

14th – 20th of May

The formation of Wellington's army.

Some days after the 16th May Wellington must have received a writing of earl Bathurst in which he expressed his hope that units which had arrived in England from America would reach Belgium late May.¹

Bathurst also wrote: "the Royal artillery, the sappers and staff corps, 7th and 43rd foot and part of the 95th regiment did not leave mobile so early as the rest of the troops, but they may be expected in a fortnight, and as these corps are understood to be in excellent order, they will be sent directly to Ostend."²

Apparently, Wellington had a clear idea about the strength of his cavalry eventually as on the 15th of May he wrote to Uxbridge:

"I have given directions that the two heavy 6 pounders with each troop of horse artillery shall be changed for 9 pounders; but I leave the howitzers with the troop, being convinced that the heavy howitzer is an useful instrument. I have delayed the alteration of the brigading of the cavalry till the whole shall arrive and I will communicate with you again upon it."³

Wellington's intelligence.

Based upon several French reports, it was on the 14th of May that Lionel Hervey, the British representative at the exile court in Ghent, sent the information to the duke of Wellington that there was a concentration of a great mass of troops in and around Maubeuge, but that there was no news about the whereabouts of Napoleon himself. The roads of the Ardennes, Sers, Philippeville and Givet would have been broken up.

Additionally, Hervey enclosed a detailed report on the situation of the fortress of Philippeville. Information from the 10th of May from Valenciennes indicated that the enemy would be breaking up all the roads on their right and that they were making preparations for the destruction of all the bridges at a moment's notice. All the boats on the Sambre and Meuse were seized and sunk.⁴

The same day, the prince of Orange wrote to Wellington about the presence of three battalions and a depot of dragoons at Maubeuge, of a numerous cavalry around Avesnes, of 10.800 men of Vandamme at Mézières-Charleville, of 750 men at Rocroy, 300 men at La Capelle, 150 men at Chimay and 650 men at Beaumont. 300 men would be at Pont Sambre.⁵

On the 15th of May, general Zieten still mentioned the French concentration between Maubeuge, Givet and Avesnes, but gave no further strengths (only that of the corps of Vandamme between Rocroy and Charleville, of 30.000 men); at the same time, he confirmed a strong defensive attitude on the frontier.⁶

From Mons, Von Dörnberg reported then about the presence of about 20.000 French at Laon.⁷

It was on the 16th of May that a report of the prince of Orange dropped in at the duke's headquarters stating that there would be 30.000 men at Avesnes and near Beaumont. At Avesnes there would be 60 guns and at Maubeuge works would be carried out to defend it with 60.000 men.⁸

And the same day, Wellington wrote to Hardinge: "I enclose a memorandum which I have drawn from intelligence I have recently received, from which the marshal will see the strength and disposition of the French army; and that with the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 6th corps, and the Guards, and the 3rd division of cavalry of reserve, we have a good lot of them in front. I should think not less than 110.000 men.

I heard yesterday that Vandamme's corps had moved to its left and had brought its right upon Givet. There are a great number of troops about Maubeuge, Avesnes etc.

I heard also that measures had been taken to move the Guards from Paris to Maubeuge in forty eight hours; and that an aide de camp of the Emperor was there on the 12th. It is reported, also, that Soult has accepted the office of major general, which is important, as it will induce many officers to serve Buonaparte; and I believe it to be true, as I see that Mortier is employed.”

The memorandum Wellington refers to, and destined for the king of the Netherlands, Blücher, Wrede and Schwarzenberg, contains - in summary - the following information about the strength and positions of the French forces:

- “-1st corps (d’Erlon), 19.200 infantry, 3600 cavalry – between Valenciennes and Condé
- 2nd corps (Reille), 24.00 infantry, 5400 cavalry – at Avesnes etc.
- 3rd corps (Vandamme), 14.000-15.000 men – between Mézières and Rocroi
- 4th corps (Rapp), 14.400 infantry, 1800 cavalry – at Metz
- 5th corps, not strong – at Strassbourg and on the Upper Rhine
- 6th corps (Lobau), 19.200 infantry, 3600 cavalry- at Laon
- 7th corps, 9600 infantry, some cavalry – at Chambéry
- 8th corps (Clusel), 8400 infantry, 2400 cavalry – on the frontier of the Pyrenees
- 9th corps (Brune), - at Aix, Toulon, Tarascon etc.
- Imperial Guard, 20.000 men, - at Paris

These forces are divided into four principal armies and three corps of observation:

- army of the North, consisting of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 6th corps and three divisions of the reserve of cavalry
- army of the Moselle, consisting of the 4th corps
- army of the Rhine, consisting of the 5th corps
- army of the Alps, consisting of the 7th corps
- corps of observation de Jura (Lecourbe), to observe the débouchés from Befort to Geneva
- corps of observation of the Var, for the defence of the Var
- corps of observation of the Pyrenees, for the defence of the Pyrenees

Additionally, the national guards to join the army in the field and to form the garrisons of the strong places. For the cavalry, 21.250 horses were produced, of which it was expected that they would have reached their regiments in the first week in May, and will increase the cavalry to 41.300 men. “⁹

Von Dörnberg wrote to lord FitzRoy Somerset on the 16th of may about the possible presence of 20.000 men at Laon and about the fortification of the position there. ¹⁰

It was probably in this period of May, that the duke of Wellington got the papers sent by earl Bathurst on the 12th of May about the organisation and location of the French forces in the country. According to these papers the 1st corps would then be between Valenciennes and Condé, the 2nd corps at Avesnes, the 3rd corps at Mézières and Rocroy and the 6th corps at Laon.¹¹

Another report, dated on or after the 17th of May reported to Wellington about the military situation in and around Paris on the 10th of May and of the one of the 17th of May about the army of the Moselle, between Bitch and Longwy. ¹²

On the 18th of May, lord Hill wrote to Brussels about the movements of French forces from Valenciennes and Maubeuge towards Lille and Dunkirk. ¹³

