

## 2<sup>nd</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> of April

### Introduction.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April general Von Röder was invited to dine with king Willem I. About this meeting, Von Röder reported to Von Kleist on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April:

“Der König der Niederlande hat mich gestern nach der Tafel bei Seite genommen, um seine üble Laune an mich auszulassen. Ich würde Ihm gar nicht Stich gehalten haben, da ich mit Ihm nichts zu thun habe, sondern mich lediglich beim Erbprinzen als commandirenden General der Armee in Belgien angestellt ansehe, und daher alle Verhandlungen mit dem Könige unmittelbar dem eigends dazu beauftragten major du Moulin überlassen kann, allein Fagel bat mich dringend darum, mich in Erläuterungen gegen Ihn einzulassen, weil du Moulin durchaus nichts ausrichte, indem Sie schon durch viele vorhergehende Geschichten airgirt wären, und sich daher bei jeder Verhandlung echauffirten und so keiner den Andern verstände.

Seine Majestät wurden einige Mal etwas heftig, allein da ich durchaus ruhig blieb, und Ihm mit aller möglichen Kälte die Unmöglichkeit bewies, dass Ew.Excellenz anders verfahren könnten, so besänftigten Allerhöchstdieselben sich nach und nach und wir schieden als so gute Freunde, dass der König mich ersuchte “wenn er sich zu heftig geäußert habe, davon keine Notiz zu nehmen, und es darauf zu rechnen, dass es ihm natürlich sehr wehe thun müsse, einen Theil seines Landes dem Feinde Preis zu geben. Da Kräfte genug vorhanden wären, dies zu verhindern, wenn man sie nur vereinigt brauchen wollte, und dass er uns weit mehr für die Erhaltung als für die Wieder-Eroberung dankbar sein würde.”

Der Erbprinz, bei dem ich heute früh wie gewöhnlich war, um seine Befehle zu vernehmen, war sehr heiter, er äusserte: “es thue Ihm zwar sehr leid, dass er mit Ew.Excellenz darüber nicht völlig sich einigen können, wie und wo Sie gemeinschaftlich agiren würden, dass er aber eigentlich darüber doch keinen grossen Kummer hege, weil er innerlich fest überzeugt sei, dass, wenn es losgeht, Ew.Excellenz ihn gewiss nicht im Stich lassen würden.” Diese wenigstens artige Äusserung habe ich nicht anders, als auch mit Versicherungen unseres guten Willens erwidern können.”<sup>1</sup>

And on the 4th of April Von Röder sent a resumé of the overall situation to Gneisenau: “Ew.Excellenz ist es bekannt, dass bald nach der Nachricht der schnellen Fortschritte von Bonaparte, der hier in Belgien commandirende Erbprinz der vereinigten Niederlande, bei der Unzulänglichkeit der ihm damals zu Gebote stehenden Vertheidigungs-Mittel, seine einzige Stütze und Rettung in der Hülfe suchte, die er von der Nieder-Rheinischen Armee erwartete, und dringend erbat. Diese Lage und nahe Gefahr drohende Nachrichten, machten ihn und seine englischen General so nachgebend, dass sie ohne allen Widerspruch, in die Vorschläge eingingen, die ihnen von unserer Seite gemacht wurden, und die in Allgemeinen darinnen bestanden, dass die Armee vom Nieder-Rhein sich in der möglichst kürzesten Zeit in der Gegend von Tirlemont aufstellen würde, um sich dort mit der Armee in Belgien zu vereinigen, wenn diese sich bis dahin vor einem überlegenen feindlichen Angriff zurückzöge. Hierbei wurde die Besetzung von Namur durch unsere Truppen festgesetzt. Kaum erschienen jedoch beruhigende Nachrichten, so schien man hier schon auch Ansichten und Pläne zu ändern. Der Erbprinz, der uns Namur ohne Zustimmung seines Vaters eingeräumt hatte, mochte von diesen vielleicht Vorwürfe bekommen haben, und beging nun die Ungeschuchlichkeit, diesen Schritt zurückzunehmen, worüber sämmtliche hiesige Engelländer [sic] auch sehr unzufrieden waren, und meinen Klagen beistimmten. Unterdessen kamen einige englische Regimenter und Artillerie in Ostende an, man erhielt die Gewissheit, dass unter allen Umständen der Feind einen schnellen Angriff nicht mit mehr als 50-60 Tausend Mann machen könne; es erwachte daher sehr lebhaft der Wunsch, sich mit aller

Macht zwischen der Grenze und Brüssel entgegen zu stellen, und in der Gegend von Ath, oder wie beschlossen wurde in der von Braine le Comte und Nivelles und endlich bei Fleurus eine Bataille zu liefern. Uns wollte man gern so in der Nähe haben, dass wir erforderlichen Falls dabei sein könnten, jedoch auch bis dahin nicht ganz auf hiesigen Boden zu stehen kämen, daher die Propositionen von der Aufstellung à cheval auf der Maas, und dem Vordringen gegen Nivelles im Falle eines Angriffs. Um nicht ganz unbillig zu sein, muss man wohl zugeben, dass dem Könige der Niederlande wünschenswerth ist, den Feind je eher, je lieber aus dem hiesigen Lande vertrieben zu sehen, und dass es für ihn ein wesentlicher und empfindlicher Verlust, sowie für Bonaparte ein grosser Vortheil sein würde, wenn dieser gleich von Anfang sich der Hauptstadt und aller ihrer Ressourcen bemächtigen und hier den Heerd einer Revolution etabliren könnte, wozu es an Materialien wahrlich nicht fehlt, anderer Seits aber hat dieser König so beschränkte und engherzige Ansichten und Präentionen, dass er keine grosse Rücksichten verdient. So lange indessen sein Sohn, der Erbprinz hier commandirt, ist es ganz unmöglich zu verhindern, dass er bei Allem mitspricht und sich das Ansehen giebt, als sei er der Allein herrschende, wodurch er auf jeden Fall der guten Sache schaden wird und dies um so mehr, da er die Preussen im Allgemeinen von Grund der Herzens hasst. So hat er sich gegen den bei ihm angestellten Major Dumoulin erst gestern sehr darüber geäussert, dass ihm von dem Einrücken der preussischen Truppen in Namur keine besondere Meldung gemacht worden ist, obwohl dieses Einrücken auf besondern erneuerten Antrag des Erbprinzen und mit ausdrücklicher Zustimmung des Königs erfolgt ist. Überigens konnte weder ich noch Dumoulin ihm hierüber eine Meldung machen, da wir es beide erst hier zufällig erfahren haben, indessen dürfte es doch wohl vielleicht rathsamer sein, in günstigen Fällen hierin lieber zu viel als zu wenig Förmlichkeiten zu beobachten, um der verdriesslichn Majestät allen und jeden Vorwand zu benehmen. Die Engelländer [sic] wünschen uns ebenfalls besser vor, jedoch würden sie sich bis dahin begnügen, uns ohngefähr in gleicher Höhe mit Brüssel, etwa in der Gegend von Gembloux zu haben, wie dies auch, so viel ich weiss, neuerdings der General Lowe an General Müffling geschrieben hat, und überhaupt scheint mir auch zwischen den engeländischen und niederländischen Ansichten eine bedeutende Differenz obzuwalten, wenigstens stimmen der Erbprinz mit Lowe nicht sehr überein, allein ich glaube, dass auch den Engelländern darum nicht zu trauen ist, weil sie im Fall eines Nachtheils sich wahrscheinlich auf Antwerpen zurückziehen und dadurch ihr Interesse von dem Unsrigen trennen würden, wenn sie sich hierüber auch nicht deutlich ausspreche, so habe ich doch manche Gründe, bei dieser Vermuthung stehen zu bleiben. Ich habe nun, so viel ich es vermag, alle Welt zu überzeugen gesucht, dass die Rhein-Armee ihre gegenwärtige Stellung nicht eher verlassen darf, als bis der Angriffspunkt entschieden sein wird, und dass sie folglich auch nirgends anders in kürzerer Zeit vereinigt sein kann als bei Tirlemont, von wo aus sie sich mit Freuden mit der Armee von Belgien verbinden, und bereit sein wird, mit dieser Angriffsweise zu verfahren, wenn es die Umstände zuliessen. Den König ausgenommen, der nicht unbefangen sein will, ist es mir ziemlich geglückt, die übrigen agirenden Personen zu beruhigen und zu überzeugen, zu diesen Personen gehört nun auch der Lord Stuart, englischer Gesandter im Haag, der hier ein wesentliches Wort mitspricht und den ich glaube, gewonnen zu haben. Alles dies ist indessen nur so lange gut, als die Gefahr nicht naht, denn ich sehe nicht ein, wie diese verschiedenen Potenzen, bei denen unendlichen respectiven Rücksichten je einig genug werden können, um einen ganz festen Beschluss zu fassen und nach diesem zu handeln. Darum seufzt Alles ohne Ausnahme nach dem Messias Wellington, der auch wohl dem alten jungen Monarchen den Kopf zurechtsetzen wird. Der Erbprinz ist ein liebenswürdiger junger Herr von ausserordentlicher Thätigkeit, sowohl in seinen Geschäften, als auch bei Anweisung und Besichtigung der Truppen und Plätze, er hat sich hier sehr beliebt gemacht; auch gilt er viel bei den Soldaten. Sein hiesiges Verhältnis ist jedoch drückend, als commandirender General geräth er in beständige Collisionen mit seinem

Vater, und als General steht er zwischen den Engländern und Niederländern, die gleiche Ansprüche auf ihn machen. Er ist zwar im Herzen ganz englisch gesinnt, allein ich glaube doch, dass er nach der Ankunft Wellington's die Truppen seines Vaters allein commandiren wird. General Lowe, der von allen hiesigen Militairs die hellsten Ansichten hat, scheint nicht immer in dem allerbesten Vernehmen mit dem Prinzen zu sein, auch beschränkt er sich lediglich auf das, was sein Posten erheischt, ohne sonst persönlichen Einfluss zu haben. So dass sich durch ihn durchaus nichts insinuiren lässt, vielmehr sucht er zuweilen dem Prinzen etwas durch mich einfließen zu lassen, und warnt bei jeder Gelegenheit, dass man es sich nicht soll merken lassen mit ihm über die Sache gesprochen zu haben, übrigens ist er ein braver Mann ohne Falsch und er es mit uns sehr gut meint.<sup>2</sup>

And on the 5th of April, Von Röder wrote to Gneisenau at 8 p.m. "Ew.Excellenz werden aus einem von dem duc Wellington selbst erhaltenen Schreiben [<sup>3</sup>] ersehen, dass auch er nun ganz der Meinung ist, dass man den Feind nicht nach Brüssel lassen, sondern zwischen diesem Orte und der Grenze sich vereinigt aufstellen, und schlagen soll. Ich habe alle Gründe dagegen angeführt, die mir bis jetzt bekannt geworden sind, allein der Duc scheint einen unendlich hohen Werth auf den moralischen Effect zu legen, den ein Rückzug, mit Preisgeben der Hauptstadt zur Folge haben würde. Er hofft mit Gewissheit, dass Ew.Excellenz seinen Vorschlägen bestimmen werden, und schien die Einwendungen, die ich machte, als nur von mir kommend zu betrachten. Ich wünsche für die gute Sache, dass Ew. Excellenz nicht zu einem absoluten Refus genöthigt werden mögen, denn dies würde ohne Zweifel hier einen sehr übeln Eindruck machen."<sup>4</sup>

And one day later it was also major Dumoulin who reported back to Gneisenau: "Ew.Excellenz Ankunft zu Aachen hätte ich, aus mehreren Rücksichten, recht sehr gern gewünscht daselbst abwarten zu können, allein Seine Excellenz der General Herr Graf von Kleist fanden es für notwendig, mich in aller Eile wieder abreisen zu lassen. Man verlangte hiesigerseits, dass die preussischen Truppen sich dermassen konzentrieren möchten, dass sie in einem Tage mit der engländisch-niederländischen Armee vereinigt sein könnte. Ich sollte das Unzweckmässige dieser Bewegung unter den damaligen Umständen dartun; allein alle Gründe, die der Herr General v.Röder und ich aufgestellt, haben keinen Eingang gefunden; man hat sogar die Weigerung zu diesem Schritt sehr ungünstig aufgenommen. Jetzt besteht man nach der Ankunft des Herzogs von Wellington neuerdings darauf, so wie Ew.Excellenz solches aus dem gestrigen Schreiben des Generals v.Röder werden zu ersehen geruhet haben. Ich habe in diesem Augenblick mit der ganzen Sache nicht viel zu tun, indem der Herr General v.Röder die bei dem Prinzen von Oranien eigentlich akkreditierte Person ist.

