

26th of March - 1st of April

Von Röder, Von Kleist's representative, arrived at Brussels in the night of the 25th of March. Von Röder was the bearer of the memorandum of Von Müffling in which he explained the concept of a joint battle near Tirlemont and which was destined for sir Hudson Lowe.

Immediately after having briefly spoken sir Hudson Lowe the next morning, Von Röder met the prince of Orange and dined with him.

For Von Röder it became clear that the prince was in a delicate situation of indecisiveness on the one hand and alertness on the other, caused by an apparent risk of a French threat. In the midst of all this, Von Röder himself thought it would still take weeks before the enemy could be a threat and what he did was developing a Prussian plan to meet the situation.¹

On the 27th of March, both sir Hudson Lowe and Von Röder had another, longer meeting in Brussels. The central question was how the Prussians could assist the prince in case he would be attacked by Napoleon. The moment both men met the French threat had decreased and the main thing was where both armies could meet so as to fight a common battle against the French. In this context, Von Röder proposed to use the area between Tirlemont and St.Trond on the river Geethe and this proposal seems not to have been rejected right away by Hudson Lowe. Von Röder himself wrote about it on the 27th : "Ich habe die Gegend von Tirlemont-St.Trond und Geethe ohne gerade zu sehr darauf zu apuyieren in Vorschlag gebracht, und man scheint dieser Idee beizustimmen."²

From the conversation it also becomes clear that the prince would have proposed Von Kleist earlier to meet in Namur, so as to work out a plan what to do. However, this meeting never materialised as Von Kleist told the prince on the 27th he had no time for such a meeting.³

Whatever sir Hudson Lowe may have said to Von Röder on the 27th of March, the reaction of the prince of Orange to the "Tirlemont-proposal" can be derived from the letter written by sir Hudson Lowe to Von Müffling on the 28th of March. In this letter sir Hudson Lowe gets back to this same proposal as was also described by Von Müffling in a memorandum on the 25th of March. Lowe writes on the 28th of March: "J'ai communiqué à Son Altesse Royale vos deux lettres avec le projet de livrer bataille aux Francais dans le cas qu'ils oseraient venir à notre rencontre à T[irlemont]. [4] Il était hier à Mons et ne pouvoit me donner réponse à la première communication. Je lui ai parlé ce matin de nouveau tant sur la première que sur votre dernière lettre reçu, du 25 de ce mois; il m'a fait sentir que le Roi son père doit arriver ici demain et qu'il désiroit naturellement avoir aussi son sentiment, vous sentirez bien comme il s'agit de la conservation de son Royaume qu'il n'y aura pas grand mal en cela. On attend également l'arrivée du duc de Wellington, et comme il arrivera à ce qu'on dit le 30 ou 31, on espère que Bonaparte ne marchera pas aussi vite, que de nous forcer à prendre des mesures définitives avant qu'il vient. Voilà, les deux raisons de mon delai à vous faire connoitre les sentimens du prince sur les propositions qui vous avez fait. Si je dois cependant vous faire connoitre mon sentiment en particulier sur le projet que vous avez indiqué je dirai qu'en l'envisageant purement comme militairement, il me paraît excellent et il n'y auroit pas meilleure à faire, mais lorsque je considère l'abandon non seulement de la ville de Bruxelles, mais de la toute la Belgique à l'influence révolutionnaire de la France; qu'un des premières actes de Napoleon serait de déclarer l'annexion de ce pays-ci à l'empire Francaise; que l'esprit et la disposition d'une très grande partie de la population, quoique assez bien disposé à présent, irait parfaitement d'accord avec ses actes, si nous abandonnions le pays, que nous aurons bientôt certains points d'appui en Tournay et Mons, qu'en gardant cette position nous tenons toujours éloignés tous les émissaires en oeuvre pour effectuer l'unité des deux états sous le même gouvernement ayant déjà le même langage et la même religion il me paroît extrêmement importante de prendre tous les mesures possibles pour conserver ce que nous avons, et ainsi,

je seroit plutôt d'avis de donner bataille en avant par des mouvements strategem [?] de la part de l'armée Prussienne donner tant à craindre au Français pour leurs flancs qu'ils n'oseraient par se compromettre par une marche trop hasardé dans l'intérieur de ce pays. En attendant s'il venoit subitement et avec des grandes forces il paroît plus que probable que nous serions obligés des nous retirer dans la direction que vous avez indiqué ou derrière le Nethe. ⁵

It was also on the 28th of March that the prince of Orange had a conversation with Von Röder. In this conversation, the occupation of Namur by the Prussians was to be the main subject. What had happened was this: while the prince had asked Von Kleist on the 22nd of March to move westward towards Namur, a misunderstanding arose about the occupation of Namur itself. Being in the extreme outer boundary of the area which was militarily to be under the control of the army of the Netherlands, apparently, the prince of Orange had asked Von Kleist to occupy it with his forces. ⁶

However, it was between the 22nd and the 27th of March that king Willem, who learned about the Prussian intention, refused Von Kleist to enter the country, through Namur. This communication has not been preserved, but can be derived from the following letter which Von Kleist wrote to the prince on the 27th:

“J'avoue avec franchise à Votre Altesse Royale que de refus qu'elle vient de me faire d'occuper Namur tandis que nous en étions déjà convenu, ne m'est pas agréable et me gêne beaucoup. Je viens d'ordonner les mouvemens projetées, ils s'exécutent avec célérité et ne pouvant rétrograder ce qui misait à l'esprit public, mes troupes s'en trouveront très mal. Mais néanmoins, comme je n'ai en vue que le bien général et que toute autre idée m'est absolument étranger je vais me confirmer d'après les désirs de Votre Altesse Royale; toutes fois je l'a [?] supplie de vouloir à une autre [...] ne plus changé ce que dont on est convenu; un tel changement qui gêne les mouvements des troupes une fois ordonné ne peut causer que de grand embarras.

Il m'est impossible pour le moment de quitter Aix la Chapelle, vu le travail qui m'occupe pour faire marcher et organiser les renforts qui me viennent des pays au delà du Rhin et pour soigner le ravitaillement des forteresses, mais Votre Altesse Royale peut être persuadé de ma coopération selon les circonstances. Je n'avance jamais rien si je ne suis en état de tenir parole.

Je ne tâcherai pas à venir. Le général Müffling a écrit au sujet des mouvements à faire en cas d'une attaque de Napoleon Bonaparte sur la Belgique aujourd'hui en long [?] au général Lówe [sic] je suis parfaitement de son avis. Le général Lówe [sic] ne manquera pas de parler à Votre Altesse Royale, et je aime à me flatter qu'elle sera du même avis.

Votre Altesse Royale peut être convaincu que de cas existant du rassemblement des troupes dans la Belgique je l'évacuerai les troupes pour m'aboucher avec Votre Altesse Royale et fixer les opérations ultérieures, je ne me ferai alors pas attendre, avec cette espérance, je prie etc.” ⁷

From the information that Napoleon could not muster more as 50.000 men in Paris, the prince and sir Hudson Lowe now proposed to advance to the French frontier and cover Brussels, to prevent Napoleon from creating a rise in Belgium. Von Röder made some military objections, which mainly had to do with the Prussian wish to fight in open country, but eventually, a sound decision was not taken.

On the 29th of March, Von Röder and the prince had another meeting. The reason was the arrival in Brussels of a report (from Lille) about an imminent French attack upon Belgium. On the 24th of March, 50-60.000 men would have left Paris, of which the advanced guard would have reached Doullens [⁸] two days later.

The prince of Orange now would have asked Von Röder to inform Von Kleist about the situation immediately. In case of a French attack the prince would collect his army between Grammont, Braine le Comte and Nivelles, while keeping Tournai and Mons at the same time.

His request to Von Kleist was to be prepared to advance towards Nivelles through Namur and to join the prince, or to fall upon Napoleon's right flank. Objections, expressed by Von Röder, to convince the prince to pull further east would not have had any result.

Meanwhile, Von Müffling had his own thoughts upon this French threat. He wrote to sir Hudson Lowe on the 28th: "Nous avons la nouvelle de Vienne que toute l'armée Prussienne sera de suite mise sur pied de guerre et le maréchal Blücher en a pris le commandement. Général Gneisenau arrivera sans delai ici. J'espère, cher général, qu'on force de même en Angleterre tout ce qu'on pourra pour rassembler des masses considérables. Il parait que Bonaparte n'avoit fait aucun mouvement le 24 Mars. Il faut avoir bien attention, car s'il parle de la conquête de la Belgique, ou s'il la fait croire dans le public, je suis persuadé qu'il fait le mouvement vers le Haut Rhin, mouvement que j'ai toujours cru plus favorable et plus décisif pour lui. [...] Nous continuons le mouvement que vous connaissez et par l'activité que nous avons mis dans nos marches, nous pourrons arriver le 1 Avril sur notre rendez-vous [sic] avec 50 m ou [sic] lieu de 40 m.

Je vous envoie un ordre que j'ai donné à l'égard des communications. Scharnhorst vous traduira ce qu'il contient. Il est absolument nécessaire de surveiller ce que Napoleon nous fera envoyer par les partisans pour révolter les pays, et d'empêcher que des nouvelles lui parviennent." ⁹

On the evening of the 29th of March Von Röder had received a letter from Von Kleist, which dated from the 28th. There are no details of this letter available. In any case, it led Von Röder to meet the very same evening with sir Hudson Lowe as to discuss the way the prince had handled the "Namur-affair".

The arrival of Von Kleist's letter of the 28th for the prince in Brussel led the prince to call for Von Röder to settle the thing about Namur. Clearly, the prince felt uneasy about it and tried to take away any impression of distrust. His explanation was that under a previous French attack he had felt that he needed to ask Von Kleist to enter the country. Yet, as the threat grew by, his wish for the Prussian occupation of Namur had diminished.

Lowe, in his turn, personally agreed upon this with Von Röder but at the same time pointed out that this whole affair was a highly political one, and that he – being British – had nothing to do with it. It was all in the hands of the king of the Netherlands, Willem I. In a way, yet, sir Hudson Lowe defended the king by stating that the matter had not been a deliberate one. It all had to do with the king's wish to keep out any other foreign powers from the territory of the Netherlands as long as possible.

The next day, the prince of Orange confirmed all this, but at the same time he eventually recognized, from a military point of view, that he wished nothing more as to have the Prussians as near to him as possible. Yet, all depended upon his father, who was to arrive in Brussels. In fact, he did on the 30th of March, accompanied by his son Frederik, his general secretary A.R. Falck, his minister of war general J.W. Janssens and baron Van der Capellen.
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The course of and the sensitiveness around the Prussians entering Namur is extensively described by Lowe in a report of his hand for lord Bunbury on the 28th of March. It reads: "My last will have informed you of our movements and proceedings in this quarter up to the 24th instant. On that day a certain degree of alarm prevailed in consequence of the reports in circulation that Bonaparte was already at Arras and his army in movement towards our frontier.

