

## 23rd – 29th of April

The formation of Wellington's army.

As in the second half of April several units of cavalry entered Ostend from England, lord Uxbridge, the commander of Wellington's cavalry, also arrived there, with some of his staff, on the 25th of April. <sup>1</sup>

Three days later, his position as commander of the cavalry of the army was formally confirmed in a general order issued by Wellington. <sup>2</sup> Not long after his arrival, however, the prince of Orange had requested Wellington that the cavalry of the Netherlands should remain under his immediate command and neither Wellington, nor Uxbridge had any objection to this. <sup>3</sup>

At the same time, Wellington expressed himself towards his brother, Henry Wellesley on how he saw the situation late April. He writes on the 28th:

“We have here now, including Dutch, about 60.000 and we are in close communication with the Prussians on our left. They promise me more men from England; but it appears to me as if they were afraid there to touch the question of war, and they have most unaccountably delayed all their warlike preparations. The consequence is that the peace opinions are gaining ground fast; and I agree with you in thinking that if we only leave Buonaparte alone, we shall have him more powerful than ever in a short time.

I have not heard from Vienna for some days. When I left that place, and when I last heard, the opinions were unanimous for attacking Buonaparte and pushing the war vigorously; and the preparations are certainly immense. According to all accounts there will not be fewer than 800.000 on the Rhine and on this side in the course of a fortnight. I think, however, that people are a little cool both a Vienna and in England in respect to the Bourbons. The Jacobin faction at Paris wishes to see the duc d'Orléans or somebody else at the head of affairs; in short, they wish to take a middle term between Buonaparte and the Bourbons, to which I am afraid the emperor of Russia principally will not feel great objection. But if we are stout we shall save the king, whose government affords the only chance of peace.

As usual, our government won't speak out; probably they can't. But I hope their conduct will, at least, save us from the establishment of a government of war in France.” <sup>4</sup>

And on the same day, towards earl Bathurst, the duke was frank about his difficult relationship with king Willem and about the quality of the army of the Netherlands, after having seen it at an inspection a few days before. [<sup>5</sup>]

“The Nassau troops are excellent; and the Dutch militia are a very good body of men, although young. The Belgians young, and some very small. The cavalry remarkably well mounted, but don't ride very well. The whole well clothed and equipped for service; and, as far as I could judge from what I saw of their movements, well disciplined.

They are completely officered by officers who have been in the French service. It was an extraordinary circumstance that the only corps which cried “Vive le roi !” were the Belgians, which appears in these good days to be the common cry of treason.

You will see in my despatch of this date the arrangement which I have made with the king for the defence of this country in case the armies should move forward. I have had the greatest difficulty in making this and indeed every other arrangement with him. With professions in his mouth of a desire to do everything I can suggest, he objects to everything I propose; it then comes to be a matter of negotiation for a week, and at last is settled by my desiring him to arrange it as he pleases, and telling him that I will have nothing to say to him.

In consequence of the arrangement for the defence of his country he will take away from the operating army about 7000 or 8000 men, which he proposes to place under the command of

prince Frederick, a very fine lad of eighteen years old. He then intends, as I understand, that all the remainder should be under the prince of Orange, notwithstanding the remonstrances I before made with the prince's consent against this arrangement, as placing in too great a mass all the youth and treason of the army.

He has given me no command over his army, and everything is a matter of negotiation, first with his son and then with himself, and although he is, I believe, a well-meaning man, he is the most difficult person to deal with I have ever met.

He is surrounded by persons who have been in the French service. It is very well to employ them, but I would not trust one of them out of my sight, and so I have told him. They manifest the greatest anxiety to get us out of Antwerp and Ostend; but unless I am ordered to evacuate those places, I shall not quit them. You'll see what has passed between the King and me about having English governors in those places; I don't know anything of the persons he has named to those situations.”<sup>6</sup>

Between the 13th and the 24th of April, several changes took place in the cantonments of the Netherlands army. While the cavalry-brigade of De Ghigny pulled away from Soignies further south towards Mons (<sup>7</sup>), the brigade of colonel Von Goedecke (later of Saksen Weimar), of the 2nd division, pulled from its positions around Ligny further north towards Tilly and surroundings.<sup>8</sup> These changes must have been caused by Prussian units of Zieten's 1st corps moving in further west and north east of Charleroi.

At the same time, the engineers of the army of the Netherlands reached Mechelen on the 24th of April.<sup>9</sup>

Wellington's intelligence.

On the 22nd of April, lord Stewart forwarded information about the strength of the French forces as they were prognosed for early May. He calculated the total to be about 430.000 men, to be decreased with 50.000 for units in formation, 70.000 for garrisons, 20.000 for the Vendée, 30.000 for the Midi and 30.000 for Paris – thereby leaving 230.000, to be opposed by 260.000 allies.

