

## The 1<sup>st</sup> corps.

The 1<sup>st</sup> corps was on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June in position, in several lines, between Solre-sur-Sambre and the road which leads from Avesnes to Maubeuge. The distance between these points is around 16 kilometres. According to the “ordre de mouvement” the corps had the following instructions:

- to leave at 3 a.m. for Charleroi
- to follow the 2<sup>nd</sup> corps
- to reach and support the left flank of the 2<sup>nd</sup> corps
- to leave a brigade of cavalry to cover its rear and to keep up the communication with Maubeuge
- to send out reconnaissances towards Mons and Binche, without crossing the border
- to occupy Thuin with one division and to protect the bridge at Aulne with the same division.
- to establish bridge-heads at both Aulne and Thuin

In all probability the corps left its positions around 4.30 a.m. <sup>1</sup> Around 10 a.m. at Jamioulx, Soult sent the following orders to d’Erlon:

*A.M.le comte d'Erlon. Bivouac de Jumignon, 15 Juin, 10 heures du matin.*

*Monsieur le comte, l'empereur m'ordonne de vous écrire que M.le comte Reille recoit ordre de passer la Sambre à Charleroi, et de se former sur plusieurs lignes à une ou deux lieues en avant, à cheval sur la grande route de Bruxelles.*

*L'intention de Sa Majesté est aussi que vous passiez la Sambre à Marchienne , ou à Ham, pour vous porter sur la grande route de Mons à Charleroi, où vous vous formerez sur plusieurs lignes, et prendrez des positions qui vous rapprocheront de M.le comte Reille, liant vos communications et envoyant des partis dans toutes les directions: Mons, Nivelles, etc. Ce mouvement aurait également lieu si M.le comte Reille était obligé d'effectuer son passage par Marchiennes. Rendez-moi compte de suite de vos opérations et de ce qui passe devant vous. L'empereur sera devant Charleroi.*

*Le maréchal de l'Empire, major général,  
Duc de Dalmatie <sup>2</sup>*

This order refers to the one given to Reille (of 10.30 a.m.) to cross the Sambre at Charleroi; d’Erlon was now requested to do so at Marchienne-au-Pont. Ham is given as an alternative for Marchienne-au-Pont. However, Ham doesn’t exist. There is a village called Ham-sur-Heure but this isn’t at the Sambre river. The road from Mons to Charleroi mentioned by Soult didn’t exist either. In case the 2<sup>nd</sup> corps might cross the Sambre at Marchienne-au-Pont, the 1<sup>st</sup> corps should always be in its track.

The order is dated at Jamioulx at 10 a.m. At that time the vanguard of the 1st corps was near Thuin. D’Erlon received it at Montigny-le-Tilleul, but it is not known at what time. The

vanguard of his corps consisted of the division Durutte and possibly the 1st brigade of the cavalry division of Jacquinot.

Around 4.30 p.m. this vanguard arrived at Marchienne-au-Pont.<sup>3</sup> Durutte's division was followed by those of Donzelot, Marcognet, Allix and the second brigade of the cavalry division of Jacquinot. According to the instruction he had, d'Erlon left this brigade at Solre-sur-Sambre. D'Erlon left the division of Allix at Thuin.<sup>4</sup> Parts of it occupied the bridges at Lobbes and Aulne. Taking into account the speed of march and the length of the column (7 kilometres), this division arrived at Thuin somewhere between 12.30 and 1 p.m. Two hours later (between 3.30 and 4 p.m.) part of the division took up position at Aulne.

