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**WELLINGTON PAPERS 8/1/2 30,478 words**

General Clausewitz account of the campaign in the Netherlands in 1815 beginning the 22 page of the 8th vol of his works on War.

**Bonaparte's attack on Wellington & Blücher.**

Before the Russians were sufficiently advanced & before the great army on the Upper Rhine was formed a force of the allies existed already in the Netherlands & on the Lower Rhine to contend with. It was sufficiently great that a decided victory over it would be of essential advantage to the general affairs of Bonaparte & yet not so large that he should despair of the result. Bonaparte had it in his power and also wished to begin the war against this force before the others had passed his frontiers. He chose the last moment when Schwartzenberg had nearly collected his pay & the Russians were about fourteen Marches off. He probably put off the attack to so late a period because his forces were much increased during the last days for otherwise it would have been decidedly more advantageous to have begun earlier in order to gain time fully to defeat this force over the Lower Rhine before the others could begin to have any influence.

The great principle which Bonaparte adopted for the campaign was to burst forth with an attack on the allied armies in Belgium & on the Maes first because these were nearest & therefore the first to be subdued & easiest to reach 2nd because they were commanded by the most enterprising leader & therefore were the most to be feared. On these accounts he assembled numbers of his troops on this point quite disproportion to the general number of enemies opposed to him. He certainly could do nothing better & this was certainly the only way in his difficult & precarious situation to attain some fixed position. He could only hope by a splendid victory over Blücher & Wellington the two generals in whom the allied sovereigns placed their principal confidence & by a total destruction of their armies a blow which would create admiration in France confusion amongst the allies & astonishment in Europe he could I say only hope by these means to increase his power &

thus to make himself equal to contend with his opponents.

If he did not obtain this victory or if the allies were not prevented by it from an immediate inroad into France it would be impossible for him to save himself from a second destruction the forces of the allies were as follows in the first half of June.

1 The army of the Netherlands under Wellington in Belgium 100,000 men consisting of English Hanoverians Netherlanders Brunswickers & Nassauers troops.

Blücher on the Maes - 115 000 men.

Allied troops on the Mosel - 20,000 men

The total of this force - 235,000 men

2 The Russian Army in  
march toward the  
Middle Rhine - 140,000 men

3 The Austrian Army  
together with the allied  
troops from South Germany  
on the Upper Rhine - 230,000 men

4 The Austrians  
& Sardinians in Italy - 60,000

Total Allied force - 665,000 men

Against these masses  
the French had of  
regular army about 180,000 men

National guards 15,000

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Total in the field 195,000 men

If to these are added about 80,000 men which during the course of the campaign may have been drawn from the garrison of the fortified places it will be seen that the French had a struggle with 275,000 against 665,000 or rather they must victoriously overcome this. But there was 100,000 men of Prussian troops advancing viz the Guards the 5th & sixth corps of many regiments belonging to the four other corps. Besides these must be numbered at the later period the Neapolitan & Danish troops as well as the result of new corps to be formed in Germany e.g. the seventh Prussian corps in Westphalia. to get the better of such a superiority in point of numbers would require a miracle & what Bonaparte states as having happened during the campaign of 1814 as a proof of its possibility is mere sophistry. The results which he produced against the allies in 1814 were neither the military results against an enemy two or three times his superior for he beat them swiftly & was either superior or equal in numbers. Nor did these victories produce any strategical result against the whole for the Campaign finished with his fall. They were the result of well arranged strategical combinations of a great energy, which however as they with all their success could not produce any favourable result on the whole sufficiently prove how insurmountable the difficulties must be of a certain inequality of force.

We do not by any means to suggest that a successful issue of the war to Bonaparte was totally impossible but to say that in any war between civilised nations where the forces & the mode of calling them are not very different that numbers generally decide more than has been usually admitted & that those that were here in existence according to all theoretics of historical possibility had already decided the war.

#### **Position of the forces on both sides.**

The following were the divisions & position of the French grand army in the beginning of June.

1 Corps Erlon at Lille 22,000

2 Reille Valenciennes 24,000

3 Vandamme Mezieres 17,000  
4 Grand Theonville 16,000  
6 Lobau Laon 14,000

The Grand Montier Paris 26,000  
The four cavalry reserve corps 15,000

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total 129,000

The Allied Army which was opposed to the French Grand Army was divided & placed as follows.

