

The central column.

The advance guard.

According to the *ordre de mouvement* the cavalry-division of the 3rd infantry-corps, the one of Domon, had to leave for Charleroi by 2.30 a.m. and that's what it did. ¹ Domon had his division in front of the 3rd corps, and it can be presumed that Domon took the same road as Vandamme would do that day. This would mean that Domon started from Clermont and passed through either Donstienne or between Thuillies and Houssogne, Marbais, Ham-sur-Heure, Les Hayes de Nalennes, tombe de Marcinelle and Marcinelle towards Charleroi.

Domon was to be followed by Pajol's cavalry corps at 2.30 a.m., but Pajol left towards 3 a.m. ² Yet, as Pajol stood on the line Fontenelle – Walcourt, this corps- after crossing the Bois de Naubert [³] - moved most probably along Thy-le-Château, through Berzée, Cour-sur-Heure [⁴], Ham-sur-Heure, Les Hayes de Nalennes, tombe de Marcinelle and Marcinelle.



The tombe de Marcinelle around 1900

At Ham-sur-Heure stood the 10th company of the 3rd battalion of the 2nd regiment of Westphalian Landwehr; at the same time it had small detachments at Nalennes and Marbais. These troops were supposed to receive the main part of the battalion at Montignies-le-Tilleul (see other chapter), but were instructed by lieutenant colonel Von Woisky to go back towards Charleroi before the French would reach its positions. As a result the French cavalry passed Ham-sur-Heure without encountering any resistance. Further to the east, near Nalennes, stood the post of the 11th company of the 3rd battalion of the 28th regiment, led by captain Von Schemler. ⁵ Major Von Müller, commander of the 3rd battalion of the 28th regiment, had orders to fall back to Charleroi through Marcinelle in case of a French major attack. The moment the French developed their offensive near Thuin, Von Woisky informed Von Müller about the situation, to be in readiness to leave after a possible French attack, or to await further orders.

These came at 8.30 a.m. They told Von Müller to leave for Marcinelle and Charleroi.

Now, Von Müller collected three of his companies (those from Gerpennes, Joncret, Acoz and

Villers-Potterie) at Acoz and broke up from there for Marcinelle.

By then he was also informed that the (11th) company at Bouchon and La Bierlière had marched off for Marcinelle as well, where it would join the other three companies of the battalion. As Von Müller was moving towards Marcinelle he was informed by Pirch II that this village had fallen and that he was supposed to cross the Sambre at Châtelet instead.

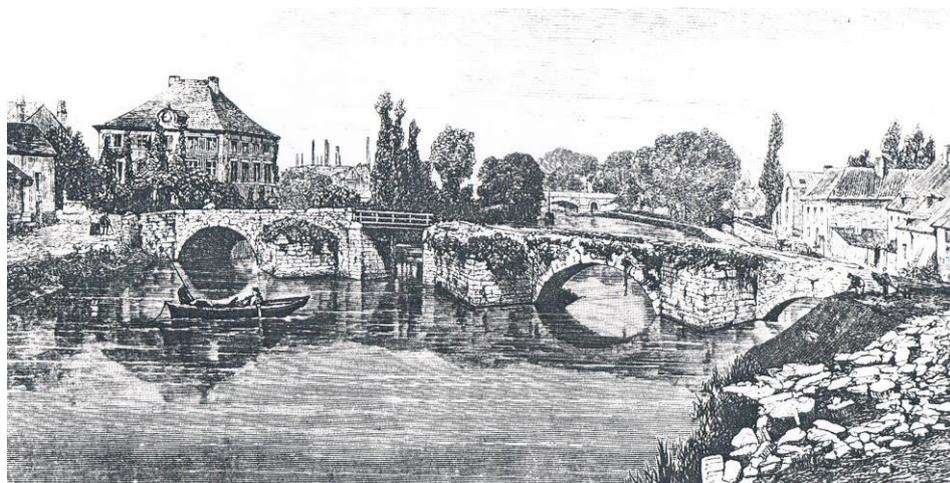
Von Müller managed to pull back with the guidance of his adjutant Barfus through the wooded valley of Bouffioulx towards Châtelet. In this way the main part of the battalion arrived – unnoticed by the enemy - at Châtelet by 9 a.m.⁶

Some time before, the 11th company of the battalion fell back from its positions near Nalines over a road which ran either along Sart Nicolas or further east (along Louverval) in good order because of the wooded and undulous area, even though it was pursued on a distance by the cavalry of Domon.

