

Observations. Blücher's retreat.

The situation of the Prussian army during the night of the 16th of June. ¹

As a result of the French breakthrough at Ligny, the majority of the 1st and 2nd corps instinctively gave way to the north, across the Namur road, across the fields and along the Roman road. Though the situation was most serious, it was possible for Gneisenau to issue instructions to lead the retreating troops towards Tilly, a village about four kilometres north of Brye. By then it was somewhere around 9 p.m.

Thanks to the absence of a French pursuit it was possible to cover this retreat with a rear-guard at Brye, which kept its position until about midnight. By that time, most of the 1st and 2nd corps – though shaken and mixed - had been assembled between Tilly and Gentinnes. ²

It had been Gneisenau's intention to draw Thielmann's corps to Tilly as well, but this commander decided otherwise. For Thielmann, Gembloux had been advised as a possible alternative and this is what he chose for. This most probably had to do with the fact that he feared the French would be a threat, by pushing further north between him and the other two corps which had been involved in the battle.

It was for the 3rd corps possible to assemble in rear of the crossing of Point du Jour and to pull back from there the next morning to Gembloux, while leaving a rear-guard at Sombreffe. This stood there until about the same time as the one at Brye.

There is no information whether Von Thielmann reported back to Gneisenau right away, but there is no doubt that Gneisenau learned that night about the fact that this corps had chosen for Gembloux instead of Tilly. If it would have done the last, Gneisenau would have known.

It had been on the late evening of the 16th of June that Bülow had reported to Gneisenau about his halt along the Roman road, while having his vanguard at Baudeset.

Resulting, towards dawn on the 17th of June, Prussian high command was facing a situation in which the army was basically cut up in three: while both the 1st and 2nd corps were between Gentinnes and Tilly, the 4th corps was along the Roman road (stretching from Baudest up to Hottomont), and the 3rd corps was on its way to a position in the vicinity of Gembloux.

While Gneisenau was aware of the situation of the different parts of the army, it can be doubted whether all corps commanders were. First of all, there is no indication that Bülow was formally informed by high command about the outcome of the battle and its resulting retreat – as far as can be verified, he had learned about the outcome through fugitives and patrols, but where the three corps involved had gone to was unclear. At the same time, it can be doubted whether Von Thielmann knew about the whereabouts of the 4th corps. What was more, in the midst of all confusion - at least for some time - the fate and whereabouts of Blücher were unknown to members of the general staff of the army.

The decision to fall back upon Wavre.

The Prussian decision, after the loss of the battle of Ligny, to fall back upon Wavre is a crucial decision taken during the campaign which was one of the leading factors in the final allied victory. ³ Yet, the context in which it was taken and by whom has not always been properly described.

Traditionally, the decision for Wavre is represented as one taken, in absence of Blücher, by Gneisenau. Additionally, it would have been an order for Wavre *through* Tilly. ⁴

In his report to Von der Knesebeck, dated 17th of June, Gneisenau himself states: “Der Rückzug der Truppen wurde nach dem Dorfe Tilly auf der von der Chaussee nach Brüssel ausgehenden, nach Wavre führenden Strasse geleitet. Die Arrieregarde blieb bei Tilly, die

übrigen Truppen bei Gentinnes stehen. Der General Von Thielmann ging mit dem III.Armeekorps und einem Teil der Brigade unter dem General Von Jagow nach Gembloux.” And the same day, he wrote to his wife: “ wir gingen 1,5 Stunden zurück und haben durch heutigen kleinen Marsch der Britische Armee uns genähert und wollen eine erneute Schlacht suchen.”

On the evening of the 16th of June, the instruction for the 3rd corps read: "Der Rückzug ist beschlossen. Das Zentrum dirigirt sich auf Tilly; der linke Flügel hat daher seine Rückzuglinie darnach einzurichten."

In his memoirs, colonel Von Reiche (chief of staff of the 1st corps) states: “[..] Mittlerweile ertheilte Gneisenau, der nach dem Unfalle Blücher’s die Zügel selbständig in die Hand genommen hatte, den Befehl zum Rückzuge auf Tilly. Eine Annäherung an die Engländer war hiermit ausgesprochen. In diesem Augenblicke traf ich mit Gneisenau auf der Römerstrasse zusammen und erfuhr von ihm die neue Rückzugsdirektion. Obgleich die Dunkelheit schon sehr vorgeschritten war, so konnte ich auf meiner Karte doch noch so viel erkennen, dass Tilly sich auf derelben nicht angegeben befand. Bei der Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass dieselbe Karte in dem Besitze mehrerer andern Offiziere sich befinden möchte, wodurch leicht Ungewissheit und Verlegenheit in dieser Beziehung entstehen konnte, schlug ich vor, an Stelle von Tilly als Rückzugspunkt eine in der verlängerten Richtung über diesen Ort hinaus liegende Stadt zu benennen, von der man annehmen könne, dass sie auch auf jeder andern Karte verzeichnet sei. Wenn auch, bemerkte ich, zwei Rückzugspunkte genannt wären, so führten sie doch beide zum Ziele, und dürfte daher eine Verwirrung nicht zu befürchten sein. Gneisenau pflichtete Dem bei. Nach seiner Karte fand sich, dass Wavre ein solcher Punkt sei. In wiefern mein Vorschlag dazu beigetragen haben mag, dass der Rückzug sich bis Wavre ausgedehnt hat, lasse ich dahingestellt sein.[..]”⁵

It may be true that Von Reiche proposed Wavre to Gneisenau, but it can be doubted whether the fact that Tilly may have been hard to find on the maps played a role in the decision for Wavre (see below).

Yet, it becomes clear from these citations that Tilly was a stage for a march further north, no more. It is very likely that Gneisenau at that moment may have considered Wavre as the eventual concentration point for the army, but this was *not* decided for *right at that time*. This was done a few hours later, at Mellery.