Wellington

from Vandennacte to Ath  
but Colville's division  
had a brig under Gen  
Johnston in Newport.

2 corps which however stood  
on the right wing  
General Hill consisting of  
Clinton's Division 6,800  
Prince Fred'k of Orange  
Netherland brigade Anthing 3,700  
division Stedman 6,600

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Total 23,800

from Alt to Nivells

1st Corps Prince of Orange  
on left wing  
Cook's division 4,100  
Alten 6,700  
2nd Netherland Division  
Perponchet 8,000  
1st Netherland Division  
Chasse 6,900

Collaret Division  
of Netherland Cavalry 3,700

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34,400<sup>1</sup>

Beseror under the immediate  
command of Wellington

M to round Brussels

Picton's Division 7,000  
Brigade of Hanoverian  
Landwehr 4,800  
Gen Decker Hanoverian  
Landwehr 9,300

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21,100

Brussels from Ghent by  
Minove to Mons

Duke of Brunswick 6,800  
Nassau troops 2,900  
Ld Uxbridge's Cavalry 9,800

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Total of Wellington's Army 98,900

Prussian Army under Blücher

1st Corps Gen. Ziethen  
Near Charleroi 27,000  
2 Gen Pevil near Namur 29,000  
3 Thielman near Viney 24,000  
4 Bülow near Liege 35,000

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Total 115,000

The troops of the Northern  
German Allies under General  
Stuke near Tours 20,000

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<sup>1</sup> Note written in margin by Sir Francis Egerton, later the 1st Earl of Ellesmere: There is a wrong addition here. The cyffers given make only 29,400.

**Considerations respecting the disposition of the force of the Duke of Wellington. Preliminary observations which must be made.**

In order to extract from the above detailed position of the forces a clear & instructive result we must have many more materials than we possess. No one of the historical writers who have hitherto described his campaign has found it necessary to enquire after these facts & all that we have in so far as it respect the strategical circumstances of the campaign that is a sufficient explanation of the circumstances which existed before the two battles is as incomplete & scanty as that of any campaign of the 17th century

The principal circumstances which all require are

1st A complete & authentick order of battle of the Wellington army, from which might be extracted the disposition of the forces & the division of the command

e.g. In that which we have given the hanoverian Landwehr under General Decker is reckoned as a part of the Grand reserve it stood however on the extremity of the right wing took no part in the engagement & appears to have destined to Garrison certain places such as Antwerp, Ostend & Ypres Lyon's brigade belonging to Colville's division stands in Newport does not come to the engagement & was probably also garrison.

The first corps under the Prince of Orange which ought to have the right wing stands in the dislocation on the left in a similar manner and order of the divisions. e.g. Perponchet & Chasse is reversed. With respect to Collaret's Netherland division of cavalry it does not appear clearly what its destination was previous to the 18th. In short what we know of the order of battle of this army is so misted up with confusion that those disposition which

in the strategical consideration of a campaign depend on the order of battle of which there are always a great number fail altogether here or are very uncertain.<sup>2</sup>

#### **The preparation for ?<sup>3</sup> & views of the Duke of Wellington.<sup>4</sup>**

It is immaterial to us to know what plans Wellington & Blücher had made to invade France since Bonaparte by his attack anticipated this. But his forces which were collected for his attacks remained so was in a defensive position before they made it that a plan must have been made for this situation of things. Of his plan for the allied Netherland army we know nothing.

With respect to the Prussian army alone no doubt arises. It was placed with two corps in the valley of the Maes where the cities of Liége, Thiers, & Namur afford quarters to a large body of troops & had one corps on the Sambre near Charleroi the other on the right bank of the Maes near Viney which two corps twice put forward like a pair of feelers. The headquarters were at Namur three or four miles from the advanced corps & connected with Brussels by chaussee. The position extends eight miles in breadth eight miles in depth & the forces can be collected at the centre in two days; but may reckon on two days being allowed under any circumstances. If the forces are collected they may either give battle if considered strong enough for this purpose or they may retire in any direction for they have no object which confines them to any particular spot or prevent their acting as freely as possible.

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<sup>2</sup> Note [Egerton?] in margin: I do not know whether the explanations required can now be afforded. It does not seem to me of much importance.

<sup>3</sup> The word is obliterated by a large blot.

<sup>4</sup> Note in margin [Egerton?]: This is an important chapter.



