

The concentration of the Armée du Nord.

The general situation on the 1st and 2nd of June.

On the 1st of June, the positions of the units of the Armée du Nord were as follows:

1st corps.

Headquarters: Valenciennes

Division Quiot: Marchiennes (between Lille and Valenciennes) ¹

Division Donzelot: Lille

Division Marcognet: Valenciennes

Division Durutte: Valenciennes

Division Jacquinet: Valenciennes

Corps headquarters: Valenciennes ²

As a preparatory measurement for a later concentration Davout was ordered by Napoleon on the 28th of May as: “Vous donnerez ordre que, le 1er ou le 3 juin, le comte d’Erlon retire toutes les troupes qu’il a dans les places, afin que son corps soit tout à fait mobile.” ³

2nd corps:

Headquarters: Avesnes

Division Bachelu: north of Maubeuge

Division Jérôme Bonaparte: in front of Hestrud (east of Maubeuge)

Division Girard: east of Maubeuge

Division Foy: east of Maubeuge

Division Piré: north of Maubeuge ⁴

3rd corps:

Headquarters: Mézières

Division Lefol: Trélon

Division Habert: Marienbourg

Division Berthézène: Chimay

Division Domon: Philippeville ⁵

4th corps:

Division Pécheux: Thionville

Division Vichery: Metz

Division Bourmont: Fontoy

Division Maurin: forming at Metz ⁶

6th corps:

Headquarters: Laon

Division Simmer: Guise

Division Jeanin: Laon

Division Teste: dispersed along the Somme in the Pas de Calais where the units acted as mobile columns to speed up recruitment. ⁷

Imperial Guard: in Paris, except for the 1st regiments of tirailleurs and voltigeurs which were at Compiègne since 18th of May, and the 2nd regiments of tirailleurs and voltigeurs now in the Vendée⁸

Reserve-cavalry:

Corps Pajol: division Soult at Marle and the division Subervie at Nouvion

Corps Exelmans: division Strolz at Guise and the division Chastel at Laon

Corps Kellerman: headquarters at Vervins, division L'Héritier at Origny, division Roussel d'Hurbal at Vervins

Corps Milhaud: headquarters at Le Cateau; division Wathiez at Douai and the division Delort at Bischweiler

General park: La Fère

Pontoneers: Guise⁹

3rd of June.

The first orders for the concentration of the armée du Nord for the campaign in the Netherlands were issued by Napoleon on the 3rd of June and these comprised in general those units which were the most remote from the majority of the Armée du Nord: the imperial guard, the 4th corps, the 6th corps and the headquarters of the army.

In this sense Napoleon wrote to Davout: “[.] Donnez ordre au comte de Lobau de partir avec son état-major le 5 pour être rendu à Laon au plus tard le 6, y passer en revue et y organiser son corps. Donnez ordre également que tous les bureaux du major général, de l’intendant général, et que la gendarmerie de l’armée du Nord soient rendues le 6 à Laon. Donnez ordre à l’état major général de la garde de réunir toute la garde à Soissons; je lui donnerai directement le détail du mouvement.”¹⁰

And to Soult he wrote:

“Remettez-moi un projet de mouvement pour le corps du général Gérard ou de la Moselle, en le masquant le plus possible à l’ennemi, pour que ce corps se porte sur Philippeville. Il faudrait qu’il fit rendu le 12, en marchant le plus vite possible. Vous me ferez connaître qui commandera alors à Metz et à Nancy. Vous donnerez sur-le-champ l’ordre d’interrompre les communications, et l’on renforcera tous les postes, Thionville, Longwy, Metz etc.

Faites-moi connaître la situation de la garde nationale de Nancy, et si cette division est dans le cas de marcher pour couvrir Metz et remplacer la division de la Moselle. L’ennemi nous menaçant sérieusement du côté de Metz, cette division s’appuierait sur les Vosges, qui appuieraient la gauche du général Rapp.

Ma Garde sera toute rendue à Soissons le 10, et peut-être le 13 à Avesnes; il faut donc que le 6^e corps parte le 9 pour se porter sur Avesnes. Remettez-moi un croquis où la marche des colonnes soit tracée, et qui marque les jours où le 1^{er}, le 2^e, le 3^e, le 6^e corps et celui de la Moselle se mettront en mouvement, et les positions que, le 13, ces corps, ainsi que la Garde et la réserve de cavalerie, devront occuper, et la force que j’aurais en infanterie, cavalerie et artillerie.

Remettez-moi un état général de la situation des corps d’armée du Nord, de la Moselle, du Rhin et du Jura, ainsi que l’organisation de toutes les divisions de réserve de la garde nationale, et la composition de toutes les garnisons.”¹¹

It had already been on the 29th of May that Napoleon had written to Davout: “Le maréchal Grouchy commandera en chef la cavalerie de l’armée du Nord. Donnez-lui l’ordre d’envoyer

ses équipages à Laon.”¹² As a result of this, he now requested Davout to order Grouchy to leave for Laon on the 5th of June.¹³

The 3rd of June was also the day that Napoleon ordered a full-scale reorganisation of the cavalry.

Since March, the cavalry was composed of divisions which were attached to the infantry corps: the 1st had two divisions, the 2nd three, the 3rd, 4th and 5th each had one, while the 6th corps had a brigade of cavalry attached. In them were three regiments of dragons, but all the rest were composed of light cavalry.

Additionally, there were six divisions of reserve cavalry (each consisting of four regiments) and they comprised dragoons, cuirassiers and carabineers.

The reorganisation essentially left a single division of light cavalry in each army corps and created four cavalry corps made up of heavy cavalry and those regiments of light cavalry no longer being attached to the army corps. This complex reorganisation meant the disbandment of certain cavalry divisions and the creation of new divisions, a change of divisional numeration for most of the retained divisions and many changes in the commanders of large formations; several divisions lost regiments or received new ones.¹⁴

Parallel to Grouchy's nomination, was the one for Pajol to be the commander of the 1st cavalry corps. Initially, Napoleon wanted Pajol to establish his headquarters at Marle, but this instruction was revoked on the 4th of June when Soult wrote Pajol: “The emperor now thinks that the 1st cavalry corps will be better at La Capelle and Nouvion, and that your headquarters should be at La Capelle.” The two divisions formed at La Capelle and Nouvion accordingly.¹⁵

Napoleon apparently also had decided to pull in a division of cuirassiers, the one of general Delort - which was attached to Rapp's corps in the Alsace - to the armée du Nord and to attach it to the 4th cavalry corps of Milhaud. Accordingly, Rapp was asked to have Delort leave for Hirson, and to arrive there on the 15th of June.¹⁶

It was about the Imperial Guard that Napoleon wrote to Davout on the 27th of May: “Mon cousin, il est probable que la Garde va bientôt partir; il ne restera alors plus de troupes à Paris [...]”¹⁷

And three days later he wrote to Drouot: “il faut préparer le départ de la garde pour le 5 juin, pour tout délai.” This also included the administration and the train of the guard.. In the same document, Napoleon also wanted to know about the strength of the units of the guard and reckoned to have some 8000 men in the Old Guard and about 4000 in the Young Guard.. Napoleon also instructed Drouot Davout how to organise his cavalry. And about the coming war, Napoleon stated: “il y aura probablement une bataille bientôt.” Last but not least, he stressed the importance of sufficient guns, in 12 pounders in particular: “Je n'ai pas besoin de vous faire sentir de quelle importance extrême il sera pour nous d'avoir des batteries de 12.”¹⁸

And again, three days later, on the 3rd of June, Davout ordered Drouot: “Monsieur le général, l'empereur me charge de vous donner l'ordre de réunir toute la garde à Soissons. Sa Majesté vous donnera elle-même tous les ordres de mouvement.”¹⁹

And these march orders for Drouot, in all their detail, basically told him to lead the Imperial Guard to Soissons in stages, through Dammartin from the 4th of June onwards and in such a way that the whole of the guard would be at Soissons by the 10th of June. In addition he instructed him: “Vous donnerez des ordres pour que, le 10, toute la Garde ait quatre jours de pain biscuité, et que ses caissons ordinaires et auxiliaires soient chargés de pain; enfin qu'à

cette époque elle présente un corps formé de trois divisions d'infanterie, de deux divisions de cavalerie et d'une réserve d'artillerie. Toutes les ambulances, toute l'artillerie et les différents détachements seront à leurs postes. Vous demanderez à l'artillerie une compagnie de pontonniers pour l'attacher aux marins et aux sapeurs de la garde.”²⁰

4th of June.

While the army corps stretched along the frontier zone, behind them the four cavalry corps, created on 3 June, were organising:

The 1st cavalry corps assembled in four days at la Capelle and Nouvion with six regiments, coming from the 1st, the 2nd and the 3rd corps.²¹

The 2nd cavalry corps formed up at Guise; 9th division (Strolz) coming from Cateau at Guise, the 10th division (Chastel) was in the vicinity of Laon. The 15th regiment of dragoons which was supposed to join the corps only did so later as it had to come all the way from Thionville. General Exelmans himself arrived on the 9th of June to take his command.

The 3rd cavalry corps was at Vervins; the 11th division (L'Héritier) at Origny, the 12th division (Roussel d'Hurbal) at Vervins, while Kellermann himself arrived at Vervins on the 9th of June.

Of the 4th cavalry corps, headquarters was at La Cateau; the 13th division (Wathier) was at one stage from Douai, and the 14th division (Delort) among the villages around Reichshoffen in the Alsace, thirteen marches from the remainder of the corps.

5th of June.

It was on the 5th of June that Napoleon pulled the armée de la Moselle to the armée du Nord by ordering Gérard to leave from his positions around Metz from the 7th of June onwards, and in such a way – through Stenay and Mézières - that he could reach Rocroi on the 13th of June.²²

On the 25th of May Napoleon had instructed general Gérard to concentrate his entire army corps before the 1st of June in columns between Thionville and Metz and this is what he had done. As the divisions of Pécheux and Bourmont concentrated at Thionville and Fontoy respectively, the one of Vichery moved on the 29th of May from Forbach (at the Sarre river, opposite Saarbrücken) through St.Avoid and Courcelles-Chaussy to positions at and around Metz. The cavalry of Maurin was placed between these infantry-divisions.²³

Soult's order to Rapp about Delort's division reached Strasbourg this day and Rapp accordingly wrote to Delort to collect and leave right away from Haguenau.²⁴

6th of June.

This day, Soult ordered Vandamme to march with the 3rd corps from Mézières and to place his troops between Marienbourg and Chimay by the 13th of June, ready thereafter to march at three hours' notice.

Lobau was to quit Laon on the 9th of June and to be in front of Avesnes by the 13th of June. At the same time, d'Erlon was to concentrate his 1st corps around Valenciennes and Reille was to pull his divisions even more towards Maubeuge.²⁵

And Davout wrote to those corps commanders who were immediately on the frontiers in the north, Vandamme, Reille, d'Erlon en Gérard: “Monsieur le général, les hostilités paraissant imminentes, je vous rapelle les différentes instructions que je vous ai données pour faire rentrer dans les places fortes toutes les embarcations, nacelles, bacs qui existaient sur les

rivières portées dans ces instructions. Je ne peux trop vous recommander ces mesures; vous savez comme moi que le difficile dans notre état est de faire exécuter les ordres qu l'on donne. [...]”²⁶

Napoleon expected the artillery of the Imperial Guard to be at Soissons on the 7th of June, to leave it there up to the 9th of June so as to reorganise it and that it could leave from there that day or on the 10th of June in the morning at the latest “pour se rendre à grandes marches sur l'armée.”²⁷

7th of June.