However, the moment the company left the protection of the wood, a little more as one kilometre in front of Marcinelle and to the west of Couillet, it was assailed by the French cavalry in the open field, overrun and almost completely taken prisoner.⁷ After that, Pajol and Domon approached Marcinelle from the south; by then it was between 9 and 10 a.m.⁸

The fall of Charleroi.

In 1815, Charleroi lay, as now, on both banks of the river Sambre. The lower part, south of the Sambre, called the Ville Basse, was in 1815 bounded by ramparts which were in a state of decay; in them were gates which gave access to Marchienne-au-Pont and Marcinelle.



The bridge at Marcinelle in 1812.

The lower town was connected to Marcinelle by a 400 metre long dike, which was bordered by hedges. It led through an inundated area and emerged at right angles to a lane. This lane led to the Place de Ville Basse. From this square a bridge led over the Sambre.⁹ This stone bridge was saddle-formed, eight meters wide and with wooden parapets. Here, the Sambre was about 30

meters wide.¹⁰

On the north side of the river, the slopes were quite steep; here was the so-called Entreville, that part of town which was between the Ville Basse and the Ville Haute, and the gates of Damprémy and Montigny. The Entreville was as an amphitheatre on the north-bank. Through it led a steep, winding road (now the rue de la Montagne) to the Ville Haute, the citadel.

In 1815, the upper part of Charleroi was also bounded by ramparts which were in decay. They were so since 1748 and were dismantled in the late 19th century. Of the fortifications the strongholds, contre-gardes etc. were removed, but what was left were the remains of the bastions, which were inter-connected by slopes.¹¹

The central point of the Ville Haute was the Place du Centre. This square was surrounded by barracks, arsenals, the house of the governor and that of the commander of town.

Just north of the ramparts of the city, to the north, at the road leading to Brussels and at the bifurcation of the road leading to Fleurus stood the inn called Belle Vue.¹²

The slopes in and around the town were covered with houses and gardens; in the environment were several coal-mines. The east- and west-side of Charleroi were flanked by the Étang du Spiniat and the Étang de la digue respectively.

In 1815, Charleroi counted about 800 houses and about 4500 inhabitants. In general, Charleroi had a grey aspect from the carts which, loaded with coal, were pulled through the streets which were covered with the dust; this was aggravated due to the insufficient drainage.

Charleroi and Marcinelle were occupied by the 1st battalion of 1st regiment of West-Prussian infantry nr.6., led by major Von Rohr. Early that morning Von Rohr was instructed to defend the town for some time, and then to retire towards Gilly in case of French superiority. Von Rohr placed his battalion in the following positions in the lower town. The 3rd and 4th company were on the central square in front of the inn of Trois Bras; the 1st company occupied the exit towards Marchienne-au-Pont, plus its nearby gardens and walls, while the 2nd company did so for the one towards Marcinelle, while having a post at Marcinelle itself. The Jäger-detachment was placed on and near the road which leads to Marchienne-au-Pont.¹³

As Pajol entered Marcinelle, the Prussian post here immediately evacuated the village and pulled back over the dike towards the lower part of Charleroi. As Pajol emerged from Marcinelle and entered the dam which connected Marcinelle to Charleroi, the skirmishers of the 2nd company, posted behind hedges and in the low ground along the dike, gave a volley and the French were repulsed. Major Von Rohr ordered lieutenant Von Ledebur to take Marcinelle with his skirmishers.¹⁴ Von Ledebur was able to do this by driving the French away with the bayonet; he held it until the French superiority got too strong. Von Ledebur now tried to pull back his men towards the gate of Charleroi but before he did so he was overtaken by the French horsemen of Pajol. These, in their turn, were fired at by the men of the 2nd company, led by captain Von Wenkstern. Now, the French halted.¹⁵ It was here that Von Wenkstern should have received another two French attacks before falling back as well into the lower city.¹⁶

