

11th – 15th of June

The formation of Wellington's army.

While Wellington received the news from major general Torrens from London about the departure for Flanders of detachments of the 23rd foot, 27th and 51st of foot, as well as about the imminent departure of more units coming from America, the duke was busy working on the reorganisation of the army of the Netherlands into four divisions (as he had proposed on the 4th of June).¹⁻²

Yet, the proposal for the reorganisation was rejected by king Willem, partly because the duke of Nassau had failed to write to him upon the subject. At the same time, the king didn't prefer to have any foreign troops within the divisions of the army of the Netherlands, but at the same time he deemed Wellington's own views in this matter as most important.³

Wellington then attempted to make arrangements in the sense of his proposal through general Tindal and the prince of Orange, who were both in favour of it, but before he had been able to finalise them, war had overtaken the process.⁴

11th of June

It was on the 11th of June that Wellington had received two reports from Mons through Von Dörnberg, who had written them the day before.

In the first one he reported that the French emperor would still have been in the capital on the 7th of June, but that he also had a report of him being at Maubeuge already and that both general Exelmans and Vandamme were there with their forces. Defensive redoubts were being built south of Maubeuge on the road to Avesnes. Later that day, he also learned Napoleon would be at Laon or that Napoleon would have left Paris on the 6th of June with 80.000 men (of whom 40.000 were national guards).

Very large magazines would have been formed at Maubeuge; 60 guns would have arrived there. Three strong redoubts would have been built near Beaufort, on the road from Maubeuge to Avesnes.⁵

On the 10th of June, information coming from the duke De Feltre – who had it from a person who left Paris on the 4th of June - was forwarded by L.Hervey from Ghent to the duke of Wellington. This intelligence about the French army comprised strengths of the different corps, totalling to 227.000 men with 500 guns (which is decreased to an apparent more realistic 182.000), stretching from Lille to Rocroi. In this, the main army in the north would be formed by the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 6th corps, plus the imperial guard, in all numbering about 120.000 men.⁶

The impression of some was that Napoleon would advance from Rocroi towards the 10th of June. The places fortes would be in a bad shape, except for those of Lille, Valenciennes and Condé – they would be all garrisoned by members of the national guards, the invalids and retired soldiers. 150.000 national guards to be raised would be the maximum, in stead of the 400.000 as mentioned. For instance, for the north 54.000 were planned and there were only 11.000⁷

The same day, Von Müffling had a conversation with the duke of Wellington which was based upon reports which had been sent by general Von Zieten from Charleroi. Von Müffling reported back to Gneisenau that day:

“Auf die von mir dem Herrn.Herzog Wellington vorgelegten Nachrichten des Generals von Ziethen, sagte mir der Herr Herzog, er habe sichere Anzeigen, dass Napoleon noch am 7.Juni in Paris gewesen sei.⁸ Auch ergibt sich dies aus dem Moniteur vom 7.Juni.

Beiliegende Nachrichten sind mir von dem Herrn. Herzog übergeben, um sie Seiner Durchlaucht dem Fürsten Blücher von Wahlstatt mitzuteilen; sie sind wichtig in hinsicht der Quelle und als Bestätigung, dass die Kräfte Napoleons nicht so übermässig sind.

Nach allem, was uns bis jetzt über die Massregeln Napoleon's zugekommen ist, glaube ich annehmen zu müssen, dass er nicht zuerst angreifen wird, aber vielleicht in demselben Augenblick, als er die Nachrichten von Eröffnung der Feindseligkeiten am Oberrhein erhält, sein Glück gegen uns versucht, da er alsdann noch immer Zeit behält (wenn seine Unternehmung gegen uns glücken sollte) sich der grossen Armee entgegen zu setzen.

Ist dies jedoch nicht sein Plan, so hat er wahrscheinlich von Laon einen Marsch gegen den Oberrhein bereitet und fällt auf den Fürsten Schwarzenberg mit allem was er entbehren kann. Ich halte es deshalb für wichtig, dass jemand nach Rheims oder, womöglich, gar nach Laon gesendet wird, der daselbst bleibt, bis die Feindseligkeiten angefangen haben und Bonaparte eine Partie ergriffen hat.

Der Herzog hat mir gesagt, dass nach seinem heute erhaltenem Rapport 180 Stück Belagerungs-Geschütz bereit wären. Es ist also anzunehmen, dass das Belagerungsgeschütz von 200 Stück bis zur Eröffnung der Feindseligkeiten hier seyn wird.

Einige englische Regimenter der Armee aus Amerika sind wieder in Ostende angekommen. ⁹

And the same day he wrote to Gneisenau:

“Euer Excellenz habe ich die Ehre nebst beyliegenden Rapport die meldungen des General lieutenants v. Ziethen zurückzusenden.

Wegen der Sachsen hat der Herzog mir noch nichts weiter gesagt; ich vermuthete, es wird geschehen, sobald sich der General Lieutenant Lecoq meldet. Die Entstellung der Sachsen Geschichte im Rheinischen Merkur, als ob die Sachsen durch uns gereizt worden wären, hat mich veranlasst dem Regierungs Rath Sack zu Coblenz eine Rectification zu übertragen. Was mit der sächsischen, zu uns übertretenden Cavallerie zu thun ist, wird sich, glaub ich, am besten zeigen, wenn Euer Excellenz die sächsisch bleibende Cavallerie in die Cantons Gölpen, Herlé und Eisden über die Maas rücken lassen. Bleibt dann der preussische Theil ruhig, so bin ich unbesorgt, er wird sich ferner gut betragen. Das sächsische Gouvernement giebt übrigens durch seine neue Formationen deutlich zu erkennen, dass es ambitioese Absichten hat. Es gelingt ihm dadurch, eine Menge Officiers zurückzuhalten, welche zu uns übertreten wollten, die es indessen bald bereuen werden. Was Herzog Wellington dem Herrn. v. Brockhausen gesagt haben soll – wie er versichert – glaube ich nicht recht, da mir vorkömmt, dass B. manches erfindet, um sich wichtig zu machen. Ich habe ihn einigemal auf diesen Punckt nicht rein gefunden.

Herzog Wellington sagte mir noch vor eine Stunde, als Ich mit ihm von den Operationen sprach, er sehe einem Angriff Napoleons mit der grössten Ruhe entgegen, da er mit seinen Anstalten so wohl als wir fertig sey.

Ich erwiederte ihm, nach meiner Ansicht gäbe es jetzt für die Coalition keine glücklichere Begebenheit, als wenn Napoleon uns angriffe. Der Herzog tratt meinen Gründen völlig bey und theilt meine Ansicht, dass wir bis an die Aisne keine bedeutende Affaire haben werden, wenn wir die Franzosen nicht überraschen.

Ueberigens erwartet der Herzog eine nicht unbedeutende Verstärkungen, ohne das geringste zu ihrem schnelleren heranziehen zu thun; z.B. 13.m. Dänen sind noch nicht abmarchirt. Ich fragte den general Waltersdorff, ob der Herzog nicht treibe, dass sie marchiren und ankommen? Er antwortete “nein”, und doch hat er den Dänen versprochen, sie nicht vor einer Festung zu lassen.

Ich lege ein Schreiben des Generals Dörnberg bey, welches wegen der Räume zu Magazinen Ausschlüsse für p. Ribbentrupp giebt.” ¹⁰

That day, general Vincent wrote to prince Schwarzenberg:

“J’attends cette occasion dans l’envoi de l’officier de Votre Altesse me fait l’honneur de me parler, porteur des notions militaires et politiques qui doivent déterminer la marche de Votre Altesse dans les opérations qui sont à la veille d’être entamées.

Le duc de Wellington connoit la franchise de Votre Altesse et le fond qu’elle peut faire sur son caractère. Il ne doute point, mon prince, que vous ne soyez disposé à agir dès que les russes se trouveront en ligne en nombre jugé suffisant; cependant, il n’y a pas de doute que de toutes les forces que Buonaparte a dans ce moment à sa disposition, les quatre cinquièmes ne soient échelonnés et disposés contre les Pays Bas; cette considération fait désirer au duc de Wellington que l’on puisse profiter de cette disposition de l’armée ennemie, soit pour s’emparer le plutôt possible des positions qui peuvent forcer l’ennemi à équilibrer ses forces et à tâcher de le faire désister d’un système au moyen duquel en rassemblant ses moyens contre une seule armée; il peut se trouver à même de faire successivement face à toutes avec des succès plus ou moins balancés.”¹¹

The letter Schwarzenberg had sent to Vincent is also mentioned by sir Charles Stuart in the letter he wrote to lord Castlereagh from Ghent on the 13th June. It reads:

“I have the honor to acquaint your Lordship that the baron de Vincent has received letters from the head quarters of prince Schwartzberg, in a great measure anticipating the answers which are expected by the duke of Wellington to state the probable period when hostilities are likely to commence.

Prince Schwartzberg declares that, although the whole of the army under his command are already in a situation to take the field, he is unwilling to commence active operations before a body of sixty thousand of the Russians now in march through Germany, shall make him quite secure of the whole line between his right and the left Prussian army on the Upper Rhine.

The reports of the persons who have lately come through Germany to Brussels, concur in stating that the different columns of Russians which were passing through Wurtzburg on the 8th, will be in a line with the Austrian army about the 20th; so that the moment of action which has been fixed by the prince Schwartzberg cannot well be delayed beyond that period.”

Another person who was pre-occupied with the invasion into France was lieutenant John Hibbert of the 1st Dragoon guards who wrote on the 11th of June: “in about 4 days we shall advance. As Napoleon is already within two days march of the frontiers and is attempting to get between us and the Prussians but will not be able to do it, as we are too near.”¹²

Some kilometers away from Hibbert, however, sir William.Ponsonby, commander of the Union brigade, saw the possibility of a French attack, but at the same he saw that this wasn’t easy due to the broken roads and bridges; as it was for an allied advance.¹³

In his turn, general Colville wrote on the 11th of June about the invasion into France: “we shall not move before the 20th [of June]”¹⁴

12th of June

On the 11th of June Von Dörnberg transmitted the news to lord FitzRoy Somerset that Napoleon was in Avesnes on the 10th of June and that on the 6th of June part of the Guards marched from Paris towards Strassbourg and the remainder towards the frontier in the north. In Valenciennes there would be a large park of artillery. General headquarters would be at Laon.¹⁵

The same day, the prince of Orange noticed no changes along the French front in his sector.¹⁶ It was also Vincent who wrote to Schwarzenberg again, and he added lists about the French strengths, one through intelligence from Paris and a list from the duke of Feltré

The first one indicated the Armée du nord being 140.000 strong and the second one 109.000, both indicating this army was between Paris, through Laon and the frontier.

Both sources give a total strength of 37.000 men for the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th corps, plus 50.000 in hospitals and depots and 500 guns.¹⁷

The news of Napoleon's situation led lieutenant the Hon. George Cathcart, a junior officer on Wellington's staff to write this day to his mother:

"[...] I am going to a place 7 miles off to dine with an officer of horse artillery at which I shall meet Charles – I shall come back tomorrow to breakfast, for as Bonaparte is come to Maubeuge not above 60 miles from Bruxelles, it will not do to be long about.[...]"¹⁸

According to Von Dörnberg's information of the 12th of June, the French posts along the frontier (between Valenciennes and Bavay roads) would have been strengthened with infantry. A part of the park of artillery at Valenciennes would have departed, as well as units which were moving, through Guise and Laon, towards the Vendée. The park remaining at Valenciennes would have numbered about 60 pieces.¹⁹

It was for the coming invasion of France that Von Müffling informed Gneisenau on the columns of the Russian army which were marching for the frontiers of France.

Von Müffling writes: "[...] Im Fall Euer Excellenz die Fortsetzung des Russischen Marsches nicht kennen sollten, lege ich das Marsch Tableau der ersten Colonne bey. Die zweyte geht bey Oppenheim, di 3. Bey Mannheim zugleich mit dieser über. Die andere habe ich nicht erhalten können. So viel scheint mir aus diesem Tableau vorzugehen, dass die Oestreicher [sic] den 20. Juny von Basel aus die Feindseligkeiten anfangen müssen.[...]"

The tableau as enclosed was dated at Mainz on the 7th of June and indicated that the first column would reach this place on the Rhine between the 16th and the 30th of June.²⁰

Apart from the information on the advance of the Russian army, Von Müffling also wrote Gneisenau on a totally other subject, i.e. the delivery of 20.000 muskets by the British to the Prussian army. On behalf of Wellington he asked him where he was to receive them, so that they could easily be forwarded to the Prussian army. For this, the port of Antwerp was proposed.²¹

13th of June

Later on the 12th of June, at 7 p.m., Von Dörnberg issued another report containing the information that the corps of Reille would have reached Maubeuge and its vicinity on the 11th of June, while general headquarters would have been transferred from Laon to Avesnes. The forces between Philippeville, Givet, Mézières, Guise and Maubeuge could be estimated at more than 100.000 troops of the line. A very considerable corps of cavalry, being inspected by Grouchy, would have been at Hirson. The general opinion in the French army would be that they would attack and that the arrival of Napoleon at Avesnes would be the signal for the beginning of hostilities.²²

The same day, at 7 p.m., baron De Roisin, from his château de Rongy, near the frontier, sent a report to the duke of Wellington informing him that Soult would have arrived at Valenciennes on the 11th of June and that he shortly after would have traveled further to Maubeuge and Avesnes. Jérôme would be at Laon. The 1st corps would be at Valenciennes and all posts of the Imperial Guard at Paris would have been relieved by the National Guard. An attack would follow on the 14th of June, but this could be a mere feint upon Mons.²³

It was lord Uxbridge who wrote to Wellington from Ninove on the 12th of June. He reported to him that Napoleon would have arrived at Laon on the 10th of June and that the Imperial

Guard would have made a two-days march from thence to the front and that it was Napoleon's intention to attack immediately. On the other hand, troops from Arras and its vicinity were making forced marches for the Vendée.²⁴

Despite all the news of French movements, Wellington was confident about his situation. In fact, he wrote to Lord Lynedoch on the 13th of June: "There is nothing new here. We have reports of Buonaparte's joining the army and attacking us; but I have accounts from Paris of the 10th, on which day he was still there; and I judge from his speech to the Legislature that his departure was not likely to be immediate. I think we are too strong for him here."²⁵

At the same time, the duke was clear to Earl Bathurst about the need for the completion of the works at Ostend, even though they would be much more expensive as they were calculated to be.²⁶

The prince of Orange, in a letter to his father dated 13th of June, showed the same sense of assurance, but eventually didn't fully rule out a possible attack:

"Ik heb de eere aan Uwe Majesteit rapport te doen dat er bij de armée niets van belang is voorgevallen, de tijding van de aankomst van Napoloen op de linie in mijn rapport van den 9^{de} vermeld, heeft zig niet bevestigd [sic] en schijnt veroorzaakt geweest te zijn door het lossen van het geschut ter gelegenheid van het aanneemen der consitutie en het ontfangen [sic] der adelaars bij de regimenten in verschillende vestingen op de frontières.

Den 10den deezes heeft er eene kleine affaire plaats gehad op de voorposten bezet door het regiment ligte dragonders no.5 bij het Bois Bourdon op het kruispunt van de oude romeinsche chaussé [sic] met die van Mons naar Maubeuge; tot deze affaire is door een Franssche officier aanleiding gegeven en had ten gevolge dat er drie Fransche hussaren gevangen zijn genomen, van onze zijde is een wachtmeester geblesseerd geworden.

De Fransche commandant van de voorposten heeft mij bekennde van hunner zijde ongelijk gehad te hebben de drie gevangene hussaren laten reclameeren, waarvan ik rapport aan den hertog van Wellington heb gedaan, dewelke om de goede verstandhouding op de voorposten niet af te breeken mij geauthoriseerd heeft deze drie gevangene uit te leveren, waartoe ik de orders heb gegeven. De laatste tijdingen van den grenzen ontvangen zijn volgende.

Napoleon wordt te Avesnes verwagt, waar men alles voor het groote hoofdkwartier in gereedheid brengt.

Den maarschalk Soult, majoor generaal van de armée, is in de nacht van den 12den te Maubeuge gepasseert [sic], alwaar men order heeft de kwartieren voor de keizerlijke garde te maaken. De divisie van den generaal van Damme rigt zig ook naar de kante van deze vesting, en alle bewegingen duiden aan dat men een groot aantal trouppens [sic] op dat punt wil vereenigen waar men Napoleon ook alle ogenblikken verwagende is.

Volgens het zeggen van Fransche generaals worden alle voorbereidingen gemaakt om een aanval op Brabant te doen.

De persoon welke deze tijdingen heeft gebracht komt van Maubeuge waar hij de nacht van den 12^{de} is geweest, en verzeekert bovengemelde zelfs gezien te hebben."²⁷

And to the duke of Wellington he wrote that day:

"I do not conceive how the formation of a fourth division would make any material difference or create any inconvenience with regard to the subsistence of the army of the Netherlands. I therefore think that if there are only the two reasons against it you mention in your letter it may very easily be accommodated in the manner you propose.

I am going to send back the prisoners this morning with a letter to Count d'Erlon according to your desire. A person coming from Maubeuge says that the head quarters had been transferred from Laon to Avesnes where a division of the guards was to arrive yesterday and Napoleon daily [sic] expected. Jérôme Bonaparte is said to be at Solre le Chateau and Soult to have passed through Maubeuge yesterday morning coming from Laon."²⁸

About this situation of complacency, sir Hussey Vivian wrote this day to his wife: “[..] On June 13th I went to Tournay to inspect the 1st Hussars. I there heard that the whole French army had concentrated at Maubeuge, and the persuasion in France was that Buonaparte would arrive from Paris and advance on the 15th. We treated this with contempt, supposing that he would hardly dare such thing etc.[..]”²⁹

And Von Müffling expressed his worries towards Gneisenau about the initiative of king Wrede of Bavaria to take Nancy, without putting himself under the command of prince Schwarzenberg and before the official operations of the allies would start.

“Nach dem von Euer Excellenz mir ertheilten Auftrag habe ich dem Herzog Wellington vorgelegt, was der F.M.Fürst Wrede über die Operationen für Ansichten hat.

Der Herzog äusserte sich folgendermassen: “er sehe nicht recht den Grund, aus welchen der Fürst Wrede allein gegen Nancy vorgehen wolle, und der Fürst Schwarzenberg, der die grössten Distancen zu durchlaufen hat, hatten solle ? Die Meynung des russischen Kaisers – mit allen Arméén zugleich zu operiren – sey durchgegangen; sie koste uns 3 Wochen Zeit. Nun müsse es wohl dabey bleiben, dass Fürst Schwarzenberg den Krieg eröffne, von dem Fürst Wrede nur einen Teil ausmache. Die Vorschläge des Fürsten Wrede gingen in ein detail über, welches nur der Fürst Schwarzenberg entscheiden könne.”

Euer Excellenz habe Ich bereits früher eröffnet, dass es mir scheine, Fürst Wrede wolle sich durchaus in den Besitz von Nancy setzen. Es schient mir, dass jetzt Chateau Salins genannt wird, um den Nahmen Nancy zu vermeiden. Wo sollen denn die Russen in Frankreich eindringen ? Es scheint mir viel zweckmässiger, dass Sie die Festungen Metz etc. rechts, als dass sie [sie] links liegen lassen, wo es keine Strassen giebt, und wo sie auf die befestigten Ardennen stossen. Nun begreife ich aber durchaus nicht, wie die Ardennen besser tournirt werden können als über Nancy, und warum der so gut als gar nicht besetzten Vogesen wegen unsre Operationen um zwölf Tage aufgehalten werden sollen ?

Nach dem, was ich hier erfahren habe, gab es in Wien lange und schwierige Unterhandlungen, eh der Fürst Wrede sich entschloss, unter dem Fürst Schwarzenberg zu stehen, und es scheint daher, dass der jetzige Vorschlag zwey Zwecke hat:

1. sich vom Fürsten Schwarzenberg loszumachen, und
2. in Nancy frei wirthschaften zu können

Dies letzte wird durch eine Convention beschränkt werden, welche unsre Gesandten mit dem König von Frankreich abzuschliessen den Auftrag erhalten haben, wovon die Haupt-Grundsätze sein werden: dass der König von Frankreich die Administration der eroberten Provinzen gleich übernimmt, dass wir jedoch Intendanten einsetzen, durch welche die Requisitionen zur Verpflegung der Armée gehen.

Bis jetzt ist der lang ersehnte Courier aus dem H.Q. des Fürsten Schwarzenberg nicht eingetroffen, indessen hat mir General Vincent mitgetheilt, dass ihm Fürst Schwarzenberg unterm 31.May geschrieben hat: “sobald die Russen in der Linie sind, fange Ich meine Operationen an, und nehme meine Direction über Langres und Chaumont.” Hiernach scheint der Fürst die Absicht des links Ziehens und Vereinigung mit Frimont ganz aufgegeben zu haben.³⁰

However, the situation was that Schwarzenberg had elaborated his plan for the invasion of France on the 6th of June.

