

9th – 15th of April

The formation of Wellington's army.

It was also in this second week of April that major general Torrens saw that Wellington needed a better army, mainly because he saw Wellington as the one who would bear the brunt in the effort to overthrow Napoleon.¹

Additionally, earl Bathurst explained to Wellington on the 11th of April that the militia was not called out in England as the crown did not have the right to do so except in time of actual war or insurrection. However, he informed the duke that it would be called out as soon as the war would start, but then it would not be more as 20.000 men.²

As for Wellington himself, he felt 55.000 men of British troops and German Legion (including 15.000 cavalry) were needed to commence operations against France in May, but at the same time “[...] he was quite sensible the government would do all they could to strengthen him; and that, if he was left with only 20,000 men, he would do the best he could with them, and would not murmur. [...]”³

It was the intention to have the contingent of Saxony to form part of the duke's army. For that reason, the same day, Wellington asked the earl of Clancarty to issue formal orders to the general commanding this contingent to be incorporated in his army, together with an order from the King of Prussia to general Gneisenau to allow him to do so.⁴

It was also on the 10th of April that Wellington wrote to the duke of Brunswick: “I have learnt from Vienna that it has been determined that the troops with which your Highness will accede to the general alliance of the sovereigns of Europe, are to join the army which will act under my command.” Consequently, he asked him to put his troops immediately in march upon Antwerp.⁵

Four days later, Wellington complained to major general Torrens not only about the high number of officers appointed for his own staff, but also about those incapable for the duty. What Wellington wanted was not even more staff-officers, but men.⁶

Yet, in the midst of Wellington's discontent about the army, important formal arrangements for the same were made.

First of all, on the 11th of April, Wellington took over the command from the prince of Orange of the Anglo-Hanoverian forces in the Low Countries.⁷ Prince Frederik kept his position as commander of the field army of the Netherlands.

Secondly, a general order arranged the division of the army and the wish to amalgamate the Anglo-Hanoverian and Netherlands forces. The order reads (extract):

“G.O. Brussels, 11th April 1815

1. His Royal Highness the prince Regent having appointed Field Marshal the duke of Wellington to be commander of His Majesty's forces on the continent of Europe, all reports are in future to be made to His Grace.

49. It being desirable to amalgamate the two armies, Anglo-Hanoverian and that of the Netherlands, in order that the troops which are to act together may be accustomed to each other, and that the whole consolidated force may with facility move in one uniform manner, having one great object in view:

50. The infantry and artillery, therefore, of the allied armies will for the present be divided into two great corps; the first of which will be under the orders of His Royal Highness the prince of Orange, and the second under the command of lieutenant general Lord Hill.⁸

51. The 1st corps will be composed of the troops Anglo-Hanoverian, as follows, viz.: The 1st and 3rd divisions of infantry, with the artillery attached to them, and the following troops of the Netherlands, viz. The 2nd and 3rd divisions of the army of the Netherlands, with a battery of foot artillery, and a battery of horse artillery, and the division of cavalry of the Netherlands.

52. The 2nd corps will be composed of the troops Anglo-Hanoverian, as follows, viz.: The 2nd and 4th divisions of infantry, with the artillery attached to them, and the 2nd brigade of cavalry of the King's German Legion, and the troops of the Netherlands, as follows, viz. The Indian brigade and the 1st division, with a battery of foot artillery and a battery of horse artillery.

53. His Royal Highness prince Frederick of Orange will command the troops of the Netherlands in the 2nd corps, under the orders of lieutenant-general lord Hill.

54. The staff of the army of the Netherlands will remain attached to His Royal Highness the prince of Orange, and His Royal Highness will have the goodness to make arrangements for attaching to the 2nd corps such staff officers as may be necessary.

55. Notwithstanding this amalgamation, everything which regards the discipline of the officers and soldiers of each nation, the provisioning, the clothing, the equipping, the means of transport &c., &c., will be under the direction of the officers, civil and military, of each nation. The General commanding each *corps d'armée* will give orders for all other matters."⁹

On the 9th of April, the army of the Netherlands was in positions between Louvain and Maastricht, while having a brigade at Namur and one in Charleroi, with the headquarters of prince Frederik, who was then the commander of the mobile forces of the army of the Netherlands, at St.Trond.¹⁰

In the period from the 11th to the 14th of April, however, it was moved by prince Frederik in a south-west direction, to the area between Genappe and Mons and in the following positions: The 1st division came in cantonments between Mons and Charleroi (headquarters at Roelux, 1st brigade around Le Roelux, 2nd brigade around Goegnies), initially covered on its left flank by the cavalry-brigade of Van Merlen (around Binche, headquarters at Fontaine l'Evêque). This brigade, however, moved on the 14th of April to positions around Villers Saint Ghislain.

The one of De Ghigny was at Soignies and it was also here, in the area around Soignies and Braine le Comte that the 3rd division was located (1st brigade around Braine le Comte and the 2nd around Soignies, headquarters at Braine le Comte).

The 2nd division was in the area between Nivelles, Fleurus and Bothey (1st brigade around Hautain-le-Val and the 2nd around Marbais, headquarters at Nivelles), while the heavy cavalry of Trip was in and around the village of Braine l'Alleud. The Indian brigade was placed in and around Genappe. On the 14th of April, headquarters moved from St.Trond to Nivelles.¹¹

The British and Hanoverian forces were concentrated in the area around Ath, between Mons and Tournay, while places like Antwerp, Ostend, Ypres, Nieuport, Tournay and Mons had garrisons.¹²

Based upon the intelligence available, Wellington must have had an impression of Napoleon's forces as having two army corps in the north-west of the country (the 1st and the 2nd in the line Dunkerque to Lille), one at Mézières (3rd) and two others (4th and 5th) in the north-east, both supported by cavalry. There would also be reserves at Paris and garrisons in numerous towns. All in all Napoleon would have a field army of about 98.000 strong (68.000 infantry, 18.000 cavalry and 12.000 artillery).¹³

Communication between Wellington and Gneisenau.

In the contacts with the Prussians, it was general Von Röder yet again who attempted, on the instruction of Gneisenau, to explain the Prussian point of view in a letter which he probably wrote to sir Hudson Lowe on the 9th of April:

“Vous avez lu, mon très cher général, le petit mémoire que j’ai adressé hier à Milord Duc Wellington. Ne le trouvant pas chez lui, je n’ai pas pu le présenter moi-même, et je l’ai laissé à son hôtel. Vous y avez vu les points sur lesquelles le général Gneisenau désire d’être informé; et j’ose vous inviter d’employer tout votre crédit pour que le Duc y réponde le plus tôt que possible, parce que je crois que cela est de la plus haute importance pour le bien de la cause commune.

Vous n’ignorez pas les raisons qui obligent l’armée du Bas-Rhin de ne pas trop s’éloigner de la Meuse, et vous conviendrez qu’elles sont bien fondées; ces mêmes raisons lui font plus craindre que désirer une bataille entre Bruxelles et les frontières, qui en cas de revers auroit les suites les plus fâcheuses pour elle, en lui coupant sa retraite derrière la Meuse, et en laissant à l’ennemi la liberté de s’avancer par Liège vers le Rhin, où se trouvent tous les points de rassemblement pour la formation des armées Prussiennes venant de l’intérieur, et destinées à faire la guerre de ce côté-ci – vous sentez vous-même, cher général, sans que j’ai besoin d’en développer des détails, quel malheur affreux ce seroit pour nous tous, si ces formations seroient interrompues et dérangés avant d’être finies; et que probablement cela nous ferait perdre les avantages de toute une campagne, peut-être de toute la guerre.

Ces considérations doivent nécessairement gêner le général commandant en chef l’armée du Bas-Rhin, et lui donner des vives inquiétudes sur les chances d’une bataille, aussi longtemps qu’il est chargé de la responsabilité des suites. Le général Gneisenau a bien prouvé qu’il désire sincèrement d’opérer de concert avec Milord Duc Wellington en faisant avancer les troupes sous ses ordres sur les points où on les a demandés, sans même attendre qu’il fut instruit du plan général: cependant cette condescendance à la volonté du Duc, suite d’une confiance sans bornes accordée à la personne du plus grand général de l’Europe, ne doit pas être considérée encore comme le consentement décidé de s’exposer dans tous les cas au sort d’une bataille en avant de Bruxelles, et dont les suites, supposant la possibilité qu’elle fut perdue, seroient trop funestes pour nous.

Le général Gneisenau espère que le mouvement en avant de l’armée Prussienne, et son rapprochement à l’armée Anglo-Batave, suffira pour imposer à l’ennemi et pour l’empêcher de tomber sur celle-ci avec toutes ses forces; et c’est en partant de ce point de vue qu’il y a consenti, sans cependant s’engager au delà. C’est ce que j’ai l’ordre de vous dire de sa part; mais j’ose y encore ajouter de la mienne qu’il me paroît que toute cette affaire dépendra des communications que le Duc de Wellington daignera faire à M.de Gneisenau, et que par conséquent je reviens à la nécessité et l’importance de ce qu’elles se fassent le plus tôt que possible.

