

## 21st – 27th of May

The formation of Wellington's army.

About his army, Wellington wrote on the 21st of May to prince Schwarzenberg:

“Après avoir pourvu pour les garnisons et postes fortifiés, qu'il faut occuper dans ce pays-ci, et pour un corps volant qu'il faut y laisser, je pourrai marcher avec 76.000 bayonettes et sabres; de ceux-là à peu près 16.000 seront cavalerie, dont dix mille d'aussi bonnes qu'il y ait au monde. J'attends encore le contingent de Nassau (3000), d'Oldenbourg (1000) des villes Hanséatiques (3000) Mecklenburg (nombre inconnu), → 7000. Si les événements, et les fausses mesures prises n'eussent pas inutilisées les troupes Saxonnnes, qui sont 14.000, votre Altesse verra que j'aurais eu le nombre de troupes calculé dans ma dépêche d'Avril.”<sup>1</sup>

And about the further formation of the army sir Augustus Frazer wrote on the 22nd of May:

“We are waiting for more companies of artillery from England, and daily expect dismounted cavalry to act as drivers for the artillery. A fifth and sixth division of the army have been formed. Generals Cole and Picton will have them. Three batteries of 18-pounders (four guns each) will be ordered up immediately. The reserves of musket ball cartridge will be sent to join the several divisions immediately. The battering train, of 160 pieces, will be placed in schuyts at Antwerp. To inspect these, reject inefficient horses, supply their places, and send them to the several points, will be my occupation. On Monday [29th] the whole cavalry and horse artillery will be reviewed. The horse artillery is previously to be remodelled, for which purpose I am to breakfast with Lord Uxbridge on Thursday, at Ninhove.”<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the forces available in the Low Countries Wellington wrote on the 16th of May to the prince regent of Portugal to request him to send a corps of his army.

It had already been in Vienna that the duke had requested lord Castlereagh to have Portuguese troops for himself because of their quality and the possibility of being mixed with British units.

The situation was that the Portuguese had acceded to the declaration of the 25th of March, thereby binding the Portuguese government to furnish a corps of 20.000 men as an auxiliary force to the common cause.

Though the British were aware of the expenses of the transport and the time needed before these would arrive in the Low Countries, they exerted themselves to convince the Portuguese government to send them to Wellington.

As far as Wellington was concerned, he was eager to have them, as he wrote on the 26th of March to viscount Castlereagh: “It seems to me, that it would be advisable to try to get the Portuguese troops, or some of them at least, there [in the Netherlands]. I shall recommend Palmella to subscribe to the treaty with 20.000 men, which is as many as they ever had effective in the late war. Of these we might safely take 12.000 or 14.000 into the Netherlands and the other 6000 the Portuguese might contrive to maintain on the Spanish frontier.”<sup>3</sup>

And Torrens wrote on the 8th of April:

“The arrangement, however, which the Duke of Wellington would like of all others is the transport here of 15.000 Portugese infantry under lord Beresford, whose rank of marshal on the continent would supersede that of general, which the prince holds in the Dutch service, without touching the old difficulty of British generals being superseded by others in our service who have foreign rank.”<sup>4</sup>

Castlereagh doubted whether they would consent to do so, but at the same time he trusted by mid-April upon the exertions of George Canning, the British ambassador at Lisbon.

Meanwhile, Canning had also been approached by lord Beresford, a general in the British army and marshal in the Portuguese army and as such based in Lisbon.<sup>5</sup>

Beresford, in his turn, had been asked by the Portuguese authorities what to do. Beresford advised them to build up a force of 15.000 men and to enter into communication with the British government.

As a result, it was by the end of April that a force of this size was in formation.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, earl Bathurst had proposed to Wellington to use them as an independent force in the south of France but the duke rejected this as he only saw their use in a combination with British forces in Belgium.

Despite the exertions of Canning and Beresford, it was in the first half of May that the Portuguese government still hadn't decided how to use the corps as it was waiting for formal documents from Vienna.

All in all, the issue revolved back to Wellington by Canning who had asked him – through viscount Castlereagh – to ask the prince Regent of Portugal to speed up the decision. The duke did so on the 16th of May, but apparently this was in vain as by the 26th of May it was still unclear to the duke whether the Portuguese would take the field. Eventually, they wouldn't. In fact, on the 16th of June it was viscount Castlereagh who wrote to Wellington from London: "I am sorry to have to acquaint you that the Portuguese Regency have peremptorily refused to send their troops on foreign service without express orders from the Brazils."<sup>7</sup>

Liaison officers at the headquarters.

