

The defensive position of the allied armies.

The Anglo-Netherlands-German army.

Early plans for the defence of the Netherlands.

After the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, the need was felt to develop a defensive system for the Netherlands to prevent it from falling into French hands ever again. Apparently, the allies were not that confident of France rejecting any future territorial claims.

As has already been referred to, it was already in the summer of 1814 that Wellington, as well as lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth, inspected parts of the southern part of the Netherlands for this purpose. Should it come to a confrontation again, the army of the Netherlands would be inferior in force to the French and that more was needed as a mere mobile army.¹

It was therefore between the summer of 1814 and early March 1815 that several plans and considerations for the defence were launched. Their perspectives form the elements upon which the basis of the defence of the Netherlands for the campaign of June 1815 was eventually formed.

No doubt there was a need for a mobile army of the Netherlands, as well as one for a militia and both were accordingly formed.²

Yet, at the same time it was felt that the country along its southern frontier - extending from Liège along the Meuse and the Sambre, through Namur, Charleroi and thence by Mons and Tournay to the North-Sea – was vulnerable.

The way Wellington saw it in September 1814, there was “no situation in the country which affords any advantages to be taken up as a fortress or which covers or protects any extent of country. Secondly, there is no situation to which the enemy could not have an easy access, both by land and by water, for the artillery and stores necessary to attack it; and thirdly, there is no single situation in the country which is fortified, the enemy might not pass without risk, as in case of being defeated and obliged to retire, he could not fail to find unnumberable roads, which would lead him to some one or other of the strong places on the French frontier.”

For the duke it was obvious that the country was to be fortified upon the old principle, i.e. on the basis of existing structures in order to save expense, but which would at several sites be improved wherever considered necessary.

Concluding, Wellington – even though he was aware of the costs and efforts involved - made a strong plea for the reconstruction of *places fortes*, citadels and field works.³

This network of strongholds was not only seen as a defence as such, but it also allowed the mobile army to gain time to assemble wherever appropriate. For the prince sovereign, Willem, its absence would necessitate the mobile army to fall back upon Holland, at the line Antwerpen – Maastricht.⁴

In February 1815 captain Van Swieten (later commander of the headquarters of prince Frederik) worked out an extensive concept of the defence of the Netherlands for Willem, the prince soeverign.

In this concept he introduced the theory of the “*défense absolue*”, which was a defence of the country without any foreign aid.

It comprised, apart from a central position of a mobile army in front of Brussels, three lines of strongholds. The first one extended from the fortress La Kénoque (between Loos and Dixmuide), through Menin and Ypres to Tournai. The second one ran from Roeselare, through Courtrai, Ath, Mons, Binche, Braine le Comte, Nivelles, Perwez le Marchez to Liège and Tongres. The third one was in the north-west, between Torhout through Deinze to

Audenarde, to secure Bruges and Ghent. Additionally, he saw a network of *places fortes* and inundations as a “*camp retranché*” (called the position of De Haan), to secure the access from the sea in the area Ostende, Nieuport, Furnes and the sluice of Plassendael.

Though Van Swieten attached special importance to Ghent and Bruges as depots, he pointed to Grammont, Hal, Wavre and St.Trond as places of importance to cover Brussels from an enemy coming from Mons, Namur or Liège.⁵

Both Wellington and Van Swieten - and with them Willem - saw in the system of defence the huge importance of the political and military communication with Holland, Germany / Prussia and Great Britain.⁶

It is in this sense that Wellington expressed himself to king Willem in 1816 as being one of his principles in the defence of the Netherlands “de s’assurer les communications avec 1. Les anciennes provinces de la Hollande; 2. l’Angleterre; 3. l’Allemagne; parce que c’est enfin avec de fortes armées qu’il faudrait décider la lutte pour la possession de ce beau pays.”⁷

To secure the communication with Great Britain, it was essential to keep a line through Antwerp, Bergen op Zoom and Breda on the one side and to secure the one with Germany (and Prussia) through the places on the lower Meuse (Maastricht, Venlo, Grave and Nijmegen) on the other. Additionally, the places on the Meuse were not only the key to this river, but also to the old Guelders provinces.

Both points were regarded as starting-points from where operations of the mobile army the Netherlands could be continued in case it had to fall back upon Holland, in that case with the foreign support from Great Britain through Antwerp and / or Prussia through Maastricht (or further north).

By mid-October 1814, Von Müffling had also been aware of the importance of the freedom of communication between the Netherlands and Great Britain through Ostend and Antwerp, and thereby through the Westerschelde and Walcheren.⁸

By late March 1815, also Von Brockhausen mentioned the principle of the presence of the army of the Netherlands along the Meuse and the possible role of the Prussian army to the Prussian king: “Maastricht doit être approvisionné pour deux mois et servira de place d’armes pour les forces Hollandaises sur la Meuse. La position de cette forteresse la rend très propre à former le point de communication de l’armée de Votre Majesté avec l’armée Anglo-Hanovrienne, dans le cas que cette dernière se repliât dans la position d’Anvers à Breda.”

And three days later he wrote: “Abondamment pourvues d’artillerie et de munitions que les Français y ont laissées, les principales forteresses de Maastricht, Grave, Breda et Anvers seront en état d’opposer une longue résistance et de servir de places d’armes. Il paraît que l’Angleterre se réserve Anvers pour son dépôt principal. Les troupes anglaises l’occupent seules, et les Hollandais en sortent.”⁹

In case of defence, it was Constant Rebecque who saw the Meuse as the best place for the army to maintain a position along a line stretching from Mons through Brussels towards Holland. His reasoning was that there would be a lower risk of a French envelopment and that the position was more “*à portée*” for realistic aid from the east.¹⁰

This idea was also in line with the way Hardenberg, at Vienna, saw matters late September 1814. It was then that he drafted a memorandum “Sur la défense des Pays-Bas, de la Hollande, et du Nord de l’Allemagne contre la France.”¹¹

In his view, both Prussia and the Low Countries shared a common interest. He coupled the defence of this country to Prussian territorial claims between the Rhine and the Meuse. For him, the moment Prussia would possess the left bank of the Rhine, it would be able to establish a system of defence there and in which the Low Countries could participate. What mattered for Hardenberg was the fact that the system of defence in the Netherlands was such that it would prevent the enemy from establishing himself there before foreign aid was “à

portée". In the logistic sense of the word he saw this aid from Germany and Prussia in particular as more realistic as support from the British.

Having sketched above the two points as a basis to fall back upon in case of need, in at least the concepts of Van Swieten and Willem the mobile army of the Netherlands was seen as one in front of Brussels.

In fact, while Willem gave it a position somewhere between Tournai and Namur, Van Swieten more specifically placed it in a central position between Ath and Mons. From there it would be able to move to its left or right according to the circumstances. In his mind, the combination of this position of the mobile army with the lines of fortresses as sketched above gave ample possibilities for the defence of the country.

The way Willem saw it was that he believed the enemy would have to invest part of his forces to besiege the *places fortes* so that his mobile army would be smaller and therewith easier to cope with by the army of the Netherlands on a battleground which would then be of the choosing of his own army. In case of a retreat, he saw the line towards the Dyle and the Nethe, while having there the Scheldt on his right and Maastricht on his left, both offering possibilities for foreign aid. In case the enemy might make a breakthrough between Maastricht and the army, he saw his new position on the frontline Antwerp, Bergen op Zoom and Breda.¹²

Wellington, in his memo of September 1814, is not that specific as he writes: "I do not consider that in a memorandum of this description it is desirable nor in the cursory view which I have taken of the Netherlands can it be expected that I should point out the positions to be taken by the disposable armies which can be allotted for their defence. Those which I should point out would be good or bad according to the strength with which they should be occupied according to that of the enemy and supposing the enemy to be on the offensive according to his plan of attack. The same reasoning applies to the fortification of positions before hand for armies to occupy eventually. [...] There are, however, good positions for an army at La Trinidad [?] and at Renaix behind Tournay, another between Tournay and Mons on the high grounds about Blaton. There are many good positions about Mons; the course of the Haine from Binche towards Mons would afford some good ones. About Nivelles, and between that and Binch there are many advantageous positions and the entrance of the forêt de Soignies [sic] by the high road which leads to Brussels from Binch, Charleroy and Namur would if worked upon afford others."¹³

With these indications, the duke had clearly an area in mind between the river Scheldt in the west and the road between Charleroi and Brussels in the east. In this connection he also saw Louvain as a support to the left of the army.

The concepts of captain Van Swieten and Willem share a common element and that is that at the time they were written a British-Hanoverian force, led by the prince of Orange, was scattered over Belgium. As both documents deal with the mobile army of the Netherlands only, this is an element which is not being spoken of. Foreign aid only comes into play on the line Antwerp – Maastricht, and not south of it.

However, in March 1815, after the escape of Napoleon from Elba it was incorporated into the actual situation of that moment.

The fact that the prince of Orange concentrated his forces around Ath and not somewhere else should be explained by the framework as set out by the plans for defence as mentioned above. The same is what happened to the mobile army of the Netherlands, which was initially placed along the Meuse, west of Maastricht.

On April the 20th 1815 king Willem explained to his son Willem why he had moved the army to the Meuse and not towards Antwerp the month before. It had to do with the fact that all

military matters relating to Flanders were managed by the British and that the authorities of the Netherlands had been held afar by the British.

Antwerp and other places in Flanders were annexed by the British as their sector, and the result was that Willem “portais le corps d’armée mobile qui est destiné à prendre part aux opérations, sur la Meuse ou à portée de ce fleuve pour pouvoir former en cas de retraite les garnisons de Maastricht, Venlo et Grave et jeter les débris dans un camp retranché en avant de Nimègue, qui était fixé pour le point de rassemblement de tous les secours et renforts que je [Willem] pourrais rassembler ou recevoir d’autres puissances. Anvers et tout ce qui était entre l’Escaut et la mer m’était étrange, de sorte que je ne m’en occupais point, attachant d’ailleurs le plus de prix à la ligne de la Meuse et à conserver au moins un noyau d’armée qui servirait de point de rassemblement aux renforts et secours à attendre.”¹⁴

In this way, both secondary operational areas near Antwerp and Maastricht were in use, while having the British-Hanoverian force of the prince of Orange in front of Brussels.

