the communication through the Dutch army (and Mons) on the 15th of June: “The first account received by the duke of Wellington was from the prince of Orange, who had come in from the outposts of the army of the Netherlands to dine with the duke at three o'clock in the afternoon. He reported that the enemy had attacked the Prussians at Thuin; that they had taken possession of, but had afterwards abandoned Binche; that they had not yet touched the positions of the army of the Netherlands. While the prince was with the duke, the staff officer employed by prince Blücher at the duke's headquarters, general Müffling, came to inform him that he had just received intelligence of the movement of the French army and their attack upon the Prussian troops at Thuin.”¹

And even though that at 3 p.m. there was no news yet about the actual French attack on Thuin in particular and the evacuation of Binche (as this was brought in later), Wellington's statements make it very clear that it was from the prince of Orange that he first learned of the hostilities, and not through Zieten or Blücher.

The third note from the army of the Netherlands, i.e. Constant Rebecque, reached Wellington just after midnight, during the ball of Richmond.

One of the main witnesses of the communication between the headquarters of Blücher and Wellington involved was of course Von Müffling, the liaison between both armies.

He has written about the 15th of June in both an early work – from 1817 (²), as well as in his memoirs - published in 1851. ³

In the first publication he writes: “So war die Lage, als am 15ten Juny Vormittage beym Fürsten Blücher zu Namur, und Nachmittag 4 ½ Uhr in Brüssel beym Herzog Wellington die Nachricht einging, dass der Feind das erste preussische Corps unter dem General-Lieutenant von Zieten längst der Sambre angegriffen habe und sich auf Charleroy dirigirte.” [...] “Der Herzog Wellington erliess am 15ten um 6 Uhr Abends den Befehl an alle Truppen der Armee zum Marsch sich in Bereitschaft zu setzen, erwartete jedoch Rapporte von Mons, ob nicht eine feindliche Colonne auf dieser Seite vordringe. Als es sich um Mitternacht zeigte, dass dies nicht der Fall war, erhielt die Reserve den Befehl den Wald von Soignes zu passieren, eine Bewegung, welche den 16ten Juny um 10 Uhr Morgens ausgeführt war.” ⁴

And in his memoirs he writes: “When general Zieten was attacked before Charleroi on the 15th of June, an event which opened the war, he dispatched an officer to me, who arrived at Brussels at three o’clock.

The duke of Wellington, to whom I immediately communicated the news, had received no intelligence from the advanced post at Mons. I put the question to him, *whether* and *where* he would concentrate his army, as in consequence of this news, fieldmarshal Blücher would concentrate his forces at Ligny, if he had not already taken up this position.

The duke replied: “If all is as general Von Zieten supposes, I will concentrate on my left wing, *i.e.* the corps of prince of Orange; I shall then be *à portée* to fight in conjunction with the Prussian army. Should, however, a portion of the enemy’s forces come by Mons, I must concentrate more towards my centre. For this reason I must positively wait for news from Mons before I fix the rendez-vous. Since, however, the departure of the troops is certain, and only the place of rendezvous remains uncertain, I will order all to be readiness, including the Brunswick corps in reserve, and will direct a brigade of light cavalry to march at once to Quatre Bras.” Orders were accordingly dispatched about six or seven o’clock. Later in the same day intelligence of the commencement of hostilities, forwarded from Charleroi to Namur, reached me a second time from thence. The field-marshal informed me of his concentrating at Sombref [sic], and charged me to give him speedily intelligence of the concentration of Wellington’s army. I immediately communicated this to the Duke, who quite acquiesced in Blücher’s dispositions. However, he could not resolve on fixing his point of concentration before receiving the expected news from Mons, but he promised to give me immediate notice when this arrived. He retained his aides-de-camp and secretaries in his business-room.

I went home after ten o’clock, made out my report, having only to add in conclusion the places of rendezvous, and kept a courier in readiness at my door.

Towards midnight the Duke entered my room and said: “I have got news from Mons, from general Dörnberg, who reports that Napoleon has turned towards Charleroi with all his forces, and that there is no longer any enemy in front of him; therefore, orders for the concentration of my army at Nivelles and Quatre Bras are already dispatched. The numerous friends of Napoleon who are here (as towards evening the cannonade could be distinctly heard before the gates of Brussels), will raise their heads: the well-disposed must be tranquillized; let us therefore go, all the same, to the ball of the duchess of Richmond; after which, about five o’clock, we can ride off to the troops assembled at Quatre Bras.” ⁵

In his first version of the events, Von Müffling only mentions the arrival of a report about the outbreak of the hostilities – which I believe must have been the one from Zieten - and which came in around 4.30 p.m.; the arrival of Blücher’s report is not mentioned.