There is one witness in particular who writes about the situation. It is prince of Thurn und Taxis, the Bavarian representative. He writes: “Von dem, was inzwischen bei dem Herzog von Wellington vorgegangen, hatte man keine genaue Nachricht. Derselbe war sehr heftig engagiert gewesen. [..] Spät am Abend hatte der Herzog sein Hauptquartier in Genappe genommen; doch wie gesagt, wir hatten keine genaue Nachricht. Unter so bewandten Umständen wurde (ungefähr um 2 Uhr des Morgens am 17.) in Tilly der Entschluss gefasst, den Rückzug bis Wavre (ungefähr noch vierthhalb Stunden weiter in derselben Direktion) fortzusetzen und dort die vier Armeekorps zusammenzuziehen.”⁶

And colonel Von der Marwitz, commander of a brigade of cavalry of the 3rd corps (and temporarily attached to the 2nd corps) reports: “Nach Mitternacht kam die Nachricht, der Feldmarschall befinde sich in einem andern Hause des Dorfes. Wir fanden ihn körperlich sehr herabgekommen, und von seinem Sturze stark hinkend. Er wolle hier bleiben. Gneisenau schlug vor, bis hinter das Wasser bei Mont Saint Guibert zu gehen. Pful zeigte, dass auch dies noch allzunahe am Feinde sei, und nannte Wavre, was angenommen wurde.”⁷

After describing Blücher’s and his own arrival at Mellery, colonel Von Nostitz, says about the situation: “Vor dem Haufe hatten sich bei unseren Pferden noch mehrere Reiter eingefunden; ich sandte sie nach allen Richtungen aus, um der verbreiteten Nachricht, dass der Fürst gefangen sei, in meinem Namen zu widersprechen und den Truppenführern das Dorf Mellery als den Ort zu bezeichnen, in welchem der Fürst die Nacht zubringen werde.

Dieser getroffenen Massregel verdankte ich, dass noch vor Aufgang der Sonne die Generale Gneisenau und Grolman bei uns eintrafen. Von den verschiedenen Korps erhielten wir die erwarteten Meldungen, und so konnten schon des Morgens ganz früh die nöthigen Befehle expedirt werden, um die Armee bei Wavre zu konzentriren.”⁸

Contrary to what is often been claimed, from all this it becomes clear that the decision for Wavre was taken at Mellery [⁹] *after midnight* (probably around 2 a.m) as a separate decision as the one for Tilly, and one taken by the *full* staff, Blücher included.¹⁰

While Blücher himself would have preferred to stay around Mellery, it were both Gneisenau and Von Pfuël who saw the need to move the army as quickly as possible away from Napoleon and to protect it – for the time being – from any other French operations by moving it further north. For Gneisenau the Orne was a enough of a barrier against the French, but the choice was made for a place further north and in rear of the Dyle river and which would have been proposed by colonel Von Pfuël, i.e. Wavre.¹¹ For both scenarios, however, there was a prolongation of the direction the retreat had taken: to the north.

In hindsight, Wavre has often been portrayed as the point from which the Prussian general staff saw the possibility of aiding Wellington in case Napoleon might turn to him in front of Brussels. This theory has not only been based upon hindsight, but also upon words expressed by Gneisenau himself to his wife on the 17th of June (and as cited above). Some time after the campaign, on the 25th of June 1815, Gneisenau also wrote in this sense of hindsight to Von Boyen: “Ich ordnete den Rückzug auf die Strasse von Wavre, um über diesen Ort mit Wellington uns vereinigen zu können. [...] Dass der Rückzug nach Wavre ging, war die Einleitung zur Schlacht bei La Belle Alliance.”¹²

Of course, this is all very true, but these statement do not cover the whole concept behind the choice for Wavre. First of all, the area around Wavre was meant as a safe haven for the re-arrangement, concentration and provisioning of the Prussian army. The army, after all, had to be re-forged into a fighting force. As such, the valley of the Orne and the defile of Lauzelle formed a barrier against any French offensive action.¹³

Moreover, Wavre’s strategic position allowed operations in different directions: towards Wellington, in front of Brussels; to the north, towards Louvain, and to the north-east, along Tirlemont towards Maastricht.¹⁴ These lines fitted within the grand strategical context the Prussian army was acting in when it came down to chances for a joint battle with Wellington, either in front of Brussels, or – if needed - deeper into the Netherlands. That is also why a supply-line was opened towards Louvain.

The moment the Prussian leadership got together for the decision where to bring the army, three options stood open: Napoleon could pursue their army to the north, he could move towards the Rhine or he could turn against Wellington. But whatever the scenario might be, what counted – as on the 15th and 16th of June – was the cooperation with Wellington so as to bring up superior forces needed for a decisive victory over the French emperor. In case Napoleon would move along Liège towards the Meuse and the Rhine, the Prussian army still had the chance to unite with Wellington and to move from Aachen towards the Rhine to support not only the Prussian reserves there, but also the Austrian and Russian armies. Alternatively, it would be possible to advance into France into Napoleon’s rear.

In case Napoleon would move to the north, the Prussian army would have the possibility to fall back either upon Louvain to join Wellington near Brussels or to their favourite battleground near Tirlemont, so that Wellington could move in the enemy’s rear or join the Prussian army through the flank. In the option that Napoleon would turn against Wellington, the Prussian leadership knew that Wellington would attempt to face the French immediately south of Brussels. In that case, the army could be moved from Wavre to one of the positions designated by Wellington for an ultimate defence of Brussels: Mont Saint Jean or Halle.

By the time the decision for Wavre was taken, there was no information from Wellington about the outcome of the action at Quatre Bras. Yet, as Gneisenau counted upon the fact that Wellington would never accept a confrontation at Quatre Bras alone, he reckoned – in case Napoleon would turn against his ally – that he would manoeuvre in such a way that cooperation was possible. Again, all was aimed at maximizing the opportunities for mutual cooperation in a joint effort as it was only in this way that the allies could prevail, and both allied commanders knew it. It was Blücher who wrote on the 17th of June to his king, almost as an excuse for the loss of the battle at Ligny, in that context: “So unangenehm der Vorfall [meant is the battle of Ligny] ist, so kann er doch von keinen bedeutenden Folgen sein, da ich mich bis morgen vormittags mit allen vier Korps hier vereinigt haben werde und der Herzog Wellington mit seiner ebenfalls vereinigten Macht mir so nahe steht, dass keine *geteilte* [italics are mine] Schlacht mehr vorkommen kann.” What mattered was a joint battle, either near Brussels or possibly further north-east, near Tirlemont if Napoleon could be induced to move there.¹⁵

For these reasons a retreat from the battlefield of Ligny to the east was no option as it would move the army away from Wellington. The fact that this was possible at all was also a matter of sheer luck for the Prussians thanks to the almost total absence of a French pursuit: it could have worked out in a totally different way if Napoleon would have pushed through in a vigorous pursuit.¹⁶

There is a claim that the Prussian army was led towards Tilly to fight another battle there the next day, in cooperation with Bülow and Wellington. Reasons to consider this would have been both of a military character (near Wellington and near the battlefield of Ligny) and of a political character.¹⁷

However, this is a claim which cannot be maintained. Let alone the fact that physically the 1st and 2nd corps were completely unable to fight another major action the next morning, the position was far too near to the French army for the army to assemble and recover.¹⁸ Other than that, there is nothing in the original documentation which hints to such a consideration.¹⁹

The retreat to Wavre.

