

The communication between Wellington and Blücher during the battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras.

There is no information about what arrangements Wellington and Blücher may have made about how the communication would be handled for the remainder of the day the moment they left each other by 2 p.m.

From the Prussian side two missions stand out. First, the one of major Von Winterfeldt, who must have been sent out first, i.e. before 6 p.m. This is what we know from lieutenant Von Wussow, the one who carried out the second mission.¹ However, about the actual content of the message Von Winterfeldt which was to convey, no information is available.

Whatever the message must have been, he didn't complete his mission anyway as he was wounded by French skirmishers just west of the Bois Delhütte, near the Namur-road.²

Lieutenant Von Wussow was the carrier of an oral message about the situation in the battle of Ligny, as issued by 6 p.m. and delivered to the duke by 7 p.m.

From his side, Von Müffling claims that he received news from Blücher each hour. As this claim cannot be corroborated with other evidence, it is doubtful whether this has been the case.

In Von Müffling's view, the latest report would have dropped in by 8.30 p.m. stating that "der Fürst Blücher noch an der Windmühle zwischen Ligny und Bry war, und dass Dorf Ligny ohngeachtet der feindlichen Übermacht und Anstrengungen zu halten glaubte."³

This mission is also referred to by assistant QMG Hervey stating that "just before dark an officer came from the Prussians to inform the Duke that they had retaken Ligny and Saint Amand, from which they had been driven in the morning, and that everything was going well."⁴ The message meant here was probably the one as conveyed by lieutenant Von Wussow.

In the context of this note I would like to mention a mission as referred to by both colonel Hardinge and lord Fitzroy Somerset and as carried out by captain Hardinge, brother of colonel Henry Hardinge, also present at Ligny. He would have arrived at Quatre Bras by 10.30 p.m. with a request for a surgeon to take care of his brother, who had got severely wounded at his left hand during the late stage of the battle. Captain Hardinge probably left the field at the very end of the battle.⁵

A mission which is veiled in secrecy – but most probably related to the one just mentioned - is one complied with by a sergeant Knothe of the 2nd regiment of Silesian hussars which regiment had a squadron, led by captain John, near the Namur road during the 16th of June in order to keep the communication with Wellington's army open.

It was towards evening that a British officer of the Prussian general staff, came to captain John with a note written by himself and which had to be delivered to the duke of Wellington. Knothe was ordered by John to do so and he did so the moment the French were repulsed at Quatre Bras that evening. However, in an attempt to return to his squadron, Knothe couldn't locate it due to the darkness and in finding Von Röder's cavalry, he joined it and fell back with this unit.⁶

From Quatre Bras, Von Müffling states several messengers were sent to Blücher from the very moment he and the duke of Wellington got back there after their visit to Bussy.

Starting with a message about Wellington's inability to come to Blücher's assistance (but also about the resolve to fix the French in front of Quatre Bras), Von Müffling then claims more were sent out after 5 p.m. about the progress of the action at Quatre Bras, both orally and in

writing.⁷ Yet, as there is no corroborating evidence about all these messages from the Prussian side, I have my strong doubts about their existence as well. The only exception to this is the return of lieutenant Von Wussow to Gneisenau, which must have taken place around 8 p.m.⁸

First version: 28th July 2006 - Last revised: 31st December 2008 - Copyright © Pierre de Wit

¹ In: Ollech, Von Geschichte etc. p.139

² Major Von Wussow. In: Ollech, Von Geschichte etc. p.139

Even though the cavalry post knew that he had fallen there, there is no information whether this event was eventually transmitted back to where it came from, Gneisenau. Von Wussow doesn't refer to the fact that he was a replacement for Von Winterfeldt, and clearly, this could not have been the case in view of the fact that Von Wussow only learned later about what had happened to Von Winterfeldt.

It may have been that Von Winterfeldt was sent out to inform Wellington about the start of the battle.

Delbrück erroneously claims that Von Winterfeldt was killed. In: Das Leben etc. Vol.IV p.661

At least by the 17th of June, he was still alive, though severely wounded. Cf. Letter of Blücher to his wife, dated 17th of June. In chapter about the Prussian headquarters, 17th of June.

Colonel Von Nostitz doesn't enter any detail about the content of the mission of Von Winterfeldt during the battle of Ligny. He adds that he got wounded in his leg during the ride towards Wellington and that he somehow managed to reach Wavre the next day. In: Tagebuch p.33

To make things even more confusing, it is claimed that Von Winterfeldt was sent out during the night by the Prussian leadership about the outcome of the battle, but that he had been wounded while carrying out this mission.

Cf. account of Von Wucherer and account of QMG Hervey. In: A contemporary letter etc. p.432

I believe this is wrong, the more as Wucherer was no member of the Prussian staff in the campaign. Cf. his letter in: Förster, F. Geschichte der Befreiungskriege p.900

Von Müffling, himself, isn't very clear about this either. On the one hand he does mention the fact that a Prussian officer had tried to get through with some information, but that he had been found wounded near the road by some Nassau troops. On the other hand he doesn't make clear why the information he carried wasn't conveyed to him, though the officer in question would have been able to state he wanted to be led to him. In: Memoirs p.238

In his earlier account he states that the bearer of the news that the battle had been lost (an adjutant of Blücher) would have been killed on the Namur road. In: C.v.W. Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.18

³ C.v.W. Geschichte des Feldzugs etc. p.12

⁴ In: A contemporary letter etc. p.432

⁵ Cf. Fitzroy Somerset in his account. In: NAM, nr.6507-1

Cf. Dalton, Ch. The Waterloo roll call p.220

⁶ Cf. the diary of Knothe. In: Dziengel, J.D.von Geschichte des Königlichen Zweiten Uhlantenregiments p.387-388

⁷ Von Müffling. In: The memoirs etc. p.238

In his older publication he claims the Prussian messages were replied to each hour. In: C.v.W. Geschichte etc. p.12

⁸ Lieutenant Von Wussow. In: Ollech. Von Geschichte etc. p.139-140

The official Prussian report, shortly before describing the fall of Ligny, states: “..es ging die Nachricht ein, dass die zu unserer Unterstützung bestimmte Abteilung des Englischen Heeres selbst von einem Französischen Heere heftig angegriffen worden ist.”

In my opinion this note refers to Von Wussow's report about what he had heard at Quatre Bras.

The same applies at least to the time, in my idea, to what baron Van Panhuys, the representative of the Netherlands at Prussian headquarters, writes when he was with Blücher at 8 p.m telling him and others: “le duc de Wellington a repoussé l'ennemi et cette journée finira également glorieusement pour nous.” Cf. his report dated 17th of June to baron Tindal. In: NA, 2.02.01. nr.6585