At 3 p.m. Soult sent an order (from Belle Vue) to d'Erlon, which reads:

*à 3 heures du soir, le 15 juin 1815, en avant de Charleroi*

*Monsieur le comte d'Erlon, l'empereur ordonne à M.le comte Reille de marcher sur Gosselies et d'y attaquer un corps ennemi qui paraissait s'y arrêter. L'intention de l'empereur est que vous marchiez aussi sur Gosselies, pour appuyer le comte Reille et le seconder dans ses opérations. Cependant vous devrez toujours faire garder Marchienne et vous enverrez une brigade sur les routes de Mons, lui recommandant de se garder très militairement.*

*Le maréchal d'empire, major général,  
Duc de Dalmatie*<sup>5</sup>

D'Erlon received it at Marchienne-au-Pont. The order implied that d'Erlon had to march directly from Marchienne-au-Pont to Gosselies, without abandoning Marchienne-au-Pont. In the process, he also had to send a brigade of infantry on the road which leads to Mons.

The 1st corps started crossing the Sambre at Marchienne-au-Pont around 4.30 p.m.<sup>6</sup> At the same time d'Erlon wrote his report to Soult:

*Marchienne-au-Pont, le 15 Juin 1815 à 4 heures 1/2 du soir*

*Monseigneur,*

*J'ai reçu les deux lettres que votre Excellence m'a fait l'honneur [?] de m'écrire aujourd'hui. La première m'a été remise à Montigny le Tigneux et je viens recevoir l'autre à Marchienne.*

*Conformément à l'ordre général d'hier j'ai laissé une brigade de cavalerie à Solre et Bienne sous Thuin, et ma division d'infanterie à Thuin, Lobbes et l'abbaye d'Aulnes.*

*Mes autres troupes commencent à arriver à Marchienne, aussitôt que la queue du 2e corps aura filée, je les ferai passer la Sambre, je porterai une brigade sur la route de Mons, une autre brigade restera en avant de Marchienne et avec les deux autres divisions d'infanterie je me porterai sur Gosselies.*

*J'ai vu la position de Thuin; elle est très forte par elle même, mais vu les localités on ne peut pas y établir de tête de pont.*

*Je prie Votre Excellence de me faire connaître si je dois laisser encore des troupes à Thuin,*

*Solre et environ.*

*Daignez, Monseigneur, agréer l'hommage de mon profond respect,*

*le lieutenant général commandant en chef du 1er corps comte D'Erlon* <sup>7</sup>

D' Erlon advanced from Marchienne-au-Pont with his divisions of Durutte and Donzelot as well as one brigade of cavalry. In conformity with the order of 3 p.m. he left the division of Marcognet near Marchienne-au-Pont. Whether the brigade Grenier marched in a western direction remains unclear; the other brigade, of Noguès, took up a position north of Marchienne-au-Pont, probably between the Chapelle St.Fiacre and the Cense de Chenoy. <sup>8</sup> These troops, as well as those of Allix, didn't advance any further; the order of 3 p.m. didn't explicitly mention these divisions, but prescribed the occupation of Marchienne-au-Pont and a reconnaissance towards Mons.

In his report of 4.30 p.m. d'Erlon asked whether he had to move forward the troops at Thuin, Solre-sur-Sambre and Biesme-sous-Thuin. Again, he did so in his report to Soult, written at Jumet on the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> of June. It reads:

*Jumay, le 15 Juin 1815*

*Monseigneur,*

*Conformément à l'ordre de V.E. en date de ce jour, 3 heures du soir, je m'étais dirigé sur Gosselies. J'y ai trouvé le 2e corps établi; en conséquence j'ai placé ma quatrième division en arrière de ce village, et ma seconde en avant de Jumay, la brigade de cavalerie se trouve dans ce dernier endroit. La 3e division est restée à Marchienne et la 1er à Thuin, mon autre brigade de cavalerie est à Solre et Bienne-sous-Thuin, ce qui dissémine beaucoup mes troupes; je prie V.E. de vouloir bien me faire savoir si je dois rappeler celles que j'ai laissées en arrière. La reconnaissance que j'ai fait pousser sur Fontaine-l'Eveque a appris que 1500 Prussiens, qui s'y trouvaient ce matin avec trois pièces d'artillerie en sont partis à midi se dirigeant sur Marche-le-Chateau; ils ont emmené avec eux beaucoup de bestiaux. J'attends l'ordre de demain par l'officier qui aura l'honneur de remettre cette lettre à V.E. Je la prie d'agréer l'hommage de mon profond respect.*