Wellington invited Blücher through Von Röder probably on the 24th of May to dine with him on the 28th of May, to take a tour with him on the 29th and to leave the day after as he wrote to sir Henry Hardinge on the 24th: "General Röder promised me he would ask the marshal to come over and dine with me on Sunday; to take this little tour on Monday; and he might return on Tuesday; and I can only repeat that I should be most happy to see him."<sup>8</sup>

As for the communication between both Wellington's and Blücher's armies, both had their liaisons at the respective headquarters, yet the position of sir Henry Hardinge – having arrived on the 12th of April at Liège – at the Prussian headquarters still doesn't seem to have been fully confirmed as Wellington wrote on the 26th of May to lord Stewart: "I have got Hardinge confirmed; and with the salary of a brigadier. I shall be glad to keep him in communication with me, as he will do what I desire him; and I have some reason not to be quite so certain of Leston [?]"<sup>9</sup>

At Wellington's headquarters Von Röder was succeeded by general Von Müffling (formerly the chief of staff of general Von Kleist) on the 25th of May. Von Röder became the commander of the reserve-cavalry of the 1st corps, while at Prussian headquarters, Von Müffling was succeeded by general Von Grolman.<sup>10</sup>

Though he had been appointed in this position by the Prussian king on the 19th of April, his business at Aachen had kept him away from Wellington's headquarters till late May.<sup>11</sup>

Von Müffling wrote the Prussian king on the 27th May:

"In Folge des von Euer Königlichen Majestät mir unterm 19. April ertheilten Allerhöchsten Befehls habe ich mich nach Beendigung meiner Geschäfte und auf Anweisung des Feld Marschalls Fürsten Blücher von Wahlstadt den 23ten May [<sup>12</sup>] hierher in das Hauptquartier des Herzogs Wellington begeben.

Gewöhnt Allerhöchst Dero Befehle ohne alle persönliche Berücksichtigung auszuführen, wollen jedoch Euer königlichen Majestät mir zu bemerken erlauben, dass, da es wohl keinen Zweifel unterworfen ist, dass die preussische Armee in ihrer jetzigen Verfassung unter allen

europäischen Armeen den ersten Platz einnimmt, da sich Officiere aller Nationen zu der Ehre dieses Krieges bey einer fremden Armee nur müssiger Zuschauer bleiben zu müssen und ausgeschlossen zu sein von aller thätigen Theilnahme.

Euer Königlichen Majestät mir oft bewiesene Gnade lässt mich hoffen, dass Aller höchst dieselben meiner jetzigen Anstellung nicht für den ganzen Krieg dauern lassen werden. Ich habe die innige Überzeugung dass wenn Allerhöchst Dieselben auf meine Wünsche, in der Linie angestellt zu sein, Rücksicht zu nehmen geruhen, ich Euer königlichen Majestät Dienst zu nützlichsten werden kann.

In der Anlage überreiche ich Euer Königlichen Majestät allerunterthänigst die Ordre de bataille der anglohanövrischen Armee, welche noch durch das in der Überschiffung begriffene Corps aus Amerika verstärkt werden soll.<sup>13</sup>

Die Herzoglich Braunschweigischen Truppen sind angekommen und haben durch ihre gute Haltung Aufsehen erregt. Der Herzog Wellington ist vorzüglich mit der Cavallerie zufrieden. Es befindet sich bey selbiger eine Abtheilung Uhlanen, welches die einzigen bey der hiesigen Armee sind, da diese Waffe den Engländern durchaus fremd ist.

Euer Königlichen Majestät überreiche ich ferner in der Anlage allerunterthänigst den Bericht über eine Unterredung, welche ich mit dem Herzog Wellington in Auftrag des Fürsten Blücher von Wahlstadt hatte.

Euer Königlichen Majestät werden daraus die Ansichten und Anstalten des Herzogs Wellington zu diesem Krieg zu ersehen geruhen.”<sup>14</sup>

As an enclosure Von Müffling sent the Prussian king a disposition of the British and Hanoverian forces under the command of Wellington and where they then were located.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, he sent him a pro memoria dated 27th of May about Wellington's ideas and arrangements to be made for the invasion into France.<sup>16</sup> The substance of this document is that in the duke's mind this invasion could only take place: “1ter Fall, wenn Napoleon seine vor uns bei Maubeuge stehende Macht durch Detachirungen, es sey gegen den Oberrhein oder gegen die Vendée, sehr vermindere oder: 2ter Fall, sobald die oesterreichische Armee bei Langres angekommen seyn würde. [...]” In Wellington's idea about the start of the war and his wishes towards the Prussian army, the duke held the possession of Givet and Maubeuge as vital,

“Givet, um uns in den Besitz der Maas zu setzen und in Verbindung mit Luxemburg die Eingänge in die Ardennen zu decken, Maubeige, um ihm, in Verbindung mit Mons, eine sichere Communication mit den Niederlanden zu geben. Was den Marsch in das französische Gebiet beträfe, so würde er such nur so weit ausbreiten, als es ihm zum Unterhalt der Armee nöthig sey.”

Von Müffling added on the position of Blücher in this: “dass der Fürst immer nur das Allgemeine im Auge habe, und so glaubte man, mit ihm vereinigt die Grenze in der Gegend von Maubeuge überschreiten zu müssen, um schlagen zu können, wenn der Feind eine Schlacht annähme, ja im Fall es ihm, dem Herzog, angenehmer sey und zweckmässiger scheine, eine andre Festung als Maubeuge anzugreifen, dürfte der Fürst Blücher vielleicht sogar dazu Truppen geben, wenn England den Belagerungstrain fournirte [...]”

