

Von Müffling's role in the campaign of 1815.

The claim historians have made that Von Müffling has been used as a dupe on the 15th and 16th of June has led me to investigate his role then (and before), as well as the way he handled this role in his later accounts.

First of all, I would like to go through what Von Müffling did during the first two days of the campaign.

After he had written some letters during the morning and possibly during the early afternoon of the 15th of June, it was by 5.30 p.m. that day that he received the report which general Zieten had written at Charleroi at 9 a.m.

Having handed it to Wellington immediately, the duke and Von Müffling discussed it and Wellington informed Von Müffling of his measures and ideas as a result.

Von Müffling, in his turn, accordingly informed Blücher about them in writing at 7 p.m.

As Blücher's letter from 12 o'clock arrived at his office in Brussels between 9.30 and 10 p.m., Von Müffling transmitted it to the duke right after.

After Wellington had issued his "after orders", Von Müffling sent lieutenant Von Wucherer to the Prussian headquarters to inform it about the situation at Wellington's headquarters. By then it was somewhere between 11 p.m. and midnight.

Right after that, Von Müffling must have attended the ball of Richmond.

The other day, he must have met Wellington early that morning to learn about Von Dörnberg's report and the orders the duke had issued accordingly.

Shortly after, Von Müffling joined the duke in his ride towards Waterloo and beyond. During this ride they encountered lieutenant Von Wucherer who had not succeeded in reaching the Prussian headquarters to whom he had been supposed to deliver his information. Around the same time, Von Müffling and Wellington must have received the letter as this headquarters had written by 11 p.m. the other day.

At Quatre Bras, Von Müffling may have joined the duke in his inspection of the outposts and the French position near Frasnes, but this is not sure.

By the moment Wellington received additional information about the situation of Blücher's army, he rode to Bussy. In this, as liaison between both armies, Von Müffling obviously joined the duke. After having attended the meeting at Bussy, Von Müffling returned with Wellington to Quatre Bras where he witnessed the action for the remainder of the day.¹

In another chapter, I have - in a general way - refuted the theory which claims the deliberate deception of Blücher by Wellington. Here, I would like to dedicate some words to the claim as done about Von Müffling in this theory in particular.

In general, Wellington would have "used Von Müffling as a dupe to provide Blücher with false information, information that would cause the Prussians to hold their positions in expectance of support from Wellington."² In that context, Wellington would have used Von Müffling "as a conduit for misleading information three times that day [15th of June]." In his turn, Von Müffling then passed on the incorrect information to his master.³

The three times as mentioned refer to the following moments.

First of all to the letter as Von Müffling wrote to Gneisenau on the 15th of June before the hostilities had been reported about at Brussels and in which he wrote: "[...] Die Englisch-Batavische Armee ist nach beiliegender Ordre de Bataille so aufgestellt, dass die beiden Flügel Korps unter Lord Hill und Prinz von Oranien von Enghien und Braine le Comte bis Nivelles liegen und in ganz kurzer Zeit zusammengezogen werden können.[...]"

The misleading element would lie in the words “in ganz kurzer Zeit” but even if this would be a most optimistic expression – which it basically was – this had in itself nothing to do with the so-called deceivement of Blücher as this took place from about 6 p.m. that day onwards.

The other misleading information would have been the letter as written by Von Müffling at 7 p.m.

I have already entered upon this letter extensively in the sense that the promise for the concentration around Nivelles as phrased in this letter was a conditional one.

The third moment claimed as a misleading one is the promise as done by Von Müffling towards midnight as one in which he stated that Wellington could have his army concentrated within 12 hours and that he would have 20.000 men at Quatre Bras the next day at 10 a.m.

As I have shown in the chapter on Wellington’s headquarters, this claim has no foundation of authenticity.

In looking over the period from the moment Von Müffling was appointed as the Prussian liaison at Wellington’s headquarters, it becomes clear that Von Müffling was, let alone a few exceptions, involved in a structural way in the exchange of information and ideas between both headquarters, both ways.