After the loss of the battle of Ligny, the 1st and 2nd corps fell back towards Tilly in some degree of disorder; while some units moved in larger, coherent masses, others moved in small and scattered groups. Others strayed out over the Namur-road, the Roman road and over the fields in all directions, some even beyond Tilly. In the confusion, officers were sent out to halt, assemble and re-form forces.²⁰ Yet, this did not prevent numerous soldiers to stream back to the east and south-east.

Both army-corps were rallied between Gentinnes and Tilly, while general headquarters was established at Mellery. There is virtually no information about the situation of this part of the army in this area, but for the few hours it was there (the first units started to arrive around 10.30 p.m. while the first units left north towards 4 a.m.) proper bivouacs were not established; the halt was used for the men to get some rest and for units to re-establish some of their coherence, but by the time they had to leave again a decent order had not fully returned in all units.

The disorder within the columns of the 1st and the 2nd corps was such that lieutenant Von Wüssow was sent out to restore order by halting the first units of the stretched out column at the defile of Lauzelle.²¹ Both the 1st and 2nd corps did not march in parallel columns. In their rear, the columns of the two corps were protected by Von Sohr's cavalry.

In this role, Von Sohr had taken up a covered position between Tilly and Gentinnes to observe the movements of the enemy and, in case of an attack, to fall back towards Mont Saint Guibert, where the 7th brigade would take a position in support.

It is in and near Mont Saint Guibert that the roads of Tilly and Mellery to Wavre pass the Orne. Its northern bank is dominated by heights. It was the brigade of Von Brause (the 7th brigade) to which the task was assigned to guard this passageway from any pursuing French. The brigade also had the task of receiving Von Sohr's cavalry, which it did as soon as it was threatened to be cut off on its right flank by the French.

After it had been decided to concentrate the army around Wavre, orders to do so were issued to the 1st and 2nd corps, but not to the 3rd and the 4th corps.

These orders were issued much later. It meant that by the early morning of the 17th of June, both their commanders, were ignorant about the situation of the remainder of the army and its destination.

It has been shown that the 3rd corps left from the area around Point du Jour towards dawn and that it marched in a relatively good order towards Gembloux. As Von Thielmann had been instructed "[...] seine Rückzuglinie darnach [=Tilly] einzurichten" he had chosen for one towards beyond Gembloux. Why he did so remains unclear, and also why he left his positions around Point du Jour hours after the remainder of the army which had fought at Ligny did. By the time he had left this area, the 1st and 2nd corps were starting to move to the north.

After he had completed his retreat upon Gembloux, Von Thielmann got in touch with Blücher reporting briefly about his situation, but without asking for further orders or for information about the situation of the rest of the army. This is most surprising indeed, the more as - at the same time - Von Thielmann contacted Bülow expressing his supposition that the army would fall back upon St.Trond through Wavre. At the same time, he asked Bülow what he intended to do – by doing so he made his decisions dependent upon his.

As he was informed this way, Bülow proposed Von Thielmann to take up a position between Corbais and Corroy. The choice for this position was probably caused by the fact that Bülow saw it as one to protect the concentration of the two other corps army around Wavre. At the same time, he advised Von Thielmann not to get involved into any actions, before both corps were united – he saw both corps merely as a rearguard. Lacking instructions from central headquarters, in doing so Bülow took it upon himself to assume the tactical leadership over half of the army.²² Concluding, during the early hours of the 17th of June on the corps commanders acted on the one hand upon both unofficial information and on their own ideas about the situation on the other.

Both Von Thielmanns and Bülow's idea about the way to go proved right not long after, as major Von Weyrach dropped in with orders to concentrate their corps around La Bawette and Dion le Mont respectively. At the same time, Bülow was instructed to leave a strong rearguard at Vieux Sart and to leave a detachment to support Von Sohr and to observe the enemy at Mont Saint Guibert.

Bülow also took the lead in the coordination of the marches of both his and the 3rd corps. By early morning Von Thielmann had already fixed his departure for 1 p.m. On what this was based remains unclear, but in the situation as it evolved this proved to be a suitable hour to cling to Bülow's rearguard which left from Baudeset towards noon. At the same time, in order not to hinder Von Thielmann, Bülow left from the Roman road in three parallel columns towards Wavre. Though he knew about the loss of the battle of Ligny and of the general movements of the 1st and 2nd corps, Bülow not only patrolled along the Roman road, but at the same time also towards Hannut, Namur and Liège. Apparently, he still felt a possible threat as coming from there.

From the very moment Von Thielmann had arrived with his corps beyond Gembloux – so before he received Gneisenau's orders - he felt that he would stay there until 1 p.m. and then to join the 4th corps in its movements. This intention meant a halt for the corps for a period of about five to six hours.

There are no direct indications from documentary evidence why Von Thielmann chose to do so and why until this particular hour, even though he was not pursued by the enemy right away. The only possible reason is that he wanted to grant his units some rest, though they had been halting around Point du Jour for a couple of hours.

Von Damitz blames Von Thielmann for halting his corps that long beyond Gembloux due to the presence of the French, the more as he could have done the same that evening.²³ In his turn, Houssaye criticizes Von Damitz for stating that Von Thielmann knew that Bülow – marching from Baudeset to Dion le Mont - would support him in case he would be attacked.

However, apart from the fact that by the time Von Thielmann wrote about his intended time of departure, Bülow was *not* on his way to Dion le Mont and there was no question of a full concentration at Wavre that moment for both corps-commanders, as Houssaye claims. The order for this concentration for them came in later.²⁴

Von Lettow Vorbeck portrays the halt of the 3rd corps as a critical point in relation to the immediate departure of the 4th corps after Bülow had received the order to do so from Gneisenau as it put the 3rd corps into a vulnerable position. Yet it is here that Von Lettow Vorbeck neglects the fact that Von Thielmann had announced his departure for 1 p.m. (instead of 2 p.m. as Von Lettow Vorbeck writes) long before he and Bülow were ordered towards Wavre.²⁵

Von Thielmann has been criticized for halting so long near Gembloux thereby bringing his corps into a perilous situation if the French would have pushed through towards Gembloux, thereby isolating the 3rd corps from the 4th.

There is a lot to say for this criticism, but at the same time it should not be forgotten that - on a larger scale – there was a huge gap in time between the orders as issued to the 1st and 2nd corps on the one side and the 3rd and the 4th on the other. As Gneisenau issued the orders for the first two corps probably around 3 a.m., those for the two remaining ones were issued only some 5 hours later.

As the 1st and 2nd corps were starting their retreat to the north around 4 a.m., Bülow halted his units along the Roman road and the 3rd corps was then just moving from Point du Jour and Sombrefe.