For the situation around 20th of May he calculated the presence of about 370.000 allied troops (200.000 Bavarians and Würtemberg, 100.000 Prussians, 70.000 under Wellington) against 280.000 French.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from a report on the detailed composition of the 1st French corps (d'Erlon), Wellington was supplied by a report of Von Dörnberg on French movements from Bavay towards Lille and by the duke of Feltre on the presence of numerous troops along the northern French frontier (30.000 men between Philippeville and Orchies and 50.000 men between Gravelines and Charleville).<sup>11</sup>

A message from a dr. Macnab and coming from Paris, dated 21st of April, that Napoleon intended to attack by surprise near Lille [<sup>12</sup>] mustn't have impressed Wellington as he wrote on the 23rd of April to Blücher:

“J'ai reçu hier la lettre que votre Excellence m'a écrite de Liège le 21 [<sup>13</sup>], et je me rejouis très fort de ce que vous y êtes arrivé, et que je dois avoir des relations si proches avec vous. Les lettres que j'ai déjà écrites au general Gneisenau vous auront démontré combien mes sentiments sont d'accord avec les vôtres, et combien j'apprécie l'honneur d'être en rapport avec la brave armée prussienne sous votre commandement.

Je n'ai rien de nouveau à vous dire. L'ennemi sur la frontière est toujours à peu près dans le même état, et les mêmes nombres. Leur mouvement est perpétuel, dont je crois que le but est d'empêcher les habitans du pays, qui sont généralement royalists, de répandre leurs opinions

politiques. Il y a eu dans les derniers jours une augmentation d'officiers généraux, et de l'état major à Valenciennes, mais je ne crois pas qu'ils aient l'intention de rien faire.

On parle en France de République, et, à juger de ce que j'entends de Vienne, et de Paris, je ne serais pas étonné si la partie se trouvait remise pour quelque temps. Mais nous l'aurons sûrement un jour ou l'autre, et je vous assure, mon cher général, que rien ne me sera en toute occasion plus agréable que d'être en rapport immédiate avec vous.”<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, Wellington arranged the more practical aspects of the communication with the Prussian headquarters by writing to colonel Hardinge: “I will hereafter send you copies of all I write to Blücher, or the original under flying seal.

Hint to Blucher that I have as yet nobody about me who can read the German character, and that it would be very desirable if he could write me in French, or order you to write me his wishes in English.”<sup>15</sup>

After Wellington had arrived in Brussels, 13.400 men were available for garrisons into Mons, Tournay, Ypres, Ostend, Nieuport and Antwerp.<sup>16</sup>

The situation was that at least for the works at Ghent king Willem had made objections to them being occupied by Wellington. As Wellington felt it unfair towards the other allies to occupy them with troops under his own command (by this time he still hadn't over the army of the Netherlands), he deemed it necessary to halt the works there.

It was for this reason that the duke wrote to his son, prince Willem, to find out what his father wanted to be done with the situation about the works in general, while using the situation at Ghent as a motive. At the same time he made it very clear to the king that for the defence of his country, defensive works would be most important, also after an invasion into France. His irritation about the situation was such that he even wrote to the prince:

“This is my decided opinion regarding these posts [Ghent, Tournay, Mons and Ath] and it rests with His Majesty to occupy them or not, as he may think proper. As far as the King's allies will be concerned, I shall take measures to render it a matter of total indifference to their particular interests, whether the enemy does or not occupy Bruxelles as soon as we shall have advanced.”<sup>17</sup>

King Willem wrote his reaction on the 21st of April, but not Wellington directly but to his son. In this letter Willem explained how he saw the situation, i.e. as one in which he was held afar from the sector where the British and Hanoverian troops were present and that for this reason he had put his army further to the east.

With the arrival of Wellington, however, he was asked to bring his troops where they were not admitted before and this had made Willem hesitant to do so which clearly irritated Wellington. Yet, after Willem had made 11 battalions (7000 men) available he had demanded where they were to be committed, but in the current situation he had now canceled his demands and the only remaining element was, in his view, where the duke wanted to use them. So basically it was all a misunderstanding. Willem clearly felt the situation as he reiterated his strong willingness to cooperate with the duke and that he highly attached to a good relationship with him.<sup>18</sup>

This bizarre situation of an indirect communication, which had also led to mutual irritations which were expressed through the prince of Orange, led Falck to write to the king: “U.M. is, naar ik vernomen heb, niet voornemens om voortaan anders dan regtstreeks met Lord Wellington te onderhandelen.” So, apparently it must have been Willem himself who must have expressed the strong wish to communicate, from then on, in a direct way to Wellington. For that reason, Falck even included an example of a letter for prince Willem to be written by the king to elucidate the situation, so as to stop his role as intermediate between the two.<sup>19</sup>

It worked, as some days later, on the 23rd of April, the duke put the subject of the garrisons forward again, but now directly to the king of the Netherlands as he wrote in a memorandum for him: "The nature of the operations which the Allies will probably carry on when their armies shall be assembled and prepared for action and the nature of the enemy's frontier, opposite to that of His Majesty, render necessary the adoption of measures for the special defence of the latter. The fortresses of Antwerp, Ostend, Nieuport, Ypres and the citadel of Tournay, are now, or will shortly be, in a situation to stand a siege; Mons is strengthened by field works, and is secure against a coup de main; and, in my opinion, Ghent and Ath ought to be rendered so, without loss of time. That which I would beg leave to propose to His Majesty is that the places above mentioned should be occupied by garrisons, and that there should, besides, be a small corps of troops in the field to aid in their defence, and to give general protection to the country." What follows is a calculation amounting to 21.700 men for the garrisons and for the supporting field army 5000 men. Then Wellington continues: "Although the prince Regent, as sovereign of Great Britain and of Hanover, has but a secondary interest in the protection of the Low Countries, from the temporary occupation of the enemy, I feel no objection to give 12.000 men, that is to say, 2000 British and 10.000 Hanoverians, to aid in supplying a force to occupy these garrisons, and to defend this country; and, as the British interests are principally connected with the maritime ports in which it is essential to the interests of His Majesty and all the allies that the British government should have establishments, I should propose that the British and Hanoverian troops should occupy Antwerp, Ostend and Nieuport; the last, as being connected with the inundations of the second; and that the troops of the Low Countries should occupy Ypres, Tournay, Ghent, Mons and Ath." <sup>20</sup>