Wellington also agreed in a common advance between Maubeuge and Valenciennes.

He also believed the war could only be ended by “Paris zum Objekt zu nehmen, anzugreifen, wo die Umstände es erlaubten, und rasch zu operiren. Ueberigens müsste nicht versäumt werden, sich einiger Grenzfestungen durch Belagerungen zu bemächtigen.”

All in all, it was Von Müffling's impression that Wellington “sich nicht leicht zur Eröffnung des Krieges, ohne besondere Zustimmung und auf Antrieb der hohen Mächte, oder ohne besondern Befehl aus England entschliessen dürfte.”<sup>17</sup>

On the 22nd of May, lord Hill expressed his feelings about the coming campaign towards his brother Robert as: “I returned late last night from an inspection of our frontier; everything

here is much in the same state as it has been for some time; Bonaparte is busy in France and the allies are coming forward, but I imagine it will take a few weeks [...] before the latter can be well up.”<sup>18</sup>

Intelligence.

As for the intelligence which reached Wellington it was on the 21st of May that Von Dörnberg reported about the presence of 8000 men infantry and 1200 men cavalry at Laon, with 37 field pieces. Between Laon and Landrecy were 20.000 to 25.000 men. Headquarters at Avesnes.<sup>19</sup>

L.Hervey also reported from Ghent to Wellington on the 22nd of May about the state of some of the fortified towns from Montmédy to Philippeville, together with some details on the state of Paris on the 15th of May. It would appear that the French were not strongly fortifying Soissons, but that they would not have thrown up any works for their intended intrenched camp between that place and Laon.<sup>20</sup>

The same day, sir C.W.Flint wrote from the Irish office about a very decided opinion in France that Bonaparte intended to make his great stand at Paris, suffering the allies to penetrate into France, with a view falling upon their weakest corps, and breaking their line.<sup>21</sup>

Von Dörnberg wrote on the 23rd of May to Wellington about some French patrols which had appeared in front of Mons. All the French troops on the frontier would have orders, in case of an attack from the allies, to fall back upon Laon, where Napoleon was expected.<sup>22</sup>

It was general Von Zieten who reported to the duke on the 23rd of May about the presence of 60.000 men in the area stretching from Givet towards the North Sea (the fortresses included), divided over three army-corpses, one (led by Vandamme) around Philippeville, the second (led by Reille) at Avesnes and the third one (led by d’Erlon) at Valenciennes, and with a reserve at Laon of about 10.000 men. Wellington, in his answer, reported back to Von Zieten that this information matched other reports he already had.<sup>23</sup>

Somewhere late May, Wellington got intelligence from Basle about the French army as it was on the 20th of May. It would stretch from Chambéry to Dunkerque and would have been formed into ten army-corpses of which three were not completed.

Of these corps, the 1st would have its headquarters at Valenciennes, the 2nd at Avesnes, the 3rd at Mézières, the 4th at Metz, the 5th at Strassbourg, the 6th at Paris, the 7th at BÉfort, the 8th at Chambéry, the 9th at Antibes and the 10th to be formed at Perpignan.

The total force would be 250.000 men - of which 25.000-27.000 cavalry - including the garrisons at Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux etc. The Imperial Guard was 20.000 men strong, to be increased to 35.000 without any serious problems. There would be no shortage in guns and their crews.

As an auxiliary army, in the whole of France the National Guard was called up, to guard and defend places fortes in particular. This would save Napoleon 100.000 men from the regular army, to be used in other *places fortes*. In the north, the regular army would be along the frontier, while the national guards were in the places fortes.<sup>24</sup>

On the 25th of May Von Dörnberg wrote to the duke about the march of several regiments from Maubeuge and Laon to Metz. And while the works at Valenciennes, Condé and Le Quesnoy were carried on with great activity, those at Maubeuge and at the Camp de Rousies would have been finished. Laon, La Fère, Soissons, St.Quentin and Guise were also fortified. It was expected that Napoleon would join his army soon.<sup>25</sup>

The duke of Feltre wrote a report on the state of Napoleon’s army late in May and according to his calculations the French forces would amount to about 155.400 men.<sup>26</sup> Of these he reckoned 71.000 would be used in armies in Bordeaux, Lyon, the Alps, the Vendée, the

Alsace, the Lorraine and on the coast in the north-west. Another 35.400 would be necessary to defend the different places fortes, which would leave Napoleon about 55.000 against the northern frontier.<sup>27</sup>

On the 25th of May, Lionel Hervey forwarded a report about the situation of the French corps of Reille, counting about 30.000 men and having its headquarters at Avesnes.

