

19th - 25th of March

The situation of the prince of Orange.

Having heard about Napoleon's March to Paris, the prince of Orange asked earl Bathurst on the 21st of March for more reinforcements:

"Pray send out the reinforcements that are intended for the Netherlands without delay, and arms for the Belgian militia which is going to be formed. It would be of the greatest use to this government if you would do so; and the more you send the better: 25.000 or 30.000 at least would be required.

I desired colonel Sir.G.Wood [¹] to make a requisition for field artillery, which I am very anxious to have out here as well as ammunition. I caused colonel Colborne to write to general Bunbury, enclosing him a list of all that would be required to complete the army to take the field. Every attention, I believe, is paid by the Prussians to Luxembourg; but at the same time I mean to give general Kleist a hint about it. He is collecting his army, and is going to have a strong corps near Liège to communicate with the army in Belgium. The Dutch and Belgian army in the field will consist of 23.100 rank and file, out of which 3100 horse."²

Colborne, as indicated, wrote to Bunbury extensively the same day about the state of affairs:

"I am preparing a statement for the duke of Wellington which will give him full information how we stand here. Ypres, Ostend, Nieuport and Antwerp will be provisioned in ten days – 40.000 rations of biscuit are now baked daily at the latter place – Tournai will very soon be in a respectable state of defence. 10.000 peasants are employed there, and work willingly for 1 franc per [...] and furnish their own tools. The flèches in front of the gate are begun, embrasures are opened to flank the four gateways, and a contractor has agreed to furnish five thousand palisades almost musketproof in a fortnight, and five thousand more in the third week – Mons will be repaired also. The 35th, 44th and 54th and two Hanoverian battalions are destined for the garrison of Ostend. The 78th will be in Nieuport – four Hanoverian battalions in Ypres. The 25th, 30th, 37th and 81st and two Hanoverian brigades and the vet.battalion will form the garrison of Antwerp, under general Mackenzie. He has already been cautioned about the destruction of the naval materials.

The British regiments are in good order, but composed of young soldiers who have never been on service except in Holland, in 1814. Could not the guards be gradually changed? The officers are almost all boys, the men recruits and have never heard a shot fired, except 3 or 400, who are too inferior for hard service. The cavalry and infantry of the Legion are excellent, and the instructions for reinlisting them are in train [?]. The Hanoverians are very young men, but are delighted at the prospect of being engaged before their return to Hanover. The officers very bad and without experience. Their hospitals most fall on ours as they have no arrangements. I would not trust the Belgian troops an inch, some of the men of the 2 regiments at Mons began the cry of Vive Napoleon on the first arrival of the news. However, their numbers are inconsiderable. The Dutch must be frightened into activity, you cannot press them too much. Bergen op Zoom, Breda, Bois le Duc, Venloo have been shamefully neglected, economy was the order of the day; the artillery of all those places is useless and there is great want of ammunition. Orders have been issued to put everything in a proper state, but I know these orders cannot be complied with. They have but 20.000 muskets in store. Maestricht and Venloo will be provisioned for 2 months for 10 and 4 thousand men. At least the contract was made yesterday. They talk of sending gun boats to the Escaut, but it will not be done unless they are urged to enforce their orders. The Dutch army, including the corps which was intended for Batavia, amounts by the last return to 42.000 They could easily send us a disposable force of 35.000 but not more than 30.000 are to march to Brabant, from which number the garrisons of Maastricht, Venloo and some other places will be deducted.

I believe we shall have about 20.000 of them in the field, good troops. Part of this force will arrive in ten days and the remainder in three weeks. Neither the Dutch nor Brabançons will be displeased to see the duke of Wellington, the commander in chief. But I am convinced it will be necessary to give the prince of Orange the immediate command of them, and should that be the case, they may be turned to made useful. The Dutch have the highest opinion of the skill and experience of the Prince, and are quite proud of him and I am told in many parts of Holland he is considered to have been the great advisor and the chief cause of the duke of Wellington's success in the Peninsula. In fact, no one should command them but him, if it is wished to make them hearty in the cause. His father and the ministers have flattered him so much, that he believes himself not one of the worst generals of the age. I dread the Dutch bureau de la guerre, Jansens is a sensible man, but he is surrounded by a shocking set of rogues. The prince told me today that they wished Antwerp to be given up to Dutch troops! This demand was of course refused.

The commanding general is endeavouring to purchase 130 carts and 200 horses for the transports of ammunition; if carts could be sent out from Woolwich immediately, it would be much better. Tournai and Ypres will be fit for the guns in a few days. It was intended to have removed some from Ostend, but should the guns arrive here this week, they can be sent to Nieuport with much less trouble.

The 49 [?] brigades, musket ammunition, pack saddles, light camp kettles and medical stores and farriers should be forwarded without the least delay.

The enclosed memorandum has been transmitted to the ordnance department by sir George Wood. Our disposable force will amount to

Infantry: 4000 British

36000 Legion

6800 Hannoverians

Total: 14.400

3700 Belgians

1500 Dutch

Cavalry 2400 Legion

700 Hannoverian

Total 3100

1700 Belgian

Sir H.Lowe, I think, will require some officers in his department who have served with the army in Spain. Any of your suggestion he would prefer. Barclay is arrived and has brought the prince a letter from lord Bathurst, there is not the least occasion to be alarmed about Luxembourg, the Prussians will take care of that, and know its importance. We have no news from Paris since [...] o'clock on the 18th. Bonaparte was then at Fontaineblau. [...] You should insist on the Dutch sending thirty thousand men into the field, besides the garrisons of Maestricht and Venloo. Those two places I find are no ordered to be provisioned for one month, for 15.0000 infantry, 1000 cavalry and 6000 [...] orders have been sent to [...] and for the troops that were returned for Batavia to march, but they will wait for a second order and if the news is good tomorrow they will remain where they are. Bad news can only make them active. They have plenty of gunboats and the sailors that are ready for Batavia ought to be sent to man them. [...] Lord Bathurst need not be alarmed for Luxembourg [...] heard the orders given for the [...] of the garrison etc.

Baron Tripp is arrived from Paris, he left it on the 19th, and by his account I think you had better lose no time in preparing for the worst.”³

And on the 22nd of March, the prince wrote to Von Kleist:

“Je viens de recevoir des nouvelles qui m'apprennent que Bonaparte est rentré à Paris. Quoiqu'elles ne soient pas officielles je ne puis douter de leur vérité: toutes les troupes et même les gardes nationales passent de son côté. On dit que le Roi va arriver à Lille; si cela est, je vais encore lui offrir l'assistance de mon armée. Peut-être en verra-t-il la nécessité maintenant; dans le cas qu'il l'accepte, j'espère pouvoir compter sur votre coopération; il me paraît que l'armée de Bonaparte si l'on ne perd point du tems, ne peut pas être en mesure de se défendre et que les alliés ont beau jeu avec lui. Je viens d'apprendre par une personne de la Maison du Roi, qui vient de Paris, que ce qui fait le plus d'effet sur l'armée était la promesse de les mener en Belgique sans perte de tems. On le connaît assez pour savoir qu'il tâchera de leur tenir parole; je désirerai en conséquence beaucoup vous voir rapprocher de la frontière; peut-être pouvez-vous dans tous les cas avancer le corps du général Zieten jusqu'à la hauteur de Namur et vous rapprocher de lui avec le gros de votre armée. Luxembourg me paraît un point de la plus grande importance qu'il ne faut point négliger de mettre dans le meilleur état possible et je suis bien sûr que Votre Excellence a pensé à tout cela. Je désirerais infiniment voir réponse à cette lettre, sans perte de tems.”⁴

All in all, the prince's approach couldn't get the approbation of neither the British, nor Louis XVIII.

