

The Prussian retreat: the 1st and the 2nd corps.

The 1st corps.

The 1st corps had its bivouacs around the villages of Tilly and Gentinnes. ¹ It was around daybreak (around 4 a.m.) that Zieten's first units starting moving to the north. ² There were two possible routes the troops could have taken towards Mont Saint Guibert. The first one led from Tilly, along the farm of Gentissart, leaving Stryon to the left, to Mellery, through this village to Haute Heuval (about one kilometre north of Mellery) , along the farm of Sartage (to the left), over the crossing called Arbre de la Justice, along the Cense de Chenoy (now the Chateau de Chenois), then just beyond Chenois one of the roads towards Mont Saint Guibert, of which the left one led along Le Grand Chêne.



A contemporary farm at Gentinnes.

The other one led from Tilly, along the ferme de Gentissart, via l'Arbre du Vénérable (now the Chapelle Saint Joseph) to Villeroux, through Villeroux (or immediately west of it), and from there to Hevillers (leaving the Bois d'Hevillers to the left) onto Mont Saint Guibert. ³

From Mont Saint Guibert, the Prussians could reach Wavre either by marching through the road to the farm of Profondval, leaving this road to the right, and then along the track which leads to the farm of de Bieraux (to the left).

The route continued over the road which leads between the Bois de Villie and the Bois de Mannil and which leads to a point east of the Bois de Tornoveaux.

In 1815 the road led to the left, along the Cense de Sainte Anne, the Chapelle Sainte Anne and the Bruyère Sainte Anne to Aisémont, a suburb of Wavre. ⁴

Another road comes from Mont Saint Guibert, along the farm de Grange à la Dime (to the right) and then to La Baraque. In front of this place, the road divides into the direction of La Baraque

and the other towards Dion le Mont. It is this road which led through Louvrance to the point near the farm of Sainte Anne.

It was near Haute Heuval, about two kilometres north of Mellery, that the units of the 1st corps were put in order per brigade before being led further north.⁵



The hamlet of Haute Heuval.

The 1st corps marched without the rear-guard which had stood – led by Von Jagow – at Brye. This body had gone off to along the Roman road Gembloux between midnight and 1 a.m. and temporarily joined the 3rd corps, after it had entered this place later that morning.⁶

After the battle of Ligny, Von der Marwitz' brigade (of the reserve cavalry of the 3rd corps), in position at the extreme right flank of the army, had got the instruction to form a rear-guard for the 1st corps. Von der Marwitz had been assigned one battalion of fusiliers and four squadrons of Silesian hussars. Von der Marwitz got into a position in front of Gentinnes where the one battalion was placed and in rear of which was the brigade of Pirch II. Patrols were sent out towards Gembloux, Sombreffe and the battlefield of Ligny. Von der Marwitz learned that the 3rd corps was near Gembloux and sometime later he was ordered by Zieten to fall back as rear-guard for the 1st corps. Now, Von der Marwitz proceeded from near Gentinnes towards Wavre, where he crossed the Dyle and rejoined his corps near La Bawette later.⁷

Both the 1st and 2nd corps would have halted near the farm of l'Auzelle for some time to get the columns more or less organised, but for how long is not known. After that, the 1st corps started crossing the Dyle, to take up positions in and around the village of Bierges.⁸ This process started around noon.⁹⁻¹⁰

From Limale, Zieten sent patrols of Von Röder's cavalry towards Von Ledebur at Mont Saint Guibert, as well on the left bank of the Dyle. Also, patrols of the 1st regiment of Silesian hussars were sent out to establish a communication with Wellington's army [¹¹] and they did so with

cavalry pickets on the extreme left flank of this army. ¹²



The farm l'Auzelle

Both these measures had to do with an instruction he had got from Gneisenau which read: “[..] Ew.Excellenz wollen hiernach Ihre Anordnungen gefälligst derart berichtigen, dass die Gegend auf dem linken Ufer der Dyle gegen alle etwa vom Feinde vorzunehmenden Unternehmungen hinlänglich beobachtet und die Kommunikation mit dem Lord Wellington unterhalten wird.” ¹³

