

French general headquarters: observations.

Napoleon versus Wellington.

By developing some of his forces on the early evening of the 17th of June Napoleon wanted to make sure whether Wellington had taken up a firm position at Mont Saint Jean. It soon became clear that he did and reports dropping in on the very early morning of the 18th of June confirmed the same. Eager to reach Brussels, Napoleon now planned a major confrontation with his opponent in the position of Mont Saint Jean. This confrontation was to start at 9 a.m.

Napoleon's plan for the battle early morning resulted in orders for the *armée du Nord* for the positions they needed to have by 9 a.m., but which they would eventually take up much later that morning.¹

As time went by during the early morning hours of the 18th of June it became clear to Napoleon that the situation didn't develop the way he had in mind and that the planned confrontation had to be postponed. The deployment of the army took much longer as expected and this did not permit an action at 9 a.m. As has been shown, the French order of battle was actually completed about half an hour after the battle had started.²

Traditionally, the breakfast as Napoleon used it - accompanied by members of his imperial staff - is portrayed as one in which Napoleon displayed an almost unlimited optimism.³

Despite the delays, Napoleon may still indeed have been most confident about the outcome of the imminent battle, but, as has been stated before, it is more logical to suppose that the main subjects discussed at Le Caillou were the time needed for the troops to arrive in the front line, the state of the field and the situation of the enemy.

The result of the meeting was Napoleon's personal check-up of Wellington's position and the eventual, but delayed plan for the battle, which was now set for 1 p.m.

Obviously, the terrible state of the ground was an element which contributed to the delay of the advance of the army into its positions for the battle. Yet, this delay was also in a high degree caused by the scattered and improvised way the French bivouacs were arranged.

The state of the ground should be seen in the context of this advance only, and not in relation to the (im) possibility of manoeuvring of units during the imminent battle. In historiography it has often been used as an argument for the French leadership to wait for the fields to dry up before any further actions could be considered, as an excuse for the tardy start of the battle. It should however be pointed out that by the early morning no one had any idea of how the weather would develop that day; in case it might have rained all day it would not have meant that the battle would not take place. So, this is (yet another) case of hindsight.

More importantly, by the time the original plan as set for 9 a.m. was launched there was no prospect to such an improvement either. Other than that, even at the moment that the weather actually did improve, by 9 a.m., there was no prospect for the fields to dry up in such a way that (artillery) units could be moved more easily a few hours later.⁴

By the time Napoleon felt he would have an idea at what time he would have all his forces in their assigned positions he released his battle-plan, and that was at 11 a.m. while the start was set for 1 p.m.

What did Napoleon know about Wellington's position and what options did he have to attack his opponent? After Wellington had pulled back the forces which had been in front of the Ohain-road to the north side of the ridge, the only forces visible for the French were the enemy's artillery which was developing on the crest of the ridge, a strong line of skirmishers and some other light troops which were in front at the bottom of the declivity. Right through the heart of

the enemy's position, along the Brussels road, activities across and along this road within the enemy's position could be seen but the view was very limited and what these activities were meant to be could only be guessed. On Wellington's extreme left flank, forces could be seen being placed on the heights in rear of the low ground of Smohain, while on the opposite flank Braine l'Alleud was occupied by infantry. It became clear to the French that Wellington's frontline extended from this village to the right to the château of Ficherfont on the left.

Major earthworks or other entrenchments were absent, but small ones like the barricades upon the highroads could easily be detected.⁵

There is no doubt whatsoever that Napoleon was aware of Wellington's tactical skills on the field of battle, but during his career he had never met Wellington in the field. Some of his subordinates, however, had. Whether these skills have been discussed on the morning of the 18th of June cannot be fully corroborated, but in the way both commanders confronted each other, two points should be highlighted.

First of all, the choice of the battle-ground. As at Ligny, Napoleon was faced with a situation in which the field of battle was the choice of the opponent, not one of his own. In itself, this should not have to be a major drawback right from the start, but it did conflict with Napoleon's own axioma.⁶

Secondly, the combination of the position of Mont Saint Jean and Wellington's tactical strength triggered the basic question for Napoleon whether he would have to seek victory by outmanoeuvring his opponent, or by simply crushing him in a head-on, frontal assault.