As stated before, it meant that the army was cut up in three parts and by the time Gneisenau did order the 3rd and the 4th corps to the north (at 8 a.m.), it was cut up in roughly two. The reasons for Gneisenau to have the situation develop this way remain obscure. Von Pflugk Harttung is the only historian who clearly sees this situation but at the same time he has no satisfactory explanation either. He suggests that Von Thielmann did not get orders right away from fear that he might be attacked and that the 3rd and 4th corps received orders for the retreat towards Wavre as soon as it was clear that the French did not pursue in an eastward direction.²⁶

But he also hints to a much larger risk the Prussian army was running: that Napoleon would have pushed in between the 1st and the 2nd corps (which were moving to the north) on the one hand and the 3rd and the 4th corps (beyond Gembloux and Baudeset) on the other, thereby splitting the army in two.

This risk was certainly not impossible; at the same time it was perhaps for this reason that for the time being central headquarters was split in two: one group (with Blücher) preparing the concentration around Wavre, and another at Mellery watching the situation there from where the corps were supposed to start their retreat. What stands out is the fact that at least by the

time the decision was taken for the army to fall back upon Wavre that contact was lost between general headquarters and half of the army. Though Bülow reported to Gneisenau at 10 p.m., Von Thielmann did not do so until about 6.30 a.m. the other day and – as far as can be ascertained – Gneisenau did not inform Bülow officially about the defeat at Ligny and above all about the important decision taken by 2 a.m. Nor did he inform Von Thielmann (and Bülow) about this last point either until 8 a.m. and all this can be regarded as most serious omissions at a time that the army was already extremely vulnerable after the defeat of Ligny. Though it may not have been possible to unite the army right at that time, at least it was vital for the commanders of its corps to know about the mutual situation of each one of them, with central headquarters playing its role in the very heart of the army.

Siborne assesses the retreat as having been conducted “with great skill and executed in very good order.” At least for the 1st and the 2nd corps this last claim is impossible to maintain as it is a fact that these corps suffered from disorder during their retreat.

He also depicts the detainment of Von Thielmann’s corps upon the field of battle until the morning of the 17th and his retreat to Gembloux as inevitable events while these were not. He does the same for the position of the 4th corps, as if it was detained at Baudeset to receive Thielmann and “to present the ready means of opposing their combined force to a vigorous pursuit, should such be attempted.” As has been shown before, however, events were at least initially dictated by the commanders of these corps, and not by high command as Siborne suggests.²⁷

Ropes qualifies the retreat as “successful [...], quickly accomplished” and that “it escaped the observation of the French.”²⁸ From the very fact that the majority army was safely concentrated around Wavre by the late night of the 17th of June, the retreat can be qualified as successful. Yet, to do so as being “quickly accomplished” is taking the facts too far out of their context.²⁹ Additionally, the fact that the army escaped the observation from the French is not only the merit of the Prussian army, but also had all to do with the serious lack of observations and pursuit of the French.

The Prussian army around Wavre.

The state of the army.

After the campaign, lieutenant colonel Von Röhl, commander of the artillery of the army, wrote in his report: “Während dem Gefecht gab Ich den Colonnen des 2. Corps, da der Ausgang zweifelhaft wurde, den Befehl, sich auf der Strasse nach Gembloux fortzuziehen und die Colonnen des 1. A.K. zugleich mitzunehmen., wodurch nachher das glückliche Ereigniss entstand, dass jene Colonnen sämmtlich gerettet wurden. Den [...] Geschützen, die aus dem Gefecht gehen mussten, gab ich den Befehl, sich über die Chaussee nach Brüssel zurückzuziehen. [...] Die Armee zog sich in der Nacht theils durch Tilly, theils durch Gembloux zurück, worauf ich eilte, die früher verschwindeten Colonnen eben diesen Weg führen zu lassen.

Da ich durch den General Graf Von Gneisenau erfuhr, dass der allgemeine Sammelplatz der sich zurückziehenden Armee morgen bei Wavre bestimmt wäre, so war es meine erste Sorge, in der Nacht dorthin voraus zu eilen, um alle dort ankommende Artillerie zu sammeln, und ebenfalls alle übrigen Truppen aufzuhalten, um sich dann zu ihren formierenden resp. Corps zu begeben.

Am 17. Juny. Dies glückte auch vollkommen, und muss ich besonders der Artillerie das Lob ertheilen, dass jeder Stab- und Subaltern-Officier sowohl, als jeder Gemeine mit ausdauernden Muthe, Eifer und Anstrengung ihre Pflichten treulich zu erfüllen bemüht war,

wodurch [...] allein die Artillerie mit Ruhe and Ordnung im zusammenhange blieb und so bei dem grossen Verlusten Menschen und Pferden es dennoch möglich ward, dieselbe schleunig zu formieren um sie wieder in einen neuen Kampf führen zu können. Jetzt war es meine grösste Sorge, die Armee mit der gestern verschossenen Muniton complettiren zu können, weshalb ich sofort einen Courier nach Maastricht absandte um die dort befindliche Muniton per Vorspann auf Bauerwagen schleunig heranzuschaffen. Zu gleicher Zeit wurde aus Vorsicht eine Estafette nach Lüttich geschickt um den Belagerungs Train nach Maastricht zu dirigiren und im Fall der Gefahr die dort in Lüttich befindlichen Eisen-Muniton Giesserei zu zerstören.

Köln [sic], Wesel und Münster wurden zugleich Zeit von dem Unfalle benachrichtigt und ihnen aufgegeben, aus dren Munitons-Depots insbesondere die Armee zu unterstützen. Bis am Abend 5 Uhr war ich noch immer in Sorgen, die Munitons Colonnen sämmtlich verlohren zu haben, wo ich aber auf einmal die Nachricht erhielt, dass sie durch die ihnen gestern gegebene Direction dem Feinde glücklich entgangen waren. Nun wurde es mir möglich die Corps und Batterien den 18.Juny sofort mit Muniton zu komplettiren, wodurch alles von diesem Tage an wieder schlagfertig stand.

[...] Von Wavre aus schickte ich sämmtliche demontirte Geschütze und sämmtliche durch die Komplettirung leergewordenen Munitons Wagen nach Maastricht, wohin ich Maj.Tackemann [?] vorausgeschickt hatte, um das Ganze zu leiden. Den Lieut.Einhart [?] schickte ich nach Langefelde, um die von den Engländern uns angebotene Muniton auf Bauerwagen heranzuschaffen [...] ³⁰

From this account it becomes clear that Von Röhl felt he had two major concerns on the 17th of June. First of all to re-establish the organisation of the artillery of both the 1st and the 2nd corps and secondly to restore the supply of ammunition for both these corps.

This could be done by simply directing their ammunition parks towards Wavre, were it not that general headquarters had no clue where they had gone after their retreat towards Gembloux on the evening of the 16th of June. It was simply a mystery where they had gone.