In his second version Von Müffling mentions them both, the first one having arrived around 3 p.m., while the second one – the one from Blücher - reached him after 7 p.m.

There is yet another account written by Von Müffling which is the letter he wrote to general G.W. Hofmann and which he published in his work in 1851, entitled “Zur Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815” etc. In this letter, Von Müffling writes that Zieten wrote him from Charleroi at 9 a.m. in these words: “er wurde nur Schritt vor Schritt zurückgehen, um der Armee Zeit zur Versammlung zu geben.”⁶ This is another indication that Zieten did indeed write a report to Wellington at 9 a.m., but which has not been preserved.

A document which has been preserved and which is one of the key documents in this context is the letter written by Von Müffling to Blücher at 7 p.m. It is in this letter that he refers to an information which had dropped in that Zieten was under attack. Von Müffling writes: “So eben trifft hier die Nachricht ein dass der General lieutenant von Zieten angegriffen ist.”⁷ From the way Von Müffling phrases his words here, it is clear the message referred to couldn't have come from Blücher himself otherwise Von Müffling would have phrased his words back to Blücher in a more personal way. As there is no reference to any previous contact with Prussian headquarters, I believe that the only information Von Müffling can refer to here was that contained in Zieten's report of 9 a.m.⁸

Of Wellington's letter to the duke De Feltre it is the first paragraph which is sometimes used to prove that Zieten wrote a report around 5 a.m. and that Wellington received it at 9 a.m.⁹ Yet, I believe that what Wellington means here was the time his latest information from Charleroi was dated at 9 a.m. and not that he then received it.¹⁰

First of all, what would have been the use of mentioning the time of arrival of a report for Wellington to the duke of Feltre? It would have added nothing to the letter as such.

As a matter of fact, in the context of the discussion itself (so not for the duke de Feltre as he got the letter as it was written, nothing more), it would have been a repetition of the report on the outbreak of the hostilities (and its resulting events like to fall of Thuin and the threat upon Charleroi) which is referred in the first sentence, while this would then be the same for the report referred to in the second sentence.

What Wellington wants to show is that he is dealing with two different sources of information. In the first sentence about one, not from Charleroi itself, but indicating that the French had attacked Thuin and that they seemed to threaten Charleroi.

And on the other hand - in the second sentence - the information from Charleroi, dated at 9 a.m. By putting both items next to each other as supplementary sources, he wants to show his uncertainty about the situation: according to a report Charleroi would be under threat, but by 9 a.m. it would still have been in the hands of Zieten. What he wants to show is the strong lapse of time between the latest report from the Prussians at Charleroi (9 a.m.) and his current situation.

At 1 p.m. Wellington wrote a note to Clinton about the renumbering of divisions and the fact that he would have done so in case he had received Zieten's report at 9 a.m. would in my idea mean that one would accept the man was an imbecile to write about such trivial matters while a war was starting; in my mind an impossible theory to maintain for a professional soldier as Wellington was.

A note on the hours at which both letters have been dated is necessary. There is no doubt that the one to the duke de Feltre was written after the one which the duke wrote to De Berry, as Wellington refers to this letter.

The one to De Berry is timed at “9 ½”, while the copy of the one to the Feltre is timed as “10 heures du soir”.

However, from an original document as written by the duke De Feltre on the 16th of June it becomes clear that Wellington's letter was actually timed at 9.30 p.m. He writes:

“Je n'ai pas reçu de lettre de Votre Excellence depuis celle qu'elle me fit l'honneur de m'écrire de Bruxelles à 9 heures ½ du soir le 15.[..]”¹¹

And he repeats this in another letter, dated 16th of June, 6.30 p.m. as: “Je n’ai pas de lettre de Votre Excellence depuis celle écrite hier à 9 heures ½ du soir.”¹²

In combination with the fact that the “after orders” were written down by 10 p.m. and that Wellington makes no reference to them, is an indication that the time of 10 p.m. is written on the copy is incorrect. So, both letters were written shortly after each other around 9.30 p.m. and that in the interval between that time and 10 p.m., Blücher’s letter came in.