As it had been approved by the emperors of Austria and Russia on the 7th and 8th of June, it was submitted to the conference on the 10th of June where it was formally approved of.

The result was sent by Schwarzenberg to Wellington the same day, but this letter reached the duke after the war had started.³¹

14th of June

On the 13th of June, at 8 a.m., Von Dörnberg wrote to lord FitzRoy Somerset about the concentration of the French army near Maubeuge.³²

That day, the prince of Orange informed Wellington about the transfer of French general headquarters from Laon to Avesnes, where a division of the guards was to arrive on the 12th of June and Napoleon daily expected.³³

In the evening of the 13th of June, baron Behr reported from Mons to the prince of Orange about the arrival of 20.000 men at Valenciennes during the night of the 12th of June; there would be numerous troops in the vicinity of Maubeuge.³⁴

On the 13th of June, lord Hill would also have been informed that, at 1 o'clock in the morning, the French outposts and pickets all fell back towards Maubeuge and that it was generally believed that an attack was intended on the 15th.³⁵

That day, Von Dörnberg also wrote to lord Uxbridge:

“The whole French army it appears is concentrating at & near Maubeuge – the troops near Valenciennes marched yesterday afternoon at 3 o'clock, leaving only their picquets. The troops near Mézières have passed Beaumont for Maubeuge, and those from Avesnes & Laon march in the same direction, so I think the whole army may [...] there today – Soult was at [...] yesterday – Jérôme Bonaparte has [his head ?] quarters at [?] le Château. But Bonaparte himself though hourly expected was not yet arrived. There is a considerable body of cavalry with this army, a great part of it was reviewed by genl. Grouchy near Hirson two days ago.”³⁶

On the 14th of June Von Dörnberg sent lord FitzRoy Somerset two reports, one at 9.30 a.m. and the other at 3 p.m. The first one indicated that the troops concentrated near Maubeuge were there to be reviewed. On the 13th they would have began to march in different directions, some to Beaumont and others to Pont sur Sambre.

The second one reported on the concentration of all forces near Maubeuge and Beaumont. The supposition was the French army up to Beaumont to be 80.000 men strong and up to Philippeville to be 100.000. Napoleon would have left Paris on the night of the 11th of June.³⁷

At 2 a.m. that morning, Lord Hill sent the following message to De Lancey:

“I forward to you three reports of the intelligence containing in these reports of the enemy's assembling in great force near Maubeuge, which have reached hd.quarters before you receive this. With respect to colonel Estorff's request to send infantry to St.Gluisbain [St.Ghislain], I have desire[d] Sir Henry Clinton to keep in view the instructions he has received, directing him to collect his division at Ath in case the enemy should attack; consequently he will not send infantry to St.Gluisbain [St.Ghislain], or further in advance than they are at present. I take this opportunity of asking whether it is the duke of Wellington's intention to send any troops for the purpose of remaining in the garrison of Audenarde.”³⁸

And one hour later, at 9 a.m., he wrote to prince Frederik:

“I have the honour to acquaint Your Royal Highness that during the night I received several reports from the frontier stating that the enemy have assembled a very considerable force near Maubeuge, for which purpose troops have been marching for some days from Laon, Valenciennes and Mézières. It appears that Bonnaparte [sic] has not been on the frontier but it is said that Soult is certainly with the army.

Should I hear anything particular Your Royal Highness may depend on hearing from me.”³⁹

By the early morning of the 14th of June, the prince of Orange must have felt the need to see for himself whether the intelligence circling round was true, as before he did so, he wrote to Wellington:

“I believe that general Tindal is mistaken as to the intention of the King with regard to the Battalion of Orange Nassau which has joined the army since the day before yesterday and a company of Nassau volontiers, since the king spoke to me about them before his departure and seemed to wish that if you had no objection to it, this battalion joined to the other with a Dutch battalion should form a brigade which therefore is the same arrangement you intend to make. I inclose the last report I received from the front. I am going this moment to Bois Bourdon to see whether I can observe any large camp or assemblage of troops in the vicinity of Maubeuge.”⁴⁰

It was also on the 14th of June that Von Müffling replied to a letter of the 13th of June of Gneisenau which had been carried to Brussels by colonel Von Pfuel; enclosed to this letter were official documents from Schwarzenberg and Knesebeck. After reading them to Wellington, Von Müffling asked the duke (and here is quoted from the letter written by Von Müffling): “

1. welchen Tag er nun zweckmässig halte, die Feindseligkeiten zu eröffnen
2. ob er die sogenannte Unterstützung der Russischen Armee (durch den Marsch auf Trier und Luxemburg) gewünscht habe.”

The duke replied to “1. er halte es zweckmässig, dass wir hier die Bewegungen 4-5 Tage später anfangen, so dass wir den 1.Juli bei Mons die Grenze passieren; zu 2.er hielte dafür, wir wären stark genug ohne die Russen, und daher müssten sie [...] ohne Umwege marschieren [...]

Nach den Nachrichten, welche heute Nacht eingegangen sind, versammelt sich die ganze feindliche Armee bis heute bei Maubeuge.

Oberst v.Pfuel wird Ew.Excellenz das Weitere sagen.” This is what Von Müffling wrote back to Gneisenau.⁴¹

General Vincent, in writing to prince Schwarzenberg, gives some insight into the state of affairs in Brussels on the 14th of June: full of preparation for the coming invasion into France, while at the same time the possibility of a French attack could not be fully ruled out.

That morning, Vincent had met Wellington to discuss the invasion in connection with Schwarzenberg’s operations. Vincent writes:

“[...] Nous sortons dans ce moment (dix heures du matin) de chez le duc de Wellington, à qui j’ai communiqué toutes les pièces qui établissent notre marche présomptive et règlent les opérations communes des armées alliées. Le duc n’a fait aucune objection; il entre dans le plan généralement adopté et compte en conséquence agir lui même à peu près en même temps que Votre Altesse passera le Rhin, c’est à dire que nos mouvements ici commenceront après le 24 de ce mois. Il s’entendra sur cet objet avec le maréchal Blücher. Cependant tout est subordonné à ce que pourroit faire l’ennemi et il n’est pas impossible qu’il prenne ici l’initiative. Les nouvelles annoncent même une concentration de troupes ennemies sur notre frontière. Le maréchal Soult est arrivé inopinément à Maubeuge et sa venue semble indiquer quelque projet hostile.”⁴²

And it was for the invasion that the duke of Wellington put his thoughts extensively on paper to prince Metternich as far as the subsistence of the allied armies was concerned once they would be in that country.⁴³

The same day, standing orders were issued for the regulation of the pontoon train [⁴⁴] and a memorandum was composed respecting the means required to besiege Maubeuge. This last

document, again, was linked to a memorandum of the 9th of June regarding the mode proposed for carrying out the duties of any siege during the invasion into France.⁴⁵

And to the prince of Orange the duke wrote that Ath could not be regarded as “une place forte régulière; mais non plus est elle exposée à une attaque régulière dans les circonstances actuelles.”⁴⁶

Wellington, having received this day (14th of June) a letter which was written on the 9th of June by general Dumouriez about the pension he had applied for to prince Metternich, wrote him:

“Je recois votre lettre du 9me et je peux vous assurer que j’aurai le plus grand plaisir d’appuyer auprès du prince de Metternich la demande que vous avez l’intention de faire à l’Empereur de la restitution de votre pension.”

The duke resumed this same letter on the 20th of June, as on the 14th of June no post left and therefore he didn’t finish it.⁴⁷

It was also on the morning of the 14th of June, around 11 a.m., that Wellington received rear-admiral sir Pulteney Malcolm, commander of the naval forces operating along the coast. Malcolm consulted with the duke on his instructions and the service he could employ in the cooperation with the allied armies.⁴⁸

At the same time, in the field, captain Bowles of 1st regiment of Foot Guards was confident in every respect, especially in the case Napoleon might take the offensive. On the 14th of June he wrote to Lord Fitzharris:

“There has been for several days past an idea that an attack on this army was in contemplation, and if it could be made with any chance of a temporary success, it might perhaps be a good though a very hazardous plan. The army of the Moselle, about 25.000 strong, has lately been moved forward, and including garrisons, the enemy probably muster 110.000 effective troops in our front. The united forces under marshals Blücher and Wellington are nearly double, and we are quite ready. One day’s march would concentrate us on the centre, and two on either flank of our present line, and we must always have sufficient notice to enable this to be done with ease. Tents have just been issued to us in quite sufficient numbers to encamp all those who cannot be cantoned during the campaign; this arrangement will save the lives of many. Every branch of the army is in high order. We have upwards of 120 pieces of field artillery with the British and Hanoverian corps, not including the Dutch and Belgian.

I doubt whether so magnificent a display has ever been seen in point of equipment. The French will not much relish being out-numbered in an arm in which they have always been accustomed to have a decided superiority. The moment we move you may depend on constant accounts.”⁴⁹

By the 14th of June, at Braine le Comte, Constant Rebecque was informed by his outposts about a possible French action.

In fact, on the 13th of June, major De Paravicini, chief of staff of the brigade of Van Merlen, wrote to Constant Rebecque that Von Dörnberg had been informed by Von Zieten that the corps of Vandamme had moved from Mézières towards Maubeuge. General Behr also had received on the evening before the news that Reille was concentrating and that the French were preparing for some kind of military operation.⁵⁰

And very early on the 14th of June, from St.Symphorien, Van Merlen wrote to Constant Rebecque: “J’ai l’honneur de vous envoyer une lettre d’un capitaine français (bon Niel) qui est assez singulier et dont on peut comprendre bien des choses.

Il parait qu'on prépare un coup sur quelque point. Les postes français de Bettignies et Goegnies sont partis; une vedette restait seulement encore le soir en avant de Villers-sire-Nicole.

Je crois qu'il serait bon de prévenir le prince de cette affaire afin d'être en mesure. Il parait qu'on en veut aux prussiens. Toutes les troupes ont des vivres et fourrages pour 8 jours pris aux magasins de Maubeuge, qui sont déjà remplis par d'autres réquisitions." ⁵¹

The enclosed letter reads:

"Le 13 à 10 heures du soir.

Je vous recommande la plus grande surveillance, mon cher Bourgoing. [⁵²] Faites faire de fréquentes patrouilles, et avertissez moi si vous avez une alerte; gardez à cet effet le chasseur que je vous envoie: dans deux heures je le ferai relever et vous me ferez savoir par lui si vous êtes tranquille.

Il a été impossible d'avoir des chevaux; le dernier déserteur voulait cinq cents francs du sien; j'espère que bientôt nous vous trouverons une monture à peu de frais car je crois que les grands coups se porteront après-demain.

L'empereur est à Avesnes et la cavalerie de la garde est en ligne. Amitié parfaite. Bn.Niel.

J'ai reçu la lettre par le comte d'Erlon, elle doit lui être arrivée maintenant." ⁵³

At the same time, Van Merlen wrote in a similar sense to major general Von Steinmetz at Fontaine l'Evêque (see below).

And on the 13th, Collaert wrote to Constant Rebecque about the presence of Napoleon at Avesnes during the night of the 12th and his presence that day at Maubeuge; five regiments of lancers and three companies of horse artillery were supposed to cross the Sambre the 13th of June. ⁵⁴

All units of the Netherlands army had been alerted some days before (see above) but it was now on the 14th of June that the order for the brigades of Ghigny and Trip to be in readiness each morning was countermanded. The measure was only permitted with the approval of the prince in respect of the short distance between Braine le Comte and Boussoit-sur-Haine.

Constant Rebecque wrote to Collaert:

"Z.K.H. de prins van Oranje vernomen hebbende dat U.H.E.G. de reserve kavalerie of de brigades Ghigny and Trip deze in meer nachten de wapenen heeft doen nemen, heeft mij gelast U.H.E.G. te inviteren deze voorzorg van zekerheid met de reserve kavalerie of de brigades Ghigny en Trip voortaan niet te willen nemen, alvorens daartoe de goedkeuring van Z.K.H. naar opgave de motieven gevraagd te hebben, daar het overbrengen dezer dépêche al zeer spoedig kan geschieden. U.H.Ed.G. zult mij verpligten bij voorkomende gelegenheid de ontvangst dezer missive te accuseren [?]." ⁵⁵

Yet, on the 13th of June, it was colonel Van Delen of the 3rd division of Chassé who ordered the division:

"De generaal gelast mij op dit moment Uw.Ed.Gestr. onverwijld aan te schrijven en [...] te kennen te geven dat Z.E. verlangt dat de bataillions Uwer brigade morgen vroeg voor 5 uren, onder de wapens zig zullen bevinden, en zig gereed houden oogenblikkelijk aan de gegevene order der 9 & 10 dezer [...] de dispositie welke bat. ter plaats, nader orders zullen inwagten en welke dadelijk naar Faj zullen marcheren, te kunnen voldoen, indien eenen aanval zouden plaats hebben." ⁵⁶

15th of June

It must have been in the early morning that the duke of Wellington was informed through a French gazette, sent on the 14th of June at 5 p.m. by the prince of Orange, containing the

information that Napoleon would have left Paris for the north frontier on the night of the 11th of June. About his personal reconnaissance to the forest of Bourdon, which is about 10 kilometers south of Mons (see above), the prince had written at the same time to the duke: “[...] I am just now returned from the front, where all is quiet, and where no change has taken place.[...]”⁵⁷

Several letters written that same morning give an impression of the state of mind in Wellington’s headquarters the moment war had already started. Some of them came from general Von Müffling for Gneisenau. One of them reads:

“Durch die Meldungen des Generals Dörnberg sind die des General Leutnants von Zieten vom gestrigen dato bestätigt worden und schliesse ich eine derselben abschriftlich an.”⁵⁸

Durch die französischen Zeitungen vom 12.Juni ist es entschieden, dass Napoleon in der Nacht vom 11. zum 12. Juni Paris verlassen hat. Wohin er gegangen ist, war unbekannt.

Da wir gestern nicht angegriffen worden sind, so scheint es, dass der Feind uns täuschen will und seine Front masquirt, um die Bewegungen die er vor hat, besser zu verbergen.

Der König von Frankreich hat gestern dem hier angekommenen General Fagel gesagt, er habe Nachricht von bedeutenden Successen der Royalisten der Vendée, und dass sie Angers genommen, allein Napoleon habe die ganze junge Garde dagegen geschickt, so dass zu fürchten sei, die Vendée werde erdrückt werden, eh wir anfangen.

Ist dies wirklich so wahr, so kann es sein, dass Napoleon hier unsere Aufmerksamkeit erregen will, um Zeit zu gewinnen, vielleicht um eine Stellung zu nehmen, die seiner jetzigen Lage angemessener ist, nemlich im Centro, in der Gegend von St.Menehould mit der Hauptarmee, um auf uns, auf die Oesterreicher und Russen fallen zu können.

Die Englisch-Batavische Armee ist nach beiliegender Ordre de Bataille so aufgestellt, dass die beiden Flügel Korps unter Lord Hill und Prinz von Oranien von Enghien und Braine le Comte bis Nivelles liegen und in ganz kurzer Zeit zusammengezogen werden können.

Das Korps des Zentrums welches man schicklicher die Reserve nennen könnte, liegt in und bei Brüssel, hat 15 / m Mann Infanterie und kann sich in allen Direktionen bewegen.

Sollte der Feind zwischen dem Meer und der Schelde eindringen, so könnte die Armee auf zwei Punkten (wo Brückenköpfe angelegt sind), sich über die Schelde zur Offensive bewegen, sollte der Feind am rechten Ufer der Maas vordringen, so ist der Herzog bereit, entweder mit uns über die Maas ihm entgegen zu gehen, oder (was ich ihm unter gewissen Umständen vorgeschlagen habe) gerade durch die französischen Festungen durch in des Feindes Rücken zu gehen.”⁵⁹

Another one from Von Müffling to Gneisenau was about the coming invasion into France:

“Euer Excellenz habe Ich die Ehre in der Anlage ein Schreiben des Lord Castlereagh und ein andres des Herzogs Wellington in Betreff der Administration in Frankreich abschriftlich mitzuteilen, aus welchem Euer Excellenz die Disposition ersehen werden, nach welchen hier gehandelt wird.

Der General v.Toll ist mit einem Schreiben des russischen Kaisers an den Herzog Wellington hier angekommen. Dieses Schreiben enthält die bekannten Ideen des Kaisers zwischen den beyden Flügel Arméén mit der Seinigen zu laviren.

Der Herzog antwortet dem Kaiser ganz dasselbe was Ich Euer Excellenz über diesen Gegenstand geschrieben habe, und rath gerade aus zu gehen, da wir der fremden Hülfe entbehren können.

In den französischen Blättern ist eine Proclamation des Fürsten Blücher mit sehr bittere Noten abgedruckt worden.”⁶⁰

Yet another one was about the service of captain Von Scharnhorst. Apparently, Gneisenau had requested Von Müffling to formally arrange his service. Von Scharnhorst, being Prussian, was at the prince of Orange's staff (cf. above) and later in Wellington's without, apparently, his position having been formally dealt with. It reads:

“Nachdem von Euer Excellenz mir mitgetheilte Auftrag in Betreff des Capt.v.Scharnhorst trug Ich den Herzog Wellingtons das nöthige vor: der Herzog erwiederte mir er wolle der Capt.Scharnhorst dem englischen Obrist zutheilen. Ich bemerkte dass die Wünsche des Fürsten dahin gingen der C.v.Scharnhorst wie im letzten Kriege zu gebrauchen und dass es ihm dazu nöthig sey den Krieg in preussischer Uniform zu machen, worauf der Herzog mir versprach sogleich nach erfolgter Rücksprache mit seinem jetzigen Chef die nöthigen Ordres hierzu zu ertheilen.”⁶¹

And Von Müffling wrote another letter to Gneisenau which reads:

Nachdem Ich dem Herzog Wellington Euer Excellenz Auftrag in Hinsicht der Gewehre ausgerichtet hatte, und am Eingang gesagt: “es müsse hier ein Missverständnis obwalten”, erwiederte mir der Herzog: “Der General Low habe ihm das Schreiben des General Lieutenants Grafen Gneisenau vorlegen müssen, da ihm über alle Vorräthe an Waffen etc. in England die Disposition gegeben sey. Er erinnere sich genau, dass drey Forderungen in dem Schreiben gewesen wären: 1) Gewehre, 2) Theubrücken, 3) Rocket Batterien. Diese Dingen habe er an 3 verschiedenen Orten für uns bestellen müssen, indessen den Brief an das Departement gesendet, welches die Gewehre sogleich abgeschickt hätte, und bey den Ackten haben müsse.

Was die Bezahlung betreffe, so sey es ganz in der Ordnung, dass ein subalternes Department sich die Zahlung sogleich erbitte, da es gewaltige Contracte über diese Gegenstände zu erfüllen habe, indess möge ich ihm nur eine Note geben, worin Ich verlange, dass diese Gewehre ein Gegenstand der Abrechnung zwischen beyden Gouvernements würden. England sey ausser den Subsidien noch viel an Preussen schuldig, und so werde ich der Ersatz schon finden. Die Theubrücken wären fertig und die Rockets befänden sich bey dem Belagerungsgeschütz.

Ich erwiederte, dass Ich Euer Excellenz nochmals über diesen Gegenstand schreiben müsste, da mir keine Abschrift des Schreibens an den General Low zugekommen wäre, welches die Absicht allerdings klar aussprechen müsste.

Der Herzog sagte mir nochmals, Euer Excellenz möchten nur ohne Sorge über die Gewehre disponieren; er wolle schon vermitteln, dass uns die Zahlung für die Gewehre nicht eher als bis zur Abrechnung abgefordert werden, auch sey der Preis nicht hoch – er wisse es nicht aus dem Kopf, allein er glaube 1 Pfund und einige Schilling.

Ich erwarte daher Euer Excellenz weitere Befehle über diesen Gegenstand.

Brüssel, den 15. Juny 1815

Von Müffling⁶²

That morning, major general Van Reede, Netherlands military commissioner at Wellington's headquarters in Brussels, paid a visit to Wellington and afterwards wrote a report to minister Van Nagell, which reads:

“J'ai l'honneur de faire parvenir à Votre Excellence un raport [sic] du direction de la police du département de Gemappes qui s'accorde parfaitement avec les rapports venues hier du général Ziethen; on n'avait pas d'après ceux-cy la certitude que Bonaparte fut arrivé cependant tout donnait lieu de croire qu'il était entre Maubeuge et Bavai ou dans l'une de ces endroits. Les troupes de Valenciennes s'étaient porté sur leur droite et se réunissent à celle qui

se trouvent à Mézières sur la droite de Maubeuge, qui se portaient sur leur gauche, pour se concentrer autour de cette place; un parc d'artillerie de 40 pièces de canon était disoit-on sorti de Valenciennes d'après ces mouvements on supposait la possibilité d'une attaque sur Mons, et si les nouvelles continuent à l'indiquer il est probable que l'armée du duc se rassemblera dans la position d'Ath.