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In the overall proposal from Wellington there were 2000 British, 10.000 Hanoverians and 14.700 men from the army of the Low Countries. In the distribution as proposed by Wellington, there would be 3000 Hanoverians for the army in the field, plus 2000 men of the army of the Low Countries.

In a reaction of the 24th of April, however, the king proposed to have these 3000 Hanoverians at Ypres and to have them replaced by men of his own army, so that all forces in the field would all be from his army. Additionally, he proposed to the duke to have all these forces (14.700) under the command of prince Frederik.

<sup>21</sup>

Eventually, however, the situation was that it very probably did not work that way: all garrisons and the forces in the field linked to them were under the direct command of Wellington, while prince Frederik got his command over the 1st division and the Indian brigade of the army of the Netherlands in May.

In the covering letter for his memorandum of the 23rd of April, Wellington had written to king Willem: "In selecting the Commanding officers for the several stations, I should earnestly recommend to your Majesty to select for Antwerp, Ostend and Nieuport, either English officers or Dutch officers who have not been in the French services." <sup>22</sup>

This remark didn't please London as on the 2nd of May earl Bathurst wrote to Wellington: "Your Grace is well aware of the importance which we have always attached to the possession of Antwerp and Ostend, not only as the means of providing for our communication with the army, but as securing a retreat in case of mischance.

It is, therefore, very probable that His Majesty may be advised by those who were recently in the French interest to press for the occupation of these places, hoping either by our acquiescence to find a favourable opportunity to surrender them to the French, or, by our refusal, to create disunion between us and His Majesty.

However the latter is to be deprecated, the occupation of those fortresses by British commanders, considering the prevailing spirit of the officers of His Majesty's army, is so important, that the prince Regent has commanded me to instruct your Grace to resist, with all possible respect, any demands which His Majesty may make to deliver up the command of Antwerp or Ostend to officers belonging to his service.

Militarily speaking, it is evident that our possession of these fortresses is most desirable for the security of our forces on the continent. If there are any political reasons which His Majesty should urge against our occupation of them, your Grace is aware that the proper channel for the communication of any representations of that description is either through Sir Charles Stuart, or His Majesty's ambassador resident at the court of London."

And:

"I have sent you a despatch authorising you to decline the surrender of Antwerp and Ostend. I thought it desirable that you should have such an instruction to plead, as in your correspondence with His Majesty you appear to be willing to give them up if the Dutch officers are persons who had not served under Buonaparte. You are enabled in the despatch to make His Majesty over to Sir Charles Stuart, if he continues to press the matter unpleasantly. I take it for granted you will do what you please with the Dutch troops when you have advanced into France." <sup>23</sup>

When it came down to the command at Antwerp and Ostend, the situation was that king Willem had replied to Wellington that both commanders had not been in French service and this situation was felt as most unpleasant in London. At the same time it was considered there as a political one and herewith diverted away from Wellington to sir Charles Stuart.

At the same time that Wellington sent king Willem colonel Carmichael Smyth's report on the state of the works involved, on the 21st of May, he also sent him instructions which were destined for the commanders at the places involved what to do in case of a French attack on the Low Countries for approval. <sup>24</sup>

After the king had approved of them, Wellington accordingly sent them to the prince of Orange on the 7th of June.

Apart from all the organisational, technical and military arrangements to be made in the different localities, as soon as the enemy had entered the territory of the Netherlands, the main item for Wellington was that all these places should be considered as being in a state of siege. <sup>25</sup>

The invasion of France.

At Prussian central headquarters both Gneisenau and Blücher were quite clear on what was to be done: invade France as soon as possible. Apparently, the message about its postponement until 1st of June had not yet reached them as Gneisenau wrote on the 23rd of April to sir Hudson Lowe:

"Je suis un peu en retard avec ma réponse à la lettre que vous m'avez l'honneur de m'écrire, et je vous demande vos excuses. [<sup>26</sup>] Nous avons eu un travail énorme par la [...] et la nouvelle formation de nos corps d'armée. [<sup>27</sup>]

Plusieurs grand renforts nous sont arrivés; la nourriture de nos troupes nous cause de même mainte inquiétude. Vous voyez par tout alors que nous ne manquons pas d'occupations. Notre force, non y compris le corps des Saxons qui restera au roi de Saxe, est de 153 / m combattants. [<sup>28</sup>] Nous pouvons entrer en campagne aussitôt que nous en recevons l'ordre. Mais je crains que ce maudit congrès délibérera jusqu'à ce que nos ennemis seront à même d'entrer en lieu avec nous." <sup>29</sup>