Davout was charged by Napoleon to find out whether Pajol, Kellerman and Grouchy had already left for the armée du Nord; if not they would have to do that the very same day. Mortier was supposed to be at Soissons by the 9th of June.²⁸

As a reply, Davout wrote Napoleon the next day that all generals in question had already left from Paris and that Mortier could reach his destination on the 9th of June at the earliest.²⁹

More importantly, it was on the 7th of June that Napoleon cut off all communication on the northern frontier, and on those of the Moselle and the Rhine. He wrote in this sense to Soult: “Donnez les ordres les plus positifs pour que, sur toute la ligne du Nord, du Rhin et de la Moselle, toutes communications soient fermées, et qu'on ne laisse passer aucune voiture ni diligence. Recommandez qu'on exerce la plus grande surveillance pour qu'aucune lettre ne puisse passer, si cela est possible. Voyez le ministre de la police et des finances pour qu'ils écrivent à leurs agents, pour intercepter absolument toutes communications.”³⁰

Being chief of staff for the armée du Nord for one month, marshal Soult was now sent on a mission by Napoleon to the far north-west of France with the following instructions: “Je pense qu'il serait convenable que vous partissiez demain soir. Vous vous rendrez droit à Lille et le plus incognito possible, afin de faire toutes les dispositions pour que les places de première ligne soient assurées, et faire sortir ce qui reste encore de troupes de ligne à Calais. Vous pourrez faire faire les versements qu'exigent les circonstances, soit en hommes, soit en armes, et vous verrez à donner une destination aux bataillons qui doivent arriver d'ici au 13. Il sera convenable que vous preniez bien au bureau de la guerre tous les départs des bataillons pour le Nord. Assurez-vous bien surtout de leur habillement et armement. Cela vous prendra le 10. Voyez s'il y a suffisamment de commandants généraux et s'il y a un bon commandant de citadelle. Enfin prescrivez au général Lapoype tout ce qui est nécessaire. Le 11 vous pourrez vous rendre à Maubeuge et à Avesnes.

Vous viendrez à ma rencontre sur la route de Laon, où il est probable que je serai le 12. Vous prendrez tous les derniers renseignements sur la position de l'ennemi; vous tâcherez de monter un bureau d'espionnage à Lille, et une compagnie d'hommes qui connaissent bien les chemins de la Belgique. Il y a des gardes forestiers des Ardennes qui communiquent par les forêts jusque derrière Bruxelles. Procurez-vous un officier intelligent qui nous procure des hommes qui puissent nous servir.”³¹

Also, baron Dejean was supposed to leave from Paris the same day for an extensive tour through the north-west of the country to procure information on the military situation at Amiens, Doullens, Aire, Saint-Omer, Dunkerque, Calais, Bergues, Lille, Douai, Condé, Valenciennes “et toutes nos places de premier ligne.” Having done this tour, Dejean was supposed to meet Napoleon at Avesnes.³²

To the far north-east of the country, Napoleon dispatched a not specified officier d'ordonnance on a mission as he wrote: “L'officier d'ordonnance se rendra à Metz. Il me fera connaître en passant la situation de Verdun et ensuite celle de Metz, Thionville et Longwy. Il ira au quartier général de l'armée de réserve qui est entre Metz et Thionville. Il ira à

Sarreguemines et à Sarrebrück. Il me fera connaître les différents mouvements des corps d'armée, ainsi que ceux de l'ennemi du côté opposé. Il m'écrira tous les jours et le 14, il partira pour se rendre en toute diligence à Avesnes.”³³

For the 6th corps, Napoleon stated to Soult: “Donnez ordre au comte Lobau de porter, le 9, son quartier général à Marle ou à Vervins, et d'évacuer entièrement Laon et les environs, parce que, le 9 et le 10, toute la Garde arrive à Laon.”³⁴

And it was just for the Imperial Guard that Napoleon had instructed Drouot that “toute la Garde doit être arrivée le 9 au soir à Soissons, hormis les deux régiments qui partent demain. – Napoleon wanted that “le 10 au soir toute ma Garde serait entre Laon et Avesnes, hormis les deux régiments qui partent demain, qui auront dépassé Soissons. [...] Vous donnerez ordre que, le 12, les deux 4^e de voltigeurs et tirailleurs, avec le général de brigade qui doit les commander, partent pour Laon, où ils arriveront le 15 au soir. Cette brigade appartiendra à la 2^e division, que le général Barrois commendera.”³⁵

At the same time, Napoleon ordered Bertrand to make preparatory arrangements for the departure of his headquarters. In addition he told Bertrand: “Donnez ordre que toute ma Maison qui se trouve à Compiègne se rend demain à Soissons, où sera mon quartier général.”³⁶

10th of June.³⁷

On the 10th of June, a general order from Napoleon was written and distributed by Bertrand to the corps commanders in the following note:

“Général, j'ai l'honneur de vous envoyer ampliation d'un ordre du jour qui indique la position que doit occuper l'armée le 13. Cet ordre doit être tenu secret: veuillez, pour ce que vous concerne, vous conformer aux dispositions qu'il renferme. L'empereur sera le 13 au matin à Avesnes: S.M. désire que vous vous y trouveriez de votre personne.”³⁸

The general order itself read:

“Paris, le 10 June 1815. Ordre du jour. Position de l'armée au 13.

Grand quartier général et garde impériale à Avesnes. Les parcs d'artillerie et équipages de ponts en avant d'Avesnes sur les glacis. Réserve de cavalerie 1er et 2^e corps à Beaumont, 3^e et 4^{me} corps entre Avesnes et Beaumont. 6^e corps à Beaumont. Le quartier général en arrière. Si le 6^e corps voyait de l'inconvénient à arriver à Beaumont, il pourrait arriver à mi-chemin.

1er corps à Pont sur Sambre. Le corps fera son mouvement sans passer par Bavay. Il passera par Le Quesnoy, afin de s'éloigner de l'ennemi. Il ne démasque son mouvement que le plus tard possible. Comme on ne suppose pas qu'il lui faille plus d'un jour, étant à Valenciennes, ce ne sera que le 13 qu'il fera son mouvement pour arriver sur la Sambre.

2^e corps en arrière de Maubeuge en colonne sur le chemin de Thuin, sans dépasser la frontière, et tachant de se faire voir le moins possible. 3^e corps à Philippeville. Armée de la Moselle à Marienbourg.

Toutes les communications sur la frontière seront interrompues. Les soldats auront quatre jours de pain sur le dos, ½ livre de riz, 50 cartouches. Les batteries seront avec les divisions. Les batteries de réserve avec leurs corps d'armée. La cavalerie légère de chaque corps d'armée sera en avant du corps. Chaque ambulance à sa division. Chaque division aura sur les charriots auxiliaires ou militaires 8 jours de pain, biscuits et un parc de bestiaux pour 8 jours.

Signé,

Napoleon, pour l'Empereur, le grand maréchal, Bertrand

On ne fait aucun changement sur la frontière. On ne la dépasse sur aucun point. On ne tirera aucun coup du canon. On ne fera rien qui puisse éveiller l'ennemi. Le présent ordre restera secret.

Napoleon ³⁹

After Gérard had received the order to move on Rocroi on the 7th of June, he set his divisions in motion in echelons on the road Metz – Mézières, with one day interval. On the 10th of June the leading division, the one of Bourmont, as coming from Fontoy reached Mouzon. The division of Pécheux spent the night of the 8th of June at Gravelotte and that of the 9th of June at Etain. From there it followed the division of Bourmont, and Pécheux reached Signy on the Meuse on the 10th of June. The division of Vichery reached Etain that day; the 6th cavalry division of Maurin did not quit Metz until the 11th of June. ⁴⁰

As Gérard left his positions, his march was covered on its right by general Belliard (commander of the 3rd and 4th *divisions militaires* at the river Meurthe) taking the command over the Moselle at Metz. In that capacity, he occupied positions at the Sarre river and the frontier with detachments coming from local free corps and of the *élite garde nationale* from the garrisons of Metz, Longwy, Sarrelouis etc. ⁴¹

The four corps of French cavalry formed up without difficulty; the regiments that had to change cantonments had completed their moves before 10th June, except for the 15th Dragoons which, coming from the Moselle, did not join the 9th cavalry division (Strolz) until 11th of June and the division of Delort which joined the corps of Milhaud on the 14th of June. Both commanders of the 2nd and 3rd corps, Exelmans and Kellermann took their commands on the 9th of June. ⁴²

No division of the reserve cavalry moved before the 13th of June, except of course for Delort's 14th division, marching from Alsace.

Delort had his cantonments in the region of the lower Rhin, in places like Haguenau, Hatten and Durrenbach. The order dated 3rd June reached Delort on the 6th of June, at 10 p.m. It told Delort to move with part of the division along the road Haguenau-Niederbronn and another part through Woerth and Reichshoffen towards Bitche, and to move from there through Sarreguemines and Metz to Hirson, where Delort would receive new instructions.

Delort assembled his division on the 7th of June and reached Bitche on the 8th of June, Saint Avold on the 9th of June and Metz on the 10th of June. ⁴³

In Paris, Lobau led the 1st *division militaire* since March, but being appointed to the command of the 6th corps, he left from Paris on the 3rd of June for Laon where he (and his staff) arrived on the 6th of June. In compliance to the orders as issued by Soult, Lobau left with his headquarters, the division Jeanin, the services of the division Teste and the artillery of the corps on the 9th of June for Marles. On the 10th of June, these units reached Vervins. ⁴⁴

From the 5th of June onwards, the Imperial Guard started to march from Paris in echelons. The first troops to do so were the artillery, the administrative services, the sappers, the marins de la Garde and the 3rd and 4th regiments of chasseurs; the 3rd and 4th grenadiers left from Paris on the 6th of June, while the 3rd regiment of tirailleurs and voltigeurs left Paris, as well as the 2nd grenadiers and chasseurs, on the 7th of June.

On the 8th of June, the 1st regiment of grenadiers and the 1st regiment of chasseurs left Paris; whereas the cavalry left Paris on the 5th and the 6th of June.

The elements from the guard as coming from Compiègne (1st tirailleurs, 1st voltigeurs, two squadrons detached since the end of April, six batteries, the ambulances) reached Soissons on the 6th of June. As the artillery arrived on the 7th of June and the cavalry on the 8th and the 9th of June, it was on the 10th of June that the complete Imperial Guard was at Soissons, except for the 1st regiment of grenadiers and the 1st regiment of chasseurs which only left Paris on the 8th of June.⁴⁵

Finally, the imperial staff (but without Soult) left Paris to be at Avesnes by the 12th of June.⁴⁶

11th of June.

In relation to the imperial headquarters, Napoleon gave general Reille (through Bertrand) the following order:

“L’intention de l’empereur est que le quartier général soit transporté le 12 à Avesnes; que la garde impériale y soit le 12; qu’Avesnes soit évacué par votre corps que vous porterez derrière Maubeuge, et que cependant vous y restiez de votre personne pour donner des renseignements, l’Empereur devant y arriver le 13 à 2 heures du matin. Il est très important que vous placiez votre corps d’armée derrière Maubeuge sans que l’ennemi s’aperçoive de rien. Interdisez très sévèrement toute communication.”⁴⁷

As Napoleon issued an *ordre général de service* for his ministers and the chambers for the time he would be absent, he also made an oral call upon marshal Ney to join the *armée du Nord*.⁴⁸ In his turn, Ney wrote from Paris to Soult the same day – 11th of June:

“Sa Majesté vient de me donner l’ordre verbal de me rendre au quartier général impériale; je vais l’exécuter; mais cependant afin de faire la marche ordinaire, je désire recevoir de votre Excellence le même ordre, par écrit, et je la prie de vouloir bien me le faire expédier sur le champs.”⁴⁹

Accordingly, Napoleon wrote to Davout:

“Mon Cousin, faites appeler le maréchal Ney; s’il désire se trouver aux premières batailles qui auront lieu, dites-lui qu’il se soit rendu le 14 à Avesnes, où sera mon quartier général.”⁵⁰

Resulting, Davout wrote to Ney:

“L’empereur, Monsieur le maréchal, me charge de vous prévenir que son quartier général sera le 14 à Avesnes, afin que vous soyez en mesure de vous y trouver pour assister aux premières batailles qui auront lieu.”⁵¹

12th of June.