*(Signé) Comte d'Erlon* <sup>9</sup>

D'Erlon reported in the same way to Ney around that time. <sup>10</sup> It is not known where d'Erlon established his headquarters at Jumet. <sup>11</sup>

The distance between Marchienne-au-Pont and Jumet, through the Bois de Monceau, is seven and a half kilometres. The vanguard of d'Erlon departed around 4.30 p.m. from Marchienne-au-Pont. At that time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> corps just left it. In all probability the distance between the rear-guard of the 2<sup>nd</sup> corps (Jérôme's division) and the vanguard of the 1st corps (Durutte) was small. The 2<sup>nd</sup> corps covered the distance Marchienne-au-Pont – Gosselies in three hours. This might be an indication that that Jérôme's division took his positions in and around

Gosselies around 8 p.m. Durutte might have taken up position between 8.30 and 9 p.m. D'Erlon reports the division Durutte as being "en arrière de Gosselies". What he means here is probably a position between Gosselies and Jumet.<sup>12</sup> The division of Donzelot took up position in front of Jumet, east of the Brussels road.<sup>13</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> brigade of the division Jacquinet was placed in Jumet itself.

The report of d'Erlon should probably be dated around 8 p.m.<sup>14</sup> Soult sent d'Erlon his orders after receiving the said report, so probably around 9.30 p.m.

Soult wrote to d'Erlon:

*A M.le comte d'Erlon, commandant le 1er corps  
Charleroi, le 15 Juin 1815*

*Monsieur le comte, l'intention de l'empereur est que vous ralliez votre corps sur la rive gauche de la Sambre, pour joindre le 2e corps à Gosselies, d'après les ordres que vous donnera à ce sujet M.le Maréchal prince de la Moskowa.*

*Ainsi, vous rappellerez les troupes que vous avez laissées à Thuin, Sobre et environs; vous devrez cependant avoir toujours de nombreux partis sur votre gauche pour éclairer la route de Mons.*

*Le maréchal d'empire, major général,  
Duc de Dalmatie<sup>15</sup>*

Around the same time, he wrote to Ney in a sense as he described in this report to d'Erlon.

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1. Houssaye, H. - 1815.Waterloo. p.112

Colonel Bro, commander of the 4th regiment of lancers (2<sup>nd</sup> brigade of the division Jacquinet) mentions 3 a.m. as time of departure from Solre-sur-Sambre. This is not very likely, the more as the 2<sup>nd</sup> corps (in front of the 1st) also left around that time. At that time the most rearward troops of this corps, near Solre-sur-Sambre, couldn't be moving. In: Bro, baron H. - Mémoires (1796-1844). p.147

Lieutenant Martin (45th regiment line-infantry, division Marcognet) mentions a time just before dawn. Cf. Martin, J.F. - Souvenirs d'un ex-officier 1812-1815. p.274

2. In: SHD, C15, nr.5

Duc d'Elchingen - Documents inédits p.24

Ropes, J.C. - The campaign of Waterloo. Annex nr.4

Lachouque, H. - Le secret de Waterloo. p.85

Pontécoulant, F.G.de. - Souvenirs militaires p.56.

Grouchy - Mémoires. Vol.IV. p.162

Lachouque's version is somewhat different: instead of "sa majesté est aussi que" he says "s.m. est que"; he leaves out "de ...toutes " altogether.