All this was clearly not the case with the army of the Duke of Wellington. The quarter of this army from Mons to the sea measures more than twenty miles, the depth from Tournay to Antwerp about fifteen. The headquarters at Brussels are ten miles from the front line of the Quarters. Such an army cannot be collected on its center in less than 4 or 5 days. But the line of the French fortress is much too near e.g. the Great fortress Lille is only one march from Tournay for one to reckon upon four to five days for collecting the army.<sup>5</sup>

But was the collecting of his army on any one point the object of the Duke of Wellington? Was the mere uniting the army enough or must it take place preferably on this or that point to protect any particular circumstance or to enable him to Act in concert with Blücher?

But if the concentration of his forces on any one point was not the intention of the Duke of Wellington but a defence with his forces more or less divided we must again ask: What was the object of each of their positions of his forces & what was his connected object of the whole?

Of all this one does not hear a word. It is easy to suppose that the Duke set great store on Brussels but even we were to abide by this & to consider this as the only object to be protected a great many considerations will present themselves as to the importance of this object.

What was the basis of Wellington' s army of operations. Its ultimate retreat, or the freedom it had on this point are circumstances of the greatest importance in reference to what it was capable of performing.

Lastly what fortified places did it possess that is places which might be left for a time to defend the reserves. The accounts which we have

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<sup>5</sup> Liverpool's note in margin: The miles mentioned are German miles equal to a french post or four English miles. This observation applies to every mention of miles by Clausewitz.

speak of places where works had been undertaken but do not mention how these works were completed & still less how far they were garrisoned & provisioned.

That the Duke was prepared on all these matters does not admit a doubt, but we know nothing about it & cannot therefore judge how far the views which he had taken on them was adapted to the circumstances. If we might venture to conjecture without any certain data the intention of the Duke appears to have been as follows. Bonaparte if he attacks will advance against me & Blücher in several columns & on an extended line, & it therefore beholds me (the Duke) to make such arrangements that he may find everywhere a sufficient resistance whilst I (the Duke) keep myself in readiness with a sufficient reserve to hasten to the point where the enemy's chief force may be directed and then that I may still be in a condition to give battle to this principal force before it reaches Brussels.

If the French advanced with their principal force from their left wing that is from the neighbourhood of Lille the reserve which was in Brussels by joining with Hill might give battle somewhere on the Dender by Alt with half or three quarters of the whole army that is to say if time and circumstances allowed the left wing to be drawn forward. If the army advanced with her principal force from the center that is from the neighbourhood of Maubeuge or Valenciennes the reserve must unite with the Prince of Orange & if circumstances allowed with a portion of Hill's corps in order to offer battle on the road from Mons to Brussels. If the enemy advanced from his right wing with his private force that is towards Charleroi or Namur the reserve & perhaps a portion of the left wing could hasten to the assistance of the Prussians. It is easily seen that for all these plans two days were sufficient for it dependent only on the uniting of the corps of Hill & the Prince of Orange that union with the reserve at Brussels could be affected by retreating a days march. With these intentions the preparations of the Duke appear sufficient for he could scarcely fail to have two days time.

It was with these views that Blücher & Wellington agreed in a conference they had at Niron in the beginning of May, & we must therefore

understand the Duke's expression of collecting his army at Quarter bras & coming to the assistance of Blücher in his position at Sambre to mean only the smaller part of his army what Wellington himself might consider his chief force that is the reserve united with the left wing. For to unite the whole army of Wellington which was stretched over an extent of 20 German miles in two days on the extreme left wing that is at Nivelles or Quatre bras was absolutely impossible at most Clinton's left division of Hill's corps about 6000 men could effect this;- this supposition occasioned by the extent of the Wellington quarters is further confirmed by the leaving Prince Frederick of Orange near Hall that is at the division of the road from Brussels & Lille & Valenciennes that 19,000 men could certainly have been at the battle on the 18th. Up till now no other explanation of their being left behind has been given than that they should cover Brussels on that side.

