

The Prussian retreat: the 3rd corps.

The march to Gembloux

On the evening of the 16th of June, somewhere between 10 and 11 p.m., Von Thielmann got the information from Gneisenau - through colonel Von Thiele - that the 1st and 2nd corps had started their retreat towards Tilly and that he was supposed to make a parallel retreat. In case this would not be possible, he was to fall back towards Gembloux.¹

Thielmann called in all his brigade-commanders at the cabaret of Point du Jour and decided to go back to Gembloux.² Von Thielmann assigned the task of rear-guard to the 9th brigade and the cavalry of Von Lottum (the brigade of Von der Marwitz was with the 1st corps).³ The corps was assembled but due to the fatigue of the troops, the scattered position of the corps in the broken landscape and the darkness this took a long time.⁴ In the very early morning the two squadrons of the 6th regiment Kurmark landwehrcavalry and the 2nd battalion of the 3rd regiment Kurmark Landwehr rejoined their brigade of Von Luck.⁵ At 1 a.m. all outposts were taken in.⁶ The advance guard of the corps, consisting of the reserve-artillery, reached Point du Jour at 2 a.m. and then left for Gembloux.⁷ It was till after 4 a.m. that the rear-guard left in silence from Point du Jour; it had been collected between Tongrinnes and Sombreffe.⁸

Some French cavalry units followed at a distance, but didn't push through: there was only some skirmishing between flankers.⁹ The main body of Thielmann's corps arrived at Gembloux around 6 a.m. The men covered the distance of about 6.5 kilometres in approximately three hours, so the column marched with a speed of about 2 kilometres per hour.

In approaching Gembloux, Thielmann learned about the position of Bülow near Baudeset. Then he sent major Von Weyrach, of Blücher's staff, to Blücher at Mellery to report about his position and to ask for instructions. This was not long after 6 a.m. The report reads:

I report to Your Excellency that I have arrived in gembloux at 6 this morning. I have suffered many casualties yesterday, but not in prisoners, 6 guns though which I had sent in the late evening against the superior French cavalry.

I found here general Von Jagow with 5 battalions and 2 regiments of cavalry. Yesterday, I have also taken in a horse battery led by captain Fritz.

*Von Thielmann*¹⁰

Now - between 6 and 7 a.m.- Thielmann started to place his corps between Gembloux and Sauvenière, on the left bank of the Orneau, while outposts were established along this stream.¹¹ Thielmann's most rearward troops arrived near Gembloux by 9 a.m.¹² Shortly after his arrival Thielmann also wrote to Bülow:

Yesterday, the army has suffered a great deal and is scattered. I, too, have suffered but still have a good 18.000 men. General Von Jagow of the 1st army-corps has joined me with 5

battalions and 2 regiments of cavalry; I have also taken in a battery of the 2nd army-corps. I have no orders from Prince Blücher but suspect he pulls back through Wavre towards St.Trond. The enemy does not pursue me. In any case, I will move off at 1 p.m. today in order to join Your Excellency. However, I ask for Your Excellency's decision before I move off. [PH]

*Von Thielmann*¹³

The horse battery nr.14 under captain Fritz had been sabred on the early morning of the 17th by Pajol on the Namur-road and that was something Thielmann didn't know yet by the time he wrote this report.

The 3rd squadron of the 7th regiment of uhlans, in observation near Onoz, had been forgotten in the bustle of the retreat. By now, the squadron, led by lieutenant Von Glugosky, had lost all contact with the army and during the night Von Glugosky decided to fall back towards Bothey. Though threatened here by the enemy, Von Glugosky somehow managed – assisted by a patrol of the 3rd squadron of the 9th regiment of hussars, which body of men lost 2 hussars and 7 horses in the affair - to get through and he reached his regiment much later, probably near Wavre.¹⁴

The march to Wavre.

It was about half an hour after his last units had reached Gembloux, around 9.30 a.m., that Thielmann received the order which came from Gneisenau from Mellery and which instructed him to move towards Bawette in rear of Wavre; at the same time it informed him about the situation of the 1st and the 2nd corps, central headquarters and the central point of concentration for the army in general, Wavre.

What actually happened was that major Von Weyrach, who delivered this order to Von Thielmann, was on his way to Bülow as well, with orders to move towards Dion le Mont.

It may have been around 11 a.m. that Thielmann received Bülow's letter dated around 9.30 a.m. Earlier, Thielmann had expressed towards Bülow his intention to start his movements about 1 p.m and that is what he did.¹⁵ By starting his march around 1 p.m., Thielmann linked up with Bülow whose front units had filed off from the Roman road near Baudeset from about 11.30 a.m. until about 1.30 p.m, so by the time the vanguard of the 3rd corps reached Baudeset (which was around 2 p.m.), Bülow's troops had just evacuated it.