Outflank Wellington by sweeping around his left flank in force was no option as the ground here was too much cut up by the low ground of Smohain and the scattered woods, enclosures and sunken roads.

A massive attack upon Wellington's left wing was another option, yet Napoleon could not see that this wing was actually weaker as were the other parts of the duke's frontline. Other than that, such an attack might push Wellington back along the forest of Soignes towards Halle and – in this way – to his operation line towards Antwerp. In itself this could not be a problem, were it not that Napoleon had no forces there where he could cut off this retreat at the same time.

To move around Wellington's right flank, by bending around Gomont through the low ground which runs all the way through to the rear of Wellington's right flank near Merbraine was another option. The open ground would allow a considerable force to move this way and push Wellington in a congested position in front of the forest of Soignes, facing west. In fact, Sir Hussey Vivian writes: "They [the French] [...] should have attacked Hougoumont in a different manner than that in which they did attack it, not advancing against the garden and wood, but occupying in force the height above it and driving our troops out with their artillery and then turning our right altogether, advancing, getting possession of the road to Brussels at the point of junction with that from Nivelles and that from Genappe [Mont Saint Jean]. They might thus have bothered us terribly."⁷

Whatever considerations Napoleon may have had for manoeuvring, finally they must not have convinced him as – eventually – he refrained from doing so altogether.⁸ The plan as he announced it by 11 a.m. stands for a massive, frontal attack on Wellington's line, of which the focus was upon the penetration of Wellington's centre as the most direct way to get to the hamlet of Mont saint Jean.

Barricading of this point by the French engineers was meant to create a point of support for the French forces of the 1st corps to hook on in their deployment against Wellington's forces from the inside, and to facilitate access for Lobau and the supporting masses of cavalry.

Starting up in this way up from the centre, it is not unlogical to suppose that the forces involved were expected to roll up the scattered halves of Wellington's army and to cut them off from the Brussels road.⁹

Gourgaud briefly sums it up as: "Ces dispositions indiquaient le projet de l'Empereur, qui était de percer le centre de l'armée anglaise, de le pousser sur la chaussée, et arrivant sur le débouché de la forêt, de couper la retraite à la droite et à la gauche de la ligne." ¹⁰

And: "En résumé, si l'on fait bien attention aux dispositions prises des deux côtés, l'on peut dire que, sans le mouvement de Bulow, la bataille eût été gagnée sur les trois heures de l'après midi, par soixante-sept mille Français, contre quatre-vingt-dix mille anglo-hollandais; car le corps du comte de Lobau, avec la jeune garde, et soutenu de toute la garde devait attaquer le centre ennemi à deux heures." ¹¹

Napoleon himself phrases it in some details somewhat differently, but the core of the plan remains the same: "Elles [dix divisions de artillerie] étaient destinées à soutenir l'attaque de La Haye Sainte, que devaient faire deux divisions du 1er corps et les deux divisions du 6^e, dans le temps que les deux autres divisions du 1er corps se porteraient sur La Haye. Par ce moyen, toute la gauche de l'ennemi serait tournée. La division de cavalerie légère du 6^e corps, en colonne serrée, et celle du 1er corps qui était sur ses ailes, devaient participer à cette attaque, que les 2^e et 3^e lignes de cavalerie soutiendraient, ainsi que toute la garde à pied et à cheval. L'armée Française, maîtresse de La Haye et de Mont Saint Jean, couperait la chaussée de Bruxelles à toute la droite de l'armée anglaise, où étaient ses principales forces." ¹²