On the 26th of May Von Dörnberg wrote that the Champ de mai would be held the same day; the national guards from the interior were sent to the frontiers, while those from the frontiers were sent to the interior.<sup>28</sup>

The same day, Wellington wrote to lord Stewart that Napoleon would have deferred the Champ de mai to the 28th of May.<sup>29</sup>

Von Dörnberg again reported on the 27th of May. He wrote about the expected arrival of a division of the Imperial Guard at Compiègne, as well as of Napoleon late May, and then to continue to Laon where his headquarters were to be.<sup>30</sup>

From Ghent, the same day, Lionel Hervey wrote that there was a belief from a French general (Gobrecht) that Napoleon would attack on the 4th of June. 80.000 rations of bread and rice (for 8 days) would have been ordered at Valenciennes for the 28th of may instant. The Champ de mai would be held on the 28th of May.<sup>31</sup>

### Garrisons in Belgium.

Wellington's measures for the defence of the Low Countries, as far as garrisons were concerned, show from a letter he wrote to the king of the Netherlands on the 21st of May: "J'ai l'honneur d'envoyer à votre Majesté le rapport de l'Ingénieur en Chef, sur les ouvrages qui ont été en main aux différentes places de ce pays-ci.

J'envoie aussi le règlement du gouverneur français sur la défense des places pour la considération de votre Majesté. Sur ce rapport je compte, si Votre Majesté l'approuve, donner ordre aux gouverneurs d'Anvers, Ostende, Nieuport, Ypres, la citadelle de Tournai, la citadelle de Gand et Ath, de tenir leur places à toute extrémité, et de ne pas les céder sans avoir soutenu au moins un assaut au corps de la place. Mons et Audenarde sont plutôt camps retranchés, et le dernier tête de pont plutôt que place; dans lesquels, cependant, des commandans [sic] zélés à faire leur devoir pourraient se tenir pendant long-tems."<sup>32</sup>

### Prussian defensive plans.

Within the Prussian army it was count Karl von der Gröben (1788-1876), an officer attached to Blücher's staff, who reconnoitred the ground along the Ligne and in this he passed the position of Point du Jour (where the road leading from Charleroi to Gembloux crosses the road which leads from Namur to Nivelles).

He must have done this survey of the ground late April or early May as on the 6th of May colonel Von Lützow, of the general staff, wrote him:

"[...] Sie haben eingeschickt Croquis einer Stellung bei le Point du Jour, das mehr südwärts gelegene Terrain zu croquieren, den Bach Orneau von der Gegend an, wo er in den Ligny Bach fällt. Zugleich das Terrain an der Oberen Dyle und die Gegend von Marbijoux zu croquieren, da der Weg von Namur nach Charleroy über Jenappe [sic] [...] etc. bereits croquirt.[...]"<sup>33</sup>

It was about the position of Point du Jour that he wrote on the 22nd of May, from Sombreffe, a memorandum of which I do not have the full version nor the sketches of the position themselves, but at least of its introduction Von Ollech gives the following interpretation:

"Graf Groeben ging damals von der Annahme aus, dass Napoleon in Belgien einfallen könne, bevor die preussische und die englische Armee ihre volle Stärke erreicht haben würden, und

zwar in der Art, dass der französische Kaiser durch eine Neben-Operation längs der Schelde die englische Armee dort hinziehen und gegen die preussische Armee über Charleroi den Hauptstoss ausführen werde. Geschah dies, so blieb Blücher eine Zeit lang seinen eigenen Kräften überlassen, und es musste dann allerdings darauf ankommen, sich in einer vortheilhaften Position auch gegen eine überlegene Macht zu schlagen, ohne die Möglichkeit der nahen Vereinigung mit der englischen Armee zu verlieren.

In diesem Sinne machte Graf Groeben der Hauptsache nach folgenden Vorschlag.”<sup>34</sup>

The memorandum itself reads:

“[...] Die Stellung liegt auf dem östlichen Thalrande des Lignebaches, mit dem rechten Flügel an Sombreffe, mit dem linken an Tongrinne gelehnt. Der östliche Thalrand überhöht den westlichen. Die beiden vorspringenden Winkel, auf welchen rechts die Kirche von Sombreffe, links das alte Schloss von Tongrinelle liegt, gleichen zwei Bastionen, zu deren Verbindung eine Kourtine mit einem nassen, stellenweise morastigen Graben gezogen ist.

Die Chaussée von Charleroi und Fleurus führt winkelrecht auf die Mitte dieser Stellung. Die Strasse von Namur nach Les Quatre Bras, Genappe und Brüssel geht nahe hinter dieser Stellung fort, und drei Kolonnenwege gewähren aus derselben einen bequemen Rückzug auf Lüttich und Maastricht.

Der Anmarsch des Feindes ist aus dieser Position leicht zu übersehen. Die Ausdehnung ihrer Front beträgt circa 3000 Schritt. Zu dieser Stellung gehört aber auch die Vorbereitung zu einer Offensive von Brye aus westlich von Sombreffe über den Ligne-Bach gegen die linke Flanke des Feindes. Eine Schwierigkeit für diese Offensive ist allerdings der Ligne-Bach, weil diese sonst schmale Wasserlinie zwischen Sombreffe, Ligny und St.Amand tief eingeschnitten ist. Man wird deshalb Übergangsstellen vorbereiten müssen, auch über das sumpfige Terrain um Sombreffe. Der Bach selbst pflegt bei grosser Hitze auszutrocknen. Südlich des Ligne-Baches steigt das Terrain sanft nach Fleurus und Fay hin an.