Immediately after his arrival late May, Von Müffling wrote the pro memoria on Wellington’s ideas about the coming invasion of France.

Yet, he wasn’t involved in the invitation of Wellington for Blücher to come to Brussels. Here, the channel through Hardinge, the British liaison at Namur, becomes apparant. In the period between his appointment in Brussels and the outbreak of the war, examples of Von Müffling’s involvement in the coming invasion – as it was planned – are obvious in the numerous letters Von Müffling sent to Prussian headquarters and others. The preparations for the invasion into France culminate in the mission of colonel Von Pfuel who was sent to Von Müffling.

Von Müffling, in his turn, discussed the resulting details related to this invasion with the duke of Wellington and reported back to Prussian general headquarters. His letters of the 15th of June also form a step in the preparation of the invasion of France.

Von Müffling’s role also included intelligence he gathered and which he forwarded to Wellington. It shows that he was not left in the dark. As an example, also the intelligence as coming from Zieten ran through him (as it did on the 15th of June).

In his correspondence in general, Von Müffling is careful to stipulate which are his opinions and which are those of Wellington. He is no mere cipher.⁴

This pattern of involvement continues during the campaign in those elements where one would expect Von Müffling to have a role.

There are two exceptions to this pattern: there are no indications that Von Müffling was informed shortly after 3 p.m. on the 15th of June, the moment Wellington learned for the first time about hostilities having started.

The other moment is at 10.30 a.m. on the 16th of June, the moment Wellington himself wrote to Blücher. It could have been that right at that moment Von Müffling was not in the immediate vicinity of the duke, but in his letter to Von Hofmann he writes: “[...] Der Herzog ritt gegen Frasnes vor, um den Feind aufzusuchen, von dem man wissen sollte, dass er dort stand. *Wir fanden ihn.[...]*” [italics are mine].⁵

Yet, though this suggests as if Von Müffling was with the duke on the heights in front of Frasnes, there is no full proof for the fact and there may have been a very plain and practical reason for the duke to write himself, Von Müffling being absent.

Von Müffling was yet the man who wrote to Prussian headquarters on the 15th of June as the first official communication in writing that day as coming (indirectly) from Wellington. It was Von Müffling who sent his adjutant Von Wucherer to Namur as a result of the “after orders”

being issued by Wellington, and most probably in accordance with Wellington's wishes, as Von Wucherer was supposed to inform Blücher about the situation at Wellington's headquarters. In leaving from Brussels on the early morning of the 16th of June, Von Müffling was asked to join the duke in his reconnaissance to the south. During this trip, they met Von Wucherer and they received Blücher's letter, two major elements of which it is actually stated by Von Müffling himself that he was there when they occurred. And though he may not have been present the moment Wellington himself wrote to Blücher some hours later, he was when the duke took him to participate in the meeting with the general Prussian staff at Bussy.

Even though Von Müffling was involved in all these events (or not), in his later accounts about them he is pretty selective though.

In being so near in time to the actual events, one would expect a fairly factual and complete version of them in his first publication. However, this is not the case. Though he starts by mentioning the hour at which he learned about the French advance and the resulting orders of the duke of Wellington, in the next sequence there is no mentioning of other important points in time where his own role was clear.⁶ Von Müffling doesn't enter the promise of support of the duke as such, but only indicates the conditional element and this was cleared, he enters upon the concentration of the 1st corps of Wellington's army at Nivelles *and* Quatre Bras as if it was all thus designed right from the beginning.

The account of Von Müffling as it has been published in the work of Von Hofmann seems to be a result of a request of this author about the events on the morning of the 16th of June only, as this is the time-frame entered upon in this account.

Within this context, it is here for the first time in the historiography of the campaign that the mission of lieutenant Von Wucherer is mentioned by name, though Von Müffling unfortunately doesn't enter the exact details of it.

The account is not less important as it confirms that Zieten did send his report towards 9 a.m. from Charleroi stating "er werde nur Schritt vor Schritt zurückgehen, um der Armee Zeit zur Versammlung zu geben."