At dawn on the 12th of June, Napoleon left the Tuileries for Laon as a first stage towards his army.⁵² He traveled through Chavignon, Urcel Etouvelles, Chiny and Semilly and reached Laon around noon. While he was received by its inhabitants with great enthusiasm, Napoleon visited the fortifications and established his headquarters in the Hôtel de la préfecture. This was also the place where he spent the night.⁵³

Ney left with his aide de camp, colonel Heymès, in a carriage towards Laon, where he arrived around 10 p.m.. Here, he wouldn’t have had the chance to see the emperor as he was asleep.⁵⁴

Marshal Soult apparently had returned from his mission on or before the 12th of June, as he wrote the following report that day for the emperor:

“Avesnes, 12th June 1815.

In carrying out the order that Your Majesty gave on the 10th of this month, I have issued the following dispositions regarding the sites that the different army corps must occupy on the

13th: the 2nd corps on the Sambre, from below Maubeuge to Solre-sur-Sambre, occupying the villages of Hantay, Montigny, Bousignies, Bersillies, Colleret, Cerfontaine and Ferrière-la-Grande.

The 1st corps between Pont-sur-Sambre and Maubeuge, staying ready to debouch on one or other bank of the Sambre, as Your Majesty has ordered.

The 3rd corps at Beaumont.

The 6th corps at Beaufort where will be its headquarters, Fontaine, Limont, Esclaibes, Dimont, Dimechaux, Wattignies, Choisies, Damousies, Obrechies and Ferrière-la-Petite.

The 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th cavalry corps, under marshal Grouchy, at Solre-le-Château and in the villages of Sars, Lez-Fontaine, Offies, Lépine, Charnoul, Clairfayts, Epinoy, Beaurieux, Grandrieu, Hestrud, Leugnies, Cousolre, Aibes, Quiévelon, Solrines, Eccles.

The artillery parks and bridging equipment will be placed in front of Avesnes; we have left some villages unoccupied so that they can stable their horses.

The town of Avesnes is left for Your Majesty's Garde to occupy, as well as the villages behind it and those in the valley of the Helle to the right and left of Avesnes.

According to a report received from comte Gérard, the first division [De Bourmont] of the Armée de la Moselle will reach Rocroi on the 13th, the second [Pécheux] on the 14th, the third [Vichery] on the 15th, the cavalry division and the artillery park also on the 15th.

I immediately wrote that Your Majesty had ordered that he should be fully assembled at Rocroi on the 13th and that I had given him an order to this effect. I repeated the order to him to accelerate the march of his troops to make up for the time lost, and to continue the march of his Armée by directing it via Chimay on Beaumont, where it will form the second line of [sic – perhaps read “with” or “behind”] the 3rd corps and follow it on its march towards the Sambre as soon as that begins.

General Delort, commanding the 14th cavalry division, wrote to me from Metz on the 9th that his division would arrive at Mézières on the 13th and that he could not reach his destination at Hirson until the 15th. I sent him an order to march from Mézières via Rocroi and Chimay to Beaumont to reach there by the 15th and to place himself in line with the remainder of the cavalry. I have informed marshal Grouchy of this.”⁵⁵

The order for Vandamme as Soult refers to reads:

Avesnes, le 12 juin 1815

L'intention de l'Empereur, monsieur le comte, est que Votre Corps d'armée soit rendu demain 13 à Beaumont. Vous le concentrez sur ce point; ainsi vous vous trouverez former la droite de l'armée et vous soutiendrez près à déboucher le 14 au matin pour la direction qui vous era donnée.

Monsieur le général comte Gérard, qui avait reçu ordre de se rendre à Rocroi, continuera sa marche sur Chimay et Beaumont où il rejoindra votre corps d'armée; il devra prendre position un peu en arrière de la votre et si à son arrivée à Beaumont vous vous etiez porté en avant, il suivrait votre mouvement de manière à vous joindre le plutôt et à former une deuxième ligne derrière vous.

Aussitôt que vous avez pris la position qui vous est indiquée, vous m'enverrez un officier pour m'en rendre compte. Je vous préviens que la droite du 2^e corps sera à Montignies et la tête de la réserve de cavalerie à Leugnies et Cousolre.

Le maréchal d'empire, major général, duc de Dalmatie⁵⁶

The parks and the équipages of the 4th corps left on the 10th from Metz and passed through Verdun. The division of Vichery followed the 6th division of cavalry (Maurin) and covered the movement in the north. The division reached Conflans on the 9th of June, and through

Etain and Damvillers it had to rejoin Sedan and the road of the Meuse on the 12th of June. Maurin followed it at an interval of 48 hours, while the headquarters preceded it with 24 hours.

The divisions of Pécheux and Bourmont, instead of being at Sedan on the evening of the 12th of June, reached Mézières. Vichery did not halt at Damvillers on the 11th of June, but continued his march towards Jametz and got on the other side of Mouzon, having covered more than 80 km in two days. The cavalry of Maurin and Delort left from Metz on the 11th of June, bivouaced that night at Ornes and reached the next day (evening) Stenay: in this way, it had covered more than 100 km in two stages.⁵⁷

Lobau's headquarters, the division Jeanin, the services of the division Teste and the artillery of the corps had moved from Laon to Marles on the 9th of June, through Vervins to La Capelle, where it took up a temporary position at La Capelle on the 11th of June, ready to break up for Avesnes on the 13th of June. Simmer's division, still at Guise, moved on the 11th of June to La Capelle, where it joined the division Jeanin.

Meanwhile, Teste had started assembling his 21st division at Arras. The 8th regiment of light infantry had gone to Beauvais in one stage and a half and by the evening of the 11th of June, Teste had the whole of his division united at Arras, ready to leave the next day. It did so, for Avesnes and, accordingly, it took up positions between Avesnes and Maubeuge.⁵⁸

On the 12th of June, from Avesnes, Soult wrote his orders to Grouchy:

“Monsieur le maréchal, j'ai l'honneur de vous adresser copie de l'ordre de l'Empereur en date du 10, relatif à la position de l'armée au 13. L'empereur ordonne que vous mettiez en marche les 1^{er}, 2^e, 3^e et 4^e corps de cavalerie et que vous les dirigiez sur Avesnes, d'où ils continueront leur route pour aller s'établir, les 1^{er} et 2^e corps en avant de Solre-le-Château, occupant les villages de Coursolre, Leugnies, Grandrieu, Hestrud, Eccles, Solrines, Quierelont et leurs dépendances.

Les 3^e et 4^e corps à Solre-le-Château, en occupant Borieu, l'Épinois, Harnault les Fontaines, Sartz et Offies. Vous devrez, Monsieur le maréchal, vous établir de votre personne à Solre et faire toutes les dispositions pour que le mouvement de ces quatre corps de cavalerie soit terminé le 13 au soir. Je vous prie, Monsieur le maréchal, de me rendre compte de l'exécution de cet ordre. Recevez etc.”⁵⁹

And about the division of Delort, Soult wrote to Grouchy the same day from Avesnes:

“Monsieur le maréchal, je reçois de Mr. le général Delort copie de l'itinéraire que suit la 14^e division de cavalerie, qu'il commande, d'où il résulte qu'il arrive le 13 de ce mois à Mézières. Je lui donne l'ordre d'en partir le 14, avec tout ce qui appartient à sa division, pour se rendre à Rocroy, d'où il continuera sa route par Chimay à Beaumont, où il joindra l'armée et se réunira au 4^e corps de cavalerie, dont il fait partie. Je lui mande qu'il est nécessaire qu'il puisse arriver le 15 à Beaumont ou du moins en être très rapproché.

Je vous prie, monsieur le maréchal, de vous assurer de la marche de cette division et de m'informer de sa réunion au 4^e corps de cavalerie. Recevez etc.”⁶⁰

On the 12th of June, from Avesnes, Reille ordered his divisions to concentrate the next day at Jeumont and Solre sur Sambre (5th division), Bercilliers, Boussigniers and Montignies (6th division), Requinies, Rocques and Marpent (7th division), Colerette, Ostrignies and Cerfontaine (9th division), Latieri, Hantes and Ferrière la Grande (cavalry) – the corps headquarters were to be at Sole sur Sambre.⁶¹

13th of June.

On the 13th of June, Napoleon left in the very early morning for Avesnes where he got in the course of the day.⁶² He traveled there through Vervins and Etroengt. At Avesnes, he established himself in the *sous-prefecture*, formerly a house owned by a lieutenant of the king under the ancine régime; nowadays it is a rectory of the deacon of Avesnes.⁶³

It was at Avesnes that the emperor joined his army and that he would have spoken with his marshals and corps-commanders.⁶⁴ It was also at Avesnes that Napoleon learned about Soult's incorrect orders for the 3rd, 4th and the 6th corps.

General d'Erlon led his corps without difficulty the way it was prescribed - from Valenciennes through Le Quesnoy to Pont-sur-Sambre - pushing his front division beyond this place on the road of Maubeuge. By evening it had reached its appointed destination.⁶⁵

By the close of the day, Reille had his headquarters at Solre-sur-Sambre and the 2nd corps was deployed in columns along the Thuin road, as the emperor had ordered.⁶⁶ The left column on the southern bank of the Sambre was led by Bachelu's 5th division at Solre-sur-Sambre and Jeumont, followed by the 7th division Girard a bit to the rear in the valley of the Sambre at Marpent, Rocques and Recquignies, behind Maubeuge. The right column was led by the 6th division Jérôme Bonaparte at Montignies and Bersillies, and the 9th division Foy was at Ostergnies and Cerfontaine. Piré's cavalry division was at Thurie between the two leading divisions. The 2nd corps was assembled *en colonne double de division*, the front at 5 kilometers from the border, in a depth of 10 kilometers.^{67 - 68}

On 13th of June, in obedience to Soult's order, the divisions of the 3rd corps left their positions at Trélon, Mariembourg and Chimay to march, not to Philippeville as the emperor intended, but to Beaumont, 20 kilometers further west. Vandamme himself went to Avesnes.⁶⁹

Initially, Soult wrote a correcting order on the 13th of June to Vandamme from Avesnes in the following sense:

“L'intention de l'Empereur, Monsieur le Général, est que vous formiez votre corps d'armée en avant de Philippeville afin d'être prêt à déboucher demain sur Charleroy, si des ordres vous sont envoyés à ce sujet.

L'armée de la Moselle se dirigera sur Philippeville & suivra votre mouvement; j'envoie des ordres en conséquence à Mr.le Lt.Gal.Gérard.

D'après les ordres que je vous ai envoyé hier, vous deviez réunir votre corps d'armée à Beaumont. Mais l'Empereur a de nouveau ordonné l'exécution de l'ordre du jour du 10 dont je vous ai envoyé ampliation, d'après lequel vous deviez vous former dans la journée du 13 en avant de Philippeville, ainsi [...] la disposition de l'ordre donné par l'Empereur le 10, que vous devez suivre.

Si cependant lorsque ma lettre vous parviendra vos troupes se trouvaient entre Philippeville & Beaumont vous les y laisserez et vous les disposerez de manière à pouvoir demain déboucher sur Charleroy, en prenant votre ligne d'opérations sur Philippeville. Donnez des ordres pour qu'on cuise beaucoup de pain à Philippeville et pour que l'ordonnateur de votre corps y fasse arriver beaucoup de subsistances.

Instruisez moi de suite de l'emplacement de vos troupes et des dispositions que vous ferez pour l'exécution de ces ordres.

Vous aurez soin, général, d'envoyer un officier au devant du général Gérard pour l'informer de ces dispositions. Le Maréchal d'Empire, major général, Duc de Dalmatie⁷⁰

Yet, having learned that the 3rd corps had apparently already gone too far in its westward march, the emperor wrote to Soult:

Headquarters, Avesnes, 13 June.