Yet, during the first days of April, upon Wellington’s instigation, the prince pulled the mobile army of the Netherlands towards his own forces. And immediately after his arrival, Wellington quickened the process so as to meet one of his axioms: to have his whole army more easy to assemble and to be able to prevent any parts of it being cut off.

Wellington’s ideas.

In his survey of the summer 1814, the duke of Wellington apparently gave a priority to the sector west of the river Dendre. In West-Flanders the network of inundations and of the *places fortes* of Ypres, Furnes, Nieuport, Ostend, Bruges, Roesbrugge and the fortress of Kenoque were points of attention, while between the Lys and the Scheldt the high ground between Audenarde to Harlebeke was another one.

This last position, plus the one east of the Scheldt, was also mentioned by lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth of the engineers in a memorandum which he wrote for the duke of Wellington on the 27th of December 1814.¹⁵

From the instructions to colonel Chapman of the engineers it also becomes clear that Wellington wanted to know about the defensive features of both the Scheldt and the Dendre (the last one from Dendermonde to Ath). From all this it becomes clear that Wellington took into account that any French attack might come from west of the Scheldt and then to turn east towards Brussels.

Later, in April 1815, he still considered this as a possibility, but by that time he had given up a defensive position on the left bank of the Scheldt. The Scheldt, and possibly the Dendre, were taken into account as defence lines for the protection of Brussels.

In both cases Wellington must have considered the sector west of the Lys as too strong for a French attack.

By September 1814 Wellington’s attention, as far as a defense system was concerned, had extended along the whole southern frontier, stretching from the North Sea to Liège. Apart from the restoration of the works in the towns in West Flanders, now Liège, Huy and Charleroi were also mentioned, as were Mons, Ath and Tournai.

But even though Wellington saw the sector between Namur and Mons as the “most vulnerable point of the line of the frontier”, the scope of Wellington’s actual attention - at least for possible positions to fight a French army - stretched from the Scheldt in the west to the line Charleroi – Brussels in the east.

What must have played an eminent role in these kind of measures must have been a principle which the duke wrote about in 1816, and which was already applicable to the situation in 1814 and 1815.

It was “de rendre l’extrême frontière si respectable qu’elle ne peut pas être attaquée par coup de main, et que le temps soit donné à rassembler les troupes pour la défense du pays.”¹⁶

As has been stated before, for the duke there were good positions for an army at La Trinidad [?] , at Renaix behind Tournay, between Tournay and Mons on the high grounds about Blaton, around Mons, on the Haine from Binche towards Mons, about Nivelles, between Nivelles and Binche and at the entrance of the forêt de Soignes.¹⁷

Three months later, in December 1814, Carmichael Smyth saw the best defensive position for the sector between Tournai and Mons at Halle, and in case the French would move over its left bank, at the Dendre valley.

Though Carmichael Smyth saw the advantages of positions like those of Blaton and Mont Palisel, he also saw that these were “too much en l’air and not sufficiently supported and [that they] would scatter our forces too much.” According to Carmichael Smyth the position of Halle, however, would “be nearer to our own resources. It cannot be passed but by a dangerous flank movement, and may be rendered (by the aid of field works) most excellent.” Here, he also saw a strong connection to the (only in the north inundated) valley of the Dendre: “Almost the whole of that valley may be disputed with a prospect of success, as the high ground is upon the Brussels side. At Grammont (in particular) there is a most excellent position which I think could hardly be forced. [...] The position of Halle might be made (as before stated) extremely strong with field works, and may be still further supported by a pretty good ridge in front of Anderlecht which in case of our being obliged to move from Halle would favour our retreat. But I think Halle might be so strengthened that it could not be forced in front. Its left would rest upon the Senne, and the skirts of wood (on the other side) might be filled with light troops.”¹⁸

Colborne also wrote late March that “redoubts are to be immediately constructed at Hal” so by that time, it was already a point of attention in the defensive strategy in case the army had to fall back from a position between Tournay and Mons.

Possibly influenced by Carmichael Smyth, it was by April 1815 that the duke of Wellington had drawn his envisaged position to resist the enemy higher up towards Brussels, i.e. in front of Halle, in the area Enghien – Braine le Comte –Halle.¹⁹

Although Carmichael Smyth hadn’t surveyed the ground beyond the line Brussels – Charleroy, he regarded the sector between Mons and Namur as the most vulnerable one. In case the enemy would advance through Binche and Charleroi, he saw the position of Mont Saint Jean - thoughbeit not yet surveyed and assessed - as a probable one to fight a French army, especially if it would be improved with field works.

He writes: “[...] in advancing from Binch and from Charleroi it is much to be wished that the ground near Braine la Leud may offer the same advantages. I have not yet gone over it, but I understand that it does not. The country near Nivelles and Genappe, I know to be very open, and to offer no features of which we could profit. It is however highly desirable that the country near Braine la Leud should be carefully reconnoitred and perhaps it may be found more favourable upon a close inspection. [...] It appears to me that the best mode of defending this open parts of the country will be to assemble as large a corps as we can on the best ground that can be found, near where the two roads from Binch, Charleroi and Namur meet, to strengthen this position by field works [...]”

Basically, this is the area around Mont Saint Jean.²⁰

Carmichael Smyth then pleas for the establishment of an entrenched camp in and near Namur from the principle “of being enabled to place a considerable corps in security and in a situation from whence they could act upon an enemy’s flank and rear, should he advance to attack our troops occupying ground in front of Brussels. The occupation of Namur is moreover highly advisable as commanding the navigation of the Meuse, and connecting our

communications with the Prussian armies, although the last object might be equally attained from Huy or Liège.”²¹

For Wellington, in April 1815, a French advance between the rivers Scheldt and Sambre meant that he would assemble his army in the area in front of Halle. Within the same sector, however, at least in December 1814, lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth made a clear distinction while describing two sectors for choosing different potential battle-grounds in front of Brussels. In this he used Mons as the breakpoint: near Halle in case of a French attack in the sector between Tournai and Mons, and Mont Saint Jean in case of a French attack in the sector between Mons and Charleroi (and beyond).

For the roads from Binche and Charleroi, both being in the sectors of both his own and the Prussian army, Wellington had a pragmatic approach, considering them in a sector of possible cooperation with the Prussian army, depending on the circumstances.

At the same time, in relation to the advice as given by lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth, it cannot be ruled out that, in case of a French attack in the sector between Mons and Charleroi (and beyond), the duke considered the position of Mont Saint Jean, near Waterloo, as a realistic one to fight the French south of Brussels.²²

In fact, it was in April 1815 that lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth was instructed by Wellington to survey the vicinity of Mont Saint Jean (as he was to do the same in front of Halle). Carmichael Smyth gave the task to C.Chaplin, member of the corps of military surveyors and draughtsmen. The results were put down in a map covering an area which was later to be the battlefield of Waterloo.²³

Clearly, the British had strong maritime interests in the preservation of Ostend and Antwerp and that was the reason why they made strong pleas for British garrisons there, in stead of those as coming from the army of the Netherlands.

It was through Ostend that the British army was led towards the Netherlands as being the nearest port to Great Britain. As such, the line between Ostend and Brussels was a most important communication line to Great Britain.

Wellington has been severely criticised for having his main supply line to the west (Ostend), so parallel to his front and not at right-angles to it.²⁴

However, in the total orientation of his mobile army (northeast-southwest) Wellington, as a professional, was not so naive to chose his main supply line in the way as he has been criticised for. His main supply line and line of retreat, in case he had to uncover Brussels, did ran at right-angles to his front, i.e. to the north, towards Antwerp.²⁵⁻²⁶

It had already been late March that Antwerp was marked as the central depot of the British and as such it formed the main supply line for the army. At the same time, lord Bathurst then pointed the prince of Orange to take positions “with a view both to covering Antwerp and the Dutch frontier”. Early May he also stressed the importance of Antwerp and Ostend to Wellington, not only as means of providing for the communication for the army, but also for securing a retreat in case of mischance.

Late March, it was the prince of Orange who explicitly mentioned to Von Kleist Antwerp as being the place where the British would go in case of a retreat.

Not long after his arrival in the Netherlands, it was Wellington who stressed the importance of Antwerp and its connection to the North Sea through the Westerschelde to the king of the Netherlands, as being the porte d’entrée for the British towards Antwerp and herewith as a vital means of securing the security of Holland.

As a passage over the Rupel near Boom was considered of vital importance in the line of retreat towards Antwerp, it was by the middle of April that this access towards Antwerp from

the south was facilitated by the construction of a pontoon-bridge.²⁷ The construction of this bridge had been initiated late March.

Last but not least, it had already been in December 1814 that lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth had pointed to the importance of redoubts near Dendermonde and Mechelen to cover a retreat to Antwerp.

In fact, sir Hudson Lowe wrote to lord Bunbury on the 24th of March: “[..] the army might in three marches be concentrated behind the Nethe between Lierre or Duffel and Rupelmonde, having Antwerpen close to its rear. I have been giving directions for a bridge of boats at Boom to have that passage open to us as well as Malines. I trust however if the Prussians come up this movement will not be necessary and that we may be enabled to maintain our present attitude.”²⁸

And on the 3rd of April the prince wrote to lord Bathurst: “[..] I was induced to concentrate the troops in that neighbourhood [near Ath] , because it is obvious they can be withdrawn unmolested behind the Nethes in two marches [..]”²⁹

Within this context, Von Röder’s fear, as expressed early April to Gneisenau, that the British might fall back upon Antwerp was not unfounded.