#### Observations

If we choose now to allow ourselves to consider these circumstances as historical facts & then submit them to criticism, it will be evident that the usual conduct of Bonaparte & the circumstances of the moment were not rightly understood. The whole supposition of a divided advance upon an extended line is taken from other times, other leaders, & other circumstances. Bonaparte has set the example of daring to venture everything on the result of one single great battle. We say venture not because more is thus ventured than when the forces & exertions all divided, on the contrary circumstances may arise and which much more may be ventured in the second way than in the first, but we call it a venture because the mind of man, without reference to any accurate consideration shrinks back from this enormous decision to concentrate everything into the moment of a battle. It is as if our spirit felt itself in too small a space we feel darkly that if time only was allowed us we should find new resources within ourselves. All this however when it is not occasioned by some external circumstances but only arises from our internal feelings is only the weakness of human nature. Men of strong minds will easily surmount this weakness and in this respect Bonaparte's mind must be reckoned among the strongest.

Bonaparte was the first who ventured everything on the result of a single battle. We must state further: he always preferred this species of decision when it was allowed by circumstances. But circumstances allow this decision by one important battle particularly if the result is to produce a great decision. Again a great decision can only be the result in the two following cases.

1. If we know that our adversary wishes it & we cannot avoid it.
2. When this is to depend upon ourselves it can only be effected when we have the means of completing it. A man should only seek one of these compleat victories when he has the means of profiting by all its results for great dangers always accompany a great victory.

The last of these cases is what occurred to Bonaparte in all his Wars of invasion - the first case was what had now befallen him

Supposing that Bonaparte formerly when he made war only to satisfy his ambition & his desires for fame never avoids the most important results nothing less could be expected of him on the present occasion when a small advantage could be of no use & where a compleat victory & one which should surpass all succeeding ones could alone give him a better prospect of posterity.

The most urgent probability was therefore this that Bonaparte would burst forth with his whole force against one particular point.

Lord Wellington had never commanded opposing Bonaparte. Perhaps the reason is to be found in this circumstance. Why this

consideration did not strike him so forcibly as it would have done any others who had been struck by the lightening of his great battles.

If Lord Wellington had made these reflections he would have made quite a different disposition of his quarters as they were disposed it was impossible for him to appear on any field of battle in Belgium with his forces

united or in any connected operations with Blücher. It could not however be his intention to place a considerable mass of his forces so as not to be able to co-operate with him.

### **Position and union of the Prussian Army.**

Let us leave the views which Ld Wellington had respecting his whole army & particularly respecting his right wing in the dark out of which we cannot draw them because his original account of the battle does not afford us any clues & no writer has fairly considered this subject, and let us keep to the circumstance which was more immediately connected with the events, viz that in case the enemy attacks Blücher Ld Wellington would come to his assistance with his reserve with his left wing, & perhaps with part of his right wing: In this manner we shall make the necessary observations on this subject as well as for what respects that affecting Blücher's Army

We have said above that the Prussian Army was placed that it stretched eight German miles each way & could be collected within two days upon Namur. We meant however except from the corps of north German Allied troops which was placed near Tours This was indeed under the command of Field Marshall Blücher but was destined to remain on the Mosel, even if this destination was no better than that of Wellington's right wing, this did not depend upon Field Marshall Blücher who did not reckon this corps as a part of his own army. In respect of this army no other intention existed but on the approach of the enemy to unite it & so united turn it whichever way the circumstances required & this was against a General like Bonaparte & under the particular circumstances the best groundwork of all further operations

### **Particulars of the French Attack.**

In order that we may be consistent as to what task would be imposed on the Prussian Army after it had been united we must ask ourselves what the particulars were of the enemy's strategical attack. The object of Bonaparte in this attack as we have already said could only be a compleat

victory over both armies. If he occasioned such a defeat to one or both of them that Blücher must retreat across the Rhine & Wellington into Zealand if his trophies of victory were hundreds of cannon & thousands of prisoners, if he broke the moral strength of both armies, if he shook the courage of both generals weakened their spirit of enterprise: - then he might hasten with a portion of his victorious army even if it was only 50,000 men to the Upper Rhine & might form an army united with corps? of 80,000 men which being increased by reinforcements from the interior would in effect really amount to 100,000. The tremendous blow on the Lower Rhine would inevitably have produced delay & indecision on the Upper Rhine the arrival of Bonaparte would have changed delay into anxiety for their own safety. A speedy retreat of all this corps which was on the left bank of the Rhine or an unexpected defeat of them would have been the next consequence.