“As general Vandamme has reached Beaumont, I no longer think he should return to Philippeville, as it would exhaust his troops. I prefer that this general should camp in the first line at a league and a half from Beaumont. I will review them tomorrow. The 6th corps will therefore be placed a quarter of a league to the rear. In these circumstances the Armée de la Moselle will concentrate tomorrow on Philippeville with the cuirassier detachment coming from Alsace. Make these changes by general order.”⁷¹

The order as referred to has not been handed over, but eventually, Vandamme’s corps halted on the evening of the 13th of June just north of Beaumont.⁷²

It was also at Avesnes that Napoleon learned about the situation of the 4th corps, in the sense that it would not be able to make it on the 13th of June to reach Rocroi. Meanwhile, Soult had already directed it further west in his order of the 12th of June, but not to Mariembourg, but to Beaumont instead.

Gérard arrived at Rocroi on the evening of the 13th of June and there he received the letter from Soult, written on the 12th June and which complained about his delay. Gérard wrote back to Soult that he had accelerated his march after the news of Gressot, who was carrying an order to do the same for Delort’s division.

The 14th division Bourmont was at Mézières on the 12th of June; instead of going to Mariembourg it went towards Beaumont and was near Chimay on the 13th of June, closely followed by Pécheux’s 12th division. The 13th division Vichery passed Mézières and reached Rimogne, 10 kilometers south of Rocroi. Lastly, both Maurin’s and Delort’s cavalry divisions reached Mézières. The parks of the 4th corps were still at Stenay.⁷³

The 6th corps bivouacked in the villages around Beaufort, where it established its headquarters; the 21st division Teste still had not joined the corps. The division had left Arras on the 12th of June, moved along Cateau and could be on the evening of the 13th of June near Avesnes, having covered 80 km in two days. The assumption was that it could only join the 6th corps at Beaumont on the 14th of June.⁷⁴

This day, the 13th of June, the Imperial Guard assembled at Avesnes.⁷⁵ The grand parc, which had come from La Fère, did the same.⁷⁶

The 1st cavalry corps of Pajol left from La Capelle and Nouvion through Avesnes and Solre-le-Château and reached by the evening the villages of Grandrieu, Leugnies and Cousolre, five kilometers west of Beaumont.⁷⁷

Following it, the 2nd cavalry corps of Exelmans took bivouacs at Solrinne, Eccles and Hestrud, villages situated at 4 and 5 kilometers north and north-east from Solre-le-Château. For the division Strolz, coming from Guise, it was a stage of 50 kilometers, for Chastel coming from Laon one of 80-85 kilometers.

The 3rd cavalry corps of Kellerman came from Vervins and Origny to Solre-le-Château and its surroundings.

The 4th cavalry corps of Milhaud, reduced to the 13th division (Wathier) coming from le Cateau, was by the evening of the 13th of June behind Solre-le-Château.⁷⁸ The 14th division (Delort) continued its march from the Alsace and reached Mézières.⁷⁹ Grouchy himself established his headquarters at Solre-le-Château.⁸⁰

From Avesnes, Napoleon launched the following orders for the new positions for the army for the next day:

“Avesnes, le 13 juin 1815

Le grand quartier général à Beaumont.

L'infanterie de la garde impériale sera bivouquée à un quart de lieue en avant de Beaumont et formera trois lignes: la jeune garde, les chasseurs et les grenadiers. M.le duc de Trévise reconnaîtra l'emplacement de ce camp; il aura soin que tout soit à sa place, artillerie, ambulances, équipages etc.

Le 1er régiment des grenadiers à pied se rendra à Beaumont.

La cavalerie de la garde impériale sera placée en arrière de Beaumont; mais les corps les plus éloignés n'en doivent pas être à une lieue.

Le 2e corps prendra position à Laire, c'est-à-dire le plus près possible de la frontière, sans la dépasser. Les quatre divisions de ce corps d'armée seront réunies et bivouqueront sur deux ou quatre lignes. Le quartier général au milieu; la cavalerie en avant, éclairant tous les débouchés, mais aussi sans dépasser la frontière, et la faisant respecter par les partisans ennemis qui voudraient la violer.

Les bivouacs seront placés de manière que les feux ne puissent être aperçus de l'ennemi; les généraux empêcheront que personne ne s'écarte du camp; ils s'assureront que la troupe est pourvue de cinquante cartouches par homme, quatre jours de pain et une demi-livre de riz; que l'artillerie et les ambulances sont en bon état, et les feront placer à leur ordre de bataille.

Ainsi le 2e corps sera disposé à se mettre en marche le 15 à trois heures du matin, si l'ordre en est donné, pour se porter sur Charleroi et y arriver avant neuf heures.

Le 1er corps prendra position à Solre-sur-Sambre, et il bivouquera aussi sur plusieurs lignes, observant, ainsi que le 2e corps, que ses feux ne puissent être aperçus de l'ennemi, que personne ne s'écarte du camp, et que les généraux s'assurent de l'état des munitions, des vivres de la troupe, et que l'artillerie et les ambulances soient placées à leur ordre de bataille.

Le 1er corps se tiendra également prêt à partir le 15, à trois heures du matin, pour suivre le mouvement du 2e corps; de manière que, dans la journée d'après-demain, ces deux corps manoeuvrent dans la même direction et se protègent.

Le 3e corps prendra position demain à une lieue en avant de Beaumont, le plus près de la frontière, sans cependant la dépasser ni souffrir qu'elle soit violée par aucun parti ennemi.

Le général Vandamme tiendra tout le monde à son poste, recommandera que les feux soient cachés et qu'il ne puissent être aperçus de l'ennemi. Il se conformera d'ailleurs à ce qui est prescrit au 2e corps pour les munitions, les vivres, l'artillerie et les ambulances, et pour être prêt à se mettre en mouvement le 15, à trois heures du matin.

Le 6e corps se portera en avant de Beaumont et sera bivouqué sur deux lignes à un quart de lieue du 3e corps. M.le comte Lobau choisira l'emplacement, et il fera observer les dispositions générales qui sont prescrites par le présent ordre.

M.le maréchal Grouchy portera les 1er, 2e, 3e et 4e corps de cavalerie en avant de Beaumont, et les établira au bivouac entre cette ville et Walcourt, faisant également respecter la frontière, empêchant que personne ne la dépasse, qu'on se laisse voir, ni que les feux puissent être aperçus de l'ennemi; et il se tiendra prêt à partir après demain à trois heures du matin, s'il en recoit l'ordre, pour se porter sur Charleroi et faire l'avant-garde de l'armée.

Il recommandera aux généraux de s'assurer si tous les cavaliers sont pourvus de cartouches, si leurs armes sont en bon état, et s'ils ont pour quatre jours de pain et la demi-livre de riz qui ont été ordonnés, ont été délivrés.

L'équipage de ponts sera bivouqué derrière le 6e corps et en avant de l'infanterie de la Garde impériale.

Le parc central d'artillerie sera en arrière de Beaumont.

L'armée de la Moselle prendra demain position en avant de Philippeville. M.le comte Gérard la disposera de manière à pouvoir partir après demain, le 15, à trois heures du matin, pour joindre le

3e corps et appuyer son mouvement sur Charleroi, suivant le nouvel ordre qui lui sera donné; mais le général Gérard aura soin de se bien garder, sur son flanc droit et en avant de lui, sur toutes les directions de Charleroi et de Namur. Si l'armée de la Moselle a des pontons à sa suite, M.le général Gérard les fera avancer le plus possible, afin de pouvoir en disposer.

Tous les corps d'armée feront marcher en tête les sapeurs et les moyens de passage que les généraux auront réunis.

Les sapeurs de la garde impériale, les ouvriers de la marine et les ouvriers de la réserve marcheront après le 6e corps et en tête de la garde. Tous les corps marcheront dans le plus grand ordre et serrés. Dans le mouvement sur Charleroi, on sera disposé à profiter de tous les passages, pour écraser les corps ennemis qui voudraient attaquer l'armée ou qui manoeuvraient contre elle.

Il n'y aura à Beaumont que le grand quartier général. Aucun autre ne devra y être établi, et la ville sera dégagée de tout embarras.

Les anciens règlements sur le quartier général et les équipages, sur l'ordre de marche, la police des voitures et bagages, et sur les blanchisseuses et les vivandières, seront remis en vigueur. Il sera fait à ce sujet un ordre général; mais en attendant, MM. les généraux commandant les corps d'armée prendront les dispositions en conséquence, et M.le grand prévot fera exécuter ces règlements.

L'empereur ordonne que toutes les dispositions contenues dans le présent ordre soient tenues secrètes par MM.les généraux.

Par ordre de l'empereur:

Le maréchal de l'empire, major général, Duc de Dalmatie”⁸¹

Observations

As stated before, the first orders for the concentration of the armée du Nord for the campaign in the Netherlands were issued by Napoleon on the 3rd of June and these comprised in general those units which were the most remote from the majority of the Armée du Nord and the point where it was supposed to concentrate: the imperial guard, the 4th corps, the 6th corps, the cavalry division of Delort and the headquarters of the army.

Being the most remote, they formed the condition to the eventual concentration of the other corps in the north.⁸²

It is in his letter dated 3rd of June to Davout that Napoleon asks him for a draft for the concentration of the Armée du Nord. The relevant passage reads: “Remettez-moi un projet de mouvement pour le corps du général Gérard ou de la Moselle, en le masquant le plus possible à l’ennemi, pour que ce corps se porte sur Philippeville. Il faudrait qu’il fit rendu le 12, en marchant le plus vite possible. [...] Ma Garde sera toute rendue à Soissons le 10, et peut-être le 13 à Avesnes; il faut donc que le 6^e corps parte le 9 pour se porter sur Avesnes. Remettez-moi un croquis où la marche des colonnes soit tracée, et qui marque les jours où le 1er, le 2^e, le 3^e, le 6^e corps et celui de la Moselle se mettront en mouvement, et les positions que, le 13, ces corps, ainsi que la Garde et la réserve de cavalerie, devront occuper, et la force que j’aurais en infanterie, cavalerie et artillerie.”⁸³

From these words it can be taken that Davout was of course informed about Napoleon’s wish to place the corps in three parallel columns in such a way that they could advance upon Charleroi on the Sambre. In this, the centre would be formed by the reserve of the army, having Avesnes as its base.

It is important to note that in the general design all is directed upon positions and situations on the 13th of June. The same is the case for measures for instance announced on the 9th of June in relation to the national guard in the *places fortes* in the north and on the Meuse and in

relation to convois in the north – they all have as datum date the 13th of June. Also, on the 11th of June Napoleon wrote to Davout: “Mon cousin, vous ferez connaître, par estafette et par le télégraphe, au maréchal Suchet, que les hostilités commenceront le 14, et que de ce jour il peut s’emparer de Montmélian.”⁸⁴

All this proves that Napoleon originally envisaged to start the campaign in the Netherlands on the 14th of June, and not on the 15th of June, as is often believed.

For reasons which remain unknown, Napoleon must have felt the necessity of reorganising the cavalry which formed part of the armée du Nord. He deemed it proper to start this operation on the 3rd of June, but why just then – and not earlier – remains a mystery. At least, the process run parallel to his nomination of Grouchy as the commander of the reserve cavalry (to be created as a consequence of this reorganisation) on the 29th of May.

By the 5th of June, actual orders for the armée de la Moselle were issued, but these no longer directed it upon Philippeville (and to be there by the 12th of June), but towards Rocroi and to be there by the 13th of June instead.⁸⁵

By the 6th of June, Napoleon saw it fit to issue his first set of orders to the remaining corps of the armée du Nord, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd corps. They directed them towards Valenciennes, Maubeuge and a position between Marienbourg and Chimay respectively. Whereas no target dates for the marches of the first two corps are known, the one for Vandamme was the 13th of June.⁸⁶

Contrary to the movements of the guard and Lobau which took place in the interior of the country, the lateral march of the armée de la Moselle and those of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd corps along and towards the northern border were more susceptible of being detected by the enemy. As a result, Napoleon ordered on the 7th of June a total ban on any communication on his frontiers in the north, on the Rhine and the Moselle.