Das 2. Armee-Korps (von Namur kommend) könnte diese Stellung zwischen Sombreffe und Tongrinne besetzen. Das 3. Armee-Korps (im Anmarsch von Ciney über Namur) rückt als Reserve hinter das 2.Korps und stellt sich bei Le Point du Jour zu beiden Seiten der Strassen nach Gembloux auf. Das 1.Armee-Korps (in Rückmarsch von Charleroi über Fleurus) überschreitet den Ligne-Bach und stellt sich nördlich der Höhe von Brye verdeckt auf; es hält Ligny besetzt. Das 4. Armee-Korps (im Anmarsch von Hannut über Gembloux) wird zwischen Chapelle du Rosaire und Elvaux (nördlich von Sombreffe) die Reserve des 1.Armee-Korps bei Brye bilden, mithin gleichfalls zur Offensive verwendbar sein.

Der Zweck dieser Position würde sein:

1. Den eigenen Rückzug auf Lüttich und Maastricht vollkommen zu sichern.
2. Im Fall der Feind diese Stellung angreift, ihn durch eine Offensive mit dem 1.und 4.Armee-Korps und allenfalls auch mit dem 3.Korps in seiner linken Flanke anzufallen und in die Defileen der Sambre zurückzuwerfen. Selbst das 2.Armee-Korps könnte eventuell aus seiner Stellung vorgehen und den eingeleiteten Sieg vollenden helfen.

Es ist wahrscheinlich dass der Feind die eigentliche Stellung nur kanonirt und seinen Hauptangriff (über St.Amand oder Ligny und Brye) gegen unseren rechten Flügel ausführt, und zwar:

1. weil er von dort (von Brye) am meisten bedroht ist
2. weil daselbst der Schlüssel der Position liegt
3. weil Trennung der preussischen Armee von der englisch-batavischen Armee sein Hauptzweck sein muss.

Sollte der Feind den rechten Flügel ganz umgehen, so könnte das 1.und 2.Armee-Korps eine Stellung hinter den Quellen der Dyle auf den Höhen von Marbijoux (nordöstlich von Brye) nehmen, und dann die beiden anderen Korps zur Offensive übergehen.

Gegen eine nicht sehr bedeutende Übermacht wird man sich in der Stellung von Le Point du Jour mit Vortheil schlagen können. Von einer doppelten Überzahl kann man freilich überall, rechts wie links, umgangen werden.

Jede Stellung näher an Charleroi ist weniger vorteilhaft. Vom Tombe de Ligny aus hat man zu wenig Übersicht und keine Gelegenheit zur Offensive im grösseren Styl, während der Feind durch die Besetzung von Fleurus einen günstigen Drehpunkt für seine Bewegungen gewinnt. Wollte man Fleurus mit in die Stellung ziehen, so ist zu bemerken, dass Fleurus ganz offen und gegen Charleroi hin ungünstig für die Vertheidigung ist. Bei einer verlorenen Schlacht hätte man die Defileen des Ligne-Baches zu nahe im Rücken. Le Tombe de Ligny könnte nur als Sammelplatz für eine Armee benutzt werden, um sich von dort nach allen Richtungen vorwärts zu bewegen.”<sup>35</sup>

Prussian plans for the invasion of France.

It may have been on the 21st or 22nd of May, that Gneisenau received Von Boyen's letter written from Berlin on the 18th of May about the use of the 4th corps in the coming invasion: “So wie die Corpsbefehlshaber nun einmal eingetheilt sind, scheint es, dass man alles aufbieten müsste, um Kleist sobald als möglich in's Feld zu bringen; würden Sie es nicht angemessen finden, wenn Bülow hauptsächlich zu Belagerungen gebraucht würde, hier würden sich die Collisionen am ersten vermeiden lassen und wenn einmal in der Nähe eine Schlacht vorfällt, so kann man ihn doch ohne Bedenken heranziehen, da es dann nur ein paar Tage sind. [...] Der König will nun darauf herreingehen, dass Kleist das Commando des durch Borstell erledigten Corps bekommt, zugleich aber das der deutschen Truppen beibehält. Dadurch würde dieses Corps bedeutend grösser, wie die übrigen; aber es hat auch das gute, dass die deutschen Truppen mehr mit den andern gemischt werden und dass dem Mangel an Train etc. abgeholfen wird.”<sup>36</sup>

On the 27th of May, Blücher inspected the 2nd corps at Branchon (about 9 kilometers southwest of Hannut).<sup>37</sup>

Though it was on the same day that Blücher still wrote to Hardenberg that his army was ready for the invasion of France and that he wanted to start offensive operations as soon as possible, - the more as he wanted to leave the Netherlands as soon as possible [<sup>38</sup>] – it was the day after that he drafted a note for his absence from the 28th till the 30th of May:

