

## May – early June 1815

The political situation.

Having no doubt about the hostile intentions of the allies, Napoleon decreed on the 30th April that preparation to war was inevitable. Politically, for Napoleon this meant the need for the choice for either a prolongation of the dictatorship of the emperor as France had known it, or for the Acte additionel.

It had been in the interest of France that Napoleon had chosen for the second option, stating about the Acte: “Nous avons présenté à l’acceptation du peuple un Acte qui, à la fois, garantit ses libertés et ses droits, et met la monarchie à l’abri de tout danger de subversion. Cet acte détermine le mode de la formation de la loi, et dès lors contient en lui-même le principe de toute amélioration qui serait conforme aux vœux de la nation; interdisant cependant toute discussion sur un certain nombre de points fondamentaux déterminés, qui sont irrévocablement fixés.

Nous aurions voulu aussi attendre l’acceptation du peuple avant d’ordonner la réunion des collèges et de faire procéder à la nomination des députés: mais, également maitrisé par les circonstances, le plus haut intérêt de l’Etat nous fait la loi de nous environner le plus promptement possible des corps nationaux.”

The result of this last statement was that Napoleon issued a decree for the convocation of the electoral colleges for the election of the deputies for the *Chambre des représentants* on the 1st of May. <sup>1</sup>

Eventually, the *Chambre des représentants* was composed of 629 members, of which the vast majority – some 500 members – was formed by all kind of liberals; it also counted some 80 hardcore Bonapartists, as well as 30 or 40 Jacobins. Its general attitude was one of hostility against the Bourbons, and it recognized Napoleon as leader of the national government, but at the same time it was hostile against his potential despotism. For that reason, a constitutional monarchy under the duke of Orléans was considered as the ideal solution in the minds of the liberal majority of the Chamber. <sup>2</sup>

The Champ de Mai.

The new constitution was approved after a plebiscite in which yet only some one and a half million votes were cast, less than half of the potential. But as the majority was in favour of it, it was sanctioned.

As a national assemblée (as announced by Napoleon mid-March) for the formal approval of the new constitution was - for practical reasons - no option, the Champ de Mai turned into a huge and pompous ceremonial meeting in Paris on the 1st of June.

Let alone all the ceremony, the core of the long meeting was the speech of Napoleon in which he mentioned that his priority had been “de constituer sans retard la nation”. For that reason he had focused upon the liberty of the citizens through a constitution “conforme à la volonté et à l’intérêt du peuple” and which was now approved by the citizens of France.

At the same time, the speech was clad in an atmosphere of war as it was also basically a pep-talk for the coming war which was inevitable due to the hostile attitude of the allies. In this context, at the ceremony eagles were distributed to the Imperial Guard and the national guard of Paris. <sup>3</sup>

The *Chambre des représentants* and the *Chambre des Pairs* were installed on the 3rd and 6th of June respectively.

Napoleon hoped that his brother Lucien would be elected as chairman of the *Chambre des représentants*, but the Chamber preferred the liberal Lanjuinas and it managed to make

Lucien's election impossible. At the same time, Napoleon was with difficulty dissuaded from quashing the election of Lanjuinais on the 3rd of June. The hostile attitude of the chamber polarized the situation as it made Napoleon consider to abolish the Chamber altogether. On the 6th of June, a strong discussion ensued amongst the members of the Chamber whether it was necessary for them to take the oath upon the new constitution and the emperor. As the opponents eventually abstained from voting, the proposal to take the oath was eventually accepted.

The first session of both chambers took place on the 7th of June. Here, at the opening of the chambers, both took the oath to obey to the new constitution and to Napoleon. In the same session, Napoleon held a speech in which he stated: "Aujourd'hui s'accomplit le désir le plus pressant de mon coeur: je viens commencer la monarchie constitutionnelle." [...] "Les hommes sont impuissants pour assurer l'avenir; les institutions seules fixent les destinées des nations. La monarchie est nécessaire en France pour garantir la liberté, l'indépendance et les droits du peuple." [...] At the same time, Napoleon made a strong call upon the patriotism of all citizens as "[...] une coalition formidable en veut à notre indépendance; ses armées arrivent sur nos frontières." [...] Il est possible que le premier devoir du prince m'appelle bientôt à la tête des enfants de la nation pour combattre pour la patrie. L'armée et moi nous ferons notre devoir." <sup>4</sup>

Both Chambers gathered to discuss their reactions to this speech. Obviously, Napoleon expected a positive reaction of both assemblées. In its reaction on the 11th of June, the *Chambre des pairs* underlined the importance of democracy and of the independence of France, but at the same time warned that the government, after a military victory in the north, would not be drawn into any temptation towards Europe whatsoever and that the sole goal could be a lasting peace. The *Chambre des représentants* gave a similar, but detached, yet at the same time respectful reaction the same day

The same day, on the 11th of June, Napoleon replied to both chambers in writing. To the *Chambre des pairs* he pointed to the huge importance of the struggle ahead against the seventh coalition as the main threat to France and in case the country would face any reverse, he expected the chamber to support both the country and himself.

To the *Chambre des représentants* Napoleon pointed to the importance of the imminent war as well and at the same time he stated: "La Constitution est notre point de ralliement: elle doit être notre étoile polaire dans ces moments d'orage." Yet, in the following eloquent words he smartly informed them that, under the current threat of an allied invasion, there were other things to do as to carry out all kinds of abstract political discussions. At the same time, he felt he was well matched with them, as he wrote: "[...] Aidez-moi à sauver la patrie. Premier représentants du peuple, j'ai contracté l'obligation, que je renouvelle, d'employer, dans des temps plus tranquilles, toutes les prérogatives de la Couronne et le peu d'expérience que j'ai acquis, à vous seconder dans l'amélioration de nos institutions." <sup>5</sup>

#### Defensive measures.

On the 30th of April, Napoleon wrote to Davout: "Mon Cousin, si nous avons la guerre, et que je sois obligé de partir, mon intention est de vous laisser à Paris, ministre de guerre, gouverneur de Paris et commandant en chef des gardes nationales, des levées en masse et des troupes de ligne qui se trouveraient dans la ville. Je n'ai point encore le projet de partir, et je ne suppose pas que l'ennemi nous attaque de tout le mois de mai.[...]" <sup>6</sup>