Überhaupt sind meine gegenwärtigen Verhältnisse äusserst unbestimmt und unangenehm. Der allerhöchsten Bestimmung zufolge sollte ich vorläufig bis zur Beendigung des Kongresses beim Könige der Niederlande verbleiben. Als die Ereignisse in Frankreich eintraten, habe ich den Herrn Kriegsminister v.Boyen, Excellenz, sogleich um Verhaltensbefehle gebeten, aber bis auf diesen Augenblick habe ich noch keine Antwort erhalten. [...] Gestern war hier das Gerücht, dass Bonaparte zu Valenciennes angekommen sei, solches hat sich aber nicht bestätigt. Der Geist bei den holländischen Truppen ist ziemlich gut, auf den belgischen Truppen darf man sich aber gar nicht verlassen."<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, Colborne – on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April - also reported on the situation as: "I hope lord Bathurst is more at ease respecting the position of the army. The Guards have been withdrawn to Enghien. The prince informs me that he has written to lord Bathurst, respecting the guns removed from Antwerp etc. The duke of Wellington calculates on being here tomorrow: but the roads are so bad I doubt that it is possible for him to arrive before the 6<sup>th</sup> or the 7<sup>th</sup> Inst.

From all the reports I have collected of travellers and gentlemen employed in the espionage since the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. I think it appears that the garrison of Lille amounts to 5000, Cambray

2000, Valenciennes 4000 and Condé 3000. That they are putting all these places into complete repair in order to diminish the garrisons when necessary. That about 25.0000 infantry and 4 or 5000 cavalry have marched by Amiens, Arras, Cambrai and Stenai and are now cantoned in that neighbourhood.

When we had two brigades at Courtrai, the French increased the garrisons of Lille and crowded the villages near it, with troops, yesterday, and two days before, the force marching from Lille has been drawn towards Valenciennes, which movement I think must have been the consequence of our battalions moving more to our left.

Bonaparte certainly is assembling a large army on the frontier and Daendels, who arrived from Paris yesterday, confirms that opinion, but he has nothing yet collected to warrant his making an offensive movement. The communication is open and there is no difficulty in passing to any part of France. The precaution of examining passports is not even adopted. From these circumstances, it is evident Napoleon wants time. He has established "corps sédentaires" commanded by the half pay officers this will give him about 70.000 men for the defence of the interior. The [...] arrived at Brussels this morning, I find that they left about 200 of their best men on [...] for America, I hope these gentlemen will be ordered from the dépôt at Portsmouth immediately, as every old soldier is more valuable. Sir George Wood is just returned from Tournai. He reports the citadel is in a state to hold out a fortnight. 23 guns are already placed." <sup>6</sup>

And finally, it was also on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April that sir Hudson Lowe reported in a private and secret letter to lord Bunbury about the stalemate in the arrangements of the defence of the Low Countries on the one hand, and about the lack of transparency in the twofold command of the prince of Orange on the other:

"I enclose copies of sundry letters and communications with the Prussian head quarters by which you will perceive that the project of any immediate and direct cooperation with them, for the defence of Belgium, if attached at the present moment, remains in dispute and that the Prussian army holds out to the position of Tirlemont as the most advanced one and the nearest to us to which it would come in case of the French advancing and though they have a corps at Namur, it is still on that point the whole in the event of attack would concentrate. If any junction at all is to take effect, it has appeared to me better it should take place more to the French, in the direction of Genappe and Gembloux, because in such case not only Brussels but the whole of Belgium becomes covered, if not by a position direct in front, at least by a lateral one, whereas the retiring, with the idea of giving a battle at Tirlemont supposes the previous loss of the whole country – the object for which the contention is made. The safety of this army would in such case rather demand it should retire at once behind the Dyle or the Nethe. These ideas you will find more developed in copies of the letters sent to general Kleist and Müffling, transmitted herewith. I fear however the idea of giving combat in any shape or place whatever may not be approved. So far as relates to the British and Hanoverian troops I have all along declared my express sentiments about the necessity of their retiring without stopping to some inattackable position the moment there is the slightest indication of the French army advancing against them - but if the Prussian army forms a junction with us the case is quite different. The superiority of numbers would then be on our side, and I really see no reason then to retire before an inferior force of the French, when the result would be the abandonment to them of the only object for which the nation is called forth to arms, and Bonaparte again called to lead it, viz. [?] Belgium, and this at a moment when the country is arming, when the fortresses are restoring and when any relaxation of our efforts for its defence might lose the country for ever. I enclose you copy of a report received from colonel Abercomby regarding the situation of Ypres. Mons and Tournay are in a progressive state. If once we suffer the kind of separation to be broken in upon – if we lose the advantages in public opinion which our preservation of it would afford us; if the balance of a population of 3

or 4 millions and the resources of one of the finest countries of the world are to be thrown without a blow [?] into the hands of France, it is not one campaign which can restore all to us again. It may be said we have not the means to prevent. Alone, certainly not, but with the immediate assistance of the Prussians, I regard the defence of Belgium against any force which the French can at present bring as not only practicable, but certain. It is this assistance alone on which my arguments turn [?]. My opinion however I would not wish you to suppose is in any degree a regulating one. The prince thinks and acts for himself. The King his father has his system of acting. They both communicate with the Prussian authorities and it has happened what has been done by the one has been unknown to or disapproved of by the other, whilst in my situation I have had no knowledge of the communications of either. With the Dutch and Belgick army I have nothing to do. The prince gives his own orders to them, or through officers with whom I am in no relation whatsoever. He has more than once given me orders for the movement of British troops to situations which have been very much in opposition to the views and ideas I entertained respecting them. Four days since an order was brought to me by sir E. Barnes to move 7 battalions to Tournay. I was struck with an idea of its impropriety and said the movement might be of such consequence that nothing less than an order in writing should induce me to send the route. Sir E. B. voluntarily undertook to return to the prince and explain to him the inconvenience which I was apprehensive of. The order in writing however was sent. In the meantime I went myself to the prince and provided to the utmost extent of unfruitful [?] representation against the movement, not only as being in itself a false [?] military one, but as I concurred in opposition to the desires of government which were extremely averted to his committing any force so much to the front. My representation however was in vain and I was commanded to send the order. The troops had scarcely arrived, before I solicited his permission to retire them again to Ath. He told me it was his intention to extend some of them along the front. My representations here were welcomed. Finding however they made no impression, I went to sir Charles Stuart and stated what had passed. In the meantime the prince went to the king and having probably mentioned the objections I had made, the movement he had designed was not executed. They were withdrawn to Leuze and Ath and the whole of the British and Hanoverian troops are this day pretty securely stationed between Ath and Enghien. There are small garrisons (I think much too small) left in Mons and Tourany. 3 German battalions not altogether 1000 men in each. These places cannot however in their present state be abandoned. If any thing however is left to rest, it is for the garrisons alone and not for the army which is in its present situation disconnected with them.

If I have adverted to the manner in which some of our military affairs have been conducted here, it does not, I assure you, arise from any idea of complaint, but merely that you may understand the precise situation in which we all stand. The prince is exceedingly civil and a perfect harmony exists in all the departments, but he acts for himself, and the British departments have no control over not I may say no knowledge of the movements of the Dutch and Belgian forces. He is the commander in chief of the whole, but there is no general staff for the whole. The general dispositions therefore are entirely his own. The duke of Wellington's arrival will set all this to rights.

General Gneisenau has joined the Prussian army. General Röder tells me it will be 150.000 men strong in three weeks time. I enclose copies of the last reports received from the front. The movements of the French army I think be accounted for by our own. – The Prussians have got down a battering train at Wesel and it has been suggested to me to recommend that we thence have one forwarded to Ostend, or in immediate readiness to lead there.”<sup>7</sup>

The arrival of Wellington.

Wellington left from Vienna for Belgium on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March. <sup>8</sup> From Vienna, he directed efforts for building up of an army in the Low Countries, as on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March earl Bathurst wrote him: "I have just seen your private letter to lord Castlereagh, exhorting us to send whatever we can to the Netherlands.

I can assure you orders were given to that effect immediately. With respect to infantry, all will have arrived which could possibly go, except the Guards, which were necessarily detained for a time, but they will now be able to go. As to cavalry, it has been reduced a good deal; but I hope we shall soon be able to send more than is now under orders. As for artillery, we have sent to our utmost, but there was a great reduction of that force (7000) also since the peace." In P.S. Colonel Colborne will give you an exact account of what has been sent and is under orders. All accounts concur in doubting the fidelity of the Belgian troops." <sup>9</sup>

This letter may have reached the duke while he was still on his way to the Low Countries or around the day he reached Brussels. Before proceeding to Brussels, however, Wellington met general Gneisenau at Aachen on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April. <sup>10</sup> In this meeting Gneisenau wished Wellington, if attacked by a superior force, to retire behind Brussels, while the Prussians would advance across the Meuse. Both were then to join about Tirlemont or St.Trond, and then attack the enemy. <sup>11</sup> So, Gneisenau adhered the Tirlemont-proposal.

From Aachen, Wellington passed through St.Trond on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, while on his way to Brussels. Here, at St.Trond, where the same day the headquarters of the army of the Netherlands was established, he met prince Frederik and Constant Rebecque. <sup>12</sup>

There are no details about Wellington's reaction during the meeting with Gneisenau at Aachen, yet, it was on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April that Wellington wrote to Gneisenau in the evening from Brussels after he had got there during the night of the 4<sup>th</sup>: "Je suis arrivé ici dans la nuit; et j'ai passé la journée en tâchant de me rendre maître de l'état des affaires.

Les rapports sur la situation, le nombre, et les intentions de l'ennemi sont toujours excessivement vagues; mais il me paraît que nous devons être préparés à résister à un coup de main qu'il pourrait tenter de faire d'un moment à l'autre. [<sup>13</sup>]

Il n'y a pas de doute qu'il lui serait de la dernière importance de faire rétrograder les troupes que nous tenons en avant de Bruxelles; de chasser le roi de France et la famille royale; et de faire retirer le roi des Pays Bas et les nouveaux établissements [sic] qui se sont formés ici. Ce serait un coup terrible à l'opinion publique en France et ici; et, selon son allure ordinaire, la nouvelle de ses succès serait connue par toute la France, tandis que celle des revers, qui pourraient en suivre, serait cachée à tout le monde.