On the other hand, Wellington did not exclude the possibility of falling back - in case of reverse - towards Maastricht or Jülich, in order to keep himself united with the Prussian army.³⁰

It is in this sense that Wellington expressed himself to king Willem in 1816 about his army: “[..] je crois que si l’armée destinée à défendre les états V.M. ne peut pas se maintenir en avant de Bruxelles, elle doit opérer sa retraite ou sur Anvers, ou sur Maastricht, selon les vues et espérances politiques du jour [..]”³¹ This principle is what also applied to Wellington’s army in 1815, being in front of Brussels.

The backgrounds of Wellington’s defensive concept.

It is in the context of the subjects alluded to in this chapter that Wellington shaped the background of his defensive position. This was formed out of three elements.

The first one was to provide for the defence and the security of his military communications with England, Holland and Germany and of the objects entrusted to his care.³² Wellington’s responsibilities were manyfold, both diplomatic and military. Besides having to keep open the communication with England, the Netherlands and Germany, he also had to protect the Netherlands court and seat of government at Brussels, as well as the fugitive Louis XVIII and his royalist entourage at Ghent.

As has been stated, Brussels in particular had for Wellington an immense importance, being the southern capital of the Netherlands. This country itself was a creation of the treaties of peace and of the congress of Vienna.

The second element for Wellington was to occupy his defensive position in such a manner and take such precautionary measures as would enable him to assemble at the latest period of time the largest disposable force at his disposition. To make this possible it was important for the duke was “to put our troops in such a situation, as, in case of a sudden attack by the enemy, to render it easy to assemble, and to provide against the chance of any being cut off from the rest” as he wrote to the prince of Orange on the 11th of May.

Wellington summarized his, and Blücher’s, position and situation as “the course to be pursued by the allied generals respectively was to be prepared to move in all directions, to wait till it should be seen in what direction the attack should be made, and then to assemble the armies as quickly as possible to resist the attack, or to attack the enemy with the largest force that could be collected.”³³

Wellington's third element in his defensive position in the Low Countries was his unwillingness "to break up his defensive position with a view to take one with his army, having solely in view the object of fighting a great battle in cooperation or in conjunction with the Prussian army."³⁴

This subject has been dwelled upon in relation to the discussion which took place in April between Wellington and Gneisenau (and before them between the prince of Orange and Von Kleist) about a junction of the allied armies at Tirlemont. At the same time, however, when it came down to cooperation with the Prussians, Wellington obviously had to keep an open flank to the Prussian army as a defeat of both his own and this army would have a tremendous effect upon both their governments and the allied alliance.³⁵

The cantonments.

Right after his arrival in Brussels, Wellington requested Gneisenau to move his army up as far as Charleroi (and beyond), so as to close the line of defence in front of Brussels. It can be questioned why he did so just there.³⁶

It was clear from the beginning that the army as initially led by the prince of Orange and later by Wellington was simply not strong enough to cover the huge stretch of land between the sea and Liège.

Already by September 1814, Wellington had a clear eye for the sector between the Scheldt and the line Brussels – Charleroi, but not beyond, as far as possible favourable grounds for actions was concerned. At that time, his attention was also fixed upon the construction of "a good casemated work on the site of an old Roman work near Binch which will command the communication from Mons to Charleroi." In hindsight this element can be seen as the key to a communication to the east, to another sector as his own.

By mid-June, the frontline of the Anglo-Netherlands-German army stretched from Menin in the west, along Tournai, Roucourt and Mons to Bonne Espérance where the outposts of the brigade of Van Merlen touched upon those of the brigade Von Steinmetz of the 1st Prussian corps. The outposts were formed by Hanoverian cavalry, except for those in the sector of the cavalry of Collaert, east of Mons. They must have been supported by companies of the infantry divisions which were in their rear.

The second and third line were occupied by the divisions of the 1st and 2nd corps, which were located to the left and right of the axe Roucourt – Enghien – Brussels respectively. The headquarters of the 1st corps was at Braine le Comte, that of the 2nd at Grammont.

The cavalry corps was to the right of the line as sketched, having its headquarters at Ninove, while the reserve was in and around Brussels.³⁷

The sector west of the river Lys was covered by garrisons in the reinforced places of Ypres, Nieuport, Ostend and Ghent, some of which were also protected by inundations. Within the sector of the field-army, Mons and Tournai also had their own garrisons. And last but not least, Antwerp as a place of storage and communication, had its own garrison.

The outer boundary of the field-army in the west was the river Lys, while the one on the left was roughly the road running from Brussels to Frassnes and from there a line bending in towards Bonne Espérance. The road at Frasnès running down along Gosselies to Charleroi was in the Prussian sector, so this road was in the sectors of both armies.

In the north the outer boundary of the field-army ran roughly along Ghent, Alost and Vilvorde back to Brussels. Roughly speaking, the frontline of the field-army was opposite the French sector stretching out between Lille, Valenciennes and Maubeuge.

On the whole, here the cantonments were not secured by any natural barriers like rivers, heights etc. nor by any strong vanguard at some distance in front which was able to resist the

enemy in order to save time for the remainder of the army to collect at some assembly point further to the rear.³⁸

When it came down to a French invasion of the Netherlands, there were roughly speaking for Napoleon three options to do so. He could operate from Lille into the coastal corridor between the North Sea and the rivers Lys / Scheldt.

The other one was to attack in the central sector between the Scheldt and the Sambre, or to strike east of the Meuse towards the Rhine valley.³⁹

In case Napoleon might operate between the sea and the rivers Lys and Scheldt, Wellington felt confident about the presence of the measures he had taken in that sector. Further, if the French would move in, he could attack the French from behind the river Scheldt.

From the way Wellington arranged his field army, it becomes clear that he felt the most probable threat might come from the line Lille – Maubeuge, so from the northern departments of France (and the great fortresses there). From here, several paved roads ran into the central part of the Netherlands in particular, most of them ending up to Brussels.

Wellington deemed it necessary to observe them. These roads were the one from Lille leading to Ghent through Menin and Courtray, the one leading from Lille to Ghent and Tournay, or upon Ath and Brussels, the road leading from Condé through Tournay, Ath and Enghien to Brussels and the one leading from Condé and Valenciennes through Mons to Brussels.⁴⁰

About the basis of Wellington's cantonments Von Müffling wrote by the middle of June: "Die Haupt-Verbindungs- und Handelsstrasse von der Hauptstadt Paris zur Hauptstadt Brüssel läuft über Mons. Die Cantonirungen der englischen Armee mussten daher dergestalt angelegt sein, dass diese sich zwischen Brüssel und Mons versammeln konnte, dass es ihr jedoch frei stand, sich auf ihrem linken Flügel mit der Preussischen Armee zu vereinigen. Dies berücksichtigend, hatte der Herzog von Wellington an der Grenze bei Mons leichte Cavallerie, auf dem halben Wege nach Brüssel das Corps de Bataille, in Brüssel selbst nebst Umgegend die Reserve. Das Hauptquartier gehörte in den Sitz der Regierung, die Hauptstadt von Belgien."⁴¹ It should be stressed that this situation, with the reserve at Brussels, existed only from late May onwards.

The Prussian army.

In his memorandum of 1842, Wellington wrote:

"[...] if it considered that the objects of protection of the army under the command of the duke of Wellington were extended over a tract of country of greater length than were those protected by the allied army under the command of prince Blücher, it will be found that this part of the country, contiguous in its whole extent to the French frontier, and traversed in all parts by excellent paved

roads leading from some one or other of the French fortresses, required for its protection a system of occupation quite different from that adopted by the Prussian army under the prince Blücher."⁴²

What Wellington refers to is his mobile army, plus the system of fortresses and their garrisons.

This last element, in relation to the Prussian sector, is unclear. Though it had been Von Müffling, sir Hudson Lowe, Wellington and Carmichael Smyth (and as a result colonel Chapman) who had pointed to the importance of having (the citadels of) Liège, Huy, Namur and Charleroi being paid attention to, no works seem to have been carried out there, nor by the Prussians nor by the Netherlanders or the British.⁴³

In 1814, and also in the first half of 1815, the country between Brussels and the Meuse seems to have had no priority in being surveyed by British engineers. In May 1815, however,

Prussian engineers did do some surveys around Sombreffe / Point du Jour and possibly from there towards the Orneau (Mazy etc.) and the Dyle (Bousval etc.) as well.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵

On a wide scale, by late 1814, Von Müffling regarded the fortresses on the Rhine as the basis upon which all the operations for the defence of the Netherlands would have to depend, but at the same time he saw that only Mainz and Wesel would be able to serve as *points d'appui*, as all other ones were in a ruined or dilapidated state. Because of the huge distance between these places, Von Müffling had recommended Koblenz and Köln to be fortified. At the same time, he favoured the construction of roads between Luxemburg and Köln and between Mainz and Namur for the further completion of the defensive network on the left bank of the Rhine, between the rivers Meuse and Moselle.

From March 1815 onwards, as the strength of the Prussian armies was built up, the army of the Lower Rhine was formed from the north and from the east on the right bank of the Meuse, while at the same time other forces moved up from the interior towards the Rhine.

In March, cooperation between the army of Von Kleist and the forces of the prince of Orange was seen while the tract of country between Mons and Namur was virtually uncovered and the distance between both forces was immense.

Right after the arrival of Wellington and Gneisenau, however, this gap was covered by pulling the 1st Prussian corps as far west as Binche, while it reached towards Namur in the east, where the corps touched upon the 2nd corps.

As the 1st corps formed the link to Wellington's forces, the 3rd corps still formed the link towards the Moselle. This situation continued until about the middle of May, when the 3rd corps was pulled up towards the Meuse and the 4th corps was led from the Rhine to the left bank of the Meuse. From that time on, the main concentration of the Prussian army was there, while the 3rd corps blocked the area between the Meuse and the Ourthe in a southward and westward direction.

The link to the Moselle was now taken over by the Bundeskorps under Von Kleist. So, through time, there was a general shift of forces to the west and north-west to close upon the defence of the Netherlands and Wellington's forces, while at the same time on the right bank of the Meuse the communication towards Liège and Mainz were still covered by the 3rd corps and the Bundeskorps respectively.