For instance, on the 22nd of March, Sir Ch.Stuart wrote from Den Haag to the prince, as a reaction on his letter of the 18th:

[...] “making known the arrangements which your Royal Highness had deemed expedient to enable the combined army to take the field, in case the progress of public affairs in France should menace the safety of the Low Countries. [...] I cannot better explain to your Royal Highness the opinions of His Majesty's government respecting any movement into France on the part of the allied and British troops, than by reference to the instructions transmitted from Lord Castlereagh to the duke of Wellington and lord FitzRoy Somerset, which express the hope that His Most Christian Majesty will feel the importance of not prematurely seeking the aid of foreign troops, especially if the magnitude of the force is not such as unconnectedly to render effectual service.”⁵

This letter may have reached the prince on the 24th of March.

It may have been the same for instructions sent out by earl Bathurst from London on the 21st of March which read: “Since I had the honour of addressing Your Royal Highness upon the 15th and 16th instant, the circumstances of France have been such as to confirm the expediency of making every exertion to place the Netherlands in a good state of defence and every preparation to meet the attack which may be expected in case Bonaparte should re-acquire the dominion of Rome. I am therefore to convey to Your Royal Highness the command of the Prince Regent that You should take every measure of precaution and preparation and that You

should concert with the commander in chief of the Prussian forces upon the Rhine a system of defensive measures placing your forces in such manner as may appear, but calculated to cover the Low Countries and to repel any irruption from the side of France: but I am at the same time to desire that Your Royal Highness will not under any circumstances invade the French position, or engage in offensive measures without having received further instructions and authority from His Majesty's Government.”⁶

And on the 22nd of March, Louis XVIII wrote him from Lille:

“Je suis bien sensible aux sentiments que vous m'exprimez et aux offres que vous voulez bien me faire. J'avais déjà chargé le comte de Blacas [⁷] de vous en remercier de ma part, et je suis très aise de vous répéter que c'est avec confiance et sécurité que je vois les armées de mes alliés sur les frontières de mes états, que j'espère qu'elles n'entreront point en France, et que je compte d'ailleurs sur mes traités avec eux, et sur les nouveaux engagements qu'ils viennent de prendre, pour assurer la tranquillité de l'Europe et l'indépendance de la France.”

⁸ This letter probably reached the prince the day after, or possibly the same day.

On the 23rd of March, sir Hudson Lowe, from his position, asked Von Kleist through Von Müffling for his assistance in the defence of the Netherlands as well: “Je finis ma lettre après avoir lu la nouvelle de l'arrivée

“Vous avez reçu la lettre que je vous ai adressée hier au soir, avec celle du général Dörnberg, et vous aurez naturellement remarqué sa conclusion; enfin la crise approche, beaucoup plus vite qu'on aurait pu imaginer et si Bonaparte trouve le moyen d'arranger bien ses affaires à Paris, et s'il use de la même vitesse pour faire marcher ses troupes vers les frontières que pour aller à Paris, il n'y a rien à empêcher que les 50.000 hommes dont parle Dörnberg ne pourront être dans le voisinage de Lille et Valenciennes en trois jours. Je parle des possibilités, et pas des choses probables, mais vu ce qu'il a déjà fait, c'est dans la première hypothèse qu'on doit toujours raisonner. Je vous ai déjà expliqué, mon cher général, la situation de nos forteresses Mons, Tournay et Ypres, peuvent bien être dans le cas de résister journellement pour les rendre plus forts, ils manquent cependant de canons; les deux premières n'ont que d'artillerie de campagne; que faire avec eux si l'armée Française approche en force ? Lorsque nous ne pouvons y laisser des garnisons, sans tant affaiblir notre armée, que de la rendre presque inutile pour toute résistance en campagne. Si l'armée Prussienne était à portée pour agir conjointement avec la notre, on pourroit tirer avantage de ces villes, et former des camps retranchés presque inexpugnables à leurs entour, et ainsi couvrir efficacement tant la frontière de la Belgique que du Rhin. Mais je ne doit pas vous dissimuler l'apprehension qu'il y aurait de perdre tant les places, que les troupes qui sont dedans, et aussi d'être obligés de retirer avec une armée diminuée de plus de la moitié, en cas d'être obligé d'agir seuls. Il me paraît toujours cependant important de consacrer notre position actuelle aussi longtems que nous pouvons, tant pour l'effet en France que pour ce pays ci, et relativement aussi à l'avantage de fortifier les places de plus en plus, tous les jours. Nous ne la quitterons pas, à moins d'un mouvement très prononcé de la part des Français, mais la décision de conserver les villes, et d'y laisser des garnisons dedans, pour dépendre beaucoup des mouvements de l'armée Prussienne; et de la sûreté que nous aurons de l'avoir pour appui de leur défense. Voilà, mon cher général, ce que me paraît être le véritable état des choses. Vous ferez vos calculs, et je suis persuadé que le résultat sera toujours celui du meilleur jugement sur l'affaire – si on ne peut pas l'unir entièrement, [the occupation of] Namur ou une situation quelconque qui nous met dans la possibilité de nous unir dans une ou deux marches paroît à mes faibles [...] un des meilleurs plans à suivre pour le bien être général. Tout ceci est soumis à vos réflexions. Le roi est à Lille. Voilà un motif de plus pour coopérer sur ce point plutôt qu'aucune autre.”⁹

On a confidential base, sir Hudson Lowe showed his uneasiness towards lord Bunbury about the prince's attitude, of putting the country in a state of defence without taking into account in what Lowe considered to be the most important element herein, i.e. the cooperation with the Prussians. Lowe wrote that day:

“I have just received your private letter of the 21st and I have reason to think the prince has been influenced by what you mention Lord Bathurst to have written to him for he has been more frank in his communication and seemed to ... upon the state of our affairs, but he is so wild and unsettled and seems so little to have considered the necessity of previous arrangements or of any arrangement at all, that it is impossible to look at our present situation without uneasiness; His Royal Highness believes of the possibility of a very early offensive operation on the part of the enemy and in this view he at once determines that Ypres shall be defended, this is in an imperfect state and its supplied with guns but in order to throw in a sufficient supply of provisions, he proposes drawing from the town of Antwerp. Without being at all acquainted with the particulars of the post of Menin; he orders that port shall be defended to the last and then that the battalion stationed there shall fall back upon Courtray; in short with a force which would ... enable them to evacuate the country without ... he insists upon the defence of every point. I think the stability of this country being effectively defended this country will be by the cordial cooperation of the Prussians, H.R.H. should concert his plan of operation with the commander of that army and act in concert with them, but if we are to have war, the sooner the duke of Wellington shall be placed at the head of this army the better. The prince has desired me to proceed to Ath .. to instruct our troops are assembling and he .. of going there himself tomorrow or Sunday.”¹⁰

While sir Hudson Lowe asked Von Kleist for his support on his behalf, the prince himself was optimistic about his situation. In fact on the 24th of March he wrote to earl Bathurst:

“I have moved a considerable body of troops upon Tournay, which I mean to defend as an intrenched camp, should Buonaparte move down upon me on that point. His force, by all accounts, cannot be considerable; and I think myself strong enough to stop him until Kleist’s corps joins me.” And in a post scriptum: “I cannot say more for want of time. Hurry out everything; no time must be lost. I go to Tournay tomorrow.”¹¹

The same day, captain Von Scharnhorst also wrote to Von Müffling: “[...] After the opinion of general Maison, Bonaparte has not yet troops enough to force the English combined army to fall back. His Royal Highness will therefore maintain the ground near Ath as long as possible, to give time to the Prussian army to come up; His Royal Highness is very much pleased with the march along the Meuse, and with the occupation of Namur and wishes the Prussian army will operate in such a manner as will best forward their and the common cause.”¹²

Meanwhile, the duke of Wellington was informed by sir Ch.Stuart from The Hague on the 25th of March about reinforcements entering the Netherlands:

“His Royal Highness the duke of Cambridge writes me that 10.000 of His Majesty’s Hanoverian troops will be assembled between the Ems and the Weser before the end of next week.