Von Borcke's brigade, Thielmann's rear-guard, left its positions between 4 and 5 p.m., after which the French dragoons of Exelmans entered Gembloux.¹⁶

Thielmann followed a track which led him most probably from Gembloux / Sauvenières towards Baudeset, and from there along Walhain towards Nil Abesse and from there through Corbais, La Baraque and Wavre to La Bawette. This covers a total distance of about 24 kilometres.¹⁷ By 8 p.m. the first units of the corps crossed the Dyle at Wavre, passed through the small town and took up bivouacs near the chateau of La Bawette. Here, Thielmann established his headquarters.¹⁸ The last bit of the march was extremely cumbersome due to the darkness, the fatigue of the troops, the muddy roads and the fact that a lot of streets in Wavre were blocked by baggage and carts of all kinds, as well as by numerous wounded. On

top of this, rations failed as most of the provision-columns had fled to the rear. ¹⁹

The rear-guard of the 3rd corps, the 9th brigade of Von Borcke, only reached the Dyle somewhere between 6 and 7 a.m. on the 18th of June; it took this rear-guard thirteen hours to cover a distance of about 24 kilometres. The brigade took up a position on the right bank, but where is unknown. The units were extremely tired and tried to make the best of their bivouac. As for the cavalry, the brigade of Von der Marwitz joined the 3rd corps that evening (see above), the brigade of Von Lottum spent the night near Von Borcke, as this brigade also formed part of the rear-guard. ²⁰

It was also that evening that those units which had been kept near Dinant rejoined the corps; these were the 2nd battalion of the 3rd Kurmark Landwehr-regiment and the 2 squadrons of the 11th brigade. Major Helwig, with his two squadrons of the 9th regiment of hussars, was still kept near Ciney. ²¹

First version: 1st June 2005 - Last revised: 7th March 2014 - Copyright © Pierre de Wit

1. For this time, see the report of lieutenant general Von Thielmann. In: Former KA nr.VIE.22.1 In: GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.5.p.41

The instruction would have read: "Der Rückzug ist beschlossen. Das Zentrum dirigirt sich auf Tilly; der linke Flügel hat daher seine Rückzuglinie darnach einzurichten."

This quotation comes from an account which is most probably from Von Clausewitz, the chief of staff of the 3rd corps. It was published in 1820 in an Austrian magazine, the *Militärische Zeitschrift*. It was published in French as well in 1977 in *Wavriensia*, under the title: "La bataille de Wavre des 18 et 19 Juin 1815."

Colonel Von Thiele had left headquarters between 10 and 11 p.m. Cf. account of Von Thiele dated 1845. In: Lettow Vorbeck, O.von - Napoleons Untergang Vol.III p.338

Captain Von Röder, chief of staff of Von Luck, mentions Von Thieles mission, but states he went to Wavre. At that time, however, this destination wasn't known yet. In: *Erinnerungen etc.* p.323

According to Wagner, Von Thiele reached Thielmann around 10 p.m. In: *Pläne etc.* p.53

2. *Militärische Zeitschrift* (1820) p.300

One of the main reasons for Thielmann to do so would have been his idea that the 1st and 2nd corps had been separated from his due to the fact that the enemy had occupied a position between Sombreffe and Ligny. In: *History of the war etc.* In: MWB, 1845 p.66

3. Cf. *Militärische Zeitschrift* (1820) p.300

Damitz, K. von - *Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815* p.215

Bredow, Von - *Geschichte des 2.Rheinischen Husaren-Regiments Nr.9* p.10

Reports of Von Hobe and Von Lottum. In: KA, VIE.22. In: GSA, HA-VI,nr.IV.1.p.33

The fact that the brigade of Von Borcke was rear-guard is confirmed by the commander of the 3rd battalion of the 1st regiment Kurmark Landwehr infantry, major Von Bornstedt and other members of the battalion, like administrator Krack and lieutenant Jäckel. In: Bornstedt, Von , *Das Gefecht bei Wavre an der Dyle am 18.und 19.Juni 1815*. Berlin, F.Heinicke, 1858

⁴ Damitz, K. von - *Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815* p.215

The 11th brigade (Von Luck) was concentrated in a bivouac at the Namur-road. Cf. Röder, C.von - *Erinnerungen etc.* p.323

⁵ Röder, C.von - *Erinnerungen etc.* p.324

⁶ Röder, C.von - *Erinnerungen etc.* p.324

7. *Militärische Zeitschrift* (1820) p.300

Damitz, K. von - *Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815* p.215