It was in this context that Von Reiche, chief of staff of the 1st corps, wrote to one of his brigade-commanders, Von Steinmetz, that afternoon or evening:

Da der Herzog Wellington nach einer eingegangenen Anzeige sein hauptquartier in Braine-la-Leud hat, so hat mir Se. Excellenz der Generalleutnant [Zieten] aufgetragen, Ew.Hochwohlgeboren ganz gehorsamst zu ersuchen, bis dahin eine Kavalleriepatrouille zu schicken, um die Gemeinschaft mit der englischen Armee zu eröffnen und um zu erfahren, wie der Stand derselben nach Beendigung des heutigen Gefechtes daselbst sein wird. Seine Excellenz glauben, das es gut sein würde, wenn das Detachement so stark gegeben würde, dass die Hälfte davon beim Herzog Wellington bleiben köntte, um zur weiteren Berichterstattung an das hiesige Armeekorps gebraucht zu werden.

*Von Reiche*¹⁴

This mission had been initiated by Zieten around 6.30 p.m. as by then he wrote to Blücher that he had heard gunfire towards Braine la Leud and that he had the impression that Wellington was retreating. For that reason he had decided to send a cavalry patrol of Von Steinmetz in that direction.¹⁵

Another result of the gunfire which could be heard from Mont Saint Jean was that Zieten concentrated his corps more around Bierges.¹⁶ In addition, the 12th regiment of infantry (Von Steinmetz brigade) was detached to protect the right flank of the corps.¹⁷

The 2nd corps.

The 2nd corps left at 6 a.m. [¹⁸⁻¹⁹] and followed the tracks of the 1st corps from its bivouac near Tilly, Gentinnes and Mellery.²⁰ It was around 2 p.m. [²¹] that it started taking up positions between Aisémont, Sainte Anne and the Chapelle Lauzelle.²²

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) which was assigned the task to guard this passageway from any pursuing French. The brigade also had the task of receiving Von Sohr's cavalry. This brigade of cavalry had been observing the French movements from a position between Tilly and which now fell back upon Mont Saint Guibert. It was here that this unit passed the night.²³

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¹ Zieten himself writes about Tilly and Gentinnes. Cf. Report of Von Zieten, dated 8 July 1815 in: Reiche, L.von Memoiren etc. p.418

2.Cf. The report of the 4th regiment of Westphalian Landwehr confirms a departure at daybreak. In: Henckel von Donnersmarck, graf - Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben p.657

Von Leszczynski, having studied the 19th regiment of the same brigade, comes to a time between 4 and 5 a.m. The 9th company and 2nd battalion – which had got separated from the regiment during the battle of Ligny - rejoined the regiment during the retreat. Due to their losses, both the 1st and 2nd battalion of the 4th regiment of Westphalian Landwehr were merged into one. In: 50 Jahr Geschichte des Königlich Preussischen 2.Posenschen Infanterie-Regiments nr.19 p.167

The brigade of Pirch II left its bivouac near Haute-Heuval at 6 a.m. Cf. State of the movements of the 2nd brigade. In: GSTA, VI HA, NL Gneisenau, Kt.19 p.11

3. For both these routes, see: Aerts, W. - Etudes etc. Livre IV (manuscript) p.63

Aerts gives yet another route but which is too excentric, i.e. through Tilly, Gentinnes, Saint Géry, Chastre (then called Chère Dame Alerne), Hevillers, Mont Saint Guibert.

Von Damitz confirms a passage along Gentinnes, Vilroux and Mont Saint Guibert. In: Geschichte etc. p.215

4. The Chapelle Sainte Anne is still there, but as a much more recent one (1994). The farm is still there, albeit highly transformed.

⁵ Cf. Briefe eines Preussischen Offiziers über den Feldzug etc. In: MWB, 1822 p.477

⁶ The time of midnight has been taken from captain Gillhausen. Cf. his report as mentioned above in the account of the battle of Ligny.