Napoleon clearly took his measures to mask the departure of armée de la Moselle from its positions, but it was just in this sector that he feared for a possible enemy irruption. Napoleon’s anxiety was such that it led him to send an officer to report about the situation there on a daily base, up to the very moment that Napoleon would have established his headquarters at Avesnes, the starting point of his invasion into the Netherlands.

As has been shown before, the extreme north-west of the country was a point of concern for Napoleon right from the very beginning because of its favourism of the Bourbons and the vicinity of the enemy. The city of Lille must have been an open nerve in particular, as it was on the 6th of June that Napoleon asked Davout to find a very reliable man to command the national guard there, “cette ville étant le but de toutes les intrigues de l’ennemi.”⁸⁷

This concern led Napoleon to send Soult on a mission to leave for Lille on the 8th of June. From there, he was supposed to unfold a multitude of assignments, much of which were not those for a chief of staff of the armée du Nord and which were related to both offensive and defensive measures.

At this critical moment in time it is incomprehensible why Napoleon sent just Soult in this mission and not someone else, like for instance general Gazan or general Lapoype, commanders in the area (at the Somme and in Lille respectively), or their representative.⁸⁸

The mission as a whole was too short anyway for a proper accomplishment, as Soult had just two full days (9th and 10th of June) at his disposal.⁸⁹ No details are available on its results; it may very well have been that Soult reported to Napoleon verbally.

The absence of Soult would prove to have detrimental results in the concentration of the armée du Nord which resulted from the order dated 10th of June.

This order forms a capital document in the concentration of the armée du Nord as it provides the outline of the positions of the corps on the eve of the campaign. It should be noted that on

the 10th of June, Napoleon was still aiming for the 14th of June to start the campaign; the 15th of June was decided about two days later (see below).

Basically, the order put the army in an area with a frontline running from just north-east of Maubeuge along Beaumont to Philippeville (45 kilometers). In depth, it covered the distance between Avesnes at the base and Beaumont in front (about 30 kilometers).

The road running from Avesnes through La Capelle, Laon, Soissons and Dammartin to Paris was both the supply line and the line of retreat of the army.⁹⁰

The corps were situated in such a way that three columns were formed: one on the left (formed by the 2nd and the 1st corps) on the axis Maubeuge – Pont-sur-Sambre, one in the centre (formed by the 6th corps, the reserve cavalry and the imperial guard) on the axis Beaumont – Solre-le-Château- Avesnes, and one to the right (formed by the 3rd and 4th corps) on the axis Philippeville - Marienbourg. In their advance they would converge upon one single point on the Sambre: Charleroi. This place was considered by Napoleon to be the point from which he could apply his strategy of the central position, the very basis of the plan for the campaign.

The order was a secret one to make sure the final concentration would have the maximum effect in its surprise. Therefore it contained strict instructions not to draw any attention from the enemy whatsoever, particularly for those corps nearest to the frontier, the 1st and the 2nd. As this was all intentional, the *actual* positions of the components of the armée du Nord were on the night of the 10th of June as follows: Reille's corps was around Maubeuge, flanked to its left by Drouet d'Erlon's corps near Valenciennes [⁹¹], and to its right by that of Vandamme between Marienbourg and Chimay. Behind these corps Pajol's cavalry was at La Capelle and Nouvin, Kellermann's at Vervins and Origny, with to its left Exelmans' corps at Guise and Laon. Of Milhaud's 4th corps, the division of Wathier was at Douai while the one of Delort was at Metz. It was by the evening of the 10th of June that the reorganisation of the cavalry had been completed. Still further back, Lobau's corps was at Guise and Vervins and the Imperial Guard was at Soissons.

The order of the 10th of June was sent out from Paris on a day that Soult was supposed to be at Lille, and the fact was that he was there just then. It was as a result of this absence from Avesnes that orders for the execution of this order were only issued the day Soult returned at Avesnes, the 12th of June. This becomes clear from the report Soult wrote that day to the emperor.

It is simply incomprehensible that just at this very crucial phase in the concentration of the armée du Nord, this order was issued to someone who was on a mission at Lille. Somehow, no arrangements appear to have been made by Napoleon to make sure that the instructions resulting from his elementary order were issued straight away by those replacing Soult at Avesnes, as Napoleon knew that Soult wasn't there to comply with them.⁹²

It was at Laon that Napoleon found out about the delay as it was there that he found Grouchy still there, while he was supposed to be heading with his cavalry for positions around Beaumont and between this place and Avesnes.⁹³

On the 12th of June, as Soult had arrived at Avesnes, he issued orders to the different corps of army. The situation of the delay was serious, but would be aggravated by the fact that Soult gave instructions to several corps which set aside what Napoleon had ordered two days before. His absence from Avesnes obviously doesn't militate against Soult, but his carelessness in part of these orders does. The inconsistencies were that he ordered the 3rd corps to Beaumont (in stead of Philippeville), the 4th corps to a position between Chimay and Beaumont (while it had to be Marienbourg), the 6th corps to Beaufort (in stead of Beaumont) and the cavalry division of Delort to Beaumont (in stead of a position between Avesnes and Beaumont).⁹⁴ By doing so, Soult completely removed the column which was supposed to

advance along the axis Mariembourg – Philippeville, and in this way overloaded the one which was to advance the axis along Avesnes – Beaumont.⁹⁵

Why Soult issued the wrong orders for these units is simply an enigma. It would be too simple to assume that Soult would be mistaken at these very crucial orders, just at the crux of the concentration, placing the corps in their starting points for the advance into the Netherlands. As a chief of staff, one would expect a more pointed carefulness, just in these details.⁹⁶

On the 12th of June Napoleon and Soult must have met, but no details of this meeting have transpired. There is no doubt that Napoleon must have expressed his strong discontent about the situation, and at least the emperor must have instructed Soult to issue correcting orders for the 3rd corps. The whole situation led Napoleon on the 12th of June to postpone the advance of the army towards the Sambre to the 15th of June.

As the 1st and 2nd corps moved on the 13th of June to their respective stations as they were ordered to, Vandamme led his corps from Mariembourg, Trélon and Chimay towards Beaumont. A correcting order of Soult directing him to Philippeville (as ordered by Napoleon) reached Vandamme too late to be of any use; the alternative as Soult indicated to Vandamme was to maintain his operation line towards Philippeville, and this is what he did: he put his corps along the chaussée running from Philippeville to Beaumont, to the east of this last place.

As has been stated before, it was on the 5th of June that the armée de la Moselle was directed towards Rocroi and to be there by the 13th of June. As Gérard received these orders on the 7th of June, it left him six full days to cover almost 200 kilometers.

Taking their positions on the evening of the 10th of June, each division covered an average distance of 25 kilometers a day during the first days of its march.⁹⁷

However, the order of the 10th of June fixed the corps to be at Mariembourg and no longer at Rocroi. Mariembourg is 25 kilometers further north as Rocroi. The document must have reached Gérard the next day. The 11th of June was the moment that Gérard reported back to Soult about the prognosis of his movements in relation to the place where he was to be by the 13th of June, Rocroi.⁹⁸

For the division of Bourmont, being at Sedan, Gérard calculated it to be at Rocroi on the 13th of June as it had to cover 40 kilometers. The division of Pécheux, from Mouzon, had to cover about 55 kilometers and Gérard expected it to be at Rocroi by the 14th of June, while the 15th of June was the day he thought he could have the divisions of Vichery and Maurin at Rocroi; from Janetz they had to march about 90 kilometers.

From this, it becomes clear that Gérard must have echeloned his divisions. This may have to do with the fact that Gérard himself was supposed to remain at Metz until the 10th of June to give instructions to general Rouyer of the 2nd *division militaire* of the national guard. Rouyer was supposed to secure the area between Metz and Thionville and which was now to be evacuated by the Armée de la Moselle; it may have been that this was done by relieving the divisions of Gérard. Rouyer had to move from his base at Nancy on the 7th of June; the distance between Nancy and Metz is about 50 kilometers.⁹⁹

As Gérard's prognosis used a distance of about 20 to 25 kilometers a day as a starting point, it was Soult who instructed Gérard on the 12th of June to accelerate his march to make up for the time lost. This becomes clear from what Soult writes in his report to Napoleon dated 12th June. Yet in this report, by ordering the corps to a position between Chimay and Beaumont, Mariembourg is suddenly completely passed over and - in this way - the important order of the 10th of June which set the starting positions for the offensive on the 14th of June. Also, from the way the report is written it seems as if Soult was surprised to learn about the situation of Gérard, as if he did not receive an earlier report.

Dated 12th of June, the background of the report was a start of the hostilities on the 14th of June. Strictly speaking Gérard was then supposed to be at Beaumont by the evening of the 13th of June, a demand it was of course simply impossible for Gérard to comply with. The same was true for his original destination, Philippeville. The result of Soult's order was that Gérard moved all his divisions in forced marches on the 13th of June and by the evening of that day his foremost units were near Chimay. Chimay is at about the same distance from Beaumont as it is from Philippeville.¹⁰⁰

Lobau moved his forces on the 13th of June to and around Beaufort and this march was not corrected right away.

Grouchy's forces, having lingered around Laon due to a lack of orders, used the 13th of June was used to reach the area around Solre-le-Château and south-west of Beaumont. For the 1st, 3rd and 4th corps distances of about 40 kilometers had to be covered, but for the 2nd corps of Exelmans distances of 50 and 80 kilometers were to be completed (from Guise and Laon), which resulted in exhaustion for at least units of this corps.¹⁰¹

The concentration of the cavalry around and south-west of Beaumont had almost been finished as it should have been, but the situation as it had arisen could easily have been avoided if a proper communication had taken place in respect of the absence of Soult.¹⁰²

The situation with the division of Delort, as attached to the army of the Rhine, was different. Being based in the Alsace, the order for its commander, general Rapp, dated 3rd of June, told him to move it from there to Hirson, a total distance of about 360 kilometers, in a time-frame of nine full days, from the 7th to the 15th of June (about 40 kilometers a day). Rapp saw the urgency and Delort accordingly started his preparations on the 6th of June.

Delort reached Mézières on the 13th of June, as planned and in accordance to Rapp's orders dated 5th of June. Yet, it was from there that Delort was no longer directed upon Hirson, but to Beaumont, to join the corps of Milhaud on the 15th of June there.¹⁰³

In relation to the orders for the starting points for the invasion of the Netherlands as issued on the 10th of June, Hirson is about 35 kilometers south of Beaumont. The target date, 15th of June, also did not match to the date set for these positions, the 13th of June. The background of this position and date has yet to be clarified.

On the 13th of June, the majority of the imperial guard reached Avesnes. In three days, it had covered the distance of about 90 kilometers from Soissons through Laon. The moment Napoleon had set the imperial guard in motion, on the 3rd of June, he expected to have this corps at Soissons on the 10th of June, and this is how the corps moved, even though it had marched off from Paris and Compiègne in four echelons. From there it had to go in forced marches to Avesnes, where it had to be on the 13th of June and this task was accomplished in time.¹⁰⁴

As a result of the preceding events, the corps of the armée du Nord were situated in the following way on the evening of the 13rd of June. On the left was the 2nd corps between Solre-sur-Sambre and Maubeuge, while the 1st corps was further to the rear at Pont-sur-Sambre and beyond.

The 3rd corps had moved from Mariembourg, Trélon and Chimay on Beaumont and had halted east of this place. Lobau was in and around Beaufort, while its 21st division (Teste) was near Avesnes. The imperial guard had reached Avesnes. Of the reserve cavalry, the 1st corps of Pajol was not far west of Beaumont, while the 2nd corps (Exelmans) and the 3rd corps (Kellermann) were located near Solre-le-Château. Of the 4th corps (Milhaud) the division Wathier was near Solre-le-Château as well and its other future division (the one of Delort) was at Mézières. The 4th corps was scattered over Chimay, Rimogne and Mézières.