L’amitié et la confiance que vous avez inspiré à nos chefs, et tous les prussiens qui jouissent de l’avantage de vous connoître, leurs font espérer que vous ne refuserez pas d’être l’interprète de nos sentiments auprès de Milord duc Wellington, dont toute l’armée prussienne est jalouse de mériter la bienveillance et le contentement. C’est pour cela que je suis chargé positivement de m’adresser à vous dans toutes les circonstances, ce que je fais avec le plus grand plaisir, rien n’égalant la haute et parfaite considération avec laquelle j’ai l’honneur d’être, etc.”¹⁴

On the 10th of April, Wellington reacted to Gneisenau on Von Röder’s note, which this officer had written on the 8th of April on behalf of him:

“[...] D’abord il faut que je remercie votre Excellence de la promptitude avec laquelle vous avez consenti à la demande que je vous fis dans ma lettre du 5. J’espère que les circonstances de la lutte où nous allons nous trouver seront telles que vous n’aurez rarement besoin de mon assistance; mais je peux vous assurer que, si jamais vous en avez besoin, vous me trouverez également prêt à vous donner, et d’agir en tout avec vous de la manière la plus franche et confidentielle.

Dans ma lettre du 5 je vous ai exposé les raisons qui m'ont donné lieu de croire qu'il serait à propos que vos troupes s'approchent un peu plus près de moi. Ce n'est pas possible de séparer entièrement les considérations politiques de celles purement militaires, surtout dans les circonstances où nous allons avoir en main. Mais il est aussi vrai qu'il ne faut pas sacrifier les considérations et convenances militaires à celles purement politiques; et je crois que ce que je vous ai proposé, et que vous avez eu la bonté d'adopter sur ma proposition, se trouvera dans toutes les convenances.

La frontière française est si couverte de forteresses que ce n'est pas très facile de connaître les forces qui s'y trouvent à présent; mais je suis bien sûr que la position réunie où nous nous trouvons nous garantira de toute attaque de la force même la plus grande qu'on ait jamais représenté être sur cette frontière.

Les troupes Anglaises et Hanovriennes sont concentrées sur Ath, ayant des garnisons en Anvers, Ostende, Nieuport, Ypres, Tournay et Mons. Les troupes Holllandaises sont concentrées sur Nivelles, Braine le Comte etc.

Nous trouvant dans ce moment sur la défensive, et n'ayant aucune intention d'en partir 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.

Si l'ennemi nous attaque, ce qui, dans les circonstances où nous nous trouverons demain, n'est guère probable, il débouchera probablement entre la Sambre et l'Escaut. Dans de cas-là 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.

En cas de reverse, je crois que toute l'armée doit se replier sur Liège et Maestricht, et, s'il est nécessaire, sur Juliers, ce qui ne serait pas une opération difficile, les troupes de votre Excellence se trouvant en réserve à Namur.

Par cette disposition votre Excellence se trouverait toujours également à portée des grands objets que vous avez en vue, comme ils sont expliqués par le général [¹⁵]; et la retraite de tout est assurée en cas de nécessité, tandis que notre position en avant de Bruxelles, et la possession de cette ville, l'est également pendant l'intervalle qui va passer jusqu'au commencement des opérations.

J'envoie à votre quartier général, pour rester auprès de votre Excellence, si vous voulez bien le permettre, le colonel Hardinge, qui possède toute ma confiance, et qui facilitera en tout les communications que je dois avoir avec votre Excellence.”¹⁶

The next day, Wellington communicated his correspondence with Gneisenau to the earl of Bathurst in writing:

“I enclose copies of a further correspondence which I have had with general Gneisenau.

Having learnt that general Gneisenau had found upon M.Reinhard, the under secretary in the foreign department at Paris, who had been arrested in Aix-la-Chapelle, a copy of the treaty of Vienna of the 3rd of January last, which had created a good deal of jealousy and ill-temper in the minds of the Prussian officers, I thought it proper to send colonel Hardinge, who is here, to remain at general Gneisenau's headquarters; and I have desired him to explain confidentially the circumstances under which the treaty had been concluded, and to show that the alliance terminated with the circumstances which had occasioned it, if the subject should ever be mentioned to him.

I have likewise desired him to tell general Gneisenau that if he is not satisfied with the position in which I have placed his troops, I beg he will place them as he thinks proper, as from the arrival of reinforcements from England and Holland I shall find myself secure in my position in front of Brussels.”¹⁷

The same day, after referring to the similarity of the plans of Gneisenau and Wellington for the invasion into France, Lowe described Wellington's approach in his cooperation with Gneisenau towards this general as:

“[...] Il [Wellington] vous écrit aujourd'hui en réponse à votre dernière lettre, autant que sur ce sujet d'une note que lui a adressé le général Röder. Il est charmé de la promptitude avec laquelle vous avez adhéré à son désir, de passer à cette côté de la Meuse, et je crois que vous pouvez accepter sur un [here a space is left blank] égal de coopération de sa part dans tout ce que pourroit regueller [sic] l'armée Prussienne. Il m'a fait remarquer que si vous auriez [?] gardé votre position au delà de la Meuse, il auroit été obligé en cas de malheur de se jeter sur Anvers [¹⁸], ou peut être sur les forteresses d'Hollande; au lieu qu'à présent il pourroit suivre les mouvemens de l'armée Prussienne jusqu'à Maestricht ou à la position que vous avez choisi près de Juliers, estimant beaucoup mieux que les deux armées fussent réunies que suivants des lignes d'opérations différents et ainsi affaiblissant les moyens générales de défense. [...]”¹⁹

The secret treaty.

The fact was that on the 3rd of January 1815, a secret treaty had been signed at Vienna by Britain, Austria and Royalist France against Russia and Prussia.

This was caused by the so-called Polish-Saxon crisis. The Russians and Prussians proposed a deal in which much of the Prussian and Austrian shares of the partitions of Poland would go to Russia, which would create an independent Polish Kingdom in personal union with Russia with Alexander as king. In exchange, the Prussians would receive as compensation all of Saxony, whose king was considered to have forfeited his throne because he had not abandoned Napoleon soon enough. The Austrians, French, and British did not approve of this plan, and, at the inspiration of Talleyrand, signed a secret treaty on January 3, 1815, agreeing to go to war, if necessary, to prevent the Russo-Prussian plan from coming to accomplishment.

Although none of the three powers was particularly ready for war, the Russians did not call the bluff, and an amicable settlement was soon worked out, by which Russia received most of the Napoleonic duchy of Warsaw as a "kingdom of Poland", but did not receive the district of Poznan, which was given to Prussia, nor Krakow, which became a free-city. Prussia received forty percent of Saxony (later known as the province of Saxony), with the remainder returned to king Friedrich August I (kingdom of Saxony).²⁰

It was late March that Castlereagh had warned Wellington that Bonaparte might lay his hands upon the treaty and publish it in order to harm the allied relations. Obviously, Castlereagh was afraid that the British might make a bad impression upon the Prussians and Russians.²¹

Some time later, on the 6th of April, the British heard that Napoleon had actually found out about the treaty.

Castlereagh wrote two days later to Wellington: “You will perceive from the enclosed that Buonaparte is trying to male mischief on the subject of our treaty of January 3rd. I do not think he can succeed. I only mention it that you may be on the watch. My own notion is, that it is better to be silent, unless Russia or Prussia should inquire as to the fact, in which case there can be no difficulty in producing the treaty, which, coupled with prince Hardenberg's declaration in coference, explains and justifies the whole.”²²

So, although Castlereagh wanted to keep it for himself, he would not avoid it if it would be asked for by Prussia or Russia.

Wellington, from his side, sent the news of Napoleon having got the treaty on the 13th of April to the British representative at Vienna, Clancarty.

As Wellington learnt about the news of the Prussians having found the treaty on M.Reinhard, the under secretary in the foreign department at Paris, he sent colonel Hardinge to the Prussian general headquarters to explain about the backgrounds of the treaty which was signed four months earlier and which by now had become obsolete because of the arrangements made in Vienna as a result of the Polish-Saxon crisis.

It was also in this context that on the 11th of April, sir Charles Stuart wrote from Ghent to Castlereagh:

“Since I had the honour of stating to your Lordship my reasons for supposing that the treaty of the 3rd of January had transpired, a circumstance has occurred which no longer permits me to doubt the fact.

M.de Reinhard, who was left in charge of the different papers belonging to the Bureau des relations extérieures at the time of M.de Jaucourt’s departure from Paris, retired to the property he possesses at Aix-la-Chapelle immediately after he had quitted France.

His answer to the invitation of Buonaparte to return to Paris, having fallen into the hands of the Belgian government, excited suspicions which were communicated to the Prussian authorities on the frontier.

M.de Reinhard was accordingly arrested by the Prussian officer commanding at Aix-la-Chapelle and his papers were signed and examined.

It is certain that a copy of the treaty signed the 3rd of January fell into the hands of general Gneisenau upon this occasion as M.Dumoulin, an aide de camp to His Prussian Majesty who lately arrived here from the headquarters of that officer, related the circumstance to the King in a tone of complaint which leaves no doubt of the unfavourable impression the circumstance has occasioned.