A second report in which Wellington expressed himself about the moment he first heard about the hostilities is his report to the earl of Bathurst, dated 19th of June. He writes: “Buonaparte, having collected the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 6th corps of the French army, and the Imperial Guards, and nearly all the cavalry, on the Sambre, and between that river and the Meuse, between the 10th and the 14th of the month, advanced on the 15th and attacked the Prussian posts at Thuin and Lobbes, on the Sambre at day-light in the morning. I did not hear of these events till in the evening of the 15th; and I immediately ordered the troops to prepare to march, and afterwards to march to their left, as soon as I had intelligence from other quarters to prove that the enemy’s movement upon Charleroi was the real attack.”¹³

The way he describes it, it seems as if Wellington regards a time towards 6 p.m. as the evening as he suggests that immediately afterwards he issued his first set of orders, which he actually did between 6 and 7 p.m.¹⁴ It is here that Wellington refers to the report of Zieten, dated 9 a.m., but on the other hand it has sufficiently been indicated that this was not the true line of events: Wellington actually heard about the hostilities for the first time around 3 p.m. on the 15th of June, through the prince of Orange.¹⁵

It is in this sense that Wellington wrote in his memorandum of 1842: “[..] and that was in line in person with a sufficient force to resist and keep in check the enemy’s corps which first attacked the Prussian corps under general Zieten at daylight on the 15th of June; having received the intelligence of that attack only at three o’clock in the afternoon of the 15th [..]” And further: “The first account received by the duke of Wellington was from the prince of Orange, who had come in from the outposts of the army of the Netherlands to dine with the duke at three o’clock in the afternoon. He reported that the enemy had attacked the Prussians at Thuin; that they had taken possession of, but had afterwards abandoned Binch; that they had not yet touched the positions of the army of the Netherlands. While the prince was with the duke, the staff officer employed by prince Blücher at the duke’s headquarters, general Müffling, came to inform him that he had just received intelligence of the movement of the French army and their attack upon the Prussian troops at Thuin.

It appears by the statement of the historian [Von Clausewitz] [¹⁶] that the posts of the Prussian corps of general Zieten were attacked at Thuin at four o’clock on the morning of the 15th; and that general Zieten himself, with a part of his corps, retreated and was at Charleroi at about ten o’clock on that day; yet the report thereof was not received at Bruxelles till three o’clock in the afternoon.”¹⁷

Though Wellington mentions the news from the front as having reached him at 3 p.m. twice, from both the prince of Orange and Von Müffling, at the same time he makes a distinction between the information he received first, from the prince of Orange - around 3 p.m. - and that received which he afterwards, from Von Müffling.

Taking this together with the accounts of Von Müffling himself, I believe that Wellington first heard of the hostilities by 3 p.m. in a very general way through the prince of Orange and some time later, but still during dinner-time, in more detail from Berkeley through FitzRoy Somerset. This was probably about 5 p.m. Still later, it must have been towards 6 p.m., Von Müffling handed him over Zieten’s report of 9 a.m.¹⁸

It was this last message which led the duke of Wellington to issue his first set of orders by 6 p.m. and these triggered Von Müffling to write his letter at 7 p.m. to Blücher.¹⁹

It is in this connection that I would like to cite the testimony of Von Hügel, the representative of Württemberg at Wellington's staff.

He writes at 6 p.m. in his letter to the Austrian king: "In diesem Augenblick reitet ein preussischer Husar bei dem General Von Müffling vor, der hart neben mir wohnt, und bringt ihm die Nachricht, die Müffling mir sogleich mittheilt, dass heute vormittag Napoleon die preussische Armee an der Sambre bei Thuin angegriffen hat. Resultat noch nicht bekannt. Soeben kommt auch Müffling wieder von dem Herzog zurück. Der Kronprinz der Niederlande hatte gemeldet, dass auf unserem linken Flügel starkes Kanonenfeuer gehört werde. Wellington befahl sofort allen Corps, die ganze Nacht zu marschieren um sich zu konzentrieren. Müffling liess mich auch Zieten's Bericht lesen: er müsse sich mit seinen Vorposten gegen Fleurus hin zurückziehen vor bedeutender Übermacht."²⁰

This account is another indication that Zieten's report reached Von Müffling towards 6 p.m. and that, earlier, the prince of Orange had reported on the French offensive as well. It also seems to confirm the fact that while Wellington and the prince of Orange sat together for dinner, Von Müffling dropped in some time later.²¹

The fact that the first information reached Wellington around 3 p.m., i.e. the time he sat down for dinner, is confirmed by captain Gurwood. He actually writes that by dinner-time the information reached Wellington that the French had passed the Sambre, but what he actually means is the outbreak of the war. If he really would have meant the actual passage, this could not have been reported by then as the moment the first French units had passed the Sambre it was towards noon, and then the report could never have reached Brussel three hours later.²²

The same hour of about 3 p.m. is confirmed by captain Mudie of the 1st regiment of Royal Scots as being the hour at which the first news of the hostilities reached Brussels, and thus Wellington.²³

Another important witness about the communication of the Prussian army towards Wellington is Sir George Scovell, Wellington's head of military communications.