Après avoir mis 13.400 hommes dans les garnisons de Mons, Tournay, Ypres, Ostende, Nieuport et Anvers, je peux rassembler à peu près 23.000 hommes de bonnes troupes Anglaises et Hanovriennes, dont à peu près 5000 sont de cavalerie excellente. Ces nombres s'augmenteront, surtout en bonne cavalerie et artillerie, dans peu de jours. Je peux aussi rassembler 20.000 hommes de troupes Hollandaises et Belges, dont 2000 de cavalerie; le tout ayant à peu près 60 pièces de canon [sic]. <sup>14</sup>

Mon opinion est que nous devrions prendre des mesures pour rassembler toute l'armée prussienne avec cette armée alliée Anglo Hollandaise en avant de Bruxelles; et que, dans cette vue, les troupes sous les ordres de votre Excellence devraient sans perte de temps longer la Meuse, et cantonner entre Charleroi, Namur et Huy.

Par cette disposition nous serons sûrs de sauver ce pays si intéressant pour les puissances alliées; nous couvrirons le rassemblement de leurs forces sur le Rhin; et nous éviterons les maux qui seraient la conséquence inévitable de notre retraite momentanée dans les circonstances actuelles; en même temps que votre Excellence serait également en mesure comme dans la position que vous occupez aujourd'hui, de vous porter partout où la présence

des troupes sous vos ordres serait nécessaire pour le service du Roi; et nous aurions un champ de bataille aussi favorable pour notre nombreuse cavalerie qu'en arrière de Bruxelles.

Je prie votre Excellence de prendre ces raisonnemens en considération, et de me faire savoir votre détermination; afin que je décide sur les mesures que je dois prendre, en cas d'être attaqué, si votre Excellence juge plus à propos de rester où vous vous trouvez.

Je dois avertir votre Excellence que le roi des Pays Bas a donné ses ordres que les mesures soient prises pour pouvoir vos troupes de tout ce qu'il leur faudra quand elles s'avanceront dans ce pays-ci." <sup>15</sup>

Sir Hudson Lowe's feeling about the duke's proposal was: "[...] He [the duke] has written to general Gneisenau to suggest that the Prussian army should move down without delay on Huy-Hannut and towards Charleroi so as to be able to cooperate with the British and Dutch directly in front of Brussels. I was happy to find that without any previous communication, the ideas I had expressed in my letters to generals Kleist and Müffling (copies of which I sent you on the 4<sup>th</sup>) were precisely the same as those entertained by him, in regard to the Prussian movement, and that the principal basis of them has been referred to public opinion in the countries where the armies are acting. To have abandoned the outwork [?] and retired from the country we were called upon to defend without availing ourselves of the advantage of a force ready at hand to assist us would have been such a blow to our credit and our means as not one campaign alone could have rejoined for us; yet I am sorry to see such a project was not in very remote view, and the greater direction sent to the Prussians not to cross the Meuse had not only a direct tendency to its execution, but has been, as I believe, and may still be with them a motive for their not more readily advancing. All is well if past errors serve as lessons for the future." <sup>16</sup>

Gneisenau would receive the duke's letter the next day (6<sup>th</sup> of April) and he replied the same day: "J'ai l'honneur d'accuser la réception de la lettre du 5 avril, dont vous avez bien voulu m'honorer. Je donnerai les ordres de faire avancer l'armée prussienne autant qu'il est possible; mais Votre Excellence jugera mieux que personne que je ne saurois m'éloigner de la Meuse sans danger, et ce ne sont que ses sentiments de loyauté connus et appréciés qui m'inspirent la confiance de me porter à ses désirs, et de faire un mouvement qui ne pourroit être justifié sous un point de vue purement militaire." <sup>17</sup>

The day after, Wellington also sent a copy of his letter to Gneisenau to the earl of Clancarty, the British representative at Vienna, while he wrote him in a covering note: "I enclose you a letter which I wrote yesterday evening to general Gneisenau which will show you our state here, and what I wish him to do. He wishes that, if attacked by a superior force, we should retire behind Brussels, while they should advance across the Meuse; both join about Tirlemont or St. Tron, and then attack the enemy. You will see my reasons for preferring that we should now join, and not let the enemy get possession of Brussels even for a moment." <sup>18</sup>

Major general Torrens met Wellington after he had received Gneisenau's reply and translated the duke's feelings to earl Bathurst about his situation in relation to the Prussian army as "Considering that no arrangements have been made at Vienna whatever for giving the duke any command beyond the British, Dutch and Hanoverians, I had the satisfaction to find him altogether much pleased with the prospect before him, and perfectly satisfied of being enabled to carry all his objects into effect, by the good understanding which he can, and in fact has established, with the Prussian commander, equally as if the latter were actually placed under his orders. An instance of this has been afforded today in the ready acquiescence of general Gneisenau to move up his force to Charleroi &c., so as to be in an immediate line of communication with our position." <sup>19</sup>

While Wellington gave towards Gneisenau a bit of an optimistic impression of his military forces, to the secretary at war, earl Bathurst, the duke was quite clear about his real situation. On the 6th of April he wrote him about his “very bad account of the Dutch troops and [that] king William appears unwilling to allow them to be mixed with ours, which, although they are not our best, would afford a chance of making something of them” [...] “troops are not what they ought to be to enable us to maintain our military character in Europe” [...] “it appears to me that you have not taken in England a clear view of our situation, that you do not think war certain and that a great effort must be made” [...] “you have not called out the militia, or announced such an intention in your message to Parliament, by which measure your troops of the line in Ireland or elsewhere might become disposable; and how are we to make out 150.000 men, or even the 60.000 of the defensive part of the treaty of Chaumont, appears not to have been considered.

If you could let me have 40.000 good British infantry, besides those you insist upon having in garrisons, the proportion settled by treaty that you are to furnish of cavalry, that is to say, the eight of 150.000 men, including in both the old German legion, and 150 pieces of British field artillery fully horsed, I should be satisfied, and take my chance for the rest, and engage that we would play our part in the game.”

In the same letter he asked for the waggon train, spring waggons, more musket ball cartridge carts, entrenching tool carts for each battalion and 200 more for the corps of engineers, the whole corps of sappers and miners , plus the whole staff corps.<sup>20</sup>

Concluding, Wellington estimated he would need for the approaching operations a force consisting of British and German legion troops to the amount of 150 field pieces, 15.000 cavalry and 40.000 infantry, exclusive of garrisons.

It was major general Torrens who saw the need for an extraordinary effort to establish in Belgium an army according to the wishes of the duke. In this sense, Torrens had written at Dover a memorandum for the duke in which he had stated in how far it would be possible to meet his demand by the close of the approaching summer. Torrens calculated how it would be possible to form such a force “within any reasonable time.” For the cavalry, while having 7892 men available, 7108 men were wanted. Deducting for the infantry 2500 men needed for garrisons, and having 15.511 men available, and 20.011 to join shortly, a total reinforcement of 23.300 would be needed.

All this would amount to 10.692 men cavalry and 40.811 men infantry, exclusive of the ordnance equipment.<sup>21</sup>

About the general situation Torrens added to earl Bathurst on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April: “Looking upon this statement of our force in the most favourable point of view, it is impossible to feel easy at the present state of its reduced numbers and defective composition, considering that the military character of the country is committed by the general impression that all the troops with the duke of Wellington come under the denomination of a British army; and it is for this reason that I feel extremely disappointed at finding that none of the Allied forces but the Dutch and Hanoverians are placed under his command.”

“The Hanoverian levies are much superior to what I expected. The duke means to mix them, as well as the Dutch, with our troops, according, in some degree, to the arrangements adopted with the Portugese; and though this formation is opposed at present by the King of the Netherlands, I imagine His Majesty will yet be induced to accede to it.”

And about the army as it was, Torrens wrote: “ With regard to the prince of Orange, the duke does not think it would at all answer to give any one the rank of a field marshal with the view of superseding him; but he thinks that upon any augmentation of our troops that would sanction such an appointment, it would be desirable to place a *general*, if not two, upon the staff of this army, senior to the prince. The arrangement, however, which the Duke of Wellington would like of all others is the transport here of 15.000 Portugese infantry under

lord Beresford, whose rank of marshal on the continent would supersede that of general, which the prince holds in the Dutch service, without touching the old difficulty of British generals being superseded by others in our service who have foreign rank.”

“As you were somewhat anxious about sir Hudson Lowe, I must apprise you that he will not do for the duke. He will go on with him, however, until Murray shall arrive.”<sup>22</sup>

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, the duke went, at least accompanied by sir Charles Stuart, to Ghent to pay his respects to Louis XVIII.<sup>23</sup>

It was to sir Hudson Lowe that Gneisenau wrote on the 6th of April: “The movements which we in this quarter will be disposed to make will depend on the views which the duke of Wellington will have conceived from that knowledge of circumstances which he will have acquired after arriving at Brussels. He may count on the cooperation of the Prussian army in all that he judges useful to our cause. Tomorrow I shall have the honour of sending you the project of a campaign which I have framed, and sent to the king my master at Vienna; it is drawn up in a few words, and gives the utmost latitude to the generals.”<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, Gneisenau referred to sir Hudson Lowe to the correspondence he had with Wellington and, in this context, to Wellington’s request to move the Prussian towards him. Gneisenau was willing to comply with this request, yet without breaking up his communication to the river Meuse. He writes:

“Hier, mon cher général, je me suis engagé à vous communiquer le plan de campagne que j’ai envoyé à Vienne. Lorsque j’avais fini ma lettre, le courrier de mr.le duc de Wellington nous arriva et nous nous sommes instantanément occupé à faire exécuter le mouvement que désirait le duc. Le 11 nos troupes seront sur les points d’où ils peuvent secourir les vôtres et couvrir la capitale, dans le cas que l’ennemi ne soit trop fort en nombre. Ce mouvement est dangereux pour nous autres en cas de revers. Alors notre armée est forcée de passer la Meuse sur une même rive avec l’ennemi et de passer ce fleuve pour la troisième fois à Liège. Vous sentez, général, combien grand doit être notre confiance dans les talents et le caractère du duc de Wellington.

Liège doit être le pivot de nos mouvements, tant que nous ne sommes pas encore en mesure de prendre l’offensive. D’ailleurs nous devons nous attendre à une autre destination, pendant que nous nous enfilons sur un théâtre de guerre qui n’est pas le notre. [..]”<sup>25</sup>

This means that immediately after receiving Wellington’s request, Gneisenau issued orders for the Prussian forces to move towards those of Wellington and the French border. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of April he wrote to Gruner [<sup>26</sup>] that he expected that the army would complete its manoeuvre to the frontier within a few days.<sup>27</sup>

And on the 8th, he wrote to the Prussian king: “Nachdem der herzog von Wellington in Brüssel von dem Zustand der Dinge sich zu unterrichten gesucht hatte, fand er sich bewogen, das hier abschriftlich angeschlossene Schreiben [<sup>28</sup>] an mich zu richten, worin er uns zur Vereinigung mit der englischen-batavischen Armee auffordert und wünscht, dass Eure königliche Majestät hiesige Armee zwischen Charleroi, Namur und Huy Cantonnirungsquartier beziehe.

