

7th – 13th of May

The formation of Wellington's army.

As before, Wellington expressed his strong discontent about the way the war office was dealing with the situation as far as the field army was concerned. On the 8th of May he wrote to lord Stewart: "I have got an infamous army, very weak and ill equipped, and a very inexperienced staff. In my opinion they are doing nothing in England. They have not raised a man; they have not called out the militia either in England or Ireland; are unable to send me anything; and they have not sent a message to Parliament about the money. The war spirit is therefore evaporating as I am informed."¹

Wellington's intelligence.

As far as intelligence was concerned it was on the 7th of May that Wellington wrote to sir Henry Hardinge: "From all accounts, the French appear to have collected all the troops they had in our front, with the exception of very small garrisons on, and in the neighbourhood of the Sambre. D'Erlon's corps from Lille has marched upon Valenciennes. Buonaparte was expected to leave Paris on Tuesday the 9th, according to a letter which the Duc de Feltre showed me this day.

It appears, by his account, that the French had 130.000 regular troops on the 30th of April, besides 25.000 Guards. Including national guards and gendarmerie, it was supposed that they would be able to produce 280.000 men, but no more than the number above stated of regular troops. The communication with foreign countries by land is forbidden on pain of death, which looks as if an attack was intended."²

On the 8th of May, colonel Hardinge reported from Liège on behalf of general Von Zieten (at Charleroi) that on the 5th of May troops at Givet and Philippeville had left for Maubeuge and Valenciennes, and were replaced at Philippeville by national guards.³

The same day, Von Dörnberg reported from Mons that he had the impression that all communication from Paris had stopped and that the French movements on their right had stopped as no more troops arrived at Beaumont. The garrisons of Givet and Philippeville would have been withdrawn and replaced by conscripts.⁴

The Duke of Feltre reported to Wellington on the presence of maximal 50.000 French between Maubeuge and Mézières and that he expected Napoleon to have 100.000 men more to oppose Wellington.⁵

That day, the prince of Orange informed Wellington that there was nothing new from Mons.⁶ On the 9th of May Von Dörnberg supposed Napoleon would have arrived at Condé; by that time the French didn't allow anybody to pass the frontier.⁷

Most probably as a result of this intelligence, Wellington wrote to lord Hill on the 9th of May: "Matters look a little serious upon the frontier; the enemy have certainly got the greatest part of their force collected at Valenciennes and Maubeuge; and it is said that Buonaparte arrived yesterday at Condé. I was assured at Ghent on Sunday that he was to leave Paris on this day. It is certain that all communication is stopped since yesterday morning."⁸

The same day, Wellington wrote to Zieten: "Il est de mon devoir de vous avertir que tous les renseignements [sic] que je recois de la frontière donnent lieu de croire que les troupes Francaises sont rassemblées entre Valenciennes et Maubeuge, et plutôt sur Maubeuge que Valenciennes. La communication a été arrêtée hier; mais j'ai tout lieu de croire que Buonaparte avait l'intention de quitter Paris comme aujourd'hui.

Je vous ferai savoir par les postes des troupes des Pays Bas toutes les nouvelles que j'apprendrai."⁹ And to Hardinge he wrote at 1 p.m.: "There appears no doubt that the

enemy's forces are collected at Maubeuge and Valenciennes, principally at the former. The communication was put an end to yesterday and it was said Buonaparte was at Condé. I was told at Ghent that he was to leave Paris on this day.”¹⁰

On the 10th of May, general Von Zieten reported from Charleroi that the French forces between Maubeuge and Beaumont (towards Avesnes) were not strong (about 4000 men).¹¹

That day, Lord Hill sent the intelligence to Brussels that “a considerable column is reported to have marched towards Lille from Valenciennes.”¹²

On the 11th of May Von Dörnberg informed lord FitzRoy Somerset that he felt certain that the French had collected the greatest part of their forces between Valenciennes and Charleville, and that they were forming a reserve at Laon.¹³

To colonel Henry Hardinge, Wellington wrote on the same day: “I received no intelligence of any importance yesterday, or during the night. It can scarcely be doubted that the enemy's force is on the Sambre, and yet they are adopting measures which look very like a defensive rather than an offensive; such as breaking up roads and bridges etc. One report is, that they have got ten day's provisions for 110.000 men at Avesnes. I enclose the copy of a letter which I received this morning from mr.Hervey at Ghent; this, however, proves nothing more than what is the general conversation and notion at Paris. I reckon the force with which Buonaparte can attack this country at 110.000 men.”

And as the duke kept the letter till later that day, pending any other information, he wrote at 5 p.m. “I have nothing of importance this day, excepting a report, which M.de Brockhausen has sent to general Gneisenau, of the enemy being in force on the Meuse, and intending to attack on that side. My opinion is, that they have placed their army in its present positions with a view to a defensive. They cannot think of attacking through the country of Luxembourg. It is said that they expected that we should have attacked them on the 10th.”¹⁴

Sir Augustus Frazer on the 11th of May was also aware of the possible danger: “We hear that Bonaparte is between Conde and Valenciennes, and in force; greater than that of the Allies in artillery, less in cavalry and infantry. We shrewdly suspect his intention of attacking us; if so, the rencontre may take place in a few days. The Duke's intention is to fight, which his Grace considers eligible, even if we should be beaten. We have two positions; one in front of Ath, from Leuze to Mons; the other near Hal. In the possible event of our being beaten from either, or both, Bonaparte could hardly advance, since the Prussians would menace, and indeed turn his right flank. So much for general speculation. Should the enemy remain quiet, we shall remain so too for a while. We are not ready, and can hardly conceive that he is; but his reinforcements are nearer, and his arrangements less shackled than ours.”¹⁵

On the 11th of May, baron Behr reported to the prince of Orange about the reinforcements in the town of Valenciennes.¹⁶ The day after Zieten sent the information from Charleroi that the enemy was on the defensive; a large part of the forces which had been in and around Avesnes would have moved for Valenciennes.¹⁷

Baron Behr wrote to the prince of Orange about the arrival of 45 guns at Péronne and of some infantry at Quiévrain.¹⁸

Lieutenant colonel Hardinge wrote to Wellington, from Hannut on the 12th of May:

“The intelligence received by prince Blücher confirms your Lordship's opinion of the enemy's measures being defensive. The reports state that the enemy is destroying roads and bridges etc. In general the information which this headquarters receives is so scanty, and derived from sources so little to be depended upon, that your Lordship's accounts are most acceptable, and alone have weight. The staff within these few days are very anxious to put this branch of the service on a more careful footing.”¹⁹

On the 12th of May Lowe reported to lord Bunbury: “[..] We have no positive intelligence as yet respecting Bonaparte’s movements. The principal French force is assembled at Maubeuge and Avesnes between that and Philippeville. There is also a strong corps at Valenciennes. They have inundated and so have we.

The French force is variously estimated. The duke of W. supposed it to be near 80.000 a few days since. No such rate, it now increased, for by every concurrent testimony, reinforcements have been sent in this direction; however, I do not well see how so large a force could be assembled, without a general dislocation of their newly organizing corps d’armées and collecting most of them opposite Belgium than what our previous information led us to expect.[..]”²⁰

And on the 13th of May, Zieten sent another report from two French officers confirming that in the early days of May there were no troops in the department of Oise and that one division of the 6th corps was in and around Laon. A force of about 25.000 men was forming between Givet and Charleville. National guards, coming from Champagne, the Ardennes and from the Aisne would form garrisons at Philippeville and Beaumont.²¹

The same day, on the 13th of May, at Braine le Comte, Constant Rebecque was informed – through Van Merlen – about the presence of French forces at Maubeuge and Avesnes.²²

The day before he had got a note from general Collaert about the works carried out at Maubeuge and Avesnes. In the latter place there was artillery, a lot of cavalry, a garrison of about 300 men and the road from Solre-le-Chateau would have been blocked.²³

Wellington re-arranges his cantonments.

On the 8th of May, Wellington wrote to the prince of Orange: “I will settle this day the distribution of the army in corps and its cantonments.”²⁴ Accordingly, he wrote him again the day after, at noon: “I have been considering the means of making the transfer of prince Frederick’s corps to Lord Hill [²⁵] and the only mode which occurs to me, in which it can be done with safety, considering that the enemy are so near to us, is as follows:

First, that the general baron Charles Alten’s division should occupy Soignies and Braine le Comte in the morning, and that the troops of the Netherlands should move from thence; those of prince’s Frederick’s corps upon Hal; and those of Your Royal Highness upon Nivelles and Genappe and their neighbourhoods.

Secondly; that the remainder of prince Frederick’s corps, not at Soignies and Braine le Comte, should move upon Hal likewise tomorrow morning, and the whole should be collected there tomorrow night. They shall have farther orders from me for their farther movement. I beg you to leave the guards at Enghien. Sir Henry Clinton will have orders to occupy Lens, if sir Charles Alten should march upon Braine le Comte and Soignies.”²⁶

At the same time he did so to the commander of the 2nd corps, lord Hill:

“Matters look a little serious upon the frontier; the enemy have certainly got the greatest part of their force collected at Valenciennes and Maubeuge; and it is said that Buonaparte arrived yesterday at Condé. I was assured at Ghent on Sunday that he was to leave Paris on this day. It is certain that all communication is stopped since yesterday morning.

I have desired the prince of Orange to make the following arrangements tomorrow morning, to get prince Frederick’s corps over to you:

First; to move baron Charles Alten’s division from Lens upon Soignies and Braine le Comte; and the whole of prince Frederick’s corps upon Hal, where they shall remain tomorrow night, and will receive farther orders from me. Secondly; his own corps of troops of the Netherlands upon Nivelles, Genappe and their neighbourhood.

I beg you you apprise sir Henry Clinton of these movements and to direct him to occupy Lens in the morning, if baron Charles Alten should march upon Soignies and Braine le Comte, still retaining, however, his cantonments in Ath.

As the whole of the enemy's force is upon Valenciennes and Maubeuge, I am inclined to get sir Charles Colville a little nearer to us. Let him keep the 35th in Courtrai; one bataillon at Avelghem for the concerns of the bridge; the other two bataillons of general Johnson's brigade at Audenarde.

Colonel Mitchell's brigade, which I understand is still at Grammont, had better, if the enemy move forward, join the rest of the army at Enghien, or rather Hal, unless it should be found that a serious attack is made upon the country between the Scheldt and the Lys.