According to major Von Reiche the Prussian rear-guard evacuated Brye around midnight. In: Memoiren etc. p.193

As the distance between Brye and Gembloux is about 10 kilometres, and as Thielmann wrote on the 17th of June that Von Jagow was at Gembloux when his first troops got there by 6 a.m., Jagow got there possibly around 5 a.m. and that it took him about four hours to get there. That leaves a time of departure between midnight and 1 a.m.

According to Harkort, the regiment of Westphalian Landwehrcavalry sent out that night the 3rd and 4th squadron under captain Von Bülow towards Limale [?] In: Die Zeiten des ersten Westphalischen etc. p.53

Of the 3rd battalion of the 29th regiment (Von Jagow), the 11th and 12th company, as well as the four platoons of sharpshooters, led by major Von Poellnitz left Brye around midnight and got to Gembloux in the early morning of the 17th of June. Here, having spent some time to rest, he

would have left around 7.a.m. for Wavre.

Around 1 a.m. the 1st battalion and the 5th and 6th company of the 2nd battalion left Brye and arrived at Gembloux after Von Poellnitz had left. It was at Gembloux that Von Jagow attached his units to Thielmann's army-corps.

In: Wellmann, R. - Geschichte etc. p.111-113, 124-16

For 1 a.m. he bases his account on the diary of captain Von Bismarck.

Zieten, in his report, gives the impression that Von Jagow had in the rear-guard his own units, plus those of other brigades and that is correct: these were coming from the 1st and 2nd brigade of infantry. In: Report Zieten, in: Reiche, L.von Memoiren etc. p.418

For the use of the Roman road, see lieutenant Von Woikowski-Biedau (regiment of West-Prussian infantry nr.7). In: Salisch, G.von - Geschichte des königlich Preussischen siebenten Infanterie-Regiments p.201-202

⁷ Aus dem Nachlasse Friedrich August Ludwigs von der Marwitz auf Feiersdorf, p.118-119 Förster, Von - Geschichte des königlich Preussischen Ulanen-Regiments Graf zu Dohna nr.8 p.67

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

8. Henckel von Donnersmarck, count - Erinnerungen etc. p. 357

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

9. Aerts, W. - Etudes etc. Livre IV (manuscript) p.63

Von Reiche claims it was in the morning. In: Memoiren etc. p.205

In presuming the corps followed the route Tilly, Gentinnes, Villeroux, Hevillers, Mont Saint Guibert, La Baraque, Sainte Anne, Wavre, Bierges then the corps covered the distance of about 21 kilometres in about eight hours (including the halt at Lauzelle).

The 29th regiment of the brigade of Von Jagow was only collected on the morning of the 18th of June as it arrived in Bierges in parts: the 9th and 10th company led by lieutenant Panten through Tilly, the 7th and 8th company and the skirmishers of captain Von Quistorp through Tilly, the 11th and 12th company plus four platoons of Schützen through Gembloux to Wavre; the 1st battalion and the 5th and the 6th company with Von Jagow via Gembloux (with the 3rd corps) to Wavre. Von Jagow himself met the 7th and 8th company, plus the detachment of Von Quistorp at Mont Saint Guibert. Cf. Wellmann, R. - Geschichte des Infanterie-Regiments von Horn (3tes Rheinisches) no.29 p.124-126

¹⁰ The 2nd brigade took up a bivouac near Rosières at 3 p.m. Cf. State of the movements of the 2nd brigade. In: GSA, VI HA, NL Gneisenau, Kt.19 p.11

¹¹ Cf. Diary of the 1st corps. Cited in: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Das I.Kops Zieten bei Belle Alliance und Wavre p.197

Colonel Von Reiche. Über die Kriegsbegebenheiten des I.Armeekorps. In: GSA, VPH-HA,

VI, nr.VII nr.5 p.59

12. Major Von der Decken (1st regiment of hussars). In: Hann.41 XXI,nr.152 p.27-29
According to colonel Hervey (assistant QMG), Prussian cavalry would have been observed about 10 kilometres behind Ohain between 10 and 11 a.m. on the 18th of June. This is highly improbable: this distance is almost equal to Bierges, and was much shorter. Cf. Hervey in a letter to Mr.Carroll (1815) in: Leeds, F. - A contemporary letter on the battle of Waterloo. Nineteenth Century 1893 p.433

¹³ In: Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang Vol.III p.374
With minor differences in: Ollech, Von – Geschichte des Feldzugs etc.p.170

¹⁴ Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Wellington und Blücher am 17.Juni p.381

¹⁵ Cf. History of the war etc. In: MWB, 1845 p.82
Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang Vol.III p.374
He only mentions the reference of the former Kriegsarchiv (VI.3.II.p.179). Unfortunately the exact text of this document has not been preserved.