Eine solche Stellung ist allerdings sehr geeignet, dem Feinde zu imponieren, wenn er die Absicht haben sollte über die sehr unvollkommen zusammengestellte belgische Armee herzufallen und sie auseinander zu sprengen, und das Erscheinen der preussischen Armee wird ihn bei einem solchen etwaigen Vorhaben bedenklich machen. Einige der Gründe, die der Herzog für diese Bewegung aufstellt, sind ebenfalls nicht unwichtig: es giebt überdies deren noch andere, die Euer K.M. Interesse und Verhältnisse zu Grossbritannien berühren; auch setzt diese Bewegung an und für sich keiner Gefahr aus, sofern nicht die entschlossene Absicht damit verbunden wird, eine Schlacht unter jeden Umständen dort zu liefern, indem man sich immer wieder auf das rechte Maasufer begeben kann, wenn der Feind mit einer entschieden Übermacht vorrückte; darum haben wir geglaubt, diese von dem Herzog von

Wellington gewünschte Bewegung nicht ablehnen zu können und die Befehle sind bereits gegeben, dass am 11ten Euer K.M.Armee im Thale der Maas und Sambre von Charleroi bis Lüttich versammelt stehe. Bei letzterer Stadt bleibt das sächsische Corps, dessen Schicksal noch nicht entschieden ist.

Dem General von Röder ist aufgetragen, den Herzog von Wellington auf die Gefahren aufmerksam zu machen, die mit einer Schlacht am linken Ufer der Maas vorwärts Brüssel verbunden sind, im Fall das Kriegsglück uns nicht günstig wäre. [<sup>29</sup>] Es wäre hierbei möglich die Maas-Übergänge bei Namur, Huy, Lüttich und Maastricht gänzlich zu verlieren, wo wir dann gezwungen wären, die Verbindung mit Deutschland über Holland zu suchen. Eine Schlacht überhaupt, die so geliefert wird, dass der Rückzugsweg auf einer der Flanken liegt, kann nie hartnäckig ausgefochten werden und gemeiniglich muss solche abgebrochen werden, bevor man die letzte Entscheidung versucht. Eine solche Schlacht also würde die vorwärts Brüssel sein. Aber auch in dem Fall dass man bei einem ungünstigen Ausgang der Schlacht Herr über den Übergang bei Namur verbliebe, so hat man daselbst nur einen einzigen Rückzugsweg, und man muss um bei Lüttich wieder sich aufzustellen, zweimal über die Maas, bei Namur und bei Huy gehen.

Auch darauf wird der Herzog aufmerksam gemacht, dass eine verlorene Schlacht die Bildung der Armee am Mittelrhein stören würde und diese dann nur in der Mitte von Deutschland stattfinden könne. Wir dürfen hoffen, dass bei dem besonnenen abgemessenen Character der Kriegsführung, den die Welt an dem Herzog kennt, er auf diese wichtigen Betrachtungen aufmerksam sein und nicht das Schicksal des Kriegs durch eine gewagte Schlacht in Gefahr stellen werde.

Nach allen uns zugekommenen Nachrichten aus Frankreich ist der dortige Umschwung jacobinischer Natur und Napoleon Bonaparte hat diese Rotte für sich zu gewinnen gewusst. Alle die Eigenthumsbesitzer fürchten, sich der Plünderung des Pöbels Preis gegeben zu sehen.”<sup>30</sup>

The note written by general Von Röder for Wellington as referred to by Gneisenau (and dated 8<sup>th</sup> of April) reads thus: “Quoique l’armée prussienne du Bas-Rhin ne refusera jamais de contribuer conjointement avec l’armée Anglo-Batave à la défense des Pays-Bas, elle est cependant chargée en même tems [sic] de veiller à la sûreté du pays situé entre la Meuse, la Moselle et le Rhin, et pour réunir ces deux différents points de vue, autant que les circonstances le permettent, elle n’ose pas s’éloigner de la Meuse et des routes qui lui donnent la possibilité de marcher en cas de besoin dans une ou dans l’autre de ces deux directions, d’ailleurs la nouvelle formation et l’organisation de l’armée prussienne en plusieurs grands corps d’armée exigent des changements, des marches par bataillons ou régiments, qui ne pourront s’exécuter qu’avec des grandes difficultés en quittant les cantonnements actuels.

Malgré toutes ces raisons et tous ces obstacles, il nous suffit que le duc de Wellington désire nous voir plus en avant, et l’armée prussienne obéit à ses ordres avec plaisir et confiance, heureuse de prouver par là son respect et sa soumission à un général révééré de tout l’univers.

En conséquence les ordres sont donnés pour que le corps du lieutenant-général de Zieten se concentre le 10 d’Avril à Namur et environs, et de se mettre en marche le 11<sup>e</sup> pour occuper des cantonnements entre Charleroi (inclusant la ville) et Namur (exclusant la ville), et dans l’espace enclavée par la Meuse, la Sambre, et l’ancienne voie Romaine qui va de Binch par Ramellies à Avenne.

Le corps du lieutenant-général de Borstel prendra le même jour les quartiers que celui du général Zieten occupe dans ce moment, y compris la ville de Namur. Le corps du lieutenant-général Thielmann sera concentré à Liège et aux environs. Le quartier-général se rendra à Liège le 11.

Il sera pourvu à l’évacuation du district sous-mentionné, destiné pour les cantonnements du corps commandé par le général Zieten.

Son Excellence Monsieur le duc de Wellington est supplié de vouloir accorder son intervention pour assurer la subsistance des troupes prussiennes cantonnants sur la rive gauche de la Meuse, tant en vivres qu'en fourrages. Son Excellence Monsieur le duc n'a prononcé jusqu'ici qu'en général le désir de voir l'armée prussienne à portée se joindre à l'armée Anglo-Batave dans peu de marches, ce qui a suffi au général de Gneisenau, confiant entièrement à la loyauté et les grandes qualités de Son Excellence, et le même sentiment lui fait espérer que Monsieur le duc daignera l'informer du plan des opérations ultérieurs, de la position actuelle de l'armée Anglo-Batave, de l'endroit où on compte livrer bataille, de la part que l'armée prussienne y doit prendre et des dispositions à prendre en cas de revers, afin de le mettre à même d'entrer dans les vues de Son Excellence, et de pouvoir ordonner d'avance toutes les mesures nécessaires pour contribuer au bien de la cause commune autant qu'il dépend de lui.”<sup>31</sup>

As the Prussian army was supposed to be collected in the valleys of the Sambre and the Meuse, between Charleroi and Liège, by the 11th of April, the resulting disposition was written out by Von Müffling (probably on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April):

“den 9. April concentrirt sich das Corps v. Borstell bei Lüttich, das Corps v.Thielmann zwischen Herve & Aachen.

den 10. concentrirt sich das Corps v.Zieten bei Namur, das Corps v.Borstell rückt nach Huy, das Corps v.Thielmann in Kantonirungen zwischen Lüttich inclusive und Herve

den 11. Corps v. Ziethen bezieht Kantonirungen zwischen Charleroy inclus und Namur exclusive [<sup>32</sup>]; ferner in dem Raum zwischen der Sambre, der Maas und der alten Römerstrasse, die von Binche bis nach Ramelies über Avenne führt.

Das Corps v. Borstell bezieht die Quartiere die das Corps v.Zieten bisher gehabt hat zwischen Namur und Huy, beide Orte exclusive. Das Hauptquartier geht den 11.nach Lüttich.”<sup>33</sup>

To discuss the situation in France and the implications for the armies invading this country when it came down to their subsistence, Wellington visited Louis XVIII in Gent on the 8th and 9<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>34</sup> It was in this context that Wellington had expressed his ideas on this subject as well on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April to the earl of Harrowby. Harrowby was one of the two members of the Cabinet sent to confer with the duke of Wellington, which he did on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April.

He refers to a memorandum written by lord Liverpool on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April with questions for the duke – What follows here is a selection of items and the duke's replies, as formulated by the earl of Harrowby:

“What system is it proposed to adopt on entering France, with respect to the maintenance of the allied troops ?”

“He considers the allies to be perfectly determined upon war, it having been decided not to receive any overtures from Buonaparte. The Prussians on the Lower Rhine, i.e., Aix la Chapelle, Mayence, Luxembourg, may be expected to amount to near 200.000 men by the beginning of May; about 100.000 Austrians on the Upper Rhine a week or ten days sooner, with 30.000 Bavarians, and a smaller proportion of Würtembergers and other lesser Powers; the British, Hanoverian levies, Dutch and Belgians, about the same time, are calculated at 60.000 men in the field; 280.000 Russians may be expected on or near the Rhine by the 10th of May. Great, however, as the force would be (supposing it as high as 300.000 or 350.000 men), still the duke thinks it would not be advisable to enter France before the arrival of the Russians, as the consequences of a partial check might be dangerous, and the enterprise should not be undertaken without such an overwhelming force as to ensure success as far as possible. He thinks this consideration of still more weight than the additional means which this delay would give to Buonaparte of increasing his own forces.”

“What plan of campaign has been decided upon by the allies, or, if not settled, by whom and when is this to be settled ?”

“No plan of campaign is definitely settled. The general idea is that the whole force should enter between the Rhine and the Sambre, the Prussians composing the centre, the Austrians the left, the British the right, the Russians chiefly as a reserve. This is adopted with a view of making it impossible for Buonaparte to attack them in detail. The plan is to be settled, de common accord, when the sovereigns come down to Frankfort or Augsburg, by the emperor of Russia with Volkonsky, the king of Prussia with Knesebeck, prince Schwarzenberg on the part of Austria, and some person on the part of England.”

“Do the allies consider themselves under their declaration as at war with France, or for what further deliberation does this decision wait; and when may it be expected to be decided ?”

The allies consider themselves as being in an intermediate state, and will not declare till their forces are assembled. The duke considers a temporary delay on this point as desirable for Belgium.”<sup>35</sup>

In the context of an allied invasion into France, Gneisenau had already expressed his ideas to the Prussian king shortly after his arrival at Aachen, i.e. on the 3rd of April. He wrote: “In der Besorgnis, dass man in Wien sich verleiten lassen könnte, künstliche mit einem Anstrich von Gelehrsamkeit versehene Feldzugs-Entwürfe anzunehmen, eine Besorgnis, die durch vorausgegangene Erfahrungen sich rechtfertigt, wage ich es, Ew.Königlichen Majestät, meine nach ganz einfachen Momente aufgefasste Ansicht eines Feldzugsplans gegen Napoleon Bonaparte zu Füßen zu legen:

1. Eine Armee in Belgien
2. Eine andere am Mittel-Rhein
3. Eine dritte am Ober-Rhein
4. Hinter der Armee des Mittel-Rheins eine grosse Reserve-Armee; diese die stärkste.

Die Feldherren der drei ersteren Armeen dringen in Frankreich ein und nehmen sämtlich die Richtung auf Paris; ob einer seiner Nachbarn geschlagen werde, darf keinen dieser Feldherrn irre machen, sondern jeder derselben geht auf seinen Zweck loss, zur Bewahrung der nächsten Festungen Abtheilungen zurücklassend.

Die Reserve-Armee ist dazu bestimmt, die Unfälle, die einer oder der anderen der vorderen Armeen begegnen könnten, wieder gut zu machen, entweder durch Flankenbewegungen gegen des Feindes Kommunikationen oder durch direkte Hülfeleistung.

Dieser Feldzugsplan ist begründet durch die numerische Überlegenheit der Truppen der verbündeten Mächte. Schläge auch Napoleon eines der drei Heere, so dringen während er verfolgt, die beiden andern in seinem Rücken vor, und die Reserve-Armee macht dann die Unfälle der geschlagenen Armee wieder gut. Wendet sich Napoleon nach einem Siege gegen eine der noch ungeschlagenen Nachbar-Armeen, so hat er einen neuen Kampf zu bestehen, den ihm die zu Hülfe eilende Reserve-Armee sehr erschweren kann, während die geschlagene, jetzt unverfolgte Armee, sich erholt und die Offensive wieder ergreift.