General Lyon's brigade of the 4th division is, I find, still here, and I have ordered them to march in the morning to join their division. The quarter master general will inform you where they will be tomorrow.”²⁷

After having received Wellington's order, the prince of Orange left for Brussels to confer with the duke about the relocations of the divisions. He returned to Braine le Comte the other day.²⁸

Being in Brussels, the prince wrote on the 9th of May on behalf of Wellington the following orders to Constant Rebecque: “Le duc ordonne que la 1ere division et la brigade des Indes doivent se rassembler demain soir à Halle. La 3me doit occuper demain les cantonnments de la 1ere et le général Chassé aura son quartier général au Reux. Le général Alten avec la 3^{me} division anglaise occupera demain soir Soignies et les environs. La 2^e division des Pays Bas restera à Nivelles et environs mais faites leur établir leur cantonnements de manière à pouvoir s'assembler dans la plus court espace de tems possible par brigades à Nivelles et aux Quatre Bras.”²⁹

And from this it was Constant Rebecque who ordered De Perponcher on the 9th of May: “Ik heb de eer UH.Ed.Gestr.te informeeren, dat de Indiaansche brigade benevens de Eerste Divisie zich op morgen avond moeten verzamelen te Halle. Z.K.H. begeerte is egter, dat uwe divisie te Nivelles blijve maar zodanig geconcentreerd worde dat de brigades zich op de spoedigst mogelijke wijze verzamelen kunnen, een te Nivelles en de andere aan de Quatre-Bras. De derde divisie zal de cantonnementen van de eerste innemen, en eene Engelsche divisie die van de derde divisie te Soignies bezetten. Ik verzoek UHEG de weg van Nivelles naar Braine le Chateau te laten onderzoeken en dezelve daar, waar het tot de passage van de artillerie en het voerwezen nodig is, dadelijk te laten repareren.”³⁰

This last request was complied with right away as a report on this reconnaissance was made up the next day.³¹

It was on the 10th of May that both corps commanders gave their feedback to the duke on what they had done. The prince, having returned from Brussels, again, then wrote to the duke of Wellington at noon:

“The movement you directed me to make has taken place: the 3rd division has already reached its cantonments at and about Soignies. The troops of the Netherlands, destined to join lord Hill's corps, will all be assembled at Hall and vicinity tonight. My brother is to go to Hall, where he will wait for further orders from your Grace. The 3rd division of the Netherlands has moved to Reux and vicinity; the 2nd remains at Nivelles and vicinity, observing the high road from Binche to Nivelles, and from Charleroi to Genappe.

The two light cavalry brigades of the Netherlands are at St.Symphorien and Havré, and communicate to their right with the Hanoverian, and to their left with the Prussian posts. The heavy brigade still remain at Braine la Leud.

Should the French push along the road from Binch to Nivelles, am I to move general Alten's division and the 3rd division of the Netherlands in the direction of Nivelles, and make a stand there; or, in case their force should not be considerable, déboucher upon them from the chaussée which leads from Reux into the other? If this could be a combined movement with the Prussians, it seems to me that it might be a successful one. The Nivelles road is the least well guarded, as well by us as by the Prussians, who have only a very weak post of cavalry at Binch, it being besides the nearest to Maubeuge, where the French have their principal force. It strikes me as not unlikely that in case of an attack they would make their principal effort along that road. " 32

And lord Hill wrote to Wellington: "I have to acknowledge the receipt of your Grace's letter, dated yesterday at noon. On the receipt of it at 9 p.m. yesterday, I communicated to sir Henry Clinton that part of the instruction which relates to him and the 2nd division.

With respect to colonel Mitchell's brigade, I beg to state that I had moved it to Renaix, in order to give sir Charles Colville an opportunity of attending to it before active operations commenced. The 4th division will, however, be placed this day agreeably to your Grace's instructions – the 35th at Courtray, one battalion at Avelghem, and the other two at Oudenarde. Mitchell's brigade and the 9th brigade of artillery will be at and near Grammont. General Lyon's brigade I find is coming up this day to Neder Brakel." 33

Eventually, Wellington wanted to have prince Frederik with his corps in the villages on the roads from Sotteghem to Ghent and from Sotteghem to Alost and it was for this reason that he wrote to prince Frederik on the 10th of May: "Je prie votre Altesse Royale de vous mettre en marche demain matin et de passer par Grammont et d'aller jusqu'à Sotteghem, et de cantonner les troupes sous vos ordres demain dans les villages sur les deux routes qui menent de Sotteghem à Gand et de Sotteghem à Alost, dont je vous envoie la liste. Je prierai votre Altesse Royale d'avoir la bonté de faire savoir à Lord Hill, qui est à Grammont, les détails de cet arrangement." 34

The day after, the duke reported to prince Willem what he had ordered his brother: "I sent your brother orders yesterday to march this morning upon Sotteghem, and to canton his troops between that place and Ghent, and that place and Alost." 35 It was complied with the same day. 36

It was on the 11th of May that Wellington wrote to the prince of Orange: "I acknowledge that I do not much like your cantonment at Roeulx for more than a body of observation; and I should prefer to have the 3rd division of the Netherlands on the high road to Nivelles, or on the high road from Mons to Hal.

In the situation in which we are placed at present, neither at war nor at peace, unable on that account to patrol up to the enemy and ascertain his position by view, or to act offensively upon any part of his line, it is difficult, if not impossible, to combine an operation, because there are no data on which to found any combination. All we can do is to put our troops in such a situation, as, in case of a sudden attack by the enemy, to render it easy to assemble, and to provide against the chance of any being cut off from the rest.

I have no objection to you leaving the 2nd division of the Netherlands upon the Nivelles road & even you leaving the 3rd division upon that road if you think proper." 37

The prince followed the instruction on the 12th of May, as he then wrote back to the duke:

"In consequence of your letter of 12 o'clock yesterday, and the instructions therein contained, I have given orders to the 3rd division of the Netherlands to move more to its left, so as to be à cheval on the Nivelles road. Reux will then only be occupied by a battalion. This movement is to take place tomorrow." 38

The defence-plan of the army of the Netherlands for the sector in front of Nivelles.

Apparently, it was between the 4th and 8th of May that the prince requested Collaert and Chassé to develop a plan of cooperation in case of a superior French attack in their sector.³⁹ The idea behind this was that the forces close to the border would set up a defensive screen, which would allow other divisions of the 1st corps which stood further to the rear to safely concentrate their forces.⁴⁰

Summarizing the plan, the cooperation meant for Van Merlen that he, having outposts at Vellereille le Sec, Havay, Givry and Haulchin (to the right of the Prussian outposts at Bonne Espérance), and after having found out about the French strength, had to fall back and collect upon Bon Vouloir (a single building immediately south-west of Havré and Boussoit sur Haine). Of the horse artillery, two guns were supposed to remain at St.Symphorien, while the remainder of Van Merlen's artillery would pass the Haine and go back as far as Ville-sur-Haine.

Of the brigade itself, the majority was to pass the Haine at Havré and the other, smaller, part at Maurage. From there, both had to head for a position in rear of Baume. Meanwhile, the brigade of De Ghigny was meant to cover the retreat of both the brigade Van Merlen and the division of Chassé. Of this last division, three battalions were supposed to cover the retreat of Van Merlen over the Haine through the defiles of Thieu, Strépy and Trivières. After doing so, they would have to retire with the light cavalry towards Fayt, where – meanwhile – the remainder of the 3rd division of Chassé would have been assembled to await further orders.

De Ghigny, in his turn, while covering the retreat of van Merlen and Chassé, was to fall back upon the position in rear of Baume as well, near the road leading to Nivelles. There, this brigade was to place itself to the left of the road, and the other one, of Van Merlen, to its right. On its way there, it would have to pick up the artillery which was posted at Ville-sur-Haine. A smaller part of the brigade, at Obourg, was meant to fall back upon Baume through Gottignies and along Roelux.⁴¹

On the 11th of May, Wellington paid a visit to king Willem, but what has been discussed there remains unknown.⁴²

The overall result of the orders issued in the period 9th -12th of May were – on the evening of the 13th of May- the following positions:⁴³

-division of Cooke in and around Enghien

-division of Clinton in and around Lens, while also occupying Ath⁴⁴

-division of Alten in and around Soignies and Braine le Comte

-division of Colville: 35th regiment at Courtrai, one battalion at Avelghem, 2 battalions at Audenarde, brigade of Mitchell at Grammont, brigade of Lyon at Neder Brakel

-corps of prince Frederik (1st division and the Indian brigade) between Ghent, Alost and Sotteghem.⁴⁵

-division of De Perponcher in and around Nivelles.⁴⁶

-division of Chassé in and around Fayt, along the road to Nivelles, while occupying Le Roelux with one battalion⁴⁷

-the positions of all the cavalry units remained unaltered⁴⁸

Wellington and Blücher.

In the contact with the Prussian general headquarters it was that lieutenant colonel Hardinge wrote to Wellington on the 10th of May: "I had the honour of receiving and communicating your Lordship's letter of yesterday to prince Blücher. [⁴⁹] The marshal has determined to

move his headquarters tomorrow to Hannut, to be nearer his troops. No intelligence has been received of the enemy's movements from any of the Prussian posts.

It has been decided this day to march the main body of the Saxon's three days' march to the rear, to occupy cantonments within the points of Wisel, Venloo, Ruremonde [⁵⁰] and Düsseldorf until further instructions are received from the king, and to get them out of the way in case of operations. The cavalry having consented to the arrangement, are intended to be brought forward.

The 4th corps will be at Liège on the 12th, and the detachments of the 2nd and 3rd now march to their respective cantonments. In case of immediate operations the Prussian force on the Meuse and Sambre is 58.000 effective, and with the 4th corps in a few days 78.000 of which the cavalry are estimated at 8000, and thirty-six batteries of eight pieces each. I shall report to your Lordship tomorrow from Hannut, by Tirlemont.”⁵¹

Wellington's reaction was on the 11th of May: “I am very glad the marshal is coming nearer to us; I intended to have proposed the measure to him. I have ordered the communication to be kept with Hannut, instead of with Liège.”⁵²

The same day Wellington wrote to Zieten: “Je n'ai pas eu des nouvelles précises hier, ni ce matin; mais on parle toujours d'attaque; cependant, vu la force des deux armées, et leur union étroite, il ne me paraît guère probable. J'ai des nouvelles ce matin du maréchal prince Blücher d'hier au soir à sept heures. Il va placer son quartier général à Hannut aujourd'hui, pour se trouver plus près des troupes, et je communiquerai avec lui par Tirlemont.”⁵³

Wellington's ideas.

In this period, Wellington wrote several letters from which his idea about his situation can be taken. On the 8th of May he wrote to lieutenant general lord Stewart: “I say nothing about our defensive operations, because I am inclined to believe that Blücher and I are so well united, and so strong, that the enemy cannot do us much mischief. I am at the advanced post of the whole; the greatest part of the enemy's force is in my front; and, if I am satisfied, others need be under no apprehension.”⁵⁴

On the 9th of May Wellington wrote to duke of Berri: “.. j'ai toute la raison de croire la force ennemie à présent rassemblée à Valenciennes et Maubeuge très supérieure à ce qu'elle a été représenté à votre Altesse; et que je ne serais pas surpris que nous fussions attaqués.”⁵⁵

And to Zieten: “Il est de mon devoir de vous avertir que tous les renseignements que je recois de la frontière donnent lieu de croire que les troupes Françaises sont rassemblés entre Valenciennes et Maubeuge, et plutôt sur Maubeuge que Valenciennes.

