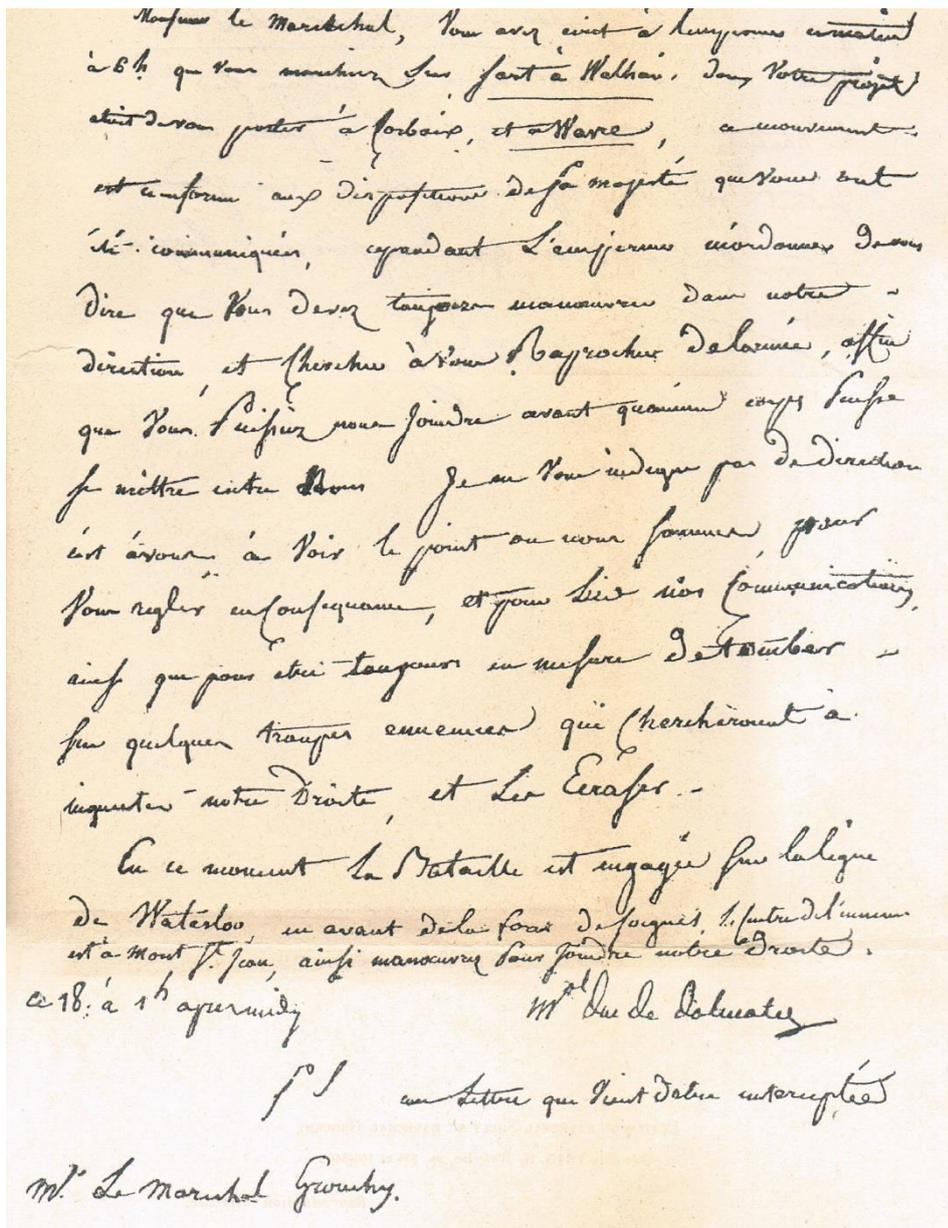


## The authenticity of the order of Napoleon to Grouchy, dated 1 p.m. 18<sup>th</sup> of June.

In 2009, for the first time ever in the historiography of the campaign, the authenticity of the order written by Napoleon and Soult to Grouchy at 1 p.m. on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June was denied, in this case by Bernard Coppens. At a later date, this denial was taken over by M. Damiens, while still later G. Glover considered the authenticity of the document to be doubtful.<sup>1</sup>

In order to refute this claim, the manuscript of the order involved, as discovered by Houssaye in 1906 will be tested against the arguments raised to support its denial. In doing so, the technical aspects of the document will be dealt with first, and those regarding its content second.