Die zu lösende Aufgabe hierbei ist, dass die drei vordern Armeen es vermeiden einander sich zu sehr zu nähern, damit Napoleon immer erst eine Reihe von Märschen zu machen habe, bevor er gegen eine Nachbar-Armee sich wenden kann.

Jeder Entwurf zu einem Feldzug der die Armee in Italien in die disseitigen Berechnungen aufnimmt, ist gekünstelt und deswegen unausführbar, oder verzögernd, folglich unheilbringend.

Der hier anwesende General Maison berechnet, dass Napoleon nicht mehr als 130-140.000 Mann in Allem vorerst aufstellen könne. Die neu zu errichtenden Bataillone der Departemente werden zu den Besatzungen der Festungen gebraucht werden. Da aber das alte Frankreich etwa 90 sehr feste Plätze hatte, so dürften diese Bataillone hiezu [sic] nicht hinreichen, und

man könnte auf eine niedere Zahl als die von dem General Maison angegebene, im freien Felde gegen uns, zu schliessen berechtigt seyn.”<sup>36</sup>

It was somewhere in March, during the contacts between the prince of Orange and Von Kleist about the best strategy to defend Belgium, that the prince of Orange issued somewhere in March instructions for two surveys: one on the state of the roads between Brussels, Liège and Hannut (including the area around Tirlemont), and another one on the roads near Wavre, Gembloux, Fleurus and Genappe.

Both respective surveyors, lieutenant Barrailer and sir Basil Jackson – both deputy assistant QMG's - wrote their reports for the prince (and Wellington) on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>37</sup>

The arrival of Gneisenau.<sup>38</sup>

The moment Napoleon returned to France, Von Kleist was in high command on the Rhine. Yet, while Napoleon was regaining power and this imminent threat had to be dealt with one way or another, it was to the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm to decide who was to lead the Prussian army in case war would prove necessary to remove the French emperor from power. And this was a most probable scenario.

A careful consideration was therefore necessary and in this context it was that the king had a choice within the military. Here, two groups could be distinguished.

The first one could be characterised as a more progressive one and was based upon men in the general staff of the army, while the other, which was more of a conservative character, was based upon the royal court.

The first group was centred around Gneisenau and composed of men like Boyen, Von Grolmann, Von Borstell, Von Zieten, Von Valentini, Von Thielmann, Von Clausewitz and Von Reiche. They had played an important role in the reforms and modernisation of the Prussian army and most of them were members of the so-called “Tugendbund”, a moral and scientific association which had been founded in 1808 after the shattering defeat of Prussia against France. Based upon a uniting feeling of patriotism, it aimed at things like: the lifting the Prussian morale, to ease the physical and mental suffering of the people, education and the reorganisation of the army. In all this, a latent anti-French approach was present.

Even though Gneisenau himself was not a member of the Tugendbund, as a person he was very close to its members. With all their enthusiasm and progressive ideas, most members of this group were young and rather inexperienced when it came down to real military leadership. That is why Blücher's name came up.

The second group was represented by older and more senior officers like general adjutant Knesebeck, fieldmarshal Kalckreuth [<sup>39</sup>] and the generals Von Kleist, Yorck [<sup>40</sup>] and Tauentzien.<sup>41</sup> Contrary to the first group, this group lacked a clear and common military goal and personal interest played a more important role.

Though general Von Bülow (the commander of the 4th Prussian corps) [<sup>42</sup>] hung more to the warfare as proclaimed by Gneisenau, from the personal point of view both men could not stand each other.

The position of general Von Müffling was also not very distinct. Though he personally was much in favour of Von Kleist, he favoured Gneisenau and Grolmann when it came down to their ideas about warfare. Hardenberg, though with contacts in both directions, probably favoured the progressive group. And last but not least, Blücher, from his background and character, was not into politics but he favoured the reformers. From his background, the Prussian king instinctively tended to the more conservative approach, while at the same time he saw that the progressive group had much more potential when it came down to its basis, its ideas about warfare and its potential for the future. And that is why, even though Knesebeck

and Von Kleist enjoyed the king's favour, he eventually entrusted Blücher and Gneisenau the command of the army.

As soon as Napoleon had entered French soil, criticism on Von Kleist as future commander of the Prussian field army began. In fact, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, Von Grolmann, then in Vienna, wrote to Boyen:

“In Hinsicht der Kommandos haben wir nichts besseres zu machen gewusst, als Blücher in seinem alten Verhältnis mit Gneisenau wieder zum Oberbefehlshaber vorzuschlagen, was auch der König genehmigt hat. Es ist sehr wichtig, dass beide sogleich nach dem Rhein abgehen; Kleist ist dort wie das fünfte Rad am Wagen. Sollte Blücher auch zögern, so möchte doch Gneisenau gleich abgehen, um den interimischen Oberbefehl zu übernehmen [...] Kleist müsste dann den Oberbefehl über sämtliche deutschen Truppen erhalten, die unter unserer Kriegsgewalt stünden. Das ist die einzige Besetzung der Befehlshaber, die noch erträglich herauskommen wird. Ob sie durchzusetzen, ist noch die Frage, jedoch ist es zu hoffen; der Staatskanzler ist damit einverstanden.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite the pleas of Knesebeck to assign Von Kleist a very broad and general command over both German and Prussian units, king Friedrich Wilhelm approached Blücher on the 15th of March to prepare himself for his command over the Prussian field army on the Rhine. Two days later, he made his definitive decision in favour of Blücher.

At the same time, he divided the command of the German Bundes-units and the Prussian units over two commanders: Von Kleist and Blücher respectively. Blücher himself, however, yet had to wait before actually leaving from Berlin for the army, pending the developments there. Gneisenau too had received on the 15th of March the news about the king's decision to have him as chief of staff of the field army on the Rhine. Two days later, he got the instruction to leave for the army right away and to act according to the circumstances there. And on the 19th of March, Friedrich Wilhelm sent him the following instruction: “Um Sie mit dem bekannt zu machen, was über die Zusammenziehung der verbündeten Armeen schon jetzt hier verabredet worden ist, erhalten Sie in den Beilagen Nachricht von den Vorbereitungen bei den österreichischen, englischen und russischen Heeren.

Die Anlage enthält die Einteilung, die Ich Meiner Armee für den Fall des Krieges zu geben beabsichtige, und welche Sie daher jetzt schon vorzubereiten haben, indem Sie die Brigaden so zusammenstosse lassen, und die Generale und Brigadekommandeure dabei in der vorgeschriebenen Art einteilen können. Das I.Armeekorps wird der Generaleutnant v. Zieten, das II.der Generaleutnant v.Borstell und das III.der Generaleutnant v. Thielemann führen. Die Königlich und herzoglich Sächsischen, Nassauischen, Schwarzburgischen usw. Truppen werden künftig, in Verbindung mit den Hessischen und Mecklenburgischen, unter dem Oberbefehl des Generals Graf Kleist von Nollendorf in ein Korps formiert werden, und bleiben bis dahin Brigadenweise in ihrem bisherigen Verhältnis.Sie haben mit dem Generalkommando der Armee, die sich am Oberrhein bildet, und mit dem Lord Wellington, der am Niederrhein und in Belgien kommandieren wird, sich in steter Verbindung zu erhalten. Sollten die Sachen eine solche Wendung nehmen, dass in der Folge Napoleon Bonaparte oder dessen etwaige Partei sich auf Eröffnungen oder irgend eine Kommunikation mit diesseitigen Truppen oder Behörden in den Provinzen einlassen wollen, so sind solche unter keiner Bedingung zu hören, sondern alle Parlamentärs ohne Ausnahme zurückzuweisen.”<sup>44</sup>

A second statement was issued on the 28th of March about the departure of Wellington. Prince Hardenberg wrote about this statement from Vienna to lord Castlereagh on the 1st of April: “Le général Gneisenau remplace le général Kleist sur le Rhin, et recoit l'ordre de se concerter avec le duc de Wellington.”<sup>45</sup>

It was also on the 19th of March that the official order was sent from Vienna to Von Kleist, at Aachen, about his transfer. It reached him some days later. Though he didn't want to show it too much, it struck him deeply.

For instance, it was on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March that he reacted in a formal way to Gneisenau's letter which he had written from Frankfurt on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March:

“Eurer Excellenz Schreiben vom 29. aus Frankfurt habe ich richtig erhalten. Anliegend übersende ich Denenselben eine Übersicht der hiesigen Lage der Sachen. Es wartet schon seit mehreren Tagen ein Kurier aus Wien mit einem Paquet unter Dero Adresse auf Ew. Excellenz; gut würde es also sein, wenn Ew. Excellenz bald anhero kämen, der Herzog von Wellington muss auf seine Reise nach den Niederlanden Aachen passieren, wo Dieselben ihn sprechen können. Übrigens habe ich in Vereinigung mit dem General v. Müffling alles, wie ich glaube, den Umständen gemäss angeordnet; wir haben nach unserer besten Überzeugung gehandelt. Sobald Ew. Excellenz anlangen, werde Ich nicht versehen, dem Befehle des Königs Majestät gemäss, Denenselben das Kommando zu übergeben, um bis zur Ankunft des Feldmarschalls Fürsten Blücher v. Wahlstadt in seinem Namen zu verfügen.”<sup>46</sup>

It must also have been on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March that the Prussian king formally arranged general Von Bülow to be the commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> corps (on the Rhine, where he was called on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April) and general Yorck of the 5<sup>th</sup> and count Tauenzien of the 6<sup>th</sup> corps (both at both banks of the Elbe).<sup>47</sup>

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April Gneisenau arrived in Aachen.<sup>48</sup> With his arrival, Von Kleist gave the supreme command over the Prussian field army of the Lower Rhine to Gneisenau, who kept it as long as Blücher himself was absent. From then on Von Kleist was to be commander of the Bundes-units of the north German contingents. In this capacity Von Kleist wrote a general order on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April and which he sent to Von Müffling with the following note:

“Die Befehle des Königs, das Kommando der Armee dem General-Feldmarschall Fürst Blücher von Wahlstadt zu überliefern, habe ich bei Ankunft des Generalleutnant Von Gneisenau, welcher, der Kabinettsordre gemäss, im Namen des Fürsten Blücher bis zu dessen Anherkunft alle Angelegenheiten leiten soll, in anliegendem Tagesbefehl ausgeführt. Es ist meine Pflicht Ew. Hochwohlgeborenen noch besonders für die während meines Kommandos mir geleisteten Dienste meinen innigen Dank zu sagen. Ihrer Einsicht und zweckmässigen Benehmen verdanke ich sehr viel. Seien Sie überzeugt, dass ich dieses erkenne, nichts sehnlicher wünsche, als mit Ihnen vereint zu bleiben, und sollte dies nicht der Fall sein können, so bitte ich um die Fortdauer Ihres mir so schätzbaren freundschaftlichen Andenkens.”<sup>49</sup>

And the general order itself reads: “Des Königs Majestät haben dem Generalfeldmarshall Fürsten Blücher von Wahlstadt den Oberbefehl über das preussische Heer zu übertragen und zu bestimmen geruht, dass der Generalleutnant Graf Gneisenau als Generalquartiermeister des Heeres bis zu dessen Ankunft alle Befehle in seinem Namen erlassen soll. Indem ich nun diesen Allerhöchsten Befehl sämtlichen Truppen bekanntmache, verweise ich sie von jetzt an hiermit in Ansehung aller das Generalkommando betreffenden Sachen an den Generalleutnant Von Gneisenau, von welchem sie die Befehle und Entscheidungen zu erwarten haben.