Twenty-five thousand Dutch are already on March towards Maestricht and Venloo, and the British army under the command of the prince of Orange are concentrated in the vicinity of Ath. Ostend is provisioned for four months and the British magazines are placed at Antwerp. The Landwehr of this country will be embodied immediately.”¹³

The same day, sir Ch.Stuart (then still in The Hague), expressed his deep concern about the prince’s ideas to Wellington in another letter, which read:

“I have since seen a letter from the Hereditary Prince, dated the 24th, stating that Louis XVIII had, on the preceding day, quitted Lisle for Courtray, and that His Majesty is now at Bruges.

His Royal Highness adds that Buonaparte has already reached Arras at the head of 14.000 men. Under these circumstances the prince of Orange was making arrangements with general Kleist to move forward. His letter does not, however, clearly explain whether it is his intention to cross the French frontier. I should conceive the instructions which he received from lord Bathurst, dated the 21st, and which positively direct him not to commit any act of hostility against France without an express order from His Majesty’s government, would have been received at that time, and would induce him not to pass beyond the limit of the Low Countries.”¹⁴

Both letters may have reached Vienna on the first days of April, when Wellington had left that city; it is unclear whether and when he got them.

For that reason he wrote the prince the same day (25th of March):

“[...] In despatches, dated the 21st, lord Bathurst and lord Castlereagh distinctly observe that although they consider it highly expedient every measure of precaution which can contribute to the security and protection of the frontier should be adopted without delay, yet it is particularly desirable that I should, under no circumstances, recommend an actual invasion of the French territory or a recourse to hostilities until I receive further instructions from His Majesty’s government. Although I consider your Royal Highness’s intention of moving forward in cooperation with the Prussian army under general Kleist to be the result of a determination to occupy the positions within the Belgic frontier which military experience may point out to be advisable, the serious consequences of any offensive measure before the above-mentioned instructions of His Majesty’s government shall be known impose upon me the duty of preventing any possible misconception by addressing the present communication to your Royal Highness.”¹⁵

It was at the very same day, the 25th of March, that sir Charles Stuart moved from The Hague to Brussels.¹⁶

Meanwhile, as far as the army of the Netherlands was concerned, orders dated 25th of March arranged the composition and command of this army in three divisions, an Indian brigade and three brigades of cavalry.

At the same time these units were ordered to the following cantonments:

1st division (under general-major Stedman): in the cantons of Huy, Perwez le Marchez, Héron, Avène; headquarters at Namur

2nd division (under colonel Van Bijlandt): cantons of Looz, Tongeren, Warem, Glans, Hologne and Bodognée; headquarters at Tongeren

3rd division (under general-major Chassé): cantons of Tirlémont, Jodoigne, Glabek, Leau, Landen; headquarters at Louvain

Indian brigade (under general-major Anthing): cantons of Hasselt, St.Trond, Sterk, Beringen; headquarters at Hasselt.

1st brigade of cavalry: cantons of Bilsen, Mechelen, Maaseyck, Maastricht; headquarters at Bilsen

2nd brigade of cavalry: canton of Diest; headquarters at Diest

3rd brigade of cavalry: cantons of Aerschot, Aecht; headquarters at Aerschot. ¹⁷

All units were supposed to be in their new cantonments during the first week of April. ¹⁸

The situation of general Von Kleist.

To comply with his promise of the 18th of March “à resserer l’armée du Bas Rhin près de Jailliers [=Jülich] , placant en même temps un corps d’armée à Liège sur la Meuse, pour bien assurer ses communications avec l’armée de la Belgique”, Von Kleist – after having decided earlier to have his 3rd corps (Von Borstell) to close up around Krefeld and to be ready - now moved it upon Aachen.

The 2nd corps (Von Zieten) was ordered to advance on the right bank of the Meuse, as far as Liège, while Von Thielmann with the Saxon contingent was ordered to March to Jülich.

On the 19th of March, Von Kleist wrote to the Prussian king:

“Die englische Armee in Belgien ist weder stark noch in besonders guter Verfassung. 22 höchst inkomplette englische Bataillone inkl. Der deutschen Legion führen einige 20 Stück schlechtes Geschütz und betragen kaum 15000 Mann der schlechtesten englischen Truppen. Das Hannoversche Korps hat eine einzige Batterie bei sich. Von den Belgiern ist kaum zu reden. Das ist miserables, zusammengelaufenes Gesindel. Die ganze Armee kann höchstens 30000 Mann mit einigen 40 Stück schlechtem Geschütz betragen, und nach den letzten Nachrichten von dem holländischen Gesandten General Fagel – vom 14.März – wonach Bonaparte in wenigen Tagen in Paris sein könnte, scheinen mir die Engländer über ihre Lage nicht ohne Besorgnis zu sein. Die belgische Armee versammelt sich am 23. März zu Ath [¹⁹]; die holländische, angeblich 20000 Mann stark, zwischen Maastricht und Hasselt. Der kommandierende General, Erbprinz von Oranien, schickte mir den Kapitän V.Scharnhorst als Kurier und hatte ihm aufgetragen, mir die Ansichten auseinanderzusetzen, welche ihn wünschen machten, dass ich mich mit der Armee ihm nähern und an die Grenze vorrücken möchte. Ich habe ihm das beiliegende abschriftliche Memoire offiziell als Antwort hierauf zurückgesandt. Hierdurch bleibt alles im ganzen in seiner Lage, bis ich Ew.Maj.nähere Verhaltensbefehle erhalte. Die Verlegung des Generals v. Zieten nach Lüttich [...] wird nach Äusserung des Kapitäns von Scharnhorst sehr zur Beruhigung der Engländer dienen, von denen nach ihren alten Grundsätzen, ihre Landarmee keinem Echech auszusetzen, sonst nicht zu sagen wär, ob sie, wenn Napoleon sich ihnen nähert, nicht gegen ihre Schisse manövrieren.

Ausser diesem offiziellen Schreiben habe ich durch ein Privat-Schreiben gezeigt, wie ich in keinem Falle ohne Übereilung den Versammlungspunkt Jülich aufgeben könnte, solange es nicht entschieden ist, ob Napoleon uns in der Gegend von Mainz angreift und dadurch die Schweiz, Italien und Deutschland in Spannung erhält, oder gleich zur Eroberung von Belgien marschiert..” ²⁰

And the day after, Von Müffling wrote to sir Hudson Lowe: “J’ai l’honneur d’annoncer à Votre Excellence que le 2me corps de l’armée Prussien, sous les ordres du lieutenant général de Ziethen entrera le 22me Mars en cantonnements aux bords de la Meuse de manière que ce corps peut se rassembler en 24 heures près de Liège, où le général de Ziethen établira son Quartier Général.

Je vous prie, Monsieur le général, de communiquer au général de Zieten tout ce qui pourrait avoir de l’intérêt pour lui à l’égard de l’invasion de Buonaparte; comme d’après les ordres du général comte Kleist de Nollendorff le général de Ziethen fera part à Votre Excellence de tout ce qui pourroit avoir de l’intérêt pour vous.” ²¹

As a result, Lowe wrote him back the day after, on the 21st:

“J’ai eu l’honneur de recevoir la lettre que Votre Excellence ma adressée en date du 20, m’annonçant la marche du 2^e corps Prussienne sous les ordres du général Ziethen vers la Meuse. J’en ai fait part à Son Altesse Royale le prince d’Orange, qui en a exprimé toute sa satisfaction, et m’a commandé de témoigner à Votre Excellence ses remerciements et de vous prier de faire connaitre la même du général comte Kleist. Je ne manquerai pas de faire part au général Ziethen tout ce qui pourroit arriver intéressant à lui de connaitre, et le prince sera toujours charmé d’avoir de ses nouvelles, lorsqu’il aura quelque choses importante à communiquer.” ²²

On the 23rd of March, after Von Kleist had got the request of the prince of the day before in the terms “rapprocher de la frontière; peut-être pouvez-vous dans tous les cas avancer le corps du général Zieten jusqu’à la hauteur de Namur et vous rapprocher de lui avec le gros de votre armée”, he decided to move his forces according to the following disposition:

“Die Armee wird konzentriert und zwar:

Das königlich Preussische II.Armeekorps unter dem Generallieutenant v.Zieten: Namur und Gegend, das heisst Sambre- und Maasdepartement, und Huy mit Zubehör ²³

Das königliche preussische III.Armeekorps unter Generallieutenant v.Borstell: Lüttich und Gegend, das heisst Ourthedepartement und Niedermaas am rechten Ufer der Maas.