Monseigneur le Maréchal, Vous avez écrit à l'empereur concernant  
à 6 h. que vous manquiez sur font à Welheim, dans votre projet  
était de vous porter à Forbach, et Warcé, ce mouvement  
est conforme aux dispositions déjà faites que vous ont  
été communiquées, cependant l'empereur voudrait  
Dire que vous deviez toujours manœuvrer dans votre  
direction, et chercher à vous rapprocher de la rive, afin  
que vous ne fussiez pas fondre avant qu'on ne  
se mette entre vous. Je ne vous indique pas de direction  
est à vous, à voir le point où vous fondez, pour  
vous régler en conséquence, et pour être sûr de communiquer  
ainsi que pour être toujours en mesure de débiter  
sur quelques troupes ennemies qui chercheraient à  
inquiéter votre droite, et les Escadrons.

En ce moment la bataille est engagée sur la ligne  
de Waterloo, en avant de la fosse de Siquès, l'ennemi  
est à Mont St. Jean, ainsi manœuvrez vous fondez entre la droite.

ce 18. à 1 h. après midi M<sup>le</sup> Duc de Dalmeizy

1<sup>re</sup> en lettre qui vient d'être interceptée

M<sup>le</sup> Le Maréchal Grouchy.

porte que le G. Bulow, doit attaquer notre flanc  
 Droit nous proposons apparemment ce force fus  
 les hauteurs de St Lambert ainsi en gardant une  
 justant pour vous reprocher de nous, et nous perdre  
 et pour craindre Bulow que - vous perdrez en fuyant  
 dit

The manuscript of the order, as published by Houssaye for the first time in 1906.

The actual document is missing from the register of staff and this element is brought up as an argument for the denial of its existence. Of other documents missing in the same register it has, however, become clear that they are actually authentic, so this argument is invalid. At the same time, it is a fact – based upon Grouchy’s report of the 20<sup>th</sup> of June and recognized by Coppins – that Grouchy received an order in the early evening to move towards Napoleon. For Coppins, this document was sent out shortly after 2 p.m. but for its existence, Coppins gives no proof whatsoever. And if it would ever have existed, one might have the same objection that it was not incorporated in the same register so in that case both documents would be even.

The very fact that the original order surfaced in 1906 after the investigation of Houssaye is regarded by Damiens as suspicious in itself, but why so ? In historical research it is not abnormal at all for documents to emerge long after the actual events, and which stand the test of serious historians, thereby possibly throwing new light upon the events. This phenomenon should be celebrated and not be approached in suspicion a priori.<sup>2</sup>

The manuscript document is set against a printed version of Grouchy of 1818, as well as two other complementary descriptions of it. The claim given by Grouchy, Le Sénécal and De Bloqueville as that the document in question was written in pencil, partly erased and therefore hard to read (resulting in reading the word “engagée” as “gagnée”) is a poor reason, in an utterly sloppy defence of his own case, while Grouchy knew reality had been different: the document was written in ink and easy to read. As has been referred to extensively in another chapter, Grouchy’s own defence should be handled with great care as, in the process, he muddled up documents, chronology and events.

The claim of the non-existence of the order is also based upon the description stating “Champ de bataille de Waterloo, le 18 Juin 13.00 heures” in the printed version of the order as published in 1818. According to the claim, this description would be impossible that day, as then there was no “champ de bataille de Waterloo.” In itself this is obviously correct, were it not that the document from which this is taken is not a manuscript which can be traced back to its source, but a mere printed version of Grouchy from 1818. In fact, the manuscript version of the document does *not* mention this, which only pleads for its authenticity. In this sense, the claim alluded to simply turns things upside down. The description as given by Grouchy in this version of 1818 is just another example of a careless projection of situations which were yet

to come into those of the moment itself during the campaign by Grouchy himself.

Though the manuscript document as it is should be approached as a whole and in its proper context, two details should be mentioned in particular as they are given as reasons for doubting its authenticity.

First of all, the inconsistency in which the order is located and dated. While other orders of Soult written during the campaign are preceded by a localisation first, a date second and an hour third, this one isn't. This is a peculiar detail indeed, yet it is not a reason to suppose the document is a fake one right away.

The same applies to Soult's signature. Though different in small details compared to former and later ones, there is no reason to suppose that it would therefore be a fake.<sup>3</sup> Though signatures in general imply a kind of consistency, they too evolve through time and are open, as any writing of a person at any time, to influences of the moment and this one is no exception. Above all, let alone the subjectivity of the issue, as stated above, details like these should be seen in the total technical aspects of the document and not as such alone. In the analysis, an even more important signature is overlooked: the one of Napoleon under the post scriptum. This would imply that this one would be a fake as well, and this would be a bold statement specially in relation to the variety in the emperor's signatures.<sup>4</sup>

While these technical aspects have a value of their own, the total context and background of the content of the order is at least as significant. First of all, the very fact that the French staff couldn't see Bülow's corps at Chapelle Saint Lambert is alluded to as a reason for the impossibility of the existence of the order. This citation, however, doesn't refer to the staff standing at the knoll of Rossomme looking at Bülow developing his forces there, but to a sighting by scouts of some Prussian forces on the heights of Chapelle Saint Lambert towards noon, and which was reported about to general headquarters about one hour later.