In this way, the majority of the army was dispersed over an area with a frontline running from just north-east of Maubeuge to Beaumont (10 kilometers). In depth, it covered the distance between Avesnes at the base and Beaumont in front (about 30 kilometers). Another part, the

4th corps, still further to the right rear, was disconnected from this part of the army between Chimay and Mézières (about 60 kilometers).¹⁰⁵

Revised: 2nd September 2010
Copyright © Pierre de Wit

¹ Other evidence, however, shows that this division was in the extreme north-west of the country (département du Nord) as it was on the 4th of June that this division moved to Bailleul (which is about 12 kilometers west of Armentières). Cf. Captain Duthilt (aide de camp of the 1st brigade) - Les mémoires du capitaine Duthilt p.297

The divisions commander, Allix, had been president of a commission of police at Lille since 28 May, so his division was now commanded by Quiot, the senior brigade commander. Cf. Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.24

² SHAT, C15, nr.35

³ Correspondance nr.21980

⁴ Cf. previous note on the positions of the corps early May. The locations here are derived from the following document, dated 1st of June, containing Reille's instructions to his corps in case of an allied invasion:

“As the advanced outposts of the 5th, 6th and 7th infantry divisions as well as the various cavalry divisions performing this service, present no defence of the line they occupy, it appears to me that it is necessary to inform the lieutenant-generals who command the said troops of the points to which they are to withdraw their cantonments in the event of an unexpected invasion by the foreign troops, and the positions where they should start to resist, so as to delay as much as possible the movements of the enemy, and to give time to the troops stationed in the rear to form themselves in front of Avesnes.

If the enemy present himself at Bavay and Maubeuge, or if they march towards Solre-sur-Sambre, or from both sides simultaneously, the troops of the 7th division and the cavalry serving with them are to withdraw successively behind the Sambre; they are to destroy the bridges and to place themselves in a position facing the bridge across the Sambre at Bellemont. The troops of the 5th infantry division and the 4th cavalry division, who are in front of Maubeuge, are to withdraw behind the town and to defend the passages, having destroyed the bridges across the Sambre. The troops belonging to the two divisions stationed on the right of Maubeuge are to withdraw on to the plateaus of Rocq and Cousolre, while the 6th division is to withdraw to the plateau of Hestrud and Frazi, and to scout in front of Xivry. After having engaged the enemy on the plateau of Courdobaert de Rocq, without however becoming committed, the troops of the 5th infantry division and the 4th cavalry division are to withdraw towards Darmousies and Hatignaud, communicating as much as possible with Maubeuge.

If the troops of the 6th division are obliged to abandon the plateaus at Hestrud and Frazi, either because of an attack by the enemy, or because of the movement of the troops on their left, they are first to withdraw towards Solre-le-Château and to occupy the plateau of that name, and thereafter to place themselves in the entrenched positions at Sarts and Beugnies. This division should occupy Felleries, and the two bataillons of the 2nd regiment léger who are stationed in Eppe and Liessies should defend the fortifications which have been erected in front of them. If the two battalions are forced back, they will withdraw through the wood towards Avesnes, and the major commanding them will take care to observe all that occurs in front of him.

If the troops of the 5th infantry division and the 4th cavalry division are obliged to leave Dimont, they will fall back to the woods in their rear, where they will complete the fortifications which have been erected. If the 7th infantry division is forced to abandon the

banks of the Sambre, it will fall back to the woods of Ecuelin. The troops thus stationed will be able to defend the defiles through the woods, and thereby give the troops in the second line time to take up appropriate positions.”

In: SHAT, C15 / 22. Translation: John Franklin.

⁵ SHAT, C15 nr.35

⁶ SHAT, C15 nr.35

Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.191

⁷ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.25

⁸ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.25

⁹ SHAT, C15 nr.35

¹⁰ Chuquet, A. - Inédits Napoleoniens nr.1623

¹¹ Correspondance nr.22005

¹² Chuquet, A. Inédits etc. nr.1609

¹³ On the 3rd of June, Napoleon wrote to Davout:

“Mon cousin, vous trouverez ci-jointe la copie des ordres que je donne pour la cavalerie de l’armée. Le maréchal Grouchy la commandera en chef. Donnez-lui un chef d’état-major et un général d’artillerie. Tous les généraux à la suite seront à sa disposition. Donnez ordre au maréchal Grouchy d’être le 5 à Laon, d’y passer la revue de ses régiments, de pourvoir à leur organisation et de faire distribuer des cartouches, afin que, le 10, on puisse entrer en campagne.” In: Correspondance nr.22003

The emperor also wrote to Soult about Grouchy’s command:

“Donnez ordre au maréchal Grouchy de partir au plus tard le 5, pour se rendre à Laon, y organiser et passer la revue de tous ses régiments, les mettre en état d’entrer en campagne, écrire aux dépôts pour qu’ils se hâtent d’accroître les escadrons de guerre, s’assurer que tous les hommes sont armés et leur faire distribuer des cartouches.” In: Correspondance nr.22004

As a result, it was Soult who wrote to Grouchy:

“Monsieur le maréchal, j’ai l’honneur d’informer Votre Excellence que l’Empereur l’a nommé au commandement en chef de la cavalerie, dont il vient d’ordonner une nouvelle organisation. Je joins ici la lettre que le ministre écrit à ce sujet à Votre Excellence et qui renferme ses lettres de service, ainsi que les états de cette nouvelle organisation de la cavalerie, tant en personnel qu’en troupes.

J’aurai l’honneur de faire connaître demain à Votre Excellence les dispositions que j’ai ordonnées pour l’exécution des intentions de l’Empereur; Sa Majesté ordonne, Monsieur le maréchal, que vous partiez au plus tard le 5, pour vous rendre à Laon, y organiser et passer la revue de tous vos régiments, les mettre en état d’entrer en campagne; écrire aux dépôts pour qu’ils se hâtent d’accroître les escadrons de guerre, vous assurer que tous les hommes sont armés et leur faire distribuer des cartouches.” In: Grouchy, A.F.E. de – Mémoires du maréchal de Grouchy Vol.III p.428-429

And Grouchy wrote in his turn to Davout on the 4th of June: “J’ai l’honneur d’accuser à Votre Excellence la réception de la dépêche d’hier renfermant une lettre du service pour le

commandement de la cavalerie, l'état d'organisation des régiment en divisions, ainsi que l'état du personnel.

Je partirai demain pour Laon, afin d'y faire exécuter les ordres de l'empereur et faire toutes les dispositions pour que les troupes soient prêtes à entrer en campagne le 10. Aussitôt que j'aurai passé en revue les différents divisions, je rendrai compte à Votre Excellence de l'état où se trouvent les régiments. Veuillez agréer etc." In: SHAT, C15 nr.4

¹⁴ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.24

Soult sent on the 3rd and 4th of June the following orders:

-to d'Erlon to dissolve the 2nd division of cavalry, to send the 3rd chasseurs to the 1st division and both other regiments, the 13rd and 20th dragoons, to Guise to form the new 9th division
-to Reille to dissolve the 4th cavalry division, to send the 5th regiment of lancers to the 3rd division, to send the 1st regiment of lancers to Marle, to the 1st cavalry corps; to send the 4th chasseurs to Chimay, destined to the cavalry division of the 3rd corps; to send also to Chimay the 9th and 12th regiment of chasseurs, for the 3rd corps and to send to Guise the 5th regiment of dragoons, destined to the 2nd corps of cavalry.

-in exchange for the 4th, 9th and 12th chasseurs, Vandamme got the order to send his three regiments of cavalry (5th regiment of hussars, the 2nd regiment of lancers and 11th regiment of chasseurs) to Marle where they entered the 1st cavalry corps.

-Gérard got the order to dissolve the 5th division of reserve cavalry, to send the 11th regiment of dragoons to Haguenau to complete the division of cavalry in the armée du Rhin; to send the 15th regiment of dragoons to Guise to form the new 9th division of cavalry and to form with the two remaining regiments of light cavalry which were already with the 4th corps, and with the two other regiments of the division which was dissolved (the 6th and the 16th regiment of dragoons) a new division led by general Maurin, numbered 6. In: Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.206-207

¹⁵ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.24

The initial instruction read: "I write to inform you that the emperor has ordered a new organisation for cavalry, the overall command of which His Majesty has given to marshal comte Grouchy, who will establish his headquarters at Laon [...] His Majesty desiring you to give you a proof of his confidence has nominated you as commander of the 1st cavalry corps, which will comprise the 4th and 5th cavalry divisions [...] Consequently, you are to leave at once for Marle where you will establish your headquarters." In: Callatay, Ph. de – The concentration of the Franch army etc. p.24

¹⁶ Soult wrote to Rapp: "Il est ordonné à M.le lieutenant général Delort, commandant la 3^e division de réserve de cavalerie, composée des 5^e, 6^e, 9^e et 10^e régiments de cuirassiers, de partir, aussitôt la réception du présent ordre, avec tout ce qui appartient à cette division et sa batterie d'artillerie, pour se rendre à Hirson.

Cette division partant des environs de Haguenau, se dirigera par Bitche, le 7; Sarreguemines, le 8; Saint-Avold, le 9; Metz, le 10; Estain, le 11; Stenai, le 12; Mézières, le 13; Aubigny, le 14, et Hirson, le 15, où cette division qui prendra le no.14, recevra de nouveaux ordres de M.le lieutenant général comte Milhaud, commandant le 4^e corps de cavalerie, dont elle fera partie.

M.le général Delort réglera la marche de cette division de manière à accélérer le plus possible, il enverra des officiers en avant pour faire préparer ses subsistances. Il fera marcher ses troupes en bon ordre et veillera à ce que personne ne reste en arrière.

M.le général Delort aura soin de faire connaître à M.le général Milhaud, au Cateau Cambresis, l'époque à laquelle sa division arrivera à Hirson.

Le général Farine, qui commande une brigade de votre division, marchera avec sa brigade dont il conserve la commandement. Paris, le 3 juin 1815. Soult." In: Stoff, L. – Essai sur le général Delort p.127-128

¹⁷ Correspondance nr. 21975

¹⁸ Correspondance nr.21994

¹⁹ Mazade, Ch. De (ed.) - Correspondance du maréchal Davout - Vol.IV nr.1749

²⁰ Correspondance nr.22006

²¹ Pajol established his headquarters on the 8th of June at La Capelle. Cf. Biot, H.F. - Campagnes et garnisons, p.232

²² Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.24

Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.202

²³ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.191

²⁴ The first instruction from Rapp to Delort - dated 5th of June, 9 p.m - read: "Mon chère général, j'ai l'honneur de vous adresser ci-joint l'ordre du départ que je reçois pour votre division. Vous voudrez bien la réunir demain aux environs de Haguenau, en la rapprochant le plus possible de la direction qu'elle doit prendre, et la mettre en marche toute entière après-demain, avec l'artillerie et tout ce qui en dépend, pour suivre la route qui lui est tracée. Comme votre division forme une masse de près de 2000 chevaux, il sera nécessaire de faire partir demain de bonne heure un ou plusieurs officiers pour lui faire assigner des cantonnements et préparer des fourrages. C'est avec le plus vif regret, mon cher général, que je vois éloigner cette belle division, sur laquelle je comptais tant, et que je perds un officier général aussi distingué que vous, mais partout où vous puissiez être, je vous prie de croire à tout mon intérêt et au sincère attachement que je vous porte. Comte Rapp." In: Stoff, L. – Essai sur le général Delort p.128

And the second read: "Strasbourg, le 5 juin, à 9 heures et demie du soir. Mon chère général, vous remarquerez dans l'ordre du major général qu'il est indispensable de partir sur le champ. Je pense que les régiments qui sont à Hatten et Durrenbach peuvent se rendre directement à Reishofen par Woerth; la route est beaucoup meilleure que celle de Haguenau. Vous pourriez alors partir demain, avec le reste de l'artillerie, pour Bitche. Mais je vous fais observer que le pays que vous allez traverser jusqu'à Sarreguemines offre très peu de ressources en fourrages et que les routes sont fort mauvaises surtout pour l'artillerie. Faites votre possible pour remplir le plus promptement et le mieux qu'il se pourra les ordres de l'empereur, et rendez-moi compte demain avant midi à Strasbourg de votre marche. etc." In: Stoff, L. – Essai sur le général Delort p.128 Both documents bear Delort's note: "Exécuté de suite."