The recommendation of the duke of Wellington that lord Clancary should make a communication to the Prussian ministers respecting this transaction in terms which prevent the possibility of any further inconvenience from the discovery, is therefore, I believe, the most prudent alternative which the present state of things will permit. [..]”²³

By the 19th of April there remained no doubt that also the Russians had got knowledge of the treaty and it was by this time that Clancarty had decided for himself not to enter into the subject as long as it was not necessary. And if it would, he would use the same reasoning as Wellington did, i.e. that the treaty should be seen in the circumstances under which it had been concluded and that these circumstances had changed in the meantime.²⁴

Though it is through a report written by colonel Hardinge to Wellington of the 22nd of April of a conversation which this colonel had with Gneisenau, this document sheds light upon the way how Gneisenau eventually saw the issue, though he had never seen the treaty itself. Hardinge wrote: “After repeating his [Gneisenau’s] surprise at the signature of such a treaty by the English plenipotentiary, I considered a proper opportunity had arrived of assuring him that, according to every interpretation I had heard given to the treaty, I conceived he mistook the nature of it if he imagined it was meant as a permanent measure of policy; that I happened to know something of its history, and that, in fact, it was only a temporary measure to prevent the congress being forced on certain points which Russia and Prussia too strongly insisted upon, and of which the other Powers disapproved. I then explained the indiscretion of prince Hardenberg, and that by Prussia’s acceptance of the present arrangements for Saxony the treaty was virtually at an end.

General Gneisenau himself remarked that the signature of the Great Britain to such a treaty in a great measure convinced him that it was only for a Congress purpose; but had war broken out and the treaty been acted upon, he would have counselled the setting up of Napoleon in France, and thus paralysed any cooperation intended by the Bourbons, could they have been so ungrateful as to have given any; and added, that at that period such a war would have been fatal to the Austrian power as head of Germany.

I laid a stress on the support given by lord Castlereagh to prince Hardenberg on the discussion of the frontier line; and the subject ended by his saying he believed everything was forgotten in the interest which the present state of affairs excited.

The whole of this conversation was entirely of a private nature, that although under no injunction of silence, I should certainly not have wished to repeat it, were it not for the fulfilment of your Lordship's instructions relative to the treaty; and I have every reason to believe, from general Gneisenau's manner, and from his dwelling on the impolicy of it rather than on any displeasure it had excited, that the treaty has passed here without marked observation or general circulation." ²⁵

It was also on the 12th of April that sir Hudson Lowe reported to lord Bunbury on the matter: "[...] The attachment which general Gneisenau bears to the English nation and his ardour for the cause of the allies in general, will I am sure make him disregard it [the treaty]; but the other chiefs may not all have the same sentiment, and his conduct must in consequence be guarded. The matter may be dissembled, but it must and will excite frustrations such as one would have wished to have seen avoided.[...]" ²⁶

The communication between Gneisenau and Wellington.

It was on the 13th of April that Gneisenau reacted on Wellington's letter of the 10th:

"J'ai eu l'honneur de recevoir la lettre que Votre Excellence a bien voulu m'adresser en date du 10 avril.

D'après la lecture de cette lettre je dois souhaiter que ce que j'ai avancé sur les dangers qui pourroient résulter pour l'armée prussienne si elle livrait bataille à une trop grande distance de la Meuse ne puisse être expliqué autrement que dans le sens suivant.

Ce n'est pas mon intention d'envoyer au secours de l'armée sous les ordres de Votre Excellence seulement le corps d'armée du général Zieten, et de laisser le corps d'armée du général Borstel à Namur pour garder le défilé; mais vous pouvez, my Lord Duc, en cas d'attaque, compter sur l'assistance de toutes nos forces disponibles ici, et nous sommes décidés à partager le sort de l'armée sous les ordres de Votre Excellence.

Mes inquiétudes sur un mouvement qui pourroit nous entraîner trop loin de la Meuse furent dictées par la supposition que Votre Excellence pourroit avoir des raisons impératives pour baser vos opérations sur la mer. Dès que Votre Excellence est résolue d'abandonner la mer en cas de revers et de manoeuvrer sur la Meuse, toute difficulté disparaît.

La forte position qui se trouve derrière le confluent de la Meuse et de l'Ourte est de nature à éloigner la supposition que nous puissions être obligés à rétrograder jusqu'à Juliers. Dans le cas que, après un revers, Votre Excellence approuveroit cette position, nous y pourrions réunir toutes nos forces sans laisser un corps d'armée à Namur, qui seroit en quelque danger dès que l'ennemi passe la Meuse entre Liège et Huy (ce qui ne lui peut être disputé). Ce corps d'armée verroit alors ses communications directes avec nous menacés, vu la difficulté des chemins entre la Meuse et l'Ourte, le manque de ponts sur cette dernière rivière, et l'impracticabilité de ses deux rives, et devoit les regagner par Bastogne et la forêt des Ardennes. Toutes les communications des habitans du pays de la rive droite de l'Ourte avec Namur se font par Liège, ce qui démontre les difficultés du terrain entre la Meuse et l'Ourte.

Des gros renforts pour l'armée prussienne ici vont passer le Rhin et nous joindront à commencer du 20 avril. Trois corps d'armée, fort chacun de 35 mille hommes, seront alors entre Luxembourg et Liège, et un quatrième va suivre immédiatement après.

Le lieutenant-général de Zieten m'annonce que la nouvelle se confirme que les garnisons de Philippeville et de Givet se sont mises en marche vers l'intérieur de la France, et n'ont laissé dans la première de ces villes que 40 et dans la seconde 80 à 100 invalides, avec 100 artilleurs. Ce même général ajoute qu'il a reçu l'information très positive que l'insurrection

du midi de la France gagne consistance, et que vendredi dernier cinq régiments d'infanterie ont quitté Paris à la hâte pour se diriger sur Lyon.

Je vous prie, my lord Duc, de bien vouloir agréer l'expression des sentiments distingués avec lesquels etc. “²⁷

And, again, two days later, on the 15th of April, Wellington wrote back to Gneisenau:

“Je viens de recevoir votre lettre du 13, et je suis bien obligé à votre Excellence de l'explication que vous avez bien voulu me donner sur vos intentions.

Sous d'autres circonstances dans ma position je serais sûrement dans la nécessité, en cas de retraite, de me borner à la défense de la Hollande, de me diriger sur ses places fortes, et de garder mes communications avec la mer; mais, dans les circonstances où nous nous trouvons, toute retraite ne peut être que momentanée, et occasionnée seulement par la supériorité de l'ennemi du moment sur ce point-ci; et je dois agir en conséquence. Mais nous sommes déjà trop forts pour penser à la retraite, ou même à être attaqués.

Je crains cependant que les affaires vont mal dans l'intérieur de la France. Il paraît par le Moniteur du 11 que M.le duc d'Angoulême avait capitulé avec le général Grouchy, et devait s'embarquer à Cette. La duchesse d'Angoulême a quitté la France, aussi bien que le duc de Bourbon.

J'ai des renseignements assez certain que nous avons en avant de nous, entre la Sambre et la mer, deux corps d'armée, composées de neuf divisions d'infanterie, et six de cavalerie. Chaque division d'infanterie peut être de cinq mille hommes; les divisions de cavalerie de quatre régiments; chacun je compte à douze cents chevaux.

Je pars demain matin pour Ostende; et je fais un tour de la frontière, qui me retiendra quatre jours; et j'écrirai à mon retour.”²⁸

The same day as Wellington wrote to Gneisenau, colonel Hardinge wrote to the duke mainly about the Prussian ideas on a invasion into France:

“I had the honour of delivering your lordship's letter to general Gneisenau on the morning of the 12th.

After some expressions of compliments to your lordship on the Peninsular war, he entered into general conversation, and rather laid a stress on the policy of making the French nation feel the effects of this war, and the necessity of humbling their military spirit. General Gneisenau did not advert to any part of your lordship's letter, nor did he make the slightest allusion to the treaty found in possession of the French general: and as in this interview I thought it proper that the conversation should originate with him, I had no opportunity afforded me of entering into explanation; and if the opportunity be afforded, I shall take care to avoid the appearance of putting forward a justification.

I am much obliged to the terms of your lordship's recommendation for the personal attentions I have received. Whilst no movements are carrying on, my communications will probably only contain the opinions to be gathered from the conversation of the generals and other officers.

Of this description is general Gneisenau's idea of the plan of operations, which, if I have understood right, is to have three armies, of 200.000 men each, assembled on the Upper Rhine, Middle Rhine, and Netherlands, with an army of reserve behind the central army. Reckoning upon a great numerical superiority over the enemy, each of these three armies, he proposes, should move independently upon Paris: if attacked, to act defensively; if beaten, to fall back on the reserve. The other two armies to continue their advance, and by preference to keep three or four days' march distant from each other, in order to have due notice and preparation against the next probable attack; and, in short, to have no mutual dependence until near Paris.

General baron Müffling, the present chief of the staff, has nearly the same idea, but rather leans to the policy of immediately commencing operations, to assist the rising spirit in the south, and to leave Napoleon no time to organise a system of national defence. He adverted to the badness of the communications along the Meuse, and stated some inconvenience, of marching to and fro, had been occasioned by a new organization of the army into corps d'armée, made by the king, for the purpose of intermixing the old and the young troops together. On the 21st instant the corps at Charleroi and Namur are to go into bivouac for their assembly in the new order; and in fortnight he states these corps will be complete, that of general Zieten 38.000 and general Börstel's 40.000" ²⁹

Wellington's ideas.