And on the 19th of May the prince of Orange reported to the duke about the forces which were assembled about Avesnes and which would have moved towards Valenciennes. ¹⁴

Information, forwarded by sir C.W.Flint to Wellington informed him about the absence of line-infantry in the places fortes (having been replaced by gardes nationales), and about the

presence of about 130.000 men on the line Thionville-Dunkerque, to be reinforced in 14 days with another 50.000 men.¹⁵ Additionally, Von Dörnberg reported about the presence of Napoleon at Paris on the 17th of May, but that he was to leave soon from the capital, where works were carried out in great activity; troops would have been ordered north.¹⁶

On the 19th of May, Wellington himself wrote to lord Uxbridge that the French cavalry now would count 16.000 men, of which 6000 cuirassers; they would get horses to mount 42.000 cavalry, heavy and light.¹⁷

It may have been on the 20th of May that an intelligence report as sent by Gneisenau reached Wellington. It was dated 19th of May and comprised information on the composition and force of the French corps. It contained the following information:

-it seemed that all roads leading from Beaumont into the interior have been blocked

-includes a list of troops in cantonments between Avesnes, Beaumont and Maubeuge: total about 6000 infantry, 340 cavalry and 72 guns.

-also includes a detailed report on the composition of the French army (dated 17th may):

1st corps, d'Erlon, headquarters at Valenciennes, 24000-25000 men

2nd corps, Reille, headquarters at Marvilles, 35.000 men

3rd corps, Vandamme, headquarters at Mézières, 20000-30000 men

4th corps, Gérard, headquarters at Metz, 15.000-20.000 men

5th corps, Rapp, headquarters at Strassbourg – strength unknown

6th corps, Lobau, headquarters at Paris or Laon, - strength ?

7th corps, at Chambéry

8th corps, Clausel, at Bordeaux

In the British document a comparisn is made with a report of the duke of Wellington, and the following differences are noted:

1st corps: Wellington 12.000 less

2nd corps: Wellington 5000 less

3rd corps: idem

4th corps: commander is Gérard and not Rapp; Wellington: 4000 less

5th corps: led by Rapp

Further, the Prussian report is more detailed as far as the composition of the units is concerned.¹⁸

On the 14th of May, the prince of Orange wrote to Wellington:

“Yesterday I went to Nivelles and Arquennes, to look at the ground near these two places. At Arquennes I do not think that I could stop the progress of the enemy for any time; but at Nivelles I think it can be done very effectually, there being a very fair and not extensive position close behind the town, to which the town would be the centre. Nivelles being quite surrounded by high walls and towers, can easily be defended, as a strong post; the cross road from Braine-le-Comte to Nivelles is very good in dry weather; the distance is only 2 ½ leagues. There is likewise a chemin de terre from Nivelles to Braine-le-Chateau and from thence to Halle, which has been reported to me as very practicable for artillery in dry weather.”¹⁹

The invasion into France.

Whatever ideas the prince may have had on defence, others were more fixed upon an invasion into France.

For instance, Lord Hill wrote to his sister, miss Emma Hill, on the 15th of May:

“The collection of French troops on the frontier mentioned in my last, appears to have been in consequence of an apprehension on the part of the French that we were about to attack them. Matters are now nearly in the same state as they have been for some time; the allies are coming up, and in the course of another fortnight, I imagine will be in a state to move forward.”²⁰

And one day later, Wellington wrote to count De Blacas:

“Je vous prie de réfléchir bien sur le principe que je vais vous énoncer. La puissance de Buonaparte en France est fondée sur le militaire et sur rien autre; et il faut ou détruire ou contenir le militaire avant que le peuple puisse même ose parler. Pour opérer contre le militaire Français en France, avec effet, il faut des armées nombreuses, qui ne laissent pas la chose long-tems en doute. Alors le peuple pourra parler et agir sans courir risque d’être détruit, et avec effet.”

And to the duc de Feltre:

“Nous sommes dans ce moment sur la défensive, et si les circonstances permettaient à Buonaparte d’attaquer ce pays-ci, il faudrait bien que nous laissons quelques parties, ou dégarnies ou très peu garnies; et tout ce qui s’y trouverait serait en danger d’être perdu.”²¹

And on the 20th of May, Wellington wrote to the count of Blacas,

“Le retard de l’arrivée des troupes est malheureux, mais il est dans la nature des choses. On ne peut pas faire arriver des troupes de l’Amérique et du fond de la Gallice et de la Pologne d’un coté et de Lisbonne de l’autre, sans qu’il ne se passe du tems; et quand on pense qu’il s’est passé à peine deux mois que les puissances alliées ont reçu les nouvelles de l’état des choses en France, qui les ont fait croire qu’un effort était nécessaire et qu’on voit les préparatifs déjà faits, on est vraiment étonné.”²²

As far as the invasion of France was concerned, it was lord Stewart who summarized on the 18th of May the principles of his wishes to the duke himself:

“First. To finish completely the affairs in Italy with Murat.

Secondly. To keep the Piedmont operations quite separate from those of the army of the Upper Rhine, which must be wholly dependent on the movements of the army of the right and centre, on the principle you have laid down, approaching as much as the facilities of subsistence will allow.

Thirdly. To press forward with the utmost celerity all the troops to form the 150.000 men on the left and in the centre, while you will take your own measures.”²³

To Prussian general headquarters, general Zieten on the 15th of May still mentioned the French concentration between Maubeuge, Givet and Avesnes, but at the same time he gave no further strengths (only that of the corps of Vandamme between Rocroy and Charleville, of 30.000 men); at the same time, he confirmed a strong defensive attitude on the frontier.²⁴

Two days later, Hardinge must have received Wellington’s memorandum on the strength and composition of the French army (see above), whereas Gneisenau had drawn his on the 19th.

Prince Schwarzenberg had written to Blücher about his idea that Napoleon was not ready to invade Belgium. As it had dropped in at headquarters at Namur on the 17th of May, Blücher replied to the prince on the 20th:

“[...] mehrere Bewegungen des Feindes gegen den 10.Mai liessen den Herzog Wellington vermuten, dass der Feind eine Offensive beabsichtigte, und ich habe daher meine Armee zur Unterstützung der Niederlande an die obere Maas zusammenrücken lassen. Jetzt aber wird es klar, dass die Bewegungen mehr defensiv gewesen sind [...]