By now, the cavalry of Pajol was reinforced by the sappers and miners of the Imperial Guard (about 200 men) and half a unit of pontoons, who were about to enter the lower part of the city. It was around 11 a.m.¹⁷

Von Rohr now realized he couldn't hold his position much longer and decided to fall back to the higher part of Charleroi; before actually doing so, however, the 1st and 2nd company fired

on the French cavalry which by now got onto the square. A Prussian bayonet action here also gave the time for 1st and the 2nd company to cross the Sambre. Here, on the other side, they were joined to the 3rd and 4th company. The sappers and miners cleared the bridge and entered into the city. ¹⁸ Immediately after, on the order of Napoleon himself, Pajol entered the higher part of Charleroi in a trot by the rue de la Montagne, driving away the Prussians who fell back on the road to Gilly, covered by skirmishers. ¹⁹ By now, it was somewhere between 11 a.m. and noon. ²⁰

Having traversed Charleroi, Pajol reached the bifurcation of roads about 250 metres north of Charleroi. To the left was the road leading through La Folie, Bonnaire, Jumet to Gosselies and Frasnes; the right one led through Gilly to Fleurus.

It was here that Pajol split up his corps: he sent the 1st regiment of hussars led by colonel Clary (470 men), joined by baron Gourgaud, to the left and with the remainder of his corps, plus the division of Domon (about 2875 men) he set off in the direction of Gilly. ²¹

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1. The 12th regiment of chasseurs à cheval (brigade of Vinot) would have been in front. Cf. Captain Aubry. In: Aubry, captain - Souvenirs du 12^e chasseurs (1799-1815)

2. Aerts, W. - Etudes de la campagne etc. p.250
Notes of the son of Pajol. In: SHD, C15 nr.5

3. Colonel Biot writes about the repair of the roads leading through the woods of Saint Naubert during the night of the 14th of June. In: Campagnes et garnisons p.233

4. Houssaye incorrectly mentions Cour-sur Heure as place where it passed the border, but this took place just north of Clermont. In: 1815.Waterloo p.110

⁵ According to the regimental history of the 28th regiment the company stood at Ham-sur-Heure, but this is incorrect.

First of all because major Von Monsterberg, commander of the 3rd battalion of the 2nd regiment of Westphalian Landwehr, is specific in his report about the presence of a part of his unit there, but not any others In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI, nr.VII.3c.p.19

But what is more important, the commander of the 3rd battalion of the 28th regiment doesn't mention Ham-sur-Heure at all; he mentions the places of Bouchon and La Bierlière for the company which marched off independently of his other three companies. These places were probably west of these three companies, which were in Les Flaches, Acoz, Joncret, Gerpinnes and Villers Poterie. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI, nr.VII.3c.p.25-26

The diary of the 1st corps confirms the company stood near Nalinnes. In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr.VII.3.p.14

Cf. Die Geschichte des 28.Regiments. In: ABN, nr.65 p.11

⁶ Die Geschichte des 28.Regiments. In: ABN, nr.65 p.12

Diary of the 1st corps. In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr.VII.3.p.14

Cf. Von Pflugk Harttung In: GSA. VPH-HA. VI., nr.II.12.p.20 and nr.II.4.p.49

Major Von Quadt (1st and 2nd battalion 28th regiment). In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr.VII.3c.p.24

Report of major Von Müller (fusileer battalion of the 28th regiment). In: KA, VI.E.7.I.76 in GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.nr.3C.p.25

For the diary, cf. KA, II.M.207 In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.3.p.14

⁷ Cf. the chapter on the Prussian concentration of the 1st Prussian corps.

Cf. Die Geschichte des 28.Regiments. In: ABN, nr.65 p.12

Major Von Müller. In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr.VII.3c.p.25-26

He mentions cuirassiers of the guard, but they were horsemen of Domon, at least if we can

believe colonel Biot. In: Campagnes et garnisons p.235

Biot claims the cavalry had encircled the Prussians in a farm off the main road in the fields, until a howitzer was brought up by Biot himself, and that they surrendered.