Des Königs Majestät haben mir dagegen den Oberbefehl über die zusammenberufenen norddeutschen Bundestruppen zu übertragen geruht.

Es geht mir nahe, von Truppen zu scheiden, die sich in vollem Masse meine Achtung und Liebe erworben haben. Ihr Andenken wird mir stets teuer bleiben, und nur die Überzeugung ihren Gedächtnisse nie entrückt zu werden, und mich stets ihrer fortdauernden Anhänglichkeit zu erfreuen zu haben, kann mir nur diese Trennung enträglich machen. Ohne grosses, meistens leere Wortgepränge begnüge ich mich, diesen braven Truppen ein herzliches Lebewohl zu sagen. Die Vorsehung walte über sie und gönnen ihnen die Genugtuung, den Unterdrücker der Menschheit vernichten zu helfen, und dadurch Europa Frieden, Ruhe und Sicherheit zu bereiten.”<sup>50</sup>

And the same day, Von Kleist informed Gneisenau about the general situation thus: “Ew.Excellenz beehre ich mich, anliegend den von mir an die Truppen erlassenen Tagesbefehl zu übersenden, durch welchen solche an Ihre Befehle verwiesen sind. Ich füge zugleich eine Übersicht des gegenwärtigen Kantonnements der Armee bei und werde noch heute Ew.Excellenz eine Übersicht der diensttuenden Stärke übergeben lassen.

In Absicht des Geschäftsganges habe ich es so gehalten, dass alles was auf Truppenbewegungen, Formationen und dergleichen Bezug hatte, durch den Generalmajor Von Müffling, Listen aber und persönliche Verhältnisse der Truppen in meinem eigenen Bureau bearbeitet worden sind. Dr Oberkriegskommissar Ribbentrop erheilt die Verpflegungs- und Bekleidungsachen, sowie der Oberauditeur Schulz die gerichtlichen Verhandlungen zur Bearbeitung, wodurch sich vier Archive bildeten, in denen, wie ich voraussetzen kann, alles etwa Nötige aus der Vergangenheit (sich) leicht wird auffinden lassen. Um indessen denjenigen Ihrer Adjutanten, welchem Ew.Excellenz das Listenwesen und die persönlichen Verhältnisse etwa übertragen wollen, ganz davon in Kenntnis zu setzen, werde ich bei meinem Abgange einen der mir attachierten Offiziere mit diesem Geschäft beauftragen und Ihnen denselben nennen.”<sup>51</sup>

It was also on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April that Von Kleist informed Von Röder and the king of the Netherlands of the transfer of the command of the Prussian army to Gneisenau.

These were all the formalities in the transfer of the command, but the actual situation in Aachen was different. In light of the combination of both a French threat and the new position of Gneisenau, Gneisenau and Von Kleist agreed upon the fact that Von Kleist would, for the moment, be still in command. It probably also was a discretionary move of Gneisenau towards Von Kleist so as to ease the pain of the transfer. In fact, Gneisenau reported to Friedrich Wilhelm on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April:

“Der General der Infanterie, Graf Kleist Von Nollendorf wird, so lange wir täglich gewärtig sein dürfen, gegen den Feind vorrücken zu müssen, von der hiesigen Armee sich nicht entfernen, und diese Ansicht wird Ew.Königliche Majestät gerechtfertigt erscheinen. Ich fühle mich geehrt, unter dessen Befehlen zu stehen und werde solche stets mit Eifer und Treue ausführen.”<sup>52</sup>

In this initial situation, Von Kleist kept his activities, yet only needed Gneisenau’s approval for all decisions. Gradually, however, all matters were taken over by Gneisenau so that Von Kleist, eventually, was only left with advisory activities. It was also the Prussian king who had seen the importance of a temporary situation in the command. Friedrich Wilhelm wrote him on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April this general order:

“Ich habe Ihre Meldungen mit dem Rittmeister Burkersrode erhalten, und daraus, wie aus den später eingegangenen ersehen, dass Sie dem Generalleutnant Grafen von Gneisenau bis zur Ankunft des Feldmarschalls Fürsten Blücher von Wahlstatt den Befehl über die Armee übergeben haben, die Truppen aber nicht in gegenwärtigen Augenblick verlassen wollen. Ich erkenne auch hierin den Geist der Vaterlandsliebe, der Sie überall beseelt hat, und die edle Entsagung, die Ihre Verdienste um so höher stellt. Indem Ich Ihnen Mein ganzes Wohlwollen ausdrücke, will Ich sehr gern nach Ihrem Wunsch gestattem dass Sie auch, nach der jetzt erfolgenden Ankunft des Feldmarschalls Fürsten Blücher von Wahlstatt bei der Armee, noch so lange bei derselben bleiben, bis Sie das Ihnen künftig bestimmte Kommando übernehmen können, indem es mir nur Freude machen kann, Sie an der Spitze von Truppen zu sehen, deren Vertrauen und Liebe Sie besitzen und verdienen.”<sup>53</sup>

With the departure of the Prussian headquarters from Aachen on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April for Liège, and with Von Kleist not joining in, his position in the army of the Lower Rhine came formally

to an end.<sup>54</sup> This was confirmed as Blücher, as supreme commander, arrived at the army not long after.

Observations.

It has been suggested that by the time both Wellington and Gneisenau came in, there was a common agreement to accept a battle near Tirlemont, but this is incorrect.<sup>55</sup> Strategically, the moment they arrived, the common ground of the prince of Orange and the Prussian high command was their goodwill to assist each other in case of need, but that was all. There was no detailed agreement upon any common strategy for a defence of the Low Countries.

Von Röder's summary again stresses the absence of an agreement the day he wrote it, despite all his exertions for the concept of a battle near Tirlemont.

According to Von Röder, initially, the prince might have shown a willingness to accept the Prussian proposal but as the French threat grew by, the readiness of the prince to accept this position decreased. This also had to do with the lobby put upon him to renounce from an invasion into France, as a result of which he put much more emphasis upon measures for defence, and that was a battle between the frontier and Brussels. And last but certainly not least, by doing so, he also met the demand of his father, the British in general and, later, Wellington in particular. Yet, even though the prince may have reacted in some positive way to the Tirlemont proposal, this is merely from Von Röder's words, shortly after it was launched. The information available points to a more careful and awaiting approach of the prince, pending the opinions of the king and the British, so this initial open attitude to the proposal can be doubted.

And by the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, Lowe wrote: "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."<sup>56</sup>

Von Müffling, in his memoirs, on the other hand, simply states as if by the moment that Wellington and Gneisenau had arrived, all problems were solved. When it comes down to the defence of Brussels, he writes: "Der Herzog von Wellington hatte früher den Wunsch geäußert, dass, wenn Napoleon gegen die Niederlande vorrückte, die beide Armeen, die Preussische und die Englische, sich ihm dergestalt entgegenstellen möchten, dass Brussel erst, wenn Napoloen eine Schlacht gewinne, in seine Hände kommen könne – dies war allen Interessen gemäss, und der Feldmarschal war hierzu bis Namur und an die Sambre vorgerückt."<sup>57</sup>

At Aachen, so before Wellington got in Brussels, Gneisenau put forward the Prussian proposal for a joint battle near Tirlemont to Wellington. The duke may have made objections, as he clearly did in his letter to Gneisenau of the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, but as these objections can be found in the same letter and as there is no reference to them as having been discussed before, the reaction of Wellington was most probably one of caution: that he wanted to be in Brussels first and get acquainted about the situation before taking further steps.

In fact, he wrote to Castlereagh at 8 a.m. on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April: "I found the Prussians very content yesterday at Aix la Chapelle, and I propose to write to Gneisenau this afternoon upon our plan, as soon as I shall have seen how matters are situated here, and on the frontier."<sup>58</sup>

It led him to express to Von Röder (and what he told to Gneisenau on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April): the total rejection of the proposal of a battle near Tirlemont. What counted for Wellington was the immense political importance of the Low Countries in general and Brussels in particular. To leave the major part of the country, including Brussels, was for Wellington out of the question. Apart from the presence of king Willem in Brussels and Louis XVIII in Ghent, he

regarded the country as a vital corridor to protect the assembling of the forces of the coalition on the Rhine. Other than that he feared a retreat towards Tirlémont would have huge political and moral implications, on both sides, as it would give rise to pro-French feelings in Belgium. Let alone the loss of the new kingdom of the Netherlands.<sup>59</sup> About the role of Brussels in relation to the defence of the Low Countries Wellington wrote in 1816 to king Willem: “Un ennemi en possession de Bruxelles non seulement empêcherait la communication de V.M. avec tout le midi de son royaume, mais aussi rendrait celle avec le pays rhéan bien difficile. Bruxelles est le vrai pivot de la défense des Pays Bas.”<sup>60</sup>

Without explicitly mentioning Tirlémont, it is in his memorandum of 1842 that Wellington extensively entered upon the criticism directed upon him of not having occupied “a position in the country having for its sole object the early junction of the two allied armies, with a view to fight a great battle with the enemy under the command of Buonaparte.[..]” And “Bruxelles, Ghent, the communications with Holland and Germany [..] ought to have been given up, and the armies united, or prepared to unite, in order to fight a general battle with the enemy, as the best mode of securing all the objects of their respective defensive positions.”

Yet, for Wellington, by abandoning Bruxelles and Ghent and their defensive positions, and by leaving in the hands of the enemy the communications with England and Holland through Antwerp, and with England through the towns on the Lys and Ostend, the allies “would not have been nearer the attainment of the object of fighting a general battle than while in the positions having for their objects to maintain and secure these advantages.”

What also counted for Wellington was that “the enemy would have had the option whether to fight the battle or not, and the initiative of the movements preparatory to it, after having had all the advantages placed in his hands, and the allied generals having thus given up those objects the possession of which alone, in a political or even a military point of view, could justify their fighting a battle at all, at least till they should be in a state of cooperation with the other armies of Europe.”

Even under the hypothesis that the great battle would have been a great victory, it would not have restored “the advantages which he [Wellington] enjoyed in the state of preparation of the army under his command for the advance into France, in cooperation with the other allied armies when they should have taken their stations, and should have been prepared to advance. The restoration of the communications with England, Holland and Germany, which would have been the result of such successful battle, would not have immediately restored and replaced his magazines not located in fortresses, and which would have fallen into the enemy’s hands by the supposed change of position with a view to fight this great battle. After all, the initiative of this battle must have rested with the enemy; and there could be no military reason for fighting it, or political reason, excepting the moral impression throughout the world of its successful result.”<sup>61</sup>

Baron Binder wrote about the situation on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May to prince Metternich: “Les dispositions qu’ont prises les armées alliées en Belgique, et qui mettent ce pays à l’abri de tout danger d’invasion, sont dues à l’énergie et à l’activité du duc de Wellington. A son arrivée ici, un parti assez nombreux était d’avis qu’il fallait céder du terrain à Bonaparte, en cas qu’il attaquât, et se renforcer sur la Meuse pour menacer son flanc droit et l’empêcher d’avancer au-delà de l’Escaut. Le duc de Wellington a rejeté cette opinion: il a déclaré qu’il était décidé à ne pas laisser pénétrer l’ennemi dans le pays, à moins qu’il ne arrivât avec des forces tellement supérieures qu’on s’exposerait à se faire battre, supposition qui n’est plus admissible depuis les armées combinées présentent une masse au moins double de celle avec laquelle Bonaparte pourrait agir.[..]”<sup>62</sup>

As Wellington felt it was well worth the risk to do so, he gave, a first priority to the proper defence of Brussels immediately after his arrival in Brussels. From this point of view, in combination with his fear for a French offensive, the vital point in Wellington’s concept was

to close up the Prussian army on his own in front of Brussels, thereby having it along the Meuse, i.e. in cantonments between Charleroy, Namur and Huy.