Das III.Deutsche Armeekorps unter Generallieutenant v.Thielemann: Aachen und Gegend Roerdepartement.

Das Bergsche Truppenkorps unter dem Generalmajor v.Jagow: Düsseldorf und Gegend.

Die Westphälischen Truppen unter Generalmajor v.Steinmetz: Wesel und Gegend.

Das königlich preussische I.Armeekorps [Pirch II] bleibt in seiner jetzigen Aufstellung.

Das Hauptquartier bleibt in Aachen.”²⁴

It was also on the 23rd that Ziethen wrote to Lowe:

“[...] Je viens de recevoir les ordres du Gl.cte.de Kleist relatives à mettre mes troupes en marche. En conséquence le 2me corps d’armée sous mes ordres sera concentrer [sic] le 27 à Namur et en conséquence je transfère mon quartier général ce jour à Huy et si mes troupes peuvent occuper Namur j’irai dans cette ville. J’attends la réponse de S.A.R. le prince d’Orange pour savoir si la ville de Namur peut être occupée par mes troupes.

J’ai donné mes ordres pour observer les routes de Givet. Je vous demande mr.le général de donner les ordres nécessaires pour que je puisse entre [sic] Huy et Liège loger des troupes sur la rive gauche de la Meuse en cas de besoin.”²⁵

Having issued this disposition, Von Kleist replied to the prince of Orange the same day:

“[...] Votre Altesse Royale peut être assuré que j’ai les meilleurs dispositions du monde et que je partage ses sentiments à l’égard d’une invasion en France qui cependant doit être calculée, pour ne pas mettre en danger de tomber partiellement dans une situation critique, qui pourrait nous nuire.

Dans la situation, où nous nous trouvons du côté du nord de la France une coopération avec les troupes francaises ne peut avoir lieu pour le moment qu’en occupant avec l’agrément de Louis XVIII, et si j’ose dire de la nation, la partie du nord, qui lui est resté fidèle, ou du moins en entrant conjointement avec les troupes francaises, des sentiments desquels il doit être sûr, dans quelques fortresses, ce qui seul peut assurer et favoriser nos opérations en France. Je crois que le Roi pourra accomplir cette condition sans laquelle il est selon moi presque impossible *pour le moment* de pénétrer en France et d’entamer une offensive. Je vais cependant d’abord assembler un corps d’armée aux environs de Namur, les autres aux environs de Liège et Juliers, où ils seront à même, selon les désirs de Votre Altesse Royale, de lui prêter les mains en couvrant en même tems son flanc gauche. Je supplie Votre Altesse de vouloir donner les ordres afin que mes troupes puissent occuper la ville de Namur, ce qui me paraît nécessaire.

Elle voudra bien faire savoir ses intentions là-dessus au général Zieten. Il faudra voir venir les choses avant de prendre des résolutions ultérieures. En cas d’une situation plus critique qui nous décèlerait les mauvaises intentions du nord de la France et d’une chance malheureuse, que la Providence veuille nous faire éviter, je crois qu’il est très urgent de veiller à la conservation d’Anvers, de Maestricht, Juliers et Luxembourg, les points les plus intéressants. J’ai fait mon possible pour mettre Luxembourg à l’abri d’un coup de main et faire résister cette place pendant un certain tems à une bloquade; mais il est impossible de ravitailler cette place de manière qu’elle puisse soutenir un siège en forme. Je me prêterai volontiers à tout ce qui dépendra de moi pour agir avec vigueur selon les circonstances etc. et je serai toujours charmé de prouver à Votre Altesse Royale le respectueux attachement avec lequel j’ai l’honneur d’être etc.”²⁶

From a personal view, Von Müffling was supporting an invasion into France and he wrote in this way to Lowe on the 22nd of March, but at the end of the very same letter (on the 23rd) he expressed Von Kleist’s point of view (cf above): “Je finis ma lettre après avoir lu la nouvelle de l’arrivée de B[onaparte] à Paris que S.A.R. a donné au général Kleist.

Vous verrez, mon cher général, que le comte Kleist se prête à tout ce qui peut être utile à la cause commune, mais je dois vous prier, de ne pas faire des mouvements offensifs en France, dans lesquelles vous comptez sur nos forces, sans concerter les mesures avec le général comte Kleist, parce que il se pourroit bien que des mesures nous servirent que écrites de Vienne, qui empêchaient le général Comte Kleist de faire une mouvement générale en Belgique.”²⁷

And to Von Boyen he wrote on the 23rd as well:

“In dieser Nacht habe ich anliegendes Schreiben des Prinzen von Oranien [of the 22nd] erhalten, wonach nicht zu zweifeln, dass N. in Paris ist, wengleich dieses Ereignis mir noch nicht offiziell bekannt gemacht worden ist; ich erwarte diese jede Minute und werde dieses Schreiben noch einige Stunden aufhalten, um Ihnen die bestimmte und sichere Nachricht davon geben zu können.

Die Sache wäre nun entschieden, nämlich – Krieg.

Aus meiner Antwort an den Prinzen von Oranien werden Sie, mein verehrter Freund, ersehen, wie ich die Sache einsehe und was vorläufig geschehen ist. Eine offensive Bewegung nach Frankreich hinein, unter den jetzigen Umständen, bei dem Raubgeist, den diese verächtliche Nation beseelt, ohne sich einer oder mehrerer der Festungen, bei welchen man durchgehen muss, versichert zu halten, scheint mir sehr gewagt zu sein. Indessen

muss man sich so stellen, um von allen zufällig Vorfalldem schnell Nutzen zu ziehen, und da ist die Stellung, die wir nehmen, glaube ich, zweckmässig, und meine Antwort der Lage der Sache angemessen, ich hoffe Sie werden mit mir darüber einverstanden sein.

Ich werde nunmehr den Konjunkturen gemäss nach meiner besten Überzeugung handeln. Es ist nicht möglich, irgend Befehle einzuholen, wenn ich nicht bestimmte erhalte. Die Infanterieregimenter und die 10 Garnisonbataillone, wovon mir Thiele schrieb, dürften nun nicht hinreichend sein – ich lebe der Hoffnung, dass nun mehr nachkommen wird. Der Himmel wolle unsere Waffen segnen, und dieser verruchten Nation den Garaus machen !

In diesem Augenblick erhalte ich noch anliegendes Schreiben des General Constant, der in Maastricht kommandiert. Die Wahrheit der Nachricht kann also wohl keinem Zweifel mehr unterworfen sein, und ich lasse also zu Ihrer Kenntnis der Sache die Estafette gehen.

Meine Lage ist eben nicht zu beneiden; indessen werde ich thun was ich kann und der Vorsehung vertrauen. Sie kann einen solchen Bösewicht denn doch unmöglich wieder emporkommen lassen; dies kann ich nicht glauben.”

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On the 24th of March, both Von Müffling and Von Kleist had a meeting to discuss the situation and this what Von Müffling refers to when he wrote to Lowe that day:

“J’ai passé une demi heure avec le général Comte Kleist pour réfléchir mûrement sur notre situation, car je regarde à présent votre armée et le notre comme une armée, ce que Vous me permettrez afin de pouvoir bien représenter ce que nous pensons.

Le roi de France s’est retiré à Lille. Je n’approuve pas cette mesure parce qu’elle réunit au Nord de la France tout ce que Napoleon a à craindre, c.a.d.

