

## Von Steinmetz' retreat.

Sensing an imminent danger, captain Von Gillhausen, commander of the post at Lobbes, had his men prepare for a possible action and it did not take long before French infantry fired at his outposts. However, the enemy did not push through their action and turned east. From a distance, Von Gillhausen's sentries observed and awaited the events at Maladrie and Thuin. Having convinced himself that this last place had fallen in French hands, he occupied a covering height on the left bank of the Sambre and pulled in his outposts, while still holding the bridge with one company. As soon as he had prepared his retreat, Von Gillhausen then also withdrew this unit and collected all his forces in the wood north of Lobbes. Meanwhile, as the French advanced along the river, the post at Hourbes had gone back towards its battalion, the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Westphalian Landwehr. Also the post at Aulnes was taken in by this battalion. Not long after, an adjutant of major general Von Steinmetz brought Von Gillhausen the order to retreat towards Anderlues. Von Gillhausen did so between 8 and 9 a.m.<sup>1</sup>



The old chateau at Fontaine l'Evêque.

As Von Steinmetz, based at Fontaine l'Evêque, could hear a distant gunfire, he sent one of his adjutants, major Von Dericke, to major Von Engelhardt at Bonne Espérance to find out what it was about. As it became clear that the fire came from the east, both men rode towards Lobbes where they observed the enemy and from which it became clear that he did not seem to have the intention to cross the Sambre. With this information, Von Dericke left for Von Steinmetz where he arrived at about 7.30 a.m. Being informed about the French attack, Von Steinmetz ordered the two alarm-guns to be fired and Von Gillhausen to pull back. It was also around this time that Von Steinmetz received the following note from Pirch II, from Marchienne-au-Pont:

*Das 2. Bataillon des 1. Westpreussischen Regiments hält Marchienne besetzt, bis die 1<sup>ste</sup> Brigade sich nach Gosselies zieht, und mit ihm in gleicher Höhe ist. Deshalb schicke Ich einen Offizier zu Ew. Hochwohlgeboren, den Sie zum Bataillon zurückzuschicken die Güte haben wollen, wenn es Zeit zum Abzug ist. So eben wird mir gemeldet dass die Feldwache von Nalinnes angegriffen ist, weiter hört man vorne nichts.*

*Von Pirch II*

*Den 15. Juni* <sup>2</sup>

Having received the information of Von Gillhausen and that about the fall of the abbey of Aulnes, Von Steinmetz decided to concentrate his brigade near Fontaine l'Evêque. <sup>3</sup> Von Steinmetz also informed general Van Merlen (at Saint Symphorien) about the events and his situation by sending out his chief of staff, major Arnauld de la Périère. <sup>4</sup> On his way to Saint Symphorien, Arnauld de la Périère called back the outposts at Bonne Espérance and Binche, led major Engelhardt.

Von Steinmetz pulled back his outposts which were lying towards Mont Saint Aldegonde (six and a half kilometres from Fontaine l'Evêque) and those towards Anderlues (four kilometres from Fontaine l'Evêque). For their retreat these outposts were supported at Forchies la Marche by a support consisting of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the 24<sup>th</sup> regiment, as well as half of the horse battery no. 7. <sup>5</sup> Accordingly, it was between 9 and 10 a.m. that a part of the brigade assembled near Fontaine l'Evêque; the first battalions to arrive were the 1<sup>st</sup> and the fusilier battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Westphalian Landwehr regiment. As the threat seemed to come from the south they took positions south of the village, on the road leading to Charleroi, facing the Sambre. As the terrain was broken, both battalions sent out parties of skirmishers.

One, led by captain Bennert and consisting of men of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion plus some sharpshooters, was sent to the left towards the river. To them, a party of Schützen of the fusilier battalion led by captain Von Sandrasky connected itself; yet, this soon got scattered due to the broken terrain. In addition, a group led by lieutenant Schulte received the post coming from Hourbe, led by lieutenant Berkmann, while lieutenant Busch went further to the left with a small detachment in order to establish a connection with the 2<sup>nd</sup> brigade at Marchienne-au-Pont. <sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, towards 9 a.m. the order of Von Zieten (dated 8 a.m.) to march through Fontaine l'Evêque towards Courcelles and from there, if necessary, to a position in rear of Gosselies was delivered to Von Steinmetz by captain Von Goschitzky.

As by this time his brigade had not been fully assembled near Fontaine l'Evêque, Von Steinmetz decided to wait until it would be completed. This decision was soon overtaken however the moment he received the following note from Pirch II, dated 9.30 a.m. By then it was around 10 a.m.