Although there would not have been any sufficient reason according to all calculations of force to delay the attack upon France after the above mentioned events beyond the period of the arrival of the Prussians & after that Blücher & Wellington had recovered themselves a little, it is however very probable that the moral effect of the victory would not have been so soon removed. The judgment which had been shaken & weakened by the effects of such a defeat would have believed in the possibility of the arming of enormous numbers of the inhabitation of France & as it were of armies rising out of the ground. But her most distinguished leaders would not have been on the spot, the last more than 100 German miles distant from the principal ready venture & it is thus possible that a very absurd time would have elapsed before things could be so far in order that an advance might be thought of.

On the other side now would not such a victory have electrified France! the vain selfsufficient French would have laid aside in the triumph of this victory both royalty & republicanism the army would have fallen out of the hands of the people of La Vendee & Bonaparte's situation in respect of the interior of France would have been totally altered.

For all far removed from the general opinions that after such a victory the situation of Bonaparte would have proved as favourable, as firm, &

as unconquerable as it was uncertain before, such propositions are mostly contrary to the nature of things & for historical criticism a very unworthy subject of declamation. We think on the contrary that after the most splendid victory Bonaparte's prospects still remained immensely difficult, that such a victory only gave him the possibility of resistance against the united forces of the enemy. If he himself considers the fall of the English ministry and peace with this power as the greatest immediate consequence of such a victory this must the more confirm us in the view we have taken how weak & uncertain he considered his position, as he wishes to conceal this by such illusions.

A splendid victory over the united army of the Netherlands is therefore the most urgent want of Bonaparte; but this being so, his leadership has one only object & this is the combined army & not any geographical circumstance as Brussels or the right bank of the Maes or of the Rhine.

Where we are treating of a great commanding decision, geographical points & the connections between these & the army can be of no importance to the undertaking, for the immediate advantages which they give, are too insignificant to the distant & new influence which they might have on the events of the war, demands too much time to produce any real effect: the great event of a battle came forward like a powerful stream so weak a piece of scaffolding. The activity of Bonaparte's could therefore only have been directed to such an object in so far as it would have afforded him a more advantageous preliminary to the battle, particularly if it had given him the means of rendering the battle more importance & more decisive, for this was his real desire. Getting into the rear of the enemy's army in order afterwards with a reversed front to attack it & to cut off its communications & its natural retreat is in most cases a never failing means of the completion of the whole scene of war, but this is not always so & particularly was not so on the present occasion.

Much was said by our people of the necessity of maintaining possession of the right bank of the Maes as Blücher's position on both banks of the river depended upon this, in the same manner great consequence was attached by Ld Wellington to the covering of Brussels But what could

happen if Bonaparte had gained possession before the battle of the right bank of the Maes or even of Brussels? The armies would have experienced some unimportant losses of ammunition & other matters of baggage & perhaps provisions & besides in the first case the Prussians & in the second the English army would have had their natural line of retreat cut off. Now it is clear that this last circumstance would be no particular disadvantage to either commanders, for Blücher could as well unite himself for a short time with Wellington & retreat on Mechlin & Antwerp; as Wellington united with Blücher could turn himself towards the Maes. The losses which both commanders would experience in case of a lost battle, would not have been severely increased by this means for under the circumstances they would neither have to fear a long line of retreat nor the possibility of being surrounded.

It was therefore clearly to be foreseen that Bonaparte would not let any value on such a turning of the position of the allies, which he must purchase by the abandonment of the greater advantage arising out of a quick & successful attack & by which in case of reverse he would expose himself to great danger. We are therefore of opinion that the two commanders might have united their forces on one point & have felt secure that wherever this point lay Bonaparte would seek after it. This union could not well have taken place previously on account of the difficulty of supplies but the settling the point of union was quite at their discretion, & was not in any way dependent on the direction that Bonaparte himself chose.

#### **The point of junction of the two allied armies.**

The most natural point of junction lay on the road from Brussels to Namur, where both could join the soonest. Now it had been found by Blücher's staff that the neighbourhood of Sambre on this road 2 1/2 miles from Namur & only one mile from the road which goes across Brussels to Charleroi on which Wellington meant to collect his left wing was particularly well suited for a field of battle against an enemy who came from the Sambre. The Ligne brook & a small tributary stream belonging to it form on that place parallel with the chaussée from Sambre to Vallatre a piece of ground which is neither very elevated nor steep but sufficiently so that was an excellent position for



every description of force was formed on the left side of the valley which was the highest.