Mit den Grundsätzen Ew.Durchlaucht über die künftigen Operationen bin ich im allgemeinen einverstanden und habe nur folgende Bemerkungen hinzuzufügen:

Gewiss muss einer jeden der Haupt-Armeen ein bestimmter Ausgangspunkt der Operationen vorgezeichnet werden, von dem aus schliesslich ein gemeinschaftliches Vorgehen auf Paris stattfinden soll. Diese Operationspunkte müssten für alle Armeen ungefähr in gleicher Entfernung von Paris bestimmt werden, nämlich für die Armee Ew.Durchlaucht Auxerre und Troyes, für die russische Armee Châlons, für die englisch-preussische Armee Ham und Laon. Da die Entfernungen welche die verschiedenen Armeen bis zu diesen Punkten zurückzulegen haben, verschieden sind, so würden die jenen Punkten zunächst stehenden Armeen zwar sogleich die Festungsreihe Frankreichs zu durchschneiden haben aber, um dann nicht isoliert zu agieren, sich durch Belagerung einiger Festungen und durch Befestigung wichtiger Plätze eine solide Basis zu verschaffen suchen, und erst wenn die entfernteren Armeen sich Ihren obengenannten Operationspunkten nähern, auch die ihnen bestimmten zu erreichen suchen. Die Aufgabe der russischen Armee, sie bloss als Unterstützung rechts und links zu wenden, scheint mir vielen Schwierigkeiten unterworfen zu sein; ich würde daher vorschlagen, diese Armee von Mainz gerade auf Nancy und Chalons vorgehen zu lassen und sie von dort erst zur Unterstützung beider Flügel-Armeen zu verwenden, resp. sie erforderlichenfalls selbst zu unterstützen.

Noch muss ich Ew.Durchlaucht bemerken, dass die Verzögerung des Anfangs der Operationen bis zum 16.Juni mir sehr unangenehm ist. Ich habe alle zu meiner Armee bestimmten Truppen mit grösster Eile und Anstrengung herangezogen. Vierzehn Infanterieregimenter haben den Marsch von der Elbe bis Aachen in 11 und 12 Tagen vollendet, und bis zum 24.Mai sind alle meine Truppen beisammen. Das Vergebliche dieser Anstrengung und die Schwierigkeit, noch fasst einen Monat in diesen Gegenden zu leben, müssen bei mir den Wunsch erwecken, dass die Operationen doch, wie es früher bestimmt war, mit den ersten Tagen des Juni ihren Anfang nehmen möchten. Die Zeit, die wir verlieren, gewinnt der Feind; er begründet seine Macht im Innern des Landes [...]"²⁵

It was also in the context of the planned invasion of France that on the 16th of May the commander at Wesel, Von Perbrandt, was ordered by Gneisenau for the "Abmarsch der Pontons von Wesel zur Armee in 8 Tagen."²⁶

This request links to the request as put out by Gneisenau, through sir Hudson Lowe, and in the middle of May as well, by Wellington to lord Bathurst "to have a battering train and rockets collected at Antwerp, some [of our] rope bridges [with the army], and 30.000 stand of arms [...]"²⁷

Yet, it had already been on the 5th of May that Wellington had written to Bathurst: "I think it will be desirable that the vessels containing all the three divisions of the battering train which has been prepared should be sent to Antwerp without a loss of time."²⁸

The situation was that the Prussians lacked these means which were necessary for the sieg-war in the north of France and therefore they asked them from the British to supply them.

As this request was put into Wellington's attention by sir Hudson Lowe, the duke replied to Gneisenau on the 20th of May:

"Tell Gneisenau that the battering train is arriving every day, and will amount to 200 pieces. They had better, however, try to get up some from Wesel; as, although we shall be glad to assist them, we cannot at once answer for being able to do so to the extent they may desire.

I have ordered four rope bridges to be constructed, which will, I imagine, answer all our purposes, as we can use for them the floors of the pontoon bridges; they will not be difficult to move. I have recommended to lord Bathurst to give the arms required."²⁹

By the end of May there were 76 heavy guns on ships at Antwerp and almost two weeks later - on the 11th of June - 180 of these guns were available for immediate use. The overall intention, however, was to have about 200 of them by the end of that month.³⁰

As by the 12th or 13th of June more guns had left for Antwerp [³¹], the battering train there was completed some days later as consisting “of two hundred and forty-five heavy guns and mortars; two hundred and eighty-eight thousand rounds of shot and shells ; nineteen thousand barrels of gunpowder, with a pontoon train, and other heavy stores.”³²

Probably to link up with the outposts of the army of the Netherlands, it was major Von Reiche, chief of staff of the 1st corps, who had requested the general headquarters to extend the cantonments of the 1st brigade across the old Roman road. It was granted by Von Grolmann on the 16th of May. He wrote:

“Auf Euer Hochwohlgeboren Anfrage wegen einiger weiteren Ausdehnung Ihrer Quartiere über die Römerstrasse hinaus, benachrichtige ich Sie, dass diese Ausdehnung ohne Bedenken stattfinden kann, in sofern Sie nur vermeiden mit den belgischen Truppen im Kollision zu kommen. Namur, den 16ten Mai 1815. V.Grolman”³³

On the 14th of May, Von Grolman also issued an instruction to all corps-commanders to keep central headquarters informed about any changes in cantonments:

“Da es nothwendig ist, dass das Armee-Kommando fortwährend von den Kantonnements-Bezirken der verschiedenen Armee-Koprs unterrichtet sei, um bei neuen Anweisungen von Kantonnements nicht Irrungen zu veranlassen, da es ferner nöthig ist, bei dringenden Fällen wo vom General-Kommando unmittelbar über gewisse Brigaden verfügt werden muss, die Kantonierungs-Bezirke der Brigaden zu kennen, so ersuche ich Ew.mir bei jedesmaliger Dislokation

1. die Umfangslinie des Kantonnements des ganzen Armee-Koprs mitzutheilen, in soweit diese Umfangslinie die Kantonirungen der andern Armee-Korps berührt.
2. Die Vertheilung der Brigaden in den Kantonnements-Bezirken den Abschnitten nach zu bezeichnen, wobei besonders die Hauptquartiers der Brigade Chefs zu bemerken.”³⁴

The intelligence departments.