Von Pflugk Harttung, however, claims the 12th brigade was the advance guard, leaving at 2 a.m. In: GSA, HA-VI,nr.IV.1.p.33

8. Militrische Zeitschrift (1820) p.300

Damitz, K. von - Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 p.216

Von Bornstedt, commander of the 3rd battalion of the 1st Kurmark Landwehr-infantry of the brigade of Von Borcke says that the order to march reached him before daybreak and according to this order he was supposed to go towards the windmill [of Point du Jour] in the direction of Namur. Therefore, the battalion marched to Point du Jour and there turned left, towards Gembloux. Von Bornstedt's battalion was then under the temporary command of colonel Von Hobe of the reserve-cavalry. In: Das Gefecht bei Wavre p.30-40

Private Strantz and administrator Krack state the battalion left at daybreak. Cf. Bornstedt, Von – Das Gefecht bei Wavre p.117-119, 111-116

According to lieutenant Mankopf (commander of the platoon skirmishers of the 4th company of the 31st regiment, brigade Von Stlpnagel) says he left at midnight, but his brigade left a few hours later. Maybe he left eastward around that time. Cf. Bornstedt, Von – Das Gefecht bei Wavre p.105-109

The fact that the 12th brigade left from Point du Jour around 2 a.m. is confirmed by Gottschalck. Cf. Gottschalck, M. - Geschichte etc. p.84

The service journal of general Von Borcke states the brigade left at 8 a.m, but this was an error in copying as the time of arrival beyond Gembloux is given as 7 a.m. The time of departure meant was therefore 3 a.m. In: Frster, F. Chr.- Geschichte der Befreiungskriege 1813, 1814, 1815. Vol.III p.1080

Lieutenant Hobauer (of the 3rd battalion 1st regiment Kurmark Landwehr-infantry) was ordered by major Von Bornstedt at 11 p.m. to fetch some provisions of the park situated on the height of Point du Jour.

Lieutenant Hobauer, in bringing the back to his unit, wasn't able to reach his battalions as French skirmishers had blocked the road. He then returned to the aprk and got the instruction to go to Namur. Cf. Bornstedt, Von. Das Gefecht bei Wavre an der Dyle am 18.und 19.Juni p.132-141

⁹ Reports of Von Hobe and Von Lottum. In: KA, VI.E.22. In: GSA, HA-VI,nr.IV.1.p.33

10. In: KA, VI.C.3.II.175 and in VI.D.9.nr.266 In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.6.p.5

Lettow Vorbeck, O. von - Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.340

11. Cf. Militrische Zeitschrift (1820) p.301 and Exelmans' report to Grouchy of the morning of the 17th of June (see below).

Berton, J.B. - Prcis historique, militaire et critique des batailles de Fleurus et de Waterloo p.47

The fact that the corps had its position on the other side of Gembloux is confirmed by major Von Bornstedt; his battalion, being in the rear-guard, occupied the defile of Gembloux with his skirmishers and a company, led by captain Von Ghren.

Scheltema and Von Plotho mention a position near the chapel of Notre Dame du Mont at one kilometre north-west of Gembloux.

Cf. Scheltema - De laatste veldtocht etc. p.117

Plotho, Von – Der Krieg etc. p.43

Gottschalck gives for the 12th brigade a position at 6 a.m. at Grand-Leez, which is still more to the north east but indicating that the corps was in rear of Gembloux. Cf. Gottschalck, M. - Geschichte etc. p.84

12. Cf. account of administrator Krack of the 3rd battalion 1st regiment Kurmark Landwehr infantry. Krack tells how his commander, major Von Bornstedt, got the information that the baggages had probably fallen into enemies hands, after which he got the instruction to go to the leading towards Maastricht to find out about the whereabouts of the remaining baggage and the cash of the battalion and to accompany them in case he would find them. Krack left in the afternoon without having a clear goal and finally ended up in the evening at units of Bülow's corps. He remained with these troops until the morning of the 18th of June, when this corps marched through Wavre and he rejoined his brigade. In: Bornstedt, Von - Das Gefecht bei Wavre an der Dyle am 18.und 19. Juni 1815 p.11-116

Major Von Holleben (commander of the 3rd battalion of the 8th Leib-regiment, brigade Von Borcke) claims his battalion passed Gembloux around 7 a.m. In: Aus den hinterlassenen Papiere etc. p.140

13. Ollech, Von - Geschichte etc. p. 157

Lettow Vorbeck, O.von - Napoleons Untergang Vol.III p. 368

¹⁴ Reports of Von der Marwitz and Glugotzky himself. In: KA, VI.E.22.64 In: GSA, VI-HA, nr.IV,1.p.53

Cf. Bredow, Von - Geschichte des 2.Rheinischen Husaren-Regiments Nr.9 p.10

According to Epner and Braun the unit lost 3 subalterns, one trumpeter and 24 men. In: Geschichte des Ulanen-Regiments etc. p.9

Another publication states it suffered 30 prisoners. Cf. Militärische Zeitschrift (1820) p.301

15. Militärische Zeitschrift (1820) p.301

The service journal of general Von Borcke. In: Förster, F. Chr. - Geschichte der Befreiungskriege 1813, 1814, 1815. Vol.III p.1080

Two o'clock is often given as the hour at which the first units of Thielmann left. Cf.