Cependant jusqu'à présent il ne s'est point part que je sache des mouvements de notre côté du moins ici il n'y a point d'ordre de donné pour le départ des troupes aussi ne parait on point convaincu encore que Bonaparte puisse avoir des sérieux projets d'attaque, partie par les désavantages de sa position même en cas de réussite sur un point partie parce qu'il vient chercher l'armée dans toute sa force, tandis qu'en la laissant venir en France elle se diminuerait de tout ce que l'observations de forteresses rendrait indispensable de laisser en arrière.

J'en été préalablement informé hier, monsieur le baron, que le prince Louis de Salm avait été arrêté mais sans recevoir encore aucun détail sur ce qui aurait été trouvé chez lui; dès que j'en saurai d'avantage j'aurai l'honneur de vous en informer.

Hier, dans la journée le duc de Cumberland est arrivé ici où [sic] après avoir passé quelques heures avec le duc il a continué sa route pour l'Angleterre; dans la nuit d'auaravent il était arrivé un aide de camp du prince de Schwartzenberg, le comte Paer, ainsi que le lieutenant général Russe baron de Toll.

Ma dépêche en étant là j'ai eu l'occasion de voir le duc de Wellington qui m'a dit en autant de termes; je ne crois pas qu'on nous attaquera, nous sommes trop fort. J'ai appris encore que les dispositions étaient telles que dans 6 à 8 heures son armée peut au besoin être réuni il compte rester ici de sa personne et attendre en général que les mouvements des francais soient plus prononcés avant de se mouvoir.”⁶³

The report as referred to read:

“Mons, 14 Juin 1815.

Des avis que je [...] apprennent que les Francais sont arrivé hier de Merbes le Château que l'on compte au moins 25 mille hommes depuis un front qui est sur la Sambre jusqu'à Solre le Château vers Maubeuge; les officiers disent qu'il sont très nombreux et qu'ils attendent le moment au moment l'arrivée de Bonaparte pour commencer les hostilités. Napoleon est partie de Paris la nuit du 11 au 12 juin dit la Gazette de France.

Ils paraissent plein d'ardeur et de désir de pénétrer en Belgique. Des nouvelles des points de la frontière vers [...] Valenciennes apprennent que les avant-postes Francais sont rétirés que même il y a peu de monde à Valenciennes [...] cependant 20 mille hommes ont été passé en revue il y a trois jours.

Toutes les communes frontières en France sont accablés de requisition de tout genre. La forte armée execute en force de [...] et fait même de nombreuses arrestations des personnes les plus marquantes pour assurer la rentrée des contributions et des [...] requisis [...]. La surveillance de la [...] est devenu tellement [...] que chacun craint pour sa personne et en général les habitants des communes soupirent après le moment [...] qui les délivra de toutes les angoisses et [...] réquisitions [...] il y a des communes dit on dans lesquelles on demande plus qu'elles ne possèdent.”⁶⁴

That morning, Van der Capellen must have seen the duke as well, as he wrote to king Willem that morning:

“Bij de mededeeling van de berigten uit Mons aan den hertog van Wellington zeide hij met den inhoud derzelve reeds bekend te zijn. Hij hoopte dat Buonaparte zoude attaqueeren, maar geloofde het niet, als niet sterk genoeg zijnde. De hertog zeide zijn dispositiën zoodanig genomen te hebben dat hij van hier in 5 of hoogstens 6 uur op alle die punten konde zijn waar zijn tegenwoordigheid noodzakelijk mogt zijn.”⁶⁵

In the night of the 14th of June general Toll arrived at Brussels, delivering Wellington a letter of the Russian emperor about the Russian participation in the coming invasion.⁶⁶

It read:

“Heidelberg, le 10 juin 1815.

Ayant joint le quartier-général depuis peu de jours, monsieur le maréchal, j’expédie auprès de vous le général de division de Toll, pour vous en faire part, et vous exprimer en mon nom combien l’armée Russe et moi nous nous trouvons flattés de vous avoir pour compagnons d’armes. Combattans à vos côtés, nous tâcherons de justifier votre estime et votre confiance. En même tems je charge le général Toll de vous rendre compte des différentes déterminations qui ont été arrêtées dans le comité militaire à Heidelberg, et qui different en partie de ce qui avait été décidé à Vienne. Veuillez nous dire franchement votre sentiment. Ma croyance en vos lumières et vos talens est entière.

Le général de brigade comte Potozky va arriver incessamment à votre quartier-général pour y rester à votre disposition et servir à nos rapports mutuels. Je vous prie, maréchal, d’accorder votre confiance à ces deux officiers, qui s’efforceront de la méritier. Recevrez, Monsieur le Maréchal, l’assurance de tout l’attachement et de la haute estime que je vous ai voué. Alexandre.”⁶⁷

In return, the duke wrote to czar Alexander:

à Bruxelles, ce 15 juin 1815

Sire,

Je suis bien flatté de la lettre que votre Majesté m’a fait l’honneur de m’écrire, et je ferai tous mes efforts pour mériter la bonne opinion que Votre Majesté témoigne de moi.

J’ai lu avec la plus grande attention les pièces sur les opérations que Votre Majesté m’a envoyé par le général Toll; et je vois avec la plus grande satisfaction que nous sommes tous d’accord sur les bases générales du plan d’opérations: c’est-à-dire, de limiter notre extension par la nécessité de trouver les subsistances pour des armées si vastes; que l’armée Autrichienne d’Italie doit coopérer avec les autres, mais sur une base différente; et que le centre de la grande armée d’opérations, celle qui s’étendra depuis la mer jusqu’à la Suisse, doit appuyer ou la droite ou la gauche, selon les circonstances. Ce centre sera composé des troupes de Votre Majesté en entier; la droite de l’armée du maréchal Blücher et de celle sous mes orderes; la gauche de celle sous les ordres immédiats du prince de Schwarzenberg.

Je ne vois pas grand inconvénient à l’extension qu’on donne à la gauche jusqu’à la Suisse, à laquelle je vois que les officiers Autrichiens tiennent très fortement. Je crois que toutes les parties de l’armée sont assez fortes pour résister chacune toute seule à tous les efforts de l’ennemi; et ainsi cette extension n’a pas les inconvéniens [sic] ordinaires d’une telle mesure; en même tems [sic] qu’elle nous facilitera les moyens de subsistance et nous donnera plus de sécurité sur notre gauche et occupera un rayon plus étendu du pays ennemi.

Pour ce qui regarde le centre, l’idée que j’avais était que cette partie de l’armée serait, aussi que la droite et la gauche, composé de 150.000 hommes; et j’ai cru que sa marche devrait être dirigée sur la Meuse, entre Verdun et Sedan. Le centre aurait été là en mesure d’appuyer ou la droite ou la gauche; et aurait eu l’appui de la première pour son passage de la Meuse et pour ses opérations sur l’Oise et la Haute Aisne.

Mais, comme chacune de ces parties de la grande armée va entrer en campagne avec de 50.000 à 60.000 hommes de plus que je ne comptais, c’est-à-dire, de 200.000 à 210.000 hommes chacune, le centre peut être dirigé avec des vues différentes. Il faut observer

cependant que, quand je parle de la force de ces différentes parties de la grande armée, je n'ai de connaissance positive que sur la droite. Si c'est vrai que chacune des trois parties soit assez forte pour se soutenir toute seule, alors je dirais que la marche du centre devrait être dirigée de Treves dans la vue des opérations qu'on voudra entreprendre contre la position que l'ennemi prendra sûrement sur l'Aisne. Si nous voulons tourner cette position par sa gauche, et opérer par les provinces du Nord, qui offrent bien d'autres ressources, et dans lesquelles les dispositions du peuple sont bien autrement favorables qu'en Champagne, le centre devrait alors s'appuyer sur la droite; et la marche des troupes de Votre Majesté devrait être dirigée de Treves à Luxembourg, et de Luxembourg sur Stenay et Sedan. Si, au contraire, la position sur l'Aisne doit être tournée par sa droite, et surtout, si la gauche n'est pas si forte que je la crois, et surtout, si la gauche n'est pas si forte que je la crois, alors la marche de l'armée de Votre Majesté devrait être droite de Treves sur St.Dizier. Le centre et la gauche seront alors en mesure de suivre les opérations sur la Marne, tandis que la droite serait en force suffisante pour se soutenir sur l'Aisne; mais les deux parties premièrement nommés seront assez concentrées dans un pays bien mauvais et beaucoup épuisé.

Cependant cette ligne est la plus droite à notre but, elle est la plus naturelle pour chacune des armées, et elle me paraît être celle que les officiers de l'armée Autrichienne adopteront le plus volontiers. Ainsi donc la marche directe de Treves sur St.Dizier, passant la Meuse au-dessus, plutôt qu'en dessous de Verdun, et laissant Luxembourg tout à fait côté, serait celle préférée par Votre Majesté.

Pour ce qui nous regarde ici, je crois que nous serons obligé de faire au moins le siège de Maubeuge. Le maréchal Blücher croit que la place de Givet ne lui serait d'aucune utilité; mais je crois que nous avons des moyens suffisants [sic] pour tout ce qu'il faudrait que nous fassions.

J'ai l'honneur d'être etc.

Wellington ⁶⁸

It must also have been in the morning hours that Hardinge's letter, dated 10 p.m. of the 14th of June (see below), reached Wellington. Being also based upon a report of Zieten, Hardinge transmitted the impression prevalent in the Prussian staff that Napoleon intended to commence hostilities. ⁶⁹

Apparently, Wellington didn't take any further actions as a result, as by 1 p.m., he wrote to general Clinton another letter regarding the re-numbering of the divisions. It reads:

Bruxelles, 15 june 1815, 1 p.m.

My dear Clinton,

Some of the general officers would wish very much to have the divisions numbered over again, and have their old numbers which appears to be a very natural wish; and I should be very much obliged to you if you would let me know as soon as you participate in it. They would stand thus:

Present numbers	New numbers	General officers
1	1	General Cooke
2	6	Sir H.Clinton
3	5	Sir C.Alden
4	2	Sir C.Colville
5	3	Sir T.Picton
6	4	Sir L.Cole

Believe me etc.
(signed) Wellington ⁷⁰

However, that afternoon, this situation of relative peacefulness would change.

The Prussian army.

11th June.

As before, Blücher was eager to start his war against France. At the same time, on the 11th of June, he wrote to Von Müffling that he had learned through Zieten that Napoleon would have arrived at Maubeuge. Further, he wrote him:

“Ich kann es nicht glauben; er hat nach meiner Meinung hier gegen uns nicht genug zusammen um selbst zu erscheinen. Ich muss sagen, dass Ich mich vor seinen Angriff noch sehr sicher halte, und geht er auf meinen Nachbar los, so werde Ich die Hände nicht in Schoss legen.”
⁷¹

12th June.

The next day, Blücher wrote to the Prussian king in more or less the same way:

“Die allgemeine Aufstellung der feindlichen Heere hat sich im wesentlichen nicht verändert; nur treffen alle Nachrichten überein, dass alle bei Paris versammelt gewesenen Truppen nach Laon aufgebrochen sind, wo auch der Marschall Soult am 7.d.M.ts. angekommen ist. Die Macht, die Buonaparte gegen die vereinigte preussich-englische Armee in Bewegung setzen kann, scheint 110 bis 120.000 Mann zu sein, wogegen die in Lothringen und in Elsass befindlichen Truppen sich auf 25 bis 30.000 Mann belaufen. Die Stärke der Nationalgarden ist schwer auszumitteln, jedoch scheinen so viel vorhanden zu sein, dass die festen Plätze damit besetzt werden können. Wenn ihm indessen noch mehr Zeit gelassen wird, so ist wohl nicht zu bezweifeln, dass er auch sehr bald seine Armee im Felde durch bedeutende Massen von Nationalgarden verstärken wird. Buonaparte gewinnt jeden Tag mehr innere Festigkeit und hat Zeit, all seine geheimen und öffentlichen Gegner im Lande zu erdrücken. Dass zögernde System von unsere Seite verschafft ihm erst die Heere, die wir dann mit vielem Blute bekämpfen müssen.

Die Ausrüstung des Belagerungstrains hat noch keinen grossen Fortgang genommen, es wird erst 25 schwere Geschütze ausgerüstet und nach Lüttich geschafft. [..]

Durch Unterhandlungen von meiner Seite mit der Niederländischen Regierung ist durchaus nichts zu erwarten, ob Ew.Majestät in Verbindung mit den anderen hohen Allirten, diesen Gegenstand nicht einzuleiten im Stand wären, muss ich Ew.Majestät höhren Ermessen anheim stellen, nur wäre es sehr zu wünschen da davon gewiss die bleibende Folgen dieses Krieges abhängen. [..]

Noch muss Ich Euer Majestät aller anfragen, welche Auskunft ich dem Engl.Bevollmächtigten geben soll, wenn er über die traktatenmässige Stärke von 150.000 Mann die nähere Nachweisung erlangte. Es sind den Engländern in Wien die 4 jetzt unter meinem Befehl stehende Armeekorps und das Garde und Grenadier Corps vorgerechnet

worden. Dies letzte Corps befindet sich noch nicht bei der activen Armee und die 4 hier befindliche Armee-Corps haben noch durchaus nicht die etatsmässige Stärke. Die ganze hier versammelte Armee hat nur die Stärke von 115.000 Combattanten.”⁷²

Yet, Gneisenau stated to Hardenberg:

“[...] Jetzt, wo die Gefahr eines feindlichen Angriffs fast verschwunden ist, fällt es dem kargen König etc. [...]”⁷³

At Namur, brigade commander Von Tippelskirch (2nd corps) reported on the 12th of June to his superior, general Pirch I:

“Der Obrist v.Borcke meldet heute von den Vorposten, dass er sich durch Nachrichten von Seiten des 3.Armeekorps, nach welchem Marschall Vandamme sein Corps um Philippeville konzentriert, veranlasst gefunden hätte, die Aufmerksamkeit des Vorposten auf der ihm kommandirenden Linie verdoppeln zu lassen, ohne aber bestätigende Daten erfahren zu haben.”⁷⁴

And Zieten reported from Charleroi:

“Bei Givet, ferner zwischen Roty, Marienbourg, Couvin sollen nach der gestrigen Vorpostenmeldungen viele Truppen sein, Stärke noch unbekannt.”⁷⁵

It was at Fontaine l'Eveque at midnight of the night of the 12th of June, that major general Von Steinmetz wrote the following report for Zieten :

“Ew Excellenz melde Ich dass von allen Seiten die Meldungen eingehen:

- 1.dass Bonaparte heute Abend in Maubeuge ankommen wird
2. dass das 2.Armeekorps bei Maubeuge angekommen ist
3. dass die Garden, von Avesnes kommend, mit Bonaparte eintreffen
4. dass heute Mittag 1 Uhr 4 Bataillons aus Solre-sur-Sambre über den Fluss gegangen, und in Merbes-le-Chateau so stark liegen, dass 2 Kompagnieen auf ein Haus angewiesen sind. Sart-la-Buissière ist bis heute Nacht 1 Uhr sehr stark besetzt, und zwar sind alle diese Truppen die besten Jäger-Regimenter der Armee.

Ich zweifle nun nicht, dass die Aussagen eines Sergeant-Major, den Ich Ew.Excellenz überschiere, wahr sind, nach welchen wir heute oder morgen angegriffen werden sollen, und ich habe darum die Vorposten das Gewehr zur Hand nehmen lassen, und befohlen den Tag zu erwarten. Der General von Merlen hat ebenfalls avertirt und ist avertirt. Den General v.Pirch habe ich ebenfalls in Kenntniss gesetzt. Morgen ist der Jahrestag von der Schlacht von Marengo. Die Aussagen der Deserteure sind vorläufig, schnell aufgenommen, und bitte Ew.Excellenz mir solche zurückschicken zu lassen. Ob der Tambour-Major keine Kanaille ist, lasse Ich dahingestellt sein, ich habe ihn darum noch die Nacht fortgeschickt.”⁷⁶

Von Steinmetz enclosed for Zieten the report of the interrogation of the french deserter:

“Derselbe komme von Merbes le Chateau; hier sein mittags 3 Bataillone je zu 800 Mann eingetroffen, diese habe man so dicht in dem einen Orte einquartiert, weil eine viertel Stunde davon, er glaube in Solre sur Sambre, der graf Reille eingetroffen sei. Dessen Armeekorps zähle etwa 20.000 Mann. Er glaube, dass die Franzosen morgen oder übermorgen, vielleicht noch heute angreifen würden. Der Kaiser solle gestern in Avesnes angelangt sein und heute in Maubeuge die Nacht zubringen. Von Maubeuge sollen 25 Bataillone gegen die Grenze vorgerückt sein, die Garde befinde sich in Avesnes und begeleite den Kaiser. Jérôme sei Sonntag in Solre le Château angekommen und befehlige die 6.Division des II.Armeekorps. Man sage, Murat sei in Avesnes, aber er glaube es nicht, vielmehr befinde er sich in Compiègne.

Jede brigade führe ungefähr 8 Kanonen. Es habe verlautet, dass französische Truppen nach dem Badischen über den Rhein gegangen seien, andere behaupteten, dieselben seien desertiert. Die Hauptmacht der Franzosen wäre nach Metz hin gerichtet. Reiterei glaube er, befinde sich den Preussen gegenüber nur wenig.”⁷⁷

13th June.

Von Zieten must have received these informations on the 13th of June, but it seems as if he forwarded them to Namur on the morning of the 14th of June (see below).⁷⁸ It also might have been that he forwarded this intelligence to Von Müffling (cf. observations below).

It was also on the 13th of June that Zieten wrote from Charleroi to Gneisenau:

“Nach gestriger Vorpostenmeldung stehen bei Givet, Marienbourg, Chimay, Maubeuge 60.000 Mann ohne Artillerie, davon 38.000 Mann Nationalgarden. Jérôme in Beaumont, Murat in Avesnes eingetroffen. Napoleon wird erwartet.”⁷⁹

Zieten may have sent this note earlier that day or possibly in his letter which accompanied the report of Von Steinmetz alluded to.

At Namur, brigade commander Von Tippelskirch (2nd corps) reported on the 13th of June to his superior, general Pirch I:

“Obriſt v. Borck meldet nichts neues als dass man heute in der Direction von Philippeville und Givet viele Kanonenschüsse hört. Es sey nicht gegründet, dass Vandamme sich bei Philippeville konzentriert hat.”⁸⁰

And from Ciney, colonel Von Clausewitz, chief of staff of the 3rd army-corps, stated:

“Vandamme soll nicht abmarschirt sein, sondern noch in Rocroi stehen.”⁸¹

Yet, the same day that Gneisenau must have received this information, on the 13th of June, he was also occupied with the coming invasion into France as he wrote in that sense to Von Müffling, thereby enclosing documents of Von Knesebeck and Schwarzenberg. The documents were carried to Brussels by colonel Von Pfuël, who was supposed to give an oral report as well. There, they were submitted by Von Müffling to the duke of Wellington.⁸²

14th June.

It may have been around 11 p.m. on the 13th of June that general Van Merlen wrote his report at Saint Symphorien for Von Steinmetz:

“J'ai l'honneur de vous donner connaissance que, d'après les rapports unanimes reçus aujourd'hui de la France, une armée nombreuse se rassemble dans les environs de Maubeuge. Hier, Napoleon doit y être arrivé vers les 4 heures; il a passé en revue, à Dourlers, entre Avesnes et Maubeuge cinq régiments de lanciers et trois compagnies d'artillerie légère (soit vingt-quatre pièces); le 1er régiment de cuirassiers, le 1er régiment de hussards et le 1er régiment de dragons doivent avoir été passés en revue aujourd'hui au même endroit. On assure que le général Vandamme, avec son corps d'armée, et le général Reille, avec le sien, y sont arrivés. Une colonne de toutes armes, forte de 20.000 hommes, a passé hier à Valenciennes et s'est de suite également dirigée sur Maubeuge. Tous ces mouvements de troupes paraissent dénoter quelque opération militaire de nos côtés. Si vous aviez des nouvelles intéressantes, vous m'obligeriez en me les communiquant.”⁸³

It reached Von Steinmetz on the 14th of June at 00.30 a.m.⁸⁴

It was probably on the early morning of the 14th of June that Van Merlen wrote a second report for Von Steinmetz, in which he stated that it was not Napoleon himself who had arrived at Maubeuge, but his brother Jérôme; and that the French army was moving from Maubeuge, through Beaumont, to Philippeville. At the end of his report, Van Merlen wrote: “Devant nous tout est dégarni; ils n'ont plus qu'un piquet à Bettignies et quelques gardes nationales dans les autres villages. Nous avons tous été sur pied la nuit passé dans ces cantons, ayant été en erreur

ou, pour mieux dire, dans l'incertitude des événements.”⁸⁵ Additionally, Van Merlen wrote that the troops collected at Maubeuge were provided with eight day's provisions and forage.⁸⁶

Having received it, Von Steinmetz, at Anderlues, forwarded this report to Von Zieten stating: “Ew.Excellenz habe ich die Ehre in der Anlage dass so eben eingegangene Schreiben des Belgischen Generals Merlen zu übersenden, aus welchem eine Bewegung des Feindes rechts über Beaumont nach Philippeville hervorzugehen scheint, und die Verstärkung der uns gegenüberliegende feindlichen Quartiere wahrscheinlich in der Absicht vorgenommen worden ist, und hinter denselben desto ungestörter diese Bewegung fortzusetzen.”⁸⁷

And in his turn it was Von Zieten who forwarded it the same day to Gneisenau at Namur with an accompanying letter in which he added “dass nach den Wachtfeuern zu urteilen, ein Korps von ziemlicher Bedeutung bei Thirimont diesseits Beaumont und ein anderes hinter dem Walde bei Marpent zwischen Maubeuge und Solre gestanden hat.”⁸⁸

During the morning hours, so earlier that day, Zieten would have sent Von Steinmetz' report of the night of the 12th of June to Namur, thereby adding himself “dass er darauf hin Veranstaltung getroffen hat, die Brigaden auf den ersten Befehl zusammenziehen zu können behufs Versammlung des Korps.”⁸⁹

On the same day Zieten must have received, through Von Müffling, Wellington's promise that he would be prepared to concentrate his forces near Nivelles if needed (see below).⁹⁰

Meanwhile, on the 14th of June, Zieten was fed with more information by the commanders of both his 1st and 2nd brigade, Von Steinmetz and Pirch II.