He has left an account –written after 1858- in which he writes: "On the 13th of June [sic] I went about 6 a.m. to his [colonel Delancey's] office for some papers I wanted, and to my astonishment found him writing; he told me he had been employed all the night preparing the duke's orders for all the divisions to move to a certain point, but that these orders were not to be sent off before Napoleon had committed himself to a certain line of operations. On the 15th, about 3 o'clock p.m., there no longer remained any doubt on the subject, and the orders as detailed in the work of Mons.Brialmont, translated by the Rev.G.R.Gleig, at page 400, Vol. the 2nd, were dispatched. The duke had a dinner party that day (15th) and the duchess of Richmond a ball in the evening, which accounts for several officers commanding divisions and others being present at Brussels: it is said that the Duke told them they would find their divisions in motion on their arrival at their stations."²⁴

First of all, it is rather singular to note that Scovell mentions the 13th of June as being the day in which orders of Wellington were drafted: as if Wellington knew a French attack was imminent, but that he didn't know yet where it would take place.

In Wellington's own correspondence of the 12th and 13th of June there is not a trace on some kind of alert of a possible line of advance of Napoleon. On the contrary. It is on the 13th of June that Wellington writes to lord Lynedoch: "There is nothing new here. We have reports of Buonaparte's joining the army and attacking us; but I have accounts from Paris of the 10th, on which day he was still there; and I judge from his speech to the Legislature that his departure was not likely to be immediate. I think we are now too strong for him here."²⁵

While I do believe this date of the 13th of June to be incorrect, it is this lack of certainty that the following sentence refers to: "On the 15th, about 3 o'clock, there no longer remained any doubt on the subject etc." The subject there is the line of operations of Napoleon and not one or more reports which reached the Duke earlier on the 15th of June.²⁶

Additionally, how could De Lancey order the divisions to "a certain point" (whatever this may be), just in a situation in which the exact line of the French advance was not revealed? This is a contradictory statement.²⁷

Scovell considerably mixes things up and his chronology is in serious error (see below).

Additionally, as a peculiar detail, I would like to point out that Brialmont and Gleig explicitly deny "that the English general was aware at nine in the morning of the attack on the Prussian posts at Thuin and Lobbes.[...] The first intelligence of the attack of the French was communicated to Wellington at three o'clock in the afternoon, by the prince of Orange."²⁸

On 26th June 1841 lieutenant Basil Jackson, in 1815 a lieutenant in Wellington's staff, wrote in a letter:

"regarding the time when the offensive movements of the enemy became known to the duke of Wellington. I was walking in the park at Brussels about six o'clock in the evening with the late colonel Robert Torrens, when an orderly of the Guards came up, and said that our presence was required at the Quartermaster General's office; on reaching which, we found Sir William De Lancey, who held in his hand a memorandum by the duke, directing the movements of the several divisions of his army from their cantonments. We were occupied, with other staff-officers, during two hours in writing and in despatching orders for moving ..."²⁹

It is another indication that at least the first orders were issued in the early evening.

In 1877, Basil Jackson printed his "Notes and reminiscences for private circulation." He writes: "Early on the 15th June 1815, we learned that the french were crossing the frontier at Charleroi. In the evening, about seven o'clock, I got a summons to the quartermaster-general's office, Sir William Delancey, our chief, having received the Duke's orders for collecting the Anglo-Netherlands-German army."³⁰

It is being suggested that by using the word "early" Wellington got the first news of the hostilities in the morning, but this is a highly subjective interpretation. Early, in what way, and in relation to what? In this sense and context, his account is not a reliable one, as neither Scovell's is, though in his account the time of 3 p.m. comes back again, which might refer to the information which came in through the prince of Orange.

It was colonel Sir Augustus Frazer who wrote from Brussels at 10 p.m. "I have this moment returned from dining [...] at Lenniche St. Quentin [...] On returning I find Ross here, he has dined at general Kempt's and has learned in the course of the evening that the enemy has moved upon Mons, and that in consequence we are to move during the night." It is other evidence that the news of the hostilities spread in the evening and not during the day.³¹

The same can be taken from the letter captain Wildman, adjudant of lord Uxbridge, which he wrote on the 19th of June. He says: "On Thursday the 15th we rode over from Ninove to Brussels to a ball at the duchess of Richmond's and we were just dressed when new arrived that the Prussians had been attacked in the morning, their outposts driven in and that the enemy had occupied the frontier town of Binch [sic].