Wagner, J.Chr.A. - Pläne der Schlachten und Treffen etc. p.62

Damitz, K. von - Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 p.216

Ollech states the corps left between 1 and 2 p.m. In: Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.167

Lieutenant Mankopf (commander of the platoon of skirmishers of the 4th company of the 31st regiment,brigade Stülpnagel) confirms that the corps remained in the field for a couple of hours before leaving. Cf.Bornstedt, Von - Das Gefecht bei Wavre an der Dyle am 18.und

19.Juni 1815

Captain Von Röder, chief of staff of the brigade of Von Luck, also mentions the halt and the march in the afternoon. In: Erinnerungen etc. p.324

16. Major Von Bornstedt, commander of the 3rd battalion of the 1st regiment Kurmark Landwehr infantry and in the rear-guard, confirms that his battalion held off the French posts for some time and then moved off himself.

According to lieutenant Jäckel (of the same battalion) his troops left their position at 6 p.m. Cf. Bornstedt, Von - Das Gefecht bei Wavre an der Dyle am 18.und 19.Juni 1815 p.14-30, 120-124

¹⁷ Aerts comes to 18 kilometres for the same stretch. In: Etudes etc. Livre IV (manuscript) p.69

According to colonel Von Lottum, commander of a brigade of cavalry of the reserve-cavalry of the 3rd corps, the corps passed from Gembloux through Tourinnes to Wavre. This remains inexplicable as, if this would be true, the corps would have made a strong detour to the east which is hardly acceptable. Cf. his account as mentioned by Von Pflugk Harttung. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.IV nr.1 p.52

Von Pflugk Harttung, in his turn, understands this as a halt near Tourinnes because of a fear for a French threat from the east. In: GSA, VPH-HA VI nr.IV nr.1 p.52

18. Militärische Zeitschrift (1820) p.302

Damitz, K. von -Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 p.216

Ollech, Von - Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.167

Lettow Vorbeck, O. von – Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.375

¹⁹ Röder, C.von - Erinnerungen etc. p.324

Cf. Lieutenant Mankopf (commander of the platoon skirmishers of the 4th company of the 31st regiment, brigade Von Stülpnagel). In: Bornstedt, Von - Das Gefecht bei Wavre an der Dyle am 18.und 19. Juni 1815 p.105-109

Captain Von Gillhausen, commander of the 2nd battalion of the 1st regiment of Westphalian infantry (brigade Von Steinmetz and member of the rear-guard led by Von Jagow) claims his battalion only reached Wavre [which he calls Vanvry] towards 11 p.m. and that he crossed this town on the morning of the 18th of June. Cf. report in former KA, VI.E.7.I.40 in GSA,VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.5.p.68

20. In: Militärische Zeitschrift (1820), p.302

According to this publication the brigade had suffered from the bad roads after the rain had started.

Major Von Bornstedt. As time of arrival Von Bornstedt gives 7 a.m., while F.Kohlheim claims it was 6 a.m. In: Bornstedt, Von - Das Gefecht bei Wavre an der Dyle am 18. und 19. Juni 1815 p.14-30, 102-105

6 a.m. is also given by major Von Holleben (commander of the fusilier battalion of the 8th regiment). In: Aus den hinterlassenen Papiere p.140

Also see: Pflugk Harttung, J.von In: GSA, HA-VI,nr.V.8.p.33

Lieutenant Jäckel believes it was 6.30 a.m.

The service journal of general Von Borcke states the brigade reached the defile of Wavre before 5 a.m. due to the presence of park columns of the 2nd and 4th corps. In: Förster, F. Chr.-Geschichte der Befreiungskriege 1813, 1814, 1815. Vol.III p.1080

Major Von Ditfurth, commander of the 30th regiment, says his regiment reached its position near Wavre (near La Bavette) at 10.a.m. In: Aus sturmbewegter Zeit. Briefe etc. p.195

According to Kohlheim some cattle was slaughtered, but there was no time to eat the meat.

Lettow Vorbeck, O. von – Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.375

²¹ Wagner, J.Chr.A. - Pläne der Schlachten und Treffen etc. p.62-62

Damitz, K. von - Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 p.216