On the left bank of the Meuse, the remainder of the army covered the communication to Liège as well. It was through this town (and that of Huy further upstream) that the line of retreat ran.

There was yet another line of retreat for the Prussian army in case a defence in front of Brussels would, for whatever reason, have to be given up and that was one through Tirlemont, St. Trond and Maastricht.⁴⁶

In the centre-rear of the three army-corps on the left bank of the Meuse was Tirlemont. This was the point formerly favoured by the Prussians to give battle in cooperation with Wellington.

After having sketched the possibilities for the French to attack the Prussian army (i.e. through Charleroi, Namur or Ciney) and therefore the Prussian 1st, 2nd and 3rd corps being in the first line and the 4th in the second, Von Damitz claims: "Die Concentrirung der Armee war nach diesen Ansichten in jeder der bedrohten Directionen bedacht und berechnet. Das Preussische Heer würde eben so leicht sich bei Cinay wie bei Namur oder Sombreffe gesammelt haben, wenn es die Umstände erfordert hätten."⁴⁷

Let alone the fact whether this concentration was easy, Ciney was not a concentration point for the whole army in case of a French offensive along the right bank of the Meuse. As has been stated before, in that case, by the 13th of May, Gneisenau had another scenario in mind: "„dass man ihm die Ardennen und Eifelgebirge überlasse und in Vereinigung mir der Wellingtonschen Armee sofort in Frankreich eindringe. Sollte H.v. Wellington aber nicht

hierauf sich einlassen, so können wir solange warten, bis der Feind über die Maas geht um uns eine Schlacht zu liefern, die wir dann annehmen können, oder sollte er, ohne uns am linken Ufer der Maas aufzusuchen, gegen den Rhein vordringen, so müssen wir ihn so weit vorrücken lassen, bis er näher dem Rhein ist, um sodann über die Maas zu gehen, und ihm eine Schlacht unter ihm nachtheiligen Umständen zu liefern. Dies wäre unser Entwurf zum Feldzug, im Fall wir über die Ardennen her den Feind zu erwarten hätten.”

And one month later, Von Müffling wrote to Gneisenau: “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.”

In all, there was such a level of resemblance in these plans, that there would probably be no chance that both allied commanders would disagree what to do in case Napoleon might move over the right bank of the Meuse.

With his other statement “die Preussische Armee hatte die Aufgabe zu lösen, sich nach Maasgabe der Umstände, auf dem rechten wie auf dem linken Ufer der Maas zu concentriren, und die Punkte von Cinay, Namur und Sombref zu decken”, Von Damitz fails to appreciate the importance of the decisions taken towards the middle of May.

These were to move most of the army of the Lower Rhine to the left bank of the Meuse, as from then on the main threat was seen there.

A state of suspense.

In their positions in the Low Countries, both armies of Wellington and Blücher had similar starting points they acted upon: one of defensive and one of an offensive nature and these were closely linked.

Wellington describes the situation as: “It is obvious that the first measures of the generals commanding the armies of the allies must have been defensive. Those in the Belgian provinces, and those on the left bank of the Rhine, must have been strictly and cautiously formed upon these principles. Their forces were weak in comparison with the French force opposed to, or which might be brought against them. The latter enjoyed other advantages in the nature and strength of their frontier.

These allied troops were at the outposts. They were destined to protect the march of the other armies of the allies to the countries which were intended to be the basis of the operations to be carried on against the enemy, for which the treaty of the 25th of March had made provision.”

⁴⁸

The defence of the Low Countries was a condition for an allied invasion into France, but at the same time this invasion could only be carried out as soon as the allies had superior forces available. It had been Wellington’s and Blücher’s hope that the grand European alliance would launch an immediate offensive before Napoleon could complete his military preparations, but the large and unwieldy Russian and Austrian armies needed time to get into position and it was decided at Vienna on a methodical mobilisation to be followed by an invasion of France late June.⁴⁹

As long as this was not the case, an invasion into France was considered to be too dangerous. Wellington says: “[..] The two allied armies, the one in the Netherlands, the other in the provinces on the left bank of the Rhine, were, as has been already shown, necessarily on the defensive. They were waiting for the junction of other large armies to attain by their cooperation a common object.

But their defensive position and immediate objects did not necessarily preclude all idea or plan of attack upon the enemy. The enemy might have so placed his army as to render the attack thereof advisable, or even necessary.

In that case the allied generals ought, and in all probability would, have taken the initiative. But in the case existing in 1815 the enemy did not take such a position as is thus supposed. On the contrary, he took a position in which his numbers could be concealed, his movements protected, and his designs supported by his formidable fortresses on the frontier, up to the last moment. The allies could not attack this position without being prepared to attack a superior army so posted: they could not therefore have the initiative of the operations in the way of attack.

They had the option of taking the initiative in the way of defensive movement. But such defensive movement, or alteration of the well-considered original position taken up by each of the allied armies, must have been founded on a conviction that such positions were faulty, and might be improved, or upon an hypothesis of the intended movements of attack by the enemy. There was no reason to believe that the first was the case; and it must never be lost sight of, that to found upon an hypothesis which might, and probably would, prove erroneous, considering what the advantages were of the position of the enemy on the frontier, the alteration of the position of the allied armies might have occasioned what is commonly called a false movement; and it must be observed, that whatever may be thought of Buonaparte as a leader of troops in other respects, there certainly never existed a man in that situation, in any times, in whose presence it was so little safe to make what is called a false movement.

The initiative then rested with the enemy; and the course to be pursued by the allied generals respectively was to be prepared to move in all directions, to wait till it should be seen in what direction the attack would be made, and then to assemble the armies as quickly as possible to resist the attack, or to attack the enemy with the largest force that could be collected.”⁵⁰

So, what basically evolved was a state of suspense, both politically and militarily as it was not certain that Napoleon would invade the Netherlands and until he did so, Wellington and Blücher could only remain in a state of watchfulness.⁵¹

This state of suspense for instance also comes back in Wellington’s words to Gneisenau on the 10th of April, as “nous trouvant dans ce moment sur la défensive, et n’ayant aucune intention d’en départir jusqu’à ce que les Souverains assemblés à Vienne décident sur l’attaque et les plans d’opérations, l’initiative est avec l’ennemi; et c’est difficile de fixer en avance exactement les opérations de chaque corps sous telles circonstances.”

And to the prince of Orange, on the 11th May as “In the situation in which we are placed at present, neither at war nor at peace, unable on that account to patrol up to the enemy and ascertain his position by view, or to act offensively upon any part of his line, it is difficult, if not impossible, to combine an operation, because there are no data on which to found any combination. All we can do is to put our troops in such a situation, as, in case of a sudden attack by the enemy, to render it easy to assemble, and to provide against the chance of any being cut off from the rest.”

I would like to enter into more detail in Wellington’s words stating “the initiative then rested with the enemy; and the course to be pursued by the allied generals respectively was to be prepared to move in all directions, to wait till it should be seen in what direction the attack should be made, and then to assemble the armies as quickly as possible to resist the attack, or to attack the enemy with the largest force that could be collected.”

It contains an element which has been stressed in former chapters and on which I would like to make some concluding remarks: mutual cooperation.

The dimensions of the cooperation between both allied armies.

First of all, I would like to go through the strategical dimensions of this cooperation for the sector between the rivers Scheldt and Sambre and throughout the whole period as covered by the preambles.

As I have shown before, it was in March 1815 that both commanders – the prince of Orange and general Von Kleist – had not been able to find a way out in the stalemate which had arisen due to their diverging interests and the resulting large gap between both armies.

The Tirlemont proposal was in that sense not the way to bring about a breakthrough, also not for Wellington and Gneisenau, early April.⁵²

With both him and Gneisenau entering the scene at the same time, as commanders with other full-powers, other responsibilities and more troops, a new era ensued in which Wellington succeeded to convince the Prussians to reach out as far as Charleroi and thereby to close the defence line in front of Brussels. At this period of time, presuming the main French offensive would be directed against him through the French sector between Valenciennes and Maubeuge, Wellington saw his concentration area in the triangle Ath – Braine le Comte – Enghien (with Mons and Tournai as breakpoints in front).

From then on, distances between both armies were much shorter and for a proper cooperation they were regarded as sufficient as it led Wellington to think at that time that if the enemy would attack him between the Scheldt and the Sambre rivers “le corps du général Ziethen formerait la gauche de l’armée, et se rassemblerait à Charleroi; et je crois qu’il serait à propos que les autres troupes de votre Excellence se rassemblent à Namur.”

In other words: at that time it was realistic for Wellington to believe that while he was in front of Brussels, in a sector about halfway between the frontier and Brussels, that the Prussians would be able to come to his aid, as coming from Charleroi and Namur.

It should be stressed that this position of the Prussian army was the wish of Wellington. For the month of April there are no data on which any realistic Prussian concentration sector can be determined. In this period no actual threats of imminent French attacks emerged.

This situation, however, changed by the end of April and the beginning of May. It was then that Wellington, still presuming the main attack would be on him, hung on the area between Enghien, Braine le Comte and Halle to eventually meet the enemy.

The Prussians, from their side, most probably did so to a sector east of Fleurus as far as Gembloux (and even beyond towards Hannut). For the Prussians this was at that moment a sector from which they would be able to support Wellington, while at the same time they would be able to meet any major French irruption from Givet through Namur.

One month later, on the 8th of May, Wellington described his position with that of the Prussian army as “I say nothing about our defensive operations, because I am inclined to believe that Blücher and I *are so well united*, [italics are mine] and so strong, that the enemy cannot do us much mischief. I am at the advanced post of the whole; the greatest part of the enemy’s force is in my front; and, if I am satisfied, others need be under no apprehension.”⁵³

I cite these words again to show the dimensions of the cooperation of both armies in relation to how they had been before Wellington and Gneisenau arrived on the scene. From then on, they were much tighter as they had been and apparently also regarded as sufficient in case of a possible invasion of Belgium.