It was in this period, towards the middle of April, that Wellington did not expect to be attacked.

He believed that a great majority of the French would be decidedly adverse to Napoleon and that the national guards and population of all the fortified towns on the northern frontier would be in favor of Louis XVIII. In this background Wellington wrote to the earl of Clancarty on the 10th of April.

"With this information [about the enemy's strength] before them, the Ministers of the allied powers, and the august Sovereigns, will see how important it is that no time should be lost in commencing our offensive operations. This point is so clear, that it would be a useless waste of your time and mine to discuss it; but there is a period approaching, before which it is desirable that our forces should enter France, and that France should see what she has to expect from the government of the usurper." [...] "It remains then to be seen with what force the allies can commence their offensive operations on the 1st of May."

Wellington calculated for the end of April on 60.000 British / Dutch / Hanoverian, 63.000 Prussians, 146.000 Austro-Bavarian corps, in all 270.000 men. About an invasion he writes:

"It remains then to be considered whether it will not be expedient to commence our operations on the 1st of May, considering the relative force of the two contending parties at that period, rather than wait till the middle of May, and thus giving Buonaparte the advantages which he will certainly derive from "l'Assemblée du Champ d Mai."

First, it must be observed that, the longer our operations are delayed, the more certain becomes the destruction and dispersion of the *noyaux* of Royalists formed in the western and southern departments; and if once destroyed and dispersed, it may be depended upon they will never reassemble.

Secondly, supposing the calculation of the total force of the French army of the late Ministry at war enclosed, to be erroneous to the amount of 100.000 infantry, it must likewise be admitted that he has put the French garrisons on a very low scale, when he estimates them only at 35.400 men.

Supposing them to be 50.000 and the armies of Bordeaux, Lyons, the Alps and La Vendée to be 25.000, there will remain for operations against the allies 180.000, total 255.000

I have above stated that, in the end of April, the allies can enter France with 270.000 men, to which 180.000 can be opposed in the field, and it remains to be seen what operations could be performed by this force of the allies at that period." ³⁰

The invasion into France.

Resulting from these ideas, Wellington wrote a memorandum on the 12th of April for the operations in France and sent it the day after to Clancarty.

Though Wellington realised that the memorandum might not reflect the situation in France at a later date, he wrote him in a covering note:

“I send you this memorandum, however, because I think it may be useful in considering of a more extended plan for all the armies.

The right, or the British, Hanoverian, and Dutch corps, might enter as proposed for the British and Prussian corps; and the Prussian corps, supported by the Russians, as proposed for the Austro Bavarian corps; and the Austro Bavarian corps by the Upper Rhine. This movement would be quite secure if the British were to get Maubeuge, and the Prussians Thionville and Verdun.”

The memorandum itself reads:

Memorandum, 12th April 1815

The object of the operations proposed in my letter to the earl of Clancarty, of the 10th, to be undertaken by the corps of the allies, which will probably be assembled in Flanders and on the Rhine in the end of the month of April, is, that by their rapidity they might be beforehand with the plans and measures of Buonaparte.

His power now rests upon no foundation but the army; and if we can introduce into the country such a force as is capable either to defeat the army in the field, or to keep it in check, so that the various parties interested in the defeat of Buonaparte’s views may have the power of acting, our object will be accomplished.

The allies have no views of conquest; there is no territory which requires in particular to be covered by the course of their operations; their object is to defeat the army, and to destroy the power of one individual; and the only military points to be considered are; 1st, to throw into France, at the earliest possible period, the largest body of men that can be assembled; 2nd, to perform this operation in such a manner that it can be supported by the forces of the allies, which are known to be following immediately; 3rd, that the troops which shall enter France shall be secure of a retreat upon the supporting armies, in case of misfortune.

The troops to be employed in this operation should be the allied British, Hanoverian and Dutch troops, under the command of the duke of Wellington; the Prussian troops as reinforced, under the command of comte Gneisenau; the allied Austrian, Bavarian, Wurtemberg, and Baden troops, to be assembled on the Upper Rhine, under prince Schwarzenberg.

The two former should enter France between the Sambre and the Meuse; the duke of Wellington endeavouring to get possession of Maubeuge, or, at all events, of Avesnes; and general Gneisenau directing his march upon Rocroy and Chimay.

The duke of Wellington, besides the garrisons in the places in Flanders and Brabant, should leave a corps of troops in observation on the frontiers.

Prince Schwarzenberg should collect his corps in the province of Luxembourg; and, while his left should observe the French fortresses of Longvy, Thionville and Metz, he should possess himself of the forts of Sedan, Stenay and Dun, and cross the Meuse.

The first object would then be accomplished, and we should have in France a larger body of troops than it is probable the enemy can assemble.

It is expected that the British and Dutch army would be followed in the course of a fortnight by about 40.000 men, and the Prussian army in the same period by 90.000 men; and that the allied Austrian and Bavarian army would be followed by a Russian army of 180.000

Supposing, then, that the enemy should have the facility of attacking the line of communication of the English, Hanoverian, and Dutch army, by Maubeuge, and that of the allied Austrian army from their fortresses on the Upper Moselle and Upper Meuse, they could not prevent the junction of those troops. It must, besides, be observed, that the enemy could

not venture to leave their fortresses entirely without garrisons of troops of the line, on account of the disgust which the usurpation of Buonaparte has occasioned universally; and the operations upon our communications will therefore necessarily be carried on by a diminished body of troops.

However inconvenient, then, they may be to those troops which will have advanced, they can neither prevent the junction of the armies which will be following the first that will enter France, nor can they prevent the retreat of these upon those which are moving to their support. According to this scheme, then, we should have in the centre of France a body of above 200.000 men, to be followed up by nearly 300.000 more, and their operations would be directed upon Paris, between the Meuse and the Oise.”³¹

It was count d’Artois, the brother of king Louis XVIII, who wrote to his brother at Ghent about Wellington’s draft for the invasion of France on the 13th of April:

“Les prussiens sont déjà arrivés au nombre de 40.000, cela augmente tous les jours, et sûrement Lord W. ne perdra pas de tems pour marcher en avant, aussitôt que le retour du courrier qu’il a envoyé à Vienne lui en donnera la liberté.”³²

This expectation of not being attacked comes back in the duke’s letter to rear-admiral Martin, dated 11th of April: “just at present it appears to me that there is no prospect of our being attacked in this country; and I would recommend that the admiral should reconnoitre Ostend, and see how far gun-vessels and other craft could cooperate in the defence of that place; and that he should station a small force at the entrance of the Scheldt to observe that river.”³³

Apparently, Martin had sent in a report on Flushing and Cadsand [³⁴] as Wellington wrote him on the 12th:

“The government of the King of the Low Countries must be best judge what should be done with Cadsand and Flushing; but it appears to me that in case of misfortune, both places are of the utmost importance to the security of Holland.”³⁵

And Wellington repeated his opinion towards the prince of Orange by lord F.Somerset on the 14th of April.³⁶

In case of misfortune, Ostend was obviously another most important point to defend as well. It was in this context that rear-admiral Martin wrote on the 15th of April a memorandum containing observations relating to naval cooperation in the defence of Ostend.³⁷

By the 9th of April, Wellington referred to subsidiary arrangements made at Vienna earlier.³⁸

The situation was that on the 25th of March a treaty was signed there in which it was agreed that Great Britain would subsidize these countries with five million pound sterling per annum. Based upon the treaties of Chaumont (9th March 1814) and the peace of Paris (30th May 1814), the four great Powers then also agreed that each power would bring up a field army to be committed actively against Napoleon of 150.000 men (of which at least 15.000 cavalry and a proper proportion of artillery).

In this context, Great Britain would accomodate the other three great Powers (Austria, Prussia and Russia) with a subsidy at the rate of five million sterling per annum.

As Great Britain itself would not be able to accomodate this number with 90.000 – 100.000 men, it was agreed at the same time that this country’s contribution to the allied alliance would be completed by an extra subsidy of about two million pound sterling.

About this aid Clancarty wrote on the 13th of April to the duke of Wellington:

“The first and most obvious application of this aid is to give it to such powers as will agree to furnish the number of troops required to complete the British contingent under your Grace’s order to the full quota of 150.000 men, exclusive of garrisons.

If there are amongst the powers who may have acceded to the treaty those who, having furnished their own quota to the alliance, may nevertheless be disposed to supply an additional number of troops beyond their own contingent upon this scale of allowance, there seems every just motive for encouraging such exertions.”

As this extra fund had to be applied to secure the residue of the quota which Great Britain was bound to supply, the distribution was placed in the hands of the duke of Wellington “as to indemnify the British government against any further claim under the articles of the treaty which impose upon them the obligation to supply 150.000 men, or to pay for deficiencies at a certain rate.”

Clearly, this huge financial exertion of Great Britain in connection to the role of the duke had strong political and military implications within the alliance, as Clancarty clearly wrote in the same letter: “Your Grace can best judge of the convenience or inconvenience of giving effect to these conflicting principles as connected with the means which are disposable; and it is the intention of the Prince Regent not only to reply on Your Grace’s judgement for making the best use of these means, but it is also His Royal Highness’s wish that any influence arising from their disposal should contribute to strengthen your authority with the Allied powers in concerting with them the operations to be carried on.”³⁹

By the 17th of April, the arrangement had been formalised in the British government and, resulting, member states of the alliance were invited to offer their troops for the completion of the contingent to be furnished by Great Britain by the 21st of April.⁴⁰

Yet, despite all these arrangements it was already around that time that misunderstandings about the subsistence of the Hanoverian forces arose.