During the battle of Ligny, a lot of artillery units had not operated in conjunction with the infantry or cavalry units they were attached to. After the battle, in this situation therefore, most of these units fell back towards Wavre. In order to be able to restore the proper organisation of the artillery, Von Röhl rode ahead of the columns of the 1st and 2nd corps to Lauzelle to collect these units and re-assign them to their brigades from there. ³¹

After he had done so, Von Röhl went to Wavre where he reported in the afternoon to Gneisenau about the situation of the artillery; from this report it becomes clear that also during the afternoon guns still reached the 1st and 2nd corps.

Most importantly, Von Röhl also made efforts to establish supply lines of ammunition running from Cologne, Münster, Wesel, Longchamps and – above all – Maastricht.

It was only by 5 p.m. that Von Röhl learned that the artillery parks of the 1st and 2nd corps hadn't fallen into enemy's hands, and were apparently heading for Wavre. It can be presumed that they reached Wavre that evening and this was the reason that ammunition was distributed the other day. Unfortunately, no details are known about the movements of these parks on the 17th of June. ³²

Gneisenau wrote to Hardenberg on the 22nd of June 1815: “[...] Wir stellten uns des anderen Tages hinter Mont Saint Guibert und bei Wavre auf. Unsere Muniton war verschossen; unsere Munitonskolonnen nicht zu finden. Grausame Lage; beinahe hätten wir dem Herzog Wellington nicht zu Hülfe kommen können. Meine Gefühle hierüber können Sie sich, bester Fürst, schildern. Auf einmal kam Nachricht von unsern Munitonskolonnen; wir hatten nun wieder so viel, dass wir eine Zwei-Drittel-Schlacht liefern konnten.[...]” ³³

The lack of ammunition not only paralyzed the 1st and 2nd corps, it also jeopardized any possible cooperation with Wellington. It was therefore by 2 p.m that Gneisenau wrote to

Knesebeck: “[...] Der linke Flügel des Herzogs von Wellington wurde heute früh, dem Gehör nach, angegriffen, dies hat sich aber nicht bestätigt, er will bei Waterloo, am Eingang des Waldes von Soignie, eine Schlacht annehmen, wenn wir ihm zwei Korps geben wollen. Dies möchten wir wohl, wenn wir Munition hätten. Es fehlen uns aber die Nachrichten über die Munition zweier Armeekorps. [³⁴] Ist diese aufgefunden, so werden wir den Antrag des Herzogs annehmen, das Bülow'sche Korps zu ihm stossen lassen, nebst noch vollzähligen Bataillonen der anderen Armeekorps und mit den übrigen figurieren [...]”

The importance of the absence of ammunition should be emphasized. In fact, the presence of this ammunition was a condition for any aid given to Wellington. In later historiography, the arrival of this ammunition has been portrayed as an almost logical chain in the events of the 17th of June, leading to those of the 18th. It should be stressed, however, that until 5 p.m. the Prussian general staff had no idea about the whereabouts of the ammunition parks of half of the army and that's why Maastricht came up as a source for its replenishment.

By calling in this place, however, this replenishment could only take place well into the 18th of June.³⁵ In other words: there were very good reasons for anxiety in the Prussian high command during the 17th of June.

Apart from the casualties suffered, after the battle of Ligny, several thousands would have fled to the east. These would have been for the most *Ersatzmannschaften* from the districts of the Rhine, Westphalia and Berg.³⁶ On another tack, the numbers of the Prussian army were further reduced on the 17th of June by sending all non-combatants to Louvain.³⁷ All in all, about a hundred thousand men may have been left in the whole army.³⁸

As the corps arrived in their bivouacs, provisions were distributed but soon these proved to be far too inadequate.³⁹ Gneisenau was clear on the reason for this when he wrote to his wife on the 19th of June: “[...] durch die verwickelten Bewegungen die unsere Armee machen musste, war der Dienst der Lebensmittel in Unordnung gekommen.”⁴⁰ So, the situation of the supply-trains had clearly got messed up after the defeat of Ligny. Additionally, French cavalry had taken Prussian large numbers of supply-trains near Mazy and Gembloux during the day.

As a result of this situation, the troops started to plunder the surroundings but soon this appeared to be insufficient as well.⁴¹ Colonel Von Reiche says about the situation: “Da vom Feinde nichts wahrzunehmen war, so wurde zur Erholung von den vielfachen Strapazen und zur Erleichterung der Verpflegung, woran es gänzlich mangelte, da das Fuhrwesen noch nicht heran war, gestattet, dass die Truppen nach ihrer Bequemlichkeit bei denjenigen Ortschaften lagern konnten, welche ihnen zur Beziehung ihrer Lagebedürfnisse angewiesen waren. Bei dem schlechtem Wetter und da die Ortschaften auf einen so zahlreichen Besuch nicht gefasst waren, konnte jedoch aus der Erholung ebenso wenig viel werden als aus der Verpflegung, was selbst der commandirende General zu erfahren hatte: er liess den Offizieren seiner Umgebung bekannt machen, dass ein Jeder zur tafel sein Brod selbst mitbringen möchte !”⁴²

The marches to the position of Sombreffe had drained the physical condition of the army, not to speak of the battle itself which had exhausted the 1st, 2nd and 3rd corps of course even more. The strain of the defeat, the confusion and the few hours rest after it could only add to the exhaustion.⁴³

And if this was not enough, the march towards Wavre was yet another aggravation of this situation, particularly for those troops which had to cover this movement over roads which had got soaked because of the rain.⁴⁴ About the moral of the army after the defeat at Ligny, Von Damitz says: “Es ist jedoch eine Thatsache, die, erntfernt von jeder Ausschmückung, in dem Erfolge die sicherste Bewährung findet, dass nämlich der Geist im preussischen Heere nach dem Verlust der Schlacht von Ligny keineswegs gebeugt war, sondern vielmehr durch das Unglück des vergangenen Tages eine erhöhte Spannkraft erhielt. Der allgemeine Wille, den erlittenen Unfall durch eine entscheidende That wieder auszugleichen, sprach sich ernst und fest aus.”⁴⁵

And Siborne, who usually follows Von Damitz, states: “But the moral of the great mass of the Prussian army continued undiminished. The spirit of the troops was neither tamed nor broken; and their enthusiasm, though damped, had not been subdued.”⁴⁶

The absence of reliable reports on this particular subject does not permit to make any firm statements. At least when it came down to the supply of provisions this moral might have been not most exemplary, but the combination of harsh measures against it on one side and feelings of hatred towards the French and the avenging of the defeat as suffered at Ligny on the other will have contributed to a strong will to fight the French.