It has also been suggested that the description of the enemy's centre being at Mont Saint Jean is incorrect (as it was in front of it), and thereby adding to the credibility of the document. In itself, this is correct, but what it means to state is a mere direction for Grouchy to head to, no more. It is the line of Waterloo in relation to the forest of Soignes in a lateral way (so not further west or east), and subsequently, on that line, at Mont Saint Jean in a vertical way. Moreover, those adhering to the denial of the authenticity of the order run into trouble with the chronology of events. First of all, if there was no order at 1 p.m., what prompted Napoleon then to call Grouchy towards him in the first place? For Coppens it was major De la Fresnaye's arrival at French general headquarters towards 2 p.m. Yet, in reality this was not what happened. In fact, as De la Fresnaye most probably left Walhain at about 11.30 a.m. there is no way that he was able to convey Grouchy's report within 2.5 hours (as he says so himself) as the distance he had to cover (from Walhain through Gembloux, Point du Jour, Quatre Bras and Genappe to the Maison Decoster) was about 38 kilometres. This would take him at least four hours.

The claim also messes up chronology in another way. Other than that it grossly neglects the gradual process in which the order was finally drafted, it surpasses the important content of the letter written by Soult to Davout between 1.15 and 2.30 p.m. and from which it becomes clear that by that time French general headquarters was unmistakably aware of a Prussian presence at the extreme right flank.

It is in this context that Glover's astonishment about the fact why Napoleon did nothing to counter the Prussian threat until the Prussian forces actually reached the battlefield should be seen. First of all, it is incorrect that he did nothing. In giving the instructions to Lobau through Ney as have been described in the morning, the emperor *did* take his precautions for whatever could happen in case the Prussians might approach his right flank. The baseline of them was though that Lobau's forces formed *first of all* an integral part of those forces attacking Wellington, as it was on him that everything would fall and that Blücher would not be able to

join him.

Further, it should be stressed that for Napoleon it was the 4<sup>th</sup> corps of Bülow which was approaching that day; he was not aware of the ones of Pirch and Zieten doing the same. This is also why the sudden irruption of Zieten came as such a catastrophic blow to the French in the evening.

The gradual process how the order eventually came to be can obviously also be found in the main text of this study. In the claim alluded to here, a lot of weight is also put upon the status of the post scriptum alone, while the body of the order – in all its profound strategic importance - is in turn either ignored or completely misunderstood. This is why Damiens is unable to explain the reason for the order within Napoleon's belief that the Prussians would be out of sight for the next days and why for Coppens the order should have been unambiguous instead of unclear in the sense that Grouchy had to find out himself where the main army would be. From this, it can be concluded that both authors don't understand the grand strategic dimensions of the day (cf. the observations below on Grouchy).

To state that the manuscript order would be a fake is one thing, but to produce a logical reason why it was ever drafted at all is something else. Though recognizing Grouchy's statement in his report of the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, that he actually received at 7 p.m. an order to move towards St.Lambert as a starting point, Coppens considers the document as published by Houssaye to be a fake, being written "à une époque indéterminée." According to Coppens – as a mere hypothesis - Grouchy made it up to save Napoleon's military prestige, in the sense that he was not surprised by the Prussians. An absurd hypothesis, the more as one considers that Napoleon was during the morning aware of some Prussian presence further to his right, but of what kind and with what intention, he did not know.

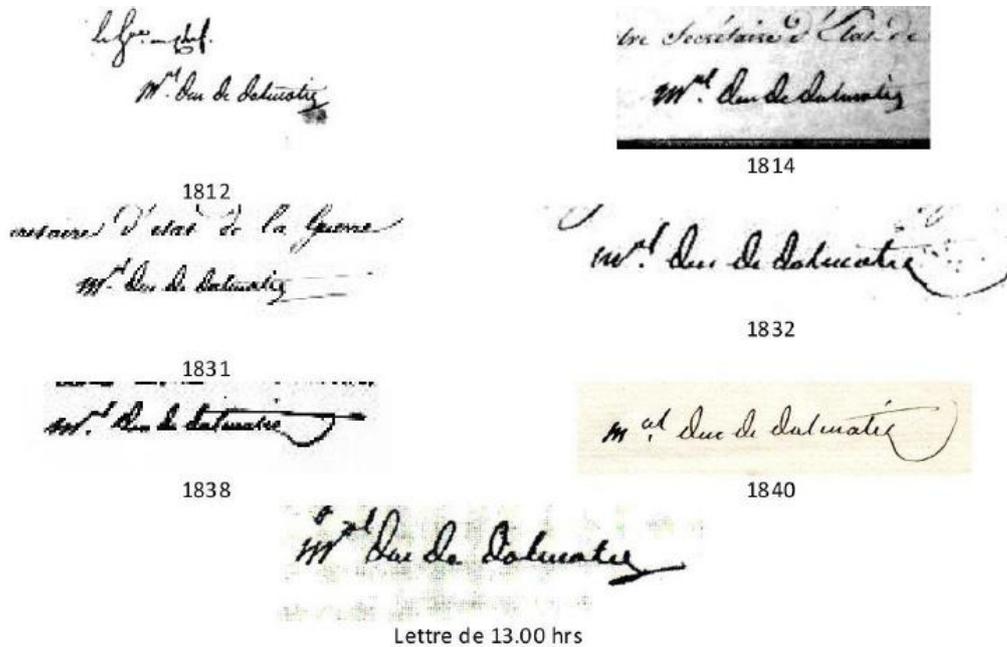
In summary, by using the wrong strategic background of the order, a printed version of the document, an incorrect chronology of events, as well as implausible assumptions regarding the writing of the manuscript document itself, the claim alluded to here makes things unnecessarily complicated, thereby missing the very essence of one of the most significant documents of the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1815.