As Wellington stepped in these arrangements it appeared that these forces were indemnified not only with 40 pound sterling per man in stead of the 11.2 pound sterling as agreed upon in the treaty of the 25th of March, but also that general baron Von der Decken, the Hanoverian representative, gave incorrect estimates of the real cost expenses of the Hanoverian subsidiary corps. Late April Wellington had proposed to Von der Decken to stop the current rate at the end of April “and that from that period the Hanoverian government shall receive a subsidy of 11 pound sterling for each man they have engaged and will furnish under the treaty of alliance of Vienna; and a further subsidy for what they will furnish in addition to serve with the British army, which shall amount to the actual expense they will incur keeping each man in the field.”⁴¹

As this proposal wasn’t accepted, both parties sent the matter back to their respective governments. The result in the middle of May was that the Prince Regent of Great Britain decided to discontinue the former system of subsidy from and after the 25th of May and to go over to the same terms as used with the other powers in Europe.

Yet, the matter still dragged on between Wellington and Von der Decken and by the 8th of June (and probably by the 15th of June neither), the matter still wasn’t settled, so this issue kept asking for Wellington’s attention as well.⁴²

The positions of the Prussian army.

As indicated above, the result of the communications between Wellington and Gneisenau was that in the period from the 9th to the 11th April the Prussian army took up the following positions:

- the corps of Ziethen took up cantonments between the Sambre, the Meuse and the Roman road which leads from Binche to Ramelies. Zieten was supposed to occupy Charleroy, but not Namur.⁴³⁻⁴⁴

Zieten reached Charleroi on the 11th of April.⁴⁵ His 9th brigade was around Charleroi and towards Namur while his 10th brigade was more to the rear and north of the Sambre towards

Fleurus. His outposts to the right were linked to the Hanoverian ones at Mont St.Geneviève (north of Sambre, between Thuin and Binche) and those to the left towards those of Borstell on the Meuse-river, opposite Dinant. ⁴⁶

- the corps of Borstell took up the former cantonments of Zieten, between Namur, Ciney and Huy. ⁴⁷ It was also here that he relieved Zieten's outpost on the line from Dinant through Rochefort to Libin.

-the corps of Thielmann came in positions between Liège and Hervé.

-the corps of Pirch was pulled from Koblenz to Diekirch; it started this march on the 10th of April and it reached Diekirch (through Wittlich) on the 16th of April

From there the corps extended its positions from the 21st of April onwards on both banks of the river Sûre between Diekirch, Grevenmacher, Trier and Bitburg, so as to be able to support the Bavarian and Austrian forces which were in Trier and south of the river Moselle. ⁴⁸

-at the same time, the units of Von Jagow and Von Steinmetz were drawn to Liège from Düsseldorf and Wesel respectively.

Meanwhile, the 4th corps was assembled on the Rhine, near Koblenz. ⁴⁹As long as it was there, Von Kleist was at Neuwied, Wiesbaden and surroundings. General headquarters were moved from Aachen to Liège on the 11th of April. ⁵⁰

Gneisenau's ideas.

A concept as written by Gneisenau on the 14th of April for a report for king Friedrich Wilhelm throws light upon his ideas at that moment:

“Seit meinem letzten an Euer königliche Majestät ehrfurchtsvoll abgestatteten Bericht hat eine beträchtliche Veränderung in der Stellung der französische Truppen sich nicht ergeben. Die Stärke des Feindes kann, nach den eingegangenen Nachrichten, zu 40 Tausend Mann angenommen werden.

Der Herzog von Wellington ist sehr dankbar für die Bewegung, die Euer K.M. hiesige Armee zum Schutz der englisch-belgischen gemacht hat. Diese ist übel zusammengestellt; die holländische Truppen noch neu, die belgischen höchst verdächtig.

Es ist nun durch den Herzog eine neue Eintheilung dieser Armee in 4 Divisionen und zwei Armeekorps, befehligt durch den Erbprinzen von Oranien und den General Hill, durchgesetzt worden, wobei die belgischen Truppen auf eine solche Art eingetheilt sollen, dass ihre verdächtige Treue nicht schädlich wirken kann. ⁵¹

Über die Besorgnis, dass Euer Königlichen Majestät Armee durch ihr Vorrücken in Bewegungen verwickelt werden könnte, die sie von der Maas entfernen, bin ich nun durch die Erklärung des Herzogs von Wellington, dass er im Fall eines ungünstigen Kriegsglückes mit uns über die Maas zurückgehen wolle, grösstentheils beruhigt. Wir dürfen nun wenigstens nicht besorgen, dass er seine Operationen mit steter Rücksicht auf das Meer berechnen und uns folglich zu weit von unserm Kriegstheater abziehen werde. Diese Bewegung zum Schutz der englisch-batavischen Armee war überhaupt nicht füglich abzulehnen aus Gründen der Politik sowohl als aus denen des eigenen Vortheils; denn die Armee des Herzogs von Wellington einmal bis zur Mündung der Schelde zurückgetrieben, würde der Feind nicht gesäumt haben, gegen uns hier vorzugehen, und wir würden dann allein den Kampf zu bestehen gehabt haben, den wir, vereint mit dem Herzog von Wellington anzunehmen, abgelehnt hätten. Jetzt, da die französische Armee noch nicht für einen Feldzug organisirt zu sein scheint und unsere Verstärkungen in Anmarsch sind, wovon man in Frankreich sicherlich unterrichtet ist, ist es nicht zu erwarten, dass die französische Armee etwas gegen die des Herzogs von Wellington unternehmen wird und die brittisch Regierung wird aus unserer Bereitwilligkeit zur Hülfe zu eilen, sich überzeugen, dass Euer Königliche Majestät uns

gemessene Befehle gegeben haben, im Einverständnis mit dem Herzog von Wellington zu handeln.

In Brüssel ist noch immer der General von Röder angestellt, wo er Euer Königlichen Majestät Interesse mit Einsicht und Behutsamkeit vertritt. Zur neuen Formation der Armeekorps werde ich ihn aber zurückrufen müssen und noch weiss ich nicht, wem ich diese schwierige Mission übertragen soll. Im hiesigen Hauptquartier ist der englische Oberst Sir H. Harding angestellt, ein scharfer Beobachter.

Als das Hauptquartier in hiesige Stadt verlegt ward, ist der General der Infanterie Graf Kleist von Nollendorf in Aachen zurückgeblieben, da die Wahrscheinlichkeit eines baldigen Ausbruchs des Krieges sich gemindert hat. Er wird sich bald an seine neue Bestimmung begeben.

Allerwärts treffen wir auf Spuren von Verbindungen der Franzosen mit Deutschland. Schon aus diesem Grunde wäre es wünschenswerth, dass der Feldzug bald eröffnet werden könnte, denn sonst gewinnen die im Finstern schleichenden Verräther Zeit, sich auszubilden.”⁵²

Privately, Gneisenau expressed his feelings about his situation on the 15th of April to lieutenant colonel Von Thile.⁵³ He writes:

“Über den zukünftigen Feldzugsplan, mein lieber Thile, hat man uns ganz im dunkeln gelassen, und doch wäre es so wichtig für uns, wenigstens zu wissen, ob wir auf diesem Kriegstheater hier oder auf dem der Mosel oder vielleicht zwischen beiden fechten sollen. Wären die Franzosen früher gerüstet gewesen, so würden wir auf diesem Theater hier durch die Macht der Umstände so verwickelt sein, dass wir uns von hier wohl schwerlich wieder losmachen könnten. Die Streitkräfte, die Sie in Ihrem letzten Briefe mir aufzeichneten, sind freilich sehr beträchtlich, aber wird man sie alle gebrauchen, mit Verstand gebrauchen, sie am Ende nicht gegen uns gebrauchen? Ich fürchte jetzt die Politik Österreichs und Bayerns Verrat. Wir müssen sehr auf unserer Hut sein.”

At the same time Gneisenau was extremely satisfied on the spirit reigning in the Prussian provinces. He says: “Wenige Tage noch, und die hiesige Armee steht in einer furchtbaren Rüstung da. Kleist hat sehr gut alles vorbereitet und Müffling für alles Fürsorge getragen. Ich darf nur fortfahren; aber dennoch will mir die Arbeit bei meiner Unbekanntschaft mit der hiesigen Lage und bei den so mancherlei verschiedenartigen Geschäften zuviel werden. Wenn ich nicht tüchtige Gehilfen hätte, so könnte ich es nicht durchsetzen, und dennoch mangelt es so sehr an Arbeitern. Möge S.M. bedenken, dass in dem Hauptquartier einer grossen Armees fast nie zuviel Gehilfen sein können.