As a general and concluding observation it is too strong, as Siborne does, to suggest that “by the evening of the 17th, the entire Prussian army had assembled in the immediate vicinity of Wavre [...] in perfect order, and fully prepared to resume the offensive.”

Fact is that between 10 p.m. and midnight, units of both the 3rd and the 4th corps were still dropping in, while parts of the 3rd corps did not reach their corps until on the morning of the 18th of June. At the same time, vital ammunition was replenished, but also men were often suffering from fatigue, a lack of shelter, food and sometimes order.

One final remark here is about the representation of the extent of the defeat of Ligny by the Prussian high command towards the Prussian king and Von Knesebeck. In reading over the reports, it is clearly represented less extensive as it actually was; of course there was the military and political motive to do so.⁴⁷

At the same time, as the French strength is exaggerated (120.000), the action at Quatre Bras is minimized as being of minor importance to the allied case. While keeping silent over other causes which could be linked to the measures as taken (or not) by high command, Bülow and Wellington are also mentioned as scape-goats, by not showing up during the battle.

The position of the army.

As has been shown before, the positions of the corps of the army were drafted in a general way as: the 1st corps near Bierges, the 2nd corps in front of Wavre, near St.Anne, the 3rd corps near la Bawette and the 4th corps near Dion le Mont.⁴⁸

In more detail - by midnight of the 17th of June - the corps were placed as follows. The 1st corps stood since the afternoon around Bierges, stretching to the north as far as Rosières. The 2nd corps stood since late in the afternoon between Aisémont, Sainte Anne and the Chapelle Lauzelle. The 3rd corps stood since about 10 p.m. for one part near Bawette (but where exactly is not known), and for the other on the other side of the Dyle, south of Wavre (probably somewhere between La Baraque and Wavre). It was towards midnight that the last units of Bülow's 4th corps reached a position near Dion-le Mont. There, the corps was centred around the Cabaret à tout vend. To the south, the army was covered by the detachment at Mont Saint Guibert, which had as its cover a brigade of the 4th corps at Vieux Sart. At the same time, attempts were made to set up a communication with Wellington, while in the east patrols were stretching towards Maleves and the road from Namur to Louvain.

The blueprint for the arrangement of the four corps around Wavre was dictated by multiple factors. First of all, it should be strongly emphasized that by the moment this arrangement of the army-corps around Wavre was drafted, the Prussian leadership had no firm information either about Wellington's intentions or about those of Napoleon, so all options had to be considered wherever possible.

First of all, to meet all contingencies for what Napoleon would do, on both banks of the river Dyle or on one of them, both options had to be met and that is why the four corps were distributed as they were. At the same time, the main line of retreat of the army now was

redirected to the north, towards Louvain, so this line had to be firmly secured as well.⁴⁹ On the left bank of the Dyle, access to Louvain (through Ottenbourg and St.Achtenrhode) was covered by both the 1st and the 3rd corps. On the right bank of the Dyle, the 4th corps at the crossroads of *Tout vent* blocked the passage between the forests of Baulez and Bierquit at the road which led here north to Louvain. Apart from its line of advance coming from the south-east and its late hour of arrival, this strategical background explains the rather remote position of Bülow's corps in relation to the remainder of the army. At the same time, roads to the west enabled a cooperation with Wellington, who was supposed to fall back somewhere along the road leading from Quatre Bras to Brussels. In another scenario, the chaussée leading from Wavre to Brussels opened further possibilities for uniting with Wellington further north-west, near Brussels, if needed.⁵⁰

Prussian headquarters at Wavre: the ideas about the French.

As major Von Weyrach and major Von Massow returned from the 3rd / 4th corps and Wellington around noon, it was clear to Gneisenau that at least around 9.15 a.m. the French were not pursuing the 3rd / 4th corps and that the French were not increasing their numbers or in offensive against Wellington at Quatre Bras either. The French inactivity on and around the battlefield of Ligny had also already been confirmed earlier by Groeben in his first two reports.

This situation gave rise to the belief in the early afternoon that Napoleon was not bent upon moving against Blücher and Wellington, but that he intended to push through Liège towards the Rhine, to attack the Austrian and Russian armies there. After the battle of Ligny, Napoleon had three options in what he could do: pursue the Prussian army as it fell back to the north, turn with his main forces against Wellington, or move towards the Rhine and threaten and attack the other allied armies which were on the move there.⁵¹ Accordingly, Gneisenau took his measures by alerting Von Kleist, Von Dobschütz, the commanders at Luxembourg and Jülich.

In the context of the information Gneisenau had at that particular time, this option was not very unlogical to consider.⁵²

Later that afternoon, by 4 p.m., it may have been that the confrontation at Genappe could have been heard at Wavre but this is uncertain. About two to three hours later, however, the situation changed. At that time, a note of Groeben dropped in at Wavre informing general headquarters that Napoleon had turned towards Genappe. Around the same time, gunfire could be heard in the direction of Mont Saint Jean which was only another confirmation that Groeben's impression was correct: it indicated some confrontation between the French and Wellington right in front of the forest of Soignes. What Groeben hadn't seen, however, was the strength of the detachment of Grouchy moving through Point du Jour towards Gembloux. For that reason, Prussian high command wasn't aware of this formation until much later.

Meanwhile, Gneisenau had received reassuring news that the ammunition-columns of the 1st and 2nd corps were approaching Wavre. He was still worried, however, about the delay of the 4th corps, which he thought might only reach Wavre the next day.

The communication with Wellington.

During the morning hours of the 17th of June a mutual check had taken place of both allied commanders on their respective situations.⁵³ As this had taken place, it was for that moment enough for Wellington to know that the Prussians intended to concentrate around Wavre and for Blücher to know that Wellington intended to fall back upon Mont Saint Jean and to fight a defensive battle there in cooperation with the Prussian army.⁵⁴ In this cooperation, Wellington asked for two army corps. After that, the situation developed further for both commanders, with all the uncertainties about the concentration of their armies and about the plans of the enemy. For

Gneisenau, two uncertainties played a key role for a possible of support to Wellington: the absence of the ammunition-columns of the 1st and 2nd corps and the absence of the 4th army corps itself.

Gneisenau understood the aid to Wellington as “das Bülow'sche Korps zu ihm [Wellington] stossen lassen, nebst noch vollzähligen Bataillonen der anderen Armeekorps und mit den übrigen figurieren.” Gneisenau learned about the presence of the ammunition columns in the late afternoon. At that time, he was still unsure about the marches of Bülow's corps, the only one which hadn't fought at Ligny. At that time, he saw no reason to contact Wellington.

The assurance of Bülow's arrival reached Gneisenau probably between 10.30 and 11 p.m. Before that time, it had been Wellington who had taken the initiative to contact the Prussians, after having concentrated most of his army in the position of Mont Saint Jean in the early evening. It was this combination of elements which led the Prussian high command to make a formal promise for support for the battle which could be expected the other day in front of the forest of Soignes.⁵⁵ By then it was almost midnight.