La communication a été arrêtée hier; mais j'ai tout lieu de croire que Buonaparte avait l'intention de quitter Paris comme aujourd'hui. Je vous ferai savoir par les postes des troupes de Pays Bas toutes les nouvelles que j'apprendrai.”⁵⁶

On the 11th of May the duke wrote to sir Henry Hardinge: “I received no intelligence of any importance yesterday, or during the night. It can scarcely be doubted that the enemy's force is on the Sambre, and yet they are adopting measures which look very like a defensive rather than an offensive; such as breaking up roads and bridges etc. One report is that they have got ten days' provisions for 110.000 men at Avesnes. [...]

I reckon the force with which Buonaparte can attack this country at 110.000 men. I am very glad the marshal is coming nearer to us; I intended to have proposed the measure to him. I have ordered the communication to be kept with Hannut, instead of with Liège.[...]

5 p.m. I have nothing of importance this day, excepting a report, which M.de Brockhausen has sent to general Gneisenau, of the enemy being in force on the Meuse, and intending to attack on that side. My opinion is, that they have placed their army in its present positions

with a view to a defensive. They cannot think of attacking through the country of Luxembourg. It is said that they expected that we should have attacked them on the 10th.”⁵⁷

Towards the prince of Orange the duke expressed himself on the 11th of May (noon) thus:

“I have received this morning Your Highness Letter of 12 o’clock yesterday. I sent your brothers orders yesterday to march this morning upon Sottgehem, and to canton his troops between that place & Gand & that place & Alost.

“I acknowledge that I do not much like your cantonment at Roeulx for more than a body of observation; and I should prefer to have the 3rd division of the Netherlands on the high road to Nivelles, or on the high road from Mons to Hal.

In the situation in which we are placed at present, neither at war nor at peace, unable on that account to patrol up to the enemy and ascertain his position by view, or to act offensively upon any part of his line, it is difficult, if not impossible, to combine an operation, because there are no data on which to found any combination. All we can do is to put our troops in such a situation, as, in case of a sudden attack by the enemy, to render it easy to assemble, and to provide against the chance of any being cut off from the rest.

I have no objection to you leaving the 2nd division of the Netherlands upon the Nivelles road & even you leaving the 3rd division upon that road if you think proper.

They should delay the advance of the enemy upon that road as much as may be in their power. There is a position for a small body at Arquennes; and the town of Nivelles would probably afford some means of defence for a short time. [⁵⁸] But whether the enemy is to be attacked by the 3rd British division, or by the Prussians when advancing upon that road, must depend upon circumstances of which it is impossible now to form a notion; and, unless a clear notion can be formed, any orders which I might give with a view to such combination would only create confusion. I must, therefore, refer Your Royal Highness to my memorandum of the 1st May, altered as it is by the detachment of your brother’s corps and other consequent arrangements, and to the directions in this letter.”⁵⁹

And it was on the 12th of May that Wellington wrote his brother Sir Henry Wellesley:

“We are here much in the same state as when I wrote last, waiting for the Austrians and the Russians. There has been a good deal of movement upon the frontier in the last week, but I am inclined to believe it is entirely defensive, and that Buonaparte cannot venture to quit Paris. Indeed, all accounts give reason to hope that, even without the aid of the allies, *his* power will not be of long duration.”⁶⁰

And to the prince he said: “I do not believe Buonaparte is on the frontiers. In his speech to the legislature on the 7th inst. He talks of his departure, but not as an event likely to take place immediately.”⁶¹

The Prussian army.

Intelligence.

On the 7th of May, it was Wellington who informed sir Henry Hardinge about his situation:

“From all accounts, the French appear to have collected all the troops they had in our front, with the exception of very small garrisons on, and in the neighbourhood of the Sambre. D’Erlon’s corps from Lille has marched upon Valenciennes. Buonaparte was expected to leave Paris on Tuesday the 9th, according to a letter which the Duc de Feltre showed me this day. It appears, by his account, that the French had 130.000 regular troops on the 30th of April, besides 25.000 Guards. Including national guards and gendarmerie, it was supposed that they would be able to produce 280.000 men, but no more than the number above stated of

regular troops. The communication with foreign countries by land is forbidden on pain of death, which looks as if an attack was intended.”⁶²

The day after, Hardinge, in his turn, informed Wellington from Liège on behalf of general Von Zieten (at Charleroi) that on the 5th of May troops at Givet and Philippeville had left for Maubeuge and Valenciennes, and were replaced at Philippeville by national guards.⁶³

That day, Gneisenau looked upon his supply-situation to Von Boyen thus: “Jetzt können wir aus diesem Lande (Brabant) nur durch Unternehmer etwas ziehen, nämlich wenn wir bezahlen. Aber an Geld fehlt es in allen Kassen. Gehen wir aber auf das linke Maasufer, so leben wir von den Vorräthen der Einwohner und geben höchstens Bons. Diese Maasregel vereinigt sich auch mit einer andern. Unsere beiden ersten Armeekorps nämlich stehen das eine bei Fleurus, das andere bei Namur. Wenn der Feind aus seinen Festungen schnell vordringt, so können sie mit Übermacht angegriffen werden. Wenn wir aber das vierte Armeekorps ebenfalls auf das linke Maasufer versetzen und es einen Marsch östlich von Gembloux aufstellen, so kann es zur Schlacht sich vereinigen. Das noch schwache dritte Armeekorps kann in diesem Falle bei dem Kreuzwege unweit Ciney aufgestellt werden, um einer etwaigen Detachirung des Feindes von Givet nach Lüttich zu begegnen. Die Gegend daselbst ist sehr schwierig.

Ich vernehme dass Kaiser Alexander seine Armee zwischen die drei andern einschieben will. In diesem Fall können also wir das Kriegstheater an der Mosel nicht erhalten und wir müssen danach uns auf das an der Maas vorbereiten. Wundern Sie sich daher nicht, wenn Sie vernehmen, dass wir eine neue Aufstellung angenommen haben. Die Kriegsregel: schnell vereinigt seyn zu können und die Nothwendigkeit: dem Mangel vorzubeugen, sind für eine solche Bewegung hinlängliche Motive; selbige kann aber nicht ausgeführt werden bevor das Vierte Armeekorps nicht heran ist.”⁶⁴

And on basis of the information provided by Zieten about the blocking of the road between Maubeuge and Givet, Blücher had the idea “hiernach schiene es als wollte der Feind sich bei Maubeuge in der Defensive aufstellen.”⁶⁵

Also on the 9th of May, the Prussians received intelligence through the Duke of Wellington. First of all he wrote to Zieten: “Il est de mon devoir de vous avertir que tous les renseignements [sic] que je recois de la frontière donnent lieu de croire que les troupes Francaises sont rassemblées entre Valenciennes et Maubeuge, et plutôt sur Maubeuge que Valenciennes.

La communication a été arrêtée hier; mais j’ai tout lieu de croire que Buonaparte avait l’intention de quitter Paris comme aujourd’hui. Je vous ferai savoir par les postes des troupes des Pays Bas toutes les nouvelles que j’apprendrai.”⁶⁶

And to Hardinge he wrote: “There appears no doubt that the enemy’s forces are collected at Maubeuge and Valenciennes, principally at the former. The communication was put an end to yesterday and it was said Buonaparte was at Condé. I was told at Ghent that he was to leave Paris on this day.”⁶⁷

That same day, Gneisenau wrote to his friend Gruner: “Wenn uns Bonaparte nicht jetzt alsbald angreift, wollen wir wohl fertig werden.”⁶⁸

And on the 10th of May, general Von Zieten reported from Charleroi that the French forces between Maubeuge and Beaumont (towards Avesnes) were not strong (about 4000 men).⁶⁹

Blücher’s measures.

Yet, the situation led Blücher to issue orders for general Von Thielmann and Von Kleist on the 10th of May. The one for Von Thielmann read:

“Ew.Excellenz benachrichtige Ich, dass die französische Armee sich bei Valenciennes und Maubeuge konzentriert und dass der Herzog von Wellington gewiss glaubt dass sie eine Offensive-Operation gegen Belgien unternehmen werde. Ich habe daher das I.Armeekorps um Fleurus konzentriert, das II.kantonniert bei Namur, Huy und Hannut, nach welchem letzterem Ort ich morgen, den 11. mein Hauptquartier verlegen werde. Das IV Armeekorps ist von mir nach Lüttich beordert, wo es den 12.eintreffen wird.

Ew.Excellenz werden mit Ihrem unterhabenden Armeekorps sogleich nach Ciney aufbrechen, um diesen wichtigen Durchschneidungspunkt der beiden Hauptstrassen zu besetzen. Sobald Sie dort angekommen sein werden, bilden Sie die Vorpostenlinie auf dem rechten Maasufer und lösen die dort und um Dinant stehenden Vorposten des II.Armeekorps ab.

Ew.Excellenz haben bei Ihrer Aufstellung in Ciney einen doppelten Endzweck zu erfüllen, nämlich: entweder ein von Givet auf Lüttich vordringendes Korps zurückzutreiben und ihm jeden Schritt streitig zu machen, wozu sich das Terrain ganz eignet, oder, wenn der Feind alle seine Kräfte auf dem linken Maasufer vereinigt, um unserem vereinigten Heer eine Schlacht zu liefern, dem Feinde über Namur oder Huy in den Rücken und rechte Flanke zu gehen und so zur Entscheidung der Hauptschlacht beizutragen.”⁷⁰

And this is the order to Von Kleist: “Nach den Nachrichten, welche mir der Herzog Wellington mitteilt, bestätigt sich des Feindes Konzentrierung zwischen Maubeuge und Condé. Napoleon soll in Condé angekommen sein, oder dürfte doch den 9.h.Paris verlassen haben, um sich zur Nordarmee zu begeben. Der Herzog hält sich überzeugt, dass Napoleon die Absicht habe, die Offensive gegen Belgien zu ergreifen. In dieser Hinsicht habe ich meine Massregeln so eingerichtet, dass das I.Armeekorps in und um Charleroy steht und sich nötigenfalls bei Fleurus konzentriert; das II.Armeekorps habe ich morgen in Namur, Huy und Hannut; das IV. Armeekorps trifft den 12.h. in und um Lüttich ein. Das III.Armeekorps habe ich von Bastogne nach Cinay, auf dem Wege von Dinant nach Lüttich dirigiert, wo es den 14.h. eintrifft. Mein Hauptquartier verlege ich morgen von hier nach Hannut.

Die Angelegenheit in Betreff der Sachsen sehe ich im allgemeinen als beendet an: die Sächsische Kavallerie nehme ich mit auf der linken Seite der Maas, die Sächsische Infanterie setze ich aber morgen von Verviers nach der Gegend von Geldern in Bewegung, damit sie dort rückwärts die fast ausgeführte Teilung vollenden.

Eure Excellenz werden den Marsch mit dem von Denenselben kommandierten Deutschen Armeekorps in der bereits angegebenen Art auf Trier kontinuierieren. Ich kann Eure Excellenz für jetzt über die fernere Bestimmung des Deutschen Armeekorps noch nichts allgemeines aufstellen, doch rechne ich, dass Eure Excellenz Ihr Augenmerk auf Sicherung der Gegend von Trier und Luxemburg vorzüglich richten werden, sowie auch dass Eure Excellenz sich in gehöriger Verbindung mit Luxemburg setzen, ebenso auch mit dem Bayerischen Armeekorps.”⁷¹

And to Zieten, Blücher reported that “er 11.Mai Hauptquartier in Hannut nehme, das 2.Corps bleibt bei Namur und Huy konzentriert, nach [?] Hannut wird die [?] 6.Brigade von hier abrücken. 3.Korps trifft 14.bei Cinay ein. 4.Korps wird 12 in und bei Lüttich konzentriert sein. Im übrigen bleibt alles bei den früheren Bestimmungen.