Von Steinmetz wrote to Zieten:

“So eben geht eine abermalige Meldung von den Vorposten ein welche ich Ew.Excellenz vorziehe in Original [⁹¹] zu übersenden, indem sie in vieler Rücksicht die vom General Merlen mitgetheilten Nachrichten bestätigt und über die Bewegung des Feindes ein mehreres Licht verbreitet.”⁹²

And Pirch II wrote from Marchienne-au-Pont:

“Nach den so eben eingegangenen Nachrichten von den Vorposten hat sich die französische Armee in der Gegend von Beaumont und Merbes le Chateau zusammengezogen und soll morgen den 15ten uns bestimmt angreifen wollen. Die Armee soll 150.000 Mann stark sein und unter dem Befehl des General Vandamme, Hieronimus Bonaparte und eines anderen vornehmen Generals stehen. Seit gestern ist alles hin- und hergehen über die Grenze bei den Franzosen bei Todesstrafe verboten. Eine feindliche Patrouille hat sich heute bei Biercée, ohnweit Thuin, gezeigt. Der Feind soll bei Sart-la-Buissière ein Lager beziehen wollen, wozu er 10 [...] Land ausgesucht haben soll. Beikommende Quittung des Majors v.Monsterberg über die 4 Louis d'or übermache Ew.Excellenz zur gewogentlichen Erstattung. Ein Schweizer Deserteur sagt so eben, Napoleon hätte vorgestern bey Rocroy Revue gehalten und wäre von Alt und Jung mit lautem, an Wahnsinn grenzenden Jubel empfangen worden.”⁹³

From Waterloo, in the late afternoon of the 15th of June, a lieutenant of the royal military police wrote in a report to his superior (a major) “Le 14, plusieurs déserteurs Francais avaient prévenu le général Zieten à Charleroy que Bonaparte devait nous attaquer cette nuit ce qui arriva effectivement ce matin à trois heures etc. [...]”⁹⁴ This would mean that Zieten would have been warned that night for a coming attack.

Meanwhile at Namur, in general headquarters, Gneisenau – having received Von Steinmetz' report of the night of the 12th of June through Zieten - wrote to his friend Gruner:

“Wir stehen noch immer hier mit müssigen Kräften, während die Feinde die ihrigen verstärken. Misstrauische Politik trägt hiervon die Schuld.

General Zieten, der unser den feindlichen Streitkräften am nächsten stehendes Armeekorps befehligt, meldet heute:

1. dass Bonaparte gestern Abens in Maubeuge angekommen sein soll
2. dass das zweite französische Armeekorps unter Reille bei Maubeuge angekommen ist
3. dass die Garden von Avesnes kommend mit Bonaparte eintreffen
4. dass bereits Truppen über die Sambre gegangen und die Grenzdörfer dick belegt sind. Die Befehle sind bereits ausgefertigt, die Armeekorps enger zu konzentrieren und auf alle Fälle bereit zu sein.”⁹⁵

There is no indication of time for this letter, but it clearly refers to the report as written by Von Steinmetz for Zieten during the night of the 12th of June, and forwarded by Zieten to Gneisenau, and to the orders issued in the evening (see below).

In the headquarters at Namur that day, lieutenant Von Gerlach, member of the general staff, wrote in his diary:

“Heute wollte man gewiss wissen, dass Napoleon gestern nachmittag in Maubeuge angekommen sei. Es bestätigte sich nicht. Bloss Jérôme wirdt erwartet. Die Franzosen machen von Maubeuge aus Bewegungen gegen Philippeville. Länger bei Marpent und Thurimont [= Thirimont].. Das Korps von Mézières bewegt sich nach links, um sich mit dem von Neille [sic = Reille] zu konzentrieren. Colonel Harding sagte auf die Frage, ob denn Wellington nicht von Napoleons Ankunft ihm Nachricht gegeben: er glaubte, Wellington hätte “trop de vanité ou d’orgeuil, après avoir pris tous les arrangements, pour annoncer l’arrivée de M. Bonaparte, qui pouvoit n’avoir aucunes fûtes partout comme on étoit préparé à tout cas.” [sic]

Bei Braine le Comte oder Hal könnte gleich alles Konzentriert werden; was hinter der Schelde stehe, seien Truppen, die Wellington die Absicht habe im Rücken zu lassen. Harding ist für “the non-attack” Bonapartes. Er sagte: rein militairement müsste er attackieren, da die Alliierten sich immer mehr verstärken. Die “chances politiques” aber würden ihn bestimmen, nicht zu attackieren, da die Vorteile der grösseren Anzahl durch die des Verteidigungskrieges, woran die Nation Anteil nehmen würde, balanciert würden. Wenn er also angriffe, so wäre das ein Zeichen, dass er sich überzeugt hätte, er können auf das Volk nicht rechnen. General Pirch wurde ersucht, einen tüchtigen Offizier aus seiner Umgebung zu den Vorposten zu schicken, um nähere Nachrichten einzuziehen. Es muss, unabhängig von dieser letzten Nachricht, ein Angriffsplan im Werden sein; ich kann nur noch nicht dahinterkommen. Auf keinen Fall dauert jetzt die Geschichte mehr lange. [...]”⁹⁶

Later that day, probably towards 9 p.m., Zieten’s report accompanying Van Merlen’s second report came in at Namur. These reports led Gneisenau to issue further orders.

One of them was for Von Kleist:

“Ew. Excellenz benachrichtige ich, dass nach so eben eintreffenden Nachrichten, der Feind sich stark bei Maubeuge konzentriert, und dass Bonaparte dort gestern Abend erwartet worden ist. Ich ersuche Sie daher, sich mit Ihrem Korps nach Arlon in Marsch zu setzen und mir den Tag Ihres Eintreffens anzuzeigen. Bis dahin werden die Verhältnisse hier klarer stehen und ich im Stande sein, Ew. Excellenz bestimmte Befehle zu ertheilen [...] Ich habe vier Garnison-Bataillone nach Luxemburg dirigirt, um die Besatzung dieser Festung zu verstärken.”⁹⁷

Von Thielmann was instructed to be able to assemble his corps near Ciney within fourteen hours in case of need, so basically he was ordered to have his forces into readiness to move at a moment’s notice.⁹⁸

Von Bülow was likewise ordered to be prepared to move upon Hannut if need be:

“Die Nachrichten, welche vom Feinde eingehen, besagen, dass Napoleon bei Maubeuge sich konzentriert, und es scheint, er beabsichtigt, die Offensive gegen die Niederlanden zu

beginnen. Diesem nach ersuche Ich Ew.Excellenz, angesichts dieses eine solche Einrichtung in Verlegung der Truppen des IV.Armeekorps zu treffen, dass sich dasselbe in einem Marsch bei Hannut konzentriren kann.”⁹⁹

Major Boyen, commander at Jülich, was ordered to send some battalions towards Luxemburg and to have them replaced by others from Wesel.

The commander at Wesel, lieutenant colonel Perband, was ordered to send some of the battalions to Jülich and others to Luxemburg.¹⁰⁰

It also may have been in the evening of the 14th of June that a report about Schwarzenberg's plan for the invasion into France was written and sent by general Von Grolmann for the Prussian king.¹⁰¹

By 10 p.m. colonel Hardinge wrote from Namur on the 14th of June:

“Namur, 14th June, 1815, 10 p.m.

My lord,

A report from general Zieten of this day's date, just received, incloses a letter from general Merlen of the Belgian army of this morning, in which he states that the troops collected at Maubeuge are in movement from thence on the road to Beaumont, being provided with eight day's provisions and forage.

At the time general Zieten wrote (presumed to be at twelve or one today) he had received no information of any movement of the enemy by their right. The fires of a body of troops, he reports, were seen last night in the direction of Thimmont [¹⁰²], near Beaumont, and also in the vicinity of Mirbes. [¹⁰³] There is nothing further said of the arrival of Buonaparte or of the guards at Avesnes, which reports were received from the front during last night.

General Gneisenau credits the intelligence he has received from different quarters of the arrival of the two divisions of the 4th corps from the neighbourhood of Thionville at Sedan and Mézières on the 12th.

The corps of general Kleist has been directed upon Arlon. In case of necessity the 3rd corps from the environs of Cinay can be assembled at this point in fourteen hours, and the 4th corps from Liège is prepared to move upon Hannut.

The prevalent opinion here seems to be that Buonaparte intends to commence offensive operations.”¹⁰⁴

In the same sense as Hardinge, at least for the part of the imminent hostilities, baron Van Panhuys wrote to baron Van der Capellen on the 14th of June: “En attendant, les Francais font filer leur quatrième corps d'armée de Thionville vers Philippeville et les nouvelles de Charleroy sont que sur frontière [sic] tous les villages sont remplis de troupes. Le général Vandamme commande un corps à Rocroy et Dumonceau à Mézières. Depuis Luxembourg jusqu'à Neufchateau il n'y a rien à opposer à l'ennemi s'il veut tenter une [...]. Assez généralement l'on croit que Bonaparte, que l'on annonce comme devant arrivant demain à son armée, sera le premier qui attaquera.”¹⁰⁵

It would have been around 11 p.m. that a small group of five to six French deserters was brought in at Blücher's headquarters by ensign Ritz of the 1st regiment of Pommerian infantry nr.2 (see above).

They would have expressed the wish to see Blücher and the information they gave him must have led him and Gneisenau to issue further orders. By then it was almost midnight.¹⁰⁶

First of all, the corps of Pirch I got the order from Gneisenau for the “zusammenziehung des 2.Armeekorps zwischen Mazy und Onoz.”¹⁰⁷

And the order for Thielmann of 11.30 p.m. read:

“Da der Feind sich an der Grenze konzentriert hat und wahrscheinlich eine Offensive beabsichtigt, so ist es nöthig, dass die Armee sich gleichfalls konzentriere. Ew.Excellenz wollen demnach sogleich nach Empfang dieses Schreibens Ihr Armeekorps bei Namur auf dem linken Maasufer vereinigen [...] Bei Dinant lassen Sie ein leichtes Bataillon und zwei Schwadronen stehen, welche die Vorposten gegen Givet und längs der Grenze bilden und sich im Fall eines überlegenen Angriffs auf dem rechten Maasufer nach Namur zurückziehen.

Auf dem linken Maasufer, Dinant gegenüber, hält das II.Armeekorps bei Vorposten mit einem leichten Bataillon und zwei Schwadronen, die, wenn sie gedrängt werden, sich auf dem linken Maasufer nach Namur zurückziehen. Die Vorposten des III. Armeekorps müssen mit denen des II.Korps die Verbindung unterhalten. Die Kranken Ihres Korps dirigieren Sie nach Lüttich. Die Truppen in Dinant und Huy haben von hier aus direkt Marschordere nach Namur erhalten, um jeden Zeitverlust zu vermeiden [...] Das Hauptquartier des Fürsten Blücher ist vorläufig noch Namur.”¹⁰⁸

The one for Bülow read:

“Hauptquartier Namur, den 14ten Juni, Abens 12 Uhr

Ew.Excellenz gebe Ich mir die Ehre ergebenst zu ersuchen, das unter Dero Befehl stehende 4.Armeekorps morgen, als den 15ten h., bei Hannut in gedrängten Kantonirungen konzentriren zu wollen. Die eingehenden Nachrichten machen es immer wahrscheinlicher, dass die französische Armee sich uns gegenüber zusammengezogen hat, und dass wir unverzüglich ein Übergehen zur Offensive von derselben zu erwarten haben.

Ew. Excellenz ersuche Ich zugleich den Kommandanten in Lüttich geneigtest anweisen zu wollen, dass er von morgen an keine der Armee nachgehende Truppen oder Leute auf Huy und Namur intradirt, sondern dass er solche auf dem linken Maas-Ufer und zwar: auf der alten Römerstrasse dirigirt. Zugleich würde es wohl am passendsten sein, wenn die sich in den Quartierständen des 4.Armeekorps befindlichen Kranken nach Aachen zurückgebracht würden.

Hierbei würde Ich dann Ew.Excellenz ersuchen, den Kommandanten von Lüttich zugleich anzuweisen, dass er die Hospitäler von Lüttich möglichst räumt und die Kranken nach Aachen und Jülich zurückschafft.

Bis auf weiteres bleibt das Hauptquartier des Feldmarschall Durchlaucht noch in Namur. Das Hauptquartier Ew.Excellenz dürfte sich wohl am zweckmässigsten in Hannut befinden, und ersuche Ich Ew.Excellenz zugleich, zur Brief-Kommunikation einen Brief-Ordonnanzposten in Hanret, zwischen hier und Hannut stellen zu lassen.”¹⁰⁹⁻¹¹⁰

Four hours later hostilities began.

Observations.

In the last week before hostilities were started by Napoleon, there was a continuous flow of intelligence dropping in at both headquarters about a concentration of French forces in the area between Valenciennes and Maubeuge on the one hand and a continuous attention for the preparations of the invasion of France on the other.

Despite all the news on the French movements in the north, it was during the days of this week that Wellington did not really expect a French attack; and if Napoleon would attack, he felt that both he and Blücher were too strong for him.

At the same time, both Gneisenau and Blücher felt the same way.

On the 14th of June the substance of the intelligence did not change. In fact, it must have been that day that Zieten reported to Von Müffling, but the report itself is unavailable. Its existence, however, can be taken from the letter written by Von Müffling the next day to Gneisenau in which he states: “Durch die Meldungen des Generals Dörnberg sind die des General Leutnants von Zieten vom gestrigen dato bestätigt worden und schliesse ich eine derselben abschriftlich an.”¹¹¹

And the same day, major general Van Reede wrote to baron van der Capellen:

“J’ai l’honneur de faire parvenir à Votre Excellence un raport [sic] du direction de la police du département de Gemappes qui s’accorde parfaitement avec les rapports venues hier du général Ziethen; on n’avait pas d’après ceux-cy la certitude que Bonaparte fut arrivé cependant tout donnait lieu de croire qu’il était entre Maubeuge et Bavai ou dans l’une de ces endroits. Les troupes de Valenciennes s’étaient porté sur leur droite et se réunissent à celle qui se trouvent à Mézières sur la droite de Maubeuge, qui se portaient sur leur gauche, pour se concentrer autour de cette place; un parc d’artillerie de 40 pièces de canon était disait-on sorti de Valenciennes d’après ces mouvements on supposait la possibilité d’une attaque sur Mons, et si les nouvelles continuent à l’indiquer il est probable que l’armée du duc se rassemblera dans la position d’Ath.”

As Zieten wrote to Gneisenau early afternoon on the 14th of June, it could be very well possible that he wrote in a similar sense to Von Müffling at the same time. If this would be the chain of events, it would mean that Zieten informed Von Müffling:

-dass er darauf hin Veranstaltung getroffen hat, die Brigaden auf den ersten Befehl zusammenziehen zu können behufs Versammlung des Korps.

-dass nach den Wachtfeuern zu urteilen, ein Korps von ziemlicher Bedeutung bei Thirimont diesseits Beaumont und ein anderes hinter dem Walde bei Marpent zwischen Maubeuge und Solre gestanden hat.”¹¹²

Von Müffling, in his memoirs, claims that he received on the 14th of June from Zieten the report that “the whole French army was concentrating in front of his advanced posts and that their attack would probably be directed against him.”¹¹³ This version is not as neutral as the one cited from, but as a fact it corroborates my conclusion that Zieten did send a report on the 14th of June to Von Müffling.¹¹⁴

There is a similar claim about Von Dörnberg, done by Von Pflugk Harttung and later by F.de Bas (but he must have used Von Pflugk Harttung as his source). The claim is formulated as that he would have sent a note to Wellington and Blücher at 14th of June at 9.30 p.m. informing them that “d’après les Francais, l’attaque aura lieu demain matin de bonne heure.”¹¹⁵

Von Pflugk Harttung cites from a document from the former Kriegsarchiv, but not in extenso so the text cannot be verified from the original document. The quotation is also taken from its context, so cannot be verified in that sense either.

De Bas gives no sources for the report and also claims it reached Blücher by 1 a.m. on the 15th of June. Taking into account, however, that the distance between Mons and Namur is almost 80 kilometers, this is certainly not a distance to be covered in about 3.5 hours. In this detail, Von Pflugk Harttung gives “während der ersten Morgenstunden des 15.”

Other than that, according to Von Pflugk Harttung and De Bas, it would be unknown whether Wellington actually got this news. There is a good reason for it: it never existed so there is nothing to doubt about.¹¹⁶

There are two other reasons for this claim. First of all, the Prussian register of staff doesn’t mention the arrival of such a report and in the second place it was not a regular procedure for Von Dörnberg to report to Namur, so it is highly unlikely that he did so on that evening.

As has been stated before, it was somewhere in the morning that Wellington received colonel Hardinge's letter of 10 p.m. of the night before. It informed the duke about the latest intelligence Prussian headquarters had received through Von Zieten and the resulting measures taken.

Hardinge made it clear at the same time that it was his impression that the majority of the Prussian general staff was of the opinion that Napoleon intended to commence offensive operations, though where Napoleon himself was remained unclear. The report gives the impression that Napoleon would attack the Prussian army, either from the area around Beaumont where to a shift in the concentration of French forces had taken place, or from another concentration further to the east, towards Mézières and Sedan, on the other. The way Hardinge describes it, it makes the impression as if the measures taken for at least the 3rd corps and the corps of Von Kleist were to oppose this last concentration, while in reality Gneisenau based his actions towards these corps upon a concentration of French forces at Maubeuge, which could at the same time be an indication for an offensive against Wellington.¹¹⁷

The alert as put out for the 3rd and 4th corps may have an impression upon Von Müffling and Wellington, but at the same time it should be pointed out that within the Anglo-Dutch-German army the 1st corps had been put on an alert since about a week as well, so this was not something of an entirely new nature.

At least the news from Hardinge did not impress Von Müffling, unless he wrote his letter before Hardinge's report came in, as he wrote that morning: "Da wir gestern nicht angegriffen worden sind, so scheint es, dass der Feind uns täuschen will und seine Front masquiert, um die Bewegungen die er vor hat, besser zu verbergen."

This remark of Von Müffling may have a relation to what Wellington had told to Vincent on the 14th: "cependant tout [i.e. invasion of France] est subordonné à ce que pourroit faire l'ennemi et il n'est pas impossible qu'il prenne ici l'initiative. Les nouvelles annoncent même une concentration de troupes ennemies sur notre frontière."¹¹⁸

By the 15th of June, it was at least believed by Von Müffling that Napoleon's movements in the north in reality were meant by Napoleon to mask an operation from a central position further south, near St.Menehould (which is about halfway between Verdun and Châlons), thereby taking up a defensive attitude first and then to switch to an offensive one the moment the allied armies would have advanced into France.

In this belief, it is possible that Von Müffling could already have received Hardinge's report of the 14th of June the moment he wrote this on the morning of the 15th of June. Even though Von Müffling makes no reference to Gneisenau's actions, as mentioned by Hardinge, it should not be forgotten that the report came from Hardinge and not from Gneisenau himself. But what is more important is that what Hardinge refers to are actual movements at the northern frontier, and just these were considered by Von Müffling to be very probably movements to mask other movements further into the interior of France.