We went to the ball where the duke of Wellington and lord Uxbridge had a long conversation, after which we mounted and rode back to Ninove, from thence orders were sent to assemble the whole of the cavalry and Royal Horse Artillery near Enghien."³²

And in his memoirs baron Van der Capellen writes:

"Den 14en [sic] Junij 1815 bevond ik mij te Brussel, in mijne betrekking van gouverneur-generaal, onder den titel van secretaris van staat, toen de prins van Oranje, die van Nivelles, te Brussel aangekomen was, waar hij zijn hoofdkwartier gevestigd had, om het bal bij te wonen,

dat door den hertog De Richmond gegeven werd, (op hetwelk zich onder anderen, ook de hertog van Brunswijk bevond, die den volgenden dag te Quatre-Bras sneuvelde), — mij het allereerst mededeelde dat de franschen bij Binch, de Sambre overgetrokken waren; de hertog Van Wellington bevestigde dit berigt, en beiden verlieten het bal, om zich naar het leger te begeven.”³³ So, Van der Capellen first heard about the hostilities at the ball of Richmond, where he was invited to, but from where he left soon after it had started (see below).

According to R.Henegan, commander of the field train department, Wellington learned for the first time of the hostilities through the prince of Orange by 4 p.m. (as he was told by Sir Alexander Dickson towards 5 p.m.).³⁴

Although it is often believed that Blücher’s letter (dated noon) reached Wellington in the afternoon - that is, before he issued his first set of concentration-orders – I do not believe this was the case for the same reason I mentioned above, i.e. the phrasing of Von Müffling’s words towards Blücher.³⁵

If Von Müffling would have received Blücher’s letter in the afternoon, Von Müffling would have referred to it in his letter of 7 p.m.

In his first version of the campaign Von Müffling doesn’t mention Blücher’s letter at all, but in his second version he does and there he makes it very clear: he received Blücher’s letter after the concentration-orders were issued and before Wellington received intelligence from Mons, which he – according to Von Müffling - received between 10 p.m. and midnight.³⁶

It has also been asserted that Von Dörnbergs report from Mons of 9.30 a.m. reached Brussels around midnight, while in reality it did late afternoon.³⁷

It is also Von Dörnberg himself who later wrote: “Dass dieser Rapport erst in der Nacht um 12 Uhr bei dem Herzog Von Wellington eingetroffen sein soll, wie in dem Werk von Major Von Damitz behauptet wird, kann ich mir nicht anders erklären, als dass der Prinz von Oranien ihn so lange aufgehalten habe – da ich diese verspätete Ankunft erst aus jenem Buche erfahren, habe ich auch keine Nachforschungen darüber anstellen können.”³⁸

It was later Von Pflugk Harttung who used the account of captain Mudie of the 1st Royal Scots to prove that the report actually reached Wellington towards 10 p.m.³⁹ However, Mudie doesn’t refer to Mons at all but to the front in general and immediately has the note, brought in by a “orderly dragoon, covered with dust and foam”, cause the ball of Richmond to be disturbed. By doing so he actually refers to lieutenant Webster and not to the messenger as sent out by Von Dörnberg.

It is Von Müffling himself who writes in his first account of the campaign: “Der Herzog von Wellington [...] erwartete jedoch Rapporte von Mons, ob nicht eine feindliche Colonne auf dieser Seite vordringe. Als es sich um Mitternacht zeigte, dass dies nicht der Fall war erhielt die Reserve den befehl den Wald von Soignes zu passiren, eine Bewegung, welche den 16ten Juny um 10 Uhr Morgens ausgeführt war.”⁴⁰ It is probably from this source that Von Damitz took his version about Von Dörnberg’s report.

In his later memoirs, Von Müffling writes: “Towards midnight the Duke entered my room and said: “I have got news from Mons, from general Dörnberg, who reports that Napoleon has turned towards Charleroi with all his forces, and that there is no longer any enemy in front of him; therefore, orders for the concentration of my army at Nivelles and Quatre Bras are already dispatched.”⁴¹

In both cases, Von Müffling suggest as if Wellington learned about the situation at Mons towards midnight and that he acted accordingly by issuing orders for a concentration at Nivelles and Quatre Bras. At that time, however, this concentration was not at hand yet (see below). It is here that Von Müffling jumps too far back in time by suggesting as if Von Dörnberg got to Wellington towards midnight, while in reality he only did so several hours later. We know, first

of all, that Von Dörnberg sent a report on the 15th of June from Mons only once and that he left this town in the evening, to reach Brussels in the very early morning of the 16th of June, probably between 4 and 5 a.m.⁴² We know this report, containing the information that there was no enemy in front of Mons. It doesn't contain the information that Napoleon had turned towards Charleroi with all his forces.