This position was of moderate extent (1/2 German mile) so that being occupied by two corps it might be defended for a long time. Blücher under these circumstances retained two corps at liberty to attack, whereby he could either alone or in conjunction with Wellington decide the action.

It was true that the military peculiarity of this position related only to the Case of an enemy coming from Charleroi, but as the strategical peculiarities besides of this position fully met every possible situation. it was natural that its military peculiarity for this one case should decide its adoption.

If both armies united here in proper time either in one position or in two so nearly connected that they could act in concert, they would have thus done everything which their destination required, they must then have left the rest at the fate of arms which their great superiority of numbers they have no reason to fear. Whether Bonaparte took the road to Brussels or anywhere else he must have been obliged himself to seek out his opponents. But we have already said that Ld Wellington appeared quite averse to such concentration of the forces & to such a simplifying of the combination, if he remained in his intended position whatever movement took place. On the French army a concentration on any one point was impossible but even if it was possible he did not choose it. The idea of exposing Brussels for however short a period appeared to him quite inadmissible & as this place was quite open it appeared impossible to protect it from casual attacks by a garrison alone. It is therefore certain that if Bonaparte had advanced from Lille or Valenciennes on Brussels, Ld Wellington would have hastened to oppose him on the one case on the road from Tournay in the other on that from Mons, & then Blücher in order not to remain idle must have equally moved thither which he could have accomplished from Sambre on the road from Tournay in about 36 hours. They might have united in the neighbourhood of Enghien or at the worst near Hall in order to oppose the enemy as Sambre lay exactly on this road, this point of concentration was in this respect also completely well

chosen.

On the other hand this point of concentration was quite improper to resist the enemy on the right bank of the Meuse in case the enemy should advance on that side. But how should Blücher even have thought of collecting his army in time on the right bank of the Meuse & still less could he expect to receive there any assistance from the English general. Blücher therefore understood better than Wellington to admit those considerations which was not imperatively prescribed by the circumstances. On the left bank of the Meuse he was sure of supporting Wellington & if Bonaparte meant to attack him Bonaparte must himself pass the Meuse.

Calculations of time for connections. The Prussian Army.

We see then the Duke of Wellington in uncertainty where he is to expect the enemy, & ready to meet him everywhere with the greater part of his troops. We see Blücher resolved as soon as the enemy advances to concentrate his army on Sambres where he is near enough to the army of the Duke & support it or be supported by it.

If we consider now the time which both armies employed to concentrate & if we compare it with the time they would have had considering the position of their advanced corps under the most untoward circumstances, we shall find no satisfactory result.

Charleroi as a point is the nearest to the point of concentration (Sombrefe) & only 21/2 German miles distant. Supposing that the news of the advance of the enemy goes from Charleroi to Namur & the order is sent from thence to Liege as the most distant quarter for assembling the Army, the time required for this will be at least sixteen hours. If we add to this eight hours as time necessary for giving orders & drawing out the troops, we shall see that 24 hours will be required before the fourth corps can begin its march. The distance from the neighbourhood of Liege to Sombrefe is ten German miles for this distance two days march would at least be required & consequently three days must elapse before this corps could reach its destination. The resistance

of Genl. Ziethen on the Sambre & his retreat to the neighbourhood of Fleurus does not furnish more than one day, that is he might stop the enemy from morning to Evening after which the night wd. be occupied by his retreat.<sup>6</sup>

Now it might naturally be expected that this advance of the enemy would not be first perceived by his cannonry but at least by the last quarter that he occupied previous to the attack of our troops, it would even be very probable that by other channels this intelligence would reach us some day sooner. In this latter supposition the time wd. suffice for assembling the whole army, but if the time was confined to the positive appearance of the enemy, the second & third corps could alone have joined the first at Sombreffe & even the third with difficulty & the fourth could not have joined at all in time. This danger was fully appreciated at Blücher's headquarters, there were however many difficulties in making the Corps of Blücher approach nearer; it received however orders on the 14th as soon as the French was perceived to be in motion, to advance to the neighbourhood of Hannut which is only five miles from the point of concentration consequently it might have reached it sooner than the 3rd corps which was 6½ miles distant from it. An accident as we shall presently see hindered this advance from so immediately taking place & it consequently did not produce these results.