And three days later, Blücher wrote to his nephew, Conrad-Daniel von Blücher-Altona:

“Ich stehe jetzt hier mit 150.000 Preussen [<sup>30</sup>] und erwarte den Befehl, die Franzosen abermals zu besiegen. Rechts, mich zur Seite in Brüssel, steht mein Freund Wellington. Die Franzosen halten sich ruhig, und ich glaube nicht, dass Bonaparte einen Offensivkrieg so balde beginnen wird; soll er also nicht regieren, so müssen wir ihm angreifen, und da wünsche ich, wann es geschehen soll, die möglichste Eile. Kurz vor dem Entweichen des Tyrannen schrieb ich dem König, meinem Herrn, und verlangte bestimmt meinen Abschied, um meine letzten paar Tage in Ruhe und mich selbst zu leben. Aber ich habe das Verlangen des Monarchen und den Wunsch der Nation folgen müssen. Bleiben die Monarchen einig miteinander, so wird die Sache wohl gehen. Aber schwer wird es immer sein, einen Bourbon auf den Thron zu erhalten, wenn er es nicht selbst versteht, die Nation zu gewinnen. Am klügsten wäre es, noch etwas von Frankreich abzuschneiden, und dann könnten sie sich eine republikanische Regierung bilden. Ich glaube nicht, dass sie alsdann ihren Nachbarn gefährlich wären; aber, wie alles verkehrt geht, so bin ich sicher, dass die heutige Politik auch nun aufs neue wieder fehlgreifen wird.”<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, at Vienna, Von Knesbeck (on the 18th and 24th of April) and Schwarzenberg (on the 28th of April) formulated their plans for the invasion into France.

For Knesbeck the question whether to start offensive operations in the beginning of May or one month later was clear: for him the second option would be the best.

Though the first one would support the Royalist movement in France and would not allow Napoleon more time to strengthen his power, it also might enhance a pro-Napoleonic attitude. Other than that, from a military point of view, the presence of the French fortresses in the north would force the allies to besiege or block them which would decrease their numbers, while Napoleon would get the chance to build up a strong defence in rear of them.

In considering these pros and cons, Von Knesbeck chose for the option to start operations the moment the Austrians would have reached the Rhine at the beginning of June. What counted was the coherent use of sheer superiority in forces, all converging in one line towards Paris. Knesbeck writes: “Battre les armées de Bonaparte, délivrer la nation Française du joug sous lequel elle gémit, tel est le but de la guerre. Tomber sur l’armée Buonapartienne avec tant de forces que possible; donc, diriger les mouvements des différentes armées alliées de manière que jamais une d’elles risque d’être accablée séparément, mais au contraire, que plusieurs doivent toutefois se trouver ensemble, et s’il est possible réunis au jour de bataille générale. Voilà le moyen d’atteindre ce but.

Il résulte de cette considération que si pour destituer Buonaparte Paris doit être derechef l’objet que les armées alliées se proposent, ils doivent se trouver sur la même hauteur avant de commencer un mouvement combiné sur cette capitale.”

In this context, Knesbeck saw Wellington’s army between Enghien, Hal and Genappe, with observation-posts at Charleroi and to his right as far as Ostend, while Antwerp would be his operation-base.

Blücher’s army would have to be on the right bank of the Meuse, between Namur, Huy and the Ourthe. In case Blücher and Wellington would be under a French attack before the beginning of June, it was left to these commanders to do whatever they felt best in a mutual cooperation. If one of them would be under attack, the other one was supposed to fall upon Napoleon’s flank. In case of success, they then had to wait for the Austrians to come up over the Rhine and through Switzerland.

With the Russians joining in, the allies would then form two huge masses, one on the Meuse and one on the side of Switzerland.

As a result, Knesbeck saw two options for Napoleon: either to split his forces in two or to manoeuvre under the protection of the fortresses in the north and the Rhine towards

Strassbourg, while he would then fall with superior forces upon the Prussian army, before it could be supported.

Knesebeck trusted both Wellington and Blücher, in case Napoleon would thrust between the Meuse and the Austrian army (and as long as the Russians hadn't arrived), would then fall upon his communications.

For the actual invasion into France Knesebeck saw the advance by moving in on the right, bringing in the most part of the forces between the rivers Marne and Oise. In this, Wellington would then move from Mons and Blücher from Namur, thereby having the shortest distance to cover to Paris.

The armies of prince Wrede and Würtemberg were then supposed to move to the river Sarre, while the Austrians would remain at the High Rhine.

The general idea was to draw Napoleon to the High Rhine and the frontiers of Switzerland and Italy as to give him the idea as if the allies would invade France from the line Basel – Langres, as in 1814. For this, the allied army of the higher Rhine would unite with the Russians there and would draw Napoleon off from Paris, while the armies of Wellington and Blücher would march straight onto Paris.

Knesebeck calculated, by taking into account the need for the observation of the fortresses in the north, that both groups of forces would contain 300.000 and 120.000 men respectively. At the same time, Knesebeck saw the possibility that Napoleon would not be drawn east and that he would attack Wellington and Blücher with superior forces, or that he would stick to a defence of Paris by concentrating his forces in the circle Péronne, Laon, Rheims, Châlons and Troyes. In the first case Knesebeck saw the possibility for both commanders to draw in the armies of Bavaria and Würtemberg, so as to take Napoleon in his right flank.