The role of part of Reille's corps in the action upon Gomont deserves particular attention. Not only the order dated 11 a.m., but also Reille himself enters upon the role of his corps in relation to this main attack. He writes: "Vers 11 heures, Napoleon donna ses instructions pour l'attaque; elle devait être faite en échelons formés en avant par la droite. Le 1^{er} corps à droite de la chaussée et le 2^e à la gauche; de cette manière, le 1er corps, qui n'avait encore eu aucun engagement avec l'ennemi, devait l'aborder le premier, tandis que le 2^e soutiendrait ce mouvement en couvrant la gauche du bois d'Hougoumont." And he adds that Jérôme attacked the buildings of Gomont, in stead of "de se tenir dans le fond derrière ce bois, en entretenant en avant une bonne ligne de tirailleurs." ¹³

According to captain Robinaux (2nd regiment of the line, division of Jérôme), Reille was meant to "enlever la position occupée par les Anglais et de prendre la ferme pour point d'appui et de nous maintenir dans cette position pendant la bataille, sans perdre ni gagner du terrain." ¹⁴

It is in this context that chef de bataillon Jolyet (1st regiment of light infantry) writes: "Après divers mouvements, je fus envoyé vers une heure après-midi pour soutenir les tirailleurs du bois d'Hougoumont. Au débouché du bois il y avait une maison que les Anglais avaient crénelée. Plusieurs fois nos tirailleurs, malgré l'ordre qu'ils avaient de se borner à empêcher l'ennemi de déboucher sur notre gauche, voulurent emporter cette maison qui les gênait." ¹⁵

The document dated 11 a.m. doesn't mention the action upon Gomont as supposed to precede the main attack, and this has led historians to create controversy around the status of the action. For instance, it has erroneously been suggested that the preliminary divisionary attack upon Gomont was designed to draw Wellington's reserves away from the target area, his centre. ¹⁶

What it is all about, is the basic question in what way the preliminary attack upon Gomont *as such and not in the way it developed* relates to the battle plan as it was launched at 11 a.m.

The purpose of the action was initiated in a common consent, and this was in the context of the way how Reille describes it: to neutralize the enemy's presence at Gomont by occupying its lower grounds and to maintain a very strong line of skirmishers in front. In a more tangible way, it basically meant the presence of the French infantry in the wood and fields of Gomont, with a skirmishing line along the southern edge of the buildings, the garden wall, which from there bent north through the orchard towards Wellington position.

All this was meant to fix Wellington within this sector and in this way to protect the left flank of the line of attack of the 2nd corps, in its supporting role to d'Erlon. As a preliminary and auxiliary action for the main attack some time later, the attack was therefore not to be pushed through upon Wellington's main line in rear of the complex. Having reconnoitred the complex, the time calculated by high command for neutralizing Gomont this way was about 1.5 hours.¹⁷

Though being a platitude in itself, the plan for the main attack of the battle has been a subject which has never received the attention it deserves. And if it does, it is usually restricted to the 1st corps only and then it is often reviled because of the simple fact that the outcome is known.

Obviously, this is a case of hindsight. The set-up for the main attack should be seen in its proper dimensions and these were far wider as they have traditionally been described. It involved the 1st corps, the reserve of the army (the 6th corps) as well as a large mass of cavalry and the Imperial Guard. At the same time, Napoleon fed in his 2nd corps against Wellington's centre and right wing as a support, with part of this corps being used as a cover of the left flank of the line of attack. Also, guns were supposed to move forward to cover the attack.¹⁸

As has been shown, it was after the order at 11 a.m. had been issued, that Ney felt the need to make an additional note when it came down to more specific information for both d'Erlon and Reille. The note reads: "*Le comte d'Erlon comprendra que c'est par la gauche que l'attaque commencera, au lieu de la droite. Communiquer cette nouvelle disposition au général en chef Reille.*" It is this note which merits attention in the the discussion around the action towards Gomont.

From the way it was drafted by Soult it can be concluded that it was most probably written for Ney only, and for him to transmit its details to both Reille and d'Erlon. After having read it, Ney deemed it necessary to make for Reille and d'Erlon the addition alluded to. Being of a somewhat ambiguous character, what does this note actually want to say ?