3. D' Erlon's report of 4.30 p.m. from Marchienne-au-Pont. In: SHD, C15, nr.5

4. Captain Duthilt - Les mémoires du capitaine Duthilt. p.298

5. In: SHD, C15, nr.5

Copy in register of staff. In: BNP, FR.Nouv.acq.4366

Duc d'Elchingen. Documents inédits p.25

Grouchy, M.de Mémoires Vol.IV p.163

6. D'Erlon's report of 4.30 p.m. In: SHD, C15, nr.5

7. Original in: SHD, C15, nr.5

8. This is known from the order of 3 a.m. of the 16th of June, written to Noguès: "à Monsieur le maréchal de camp Noguès en avant de Marchienne au Pont ". Cf. the original in Vincennes. In: C15, nr.5 Also see the chapter on the marches of the 1<sup>st</sup> corps on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June.

9. Original in: SHD. C15, nr.5

D'Erlon mentions the village of Bienne-sous-Thuin. Here he means Bieme-sous-Thuin, a hamlet about 12 kilometres east of Solre-sur-Sambre ! In addition, d'Erlon mentions a body of 1500 Prussians and three guns, which went towards Marche-le-Chateau around noon. A place with this name doesn't exist, but what could have been meant here is a combination of the village Forcies-la-Marche and the farm of Le Chateau, both a few kilometres north of Fontaine l'Evêque. The troops referred to were those of Von Steinmetz but they had already left Fontaine

l'Evêque around 10 a.m.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ney's report to Soult, dated 11 p.m. in which he refers to such a report.

<sup>11</sup> According to Moreau, d'Erlon might have established his headquarters in a house, which in 1955 was located at the Chaussée de Bruxelles nr.395b, at the angle of this road and the rue Martin Falleur. This house - from 1784 - was in the hands of a family of notaries and had an old garden. According to the local tradition, Napoleon would have slept in this house. Somehow, the presence of a French military celebrity must have gone round through time, changing from d'Erlon into Napoleon. Cf. Moreau, M. A - Jumet, en Juin 1815. In: Bulletin of the SBEN, 1955 nr.14 p.24

According to another tradition, a French officer would have stayed in the house of mr. Schlaubas van den Steen, assistant mayor of Jumet. Cf. the annals of the Communauté des soeurs de Notre Dame, as mentioned by Delpierre. Delpierre thinks this officer might have been Donzelot, Schmitz or Aulard. In: Jumet: journées de Juin 1815 p.52-53

12.In: SHD, C15, nr.5

Durutte himself gives a position "en avant de Gosselies", and this is probably one south of Gosselies. In: Durutte's account in the Sentinelle d'armée of 8<sup>th</sup> March 1838.

Captain Chapuis (85<sup>th</sup> regiment line infantry) confirms the position south of Gosselies. In: Waterloo. Notice sur le 85e de ligne etc. p.26

Chef de bataillon Rullière (95<sup>th</sup> regiment) confirms a position along the road almost 7 kilometres north of the Sambre. Cf. his account dated 1856. In: Largeaud, J.M. - Napoleon et Waterloo p.372

13. Account of major general Schmitz (division Donzelot). In: Brouwet, E. - Mémoires et documents. In: Revue des études Napoleoniennes, June 1932 p.362

14. Houssaye dates it at 9 p.m. In: 1815.Waterloo. p.133

The chronology has been most probably thus: From Jumet d'Erlon wrote to Soult his report around 8 p.m. and this reached central headquarters at Charleroi towards 9 p.m. Soult wrote his orders to both d'Erlon and Ney by 9.30 p.m. Both d'Erlon and Ney received these documents before 11 p.m., the moment Ney sent his report to Soult and his resulting orders for d'Erlon who was to start to comply with them by dawn the other day.

15. In: SHD, C15, nr.5

In this order "Sobre" should be read as Solre-sur-Sambre.

Also in:

Duc d'Elchingen - Documents inédits. p.25

Pontécoulant, F.G.de - Souvenirs militaires. p.143

He times it at 10 p.m. but in connection to the distances involved an hour between 11 p.m. and midnight is more likely.

Ropes, J.C. - The campaign of Waterloo. Annex nr.6