The result of the communications between both allied commanders throughout the 17th of June concluded that day with what they needed: a firm mutual statement about cooperation for an upcoming and probably decisive battle the next day. Yet, the lapse of time between these communications was extensive and one could wonder why no further communications were exchanged during the day about the mutual developments on both sides to make more sure things were moving into this direction.

Final observations.

In a general sense, Von Damitz sees as the result of the 17th of June “die ausgeführte Vereinigung der englischen und preussischen Armee.”⁵⁶ At the same time, Siborne says about the Prussian dispositions of that day: “These dispositions, so ably planned and so efficiently performed were well calculated to facilitate the grand operation of the morrow, namely Blücher's flank movement to the right, to effect a junction with Wellington.”⁵⁷

Both these remarks are not only taking facts way beyond their true value, they are also covered by hindsight and are - as such - typical for a lot of descriptions of the events of the 17th of June.

The element of hindsight has also crept in the historiography of the 17th of June, as if all was aimed at the grand battle of the 18th of June *as it took place*.

In this process, not only the different aspects of the physical state of the army, but also the different stages of information Prussian headquarters disposed of during the day are neglected. For instance, it was about four hours before the first units of Bülow embarked upon their march to Chapelle Saint Lambert that the last units of this corps had reached their positions near Dion le Mont. Not to mention the full decision for support as given to Wellington by 11.15 p.m.

All this was the result of the uncertainties which had reigned during the day and the evening about the concentration of the army, its supplies and the information about the situation of Wellington. If these would have developed in a different way as they did now, the resulting situation would have been different, thereby changing the scenario for a common battle at Mont Saint Jean. In this general sense, this also applied to the situation of Wellington.

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¹ VPH-HA VI nr.IV nr.1 p.19-20

² The first units may have reached Tilly around 10.30 p.m. and Gentinnes around midnight.

³ Count Hügel described the decision as “der entscheidene Augenblick des Säkulums” in his report to the king of Württemberg of the 24th of June. In: Count Hügel. In: Pfister, A. - Aus dem Lager der Verbündeten 1814 und 1815 p.371

⁴ Cf. Wagner, J.Chr.A. - Pläne der Schlachten und Treffen etc. p.53
Damitz, K.von- Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.179
Ollech states “Rückzug nach Tilly und Wavre.” In: Geschichte etc. p.156

⁵ In: Weltzien, K.von (ed) - Memoiren des königlich preussischen Generals der Infanterie Ludwig von Reiche p.201

⁶ In: Memoirs of prince Von Thurn und Taxis. In: Aus drei Feldzügen etc. p.328

⁷ In: GSA, VPH HA VI nr.IV nr.1 p.39

⁸ Das Tagebuch p.32

⁹ Thurn und Taxis is incorrect here by mentioning Tilly as the place where the headquarters were established.

¹⁰ Even Von Pflugk Harttung clings to the traditional theory, i.e. that it was *Gneisenau alone* who decided for *Wavre* on the *evening of the 16th*. In: VPH-HA VI nr.IV nr.1 p.21, 27

¹¹ In this scenario, the suggestion of Von Reiche towards Gneisenau for Wavre is not to be excluded a priori.

¹² In: Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. p.540-541

¹³ Cf. Aerts, W. - Etudes etc. Livre IV (manuscript) p.60-61

¹⁴ Cf. Thielmann’s remark to Von Bülow of the morning of the 17th of June that he thought Wavre might be a stage for a march towards St.Trond.
Cf. Ropes, J.C. - The campaign of Waterloo p.227
Houssaye, H. - 1815. Waterloo p.240-241
However, Houssaye claims on the other hand that Gneisenau could not foresee the potential of a flank-march towards Wellington, as he could not be sure where Wellington would retreat. Yet, from April onwards it was clear to Gneisenau that Wellington’s line of retreat was toward Antwerp, and that in case of misfortune, Wellington also considered to move towards the Meuse. Cf. preambles.

¹⁵ In this context, Von Lettow Vorbeck understands Gneisenau’s measures in relation to Wellington only as to prevent him from falling back to the North Sea, while at the same time he completely ignores the fact that Gneisenau had a very good reason to cooperate with Wellington and that was the safety of his own army. Other than that, Wellington’s line of retreat did not run to the west, but to the north. In: Napoleons Untergang Vol.III p.338

Napoleon criticizes Blücher for not moving towards Quatre Bras or Waterloo on the early morning of the 17th of June. He regards the Prussian retreat towards Wavre as being “à contre sens” as it led the Prussian army away from Wellington.

Yet, as has been stated above, Blücher could not be sure of Wellington having maintained his position at Quatre Bras until next morning. Further, on the 16th of June, both armies were not “réunies” as Napoleon considers them, having as their communication “une belle chaussée.” Both armies were physically clearly separated and this main road was dominated by the French. As a result, a Prussian retreat along this road would have been most perilous. Though Napoleon does see the cooperation of both allied armies as their sole chance of success, he overlooks the chance they could have deeper into Belgium by operating along the lines of either Louvain or Tirlemont, on both of which Wavre was merely a stage for the Prussian army. In: Mémoires pour servir etc. p.190-191, 199
Cf. Lenient, E. La solution etc. p.332

¹⁶ Cf. Colonel Von Reiche. In: In: Memoiren des königlich preussischen Generals der Infanterie Ludwig von Reiche p.203

¹⁷ Cf. Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang Vol.III p.338
He sees the difference in decisions for Tilly and Wavre, but here he takes the initial choice for Tilly too far.
For the claim, also see Von Pflugk Harttung. In: GSA, VPH-HA nr.VI nr.IV nr.1 p.23

¹⁸ Aerts, W. - Etudes etc. Livre IV (manuscript) p.58-59

¹⁹ Cf. the remark of Gneisenau to his wife as cited before in this chapter.

²⁰ Cf. Colonel Von Reiche. In: Memoiren etc. p.202

²¹ This is in contrast to what Zieten himself – incorrectly - claims about the situation of his corps, i.e. that “man alles wieder gesammelt und geordnet [hat], wodurch der Rückzug in einem vollkommen schlagfertige Zustande geschah.” In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Das I.Korps Zieten bei Belle Alliance und Wavre p.197

²² In: GSA, VPH-HA VI nr.IV nr.1 p.38

²³ In: Geschichte etc. p.217

²⁴ Houssaye, H. - 1815. Waterloo p.242

²⁵ In: Napoleons Untergang Vol.III p.370

²⁶ In: GSA, VPH HA VI nr.IV nr.1 p.40

²⁷ In: History of the war etc. Vol.I p.299

²⁸ In: The campaign of Waterloo p.233

²⁹ Due to the lapse in time of orders, the first half of the army took up its positions in and around Wavre roughly between noon and 4 p.m. (1st and 2nd corps) and the other half between

8 p.m. and midnight (3rd and 4th corps).