Other than that, it gives in my mind a good insight in the state of mind and situation of Wellington's headquarters during the hours of the morning of the 16th of June particularly in respect of its uncertainty about the concentration of the Prussian concentration near Sombreffe and the strength of the enemy at Frasnes and in front of Blücher.

Lacked his first version of the events a personal idea about them, it is in this second version that Von Müffling slightly profiles himself, in this case at the expense of general Von Zieten in particular. Von Müffling blames him for evacuating the Brussels road, thereby putting Wellington in an impossible situation at Quatre Bras, where the units could only arrive too late. In doing so, Von Müffling doesn't enter into the deeper reason for this situation and that was the obsession of Wellington with his own sector further west.

Some 20 to 30 years after the events of 1815, Von Müffling wrote his memoirs as they have been published in 1851 for the first time.⁷

In some ways, at least in relation to the description of the campaign itself, there are some similarities with his other versions of the events. It is also in this publication that Von Müffling is selective in what he describes as events during the 15th and 16th of June as far as his own role was concerned.

One example is the letter of 7 p.m. of the 15th of June, which he doesn't mention as such, but of which he describes the general idea (as he does in the other version) of a concentration further east, this being dependent upon what Wellington would learn upon the sector in front of Mons first. Though Von Müffling's in his account for Von Hofmann is not that explicit about it, it also suggests – as the memoirs actually do – that Wellington decided to concentrate his army at Nivelles and Quatre Bras before midnight, which is incorrect.

The moment at which he would have received Zieten's report is in the memoirs of an earlier hours (3 p.m.) as in his first account (4.30 p.m.), while the mission of Von Wucherer is mentioned but not as explicitly as it could have been.⁸

Von Müffling's memoirs are, however, in some respects in the account of the events themselves different to his prior versions of the campaign of 1815.

By far the strongest way in which it differs, however, is in the sense that Von Müffling presents himself in a role which he didn't have and in which he enlarges his share in a most disproportionate way.

I will mention several examples of this self-complacency.

First of all, in relation to his appointment and formal role within the army. Von Müffling was the Prussian liaison between Wellington's headquarters and that of the Prussian army. As such, if we may believe him, he had a numerous staff at his disposal consisting of four aide-de-camps, with bureau and orderlies, plus a group of field Jägers, letter-carriers and mounted officers.

In his position as liaison, Von Müffling always had to make a clear distinction in where he spoke on behalf of himself, or on behalf of the Prussian general staff; in the latter case, he could obviously only do so with its consent. The same principle worked in the same way from Wellington towards the Prussian army, so Von Müffling acted between the consent of both commanders when it came down to the coordination of matters of different kind.

The way Von Müffling describes his position in the same way, except for cases where there was no time to wait for the assent of both commanders (for instance in the case of war). Then Von Müffling hands himself far-reaching full-powers. He writes: "[...] unity in the conduct of the army could only be attained, by my being certain that I was the only mediator between the Prussian army and the English General-in-chief, and by my having full power to make and receive, whenever necessary, propositions in the name of Prince Blücher. General Gneisenau, to whom I expressed these views, knew that I would derogate nothing from the dignity of the Prussian leader, and that I would as little give occasion to the reproach that more might have been done on our part; he acquiesced in my views, and the Prince granted me the necessary authority. This answered to the position conferred on me by the King; and there was therefore nothing else required but to send the necessary instructions to the superior Prussian generals to obey my summons. The Prince was obliged to leave all the rest to my tact and responsibility, which I had not the remotest intention of throwing off."⁹

While fully respecting the importance of the position of liaison as Von Müffling had it, it is here that he grossly exaggerates his formal role – as if Blücher would have given him full-powers to act far beyond his formal responsibilities, and as if Von Müffling could tell the Prussian generals what to do.

At the same time, Von Müffling most unjustly claims that in his place of quartermaster-general of the Prussian army (a post which he had formerly held until late May 1815), general Von Grolmann was appointed as his deputy.¹⁰

In his position as liaison, Von Müffling had nothing more to do with the Prussian staff in a direct sense of the word. Von Grolmann and Von Müffling had fully separate and independent functions in relation to each other.