For d'Erlon, it was meant to be a confirmation what the order already stated: that he was supposed to advance *en echelon*, with his division on the *left* in front. In terms of seniority it would normally be the one of Durutte to start with, but now it was the other way around. For Ney, it was merely to make sure that he would understand it that way. For Reille, however, it was different, the more as d'Erlon's first echelon to the left and in front would influence his own advance.

It has been suggested that the French order of battle, shaped in a concave line, enveloped the one of Wellington. This is incorrect. In fact, the Anglo-German-Netherlands frontline, with infantry at Smohain / Fichermont and Braine l'Alleud actually extended beyond the extreme French right and left flank.¹⁹

Napoleon and the Prussian army.

For Napoleon, by the morning of the 17th of June, the application of the strategy of the central position had worked so far: in his idea he had thrown the Prussian army towards the Meuse, so away from his ally. In this, Napoleon assumed that Blücher would either move south-east (Namur), or to the north-east, to possibly seek for an allied junction somewhere between Brussels and Maastricht after all. For that reason, this was the basic concept upon which Napoleon sent Grouchy away with 32.000 men

From Wellington Napoleon expected that he would either fall back beyond Brussels towards Antwerp. If he would dare to make a stand south of Brussels, he would then be left to his mercy on his own.

As such, Napoleon's ideas about the allies' line of retreat, or rather, their potential positions for a defence deeper down into the Netherlands, fitted almost seamless to the way they were actually designed by the allies. As has been described in the preambles of the campaign, the strategic dimensions for a campaign in the Netherlands for the allies were far larger as they have traditionally been described.

Grouchy reported back to Napoleon on the late evening of the 17th of June that he had the impression that the majority of the Prussian army could be moving either towards Liège (through Perwez) or towards Brussels (through Sart-à-Walhain and Wavre). Pending further intelligence, he would either pursue Blücher in one of these two directions. In the second scenario he then intended to prevent Blücher from joining Wellington beyond Wavre, near Brussels.

10 uur order:

It is still a mystery how it took the messenger eleven hours to cover the distance between Gembloux and Le Caillou, which is about 30 kilometers.

Since the previous day, Napoleon had been aware of the fact that a Prussian column of major strength had been moving towards Wavre.²⁰ He did not share this with Grouchy, and now as he received Grouchy's report of 10 p.m. he realized that Grouchy was apparently not aware of the presence of this column.²¹

It all led Napoleon to change the basic concept upon which he had detached Grouchy. Initially, Napoleon supposed Blücher would fall back upon the Meuse, towards Namur or further north, towards Maastricht, in a possible attempt to cover Brussels by taking up a position between this city and Liège. But from now on, Napoleon shifted his attention to another theatre of war, taking into account that part of the Prussian army would no longer pull back directly to the Meuse on the line Maastricht - Namur, but towards Brussels or in front of the forest of Soignes in both cases to seek a junction with their ally after all.

It is within this strategic context that Napoleon now pulled Grouchy back into his operation-area to make sure he was *à portée* in case he yet had to confront both allied armies.

The way Napoleon saw it, by pulling Grouchy into his operation area by his occupation of Wavre this now served a multiple purpose: it would not only prevent Blücher of posing an immediate threat upon the right flank of the main French army south of the forest of Soignes, it would also allow himself to link up with Grouchy for joint operations beyond Brussels against the allies in case of a retreat of Wellington and Blücher further north (east). The situation asked for a careful fine-tuning so therefore Napoleon attached a high significance to a frequent communication from Grouchy's side about his own and the enemy's operations.

In the time frame of three hours after issuing the order of 10 a.m., two pieces of information dropped in at French headquarters: first of all, that a Prussian force of some apparently relative small size was approaching at Chapelle Saint Lambert and second that Grouchy was heading for Wavre.

These elements triggered Napoleon to issue his order of 1 p.m. In the order of 10 a.m., Grouchy's presence at Wavre in itself was the means of establishing the new operational base upon which Napoleon desired to act. Now, in the order of 1 p.m., Napoleon asked Grouchy to actually manoeuvre towards the main army so as to be able to join it before any Prussian force might place itself between him and the Napoleon.