Before entering into the observations on this chapter, I would briefly like to enter upon the way the allied commanders had organised their intelligence.³⁵

For the intelligence he needed, the duke of Wellington had not only ample means in the sense of funding, he also had a large network of diplomats, military men, civilians etc. to his disposal.

There were those of the royalist and government circles with whom he had cooperated during the time he had spent as British ambassador. Apart from that, Wellington had his contacts within the court in exile in Ghent, which had in its turn contacts in France.

At Paris, Wellington had spies in for instance general Bertrand's cabinet. Bertrand was Grand Master of the Palace and a close advisor of Napoleon. His wife was a niece of colonel Henry Dillon, a serving British officer, who used this family connection to obtain sensitive information.

Within the Ministry of Police, it was Fouché, the minister himself, who was in touch with Wellington about Napoleon's intentions.

Further, it was through informants at Paris that Wellington almost on a daily base received information through express post, including the daily newspaper, the Moniteur.

In Belgium itself, the centre for the gathering of intelligence was at Mons, on the road from Paris to Brussels.

Here, major-general Von Dörnberg, a Hanoverian Peninsular veteran, was placed.³⁶ He gathered his intelligence through spies sent into France with special missions [³⁷], scouts,

farmers, travellers and French citizens. Further, he received newspapers which he forwarded to Wellington in Brussels.

All the reports which he sent on a regular base to Brussels also went through the headquarters of the prince of Orange at Braine le Comte.³⁸

Von Dörnberg was also in touch with general Von Zieten at Charleroi, i.e. Zieten reported to Von Dörnberg as well.³⁹ In his turn, Zieten reported to Wellington as well.⁴⁰

In his turn, Wellington himself used the line through the army of the Netherlands as an information channel towards Zieten as he wrote to Zieten on the 9th of May: "Je vous ferai savoir par les postes des troupes des Pays Bas toutes les nouvelles que j'apprendrai." (see below)⁴¹

It had been since somewhere late March that Von Dörnberg had been working at Mons for the intelligence for the prince of Orange and his military secretary, colonel Colborne.

Some days after Wellington had taken over the command, on the 16th of April, Von Dörnberg no longer reported to Colborne, but to the duke's military secretary, lord FitzRoy Somerset, in Brussels.⁴²

Not longer after, on the 25th of April, it was sir Hudson Lowe who wrote a "Memorandum respecting the formation of an intelligence department to be attached to the head-quarters of the army." The main point in this proposal was the appointment of "an officer belonging or attached to the Quartermaster-general's department to be specifically charged with this duty."⁴³

The result was that four days later, Wellington wrote to major general Sir H.Torrens: "I had also desired lord FitzRoy Somerset to write to lieutenant colonel Grant of the 11th regiment, to beg him to come out with the intention of employing him at the head of the intelligence department, which he hoped would be approved of; and lieutenant colonel Scovell at the head of the department of military communications. It is quite impossible for me to superintend the detail of the duties of these departments myself, having already more to arrange than I am equal to, and I cannot intrust them to the young gentlemen on the staff of this army."⁴⁴

Lieutenant colonel Colquhoun Grant had been Wellington's head of intelligence in the Peninsula and as such had spent times behind enemy lines; he even was taken prisoner there, but escaped. He returned in Wellington's service in 1813.

Grant accepted the appointment and reached Brussels on the 12th of May.

From there he left for Mons, where he tried to organise a system of agents on the frontier, but Grant was not able to recruit anyone of the sort he wanted at all. Yet, Grant was able to involve an agent who was working at the ministry of war. From this position, he was able to deliver Grant information about the strengths, destinations, routes and tim-schemes of Napoleon's forces.⁴⁵

Most of the intelligence covered by the Prussians was channeled to the duke by lieutenant colonel sir Henry Hardinge, Wellington's liaison at Blücher's headquarters. Hardinge had this post since the 12th of April, but it was after the meeting at Tirlemont (from the 4th of May onwards) that he reported – with very few exceptions - on a daily base to the duke of Wellington.⁴⁶

The army of the Netherlands.

At Mons, there was another man who was supposed to gain intelligence, but he was to report back to the prince of Orange and not to Wellington directly. This was baron Behr, the commander at Mons.

About his role, the duke of Wellington wrote on the 8th of May to the prince of Orange:

“I enclose a report received this morning from General Behr at Mons. It appears to me that the general has misunderstood the King’s order; at least, he has not understood it as I do. I understand that all reports are to reach me in the usual channel; that is to say, they ought to go first to Your Royal Highness, and Your Royal Highness would send me such as you would deem it necessary I should have knowledge of. It would be quite impossible for me to attempt to conduct the details of the Dutch army.

That which I would recommend therefore to Your Royal Highness is, that you should give an order explaining that of the King, in which you should point out in what channel the reports are to be made. You should submit it to His Majesty first, and let me see it.

Those reports then which I should beg your Royal Highness to communicate to me are those in which the British or Hanoverian troops may be concerned, or the permanent garrisons and ports of the country, or the enemy. The orders from the government will remain as directed by the King.”⁴⁷

Yet, by the 5th of June, Behr’s role still doesn’t seem to have been that clear as at that date Constant Rebecque wrote to Behr about his request to gain intelligence and to report these on a daily base to the prince of Orange.⁴⁸

Being in the outposts towards Valenciennes and Maubeuge, the cavalry-brigade of Van Merlen played a role in the intelligence for the army of the Netherlands, as well as for the Prussian army, and then the 1st corps in particular. This, in turn, had to do with the fact that there were also communications between Van Merlen and his Prussian counterpart in this sector, the brigade of Von Steinmetz. Von Steinmetz, obviously, communicated to his superior, Von Zieten, at Charleroi. And these lines also worked vice versa.