Von den Sachsen kann ich nicht viel Guts versprechen, wenn die jetzige Unentschiedenheit ihres Zustandes fort dauert, denn sie hat die Unzufriedenheit derselben noch gesteigert. Murren darüber lässt sich täglich vernehmen, und man darf schliessen, dass durch Emissäre aus Frankreich das Feuer noch mehr geschürt wird. Wenn wir eine Schlacht zu liefern hätten, so würde ich Bedenken tragen, sie in dieselbe zu führen. Leben Sie wohl.”⁵⁴

Observations.

Von Röder stressed to sir Hudson Lowe the cooperative attitude of Gneisenau, even while he had no idea of the general plan how to face Napoleon in case he would attack the Low Countries. He described this approach as a plea for Gneisenau, but at the same time he made it clear that his willingness to move towards Wellington did not signify that he possessed an unconditional willingness to accept a battle in front of Brussels.

Apart from the cooperation as such, Von Röder stressed the element of deterrence as the most important reason for Gneisenau to move his army towards that of the duke.

His own initiative, the questions to Wellington about his situation and intentions, were – according to Von Röder - supposed to determine the Prussian decisions. Yet, if this were true, it remains unclear why Gneisenau didn't ask them and if not, why he did not ask Von Röder to ask them.

He may have done so, but in any case, the whole sequence in these contacts is a most confusing one.

Wellington sent the replies to Von Röder's questions to Gneisenau, but this was as Von Röder had asked him to do so.

The situation, the ideas and request as laid out by the Prussians to Wellington did not result in Wellington entering into their main objections. What it did result in was a most general promise on the 10th of April. Wellington wrote:

“J'espère que les circonstances de la lutte où nous allons nous trouver seront telles que vous n'aurez rarement besoin de mon assistance; mais je peux vous assurer que, si jamais vous en avez besoin, vous me trouverez également prêt à vous donner, et d'agir en tout avec vous de la manière la plus franche et confidentielle.”

As the invasion into France was not at hand, he saw that the initiative was in the hands of the enemy, and therefore regarded his own (and the Prussian) position as a defensive one.

The duke took into account the possibility of a French attack, but at the same time regarded his own and the Prussian position that strong, that he felt such an attack was impossible. Gneisenau at this time did not expect a French attack either.

Wellington thought that if the enemy would attack, that he would do so between the rivers Sambre and the Scheldt. In that case he considered the Prussians would concentrate one corps (the 2nd) at Charleroi, on his own extreme left flank, and the remainder of their army at and around Namur.

The Prussians could conclude that the duke's intentions were clearly aimed at defence of the Low Countries, while having his positions around Ath, with garrisons at Anvers, Ostende, Nieuport, Ypres, Tournay, Mons and the Dutch troops at Nivelles, Braine le Comte etc.

Though he was not very explicit about it, it becomes clear that Wellington apparently saw the position where he wanted to face the enemy to be in the area around Ath, Braine le Comte and Nivelles.

About what he would do in case of a reverse, he wrote: “En cas de reverse, je crois que toute l'armée doit se replier sur Liège et Maestricht, et, s'il est nécessaire, sur Juliers, ce qui ne serait pas une opération difficile, les troupes de votre Excellence se trouvant en réserve à Namur.

Par cette disposition votre Excellence se trouverait toujours également à portée des grands objets que vous avez en vue, comme ils sont expliqués par le général [...]; et la retraite de tout est assurée en cas de nécessité, tandis que notre position en avant de Bruxelles, et la possession de cette ville, l'est également pendant l'intervalle qui va passer jusqu'au commencement des opérations.”

So, in case of a reverse he believed the Prussians could fall back (at least those coming from Namur) upon Liège and Maastricht, or even Jülich. By doing so they would then still be able to maintain their strategic concepts.

At the same time he saw himself still safe in front of Brussels, but in what way is not clear.⁵⁵ It must have been both Wellington's and Lowe's letters of the 10th of April which must have given Gneisenau the conviction that Wellington, in case of a reverse, was willing to leave his communication with Antwerp and that he would then be willing - as long as the Prussians were on the left bank of the Meuse - to manoeuvre towards the Meuse as well.⁵⁶

The reason for this approach of Wellington was, according to Lowe, his "[...] estimant beaucoup mieux que les deux armées fussent réunies, que suivants des lignes d'opérations différents et ainsi affaiblissant les moyens générales de défense. [...]"

This approach, in turn, led Gneisenau on the 13th of April to make to the duke a more concrete promise: "Ce n'est pas mon intention d'envoyer au secours de l'armée sous les ordres de Votre Excellence seulement le corps d'armée du général Zieten, et de laisser le corps d'armée du général Borstel à Namur pour garder le défilé; mais vous pouvez, my Lord Duc, en cas d'attaque, compter sur l'assistance de toutes nos forces disponibles ici, et nous sommes décidés à partager le sort de l'armée sous les ordres de Votre Excellence."

Gneisenau also added, that in that case of reverse and with the duke approving of this alternative position, that both commanders then could also place their forces in the strong position east of the point where the rivers Meuse and Ourthe meet. This option would avoid the Prussians having to fall back further to the rear as far as Jülich.

Apparently, in that case, Gneisenau then felt strong enough to resist Napoleon, as in that case he would leave the Meuse and the Rhine, the protection of Prussia.

The day after, while having no reply of Wellington yet, Gneisenau transmitted to his king a rash conclusion, i.e. that Wellington "im Fall eines ungünstigen Kriegsglückes mit uns über die Maas zurückgehen wolle [...]. Wir dürfen nun wenigstens nicht besorgen, dass er seine Operationen mit steter Rücksicht auf das Meer berechnen und uns folglich zu weit von unserm Kriegstheater abziehen werde."

Although in general the Prussians were very reluctant to express this – in fact they never did so far to Wellington - it was Gneisenau who clearly saw the ambiguity of the manoeuvre of leaving the Meuse right from the beginning.

The situation was that, apart from the political motive, there was also a strong military motive to do this. In fact it was closely linked to the safety of the Prussian army. The reasoning was that in case Napoleon would force Wellington back towards the mouth of the Scheldt-river (so north-west, towards Antwerp), he then would probably turn to the Prussian army. And in that case the Prussians, left on their own, would not have accepted a battle, as they only would have done so in conjunction with Wellington.⁵⁷

This was something which Gneisenau realised right from the beginning, but he never used the motive explicitly in his communications to Wellington or others of his staff, nor Von Röder did. It all fitted in the orders issued right from the beginning by the Prussian king to Gneisenau "im Einverständnis mit dem Herzog von Wellington zu handeln".

On the other hand, Wellington must have known of the motive, as he was in a similar situation: he could not accept a major battle in case it would not be able to act in cooperation with the Prussian army either.⁵⁸

Each of both partners had his own interests and these were stretched to the limit, but at the same time both Wellington and Gneisenau were professionals enough to realise that even though each nation had his own interests, it was in this area of tension that a common ground had to be found to accomplish their common goal when it came down to the interest of the

alliance in general and the defence of the Netherlands in particular: the utter defeat of Napoleon.

The ambiguity of leaving the Meuse in a way was something Gneisenau clearly had to deal with in his report to the king: on the one hand he didn't want to feed the king's (and his own) worry that he would compromise the army too much by moving it to the west, on the other hand it was an unavoidable measure to take as to comply with the general instructions to Blücher and Gneisenau - as issued by the king - to act, in their general decisions, in conjunction with Wellington. And Gneisenau realised this was the only chance to prevail in case Napoleon would invade Belgium.⁵⁹

As a reaction to Gneisenau's statement about Wellington's position and his resulting general promise of the 13th of April, Wellington - on the 15th of April - explained that for him the strength of his position and his line of retreat were linked. As long as he felt secure, like he did now in the middle of April, a retreat, and therefore the protection of the communication to the sea was no issue.

At the same time, however, the duke did not explicitly add to this what that would mean as far as any possible measures from his side towards the Prussian army was concerned.

Gneisenau may have understood from this concept that he could count upon Wellington as moving towards him as long as he would feel secure in his own position, but what if he wouldn't? Logic would tell him that, as long as Wellington felt threatened and his position unstable, that the situation could become more complicated when it came down to such a manoeuvre. Wellington clearly wanted to rectify any possible misunderstandings as to his own lines of communication, "while at the same time avoiding any clash with Gneisenau that an open disagreement could have provoked."⁶⁰

As there is no more direct reaction of Gneisenau to this nuance given by Wellington about his situation, it is very difficult to determine under which impression he was acting after the 15th of April regarding the duke's course of action in case of a reverse.

But even though Wellington might have felt secure in his current positions, he did pay attention to the works at Ostend, Cadsand and Flushing, all places related to his connection to the sea, through Flanders and Antwerp – so the west and north.

At the same time, he had the army of the Netherlands pulled to a position between his own forces which stood around Ath and the Prussians which stood east of Charleroi, so as to fill the gap in the line covering the country.

In his letter written on the 28th of March to the prince of Orange, Wellington had recommended him to have the army of the Netherlands more near to those between Mons and Brussels, and I believe the movement referred to was a result of this recommendation which must have reached the prince on the 5th of April.⁶¹

Constant Rebecque claims the decision to move the army of the Netherlands south-west was decided upon on the 5th of April, while he issued his orders on the 7th. In his view, headquarters left St.Trond on the 9th of April, reached Brussels on the 10th and then moved to Nivelles. At least, Constant and prince Frederik got there on the 12th, after having stayed in Brussels the days before.