At the same time, Napoleon (again) had a strong eye for his northern and eastern frontiers stating the same day (1st of May): "toutes les places de première ligne de nos frontières du Nord et de l'Est, dont l'état est joint à ce décret, sont mises en état de siège." <sup>7</sup>

Also, on the 2nd of May, Napoleon asked Davout to order general d'Erlon to prepare inundations in the north, but with the explicit instruction only to activate them at the actual start of hostilities.<sup>8</sup>

The concern for the defence of the country led Napoleon to induce on the 30th of April a general reorganisation of the present eight observation corps into four armies and three observation corps. The armies designated were:

The Armée du Nord, the Armée de la Moselle (the 4th corps), the Armée du Rhin (5th corps) and the Armée des Alpes (7th corps) – all armies were to be supported by reserve divisions of grenadiers and chasseurs of the national guard. Further, all *places fortes* in their territories were to be garrisoned by national guards.

The armée de la Moselle was led by general Gérard, while the one of the Rhine came under the command of general Rapp. This last army was destined to contain the enemy on the left bank of the Rhine and on the Sarre. The armée des Alpes had been put by Napoleon under the command of general Suchet on the 26th of April.<sup>9</sup>

The three observation corps were those of the Jura (on the line stretching from Belfort to Genève), of the Pyrenees and Var.<sup>10</sup> The last one was to observe Marseille, the coasts of the Provence and was based at Toulon.

On the 1st of May, Napoleon also explained to Davout his system of defence of the territory of France, and he asked him to communicate it to the commanders of the Armées du Nord, De la Moselle, Du Rhin, Des Alpes and the observation corps of Jura. It comprised the following elements:

- the above mentioned armies being composed of active forces and *troupes de garnisons*
- the garrisons being composed of bataillons of grenadiers et de chasseurs of the national guard and of the national guard "*sédentaire de la place*"
- the active army being composed of line troops of all arms, and the reserve divisions of national guards, free-corps or partisans of the *levée en masse*
- the active national guard to be composed of one reserve division for the Armée du Nord, one for the Armée de la Moselle, one for the Armée du Rhin, two for the observation corps of the Jura and three for the Armée des Alpes.
- each general was supposed to stimulate the formation of corps of partisans under their command
- la levée en masse*. This force was to be composed of *la garde nationale, les gardes forestiers, la gendarmerie et de tous les bons citoyens et employés qui voudraient s'y joindre*. It was to be organised per departement.
- the "comité de défense" would give instructions for the defence of the second line at the Somme, the Meuse, the Vosges, the Sambre and the Rhône.
- the organisation of 40 battalions, destined to contain any resistance at Bordeaux, Toulouse, Nantes and the principal outlets of the Loire
- the observation of the Var and the Pyrenees.<sup>11</sup>

On the 1st of May Napoleon also worked out further orders for Davout regarding the positions of the reserve divisions of the different armies. For instance, the one of the Armée du Nord had to collect at Sainte-Menehould, while the one of the 4th corps would have to do so at Nancy and the of the army of the Rhine at Colmar.

The observation corps of the Jura had two reserve divisions which had to assemble at Vesoul and in front of Besancon. Finally, the three reserve divisions of the army of the Alps were to be at the fortress of Barraux, Valence and between the fortress of l'Ecluse and Lyon.

Last but not least Napoleon added the following specific instruction: “Il faut donner pour instruction aux généraux commandant dans le Nord que les garnisons des places puissent se réunir et former des divisions actives, qui prennent position en avant des lignes.

Cela doit s’appliquer à toutes les grandes garnisons. Metz, par exemple, qui a une excellente garde nationale, peut former ses grenadiers et chasseurs en une division de réserve, pour aller au secours de l’armée active, assurer les convois etc. Il est donc nécessaire que les généraux en chef connaissent bien les troupes qui doivent composer les garnisons. [...] Il est important que, du 10 au 15 mai, toutes les places soient occupées par les gardes nationales, et que les troupes de l’armée se réunissant dans les camps, deviennent mobiles. Cela fait, en tout 294 bataillons, sans y comprendre les garnisons de la 13<sup>e</sup> et de la 14<sup>e</sup> division. Sur ces 294 bataillons, 92 sont réunis en divisions de réserve et 202 forment la garnison des places.”<sup>12</sup>

In accordance with the orders as issued late April, the forces in the north started moving. From the 2nd of May onwards, the 1st corps started arriving at Valenciennes, after the 2nd corps had started evacuating this town, Condé, Bouchain and Cambrai. It had almost completed this evacuation by the 9th of May. The result was that the 1st corps took up positions between Valenciennes and Condé and that the 2nd corps had one division around Maubeuge, its cavalry towards the Sambre and the remainder of the corps around Solre-sur-Château. As the 3rd corps got into positions further west, between Mézières and Rocroi, the 6th corps concentrated around Laon. Additionally, two of the three reserve divisions of cavalry were taken west. They left on the 1st of May from Metz and Verdun and reached Mézières on the 4th and 6th of May, from where one division reached the area around Vervins and the other the one around Origny.<sup>13</sup>

The increase of the mobile army.

One of the main activities of Napoleon in this week of May was to make from the *places fortes* as many line-forces available as possible for service in the field. This process had to be finished around the middle of May.

One of the orders of this kind was for instance the one which was already dated 2nd of May and which told Davout to have the national guard to go “en toute diligence dans les places fortes, afin que le 10 mai il n’y ait plus un bataillon de troupes de ligne dans nos places, et qu’à cette époque tous les corps soient cantonnés; ou, s’il en reste encore dans les places, qu’ils n’y fassent aucun service, qu’ils soient entièrement disponibles.”<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, Napoleon put pressure upon Davout to accelerate the confections and the increase of the “troupes actives par tous les moyens possible.” For the completion of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd battalions to 500 men – and as soon this was finished, to increase them to 600 men.