Lt. general Zieten wrote at this time to say his corps d'armée was directing itself upon Namur and wished to know whether he might cross the Meuse and occupy cantonments on this side the river. To this a reply was sent he might in a letter to general count Kleist of which copy was forwarded to you with my last.

The prince of Orange naturally reported what had been done at the Hague, but I regret to say his proceeding was not approved. He received a letter from the King Highness disapproving his having given any encouragements to the Prussians to push any force across the Meuse into this country and desiring the [...] take steps to prevent it. His Royal Highness sent for me to desire I would unite to general Kleist to beg he would stop the march of troops in that direction. I stated the idea of mistrust which such a communication might give rise to, that the defence of this country at the present moment rested entirely on the active and neat cooperation of the Prussian army and that all points of local and minor consideration must give way at such a moment to general views. That I thought the views of the Prussian army were considered too unfavourably of, that I had served with it for some time and found the chiefs of it acting upon general principles for the benefit of the cause at large and that anything which looked like separate views and interests be contrary to the feeling with which they seemed to me to be actuated. That there were motives of objection enough on their part towards coming in this direction and that it really appeared to me much better to let measures take their course. The directions of the King however were I believe much too positive to admit H.R.H. taking any other measure than that directed – he expressed his own regret at having given any sanction to the Prussian troops crossing the river and wished me to write a letter to general Kleist in his name to suspend the movement of any troops beyond the right bank of the Meuse. I mentioned herewith that such a communication would perhaps carry with it a better grace if made direct from himself to general Kleist; that it was political and not military considerations which would dictate it and therefore more fit subject for His Royal Highness own decision and communication than for mine. To this he asserted and wrote himself on the following day. I received a letter from general count Kleist of which copy is enclosed. You will observe, sir, the cordial spirit it breathes. I received by the same occasion a letter from general Müffling with a project of a plan of operations by which, instead of moving down on Namur, he proposed our army should quit the frontier line, if the French advanced in force, abandon Tournay and Mons and retire in the direction of Tirlemont where the Prussian army could unite with us and give battle and the enemy with almost every confidence of success from the great superiority of cavalry, which the Prussian could bring into the field. (the letter is at present in the prince's hands and I cannot therefore send a copy of it). The bearer of it was m.general Röder of the Prussian army whom general Kleist sent to join the prince in order to remain at his head quarters and concert operations with him. General Röder told me that the prince of Orange might really consider the Prussian army as entirely at his disposal; that it had a numerous and excellent artillery (240 pieces) and 10.000 cavalry, that the prince had only to express his wishes and any part of it would be sent hither. This I mentioned to the prince who seemed disposed to avail himself of the offer, but on my mentioning they must in such case pass the Meuse, the objections of his father again presented themselves. This morning the prince received an answer from general Kleist. I have not seen it, but understand it to be expressive of much dissatisfaction and indignation, not at him, but at the councils which had dictated his communication, and that it states besides the great embarrassment which had arisen from his troops having been put in movement and then compelled to retrograde. It appears that in the recent time the Dutch authorities had been using an effort to induce the cooperation of the Prussian army with theirs in the rear, thus having as it were the army in front, (probably from a want of confidence in it) to its fate. I enclose copy of general Müffling's letter to me on the subject.

I have had a good deal of conversation with Sir Charles Stuart on all these matters. He tells me nothing can exceed the alarm with which the Dutch contemplate the idea of the Prussians entering this country and that they would regard it as quite decisive in its influence on the dispositions of the Belgians who dread so much again to see the Prussians among them. To this I have observed that it is much better the Prussians should enter the country along that

part of it which is close to the French frontier (in the triangle between the Meuse and the Sambre) than higher up or in the centre of it after suffering the French quietly to occupy the other part of it. The prince has remarked that the Prussian army may concentrate near Namur without crossing the river and be still near enough at hand to effect a junction with us if the French advance, presuming he will always have sufficient information [?]. To this I have observed that in one march their troops may come on (from Condé or Lille) and that if the Prussians are on the other side of the Meuse, they could not effect a junction with us in time to prevent one retreating principally from Ath and Mons and Tournay. That if the Prussian army was at hand the French could not assemble a force sufficient in time to drive both us and them; that we could maintain our position and preserve Belgium intact, until the greater forces of the allies arrived and enabled us to assume offensive operations. If the French once enter this country they proclaim its annexation to the French empire and the spirit and dispositions of the people, already sufficiently disposed to French connections, immediately undergoes a decided change. So long as we show [...] and a resolution to defend them, there will on the contrary be a spirit operating in our favour.

Such is at present the situation here – nothing positively decided in respect to our plan of operation whether on general Müffling's plan of Tirlemont or on what I should be much more disposed to, getting the Prussians to concentrate near Namur. The King is expected here tomorrow and the duke of Wellington in a few days. Their arrival will decide. General Röder has written to general Kleist and tells me he is assured which he has written will remove any possible cloud from general Kleist's mind respecting the late communications to him from hence. I enclose copies of two reports received from Lt.col.sir Henry Bradford who is one of my assistants and at present stationed at Tournay. Colonel Abercombrie who is another assistant is between Menin, Ypres and Nieuport.

M. general Dörnberg two days since stopt [sic] a French patrol of three men which had crossed the frontier. The commandant of Maubeuge write to him to beg they might be given up as it was through ignorance the men had [...] and that "we were at present at peace." G.Dörnberg reported the matter to the prince and the men have been [...] to return. I send copy of the letter.

I just receive a line from general Dörnberg dated this day from Mons. The following is an extract: "I receive a very kind answer from general Ziethen informing me that he is with the 2nd Prussian corps between Huy and Namur and assured me that he with the whole army has the most ardent wish to advance, but that they have orders to remain on the right of the Meuse. He has his quarters etc." ¹¹

That day, on the 30th of March, Von Müffling wrote to Lowe: "Vous avez bien raison qu'il est de la plus grande importance de conserver Bruxelles [sic] s'il est possible, quoique Bonaparte n'auroit pas le temps d'en profiter si nous l'attaquons de suite. Le général Röder vous présentera le point de vue que nous devons avoir. Balaniez [sic] bien le pour et le contre, vous savez que vous avez à faire à des gens qui ne désirent que de vous être utiles ayant le même point de vue que vous le bien général.

Il faut peser sans passions. Il me paroît que votre situation devient très délicate par l'arrivée du Roi, qui naturellement voit le bien de Bruxelles avant de voir le bien de l'Europe. Vous êtes au milieu entre le père et le fils et vous aurez besoin de toute votre fermeté pour ne pas céder à demi mesure comme le Roi me paroît [...]. Persistez au nom de Dieu, cher général, que l'armée Hollandoise se rassemble sur la champ dans un bivouacq afin que ces paysans et bourgeois [sic] deviennent des soldats.

Dites au roi de Hollande que sa couronne est perdue s'il ne tâche de gagner la confiance et l'amour du militaire.

Il faut qu'il aille en bivouacq, qu'il parle dans leur présence tout eux qui ne les soignent par bien etc. etc. Il me paroît que le Roi ne prévoit pas ce qui va arriver." ¹²

The same day the prince of Orange received the intelligence from general Von Dörnberg that Napoleon and marshal Ney would have reached Valenciennes along with numerous troops and that here and in Lille more reinforcements were expected. At Valenciennes, Ney would have inspected 18.000 men and according to Von Dörnberg all this might be an indication that Napoleon could attack, aiming for Brussels.

It led the prince to call for Von Röder once again so as to ask Von Kleist to support him, while he would chose a position around Braine le Comte or Nivelles. Again, Von Röder repeated the Prussian point of view, i.e. to have the prince's army to pull back towards Tirlmont so as to join the Prussian army there for a joint battle, but also now this proposal was rejected by the prince as he didn't want to leave a major part of the country (including Brussels) to Napoleon.¹³

On the 28th of March, it was Von Müffling who prepared a memorandum for king Willem what in his opinion should be done in case the French would attack, while having 50.000 men in Paris.

The reason for doing so was a plan of defence for the Netherlands which had been sent to Von Kleist by king Willem.¹⁴ It led Von Kleist and Von Müffling to work out a memoir which "setzte den Fall, dass Bonaparte am 29.März die Anglo-Niederländer angriffe, welche zwischen Brüssel und Valenciennes keinen genügenden Widerstand bereiten könnten. Die Aufstellung der preussischen Armee am 23. März erlaube nicht ein herankommen vor dem 2. Oder 3.April mit allen Kräften bei Lüttich. Daraus ergäbe sich, wenn das belgische Heer [=Anglo-Netherlands-German] am 29.angegriffen würde, und sich auf das des Niederrheins zurückzöge, so müsse es am 1.April zwischen Tirlmont und St.Tron eintreffen. Demgemäss habe die Armee des Niederrheins eine Stellung einzunehmen, welche ihr erlaube, am 1.April in den Ebenen von Tirlmont zu erscheinen, sobald die Meldung eingegangen sei, dass Bonaparte die Niederländer aufsuche. Eine solche Stellung bedinge: dass sie nicht einen Seitenabmarsch unmöglich mache (für den Fall dass Napoleon sich gegen den Oberrhein wende), und dass sie sich nicht über die Maas ausdehne, um dem Feinde den diesseitigen Plan nicht zu enthüllen. Man habe nun eine Örtlichkeit gefunden, welche diese Bedingungen erfülle und der Armee gestatte, in dreimal 24 Stunden, nach eintreffen der Angriffsmeldung zu Aachen, mit Massen auf dem Schlachtfelde von Neerwinden zu erscheinen. Aber dies lasse sich nur durch grösste Anspannung bewerkstelligen. Die Befehle seien sofort erteilt, und das Heer befinde sich in der entsprechenden Stellung.