While in May Wellington’s operational area didn’t change, it was in the middle of this month that the army of the Lower Rhine had left the Rhine in favour of the left bank of the Meuse due to the threat felt upon Wellington’s sector. The result was that it must have given the Prussians the idea that Napoleon might throw his main thrust against them through Charleroi, and not only through Givet – Namur.

As a result, by the end of May, the position of Point du Jour had come into play as a possible

defensive position in case the French might carry out their main attack through Charleroi. Yet, this was an extra element in the Prussian operational area as this still stretched further east as far as Gembloux, and even beyond towards Hannut, in order to be able to meet either an attack through Mons / Charleroi on one side or through Givet / Namur on the other. This clearly can be taken from Blücher's orders of late May.

This means that in case of a major attack on Wellington, through Mons, that the area mentioned was the Prussian focus for concentration of the army, and therefore for possible support to Wellington.

At least at this stage it seems that for him all depended upon the circumstances of the attack where he would concentrate his forces.

By mid-June, the situation respecting the main concentration areas of both armies in case of a main attack upon one of each of them hadn't changed. In case of a main French offensive against the Anglo-Netherlands-German army, Wellington would choose for the triangle Enghien – Braine le Comte – Halle as his ultimate concentration area.

In the event of a main French offensive on his army (either through Charleroi or Namur) Blücher would do so in the sector the east of Fleurus, to Gembloux and beyond, towards Hannut.⁵⁴

By mid-June, however, Wellington had apparently become more concrete when it came down to cooperation in case the main French attack would fall upon upon Blücher, i.e. at least through Charleroi, as then Wellington would concentrate his forces around Nivelles. Whereas if this attack would take place against Wellington, then Blücher would do so between Fleurus and Gembloux.

This was the strategical background in which the initial events of the campaign of 1815 should be seen. It is clear from this, contrary to what often has been asserted, that within this context Quatre Bras played no role whatsoever.

Mentioning Quatre Bras in this stage as a major strategic point for the allies is as with the way the intentions of Napoleon on both the 15th and 16th of June have often been described (see below): it is a way of projecting events which had yet to take place into arrangements in which these events couldn't of course have a place at all.

In this sense, also here, it is projection which is dominating the historiography of the campaign.

In numerous cases it is suggested as if the concentration points of Blücher's and Wellington's armies were similar to the ones Napoleon was aiming at on the 15th and 16th of June – a most peculiar coincidence and for those who adhere to this theory too good to be true, but this opinion is built upon highly erroneous assumptions (see below).⁵⁵

Within these geographical and strategic dimensions, arrangements were set by both commanders about the way they wanted to cooperate. For this I can only repeat what I wrote about this before: "As far as cooperation between the rivers Scheldt and the Sambre was concerned, what mattered for both armies was that each of them had its flank to the partner army open to either receive or to give support to the other. What mattered was a realistic prospect of cooperation, so as to avoid each army having to fight a major action alone. This cooperation could be either by a direct junction just before a battle or an indirect one during a battle, wherein one army would be on the defensive while the other would move in the flank or rear of the enemy.

In other words: the basic formula was that both armies would concentrate in time on one or two points arranged in such a way that both armies would be able to cooperate.⁵⁶

That was the basic agreement upon which all depended, and all further resulting arrangements were dependent on the specific situation regarding time and space.

Whereas these arrangements were of a rather general character, those for cooperation in case

of a French offensive on the left bank of the Scheldt or over the right bank of the Meuse were virtually non-existent or open to consideration.

Von Müffling wrote on the morning of the 15th of June to Gneisenau: “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.”⁵⁷

In other words, in these two other scenario's the mutual distances between both allied armies were of such an extent that another type of concept was probable to come play and that was the invasion of France by the army which was not under attack by the Armée du Nord.

Calculations.

Calculations of the speed in which the allied armies would be able to concentrate at specific points form the key to assess any realistic possibilities for cooperation. Being a most obvious rule in warfare this doesn't need any further explanation. As such, they merit a special attention.

These calculations contain different steps to go through when concentrating an army. These are: the time needed to get the alarm of the start of the hostilities there where the decision for the concentration of the army is to be taken, the time needed to draft and send out the orders to the different units of which the army is composed, the concentration itself of these units at their assembly places and consequently their marches to the concentration point of the army as a whole.

As a rough estimate, the army of Wellington covered in its cantonments an area of about 80 kilometers (west-east) x 70 kilometers (north-south). Taking the army as a whole, it was on the 13th of June 1815 that captain Bowles (1st Regiment Foot Guards) wrote: “[..] 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.[..]”

In this short description, Bowles makes a clear distinction between the actual marches for the concentration of the army as such and its preparatory elements, in an *ideal situation*.

It means that it would take the army one day's march (about 12 hours) to assemble somewhere between Ath and Soignies and two day's marches (about 24 hours) either at the Scheldt river or Nivelles / Quatre Bras. In this, he apparently uses a speed of about 3 kilometers per hour as a starting point.

In my mind, Bowles' statement provides a proper reference for statements as done in the context of this subject.

It is in this context that I would like to enter upon some of these statements (in a chronological order) so as to get a better picture of how these statements should be understood.

The first one is one of the most important ones, if not the most important one, right away. It is the letter as written by Von Müffling at 7 p.m. on the 15th of June in which it is stated, unless the enemy would attack at Nivelles at the same time, that Wellington would be in the vicinity of Nivelles with the whole of his army on the 16th of June. Taking into account the distances and the hour at which the letter was written, it must have been clear to Blücher it would take Wellington most of the day to collect just a part of his army there.

The same day, general Van Reede wrote to Van Nagell: “[..] 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 réunie; il compte rester ici de sa personne

et attendre en général que les mouvements des français soient plus prononcés avant de se mouvoir.” Van Reede must have misunderstood what Wellington would have said as the claim done here is impossible to maintain, wherever this concentration would have taken place, even at the centre of the army.

That morning as well, baron Van der Capellen wrote to his king: “Wellington had dispositie zodanig genomen dat hij vanuit Brussel in 5 of hoogstens 6 uur op alle die punten kon zijn waar zijn aanwezigheid noodzakelijk mocht zijn.” It is highly subjective where these points would be, but on the whole this was feasible within a radius of approximately 50 kilometers.

That morning, Von Müffling had written to Gneisenau: “[..] 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.[..]” In this way, in this respect, it is a highly uninformative document.

In August 1815, Gneisenau wrote to a friend: “Er [Wellington] hatte diese Konzentrierung zu wiederholten Malen und namentlich noch am 15ten Juni auf das bestimmteste, und zwar binnen zwölf Stunden, zugesagt, und mit uns verabredet, der Feind möge die von beiden Armeen, welche er wolle angreifen, so solle die andere ihm in den Rücken fallen. Aber der Herzog konnte sein Konzentrierung nicht zu Stande bringen, vermuthlich aus Fehlern in der Berechnung der Zeit und des Raums.”⁵⁸

The way Gneisenau cites the duke, in the sense of the calculation, the hours indicate that this could only have been a concentration of the army in its centre.

Napoleon wrote in 1820: “[..] Il fallait donc aux deux armées deux jours entiers pour se rassembler sur un même champ de bataille [..]” Having taken Quatre Bras and Fleurus as his references for the distances given, these 24 hours fairly matches the time as given by Bowles, provided Napoleon’s figure refers to actual marching times, but this is not clear.⁵⁹

In 1837 Von Damitz wrote in the context of the mission of colonel Von Pful: : “Der Oberst v.Pful 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.”

I have already demonstrated that Wellington never did this promise as described by Von Damitz. At the same time, if he ever would have done so it is in absurd one in relation to the calculation of the hours as mentioned. Let alone the fact that Wellington never would act in this way right away after some “first gunshot somewhere”, it is the calculation itself which fails completely. As I have shown it would have taken the full army to concentrate it its left (=Nivelles / Quatre Bras) or right flank 24 hours for marching only, let alone the time needed for the alert, the issuing of orders etc.

Five years after Von Damitz, in 1842, Von Clausewitz wrote: “Die Ausdehnung dieser Armee von Mons bis aus Meer beträgt über 20 Meilen, die in der Tiefe von Tournay bis Antwerpen etwa 15. Das Hauptquartier in Brüssel liegt 10 Meilen weit von der vorderen Linie der Quartiere. Eine solche Armee kann in ihrem Mittelpunkt nicht unter 4 bis 5 Tagen versammelt werden.”⁶⁰

It is here that Von Clausewitz assigns Wellington’s army an incorrect area of cantonments as his mobile army did not stretch towards the places as he describes it. It did – roughly-between the Scheldt river, Ghent, Brussels, the road leading from Brussels to Charleroi, Binche and Tournai, thereby covering a much smaller surface of about 5600 square kilometers (instead of 16.800).

At the same time, there where Von Clausewitz does take the army as it was cantoned into account, combined with the fact that not the whole army could be collected at a specific point he is moving towards the reference of Bowles much more. In fact, he states that Wellington could assemble half or two thirds of his army (the reserve plus either the 1st or 2nd corps) on one of his flanks or the centre of his army in one to two days.⁶¹

In his memoirs of 1844 Von Müffling wrote:

“der Herzog von Wellington, durch mich unterrichtet, dass die Espionage des Fürsten Blüchers schlecht organisirt war, glaubte sich auf diesem Punkt sehr sicher, und dass er alles sofort erfahren würde, was in Paris auf einen Marsch gegen die Niederlande deute – in dieser Zuversicht war die Dislocation der englisch-niederländisch-hannoverschen Armee angelegt, und die Stunde berechnet, in welcher Sie – vom Augenblick der Absendung der Cavalerie-Ordonnanzen aus Brüssel auf dem einen oder auf dem andern der drei verschiedenen Rendezvous versammelt sein konnte.