Blücher therefore thought that he could collect his forces at Sombreffe in 36 hours altho the chances were 100 to one, that the enemy's advance wd. be known more than 36 hours before he approached the field of battle still it was very hazardous to keep the forces so scattered in so forward a position. The continual difficulties which the magistracy of the Netherlands made with respect to supplies prevented Marshall Blücher from collecting his forces he still wished to wait for some more certain accounts of the movements of the enemy's army. He cannot however be entirely absolved from fault.

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<sup>6</sup> Liverpool's note in margin: Every mention of a mile in this work means German mile equal to a french post or five English miles there is also an occasional use of the expression stund or hour, applied not to time, but distance, & this means a french league, or 2½ English miles.

## **Wellington's Army**

Respecting the assembling of Wellington's army, we can form no judgment because to objects & disposition of the right wing are not known. But so far is clear that for the occasion in which the least time would be allowed, that is to say if the enemy advanced by Charleroi the result respecting the assembling of Wellington's army must turn out still more unfavourably. If in this case only the left division of the right wing, that is to say Clinton's corps, was alone to advance & the concentration was to take place at Quatre bras, this corps had to march from Ath & Liege that is 8 & ten miles & the advice had an equal distance to the West to Brussels & the orders from Brussels to the corps must travel the same distance. It is clear that the division would reach the field of battle later than the fourth Prussian corps. On the other hand the left wing, whose furthest division was placed in Rouen five miles from Quatre bras, as well as the reserves from Brussels could easily arrive, that is within 36 hours, if this did not occur, this was occasioned by circumstances which we will hereafter notice.

## **Reflections.**

So long as it was known that the French had one corps in the neighbourhood of Lille & another at Metz, so long was it needless to fear an attack by a concentrated force. But in the very first days of June the French troops left Lille & Metz & even supposing their direction was not known, it was however well known about the middle of the month by the allies that the fourth corps was moved from the Moselle to the Meuse. From this moment no second notice of the commencement of hostilities was with any certainty to be expected & it was now high time to draw the army together & to draw it together in such a manner that all the corps could unite on the field of battle within 24 hours. What changed in the position would have been consonant to this, is not necessary to enter into, but it wd. have been a great advantage if the Duke of Wellington had placed his headquarters nearer his own army & that of Field Marshall Blücher somewhere about Nivelles by other means alone

at least twelve hours would have been gained and many accidents avoided. But neither of these things took place. It was only the fourth Prussian corps that had received orders to unite itself in closer quarters near Hannut which order however arrived too late as we shall see

It was partly wished to obtain further advice before the commencement of hostilities, partly because Wellington thought that in collecting his forces he must direct them towards the enemy's principal force & respecting this nothing certain was known. No declaration of war had yet appeared, it was not yet known that the guards had left Paris (which occurred on the 8th June) & these things remained in a sort of culpable uncertainty until the 14th in a situation which might be dangerous out of which it was resolved to emerge in which situation however events so took them by surprise.

### **Bonaparte collected his army.**

Bonaparte had resolved to begin the campaign on the 18th of June. On the 6th the 4th corps quitted Metz. A few days later the first corps left Lille. This movement was concerted by strong advanced posts from three fortresses. The guard left Paris on the 8th the 6th corps left Laon & the 2 Valenciennes. All these corps united on the 13th between Philippeville & Avesnes at which place Bonaparte arrived on the evening of the 13 having left Paris on the 12th.

Metz is about 25 German miles from Philippeville in performing which the 4th corps consumed eight days, from Paris to Avesnes the distance is thirty miles, for which the guard employed only six days. The first distance however is a cross road & not a great thoroughfare. But it is impossible to judge of a march without the fullest knowledge of all the particulars. We may here conclude that Bonaparte whose great object was surprise had prescribed the greatest possible dispatch to his several corps. On the 14th the different French corps drew still nearer together & took up the following positions in the columns

The right wing 16,000 men strong consisting of the 4th corps &

the 5th & 6th corps of the guards & the principal cavalry force near Beaumont. The left wing 44,000 men strong consisting of the 1st & 2nd corps near Sombre on Sambre.

This position was still four German miles from Charleroi. As the breaking up from Metz & Lille was no preparatory drawing together of the Quarters of the army but was in effect a real march to unite the forces, the allies if they had had a good system of intelligence ought to have gained this intelligence sooner than the 13th or 14 that is to say 8 or 9 days after it occurred & wd thus have been relieved from that uncertainty. This however was not the case, it was not till the 14th that the communication of the French army & the arrival of Bonaparte was known & it still remained uncertain on what point this would occur. They first learned from Genl. Ziethen in the night of the 14th that the enemy was collecting on his front & that he expected an attack on the following morning, so that the exact news of the disposition of the enemy was only known 36 hours before the beginning of the battle of Ligny.