1. Le pouvoir Royal et

2. Les forces alliés.

Ainsi il est probable que Napoleon dirige ses forces vers Lille, et les Pays Bas, parce que son autorité seroit tout de suite rétabli en France s’il pourvoit dire “j’ai reconqueri la Belgique”. Supposons donc, qu’il se dirige sur Bruxelles [sic] ou tout de suite, ou entre ici et le 15 Avril.

Alors l’armée de la Belgique ne doit point attendre l’attaque, mais elle doit se replier de manière qu’elle ne peut pas être attaquée et entamée, laissant toujours sa cavallerie [sic] à la face de l’ennemi. Les places de Tournay et de Mons doivent être évacuées.

L’infanterie belge mêlée avec des anglais ou hollandais, pourront être employée pour faire les garnisons d’Anvers, Nieuport et Ostende.

Le point de Votre retraite seroit Tirlemont d’ou partent les routes à Namur et à Liège.

Ce seroit de même le point de réunion de notre armée avec la Votre. Je suis persuadé que Napoleon ne s’attend pas de nous voir arriver avec force pour Vous soutenir; d’autant plus si Vous faites croire à Vos officiers que la retraite [sic] se fait, parceque l’armée prussienne fait une Marche vers Mayence. Cette nouvelle se repandroit bientôt à Bruxelles [sic] et donneroit encore plus d’[...] à Bonaparte. Enfin, cher général, s’il réussit que B.vous suit sur Tirlemont nous donneront une bataille offensive, dans laquelle nous pouvons faire jouer 200 pièces de canons et agir avec 10/m de cavallerie [sic].

Pour bien surprendre notre ennemi, il est nécessaire de garder cette disposition comme le plus grand secret.

S’il est nécessaire de donner cette bataille le 1 Avril nous y serons avec 40/m hommes. Le 5 Avril nous pouvons y être avec plus de 50/m h. et si N.tarderoit jusqu’en 15 Avril, nous y serions avec 60/m h.

Comme il ne faut jamais négliger les précautions, nous aurions pendant la bataille une brigade à Namur, pour nous assurer les trois ponts de Namur, Liège et Huy. Comme je suppose que l’armée de la Belgique prendrait la droite, elle disposerait des passages de Maastricht [sic] et de Venloo.

Si nous avons le malheur d’être battu, nos pertes seroient redressé quelque jours après par les renforts qui nous arrivent.

Si nous avons le bonheur de battre B., nous aurions l’honneur d’avoir sauvé l’Europe; car avec cette cavallerie nombreuse que nous avons, je ne crois pas qu’il sauveroit 10/m h. à Paris. Demain, cher général, le général de Röder part pour Brussel et restera chez vous pendant la crise. C’est un homme qui est informé de notre situation, et des intentions du général comte Kleist. Je vous prie de l’honorer de Votre confiance.

Si Napoleon n’avance pas, il faut rester dans la position où nous sommes jusqu’au que nous aurons des ordres de Vienne, qui doivent arriver incessamment. Cette position est bonne. Continuez toujours Vos travaux à Mons pp. Si B. nous laisse le temps, ces places nous seront très utile.”²⁹

As Von Müffling stated , it was within the context of cooperation and communication with the prince that Von Kleist sent general major Von Röder to Brussels to act as a liaison between both armies. For that reason, Kleist wrote to Lowe on the 24th:

“Bien des graces de l’envoi de votre lettre par Gerlach. Il serait bien à désiré que le roi de France puisse parvenir à nous [...] à Lille et Valenciennes, [...] serait que conjointement avec les Français, cela nous donnerait l’avantage

de [...] en avant et de [...] une petite [...] du village. Dieu veuille qu'il joue le rôle de valet de cette pièce, qui peut être vous est [...].

Vous pouvez [...] sûr d[...] opération et sûr ce que Müffling vient de vous écrite [sic] Je ne suis pas d'avis de [...] je suis pour l'exacte vérité; aussi vous pouvez être persuadé que je n'[...] rien que pourrait [...] un faux calcul.

J'ai fait du [...] possible, pour me renforcer; il y a plusieurs troupes en marche, mais ils ne peuvent arriver de si tôt vu la grande distance de Weiss au Rhin. Mais vous pouvez être persuadé qu'en y met toute la diligence possible. Il m'a paru qu'il serait bien que dans les circonstances présentes un officier des corps d'armées que je commande se [...] à Votre Quartier Général; cela abrège les affaires puisque vous pourriez toujours recevoir dans le moment [?] les renseignements désirés. Je viens de choisir le général major de Röder pour se rendre près de Son Altesse Royale, et je vous supplie, mon chère général, de le vouloir honorer de vos bontés et lui porte [?] confiance.”³⁰

Von Röder got in Brussels during the night of the 25th of March.³¹

It was on the 25th as well that Von Kleist sent his disposition of the 23rd to the Prussian king with the following covering report:

“In Verfolge meines allerunterthänigsten Berichts vom 19.März, zeige ich Euer Majestät an, dass die Nachricht von Napoleons am 20. in Paris erfolgtem Einzuge mich veranlasst hat, die allerunterthänigst abschriftlich angeschlossene Disposition zu geben.

Ich habe mit ihr zugleich die Generale v. Steinmetz und v. Jagow, nebst den respektiven Gouvernements, in welchen sie kommandieren, aufgefordert, die Truppen in marschfertigen Stand zu setzen, Beurlaubten einzurufen usw. Die Westphälische Landwehr ist nicht mobil, indes hoffe ich, dass Eurer Majestät Befehle noch vor erfolgter Versammlung eingesehen werden.

Die Disposition ist veranlasst durch die Aufforderung des kommandierenden Generals der Armee von Belgien, Erbprinzen von Oranien, und dadurch, dass Napoleons Ankunft mit einem Heer in Paris für die Niederlande drohender ist als für den Oberrhein. Da überdies im Elzas und Lothringen die französische Armee schwach und die trikolor Kokarde noch nicht aufgesteckt sind.

Sollte Napoleon nach einigen Ruhetagen die Armee, welche nach allen Nachrichten jetzt in der Gegend von Paris auf 50.000 Mann anzunehmen ist, gegen Lille und die nördlichen Festungen führen, und dann die Engländer in Belgien schnell angreifen, so glaube ich, in Folge der Deklaration [of the 13th of March] Euer Majestät Allerhöchstem Interesse gemäs zu handeln, wenn ich die Belgische Armee in den Ebenen von Tirlmont aufnehme, und wir Napoleon vereint zu einer Schlacht zwingen, in welcher die Übermacht und alle Vortheile wahrscheinlich auf unserer Seite sein würden.

Ich habe diese meine Intention vorläufig dem Prinzen bekannt gemacht und heute den Generalmajor Von Röder mit dem Auftrag nach Brüssel gesendet, sich von der Lage der Belgischen Armee selbst zu überzeugen und alles vorläufig auf diesen Fall zu verabreden.

Das Geheimnis muss diesen Plan bedecken, damit Napoleon glaubt, es mit der belgischen Armee allein zu tun zu haben, und hofft nach seinem alten System uns einzeln zu schlagen.

Sollten wir das Unglück haben, geschlagen zu werden, so würde ein gut gesicherter Rückzug über die Maas den Folgen der Schlacht Grenzen setzen, und die Armee vom Niederrhein durch die ankommenden Verstärkungen die Offensive bald wieder ergreifen können.

Sollte Napoleon geschlagen werden, so könnte dies seinen Thron sogleich wieder umstürzen, da 12.000 Mann gute Kavallerie uns die Mittel geben würde, ihm die Folgen der Schlacht verderblich zu machen.

Der Premierleutnant v.Gerlach, Adjutant des Generalmajors v.Müffling, den ich nach Paris gesendet hatte, ist gestern abend von daher zurückgekommen, nachdem er dort Napoleons Einzug und die Ereignisse des 21.März abgewartet.