Die Rechnungen selbst waren mir nicht bekannt, sie waren jedoch, wie es sich später auswies, in der Voraussetzung geführt dass die Befehle zur Zusammenziehung am Tage, und nicht in der Nacht gegeben und ausgeführt wurden. Nur zu oft kommt bei den Berechnungen dieses Versehen vor. In dunkler Nacht können die Ordonnanzen auf Nebenwegen nicht scharf reiten, sie finden in den Cantonierungen Alles in tiefem Schlaf und eine Verspätung der Ankunft auf dem Rendezvous ist die unabwendbare Folge einer auf die Zeit des Tages und nicht der Nacht gegründeten Berechnung.”⁶²

It is unfortunate that Von Müffling doesn't name the three rendez-vous by name and that he claims he was not aware of the calculations as designed by Wellington, but at the same time his statements only confirm that, supposing he is speaking the truth, that they were drafted in more or less ideal circumstances, that is at least during daytime. This corresponds to a certain extent to Bowles' statement. Yet, this element is an additional one to the actual calculations of which I can hardly imagine that Von Müffling was not aware of them.

In the same publication, Von Müffling cites the duke of Wellington as having said to him on the 15th of June: “If all is as general Von Zieten supposes, I will concentrate on my left wing, i.e. the corps of the prince of Orange; I shall then be *à portée* to fight in conjunction with the Prussian army.[..]”⁶³ The italics used do not denote any specific significance as all French expressions in the memoirs have been printed this way, but in this case the expression is the key in the passage as cited.

The expression meaning “within reach” is not defined, and at the same time has a highly subjective connotation, as this all depends upon the circumstances of the moment. In that sense, it does not help us any further what calculations formed the basis of the expression used here.

In the same year it was William Siborne who wrote about Wellington's army: “from whatever point offensive operations might be directed against that portion of the Belgian frontier occupied by the army under Wellington, the duke, by advancing to the threatened point with his reserve and placing the remainder of his troops in movement had it in its power to concentrate at least two thirds of his intended disposable force for the field, upon the line of enemy's operations, within 22 hours after the receipt of intelligence of the actual direction and apparent object of those operations.[..] the main points of interior concentration were Audenarde, Grammont, Ath, Enghien, Soignies, Nivelles and Quatre Bras.”⁶⁴

Though Siborne is not specific on the points where Wellington could confront the French, his statements make more of a distinction when it comes down to the time needed to get a proper alarm of the situation, the direction of the enemy and the resulting actual time needed for moving the forces. Additionally, he doesn't bind his calculation to the army as a whole but to two thirds of it. Yet, his calculation is still tight. Also, his description of the main points of interior concentration is confusing: one the one hand it seems to have been set upon those

places where divisional headquarters were located, while at the same time not all divisions are covered; on the other hand, there is no evidence whatsoever that Wellington had actually indicated these places as points of interior concentration.

In 1857, Charras wrote: “Attaqué par sa [Wellington’s] droite, attaqué par sa gauche, il lui fallait un jour de marche forcée pour concentrer la moitié environ de son armée sur l’une ou l’autre aile, et deux jours pour l’y réunir tout entière.”⁶⁵

For the Prussian army, the general report dated 19th of June states: “Die Konzentrationspunkte der vier Preussischen Armeekorps waren Fleurus, Namur, Cinay und Hannut, und so gelegen, dass die Armee auf einem dieser Punkte in 24 Stunden versammelt sein konnte.”⁶⁶ Taking these 24 hours and the distances involved, what is meant here is the concentration of the army as such. In this sense it resembles the reference as given by Bowles (see above).

When it came down to the concentration of the 3rd corps, colonel Henry Hardinge made a realistic calculation in writing on the 14th of June: “In case of necessity the 3rd corps from the environs of Cinay can be assembled at this point in fourteen hours [..].”

Von Damitz, in 1837, however, didn’t do so for the Prussian army in general. Using the concentration of the army near Sombreffe as a starting point, he writes: “Die Armee-Corps waren demnach so dislocirt, dass die entferntesten Brigaden höchstens 3 Meilen bis zum Sammelplatz ihrer Corps hatten. Wenn man 6 Stunden zur Ausfertigung und Überbringung der Befehle rechnet, so konnten demnach in 12 Stunden die Armee-Corps versammelt sein, und zwar das erste Corps bei Fleurus, das zweite bei Namur, das dritte bei Cinay und das vierte nach den eintretenden Verhältnissen auf dem rechten oder linken Ufer der Maas.

Es war jedoch gar nicht einmal nothwendig, dass die einzelnen Corps sich auf ihren Sammelplätzen vereinigten, sondern nur dasjenige Corps, welches angegriffen wurde, musste sich concentriren, die übrigen Truppen marschirten den nächsten Weg nach dem Sammelplatz der Armee.

Für den Fall, dass die Armee sich also bei Sombref concentriren sollte, musste der feindliche Angriff das erste Armee-Corps treffen, welches sich allmählich gegen Fleurus zurückzog, und von hier aus noch eine Meile bis Sombref zu marschiren hatte.

Das zweite Armee-Corps durfte von Namur bis Sombref nur 2 ½ Meile zurücklegen. Das dritte Armee-Corps würde für diesen Fall schon seine detaschirte 11te Brigade herangezogen haben, und dann von Cinay 5 ½ Meile, so wie das vierte Armee-Corps, welches bis Hannut heranzuziehen war, nur 4 ½ Meile bis Sombref zu marschiren gehabt haben.

In 10 höchstens 12 Stunden konnten also die entferntesten Armee-Corps, vom Augenblick ihres Abmarsches an gerechnet, bei Sombreffe eintreten, und wenn man 6 Stunden für das Eingeben der Meldungen der Vorposten rechnet, so wie 6 Stunden für die Ausfertigung und Überbringung der Befehle annimmt, so was er möglich, die Armee in 24 Stunden auf dem entferntesten Concentrirungs-Punkte bei Sombref zu vereinigen.”⁶⁷

First of all, not all brigades were located within the 23 kilometers of the corps assembly point as Von Damitz claims to be.

Secondly, Von Damitz’ calculations contain an inner contradiction. While on the one hand Von Damitz sees no necessity for those corps which were not under attack to concentrate first on their assembly point before their actual march towards that of the army, in his calculations he *does have* these corps march off to these points (Fleurus, Namur, Cinay and Hannut). In this way, the calculation is not complete as it skips the concentration of the corps on these points while they have to be taken into account on that type of calculation. Other than that, I see no chance that for instance the 4th corps could cover the distance between Hannut and Sombreffe (which is about 45 kilometers) in 10 to 12 hours.

For Von Clausewitz “Blücher croyait pouvoir rassembler son armée près de Sombreffe en trente-six heures.” For the 3rd corps he calculates a time needed of 36 hours as coming from Ciney, while for the 2nd he gives 12 hours as coming from Namur. So, this means that the statement on Blücher’s presumptions must have been one as starting from the moment the army-corps were concentrated on their assembly-points.

William Siborne wrote on the subject: “The points of concentration for the corps were Fleurus, Namur, Ciney and Liège. Each corps could be collected at its own headquarters within 12 hours, and it was fully practicable to form a junction of the whole army at any of those points within 24 hours.”⁶⁸ In relation to the distances involved, these figures should be seen as ones pure for marching, no other.

The calculation as given by Siborne is one of the calculations I have given to demonstrate that figures given in this context should be handled with care, in the sense that they often are not well described in what they do and what they don’t incorporate. In this, sometimes also subjectivity plays a role, in the sense that they are represented in such a way as to be of some use in one way or another. As such, they are often fairly meaningless.

Napoleon’s intentions versus allied expectations.

Surprise may have been the key element of Napoleon’s attack, but what matters is the basic question: were the allied commanders actually surprised on the 15th of June ?

A background to the way of how the allied commanders reacted on the attack of Napoleon on the 15th of June can be filtered from an analysis of the intelligence they had on Napoleon’s activities and the true state of affairs on his side.⁶⁹

During the first half of April, the allies were informed about the fact that French forces were deployed along the north frontier of France, from Dunkerque and Lille as far as the Moselle and the Rhine. Though Wellington deemed a French attack highly improbable, if Napoleon would attack he thought he would most probably do so between the rivers Scheldt and Sambre. Upon which information he based this idea remains unknown.

After that period of time, the impression was one of a more or less stationary situation on the French side but this changed by the end of April. Then, information about the whereabouts of the Imperial Guard and Napoleon himself triggered Wellington to take preventive defensive measures. In these, he reckoned a French irruption could take place in front of all sectors of his frontline and this may have been caused by the fact that he thought French forces were extended along the line stretching from Lille as far as Metz. In reality, however, this frontline was much smaller as it involved the line Valenciennes – Maubeuge – Mézières, while being linked to Paris through Laon. Napoleon, in his turn, took into account a possible allied irruption upon Avesnes.

This very concentration of French forces between Valenciennes and Mézières emerged as a threat upon Wellington again in the second week of May, but not as one coming from this sector as a whole, but from the one stretching from Valenciennes to Maubeuge.

The situation caused the Prussian army to move away from the Moselle and to take positions along the Meuse. Some days later, however, the threat appeared to have been a *defensive* concentration of Napoleon on the Sambre after all. From the allied point of view this reasoning was not unlogical at all, as what they had planned was an invasion of France. Meanwhile, in May, this invasion was postponed to the 16th of June. They could be sure that their opponent would be aware of this delay as well. So early May, the mutual chance of an invasion had eventually resulted in defensive measures on *both* sides, in stead on an invasion of one of them.

From the second week of May until the 15th of June reports of Napoleon having left or about to leave Paris streamed towards Brussels and Namur unabated. Throughout the month of May, also more detailed information about the strengths and whereabouts of the main French forces dropped in and these roughly pointed to an area between Paris and the frontier in the north, i.e. from Paris, through Guise and Laon, to the line Valenciennes – Maubeuge – Avesnes – Rocroi – Mézières and Metz. And while intelligence told the allied commanders about the rise in the Vendée in May and the military movements as a result, the first speculations on a possible French offensive in the north at specific dates started to come through.