It is crucial to state here that this last request was not based upon the actual threat as coming from some forces further east. First of all, by 1 p.m. the identity of this force was still unknown. More importantly, as it was deemed not that much of a threat both in its strength and intention, Grouchy was supposed to deal with it in the act of manoeuvring towards the main army. The

main thing for Grouchy to do was to manoeuvre towards the army to link up so as to be ready to act against a major Prussian force, either south of the forest of Soignes or beyond Brussels. It had no relation with the Prussian flankmarch as we know it, as this is all hindsight. Obviously, Napoleon was not aware of the fact that other Prussian corps were on their way to Mont Saint Jean.

It is most significant to state here that at 1 p.m. the state of affairs at Mont Saint Jean for the French was all but hopeless; in fact the grand offensive which would settle the battle yet had to start. As it was obviously presumed that this would be successful, the presumption in the general staff was that by the time Grouchy would receive the document, the main army could very well be no longer at the forest of Soignes, near Mont Saint Jean, but possibly further north. It was therefore that Grouchy had to discover the precise direction where to find the main army himself. The significance of the union of the main army and Grouchy's detachment was considered as the first priority for future operations beyond the battle which had just started. The dealing with what was considered as a minor threat further east was at that moment considered an extra advantage of the union of both parts of the Armée du nord.

It did not take long before the mysterious force was identified, located and its intention determined: it was the 4th corps, led by Bülow, at Chapelle Saint Lambert bent on attacking Napoleon's right flank and this was duly communicated to Grouchy in a post-scriptum. It also made Soult decide to specify where the main army could be found. These two elements did not contribute to the overall clarity of the order. In this way the document became a typical reflection of the development of a situation instead of being an unambiguous order telling Grouchy what to do.

In traditional historiography of the campaign, the request from Napoleon to Grouchy to move towards him has always been explained in the context of an imminent Prussian threat as coming from Wavre and as it actually took place during the afternoon and evening of the 18th of June. Yet, again, this is reasoning from hindsight. As has been shown - and this cannot be stressed enough - the moment Grouchy was called upon was by no means a moment of despair at Mont Saint Jean and the strategic dimensions of the issue for Napoleon at that moment were more extensive than the field where he was fighting a battle against Wellington. Napoleon may have thought in the afternoon of the 18th of June that the union of Grouchy and the main army could be possible *before* any Prussian intervention to prevent this, the key to the issue is obviously that it proved all too late.

¹ On the very early morning of the 18th of June, the 1st corps stood in the first line over the whole length of the position and was moved some time later to the right wing. The fact that it was moved there and not towards the left had to do with the plan Napoleon had in mind for the main attack of the battle (see below).

² Cf. Movements of the division of Durutte and the Imperial Guard.

Bonaparte, J. - Mémoires et correspondances etc. Vol.VII p.21

Jérôme Bonaparte in a letter, dated 15th July 1815. In: Martinet, A. - Jérôme Napoleon, roi de Westphalie p.274

General Alava states French movements took place around 10.30 a.m. Cf. his report dated 20th June 1815 to secretary of state P.Cevallos. In: Kelly, Chr. - A full and circumstantial account of the memorable battle of Waterloo etc. p.64-67

Colonel Baudus adds that the army started to take up its positions by 9 a.m. Cf. Baudus. Etudes sur Napoleon. Vol.I p.225

Petiet claims the army had completed taking up positions by 11 a.m. In: Souvenirs militaires p.213

Aerts even believes that the last troops to take up their positions arrived after 1 p.m. Cf. Aerts, W. - La nuit de Napoleon et la matinée du 18 juin 1815. Réfutation de quelques légendes. In: Bulletin of the SBEN, 1952 nr.5 p.16

The way Napoleon describes the deployment of his army, as eleven columns getting together in a perfect array, is pure fiction and has therefore nothing in common with the events on the 18th of June. In: Mémoires pour servir etc. p.128-133

Those who accept this deployment uncritically are for instance Houssaye, Charras, De Pontécoulant, Piérart, Quinet, De Mauduit and F.de Bas.