Die neuesten Nachrichten deuteten darauf, dass Napoleon nicht so schnell handeln könne, als man anfangs vermutet habe. Die niederländischen und englischen Streitkräfte kämen an und erweckten den Wunsch, sich Napoleon zwischen Brüssel und Valenciennes entgegenzustellen, um die Hauptstadt zu sichern und sie nicht zu einem Revolutionsherde zu machen. Unfraglich sei Brüssel wichtig; man dürfe nichts zur Erhaltung seiner Hilfsmittel unterlassen, die Befestigungen von Mons und Tournai dienten dazu und befänden sich in Verbindung mit der Stellung von Ath. Es scheine, dass die Verteidigung Brüssels von der Stärke dieser beiden Plätze und der der Armee abhängen, die man bei Ath dem Feinde entgegenzuwerfen vermöge. Aber man müsse von den dortigen Kräften, die der niederrheinischen Armee abziehen, weil diese nicht früh genug einzutreffen vermöge, um Bonaparte in einer grossen Schlacht zu bekämpfen. Sie könne aber ihre jetzige Aufstellung an der Maas kaum verlassen, bevor sie nicht ganz sicher sei, dass das Unternehmen des feindes wirklich Brüssel gelte, und nicht etwa Namur, Givet oder dem Oberrhein. Eine solche Gewissheit gewähre nun der tatsächliche Angriff. Infolgedessen vermöge die niederrheinische Armee erst am siebenten Tage nach Beginn jenes Angriffes bei Ath einzutreffen. Könne das belgische Heer sich nicht so lange halten, so sei es besser, sich einer Schlacht zwischen Brüssel und Valenciennes nicht auszusetzen, sondern zu warten bis man überlegene Kräfte beisammen habe."¹⁵

Von Kleist, after writing a covering letter, sent it the day it was written to Von Röder in Brussels through lieutenant colonel De Perponcher.¹⁶ Von Kleist sent it to king Willem on the 30th of March.¹⁷ He also sent a copy to Gneisenau on the 31st of March (see below). Before Von Röder got the memorandum on the 31st, he had a meeting with king Willem. Others present were the prince of Artois and the prince Condé.¹⁸

It may have been after this meeting that Von Röder wrote the following letter to Lowe that day: “J’ai reçu une lettre du général Kleist contenant un mémoire qu’il m’a fallu présenter tout de suite au Prince Hériditaire, la lettre m’ayant été remis en sa présence; j’espère à l’avoir demain, pour vous le faire lire, en cas que le prince ne vous l’ait pas communiqué plus tôt. Le général Kleist se prononce d’une manière très satisfaisant sur le désir d’agir de concert avec les troupes anglaises et il ne se refuse aucunement à faire marcher l’armée Prussienne jusqu’avant de Bruxelles aussitôt qu’il ne reste plus de doute sur l’intention de l’ennemi de diriger son attaque sur ce point, mais comme il est très possible que Napoleon marche avec la plus grande partie de ses forces par Givet ou Dinant sur Liège, et qu’alors quand tout le corps Prussien se seroit transporté sur la rive gauche du Rhin le pays entre la Meuse et le Rhin, avec toutes ses ressources et mêmes avec plusieurs petits depots, seroit perdu et abandonné, le général Kleist ne veut donc pas entièrement quitter la rive droite de la Meuse avant que le véritable point d’attaque soit découvert. Tout ceci et même la supposition que vous trouverez dans le mémoire qu’en defendant Bruxelles on risque de perdre la grande route par Namur, n’est calculé que sur la position d’Ath car celle dont il a été question en dernier lieu entre Nivelles et Braine le Comte, réunit les avantages que le général Kleist craint de perdre, et j’ai donc tout lieu de croire qu’il ne fera aucune difficulté de l’agréer, ce qui me fera grand plaisir, considérant ce mouvement comme le plus sûr pour notre réunion – le général Kleist a écrit en même tems au roi d’Hollande pour lui protester, que les Prussiens feront tout ce qui est en leur pouvoir pour défendre ses états; mais en observant aussi respectueusement, que dans des circonstances pareilles la Prusse avec la même population que celle des Pays Bas actuelles avoit fourni 108 milles hommes en six semaines. J’ose vous prier, mon cher général, de bien vouloir faire partir l’incluse s’il se peut encore ce soir, ou demain de fort bonne heure; je suis très fâché de vous importuner tant par ma correspondance, je suis moi même un ancien officier de cavallerie et c’est pour cela que je n’aime pas à fatiguer les chevaux d’ordonnance mais il est de la plus grande importance pour le bien de la cause commune que j’envoie le plus souvent que possible mes dépêches aux [sic] gl. Kleist qui désirerait en avoir quatre par jour si cela se pourrait. Le général Müffling qui comme le comte de Kleist me chargent de leurs compliments pour vous m’écrit qu’il attend d’un moment à l’autre le Genl. Gneisenau qui doit être suivi de près par le Prince Blücher. Les souverains réunis à Vienne doivent se rendre à Frankfort 1:1 / m vers le 15 d’Avril.”¹⁹

As promised, Von Röder sent Lowe a copy of the memoir, covered by the following letter:

“J’ai l’honneur de communiquer ci joint à Votre Excellence la copie d’un mémoire que j’ai présenté hier à Son Altesse Royale Monseigneur le Prince heréditaire des Pays Bas réunis, de la part du général comte Kleist. Votre Excellence trouvera dans ce mémoire des calculs exactes, qui preuvent 1me que l’armée Prussienne dite du bas Rhin n’ose pas abandonner sa position actuelle sur la Meuse, avant d’avoir la certitude sur quel point et dans quelle direction l’ennemi commun va pousser son attaque et que 2me cette armée du Bas Rhin se trouve par conséquent trop éloignée. La mémoire conclut donc qu’on ne doit pas compter sur les secours de l’armée du Bas Rhin dans une bataille qui certainement auroit lieu peu de jours après l’invasion de Bonaparte, quand elle doit se donner, entre Bruxelles et Valenciennes, et qu’il vaudrait peut être mieux attendre jusqu’au moment où il sera possible d’agir avec toutes ses forces.

En exposant ici en peu de mots le contenu du mémoire je crois aussi observer à Votre Excellence qu’il a été fait et expédié avant que la nouvelle proposition de l’armée de la

Belgique dans les environs de Nivelles , dont j'ai informé le général comte Kleist par ordre de S.A.R. le prince héréditaire lui fut parvenu, il me paroît que cette proposition doit remédier à plusieurs des difficultés alléguées dans le mémoire, il ne me reste qu'à attendre la décision et les ordres de mon chef dont j'aurai de vous faire part immédiatement après les avoir reçues.

Je supplie Votre Excellence d'être persuadé et je suis positivement chargé de vous le répéter, que le général comte de Kleist et toute l'armée Prussienne s'empressent de tendre tout les services possibles à l'armée de la Belgique et qu'ils désirent sincèrement de combattre conjointement avec elle, il ne s'agit donc que de convenir des points de raillements, et j'espère autant que je le souhaite qu'on sera bientôt d'accord sur cet objet important comme on s'est sur tous les autres.

Je dois annoncer encore à Votre Excellence qu'on prépare à Wesel un équipage de siège très complet qui sera en état de marcher avant trois semaines, s'il m'est permis de vous parler avec franchise, il me paroît bien désirable que l'Angleterre fasse la même chose à Ostende, car dans le cas que Bonaparte porte son attaque principale sur le Haut Rhin ou sur tout autre point éloignée de nous, ou après une bataille gagnée sur lui dans ce pays ici, il nous faudra ces assieger les forteresses.

P.S. Je viens de recevoir dans ce moment la réponse du général comte de Kleist sur la proposition de faire avancer les troupes [sic] sous ses ordres par Namur sur Nivelles en cas d'une attaque de la part des Français, il ne crois pas pouvoir y consentir, calculant le tems qu'il faudroit pour faire passer toute l'armée sur une seule colonne, par le seul défilé de Namur; il est certain que cette armée arriverait trop tard sur le champ de bataille, et comme le général Kleist est de l'opinion qu'on auroit tort d'engager une affaire générale avant d'être dans toute sa force pour ne pas s'exposer de perdre dès le commencement de la guerre tous les avantages d'une campagne entière, il croit devoir persister sur ce qu'il a exposé dans le mémoire du 30me Mars, d'après lequel on peut compter pour vous [?] de pouvoir disposer de toutes les forces réunies de l'armée du Bas Rhin trois jours après l'arrivée de la nouvelle de l'entrée de l'ennemi, sur le territoire des Pays Bas unis, dans les environs de Tirlemont.”²⁰

Meanwhile, as sir Charles Stuart wrote it to Castlereagh on the 31st of March, king Willem had given his consent to “allow general Kleist to cross the Meuse and to occupy the district between that river and Nivelles. According to this disposition the Dutch troops expected from Maastricht will occupy the vacancy between the right of their line and the left of the British and no general action will compromise the army before the arrival of the duke of Wellington.”²¹

Von Röder and the prince of Orange met again on the 31st of March. In this conversation, the prince of Orange made it clear to Von Röder that he believed, in case Napoleon would actually be in Valenciennes, that an action would be imminent in two days. In that case he would try to make a stand between Braine le Comte and Nivelles with the British, Hanoverian and Belgian troops, while the Dutch troops would be in and around Wavre. In that situation he reckoned the Prussians would then advance from Namur towards Nivelles. It was for this reason that the prince urged Von Röder that Namur should be occupied by the Prussians right away. Meanwhile, king Willem had given his consent. To make this possible, the current Dutch garrison, led by general Stedman, would then evacuate it on the 1st of April.

As a result, both the prince and Von Röder informed Von Zieten, who was the one to occupy Namur, to do so. It was an adjutant of the prince who carried both letters. He was, for some reason, supposed to ride to Aachen anyway and had offered to ride through Huy, where Zieten had his headquarters.

He reached Huy late in the night. Zieten, however, being clearly aware of the political implications of the Prussian occupation of Namur, didn't take it upon himself to occupy Namur and wrote to Von Kleist at 1.30 a.m.

“General Von Röder schreibt mir, der Prinz Von Oranien meint, ich würde gleich bis Namur rücken; indessen kann ich dies nicht ohne Eurer Excellenz Befehl, und werde diesen abwarten.”²²

And after his meeting with the prince, Von Röder wrote to Von Müffling: “Der Prinz von Oranien bittet nun darum, Namur von den preussischen Truppen sogleich besetzen zu lassen. Ich habe den General v. Zieten direkt davon benachrichtigt. Auch der Prinz hat dies persönlich gethan. Was die Verpflegung anbetrifft, so sind die holländischen Kommissarien angewiesen worden, mit den unsrigen alles Erforderliche zu vereinbaren, damit es an nichts fehle. Der König der Niederlande hat den sehnlichen Wunsch geäußert, dass beim Eintreten eines Unfalls die Preussen Maastricht besetzen und vertheidigen möchten. Ist Napoleon wirklich in Valenciennes, dann werden wir wohl innerhalb zwei Tagen handgemein sein. Der Plan des Prinzen ist, sich mit den Engländern, Hannoveranern und Belgiern zwischen Nivelles und Braine le Comte zu konzentrieren (also östlich von Ath); die Holländer kämen dann in Wavre zu stehen. Die preussische Armee erwartet er im Vorrücken von Namur gegen Nivelles. Unter solchen Umständen glaubt man, sich mit dem Feinde schlagen zu können. Sollte aber Napoleon das Alles nicht stören? Vorläufig kommandirt General Lowe die Engländer. Ich werde dem Hauptquartier folgen, sei es nach Ath, wie man es ursprünglich beabsichtigt hatte, oder nach Nivelles.”²³

It was also the prince himself who communicated to Von Kleist in writing. In this letter, dated 31st of March, which is unavailable, the prince felt very much obliged if Von Kleist could cross the Meuse at Namur and Huy right away, so that the Prussian army could cooperate in the way as he had proposed to Von Röder: to fight a united and major action southwest of Brussels. He himself didn't want to move towards Tirlemont, not only for reasons of giving away the capital to Napoleon, but also not to be cut off from Antwerp, the place where the British would go to in case of a retreat.²⁴

The very same day, the 31st of March – at 7 p.m. - Von Kleist wrote his reaction to sir Hudson Lowe: “Je viens de recevoir la lettre du général Röder qui me mande que le prince l'a fait venir pour lui dire que Napoleon était à Valenciennes, et qu'une opération sur la Belgique paraissait être sue; qu'il voulait se battre à Nivelles et à Braine le Comte et m'engageait de réunir en ce cas mes troupes aux siennes. Malgré toute la bonne volonté qui m'anime, je ne saurais me soumettre à un tel plan, qui pourrait avoir donner les chances les plus malheureux. Il y a du salut de l'Europe et non d'une seule ville, mon cher général. Le point de Nivelles ne facilite en aucune façon notre réunion, je m'embouche dans des défilés et le champ de bataille se trouve être trop éloignée de tous les point, qu'en cas de malheur, nous devons atteindre pour nous remettre en position. Je vous prie, mon cher général, de bien réfléchir à cela. Nous nous battons bien. Je vous assure mais il faut agir de façon à s'assurer le gain d'une bataille et prévenir les désastres qui pourraient s'en nuire, du moins les diminuer. Le prince est un jeune [...] rempli de vivacité, il ne pense pas au suite qu'une tel choix peut avoir. Je vous supplie de le faire agir avec raison.