³⁰ In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.5 p.31-34

³¹ Cf. Von Wussows report as well.

³² From the direction taken, it can be supposed that the park columns were during the night of the 16th of June in the vicinity of Gembloux. From Gembloux through Baudeset, along Walhain, through Nil Abesse, Corbais, La Baraque to Wavre covers a total distance of about 22 kilometres.

Taking roughly an average speed of about 2 kilometres an hour, the column could have left Gembloux around 6 or 7 a.m. In that case it preceded Von Bülow, who left between 11 and 12 o'clock.

According to Clayton they stood north of Mazy and Sombreffe during the battle, comprising some 400 wagons in total for two corps. In: Waterloo p.277

³³ Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.530-531

³⁴ Whether Gneisenau knew about the situation of the 3rd corps in this respect cannot fully be substantiated. Yet, it seems as if he was under the impression that it did not suffer from a lack of ammunition, probably after being informed by Von Röhl about the situation.

³⁵ The distance between Wavre and Maastricht is about 33 kilometres. It would take a messenger almost 4 hours to cover this distance. In case he left from Wavre by midday, he could reach Maastricht in the late afternoon. If the ammunition carts would move during the night, it would take them about 16 hours to reach Wavre. Before the actual distribution would be finished there, it would run into the late morning of the 18th of June before all units had replenished their ammunition.

³⁶ Damitz, Von – Geschichte etc. p.220 He states there were about 8000 of them, while Von Lettow Vorbeck mentions 6000. In: Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.370

³⁷ Diary of prince Von Thurn und Taxis. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Archivalische beiträge etc.p.617

³⁸ Cf. Casualties in separate note.

³⁹ Von Pflugk Harttung already points to a shortage of provisions in the bivouac of the 2nd corps near Onoz and to a lack of time to prepare a proper meal position near Marbais and Tilly. In: VPH HA, VI, nr.VII nr.5 p.9

⁴⁰ In: Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.525

⁴¹ Reports from the former Kriegsarchiv, like the diary of the 13th brigade (VI.E.38.1), report of Von Hiller (93), letter of 1st lieutenant Elsner (4th company 18th regiment, brigade Losthin), private Diederichs (unit ? – VI.E.35.113) In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Von Wavre bis Belle Alliance p.500-501

⁴² In: Memoiren des königlich preussischen Generals der Infanterie Ludwig von Reiche p.205 That at least the troops of the 1st corps exceeded all bounds in their search for food becomes

clear from a proclamation of general Von Zieten, dated 18th of June: “ [...] Ich überzeuge mich dass der Soldat vergisst in dem Lande eines alliirten Monarchen zu sein, dass die Bewohner Belgiens in uns ihre Beschützer gegen den Feind sehen sollen. Es werden Exzesse aller Art begangen, Keller werden erbrochen, Kasten und Spinden aufgeschlagen und unter dem Vorwand Lebensmittel zu suchen, Moebels, Effecten, Kleidungsstücke verbrannt und entwendet. Ordnung ist wesentlich erforderlich in jeder Armee, ich werde strenge darauf halten und nach Befinden der Umstände die Todesstrafe über Verbechen gegen die Disziplin verfügen.[...] ” In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.IV nr.1

⁴³ The 4th corps had a relative long rest on the morning of the 17th of June, but this corps had carried out extremely long and sometimes forced marches; it halted only in the late evening of the 16th of June. Cf. Von Pflugk Harttung. In: VPH-HA VI nr.V 4 E nr.2 p.41, 43-44

⁴⁴ At least those units moving later in the afternoon and in the evening were faced with rain. Cf. Kolonnenjäger Diederichs (4th corps) who mentions the rain as having started during the afternoon. In: GSA, VPH-HA VI nr.VI 4^e.2 p.42
Wickede, J.von – Ein Deutsches Reiterleben p.300

⁴⁵ In: Geschichte etc. p.221

⁴⁶ In: History of the war etc. Vol.I p.302

⁴⁷ Von Nostitz says in this context: “Der Fürst [Blücher] schrieb auf seinem Ruhebett mehrere eigenhändige Briefe nach Berlin und Schlesien, um durch die von ihm darin ausgesprochene gewisse Hoffnung eines glücklichen Ausgangs des grossen Kampfes den üblen Eindruck zu mildern, welchen, wie er befürchtete, die übertriebenen und böswilligen Berichte des bisher gehalten nachtheiligen Gefechte im Vaterlande hervorgebracht haben könnten.” In: Tagebuch p.35-36

⁴⁸ So far, its been impossible to understand the general concept which lay behind this particular arrangement.

⁴⁹ The strong significance of Louvain for the army becomes very clear from the disposition of the night of the 17th of June, stating: *Der Rückzug des niederrheinischen Kriegsheeres soll im Fall eines unglücklichen Ausgangs über Ober-Uschke [= Overijse] nach Louvaines [=Louvain] gehen.*⁴⁹

It was also for this reason that the convoys of the 1st / 3rd and the 2nd / 4th corps were to be sent on the 18th of June to this town over the left and right bank of the Dyle respectively.

⁵⁰ Von Bülow, in his report, explicitly states that his position that night was at the crossroads of the roads to Gembloux, Wavre and Louvain. In: Bas, F.de & T'Serclaes de Wommersom - La campagne de 1815 Vol.III p.520

⁵¹ Cf. Von Pflugk Harttung. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.IV nr.1 p.41

⁵² After the battle of Ligny, on the 17th of June, French-Prussian contacts had been very superficial, as both sides did not enter into any actions.

Cf. the observation of Von Thielmann's corps by Exelmans, the mutual observation of Prussian and French patrols as mentioned by Groeben, the skirmishing of French chasseurs à

cheval with Prussian horsemen near Mousty and the observation of the Prussians by detachments of Exelmans in and around Tourinnes and Perwez.

Cf. Other chapters of this study.

Aerts, W. - Etudes etc. Livre IV (manuscript) p.79

Berton, J.B. - Précis historique, militaire et critique des batailles de Fleurus et de Waterloo p.48-50

⁵³ Cf. the missions of colonel Gordon and major Von Massow.

⁵⁴ Aerts, W. - Etudes etc. Livre IV (manuscript) p.82

⁵⁵ Cf. Von Pflugk Harttung. In: GSA, VPH-HA VI nr.IV nr.1 p.61

⁵⁶ In: Geschichte etc. p.243

⁵⁷ In: History of the war etc. Vol.I p.300