Further: “Les cadres du 4<sup>e</sup> bataillon et les dépôts, au moment de la déclaration de guerre, sortiraient des places pour se rendre dans l’intérieur, conformément à la lettre que je vous ai écrite. Il ne faut donc pas que, pour la garde des grands places, on affaiblisse d’un seul homme les troupes de ligne.”

Same orders for Vandamme, so that from the 10th to the 15th of May “il n’aura plus un seul homme dans les garnisons”, but that these would have been abandoned and left to the national guards d’élite et des gardes nationales sédentaires.<sup>15</sup>

Napoleon’s main concern was in the north, as he wrote to Davout on the 12th of May: “[...] Le plus grand malheur que nous ayons à craindre, c’est d’être trop faibles du côté du Nord et d’éprouver d’abord un échec. J’attends l’état que je vous ai demandé pour faire le travail de l’armée du Nord. Il paraît que les seize régiments qui la composent sont bien faibles et ont bien peu de moyens de s’augmenter. C’est ce qui me porterait à réunir les seize dépôts sur la

Somme et à faire, dans les meilleurs départements, un appel de 24 à 30.000 hommes de la conscription de 1815, pour renforcer ces régiments. [...]”<sup>16</sup>

So, Napoleon gave an absolute priority to the increase of his forces in the field, no matter what, especially in the north of the country.<sup>17</sup>

The same, on the 9th of May, Davout instructed Gérard to have the line-forces evacuate the *places fortes* in favour of the national guard. Gérard was supposed to establish his headquarters at Haguenau and the army of the Rhine was supposed to defend the lines of the Lauter. This movement had to be finished by the 15th of May.

Before that date, Gérard was supposed to have his corps either near Longwy, or Sarrbruck or Thionville. The best options would be those of Sarrebruck and Thionville, so as to disturb the enemy near Trèves and Luxemburg and to communicate with Rapp through Bitche at the same time. Gérard was supposed to focus upon the defence of the Vosges, while Vandamme had to do the same for the Argonne.<sup>18</sup>

In the context of this concern for the passages of the Vosges and of the Argonne, Napoleon asked Davout to move the reserve divisions of the Armée de la Moselle and of the Armée du Nord there; they had to assemble at Nancy and Sainte-Menehould respectively.<sup>19</sup>

In this line of thinking Davout also instructed general Rapp on the 9th of May to have the line-forces leave the *places fortes* to the national guards and to have the army of the Rhine available in its full extent. In Napoleon’s mind, the defence of the land between Huningue and Strassbourg and from there towards the lines of Wissembourg should be left to the national guards. Rapp was to move his headquarters to Haguenau.<sup>20</sup>

On the 10th of May, though, Vandamme was warned by Davout about a possible irruption from Wellington through Chimay and Vervins towards Laon. For that reason, Vandamme was supposed to take up a strong position in rear of Beaumont and to block the passages between this place, Avesnes and Chimay.<sup>21</sup>

A few days later, Napoleon turned his attention to the organisation of his forces as well. First of all, he asked Davout for a *full* survey of all regiments in the army-corps, with their *imperial* numbers. The reason for asking was that, up to that moment, some regiments apparently were still carrying their royal numbers and this only led to confusion.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, Napoleon proposed a reorganisation of the “*divisions militaires*” in the following sense: “les gouverneurs de toutes les places, les lieutenants généraux commandant les divisions, les lieutenants généraux commandant les gardes nationales, doivent être sous les ordres du commandant en chef de l’armée dans le territoire de laquelle ils se trouvent.” In practice, this meant that the 5th division came under the orders of the commander of the Armée du Rhin, the 3rd and the 4th division under the one of Armée de la Moselle, the 2nd and the 16th division under the one of the Armée du Nord, the 7th and the 19th division under the one of the Armée des Alpes, the 8th division under the one of the Armée du Var and the 9th, 10th and 11th division under the one of the Armée des Pyrénées.<sup>23</sup>

By the 11th of May, Napoleon had formed his wish for the swift incorporation of pontoons into the Armée du Nord as he then wrote to Davout: “Présentez-moi le projet d’un équipage de pont pour l’armée du Nord. Qu’il y ait de quoi faire plusieurs ponts sur l’Escaut, sur la Sambre et sur les canaux de Belgique. Il serait nécessaire d’avoir des équipages le plus tôt possible, et que le personnel et le matériel fussent promptement réunis. Il serait également convenable d’avoir un demi-approvisionnement pour le parc général de l’armée du Nord.”<sup>24</sup>

Two days later, Napoleon specified his idea about dividing eight companies of pontoneers: one to remain at Strasbourg, near the Armée du Rhin, one at Metz near the Armée de la Moselle and six to be placed at Douai, Paris and Laon; these were to be attached to the Armée du Nord. Additionally, Napoleon wanted to know about the number of pontoons being present

and the number needed for crossings where applicable. Lastly, Napoleon wanted to be informed about the width of the canals of Condé, of the river Scheldt near Mons, of the river Sambre near Charleroi, of the canal of Brughe and of that of Brussels and of the river Meuse near Maastricht.<sup>25</sup>

The second half of May was dominated by measures to increase military resources further. First of all, it was on the 15th of May that Napoleon decreed the creation of 24 battalions of *tirailleurs fédérés* (of 720 men each), to be formed and used in Paris only. At Lyon, 15 similar battalions were formed as well.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, it was in the Aisne, the Ardennes and in the eastern departments that Napoleon could count – in the case of an allied invasion – for the defence of mountains and defiles upon the support of a diverse mix of forces such as *gardes forestiers, gendarmes, douaniers, gardes nationaux sédentaires and citoyens valides*.<sup>27</sup>

On the 18th of May Napoleon proposed to call retired veterans of former imperial armies so as to bring more experienced men into the national guard. It resulted in the decree of the same date “ordonnant la levée dans tout l’empire de 56 bataillons de militaires en retraite.” Each battalion was to be composed of 500 men.<sup>28</sup>

On the 20th of March, the Imperial Guard did not contain more as two regiments of grenadiers and two of chasseurs of the old guard, plus four regiments of cavalry. Napoleon increased the strengths of the regiments of cavalry, created a third and a fourth regiment of grenadiers, a third and a fourth regiment of chasseurs, eight regiments of voltigeurs and eight of tirailleurs, as well as a second regiment of chasseurs à cheval. He reinstated the regiment of horse artillery and the regiment of foot artillery of the old guard, as well as the regiment of train, the squadron of the *gendarmerie d’élite, l’équipage des marins* and the company of sappers of the engineers.<sup>29</sup>

On the 23rd of May, Napoleon expressed his strong discontent about the deficient supply of horses, which resulted in a serious slowing down of the formation of the cavalry.<sup>30</sup>

Back on the 20th of March, the cavalry, artillery, trains and other services had 35.629 horses, but around that time Napoleon expected to need 36.000 horses for the regular cavalry only; on top of that came those needed for the Imperial Guard, the artillery and the other services. By mid April, this figure had been increased by Napoleon to more than 40.000 for cavalry only.