For the second case Knesebeck reckoned both armies of Bavaria (60.000) and Würtemberg (50.000) would move towards the Sarre river and from there to Stenay.

The Russians (120.000) were then supposed to follow these armies and direct themselves towards Luxembourg.

The Austrians (125.000) would pass the Rhine between Strassbourg and Basel.

Having these three masses of allied forces in place Knesebeck's idea for the actual invasion was in the first place "qu'on présente à l'ennemi trois masses à peu près égales, dont le centre est destiné de se porter, d'après les circonstances, ou sur la droite ou sur la gauche, et de renforcer de cette manière, par un mouvement rapide, une des ailes, pour lui donner une telle prépondérance de forces qu'il pourra livrer bataille à l'ennemi avec l'espoir de la victoire.

Secondly, in case this movement had to take place to the right, the Russian, Prussian, British and Bavarian armies had to assemble as quickly as possible on the Meuse either to give battle to Napoleon or to march to Paris, then trying to defeat Napoleon if he would oppose them or would move to their left along the Meuse.

In that context, the Würtemberg army was supposed to keep the communication between these armies and the Austrian army. This army, in its turn, was then to march on the French flank, either to draw them off from Paris or to follow the French in case they would turn against Wellington and Blücher.

For this, the Austrian army would advance to Langres first, while prince Wrede would do so to Verdun and the prince of Würtemberg to Nancy, Toul and Comerey; the Russians were to do so to Stenay, thereby avoiding Sarre-Louis, Thionville and Longwy. Blücher would direct himself to Mézières while Wellington would do this towards Chimay.

All armies while advancing were supposed, if possible, to take fortresses by surprise and not to engage superior French forces.

In case Napoleon might make an attempt to penetrate the allied centre, the prince of Würtemberg would have to fall back, while the other armies would throw themselves upon the flanks of the enemy.<sup>32</sup>

Prince Schwarzenberg wrote a memorandum on the coming war on the 28th of April in which he laid down some principles upon which it should be based. These were in his description:

- “1. Chacune des armées doit s’attacher à la base d’opération qui lui est la plus naturelle.
2. Toutes les armées doivent avoir un objet d’opération commune entre elles, afin qu’elles puissent diriger leurs efforts vers le même point.
3. [...] l’armée doit se trouver dans la plus parfaite sécurité quant à ses derrières.
4. Les armées qui avancent doivent donc être disposées de manière qu’elles puissent contraindre l’ennemi à découvrir entièrement une partie de ses possessions, s’il était tenté d’agir offensivement d’un autre côté.
5. Le moyen le plus efficace pour atteindre ce but serait de menacer différens [sic] points assez distans [sic] les uns des autres pour pouvoir, dans le cas qu’une de nos armées essuyat des revers, rétablir les affaires en agissant avec vigueur d’un côté différent, l’empêcher de poursuivre ses avantages déjà acquises, et l’obliger peut-être à gagner avec rapidité une pointe opposé de sa monarchie. Ce n’est qu’ainsi qu’une de nos armées battue gagnerait le tems nécessaire pour reprendre l’offensive, et que même, en admettant un second revers, l’ennemi finirait par succomber à la continuité de ses efforts.”

The Russian army, obviously, was not able to operate from its natural base. For that reason, Schwarzenberg describes its role as “remplir le grand interval que la nature même des opérations des armées alliées, Autrichiennes, Anglaises et Prussiennes, formera infailliblement. Elle doit être prête à porter des secours à celle d’entre les armées alliées qui en aurait besoin, non pas comme une armée de réserve, mais placée sur la même ligne, afin de pouvoir se porter à droite ou à gauche selon le besoin.”

Resulting, Schwarzenberg distinguished three masses: one consisting of the Austrian army of the High Rhine, the Bavarian corps, the Würtemberg corps, the troops from Bade and Darmstadt and the Austrian troops in Italy (344.000 men), the second consisting of the armies of Wellington and Blücher, plus the troops of Saxony and Hesse (250.000 men) and the third mass, consisting of the Russian army (200.000 men) - all having Paris as their goal.

In this intention, it would not be possible to start operations before the 16th of June. In case Napoleon would act offensively, Schwarzenberg writes: “Tout ce que l’ennemi pourrait vouloir entreprendre jusqu’à cette époque devrait être soumis aux mêmes principes que nous venons d’établir par rapport à l’offensive; c’est-à-dire, qu’un corps de troupes attaqué avec supériorité se retirerait sans se compromettre jusqu’à ce que tous les autres eussent fait des démonstrations énergiques.”<sup>33</sup>

Both documents probably reached Wellington and Blücher during the first week of May.

#### Observations.

Wellington felt irritated about the passive attitude back in London when it came down to the preparations for war. Additionally, when it came down to politics, he felt annoyed that the government did not speak out about the future government of France.

For Wellington matters were simple, as far as the general purpose was concerned, and that was to establish peace, not war, and this could only be reached by restoring Louis XVIII and not by having even a Jacobin government.