So, in that sense, they confirmed him in his idea, while at the same time – yet – somehow Von Müffling did not exclude the chance that Napoleon might operate against the Netherlands after all, and therefore Von Müffling sketched Gneisenau the concept underlying the positioning of Wellington's forces. He writes:

"Die Englisch-Batavische Armee ist nach beiliegender Ordre de Bataille so aufgestellt, dass die beiden Flügel Korps unter Lord Hill und Prinz von Oranien von Enghien und Braine le Comte bis Nivelles liegen und in ganz kurzer Zeit zusammengezogen werden können.

Das Korps des Zentrums welches man schicklicher die Reserve nennen könnte, liegt in und bei Brüssel, hat 15 / m Mann Infanterie und kann sich in allen Direktionen bewegen.

Sollte der Feind zwischen dem Meer und der Schelde eindringen, so könnte die Armee auf zwei Punkten (wo Brückenköpfe angelegt sind), sich über die Schelde zur Offensive bewegen, sollte

der Feind am rechten Ufer der Maas vordringen, so ist der Herzog bereit, entweder mit uns über die Maas ihm entgegen zu gehen, oder (was ich ihm unter gewissen Umständen vorgeschlagen habe) gerade durch die französischen Festungen durch in des Feindes Rücken zu gehen.”¹¹⁹

What Von Müffling summarizes here is the concept of the way the Anglo-Netherlands-German army was arranged for the defence of the Low Countries. In this he basically divides the danger zone into three sectors: the one between the sea and the river Scheldt, the one between this river and the river Meuse and the one east of the Meuse.

For the first zone, the scenario would be that Wellington could attack the French over the river Scheldt, thereby passing it at two points and these are probably Audenarde and Avelghem. In this sense, the scenario as sketched is highly similar to the one contained in the secret memorandum of the 30th of April.

The whole sector between the rivers Scheldt and Meuse was presumed to be covered by the presence of both the Anglo-Netherlands-German army and the Prussian army. For the first one Von Müffling gives an outline of the strategical concept behind the way both army-corps are located: two corps as a left and a right wing, centred around a line running roughly from Brussels through Enghien and Ath to Roucourt, towards a point halfway between Lille and Maubeuge, while having a reserve in the rear, to be moved wherever necessary.

What Von Müffling wants to show is that Wellington's main operation area was between the Scheldt on his right and the line Binche – Quatre Bras-Brussels on his left. Within this sector the main line of concentration was centred around the line Enghien - Braine le Comte – Nivelles, depending upon the exact line of advance of the French army.¹²⁰

The confusing element here is that Von Müffling suggests as if both corps were located on the line stretching from Enghien and Braine le Comte to Nivelles. In doing so, however, he leaves out the 2nd corps altogether, as this stretched as far west as Audenarde. What he actually means here is the main concentration line upon which the army was operating within its own sector as long as the enemy would advance between the rivers Scheldt and Meuse, while having the Prussian army on his left for assistance if necessary.¹²¹

In the third scenario, as having the enemy advance on the right bank of the Meuse, Wellington would be prepared to move with the Prussian army over this river against Napoleon or to move through the “places fortes” in France in his rear.

In an overall view, the basic concept of the positioning of the forces of Wellington's army was very similar to the one which formed the basis of the secret memorandum. The main difference is the presence of the reserve which could now give support wherever necessary. In another respect it extends the concept of defence, by pulling in the Prussian army, by explicitly mentioning what the duke would do in case Napoleon would advance east of the Meuse river, in that case obviously touching upon the Prussian army. Taking this element in a combination with the secret memorandum of one month earlier, it might mean that Wellington would have done the same in case the same route would have been used by Napoleon against the Prussian army, i.e. by manoeuvring over the right bank of the Meuse.¹²²

Nivelles merits a special attention in this respect. It was on the 15th of June, after the hostilities had started, that Zieten wrote to Blücher at 8.15 a.m. “Den Herzog Wellington habe ich hiervon Benachrichtigt, und ihn ersucht, sich nunmehr bei Nivelles zu concentrieren, welches derselbe nach einer gestern vom General Von Müffling erhaltenen Nachricht thun will.”

Here, Zieten clearly refers to a willingness of Wellington to concentrate near Nivelles, as expressed by Von Müffling in a document which Zieten had received on the 14th of June. This document may have dated from the 14th or, more probably, from the 13th of June, but it is not clear whether this expression was the result of a report as handed in by Zieten himself or possibly by others.

Yet, it seems logical that it would have been provided by Zieten, as what sense would it have made to make such a statement to somebody who would not have sent in the intelligence upon which this very statement was based ?

If this would be the true line of events, it becomes apparent that it must have been intelligence which most probably dated from the 12th or the 13th of June which led Zieten to write to Von Müffling in a document which is, however, not available.

Von Müffling, in his turn, would have analysed the report and discussed it with Wellington who would have seen a reason to express his willingness towards Zieten to concentrate his forces near Nivelles in case the full weight of the French offensive would fall, through Charleroi or else, upon Blücher. In this sense, this promise should be regarded in the same way as it was done (a similar promise) in the letter as sent by Von Müffling on the 15th of June to Genisenau at 7 p.m.¹²³

As a last practical point it was just before the war started that Wellington was apparently involved in a proposal of some general officers to renumber all Anglo-Hanoverian divisions (except for the 1st division), but the process was broken off by the war.¹²⁴

The Prussians.

During the first days of the time-frame involved, the Prussian leadership showed an optimism about their situation, both in the strength of the Prussian army and the idea that the French would not attack; this optimism ran parallel in that of Wellington.

The concentration of the 1st corps.

There is a general idea about the measures taken by general headquarters during the evening and night of the 14th of June relative to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th corps.

Yet, when it comes down to orders of these headquarters, or those of Zieten, for the 1st corps - the one which was attacked on the 15th of June - the situation is most confusing. At the same time, this issue is of a considerable importance and therefore merits a detailed investigation.

As has been stated, it would have been on the morning of the 14th of June that Zieten would have “[...] Veranstaltung getroffen [hat], die Brigaden auf den ersten Befehl zusammenziehen zu können behufs Versammlung des Korps.”

This would mean that he would have taken preparatory measure for the concentration of his brigades, as soon as orders would arrive. So, basically, this means that an actual concentration did not take place right then.

This was in line with the way Zieten ordered his brigade-commanders on the 9th of June, in which he stated: “[...] daher is nöthig wird, die Truppen so bereit zu halten, dass sich die Brigaden auf das erste Signal auf den angewiesenen Sammelplatzen konzentriren können.”

This order was in its turn based upon the disposition which was issued by Zieten on the 2nd of May and which arranged, in case of a superior French attack, for the defence of the Sambre as long as the assembling of the corps in and around Fleurus had not been completed, and in such a way that the units would not get entangled into serious actions. The position of Fleurus was then intended for the preparation of a battle, involving the whole army, or, depending upon the circumstances, for the continuation of the retreat.¹²⁵

Both for the further concentration of his corps and the measures to be taken in case of a French offensive, Zieten was to base himself upon his disposition of the 2nd of May and that is probably why no orders were sent to Zieten that evening.

It is colonel Von Reiche who, in his memoirs, enters into the question whether the 1st corps was surprised by the French attack and in this sense whether the corps, or the individual brigades, were concentrated on the 14th of June or not. After having accused major general Von Steinmetz of not having done so that day, he continues by stating: "Später suchte man die Schuld hiervon auf den General Ziethen zu werfen, da von ihm kein Befehl zur Zusammenziehung der Truppen für diesen Tag erlassen worden sei. Ein solcher Befehl für jeden speciellen Fall konnte jedoch nicht verlangt werden." So, concluding, Von Reiche is quite clear on this in the sense that Zieten did not give any such concentration orders.

On the other hand, cavalry major and adjudant of baron Tindal, who had been sent on a mission to Prussian headquarters on the 16th of June, writes:

"Un tambour major Francais déserteur déclara dans son interrogatoire à mr. L'officier de la gendarmerie "que l'armée Francaise attaquerait le 16" cet officier en prévint mr.le général Prus.comdt. l'avantgarde de Zietehn qui parut en douter. Cependant on pris les armes. Mais à peine était on rassemblé que l'ennemi attaqua avec impétuosité." This would suggest that Zieten received this information through the local gedarme of Charleroi and that he would have ordered a general assembling of his corps in the evening or the night of the 14th of June.

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Major general Von Steinmetz wrote in a private letter on the 14th of June:

"Grosse Bewegungen geschehen jetzt, und es ist nur zweifelhaft ob solche einen Angriff vorbereiten, oder der Vertheidigung wegen geschehen, mir ist es nicht lieb, dass wir ihm [the enemy] zum Angriff Gelegenheit geben, denn natürlich können wir uns nicht in der zerstreuten Lage schlagen, sondern müssen uns zurückziehen, um uns zu sammeln." ¹²⁷

This may be an indication that the 1st brigade indeed did not concentrate that day, but it is no strong proof.

It is for the 2nd brigade of Pirch II that Von Reiche claims that this brigade concentrated in the night of the 14th of June, contradictory to the 1st one.

This statement may well fit in with the following order wick was issued by Pirch II for his brigade that day, and which may well have been the result of the intelligence received by Pirch II that day about an imminent attack for the day after, this in respect of the urgency in which it is formulated:

"Die Brigade wird sich sofort in enge Kantonirungen zusammenziehen. Wenn zwar sämtliche Bataillons die bis jetzt inne habenden Kommunen auch bei der Konzentrirung behalten, so müssen doch alle entferntere einzelne, detachirte Gehöfte geräumt und die Truppen in die Kirchdörfer der Kommune dergestalt einquartirt werden, dass auf den ersten Allarm die Bataillons gesammelt und bereit sind, nach der früher gegebene Disposition auf ihre Bestimmungsplätze zu rücken etc. Die veränderte Dislocation der Brigade ändert die früher gegebene Disposition dahin ab, dass nunmehr

1.Bataillon 1.Westpreussischen Regiment

2.Bataillon 1.Westpreussischen Regiment

besetzt Marchienne-au-Pont wie früher das Füsilier-Bataillon thun sollte. " ¹²⁸

Regarding a main part of the 3rd brigade, of major general Von Jagow, there is an order which has been published by Wellmann as having been issued on the afternoon of the 14th of June. It reads:

"Das 29te Regiment und das 3te Westfälische Landwehr Infanterie-Regiment schicken jedes sofort einen berittenen Offizier nach Charleroi; sie sind dazu bestimmt, die Befehle, welche vom kommandierenden General in Hinsicht des augenblicklichen Zusammenziehens der Truppen gegeben werden, ohne Zeitverlust ihren Regiments-Kommandeuren zu überbringen.

Sobald die Herren Regiments-Kommandeurs durch diese Offiziere den Befehl zum Zusammenziehen der Brigade erhalten, wird sofort in den Quartierständen Alarm geschlagen

und ohne Aufenthalt abmarschiert, um sobald als möglich das Rendez-vous bei Fleurus zu erreichen. Die Bagage fährt sogleich unter Aufsicht eines Offiziers nach Gembloux ab.”¹²⁹

In my opinion, however, this document cannot have been from the 14th of June because of its extreme urgency. As a matter of fact, what it is dealing with is a moment of an actual alarm and a sudden rendez-vous at Fleurus and this could only have been the events which took place *after* the attack of the French, on the very early morning of the 15th of June.

At the same time, however, Wellmann claims that at least the 29th regiment of the brigade of Von Jagow was called into alarm-houses on the evening of the 14th of June and that the men were sent back to their quarters at 3 a.m. on the 15th of June to have breakfast. As he most probably bases his assertions upon documents of the regiment, it could very well be that the 3rd brigade may have been on the alert for some time during the night of the 14th of June.¹³⁰

Major general Henckel, commander of the 4th brigade, writes on the 14th of June: “[...] die Truppen waren angezogen in ihren Quartieren und marschfertig. Dispositionen waren schon seit mehreren Wochen auf alle etwa vorkommende Fälle ausgegeben worden. Am Morgen des 15. hörten wir ein heftiges Kanonenfeuer nach der Gegend von Charleroi zu, worauf die ganze Brigade den Befehl erhielt, sich auf dem Sammelplatz bei Fleurus zu vereinigen”

Though Henckel claims at least his brigade was concentrated on the 14th of June, at the same time he makes a clear distinction with the orders of the 15th for the brigade to render itself to the rendez-vous.¹³¹

The 19th regiment of infantry, one of the regiments of this brigade, doesn't claim having received any instructions for its concentration on the 14th or in the night.¹³²

Apart from the document as mentioned by Von Lettow Vorbeck, in which Zieten announced his preparatory arrangements for a concentration of his corps, there are no traces of such a concentration as being carried out in any other document as produced by Zieten that day. It is also in Hardinge's letter of 10 p.m. that no reference is made to any such orders of general headquarters for the 1st corps, nor to any report of Zieten having complied with it then or having taken the initiative himself.

This contrasts with the statement as done by Gneisenau to his friend Gruner on the evening of the 14th of June, as “Die Befehle sind bereits ausgefertigt, die Armeekorps enger zu konzentriren und auf alle Fälle bereit zu sein.”

Fact is that Zieten, as a result of the information he had, decided to send off the heavy baggage of his corps through Gembloux to Perwez le Marche. This was done on the evening of the 14th of June.¹³³

Despite some other indications, my concluding and overall impression is that Zieten did take preparatory measures to make a concentration of his corps possible, but that he did not push this through on the 14th of June.¹³⁴ This impression is primarily based upon the official documents available, as well as upon the fact that Von Reiche himself admits he did not do so.

However, it is very likely that at least the brigade of Pirch II did concentrate, after having received very specific information on a French threat, being right in front of it.

For the 2nd corps the situation is even more unclear, as references to any orders at all are lacking completely. The single reference present is Hardinge's letter which does not seem to support the fact that it was alerted and / or concentrated in any way whatsoever.

Only those corps which were the most remote from the potential threat (as coming from Maubeuge / Beaumont) received orders of general headquarters in the evening of the 14th of June. In summarizing them it meant that the 3rd corps was to be able to assemble near Ciney within 14 hours, in case of need; for Von Bülow to put his troops in such a way that his corps could concentrate near Hannut in one march and for Von Kleist to move from Trier towards Arlon. Four battalions were sent from Jülich to the city of Luxembourg.

These orders were communicated to Wellington by colonel Hardinge; there is no proof that the Prussians themselves did so to Von Müffling.

Blücher has been criticized for not pulling Von Kleist towards him, the moment he knew that the French 4th corps had moved from Metz towards Philippeville. This march would have shown that Napoleon no longer had the intention of moving through Luxemburg or the Alsace.¹³⁵ There is a lot of truth in this, but at the same time it should not be forgotten that the Prussians had an “open nerve” with a possible offensive from Givet through Namur and it cannot be fully excluded that they thought that Von Kleist might play a role in the scenario as well, as a force acting on the French rear.¹³⁶

What kind of information actually triggered Gneisenau and Blücher to issue further orders around midnight for most of the army remains unclear. However, due to the fact that in these orders by far the most of the army was immediately pulled to the left bank of the river Meuse, it must have been very convincing information about an imminent French offensive against the *Prussian* army and then most probably from the sector around Maubeuge and Beaumont.¹³⁷

For that reason the 2nd corps was ordered to assemble between Mazy and Onoz, the 3rd corps near Namur on the left bank of the Meuse and the 4th corps was ordered to concentrate in closed cantonments near Hannut.

No orders were issued to the 1st corps that moment. This can be concluded from the letter from Blücher which he wrote to Zieten at 9 a.m. on the 15th of June. In this document he wrote: “Ich habe schon diese Nacht dem 2., 3. und 4. Armee-Korps den Befehl gegeben, sich zu konzentriren, und zwar das 2. bei Onoz und Mazy, das 3. bei Namur und das 4. bei Hannut.”¹³⁸

It is something he would not have written if he had already given Zieten some kind of order around midnight, as in that case he would very probably have done this at the same time.¹³⁹

As Zieten was supposed to base his own actions in case of a French attack upon his own disposition of the 2nd of May, this means that by the moment Zieten was under attack he was not aware of the grand movements of the remainder of the army, as well as the information these were based upon.

There are no indications either that Von Müffling, and herewith Wellington, was informed, as there is no trace of any document or any reference to this information whatsoever. In case Prussian headquarters had informed him, this would come up without any doubt in the extensive correspondence of Von Müffling of the morning of the 15th of June. If these two elements are true, this can be regarded as very serious omissions of the Prussian leadership.¹⁴⁰

The general concept of the orders as issued around midnight of the 14th of June are completely similar as to the instructions which Blücher left on the 28th of May, and which already had a French advance upon Mons and Charleroi as a starting point.¹⁴¹

As an initial step, as has been stated, the corps were centred around the area east of Gembloux and north of Namur.

Though most intelligence pointed to a possible French attack from the sector of Maubeuge and Beaumont upon Charleroi, the Prussian leadership was still concerned about a possible French irruption from Givet upon Ciney and from there to Namur and Liège as well. This was the reason that both the 2nd and 3rd corps were supposed to leave outposts near Dinant on both banks of the river Meuse.

Since mid-May, both Wellington and Blücher were in the supposition that the invasion of France was set for the 16th of June. Logically, by now, the invasion had got a subject of an almost daily exchange of information.

At the same time, however, Wellington was waiting for information from Schwarzenberg about his intentions and situation, especially the date he expected to cross the Rhine. Even though he and Blücher wanted to start their operations, this was for him the determining factor to start his operations. And that was, in turn, the condition for the Prussians to do the same.

Schwarzenberg, in his turn, however, was dependent on the advance of the Russian army and that is why this advance had such an importance for all commanders. This explains the fact why Von Müffling sent Gneisenau on the 12th of June the state of the advance of the Russian army, in relation to their being able to reach the Rhine.

This connection was also noted by the commander of the Royal Horse Artillery, sir Augustus Frazer, as he wrote on the 10th of June: “All expect to move soon; nevertheless I do not imagine we shall quit Brussels for ten days or a fortnight. The Emperor of Russia did not reach Munich till the 28th of May; and I doubt the Russians being up so as to enable us to move for ten days.”¹⁴²

And it was on the 11th of June that baron Vincent, the Austrian representative in Brussels, had a conversation with Wellington about Schwarzenberg’s operations in relation to the suitable moment for the invasion of France.

In the period from the 10th till the 13th of June, the impression in Wellington’s headquarters must have been that Schwarzenberg would cross the Rhine on or not long after the 20th of June, but all were impatiently waiting for his definitive measures.¹⁴³

Meanwhile, what had happened was that Schwarzenberg had adapted his plans (dated 28th of April) on the 6th of June and in this plan he had set the invasion at least for Blücher and Wellington on the 27th of June.

Schwarzenberg’s plan had been approved of by the Austrian and Russian emperor on the 7th and 8th of June respectively and this resulted in a protocol taken up on the 10th of June which essentially mean that all allied armies, the Russians included, would advance into France simultaneously.

This led Schwarzenberg, now at Heidelberg, to write about the situation to Wellington on the 10th of June. In this letter he indicated that he expected to pass the Rhine near Basel on the 24th of June. But more importantly it accompanied his – approved - plan for the coming invasion.¹⁴⁴

The same letter can also be regarded as a reply to Wellington’s letter of the 2nd of June. Apart from Wellington, Schwarzenberg also wrote in a similar sense to baron Vincent.

The mission of colonel Von Pfuel.¹⁴⁵

There is no doubt that Schwarzenberg also wrote to Blücher on the same day and in the way as he did towards Wellington on the 10th of June. After all, both commanders had an equal role in the coming allied invasion and the information had an equal importance for both of them. In fact, both commanders got his letters through the same messenger, count De Baar, who rode from Heidelberg to Namur, where he arrived on the 13th of June, and from there to Brussels, where he arrived in the night of the same day.

On the 14th of June, baron Van Panhuys writes in this context: “Le colonel De Baar, aide de camp du prince de Swartenberg [sic], a passé hier ici pour le quartier général anglais, de depuis tout semble annoncer que l’on ne tardera pas de commencer” [the invasion].¹⁴⁶ And on the 15th of June it was major general Van Reede who referred to De Baar, as having arrived in Brussels on the night of the 13th of June.¹⁴⁷

As a matter of fact, as can be read from Von Müffling's letter, an official document of Schwarzenberg (as well as a confidential one of Von der Knesebeck) was delivered in Namur on the 13th of June.¹⁴⁸ Both these documents, covered by an adjoining letter, were sent by Gneisenau to Von Müffling through colonel Von Pfuel.

It is most unfortunate that all these documents are not available. The only one which is available, and then only partially, is the reaction of Von Müffling to Gneisenau on the 14th of June. Those parts suggest that the subject of the correspondence carried by Von Pfuel all had to do with the time-table and zones for an allied invasion into France. Apart from that, Von Müffling added some latest intelligence and informed Gneisenau that Von Pfuel also had something to report him orally.