“Den 28. D.Mts. gehe ich nach Brüssel und werde den 30. Nach Namur zurückkehren. Sollte das I.Armeekorps, infolge eines Angriffs des Feindes, genötigt werden, sich zusammenzuziehen, so sind mir die betreffenden Meldungen den 28. nach Brüssel den 29.nach Ninove zu schicken (westlich von Brüssel), aber ausserdem auch nach Namur, wo Oberst von Pful zurückgeblieben ist, mit der Weisung, alle Briefe zu öffnen und, wenn es erforderlich ist, sie mir nachzusenden. Das II., III. und IV. Armeekorps melden nur nach Namur. Wenn der Feind gegen Mons und Charleroi vorgehen sollte, so sammelt sich das II. Armeekorps bei Bossière und Onoz (beide Orte zwischen Namur und Sombreffe und nördlich von Moustier sur Sambre), das III.Korps bei Ciney, und die um Huy liegende Brigade bei Namur, das IV. Korps bei Hannut. Dorthin werde ich weitere Befehle schicken. Die Vorposten, welche nicht angegriffen werden, bleiben vorläufig stehen.”<sup>39</sup>

And it was in the same context that Von Grolman wrote to Von Bülow on the 26th:

“Sollte der Feind gegen die Maas und Charleroi Offensivebewegungen machen, so wollen Ew.Excellenz Ihr unterhabendes Korps bei Hannut versammeln, wohin ich dann die weiteren Befehle senden werde.”<sup>40</sup>

Observations.

The memorandum about the position of Point du Jour as sent by count Gröben to Gneisenau on the 22nd of May was published for the first time by Von Ollech (1876).

While he was the first to pay some attention to it, he almost also was the last, as since then the document has been highly neglected by most historians of the campaign.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, as the memorandum was received in a very positive way by the Prussian leadership [<sup>42</sup>], it merits - even in its incompleteness - a proper analysis as it provides an insight into how the Prussians saw the situation for their part in the defence of Belgium.

It is now impossible to determine what Von Ollech has left out from the memorandum but from the way it has been published, it seems as if he has left the main text intact, while leaving out the introduction and the end of it.

It is not my intention to give a detailed analysis here of the memorandum on a tactical level, as that will be dealt with in another chapter. What I will deal with here is its strategical importance.

First of all, it is the date at which it was produced. As stated before, surveys and sketches of the area around the position must have been done late April and early May. At that time, the importance of a possible confrontation with Napoleon's army must have been recognised the more as there was a potential threat from Maubeuge and Valenciennes. Yet, by mid-May, as the Prussian high command had chosen for the Meuse river as the most probable theatre of war, the need for a more detailed description was felt and that is probably why the memorandum was written in the period between mid-May and the 22nd of May, and not before.

Secondly, the value of the position was based upon a French threat coming from the line Charleroi-Fleurus, and not from for instance the line Givet-Namur.

After describing the position of Point du Jour in some more detail, it is then that Gröben situates it on a strategical level, i.e. in the sense of communication-lines towards Brussels, Namur, Maastricht and Liège.

The need for a proper communication with Namur and Brussels is evident, but at the same time the memorandum stresses the presence of three good communication-lines with Maastricht and Liège, the places where the army was supposed to fall back upon in case of reverse.<sup>43</sup> The role of Maastricht in such a situation may have been mentioned within the Prussian leadership before; at the same time the memorandum makes clear that this place was, apart from Liège, apparently a second or additional option for the Prussian army in case of a reverse.

As far as the protection of a possible retreat from an actual battlefield is concerned, the memorandum is most optimistic on the position of Point du Jour as it suggests that this would be the ideal one to make such a safe retreat possible.

It breaths the same air when it comes down to a battle with the French in the position itself, especially as long as the French would not be superior: in that case it suggests as if a Prussian victory cannot be in doubt whatsoever: "Im Fall der Feind diese Stellung angreift, ihn durch eine Offensive mit dem 1.und 4.Armeekorps und allenfalls auch mit dem 3.Korps in seiner linken Flanke anzufallen und in die Defileen der Sambre zurückzuwerfen. Selbst das 2.Armeekorps könnte eventuell aus seiner Stellung vorgehen und den *eingeleiteten Sieg* vollenden helfen." <sup>44</sup>

At the same time, any role of Wellington's army is not mentioned at all.

However, Gröben does see the French threat upon the Prussian right wing, so in the sense of a potential chance that Napoleon would try to prevent the Prussian and the Anglo-Netherlands - German armies from joining hands. He even considers the chance that Napoleon would make

this attempt more probable as that he would attack the Prussian army in the position of Point du Jour itself. In that sense, Gröben moves away from this position as such as he extends the position then towards Marbijoux etc.

In Gröben's description of the scenario what to do in case of such an attack by the French, even here a specific role of Wellington is not spelled out. On the other hand, from the way he describes it, it becomes clear that the duke had the possibility of moving in Napoleon's flank and / or rear from the area Quatre Bras – Gosselies, while the Prussian army would block and / or attack him from the north and east.

Gröben takes it even a step further by recognizing the possibility that Napoleon could turn the Prussian army either from the right or left flank. Gröben doesn't specify what was to be done in the latter case in particular and about any outcomes he remains silent: no matter how strong the position of Point du Jour would be in case of a frontal French attack, this kind of guarantee didn't seem to apply to such attacks.