The moment Von Dörnberg left from Mons, the information then available must have been that Thuin was in French hands, that Lobbes was pillaged by the French and that in his own sector no enemy had shown up. Apart from this last element, this did not add anything material to what Wellington already knew.⁴³

The way as Von Dörnberg describes it corresponds to the orders for the actual concentration at Nivelles and Quatre Bras which (partly) took place on the morning of the 16th of June, and of which Von Müffling wants to suggest as if it took place around midnight.

In conclusion, I believe that it could not have been Von Dörnberg's report, but in all probability Blücher's letter (dated noon) which must have triggered Wellington to issue his march-orders", the so-called "after orders" by 10 p.m.⁴⁴

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¹ In: WSD, Vol.XII p.523-524

The fact that Wellington heard about the French advance during dinner is confirmed by Sir Hussey Vivian, who met sir Pulteney Malcolm shortly after he had dined with the duke. In: BL, Add.ms.34.707 p.150-158

² C.v.W Geschichte des Feldzugs etc.

³ Aus meinem Leben. I have used the english translation, The memoirs of baron Von Müffling etc. published in 1997

⁴ C.v.W. Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.8-9

⁵ The memoirs of baron etc. p.228-230 The words in italics are Von Müffling's.

⁶ Von Müffling. In: Hofmann, G.W. Zur Geschichte etc. p.132

⁷ GSA, Nachlass Gneisenau, Paket 23 fol.93-94

⁸ Pflugk Hartung, J.von Die preussische Berichterstattung etc. p.51

⁹ Hofschröder, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.194

Hofschröder, P. Zieten's message to Wellington p.287

Bunsen, ambassador at London (and no participant in the campaign) to Siborne. In: BL, Add.ms.34.708.98

Major Gerwien (head of the historical department of the Prussian staff, and no participant either) to Siborne. In: BL, Add.ms.34.708 p.269-274 and 34.708 p.284-287

Charras. Histoire de la campagne etc. Vol.I p.130

In January 1848 Siborne expressed his strong doubts, in reaction to Gerwien's statements, that Zieten would have written a report for Wellington towards 5 a.m. in view of the short interval of time between this report and the arrival in Brussels (9 a.m.).

Later, in february 1848, Siborne supposed that if Zieten would have written to Wellington by 3.45 a.m. (as suggested by Zieten himself in1819) about a French presence or an imminent attack, that he also would have done so to Blücher. In that case he would certainly have done so to both after the French attack.

However, this is using the first report of 3.45 a.m. to prove the existence of the second of 5 a.m. while this first one never existed, and which is described by Zieten as the one in which he reported the actual attack. Cf. Siborne in: BL, Add.ms.34.708 p.269-274 and 34.708 p.284-287

Major Gerwien, in writing to Siborne, sees Wellington's letter to the duke De Feltre as the key element to prove that Zieten wrote to Wellington long before 9 a.m. and that the report reached Wellington at that time. Hussey, however, very justly sees that Gerwien's argumentation is a circular one: "for it is in order to decide on the correct interpretation of Wellington's letter that we need Zieten's proofs, and the absence of any Prussian documentary or other proofs obliges the Prussian archivist to base his arguments on the

disputed interpretation of the duke's letter." In: At what time etc. p.105 and in: Towards a better chronology etc. p.464

As I have explained elsewhere, the letter simply cannot be used to prove that Wellington actually received news from Zieten at 9 a.m. and therefore Gerwien's and Bunsen's argument falls through.

Hofschröder refers to the correspondence between Siborne and Gerwien and Bunsen as main evidence that Wellington did hear from Charleroi at 9 a.m., but he nowhere enters into the actual content of the documents involved and the arguments exchanged – he simply mentions the references of the files in question. In:

1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. 194

Zieten's message to Wellington 4.45 etc. p.287

Wellington and Zieten. 15 June 1815. When did the duke first hear from Charleroi? p.13

Yet another reply etc. p.287

According to Von Damitz, Zieten sent a messenger at 4 a.m. to Wellington, to whom he arrived at 11 a.m. Yet, this claim is based upon a time at which the actual French offensive started, and this could never have been written simultaneously. Cf. Geschichte etc. p.96

It should be remarked that, according to Hofschröder, it took the messenger about 4 hours to cover the distance between Charleroi and Brussels to bring Zieten's report dated 4.45 / 5.00, while in his version of Zieten's report of midnight of the 14th of June, it took the messenger seven hours.