However, the approach of Blücher was quite the opposite of what Wellington wanted: he did not see the use of restoring the Bourbons, as they didn’t have the support of the country. He saw much more in a republican government, thereby giving Prussia the opportunity to claim French territories.

Additionally, when it came down to military operations against France, it seems as if Blücher was even more in a rush as Wellington was.

For his defence, Wellington again pointed to the importance of strong places like the ones with clear British maritime interests like Ostend, Nieuport (connected to the inundations of Ostend) and Antwerp. They were to be occupied by British / Hanoverian garrisons, contrary to the remaining ones which were to be occupied by units of the Low Countries.

This difference gave rise to irritations amongst the Dutch authorities who were disturbed by the presence of British units at Ostend and Antwerp. In this issue, however, the duke kept safely aside by making clear that he didn't have any orders to evacuate them.

The Dutch authorities weren't the duke's only point of concern. It was king Willem with whom he had to deal with as well and whom he started to regard as "the most difficult person to deal with I have ever met."<sup>34</sup>

It is in this connection that it should be stressed that in his relationship with the government and king Willem of the Netherlands, Wellington still had no formal command over the army of the Netherlands.<sup>35</sup> This was something which was arranged for in the week to come.

As for the formation of the army of the Netherlands - having initially been assembled between Maastricht and Hasselt, after one month of further preparation, equipment and formation - it was deemed by the end of April fit to have it inspected by king Willem, Wellington, the princes of Orange and their staff.

Revised: 9th December 2009

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. One leg, p.122

Cf. Staatscourant, newspaper, dated 1st of May 1815

Sir Augustus Frazer. In: Sabine, E. (ed) , Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer p.494

<sup>2</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.169

Gurwood, lieutenant colonel (ed) - The general orders of field marshal the duke of Wellington p.388

According to Beamish, while Uxbridge had this command, it was still general Alten who had the immediate superintendence of the Hanoverian cavalry. In: History etc. Vol.II p.324

From the general orders as issued to sir Hussey Vivian, Uxbridge's command wasn't formalized until the 3rd of May. In: NAM, 7709-6-1

<sup>3</sup> One leg p.123

This claim is contradictory, however, to the general issued on the 11th of April which explicitly kept the division of cavalry of the Netherlands under his direct orders within the 1st corps.

<sup>4</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.168-169

<sup>5</sup> Wellington and Willem I, accompanied by Willem, the prince of Orange, inspected the army of the Netherlands on the 25th and 26th of April. The first day they started their inspection at Lillois (Trip's brigade), near Genappe (Indian brigade), Quatre Bras (Von Goedecke's brigade), Hautaine-le-Val (Van Bijlandt's brigade), Seneffe, Fayt and Goegnies (1st division). The 1st and 2nd division, as well as the brigade of heavy cavalry, all near Roeulx, while both other brigades of light cavalry and the 3rd division of infantry were inspected on the day after, on the road between Soignies and Braine le Comte. They returned to Brussels the second day.

Cf. Constant Rebecque to Chassé, dated 24th of April. In: NA, 2.12.52 3 nr.1113

Cf. Count Pozzo di Borgo to count De Blacas. In: Romberg, E and A.Malet (ed.) Louis XVIII et les Cent Jours à Gand: recueil etc. Vol.I p.95

Cf. Wellington to Bathurst, 28th of April. In: WSD, Vol.X p.167

Cf. Journaal der 2<sup>e</sup> divisie infanterie. In: NA, 2.13.52 nr.1090 p.9b-10

Pirenne, on the 25th of April, sees some strange connection between manoeuvres as carried out around Quatre Bras, which would be analogue to ones of the heavy cavalry around Braine l'Alleud and Waterloo nine days earlier, as if they had a relation to the later concentrations there during the campaign. He also claims that on the 25th of April "les positions de combat qui y [at Quatre Bras] seraient occupées le 16 juin furent déterminées ce jour-là." – again, absurd claims which are highly determined by hindsight. In: La stratégie de Wellington etc. p.4

<sup>6</sup> WSD, Vol.XII p.167-168 Here, Wellington refers to the inspection he had carried out (see above).

<sup>7</sup> It was on the 20th of April that lieutenant general Stedman, at Le Roeulx, reported to Constant that Zieten, through major Von Neumann, requested Van Merlen to evacuate Binche and to him to do the same with his cantonments south of the Roman road. Stedman wanted to know whether Van Merlen was supposed to stay in Binche. In: 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8

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Apparently, Van Merlen himself was fully surprised being asked to do so as he complained about this to Constant Rebecque directly. Van Merlen was only prepared to evacuate Binche on his orders. At the same time, Van Merlen expressed himself in hard terms about the Prussians, as “ces messieurs veulent nous enlever tout en vivres et fourages, et occuper encore nos cantonnemens.[..] veuillez me répondre par le retour du porteur si ces messieurs ont droit à [..]”