Of those 35.000 horses present, some 5000 were on loan to farmers in order to cut the costs of the government and these animals were called back right away. Resources for horses were organised through the depots in the country, while at the same time the distribution was set up through a central depot, placed at Versailles. The idea behind this centralisation was that it would be possible in case of a defensive war to centralise the main military forces between Paris and the Loire.

In all depots, horses were bought from locals, while at the same time the exportation of horses from the country was prohibited. Napoleon also claimed animals from the former Maison du Roi

By mid-April, some 20.000 animals were formally bought for the cavalry and some 15.000 for the other services, but deliveries were slow.

General Bourcier, the man in charge of the central depot at Versailles, was a most able organiser of cavalry, but too stern for the job for that moment. The result was that the increase of the number of horses was yet too slow, and therefore Napoleon also came up with the idea to requisition horses of the gendarmerie. This resulted in about 4250 animals.<sup>31</sup> Other requisitions in the *départements* resulted in another 5000 horses for the cavalry and in the same number for the artillery.

Napoleon also set up another main depot at Beauvais for the armée du Nord only. A second one (for the armée du Rhin, de la Moselle and a few military divisions) was established at

Troyes. At the same time - being dissatisfied about the way it functioned - Napoleon appointed general Prével to reorganise the department for cavalry of the ministry of war in Paris.

The overall result was that by early June some 40.000 horses were available for the cavalry in the armies and depots, while the artillery and the other services had about 16.500 animals to their disposal.<sup>32</sup>

It had already been on the 26th of March that Napoleon wrote: “[...] Je forme, au besoin, des 4<sup>e</sup> et 5<sup>e</sup> bataillons, soit avec les anciens soldats soit avec la conscription que je lèverai, car c’est une idée vide de sens de se persuader que l’armée puisse se recruter d’une autre manière; je crois d’ailleurs avoir assez d’autorité sur la nation pour le lui faire comprendre.[...]”

These last words were a bluff as Napoleon did not push through his intention to call up the class of 1815. He knew all too well that the conscription could alienate him from the nation, particularly in this case where his authority as he had known it had been constrained by a compromise towards the liberals.

It was by the 3rd of May that Napoleon asked Davout to make the first preparations for the call of the conscription of 1815 as he felt it being “indispensable de lever 120.000 hommes sur la conscription de 1815.”

Yet, he wanted to wait some days before he would do so “jusqu’à ce que l’opération des anciens militaires soit plus avancée” and then only partially. He regarded the class of 1815 as indispensable for the prolongation of the war. He wanted to use the conscripts to form the cadres of the 4th and 5th battalions and as coming from the “*divisions militaires*”, as he expected not to have more as 100.000 veterans to join, which would be just enough to complete the 2nd and 3rd battalions. With these conscripts Napoleon intended to form four reserve armies, one in Paris, one in Lyon, one in Bordeaux and one in Toulouse.<sup>33</sup>

And by the 12th of May he also saw the means to use the conscripts of 1815 for the enlargement of the Armée du Nord, as he wrote to Davout: “[...] J’attends l’état que je vous ai demandé pour faire le travail de l’armée du Nord. Il paraît que les seize régiments qui la composent sont bien faibles et ont bien peu de moyens de s’augmenter. C’est ce qui me porterait à réunir les seize dépôts sur la Somme et à faire, dans les meilleurs départements, un appel de 24 à 30.000 hommes de la conscription de 1815, pour renforcer ces régiments. [...]”<sup>34</sup>

By the 20th of May, Napoleon had received Davout’s report about the need to call for the class and the result was that Napoleon asked him to draft a report of what each department could produce in numbers of men. The idea was not to make a general call, but for one for a selection of divisions, some of those for the armée du Nord.<sup>35</sup>

On May 23, Napoleon made a formal request to the *conseil d’état* for the recall of the class of 1815 but they refused - despite Napoleon’s plea - stating that “aux termes de la nouvelle constitution les levées appartenaient au pouvoir législatif.”<sup>36</sup>

One week later, Napoleon circumvented the *conseil d’état* by treating the class of 1815 as discharged soldiers, who were therefore obliged to serve.<sup>37</sup>

According to the report of Davout, some 85.000 men had already served and some 37.000 men came from loyal departments. Of all others, Napoleon realized that he couldn’t fully trust them, so in all he counted to have some 80 to 90.000 men as an extra resource.<sup>38</sup>

In the first few days of June Davout could send out his instructions for the call of the class and it was by the 11th of June – only a few days before Napoleon would lead his Armée du Nord into the Netherlands – that 46.419 men of the class of 1815 were on their way to the depots, but the war was over before any of them reached the field.<sup>39</sup>

The financial situation.

The acceleration to get more forces ready to take the field was also strongly felt by the treasury of France, as it was on the 9th of May that Napoleon pressed Mollien to activate all available funds for the production of uniforms and weapons, so as to make a 100.000 men ready to take the field.

Early April, Napoleon had set about arranging a complete overview of the financial situation of the country by asking Gaudin for the budgets of 1814 and 1815, the situation of the treasury on the 1st of January 1815 and of the total resources available for increasing the military (mobile) force of the country from 150.000 to 300.000 men.