Le major Du Moulin porteur de cette lettre, officier instruit auquel vous pouvez vous confier, vous dira le reste, mon cher général. Je suis de même que Müffling qui vous salue amicalement animé du même désir de coopérer de toutes nos forces, à la cause commune, mais il faut cependant agir selon la raison.”²⁵

It also seems, however, that Von Kleist wrote in a similar sense to Von Röder.²⁶ Earlier that day, the 31st of March, Von Kleist had also written a report for Gneisenau, to which he enclosed the memorandum as written by Von Müffling on the 30th of March. He writes:

“Euer Excellenz habe ich die Ehre, anliegend das von mir unter gestrigen Dato dem König der Niederlande eingereichte Memoire über die, im Fall eines Einfalls Bonaparte in Belgien, zu nehmende Massregel, abschriftlich mitzuteilen. Dieselben werden daraus unsere hiesige Stellung am besten beurteilen können, und es bleibt mir nur noch übrig zu bemerken, dass das

II.Königlich Preussische Armeekorps Namur gegenüber und das III. bei Lüttich steht, das I.Armeekorps habe ich bei Koblenz gelassen, und das III. Deutsche Armeekorps hierher nach Aachen und Gegend gezogen.”²⁷

By this time, the 4th corps was still in formation. It was on the 30th of March that Von Müffling wrote to Lowe about the fact that Murat had rallied Napoleon and he continues: “Cette nouvelle du roi de Naples me fait croire que Napoleon jouera son grand jeu, c’est-à-dire il donnera un rendez-vous à son beau frère à Vienne et nous fera croire jusqu’au dernier moment qu’il a l’intention de conquérir la Belgique.”²⁸

In his reply, which he sent on the 1st of April, Lowe again explained the specific importance of the defence of the Netherlands and therein the cooperation of the allied armies, as well as the reinforcement of its defensive infrastructure:

“Infiniment des remerciemens pour vos deux lettres du 29 et 30. La défection du roi de Naples est ce qu’on devoit naturellement attendre. Il n’y a grand mal à cela. Il vaut mieux un ennemi déclaré qu’un ami dissembleur [?]. Les Italiens ont été contrarier aux Autrichiens. A présent ils resteront neutres. Ils n’ont pas plus envie que ces autres peuples des conscriptions et contribution.

Si je vous ai porté pour la défense de ce pays ci plutôt que quelque autre, c’est dans une persuasion indispensable de sa majeure importance. La Belgique (car je ne parle plus de sa capitale) n’est qu’un point dans la carte de l’Europe mais c’est vers ce point là que le premier pion sera toujours poussé. Le Rhin pour frontière. Voilà le langage de tous les Français, soit Royalistes, soit Jacobins, Impérialistes. Comment y parvenir sans pousser les avant postes de l’ennemi et s’assurer de ses flancs notre armée est faible, la conquête paroitra trop [...] pour ne pas désirer la faire. Si l’armée est forte étant ami avec la votre, voilà un motif de plus de venir nous chercher, car comment avancer en autre direction sans chercher à se débarasser d’un voisin si incommode sur son flanc. Une fois en possession de la Belgique et arrivés au Rhine [sic] la France est maitresse de ses mouvements. Elle peut agir offensivement ou diffinivement [sic]. Elle est dans le cas de pouvoir .. A présent elles n’a pas de choix que dans l’offensive et il n’y a sorte des ruges et .. qu’elle n’employera pas à se soustraire de risquer ou ce systeme pourroit l’entraîner. Rien plus efficace que de persuader par les mouvemens qu’elle en veut ailleurs et ainsi affaibli nos moyens dans le point le plus essentiel pour elle à gagner. Il n’y a qu’une seule raison qui parroit me persuader qu’il y auroit avantage de laisser quelque chose à l’hazard pour ce pays ici cela seroit la réunion plus à gauche d’une masse assez considérable pour aller encore aux mais [?] la capitale, mais jusqu’à ce que cette force se ressemble il est bon non seulement de garder les points que nous avons mais de la renforcer en telle manière qui si le grand coup manquait on pouvoit toujours revenir à celui ci. Ce n’est pas avec les forteresses qu’on doit attaquer Napoleon mais si on n’a pas immédiatement le tems et les moyens pour assieger Lille, Valenciennes, Maubeuge etc. on ne doit pas négliger Ypres, Tournay et Mons qui leur sont opposés. Namur aussi doit avoir ses attentions.

Voilà mes idées en général sur le meilleur système à suivre pour ce que regarde les détails, la position indiqué de Nivelles etc. paroît au bon endroit d’attendre d’autant plus que tout le pays entre Fleurus et Genappe est très favorable pour les opérations de la cavallerie [sic] et cela ne vous été pas trop loin de la Meuse. Pour le reste le triangle formé par Ath, Mons et Tournay offre aussi des avantages – avantages toujours augmentant si on a le tems de les renforcer.”²⁹

On the 31st of March, Lowe wrote his report to Bunbury. It reads: “We are busy in making various arrangements here but they have not yet sufficiently developed themselves to enable me to give you a very accurate account of them. There has been until this day a very strong disposition to meet the French at the frontier, but this has given way to a more prudential system and it now seems resolved to give way a little in the first instance, should a large force advanced against us and to incline to the left so as to meet the cooperation of the Prussian

army, which has this day been invited to cross the Meuse and place itself in direct relation with us. The disposition however is not yet perhaps quite so perfect as could be desired. They are afraid I believe of letting too many of the Prussians into the country. I have just left the prince who told me he thought 30.000 would be as many as would be required. I replied that the more there were, the more decisive must be our advantages and general Müffling had [...] to me to say he could assemble 50.000 on the 1st. The prince has been communicating to general Kleist, but I know not precisely what he has been writing; however, there is now every hope we shall have a good appui in the Prussian army and that if Bonaparte should advance there may be a chance of his receiving such a check as may stagger all his future pretensions. We are not yet unfortunately sufficiently collected, but if two days more is given us shall be all concentrated between Ath and Enghien and .. the Prussians as I am willing to expect near Wavre [sic].³⁰ Their reply is not however yet arrived to the prince's propositions. It is trusted they are of such a nature as to have abated their resentment [?] which has been very strong. Had not their march been checked we should in this moment have been in absolute security and even an object of some alarm to our neighbours. The Dutch are coming up and the armies if they unite together will soon form a mass of 100.000 men exclusive of what may be left in the fortresses. After the 2nd or 3rd if the Prussian reply is favourable, everything I should conceive may be regarded as secure and about this time the duke of Wellington may be expected. The King entered Brussels yesterday.

In reply to your questions on the subject of Lille, there was a moment when there were scarcely any troops in it and the disposition favourable to the king. All this has changed. The tricolor flag is hoisted. The garrison by the last account of the numbers [...] in the accompanying paper.

All reports concur in stating the march of about 15 or 20.000 troops from Paris in addition to those in the garrisons and it is probable that since the last accounts from Paris, which were of the 26th, more troops have been marched down.

Prodigious efforts are expected from Bonaparte in raising troops. A very intelligent person who left Paris on the 26th and who was acquainted with a brother and some friends of Bertrand says it was conceived he might be able to organize 300 or 400.000 before the end of May; the whole of the prisoners almost having returned from Russia and elsewhere and all the youth from 15 to 35 having been born or educated with the name of Bonaparte and the French empire in their mouth.

You will see of what importance it is to gain time. Caulaincourt has gone to Vienna where it is to be .. he will not be received. His envoys and emissaries and the readiness there is to communicate with them is the main point to be dreaded. I am accordingly obliged for your kindness in respect to the officers of my department and particularly of Lt.col. Broke of whom I hear every person speak so highly. If Read [?] should return from America, I should be most happy to have his assistance and should esteem it a most particular favor your mentioning him.

I intended to have entered into more regular details by their opportunity but time has not admitted and hope therefore you will excuse this tardy communication.”³¹

At the same time, Colborne felt confident about the defensive situation: “The prince is much annoyed at Lord Bathurst's letter. He says with respect to sir Henry Clinton [...] he does not see any reason for consulting an officer whose talents and correct military ideas are only known at the Horse Guards.

However, I think everything must now go on well, even if we should be attacked before the arrival of duke of Wellington. Redoubts are to be immediately constructed at Hal, and on the roads where it may be necessary to halt and look about us. The whole will retire in three columns [...] and as the Prussians cross tomorrow and the Nassau brigade is at hand no disaster

can happen to us on the march. The guns at Tournai are not yet up. Of course the town will be abandoned should the advance of Napoleon take place immediately.

Ney is at Valenciennes and was at Condé yesterday. The salute on his arrival there caused a rumour of Bonaparte being arrived on the frontier. He was continued to circulate an address to the Belges reminding them of their former victories under him. The king and queen made their entrée yesterday and was really received with enthusiasm. The reports yesterday from Valenciennes calculate the troops marching on Lille at 10.000 and on Maubeuge at 5000. I think we must have nine or ten days more, before Napoleon can venture to attack us with any prospect of driving us from Brussels.”³²

On the 1st of April, Von Röder sent Lowe a memorandum in which he explained, from his side as well, why it would not be wise to accept a battle around Nivelles and that the option for one near Tirlemont was the better one to prevent the armies of being beaten separately.