Cf. Briefe eines preussischen Offiziers über den Feldzug etc. In: MWB(1822), p.461

Diary of the 1st corps. In: GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.3.p.14

Under the casualties were captain Von Schweller, 1st lieutenant Zammles, 2nd lieutenant Von Steprodt and Bürgel. By the time the company was badly mauled by the French cavalry, lieutenant Schröder had succeeded in leaving for Charleroi with 36 men of his picket. Cf. Die Geschichte des 28.Regiments. In: ABN, nr.65 p.12

De Vaudoncourt erroneously claims a battalion was one of the West-Prussian regiment nr.6 which presented square "à quelque distance en avant de Charleroi". It would have been overrun by the 4th regiment of chasseurs à cheval, under colonel Desmichels, which would have taken 400 men prisoner.

Though there may be some truth in his statements, what is meant here is the company referred to, and this was probably not stronger as 190 men. In: Histoire des campagnes de 1814 et 1815 en France Vol.III p.126

The fact that the 4th regiment was involved in action, is confirmed by the losses the regiment suffered in officers (three in total). Cf. Martinien, A. Tableaux etc. p.585

Wagner mentions both the 4th and 9th regiment of chasseurs à cheval (brigade Dommanget). In: Plane etc. p.14

According to E.von Conrady, it was not the company of the 28th regiment but the 4th company of the 2nd regiment of Westphalian Landwehr, which was cut down near Couillet, but in this he is incorrect. In: Geschichte des Königlich etc. p.240

8. Cf. Houssaye, H. - 1815.Waterloo p.119

Some believe it was 8 a.m.

Cf. Wagner - Plane etc. p.14

Charras - Histoire de la campagne de1815 Vol.I p.101

Von Damitz - Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 p.80

Von Pflugk Harttung believes it was 9 a.m. In: GSA, VPH-HA VI,nr.II.5.p.10

GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr.II 12.p.29

Von Ollech claims it was 8.30 a.m. In: Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 p.97

Taking 9.30 a.m. as time of arrival in front of Marcinelle, Pajol covered the total distance of about 24 kilometres with an average speed of about 3.7 km/ hour.

9. This bridge dated from 1670 and was made wider in 1716. Cf. Maes, P. - 15 Juin 1815. Les premières heures de la campagne de Belgique p.31

10. Cf. Hofschröer, P. - 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.176

According to Delaet its width here was about 16 metres with a depth of about 180 cm. Cf. Delaet, J.L. (ed) , Libre sur Sambre. Charleroi sous les révolutions 1789-1799 p.22

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

Delloye, S. - Charleroi 1815 p.4

Le Loup - Les délices du Pays de Liège etc. p.333-334

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

In the Musée de l'armée in Paris there is a model of Charleroi as it was in the 17th century.

12. This inn has been demolished towards 1884.

It stood at the place near the Université du travail, near the corner formed by the streets Fagnart and Zénobe Gramme. Cf. Delloye, S. - Charleroi 1815 p.5

13. Report of major Von Rohr. In: KA, VI.E.7.I.70 and II.65 In: GSA, VPH-HA VI, nr.5.p.9 and VII.2.p.4 and VII,nr.3C.p.16

Cf. Conrady, E.von - Geschichte des Königlich etc. p.240

Report about the 2nd brigade. In: KA, VI.E.7.I.64 in: GSA,VPH-HA,VI. nr.VII.3c.p.28

Briefe eines Preussischen Offiziers über den Feldzug etc. In: MWB, 1822 p.461

¹⁴ It is asserted by Pirch II that Von Rohr advanced to Marcinelle in order to assist the company of the 28th regiment at Couillet, but from the report of Von Rohr it becomes clear that Von Ledebur's detachment was simply too weak to be able to do this. Both events may have both taken place around the same time though. Cf. Reports of Pirch and Von Rohr, in KA, VI.7.I.64 and VI.E.7.I.70. In: GSA,VPH-HA VI, -- nr.5.p.12, and VII, nr.3C.p.16