¹⁶ Cf. Diary of the 1st corps. Cited in: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Das I.Kops Zieten bei Belle Alliance und Wavre p.197
For the same 2nd brigade it meant that it moved out of its position by 8 p.m. to arrive near Bierges towards 10 p.m. Cf. State of the movements of the 2nd brigade. In: GSA, VI HA, NL Gneisenau, Kt.19 p.11
There is a claim that the 24th regiment of infantry (brigade of Von Steinmetz) had a bivouac for the night on the great road which leads from Wavre to Brussels. This seems highly improbable as this was the area where the 3rd corps was located. In: Zychlinski, F.von – Geschichte etc. p.280
At the same time, the diary of the 19th regiment (Henckel) states it stood that night in rear of Wavre. In: Henckel von Donnersmarck, graf - Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben p.641

¹⁷ Cf. Reiche, L.von - Memoiren etc. p.207 He doesn't make it clear where the regiment actually stood.
According to another source, the 1st brigade had been called towards evening to the road leading from Wavre to Brussels, while having posts towards Brussels. The reason was that the alarm had spread that the enemy had penetrated between Wellington and Blücher, which later appeared to be a false one. Cf. Otto, F.von - Geschichte des 2.Schlesischen Jäger Bataillons nr.6 p.81

¹⁸ Report of Pirch I. (former Kriegsarchiv VI.E.15.2). In: GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII.5.p.9
According to Stawitzky, the 25th regiment of infantry (brigade Von Tippelskirch) left at 2 a.m. but this is highly improbable, after having taken up a bivouac at Tilly after midnight. In:

Geschichte des Königlich Preussischen 25ten Infanterie-Regiments p.88

Lieutenant Nagel (25th regiment) speaks of daybreak as the moment of departure. In: Ammon, F. & Th. Herold – Das Leben Dr. Christian Samuel Gottlieb Ludwig Nagel's p.134

¹⁹ The 11th regiment of hussars would have gone from Tilly to Gembloux, where it would have remained from 4 to 10 a.m. Then it moved off to Wavre. Cf. Eck, Von - Geschichte des 2. Westfälischen Husaren Regiments nr.11 p.146

20. Damitz, Von – Geschichte etc. p.215

21. Report of Pirch I. In: Former KA, VI.E.15.2 in GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.5.p.9

According to Stuckrad it was in the late afternoon that the corps took up its bivouacs; the 26th regiment (brigade Von Krafft) did so at 5 p.m. In: Geschichte etc. p.112

Others believe the 2nd corps got there by noon. Cf. Clausewitz, Von – Hinterlassene Werke etc. p.75

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

Captain Von Borcke (3rd battalion 1st Elbe Landwehr infantry regiment) mentions Aisémont. Cf. Captain Von Borcke (3rd battalion 1st Elbe Landwehr infantry regiment). In: Kriegerleben etc. p.313

Of the 2nd regiment of Pommeranian infantry nr.1, the fuselier battalion formed the rear-guard in the position. Cf. Mach, A.von - Geschichte des Königlich Preussischen etc.p.337

Von Tippelskirch's brigade would have been on the right wing of the corps' bivouac. Cf. Report of major general Von Tippelskirch. In: Former KA. VI.E.15.12 in GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII.5.p.13

Stawitzky, L. – Geschichte des Königlich Preussischen 25ten Infanterie-Regiments p.88

23. Cf. Bewegungen und Gefecht des Detachements der Arriergarde 4ten Armeekorps etc, MWB no.34 p.143