Initially, the total military budget for 1815 which had to be presented to the Chambres in their April-session was set on 298 million francs.

In general, the total imperial budget for 1815 had been set on 770 million francs, while the expenses of the *royal* budget had been calculated to be 646 million francs. This left the imperial budget with a considerable deficit, but Napoleon expected to create considerable resources by cutting in the budgets of his ministries and by the sale of state-forests and other confiscated real property. This produced some 40 million francs. The treasury also possessed the Crown silverware worth six million francs and the 50 million francs in cash which Louis XVIII had left at the treasury.

In Napoleon's mind, the military budget had to be increased with another 100 million so as to meet the needs, but all would depend of course upon the duration of the war. By early April Napoleon had estimated the total budget for military operations at 400 million. While this expenditure would be immense, at the same time, Napoleon neither did want to take any public loans, nor raise taxes as both measures would make him unpopular both in the Council and the Chambre.

In the military budget, however, costs of arming, equipping and clothing the mobilised national guards were not included. They were devolved upon the *départements*, which had to bring up the financial means by taxes, other funds and donations. Some departments presented the treasury with gifts of up to one million francs. Despite all this, in general, the equipment of the national guards was defective.

By mid-April, the military machine was running slow and this was basically a matter of finance. The constraints continued and the result was that by the month of May, financial resources were running short.

As a result of this situation, for instance, pay suffered from delays and there where it was paid to new units, the procedures were not always complied with, in the sense that money was spent which had not been made formally available. For the Armée du Nord, the gratification for entering into a campaign had not been paid and while the total pay for this army per month was 5 million francs, the treasury of this army carried no more as 670.000 francs in cash.

Moreover, Davout calculated the war for the month of July to cost 72 million francs. This led Napoleon to include for the budget – which had to be presented to the Chambres on the 19th of June - a national loan of 150 million francs after all.<sup>40</sup>

### Military equipment.

After the peace of 1814, the production of uniforms had been strongly reduced. It was right on the second day of April that Napoleon had Davout inquire about the general situation of that moment. By mid-April, it became clear that there was indeed a general shortage of uniforms, which was caused by the lack of money and fabric.

The result was that Napoleon gave loans to the manufacturers of fabric so as to speed up its production. Additionally, in Paris, workshops for the production of uniforms were

established; the moment these were in full production, they produced some 1250 items a day. Other major workshops were also established in Lyon, Bordeaux and Toulouse.

On the whole, the efforts for the production of uniforms and for the monitoring of their quality were comprehensive, but the overall results were not completely satisfactory: for instance for the national guards, as well as for line units, uniforms were simplified to cut costs and to speed up the production process.<sup>41</sup>

On the 21st of March, the artillery possessed 13.947 guns. In the way Napoleon developed his forces, for the *places fortes* and fortifications almost 9000 guns were necessary, while for the armies he had 1200 guns in mind.

So, basically, the numbers of guns itself was not the problem, it was more one of its distribution and the shortage in horses, their harnesses and manpower for the trains.

For instance, on the 22nd of April, Napoleon wanted another artillery park on the Loire (for instance at Orléans) or else on the Seine, in the forests between Saint-Germain and Rouen.

At that time he wanted to organise 16 train-companies, run by 2000 men. This target meant that another 1000 men had to be added, as well as another 2700 horses to make a total of 3000.<sup>42</sup>

1813 and 1814 had been years in which Napoleon had been harassed by a continuous lack of fire-weapons, muskets in particular. Now, in 1815, a similar situation was about to develop and Napoleon was very well aware of this and all what he wanted was that he would not be confronted with such a shortage again. That is why he ordered some 250.000 fire-weapons on the 22nd of March, so immediately after his return to Paris.

He could not stress the importance of the presence of these weapons enough by stating to Davout: “Je ne connais rien de plus urgent.” (23rd March), “Songez que, dans la situation actuelle, le salut de l'état est dans la quantité de fusils que nous pourrions armer.” (2nd of April), “La fabrication des armes est le premier moyen de salut de l'état.” (11th of April) and “Le salut de l'état est attaché aux fusils.” (15th of April)<sup>43</sup> Napoleon also wanted to hear twice a week from Davout on the subject.<sup>44</sup>

By the 27th of March, La Fère and Vincennes were assigned as depots for muskets.

Napoleon's demand for muskets for the whole year was immense. By late March, he saw a development in 40 days up to a number totalling 144.000 pieces. These could be either new ones, repaired ones or those composed of spare parts. At that moment, he hoped to have some 312.000 in Paris only by the end of the year. In total, he was aiming at 400.000 pieces.

By the 13th of April, however, Napoleon expected to have 240.000 muskets one month later because of the increase of the Imperial Guard with 20.000 men, the line with 100.000 veterans and for the national guard of 120.000 men.<sup>45</sup>

In order to attain these numbers, production had to be accelerated so factories for the production of new muskets and of workshops for the repair of existing ones were (re)started at Paris, Versailles, La Fère, Strasbourg, Metz, other *places fortes* and maritime arsenals. Late March, Napoleon even ordered the purchase of several thousands of suitable muskets from countries like Switzerland, the UK and the Rhineland.

And while the exportation of fire-weapons was prohibited, people were asked to offer their private fire-arms for purchase by the government. Additionally, taxes upon the importation of raw material were abolished.

The production rate in the industry came to about 900 muskets a day (600 repairs and 300 new ones).<sup>46</sup>

While there were on the 1st of April 150.000 muskets ready available and 300.000 for repair and assemblage, by the 10th of June of these 300.000 almost 150.000 were available or *en route*. Of these 150.000, some 80.000 were used for the national guards. The prognosis was that by the end of June the remaining 68.000 could be added to 20.000 new muskets and another 60.000 repaired and / or assembled ones, bringing the total then to about 150.000

again. This reserve -in its turn - could then be used for new formations such as the conscripts of 1815 , some 90.000. The remainder, about 60.000, could then again be used for yet another round of new formations, like the *levée en masse*, in conjunction with 84.000 repaired muskets by the 1st of August.

Yet, in reality, despite the acceleration in the production of fire-arms, this increase could not cope with the increase of men in new formations, particularly between mid May and mid-June. This resulted in a crisis in the deliveries and only improved after the 10th of June.