Von Müffling's description of his task "to concert all the operations to be undertaken in common" by the two field-marschals is in my mind also taking things beyond their context.¹¹

Von Müffling was a liaison, and as such he did not have the role to actually concert the operations.

Another striking example of a situation where Von Müffling arrogates something which in my mind is simply impossible to accept is his claim that it was him who proposed to the duke of Wellington on the 17th of June to pull back to a position which was in line with the one of the Prussian army at Wavre. Wellington, having known this position for so long and being aware of

its strategical relevance in relation to Wavre, wasn't so naive to do this on the recommendation of Von Müffling.¹²

Another example of Von Müffling's self-orientation and the figurative enlargement of his actual role which he shows in his memoirs is the role he assigns himself in the meeting at Bussy. As I have explained previously, it is here that he reduces the duke of Wellington to someone who almost didn't speak at all and as if Von Müffling did most of the talking, thereby distorting the total impression of the actual way the talks developed.

What he actually does is taking Wellington's original and first proposal to advance towards Frasnes to himself, as if he was the first to launch it and therewith prompting the Prussian objections; Wellington only steps in after that, asking Gneisenau what he wanted him to do. Having described the Prussian proposal, it is here again that Von Müffling assigns himself a role which he didn't have by (again) proposing to advance towards Frasnes, which proposal the duke would have caught up, but which was rejected by the Prussians again. This confusing way of describing the events is in my mind only meant by Von Müffling to enlarge his role, thereby distorting the real chain of talking at Bussy.

Other than describing his formal position in a figurative way, it is in his memoirs that Von Müffling clearly disassociates himself from members of the Tugendbund, like Von der Knesebeck, Von Grolmann, Von Boyen and Gneisenau, the last one in particular. Other than his general attitude towards the Tugendbund, Von Müffling clearly envied Gneisenau, him having taken over Von Müffling's former position as chief of staff of the army.¹³

As Von Pflugk Harttung has indicated, Von Müffling's accounts should be handled with care, his memoirs in particular.¹⁴ However detailed as they may be, they suggest a kind of authenticity which they do not always have and one should be very well aware of the exact context of details to assess Von Müffling's assertions in their proper value.

The memoirs suggest as if Von Müffling enjoyed a high degree of Wellington's confidence right from the beginning. Reality was different, however. It was not that Wellington *distrusted* Von Müffling, but it should be stressed – at least during the days before and during the campaign – that their relation was strictly objective. Amidst the wealth of correspondence which is available there is nothing which suggests the contrary, and it was Von Müffling himself who wrote to Von Boyen on the 24th of June 1815: “Mit dem Herzog Wellington habe ich mich auf meine Geschäfte beschränkt, bis die Bataillen, Cameradschaft und Gewohnheit vertraulicher zu reden jetzt seit einigen Tagen uns näher gebracht hat.” Their actual relationship could not be described in a more authentic and marked way.

An interesting element is the role of Von Müffling assigns himself in the decision of Wellington to fall back upon the position of Mont saint Jean. Von Müffling writes nothing about this in his publication under the pseudonym of C.v.W. (1815). Yet, on the 24th of June 1815, he writes to Von Boyen: “[...] und der Herzog meine Meynung foderte was zu thun sey, da Bonaparte mit allem was er hatte ohnfelbar auf die englische Armée fallen würde, er augenblicklich einwilligte als ich ihm vorschlug sich am forêt de Soignies [sic] in die Defensive zu stellen und den Preussen die Offensive zu überlassen.

Ich verbarg ihm die Schwierigkeiten seiner Lage im Fall wir geschlagen würden nicht, allein er wollte Brüssel nicht Preis geben. Dann gab es keine andre Stellung als die, die er wählte.”¹⁵

In his memoirs, Von Müffling writes that he told Wellington: “die Sache könne nicht so ganz schlimm stehen; der Herzog müsse bis auf einen Punkt zurückgehen, welcher mit Wavre in einer Höhe läge, dann würden wir Nachricht von dem Zustand der Blücherschen Armee haben, und früher liesse sich nichts beschliessen. Dies war ganz die Ansicht des Herzogs. Er hatte die Stellung von Mont-Saint-Jean gewählt [...]”