In fact, what Von Müffling mentions as questions as he put them forward to the duke of Wellington, there is no doubt that these were the ones as stated in the letter which was sent by Gneisenau on the 13th through Von Pfuel, i.e. first on which date Wellington thought it would be the most efficient to start his operations and secondly whether he wished for the support of the Russian army.

The fact that a colonel, Von Pfuel – the assistant of Von Grolmann – was sent to Brussels is an indication of the importance of the mission. Yet, it seems that Von Pfuel wasn't able to report to Wellington himself as it would have been Von Müffling who would have read the documents (which were of course in German) to the duke in French, as Wellington couldn't read any German. French also was the language in which both Wellington and Von Müffling communicated. So, in this case, Von Müffling not only acted as the official liaison, but also as an interpreter. For this reason it is to be expected that Von Müffling also knew about Wellington's additional comments which colonel Von Pfuel had to report about orally to Gneisenau.¹⁴⁹

It is not clear when Von Pfuel arrived at Brussels, but it must probably have been in the late hours of the 13th or in the early hours of the 14th of June.

The way baron Vincent describes his meeting with Wellington on the 14th of June at 10 a.m., as one in which the duke was not surprised by the news from Schwarzenberg through his visit, also suggests that Von Pfuel met Von Müffling and Wellington before 10 a.m.

The roots for the description of Von Pfuel's mission in the Waterloo literature can be found in the accounts of two Prussian historians: major Wagner (1825) and major Von Damitz (1838)

The one of Wagner reads:

“In der Nacht vom 13. Zum 14. bemerkte man von den Vorposten des Generals von Zieten die Lagerfeuer von zwei grossen Lagern, die man bei Baumont [sic] und in der Gegend von Solre-sur-Sambre muthmasste. Den folgenden Tag brachten Ueberläufer die Nachricht von der Ankunft Napoleons und seines Bruders Hieronymus. Von den Vortruppen wurde gemeldet, dass die vor der Front gelegenen Ortschaften stark besetzt wären, und früher schon hatte man durch sehr bestimmte Nachrichten aus Paris erfahren, dass die preussische Armee zuerst angegriffen werden würde. Alles diese machte, dass man auf seiner Huth war; man traf alle Anstalten zum Gefecht, und das schwere Gepäck wurde rückwärts, in der Richtung von Gembloux gesendet. Da der Fürst von Blücher die Absicht hatte, sich hinter Fleurus zu concentriren, so ertheilte er dem 1sten Armeecorps unter General von Zieten Befehl, diesen Ort zu halten, den drei übrigen Corps aber, sich zusammenzuziehen. Diese Befehle wurden in der Nacht vom 14. Zum 15. ausgefertigt. Der Herzog von Wellington sendete Nachricht, dass seine Massregeln alle so getroffen wären, um zwei und zwanzig Stunden nach dem ersten Canonenschusse seine Truppen entweder bei Nivelles oder Quatrebras zu vereinigen. Da indessen bei dieser Berechnung Entfernungen von sieben bis neun Meilen zum Grunde lagen, wie die von Gent und Courtray nach Quatrebras, so gehörte dazu die grösste Genauigkeit in Ausfertigung und Ueberbringung der Befehle, so dass der geringste Aufenthalt, den

unvorhergesehene oder nicht vorherzusehende Umstände verursachten, eine allgemeine Störung veranlassen musste.”¹⁵⁰

And the one of Von Damitz reads:

“In der ersten Hälfte des Monats Juni nahm man Bewegungen bei der französischen Armee wahr. Es ging aus zuverlässiger Quelle im preussischen Hauptquartier (13ten Juni) die Nachricht von Paris ein, dass Napoleon den 12ten die Hauptstadt verlassen und zur Armee abgehen würde.

Man erkannte hierdurch, so wie auch aus anderen vom rechten Ufer der Maas und aus der Gegend von Laon über die Bewegungen der französischen Truppen eingezogenen sichern Nachrichten, dass der Ausbruch der Feindseligkeiten sehr nahe sei.

Der Feldmarschall Fürst Blücher hielt es daher für nothwendig, die entfernteren Truppentheile seines Heeres näher heranzuziehen.

Dem General Grafen Bülow wurde daher schon am 13ten der Befehl ertheilt, sein Corps auf dem linken Ufer der Maas zusammen zu ziehen, und alle Anstalten zu treffen, um Hannut in einem Marsche erreichen zu können.

Der Oberst v.Pfuehl vom Generalstabe des Fürsten Blücher wurde nach Brüssel zum Herzog v. Wellington gesandt, um mit demselben nochmals die letzten Maassregeln zu verabreden. Der Herzog schien indess nicht die Ueberzeugung gewinnen zu können, dass Napoleon die Preussen mit seiner Hauptmacht zuerst angreifen würde. Der Oberst v.Pfuehl kam den 14ten von Brüssel zurück und überbrachte die wiederholte Versicherung, dass der Herzog v. Wellington 22 Stunden nach dem ersten Kanonenschusse seine Armee nach den eintretenden Umständen bei Quatrebras oder Nivelles concentrirt haben würde.

Der englische Feldherr wollte seine Maassregeln so getroffen haben, dass er in 6 Stunden die Meldung von den Vorposten erhalten könne, 8 Stunden die Ertheilung und Ueberbringung der Ordres erforderten, und 8 Stunden hinlänglich wären, um die Truppen auf dem Schlachtfelde vereinigt zu sehen.”¹⁵¹

Though Wagner doesn't explicitly mention colonel Von Pfuehl, it is the promise of Wellington to the Prussians which binds both versions as dealing with the same communication.

In his “introduction” to the actual communication referred to, Wagner erroneously claims that “Alle Anstalten zum Gefecht” were made. Whatever these “Anstalten” may have been, I have shown before that there was no such thing as a general concentration, if it comes down to that only.

Apart from that, Wagner suggests as if everything was already focused upon a general assembling of the army in rear of Fleurus, near Sombreffe, and as if Wellington was set for a support there as coming from Nivelles and / or Quatre Bras.

Let alone the complete absence of Quatre Bras in any rendez-vous or strategic concept from Wellington's side – and this is something I will deal with extensively further – Wellington was certainly not the man to make such a precise promise in time and place as formulated by Wagner. In this, I would like to refer again to the letter which Wellington wrote to the prince of Orange on the 11th of May.

In Wagner's version of the events, Wellington's communication to the Prussians suddenly appears out of the blue as if the duke just wrote it, nothing more. Apparently, in Wagner's idea, the Prussians must have asked for such a kind of promise but there is no further reference to such a type of communication. He even doesn't give it a date, from the sequence of the events as sketched it seems as if Wellington sent it on the 14th of June.

Finally, Wagner believes the calculation of the 22 hours to be most vulnerable for contingencies, thereby already suggesting as if it would be very hard, if not impossible, for the duke of Wellington to comply with his own promise.¹⁵²

Last but not least it remains a mystery what sources Wagner used to make his claims.

Resulting from the apparent threat upon the Prussian army, it is Von Damitz who makes a link here between this threat and the 4th corps of Von Bülow moving over the river Meuse to its left bank and “alle Anstalten zu treffen, um Hannut in einem Marsche erreichen zu können” as ordered on the 13th of June.

First of all, Von Bülow had already been ordered to the left bank of the Meuse by mid-May and the second order was issued on the evening of the 14th of June.

Von Damitz then dates the departure of Von Pfuel to Wellington on the 13th of June “um mit demselben nochmals die letzten Maassregeln zu verabreden.” Damitz suggests here as if more detailed defensive arrangements had been made before, but he doesn’t specify which these were. This element of reiteration can also be found in “die wiederholte Versicherung” of Wellington, and both these descriptions clearly refer to the version of the Tirlemont-meeting as described by Von Damitz (see above). The only difference here in Von Damitz’ version is that on the 3rd of May, Wellington didn’t hang a time-frame on his assistance to the Prussians.

So, while Von Damitz gives a clear reason why Von Pfuel was sent to Brussels, he, as well as Wagner, completely ignore the invasion of France which was the real background and reason for Von Pfuel’s mission (see below).

Additionally, the way the so-called promise as done by Wellington is militarily naive. Apart from the fact that this was not the style of Wellington to express himself, it would be simply naive for a military commander in general to start running to some kind of rendez-vous after hearing of the very first few gunshots, directly or indirectly.

The resemblance of the promise is striking and I am very much inclined to think that Damitz took it from Wagner, thereby extending the promise even further by putting in a very specific time-frame within these 22 hours, i.e. for the conveyance of the message of the hostilities, the distribution of orders and the assembling of the army on the battlefield.

Let alone the feasibility of the scenario, this statement also supposes a battle near Sombreffe and this was something which had to be decided upon (see below).

The whole defensive character of Von Pfuel’s mission as described by both historians is not corroborated by any other document of the days involved whatsoever, nor of those produced on the 15th of June.¹⁵³ There is not a trace of a Prussian request on the one hand, or of a promise of Wellington to Prussian headquarters on the other and which was somehow linked to Von Pfuel’s visit to Brussels.¹⁵⁴ If the French threat would have been the main issue for the Prussian army right then, it would certainly have transpired in the communication which we have resulting from the mission of Von Pfuel and that is the letter as written by Von Müffling on the 14th of June and also in this document there is no word referring to anything which could even make the slightest reference to such a request on the one hand or some kind of promise on the other.

An additional element is that by the time Von Pfuel was sent out, on the 13th of June, the potential threat was not upon the Prussians alone, so it would be most unlogical to have a promise as has been stated by Wagner and Von Damitz; Wellington also might have asked the same from Blücher.

All statements of both Wagner and Damitz are so much shadowed by hindsight of the later events that all what matters give way to it: the general concepts of both commanders, their communications before the campaign started and their occupations with the invasion of France.¹⁵⁵

Through time, the Von Pfuel mission is one which has deserved very little real attention, in the sense that it has been critically analysed.

William Siborne, in his study, doesn't mention Von Pfuel's mission at all, while other authors, even up to the present time, simply mention it in the way Wagner and Von Damitz did.¹⁵⁶

The first exception, in a way, is Von Lettow Vorbeck (1904). He had access to the Prussian war archives and as a result he had the opportunity of consulting the letter which Von Müffling wrote back to Gneisenau on the 14th of June and which shows the background of the mission of colonel Von Pfuel.¹⁵⁷

He cites from the letter, thoughbeit not in an integral way. What he did take from the letter was that Von Pfuel had delivered a letter of Gneisenau to which documents of Von der Knesebeck and Schwarzenberg were enclosed.

Using this letter of Von Müffling as a starting point, Von Lettow Vorbeck briefly touches upon the invasion simply by citing from it, but eventually he translates the last sentence of this letter ("Oberst Von Pfuel wird Ew.Excellenz das Weitere sagen.") in the promise as it has been described by Wagner and Von Damitz.¹⁵⁸ As such, he also downgrades in what would be the most important of that moment, if this were all true, into a simple remark at the bottom of a letter, while treating the secondary element (the invasion into France) in that case as the main subject of the letter – an absurd interpretation.

For the reasons why the mission as been described in the ways as I sketched here, I would like to refer to the evaluation of the cooperation of Wellington and Blücher on the 15th and 16th of June (see below).

The mission of Von Pfuel should be fully linked to the letter of Schwarzenberg of the 10th of June and this letter was justly regarded by Prussian general headquarters, in all its impatience, as a "go" to start operations for the invasion, a green light as given by Schwarzenberg in the time-frame as he sketched it (see below) and upon which everything depended. It now allowed both Blücher and Wellington to settle the details for the planning and the coordination of the invasion as set on a specific and definitive date.

Obviously, Prussian general headquarters will have presumed Wellington might have received the same type of letter from Schwarzenberg the same day, or the next, at the latest, but in view of its impatience to invade France the need was clearly felt to discuss the information which had now become available right away.¹⁵⁹

It was at some point on the 13th, that Von Müffling still wrote about the lack of news from Schwarzenberg, which would eventually drop in later during the 13th of June, as carried by count De Baar.¹⁶⁰

To show the importance of the letter of Schwarzenberg as well as its background, I will summarize the events preceding it.

By late March, the duke of Wellington summarised the situation regarding the invasion of France as:

"No plan of campaign is definitely settled. The general idea is that the whole force should enter between the Rhine and the Sambre, the Prussians composing the centre [at the Lower Rhine], the Austrians the left [at the Upper Rhine], the British the right [in the Netherlands] , the Russians chiefly as a reserve [on the Middle Rhine]. This is adopted with a view of making it impossible for Buonaparte to attack them in detail. The plan is to be settled, de common accord, when the sovereigns come down to Frankfort or Augsburg, by the emperor of Russia with Volkonsky, the king of Prussia with Knesebeck, prince Schwarzenberg on the part of Austria, and some person on the part of England."

The first person who submitted his plan for the invasion of France was Gneisenau, on the 3rd of April.

Based upon a swift march to Paris and upon numerical superiority, Gneisenau divided the forces in four armies: one in Belgium, one on the Middle-Rhine and one on the Upper-Rhine. In rear of the one at the Middle-Rhine was the largest army which formed the reserve.

Lord Stewart, on the 28th of April, summarizes it as:

“Reckoning on a great numerical superiority over the enemy, each of these armies the General proposes should move independently upon Paris; each to mind its own base and communications. If one be attacked, to act defensively; if beaten, to fall back upon the reserve; the other two armies to move on, and, by preference, to keep four or five days from each other, and to have no mutual dependence or combination till near Paris.”¹⁶¹

Somehow, however, the plan doesn't seem to have been properly debated in Vienna.¹⁶²

This was certainly not the case with the plan of the duke of Wellington, which he had sent in on the 12th of April. Its arrival at Vienna led to a meeting on the 19th of April in which all the pros and cons of the duke's proposal to start hostilities on the 1st of May were discussed.

The plan was also built upon speed in movements and the numerical superiority of the allies over Napoleon's armies, which Wellington regarded as his sole of base of power. But it was, above all, built upon a swift offensive, not letting Napoleon the time to increase his power. For that reason he didn't want to await the arrival of the Russian army.

Eventually, however, the plan was rejected as the general feeling, especially of Austria and Russia, was that more time was needed to have more forces established so as to be sure about a strong numerical superiority over the French armies when they would enter France.

What counted for Schwarzenberg was for Austria to extend its power into Italy and his wish to have the total command of the allied armies, and that was only possible if he would lead the largest army and therefore he needed time to build it up.¹⁶³

For this reason, the date for the start of the operations was set upon the 1st of June.¹⁶⁴

The protocol of the military conference held at Vienna on the 19th of April summarised the reasons for this date as:

“L'armée Prussienne ne peut être rassemblée sur le bas Rhin que vers la fin du mois de Mai, où encore elle ne présentera qu'une force de 100.000 hommes, y compris les troupes du Nord de l'Allemagne.

L'armée Autrichienne ne commencera pas à se former avant le 18 Mai sur les points de Kannstadt, Stockach et Hall, où elle ne pourra réunir que 120.000 hommes, jusqu'à la fin de ce mois.

Il n'y a donc que l'armée Bavaroise et Wurtembourgeoise et les troupes de Bade et de Darmstadt, dont on pourrait disposer au commencement du mois de Mai.

Toute opération offensive que l'armée du Haut Rhin pourrait entreprendre l'oblige à disposer d'un corps de 50.000 à 60.000 hommes, tant pour le blocus des fortresses que pour maintenir l'esprit du peuple dans les départements du Nord de la France, et pour y organiser les moyens de subsistances pour l'armée.

Les mouvements dans le Midi de la France sont beaucoup trop éloignés des armées du Nord pour espérer qu'elles pourraient les seconder à tems.

On est enfin généralement de l'avis de ne pas vouloir hasarder des attaques séparées qui ne pourraient pas être soutenues par des forces supérieures à celles de l'ennemi et on croit que des chances qu'on pourrait avoir pour soi, en attaquant, ne sont pas à comparer au mauvais effet que pourrait produire une défaite des premiers corps des alliés.

On a donc unanimement décidé de ne commencer l'offensive contre la France qu'au premier du Mois de Juin. [...] Le maréchal Wrede a supposé le cas que le duc de Wellington fut attaqué de vives forces avant que les armées Alliées fussent en état de prendre l'offensive, et c'est dans ce seul cas que la Haute Conférence a cru devoir admettre la nécessité de faire faire alors

une démonstration à l'armée Bavaroise et Wurtembourgeoise vers Metz, pour dégager l'armée du duc de Wellington." ¹⁶⁵

By the time this news reached Liège and Brussels, both Knesebeck and Schwarzenberg developed their own plans for the invasion.

Knesebeck's plan (dated from the 18th and the 24th of April) came down to the principle of not getting involved into any kinds of actions whatsoever as long as the Austrians had not reached the Rhine and the Russian army had not arrived.

On the 28th of April it was Schwarzenberg who submitted his ideas for the invasion of France.

It is not within the scope of this study to analyse each plan for the invasion in detail, but for the one of Schwarzenberg I would like to make an exception up to a certain extent as this was the one which was adopted by the great powers to be used for the coming invasion and which played a significant role in the weeks preceding the campaign of 1815. ¹⁶⁶

By the 28th of April, Schwarzenberg had formulated the principles upon which he wanted to base his plan for the invasion of France.

Aiming at the destruction of the French army and the taking of Paris at the same time, Schwarzenberg made a clear distinction between the operational basis of each participating army. For the Prussian army that would be the area stretching between Mainz to the left and Wellington's army to the right. For the army under his own command, Schwarzenberg saw his operational base having Mainz on his right, Switzerland in the centre and the gorges of Piemont to his right. In the centre, in the same line as the other two armies so as to be able to move to the right or the left, and not as a reserve, would be the Russian army.

Taking it from a common goal, each army, on the other hand, had to maintain a safe communication line to the rear.

The idea was to wear down the French forces by obliging them to move from one point to the other, thereby showing their intentions. In all, Schwarzenberg counted upon 800.000 men in the alliance, against 400.000 French.

For the invasion as such, it was Schwarzenberg's idea that Wellington, Blücher and he himself would move as soon as two columns of the Russian army (each consisting of 50.000 men) had reached Koblenz and Mannheim, while the main part of the Russian army would move in forced marches upon Koblenz and Mainz.

It all meant that, due to these combinations, and as it was decided in Vienna, that the invasion could not start before the 16th of June.

Meanwhile, in Brussels and Liège, Wellington and Blücher were anxious to start the invasion, of which they still were in the impression that this would start by the 1st of June.

However, it was on the 9th of May that the proposal as sketched by Schwarzenberg had got through to them as well. By then they were aware that the invasion was postponed to the 16th of June.

At the same time, and from the way it is written it seems that it was not a reaction to Schwarzenberg's proposal, Wellington drafted a new proposal for the invasion of France.

For Wellington, by that time, the invasion could only take place "wenn Napoleon seine vor uns bei Maubeuge stehende Macht durch Detachirungen, es sey gegen den Oberrhein oder gegen die Vendée, sehr vermindere oder sobald die Oesterreichische Armee bei Langres angekommen seyn würde."

Meanwhile, probably by the 20th of May, Schwarzenberg moved his headquarters to Heidelberg as he got there on the 24th of May, and where he was joined on the 5th of June by the emperors of Austria and Russia. ¹⁶⁷

In conclusion, the statement of Schwarzenberg about his own operations was vital for the decision of Wellington, and with him, Blücher, when and where to invade France.

In fact, by the 2nd of June Wellington asked Schwarzenberg about the issue as he, and of course Blücher, wanted to know where they stood.

Around the same time, Gneisenau also drafted a new plan how to invade France and sent it to Von Boyen. He had done so as his former one had been based upon speed, but he now saw that Napoleon's force had grown stronger and therefore he felt forced to adjust his plan. Yet again, whether it got through to Vienna or Heidelberg by that time remains unclear.

What did happen, however, was that Schwarzenberg, in his turn, developed his plan for the invasion of France upon the principles as he had stated them late April and which had been approved by both Blücher and Wellington, as well as the Austrian emperor.

This elaboration was dated 6th of June and contained three important elements: the date on which Schwarzenberg was supposed to have crossed the Rhine near Basel (the 25th of June), Schwarzenberg's wish for Blücher and Wellington taking the offensive on the 27th of June, while the Russian army would arrive on the Rhine (between Mainz and Mannheim) between the 21st and the 29th of June.¹⁶⁸

Though both the Austrian and Russian emperor agreed upon it on the 7th of June, it was Alexander who still wanted some modifications on the advance of his own army in relation to that of Schwarzenberg as he felt the gap between them was too large. Schwarzenberg did in some way meet his request by having the Russians pass through Trier into France and from there establish communication with him in his advance through Belfort, Langres and Chaumont. What resulted was a formal protocol as settled in Heidelberg on the 10th of June. As in this way the invasion had been formally settled both in time and routes, it was reason for Schwarzenberg to write both Blücher and Wellington immediately to report about these events and to summarize its conclusions.¹⁶⁹

It is within the context of this most important news that the comments in the period from the 11th to the 15th of June should be seen. Having this news, Wellington yet deemed it preferable to advance into France 4-5 days later and not necessarily with the Russians.¹⁷⁰ It was in this sense that Wellington wrote to the czar on the morning of the 15th of June, after having received his letter, making it clear in a diplomatic way that he had no direct need for his assistance.