Der Herzog Wellington theilt so eben die Nachricht mit dass Napoleon seine Armee zwischen Maubeuge und Valenciennes konzentriert habe und selbst für seine Person in Condé eingetroffen sey, bemerkt aber zugleich dass nach ein andern Nachricht seine Abreise von Paris erst auf den 9.festgestellt gewesen.”⁷²

It would be on the 12th of May that Blücher wrote about these measures to the Prussian king: “Meine Absicht ging dahin, am 12.die Preussischen Truppen von allen Seiten heranrücken zu lassen und die befohlene Formation in Bataillone mit Gewalt zu erzwingen. Ich hatte zum

10. Mai die Obersten nach Lüttich kommen lassen, um ihnen zu eröffnen, welche Massregeln ich nehmen würde, als am Morgen dieses Tages Nachrichten vom Herzog Wellington eingingen, nach welchen man vermuthen musste, dass Bonaparte unverzüglich einen Angriff auf uns bezweckte, der vorzüglich von Maubeuge aus erfolgen solle. Hiernach wurde es mir wünschenswert, alle Kräfte gegen den Feind führen zu können und der Bewachung der sächsischen Infanterie überhoben zu werden. [...]

Nachdem ich diese [Saxon] Angelegenheit so abgetan hatte, dass mir die Disposition über die Truppen blieb, verlegte ich gestern mein Hauptquartier nach Hannut und zog das IV Armee Korps nach Lüttich [...] Ich war hierdurch in den Stand gesetzt, wenn Bonaparte mir durch einleitende Bewegungen bis zum 14. oder 15. Zeit gab, mit 70.000 bis 80.000 Mann in einer Schlacht gegen ihn auftreten zu können. Indes sind seit gestern viele Anzeichen vorhanden, dass Bonaparte geglaubt hat, wir würden ihn angreifen, und dass es nicht seine Absicht ist, die Grenze zu überschreiten. Von mehreren Seiten geben die letzten Nachrichten seine bei Maubeuge und Gegend versammelte Armee auf 110.000 Mann an. Die in der Anlage abschriftlich beigefügte Mitteilung des Generals Grafen Golz veranlasst mich, am 14. mein Hauptquartier nach Namur zu verlegen, wo ich im Mittelpunkt der Armee bin.”⁷³

Later that day, Hardinge summarized the Prussian measures towards Wellington: “I had the honour of receiving and communicating your Lordship’s letter of yesterday to prince Blücher. The marshal has determined to move his head quarters tomorrow morning to Hannut, to be nearer his troops. No intelligence has been received of the enemy’s movements from any of the Prussian posts. [...] The 4th corps will be at Liège on the 12th, and the detachments of the 2nd and 3rd now march to their respective cantonments. [⁷⁴] In case of immediate operations the Prussian force on the Meuse and the Sambre is 58.000 effective, and with the 4th corps in a few days 78.000, of which the cavalry are estimated at 8000, and thirty-six batteries of eight pieces each. I shall report to your Lordship tomorrow from Hannut, by Tirlemont.”⁷⁵

As a reaction, to colonel Henry Hardinge, Wellington wrote him on the 11th of May:

“I received no intelligence of any importance yesterday, or during the night. It can scarcely be doubted that the enemy’s force is on the Sambre, and yet they are adopting measures which look very like a defensive rather than an offensive; such as breaking up roads and bridges etc. One report is, that they have got ten day’s provisions for 110.000 men at Avesnes. I enclose the copy of a letter which I received this morning from Mr. Hervey at Ghent; this, however, proves nothing more than what is the general conversation and notion at Paris. I reckon the force with which Buonaparte can attack this country at 110.000 men.”

And as the duke kept the letter till later that day, pending any other information, he wrote at 5 p.m. “I have nothing of importance this day, excepting a report, which M. de Brockhausen has sent to general Gneisenau, of the enemy being in force on the Meuse, and intending to attack on that side. My opinion is, that they have placed their army in its present positions with a view to a defensive. They cannot think of attacking through the country of Luxembourg. It is said that they expected that we should have attacked them on the 10th.”⁷⁶

And the day after, Hardinge reacted to the duke: “The intelligence received by prince Blücher confirms your lordship’s opinion of the enemy’s measures being defensive. The reports state that the enemy is destroying roads and bridges etc.

In general, the information which this head quarters receives is so scanty, and derived from sources so little to be depended upon, that your Lordship’s accounts are most acceptable, and alone have weight. The staff within these few days are very anxious to put this branch of the service on a more careful footing.

The marshal will, I am informed, write to the King of the Netherlands respecting the change of his quarters and the disposition of his troops. The suggestions of your Lordship are well received, but it is necessary to present them through general Gneisenau or general Müffling, which is in a

great measure the custom of the army; but I cannot make myself better understood than by stating I don't believe any letter has been yet written, because general Gneisenau was absent today at Huy and Namur.”⁷⁷

It was on the same day (12th of May) that Zieten sent the information from Charleroi that the enemy was on the defensive; a large part of the forces which had been in and around Avesnes would have moved for Valenciennes.⁷⁸

And the day after he sent another report from two French officers confirming that in the early days of May there were no troops in the department of Oise and that one division of the 6th corps was in and around Laon. A force of about 25.000 men was forming between Givet and Charleville. National guards, coming from Champagne, the Ardennes and from the Aisne would form garrisons at Philippeville and Beaumont.⁷⁹

It was also on the 13th of May that Gneisenau expressed himself to Von Boyen on how he saw the situation of the army: “Die Concentrirung des Feindes gegen Maubeuge ist in den letzten Tagen so entschieden geworden, dass der Feldmarschall für nöthig erachtet hat sein Hauptquartier den Truppen näher zu verlegen. Morgen werden wir nach Namur gehen. Die von dem Herzog von Feltre, General Clarke, unserm Gesandten bei Ludwig XVIII, dem Grafen Golz gegebene, dem heutigen Bericht an S.Majestät beigelegte Benachrichtigung bestätigt die Wahrscheinlichkeit eines Angriffes gegen uns insbesondere, wenn anders derselbe jetzt schon statt finden dürfte. Es schien daher, um auf alle Ereignisse gefasst zu seyn, das 4.Armeekorps ebenfalls auf das linke Maasufer übergehen zu lassen und das 3.Armeekorps von Arlon nach Ciney heranzuziehen, um die von Givet auf Lüttich führende Strasse die leicht zu vertheidigen ist zu bewachen. Sollte der Feind von Sedan über Bouillon nach der Eifel vordringen, so bin ich dafür, dass man ihm die Ardennen und Eifelgebirge überlasse und in Vereinigung mit der Wellingtonschen Armee sofort in Frankreich eindringe. Sollte H.v.Wellington aber nicht hierauf sich einlassen, so können wir solange warten, bis der Feind über die Maas geht um uns eine Schlacht zu liefern, die wir dann annehmen können, oder sollte er, ohne uns am linken Ufer der Maas aufzusuchen, gegen den Rhein vordringen, so müssen wir ihn so weit vorrücken lassen, bis er näher dem Rhein ist, um sodann über die Maas zu gehen, und ihm eine Schlacht unter ihm nachtheiligen Umständen zu liefern. Dies wäre unser Entwurf zum Feldzug, im Fall wir über die Ardennen her den Feind zu erwarten hätten.

Da wir uns denn doch jeden Augenblick auf einen feindlichen Angriff gefasst halten müssen, so habe ich mir nicht erlauben können, die Huldigung der eroberten Länder abzunehmen, sondern den General von Dobschütz hiezu [sic] beauftragt. Ew.Excellenz wollen meine Rechtfertigung hierüber übernehmen.”⁸⁰

Still on the 12th of May Blücher wrote to the King: “Nachdem ich diese [Saxon] Angelegenheit so abgetan hatte, dass mir die Disposition über die Truppen blieb, verlegte ich gestern mein Hauptquartier nach Hannut und zog das IV Armeekorps nach Lüttich [...] Ich war hierdurch in den Stand gesetzt, wenn Bonaparte mir durch einleitende Bewegungen bis zum 14. Oder 15. Zeit gab, mit 70.000 bis 80.000 Mann in einer Schlacht gegen ihn auftreten zu können. Indess sind seit gestern viele Anzeichen vorhanden, dass Bonaparte geglaubt hat, wir würden ihn angreifen, und dass es nicht seine Absicht ist, die Grenze zu überschreiten. Von mehreren Seiten geben die letzten Nachrichten seine bei Maubeuge und Gegend versammelte Armee auf 110.000 Mann an. Die in der Anlage abschriftliche beigelegte Mitteilung des Generals Grafen Golz veranlasst mich, am 14. Meine Hauptquartier nach Namur zu verlegen, wo ich im Mittelpunkt der Armee bin.”⁸¹

At the same time, on the 13th of May, Blücher instructed Zieten to block all coal-transports which ran between Charleroi and Maubeuge.⁸²

The Prussian positions.

Taking all reports, orders and instructions together, it was between the 7th and 13th of May that the Prussian army had the following positions:

-the 1st corps in and around Charleroi, in such cantonments so as to be able to carry out a swift concentration at Fleurus if needed.⁸³ The 1st brigade was in and around Fontaine l'Evêque, the 2nd in and around Marchienne-au-Pont, the 3rd in and around Fleurus, the 4th in and around Moustier-sur-Sambre, the reserve-cavalry near Sombreffe and the reserve-artillery near Gembloux.

Its outposts stood for the 1st brigade north of the Sambre, on the west bank, from the Roman road near Binche up to Lobbes. The 2nd brigade had its outposts south of the Sambre, from Lobbes to Gerpennes; those of the 4th brigade stood from Gerpennes through Diniée to the Meuse.⁸⁴

-the 2nd corps in the area Namur – Hannut – Huy, in such cantonments so as to be able to carry out a swift concentration around Namur if needed.⁸⁵

The corps had its headquarters at Namur, its 5th brigade around this town, the 6th around Perwez, the 7th around Héron, the 8th around Huy, the reserve-cavalry around Hannut, while the reserve-artillery stood north of Namur.⁸⁶

It would have pushed its outposts as far as the line Falaen – Mettet (between Charleroi and Dinant).⁸⁷

-the 3rd corps left cantonments between Bastogne and Arlon probably on the 11th of May for Ciney, in and around which place it took up its positions on the 14th of May.