¹⁵ Report of captain Von Guionneau, for major Von Rohr (commander of the 1st battalion of the 1st West-Prussian regiment of infantry nr.6), dated 16th June 1815. In: KA, VI.E.7.I.p.70 in GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.3C.p.16-18

Colonel Biot In: Campagnes et garnisons p.236

16. Cf. Conrady, E.von - Geschichte des Königlich etc. p.240

Diary of the 1st corps. KA, II.M.207 In: GSA,VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.3.p.15

Grouchy, G.de - Mémoires du maréchal de Grouchy. Vol.III p.458

¹⁷ Report of captain Von Eberstein (2nd battalion of the 2nd Westphalian Landwehr infantry regiment). In: KA, VI.E.7.I.77 in GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.nr.3C.p.12

Report of lieutenant colonel Von Reiche. In: KA, VI.E.7I.1 in GSA,VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.5.p.53

Houssaye, H. - 1815.Waterloo p.119

Hamilton-Williams, D. - Waterloo, new perspectives p.157

According to Von Müffling, Charleroi was in French hands at 11 a.m. In: Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.8

An inhabitant of Charleroi, Francois Joseph Weggant, attached to the local court, states the

French entered the city, skirmishing, between 11 and noon. In: Bastelaer, D.A. van - Charleroi, Gilly, Fleurus et Waterloo. Episode de 1815 écrit par un témoin oculaire carolorégien. Notes posthumes détachées des papiers de feu Francois Joseph Weggant. Mons. H.Manceaux, 1883 p.3

18. According to Zieten it was 11 a.m. Cf. Report of Von Zieten, 8th July 1815 in: Reiche, Von - Memoiren etc. p.416

According to general Haxo (commander of the guard's engineers), the sappers and miners had attacked Marcinelle without explicit orders, but this is highly impossible as Napoleon was there as well. Cf. his notes taken by M.Maurice on the 25th June 1815. In: Mélanges et documents etc. p.374

Haxo's aide de camp, captain Vaillant, adds that the sappers and miners established themselves at Charleroi. In: Deux notes autobiographiques etc. p.246

For the fact that the sappers and miners entered the city first, cf.

Petiet, A. (aide de camp of Soult) In: Souvenirs militaires p.190

Mauduit, H.de - Les derniers jours etc. Vol.II p.10

19. Report of captain Von Guionneau, for major Von Rohr (commander of the 1st battalion of the 1st WestPrussian regiment of infantry nr.6), dated 16th June 1815. In: KA, VI.E.7.I.p.70 in GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.3C.p.18

This order was carried over by Petiet. It told Pajol to enter Charleroi, drove off the enemy and to pursue him on the road which leads towards Fleurus. Cf. Petiet, A. (aide de camp of Soult) In: Souvenirs militaires p.190

Captain Aubry (12th regiment of chasseurs à cheval, brigade Vinot - division Domon) claims his squadron entered Charleroi first, accompanied by a company of pontoneers. In: Souvenirs du 12^e chasseurs (1799-1815)

²⁰ According to Gourgaud it was 10.30 a.m. In: La campagne de 1815 p.37

Some state it was 11 a.m. Cf. Hofschroer, P. - 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.16

The report of the 1st army-corps. KA, VI.E.7.I.3 In: GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.3A.p.2

Von Reiche. Report in KA, VI.E.7.I.7 in GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.5.p.43

And yet others claim it was noon. Cf. Ropes, J.C. - The campaign of Waterloo p.47

Baron Van der Capellen, in his report dated midnight of the 16th of June, says that he met in Brussels a count De Glymes who had left Charleroi by 12.30, the moment the French entered the city. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6585

Lieutenant Basslé, a lieutenant attached to the military command at Charleroi, claims he left the city by noon, the French having entered between 11 a.m. and noon. Cf. his report, dated 16th of June, 3 a.m. In: Archives générales du royaume in Brussels, inventaire nr.108, box nr.5 item 150a. Cited in: Couvreur, L. - Le drame Belge de Waterloo p.76-77

21. Cf. Biot. In: Campagnes et garnisons p.237

Baron Gourgaud. In: AN, Fonds Gourgaud 314 AP 30