That morning, Von Müffling was also busy arranging practical matters such as the service of captain Von Scharnhorst, the future administration in France and the delivery of a large quantity of British muskets to the Prussian army.

Revised: 9th November 2010

¹ WSD, Vol.X p.435

² Meanwhile two other units had reached the army on the 11th of June. These were the 2nd bataillon of Nassau and the Nassau Voluntary Chasseurs; they were both placed at Bousval. The chasseurs came from Maastricht.

In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8 – 224

Starklof, B. Das Leben et. p.177-178

Domarus, M. Die Oranien-Nassauische etc. p.15

According to the journal of the 2nd division, both units arrived on the 12th of June. In: Journaal der tweede divisie infanterie. In: NA, 2.13.52 nr.1090 p.28b

³ Cf. Willem to Wellington, 11th of June 1815. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6211

⁴ Wellington to the prince of Orange, 12th June and 13th of June 1815. In: WD, Vol.XII p.460-461

Prince of Orange to Wellington, 13th June 1815.

In: Hussey, J. - Two letters of the prince of Orange to Wellington, June 1815 p.225

Hussey correctly refers to the original document in the Hartley Library which has not been published in full in the Supplementary dispatches (Vol.X p.471)

The missing passage here reads:

“I do not conceive how the formation of a fourth division would make any material difference or create any inconvenience with regard to the subsistence of the army of the Netherlands. I therefore think that if there are only the two reasons against it you mention in your letter it may very easily be accomodated in the manner you propose.”

⁵ WSD, Vol.X p.439

⁶ The state reads:

Etat envoyé de Paris, 4 juin 1815:

Supputations qu'on croit plus exacte

1st corps (d'Erlon), 25.000 – 20.000

2nd corps (Reille), 25.000 – 20.000

3rd corps (Vandamme) 15.000-10.000

4th corps (Gérard) 20.000-15.000

5th corps (Rapp) 20.000-15.000

6th corps (Lobau) 15.000-10.000

Imperial guard 20.000 – 15.000

Corps Lecourbe 8000-6000

Suchet 8000 – 4000

Brune (garrison at Marseille included) 6000-5000

Pyrenees 15.000-12.000

Hospitals and depots 50.000-50.000

Total: 227.000 – 182.000

In: WSD, Vol.X p.743

⁷ 1st corps 25.000 (to the left) , 2nd corps 25.000 (in the centre), 3rd corps 15.000 (to the right), 4th corps 20.000 (at Metz), 5th corps 20.000 (on the Rhine, headquarters at Weissembourg), 6th corps 15.000 (at Laon), Imperial Guard 20.000, (to leave from Paris on the 5th June for Laon), corps of Lecourbe 8000 (around BÉfort and Altkirch), corps of Suchet

8000 (in the Savoie), corps of Brune (incl. the garrison at Marseille) 6000, corps at Bordeaux and the Pyrenees 15.000 and in the hospitals and depots 50.000. In: WSD, Vol.X p.449-451
And in: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8

⁸ He told the prince of Orange the same. Cf. WD, Vol.XII p.458

⁹ Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.327-329
Delbrück, H. Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.517-518

¹⁰ Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.328-329
Delbrück, H. Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.517-518

¹¹ GSA, VPH-HA, VI – nr.VIII - copy files from Kriegsarchiv at Vienna. Nr.1815.VI.65

¹² Letter to his mother, dated 11th of June 1815. In: Regimental Museum, 1st Dragoon Guards

¹³ Letter of his mother, dated 11th of June 1815. In: Sir J.Ponsonby - The Ponsonby family p.217

¹⁴ Colville, J. - Portrait of a general p.198

¹⁵ WSD, Vol.X p.454-455

¹⁶ WSD, Vol.X p.455

¹⁷ GSA, VPH-HA, VI – Copy of files from the Kriegsarchiv at Vienna, nr.1815.VI.65

¹⁸ Hofschroer, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign p.153, from Cathcart papers, folio C

¹⁹ WSD, Vol.X p.455-456

²⁰ GSA, VI.HA NL Gneisenau kt.23 p.88
Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.329

²¹ In: GSA, VI, HA-NL Gneisenau kt.23 nr.89
Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.331 (nr.19)

²² WSD, Vol.X p.456

²³ WSD, Vol.X p.457

²⁴ WSD, Vol.X p.463

²⁵ WD, Vol.XII p.462

This fits in with the statement given by Von Dörnberg about general Clinton telling him on the 14th of June that Wellington did not believe that Napoleon was concentrating his army and that he had arrived there. In: Aus einem Manuskript etc. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von. Die Vorgeschichte etc. p.292

²⁶ Wellington to earl Bathurst, 13th of June 1815. In: WD, Vol.XII p.462-463

²⁷ NA, 2.05.01 nr.772

²⁸ In: HL, WP nr. 1/467

²⁹ BL, Add.ms. 34.703 p.44

³⁰ GSA, VI, HA NL Gneisenau kt. 23 p.91
Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.331-332

³¹ Schwarzenberg to Wellington, 10th June 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.440-441
Schwarzenberg to Wellington, 10th June 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.441-448
The same day, Schwarzenberg wrote to Vincent in a similar sense. In: HL, WP1.488

³² WSD, Vol.X p.470

³³ WSD, Vol.X p.471

³⁴ HL, WP 1.467
WSD, Vol.X p.471-472

³⁵ Sydney, E. The life of lord Hill p.304
His source remains unknown.

³⁶ Hofschroer, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign p.154 - from the Paget Papers, 644/A/21

³⁷ WSD, Vol.X p.476-477
HL, WP 1.467

³⁸ BL, Add.ms. 35.062 fol.358

³⁹ In: KHA, A37.VII.b4
A copy is slightly different and dated at 8 a.m. In: BL, Add.ms.35.062

⁴⁰ HL, WP 1.467
Hussey, J. Two letters etc. p.225-226
He points out that this letter wasn't published in the Dispatches.
Due to the distance between the forest of Bourdon and Braine le Comte and the moment of his return (towards 5 p.m. – see below), it must have been before 10 a.m. that the prince wrote this letter.
The enclosure he mentions was the report written at Mons on the 13th of June by baron Behr.

⁴¹ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleons Untergang p.195 The document came from the former KA, nr.VI.C.3.II p.25
The documents of Gneisenau, Schwarzenberg and Knesebeck as referred to by Von Müffling are all missing.

⁴² GSA, VPH-HA, VI - Copies of files from the Kriegsarchiv at Vienna Nr.1815.6.81

⁴³ WD, Vol.XII p.466-469

According to Hussey, this letter was dated 12th of June. He bases himself here upon Romberg & Malet, Louis XVIII et les Cent Jours à Gand Vol.I p.238-241
In: Provisioning the allied armies in 1815 p.27

⁴⁴ In: NAK, WO 55/959

⁴⁵ NAK, WO 30/35 nr.1

⁴⁶ WD, Vol.XII p.465

⁴⁷ Letters as published on: www.sgwilkinson.freemove.co.uk/wellington.htm

For the letter of general Dumouriez, cf. WSD, Vol.X p.692-694

Dumouriez was a former French general (1739-1823) and from 1804 onwards an informant of the British in their struggle against Napoleon.

⁴⁸ Cf. Hussey, J. – The anniversary of Marengo etc. p.25

Hussey draws from the journal of Sir Pulteney Malcolm's journal. In: NAK nr.ADM 50/87

⁴⁹ Malmesbury, lord - A series of letters of the first earl of Malmesbury 1745-1820 p.440

⁵⁰ NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8

⁵¹ NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8

Colonel De Mercx, commander of the 5th regiment of light dragoons – brigade of Van Merlen – states he heard in the night of the 14th of June about the withdrawal of French outposts. This may well be true, but it seems most unlogical that he reported this to Collaert and not to Van Merlen, who was his immediate superior. De Mercx also erroneously claims Collaert was at Braine le Comte (while he was at Boussoit). Cf. his letter to J.B.Renard. In: Marchot, R. Notice biographique etc. p.76

⁵² This could be Paul-Charles-Amable, baron de Bourgoing. In 1815 he was lieutenant in the Young Guard. He published his memoirs in: Souvenirs militaires du baron de Bourgoing, sénateur, ancien ambassadeur en Espagne, ancien pair de France, ministre plénipotentiaire en Russie et en Allemagne, grand officier de la Légion d'Honneur, grand-croix de Charles II d'Espagne, etc., etc. (1791-1815), publiés par le baron Pierre de Bourgoing.

⁵³ NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8

⁵⁴ NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8

⁵⁵ NA, 2.13.14.01. nr.6 – 176

⁵⁶ NA, 2.13.52 nr.3 nr. 1113

⁵⁷ WSD, Vol.X p.475

⁵⁸ This concerns Von Dörnberg's report of the 14th June, 3 p.m. In: Von Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.47

⁵⁹ Von Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.47 and in Die Vorgeschichte der Schlacht bei Quatre Bras, p.197-198
Original in KA. VI.E.3.Vol.II.p.53

It reached Prussian headquarters the same day. Cf. the note Ad acta, d.15.Juni. In: KA. VI.D.9.nr.257b In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.48

The “ordre de bataille” as referred to is (unfortunately) not available.

The idea as that Napoleon would demonstrate against the Netherlands, while his real intention was to fall upon the Upper-Rhine, Von Müffling also expressed to Von der Knesebeck on the 13th of June. In: Königer, J. – Der Krieg von 1815 und die Verträge von Wien und Paris p.232 (the letter is not given *in extenso*).

⁶⁰ GSA, VI, HA, NL Gneisenau, kt.23 p.94

Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.332-333

I have not been able to find out to which letter of Castteleigh Von Müffling refers to; those of Wellington as mentioned are those of the 14th of June to prince Metternich and of the morning of the 15th to the Russian emperor (see below).

⁶¹ GSA, VI, HA, NL Gneisenau, kt.23 p.95

Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.334 (nr.23)

⁶² In: GSA. VI.HA NL Gneisenau, kt.23 p.96

Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.333

⁶³ NA, nr.2.02.01 nr.6210

Due to a lack of proper interpunction, the citation from Wellington becomes somewhat unclear, but should be read between quotation marks producing: “je ne crois pas qu’on nous attaquera, nous sommes trop fort” , after which Van Reede resumes his own words.

⁶⁴ NA, nr.2.02.01 nr.6210

⁶⁵ In: Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VII p.774-775

⁶⁶ Cf. letter of Von Müffling to Gneisenau of the same morning (above) and the preceding one of Van Reede (see above).

⁶⁷ WSD, Vol.X p.448

⁶⁸ In: HL, WP nr.1.470 / WD, Vol.X p.470-472 The letter itself doesn’t state the name of the addressee, but the covering note in the register of letters from the duke mentions “recs. His letter by general Toll – plan of operation” which means the person involved is the emperor of Russia. In: HL, WP nr.6.1.19

⁶⁹ In this context, Gleig writes: “The 15th passed at Brussels in perfect quiet. Intelligence came in, no doubt, from Charleroi at 7 that morning, that the fires of numerous bivouacs were seen the previous night, to blaze up suddenly, and that in the morning the outposts at Lobbes and Thuin had been attacked.” Here he might make a slight allusion to the report of Hardinge which also speaks of campfires blazing.

Yet, as Thuin came under attack at 6 a.m., this statement, in relation to a time of arrival at 7 a.m. in Brussels, yet cannot hold in any way whatsoever.

Apart from this, Gleig mixes up his chronology for the events on the 15th June considerably. In his idea, Wellington issued his orders for the troops to be in readiness after the news referred to above, but he doesn’t mention an hour. Later, the prince came in at 3 p.m.

reporting “that the Prussians had been warmly engaged in and about Charleroi”, a fact shortly after confirmed by Von Müffling. Gleig then states: “An orderly dragoon, it appeared, whom general Zieten had early dispatched to announced to him the commencement of hostilities, had lost his way; and but for the delivery of dispatches from prince Blücher to general Müffling it is impossible to guess when the true state of the case might have been communicated to the duke of Wellington.” This all was the reason for Wellington to issue, between 4 and 5 p.m., orders for “three distant divisions [to march] to the left. Then, at 10 p.m. as “the enemy’s movements had sufficiently disclosed his intention; and the whole army with the exception of the reserve was put in motion. It marched by various roads upon Quatre Bras.”

In: Gleig, G.R. The life of Arthur, first duke of Wellington p.307-308

Hofschröder makes a connection between Gleig’s remark on the campfires, as coming from Zieten, as Gleig mentions it as coming from Charleroi.

Hofschröder’s claim is that the message was written by Zieten around midnight and that it got at Brussels by 7 a.m.

However, Gleig states that at the same time the information dropped in about the commencement of the hostilities and this is something Hofschröder does not mention, and this news which was impossible to arrive that early in Brussels.

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

⁷⁰ HL, WP 1.470

WD Vol.XII pp.469-470

⁷¹ Blücher’s Briefe p.281

⁷² GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.7 p.1, 4

Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon’s Untergang p.195

Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.52

⁷³ Delbrück, H. Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.518

⁷⁴ GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.7 p.10

Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon’s Untergang p.516

⁷⁵ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon’s Untergang p.516

⁷⁶ MWB, 1846 p.22

Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang p.517

⁷⁷ Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Der Verrath im Kriege 1815 p.377 – From former Kriegsarchiv nr. VI.C.I.III p.140,151

⁷⁸ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang p.518

It seems as if Lettow Vorbeck bases himself here upon a note written on the document, but this is not sure.

Cf. Gneisenau, in his letter to Gruner of the 14th of June, refers to the information as sent by Zieten in these reports,. (see below).

⁷⁹ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon’s Untergang p.517

According to Otto, two french deserters reported on the evening of the 13th of June at the outposts of the 1st army-corps that Napoleon had arrived at the army and that he wanted to attack

on the 14th or on the 15th of June by daybreak at the latest. Both men were sent to Zieten, who gave orders for a possible french attack. For the outposts of the 1st brigade this meant that they were not allowed to engage any serious fight but that they were supposed to fall back to the Piéton , where the brigade would collect to go from there to Gosselies and Fleurus. In: Otto, F.von - Geschichte des 2.Schlesischen Jäger Bataillons nr.6 p.78

⁸⁰ In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.7 p.9

⁸¹ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon's Untergang p.517

⁸² See above.

⁸³ Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.353-354 (from former KA, VI.15.II.9) MWB, 1846 p.33 – (with slight changes)

⁸⁴ Cf. the note on the document reading: "praes. Fontaine l'Evêque den 14. Juny Morgens ½ 1 Uhr" In: VPH.GSA-HA, VI nr.I.nr.6.p.13 and nr.VII nr.7 p.5 (former Kriegsarchiv nr.VI.C.15.I.p.9)

⁸⁵ Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.354 MWB, 1846 p.34

⁸⁶ Cf. Colonel Hardinge to Wellington, 14th of June 10 p.m. Here, he refers to this second report of Van Merlen (see above).

⁸⁷ GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.7 p.5 MWB, 1846, p.33

⁸⁸ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von - Napoleons Untergang p.518

He apparently cites from a document from the former Kriegsarchiv, but the original text is not available.

Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.273

Hardinge also refers to this letter in his report of 10 p.m. by stating:

“At the time general Zieten wrote (presumed to be at twelve or one today) he had received no information of any movement of the enemy by their right. The fires of a body of troops, he reports, were seen last night in the direction of Thimmont, near Beaumont, and also in the vicinity of Mirbes. There is nothing further said of the arrival of Buonaparte or of the guards at Avesnes, which reports were received from the front during last night.” (see above).

⁸⁹ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von - Napoleons Untergang p.518

He apparently cites from a document from the former Kriegsarchiv, but the original text is not available.

Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.273

⁹⁰ Cf. The letter written by Von Zieten on the 15th of June, at 8.15 a.m. in which he writes:

“Den Herzog Wellington habe ich hiervon benachrichtigt, und ihn ersucht, such nunmehr bei Nivelles zu concentrieren, welches derselbe nach einer gestern vom General Von Müffling erhaltenen Nachricht thun will.” (see below).

The message received from Zieten at Brussels on the 14th of June as mentioned by Van Reede may be the same one as referred to here.

⁹¹ The report itself is missing.

⁹² MWB, 1846 p.33

⁹³ MWB, 1846 , p.34

Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.89

Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Der Verrath im Kriege p.379 (from former KA, VI.C.15.II.p.13)

⁹⁴ The original is in the Archives générales du royaume at Brussels, inventaire nr.108

Cited in: Couvreur, H.J. Le drame Belge etc. p.71

From the description it can be concluded that the man probably left Quatre Bras around 7 p.m. (cf. action at Frasnes), and got at Waterloo by 9 p.m.

The fact that the report reached Brussels, probably baron Tindal, on the 16th of June can be taken from the note which gives a summary of the report in a document entitled “Lettres confidentielles reçues le 16 Juin 1815.” In: NA, nr.2.02.01 nr.6585

The officer involved probably spoke to Van Saksen Weimar, as he writes:

“Dès la matinée du 15 juin j’app[erçus] un mouvement extraordinaire sur la grand route quantités de personnes se retirèrent de Charleroi disant que les troupes francaises ayant passé la frontière s’approchèrent de leur ville, plus tard l’officier de notre marechaussée stationné à Charleroi vint confirmer cette nouvelle en ajoutant que les francais devaient déjà avoir dépassé sa résidence. Je n’eus pas besoin d’en faire rapport au commandant de la brigade [..]”

This last detail is most interesting: apparently Van Saksen Weimar did not deem it necessary to inform Wellington directly as well. In: VLS, II. 3. Nr.5

⁹⁵ Delbrück, H. Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.520-521

⁹⁶ In: Aus den Jahren etc. p.144-145

Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.121

⁹⁷ Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.90

Having received the order on the 16th of June, Von Kleist would have expressed himself that day as:

“Laut einem Befehle Blüchers solle er mit den Bundestruppen in die Gegend von Arlon marschieren. Er ersucht Eglosstein sich so mit seinen Truppen in Bewegung zu setzen, dass sie am 18. Abends bei Ettelbrück enge Kantonierungen beziehen könnten. Zur Erleichterung der Verbindung möge er gleich die nöthigen Briefkommandos durch Dragoner bis nach Saul aufstellen. Er, Kleist, werde von Arlon aus ihm mit ähnlichen Kommando’s entgegen kommen, so dass Befehle schnellstens befördert werden könnten. In Ettelbrück seien die Truppen mit einem sechstägigen eisernen Bestande zu versehen; dieser müsste beigebracht werden. Da möglicherweise Lebensmittel und Fourage noch besonders nachgeführt würden, so habe er einen Offizier zu deren Leitung abgesandt mit dem Befehle, sich der thüringschen Brigade anzuschliessen. Er selber gehe morgen nach Grevenmachern, das Hauptquartier werde den 18. In Luxemburg und den 19.wahrscheinlich in Arlon sein.” In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.183 – (from former KA, VI.C.94)

⁹⁸ Cf. Hardinge to Wellington, 14th of June, 10 p.m. In: WSD, Vol.X p.476

⁹⁹ Conrady, E.von – Das Leben etc. p.293-294. (from former KA, III.C.53)
Ollech, Von Geschichte etc. p.90

MWB, 1845 p.19 (slightly different version)

It was marked with two crosses to indicate extreme urgency. It was stamped:

“Arm.Com.I.Setzt.Nr.” and then in writing “243 per Ordonnanz ++” Folio 19 - on top in Von Below’s hand is written: Nr.136 pr(aesentatum) 15/6.15 Morgens 5 Uhr” and below is the following note:

“Hiernach ist denen Brigade-Chefs die veränderte Dislocation, welche noch den 15 J.zu beziehen mitgetheilt worden. Dem Feldmarschall der richtige Eingang der Ordre gemeldet und dem General Grollmann die allgemeine Dislocation zugesendet. Der Kreis-Direktor Simon de Harlez wegen den Etappen auf dem Wege nach Huy und Ober-Kriegs-Commissair de [...] in so weit es sie angeht auch benachrichtigt.

d.15.Juni 15 v.Bel[ow].”

In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von. In: GSA.VPH-HA,VI,nr.II.13.p.4 In former Kriegsarchiv. Register of staff. VI.D.9

According to this register, the text was written by lieutenant Von Lützwow on behalf of Blücher. The summary reads: “Auf eingegangenen Nachricht dass sich der Feind bei Maubeuge sammelt, wollen Exc. Sich so in Cantonnements legen, dass in einem Tagenmarsche bei Hannut concentrieren können (abgang 14. P.Estafette). In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.6 p.2

As for the moment the order was issued, Von Clausewitz and Von Nostitz also claim it was in the evening. Cf.