In this, he presumed Constant Rebecque would be in touch with Zieten. Cf. Van Merlen to Constant Rebecque, from Binche 20th of April 1815. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8

De Ghigny himself wrote from Havré to Constant Rebecque on the 17th of April. In: NA, 2.13.14.01. nr.8

At least for a part of the 4th regiment of light dragoons there is an indication that it reached Havré on the 11th of April, having come from Utrecht, through Zaltbommel, Hedel, Den Bosch and Mons. Cf. major Krayenhoff, account. In: Rijksmuseum, nr.NM 10255b

On the 1st of May, the brigade of De Ghigny was at Havré (headquarters), Obourg and Havré (light dragoons) Saint Denis and Casteau (hussars). On the 15th of May, the 8th regiment of hussars also occupied Gottignies while on the 20th of May Casteau was evacuated and Thieusies occupied. On the 13th of May, Collaert had requested Constant Rebecque to occupy Thieusies with 100 men of the 8th regiment of hussars. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

After the 20th of May no more changes took place until the 15th of June.

The fact that the brigade was around Havré on the 10th of May is confirmed by the prince of Orange in his letter to Wellington. In: WSD, Vol.X p.271

On the 29th of April, Van Merlen had moved his headquarters from Binche to Saint Symphorien and on the 1st of May his brigade stood at Saint Symphorien, Harmignies, Harveng, Spiennes, Givry (5th light dragoons), Estienne-au-Val, Estienne-au-Mont, Haulchin, Vellereille-le-Sec (6th hussars); the artillery and the train were at Saint Symphorien and Villers Saint-Ghislain.

The fact that the brigade was around Saint Symphorien on the 10th of May is confirmed by the prince of Orange in his letter to Wellington. In: WSD, Vol.X p.271

Cf. Van Merlen to Constant Rebecque, 1st of May. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

The brigade of heavy cavalry of Trip was on the 1st of May still around Braine l'Alleud, i.e. at Waterloo, Ohain, Braine-le-Château, Wauthier-Braine, Bois Seigneur-Isaac, Haut-Ittre, Witterzée, Lillois.

Later, the brigade moved its positions twice in June (see below), but before it did so it extended its cantonments on the 23rd of May to Placenoit.

The fact that the brigade was around Braine l'Alleud on the 10th of May is confirmed by the prince of Orange in his letter to Wellington. In: WSD, Vol.X p.271

In: Journaal van de divisie kavallerie etc. In: Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 etc. Vol.III p.380-384

Cf. Autobiographical notes of captain Von Omphal, 6th regiment of hussars. In: NIMH, nr.104/7

The horse artillery which was attached to Collaert's division was on the 1st of May at Lillois and Saint Symphorien and Villers Saint Ghislain. Yet, it was on the 7th of May that the artillery which was at Lillois (near Trip) was moved to Spiennes and Villers Saint Ghislain. From there it moved on the 12th of May to Saint Symphorien, while the guns there moved to Viller sur Haine. So, by mid-May the horse artillery was at Saint Symphorien and Viller sur

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Haine. Later again, on the 20th and 22nd of May, some guns were moved to Boussoit sur Haine and Thieu.

Eventually, by the 12th of June, all horse artillery was posted in four villages: Saint Symphorien, Villers sur Haine, Boussoit sur Haine and Thieu. Taking it from the events of the 15th and 16th of June, it is my impression that the section of captain Gey was in the first two and the one of captain Petter in the last two.

Cf. Journaal van de divisie kavallerie etc. In: Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.380-384

General Collaert moved his headquarters from Braine le Comte to St.Denis on the 6th of May and on the 20th of that month to Boussoit sur Haine. Cf. Journaal van de divisie kavallerie etc. In: Bas, F.de – La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.380-384

<sup>8</sup> Bas, F.de La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.80-85

<sup>9</sup> They had left Maastricht on the 21st of April and had marched through Hasselt, Haelen, Diest and Aerschot. Cf. Klijnsma, S.F. De veldtog van 1815

<sup>10</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.135-138

<sup>11</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.152-154, 157, 166-167

<sup>12</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.128-129

<sup>13</sup> This letter from Blücher is not available, but must, in the context of Wellington's answer have dealt with his arrival in Liège and his wish to cooperate with the duke.

<sup>14</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.323-324

<sup>15</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.323

<sup>16</sup> A state dated 1st of April and originating from the former Kriegsarchiv (nr.VI.D.118.I.70) gives totals of 50.000 Prussians on the Meuse and 23.000 English and Hanoverian troops and 20.000 Dutch / Belgian troops in the Netherlands. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.48

Some days before, on the 27th of March, Wellington was informed in detail by lieutenant colonel J.Carmichael Smyth of the Royal Engineers in a memorandum about the progress in the field works in the Netherlands as initiated by the prince of Orange and which were carried out in Ostend, Nieuport, Ypres, Tournay, Antwerp, Mons etc.

In: WSD, Vol.X p.721-724

<sup>17</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.312-313

<sup>18</sup> NA, 2.02.01 nr.6211

Also in: Colenbrander, H.T. Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VII p.765-766

<sup>19</sup> In: Colenbrander, H.T. Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VII p.765

<sup>20</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.324-326

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It was in the context of inundations that Jean de Brock, inspector of bridges and roads of the Lys-department wrote in April 1815 a memorandum on the possibilities for this way of defence in his department. In: WSD, Vol.X p.194-196

It has been claimed that the memorandum was from the 12th of June, but this is incorrect as king Willem confirms its arrival in his office on the 24th of April. Cf. NAK, WO 30/35 nr.1 Other than that, the accompanying letter from Wellington is also available. Cf. WD, Vol.XII 324

<sup>21</sup> Eventually, as far as British and Hanoverian units were concerned, the following were stationed at Antwerp, Ostend, Nieuport, Ypres, Tournai and Mons:

7th Division - Major-General McKenzie:  
7th British Brigade  
2nd Battalion / 25th (K.O.S.B.) Regiment  
2nd Battalion / 37th (Hampshire) Regiment  
2nd Battalion / 78th (Seaforth Highlanders) Regiment

13th Veteran Battalion, the 2nd Garrison Battalion and the 1st Foreign Battalion  
Total: about 3200 men.