The headquarters were at Ciney, the 9th brigade stood around Assesse, the 10th brigade around Ciney, the 11th brigade around Dinant, the 12th brigade around Havelange, the reserve-cavalry around Conneux (south of Ciney) while the reserve-artillery had its cantonments along the road between Havelange and Ciney. The outposts of the cavalry reached from Dinant through Rochefort to St.Hubert.⁸⁸⁻⁸⁹

-the 4th corps left Koblenz on the 8th of May and reached its new cantonments in and around Liège mid-May⁹⁰

There, its headquarters were established at Liège, the 13th brigade was around Liège, the 14th brigade around Waremme, the 15th brigade around Hollogne, the 16th brigade around Liers, the reserve cavalry between Looz and Dalhem and the reserve artillery stood between Glons and Dalhem.⁹¹

-on the 8th of May Von Kleist wrote to Gneisenau that his corps had not been fully formed but that he would move on the 11th or 12th through Neuwied to Koblenz where he expected to arrive on the 17th or 18th of May.⁹² From there he would move towards Trier where he arrived some days later. The initial position of the German “Bundeskorps” was on the right bank of the Rhine, between the rivers Sieg and Lahn.

-general headquarters moved on the 11th of May from Liège to Hannut and on the 14th of May further to Namur.⁹³

Observations.

By the 9th of May, the duke of Wellington seriously considered that in case of a French attack, the bulk of the French forces would fall upon him, not the Prussians, as can be taken from his communications to Blücher, lord Hill and general Zieten.

The situation was that the French would have collected the greatest part of their force at Valenciennes and Maubeuge, that Napoleon would have arrived at Condé on the 8th of May. Further, from the same day onwards, all communication was stopped. At the same time, however, Wellington was most optimistic about the situation as he saw both his and the

Prussian army as very strong and very well united and he felt the French couldn't do very much mischief. In having the majority of the French forces at Maubeuge and Valenciennes, Wellington saw the possibility of a French attack between the Sambre and the Scheldt river. It was in this scenario that the duke wrote to lord Hill on the 9th of May: "Colonel Mitchell's brigade, which I understand is still at Grammont, had better, if the enemy move forward, join the rest of the army at Enghien, or rather Hal, unless it should be found that a serious attack is made upon the country between the Scheldt and the Lys." ⁹⁴

This statement is of a profound significance as it throws light upon Wellington's idea where he proposed to give battle in case of a French attack in the sector between the rivers Scheldt and Sambre: Enghien, or, rather, Halle. For Wellington this was the ultimate battle-ground to stop Napoleon from reaching Brussels. That Hal was an important position for Wellington can also be derived from the fact that he had it surveyed twice by his engineers in the spring of 1815. In fact, lieutenant Sperling of the engineers writes:

"13th [of May] As there was some intention of making use of the favourable ground about Hal as a position of defence against an invading army, I was directed to go thither and make additions to a reconnaissance which I had made some time before. [...] Working myself and horses hard, my sketch was finished on the 16th and I returned to headquarters. [...] 17th [of May]. My sketch was laid before the duke. [...]"

[13th of June] The reconnoitring at Hal was the sketch of a position formerly held for some time by the duke of Marlborough. Other officers have been similarly employed so that the Duke has made himself acquainted with the best points for meeting an attack." ⁹⁵

Additionally, sir Augustus Frazer wrote on the 11th of May: "We have two positions; one in front of Ath, from Leuze to Mons; the other near Hal." And on the 12th of May: "We shall pass (we meaning Maxwell and myself) near Hal, a position in which we may have a contest: that is, should Napoleon, who is in force near Condé (out with your map), advance to attack us. We have two positions: one between Leuze and Mons, the other near Hal. Somewhere near the latter town, I think, Marlborough fought a battle." ⁹⁶

The defensive strength of the position lay in the combination of the heights along the valley of the Senne on the right, the heights in rear of Braine le Chateau on the left and the low ground of the Hain in front. ⁹⁷

The document as produced under the supervision of lieutenant Sperling may be called a map, or rather a compilation of sketches, which is available of the area between Waterloo, Genappe, Braine le Comte and Bogaarden and which has been produced in two stages: the first and south-west one consisting of the ground south of the Haine and west of the line Braine l'Alleud – Nivelles and bearing the date 12th June 1814, in its eastern corner, while the second one (north of the same river and along the line Waterloo – Genappe) extends to the line Waterloo - Halle - Bogaarden, and bearing the date 21st of May 1815 in its corresponding corner. The southern half is the work of two or even three officers, but the northern one appears to be the work of four separate persons and is partly unfinished. ⁹⁸

Two features of the document involved should be stressed: first of all that it is a compilation of sketches (and not a map) and secondly that it which was drawn in two phases. The fact that the future battlefield of Waterloo is incorporated makes it most open to hindsight getting in. ⁹⁹

In respect of the first part, sketched in the summer of 1814, for Wellington, there were several options to cover Brussels and as such the part involved doesn't reflect these in their full scale. The lack of further information on the background of the part dated 1814 makes it impossible to make a proper analysis of it in the context of that time. What stands out, however, is that this part should be seen within the context of that period of time - whatever this context may have been - and not in the one of 1815.

The same applies to the other part, including the area around Halle, which was added in April-May 1815. Apart from the extension to the north of the Haine, the strange extensional shape of the map's boundary, making a westward arc around Halle, clearly shows the fact that a particular attention was given to this point and this fits in with Wellington's concept of the defence of Brussels in 1815.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, it includes the position of Mont Saint Jean as having been surveyed in the spring of 1815, as well as the sector between this position and Genappe.¹⁰¹

While Wellington was fixed upon a possible French attack in the sector between the rivers Scheldt and Sambre in general, the prince of Orange was fixed on one from Maubeuge, through Binche, upon Nivelles in particular.

In this, he clearly saw the threat from Maubeuge in a direct line to Brussels, and this in combination with the relative weak forces in his sector involved. To meet such an attack he was in doubt what to do, also in a possible cooperation with the Prussian army, and asked the duke for advice.¹⁰²

The request brings about, as stated above, a deeper insight in the way Wellington looked upon his own situation. Apart from the fact that he did not regard the position of Nivelles as a particularly strong one, it should be stressed here again that the prince was to act under the guidelines as set out by Wellington in his letter to him, dated 11th of May, plus those contained, thoughbeit slightly changed due to a change in cantonments (see below), in the secret memorandum of the 30th of April.

Essentially, this meant, in case of an attack between the rivers Scheldt and the Sambre, that the prince was to follow the second scenario as sketched by the secret memorandum – and this scenario was based upon two elements the duke of Wellington wanted to act upon: to render the army easy to assemble and to provide against the chance of any being cut off from the rest.¹⁰³ In this way, the duke clearly assigned the Netherlands units a sector of their own, the one covering the road leading from Binche through Nivelles to Brussels.

As far as any role of the Prussians was concerned it can only be repeated that pragmatism ruled here. As the most important letter to the prince shows, Wellington wasn't intent upon fixing himself upon any special arrangements in his sector nearest to the Prussian army or towards it.

Had Wellington previously considered the possibility of a French attack, it was by the 11th of May that he saw the French movements on the Sambre more as defensive measures against an allied invasion. Additionally, he believed Napoleon would not invade Luxemburg

It has become clear that the 1st and 2nd army corps were established on the 11th of April and that in this organisation, both the British / Hanoverian forces on the one side and those of the Netherlands on the other were to be amalgamated. Yet, this was only on paper.

In reality, physically, both sets of forces were still separate. But it was now, right after getting the full command of the forces of the Netherlands, that Wellington immediately started mixing both forces and settling the army corps as far as their cantonments was concerned.¹⁰⁴

Right at this time, as Wellington sensed some danger from the front, his sequence to do this was first to move Alten's division from Lens to Braine le Comte and Soignies, then Chassé's division from Braine le Comte and Soignies to Le Roeux and a part of prince Frederik's forces from Le Roeux to Hal. The division of Perponcher was kept in its positions near Nivelles / Genappe. The second step was the other part of prince Frederik's forces to go to Hal (and later further through to Sotteghem etc.), while the Foot Guards were kept in their position in and around Enghien; the division of Clinton was moved to Lens (including Ath), while the one of Colville was pulled towards the army. In other words: the gap where Frederik had stood was filled by Chassé, the one where Chassé had stood was filled by Alten, the one where Alten had stood was filled by Clinton and the division of Colville was pulled further

east. The general result was that the 1st and 2nd corps were physically assembled and that - at the same time - the whole army had been pulled in on its right.

It has sometimes been suggested that Wellington explicitly asked Blücher on the 9th of May to move his army further towards him, but it becomes clear from the correspondence of the Prussian general headquarters right after that this was not the case.

Wellington wrote to Blücher on the 9th of May and though this letter is not available, those written by the duke the same day to lord Hill, general Von Zieten and colonel Hardinge give a clear and consistent idea what this letter was about: that the French would have collected the greatest part of their force at Valenciennes and Maubeuge, that Napoleon would have arrived at Condé on the 8th of May and that from the same day onwards all communication had stopped (see above).

Apart from the Prussian initiative to change the cantonments of part of their army, it was also colonel Hardinge who reacted to Wellington the day after that at least there was no direct threat upon the Prussian army.

Yet, right at this moment a most important strategic decision was taken by the Prussian leadership: it was the one to choose for the Meuse as the major theatre of war, by leaving the one of the Moselle altogether.

As Gneisenau summarised it to Von Boyen on the 8th of May, there were three reasons to do so. The first one was a threat which was felt from Maubeuge and Valenciennes. Had the presence of the numerous French forces there only been threatening to Wellington in particular, for some reason this threat now also extended upon the Prussian forces on the left bank of the Meuse as well. The idea was that this might very well result in a battle north or north-west of Namur, probably in the vicinity of Gembloux. It was there that the Prussian army was supposed to be assembled (cf. the orders for Thielmann of the 10th of May). In this scenario a secondary French attack upon Liège through the line Givet-Dinant-Liège wasn't excluded. For this reason, the position of the 3rd corps was fixed around Ciney so as to control the main roads leading from Dinant to Liège and the one from Luxemburg to Namur.

Yet, in case Napoleon might move with his entire army over the left bank of the Meuse it was to cross this river to move against his right or rear. Von Bülow would then move up from the east.¹⁰⁵

Another reason to contemplate the change of theatre of war was the decrease of the urgency for the army of the Lower Rhine to be in the sector of the river Moselle as the Russian army was now meant to move there. And another extra factor for the Prussians to move to the Meuse was the relative improvement of the supply situation.

However, there were other circumstances for the Prussian leadership to take the decision, apart of course from the intelligence which it had through its own channels and through those of Wellington, and that was the position of the corps of Von Bülow. It was the presence of this corps between the Rhine and the Meuse, the advance of Von Kleist from the Rhine towards Trier and the intelligence on the French threat coming from Maubeuge and Valenciennes available on the 9th of May, which made Blücher decide to move the corps of Von Bülow upon the left bank of the Meuse and thereby to leave the river Moselle by pulling the 3rd corps up from Trier / Arlon towards Ciney.