*Das Füsilier Bataillon aus Thuin ist mit der Kavallerie bis Montigny les Tigneu [sic] geworfen; es soll viel gelitten haben. Ich lasse es sich bis Marchienne zurückziehen, weil der Feind viel Kavallerie zeigt und von da bis Marchienne nichts als Plain ist. Dies zur gefälligen Nachricht.*

*Hiernach würden Ew.Hochwohlgeboren nach der Meinung des General Von Zieten Ihren Marsch nach Courcelle antreten.*

### *Pirch II*<sup>7</sup>

In all probability, the troops at Buvrines, Vellereille, Epinois, Waudrez and Ressaix had gone back to Anderlues. Those at Carnières might have gone back to Mont Saint Aldegonde, so that the troops in the centre and on the right wing of the brigade eventually came on the line Mont Saint Aldegonde - Anderlues - Fontaine l'Evêque. Yet, by the time Von Steinmetz started his further retreat from Fontaine l'Evêque, around 10 a.m., his brigade had not been assembled to its full extent<sup>8</sup>

To gain time, Von Steinmetz went back to Gosselies in two columns: one, of the main body, through Courcelles and the other one through Roux, in order to cover the flank of the main body and to secure the communication with the brigade of Pirch II.<sup>9</sup> The main body consisted of the troops coming from Mont Saint Aldegonde, Anderlues, Fontaine l'Evêque, Courcelles and Trazegnies. The 6<sup>th</sup> uhlans at Viesville concentrated at Gosselies around 9 a.m.<sup>10</sup>

The flank column consisted of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> regiment Westphalian Landwehr (coming respectively of Lobbes and Lernes, Landelies, Hourbes and the abbey of Aulne) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> company Silesian sharpshooters under the command of major Von Neumann (the battalion commander of the sharpshooters), all under the command of colonel Von Hoffmann (2800 men).<sup>11</sup> Von Hoffmann got the instruction to reach the crossing over the Piéton at La Motte (this is the point where the road from Courcelles to Gosselies crosses the Piéton) as soon as he could; in case he would reach this crossing before the main body, he had to take up a position to be able to defend the bridge as long as he could.<sup>12</sup>

Around 10 a.m. Von Steinmetz sent captain Von Goschitzky back to general Von Zieten to inform him that he intended to fall back to Courcelles first.<sup>13</sup>

The evacuation of Marchienne-au-Pont probably took place between 11 a.m. and noon.<sup>14</sup> It may have been that Von Steinmetz halted his units at Courcelles until news came from this evacuation. The distance between Marchienne-au-Pont and Courcelles is about eight kilometres. Von Steinmetz had started his retreat from the line Mont St.Aldegonde – Anderlues - Fontaine l'Evêque around 10 a.m. and reached La Motte around 1.30 p.m.<sup>15</sup> Whether the flank column under Von Hoffmann also left Fontaine l'Evêque at the same hour is not known.

The companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> regiment Westphalian Landwehr led by captain Von Gillhausen had to cover seven kilometres coming from Lobbes. By the time, however, they reached the assembly point between Anderlues and Fontaine l'Evêque, the brigade had already left. Von Gillhausen now rushed his men through the fields towards Gosselies.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion could also have arrived at Fontaine l'Evêque around the same time; it came from Aulnes and had to cover five kilometres, leaving Aulnes around 8.30 a.m.

In case these troops left Fontaine l'Evêque right after their arrival, they too could reach Roux around noon. It was here that they met the 4<sup>th</sup> company of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> regiment Westphalian Landwehr (Pirch II); this company had its post here till the moment Charleroi fell into French hands.

All in all, Von Hoffmann would have reached la Motte just before Von Steinmetz did with his main body. It was here that the brigade was assembled and took up a position, having the Piéton

in front. From here a post was pushed forward towards Jumet to reconnoitre the French, which had crossed the Sambre at Marchienne-au-Pont.<sup>16</sup>

Though Von Steinmetz didn't have his brigade completed, he started his crossing over the Piéton around 2 p.m., having the Silesian hussars and the foot-battery nr.7 in front. As soon as the fuseliers of 1<sup>st</sup> Westphalian Landwehr had crossed the stream, they were ordered to take up a position on the east-bank to protect the other units against possible enemy actions while crossing the stream.<sup>17</sup> During this march from the Piéton towards Gosselies Prussian flank-patrols were engaged with French patrols in some skirmishing fire.<sup>18</sup> It was during the action at Gosselies that 50 men of a company of the 1st regiment Silesian hussars under the command of lieutenant Sellin (in former outposts near Mont Saint Geneviève and which had been ordered to Gosselies) was threatened to be cut off from its unit and as a result of which Sellin decided to pull back further to the north, towards the road Nivelles – Quatre Bras.<sup>19</sup>

First version: 21st June 2005 - Last revised: 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2016 - Copyright © Pierre de Wit

<sup>1</sup> In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.39  
Cf. J.von Pflugk Harttung in: GSA, VPH-HA,VI, nr.I.5.p.39-42

<sup>2</sup> In: Beleuchtung etc In: MWBL, Vol.30 p.43

<sup>3</sup> Jonkheer Vrijthoff, general commissary of the inspection between the Lys and the Sambre claims that he would have informed Von Steinmetz on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June about the presence of French lancers at Binche [?]; he would also have been informed by a custom-officer at Thuin about the imminent French offensive. It would have led Von Steinmetz to concentrate his brigade. In: Geusau, baron Von Eene onuitgegevene bijdrage etc. p.192-194  
Vrijthoff may have informed Von Steinmetz about what he heard about a possible French offensive, but this did not led him to concentrate his brigade.