²⁵ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.24

Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.202-203

The 1st division (Allix, 1st corps) moved in the period between the 4th and the 8th of June

from the far north-west of France (Bailleul) towards St.Amand, which is between Orchies and Nivelles (north-west of Valenciennes).

Cf. Captain Duthilt (aide de camp of the 1st brigade) - Les mémoires du capitaine Duthilt p.297

The 1st corps would have been assembled near Valenciennes by the 8th of June, while one battalion of the 54th regiment of the line (1st division) would still be at Calais. Cf. Geoffroy, lieutenant - Travaux d'étude et d'état major – étude sur la concentration de l'armée française du Nord en 1815 p.25

According to captain Robinaux, his battalion of the 2nd regiment of the line (division Jérôme Bonaparte, 2nd corps), was on the 6th of June at Dourlers, a village in the vicinity of Avesnes. In: Journal de route du capitaine Robinaux 1803-1832 p.204

Colonel Trefcon's account is confusing in this stage of preparations. He claims that the corps was ordered on the 2nd of June to move towards Maubeuge, and that this was complied with; having the corps headquarters at Maubeuge. The papers in Reille's original register of staff, however, make clear that at least corps headquarters was at Avesnes till 13th of June. He also incorrectly claims that the corps stood in and around Maubeuge until the 11th of June, when it would have taken up a position near Solre-sur-Sambre; in reality this took place on the 13th of June. In: Trefcon, T.J. - Carnet de campagne du colonel Trefcon 1793-1815 p.178

²⁶ Mazade, Ch. De (ed.) - Correspondance du maréchal Davout - Vol.IV nr.1750

²⁷ Correspondance nr.22022

²⁸ Correspondance nr.22025

²⁹ Mazade, Ch. De (ed.) - Correspondance du maréchal Davout - Vol.IV nr.1753

³⁰ Correspondance nr.22027

³¹ Correspondance nr.22028

³² Correspondance nr.22032

³³ Chuquet, A. – Inédits Napoléoniens nr.1665

³⁴ Correspondance nr.22029

³⁵ Correspondance nr.22031

³⁶ Correspondance nr.22030

On the 7th of June, Napoleon had ordered baron Peyrusse, the treasurer, to have the treasury, escorted by seven men, follow the Imperial Guard on the 8th of June. In: 1809-1815. Mémorial et archives p.310

³⁷ There are no special particulars for the 8th and 9th of June.

³⁸ SHAT, nr.C17/193

³⁹ SHAT, nr. C17/95 and C17/193

⁴⁰ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.25
Some Berthézène and Gourgaud claim that the corps started moving on the 6th of June. Cf. Berthézène - Souvenirs militaires p.356
Gourgaud, C. - La campagne de 1815 p.29
Clausewitz, Von - Hinterlassene Werke etc. p.35-36
Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.164
Captain Forget, member of staff of the 4th corps, mentions 9th of June. In: Chuquet, A. Lettres de 1815 p.308

⁴¹ Gourgaud, C. – La campagne de 1815 p.29
Mémoires pour servir etc. p.67

⁴² Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.208

⁴³ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.165
Stouff, L.- Essai sur le général Delort p.95

⁴⁴ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.206
Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.26
Geoffroy, lieutenant - Travaux d'étude et d'état major etc. p.24

⁴⁵ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.26
Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.204-205
According to the surgeon Lagneau, the 3rd regiment grenadiers left from Soissons to Laon, where it arrived at midnight of the 10th of June. In: Tattet, E. - Journal d'un chirurgien de la grande armée 1803-1815 p.297
The company of marines of the imperial guard left from Paris on the 7th of June and reached Soissons on the 10th. Cf. Lomier, E. - La bataillon des marins de la garde p.443

⁴⁶ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.26
The “battalion des marins de la garde” left Paris on the 7th and reached Soissons on the 10th of June. Cf. Lomier, E. - La bataillon des marins de la garde p.443

⁴⁷ Chuquet, A. - Inédits Napoleoniens nr.1684

⁴⁸ Correspondance nr.22044
Colonel Heymès. In: Relation etc. In: Documents inédits p.2

⁴⁹ SHAT, Ney's file - nr.12 MF/2
The fact that Ney was in Paris on the 11th of June is confirmed in his letter to Fouché, dated 26th of June 1815. In: LMB, nr.AS1301
Baron Peyrusse, treasurer, was surprised to find Ney in Paris on the 11th of June, while all other commanders were with the army, but the day after he learned that it had been only on the 11th of June that Davout had summoned Ney to join the army. In: 1809-1815. Mémorial et archives p.311

⁵⁰ Correspondance nr.22042

A slightly different version reads:

“Faites appeler Ney. S’il désire être à la première bataille, qu’il soit rendu le 13 à Avesnes, où sera mon quartier général.” In: Portefeuille pris etc. p.39

⁵¹ Mazade, Ch. De (ed.) - Correspondance du maréchal Davout - Vol.IV nr.1755

⁵² Marchand, L.J.N. Mémoires de Marchand. Vol. p.
Mémoires pour servir etc. p.67

⁵³ Marquiset, J. Deux étapes de Napoleon à Laon, 1909. In: Delloye, S. Napoleon dans sa dernière campagne p.29-30

Gourgaud, C. – La campagne de 1815 p.30

Mémoires pour servir etc. p.67

⁵⁴ Cf. Heymès. In: Documents inédits etc. p.2

Paris – Laon is about 130 kilometers; this would mean that Ney would have traveled in an average speed of almost 10 kilometers per hour.

According to Heymès, Ney would have spoken with Napoleon the other morning. In case this would be correct, one wonders about the reaction of Napoleon on the 15th of June and his letter to Ney of the morning of the 16th of June in which he explains the basic principle of the campaign and what is expected him. The first element in particular sets serious question marks to the conversation referred to. In: Documents inédits etc. p.2

Sometimes it is claimed that Ney had no staff of his own. However, Ney had - apart from colonel Heymès - colonel baron Prel, chef de bataillon Octave Levavasseur and the aide de camp Crabet at his disposal. In: Letter of Prel to marshal Pélissier, dated 27th december 1859. In: Aerts, W. Etudes etc. p.268

Octave Levavasseur, Souvenirs militaires p.298

Colonel Heymès also gives the names of Dutour and Rayot, Ney’s personal secretary and intendant respectively. According to Heymès, Ney would also have been on joined on the evening of the 16th of June by Devaux, another aide de camp. In: Relation etc. In: Documents inédits etc. p.12

⁵⁵ The French text not being available, it has been taken from:

Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.26

⁵⁶ SHAT nr. C17/193

⁵⁷ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.211

⁵⁸ Teste - Souvenirs p.168

Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.26

Geoffroy, lieutenant - Travaux d’étude et d’état major etc. p.24

Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.205-206

⁵⁹ SHAT nr.C15/5

⁶⁰ SHAT nr.C15/5

In the archives of Vincennes there is another note (most probably from Soult) stating basically the same; to whom it is directed is not indicated. It reads:

“Je vous prévient que la 14^e division de cavalerie commandé par le général Delort recois l’ordre de partir le 14 de Mézières pour se rendre à Rocroi. Elle continuera sa route par Chimay et Beaumont pour rejoindre l’armée et se réunir au 4^e corps de cavalerie dont elle fait partie.” In: SHAT, C17/193

⁶¹ The complete order reads: “Demain, 13 du courant les divisions composant le corps d’armée quitteront leurs cantonnemens pour se concentrer savoir
La 5^e division d’infanterie aux ordres de Mr.le lieutenant Bachelu se massera sur Jeumont et Solre sur Sambre où sera le quartier général de la division.

La 7^e division aux ordres de mr.le lieutenant Girard se placera à Requignies, Rocques et Marpent où sera le quartier général de la division.

La 6^e division commandé par son Alt. Imp.le prince Jérôme ira s’établir à Bercilliers, Boussigniers et Montignies où Son Altesse placera son quartier afin d’avoir une meilleure route, l’artillerie de cette division passera par Beaumont.

La 9^e division aux ordres de monsieur le lieutenant général Foy se placera à Colerette, Ostrignies et Cerfontaine où sera le quartier général de la division.

La 2^e division de cavalerie légère aux ordres du mr. le lieutenant général Piré à Latieri et Hantes où sera le quartier général de la division Sa batterie de reserve à Ferrière la Grande.

Le quartier général du corps sera établi à Solre sur Sambre.

Le mouvement de concentration devra se faire de manière à en dérober la connaissance aux ennemi, en conséquence les 6^e, 5^e et 7^e division d’infanterie laisseront leurs avant-postes sur la ligne où ils sont placés, recommandant la plus grande surveillance afin que personne ne puisse passer les frontières et donner connaissance à l’ennemi de ce qui se passe en arrière. Pour la même raison, si l’on est dans le cas d’allumer des feux, il faudra ne le faire que sur du revers où dans des fonds, d’où on ne puisse point être vus.

On aura cette attention toutes les fois, que l’on sera en présence de l’ennemi, ou à même d’être vu par lui.

Il sera laissé par division un officier supérieur pour prendre le commandement des avant-postes qui restent sur la ligne, cet officier sera chargé des les rallier au besoin et d’après les ordres qui lui en seront donnés de rejoindre sa division d’après les mouvements que le corps d’armée pourrait faire.

Les équipages auxiliaires n’étant point encore arrivés, la réserve de pain biscuité pour la 6^e division qui doit être transporté d’Avesnes à Solre-le-Château suivra le mouvement de sa division sur des voitures de réquisition.

La réserve de pain biscuité pour les autres divisions sera chargé par le soins de l’ordonnateur en chef pour suivre les mouvements du corps d’armée.

Le soldat qui doit avoir déjà pour quatre jours de pain devra en prendre encore pour deux jours soit en pain fraise soit en pain biscuité de manière à être servi jusques au 18.inclus. La 6^e division recevra cette distribution au moyen du pain parti d’Avesnes. Les autres divisions le recevront à Maubeuge. La cavalerie devra la prendre à Avesnes.” In: SHAT, C15 nr.22

⁶² Mémoires pour servir etc. p.67

⁶³ Delloye, S. - Napoleon dans sa dernière campagne p.31

Napoleon à Avesnes en 1815. p.15

During his visit, Napoleon would have paid a visit to the church of Saint Nicolas and the cemetery of the Madeleine, from where the old ramparts of the city could be observed. In:

Mossay, J. – Histoire de la ville d’Avesnes, p.

⁶⁴ Gourgaud, C. – La campagne de 1815 p.30

Germain claims general d’Erlon spoke to the emperor on the 14th of June at Avesnes; if it was there, it must have been on the 13th of June instead. In: J.B.Drouet d’Erlon. Maréchal de Franc etc. p.156

Ney would have reached Avesnes during the morning hours and dined with Napoleon, but in relation to the distance between Laon and Avesnes (about 70 kilometers), it would be more logical to suppose that Ney reached Avesnes in the afternoon. Cf. Colonel Heymès. In: Documents inédits etc. p.2

⁶⁵ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.225

Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.27

The 1st division of Allix assembled at 6 a.m. at Préseaux (about 7 kilometers south-east of Valenciennes), at the road from Valenciennes to Berlaimont. In the evening its 1st brigade stood at Berlaimont (about 12 kilometers south-west of Maubeuge) and the 2nd brigade at Aulnoy les Berlaimont and Aymeries. Cf. Captain Duthilt (aide de camp of the 1st brigade) - Les mémoires du capitaine Duthilt p.297

On the 13th of June, the division of Donzelot assembled at 7 a.m. at Villers-Pol (about 7 kilometers south-east of Valenciennes), where it received the order to move to Pont-sur-Sambre. That night it bivouaced at Hautmont and Saint-Rémi (about 4 kilometers south-west of Maubeuge). Cf. Report of general Schmitz. In: Brouwet, E. – “Mémoires et documents sur la campagne de 1815.” In: Revue des études Napoléoniennes. (1932) p.360-365

Colonel Marbot confirms his regiment (the 7th regiment of hussars) stood at Pont-sur-Sambre on the 13th of June. In: Mémoires du général baron de Marbot p.374

⁶⁶ From Solre-sur-Sambre, baron Pamphile Lacroix, chief of staff of Reille, wrote to Jérôme Bonaparte that evening:

Mon prince,

J’ai l’honneur d’annoncer à Votre Altesse que la 2^e compagnie de sapeurs du génie est envoyée à la 6^e division d’infanterie dont elle fera désormais partie ainsi que les officiers qui la commandent.