In this sense, the memorandum on the position of Point du Jour extends out to possibilities which were not all worked out in detail for the Prussian army, let alone about any possible role of Wellington's army in the different scenario's.

Altogether, it makes a somewhat ambiguous impression: on the one hand the strength and the resulting optimism about the position of Point du Jour and the non-committance of any alternative positions -dependent on the direction of the French attack - arising from this position on the other.

In this context it is interesting to quote the introduction of Von Ollech. He writes:

“Graf Groeben ging damals von der Annahme aus, dass Napoleon in Belgien einfallen könne, bevor die preussische und die englische Armee ihre volle Stärke erreicht haben würden, und zwar in der Art, dass der französische Kaiser durch eine Neben-Operation längs der Schelde die englische Armee dort hinziehen und gegen die preussische Armee über Charleroi den Hauptstoss ausführen werde. Geschah dies, so blieb Blücher eine Zeit lang seinen eigenen Kräften überlassen, und es musste dann allerdings darauf ankommen, sich in einer vortheilhaften Position auch gegen eine überlegene Macht zu schlagen, ohne die Möglichkeit der nahen Vereinigung mit der englischen Armee zu verlieren.

In diesem Sinne machte Graf Groeben der Hauptsache nach folgenden Vorschlag.”<sup>45</sup>

As Von Ollech most probably left out the introduction of the memorandum, it is mere guessing what Gröben may have written here. In writing the way he does here, however, Von Ollech gives the impression as if this introduction was written in the sense he describes.

Yet, if this were true, why didn't he then publish the introduction as well ?

In going through the passage as cited, it can be questioned whether it was felt within the Prussian leadership, or at least by Gröben, that the army had not reached its full strength as there is no trace of such an impression in the memorandum.

Further, while Gröben clearly uses a French main attack as being directed against the Prussians as a starting point for his memorandum, at the same time he makes no reference to a feint attack then being carried out against Wellington. This might have been a scenario, but the way the memorandum is written, it doesn't hint that way.

But what is more important in this sense is the element of the Prussian army maintaining its position on its own, until Wellington would come up to join in – at least that is the way as Von Ollech describes it. For him, the quality of the position of Point du Jour and a possible union with Wellington's forces would neutralize the (numerical) inferiority of the Prussian army against an overwhelming enemy.

In taking into account to what I wrote in these observations just before, the memorandum doesn't make this impression on me, on the contrary.

Instead, the position as described would – presuming a Prussian numerical superiority - afford a complete Prussian victory without any other aid whatsoever. In the alternative scenarios,

based upon other lines of attack of the French, there is no mentioning of holding the position until further support would move in.

In general, even though the possibility of support by Wellington is not excluded altogether in the first place, the important thing is that the memorandum has a defensive starting point: against a French attack as coming from Maubeuge / Valenciennes, through Charleroi, and this solely for the Prussian army.

The memorandum was not written in the intention that the position could also be used as one for a manoeuvre towards Wellington's army, along the axe which was formed by the road leading from Namur to Nivelles.

On the 26th of May Von Grolmann wrote to Von Bülow:

“Sollte der Feind gegen die Maas und Charleroi Offensivebewegungen machen, so wollen Ew.Excellenz Ihr unterhabendes Korps bei Hannut versammeln, wohin ich dann die weiteren Befehle senden werde.”<sup>46</sup>

And two days later, the note as written by Blücher on the 28th of May reads:

“Wenn der Feind gegen Mons und Charleroi vorgehen sollte, so sammelt sich das II. Armeekorps bei Bossière und Onoz (beide Orte zwischen Namur und Sombreffe und nördlich von Moustier sur Sambre), das III.Korps bei Ciney, und die um Huy liegende Brigade bei Namur, das IV. Korps bei Hannut.”

These notes are close linked, not only in time, but also in the strategical sense of the word. It meant that in case the French would attack between the Scheldt and the Sambre (so basically as in one of the scenarios as sketched by Wellington in his secret memorandum), that the corps of the Prussian army would concentrate at and around Fleurus (1st corps), near Bossière and Onoz (2nd corps), near Ciney and Namur (3rd corps) and near Hannut (4th corps). Observing these positions together, they centre around the area east of Gembloux and north of Namur. As stated before, this area was already focused upon three weeks earlier.

Revised: 8th September 2008

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<sup>1</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.414

<sup>2</sup> Sabine, E. (ed) , Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer p.515

<sup>3</sup> HL, MS61 WP DA68,2W4

<sup>4</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.41-43

<sup>5</sup> William Carr Beresford, 1st Viscount Beresford GCB GCH (October 2, 1768 – January 8, 1854), British soldier and politician.

A general in the British Army and a marshal in the Portuguese army, who fought with the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsular War and in 1828 held the office of master-general of the ordnance in Wellington's first ministry.

He was sent across the South Atlantic to invade the Plata region, with a smaller British force of 1,500 men, departing on 14 April 1806. In the British invasions of the Río de la Plata, when the British Crown attempted to take control of Buenos Aires and thus, over the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, he was defeated and had to surrender.