During the first two weeks of June, Wellington and Blücher were alerted about a returning threat from Maubeuge. As a result, the prince of Orange and general Zieten took measures to have their corps in readiness to be able concentrate at any moment; this situation was maintained until the 15th of June.

With this situation, the French threat shifted from the line Valenciennes – Maubeuge to Maubeuge as the main concentration point of the French army. In real life, the French *armée du Nord* was then in the area between Paris, Valenciennes, Maubeuge, Philippeville and Metz.

During the last two days before the campaign started, Wellington felt that his and Blücher's army were too strong for Napoleon to attack them, but he did not rule out the fact altogether that he could.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, both Blücher and Gneisenau felt on the 11th and 12th of June that the threat had diminished. As the threat had passed, Von Müffling - in his turn - believed on the morning of the 15th of June that the French movements around Maubeuge were not intended to strike on the Netherlands after all, but to mask a possible major concentration around St.Menehould. His guess was that Napoleon could operate in a defensive war from this central position against allied columns coming from the north and from the east.

It was on the 14th and 15th of June that intelligence was acquired in both Brussels and Namur on a French concentration east of Maubeuge, towards Beaumont and north-west of this place, towards the frontier. As a result of this, Zieten took preparatory measures to make a concentration of his corps possible, but he did not push this through on the 14th of June (see below). Wellington did not take any further measures, as what the prince had done before.

Though the Prussians had their own intelligence, it has been stated before that most of the information which they obtained about French activities came in through Brussels, Ghent and Charleroi. At some stage, this information involved French movements in the sector Valenciennes – Mézières. Yet, in *both* armies a potential threat seems predominantly to have been felt as coming from Valenciennes – Maubeuge, and still later Maubeuge and its immediate vicinity. The sector further to the east, as far as Mézières and Rocroi is virtually non-existent. For the Prussians this meant a threat upon their extreme right flank, and for Wellington one upon Mons in particular. Only at the very latest moment the presence of a concentration east of Maubeuge, near Beaumont transpired.

In the mishmash of information which reached both allied headquarters, it was of course the trick to select information which could be regarded as reliable information. Additionally, it needed time to travel to these places, so in this respect both commanders were always in a vulnerable position, but from that point of view there was no other way.

The departure of Napoleon and the Imperial Guard could be an important signal for an imminent attack, but since May this kind of information was delivered almost on a daily base.

In the “confusion” of French activities which took place for several weeks in all kind of geographical areas, it was the trick to determine those movements which could be qualified as more pronounced and which as such made the difference between a supposed and a real concentration of forces. Obviously, this applied to both lateral movements and those in a north-south direction.

Former experience had taught the allies - and Wellington in particular - that Napoleon’s activities could very well be defensive ones, in stead of offensive ones. An invasion was not only the option for Napoleon, but also one for the allies. In short: there was a risk that a concentration of the armée du Nord aiming at the invasion of the Netherlands could be absorbed into a pattern of so-called defensive activities while these were not - and this is what actually happened.

This connection is of eminent importance to understand and assess the proper value of the surprise effect of the concentration of the armée du nord. In the traditional historiography of the campaign of 1815 it is common practice to assign the success of this concentration through its concentration *per se*, but the phenomenon has far larger dimensions in both time and space. The way the allies were moulded by what they had experienced about the enemy in the months before the middle of June substantially contributed for Napoleon – also unwillingly - to the success of his masked concentration of the armée du Nord.

The result was that the allies were not surprised about the *fact* that Napoleon attacked; in fact they had taken it account for a long time that he *could*. What they *were* surprised about was the timing and the direction of the attack. It was at the very latest moment that general Zieten expected to be attacked on the 15th of June or shortly thereafter.

Final observations on the preambles.

Before entering into the description of the campaign of 1815 itself, I would like to make a few remarks on the historiography of its preambles.

In relation to the campaign itself, the preambles regarding the allied armies in the Netherlands are often dealt with in a rather coarse way, in the sense that events and documents are mentioned, but without a proper context or without any relevant connections.

For that reason, this study of the preambles is an attempt to integrate available and relevant sources in a systematic way. The proper value of the preambles can only be traced through a step by step description and analysis of these sources. In that sense, in former studies, strategic elements, concepts and backgrounds which can be found in a lot of these single documents or in their sequences are often insufficiently explored or not even explored at all.

A typical example of this last approach is the strong tendency to neglect the importance of the coming invasion of France by the allied armies. This invasion was constantly on the minds of their commanders and played a significant role in the way they behaved. The more time was progressing, the more they felt confident about a swift start. As it had been planned for late June, it became a particularly strong item in the week before the war was started by Napoleon and as such formed a fundamental background for this period of time, one which has been overlooked by many historians.

Gash wrote about the battle of Waterloo: “There is a standing temptation to view the 1815 campaign in terms of the events of 18 June, Yet clearly it is more realistic and more illuminating to consider the battle in the context of the campaign.”⁷¹

In respect of the preambles I would like to make a variation on this statement, as I feel this approach is also typical for the way these preambles have been described. This variation is: there is a standing temptation to view the preambles of the campaign in terms of the events of the campaign itself. Yet clearly it is more realistic and more illuminating to consider the campaign in the context of its preambles and its aftermath.

All too often the preambles have been described as if the only result could, as if almost

inevitably, take place the way it did: a French offensive through the area around Charleroi, resulting in the battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras the next day, and, with this, the measures taken accordingly on the side of the allied commanders.

In other words: the description of the preambles in former studies all too often suffers from hindsight, resulting in a distortion in the description of the events and their interpretation, thereby making it virtually impossible to view them in their own value.

In that sense, the preambles as I have attempted to describe them is not only an attempt to do so, but at the same time one as to break down those cases where hindsight has come in, and to put them in their right context at the same time.

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¹ Cf. Wellington's Memo on the defence of the frontier of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

This memorandum has been published in print in: Soane, G. – Life of the duke of Wellington Vol.II p.464-468

[undated] Mémoire sur la défense etc. of Willem, sovereign prince of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

[undated] Propositions d'examiner etc. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

² Cf. the plea for both as done by De Bosset, lieutenant colonel in British service [1814]. In: Observations générales etc. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6591

³ In: Memo on the defence of the frontier of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

[undated] Mémoire sur la défense etc. of Willem, sovereign prince of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

⁴ [undated] Mémoire sur la défense etc. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

⁵ Considérations etc. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

⁶ This element was one the two leading principles again for Wellington in designing a defence system for the Netherlands in March 1816. The other one was "de rendre l'extrême frontière si respectable qu'elle ne peut pas être attaquée par coup de main et que le temps soit donné à rassembler les troupes pour la défense du pays." Cf. Wellington to king Willem, 10th March 1816. In: Colenbrander, H.T. Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VIII p.30

⁷ Wellington to king Willem, 10th March 1816. In: Colenbrander, H.T. (ed.) Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VIII p.30

⁸ Sir Hudson Lowe to Bunbury, 17th October 1814. In: WSD, Vol.IX p.347

⁹ Letters dated 28th and 31st of March 1815. In: Colenbrander, H.T. Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VII p.316

¹⁰ Memo on the defence of the frontier of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

[undated] Mémoire sur la défense etc. of Willem, sovereign prince of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

[undated] Plan générale de défense. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

[undated] Propositions d'examiner etc. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

As the Netherlander entered into Maastricht on the 5th of May 1814, the document can be classified as being of a later date.

¹¹ WSD, Vol.IX p.307-312 He sent it to viscount Castlereagh, who forwarded it to Wellington on the 2nd of October. In: WSD, Vol.IX p.301-303

¹² [undated] Mémoire sur la défense etc. of Willem, sovereign prince of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

[undated] Plan générale de défense. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

Considérations etc. by captain Van Swieten, 20th February 1815. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

In his secret letter to lord Bathurst, dated 3rd of April, the prince of Orange also referred to a possible retreat behind the Nethe in two marches. Cf. preceding chapter of that date.

¹³ Memo on the defence of the frontier of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

¹⁴ King Willem to his son Willem, 20th April 1815. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6211

¹⁵ NAK, WO 30/35 nr.7

¹⁶ Wellington to king Willem, 10th March 1816. In: Colenbrander, H.T. (ed.) Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VIII p.30

¹⁷ Memo on the defence of the frontier of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592
The position of Blaton and the area there near Mons (i.e. the position of Boussu) are described in more detail in another document in the same file. Cf. Observations générales etc, by M.de Bosset, lieutenant colonel in British service. In: NA, 2.02.01.nr.6592

¹⁸ NAK, WO 30/35 nr.7

¹⁹ It was again in March 1816 that Wellington repeated the importance of field works at Halle (and Waterloo) as a second line of defence in Belgium.

He regarded the fortresses at the river Meuse and those between that river and the Scheldt as the first line. In his letter to the king Willem, dated 10th March 1816. In: Colenbrander, H.T. Gedenkstukken etc. pVol. VIII p.31

²⁰ Later, after his arrival in Belgium sir Hudson Lowe wrote in his “queries submitted regarding the measures to be taken for the defence of the Belgic provinces, on the supposition of the French government having any hostile designs against them” one of his queries as follows: “Should any intermediate post be taken up between the frontiers and Brussels, supposing the latter line of operations be thought the most suitable, query in respect to the construction of a work at Mont Jean [sic], being the commanding point at the junction of the two principal chaussées leading direct from the French frontier on the side of Charleroi and Namur to Brussels, and the line of direction in which an enemy must then move ?”
In: Holland Rose, J. Sir H.Lowe etc. p.517-518

²¹ NAK, WO 30/35 nr.7

²² Bleibtreu, in his extreme anti-British approach, claims that Wellington didn’t intend to have a battle further south towards the Sambre, but only one just in front of Brussels, i.e. at Mont Saint Jean. He also regards Nivelles as a line to the west, away from the Prusians, while in reality Nivelles was the major starting point for Wellington for support towards the Prussians. In: Englands grosse Waterloo-Lüge p.11-12

A former military, and resident in Brussels since 1814, claims to have met the duke of Wellington, while accompanied by the duke of Richmond and the prince of Orange, on the 13th of June. The he would have stated “that if he was attacked from the south, Halle would be his position, and if on the Namur side, Waterloo.” There can be considerable doubt about the status of these words as, first of all, the prince of Orange was not in Brussels that day and the relation of Pryse Lockhart Gordon to the army cannot be substantiated. In: Personal memoirs or reminiscenses etc. p.267

²³ The original is now in the British Library (Add.ms.57.653/3 and 4), while a copy is kept in the Newberry Library (Chicago, USA). It is this copy which carries this covering note: “Sketch of the ground upon which was fought the memorable battle of Waterloo, copied from a plan which was taken by order of his Grace the duke of Wellington in the month of April previous to the battle.”