In case Napoleon might move from Sedan through Bouillon to the Eifel after all, Gneisenau proposed "dass man ihm die Ardennen und Eifelgebirge überlasse und in Vereinigung mit der Wellingtonschen Armee sofort in Frankreich eindringe. Sollte H.v. Wellington aber nicht hierauf sich einlassen, so können wir solange warten, bis der Feind über die Maas geht um uns eine Schlacht zu liefern, die wir dann annehmen können, oder sollte er, ohne uns am linken Ufer der Maas aufzusuchen, gegen den Rhein vordringen, so müssen wir ihn so weit vorrücken lassen, bis er näher dem Rhein ist, um sodann über die Maas zu gehen, und ihm

eine Schlacht unter ihm nachtheiligen Umständen zu liefern. Dies wäre unser Entwurf zum Feldzug, im Fall wir über die Ardennen her den Feind zu erwarten hätten.” This plan was the alternative for a major part of the left wing in the “pivot of Liège.”

There was another clear reason for Wellington to write to Blücher on the 9th of May: it was the memorandum written on the 28th of April by Schwarzenberg with his proposal to have the invasion of France not start before the 16th of June. The document was sent by lord Stewart to the duke on the 28th of April and the document reached Wellington on the 8th of May. As it was confirmed by Schwarzenberg himself towards the duke on the 29th of April, he received this note on the 9th of May.¹⁰⁶ The proposal was deeply regretted by the Prussian staff in particular, being particularly eager to start offensive operations as swiftly as possible.¹⁰⁷

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¹ WD, Vol.XII p.358

Three days later, on the 11th of May, Wellington would have inspected a Hanoverian division at Brussels. Cf. Brunelle, P.J. – Bruxelles, et ses environs p.29

² WD, Vol.XII p.356

³ WSD, Vol.X p.261

⁴ WSD, Vol.X p.262

⁵ WSD, Vol.X p.260

⁶ HL, WP, 6.1.18

⁷ WSD, Vol.X p.263

⁸ BL, Add.ms.35.060

WD, Vol.XII p.366

For what purpose Wellington was at Ghent on the 7th of May (Sunday) remains unclear.

On the 29th of May, a general order (nr.38) would be issued for the army of the Netherlands, in the field and in the garrisons, stating explicitly that it was forbidden to have any communication whatsoever with French troops or garrisons, without the explicit permission of the duke of Wellington or the prince of Orange.

⁹ WD, Vol.XII p.367

¹⁰ WD, Vol.XII p.368

¹¹ WSD, Vol.X p.270-271

¹² BL, Add.ms. 35.062 and 20.192 p.358

¹³ WSD, Vol.X p.274

¹⁴ WD, Vol.XII p.372-373

¹⁴ KHA, A40 XIII-10

¹⁵ Sabine, E. (ed) - Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer p.512

¹⁶ KHA, A40 XIII-10

¹⁷ WSD, Vol.X p.280-281

¹⁸ KHA, A40, XIII-10

¹⁹ WSD, Vol.X p.275

²⁰ BL, Add.37.052 f.142-145

²¹ WSD, Vol.X p.283-284

²² NA, 2.13.14.01, nr.7 nr.124

²³ NA, 2.13.14.01 nr. 7-8

²⁴ WD, Vol.XII p.363

This had already been initiated by a general order on the 11th of April.

²⁵ This was arranged by a general order dated 10th of May. In: Bas, F.de - Prins Frederik etc. Vol.III p.1151

²⁶ WD, Vol.XII p.365
KHA, A40.VI.C.W10

²⁷ BL, Add.ms.35.060 and 20.114 f.94-95

WD, Vol.XII p.366-367

Late April, of the 4th division, the brigade of Mitchell closed in upon Audenarde from Grammont; the brigade of Johnstone had a regiment in Courtrai, one in Audenarde and one in advance upon the road to Tournai. By then, Wellington wanted the division to be brought more close together.

By the 17th of May, the Hanoverian brigade of Lyon had moved from Brussels to a location between the other (British) brigades of the division, of which the main part then was near Grammont. Cf. letters of Colville himself. In: The portrait of a general p.192-194

Between the middle of May and the middle of June, Lyon's brigade was moved out to the west, to Nieupoort etc.

²⁸ Constant Rebecque. He gives no reason for his departure on the 9th. The fact that he was back on the 10th of May can be derived from the prince's letter written at noon for Wellington. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

²⁹ KHA.A.40.XIII.10
NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8 nr.113

³⁰ NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.6 – 114

Cf. Journaal der 2^e divisie infanterie. In: NA, 2.13.52 nr.1090 p.17

In this journal the order of the day (9th of May) reads:

“De officieren de grootste activiteit aannemen om in cas van alarm zich zonder verzuim met hunnen troepen naar hunnen loopplaatsen te begeven dispositiën voor de ordonnancien en het klaar houden der orders – ieder cantonnement marcheerd direct naar de loopplaats. De manschappen zullen alle gepakt zijn; geene andere orders tot vertrek zullen wordn gegeven.”

In: Cf. Journaal der 2^e divisie infanterie. In: NA, 2.13.52 nr.1090 p.17

³¹ A note in the journal of the 2nd division on the 10th of May states: “117.Uitvoerig rapport aan de kwartiermeester generaal wegens een gedane reconnaissance van de weg van Nivelles naar Braine le Chateau en vandaar naar Halle en Waterloo; met indicatie der positien op dezelve.” In: Journaal der tweede divisie infanterie. In: NA, nr.2.13.52 nr.1090 p.17b
Braine le Chateau is at about 10 kilometres north-west of Nivelles, on the road to Halle.

Resulting, on the 13th of May, an order was given to captain Goblet, officer of the engineers of the staff of the 2nd division, to have this road repaired for the use by artillery. In: *Journal der tweede divisie infanterie*. In: NA, nr.2.13.52 nr.1090 p.19

This order is confirmed to Constant Rebecque the day after. Cf. NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

³² WSD, Vol.X p.271

KHA A40VI.C.W10

In the copy at the KHA in “the Nivelles road is the least well guarded” the word “least” is a correction of the word “best” which seems to have been written first.

³³ BL, Add.ms.35.062

WSD, Vol.X p.273 The copy here states 7 p.m. in stead of 9 p.m.

³⁴ WD, Vol.XII p.371

KHA A37.VII.B4

By 1 p.m. Wellington informed Hill of having sent this letter to Frederik; in fact he enclosed a copy of this letter In: BL, Add.ms.35.060 f.407-408

³⁵ KHA, A40.VI.C W10

WD, Vol.XII p.375

³⁶ Report of prince Frederik to Wellington. In: KHA A37.VII.B4

From a letter dated 12th of May of lord Hill to the prince it becomes clear that cavalry was in several villages which Fredrik was supposed to occupy. In: BL, Add.ms.35.060

Major general De Eerens (1st division, 2nd brigade) confirms the presence of the headquarters at Sotteghem. Cf. his account. In: NA, Collection 145, De Eerens, inv.nr.64 p.265

³⁷ KHA, nr.A40.VI.C W10

³⁸ WSD, Vol.X p.281

³⁹ NA, 2.13.14.01. nr.8

On the rear of this document the prince of Orange wrote:

“Je charge le Genl [...] Collaert de donner ordre de ma part aux officiers aux dépôts de joindre les escadrons de campagne sans delai et aucune excuse doit etre admise.”

NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8 nr.24

NA, 2.13.14.01. nr.8 nr.40

⁴⁰ Muilwijk, E. – From mobilisation to war p.157

⁴¹ Cf. Muilwijk, E. – 1815. From mobilisation to war p.157-165

⁴² Cf. Wellington to the king, 11th May. In: WD, Vol.XII p.374

⁴³ Cf. plan in: Muilwijk, E. – 1815. From mobilisation to war p.168

⁴⁴ It was on the 11th of May that the 5th battalion of line-infantry KGL moved from a small village near Ath through Soignies to Naast. Cf. Ensign Wheatley of the said battalion. In: Hibbert, Chr. (ed) - *The Wheatley diary; a journal and sketchbook kept during the Peninsular war and the Waterloo campaign* p.58

According to lieutenant Dehnel (3rd battalion of the line, brigade Duplat) his brigade had arrived in and around Lens on the 8th of April; the 16th of April it moved to Ath and surroundings, while in the months of May and June it changed its cantonments between Ath, Lens, Beloeil and Huissignies. In: Dehnel, Rückblicke etc. p.234

⁴⁵ Prince Frederik himself had his headquarters in the old chateau of the count of Egmont. It was on the 12th of May that a daily order was issued to the 2nd division about his command over the Indian brigade and the 1st division; and about the direct command his brother prince Willem of Orange would hold over the 2nd of 3rd division. In: Cf. Journaal der 2^e divisie infanterie. In: ARA, 2.13.52 nr.1090 p.18b

It took the units of Frederik's corps 10 to 12 hours to reach, from Hal, its new positions. Cf. Count St. Aldegonde to Constant Rebecque, 15th of May. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

Colonel count de St.Aldegonde, adjutant of prince Frederik, sent on the 14th of May to Constant Rebecque a detailed list of the positions as taken by all units of the 1st division and the Indian brigade on the 12th and 13th of May. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.7-8

On the 27th of May, colonel count de St.Aldegonde (quarter master of prince Frederik) instructed captain Rothmaler to make a reconnaissance of the roads leading from Sotteghem to Audenarde and Renaix. He made the survey the two days after and made his report on the 1st of June. In: NA, 2.13.14.02 nr.13

⁴⁶ On the 8th of May the brigade of colonel Saxen Weimar had taken positions further northwest, after it got a concentration order on the 7th of May which read: Copy from the "Copieboek der tweede divisie infanterie" of colonel Van Zuylen van Nijvelt.

Z.K.H. de commanderende generaal, gelast hebbende, dat de divisie meerder zoude geconcentreerd worden, ten einde in geval van attaque spoediger zich te kunnen verzamelen, zoo zal de divisie op morgen occuperen de navolgende cantonnementen:

1^e brigade, hoofdkwartier te Nivelles

27^e baton jagers te Obay, Beuzet en Rêves

7^e baton van ligne te Feluy, Petit Roex en Arquennes

5^e baton L.M.N.N. [land militie noord nederland] Nivelles

7^e baton L.M.N.N. Beaulers en Thinnies en te Nivelles, de beide compagnieen gedetacheerd te Bornival en Monstreuil

8^e baton L.M.N.N. Bornival en Monstreuil

2^e brigade, hoofdkwartier te Hautain le Val.

1^e baton Nassau - Hautain le Val, Hautain le Mont, 4 Bras

2^e baton Nassau - Frasnes, Villers-Peruin

3^e baton Nassau - Villers la Ville, Sart à Mavelines

Baton Oranje Nassau – Marbais

Artillerie: staf en parc te Frasnes, rijdende artillerie en trein te Frasnes en Rêves – artillerie te voet en trein te Nivelles

[..]

In cas van alarm, gelast Z.E. de generaal van divisie de navolgende dispositien:

1^e brigade

De troepen gecantonneerd te Obay, Rêves en Beuzet marcheeren zonder op elkaar te wachten naar Nivelles en masseeren zich vóór de poort van Charleroy.

Die van Petit Roelx, Felny [sic] en Arquennes, mede zonder op elkaar te wachten, marcheeren naar Nivelles en masseeren zich vóór de poort van Mons.

Die van Bornival en Monstreuil, mede zonder op elkaar te wachten, marcheeren van Nivelles en masseeren zich vóór de poort van Soignies.