[...] Die dreimonatlichen Approvisionnements von Luxemburg und Jülich werden mit möglichster Eile betrieben, ersteres wird den 1., letzteres den 10.April vollendet sein. Die Zeit und mangel an Geld haben jedoch nicht erlaubt, die Festungen so mit Kriegsbedürfnissen zu versehen, dass sie eine förmliche Belagerung aushalten könne, sondern es ist nur die Vertheidigung gegen einen gewaltsamen Angriff eingerichtet.”³²

At the same time, Von Kleist saw matters as quite serious, as he issued to general Pirch II (at Koblenz) the following order on the 25th of March:

“Euer Hochwohlgeborenen haben aus der Disposition vom [23] März gesehen, dass ich Massregeln auf gewisse Fälle nehme, zu diesen gehört ein Angriff Napoleons auf Belgien. Tritt dieser ein, so ist es nötig, dass ich die unter Ihrem Befehl stehende Kavallerie mit forcierten Märschen an mich heranziehe, damit sie noch zur Schlacht komme. Euer Hochwohlgeborenen sind in diesem Fall bestimmt, mit der Infanterie der 7. Brigade und einer Batterie durch die Gebirge gerade nach Namur in sechs bis sieben Tagen zu marschieren [...]”³³

It was on the 25th of March as well that Von Müffling sent a memorandum to Von dem Knesebeck, Friedrich Wilhelm's senior aide de camp [³⁴], which contained his thoughts on what was to be done. In his idea Napoleon would have about 50.000 men available, a number which could increase to 70.000 or even 100.000

Von Müffling also expected that soon Napoleon would have regained complete power in France.

At the same time, Von Müffling saw that an allied invasion into France would not be possible before June and the choice was either to start an invasion with insufficient means or to wait with an invasion till more reinforcements and means would be available.

Von Müffling clearly expressed a preference for the first option in these words:

“wir müssen alle jetzt an Frankreichs Grenze stehende disponible Truppen als eine Avantgarde ansehen, welche das Gefecht mit ihm erhält, und ihn dergestalt ermattet, dass wenn die Reserven (d.h. die neu an den Rhein zu führenden Armeen) ankommen, sie hinreichen, um ihn zu erdrücken.

Würde dies die allgemeine Disposition, so würde zu versuchen sein, wie viel man von den vor uns liegende Festungen entweder durch die Königliche Gewalt, oder durch schnellen Angriff (sie sind sämtlich schlecht mit allem versehen) bekommen könnte, um gegen Paris zu einer Schlacht zu Marchiren. Wenn man von englischer Seite sogleich vereinigt den Krieg mit 80/m bis 90/m Mann anfangen und in vier Wochen doppelt so stark sein. Ausserdem kann ein Corps Süddeutscher die Schweiz besetzen und von da aus operieren.

Erscheint dann im Monath Juny eine grosse Armee von 200/m Mann Oestreicher, Russen, Preussen und Deutschen, so wird diese, der Reserve in einer Schlacht gleich, Napoleons Macht zertrümmern.

Bleiben wir aber jetzt an den Grenzen stehen und warten die Begebenheiten so wie die Reserve Armeen ab, so wird Napoleon seine Festungen ravitailliren und das vereinigte Frankreich gegen uns führen. Ob uns dies letzte mehr Blut, Geld, Zeit kosten, und das Ende ingewisser machen wird, scheint mir keiner Frage zu bedürfen.”³⁵

The same day, on the 25th of March, Von Müffling wrote sur Hudson Lowe about the Prussian proposal, in case Napoleon would attack the prince of Orange, to receive his army near Tirlemont and to fight a joint battle there, with superior numbers.

Von Müffling wrote:

“J’ai reçu la lettre du capitaine Scharnhorst qu’il m’a écrit d’après Vos ordres, où il me donne la nouvelle que le duc d’Orléans a apporté au général Hinuber. Je viens de recevoir Votre lettre du 24, d’après laquelle Napoleon doit avoir couché à Arras le 23. [36] Cela se peut bien, car il est de la plus grande importance pour Napoleon d’être maître de Lille, et probablement il n’a besoin que de se montrer pour faire changer la garrison. Mais comme un de nos officiers a vu le 22 Napoleon à 5 ½ heures du soir, faisant passer la revue au chateau de Tuilleries d’un corps de 15 / m hommes, et ayant rencontré des soldats en Marche pour Paris, et non sur les frontières il est impossible que N. vous attaquez avec des forces suffisantes avant le 28^e ou le 29^e Mars. S’il arrive le 30 ou le 31 à Brusselles [sic], c’est au plus tôt le 1 Avril que notre réunion est nécessaire. Voilà, mon cher général, comme j’ai calculé, et si vous envoyez nous avertir au momens [sic] ou on vous porte la nouvelles que l’ennemi attaque, nous avons le temps d’arriver au rendez vous.

J’espère, cher général, que vous serez content des propositions que le général Röder vous fait. Que le prince ne s’inquiète pas de la perte de Bruxelles, la bataille décidera du sort de la Belgique et si nous la gagnons ce sera la perte de quelques vivres.

Si le temps était plus avancé et les champs plus sec on pourroit se battre sur les points que vous avez indiquées; mais le point que je vous ai indiqué nous donne plus d’avantage.

1. à cause de la direction des chaussées
2. si nous avons le bonheur de battre l’ennemi
3. par rapport à sa distance de la Meuse
4. le terrain se prête parfaitement à nos troupes et à nos forces. Par exemple l’armée Belge pourroit prendre position à Halle entre Tirlemont et St.Tron, ayant son avant garde près de Gutsenhoven [=Goetsenhoven] et Orsmael [=Orsmaal]. L’armée prussienne seroit caché par les hauteurs de Neerlanden et Rumsdorff [=Rumsdorp]. Si l’ennemi ne croyoit avoir à faire qu’aux anglais et attaquait l’avantgarde; un corps de cavallerie [sic] de 6 à 8/m chevaux avec 50 pièces tourneroit la droite de l’ennemi en Marchant par Neerwinden, Laer [=Laar] et Elissem [=Eliksem], l’armée prussienne sur Wanghe [=Wange] et Overhespen, et l’enveloppement de l’aile droite ennemie seroit le signal d’attaque pour vous par Gutsenhoven et Orsmael.

Je dois vous observer, cher général, que le terrain se prête à des dispositions pareilles plus en avant et plus en arrière, partout entre Tirlemont et St.Tron.

Je n’ai pas compté sur les hollandois, parce que je ne crois pas qu’ils arriverons assez tôt, et je crains qu’ils auront trop peur d’un engagement général ou par suite des événements ils pourroient être coupés de leur forteresses. Mais si les forteresses sont pourvus de garnisons, je verrai avec plaisir qu’ils se joignent à vous, parce que le nombre de troupes doit au fond toujours décider dans les batailles si on sait l’art de les développer.

Nous attendons toujours le courier de Vienne qui n’arrive jamais.

Les nouvelles du 23 mars de Metz disent qu’un courier est arrivé avec la cocarde tricolore de Paris; que les soldats se sont rassemblés autour de lui et on crié “Vive l’empereur” mais que le commandant ne s’était pas déclaré au départ de notre messenger. C’était le même chose à Thionville, mais on ne peut pas douter que le militaire prendra le parti de Napoleon de ce côté de la France comme partout.”

Apparently, the despatch of the letter was delayed until the next day, as below it, and dated 26th of March (noon), Von Kleist wrote:

“Je suis tout à fait de l’avis de Müffling. Il ne faut pas à cause de la perte momentanée de Bruxelles nous engager dans un terrain désavantageux et aussi [?] risque de ne pas nous joindre à tems. J’espère qu’après une même reflexion Vous serez de nôtre avis et qu’en agir en conséquence.”³⁷

Meanwhile, higher up on the Rhine, other forces were on the alert too. As he took a possible French offensive into account, it was king Wrede who took his headquarters at Worms and from there he instructed his generals to concentrate their Bavarian forces further. These were located on the left bank of the Rhine, between the river Moselle and Sarre. In the event of a French attack they had to fall back through Kaiserslautern to Germersheim on the right bank of the Rhine, so as to collect between Mannheim and Speier.