<sup>4</sup> This was oral information. Cf. Account of Arnauld himself. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.39

<sup>5</sup> In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.39

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Harkort, F. - Die Zeiten des ersten Westfalischen Landwehrregiments p.40  
In: GSA, VPH-HA,VI, nr.I.5.p.54-55

<sup>7</sup> In: GSA, VPH-HA,VI, nr.I.5.p.59

8. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.39

Account of an adjutant of Von Steinmetz. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.180  
According to this adjutant Von Steinmetz sent his captain Goschitzky to Von Zieten to inform him of this retreat.

Account of major Von Hofmann. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.84

The diary of the 1st corps claims Von Steinmetz started his retreat after 9 a.m. In KA. VI.E.13  
In: Pflugk Harttung, J.von Vorgeschichte etc. p.51

The distance between Lobbes to the point between Fontaine l'Evêque and Anderlues is about seven kilometres. Von Gillhausen left Lobbes around 7.30 a.m. and marched to the Bois de Sart-de-Lobbes and from there to a point between Fontaine l'Evêque and Anderlues.

<sup>9</sup> Account of major Von Hofmann. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.84  
Cf. J.von Pflugk Harttung in: GSA, VPH-HA,VI, nr.II.12.p.43

<sup>10</sup> Cf. account of an officer of that regiment. In: Minerva 1840. Cited in: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.38

He speaks of "Während unseres Marsches am 15. Des Morgens 9 Uhr hatte sich der Himmel umzogen und jetzt fiel ein dichter Nebelregen, der die Forttragung des Schalles hemmte und nur einzelne Schüsse hin und wieder und sehr schwach hören lies."

11. Aerts, W. - Etudes etc.p.296

<sup>12</sup> Account of an adjutant of Von Steinmetz. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.180 Cf. Hofschröer, P. - 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.173-174 Cf. GSA, VPH-HA,VI, nr.I.5.p.60-61

<sup>13</sup> Account of an adjutant of Von Steinmetz. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.180 Cf. Hofschröer, P. - 1815. The Waterloo campaign. Wellington etc. p.173-174 Cf. GSA, VPH-HA,VI, nr.I.5.p.60-61

<sup>14</sup> According to another source Von Steinmetz learned about the evacuation of Marchienne-au-Pont between 10 and 11 a.m. but this is too early. Cf. Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.43

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Lettow Vorbeck, O.von Napoleon's Untergang Vol.III p.261 According to another source it was 12.30 p.m. Cf. Cf. Beleuchtung etc. In: Militär Wochenblatt, 1846 p.44 Both Von Steinmetz and Von Hoffmann crossed the Piéton at la Motte (about 500 meters north of the abbey of Sart le Moine). Cf. Account of an adjutant of Von Steinmetz. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.180 Major Von Engelhardt of the 1st regiment of Silesian hussars. In: KA, VI.E.7.II.53 p.15 In: GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII,nr.3B. p.15 Major Arnould, on his return from St.Symphorien, met several units of the 1<sup>st</sup> brigade on their way to Courcelles; at that time no alarms could be heard. Account of Arnould himself. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.39

<sup>16</sup> Account of an adjutant of Von Steinmetz. In: Beleuchtung etc. In: MWB, 1846 p.180 Report of major Von Götz (fuselier battalion 2<sup>nd</sup> Brandenburg regiment of infantry nr.12). In: KA,VI.E.7.I.36 In: GSA, VPH-HA,VI nr.VII,3B p.1

<sup>17</sup> Report of captain Von Gillhausen (2<sup>nd</sup> battalion 1<sup>st</sup> regiment of Westphalian Landwehrinfantry). In: KA, VI.E.7.II.35 In: GSA,VPH-HA,VI nr.VII,nr.3B p.8 Cf. Pflugk Hartung, J.von In: GSA, VPH-HA VI,nr.II.2.p.22 He reports that it took a long time before the brigade had been completed. The 4<sup>th</sup> company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Westphalian landwehr (brigade of Pirch II) was near the bridge of Roux, but fell back to Gosselies, to the 1st brigade. Cf. Pflugk Hartung, J.von In: GSA, VPH-HA VI,nr.II.2.p.20

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Otto, F.von - Geschichte des 2.Schlesischen Jäger Bataillons nr.6 p.78

19. Report of major Von Engelhardt (1<sup>st</sup> regiment of Silesian hussars). In: KA, VI.E.7.II.53 In: GSA,VPH-HA,VI nr.VII,nr.3B p.15 Report of lieutenant Sellin (1<sup>st</sup> regiment of Silesian hussars) himself. In: KA, VI.E.7.II.53 In:

GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr. VII, nr. 3B p. 25

Von Pflugk Harttung. In: GSA, VPH-HA, VI nr. I. 5 p. 52

According to Von Reiche, Sellin was sent there to Quatre Bras in order to keep up the communication with the Anglo-Netherlands-German army. Though he doesn't mention the name of Sellin, this cannot have been another detachment than his. It returned to its unit on the 16th. See: Reiche, L. von - Memoiren etc. p. 168