Cf. Hofschröder, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.192, 194, 354

Also, in case Zieten had reported to Wellington at 5 a.m. it would have been more logical if he would have mentioned it in his report to Blücher of 6.30 a.m. Otherwise, it would be a serious omission to have only reported about it by 8.15 a.m. In fact, he didn't and this proves that he wrote it at least after 6.30, and after 7 a.m. because of the mentioning of the fall of Thuin.

¹⁰ Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J. von Die preussische etc. p.54

Maxwell, Sir H. The life of Wellington Vol.II p.12

Lettow Vorbeck, O. von Napoleon's Untergang p.293

Pedlow, G. Back to the sources etc. p.33

¹¹ HL, WP 1.468

¹² HL, WP 1.468 and (in print) WP, MS61 - 7.2.20

¹³ In: Bas, F. de La campagne de 1815 etc. Vol.III p.436,438

¹⁴ The same claim, as that Wellington heard for the first time about the commencement of the hostilities in the evening of the 15th of June, is done by Colonel Hervey, assistant quarter master general at Wellington's staff in 1815. In: A contemporary letter etc. p.430

¹⁵ "These events" in Wellington's despatch refer to the attack on Thuin and Lobbes on the Sambre and the first time he learned about these events *directly* from the Prussians (=Zieten) was by 6 p.m. so in that sense Wellington does speak the truth, but it is a most formal approach, neglecting the news he got earlier through the prince by 3 p.m. and in particular that through Berkeley by 5 p.m.

¹⁶ The memorandum was written by the duke of Wellington as a reaction to the publication of the book of Von Clausewitz about the campaign. Cf. WSD, Vol.X p.513

¹⁷ In: WSD, Vol.X p.523-524

¹⁸ In taking the words “..advanced on the 15th and *attacked the Prussian posts at Thuin* [italics are mine] and Lobbes, on the Sambre at day-light in the morning..” as they are, Wellington is right in so far that he learned about this between 5 and 6 p.m. (through De Paravicini and Zieten).

¹⁹ A time of arrival towards 6 p.m. would mean a ride of about 8.5 hours, covering a distance of about 50 kilometers (average of almost 6 kilometers per hour).

Taking into account an average speed of a courier, which is about 10 kilometers per hour, the message could have been delivered about 4.30 p.m.

There is not a trace of information about what could have caused this serious delay. The Prussian communication system had its deficiencies, but the confusing element here is that the stretch Charleroi – Brussels was a pretty unambiguous one, in the sense of a paved road, running in a straight line.

In the months before, Zieten sent numerous couriers along the same stretch, so the experience was there.

A well paved connection, between Liège and Brussels and stretching over a distance of almost a hundred kilometers, could be covered by a rider in about 8 ½ hours, as colonel Hardinge wrote to sir Hudson Lowe: “I send you back a route which I forgot to do before by which you will observe the communication can be kept up in 8 ½ h.” In: BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.84

²⁰ In: Pfister, A. Aus dem Lager der Verbündeten p.366

²¹ Cf. Hussey, J. At what time on 15 june etc. p.113

²² In: BL, Add.ms.34.706.132

²³ In: Operations of the fifth or Picton’s division etc. In: USJ, 1841 part 2 p.172 Mudie wrote down his notes on the 21st and 22nd of june 1815 while being at Bavay and compiled them in 1835. In: USJ, 1841 part 2 p.170

²⁴ Sir G.Scovell. In: NAK, WO 37 / 12, fol.2 The fact that is was written after 1815 can be derived from the fact that Scovell mentions the book of Brialmont / Gleig, which was published that year. This book is entitled: History of the life of Arthur duke of Wellington trans.from the french of M.Brialmont, with emendations and additions by rev. G.R.Gleig. London, 1858

²⁵ In: WD, Vol.XII p.459-462

²⁶ Cf. Hofschroer, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.194

²⁷ In some way, yet, this description resembles the situation on early the morning of the 16th of June, when there was no clear idea in Wellington’s mind yet whether Napoleon was fully bent on advancing towards Brussels through Charleroi or not, this in relation to the claim as that Wellington first heard of the hostilities at 9 a.m.

²⁸ Brialmont / Gleig. History of the life of Arthur duke of Wellington trans.from the French of M.Brialmont, with emendations and additions by rev.G.R.Gleig. London, 1858 Vol.II p.399

Cf. Hussey, J. At what time on 15 June etc. p.110

²⁹ In: Hussey, J. At what time etc. p.110 Originally published in the USJ, June 1841 Part II p.172

³⁰ In: Notes and reminiscences of a staff officer etc. p.10

³¹ In: Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer etc. Letter nr.19 p.533-6

Also see: Hussey, J. At what time etc. p.108

It is in this context that count Pozzo di Borgo, the Russian representative at Wellington's staff, wrote in 1837: "On the evening of June 15th we were alerted that Napoleon had crossed the frontier and that he had driven back before him an advanced corps of the Prussian army."