Von Röder seems to have been taken by surprise by the duke's strong opinion, as the duke didn't want to hear about the proposal at all, and that of something Von Röder had been engaged in so much.<sup>63</sup> With Wellington's arrival the British point of view in this rejection seems to have hardened as the concept is no longer mentioned, but this may have to do with the dominance of Wellington's total rejection of it and taking control.<sup>64</sup>

In his request to Gneisenau on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April Wellington made his own further measures in case of a strong French attack dependent on the decisions of the Prussians, but at the same time he didn't specify where he thought to resist the French if they would attack. At the same time the duke did not change the positions of his forces around Ath and between Mons and Tournai.

It meant that if the Prussians would stay where they were, he would reconsider his situation in case he would be attacked in force. This was a diplomatic way of increasing the pressure upon the Prussians to give in. If they wouldn't, Wellington believed that the Prussians would in their new positions still be able to accomplish their main goals: to cover the assembling of the allied forces on the Rhine and to move there where they were needed, on the left or on the right bank of the Meuse. It is the principle of Liège being the pivot of their movements (see below).

Further, he believed that a battle in front of Brussels would also afford ample means for the use of cavalry, as the area would be well suited for that. It was clearly Wellington's alternative for a battlefield near Tirlemont, when it came down to open ground which was preferred by the Prussian military.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, prince Hardenberg wrote from Vienna to lord Castlereagh: "Le général Gneisenau remplace le général Kleist sur le Rhin, et recoit l'ordre de se concerter [= take counsel together] avec le duc de Wellington."<sup>65</sup>

If these were the instructions for Gneisenau, it was in this non-committence that Gneisenau complied with the duke's request, but not as he put it, from a strict military point of view.<sup>66</sup> Had the negotiations about the Tirlemont proposal ended with a general expression of goodwill, it was this goodwill which formed the basis of what Gneisenau did by moving his forces further west to cover Brussels and to be in immediate line of communication with the duke's forces so as to succour them in case of a strong French offensive.

Yet, in his promise to move towards him, Gneisenau, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, it is not clear where he would place his forces. Apart from the fact that his "autant qu'il est possible" is highly subjective and non-committent, he presumes Wellington would understand why he could not move away from the Meuse too much, and that he did not do it for purely military reasons, but more as a token of loyalty towards the duke.

At the same time, however, Gneisenau was very well aware of the political reasons to move towards Wellington, as he wrote to his king on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April: "[...] Einige der Gründe, die der Herzog für diese Bewegung aufstellt, sind ebenfalls nicht unwichtig: es giebt überdies deren noch andere, die Euer K.M. Interesse und Verhältnisse zu Grossbritannien berühren [...]"<sup>67</sup>

The day after, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, Gneisenau wasn't specific towards Lowe about his new position either as he described it as "those points whence they [= the Prussian forces] may succour yours and cover the capital".

Actually, while Wellington had asked Gneisenau to put his forces between Charleroi, Namur and Huy, "pour rassembler toute l'armée prussienne avec cette armée alliée Anglo Hollandaise en avant de Bruxelles", he placed it between Charleroy, Huy and Liège, along the Meuse river. In this way, the Prussians took an operation line which was formerly held by the Netherlanders. These, in their turn, now moved to the south, in front of Brussels.

To Lowe, however, Gneisenau explicitly mentioned his main objection to the request of Wellington: that this position on the left bank would be dangerous in case of a reverse, i.e. that the army then would have to pass the river Meuse on a single brigade at Namur.

The reason that Gneisenau did not mention his main objections to Wellington right away in his letter of the 6th of April is unclear, but it may be that he refers here to elements he may have mentioned in his conversation with the duke at Aachen. These are the elements Wellington refers to in his letter to Gneisenau, dated 5<sup>th</sup> of April.

For this reason it is very well possible that Gneisenau mentioned them to the duke during their meeting in Aachen. They were for the Prussians: the possibility to cover the assembling of the allied armies on the Rhine on the one hand and to use Liège as the pivot of the movements of their forces as long as France could not be invaded on the other.

The pivot served for either moving with the army towards the Low Countries on the one hand or towards the area between the Moselle, the Meuse and the Rhine on the other, depending on where Napoleon would strike with his main army.<sup>68</sup> In this, it was felt the Meuse could not be abandoned – it was the Prussian strategic concept which had dominated all the time.

While Gneisenau wasn't specific about his objections to accept a battle where Wellington wanted to do so (between the frontier and Brussels) towards the duke himself, he gave Von Röder the task to do so.

The sequence in the Prussian initiative is most surprising as Gneisenau promised to comply with Wellington's request, but at the same he asked him, and now through Von Röder, for the assurance that he would not accept a battle on the left bank of the Meuse under all circumstances. To cross the Meuse was one thing which he considered dangerous in itself, but what counted for Gneisenau was the fact that his army would always have the possibility to fall back upon the right bank of the Meuse, in case of a reverse.

His fear was, in case such a battle would be fought and lost, that the passages over the Meuse (Namur, Huy, Liège and even Maastricht) would be lost and that the Prussian army would have to fall back to Prussia through the Netherlands and Germany. Any battle fought in front of Brussels was seen by Gneisenau as one which could not be fought out completely as having the line of retreat on his flank instead of in his rear.

So, again Von Röder was charged with a mission of elucidating the risks the allies would run in case of a fixed intention of Wellington to accept a battle on the left bank of the Meuse, in front of Brussels.

Though eventually a supporter of the Tirlemont concept, Gneisenau didn't approach the issue through this line again, but by mentioning the risks of accepting a battle on the left bank of the Meuse under all circumstances, specially in case of a reverse, instead.

With this, he put the issue in a wider context (so not connected to Tirlemont as a battleground) to be sure, as soon as he would move his army over the river Meuse, that he would not be bound to a battleground which was chosen by Wellington.

It is remarkable that Gneisenau did not express his objections directly towards the duke, as it now fell again to Von Röder to handle the difference in the views of both commanders. Gneisenau had done so towards Lowe, but this was not the whole thing as now Von Röder was supposed to explain to the duke the more detailed objections he had against accepting a major battle in front of Brussels.

Remarkably enough, as far as can be derived from the available sources, Von Röder didn't mention all objections Gneisenau had. Though he explained towards the duke of Wellington the principle of the pivot of Liège, Von Röder handles the issue by first asking about Wellington's situation and intentions in more detail so as to have the information in hand upon which the Prussians could react. Though probably disappointed about the rejection of the Tirlemont concept, Von Röder yet again was courteous towards the duke and kept seeing the common interest of the war. In that context, he reiterated the general Prussian willingness

to cooperate. Yet, it was the other way around in which the Prussians approached the issue: first to comply with Wellington's request and then to put down the conditions for this operation, in which also belonged the requests for information as mentioned above. In fact, the Prussians moved further west, over the Meuse, without actually having a clear and sound idea of what Wellington's intentions were.

In this, they took a risk as – once again – they now tried, through Von Röder, to point Wellington to the risks of accepting a battle on this left bank, while at the same time they asked for vital information about his strength, positions and intentions.

By the time Gneisenau wrote to his king on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April about his movement towards Wellington's army, he had no answer regarding the acceptance of a battle in front of Brussels under all possible circumstances. But it were the reasons as mentioned by Wellington, his instruction to cooperate with the duke and his own belief that this manoeuvre would deter the French that Gneisenau informed the king about it.

Yet, however important Gneisenau's reason of deterrence may have been, there is a contradictory element in this, as - at the same time - Gneisenau wasn't prepared to go into battle with Wellington under all circumstances. So, in this sense it was a bluff as well. Additionally, Gneisenau clearly was self-protective by describing a worst-case scenario.<sup>69</sup>

In the request as Wellington put it towards Gneisenau immediately after his arrival at Brussels it should be stressed that this wasn't as self-evident as one would think it was. It had been just some days before that king Willem had consented in having the Prussians enter his country – if he hadn't, Wellington would have had to postpone his request. At the same time, the duke also was aware of the fact that the army of the Netherlands was to be placed between the British-Hanoverian forces and the Prussians (to be) at and east of Charleroi.<sup>70</sup>

Major general Torrens met Wellington after he had received Gneisenau's reply and translated the duke's feelings to earl Bathurst about his situation in relation to the Prussian army as "Considering that no arrangements have been made at Vienna whatever for giving the duke any command beyond the British, Dutch and Hanoverians, I had the satisfaction to find him altogether much pleased with the prospect before him, and perfectly satisfied of being enabled to carry all his objects into effect, by the good understanding which he can, and in fact has established, with the Prussian commander, equally as if the latter were actually placed under his orders.

An instance of this has been afforded today in the ready acquiescence of general Gneisenau to move up his force to Charleroi &c., so as to be in an immediate line of communication with our position."<sup>71</sup>

The same line of thinking can be found in a letter written by Wellesley Pole to lord Castlereagh, dated 7<sup>th</sup> of April. Here he writes: "It will gratify you to know that the Duke of Wellington is perfectly satisfied with the footing on which he stands with the Prussian troops in this neighbourhood, and that he thinks his control over them will be even more efficient and more beneficial to the general cause than if they were formally and unwillingly under his command.

Lord Bathurst will receive from the Duke the answer of General Gneisenau to the letter which the Duke wrote to him yesterday [was in fact on the 5<sup>th</sup>], respecting the movement of the Prussians (a copy of which was transmitted to Lord Bathurst). You will perceive the promptitude with which the Duke's recommendation has been obeyed by the General. I observed to the Duke, that the General had complied with his request, leaving the responsibility on his Grace, to which he assented, and said to that he had no objection: the Duke seems to feel confident that there never will be any difficulty thrown in the way of his receiving the most cordial co-operation from the Prussians, and seems to consider them as virtually under his command. I do not think he wishes them to be placed more closely under

his orders.”<sup>72</sup> What transpires here –thoughbeit not from Wellington directly - is a haughty feeling as if Wellington could have been a “commander-in-chief”, commanding both armies at the same time. It didn’t work that way, and it is unclear whether it has ever seriously been considered. Now, each commander had his own “right to withhold agreement” [<sup>73</sup>], as instructions were most general.<sup>74</sup>

Late March, an invasion of France was for Wellington mainly a matter of overwhelming the enemy with superior forces. If not, he feared partial checks in the advance. He reckoned that by the beginning of May sufficient forces would be ready for the invasion. At the same time, no specific plan had been settled at Vienna, but the general idea was “that the whole force should enter between the Rhine and the Sambre, the Prussians composing the centre, the Austrians the left, the British the right, the Russians chiefly as a reserve. This is adopted with a view of making it impossible for Buonaparte to attack them in detail. The plan is to be settled, *de common accord*, when the sovereigns come down to Frankfort or Augsburg, by the emperor of Russia with Volkonsky, the king of Prussia with Knesebeck, prince Schwarzenberg on the part of Austria, and some person on the part of England.”<sup>75</sup>

As there may have been in Vienna a general idea about what was to be done, the military commanders had their own ideas about the details of the invasion. For instance, Gneisenau already sent his plan for the invasion of France to the Prussian king on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April and Wellington was soon to follow.