Hanoverian Reserve Corps - Lieutenant-General von der Decken:  
1st Brigade - Lieutenant-Colonel von Bennigsen  
Brothmer Landwehr Battalion  
Mölln Landwehr Battalion  
Bremerlehe Landwehr Battalion  
2nd Brigade - Lieutenant-Colonel von Beaulieu  
Nordheim Landwehr Battalion  
Ahlefeldt Landwehr Battalion  
Springe Landwehr Battalion  
3rd Brigade - Lieutenant-Colonel Bodecken  
Otterndorf Landwehr Battalion  
Zelle Landwehr Battalion  
Ratzeburg Landwehr Battalion  
Luchew Landwehr Battalion  
4th Brigade - Lieutenant-Colonel Wissel  
Hanover Landwehr Battalion  
Uelzen Landwehr Battalion  
Neustadt Landwehr Battalion  
Diepholz Landwehr Battalion

Total about 9000 men.

Cf. Siborne, W. History of the war etc. Vol.I p.32 and  
[http://www.waterloo1815.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=26](http://www.waterloo1815.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=26)

<sup>22</sup> WD, Vol.XII, p.324

The commanders in the different places were:  
Antwerp – lieutenant general Van der Plaet  
Ostend – general major de Vrinieux [?]  
Nieuport – colonel Van Doorn

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Ypres – lieutenant general De Veldrickek [?]  
Tournay – general major Dierman  
Mons – general major Behr  
Ath – colonel Van der Bergh  
Ghent – lieutenant general Marthusewitz  
Bruges – general major Demoulin.  
Cf. state in NA, nr.2.02.01 nr.6211

<sup>23</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.215-216

<sup>24</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.413

The report of lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth mentioned (and dated 19th of May) gave an extensive overview of the works carried out and which comprised in general:

- the strong network of field works and other arrangements around Nieuport and Ypres
- the reinforcement of Ghent
- the works at Audenarde and Escanaffle (immediately south of Avelghem) securing the bridges over the Scheldt and a free passage to the movements of the army
- that Ath, Mons and Tournai were no longer open to a sudden irruption and therefore able to delay any French advance into the country.

In: NAK, WO 30/35 p.4143

<sup>25</sup> Wellington to the prince of Orange, 7th of June 1815. In: WD, Vol.XII p.450-452

At Mons, on the 15th of June, trees surrounding the city were cut and roads cut up. Cf. Jonkheer Vrijthoff, from Mons, 15th of June, 10 p.m. [to ?]. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6585

In the afternoon of the 17th of June, the city of Antwerp was declared in state of siege. Cf. report of the same date of lieutenant general Van der Plaat, the commander at Antwerp, to king Willem. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6585

Van der Plaat also refers to the instruction of the 7th of June.

Cf. Van der Plaat to Wellington, 17th of June 1815, twice. In: HL, WP 1.468

<sup>26</sup> This letter is not available. In light of Gneisenau's reaction, it could be that this letter dealt with the possible invasion of France.

<sup>27</sup> At least the 1st corps had most of its composition as it had during the campaign by the 27th of April.

By that time the 1st brigade was located around Fontaine l'Evêque, the 2nd around Charleroi, the 3rd north-east of Charleroi and the 4th east of this town, towards Namur. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI, nr.I.nr.6 p.23

<sup>28</sup> This figure is highly exaggerated. The actual strength of the Prussian army then was probably around 50.000

<sup>29</sup> BL, Add.ms.20.192 f.243 and 20.114

English translation in: Holland Rose, J. Sir Hudson Lowe etc. p.526-527

<sup>30</sup> This figure is either an error in the transcription of the original manuscript or the figure is highly exaggerated. The actual strength of the Prussian army then was probably around 50.000

<sup>31</sup> In: Unger, W.von (ed.) Blücher's Briefe p.269

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The original is from the Gräfllich Schimmelmannes Archiv.

The 150.000 men strength of the Prussian army couldn't be correct. At this stage, it may have been more around 50.000

<sup>32</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.174-179

<sup>33</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.179-181

Schwarzenberg wrote Wellington on the 29th of April, asking him about his opinion on the general principles as he had laid down in his memorandum the day before. In: WSD, Vol.X p.186

<sup>34</sup> Gneisenau had equal feelings. Cf. his letter to Hardenberg, dated 12th of June (see below).

<sup>35</sup> This became from the very beginning, referring to what the duke wrote on the 6th of April to earl Bathurst: "king William appears unwilling to allow them [the Dutch troops] to be mixed with ours, which, although they are not our best, would afford a chance of making something of them."