Cf. his letter dated 22 September 1837 to the countess of Archiac In: LMB, archieffonds 1792 to 1815, box 31

³² In: The Waterloo Journal, Vol.19 nr.2 p.22 and in The Listener. 24th June 1954 p.1085-1087

In the first version Nivelles is mentioned where it has to be Ninove (see below).

³³ Grovestins, baron C.F.Sirtema van – Gedenkschriften van den graaf Van der Duyn van Maasdam en van den baron Van der Capellen p.477

³⁴ In: Seven years' campaigning etc.p.282

³⁵ Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von In: Die preussische Berichterstattung etc. p.46, 57 He erroneously situates the arrival of Blücher's letter at 4 p.m. and bases himself here upon Von Damitz. In: Geschichte etc. p.103

Also in: Vorgeschichte der Schlacht bei Quatre Bras p.513 and in GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.II.12 p.91

Ollech believes the letter reached Wellington towards evening. In: Geschichte etc. p.115

It may very well be that Von Damitz bases his version upon the one of Wagner, even though he doesn't mention an hour. Wagner writes: "[Wellington] erheilt diese Nachricht als er eben von Tische aufstand." This meaningless statement may be interpreted as 4 p.m. In: Wagner, Plane etc. p.21

Also, the fact that Von Müffling mentions Fleurus and not the area around Sombreffe is another indication that Blücher's letter hadn't reached Brussels by 7 p.m. In fact, Zieten's report of about 9 a.m. did contain Fleurus as a direction of his retreat at least.

³⁶ Von Müffling. The memoirs etc. p.229

³⁷ Von Müffling. The memoirs etc. p.230

Wagner, Plane etc. p.21

Cf. Damitz, Von Geschichte etc. p.105

Von Pflugk Harttung erroneously believes it came in at 10 p.m. Cf. Vorgeschichte der Schlacht bei Quatre Bras p.209 and in GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr.II.12 p.103

³⁸ Account of Von Dörnberg. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.292

³⁹ In: Vorgeschichte etc. p.69-70 and in: Vorgeschichte der Schlacht bei Quatre Bras p.208-209

Cf. Houssaye, H. 1815. Waterloo p.149
Uffindell, A. The eagle's last triumph p.59

⁴⁰ In: C.v.W. Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.9

⁴¹ In: The memoirs of baron etc. p.228-230

⁴² Von Dörnberg. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.292

⁴³ Cf. the report of Vrijthoff from Mons, from 10 p.m. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6585

⁴⁴ A time of arrival between 9.30 and 10 p.m. would mean that it took the messenger almost 10 hours to cover the distance between Namur and Brussels.

Yet it seems that the letter wasn't transmitted via the crossroads of Quatre Bras and through Genappe further north as Blücher writes in the same letter: "Die Ordonnanzlinie wäre nun über Genappe zu eröffnen." This would mean that yet this letter would have been transmitted over a road further east, maybe through Gembloux. If this would have been the case, this would substantially have contributed to the delay.

Cf. Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon's Untergang p.290

The distance between both cities through Sombreffe, Quatre Bras and Genappe was about 63 kilometers.

Lord FitzRoy Somerset is explicit when he writes, after having written about the concentration orders and the Richmond-ball: "Further reports reached the duke in the course of the evening from the Prussians, sent by colonel Hardinge to general Müffling, which determined the duke to send orders to the British on the right to march to their left (on Nivelles and Quatre Bras). In view of the fact that FitzRoy Somerset explicitly mentions Hardinge, the British liaison at the Prussian general headquarters, the word "reports" can only refer to the letter as written by Blücher. The mentioning of Quatre Bras in this connection is incorrect, however. In: NAM, nr.6507-1

Siborne believes Blücher's letter arrived towards 10 p.m. as well as "required intelligence from others quarters [which] arrived almost at the same time", but he doesn't specify where this intelligence came from. In: History of the war etc. Vol.I p.79-70

There is an account of captain Mudie, where he claims that he met in Brussels, towards 6 p.m., two Prussian aide-de-camps who had come from Blücher with intelligence of the advance of the French army, pointing towards Brussels, or in that direction." In: Operations of the fifth etc. p.172

I do not believe this can have been the letter written by Blücher for the reasons stated above; either Mudie refers here to the report of Zieten or he mixes up the hours.

Lettow Vorbeck claims the letter reached Brussels around 8 p.m. In: Napoleon's Untergang p.290

Charras writes it was between 8 and 9 p.m. In: Histoire de la campagne etc. Vol.I p.131