By the 1st of May, there were about 60.400.000 cartridges for the infantry in stock, while there was about 1.390.000 kilogram of powder for the production of another 55 million new cartridges. Taking 100 cartridges a man, this would be enough for about 600.000 men, but to provide the garrisons in the *places fortes*, the reserve in powder had to be used, as well another million kilograms extra. In Vincennes, 12 million cartridges were produced in a period of two months; on the 1st of June, the reserves of the Armée du Nord counted 5 and half million cartridges and all soldiers of the units in the first defence line of the country, by far the most of them had 50 of them in their pouch.

The royalist rise in the Vendée.

While Napoleon was trying to ease his shortage of resources by creating more military forces, he was at the same deprived of a force of about 15.000 men in the Armée du Nord by a royalist surge which took place in the Vendée.

At the end of March, the duke of Bourbon had made efforts to make the Vendée rise against Napoleon. Yet, as the main royalist leaders there wanted to wait for the allies to invade France, nothing materially happened. Yet, since that time, the situation kept being in a ferment. In April, Napoleon had hoped to control the situation through the presence of the gendarmerie and by all kinds of administrative measures. At the same time, he had also spared the Vendée in his calls for veterans and national guard.

Yet, it was towards the middle of May that the situation gained momentum thanks to the actions of the marquess De la Rochejaquelin. This resulted into military actions on the 15th of May. What had started as small bodies of men, had now grown into small armies and these were by now at least in numbers much superior to the imperial forces as led by general Delaborde. By the 21st of May Napoleon wrote: “On ne peut pas dissimuler que la guerre civile éclate réellement dans la Vendée et qu’il n’y a point à différer pour prendre les mesures militaires et organiser une armée pour combattre la rébellion.[..]”<sup>47</sup>

As the situation grew more and more serious, Napoleon eventually formed an army in the Vendée, the “armée de Ouest” of the Loire consisting of about 20.000 men and led by general Lamarque. Lamarque took his command by the 29th of May.<sup>48</sup>

In the meantime, Fouché had – with the consent of Napoleon – opened negotiations for an armistice in an attempt to convince the royalist leaders further resistance was of no use.

In order to survive as minister of police under a future royalist government, Fouché had a large interest in not getting involved into a repression of the uproar. At the same time, it gave Fouché the chance to gain Napoleon’s trust.

Even after a major defeat of the royalists at Aizenay on the 20th of May, it was De la Rochejaquelin who didn’t want to hear about any armistice whatsoever. Other royalist leaders, however, did, as they preferred to wait for their chances the moment the allies would invade France. The royalist leadership was divided, but on top of that it was De la Rochejaquelin who died in a confrontation with the imperial forces on the 3rd of June. The spirit amongst the royalists had already ebbed away, but this blow now completed the desintegration of the uproar.<sup>49</sup>

In the middle of May, it was not only in the Vendée that the government was faced with royalist unrest. Also, places in the western-Pyrenees and Var (Marseille in particular) were scenes of violent agitation, in which only harsh measures could keep the situation under control.<sup>50</sup>

Murat.

It must have been towards the middle of May that Napoleon learned about Murat's defeat. After Napoleon's abdication in 1814, Murat had found the allies not willing to negotiate with him about guarantees of his throne and possessions in northern Italy. Therefore, he sought to regain the support of Napoleon in 1815.

The deal Murat had with Napoleon was that he would prepare for war, but that he would keep quiet as long as Austria would not choose for Louis XVIII; meanwhile he would prepare for war. As soon as war would break out between Napoleon and the allies, Murat would distract the Austrians towards the Alps. Napoleon's success made Murat long for the occupation of Italy.

On the 31st of March, Murat had made a call upon North Italy to revolt, while at the same time he proclaimed himself king. The result was that Austria declared him war and a military confrontation ensued, long before any invasion of the allies into France. The fighting dragged on for weeks, until Murat was beaten by the Austrians on the 4th and 5th of May at Tolentino. Murat fled through Naples to France where he was ordered by Napoleon to stay until further notice.<sup>51</sup>

## **Observations.**

Introduction.

It must have been late April that Napoleon learned about the 1st of June as the date set for the allied invasion. It may have been this news which caused him to formally determine and complete the defensive disposition of his forces on the last day of April. He did so by putting an end to the observation status of some of the corps by designating them as proper armies, while others kept their former status of observation corps.

Within this structure, the roles of the active forces, the national guard, the reserve divisions and garrisons in the *places fortes* were now properly defined. In the second week of May, the defence system was also worked out in further detail for reserve division destined to be placed in the Vosges, at the Moselle, the Rhine and in the Argonne. By that time – it may have been on the 9th of May – the *armée du Nord* had completed its concentration on the line Valenciennes – Maubeuge – Mézières.

As stated, Napoleon must have been aware that the allies did not intend to invade France before the 1st of June. As a matter of fact, he must have learned most probably in the second week of May that they had postponed this very invasion until at least the 16th of June. Initially, it gave rise to a feeling that there was no reason to fear for some specific invasion on a specific point. For that reason, the emperor's arrangements were of a general character, spread across the frontiers in the north and the north-east. This approach, however, would change into one of a concentrated offensive in the north, while at the same time the defensive arrangements in the remaining sectors of the country were still developed, in case an offensive in the north would not work out as it was supposed to do (see below).

As has been stated before, the northern part of the country was a particular point of concern for Napoleon, probably as he must have feared strong royalist feelings rising again parallel to an allied invasion there. So, he had his reasons to write to Davout on the 12th of May: “[...] Le

plus grand malheur que nous ayons à craindre, c'est d'être trop faibles du côté du Nord et d'éprouver d'abord un échec."

After Napoleon had set the basic arrangements for the military establishment and after he had subjected the royalists by mid-April, his main concern was to increase the active army with all possible means. It was now time that his preliminary measures would swiftly pay off. The way to do this – and this was stressed at any point from mid-April onwards - was the transfer of active forces from the *places fortes* into the field army and to replace these by national guards, thus serving as garrisons. Additionally, in the second half of May, more forces such as veterans, the *tirailleurs fédérés* and the class of 1815 were called for. Theoretically, this last group gave Napoleon another 120 to 160.000 men, but by mid-June only about 46.000 were in the depots or *en route*.