Von Röder wrote: “Supposant ce qui me paroît probable que l’ennemi débouche avec toutes ses forces par Valenciennes et Condé, détachant sur Tournay et Mons pour attaquer ou bloquer ces deux places; et se dirigeant sur Bruxelles, il avancera le même jour jusqu’à Leuze et Ath, de là il se dirigera jusque vis à vis de la position qu’on a l’intention de prendre, et il tentera la bataille le lendemain ou tout au plus un jour plus tard. La nouvelle de son invasion peut arriver ici en quatre heures je suppose, il faut une heure pour l’expédition du courrier, qui doit la porter au général comte Kleist et qui en y mettant toute la célérité possible arrivera à Aix la Chapelle en 12 heures; avec le tems [sic] nécessaire pour l’expédition les ordres du général Kleist ne pourroient parvenir à la tête de nos troupes à Namur qu’en 12 heures; il faudroit encore au moins 24 heures avant que cette division fut en état de pouvoir s’avancer de Namur, car elle ne peut marcher que bien concentrée allant à l’ennemi enfin ce ne serait que par une marche des plus forcées qu’elle pourroit arriver en 24 heures après son départ de Namur à Nivelles, si encore cela est possible. D’après ce calcul cependant elle y seroit le 4^{me} jour, ou celui que je crois jour de bataille, au plus tard, une fois arrivée elle ferait son devoir quoique épuisée de forcer par une marche exagérée, mais elle ne seroit que de 5 ou 6 mille hommes. La division cantonnée aux environs de Huy n’arriveroit que la 5^{me} jour, celle à Liège le 6^{me} une autre entre Liège et Aix le 7^{me}, celle à Aix le 8^{me} jour et en proportion toutes les autres. Il paroît donc évident que dans la position où se trouve actuellement l’armée du bas Rhin et qu’elle n’ose pas quitter par des raisons majeures, avant d’être sur par où l’ennemi voudra pousser sa pointe, il lui sera toutjours [sic] impossible de se joindre à l’armée de la Belgique pour livrer une bataille entre Bruxelles et Valenciennes, et que toutes les tentatives qu’elle pourroit faire pour atteindre ce but ne serviroient qu’à la séparer en elle même, et à l’exposer à des revers ruineuses pour elle et nuisibles à la cause commune. Au lieu de ce projet dont je crois avoir démontré l’impossibilité le général comte Kleist assure et j’en répond [?] sur ma tête que toutes les forces disponibles de l’armée du bas Rhin avec 10 milles hommes de cavalerie et 200 canons au moins seront réunis aux environs de Tirlemont prêts à se joindre à l’armée de la Belgique si celle-ci juge convenable de se replier jusque là, et à aller au devant de l’ennemi conjointement avec elle pour lui livrer bataille si les circonstances le permettent et cela trois jours après l’arrivée de la nouvelle de l’invasion de l’ennemi commun.

Le général comte Kleist convient et qui pourroit le nier qu’il seroit avantageux de pouvoir opposer à Napoleon des forces suffisantes dès son entrée dans le pays pour l’en réchasser, tout de suite mais vu l’impossibilité absolue de les réunir tant en avant, il est de l’avis qu’il vaut mieux céder pour peu de jours afin de pouvoir tomber sur lui avec d’autant plus de vigueur, que de risquer d’être battu en détail, ce qui certainement seroit très fâcheux dans les circonstances actuelles où nous pouvons nous attendre à des renforts considérables jour par

jour, qui en peu de tems [sic] augmenteront nos forces à un point qui ne pourra plus laisser de doute sur le succès.”³³

It was more or less a repetition of the reasons as mentioned by Von Müffling on the 30th of March and came down to the fact that Prussian assistance would simply come too late to be of any use. The nearest units would need four days to reach the area, while others would need another four days.

Resulting, on the 1st of April, sir Hudson Lowe gave to Von Kleist his personal opinion which might, at least from the military point of view, have created an opening in the discussions. He writes: “Je viens de recevoir la lettre que votre excellence m’a adressée en date de hier et j’ai parlé au major du Moulin. J’ai aussi depuis reçu une note du général Röder où il met en avant tous les raisonnemens qu’on peut offrir contre l’idée de se réunir pour donner bataille aux Français dans le voisinage de Nivelles. Ces raisonnemens n’ont peut-être que trop de fondement mais elles n’empêchent pas de prendre une position plus à gauche sans nous retirer aussi loin que Tirlemont, ce qui leur cederait Bruxelles, Gand et les rives de l’Escaut sans onsatacle, et sans même aucune certitude, qu’ayany gagné ces points là, ils viendraient nous chercher dans notre position.

Ma première idée était de nous réunir plus à gauche vers Genappe ou Fleurus ou même vers Gembloux, avec égard au désir naturel de l’armée Prussienne de ne pas trop s’éloigner de la Meuse. Si on ne peut pas garder une position directement en front des endroits qu’en désire protéger, il se pourroit bien d’en garder une qui soit parallèle à celle du front afin de donner de quoi penser à un ennemi avant de pousser trop en avant. Ma première idée aussi étoit si nous ne pouvions pas nous unir entièrement dans un corps d’être assez proches de pouvoir nous réunir dans un ou deux jours. Les situations indiquées me paraissent offrir cet avantage, et dans la supposition que l’armée Prussienne étoit sur la Meuse elle pourroit également s’unir à nous à Tirlemont ou entre Gembloux et Genappe dans le temps indiqué. Ce sont les circonstances qui doivent commander et une position, qui pourroit mettre l’armée Prussienne dans le cas de se porter à tel point qu’elle voudroit, soit à Tirlemont soit aux derniers environs en un ou deux jours me paraît toujours la meilleure, calculant que nous marchons pour le rencontrer. Je n’ai pas encore parlé au prince et je ne prétende pas donner mes calculs comme positifs mais il me parait se important de ne pas donner à Bonaparte de quoi se vanter dans ses premières actes offensifs que je serois toujours d’avis de ne rien lui céder à moins d’être forcé, mais sans la coopération immédiate ou très voisine de l’armée Prussienne, nos efforts seuls seront impuissans. Tout cela est soumis à vos meilleurs réflexions, persuadé du sentiment du bien général, qui les dirigent et des droits que V.E. obtiendra toujours de plus en plus à l’estime publique et au respect et reconnaissance de tous ceux qui savent apprécier vos motifs.”³⁴

Von Kleist from his side, sent major Dumoulin, “an officer of distinction” and a man with diplomatic skills in order to bring about a breakthrough in the stalemate in the issue. And while Von Röder was a representative from the Prussian military, Dumoulin – a friend of Hardenberg – was meant to represent the Prussian government as to “vorläufig bis zur Beendigung des Kongresses beim Könige der Niederlande zu bleiben.” On the other hand, the Prussian envoy, Von Brockhausen, was at The Hague for already quite some time.

However, a smooth cooperation between Dumoulin and with the king was not to be, on the contrary. Mutual irritations created no atmosphere of progress at all and the double representation of Prussia only could make the situation more untransparent, neither for the king, nor for Von Röder.

After that, Lowe forwarded the memorandum to the prince and then the prince would finally have understood the issue for the Prussians: that they preferred to stay where they were as

long as the direction of the French threat was not clear. It implicated that a union of both armies through Namur would be impossible.³⁵

Zieten, having asked for permission from Von Kleist to occupy Namur was told to do so on the 1st of April and the result was that Zieten did so not long after. Yet, he left his main force between Huy and Havelange and from Namur he sent units to the west, south and east.

Zieten secured his left flank by posting his 1st regiment of Silesian hussars on the line Annevoie – St.Gérard – Fosses-la-Ville. At the same time, the Silesian uhlans observed Givet from Dinant and Bouvignes; it also observed the road from Bouillon to St.Hubert near Libin. A regiment of dragoons supported the outposts to the right of the Meuse near Ciney.³⁶

The same day, Henckel, with his brigade of cavalry, came up from Luxemburg to Bastogne.³⁷

While all these events took place, efforts by the British to prevent the prince of Orange from his initial plans to invade France continued. For instance on the 27th of March sir Charles Stuart wrote to the duke of Wellington: “[...] I have strongly urged [on the 25th of March] the prince of Orange to confine his present measures to the establishment of a system of cooperation with the Prussians and Dutch, and to avoid the commencement of hostilities under circumstances which may lead to unconnected efforts, committing government at a risk which no probable advantage can justify. Matters will, therefore, remain in their present state at this head quarters until your lordship’s arrival.”³⁸

And the day after, sir Charles Stuart wrote to viscount Castlereagh: “Although a system of perfect good intelligence is otherwise established with general Kleist, the proposal of that officer to pass the Meuse and to occupy the district between that river, the Sambre and the French frontier has not been admitted. The left bank of the Meuse, opposite Namur, is therefore the extreme point of the prince’s cantonments.

The whole British and Hanoverian force, with the exception of the troops which are necessary in the garrisons, are thrown forward so near the frontier as to cover the country, and to afford protection against any movement which Buonaparte may venture to make until the arrival of succours from England shall permit measures of farther precaution.”³⁹

While the prince of Orange was ought to act within strict instructions, the duke of Wellington, who was ready to leave for the Netherlands was given carte blanche. Earl Bathurst wrote him on the 28th of March:

“Your commission is ready, and will be sent out immediately. Your Grace’s arrival is necessarily uncertain, and the time presses so much that I have thought it advisable not to delay giving an instruction to the Hereditary Prince how to act; as I apprehend everything from his committing the army with Buonaparte.

Your Grace, however, will have the goodness to understand that whatever instructions you may find His Royal Highness in possession of, they are not to regulate your conduct, as you are left with full power to act in whatever way it shall appear to you most fit.”⁴⁰

The same day, the duke himself was also clear towards the prince on what he thought he was supposed to do or not: “I am about to send colonel Hartmann to you and have only to thank you for your communications. I recommended to you not to have your troops too far in advance. It is very easy to move forward if necessary, but very difficult and disagreeable circumstances as we are to fall back. I should think the Dutch army should be a little nearer to you than Maastricht.

I have already stated my opinion to you about any attempt on the French fortresses, and I conclude you will have had instructions either from England or from the king of the Low Countries regarding your conduct in case of the king of France calling for you. We must not forget what has happened in France of which I have reports up to the 20th inst. And we must not allow ourselves to be carried away by the expectations and reports of the royalists, that the military will support us, or even will not oppose us in any case.