J’ai l’honneur etc., le lieutenant général, chef de l’état major général du 2^e corps, baron Pamphile Lacroix

Le capitaine du génie Leroux Douville a reçu l’ordre de se rendre à Votre quartier général pour être employé dans la 6^e division

In: SHAT nr. C15 / 5

⁶⁷ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.27

Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.224-225

Robinaux,

Arvers, P. - Historique du 82^e régiment d’infanterie de ligne et du 7^e régiment d’infanterie légère (1684-1876) p.160

⁶⁸ Baron Rippert, chief of staff of the 2nd cavalry division (Piré) wrote that evening from Hantes to the chief of staff of the 6th infantry division (Jérôme Bonaparte), colonel Sarlot [?]: à monsieur Sarlot [?] chef d'état major de la 6^e division à Montigmes au quartier général à Hantes, le 13 juin à 7 heures du soir.

Mon cher colonel,

Mr.le lieutenant général comte de Piré commandant la 2^e division de cavalerie du 2^e corps a pris conscience de la lettre que vous avez écrit à mr.le maréchal de camp Huber: mr.le comte de Piré me charge de vous dire qu'il va faire faire la visite de la ligne sur le point que vous lui désignez et particulièrement de la ferme de Dansonprenne qu'après le rattachement [sic] qui lui sera fait il le fera occuper convenablement s'il trouve que cela soit nécessaire. Je vous prie etc.

baron Rippert

In: SHAT, C 15 / 5

⁶⁹ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.27

⁷⁰ Original in SHAT, nr.C15/5

⁷¹ Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.28

Callatay took it from: Portefeuille pris etc. p.98

⁷² Fantin des Odoards. - Journal du général Fantin des Odoards. Etapes d'un officier de la grande armée p.428

According to Lefol, his division was on the night of the 13th of June at Trélon. In: Souvenirs sur le retour de l'empereur Napoleon de l'île d'Elbe et sur la campagne de 1815 p.58

Regnault claims the corps was that night near Philippeville. In: La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.225

⁷³ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.227-228

⁷⁴ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.225

Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.27

⁷⁵ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.225

Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.28

On the 12th of June, the 3rd regiment of grenadiers was at Clairefontaine, and on the 13th of June at Cartigny. In: Tattet, E. - Journal d'un chirurgien de la grande armée 1803-1815 p.297

⁷⁶ Gisbert. Campagne de Belgique (1815) (états d'emplacements). SHAT (MR.895) - table

The table referred to gives an outline of the positions of the different corps of the Armée du Nord over the period 1st of June, 7th – 14th of June. In its general outline it matches my conclusions about these positions, except for those applicable to the 4th infantry corps and the initial stages of the cavalry corps.

⁷⁷ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.226

Callatay, Ph. De – The concentration of the French army etc. p.27
le Moine de Margon. Historique du 11^e régiment de dragons p.167
Historique du 5^{me} régiment de hussards p.104
Biot, H.F.- Campagnes et garnisons p.232

⁷⁸ The 1st regiment of cuirassiers (brigade Dubois, division of Wathier) was at Solre le Chateau les Fontaines and Beauvieux on the evening of the 13th of June. Cf. Histoire du 1er régiment de cuirassiers p.160

⁷⁹ Regnault, J. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.226

⁸⁰ Cf. Soult's order dated 12th of June to Grouchy (above).

⁸¹. Original in SHAT, C15/193
Copy in register of staff. In: Bibl.nat. 4366
Correspondance nr.22049
Grouchy, Mémoires III p.440-444
Gourgaud, C. Campagne de dix-huit cent quinze. p.153

⁸² Lobau had to be at Laon on the 6th of June at the latest. One of his divisions was at Laon already, while the other was at Guise, 40 kilometers from Laon. It would have two days to cover this distance.
Headquarters was at Compiègne, 80 kilometers away from Laon.
The imperial guard had to cover the distance Paris – Soissons (about 100 kilometers) within 6 to 7 days.

⁸³ It is most unfortunate that Davout's draft is unavailable.
Striking detail is that Napoleon asks Davout for the current total strength of the total forces of the Armée du Nord.

⁸⁴ In: Correspondance nr.22040
In another publication, there is an undated note stating:
"Note de la main de Bonaparte:
Juin. Le 12, départ de Paris et coucher à Laon
Le 13, coucher à Avesnes
Le 14, coucher à B [Beaumont, which has been added by the author].
In: Portefeuille pris etc. p.32
The way it is written it seems to be some sort of planning for the advance of Napoleon himself towards the army, but the last line is puzzling due to its incompleteness and due to the unavailability of the original document.

⁸⁵ Rocroi is about 30 kilometers south of Philippeville.
Presuming the corps could leave on the 7th of June, it had to cover almost 200 kilometers in seven days, i.e. 28 kilometers a day.

⁸⁶ Presuming Vandamme received the order on the 8th of June, it meant that he had 5 days to cover the 60 kilometers between Mézières and his destination.

⁸⁷ Correspondance nr.22021

⁸⁸ Von Lettow Vorbeck also criticizes Napoleon for sending Soult out at this stage of preparations. In: Napoleon's Untergang p.221

⁸⁹ Cf. Oosterman, J.T.- Opmarsch en concentratie van het Franse leger in Juni 1815 p.778
Oosterman believes that Soult's presence at Lille may also have been intended as a diversion, but as Soult was supposed to travel incognito, I do not believe this was the case.

⁹⁰ Geoffroy, lieutenant - Travaux d'étude et d'état major – étude sur la concentration de l'armée française du Nord en 1815 p.26

⁹¹ Some days later, on the 12th of June, the 1st division Allix of the 1st corps was assembled in conjunction with the 2nd one of Donzelot in villages immediately south of Valenciennes. The situation was:

54th regiment of the line at Lary

55th regiment of the line at Famars

28th regiment of the line at Aulnoit

105th regiment of the line at Trith St.Léger

Cf. Captain Duthilt (aide de camp of the 1st brigade) - Les mémoires du capitaine Duthilt p.297

On the 12th of June, the division of Donzelot (1st corps) left its cantonments from Hasprès and Denain (south-west of Valenciennes) for Valenciennes in order to assemble; after that the division was in bivouacs at Pressan, Mariche and their surroundings. Cf. Report of general Schmitz. In: Brouwet, E. – "Mémoires et documents sur la campagne de 1815." In: Revue des études Napoléoniennes. (1932) p.360-365

⁹² Regnault points to the responsibilities of Monthion in this respect, but this is not fair as Napoleon was well aware of the fact that Soult was not at Laon and he could have taken preventive measures to avoid the delays which now occurred. In: La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.217-218

For Oosterman as well, it was Napoleon who was responsible for Soult's absence. In: Opmarsch en concentratie van het Franse leger in Juni 1815 p.2

⁹³ Grouchy himself claims he was at Laon for ten days before he received any orders. This is incorrect. He reached Laon on the 5th of June and he received his orders on the 13th of June. In: Relation de la campagne de 1815 p.9

⁹⁴ Beaufort is about 20 kilometers west of Beaumont.

⁹⁵ Callataÿ, Ph. de - The concentration of the French army for the campaign of June 1815 p.26-27

⁹⁶ Oosterman suggests that Soult changed Napoleon's orders on purpose, but gives no proper arguments for this claim which in my mind cannot be substantiated in any way. In: Opmarsch en concentratie van het Franse leger in Juni 1815 p.6-7

⁹⁷ Leaving Fontoy on the 7th of June, the division of De Bourmont moved to Mouzon, a

distance of about 100 kilometers, in four days.

The division of Pécheux, leaving Thionville on the 8th of June, reached Signy in three days; total distance about 80 kilometers.

Vichery's division, coming from Metz on the 9th of June, reached Etain the next day; total distance about 50 kilometers.

⁹⁸ This report could be a result of the arrival of the order of the 10th of June, but this is not sure.

⁹⁹ Cf. Lettow Vorbeck. O.von – Napoleon's Untergang p.220

Regnault claims the echelons were caused by the fact that there was only one decent road along the Meuse, but from the marches of the divisions of the Armée de la Moselle up to Mouzon it becomes clear that they followed different roads. In: La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.165

¹⁰⁰ The divisions of Bourmont, Pécheux and Vichery covered that days each about 40 kilometers, while the one of Maurin marched about 56 kilometers.

¹⁰¹ Cf. account of Bonnemains. In: SHAT, nr. C15

Callataÿ, Ph. de - The concentration of the French army for the campaign of June 1815 p.27-28

¹⁰² Houssaye states the concentration of the cavalry wasn't delayed, but at the same time blames Soult for the situation - which is in my mind not correct for the reasons mentioned. In: 1815.Waterloo p.102

¹⁰³ The total distance between Mézières and Beaumont is 80 kilometers, so it meant that Delort had to cover 40 kilometers a day, which was not an unusual stage for a body of cavalry.

¹⁰⁴ The first echelon was to leave on the 4th (or on the 5th of June at the latest) from Paris and Compiègne (through Dammartin) to Soissons, a total stretch of about 100 kilometers.

In Paris were the 3rd and 4th chasseurs à pied, while the the Young Guard, the artillery, the équipages militaires, the sappers and miners, the cavalry and the administration of the corps were at Compiègne.

The second echelon, consisting of more cavalry and the 3rd and 4th regiment of grenadiers, was supposed to leave from Paris on the 6th of June.

The third echelon, consisting of the 3rd regiments of voltigeurs and tirailleurs and of the 2nd regiments of grenadiers and chasseurs, was supposed to leave from Compiègne and Paris on the 7th of June.

Finally, as a fourth echelon, the 1st regiments of grenadiers and chasseurs were supposed to leave from Paris on the 8th of June. These schedules left the units 3 to 7 days to cover the stretch of about 100 kilometers.

The artillery was supposed to arrive at Soissons on the 7th of June and to reorganise there in the next three three days.

Cf. Correspondance nrs.22006, 22022 and 22031

In this last document, Napoleon expected to have the majority of the guard at Soissons by the evening of the 9th of June, and somewhere between Laon and Avesnes on the 10th. It is an

unrealistic prognosis, taking into account that the corps was on the 10th of June at Soissons and that the distance between Soisson and a point halfway between Laon and Avesnes was 60 kilometers further north.

Letter nr. 22006, dated 3rd of June, mentions for the departure on the 7th of June the 4th regiments of grenadiers and chasseurs à pied, but these must be read as the 2nd regiments. Additionally, several regiments of cavalry are mentioned which eventually did not form part of the cavalry of the guard.

The same was the case for the 4th regiment of voltigeurs and tirailleurs which were due to leave on the 12th of June for Laon, where they had to arrive on the 15th of June. They were supposed to form a new brigade of the 2nd division of the imperial guard. Eventually, these units did not reach the army in time. Cf. order to Drout dated 7th of June. In: Correspondance nr.22031

General Petit (1st regiment of grenadiers) confirms that the guard marched towards the north in different columns, but doesn't state when his regiment reached the majority of the guard. In: Moore-Smith, G.C. - General Petit's account of the Waterloo campaign p.322

¹⁰⁵ The distance between Beaumont – Chimay is about 25 kilometers.