Die van Beaulers en Thinnies, mede zonder op elkaar te wachten, marcheeren naar Nivelles en masseern zich vóór de poort van Namur, alwaar zij zullen gerejoigneerd worden door de twee compagnieën van dat batakon gestationeerd te Nivelles.

Het 5^{de} bat. L.M.N.N. vereenigt zich op de groote plaats.

2^e brigade

1^e bataljon Nasau marcheert naar les 4 Bras en stelt zich daar, de linkervleugel naar les 4 Bras, de rechtervleugel naar Hautain le Val.

Het 3^{de} bataljon en het bataljon Oranje Nassau stelt aan de andere kant van les 4 Bras, de regtervleugel aan de 4 Bras en de linkervleugel zich uitstreckende naar Marbaix. In cas van alarm vereenigt zich het 2^{de} bataljon Nassau te Frasnies. De majoor Normann wacht aldaar tot de artillerie gereed is en marcheert met dezelve naar les 4 Bras, zich stellende op de chaussée van Charleroy.

In cas van alarm vereenigt de capitein Bijleveld, alles wat tot de rijdende artillerie behoort, te Frasnies en wacht de vereeniging van het 2^{de} bat.Nassau om met hetzelfde te marcheeren naar les 4 Bras. Van dat oogenblik en tot nader order staat die batterij onder de orders van den kolonel Von Goedecke.

De artillerie te voet vereenigt zich in deszelfs park en wacht de orders af van den generaal-majoor Van Bijlandt, zullende dezelve in cas van alarm en tot nader order, behooren tot de 1^e brigade en deszelfs mouvement volgen.

De troupen aldus geplaatst zijnde, zal op de plaats gerust worden en nadere orders van de commandanten der brigade afgewacht.”

In: Bas, F.de - Prins Frederik etc. Vol.III p.1148-1150

Cf. Isenbart, W. - Geschichte des Herzoglich Nassauischen 2es Regiments p.142

⁴⁷ Of this division, the 4th battalion of national militia (Detmers brigade) was on the 7th of May at Steenkerque (between Braine le Comte and Enghien), and moved from there on the 10th of May to Gottignies and three days later towards Goegnies and one day later to Haint Saint Paul and Haine Saint Pierre where it kept its cantonment till the 15th of June. Cf. Sergeant Van Wetering. Diary.

On the 12th of May the engineers of the army of the Netherlands left from Mechelen to Braine le Comte through Vilvoorde, Brussels, Uccle and Halle. Cf. Klijnsma, S.F. - De veldtog van 1815

⁴⁸ Constant Rebecque confirms the positions of all divisions mentioned. In: NA, 2.21.008.01 nr.25

⁴⁹ It has not been possible to locate this letter.

⁵⁰ The locations meant are Wesel, Venlo and Roermond respectively.

⁵¹ WSD, VolX , p.273

Two days later, on the 12th of May, Hardinge wrote to Lowe about an overall strength of 81.000 men. In: BL, Add.ms.20.114 f.96

⁵² WD, Vol.XII p.372

⁵³ WD, Vol.XII p.373

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- ⁵⁴ WD, Vol.XII p.360
- ⁵⁵ WD, Vol.XII p.366
- ⁵⁶ WD, Vol.XII p.367
- ⁵⁷ WD, Vol.XII p.372
- ⁵⁸ Cf. Wellington's memo on the defence of the frontier of the Netherlands of September 1814. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6592
- ⁵⁹ KHA, nr.A40.VI.C W10
WD, Vol.XII p.375-376 (incomplete)
- ⁶⁰ WD, Vol.XII p.378
- ⁶¹ WD, Vol.XII p.379-380
- ⁶² WD, Vol.XII p.356
- ⁶³ WSD, Vol.X p.261
- ⁶⁴ Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.503
- ⁶⁵ Blücher to the Prussian king. In: Lettow Vorbeck, O.von - Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.176
- ⁶⁶ WD, Vol.XII p.367
- ⁶⁷ WD, Vol.XII p.368
- ⁶⁸ Griewank, K. – Gneisenau. Ein Leben in Briefen p.317
- ⁶⁹ WSD, Vol.X p.270-271
- ⁷⁰ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.176-177
- ⁷¹ Pflugk Harttung, J.von - Bundestruppen p.92-93 (from KA, VI.C.92.I)
- ⁷² GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr.VII nr.7 p.15 (from former KA, VI.E.17.I.62)
- ⁷³ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleons Untergang Vol.III p.176-177
- ⁷⁴ On the 9th of May, at 8 p.m., Hardinge had written to Wellington:" On the 11th there will be about 5000 men of the 3rd corps at Aix-la-Chapelle, and on the same day the 4th corps, 13.000 or 14.000 strong, arrives at Malmédi." As Hussey has correctly noted, what Hardinge probably means here is Arlon, and not Aachen as this is far north; it might have confused Wellington but this unsure. In: The aftermath of Tirlemont etc. p.28
- ⁷⁵ WSD, Vol.X p.272-273
- ⁷⁶ WD, Vol.XII p.372-373

⁷⁶ KHA, A40 XIII-10

⁷⁷ WSD, Vol.X p.275-276

⁷⁸ WSD, Vol.X p.280-281

⁷⁹ WSD, Vol.X p.283-284

⁸⁰ Delbrück, H. - Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.508-509

⁸¹ Lettow Vorbeck, O.von – Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.176-177

⁸² Blücher to Zieten, 13th May 1815. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI, nr.I nr.9 p.5
He had seen that in these transports arms were smuggled from Liège to France.

⁸³ In details of its cantonments colonel Von Hoffmann wrote to Zieten on the 7th of May:
“Euer Excellenz sehe ich mich nothgedrungen unterthänigst zu bitten, dass gänzlich im Kantonnementsbezirk der 1ten Brigade gelegene Dorf Lernes, welches ich bereits mit dem Jäger-Detachement des westphälischen Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiments besetzt habe, der 1sten Brigade zur Disposition überlassen zu wollen.

Es ist dasselbe nur eine kleine Gemeinde von etwa 20 Häusern und dem Kantonnement der 1ten Brigade viel unentbehrlicher, als der Verlust derselben der 2ten Brigade unangenehm sein kann. Im Fall daher es irgend möglich ist, mich im Besitz diese Dorfes zu lassen, so sehe ich Euer Excellenz Gewährung dieser Bitte entgegen, und werde bis dahin mit der Räumung desselben noch Anstand nehmen.

Fontaine l'Evêque, den 10.Mai 1815 (gez.) v.Hofmann” In: MWB, 1847 p.168

And on the 13th of May, major general Von Steinmetz wrote to Zieten:

Euer Excellenz werden es nicht unzeitig finden, wenn ich hochdensenben eine Vorstellung, zu welcher ich durch die Lage des Kantonnements meine Brigade und der Art und Weise auf welche die Vorposten angeordnet sind, verglichen mit der Disposition vom 3ten Mai mich gedrungen fühle, Eure Excellenz zu geneigter Entscheidung vorlege. Der Oberstlieutenant v.Lützow, Kommandeur des Ulanen-Regiments no.6, welcher in der gedachten Disposition angewiesen worden, sich auf Marchienne au Pont und Charleroi im Fall eines feindlichen Vordringens zu ziehen, würde durch diese Bewegung das Stück der Sambre von Thuin bis Landely, welches vor meiner linken Flanke sich befindet, frei machen und die dasigen Passagen ohne weitere Beobachtung lassen, wenn solche nicht durch Infanterie-Posten besetzt wären, welches Euer Excellenz auch bereits angeordnet haben. Um diese Besetzung nun bewirken zu können, ist es unumgänglich nothwendig, die beiden zwischen Fontaine l'Evêque und der Sambre gelegenen Orte Lernes und Landely mit Truppen meiner Brigade zu besetzen, in welchem Fall einer des andern Repli abgeben und die ganze Mannschaft ihren endlichen Rückzug auf Fontaine l'Evêque machen könnte.

Wollten die gegenwärtig darin stehenden Truppen der 2ten Brigade diese Beobachtung der Sambre über sich nemen, so würden solche dem Generalmajor von Pirch zu seiner weiteren Benachrichtigung mehr dienen, als die sich von Marbais und Gouzée zurückziehende Kavallerie ihm viel besser gewährt, und zuletzt ihr Rückzug auf Marchienne Inconvenienzen haben. Meine Brigade würde aber auf diese Art, von diesen vor der Front liegenden Posten wenig Vortheil haben, und muss ich, von dem Augenblick an, in welchem der Oberstlieutenant v.Lützow mir die letzte Meldung macht, welches der Augenblick ist, in

welchem er seinen Rückzug antritt, meine linke Flanke als gänzlich bloss von Lernes und Landely für meine Brigade anzutragen, wenn mich nicht noch überdies die nahe Ankunft des 23sten [?] Infanterie-Regiments, mit meinen ohnedies schon enge dislocirten Truppen, gewissermassen ihrer Einquartierung wegen, in Verlegenheit brachte, und anderntheils auch die in Rede stehenden Orte dergestalt in meinem Kantonnementsbezirk liegen, dass es natürlicher scheint, solche von der 1ten als 2ten Brigade zu besetzen; auch muss ich bemerken dass Landely stets der 1ten Brigade gehört hat, vom Oberst v.Hofmann aber deshalb freiwillig abgetreten worde, weil ohne den Besitz von Lernes die Bequartierung dieses Ortes Unbequemlichkeiten hatte.

Fontaine l'Évêque, den 13. Mai 1815 (gez.) v.Steinmetz

In: MWB, 1846 p.170

From the 15th of May until the 15th of June, the 1st regiment of Brandenburger dragoons nr.2 (Von Röder) stood at Heppignies; its staff plus one squadron stood at Thuméon.

The regiment had pulled on the 21st of April through Namur towards Fosse, from where it moved later to Gembloux, and then to Heppignies.