I don't know how Your Royal Highness troops are equipped, but I recommend [...] camp kettles in preference to the others in every case. I shall be very much obliged to Your Royal Highness if you should have quitted Brussels if you will let me have a line from your secretary at that place.”⁴¹

On the 30th of March, the day he arrived in Brussels, sir Ch. Stuart wrote to the duke of Wellington: “You will see that I have spared no efforts to keep the prince quiet, which object has indeed been the principal motive of my journey to Brussels. The army under his command is, however, so weak and so ill-composed that it is impossible to place great confidence in their exertions unless we can depend upon the cordial cooperation of the whole Prussian corps under Kleist, being the result of directions from his Court, which entrust that officer entirely to your control. Under these circumstances, I leave you to judge of the extreme importance we all attach to your early arrival.”⁴² Meanwhile, the letter as written by the duke of Wellington on the 22nd of March from Vienna to the prince read: “be very cautious what you attempt on the French fortresses [...] to attempt in any manner and get possession of it might ruin our cause.”⁴³

By the 30th of March, the prince had also received Bathurst a secret dispatch which was pretty convincing on what he was not supposed to do, as colonel Colborne then wrote to Bunbury: “[...] The prince has received lord Bathurst's secret dispatch and I think no further caution is necessary relative to this army bringing on hostilities. [...]”⁴⁴ And by the 3rd of April he wrote him: “[...] Lord Bathurst may be assured that the prince is now determined to retire, the instant there is the least appearance of the advance of an enemy.[...]”⁴⁵

Last but not least, late March, lord Hill was sent to the Low Countries to restrain the prince. On the 28th of March, lord Bunbury wrote him: “[...] Bonaparte is on the frontier, but no large body of his troops yet arrived. Government is anxious you should go out immediately, as it is of the greatest importance that you should prevent any rash action, and also that you should persuade Louis to retreat upon Holland, rather than come to England.”⁴⁶

The same day, lord Bathurst gave him his instructions. He was to recommend to the prince the “utmost caution on the part of the forces under his command” and to assure him that it was deemed of the greatest importance that the prince's “army should be preserved in an efficient state, until a greater mass of force could be brought forward.” It was also urged, that it was not desirable “to maintain too advanced a position; and that it was more creditable, as well as more secure, to withdraw before the enemy had assembled such a force as could compel a retreat, rather than to risk then being obliged by their activity and numbers, to retire in such a manner as might produce an unfavourable effect upon the public mind.” Also, it was to be conveyed to him, as the pleasure of the prince Regent “that the army under his command should avoid any serious engagement, and should withdraw into more retired positions, which should be closer, with a view both to covering Antwerp and the Dutch frontier, and also to preserving a ready communication with the Prussian forces.” And the day after, he added: “In delivering to you a duplicate of my instructions of yesterday's date, I think it will be satisfactory to you that I should put down in writing the substance of the explanations with which I have accompanied it.

Your Lordship is aware that the instruction not to maintain so advanced a position is peremptory; but you know also that it was given under the impression that Bonaparte was collecting a force on the frontier. In the event of no such force being in progress, the obedience to the instructions becomes less urgent, if any positive advantage be derived from maintaining that position longer; but even on this supposition that no force is collecting, the measures for commencing a retrograde movement must be taken, so as to be able to execute it at any time. If a force be collecting, but no great progress made in it, the obedience to the instruction may be more gradual, but the commencement should not so depend; first, because the enemy has means of collecting a sufficient force to advance; and secondly, because the

change of position will be made with more advantage every way, when it appears to be, and in truth is, voluntary. The object of the instruction being not to risk an action, but not to risk, if it can be helped, the change of position with an enemy in force near you.”⁴⁷

Hill reached Brussels on the 1st of April and had that day a conversation with the prince of Orange about the situation. He reported on this conversation to earl Bathurst on the 2nd and 3rd of April: “I beg leave to acquaint Your Lordship that I arrived here yesterday evening, and immediately waited on the prince of Orange. I had a long conversation with His Royal Highness on the subject of the instructions which I received from Your Lordship.

It appears that the army under the prince is stationed as follows – head quarters at Bruxelles, the Dutch troops coming up towards Genappe, and the British Hanoverians at Tournay, Ath etc.[⁴⁸]

It also appears that the troops at and about the two last mentioned places have orders to retire in case of being attacked. Conceiving however that the British and Hanoverians are too far advanced, I did not fail to refer His Royal Highness to the late instructions, and to explain to him the conversation I had with your lordship on the subject – in consequence of which the prince has ordered the main body of the troops on the advanced line of Tournay to fall back tomorrow to Enghien, keeping their advance at Leuze and Lens, and occupying Tournay and Mons with garrisons if they are considered tenable.

This arrangement seems to be good for tomorrow but if the intelligence from the frontier is in any way threatening, I hope the prince will lose no time in bringing the troops farther back.

The prince informs me that he does not think the enemy are collecting in force on the frontier, and he does not seem to expect any attack. Your Lordship is aware that the King of the Netherlands is here, and from what I can learn, it is the anxious wish of His Majesty to preserve this place: a circumstance, no doubt, very desirable, though at the same time it ought not to be considered if it is to be effected by force. Indeed I am not aware that the prince has now any intention of making a stand to cover Brussels; and I shall do what I can do to prevent our coming in contact with the enemy in any way until we are in a better state to do so.

By accounts from Vienna I am told we have reason to expect and hope, that the duke of Wellington will be here in the course of a day or two. The prince of Orange begs me to mention, in case I should write to your lordship, though he will no doubt also write himself, that he never had any intention of fighting a battle on the frontiers near Tournay.

At the bottom of the letter, it read: 3rd April. Since writing the accompanying letter the Qr.Master Genl. has informed me that the movement on Enghien, alluded to in my letter of yesterday, did not take place this day, but is ordered for tomorrow.”⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Colborne wrote privately on the 28th of March to Bunbury in a more optimistic sense when it came down to the defence of the country, in case the prince would invade France from as he calls it a “rage militaire”: “It is reported that Bonaparte means to collect his troops at Beauvais and Compiègne. Bonaparte’s agents are very active in this country, and overtures have been made to some of the general officers non employed. The commandant at Mons is certainly in the plot, and probably the detection of him may lead to others being discovered.

You need not be alarmed about the prince of Orange’s rage militaire carrying him into France. Colonel Smyth thinks that Antwerp is at this moment perfectly defensible and that in three weeks Ostend, Nieuport and Ypres will require an enemy to undertake a serious siege and that Tournai will be a good post. It is intended that all regiments on their disembarking at Ostend, shall march in the first instance to Bruges to equip. The prince has heard from the duke of Wellington. The king of the Netherlands will be here tomorrow. [..]”⁵⁰

Observations.

After the Tirlemont proposal had been launched by the Prussians, the prince of Orange initially didn't want to react on it. It becomes clear the prince wanted to discuss the Prussian proposal with his father first before taking further steps. Apart from that, he hoped the situation would linger on until the duke of Wellington would arrive late March and that he would be the one to take definitive measures instead.

Clearly, he felt the proposal had strong military and political implications as it left open a major part of the Low Countries and Brussels to the French; further it would leave open the road to Antwerp, the line of retreat of the British.

After the 30th of March, the moment Willem arrived in Brussels, the prince of Orange followed the steps of his father: to protect Brussels from an invasion, and this by taking up a position between Nivelles and Braine le Comte with the British-Hanoverian forces, and the army of the Netherlands further to the rear, while the Prussians were expected to come to support from Namur towards Nivelles.

In this idea, the political aspect of the conservation of the major part of the realm and its capital dominated, let alone the disinclination of Willem to have the Prussians on his territory. He clearly wanted to compromise with them at least as possible.

The presence of sir Charles Stuart and possibly Wellington's influence may have helped to strengthen this idea. After all, the prince was in the service of the British.

Lowe approached the concept of Tirlemont strict militarily and in two steps. Personally, he evolved from the initial idea (on the 28th of March) of recognizing the strength of the position of Tirlemont in case the French would make a strong move against the prince, but in case the French wouldn't, he still made a plea for a more forward position.

But some days later (1st of April) he attempted to create an opening by further analyzing the situation from a strategic point of view by suggesting for the forces of the prince a position further east so as to unite both armies towards Genappe, Fleurus or even Gembloux.

And if a full union of both armies would not be possible in front of Brussels, what counted was to have at least the possibility of uniting in one or two days, either between Gembloux and Genappe, or even Tirlemont, depending on the circumstances. To unite, Lowe even did not exclude a retreat even further north, behind the Nethe river.

Lowe acted in this concept towards Von Röder on his own initiative without consulting the prince and this was quite fargoning; what Lowe saw was the vital need for cooperation with the Prussians in a much closer way as others did, so as to have any chance at all against a possible French offensive; it meant – cooperation was a *condition* for success.

Personally, Lowe well understood the reasons the Prussians had in their approach of the situation, while at the same time he looked at the overall picture of the situation, without omitting to look upon the interests of his own army. In fact on the 2nd of April he wrote to sir Henry Clinton: “[...] The armies of the allies on both sides of the Meuse are quite strong enough if acting together to infuse this spirit into them, and it becomes advisable therefore to put the best face on the matter without omitting any necessary precaution that our safety may require- if compelled to act independent of them.”⁵¹

Militarily, the situation was clearly in a stalemate as the Prussians did not want to leave the Meuse on the one hand, so as to keep their communication-lines. On the other hand, what mattered for that the Prussians too was that they did not want to give the British a motive to start doubting about their good intentions.⁵² The prince of Orange, on the other hand, influenced by his father and the British, clung to his idea to meet the enemy in front of Brussels, in the area between Grammont and Nivelles, with Mons and Tournai in front and Ath in the centre, and with Prussian support coming from Namur.

The fact that the prince felt confident in this idea can be taken from a secret letter he wrote on the 3rd of April to Lord Bathurst, which reads: "I have received your Lordship's dispatches of the 28th and 30th Ultimo, marked secret, from which I observe that your Lordship imagined the army under my command occupied a position at Tournai. It becomes necessary to explain to your Lordship, that the divisions of infantry are in cantonments at Lens and Ath, prepared for a retrograde movement.

I was induced to concentrate the troops in that neighbourhood because it is obvious they can be withdrawn unmolested behind the Nethes in two marches, whilst their forward cantonments would cover the Netherlands from the irruption of small corps on the side of France, and create in this country exertion and active measures, which can only continue by confidence and public opinion.

I am well aware of the importance and the necessity of preserving the allied army in an effective state for the great contest and of the imprudence of prematurely diminishing its strength by partial or general engagement. But, with correct information of Napoleon Buonaparte's present means and force, I must confess to your Lordship, I cannot perceive the risk of placing the British army in cantonments in the vicinity of Ath, six leagues from the most advanced post of any of the French fortresses on the frontier, with the Escaut on its right, the Dutch army at Soignies, Braine le Comte and Nivelles and the Prussians at Namur and Huy.

In consequence of your Lordship's dispatch of the 30th ultimo I have directed part of the British force to retire to Enghien.

The guns, ammunition and provisions are arrived at Tournai, and every exertion will be made to complete the works for its defence as recommended in your Lordship's dispatch of the 14th ultimo." ⁵³

On the 30th of March, Von Müffling wrote to Lowe: "Votre situation devient très délicate par l'arrivée du roi, qui naturellement voit le bien de Bruxelles avant le bien de l'Europe." ⁵⁴

It is this statement which pretty sums up the crux of the issue: the validity of the military (Prussian) and also the political arguments (Netherlands / British). ⁵⁵

For the Prussians the approach of the prince would result in an isolated action, as they felt they could not reach his forces in time as to deliver an effective support, either by actually joining the prince or by moving upon the French right flank, due to the distance between both armies.