The most notable action in which Beresford held independent command, during the Peninsular War, occurred in 1811 when a combined Anglo-Portuguese and Spanish army under his command as a Portuguese field-marshal, intercepted a French army commanded by Marshal Nicolas Soult who had been ordered by Marshal Auguste Marmont to move to protect Badajoz. After the bloody Battle of Albuera the French were forced to retreat.

In: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Carr\\_Beresford,\\_1st\\_Viscount\\_Beresford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Carr_Beresford,_1st_Viscount_Beresford)

<sup>6</sup> On the 28th pf April Sir Augustus Frazer writes: “I believe 10.000 Portuguese troops are coming; the agent of transports here [Ostende] talks of having orders to send part of his vessels for them. In: Sabine, E. (ed) , Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer p.498

<sup>7</sup> Earl Bathurst to Wellington, 7th April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.27-28

Wellington to Bathurst, 12th April 1815. In: WD, Vol.XII p.301-302

Earl Bathurst to Wellington, 17th April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.90

Earl Bathurst to Wellington, 18th April, 18th April, 2nd May and 16th May 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.90, 91, 217, 304

Wellington to Bathurst, 5th May 1815. In: WD, Vol.XII p.354

Viscount Castlereagh to Wellington, 9th May 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.267

Wellington to the prince Regent of Portugal, 16th May 1815. In: WD, Vol.XII p.398-399

Lord Beresford to Wellington, 21st April, 28th April, 4th May and 12th May 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.131-132, 170-171, 229-230 and 276

Wellington to Castlereagh, 26th May 1815. In: WD, VolXII p.427

Castlereagh to Wellington, 16th of June 1815. In: HL, MS61 WP 7.2.20

<sup>8</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.422

On the 26th of May, the duke of Wellington gave a ball at Brussels, which was at least attended by the prince of Orange. Cf. Sir Augustus Frazer. In: Sabine, E. (ed) , Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer p.520

<sup>9</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.426

<sup>10</sup> Conrady, E. von - Leben und Wirkung des Generals Carl von Grolman p.281

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<sup>11</sup> It had been on the 14th of April that Gneisenau had announced to the king that he was to have Von Röder relieved by someone else, but that he did not know who (see above). Yet, the choice for Von Müffling must have been made very shortly after, as he was nominated by the king as successor on the 19th of April.

<sup>12</sup> For the 23rd must be read 25th of May instead as in another publication Von Müffling confirms it was on this date that he left from Aachen for Brussels. In: Zur Geschichte des Feldzuges von 1815. In: MWB, 1891 nr.100 p.2585  
It also general Von Hügel, the representative of Würtemberg, who reported in a letter dated 26th of May about the presence at Brussels of Von Müffling the day before. In: Pfister, Aus dem Lager etc. p.365

<sup>13</sup> Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.279-285  
According to Von Pflugk Harttung it dates from around the 25th of May. It contains only those units which fell under the king of Great Britain, so excluding the units of Nassau, the Netherlands and Brunswick.  
It was kept in the Secret archive of the war office, under Kab.Sach.Tit.XV Abt.II nr.8

<sup>14</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.351-352

<sup>15</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.279-285  
Originally from the secret archives of the war office, under Kab.Sach.Dt.XV Abt.II nr.8

<sup>16</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.309-313  
Originally in KA, VI.C.3.I.p.103-106

<sup>17</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.309-313  
A copy was in the former KA, under VI.C.3.I.p.103-106

<sup>18</sup> BL, Add.ms 35061 p.216-217

<sup>19</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.336

<sup>20</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.338

<sup>21</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.337

<sup>22</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.344-345

<sup>23</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.348-349

<sup>24</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.360-366

<sup>25</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.367-368

<sup>26</sup> 105.000 infantry, 25.000 cavalry, 15.000 artillery, 2400 engineers, 2000 gendarmerie and 6.000 guard. In: WSD, Vol.X p.373

<sup>27</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.373-374

<sup>28</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.379

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- <sup>29</sup> In: WD, Vol.XII p.426
- <sup>30</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.386
- <sup>31</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.387
- <sup>32</sup> In: WD, Vol.XII p.413
- <sup>33</sup> In: Register of staff. In: VPH-HA,VI, nr.VII nr.6 p.7
- <sup>34</sup> Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.65
- <sup>35</sup> Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.65-67
- <sup>36</sup> Delbrück, H. Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.510
- <sup>37</sup> Dziengel, J.D. von – Geschichte etc. p.384
- <sup>38</sup> Briefe, p.273
- <sup>39</sup> Lettow Vorbeck, O.von - Napoleons Untergang p.188 (this version would be a shorter one)
- <sup>40</sup> Conrady, E.von - Leben und Wirkung etc. p.293 (from former KA, VI.C.53)
- <sup>41</sup> One of the very few exceptions is Winand Aerts. Cf. Études etc. p.42
- <sup>42</sup> Colonel Von Nostitz. Diary p.18
- <sup>43</sup> It is not clear which roads are meant here.
- <sup>44</sup> The italics are mine.
- <sup>45</sup> Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.65
- <sup>46</sup> Conrady, E.von - Leben und Wirkung etc. p.293 (from former KA, VI.C.53)