South of the river Moselle were also Austrian forces which were led by general Geramb and which were meant to protect Mainz. The commander of Mainz, colonel Krauseneck, warned Geramb not have himself cut off from Mainz. In case the enemy would attack, Geramb was supposed to concentrate his forces between Simmern, Kirchberg and Kirn, pass the Nahe near Kreuznach and Bingen and to take up a position so as to be able to reinforce the fortress of Mainz.³⁸

The situation of Louis XVIII

On March the 23rd Louis XVIII passed the border at Lille; from there he went to Ostend, where he arrived on the 27th of March.³⁹ It was here that he would have learned about the departure of his brother, the count of Artois and his cousin, the duke of Berry, from Paris to Ghent. They were accompanied by the Royal Household and 300 gardes du corps, led by marshal Marmont. The result was that the former king joined them there on the 31st of March.⁴⁰

While the duc d’Orléans left for England, many accompanied Louis XVIII in exile. Among them were the duke of Berry, the loyal marshals, the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of war, Clarke, the duke of Feltre, Sir Charles Stewart, general Fagel, the Russian plenipotentiary Pozzo di Borgo and Chateaubriand.⁴¹

The royal troops, led by the duke of Berry, were in cantonments in Ghent and Termonde.

Observations.

As the threat of a French invasion of the Netherlands increased, the prince of Orange carefully asked Von Kleist to draw towards his forces, by establishing at least one corps as far as Namur so as to link up with him, and to post his main forces in rear of this corps.

At the same time, however, the prince also still saw the Prussians as having a role in a possible invasion into France.

Sir Hudson Lowe went even further in his concept of the defence of the Netherlands as he saw Prussian aid as a condition for this defence as such. For him, Prussian aid was necessary for the prince to be able to garrison the towns in Belgium and which were vital for the possession of the country. What counted for him was an *actual entire union* of both armies and not a situation in which both armies would be *a portée* of each other.

As Lowe also saw this would not be possible, his compromise was to have at least Namur occupied by the Prussians and to have them one or two Marches away from the prince’s army. Additionally, he also saw the political motive: Louis XVIII at Lille.

At that moment the prince was optimistic of being able to resist Napoleon in the area around Tournay, until Von Kleist would join in to assist. He estimated the French not to be too strong, but apparently felt he needed the Prussians to destroy them.

It must have been from his strong optimism to withstand Napoleon, coupled with a similar feeling about the timely arrival of the Prussians that he saw his position as a most proper one to fight the French.

There is a striking contradiction in the prince’s statements about his own strength. Towards lord Bathurst he made it clear that the army was insufficiently equipped and not strong enough in numbers to take the field, while towards Von Kleist and lord Bathurst he believed he was strong enough for either an invasion into France or to stop Napoleon on Belgian soil until Von Kleist would join him.

It may very well have been that he didn’t want to give Von Kleist an impression of his own weakness, even though Von Kleist had his own ideas about the quality of the prince’s army. On the other hand, it is Von Kleist as well who showed two faces about his situation. While he wrote on the 23rd of March to the prince that he had “les meilleurs dispositions du monde”, it was on the very same day that he complained towards Von Boyen about the lack of clear instructions what he was supposed to do and about his weakness, and, resulting, about his

position – it is almost as if he couldn't cope with the situation he was in, but at the same time he clearly saw and believed in what was the general goal: to destroy Napoleon's power altogether.

On the 23rd of March, in all his uncertainty about his situation due to a lack of instructions (which he asked for on the 19th), Von Kleist yet complied to the second request of the prince: to place one corps as far as Namur and to place the majority of his forces in rear of it, thereby leaving his former assembly-point, Jülich.

What caused Von Kleist to do so, apart from the prince's request, was the news of the arrival of Napoleon at Paris. With Napoleon in Paris, Von Kleist felt he was now no longer a real threat for the Upper-Rhine (Mainz) and beyond, but to the Low Countries.

Until that time, he must have had the instruction not to leave his operational base – Jülich - as long as there would be a French threat towards the Upper-Rhine. Von Kleist knew he was exceeding his instructions, as on the 23rd of March he expressed his hope that Von Boyen would approve of his decision.

This new position of the Prussian forces along the river Meuse was regarded by Von Kleist as one linked to those of the prince and as a cover of his left flank, but at the same time Von Kleist saw it as a flexible one, to be used according to circumstances “um von allen zufällig Vorfalldem schnell Nutzen zu ziehen.” Whatever vague this description is, it probably hints to possible movements towards the Upper Rhine after all.

At the same time, the increase of the strength of his forces also allowed Von Kleist to move his forces further west.⁴²

By having a potential threat towards the Low Countries, and no longer towards the Upper-Rhine, and as they had taken up a new position further south-west (after the 23rd of March), the Prussians now came up with a new strategic defensive concept on the 24th of March.

In case Napoleon would fall upon the prince in the area around Tournay-Ath-Mons in force, they believed they would be able to receive his army in the position of Neerwinden, near Tirlemont.⁴³

In that case it was presumed the prince would not fight in his position near Ath, but that he would fall back in front of the enemy towards Tirlemont.

The idea was to fight a combined and offensive battle near Tirlemont. In this battle the element of surprise was vital. This surprise would be the presence of the Prussian army, of which the impression would have to be that it was actually retiring towards Mainz, thereby necessitating the prince to fall back upon Tirlemont, all this to mislead Napoleon. For that reason the concept had to be kept secret.

The idea was that after the forces of the prince would have received the enemy in their position in front of St.Trond first, the Prussian forces would then turn his right flank. In the general idea, the Prussians did not take into account that the army of the Netherlands would play a role, as it was thought “qu'ils arriveront assez tôt, et [...] qu'ils auront trop peur d'un engagement général ou par suite des événements ils pourroient être coupés de leur forteresses.”

However, it should not be forgotten that this army was just dropping in in the region between Hasselt and Maastricht and that it was at this time not sufficiently assembled and equipped yet to take the field.

In case the battle would go wrong there would still be a way out over the Meuse, where the army would be received and supported by the reinforcements on the other side of this river and so to be able to resume hostilities. This was the more possible as there were good roads from Tirlemont leading to Namur and Liège. To make this retreat possible, Prussian units would be left at Namur and along the Meuse to secure the bridges.

A battle in a position near Tirlemont was not a new concept, as the position had proven itself before.

In March 1793 an Austrian army under prince Josias of Coburg beat a French army led by general Dumouriez in the battle of Neerwinden (about 7,5 kilometers from Tirlemont). The Austrians advancing from Maastricht in the direction of Brussels, encountered the French army which was assembling at Tirlemont on the 15th of March. Coburg took up a position between Neerwinden and Neerlanden, but on the 18th of March, after a little preliminary fighting, he drew back and re-arranged his army on a more extended front between Racourt and Dormael, thereby parrying the enveloping movement begun by the French from Tirlemont.

By this manoeuvre the French were compelled to fight on parallel fronts after all and in the open ground the superiority of the Austrian forces prevailed.⁴⁴

In the Tirlemont proposal, at the same time, Von Kleist saw the huge importance of Antwerp, Maastricht, Jülich and Luxemburg, as most important places for supplies and the concentration of forces, while at the same time they would allow to link up to communications to the north and north-east so in this sense it included the possibilities of opening other operation-lines if this would prove necessary.

The concept of the Tirlemont proposal came up the moment the French threat to the Low Countries, instead of the one towards the Upper Rhine, increased. It may, however, very well be that the Prussians had it in mind before.

In fact, it was the Prussian reply to the prince and Lowe's proposals about the role of the Prussian forces in the defence of the Low Countries.