Eventually, it was between the 20th of May and mid-June that the actual increase of active forces accelerated, also in the armée du Nord.<sup>52</sup> It meant that lots of active line forces had reached their corps and that national guards and other auxiliary forces were used to guard and occupy *places fortes* and other defensive structures. Other parts of the national guard were used for the reserve divisions of the different armies. At the same time, however, deliveries of fire-arms stagnated.

Revised: 2nd September 2010  
Copyright © Pierre de Wit

---

<sup>1</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21854

Houssaye, H. – 1815. La première restauration etc. p.558-559

<sup>2</sup> Houssaye, H. – 1815. La première restauration etc. p.564

<sup>3</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21997

For an extensive description of the Champ de Mai, see: Houssaye, H. – 1815. La première restauration p.598-609

<sup>4</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.22023

<sup>5</sup> Correspondance etc. nr. 22038, 22039

<sup>6</sup> Correspondance etc. nr. 21856

<sup>7</sup> Chuquet, A. - Ordres etc. nr.6720

<sup>8</sup> Correspondance etc. nr. 21871

<sup>9</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21844

<sup>10</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21855

In relation to order nr.21723, units were renamed and renumbered, but not in a consistent way. The former 6th corps (Alps) was now named the 7th and baptised as the Armée des Alpes, while the former 7th corps became an observation corps. The former 8th corps was now the 6th.

Cf. Gourgaud, C. – Campagne de 1815 p.16

On the 27th of April Napoleon spoke to Davout about a division which was on its way to Belfort and which was not to be part of the 6th corps, but of an observation corps which was to be led by general Lecourbe. In: Chuquet, A. – Inédits etc. nr.1512

Lecourbe had been sent on the 16th of April to Belfort to take the command over six divisions. In: Correspondance nr.21815

On the 27th of May, the army of the Pyrenees was split into two, as Napoleon handed the command of the eastern half (including the 9th and 10th division) to general Decaen. This had to have its headquarters at Toulouse. General Clausel kept the command of the other half, the observation corps of the western Pyrenees, having his headquarters at either Bordeaux or Bayonne. Cf. Chuquet, A. – Inédits Napoleoniens nr.1600

Cf. Regnault, J. – La campagne de 1815 p.119

The corps of the Var came under the command of general Brune. Though the disposition was dated 30th of April, it was only on the 22nd of May that Brune was instructed by Napoleon to form the corps. In: Correspondance etc, nr.21952

<sup>11</sup> Correspondance etc, nr.21861

By mid-April, Napoleon had already taken measures for the establishment of the 7th corps (Alps) and announced the formation of the 9th (Provence). In: Correspondance nr.21819

<sup>12</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21860

---

<sup>13</sup> Regnault, J. – La campagne de 1815 p.115-117

1st corps:

Colonel Bro (4th regiment of lancers, 1st corps) joined his regiment on the 10th of May at Aire-sur-la-Lys (about 45 kilometers west of Lille). In: Mémoires (1796-1844) du général Bro p.145

Adjutant Gastinieu (13th regiment of light infantry, 1st corps), however, states that his regiment was on the 15th of May at Roubaix and Tourcoing. In: Coppens, B. & Courcelle, P. - La Haye Sainte. Waterloo 1815 p.75

The 7th regiment of hussars (1st corps) first stood opposite Tournai, between Mouchin and Chéreng, and it moved early May to Saint Amand (about 10 kilometers north-west of Valenciennes). Cf. Marbot, J.B.A.M. de - Mémoires du général baron de Marbot p.373

Chef de bataillon Rullière confirms that d'Erlon moved his corps from Lille to Valenciennes. Cf. his account dated 1856. In: Largeaud, J.M. - Napoleon et Waterloo p.371

2nd corps:

A table in the archives of Vincennes states the divisions of the 2nd corps had the following positions on the 1st of June:

Headquarters: Avesnes

Division Bachelu: Ferrière la Petite

Division Jérôme Bonaparte: Solre-sur-Château

Division Girard: Berlaimont

Division Foy: Landrecies

Division Piré: La Capelle

In: SHAT, C15 / 35

These positions, however, do not match with an original reference to the actual positions of Reille himself of the same date. They do, however, match positions of an earlier period, possibly of early May. See below. Cf. Registre du comte Reille. In: SHAT, C15 / 22.

Colonel Trefcon states the 2nd corps left for Avesnes on the 5th of May. In: Carnet de campagne du colonel Trefcon p.178

General Lefol (division Lefol) claims his corps (the 2nd initially) stood at Cambrai and surroundings from mid-April onwards and that it didn't move for about 6 weeks. In: Souvenirs sur le retour de l'empereur Napoleon de l'île d'Elbe et sur la campagne de 1815 p.57

The 93th regiment of the line (division Foy, 2nd corps) moved early April from Lille to Douai and from there in May to Landrecies, to complete its formation. Landrecies is about 16 kilometers west of Avesnes. Cf. Puvis, Th. Souvenirs p.113-114

Regnault situates the 3rd corps between Marienbourg and Rocroy, though the order clearly states between Mézières and Rocroy. In: La campagne de 1815 p.116