Additionally, the army of the Netherlands also had its own informant in Charleroi, the local commander De Wesener. Initially, De Wesener sent his reports to general Tindal at Brussels, but after the 22nd of April he did so to Constant Rebecque at Braine le Comte.⁴⁹

De Wesener may have procured intelligence through general Von Zieten, but he also sent informants out into France, for instance to Condé, Maubeuge, Givet, Valenciennes, Philippeville, Chimay and Beaumont.⁵⁰

The Prussian army.

Obviously, the Prussian army had its own system of intelligence, but sources are lacking. There is a note, however, from colonel Hardinge who wrote from Hannut on the 12th of May: “The intelligence received by prince Blücher confirms your Lordship’s opinion of the enemy’s measures being defensive. The reports state that the enemy is destroying roads and bridges etc. In general the information which this headquarters receives is so scanty, and derived from sources so little to be depended upon, that your Lordship’s accounts are most acceptable, and alone have weight. The staff within these few days are very anxious to put this branch of the service on a more careful footing.”⁵¹

And to Lowe he wrote in a similar sense: “It is difficult in the situation of the armies to procure information to be relied upon, and the distance at which we have been from the front, together with the laborious political work which the King gives to the general officers of the staff, renders our intelligence of the enemy little to be relied upon and that much not well arranged. Our intelligence generally comes from Brussels or Ghent.”⁵²

If this would be true, the quality of the way intelligence was gathered left to be desired. Anyway, the Prussian staff sent intelligence to Wellington, while Wellington also did so

towards the Prussian leadership through colonel Hardinge. After the meeting at Tirlemont Wellington did so almost on a daily base (but with a slight decrease in June), in most cases as reactions to the reports of Hardinge.⁵³ This could be in his own correspondence, but also through others.⁵⁴ Apart from that, he also communicated with general Von Zieten at Charleroi.⁵⁵ One of the means Zieten used to collect information was to send men with missions into France.⁵⁶

Whatever defective the Prussian system of intelligence may have been, general Zieten – at Charleroi - was right from the beginning within a network of it, having lines towards Namur (Blücher), Fontaine l'Évêque (Von Steinmetz), the army of the Netherlands (Van Merlen) and Brussels (Wellington).⁵⁷

Observations.

Even though the duke of Wellington had tried to reassure the prince of Orange in regard to his fear of a French irruption upon Nivelles through Binche, the prince – after having visited the grounds around Nivelles on the 13th of May – had on the day after worked out an idea how he considered to guard his sector in front, to halt the French there in a position close behind Nivelles, while having the fortified town as a strong-hold in the very centre.

The prince pointed out to the duke of Wellington that there were connecting and practicable roads (in dry weather) to Braine le Comte and Braine le Chateau (and from there to Hal). The reason he must have done so is that he must have tried to link up with Wellington's ideas about a possible line of attack further west, thereby having the opportunity to face the French near Braine le Comte, Enghien or Hal and so that the units near Nivelles could move there after all.

It is not clear which units the prince wanted to engage, but these must at least have been those of Alten, Chassé, De Perponcher and Collaert. What role the Prussians may have played in his idea yet remains unclear. The idea of taking up a defensive position around Nivelles is confirmed by the fact that on the 14th and 16th of May the prince issued a general instruction that the demolition of the walls of Nivelles had to be stopped; apparently, this was taking place for some time already.⁵⁸

The request of the prince to Collaert and Chassé to develop a plan of cooperation in case of a superior French attack in their sector should be considered within the same context, but whether Wellington knew about this initiative remains unclear.

Unfortunately, the reaction of Wellington upon the prince's feelings is not available but this was probably again in line of what he wrote in his letter of the 11th of May as since this day there were no major changes in the prince's dispositions of his forces.

These forces which were touching upon those of the Prussian army to the north and west of Charleroi.

Yet, there is no documentation about the background of this tuning of these cantonments. As for Wellington, he apparently didn't regard Charleroi (and its surroundings) as a part of his positions; in fact it was regarded as a point from where the Prussian army could be in an immediate line of communication with the position of the Anglo-Netherlands-German army.

Yet, from the way the units of the army of the Netherlands moved during these first three weeks of April, their resulting cantonments and the instruction as given to Von Steinmetz on the 16th of May, I am inclined to believe that the old Roman road must have been agreed upon as a rough demarcation line between the cantonments of the forces of the prince of Orange on one side and those of Zieten on the other, but from where and by whom this has been initiated remains unclear.⁵⁹

By now, both Wellington and Blücher considered the French movements to the north and which initially had appeared to be offensive ones to be defensive ones after all and caused by an imminent Allied invasion.

By the 20th of May, Wellington also seemed to be more realistic about the slow increase of the allied forces, in view of the sheer scale and complexity of the operation.

By the 17th of May, lieutenant colonel Nicolay of the Royal Staff Corps noted: “the present stationary position of the army has nothing with communicating of a military nature”. Having the army between the sea and Mons, and the Prussians further east, Nicolas noted further that “at present there does not appear any sign of our moving.”⁶⁰

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¹ These were the 1st battalion of the 4th regiment, of the 27th regiment and of the 40th regiment.

At least the 27th regiment reached Ostend on the 24th of May and went through to Ghent, where it remained until the war broke out. In: [..]

² In: WSD, Vol.X p.305-306

³ In: WD, Vol.XII p.390

Of some units it is known that they arrived in Belgium in the period of the second half of April and in the beginning of May.

All of these used more or less the same route: from Ostend through Brugge, Eeklo, Ghent and Aalst to Ninove.