In: Kraatz-Koschlau, M.T. von , Geschichte des 1.Brandenburgischen Dragoner-Regiments nr.2 p.100

On the 7th of May, when it received its 3rd battalion, the 29th regiment of infantry (brigade Von Jagow) stood near Fleurus. Cf. Wellmann, R. - Geschichte etc. p.46

⁸⁴ Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc.p.59

⁸⁵ The infantry regiment nr.22 (brigade Von Brause) reached Huy on the 5th of May; it had reached Marchovelette (about 10 kilometres north-east of Namur) - while coming from Verviers and Liège - on the 21st of April. Cf. Geschichte des 1.Oberschlesischen etc. p.109, 433

The infantry regiment nr.23 reached Namur on the 11th of May. It had left from Luxemburg for Arlon on the 27th of April; from where it marched to Massogne near Ciney. Cf. Busse, Von - Geschichte etc. p.159

The 3rd battalion of the 1st Elbe Landwehr infantry regiment (Von Krafft) moved on the 11th of May from Liège to a cantonment between Louvain and Namur. It had passed the Rhine near Koblenz on the 23rd of April. Cf. Borcke, J. Captain von – Kriegerleben etc. p.305

The 2nd regiment of uhlands (Von Wahlen Jürgass) left Dinant for Namur on the 16th of May. On the 21st of May at stood near Hannut, at Avin, Ville-en-Hesbaye and Meeffe. Cf. Dziengel, F.von – Geschichte etc. p.383-384

⁸⁶ Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.59

At least on the 23rd of May the regiment of Königin dragoons nr.1 (brigade Von Thümen) stood at Braines, Latinne and Avennes, near Hannut. Cf. Ravenstein, H. Darstellung etc. p.121

⁸⁷ Hagen, E.von – Geschichte etc. p.279

⁸⁸ Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.58

⁸⁹ According to Gottschalk, the corps stood between Ciney, Assesse, Dinant and Havelange. There, the 31st regiment of infantry (brigade Von Stülpnagel) joined it. It had come from Köln, through the Eifel and Diekirch. Cf. Gottschalck, M. , Geschichte des 1.Thüringschen Infanterie-Regiments nr.31 p.71

Mid-May, the 8th regiment of uhlans (Hobe) arrived in positions in and around Rochefort, where it would stay till the campaign started. It had been at Echternacht (23rd April), Trier (24th April – 8th May), Luxemburg (9th May), in and around Arlon (10th -12th May), Recogne (12th May), Bure (13th May). On the 14th of May it was in Rochefort, Serinchamps, Nassonge and Jemelle. Cf. Förster, F. - Geschichte etc. p.58-60

Major Von Holleben, of the 3rd battalion 8th regiment Leib-infantry, confirms his brigade (the one of Von Borcke) moved in the first half of May from Trier and Arlon to Ciney; later, on the 23rd and 25th of May, the brigade moved further towards Namur. Cf. Aus dem hinterlassene etc. p.137

⁹⁰ Aerts, W. - Etudes etc. p.40

The 16th brigade left its positions near Koblenz on the 6th of May; on the 14th it got new positions on the left bank of the Meuse river near Liège, with headquarters at Voroux-les-Liers. On the 19th and 26th of May two other regiments joined the brigade: the 2nd regiment of Silesian Landwehr and two squadrons of the 3rd regiment of Silesian Landwehr cavalry. Cf. Unger, W. von (ed) - Denkwürdigkeiten des Generals A.Freiherr Hiller von Gaertringen p.234-235

Of the 15th brigade, the 18th regiment of infantry reached its cantonment at Voroux-Goreux (north-west of Liège) mid-May; it would stay there until the 15th of June. Cf. Kriegsbrieife des leutnants Wilhelm Alberti p.163

The 10th regiment of hussars left from Koblenz on the 10th of May; on the 17th of May it moved through Spa to Liège, from where it got into positions at Bergilers, Hodeige and Remicourt. Cf. Thielen, H. von - Geschichte des Magdeburgischen Husaren-Regiments nr.10 p.14

The 6th regiment of hussars (2nd Silesian) (brigade Von Schwerin) had marched off on the 4th of April, through Kassel, to Koblenz where it arrived on the 22nd of April. On the 30th it passed through Trier, the next day through Spa and from there to Verviers, on the 15th of May. Three days later it moved to the Meuse where it reached its cantonments on the 20th in Eben and vicinity, south of Maastricht. In: Lippe-Weissenfeld, E. zur - Geschichte des Königl. Preussische 6. Husaren-Regiments p.238

The 2nd Neumark Landwehr regiment of cavalry reached Liège on the 13th of May, where it joined the 13th brigade (Von Hacke). Cf. Schulze, M. Das 2.Neumarkische etc. p.168-170

⁹¹ Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.58

Von Damitz gives a listing of the 4 army-corps for the 27th of May which closely resembles the data as given by Ollech. In: Geschichte etc. p.42-43

⁹² Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.46

⁹³ Ollech, Von – Geschichte etc. p.58

Prince Thurn und Taxis. In: Aus drei Feldzügen 1812 bis 1815, p.314

According to Von Henckel it moved to Namur on the 15th of May. In: Erinnerungen etc. p.350
Wellington to king Willem, 11th of May, 2 p.m. In: NA, 2.02.01 nr.6211 and WD, Vol.XII p.374

⁹⁴ Hussey sees in this letter an actual plan for the defence, covering specific roads, but this was not the case. Of course the general cantonments covered several main roads, but as has been shown above the changes in cantonments were initiated to what the duke called to “settle the distribution of the army in corps and its cantonments”, as an organisational item. That it

was no plan in the sense as Hussey describes it, can also be derived from the fact that for instance nor the cavalry nor the 1st British division were mentioned. The reason for this was simple: their positions didn't change. Other than that, the one at Halle for the forces of the prince should be regarded as a temporary one, for a march one day later towards other cantonments further to the west. In: *The aftermath of Tirlemont etc.* p.27

⁹⁵ Sperling, J. - *Letters of an officer of the corps of Royal Engineers etc.* p.124, 127
According to De Bas, it would already have been on the 20th of August and on the 2nd and 3rd of September 1814 that the position was surveyed by lieutenant Braun, of the British general staff. Reports of this surveyance would have been present in the historical section of the general staff in The Hague, at least this is the reference as given by De Bas, but no more. It has been impossible to retrieve the reports as referred to. In: *La campagne de 1815 Vol.II* p.69

⁹⁶ Sabine, E. (ed) - *Letters of colonel Sir Augustus Frazer* p.516

Later, captain Mercer of the Royal Horse Artillery wrote in his memoirs: "To meet the threatened invasion, it was generally understood in the army that the duke had made choice of two positions in the neighbourhood of Brussels – the one a little beyond the village of Waterloo, the other at Hal, the points where the roads from Ath and Mons unite. In one or the other of these, it was said, he intended to await the attack, according as the enemy might advance. Frequently, attended only by an orderly dragoon, he would visit these positions, studying them deeply, and most probably forming plans for their occupation and defence." Though a degree of hindsight may have crept into these words, the fact that Halle is mentioned is remarkable. In: *Journal of the waterloo campaign Vol.I* p.211

Just as important is the contemporary account of lieutenant Von Gerlach, member of the general Prussian staff, who wrote in his diary on the 14th of June about colonel Hardinge who – in the context of a possible French attack - talked about Wellington in the sense that "[...] bei Braine le Comte oder Hal könnte gleich alles Konzentriert werden [...] ; was hinter der Schelde stehe, seien Truppen, die Wellington die Absicht habe im Rücken zu lassen."

This is another indication that the Prussian staff was aware of Wellington's choice for these battle-grounds, and not only on the 14th of June, but long before that date. In: *Aus den Jahren etc.* p.144-145

The fact that the position of Halle was a strong one in the defensive sense of the word is confirmed from the side of the army of the Netherlands as well. Cf. *Dagboek der operatiën etc.* p.14

⁹⁷ Cf. Von Müffling. In: *Esquisse etc.* p.98

⁹⁸ The original map, the so-called "Waterloo map" can be found in the Royal Engineers Museum at Chatham (UK), nr.CHARE 4601.54.1

Cf. Whitehead, J.G.O. - "Waterloo. Wellington's right flank." In: *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal.* (1972), p.201-208

A copy of a very high quality can be found in the British Library, clearly showing the two parts of which the maps is composed. The accompanying note reads:

"This plan was copied from the original reconnaissance of the position of Waterloo made in 1814-1815 by officers of engineers under the orders of lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth. The original was on the morning of the 17th of June [...] of captain Oldfield brigade major to the corps of royal engineers until required by the duke of Wellington, who gave it to his Quarter Master General sir William Delancey with orders to move the troops into their

position. It was in the waist coat pocket of sir William Delancey at the time that officer fell on the 18th of June 1815 and subsequently obtained for lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth commanding royal engineers by his brigade major from the QMG's department at [...] Cambrai on the march to Paris. The original is in possession of lady Carmichael Smyth, widow of the late sir James Carmichael Smyth [..title]

John Oldfield, colonel, late major of brigade Royal Engineers in the Netherlands and France, 31 January 1846. On the bottom it reads: Copied by C. [...] of the [...] Dept., Plymouth 16 September 1845. In: BL, Add.ms.57.653/3 and 4

In 1838, an officer named Robinson wrote about the map: "Superintended under the orders of major general J.Carmichael Smyth RE the making of the Plans of the fortress in the Netherlands. He provided also under his directions a plan of the ground about Waterloo previous to the battle, which was consulted continually in the course of that eventful day and found in the breast pocket of the DQMG after he was killed." Cf. A letter from Robinson to sir Hussey Vivian, dated 4th of April 1838. In: NA, WO/44/692 file 389. Cf. Miller, D. – Lady De Lancey at Waterloo p.66

A copy of the map is kept in the Newberry Library (Chicago, USA), with the following covering note: "Sketch of the ground upon which was fought the memorable battle of Waterloo, copied from a plan which was taken by order of his Grace the duke of Wellington in the month of April previous to the battle." Cf. Lemoine-Isabeau, C. - La cartographie du territoire Belge de 1780 à 1830 Annex W7.14

Major Van Gorkum, of the general staff of the army of the Netherlands, mentions the map as having been shown to him by lieutenant colonel Carmichael Smyth in Brussels on the 9th of June. In fact, he speaks of two maps, one of an area around the position of Mont Saint Jean and the second of the area around Wavre. Yet, as Wavre was no position for Wellington to turn to it is highly unlikely that this one was sketched for the duke. It may very well be therefore that Van Gorkum saw the maps as referred to here, dated 12th June 1814 and 21st of May 1815. In: *Mijne staats en militaire herinneringen*

⁹⁹ The document was used in the Waterloo-campaign, but this mere fact is not a reason to interpret it in the context of this campaign right from the beginning.

¹⁰⁰ J.G.O. Whitehead dedicates a chapter to the document but he draws too far-reaching conclusions on it, which are partly based upon an interpretation which is too much based upon the situation in 1815 alone, and not in 1814 as well. In: *Waterloo. Wellington's right flank.*

¹⁰¹ For further observations on this subject, see the last chapter of these preambles.

¹⁰² On the 4th of May, it was also lieutenant De Wesener, at Charleroi, who expressed himself in almost similar terms, i.e. a fear for a major French attack over the Roman road in an attempt to drive a wedge between both armies. Cf. his letter to Constant Rebecque. In: NA, 2.13.14.01 nr.8

¹⁰³ Even after the change of cantonments of most divisions, their destinations for this memorandum remained the same, except at least for the units led by prince Frederik due to their new position far away from their former one. Initially, he was supposed to assemble at Soignies and Braine le Comte, now perhaps at Sotteghem.

¹⁰⁴ Prince Willem of Orange was supposed, according to the general order of the 11th of April, to have the staff of the army of the Netherlands to remain attached to himself but to “make arrangements for attaching to the 2nd corps such staff officers as may be necessary”. When he did so remains unclear, but it may have been in this period that it was arranged.

¹⁰⁵ It is here, again, that the concept of the battle of Ramillies (see above) comes into play.

¹⁰⁶ WSD Vol.X p. 171-174, 186 and WD, Vol.XII p.359-362, 368-370

It was around this date that Schwarzenberg moved his headquarters from Vienna to Heilbrunn. Cf. Hussey, J. All too quiet etc. p.14

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Blücher’s letter to prince Schwarzenberg, dated 27th of May. In: Blücher’s Briefe p.273