<sup>14</sup> Correspondance etc. nr. 21866

<sup>15</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21879

<sup>16</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21896

<sup>17</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21879

<sup>18</sup> Mazade, Ch.de – Correspondance etc. Vol.IV nr.1684

- 
- <sup>19</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21880
- <sup>20</sup> Mazade, Ch.de – Correspondance etc. Vol.IV nr.1687
- <sup>21</sup> Mazade, Ch.de – Correspondance etc. Vol.IV nr.1691
- <sup>22</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21897
- <sup>23</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21895
- <sup>24</sup> Mauduit, H.de – Les derniers jours Vol.I p.366
- <sup>25</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21900
- <sup>26</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21907  
Saint-Chamant, H.C.de - Napoléon: ses dernières armées p.194
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. Houssaye, H. 1815.Waterloo p.14
- <sup>28</sup> Mazade, Ch.de – Correspondance etc. Vol.IV nr.1681  
Saint-Chamant, H.C.de - Napoléon: ses dernières armées p.195-196  
Houssaye, H. 1815. Waterloo p.13
- <sup>29</sup> Houssaye, H. 1815.Waterloo p.32
- <sup>30</sup> Correspondance etc. nr. 21961
- <sup>31</sup> Charras states it resulted in 6000 to 8000 horses. In: Histoire de la campagne de 1815 p.40-41
- <sup>32</sup> Napoleon claims that by the 1st of June some 46.000 horses were in de depots or *en ligne*, for the cavalry and about 18.000 for the artillery. In: Mémoires pour servir etc. p.23-28)
- <sup>33</sup> Correspondance etc. nr. 21874
- <sup>34</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21896
- <sup>35</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21929
- <sup>36</sup> Houssaye, H. 1815. La première restauration etc. p.500
- <sup>37</sup> Bowden S. Armies at Waterloo p.19
- <sup>38</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21986
- <sup>39</sup> Houssaye, H. 1815. Waterloo p.16  
For example, by the 12th of June some 1500 men of the conscription of 1815 had left from the department of the Aisne and these were to be assigned to the army of the Rhine. In:

---

Correspondance etc. nr.22047

<sup>40</sup> Houssaye, H. – 1815.Waterloo p.26-30

Napoleon - Correspondance nrs. 21752, 21761, 21762, 21764, 21803, 21816, 21853, 21886 and 21960

Chalfont, lord (ed.) – Waterloo. Battle of three armies p.28

“Exposé de la situation de l’empire” written by Carnot dated 13th June 1815. In: Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860 p.421

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Charras, J.B.A. - Histoire de la campagne de 1815 p.38-39

Saint-Chamant, H.C.de - Napoléon: ses dernières armées p.228-234

Mazade, Ch. De (ed.) - Correspondance du maréchal Davout prince d’Eckmühl nr.1590

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Charras, J.B.A. - Histoire de la campagne de 1815 p.38

Saint-Chamant, H.C.de - Napoléon: ses dernières armées p.213-215

Houssaye, H. – 1815.Waterloo p.17

Correspondance nr.21835

<sup>43</sup> Correspondance nr.21702, 21755, 21795, 21811

<sup>44</sup> Correspondance nr.21702, 21755 (2nd April).

<sup>45</sup> Correspondance nr.21798

<sup>46</sup> Napoleon to Carnot, 22nd of May. In: Correspondance nr.21958

In his memoirs, Napoleon claims that - on a daily base - in May 1500 muskets were produced and in June 3000. In: Mémoires pour servir etc. p.23

Charras puts these numbers on 1000 and 1500 pieces respectively. In: Histoire de la campagne de 1815 p.37

This matches with the number as given by Carnot, who mentions 80.000 muskets being *repaired* (not new) in 60 days. Cf. his “Exposé de la situation de l’empire” dated 13th June 1815. In: Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860 p.419

It is not clear for whom and why this document has been written, but it is one full of propaganda for Napoleon and his merits and deeds over the last two months.

<sup>47</sup> Correspondance etc. nr.21945

The figure of 15.000 is based upon Gourgaud. Not only the strength, but also the composition of the forces as being set aside for the Vendée instead of the *Armée du Nord* is given in different ways.

Gourgaud mentions 3 regiments of dragoons, 2 regiments of the Young Guard, plus a large number of detachment and 3rd battalions which were halted at the Loire river to move towards the Vendée. In: La campagne de 1815 p.29

According to Napoleon the 4th corps sent one regiment to the Vendée, while the 6th corps did so with 3 regiments. Apart from these units, both the corps of Decaen and Clausel each sent one regiment of infantry to the Vendée. Eventually, the Vendée army was composed of 8 regiments of infantry of the line, 2 regiments of the Young Guard, 2 regiments of cavalry, 10 squadrons of gendarmerie (of about 400 men each) and 12 battalions or detachments of the

---

line which were destined for the mobile army, but which were kept back in the Vendée. Eventually, a total force of about 20.000 was taken out from the Armée du Nord for the Vendée. In: Mémoires pour servir etc. p.31-32, 59

In the 10.000 as given by Regnault, two regiments of the Young Guard (2nd regiment of voltigeurs and 2nd regiment of tirailleurs), another four regiments of the line (nine battalions in total), 18 other (3rd and 4th) battalions, plus 8 (fourth) squadrons of cavalry are included. In: La campagne de 1815 p.189

Houssaye gives no total figure but includes 2800 gendarmes, 2 regiments of the Young Guard, 25 battalions of the line, 8 squadrons of cavalry and three batteries of artillery.

In: 1815. La première restauration p.572

From the regular state of the Armée du Nord it becomes clear that at least both regiments of the Young Guard and the 47th regiment of line infantry (6th corps) were sent to the Vendée. They count for about 2800 men.

<sup>48</sup> Napoleon expressed his intention to form the army on the 22nd of May. In: Correspondance etc. nr.21948

<sup>49</sup> Houssaye, H. 1815. La première restauration p.565-584  
Regnault, J. – La campagne de 1815 p.130

<sup>50</sup> Mazade, Ch. De –Correspondance Vol.IV nrs.1707, 1721

<sup>51</sup> Saunders, E. – The hundred days p.46-47, 84

Chandler, D. Dictionary of the Napoleonic wars p.295

<sup>52</sup> For example the 3rd corps. It counted on the 17th of May: 17 battalions, 292 officers and 6699 men. Counting up to the moth of April, this was not a lot. On the 15th of June, however, it counted: 20 battalions, 390 officers and 9720 men.

From the 1st of May until the 15th of June, the 1st, 2nd,3rd and 6th corps received 23.566 men: in the period from the 1st up to the 25th of May: 10.613 men, in the period from the 26th up to the 31st of May 5500 men and from the 1st of June until the 13th of June 7453 men. In: Regnault, J.B. - La campagne de 1815; mobilisation et concentration p.128