The 1st regiment of Life Guards (Household brigade) reached Ostend on the 3rd of May and from there it marched to a village 3 miles west of Ghent where it was for seven to eight days; then it moved to Ninove, where it got on the 3rd of June. Cf. Colonel Ferrior to his brother, 7th June 1815. In: HL, Ms.88.4

Captain McGuffie (1st Life Guards) in letters to his wife. In: McGuffie, T.H. "Kelly of Waterloo." p.99

The 1st King's Dragoon Guards arrived at Ostend on the 19th of April, from where it moved to Brugge on the 20th; on the 21st of April it was at Eeklo and the 22nd at Ghent. On the 1st of May it reached Sint-Lievens-Esse.

Cf. captain Naylor (1st King's Dragoon Guards), account in King's Dragoon Guards Museum, Edinburgh. CARDG.1985.119

Of the 1st (or Royal) regiment of dragoons, two squadrons arrived at Ostend on the 14th of May, while the remainder and headquarters got there on the 18th of May. On the 18th it moved to Gistel and the day after to Bruges; after that it was at Ghent for one week, and left there on the 27th to be established in two or three villages near Ninove. Cf. Journal of the regiment 1811-1816. In: Ainslie, Ch.P.de, Historical record of the first or the Royal Regiment of Dragoons p.147-148

Atkinson, C.T. History of the Royal Dragoons. 1661-1934 p.298

The 2nd (Royal North British) dragoons (Scots Greys) also came in Ostend on the 20th of April, from where it moved to Eeklo where headquarters were established. On the 1st of May the regiment was ordered to move to Denderhoutem. Cf. Sergeant Johnston. In: Atkinson, C.T. A Waterloo journal p.31

The 15th regiment of hussars (brigade Grant) reached Ostend on the 19th of April and marched through Bruges and Eeklo to Sleidinge, near Ghent. From there it moved on the 26th of April to the villages it would continue to occupy until the 15th of June. In: Wylly, H.C., The military memoirs of lieutenant general Sir J.Thackwell p.68-69

The 13th regiment of light dragoons passed through Bruges (20th May), Eeklo (21st May), Drogen (22nd May), Nieuwerkerken to Haute Croix (near Kester). Cf. Lieutenant Packe (13th regiment of light dragoons) in his journal. In: www.1815.ltd.uk Original in Leicester and Rutland record office. DE 1346/419-427 (DG18)

The regiments of the brigade of Vivian, the 7th, 10th and 18th of hussars were on the 17th of April in Ostend, while they moved on the 23rd of that month towards Ghent. From the 26th of April onwards the brigade was at Harelbeke (immediately north of Courtrai); yet, the 1st of May the 7th hussars marched through Audenarde to Ninove and both other regiments on the 2nd of May to Appelterre (4 kilometers west of Ninove). Later, on the 10th of May, the brigade moved to Renaix and by the 30th of May the 7th hussars was assigned to Grant's brigade. Cf. brigade-orders of sir H.Vivian. In: NAM, 7709-6-2

This particular regiment, by the 24th of April, stood at Evergem (about 7 kilometers north of Ghent). The day after, on the 25th, the regiment moved to Deynse [?] at the Dendre, and on the 26th of April it moved to Harelbeke and other villages near Courtrai. It was on the 1st of May that the regiment left these villages (through Audenarde) for Ninove and some villages in its vicinity. The regimental headquarters then moved to Schendelbeke. Cf. Lieutenant J.E.Daniel.

Daniel was a lieutenant of the commissariat who had arrived in Ostend on the 12th of April and who had been attached to the hussars on the 15th of April; he joined them on the 24th of that month at Evergem. In: Journal of an officer in the commissariat department etc. p.359-363

The 16th regiment of light dragoons (brigade Vandeleur) arrived in Ostend on the 12th of April. From there it moved to several villages around Audenarde, until it changed its position to Denderwindeke on the 8th of May. In: Tomkinson, W. , The diary of a cavalry officer p.274-277

According to Graham the regiment was there since the 1st of May. At Audenarde, the 16th regiment of light dragoons joined the other two of the brigade, the 11th and the 12th regiments of light dragoons. Cf. Graham, H. History of the 16th, the Queen's Light Dragoons p.59

The 12th regiment of light dragoons (brigade Vandeleur) reached Ostend on the 3rd of April and came on the 8th in bivouac at Renaix. From there it moved on the 1st of May to Vollezeel, near Grammont. In: The 9th / 12th Royal Lancers Regimental Journal p.73-74

The 11th regiment of Light dragoons marched through Brughes, Ghent and Meerbeke to Gooik. Cf. Private George Farmer. In: Gleig, G.R. The light dragoon p.146-147

The 13th regiment of hussars (brigade Grant) reached Ostend on the 22nd of May, from where it moved through Brugge, Eeklo and Ghent to Drongen. From there it moved on the 26th of May to Nieuroc, Verschen, Haaltert, Erembodeghem, Pepingen, Bogaarden and Hautecroix. In: Barrett, C.R.B. , History of the XIII hussars p.?

The Cumberland hussars would have passed through Antwerp on the 2nd of May. Cf. Staatscourant, newspaper, dated 8th of May 1815.

As Wellington had the whole of his cavalry available as he used it in the Waterloo-campaign by the 29th of May (see below), the remainder must have reached its destinations in the Low Countries between half and the end of May.

Of the Royal Horse Artillery, the one of Gardiner reached Ostend on the 13th of April. From there it moved through Gistel, Brugge, Eeklo and Ghent to St.Gillis near Dendermonde; on the 1st of May it reached Strytem. Cf. lieutenant Ingilby (Gardiner's troop) in his diary. Captain Mercer's troop moved from Ostend on the 14th of April to Gistel, Eeklo and Lovendegem to Ghent, where it arrived on the 17th of April. From there it left on the 25th of April for Lochristi, Zeveneken, Lokeren, Zele and Dendermonde to St.Gillis. There it left on the 1st of May for Strytem through Lebbeke and Assche. Cf. Mercer, C. Journal of the Waterloo campaign Vol.I

Mercer's presence on the 19th of April at Ghent and his departure on the 25th is confirmed by Sir Augustus Frazer. In: Sabine, E. (ed) , Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer p.488

On the same day, captain Gardiner's troop of RHA, as well as captain Rogers of Royal Artillery left from there to Ghent and Dendermonde respectively.