In the negotiations about the best way to defend the Low Countries, there was a double line of communication: a request from the prince and Lowe towards Von Kleist to move towards the Meuse and the border, and as a result the mission of Von Röder and the documents as produced by Von Müffling, on the 25th of March, to explain the Prussian strategic concept.

Meanwhile, the British did their utmost to suppress the offensive ideas of the prince of Orange as they felt they would do more harm than good.

It was for instance on the 21st of March that sir Charles Stuart referred to instructions transitted by lord Castlereagh to Wellington and lord FitzRoy Somerset, which he does not actually describes, but of which the general idea was that it was hoped that Louis XVIII would not seek for the aid of foreign troops, especially if these were no strong enough – and this is what Stuart implied to the prince.

Stuart put the situation in a broader (political) context, and at the same time made it clear that the prince's force was by far not strong enough to move into France. By the time the prince got this note it must have been the 23rd or 24th of March.

What also counted for the British in order to stop the prince to undertake an invasion to support Louis XVIII was, apart from the insufficient strength of his forces, the prior agreement of Louis XVIII to do so.

From London, earl Bathurst urged the prince of Orange on the 21st “not to commit any act of hostility against France without an express order from His Majesty's [=Louis] government” – this warning reached the prince possibly on the 24th or 25th of March.

As for Louis himself, meanwhile at Lille, he hoped the allied armies would not have to move into France, and if they had to, that they would do so on the basis of international agreements, thereby restoring the tranquility in and the independence of France.

Wellington, from his side, was not that explicit on the consequences of an invasion. He too warned the prince, but this warning may only have reached him on the 29th or 30th of March.

The concern of an invasion as expressed by Stuart on the 25th of March may have reached Wellington, but where is unknown as by the time the letter must have reached Vienna (possibly on the 2nd or 3rd of April), the duke had left for Brussels.

All these efforts were succesful to prevent the prince from working out this idea further and it bled to death as the arrival of Wellington at Brussels was drawing near.

Around the same time, on the Prussian side it was Von Müffling who made a plea for a swift invasion of France as well.⁴⁵

He regarded the armies at the frontiers of France to be used as a vanguard to fix and wear down Napoleon, while the reserve armies, coming up meanwhile from Austria, Russia, Germany and Prussia towards the Rhine would crush him

A diversion, meanwhile, could be effectuated from Switzerland while the armies in front would attempt to take fortresses on the frontiers of France in order to consolidate their position.

But it was a plan which Von Kleist opposed to. In his view, the plan was bold as the prince of Orange wasn't ready, as the Prussians weren't. Apart from that, an invasion would also bring the French together. He saw much more success in the concept of a combined battle (Tirlemont).

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¹ Colonel sir George Wood, commander of the Royal regiment of artillery.

² WSD, Vol.IX p.604

³ BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.77-80
The memorandum of sir G.Wood is enclosed.

⁴ Bas, F.de Prins Frederik etc. p1139 – from the Rijksarchief, Maastricht – the Netherlands
And in: La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.175
Here, the letter is erroneously dated on 12th March.

⁵ KHA, A40 XIII 28
Also In: WSD, Vol.IX p.631 – this one is incomplete.

⁶ BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.83 (copy)
On the 25th, Bathurst wrote to Wellington: “and which positively direct[ed] him not to commit any act of hostility against France without an express order from His Majesty’s government, [...] and would induce him not to pass beyond the limit of the Low Countries.” In: WSD, Vol.IX p.619

⁷ Count Blacas was the prime minister of France in 1814-1815 under King Louis XVIII.

⁸ WSD, Vol.IX p.620

⁹ BL, Add.ms. 80.775 and 20.192 f.190-192
English translation in: Holland Rose, J. Sir H. Lowe etc. p.520-521

¹⁰ BL, Add.ms.37.052

¹¹ WSD, Vol.IX p.607
Colborne expressed his same hopes for the situation by stating towards Bunbury on the 24th: “The allies are so much committed by their declaration that no time should be lost in sending everything you can to this country. [...] The prince moves his head quarters to Tournai tomorrow.” Yet, about the army of the Netherlands he was conceited: “The Belgian troops I know to be disaffected officers and men [...] nothing good can be expected from the soldiers who have served with Bonaparte. But perhaps a militia might be raised from the remaining who are uncorrupted.” In: BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.91-94

¹² BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.36

¹³ WSD, IX p.616-617

¹⁴ WSD, IX p.619

¹⁵ KHA, A40 XIII 28
WSD, IX p.632

¹⁶ Cf. Sir Ch.Bathurst to viscount Castlereagh, 24th of March and to Wellington, 25th of March. In: WSD, Vol.IX p.619-620

¹⁷ Orders in: Bas, F.de Prins Frederik etc. Vol.III p.1134-1138
All cavalry units reached these positions mid-April. Cf. Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.195

¹⁸ On the 28rd of March, Von Brockhausen, the Prussian representative at The Hague, reported to the Prussian king about the movements of the Dutch mobile army since the 14th of March towards Maastricht where it was expected to arrive on the 30th and 31st of March. In: Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VII p.316

¹⁹ What he actually means is the British-Hanoverian force. Also see below in some other cases where Von Kleist uses the same name.

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- ²⁰ Lettow Vorbeck, O. von Napoleon's Untergang p.134-135
Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.4
Unfortunately, the memorandum referred to, as well as the letter Von Kleist must have written privately to the prince, are both lacking.
- ²¹ BL, Add.ms.20.192 f.180 and 20.114 f.28
- ²² BL, Add.ms.20.192 f.184 and 20.114
- ²³ It reached its destinations on the 24th of March.
- ²⁴ Pflugk Harttung, J.von Bundestruppen p.23 (from KA.VI.D.119 II 61)
Of the 3rd corps, the 26th regiment of infantry (brigade Von Krafft) had gone towards Jülich on the 22nd of March; on the 27th it continued its March through Herzogenrath to Liège. Cf. Stuckradt, Von Geschichte etc. p.98
- ²⁵ BL, Add.ms.20.114
- ²⁶ Bas, F.de - Prins Frederik etc. p.1140 – from RA, Maastricht
Pflugk Harttung, J.von Bundestruppen p.19 (from KA.VI.D.119 II)
- ²⁷ BL, Add.ms.20.192 f.188
- ²⁸ Pflugk Harttung, J.von Bundestruppen p.21-22
- ²⁹ KHA, A40 XIII 28
- ³⁰ BL, Add.ms.20.192 f.198
- ³¹ Pflugk Harttung, J.von Bundestruppen etc. p.28
- ³² Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.23-24 (from KA VI.C.3.I.18)
- ³³ Pflugk Harttung, J.von Bundestruppen p.25
- ³⁴ Karl Friedrich von dem Knesebeck (1768-1848)
- ³⁵ Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.347-349 (from KA. VI.D.118 I p.18)
- ³⁶ This letter is unavailable.
- ³⁷ KHA, A40 XIII 28
- ³⁸ Ollech, Geschichte etc. p.7-8
- ³⁹ Cf. Sir Ch.Stuart to Wellington. In: WSD, Vol.IX p.629
- ⁴⁰ Here, he established himself in the house of the count Jean Baptiste d'Hane Steenhuyse, rue des champs 63
Cf. Mémoires du général comte Van der Meere p.35
Romberg, E. & A.Malet. Louis XVIII et les Cent-jours etc. Vol.I p.xxi
- ⁴¹ François-René, viscount de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) was a French writer, politician and diplomat.
- ⁴² Damitz, Von – Geschichte etc. p.33
- ⁴³ In his memoirs, Von Müffling doesn't mention Tirlemont as such; he only indicates a possible junction of both armies between Liège and Brussels. In: The memoirs of baron etc. p.220
- ⁴⁴ In: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911

⁴⁵ Even though Von Müffling supported the concept of the battle near Tirlemont, he wrote – behind Von Kleist's back ? - to Von Knesebeck, the adjutant of the king, about his proposal for an invasion of France.