³ Traditionally, the following utterances as coming from Napoleon are referred to:

"Messieurs, si mes ordres sont bien exécutés, nous coucherons ce soir à Bruxelles." In: Marchand – Mémoires p.163

And: "L'armée ennemie est supérieure à la notre de près d'un quart; nous n'en avons pas moins quatre-vingts-dix chances pour nous, et pas dix contre".

As Ney said: "Sans doute, si le duc de Wellington était assez simple pour attendre Votre Majesté; mais je viens lui annoncer que déjà ses colonnes sont en pleine retraite; elles disparaissent dans la forêt" – resulting, Napoleon would have corrected him stating: "Vous avez mal vu, il n'est plus à temps, il s'exposerait à une perte certaine, il a jeté les dés, et ils sont pour nous !" In: Mémoires pour servir etc. p.124-125

Gourgaud's version of Ney's words is not much different: "Sans doute, Sire, si Wellington était assez simple pour rester là; mais je viens vous annoncer que la retraite est prononcée et que si vous ne vous hâtez de les attaquer, ils vont nous échapper." In: La campagne de 1815 p.72

⁴ Drouot therefore establishes a non-existent relation between the orders for the attack and the

improvement of the weather, specially in relation to the manoeuvring of the artillery. In: The battle of Waterloo also of Ligny and Quatre Bras etc. by a near observer Vol.II p.111

Artillerymen take the mud as a *fait accompli* they had to deal with, no more. Cf. for instance: Major Von Ziegler (reserve artillery 4th Prussian corps).In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Die Verzögerung etc. p.331,332

Lieutenant colonel Lehmann (reserve artillery 1st Prussian corps). In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Die Verzögerung etc. p.332

Captain Mercer (battery Mercer). In: Journal of the Waterloo campaign Vol.I p.296

Lieutenant Ingilby (battery Gardiner). In: BL, Add.ms.34.703 p.266-271

⁵ Haxo is sometimes being accused of having insufficiently surveyed Wellington's position, but this survey should be assessed in relation to major earthworks etc. constructed specifically as an *extra*, apart from the presence of the farms and other minor – and clearly visible – entrenchments. Cf. Houssaye, H. – 1815.Waterloo p.334

⁶ Cf. Becke's quote of Turenne: "never do what the enemy wants you to do simply because he wants it: therefore, avoid the battle-field which the enemy has reconnoitred and studied, and *a fortiori* that which he has entrenched." From: 18th observation. Guerres de Turennes. Commentaires de Napoleon Ier. Vol.VI p.265 In: Becke, A.F. – Napoleon and Waterloo Vol.II p.9

⁷ In: BL, Add.ms.34.707 p.50-57

⁸ Napoleon himself remains silent about the pros and cons of the different options. He only restricts himself to his preference of turning Wellington's left flank, yet at the same time he uses the wrong arguments why he would have refrained from doing so.

First of all he claims that this left wing was weak. This is true, however, Napoleon could not see this. Secondly, Napoleon states that by moving upon Wellington's left wing he would cut him off from the Prussian army. This is incorrect as well, as in the morning hours Napoleon did not take into account that the Prussian army would intervene at all. And in this way his third argument falls through, by stating that he sought the link with Grouchy, whom he expected in his right flank, which is incorrect as well (see below). In: Mémoires pour servir etc. p.134-135

At Waterloo, Napoleon clearly rejected one of the axioms he so much admired about Turenne and which reads "never make a frontal attack against a position which can be gained by turning it." Cf. 18th observation. Guerres de Turennes. Commentaires de Napoleon Ier. Vol.VI p.265 Cited by Becke. In: Napoleon and Waterloo Vol.II p.9

⁹ Cf. Roberts, A. – Napoleon and Wellington p.xxxi

¹⁰ Gourgaud – La campagne de 1815 p.74

¹¹ Gourgaud – La campagne de 1815 p.103

¹² By making a distinction between La Haye [which is in fact the complex of the farms of La Haye and Papelotte and the hamlet of Smohain], it becomes clear that what has been mentioned La Haye Sainte slightly before is, in fact, Mont Saint Jean.