The one of captain Webber Smith reached Ghent on the 4th of May; he was ordered to Erweteghem (about 1 kilometers south of Zotteghem) on the 25th of May.

That same day, captain Whinyates' troop was ordered from Bierghes (between Hal and Enghien) to Oosterzeele (about 10 kilometers south-west of Ghent), while the one of captain Bull was then ordered to Steenhuyse (about 10 kilometers west of Ninove).

Captain Ross' troop must arrived on the 31st of May and the 1st of June at Ostend, halted on the 2nd and moved on the 2nd of June to Brughes and the day after to Eeclo; on the 5th of June it marched through Ghent to Oostakker (about 8 kilometers north-east of Ghent), from there Ross moved on the 12th of June through Alost to Meldert (between Alost and Asse), from where he then moved to Perk, near Vilvoorde. Cf. Journal of captain Ross. In: Ross, H.D. Memoir of field-marshal sir H.D.Ross p.60

On the 12th of June, captain Beane's troop had arrived at Oostende and was from there ordered to Ghent.

Cf. Sir Augustus Frazer. In In: Sabine, E. (ed) , Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer p494, 502, 516, 519, 530, 533, 535

It was only on the 31st of May that the six troops of horse artillery were formally attached to the cavalry. Cf. Gurwood, lieutenant colonel (ed) - The general orders of field marshal the duke of Wellington p.375-376

As for the Royal Artillery, the following mustering records are available:

Rogers' troop: at Ostend on the 2nd of January, 7th of February, 14th of March and on the 1st of April, at Pamel on the 8th of May and at Forêt (Brussels) on the 4th of June.

Sandham's troop: at Assche on the 6th of January, the 6th of February, the 1st of March, at Enghien on the 28th of April, 4th of May and the 7th of June.

Lloyd's troop: at Ostend on the 11th of April and the 1st of May and at Merelbeke (immediately south of Ghent) on the 2nd of June.

Cf. Laws, M.E.S. Battery records of the Royal Artillery 1716-1859 p.163

Referring to the road leading from Ostend to Brugge: it is confirmed that there was a continuous flow of all sorts of troops. Cf. Staatscourant, newspaper, 3rd of May 1815.

⁴ In: WSD, Vol.X p.288-294

⁵ In: WSD, Vol.X p.295-297

⁶ In: WSD, Vol.X p.303-304

⁷ In: WSD, Vol.X p.311

⁸ In: WSD, Vol.X p.311-312

⁹ In: WD, Vol.XII p.394-396

¹⁰ In: WSD, Vol.X p.311

¹¹ In: WSD, Vol.X p.277-280

¹² In: WSD, Vol.X p.313-315

¹³ In: BL, Add.ms. 35.062 and 20.192 p.358

¹⁴ In: WSD, Vol.X p.325

¹⁵ In: WSD, Vol.X p.326-327

¹⁶ In: HL, WP nr.1.462

¹⁷ In: WD, Vol.XII p.403

¹⁸ In: WSD, Vol.X p.736-740

¹⁹ In: WSD, Vol.X p.296

²⁰ BL, Add.35061 p.214-215
Sidney, E. - Life of Lord Hil p.302

²¹ In: WD, Vol.XII p.391-392

²² In: WD, Vol.XII p.405-406

²³ In: WSD, Vol.X p.316

It is here that Lord Stewart refers to Wellington's letter to him, dated 8th of May. In: WD, Vol.XII p.359-362 (see above)

²⁴ In: WSD, Vol.X p.303-304

²⁵ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang Vol.III p.187
Ollech, Von - Geschichte etc. p.50

²⁶ In Prussian register of staff. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI, nr.VII nr.6 p.13

²⁷ Wellington to Hardinge, 20th of May 1815. In: WD, Vol.XII p.407
For the Prussian request, cf. Von Müffling in his memorandum to Gneisenau dated 27th of May (see above).

²⁸ WD, Vol.XII p.353 and NAK, WO 1 /205/1

²⁹ Wellington to Hardinge, 20th of May 1815. In: WD, Vol.XII p.407

It had already been on the 5th of May that Wellington had requested earl Bathurst to send the three divisions of the battering train then available without loss of time to Antwerp. In: WD, Vol.XII p.353

By the 8th of May, sir Augustus Frazer, commanding the RHA, expected a battering train of 160 pieces of heavy ordnance (excluding the ordnance in the garrisons). In: Sabine, E. (ed) , Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer etc. p.506

³⁰ Cf. Sir Augustus Frazer. In: Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer, K.C.B., commanding the Royal Horse Artillery etc. p.515

Von Müffling to Von Boyen, 30th of May (see below)

Von Müffling to Gneisenau, 11th of June (see below)

³¹ Cf. Earl Bathurst to Wellington. In: WSD, Vol.X p.463-464

³² Lieutenant Henegan, commander of the field train department. Cf. Henegan, R.D., Seven years' campaigning in the Peninsula and the Netherlands: from 1808 to 1815 p.340-341

Henegan was put in charge of the battering train on the morning of the 19th of June.