When it came down to the invasion of France, both Wellington and Gneisenau were waiting for decisions from Vienna.

It had already been on the 3rd of April that Gneisenau had finished his plan for this invasion and Wellington followed with his on the 12th.

Though Gneisenau gave no time-frame for the commencement of the invasion, it becomes clear that the duke, as well the Prussian staff felt frustrated about the delays in Vienna. Within this context it was Wellington who must have, somewhere down the line, proposed to the congress at Vienna to start the operations on the 1st of May.

What mattered for Gneisenau in this context was the theatre where his army was supposed to be: on the river Meuse, the river Mosel or between them – even in this respect there was no clear idea as this was dependent upon the plan of invasion to be decided about in Vienna.

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¹ WSD, Vol.X p.49

² WSD, Vol.X p.66-67

³ Cf. Wellesley Pole to lord Castlereagh, 7th April 1815. In: Correspondence, despatches and other papers of viscount Castlereagh p.298

⁴ WD, Vol.XII p.300

⁵ WD, Vol.XII p.298

⁶ WD, Vol.XII p.309

⁷ Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25 He adds that he, general Van der Wijk and the prince of Orange met Wellington on the 11th at Brussels because of the transfer of the command and the new organisation of the army under the duke's orders.
Cf. Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.187
Aerts, W. Etudes etc. p.37

⁸ It was not until the 17th of April that lord Hill actually took command of the 2nd corps, establishing his headquarters at Grammont. Cf.his letter to his sister Emma, dated 16th of April. In: BL, Add.ms.35061 p.210-211

⁹ WSD, Vol.X p.62-63

¹⁰ Prince Frederik had established his headquarters at St.Trond on the 9th of April. In: Dagboek der operatiën etc. p.5

Cf. Stedman to Constant Rebecque, 9th of April. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8 nr.12

A general order dated 4th of April (nr.1), however, states the fact that prince Frederik was to be the commander of the "Koninklijke Nederlandse Mobile Armee", with headquarters at St. Trond. As quartermaster general was appointed baron general-major Constant-Rebecque, having as his adjudant-general Van Der Wijck. The artillery was led by colonel Gunkel, while mr.Reuther was the inspector of the administration. In: Tresoar, 318-37; 11-160

This order, suggests that headquarters were at St.Trond from the 4th of April onwards. This version is adhered by Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

The units (just east of) Charleroi and at Namur were a Nassau brigade led by colonel Von Gödecke and a brigade led by general Steman respectively.

¹¹ Cf. Dagboek der operatiën etc. p.6

Disposition of cantonments dated 12th – 13th of April 1815. In: Bas, F.de La campagne etc. Vol.III p.78-79

Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

General headquarters were established in the house of the baron Van Grave. In: Bas, F.de La campagne etc. Vol.I p.265

Constant Rebecque claims the decision to move the army of the Netherlands south-west was decided upon on the 5th of April, while he issued his orders on the 7th. In his view,

headquarters left St.Trond on the 9th of April, reached Brussels on the 10th and then moved to Nivelles. At least, Constant and prince Frederik got there on the 12th, after having stayed in Brussels the days before.

In his letter written on the 28th of March to the prince of Orange, Wellington had recommended him to have the army of the Netherlands more near to those between Mons and Brussels, but by the time this letter reached the prince the duke must have reached Brussels as well, as he left from Vienna on the 29th of March. In: KHA. A.40.C.W10

Yet, the new positions of the 1st and the 3rd divisions of infantry were also caused by the Prussians moving west as far as beyond Charleroi.

Cf. for the cavalry. Trip to Constant Rebecque, 13th and 14th of April 1815. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

De Ghigny to Constant Rebecque, 13th of April 1815. . In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

For the 15th of April, Van Merlen gives the following locations: headquarters at Villers Saint Ghislain; Spiennes, Harmignies, Harveng, Villers Saint Ghislain for the 5th regiment of light dragoons; Estennes-au-Val, Estienne-au-Mont, Vellereille-le-sec, Haulchin for the 6th regiment of hussars. Van Merlen to Constant Rebecque, 15th of April. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

On the 18th of April, Van Merlen moved his headquarters to Binche. Cf. Van Merlen to Constant Rebecque, 17th of April. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

Some horse artillery was at Saint Symphorien, but which unit is unclear. Cf. Van Merlen to Constant Rebecque, 15th of April. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

Pirenne sees a link by placing Trip at the line Braine-l'Alleud-Lillois-Waterloo with the later events in stating "comme s'il [Wellington] avait voulu expérimenter le temps nécessaire à la concentration de troupes à Mont Saint Jean." In: La stratégie de Wellington p.4

This is putting events far too strong as first of all it was not Wellington who put them there and secondly, it would be absurd to do this with one brigade of cavalry only, if there would have been a relation at all.

Indian brigade and 1st division.

For Anthing at Genappe, see his reports dated 14th and 16th of April to Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.13.14.01. nr.8

For the 1st division, cf. Stedman from Roeulx, 16th of April, to Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

The majority of this division had reached its new cantonments by the 13th of April. Cf. baron Schnouckaert tot Schouburg, chief of staff of the 1st division to Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

Until the moment this division moved to the north in May, by the 5th of that month it stood in the following villages:

Headquarters at Le Roeulx, 1st brigade: 16th battalion of chasseurs at St. Vaast Trivière, 4th battalion of the line at Gottignies, 6th battalion of the line at Le Roeulx, 9th battalion of national militia at Thieusies, 14th battalion of national militia at Thieu and Ville sur Haine, 15th battalion of national militia at Strépy and Maurage.

2nd brigade: 18th battalion of chasseurs at Haine St.Paul and Haine St.Pierre and Beaume, 1st battalion of the line at Goegnies, 1st battalion of national militia at Houdeng, 2nd battalion of national militia at Hestre and Fayt, 18th battalion of national militia at Morlanwelz, the

artillery and the train at Le Roeulx. Cf. baron Schnouckaert tot Schouburg, chief of staff of the 1st division to Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

2nd division.

Cf. Journaal der 2^e divisie infanterie. In: NA, 2.13.52 nr.1090

The 7th battalion of the line (2nd division) would already have moved on the 6th or 7th of April from Ghent, through Brussels, to Nivelles. Here it got a bivouac near Feluy and Arquennes. In: Scheltens, Souvenirs p.196-197

The 2nd regiment of Nassau infantry had left Maastricht on the 30th of March and had marched through Liège and Namur to Montigny-sur-Sambre, from where it left on the 11th of April for Marbais. Cf. Isenbart, W. Geschichte des Herzoglich Nassauischen 2es Regiments p.140-141

3rd division.

The 19th battalion of national militia (3rd division) moved on the 9th to Louvain, from where it moved the next day to Brussels. On the 11th it moved through Tubize, and on the 12th to Braine le Comte. Cf. Account captain Rochell, in family archive.

The 4th battalion of national militia stood on the 4th of April at Velm (near St.Trond) and moved from there to Tirlemont (9th), Louvain (10th), Brussels (11th), Ittre (12th), where it kept its position until early May. Cf. Sergeant Van Wetering. Diary.

¹² Wellington to Gneisenau, 10th April. In: WD, Vol.XII p.294

On the 13th of April, the 51st regiment (brigade Mitchell, division Colville) moved from Brussels to Grammont. Cf. Wheeler, private – The letters of private Wheeler p.160-161

The regiment had arrived at Ostend on the 30th of March. Cf. Mockler-Ferryman, A.F. The life of a regimental officer p.275

¹³ Intelligence from an anonymous correspondent and from the duke of Feltre. In: WSD, Vol.X p.57-58, 76-78

¹⁴ WSD, Vol.X p.51-52 The addressee has been left blank.

¹⁵ Is left blank in the transcript. The person alluded to is probably Von Röder.

¹⁶ WD, Vol.XII p.293-295 and NAK, WO 1/205/1

¹⁷ WSD, Vol.X p.62

Copy also in NAK, WO 1/205/1

For the arrest of Reinhard, also see baron Falck to A.W.C. baron Van Nagell, Dutch minister of foreign affairs [1756-1851], 9th of April 1815. In: Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VII p.760

¹⁸ The actual word reads as “armées”, but this is obviously an error of copying.