For Von Kleist it was also a matter of self-preservation. His reasoning in this was that, by moving westwards as far as Nivelles or Braine le Comte, he didn't want to get – to use his own words – "embouché dans les défilés" or "engagé dans un terrain désavantageux." He used this argument to enhance his reasoning of having more suitable grounds near Tirlemont as in the region between Valenciennes and Brussels.

About this stalemate situation Von Müffling later wrote: "In den zu diesem Zweck angeordneten Conferenzen zwischen mir und sir Hudson Lowe, Chef des Generalstabes beim Prinzen von Oranien, legte Ich meinem tapfern Freund und Collegen eine Karte von Belgien vor, auf welcher ein fingerbreit rother Strich von Marchienne an der Sambre, längs der Dyle über Wavre bis Löwen gezogen war. Hier haben Sie, so deducirte Ich mit deutschem Pedantismus nach dem gegebenen Subject und Object die von der Natur vorgezeichnete strategische Demarcations-Line, ein westliches (Englisches), ein östliches (Preussisches) Fach. Mein Zweck wurde vollkommen erreicht. Wir kamen keinen Schritt weiter, und als Wellington eintraf wurde alles in den Akten genommen." ⁵⁶

The meetings of Lowe and Von Müffling, as mentioned by the latter, at this stage did not result in a demarcation-agreement as has been suggested, on the contrary. By sketching this line, and by confronting Lowe with it, Von Müffling wanted to show the extreme line the

Prussian army might be willing to hold when it came down to any assistance to the prince, and not any further. And it was also something he wanted it to be that way - even though Lowe from his side was willing to move over this line to the east, but he couldn't decide that way alone. Briefly, the line is the symbol of the stalemate of late March, in which it was hoped that Wellington was able to bring about a breakthrough.⁵⁷

On the 30th of March, Von Müffling described the principle of the pivot for the Prussian army. Resulting, the only option which remained for the Prussians was the one near Tirlemont as in that case the direction of the French attack would become clear in sufficient time for both armies to fall back to that position and to accept a joint battle.

Yet, even for the Prussian army from its new positions, the time-frame to get there was in the most optimal scenario about 72 hours, as Von Müffling wrote on the 30th of March in his memorandum for king Willem: "Demgemäss habe die Armee des Niederrheins eine Stellung einzunehmen, welche ihr erlaube, am 1. April in den Ebenen von Tirlemont zu erscheinen, sobald die Meldung eingegangen sei, dass Bonaparte die Niederländer aufsuche. Eine solche Stellung bedinge: dass sie nicht einen Seitenabmarsch unmöglich mache (für den Fall dass Napoleon sich gegen den Oberrhein wende), und dass sie sich nicht über die Maas ausdehne, um dem Feinde den diesseitigen Plan nicht zu enthüllen. Man habe nun eine Örtlichkeit gefunden, welche diese Bedingungen erfülle und der Armee gestatte, in dreimal 24 Stunden, nach Eintreffen der Angriffsmeldung zu Aachen, mit Massen auf dem Schlachtfelde von Neerwinden zu erscheinen. Aber dies lasse sich nur durch grösste Anspannung bewerkstelligen." It is the same scheme as he had sketched on the 25th of March to sir Hudson Lowe.

Von Kleist, Von Röder and Von Müffling saw the only chance of victory in the strict military approach, i.e. leaving Brussels to the French for a moment, thereby at the same time creating the mutual support for a combined battle in the position of Tirlemont.⁵⁸

At the same time, they were so opportunistic to make sure that any negative results of such a battle could be kept to a minimum. In this way, it afforded them to keep a line to the Meuse and thereby a line of retreat, but about the fate of the prince's forces no word is spoken. The Prussians may have presumed they would join the Prussian army to the east, or that they would fall back upon Antwerp or Maastricht.

As far as his general position was concerned, the key for Von Kleist was to be able either to move towards Tirlemont in time, if this would prove necessary so as to receive the forces of the prince of Orange and to offer a combined battle, or to move on Napoleon's flank in case Napoleon would move upon the Upper Rhine after all. What counted was the certainty of the French direction of the attack, before taking further steps on any movements. In this context, the argumentation of the Prussians was ambiguous. Initially, Von Kleist did not want to leave Jülich as assembly point as long as the point of a possible French attack was unclear. The moment Napoleon reached Paris, however, it was a reason for him to disengage himself from Jülich and to approach the Meuse.

However, once in this position, the same argument was used again towards the prince of Orange and also in combination with the proposal for a battle near Tirlemont: his reluctance to leave the Meuse as long as the definitive direction of the French attack was uncertain. This uncertainty, coupled to the position chosen by the prince near Braine le Comte and Nivelles would make it impossible for the Prussians to arrive in time to support him there in a combined battle.

The prince's attitude, in the meantime, turned from an offensive more to the defensive, and this clearly had to do with the lobby which had been set in by the British to prevent him from invading France. Eventually, it was lord Hill who had the mission to prevent the prince from any rash action and from provoking the French in any way by maintaining a forward position, thereby showing at the same time the weakness of his own forces.

In this sense, the lobby had gradually changed from a prevention of an invasion into one aimed at a more distant attitude towards the French frontier, which the prince eventually complied to by pulling his forces back to Enghien, and while keeping an advance line at Leuze and Lens and occupying Tournay and Mons with garrisons, in case they were considered tenable.

Additionally, the British did not have a high esteem of the prince's strength and only saw any chance of success in a more concentrated position and one which made it possible to preserve communication with the Prussian army.⁵⁹ In the two weeks which had passed, the forces of the prince had undergone apparently not enough improvement, despite the complaints and requests of its commander. Negotiations about the different options continued through all possible channels since 25th of March until the first few days of April; these channels were not only in correspondence of all those involved, but also in meetings (the prince of Orange and Von Röder had meetings on a daily base).

In this, it is striking that Von Kleist did not enter into the prince's proposal to meet so as to discuss matters. In Von Kleist's view, this is where Von Röder was for and he had handed it all over to him. After that, the prince probably did not push through to meet Von Kleist. All in all, the result was that up to the moment the duke of Wellington came to Brussels there was no clear agreement on a cooperation of both armies to defend the Low Countries.

Eventually, the "Namur-affair" was basically a political issue in which the military element became secondary and which was based upon a lack of coordination between the prince of Orange and his father.

Willem used it over the shoulders of his son, but eventually had to understand that he couldn't do without the Prussians to protect his realm. The affair, however, only did unnecessary extra harm to the already problematic relations between the king and the Prussians and it only distracted and delayed both allied commanders from the main activities they were supposed to deploy: to design a common strategy for the protection of the Low Countries.⁶⁰

The prince of Orange, for himself, ultimately felt confident that if things would go loose on him, the Prussians would always be willing to support him, one way or the other. In general, the will to design such a strategy was there, but the question which remained was how. All hopes were aimed at the new commanders to arrive: Wellington and Gneisenau.

The role of Von Röder.

In looking back to the pre-Wellington / Gneisenau period, Von Röder clearly saw the political implications of the presence of the Prussian army in the Low Countries and the role of king Willem, and, resulting, the impossible role of his son in between him and the Prussians.

At the same time he saw the uncertainty within the army under the command of the prince what to do; while the prince tended to offer a battle near Braine le Comte and Nivelles, Lowe tended to take this concept further east, towards Gembloux or even Fleurus. Yet, Von Röder also saw that this approach came from Lowe alone, but at the same time he regarded him as an intelligent, but more or less isolated person within the staff of the army and his political environment. As such, he was unable to convince the prince and his environment of his own ideas of the cooperation with Von Kleist and this was the cause that Von Röder couldn't use him in his lobby for the interest of his country.

It had already been in the autumn of 1814 that Lowe, as an admirer of the Prussian military, had pleaded to Von Kleist and Von Müffling that the Prussian army would undertake to the defence of the Meuse and not so much the Rhine, while having then a mixed German and British force to garrison the Belgian fortresses. At the same time he saw the risk of locking up the British / German army into places which could be isolated, but to prevent this he saw the clear need to cooperate with the Prussians.⁶¹

As for the general Prussian concept, Von Röder underlined Von Kleist's general idea: to keep the Prussian army on the Meuse as long as the direction of a serious French offensive was not clear, and so to afford it maximum flexibility to operate to its right or left. For Von Röder, as translator of the Prussian military idea of the situation, the concept of the choice for the position near Tirlemont was the best suitable for a complete union of both armies in case Napoleon would fall in strength upon the prince's forces. Eventually, however, what counted for him was to be united and in agreement at the decisive moment, either at Tirlemont or through Namur to the west. What counted was cooperation.⁶²

Yet, in his argumentation Von Röder gives the impression as if it was purely from the side of the prince that he asked for Prussian support on one side, while at the same time he refused to have the Prussians advance far into the territory of the Low Countries on the other.

The most vital Prussian argument, however, is not mentioned here: that the Prussians didn't want to leave the Meuse.

As for his position, Von Röder had the impression to be careful in all what he did while he himself had insufficient means to make real progress. The Prussian concept had made it clear at least what the prince would do in case the French would attack. For Von Röder it meant that he had the feeling that it was important to maintain good relations, but at the same time he felt he had to take account with all kinds of people and ideas and that he was "walking on eggs" which wasn't his personal style.⁶³

What the prince of Orange did was basically compromising two interests: on the one hand the Prussian presence along the Meuse, not entering the Low Countries and thereby meeting the demands of his father, and on the other hand the option to have their support for a combined battle near Braine le Comte / Nivelles then by moving through Namur into the Low Countries either to join in with him or to fall upon the French right flank.⁶⁴

As Von Röder saw it, this was quite an impossible position. Even if the prince would have considered to tend to the concept of the Tirlemont proposal, this would be "not done" for his father and the British. The Namur-affair is a typical example of an incident resulting from the difficult position he was in. The prince succeeded in having Von Kleist advance up to Namur, but obviously, as the Prussians made it clear, this was militarily no option as the gap between the armies was far too large to prevent Napoleon from destroying the prince's forces before the Prussians could reach them to prevent it.

All in all, it was a naive idea to believe that a combined action could be fought near Braine le Comte – Nivelles after all in the way the prince had designed it. Clearly, the strategical alternative as offered by the Prussians, a combined battle near Tirlemont, might militarily have been a better one, but it was politically impossible. Yet, this option also still had its risks for Von Kleist as it would take his forces, in the most favourable circumstances, about 72 hours to get there.

From his side, the prince, with his pre-occupation of a French attack as coming from Valenciennes, seems to have totally disregarded a possible threat upon the Upper Rhine and in that sense did not take into account Prussian interests in any way whatsoever. Influenced from all sides, the prince's offensive ambitions gradually decreased from bold to absent and this was for that moment in time the best development the coalition could have as any offensive into France would not only militarily, but also politically have been disastrous. Apart from the fact that this action would be too weak and too isolated, and therefore unsuccessful, it would only strengthen Napoleon's position and would therewith disrupt the process to overthrow Napoleon.