In Von Hofmann's book, Von Müffling, after having mentioned Gordon's arrival, writes: "Hierauf sagte ich ruhig zu Wellington: Ney steht Ihnen hier gegenüber. Napoleon kann nicht mit ihm vereinigen oder gegen Blücher marschieren, gleichviel, Sie können nicht in dieser erbärmlichen Stellung stehen bleiben. Da Blücher, wie es scheint, nicht geschlagen, sondern nur zurückgegangen, um sich mit Bülow zu vereinigen, so kann Napoleon sich nicht mit allen seinen Kräften gegen Sie wenden." Wellington setzte sich auf die Erde und zog seine Karte heraus. "Sie haben recht", sagte er, "mein Verweilen hier hat keinen Zweck. Ich werde in mein gewähltes Lager nach Mont Saint Jean zurückgehen." After then describing the arrival of Von Massow, Von Müffling continues: "Unter vier Augen sagte ich später dem Herzoge: Sie kennen nun des Fürsten Ansichten, gegründet auf die Übersicht seiner Mittel; dass er hält, was er versprochen hat, darauf können Sie rechnen, aber verabreden lässt sich noch gar nichts, so lange es ungewiss ist, was Napoleon thut. Ney allein wird Sie nach den gestern gemachten Erfahrungen schwerlich angreifen.

Man übersieht von hier aus die Chaussée nach Sombreffe auf 1 ½ Stunden. Kommt Napoleon von dort, so kann zeitig einer Schlacht durch einen Rückzug nach Mont Saint Jean ausgewichen werden. Es hängt dann von Ihnen ab, sich heute zu erklären, ob Sie für morgen eine Defensivschlacht in jener Stellung annehmen wollen, allein oder vereint und mit welchem Beistande von Blücher. Dies ist deshalb nöthig, weil dessen Anerbieten auf eine Voraussetzung gebaut ist, welche so unendlichen Wechselfällen unterliegt. Marschirt Napoleon gegen die Maas

oder zu einer Schlacht gegen Blücher, so kann er nicht zu Ihnen, sondern nur Sie können zu ihm kommen." Ich bat Wellington, er möge selbst mündlich und zwar sehr bestimmt antworten. Dies that er, indem er erklärte: "Der gestrige Tag hat in meiner Ansicht zu einer vereinten Offensive nichts geändert, ich gehe in das Lager von Mont Saint Jean zurück und wenn ich dort auch nur mit einem preussischen Armeecorps (30.000 M.) unterstützt werde, so nehme ich morgen eine Defensivschlacht an und gehe am 19. in Verbindung mit dem Fürsten zum Angriff über.

Kann ich diese Unterstützung nicht erhalten und Napoleon führt Alles, was er hat, gegen mich, dann könnte ich die Schlacht nicht annehmen, sondern müsste auf Brüssel zurück gehen." ¹⁶

After the arrival of the information about the Prussian army through both Gordon and Von Massow, there can be no doubt that Wellington must have spoken about this with Von Müffling. In the presentation of this conversation, it is in his report to Von Boyen that Von Müffling pulls the whole concept as it took place too much towards himself; in a sense, here he suffers from hindsight.

In his other two accounts, however, it is more like a conversation in which Von Müffling made some general comments to be considered, after which Wellington made his decision what to do.

There is no doubt either that Wellington was of course well aware of the situation as Von Müffling claims he sketched it. It can be doubted, however, that Von Müffling made his arguments in this way and that it was Wellington who made his decision what to do as a result. This would be too much honour for Von Müffling and this reasoning would also fail to recognize Wellington's analysis of the situation. After all, he had recognized the potential importance of the position of Mont Saint Jean as an ultimate one for the defence of Brussels already in 1814.