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<sup>1</sup> In: Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.484

<sup>2</sup> In: Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.485-486

<sup>3</sup> Cf. in WD, Vol.XII p.288-289

<sup>4</sup> Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.487

<sup>5</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.60-61  
The original came from the Gneisenau archive A.45.58

<sup>6</sup> BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.119-121

<sup>7</sup> BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.122-127

<sup>8</sup> Hardenberg to Gneisenau. In: Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.482  
He would have been accompanied by lieutenant colonel Fremantle and William Pitt Lennox. In: Fifty years' etc. p.222

<sup>9</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.8

<sup>10</sup> Cf. F.de Bas. In: La campagne de 1815 etc. Vol.I p.245  
Stadt Aachener Zeitung, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1815  
Wellington had reached Frankfurt am Main on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April between 2 and 3 p.m. and Köln the day after. Cf. Staatcourant, 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1815  
Stadt Aachener Zeitung, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1815

Gneisenau had reached Aachen on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April. Cf. letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1815. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592

<sup>11</sup> See below, Wellington to Clancarty. In: WD, p.290  
Cf. Lettow Vorbeck, O. von - Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.143

<sup>12</sup> Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25  
The duke probably got in Brussel after midnight, so on the very early morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> of April. Cf. the newspaper l'Oracle, datd 5<sup>th</sup> of April.  
Cf. Colonel Hardinge to count d'Urban, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1815. In: NAK, WO 135/3  
He established himself at the rue Royale, at a house of mr.Van den Cruyce (nowadays nr.36). In: Galesloot, L. - Le duc de Wellington à Bruxelles, p.135  
Galesloot got this information from baron De Broux, the son-in-law of Van den Cruyce himself.

<sup>13</sup> In the morning the duke had a conversation with the count d'Artois about the treaty of the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, among others. Cf. Count d'Artois to his brother, Louis XVIII, dated 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1815. In: In: Romberg, E and A.Malet (ed.) - Louis XVIII et les Cent Jours à Gand: recueil etc. Vol.I p.125

<sup>14</sup> A state dated 1<sup>st</sup> of April and originating from the former Kriegsarchiv (nr.VI.D.118.I.70) gives totals of 50.000 Prussians on the Meuse and 23.000 English and Hanoverian troops and 20.000 Dutch / Belgian troops in the Netherlands. In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.48

Some days before, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, Wellington was informed in detail by lieutenant colonel J.Carmichael Smyth of the Royal Engineers in a memorandum about the progress in the field works in the Netherlands as initiated by the prince of Orange and which were carried out in Ostend, Nieuport, Ypres, Tournay, Antwerp, Mons etc. In: WSD, Vol.X p.721-724

<sup>15</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.288-289

<sup>16</sup> Lowe to Bunbury, 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1815. In: BL, Add.ms.37.052 f.128-129

<sup>17</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.26

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<sup>18</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.290

<sup>19</sup> Torrens to earl Bathurst. WSD, VolX p.41

<sup>20</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.292

<sup>21</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.49-51

<sup>22</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.41-43

Referred to is Sir George Murray (1772-1846). Murray was Wellington's first choice to replace Lowe, but he had been sent as a lieutenant-governor of upper Canada late in 1814, with the acting rank of lieutenant-general. Although he was summoned with urgency, Murray's arrival at the army did not materialize until after the campaign had ended. Cf. Miller, D. – Lady De Lancey etc. p.55

<sup>23</sup> Sir Ch.Stuart to count de Blacas, 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1815. In: Romberg, E and A.Malet (ed.) - Louis XVIII et les Cent Jours à Gand: recueil etc. Vol.I p.143

Sir Hudson Lowe to Gneisenau, 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1815. In: BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.67-68

<sup>24</sup> In: Holland Rose, J. - Sir H.Lowe etc. p.525

<sup>25</sup> BL, Add.ms. 37.052 f.138 and 20.114

The remainder of the letter is about Gneisenau's plan for the invasion of France.  
English translation in: Holland Rose, J. - Sir H.Lowe etc. p.525-526

<sup>26</sup> Karl Justus Gruner, (1777-1820), Prussian diplomat.

<sup>27</sup> In: Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol. IV p.487

<sup>28</sup> Cf. WD, Vol.XII p.288

<sup>29</sup> It may have been the day before that Von Röder was given this job.

<sup>30</sup> In: Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol. IV p.488-489

<sup>31</sup> WSD, Vol.X p.47-48

NAK, WO 1/205/1 p.81-83

The fact that it was dated 8<sup>th</sup> of April can also be taken from Wellington's reply, dated 10<sup>th</sup> of April. In: WD, Vol.XII p.293

<sup>32</sup> Namur would have been occupied by the Prussians already on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April.

<sup>33</sup> GSA, VPH-HA, VI. Korps und brigade befehle etc. p.38 Originally from KA (VI.E.3.I p.51)

Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Vorgeschichte etc. p.350-351

The fact that the orders were issued on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April can be drawn from the letter which was written by Gneisenau to Lowe on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April (see above).

Prussian headquarters were established in what is now the museum of weaponry, at the quai de Maestricht, Liège.

<sup>34</sup> Wellington to the earl of Clancarty, 10<sup>th</sup> of April. In: WD, Vol.XII p.295

Lord Harrowby to viscount Castlereagh, 7<sup>th</sup> of April. In: WSD, Vol.X p.33

<sup>35</sup> WSD, Vol. X p.33-37

<sup>36</sup> Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.346

Pflugk Harttung, J.von – Nelson etc. p.45-46. He located the original in Von Kneesebecks papers in the former Kriegsarchiv, Berlin.

The English and French versions are in:

Holland Rose, J. Sir H.Lowe etc. p.525-526

<sup>37</sup> In: GstA, VI.HA.NL Gneisenau kt/19

<sup>38</sup> This chapter relies heavily upon Von Pflugk Harttung. In: Bundestruppen etc. p.49-65  
Cf. The memoirs of baron Von Müffling etc. p.225-226

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich Adolf Graf von Kalckreuth, Prussian general (1737-1818)

<sup>40</sup> Johann David Ludwig Graf Yorck von Wartenburg, Prussian General (1759-1830)

<sup>41</sup> Bogislav Friedrich Emanuel Graf Taubert von Wittenberg, Prussian general (1760-1824)

<sup>42</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bülow, Graf von Dennewitz (1755-1816)

<sup>43</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.51-52  
Conrady, E.von – Leben und Wirken etc. p.273

<sup>44</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.54-55  
He took the original from the GstA, Rep.63.88.1840

<sup>45</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.73

Von Pflugk Harttung describes the statement as “Gneisenau möge gemeinsam mit diesem [Wellington] nach freiem Ermessen in steter Übereinstimmung handeln.” Pflugk Harttung, J.von Bundestruppen p.55

<sup>46</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.56

<sup>47</sup> Das Preussische Heer in den Jahren 1814 und 1815 p.129-130, 143

<sup>48</sup> Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleon’s Untergang Vol.III p.140

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, Gneisenau reached Köln, to leave from there for Aachen. Cf. Staatscourant, dated 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1815.

He had traveled from Berlin through Erfurt, Frankfurt and Mainz. Cf. Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.55

<sup>49</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.57  
The original was in the KA, VI.D.6.I.18

<sup>50</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.58  
The original was in the KA, VI.D.6.I.19  
Cf. Dziengel, J.D.von Geschichte etc. p.377

<sup>51</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.58-59  
The original was in the Gneisenau archive, A.45.51

<sup>52</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.61

<sup>53</sup> In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen etc. p.63  
The original was in the Gneisenau archive, A.45.51

<sup>54</sup> The fact that headquarters would move to Liège on the 11<sup>th</sup> is confirmed by Gneisenau in his letter to Gruner on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April. In: Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.493

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Chandler, D. - The hundred days p.29  
Wagner, J.Chr.A. - Pläne der Schlachten und Treffen p.2

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, Von Röder wrote: “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.”

Yet, on the 28<sup>th</sup> he also wrote that the prince clung to his opinion, i.e. to meet Napoleon at the frontier.

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In: Bundestruppen p.31-32

The passage involved comes from the correspondence of Von Röder which was once in the Kriegsarchiv. The way Von Röder describes it, there were moments in the negotiations and the prince c.s. may have shown some willingness to think about it, but eventually it didn't work out, which also becomes clear from the other correspondence available.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. preceding chapter.

<sup>57</sup> Aus meinem Leben p.220

<sup>58</sup> WD, Vol.XII p.288

<sup>59</sup> On the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, Wellington wrote to colonel Hardinge about the Low Countries:

“The circumstances of our general situation require they [=the Prussians] should be here; for I can never admit that all the allies have not nearly an equal interest in preventing this country from falling, even for a moment, into the hands of the enemy.” (see below).

Wellington's ideas about the role of Brussels were no different by the spring of 1816, when he was in communication with king Willem about the design of a defence system for the Netherlands. Cf. Wellington to king Willem, 10th March 1816. In: Colenbrander, H.T. Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VIII p.30

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Wellington to king Willem, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1816. In: Colenbrander, H.T. - Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VIII p.30

<sup>61</sup> Memorandum on the battle of Waterloo etc. In: WSD, Vol.X p.518-522

<sup>62</sup> In: Colenbrander, H.T. - Gedenkstukken etc. Vol.VII p.346

<sup>63</sup> Von Pflugk Harttung claims that what counted for Von Röder was that both armies would, in decisive moments, be united and had agreed upon what to do. It meant that he would have agreed upon the prince's idea, i.e. to meet the French in battle south or south-west of Brussels.

Yet, in view of the reaction of Von Röder to Gneiseau early April this can be doubted.

In: Bundestruppen p.

<sup>64</sup> The role of Lowe and Von Röder as appearing to have diminished after the arrival of the duke Wellington may also have to do with a lack of sources.

<sup>65</sup> In: WSD, Vol.X p.73

Von Pflugk Harttung describes the statement as “Gneisenau möge gemeinsam mit diesem [Wellington] nach freien Ermessen in steter Übereinstimmung handeln.” Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.55

<sup>66</sup> There was no more such thing as a Namur-affair. Somehow, Wellington managed it right away to arrange it with king Willem for the Prussian forces to enter his country through Namur. Wellington wrote on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April that he had done so, as the king had issued the respective orders, while he had arrived himself on the day before.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Hussey, J. - Defending Brussels etc. p.17

<sup>68</sup> Von Müffling gives the position an offensive interpretation: to keep the enemy uncertain where the Prussian army would advance. In: C.v.W. - Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.4

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Hussey, J. - Defending Brussels etc. p.17

After describing Wellington's strategem for the invasion of France, which was “to ensure that the Prussians played a secondary role, while the Austrians and their German allies formed up along the Rhine” and that “the duke would then lead the invasion of France, while the Austrians would protect Germany”, Hofschröder links this strategem to Röder's letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> of April as being a reaction to this, in the sense that Gneisenau “saw through the duke's scheme.”

However, the report of the 8<sup>th</sup> involved has nothing to do with the invasion as such, as it only dealt with the defensive position in the Netherlands. Cf. Hofschröder, P. - 1815.The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.103-104

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Muilwijk, E. Waterloo campaign. The contribution of the Netherlands mobile army (on-line study).

<sup>71</sup> Torrens to earl Bathurst, 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1815. In: WSD, Vol.X p.41

<sup>72</sup> In: Correspondence, despatches and other papers of viscount Castlereagh p.298

<sup>73</sup> Hussey, J. - Defending Brussels etc. p.15-16

<sup>74</sup> For instance, prince Hardenberg wrote from Vienna to lord Castlereagh on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April: “Le général Gneisenau remplace le général Kleist sur le Rhin, et recoit l’ordre de se concerter avec le duc de Wellington.”

<sup>75</sup> WSD, Vol. X p.33-37