Clausewitz, C. von - Hinterlassene Werke p.36 – Nostitz, Das Tagebuch etc. p.19

For the afternoon, see: Von Pflugk Harttung, Vorgeschichte etc. p.253

Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon’s Untergang p.196

Hussey, J. The shadow of Ligny etc. p.14

Major Ritz, a former ensign of the 1st regiment of Pommerian infantry nr.2 and during that night on guard near the bridge of the Meuse at Namur states it was 10 p.m. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.nr.1 p.18

Siborne believes the news from Zieten dropped in between 9 and 10 p.m. and that orders were issued immediately after. In: History etc. Vol.I p.54

¹⁰⁰ Both orders were written out by lieutenant Von Wussow. Cf. Register of staff. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.6 p.1 (former KA, VI.D.9).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Register of staff. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.6 p.1 (former KA, VI.D.9).

¹⁰² Thirimont, a village about 3 kilometers north of Beaumont.

¹⁰³ Probably Merbes-le-Chateau, about 10 kilometers south of Binche.

¹⁰⁴ HL, WP 1.467
WSD, Vol.X p.476

¹⁰⁵ In: NA, 2.05.01 nr.771

The letter must have been written not long after 5.30 p.m. as Van Panhuys writes in a post scriptum:

“Son Altesse Royale le prince Guillaume de Prusse est arrivé ici à 2 ½ heures et demi [sic] et vient de repartir en ce moment à 5 ½ après avoir diné chez le feldmaréchal pour retourner à Liège.”

¹⁰⁶ Major Ritz in his account of 1861. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.nr.1 p.17-29

The version of the additional information about the coming offensive as provided by deserters is taken over by:

Wagner, J.Chr.A. Pläne der Schlachten und Treffen p.11

Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.90

Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon's Untergang p.197

Von Bredow. Geschichte etc. p.7

Förster, mentions Zieten as having reported at 10 p.m. to Blücher about the presence of the French army in front of him. This message would have reached Namur by 11 p.m. but this is – in relation to the distance involved - impossible. In: Geschichte etc. p.834

¹⁰⁷ Report of Pirch I - In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.5 p.4 According to him it was dated midnight.

According to Von Lettow Vorbeck, Pirch I was also ought to leave one battalion and two squadrons near Dinant in outposts and to one battalion at Namur. In: Napoleons Untergang p.198

Von Ollech gives the order yet another twist by stating that Pirch I was to collect the 7th brigade at Namur on the early morning of the 15th of June, to leave one battalion in the city and to place the three other brigades between Mazy and Onoz. In: Geschichte etc. p.92

¹⁰⁸ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang p.197-198

¹⁰⁹ In: History of the war etc. In: MWB, 1845 p.20

Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.255 (a part of it).

Conrady, E.von - Das Leben etc. p.294-295

Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang p.198

The version of Von Ollech is not correct. In: Geschichte etc. p.91

¹¹⁰ Register of staff, nr.243 which states: “Abgang 14. P.Estafette” In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.255

The short description of the order in the register of staff is “Disp.zur concentrirung den 15.J. (Mitternacht per Ordonnanz +++). Cf. Register of staff. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.6 (former KA, VI,D.9).

According to Von Damitz it was sent out before 11 p.m. In: Geschichte etc. p.71

Von Pflugk Harttung also points out that under nr.249 there is the following note on the 14th of June: “An 4 Korps Commandanten, Disposition zur Concentrirung den 15.Juni Mitternacht per Ordonnanz A+++ ad Acta A.1”

From it could be read as if another order was sent out to Von Bülow, which is highly improbable. Also the note ad Acta A.1 seems to refer to the 1st corps.

¹¹¹ Therefore, Hofschröder's presumption that Zieten did not send any information to Brussels after the 9th of June is incorrect. In: Yet another reply eyc. p.223

¹¹² Lettow Vorbeck, O.von - Napoleons Untergang p.518

Hardinge also refers to this letter in his report of 10 p.m. by stating:

“At the time general Zieten wrote (presumed to be at twelve or one today) he had received no information of any movement of the enemy by their right. The fires of a body of troops, he reports, were seen last night in the direction of Thimmont, near Beaumont, and also in the vicinity of Mirbes. There is nothing further said of the arrival of Buonaparte or of the guards at Avesnes, which reports were received from the front during last night.” (see above).

¹¹³ In: Recollections p.221

¹¹⁴ Siborne claims that on the 14th of June Zieten sent information to Blücher and Wellington about French bivouac-fires towards Beaumont and Solre-sur-Sambre and about the arrival of Napoleon and Jérôme.

Siborne gives no source, but, apart from the details of the report which do not fully match, his claim about the existence of a report is correct. In: History etc. Vol.I p.54

¹¹⁵ Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.49 (from KA, VI.C.15 p.15)
Cf. F.de Bas. La campagne etc. Vol.I p.353

¹¹⁶ Cf. F.de Bas. La campagne etc. Vol.I p.353

¹¹⁷ Lieutenant Von Gerlach's words go in the same sense: a French concentration near Beaumont, from the west, as well as from the east. He probably refers here to information which Hardinge refers to as well.

Striking details in Von Gerlach's words are his confirmation of Wellington's optimism, as expressed by Hardinge, when it came down to a French attack upon his sector, while Von Gerlach also mentions the positions near Braine le Comte or Halle, which was the concentration area for Wellington in such a scenario.

¹¹⁸ GSA, VPH-HA, VI - Copies of files from the Kriegsarchiv at Vienna Nr.1815.6.81

¹¹⁹ Von Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.47 and in Die Vorgeschichte der Schlacht bei Quatre Bras, p.197-198

Original in KA. VI.E.3.Vol.II.p.53

It reached Prussian headquarters the same day. Cf. the note Ad acta, d.15.Juni. In: KA. VI.D.9.nr.257b In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.48

Hussey concludes that Von Müffling did not have any knowledge of the letter of Hardinge, but it is yet in describing both these scenarios that he saw the chance of both an offensive and a defensive strategy of Napoleon. In: The Frasnés letter, a reconsideration etc. p.12

¹²⁰ Within this context, the remark of major general Van Reede comes into play as he states: "From these movements one assumes the possibility of an attack on Mons, and if the news continues to indicate this it is probable that the duke's army will assemble in the position of Ath." However, Ath was no particular point of attention for the duke at that time as he wrote to the prince of Orange on the 14th of June.

¹²¹ Hussey points to the unclear phrasing as well and understands it as one in which Von Müffling – as a man of "topography" and marching times - is not committing a blunder, but that he means "that those forces stationed 'from Enghien to Nivelles' could concentrate rapidly against an eastern threat, essentially 'Orange's Corps', for as an experienced officer he would have known that the western divisions at Ath, Audenarde and Sotteghem (the Schldt sector) were inevitably *too far distant* to give the Prussians support in a very short time'. I think this interpretation is incorrect as Von Müffling clearly refers to *both* corps. In: When did Wellington etc. p.101

¹²² Von Ollech, by simply leaving out the entire part of the letter involved about the position of Wellington's army in front of Brussels, and only by citing from the options on an offensive, gives a most misleading and highly incorrect statement as that "der Herzog hatte

mit seinem Kantonnements, dem Wesen nach, eine Aufstellung zur Offensive und nicht zur Defensive genommen. In: Geschichte etc. p.75 (see below as well)

¹²³ I will get back to this concept in further detail in the concluding observations on the cooperation of both allied commanders on the 15th and 16th of June.

Hofschröer writes about the documents involved:

“What is, however, certain is that in his letter sent from Charleroi to Blücher at 8.15 a.m. in 15 June, Zieten confirmed he had requested Wellington to move there [=Nivelles], and mentioned that Wellington had promised him, in response to any French move against Charleroi, to move his army on Nivelles – a promise the Duke did not keep. This letter to Wellington was therefore potentially compromising and is also missing from the duke’s records.” In his appendice entitled “The “missing letters”, Hofschröer describes the document involved as sent on the 14th of June to Zieten [no sender] , containing a promise of support and as being a compromising and missing document. In: 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc, p.334, 366

These statements are contradictory. While in the main text the missing document would have been sent to Wellington, in the appendice it is described as being sent to Zieten. If there would have been a compromising document at all, it would have in my mind been sent by Wellington, or in this case, Von Müffling.

That this document is missing is plain, but that it is compromising is not. Wellington’s promise to concentrate at Nivelles –thoughbeit through Von Müffling – was valid as long as the main French attack fell upon the Prussian army. It is this conditional element which is neglected by Hofschröer on the one hand, and possibly by Zieten on the other, but this last element is impossible to verify for the full 100% as long as the documents involved are unavailable. Cf. evaluation of the cooperation of both allied armies on the 15th and 16th of June as well as the observations on Wellington on the 15th of June.

Hussey understands Hofschröer’s description as a letter as coming from Wellington, but this is not the case: it is anonymous. In his overall conclusion, Hussey is right however in the sense that the document involved came from Von Müffling, citing from Wellington. In: Müffling, Gleig etc. p.253

Apparently, Von Pflugk Harttung does recognize the conditonal element here and just understands Zieten’s words as that Wellington decided “am 14. sich bei Nivelles zu konzentrieren, aber da die Dinge weder ihm noch dem preussischen Hauptquartier übermässig dringend erschienen, vollzog er diese Bewegung nicht sofort.” In my idea, Von Pflugk Harttung takes this too far as a fact, while it was a mere intention in a certain case. In: Vorgeschichte etc. p.235

¹²⁴ why only the duke’s letter to Clinton has been handed over, while almost all divisional commanders were involved, remains a mystery.

¹²⁵ Report of colonel Von Reiche. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.5 p.42-43

¹²⁶ Major Von Bausch to baron Tindal, 17th of June. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6585

¹²⁷ MWB, 1846 p.21

¹²⁸ MWB, 1846 p.34

¹²⁹ Wellmann, R. Geschichte etc. p.64

¹³⁰ Wellmann, R. Geschichte etc. p.65

¹³¹ Henckel, count - Erinnerungen etc. p.352

¹³² Its diary states: “Den 14. Nach eingegangenen Nachrichten concentrirte sich die französische Armee bei Maubeuge. Das 1te Bataillon erhielt Befehl, sich im Falle eines Allarms oder Angriffs hinter Biesmer [=Biesme ?] zusammenzuziehen. Die Vorposten wurden verstärkt.

d.15. [...] Mit Tagesanbruch hörte man ein heftiges Kanonenfeuer von Charleroi her, worauf die ganze Brigade den Befehl erhielt, sich schleunig auf dem Brigadesammelplatz bei Fleurus zu versammeln [...]” In: Henckel, count - Erinnerungen etc. p.640-641

¹³³ Colonel Von Reiche in his report. In: GSA, VPH-HA VI nr.VII nr.5 p.42

Report of the 1st corps. In: GSA, VPH-HA, I nr.3 p.37

Major general Von Jagow (3rd brigade) confirms in his report the march of the heavy baggage of the corps towards Gembloux during the night of the 14th of June. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.nr.3D p.10 (in former KA, VI.E.7.I.116)

Cf. major general Henckel (4th brigade). In: Erinnerungen etc. p.352

The baggage of the 4th brigade was led towards Gembloux by captain Von Eicke of the 19th regiment of infantry. It was there that he took command over the complete baggage of the 1st corps. Cf. Leszczynski, R.von – 50 Jahr Geschichte des Königlich Preussischen 2.Posenschen Infanterie-Regiments nr.19 p.153

Von Zieten himself in his autobiography “Aus dem Leben des General-Feldmarschalls Grafen von Zieten” erroneously claims he already sent it there on the 13th of June. In: Hafner, D. - Hans Carl Ernst Graf von Zieten p.252

¹³⁴ Cf. Ollech, Von – Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.89

Lettow-Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang p.247

Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von – GSA, VPH-HA, VI, nr.I nr.7 p.3-4

In another chapter Von Pflugk Harttung criticizes Von Steinmets, and more in particular Von Zieten for not concentrating the units of the 1st corps on the 14th of June. In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr.I nr.5 p.4

If this would be a correct interpretation, that would mean that the order from Zieten dated 9th of June “die Truppen so bereit zu halten, dass sich die Brigaden auf das erste Signal auf den angewiesenen Sammelplätzen konzentrieren [zu] können” was not countermanded at a later date.

Additionally, my interpretation contrasts with the correspondence which Zieten and Blücher had on the 5th and 6th of May, in a more or less similar situation.

My interpretation fits in with the version of Zychlinski though, as he states that the 24th regiment (brigade Von Steinmetz), on the instruction of its commander, major Von Laurens, pulled its men into alarm-houses on the 14th of June. Zychlinski publishes a detailed disposition of Laurens for that situation. In: Geschichte etc. p.261

¹³⁵ Pollio, A. Waterloo 1815

¹³⁶ In February 1815 it was already captain Van Swieten, the later commander of the headquarters of prince Frederik, who saw the importance of a post at Bouvignes (just north of Dinant) on the Meuse, to observe the access from Givet towards Namur. In: Considérations générales etc. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

¹³⁷ There could be a relation here with the letter as written by major Von Brunneck on the morning of the 15th of June (see below) in which he states: “[...] Schon gestern hatten wir die Nachricht, dass Bonaparte mit seinen Garden in Maubeuge angekommen sey. Es war daher zu erwarten, dass wir in diesen Tagen angegriffen werden würden. [...]”

It may well be that this information (which must have arrived after Hardinge wrote his letter to Wellington at 10 p.m.) led the Prussian leadership to concentrate the army. In: Pflugk Hartung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc. p.239-240 Originally from the Kriegsarchiv, Berlin nr.VI.C.nr.3 Vol.II p.59

^{138.} Ollech, Von. Geschichte des Feldzugs etc.p.96-97.

In: KA, VI.C.3.II.p.49 in GSA,VPH-HA, VI, nr.VII.6.p.10

Here, it can be taken from the register that the document was written at 9.a.m.

¹³⁹ Colonel Von Reiche states in his memoirs that at 3 a.m. of the 15th of June the order reached the 1st corps “dass die Concentration aller vier Armeecorps bei Sombreffe nunmehr unverzüglich stattfinden solle.”

However, the actual decision to fight there was taken late on the 15th of June so this order could never been issued on the late evening of the 14th of June (see below).

Von Reiche also gives the impression as if Zieten ordered his 1st and 4th brigade to fall back upon Fleurus during the night, but this took place after the hostilities had started.

In: Memoiren p.154, 158

Von Damitz believes that an order for Zieten, dated midnight, ordered Zieten “sich im Fall es mit Übermacht angegriffen wurde, gegen Fleurus zurück zuziehen. Jedoch sollte man den Feind stets im Auge behalten, um ihm das Terrain streitig machen.” In: Geschichte etc. p.71

And Förster claims Zieten was ordered around midnight, quoting: “das erste Armeecorps zieht sich vor der Übermacht fechtend nach Fleurus zurück”lol., but from where he cites this remains unclear. In: Geschichte der Befreiungskriege etc. p.834

¹⁴⁰ In this context, it is most remarkable why colonel Hardinge did not report back to Wellington about the situation at Prussian headquarters. Cf. Hussey, J. – The Frasnes letter, a reconsideration etc. p.16

For instance, from Wellington’s headquarters, the Prussian liaison, Von Müffling als communicated himself towards his own headquarters, so why Hardinge could not have done the same ?

¹⁴¹ The only difference is in the position for the 2nd corps which on the 14th of June was meant to be between Mazy and Onoz, while late May it was meant to be between Bossière and Onoz, which in all is a difference of about 3 kilometers.

¹⁴² Sabine, E. (ed) , Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer p.532

¹⁴³ Cf. Von Müffling to Gneisenau, 12th of June and sir Ch.Stuart to lord Castlereagh, 13th of June.

¹⁴⁴ WSD, Vol.X p.440-441

¹⁴⁵ This chapter is largely based upon the research done by John Hussey and as published as entitled “The shadow of Ligny. Hindsight and the Wellington-Pfuel interview”

¹⁴⁶ In: NA, 2.05.01 nr.771

¹⁴⁷ NA, nr.2.02.01 nr.6210

¹⁴⁸ The news about Waterloo would have been delivered at Heidelberg on the 21st of June so it would take a messenger about three days to cover the distance Namur – Heidelberg and vice versa. Cf. Friedrich Dittenberger: Die Kaiser in Heidelberg. Heidelberg bei Mohr und Zimmer. 1815

In: <http://www.zum.de/Faecher/G/BW/Landeskunde/rhein/hd/km/kdm/maerz04b.htm>

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Wellington to Von Müffling. In: WD, Vol.XII p.540

¹⁵⁰ Wagner. Plane der Schlachten und Treffen etc. p.11

¹⁵¹ Damitz, Von – Geschichte etc. p.70-71

¹⁵² Hussey regards Wagner's words here in the sense that he believed Wellington's most western units could actually cover 53 to 50 kilometers within 22 hours, but in my view he doesn't; Wagner just wants to suggest that it was not possible, as the calculation as such was too theoretical. In: The shadow of Ligny p.13

¹⁵³ It is also on the 17th of June that Gneisenau, in his report on Ligny, did not refer to such a promise as done on the 13th or 14th of June. Cf. Hussey, J. The shadow of Ligny etc. p.18

¹⁵⁴ The promise as done by Wellington through Von Müffling to Zieten and to which Zieten refers on the 15th of June in all probability dates from the 13th of June and did not run through Von Pful straight to Namur.

¹⁵⁵ Von Damitz' version is the more striking as he had access to general Von Grolmann's papers, and Von Grolmann was the direct superior of colonel Von Pful. As far as Von Damitz account is concerned, as Von Pflugk Harttung very justly remarks, it is in general hard to assess where Von Grolmann ends and Von Damitz starts.

In: Vorgeschichte etc.p.34

In this context it is Hussey who describes Von Grolmann's role in the meeting for Von Damitz as one of hearsay, but I believe as Von Damitz had access to Von Grolmann's papers that he then most probably also had access to the register of staff, a document administered by Von Grolman. As such, it was no hearsay, as the documents involved around the mission could directly be taken from this register by Von Damitz. In: The shadow of Ligny etc. p.14

¹⁵⁶ Cf. for instance:

Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.90

Aerts, W. Etudes etc. p.288

Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc.p.34

Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.477

The only element Von Pflugk Harttung adds is that he doubts about the mentioning of Quatre Bras.

Hofschröer, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.159

In a footnote, Hofschröer adds: "The original documentation was at one time in the Prussian War Archives, and is missing, presumed destroyed in World War Two."

Personally, however, I do not see any direct connection between the mission of Von Pfuël as Hofschröder describes it and this note about the Prussian war archives. Anyway, the way he describes the mission and its result is incorrect as it is based upon Wagner.

¹⁵⁷ It was filed in the former Kriegsarchiv under VI.C.3.II p.25

¹⁵⁸ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang p.195

For Hussey, Von Lettow Vorbeck “reduces Wagner and Damitz to nearly nothing” by citing from Von Müffling’s letter, but in my view he doesn’t. Though he cites from the letter as mentioned, which is in itself of course a new and important element, he eventually clings to the traditional approach as well. In: The shadow of Ligny etc. p.16

¹⁵⁹ Whatever meticulously Hussey is in his article about the true status and character of Von Pfuël’s mission, he fails to stress the very specific and very strong importance of Schwarzenberg’s letter and its previous history for the preliminaries of the invasion of France. In: The shadow of Ligny etc.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Schwarzenberg to Wellington. In: WSD, Vol.X p.440-441
Letter of major general Van Reede.

¹⁶¹ Lord Stewart to Wellington, 28th of April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.172

¹⁶² De Bas explains this by the influence of Von Knesebeck, who disagreed with Gneisenau on this issue. In: La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.279-282
According to Delbrück Gneisenau’s plan was rejected by the Austrians for fear of being turned by Napoleon through Italy. In: Das Leben etc. p.346

¹⁶³ Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Vorgeschichte etc.p.4

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.I, p.285-286
Delbrück, H. Das Leben etc. p.345
Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang p.155-156

¹⁶⁵ In: WSD, Vol.X p.120121

¹⁶⁶ For comments on Von Knesebek’s plan I would to refer to Von Pflugk Harttung. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI no.I nr.1 p.11-18

¹⁶⁷ Friedrich Dittenberger: Die Kaiser in Heidelberg - Heidelberg 1815 In:
<http://www.zum.de/Faecher/G/BW/Landeskunde/rhein/hd/km/kdm/maerz04b.htm>
Prince Wrede to Wellington, 25th of May. In: WSD, Vol.X p.369

¹⁶⁸ In: WSD, Vol.X p.441-444

Evidently, the key of the invasion – the Russian advance to the Rhine – was also felt in Brussels as Von Müffling sent the situation of this army, and the prognosis about it in relation to the Rhine, on the 12th of June to Gneisenau.

¹⁶⁹ In: WSD, VolX p.445-448

¹⁷⁰ Damitz claims Wellington and Blücher actually agreed upon this date, 1st of July, but it never got to that stage; it was merely the proposal of Wellington to Blücher and the definitive decision would be taken at Heidelberg anyway. In: Geschichte etc. p.40

Cf. Houssaye, H. 1815. Waterloo p.93

Hofschröder, P. 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.123