First version: 7<sup>th</sup> February 2015 - Last revised: 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2016 - Copyright © Pierre de Wit

<sup>1</sup> Coppens, B. – Les mensonges de Waterloo (2009) p.315-329  
 Damiens, M. – La bataille de Plancenoit (2012) p.64,126-143  
 Glover, G. – Waterloo. Myth and reality (2014) p.172, 213

<sup>2</sup> Upon what he bases this idea remains unclear, but it is Coppens who writes: “il reste des centaines, peut-être des milliers des documents sur la campagne de 1815 qui n’ont pas encore vu le jour.” In: Les mensonges de Waterloo p.79

<sup>3</sup> Compared to other signatures, the dot on the “i” in “Dalmatie” is missing, just as the long stripe of the “t” is. Other than that, the word “Mal.” is not “underlined” with a dot. Cf. examples below as given by Damiens.



<sup>4</sup> Cf.





Signature apposée au bas de la proclamation d'Austerlitz, le 3 décembre 1805



Signature du début de la campagne de 1806



Signature datée du 26 octobre 1806, à Postdam

Signature datée du 29 octobre 1806, à Berlin.



Signature datée du 27 janvier 1807, à Varsovie.



Signature datée du 22 juin 1807, de Tilsit. A partir de cette date, le nom Napoléon apparaîtra en entier que très rarement.



Signature datée du 18 avril 1809, à Donauwörth (c'est le fameux "Activité, activité, vitesse. Je me recommande à vous !" adressé à Masséna)



Signature datée du 24 avril 1809, de Regensburg. Proclamation à l'armée : "Un mois se sera à peine passé, et je serai à Vienne"



Signature datée du 29 avril 1809, à Burghausen (Lettre au général Bertrand)



Signature datée du 13 mai 1809, à Schönbrunn



Signature datée du 24 mai 1809, à Kaiser-Ebersdorf (Lettre à Lauriston)



Signature du 10 juin 1809, de Schönbrunn (lettre à Vandamme)



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Signature datée du 20 mars 1811, de Paris (lettre à François I)

Signature datée du 22 mars 1811, à Paris (Lettre à Joséphine)

Signature datée de 1812, de Moscou.

Signature datée de 1812, de Moscou.

Curieuse signature, deux fois rayée et écrite une troisième fois, datée de 1813.

Une des plus étranges signatures, datée du 13 octobre 1813, à Erfurt

Signature datée du 14 mars 1814, à Reims (Lettre à Marie-Louise)

Signature datée du 23 mars 1814 (lettre à Marie-Louise)

Signature datée du 4 avril 1814, à Fontainebleau

Signature datée du 11 avril 1814, à Fontainebleau (lettre à Marie-Louise)

Signature datée du 9 septembre 1814, de Porto-Longone

Signature datée du 9 août 1814 (lettre à Marie Walewska)

Signature datée du 4 avril 1815, à Paris (lettre à Marie-Louise)

Signature datée du 4 avril 1815, à Paris (lettre à Marie-Louise)

Signature datée du 14 juillet 1815, de l'île d'Aix (lettre au Prince Régent)

Signature datée du 14 juillet 1815, de l'île d'Aix (lettre au Prince Régent)

Signature datée du 4 août 1815, à bord du Bellerophon (lettre à Lord Keith)

Signature datée du 4 août 1815, à bord du Bellerophon (lettre à Lord Keith)

Signature datée du 11 décembre 1815, de Sainte-Hélène (lettre à Las-Cases)

Signature datée du 11 décembre 1815, de Sainte-Hélène (lettre à Las-Cases)

Coppens overlooks the signature of Napoleon completely, both in his transcription of the 1 p.m. order manuscript and in the facsimilé itself.