The conversation should be seen in a way that the considerations as mentioned must have been discussed in a more dynamic way as Von Müffling describes it, but having Wellington in the dominant role. ¹⁷

Regarding the role of Von Müffling one last element should be touched upon, as mentioned by Von Müffling himself. After Wellington had heard about the Prussian retreat upon Wavre

through Gordon, Von Müffling writes: “Wellington sah mich mit grossen Augen an, aus denen Ich las: “Hast du das gewusst und mir diplomatisch verschwiegen ?” Ich fand das natürlich, da wir uns noch zu wenig in wichtigen Augenblicken gesehen hatten und während Alles durch mich ging, dieser Rückzug ihm zehn Stunden lang ein Geheimnis geblieben war.”
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Supposing Von Müffling’s impression was correct, it is impossible to understand what benefit Von Müffling could possibly have had for himself by writing these words. For him, this impression was not unlogical, as if Von Müffling would have known about the retreat and had told nothing about it to the duke – if this were true, this would have been something of the most serious neglect. Apart from the fact that this in itself was incorrect, circumstances during the other days of the campaign prove that Von Müffling *was* actually involved in the most important moments when it came down to the cooperation between Wellington and Blücher.

But if Napoleon would attack according to one of the three options as sketched by the disposition, Wellington had arranged his forces at Mont Saint Jean in such a way that he thought he could meet them, and this of course in cooperation with the Prussian army, as it was described in the disposition written by Von Müffling by 8.30 a.m.

This disposition was the result of an intense communication which ran between both headquarters since the moment Von Müffling announced to Blücher the intention of the duke to fight at Mont Saint Jean, provided he would receive his Prussian support. By dawn, Wellington had a formal promise for this support (at least two Prussian army-corps). After that, Von Müffling developed the disposition on army level, but which he worked out on corps level some time later, after Von Bülow had reported about his situation by 11.30 a.m. The coordination of arrangements on these two levels eventually shaped the way the Prussian army would intervene at Waterloo.

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¹ It is impossible to tell what Von Müffling did during the action and where he spent the night of the 16th of June.

² Hofschröer, P. – Wellington’s smallest victory p.256

³ Hofschröer, P.- 1815. The Waterloo campaign. The German victory p.334

⁴ Hussey, J. – At what time on 15 June 1815 did Wellington etc. p.101

⁵ Hofmann, G.W. , Zur Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 p.132

⁶ Like there were his letter of 7 p.m. of the 15th of June, the arrival of Blücher’s letter in the late evening of the 15th of June, Wellington’s resulting after orders, the mission of Von Wucherer and the Frasnes-letter of the 16th of June.

⁷ As the introduction note is from 1844, they must have been written before that year.

⁸ It is the “courier” as referred to on p.230

⁹ Von Müffling’s memoirs p.218

¹⁰ Von Müffling’s memoirs p.215

¹¹ Von Müffling’s memoirs p.231

¹² Von Müffling’s memoirs p.240

¹³ Von Pflugk Harttung, in the description of Von Müffling’s extreme self-orientation, accuses him of neglecting Hardinge’s role at Quatre Bras. In Von Pflugk Harttung’s idea it was Hardinge who informed Wellington about this and not Von Müffling. As I have shown, this was not the case. Though it can not be proven that it was Von Müffling who was informed about this first, but it is a fact that it wasn’t Hardinge. Von Pflugk Harttung apparently had not consulted the archives at Southampton.

¹⁴ He dedicates a special chapter to Von Müffling’s accounts. In: Vorgeschichte etc. p.267-276

Aerts is also suspicious to Von Müffling’s memoirs in particular. Cf. his Etudes etc. (manuscript) p.110

¹⁵ In: MWB, 1891 nr.100 p.2589

¹⁶ Hofmann, G.W. , Zur Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 etc. p.136

This version is in some different wording essentially taken over by Von Ollech. In: Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 p.180

¹⁷ Aerts puts it more bluntly by stating that Wellington simply needed no advice from Von Müffling by pointing to old surveys of the position of Mont Saint Jean. In: Etudes etc. Livre IV (manuscript) p.107

¹⁸ Hofmann, G.W. , Zur Geschichte des Feldzugs von 1815 etc. p.15-136