¹⁹ BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.71-72

²⁰ <http://www.answers.com/topic/congress-of-vienna>

²¹ WSD, Vol.IX p.626

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- ²² Sir Ch.Stuart to Castlereagh, 6th April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.43 and Castlereagh to Wellington, 8th of April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.43
- ²³ Malet, A. (ed.) Louis XVIII et les Cent-jours à Gand Vol.II p.39-40
Original in the PRO.
- ²⁴ WSD, Vol.X p.107-108
- ²⁵ WSD, Vol.X p.139
- ²⁶ BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.134-137
- ²⁷ WSD, Vol.X p.69-70
- ²⁸ WD, Vol.XII p.311
As far as I have been able to determine, the duke did not write to Gneisenau the moment he got back in Brussels.
- ²⁹ WSD, Vol.X p.79-80
- ³⁰ WD, Vol.XII p.295-297 and NAK, WO 1/205/1
- ³¹ WD, Vol.XII p.303-305
- ³² Romberg, E. and A.Malet (ed.) Louis XVIII et les Cent-jours à Gand Vol.I p.131
- ³³ WSD, Vol.X p.65
- ³⁴ These Dutch places are Vlissingen and Cadzand, both at the entrance of the Westerschelde, the access for Antwerp to the North-sea.
- ³⁵ WD, Vol.XII p.68
- ³⁶ KHA. A40 VI c S19
- ³⁷ WSD, Vol.X p.98-99
- ³⁸ Wellington to the earl of Clancarty, 9th of April. In: WSD, Vol.X p.48
- ³⁹ Wellington to the earl of Clancarty, 13th of April. In: WSD, Vol.X p.71-72
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Viscount Castlereagh to Wellington, 21st of April. In: WSD, Vol.X p.124-125
In May, Wellington entered into subsidiary agreements with the governments of Bavaria, Sardinia and Baden-Württemberg.
Cf. Wellington to Castlereagh, 2nd of May. In: WD, Vol.XII p.342
Grand duke of Baden to Wellington, 6th of May. In: WSD, Vol.X p.241
Colonel Washington to Wellington, 9th of May. In: WSD, Vol.X p.265
Wellington to Castlereagh, 10th and 20th of May, 9th of June. In: WD, Vol.XII p.372, 411, WSD Vol.X p.432
It was on the 10th of June, shortly before the war broke out, that the duke received a request for subsidiary assistance of the grand duke of Nassau for supplying his Nassau units which

had just arrived at Brussels a few days before. Cf. Grand duke of Nassau to Wellington, 10th June 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.451-452

⁴¹ Wellington to Castlereagh, 24th of April. In: WD, Vol.XII p.327

⁴² Cf. Wellington to Castlereagh, 24th April, 10th of May and 8th of June. In: WSD, Vol.X p.327-328, WD, Vol.XII p.372, 454

General Von der Decken to Wellington, 8th May. In: WSD, Vol.X p.259

Viscount Castlereagh to Wellington, 15th of May. In: WSD, Vol.X p.298-299

Wellington to count Alten, 16th of May. In: WD, Vol.XII p.391-392

Wellington to general Von der Decken, 19th of May, 7th and 8th of June. In: WD, Vol.XII p.401-402, 452-453, 453-454

Wellington to the Prince Regent, 21st May. In: WD, Vol.XII p.413-414

⁴³ On the 13th of April, Zieten wrote to Gneisenau about the outposts in front of his corps: "Sowohl in Namur als auch hier in Charleroi habe Ich die Erfahrung gemacht, dass die französische Grenze von den in genannten Orten früher gestandenen Belgischen und Holländischen Truppen, beinahe gar nicht beobachtet worden ist. Den erhaltenen Befehlen zuwider, fand durchaus keine Sperrung statt; die Reisenden wurden ohne alle Schwierigkeiten [...] des- und jenseits gelassen, und es schien, als ob man im tiefsten Frieden lebte. Ich bin bemüht gewesen, sowohl in Namur als auch hier die schleunigste Änderung darin zu treffen, und wenn ich es für Pflicht halte Ew.Exc. dies Benehmen der Belgischen und Holländischen Truppen ergebenst anzuzeigen, überlasse ich es Hochstdensleben in wiefern eine Bekanntmachung hiervon nach dem Hauptquartier von Brüssel für das allgemeine Beste von Nutzen sein dürfte." In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI. Nr. VI nr.2 p.4

⁴⁴ The old Roman road ran from Bavay through Tongres to Cologne; it was also called chaussée Brunehault.

⁴⁵ Zieten had written to Stedman that he wanted to establish his headquarters at Charleroi on the 11th of April. Cf. Letter of Zieten enclosed to one written by Stedman to Constant Rebecque on the 9th of April. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8 nr.12

On April 10th, lord Hill wrote to his brother: "The Prussians about 50.000 or 60 are now on their march & will be at Charleroy the day after tomorrow, which will put us in a state of safety for till we are able to act offensively no hostilities have yet commenced, but great [?] preparations are making on both sides." In: BL, Add.ms.35061

⁴⁶ Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.25

The 1st regiment of Silesian hussars reached positions near Charleroi on the 11th of April. There it was assigned to the 1st brigade and came in outposts between Lobbes and Binche. Cf. Wechmar, Von Braune Husaren etc. p.59

Stedman, as a result, would, on the 10th of April, evacuate Gosselies, Heppignies, Wagnelée, Fleurus and all other intermediate villages. Cf. his letter to Constant Rebecque, dated 9th of April. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8 nr.12

Stedman also corresponded with Constant Rebecque on the 20th of April about Zieten occupying Binche and positions south of the Roman road. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

⁴⁷ Von Mach yet claims the 1st Pommeranian regiment (5th brigade), coming from the Rhine late March, reached Namur on the 11th of April. In: Geschichte etc. p.323

⁴⁸ Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.25

Major Von Holleben, of the 3rd battalion 8th regiment Leib-infantry, confirms his brigade (the one of Von Borcke) moved from Koblenz to Diekirch where it arrived on the 10th of April. Cf. Aus dem hinterlassene etc. p.137

⁴⁹ Colonel Hiller (future commander of the 16th brigade) left for the army on the 16th of April. By the time he reached the army, only the 15th regiment of infantry was at Kochem at the Moselle; the remainder of the brigade had not arrived yet; it did so in May. Cf. Unger, W. von (ed) , Denkwürdigkeiten des Generals A.Freiherr Hiller von Gaertringen p.233-235

⁵⁰ Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Bundestruppen p.64
Unger, W.von Gneisenau p.323
Aerts, W. Etudes etc. p.40
Ollech, Von Geschichte etc. p.25-26
Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleon’s Untegang p.144

Some time before the 14th of April, the day he wrote to Lowe, Von Müffling had sent out officers to survey the roads between Liège and Gembloux. Von Müffling also writes: “Si on peut marcher par trois colonnes il n’y a pas de doute que nous pourrions nous joindre avec vous entre Nivelles et Namur.” In: BL, Add.ms.20.192 f.236

⁵¹ This means that the general order of the 11th of April about this was communicated to Gneisenau.

⁵² Delbrück, H. Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.493-495

⁵³ Lieutenant colonel Ludwig Gustav von Thile (1781-1852) was a member of the representation of Prussia at the congress of Vienna.

⁵⁴ In: Griewank, K. – Gneisenau. Ein Leben in Briefen p.312-313

⁵⁵ There has been some misunderstanding what is meant with “toute l’armée”. It is clear that here Wellington refers to both his own and the Prussian army, because of the description which is given by Hudon Lowe as well, on his behalf.

Delbrück, Von Unger and Pirenne, for instance, also interpret the expression as being applicable to Wellington’s own army as well. In: Das Leben des Feldmarschalls etc. p.344 – “Gneisenau” p.323 and La stratégie de Wellington p.3

Hussey sees the confusing element of these words as well, the more as he too does not enter into the passage which explains about Wellington’s army being then in front of Brussels. Yet, he comes to the conclusion that Wellington “did not agree to the concept of an eastward communication line”, in other words a retreat towards Liège, Maastricht or Jülich. In: Defending Brussels etc. p.19-20

Lachouque struggles with the words, but does not reach to some conclusion. In: Le secret de Waterloo p.20

⁵⁶ It has been suggested as if the duke’s promise, as interpreted by Gneisenau, would have triggered him to pull away from the Meuse. Yet, by this time this had already been ordered and executed. Cf. Delbrück, H. Das Leben des Feldmarschalls etc. p.344

Unger, Von - Gneisenau p.323

Ollech, more correctly, states that one can doubt whether Gneisenau had understood Wellington well. In: Geschichte etc. p.24

⁵⁷ The statement “[..] und wir würden dann allein den Kampf zu bestehen gehabt haben, den wir, vereint mit dem Herzog von Wellington anzunehmen, abgelehnt hätten”, is described by Hussey as that the Prussians, even if united with the Duke, might have refused to accept battle. Yet, this is not what Gneisenau means. The actual wording is phrased as two options: either acceptance in cooperation, or no acceptance in case of an absence of cooperation. In Hussey’s interpretation, the phrasing would have been: “[..] und wir würden dann allein den Kampf zu bestehen gehabt haben, den wir, vereint mit dem Herzog von Wellington, abgelehnt hätten”. In: *Defending Brussels* p.19

⁵⁸ Hussey admires Gneisenau for moving towards the Duke, but here tends to overlook this element of self-interest and, with this, cooperation. In: *Defending Brussels etc.* p.17

⁵⁹ After the affair with the secret treaty, for Hofschröder it was unlikely that the Prussians would be “particularly cooperative with their ally.” In: *1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc.* p.105

Despite the fact that there were of course political tensions between both states on a grander scale, I would like to point out that – militarily – the situation of the moment the affair came about doesn’t reflect this attitude. This reflects a Prussian awareness of cooperation and the resulting movements (e.g. Gneisenau’s letter dated 13th of April, Von Röder’s letter dated 9th of April, Blücher’s promise of support at the Tirlemont meeting, the resulting shift of the Prussian army towards the Anglo-Netherlands-German army in April and May).

⁶⁰ Hussey, J. *Defending Brussels etc.* p.19

⁶¹ Constant Rebecque claims the decision to move the army of the Netherlands south-west was decided upon on the 5th of April, while he issued his orders on the 7th. Cf. his journal. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25