Von Müffling claims Wellington eventually had 200 and Blücher 50 pieces of heavy artillery suitable for siege warfare. In: C.v.W. Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.6

³³ In: MWB, 1847, p.169

The rendez-vous of the different brigades were:

1st brigade: between Anderlues and Fontaine l'Evêque

2nd brigade: Charleroi, on the left bank of the Sambre

3rd brigade: between Lambusart and Fleurus

4th brigade: Moustier

Reserve-cavalry: Gosselies

Reserve-artillery: Sombreffe

In: GSA-VPH, HA, VI nr.I nr.6 p.24-25 (Dislokation 2.Brigade)

It was in this connection to the Prussians that general Chassé wrote from Haine St. Pierre to Constant-Rebecque on the 14th of May: "Overigens kan ik niet nalaten UWEG te informeren dat ik heden het front van mijne positie gerecognoteerd heb, op mijnen linker vleugel bevinden zich te Leval [=Leval-Trahegnies], Mont St Aldegonde, en Ressij [=Ressaix] eenige Escadrons prussische Hussaren, maar Binch vlak voor mijn front is onbezet, en slechts door een zwak prussisch Hussaren piquet gedekt." In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

³⁴ MWB, 1846 p.14

³⁵ This chapter has been partly based upon: Hofschröder, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.136-140

³⁶ On the 11th of May, Von Dörnberg asked Wellington for instructions: either to leave for his brigade which was stationed at Malines, or to stay in Mons. It became Mons. In: WSD, Vol.X p.274

Cf. Hussey, J. The fog of war etc. p.15

³⁷ Cf. Reports of Von Dörnberg. In: WSD, Vol.X p.408 and 436

³⁸ Report of Von Dörnberg himself. In: Pflug Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.291-292

³⁹ WSD, Vol.X p.269, 439, 470

⁴⁰ He did so on the 10th, 12th, 13th, 15th, 23rd of May, the 4th, 6th, 8th, 9th and 13th or 14th of June.

In: WSD, Vol.X p.269, 280, 283, 303, 348, 425, 429 and 437

The one of the 4th of June cannot be found amongst the Wellington papers, but there is a reference to it in the index of letters to the duke – March to December 1815. In: HL, WP 6.1.18 The content is only described as "intelligence". Date of departure and arrival were both 4th of June.

⁴¹ WD, Vol.XII p.367

⁴² Von Dörnberg to Colborne, 9th April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.52-53

Von Dörnberg to FitzRoy Somerset, 16th April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.81

The reports written by Von Dörnberg to both colonel Colborne and lord FitzRoy Somerset can be found in the KHA (nr.A40 XIII 21) and the Supplementary dispatches

Hofschröer claims Von Dörnberg also reported to Von Müffling but this is highly improbable. Though Von Müffling writes in Hofschröer's reference (a letter dated 9th of June to Gneisenau) about Von Dörnberg's ideas, these were the same as those formulated in his report of the 6th of June for lord Fitzroy Somerset. Therefore, I believe Somerset must have shown it to Von Müffling. It would not have been logical for Von Dörnberg to report to Von Müffling as well.

Von Müffling to Gneisenau, 9th of June 1815. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.327

Hofschröer does the same for a communication line between Von Dörnberg and Blücher, at least on the 14th of June at 9.30 p.m., but there is no proof for the existence of this report. He takes this claim from De Bas.

In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.353

Hofschröer, P. Grant's Waterloo intelligence p.4

⁴³ BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.50-53

WSD, Vol.X p.157-159

⁴⁴ In: WD, Vol.XII p.336

⁴⁵ Haswell, J. The first respectable spy p.216-218

There is an expense claim of Grant for the intelligence gained between the 30th of May and the 4th of July 1815.

In: HL, WP nr. 1.492 f.3

⁴⁶ Hardinge to Wellington, 12th of April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.79

Hardinge reported to Wellington on a daily base from the 4th of May onwards, except for the following dates: 11th, 14th, 15th 17th, 20th, 23rd, 24th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th and the 31st of May, and in June he did not do so on the 1st, 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th of that month. Cf. WSD, Vol.X

⁴⁷ WD, Vol.XII p.363

Constant to Behr, 5th of June 1815. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.6-156

⁴⁸ In: NA, nr.2.13.14.01 nr.156

⁴⁹ Cf. De Wesener to Constant Rebecque, 22nd of April 1815. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

⁵⁰ Cf. De Wesener to Constant Rebecque, 2nd of May 1815. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

⁵¹ WSD, Vol.X p.275

⁵² BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.96-97

⁵³ The duke wrote to Hardinge on the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 16th, 17th, 19th, 20th, 21st and 24th of May and on the 6th, 7th and 10th of June. In: WD, Vol.XII

⁵⁴ At the bottom of a report of Von Dörnberg dated 11th of May for Wellington, the duke gives the instruction to his staff to extract information from it and to send it to Hardinge. In: WSD, Vol.X p.274

⁵⁵ Cf. Dispatches, Vol.XII

⁵⁶ Cf. Von Dörnberg to Lord FitzRoy Somerset, 9th of June 1815. In: WSD, p.436

⁵⁷ In this context fits the remark:

“In einem wohl vier Finger starken Aktenstück betitelt: “Nachrichten vom Feinde und Meldungen von den Vorposten vom 24ten April bis 13ten Juni 1815”, woraus hervorgeht dass täglich Nachrichten eingingen, und dass das 1^{te} Armeekorps durch die vom general Von Dörnberg empfangenen und ihm mitgetheilten Nachrichten, in stetter Verbindung mit der Englisch-Niederländischen Armee war.” The writer here refers to the former Kriegsarchiv. In: MWB, 1846 p.11-12 (footnote). It is most unfortunate that these records are unavailable.

⁵⁸ Cf. Journal of the 2nd division. In: [..]

It will be shown later that the fear for Nivelles dominated the thinking of the Netherlanders up to and during the campaign. Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Vorgeschichte p.195

⁵⁹ The shift in cantonments also becomes clear from those of for instance the 19th regiment (4th brigade, 1st corps). On the 11th of April these were at Tongrinnes, Tongrenelle, Balâtre, St.Martin (1st battalion), Jemeppe, Velaine, Onoz, Wanfercée (2nd battalion), Moustier, Spy, Temploux (3rd battalion) and Sombreffe (staff). These were moved from the 18th of May onwards to Jemeppe, Moustier (1st battalion), Auvelais, Falisolle (2nd battalion), Levaux, St.Eustache (3rd battalion), with outpost on the line Gerpennes, Biesme and Sossoye. Cf. Leszczyński, R.von – 50 Jahr Geschichte des Königlich Preussischen 2.Posenschen Infanterie-Regiments nr.19 p. 149,152

⁶⁰ Lieutenant colonel Nicolay to general Brown, 17th of May 1815. In: NAM, 8903-48