Napoleon also writes about the involvement of the cavalry of the 6th corps. This corps had no cavalry of its own, but on the 18th of June the cavalry division of Domon was temporarily attached to Lobau. It may be that Domon was destined to act on the left flank of the 1st corps, but that it had to be replaced by other cavalry due to the fact that Domon was detached to the extreme right flank. In: *Mémoires pour servir etc.* p.123, 134-135

¹³ In: *Document inédits etc.* p.61

¹⁴ In: *Journal de route du capitaine Robinaux etc.* p.

¹⁵ In: *Souvenirs et correspondance etc.* p.77

¹⁶ Cf. Roberts, A. – *Napoleon and Wellington* p.xxxi

¹⁷ Von Müffling misses the point of the action upon Gomont completely by stating that the action here can only explained in a context that Napoleon intended to attack Papelotte with the 1st corps, with a manoeuvre to its left in order to deploy his forces further. In: *Esquisse etc.* p.84

¹⁸ As a Napoleonic battle, the very scale and layout of this first attack at Waterloo fits into examples of former battles such as for instance Austerlitz and Wagram.

At Austerlitz, after Napoleon had slightly changed his plans, he decided to have Soult carry out the main effort towards Pratzen, with Bernadotte's two divisions in support. At the same time, Lannes was to deliver a secondary attack against the Austrian far right flank. Murat's cavalry had a central position as support. The Imperial Guard and Oudinot's infantry formed the reserve.

The huge formation of MacDonald at the battle of Wagram is often associated with d'Erlons formation at Waterloo. This is incorrect however, as Macdonald marched in a large, hollow oblong.

Yet, in the general design of the counterattack which was designed and subsequently launched by Napoleon at Wagram at there are several similarities with the first offensive as launched by him at Waterloo.

First of all, the attack was prepared by a grand battery. While Eugène had to be on the defensive, Oudinot to his right was supposed to threat the Austrian left flank with a secondary attack. To the left of Eugène, the main assault against the Austrian centre was to be carried out by Macdonald, supported by a mass of cuirassiers and cavalry of the imperial guard. Further to the rear stood the infantry of Marmont, Wrede and the infantry of the imperial guard in reserve.

As Macdonald penetrated the enemy line, Eugène was launched, while Napoleon sent in Wrede and the imperial guard to support Macdonald. Meanwhile, Oudinot maintained his success on the French right flank.

In: Esposito, V.J. & Elting, J.R. , *A military history and atlas of the Napoleonic wars* p.55, 106

¹⁹ Cf. Houssaye, H. 1815. *Waterloo* p.331

Some historians depict in the French order of battle detailed positions of specific regiments etc. which, however, cannot be corroborated from authentic evidence. Cf. Mauduit, H. de – *Les derniers jours etc.* Vol.II plan

Adkin, M. – *The Waterloo companion* p.118-119, 202

²⁰ In the order of 10 a.m. Soult designates the column as one which was “assez forte” and later in the same document he speaks of “les corps de l’armée Prussienne” which had gone towards Wavre. It might be that French headquarters thought it was two thirds of the Prussian army which had gone to the north.

Napoleon claims flankers of the army were in constant contact with those of Grouchy and that the cavalry of Milhaud was used to maintain communication. In this sense, Milhaud would have reported at 9 p.m. to Napoleon having seen Prussian cavalry moving from Tilly to Wavre. In: Mémoires pour servir etc. p.114

It is unlogical to suppose that heavy cavalry was used for patrolling, but it is a fact that the information Napoleon refers to in his order dates from the 17th as this refers to the initial stage of advance and pursuit of the main army.

²¹ It should be noted that by the time Napoleon sent his order at 10 a.m., he was still informed on the situation of Grouchy as that he was still in doubt whether the majority of the Prussian army fell back upon Perwez or Wavre. Theoretically, it could have meant that Grouchy – for whatever reason – could have strayed further east and not to the north by the time he would receive the order.