Cf. Lemoine-Isabeau, C. La cartographie du territoire Belge de 1780 à 1830 Annex W7.14

Major Van Gorkum, of the general staff of the army of the Netherlands, mentions the map as having been shown to him by lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth in Brussels on the 9th of June. Cf. his memoirs in a private collection.

Yet, according to De Bas, it would have been already in August and September 1814 that lieutenant Brauns, of the British staff, had been instructed by Wellington to make a detailed survey of the position of Mont Saint Jean. I have no references from where he might have taken this information. In: Bas, F.de and T’Serclaes de Wommersom. La campagne de 1815 Vol.II p.50

²⁴ Cf. Gash, N. Wellington and the Waterloo campaign p.2
Bas, F.de – la campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.264 He believes the duke would fall back to Ostend in case of a retreat.

²⁵ Cf. Von Müffling. In: Memoirs etc. p.220

²⁶ Whitehead only sees the communication line towards Ostend and an alternative one in the one to Antwerp, in case Wellington would have to give up the first one. In: Waterloo.Wellington’s right flank p.203

²⁷ Cf. Sir Carmichael Smyth. In: Chronological epitome of the wars etc. p.369
The importance of the bridge is clearly mentioned by captain Oldfield of the royal engineers. He does the same for the bridge linking the centre of Antwerp and the *tête de Flandre*, a former fortification on the left bank of the Schledt river. In: NAM, nr.7403-147

²⁸ BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.87-88
Lierre and Duffel are both south-east of Antwerp, Rupelmonde south-west. The overall position is immediately south of Antwerp.

²⁹ In: NAK, WO.1/205.1 p.13-16

³⁰ Cf. chapter on the 10th of April and the 6th of May.

³¹ Wellington to king Willem, 10th March 1816. In: Colenbrander, H.T. (ed.) Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VIII p.30

³² Cf. Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo. In: WSD, Vol.X p.522

³³ Cf. Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo. In: WSD, Vol.X p.518-519

³⁴ Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo etc. In: WSD, Vol.X p.518-522

³⁵ Cf. Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo. In: WSD, Vol.X p.520, 522

³⁶ Hofschröder puts the fault line of the coalition in the Low Countries along the axis Thuin-

Charleroi-Fleurus-Gembloux-Tirlemont, but it was further west, on the line Binche - Frasnes les Gosselies – Wavre – Louvain. In: 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.112

³⁷ According to a British “officer on the staff” the position of the cantonments of the cavalry was dictated by a sole element: forage. In: An account of the battle of Waterloo, fought on the 18th of June, by the English and allied forces, commanded by the duke of Wellington p.28

³⁸ Cf. the criteria set for cantonments in general, as described by general-major Knoop. In: Quatre Bras en Waterloo p.23

³⁹ Cf. Gash, N. Wellington and the Waterloo campaign p.2

⁴⁰ Cf. Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo. In: WSD, Vol.X p.523

⁴¹ Aus meinem Leben, p.232-233

⁴² WSD, Vol.X p.523

⁴³ Cf. Wellington’s Memo on the defence of the frontier of the Netherlands. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

Carmichael Smyth. In: NAK, WO 30/35 nr.7

Sir Hudson Lowe to major general Bunbury, 17th October 1814. In: WSD, Vol.IX p.349

In 1814, sir Hudson Lowe made a cursory tour along the southern frontier of the Netherlands, as he wrote a report entitled: “Observations on a cursory tour along the frontier of the Belgick [sic] Provnice from Liège to Tournay. 1814” Manuscript in the LMB, but not yet consulted.

By mid June 1815, the ramparts of Charleroi were in a state of decay.

Cf. Aerts, W. Etudes relatives etc. p.261-262

Delloye, S. Charleroi 1815 p.4

Leloup, Les délices du Pays de Liège etc. p.333-334

Lithography of Jobard. In: De Cloet, Voyage pittoresque dans le royaume des Pays Bas Vol.II p.156

⁴⁴ There is a detailed sketch though of the strip of country along the Sambre, stretching from Namur to Peruwelz, entitled “Sketch of the military frontier of Belgium from Namur on the Meuse to Peruwelz to Tournai”, as “reconnoitred in June 1814 by Charles Hamilton Smith, D.A.Q.M.Genl.”. In: NAK, MR1.163 (28).

Cf. Lemoine-Isabeau, C. , La cartographie du territoire Belge de 1780 à 1830. Annex 6.W12

Another one is a survey carried out in 1815 along the Sambre between Charleroi and Lobbes by a captain Harris, with an accompanying plan. In: NAK, WO78.1765 and MPH 242/10

Cf. Lemoine-Isabeau, C. , La cartographie du territoire Belge de 1780 à 1830. Annex 6.W13

⁴⁵ In: Considérations etc. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

In this documnt captain Van Swieten places his (what he calls second) line of defence here not along the Sambre but further north, extending from Braine le Comte in the west along Perwez as far as Tongres, without mentioning any strongholds however in these places. Though he emphasizes other sectors as the one meant here, he yet mentions Namur as a potential point through which the French might irrupt, coming from Givet.

⁴⁶ Cf. events of the 17th of June.

Von Clausewitz here completely misses the point of the allied cooperation in case a defence in front of Brussels would fail. He admits that Wellington could in that event move to the Meuse, while Blücher could move towards Wellington, upon Antwerp. There is evidence that the first scenario was realistic, but none of the second; in fact the Tirlemont scenario was the Prussian compromise towards Wellington. In: *Campagne de 1815 en France* p.42

⁴⁷ *Geschichte etc.* p.40

⁴⁸ Cf. Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo. In: *WSD, Vol.X* p.515-516

⁴⁹ Gash, N. *Wellington and the Waterloo campaign.*p.2

⁵⁰ Cf. Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo. In: *WSD, Vol.X* p.518-519

⁵¹ Gash, N. *Wellington and the Waterloo campaign.*p.2

⁵² At the end of March, colonel Colborne was yet highly optimistic about the cooperation of both armies in the distances involved, as he wrote on the 31st of March:

“However, I think everything must now go on well, even if we should be attacked before the arrival of duke of Wellington. Redoubts are to be immediately constructed at Hal, and on the roads where it may be necessary to halt and look about us. The whole will retire in three columns [...] and as the Prussians cross tomorrow and the Nassau brigade is at hand [at Namur] no disaster can happen to us on the march.” In: *BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.115-116*

⁵³ *WD, Vol.XII* p.360

⁵⁴ Cf. Wellington’s orders of the 15th of June.

For Hussey, depending on the circumstances, the Prussians could march over three roads to support Wellington: one through Charleroi – Binche – Mons, one through Charleroi – Quatre Bras – Nivelles and one through Namur – Sombreffe – Nivelles or Genappe.

Yet, as Wellington sought a defence deep within the country, well away from the frontier, the first one most probably didn’t come into play. In: *The aftermath of Tirlemont etc.* p.31 (footnote nr.20)

⁵⁵ Pollio also sees that the concept of a concentration at both Sombreffe and Quatre Bras has never existed and that it is one invented at a later date. In: *Waterloo* p.166

⁵⁶ Cf. chapter on the period 30th of April – 6th May.

According to Von Lettow Vorbeck the allies confined themselves to a most general arrangement in which they “[sich] nur zu gegenseitiger Unterstützung verpflichtet hatten.” In: *Napoleon’s Untergang* p.272

According to Pollio there was no “accord précis” what to do in case of a French attack. In: *Waterloo* p.169

⁵⁷ 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 not available.

⁵⁸ Cf. the letter to his friend Alexander Gibsone, consul in Danizg, dated 6th August 1815. In: Delbrück, H. Einiges zum Feldzuge von 1815 p.659

⁵⁹ Mémoires pour servir etc. p.77

⁶⁰ In: Hinterlassene Werke etc. p.21
A “Meile” is the German mile, which is 7.5 kilometers.

⁶¹ In: Campagne de 1815 en France p.35-36

⁶² The memoirs of baron Von Müffling etc. p.232-233

⁶³ The memoirs of baron Von Müffling etc. p.229 In hindsight, this expression would mean a distance of about 20 kilometers (Nivelles – Sombreffe).

⁶⁴ History of the war etc. Vol.I p.34-35

⁶⁵ Histoire de la campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.80

⁶⁶ In: Bas, F.de and T’Serclaes de Wommersom, J.de, La campagne de 1815 etc. Vol.III p.444

⁶⁷ Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.52-53

⁶⁸ History of the war etc. Vol.I p.39

⁶⁹ This background and analysis though can only be of a very general character as the intelligence which the allied commanders used must have been much more extensive as we currently have it. Further, the selection of the information contained in this intelligence is prone to be subjective. Further, the selection of the information contained in this intelligence is prone to be subjective.

As a general additional remark: intelligence regarding strengths of French units are left out in this analysis, as these can not be compared to the actual strengths of them through time.

⁷⁰ Cf. Hussey, J. – Thirty-six hours in Belgium etc. p.16
For this viewpoint, see Wellington’s letter to lord Lynedoch and the letters from major general Van Reede and baron Van der Capellen, both dated 15th of June.

⁷¹ Wellington and the Waterloo campaign p.1