Von Kleist comes out as a careful, but at the same time determined man, with a clear view on the interests of his country, without losing the total picture of the situation.⁶⁵ Eventually, he advanced as far as Namur, but there the process stranded and dragged on in time until Gneisenau stepped in. In this context fits the mission of Dumoulin. Though Dumoulin might

have had diplomatic skills, and as Von Kleist might have felt the lack of progress and therefore the need to send him out, this mission was a mere repetition of what had already been done in the negotiations and this second representative could only create confusion. As such, the mission did not add anything material on the arguments which had already been exchanged.⁶⁶

It would not be fair to compare the prince of Orange and Von Kleist to Wellington and Gneisenau respectively, as having to deal with the stalemate which had arisen early April. Though Wellington clung to Brussels, as the prince did, and Gneisenau - initially - clung to Tirlemont, as Von Kleist did, both men had different assignments from their kings and therefore different full-powers to act. Let alone the fact of course that both men had a different character and status.

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¹ Reports of Von Röder as mentioned by Von Pflugk Harttung. In: Bundestruppen p.28
Apparently, these were written to Gneisenau, as they were in the archive of Gneisenau.

² Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.30-31

³ Cf. Von Kleist's letter as given below. In: KHA. A.40.VI.C.k9
Hofschröer erroneously believes it did take place, but neither gives a date, nor any details of it. In: 1815. The Waterloo campaign etc. p.93

On the 27th of March, the day of the meeting between Von Röder and Hudson Lowe, the prince was out to his posts at Mons. Cf. Hudson Lowe to Von Müffling. In: Holland Rose, J. - Sir H.Lowe etc. p.521-522

⁴ In the original copy there is only the letter T, the remainder is left blank.

BL, Add.ms.80.775

Cf. English translation in: Sir H.Lowe etc. p.521

⁵ BL, Add.ms.80.775 and 20.192

English translation in: Holland Rose, J. - Sir H.Lowe etc. p.521-522

The Nethe river is the Grote Nete, a river flowing east-west from Sonnis to Antwerp, where it falls into the Scheldt.

⁶ According to sir Ch.Stuart, however, Von Kleist would have proposed to pass the river Meuse and to occupy the district between that river, the river Sambre and the French border. In his letter to viscount Castlereagh, 28th of March. In: WSD, Vol.IX p.630 and NAK, FO 37/78

⁷ KHA. A.40.VI.C.k9

⁸ Doullens is at about 150 kilometres north west of Paris, between Amiens and Arras.

⁹ BL, Add.ms.80.775 and 20.192 and 37.052 f.103

English translation in:Holland Rose, J. - Sir H.Lowe etc. p.521

¹⁰ On the 28th of March, the Staatscourant (newspaper) announced Willem's departure from Den Haag for Brussels.

¹¹ BL, Add.ms. 37.052 f.97-102

¹² BL, Add.ms.80.775 and 20.192 f.206 and 37.052 f.104

De Bas erroneously dates the document on the 30th of May. In: La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.257-258

¹³ Pflugk Harttung, J.von Bundestruppen etc. p.36

All this is probably based upon the reports of Von Röder.

¹⁴ Von Kleist to Lowe, 30th March 1815. In: BL, Add.ms.20.192

¹⁵ The citation comes from the description as given by Von Pflugk Harttung. In: Bundestruppen p. 37-38

Cf. Lettow Vorbeck, O.von - Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.137-138

Ollech, Von - Geschichte etc. p.8-9

The full version in French can be found in: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6211 and in BL, Add.ms.20.192 f.22

¹⁶ De Perponcher, adjutant of king Willem, would have been sent to Aachen by the prince of Orange, but when and for what reason remains unclear. Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von Bundestruppen etc. p.38

¹⁷ Cf. Kleist to king Willem, 30th March 1815. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6211

¹⁸ Louis Joseph of Bourbon or Louis V (August 9, 1736 – May 13, 1818) was Prince of Condé from 1740 to his death. He was the only son of Louis Henry I and Charlotte or Caroline of Hesse-Rotenburg. Louis Joseph occupied an important place in the French court, where he was Chief of the House of the King. He was also Governor of Burgundy and a general in the French army. Louis was forced to escape from the country during the French Revolution to avoid prison and trial. This decision proved right, since during the *Terror* all the Bourbons living in France were arrested (cf. Philippe Egalité, Duke of Orléans, executed in 1793). He spent his exile in England, where he married for the second time with another refugee Marie-Catherine de Brignole-Sale, but sometime in the early 19th century, Louis returned to Paris, where he died in 1818.

¹⁹ BL, Add.ms.20.192 f.214-215 and 37.052 f.105-106

²⁰ BL, Add.ms.20.192 f.216-217

²¹ NAK, FO 37/78

²² In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.40

Earlier that day, Zieten had still written to Von Kleist:

“.. aus Lüttich geht soeben die Nachricht ein dass holländische Truppen am linken Maasufer zwischen Namur und Huy eine Cantonierung beziehen sollen, auch in Namur ein Haupt-Quartier des Prinz von Oranien ankommen soll. Ich sende sofort nach Namur um mich genauer davon zu unterrichten, behalte mir vor Euer Exc.den weiteren Bericht deshalb gehorsamst vorzulegen.” In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.I.nr.9 p.3

²³ In: Ollech, Von - Geschichte etc. p.9

²⁴ In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.40-41

He bases himself upon the document in the former Kriegsarchiv (nr.VI.C.3.I.41)

²⁵ BL, Add.ms.80.775 and 20.192 f.212

English translation in: Holland Rose, J. - Sir H.Lowe etc. p.523

²⁶ Von Pflugk Harttung clearly quotes from such a letter, and not from the one to sir Hudson Lowe, which he probably didn't have access to. In: Bundestruppen etc. p.41

²⁷ In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.56-57 (from archive Gneisenau KA, A.45.40)

²⁸ BL, Add.ms.80.775 The document bears no date.

²⁹ BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.55-56

³⁰ This is puzzling. He probably means Namur, or makes the connection to the Dutch who were expected around Wavre.

³¹ BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.111-113

³² BL, Add.ms. 37.052 f.115-116

³³ KHA, A40 XIII 28

The document itself has no addressee, but Lowe is mentioned by Von Pflugk Harttung. In: Bundestruppen etc. p.44 Other than that, the covering note is in English / French stating: “April 1st , Brussels. General de Roder.Projet.”

³⁴ BL, Add.ms.80.775 and 20.192 f.218-219 and f.223-225

English translation in: Holland Rose, J. - Sir H.Lowe etc. p.524

³⁵ Report of Von Röder dated 2nd of April as referred to by Von Pflugk Harttung. In: Bundestruppen p.40-41

³⁶ Ollech, Von - Geschichte etc. p.9

The 1st regiment of Silesian hussars came in outposts at the Meuse on the 2nd of April. It had passed Liège on the 26th of March. Cf. Wechmar, Von Braune Husaren etc. p.59

³⁷ Ollech, Von - Geschichte etc. p.9

³⁸ WSD, Vol.IX p.628

³⁹ WSD, Vol.IX p.630
NAK, FO 37/78

⁴⁰ WSD, Vol.X p.5

⁴¹ KHA, A.40.C.w10

⁴² WSD, Vol.X p.8

⁴³ KHA.A.40.VI.c.w10

Wellington also mentioned these words the same day to sir Charles Stuart as: [...] "I have written by this occasion to the hereditary prince of Orange to beg him to be very cautious in what he does regarding the French fortresses. An incautious step there might ruin the cause, and no step can do us much good. [...]" In: HL, MS61 WP SA68.12W4

⁴⁴ BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.109

⁴⁵ BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.117-118

⁴⁶ Sidney, E. - The life of lord Hill p.297-298

⁴⁷ Sidney, E. - The life of lord Hill p.298-299
Sidney had access to Hill's papers, as those of Bathurst amongst them.

⁴⁸ On the 25th of March two battalions of the 1st and 3rd Foot Guards were moved from Brussels to Enghien, and one day later they moved further down to Ath. By the 4th of April, the brigade of Foot Guards returned to Enghien, however. In: Hamilton, F.W. - The origin and history of the first of grenadier guards. Vol.III p.8-9

⁴⁹ BL, Add.ms.35.060 p.395-396 and 37.052 f.140-141

⁵⁰ BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.107-108

⁵¹ BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.57

⁵² Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.42

⁵³ NAK, WO1 / 205.1 p.13-16

The army of the Netherlands was placed in positions mentioned in the period 11th – 14th of April (see below).

⁵⁴ In: Bas.F.de - La campagne de 1815 Vol.I p.257-258
De Bas erroneously dates the document on the 30th of May, and as being written to Howe. He took it from:
BL, Add.ms.20.192 p.206-207

⁵⁵ Hussey regards this statement as a trace of the "Kleist / Müffling tenet" still lingering on, in relation to the approach of Gneisenau to move westwards towards Wellington, but the day this was written (30th of March), Gneisenau hadn't arrived yet. In: Defending Brussels etc. p.17

⁵⁶ Von Müffling - Aus meinem Leben p.223-224

⁵⁷ Hussey erroneously marks the demarcation-description as an agreement, but for the reason above this is incorrect. In: The Tirlmont meeting etc. p.18

⁵⁸ At some point Von Pflugk Harttung suggests as if Von Kleist did not fully adhere the Tirlemont proposal because of his fear of moving too far to the west, yet it becomes clear, for instance from his letter written to the king on the 25th of March, that he did. In: *Bundestruppen* p.31

Hussey states as if Von Müffling was primarily concerned about the Rhine, Mainz etc. and that he “discounted Belgium as Napoleon’s primary objective” and that “in order to protect Germany he was resigned to seeing most of Belgium abandoned.” Yet, this abandoning of a part of Belgium was just the way of making a destruction of Napoleon’s forces possible. In this way, the proposal for Tirlemont was not only designed for the protection of Germany only, but also of Belgium, yet thereby temporarily compromising in a retreat of the forces of the prince towards Tirlemont. In: *Defending Brussels etc.* p.16

⁵⁹ Cf. the instructions of prince Regent to lord Hill, for the prince of Orange.

⁶⁰ The total delay was about one week (from about the 24th until the 31st of March).

⁶¹ Gregory, D. - Napoleon’s jailer p.101-102

⁶² Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von – *Bundestruppen* p.43

⁶³ Pflugk Harttung, J.von - *Bundestruppen* p.45

⁶⁴ In the meantime, however, the prince had issued instructions to survey the areas between Brussels, Hannut and Liège and the one between Wavre, Gembloux, Fleurus and Genappe, probably because of possible movements here.

⁶⁵ Pflugk Harttung, J.von - *Bundestruppen* p.59-60

⁶⁶ Pflugk Harttung, J.von - *Bundestruppen* p.43-44