#### **Blücher's concentration of his forces on Sombreffe.**

On the receipt of the news of the motions of the enemy & the arrival of Bonaparte an order was sent from Namur in the evening of the 14th to Genl. Bülow so to collect his troops that he might reach Hannut in one march. General Bülow received this order at 5 o'clock in the morning of the 15th he immediately took the necessary measures to comply with it

In the night of the fourteenth, as soon as Genl. Ziethen had announced the advance of the enemy a second order was sent to Genl. Bülow to advance immediately to Hannut & to post his headquarters in this place. Genl. Bülow received this order on the fifteenth at eleven o'clock before noon. If he had in consequence of this given orders to his troops after a short rest to make the second march to Hannut which could easily have been done, as Hannut is only five German miles from Liege & most of the troops were situated between Liege & Hannut, his corps would have been collected during the night of the 15th at Hannut Genl. Bülow thought that he could put off the

obeying this order till the next day, I st because he thought that the concentration of the Prussian Army would take place on Hannut, that there would therefore be plenty of time for him to reach Hannut; secondly he thought that so long as there was no declaration of war no hostilities would take place.

On this he made his report to the headquarters & announced that he should be in Hannut on the sixteenth at noon. This report no longer found Marshall Blücher in Namur. A third & fourth order in the course of the 15th dispatched from Namur to Genl. Bülow ordered him to continue his march on the 16th to Sombreffe. As Sombreffe is five German miles from Hannut & Bülow's corps could only have reached Hannut in the night of the 15th he might with great exertion have reached Sombreffe with his advanced guard in the afternoon of the 16th with the rest of his corps in the evening. It is plain from this that there was not sufficient time.

Both these last orders were sent to Hannut where Genl. Bülow must arrive & was expected, on which account they remained there. But Genl. Bülow had remained the 15 at Liege & first received these orders at ten o'clock in the morning of the 16th. The loss of time was now so great that he arrived at 3 o'clock after midnight in the morning of the 17th near high & Low Bodeice a french league from Gembloux & three french leagues from the field of battle. Had he arrived twelve hours sooner he might still have decided the battle of Liege.

The third Prussian corps by an accident received only at ten o'clock on the morning of the 15th its marching orders which were sent on the night of the 14th, nevertheless they were at ten o'clock on the 16th on the field of battle, having only left behind some troops which were at the advanced posts. The second Prussian corps had joined shortly before.

#### **Concentration of Wellington's Army.**

The advices which Field Marshall Blücher received on the 14th which occasioned him to order the concentration of his army on the night of

the 14 do not seem to have determined Lord Wellington to any decided step. Even when he received intelligence in the Evening of the 15th that General Ziethen was attacked & driven back by the principal French force he still considered it doubtful whether he should march with the reserves towards his left wing & still less advisable to weaken his right wing. He expected that Bonaparte would advance on the road from Mons & considered the battle near Charleroi as a feint, he therefore contented himself with ordering his troops to be in readiness. At midnight when the news came from General Dornberg who commanded the advanced posts near Mons that he was not attacked & that the enemy appeared rather to draw to the right he at length gave orders for the reserve to march to pass the wood of Soignes which according to the written account of General Muffling was affected at 10 o'clock in the morning. This was only three German miles from the battlefield at Sombreffe. The Duke's reserve might therefore have arrived in good time, but much time was lost whilst the Duke went to his left wing at Quatrebras, reconnoitred the enemy near Frayne, & then hastened to Prince Blücher at Sombreffe where he arrived at one o'clock in order to satisfy himself whether the enemy was advancing on this point with his principal force & also to have the necessary communication with the Prince. During this time the reserve appears to have waited for further orders at the extremity of the wood of Soignes that is where the roads cross from Nivelles to Quatrebras. Even then there would have been sufficient time, but the Duke had divided his forces so as to meet every contingency to that extent, & had resolved not to take away the right wing of the Prince of Orange so long, that he was too weak to be able to assist Blücher, all which we shall presently see more clearly.

### **Bonaparte's attack is directed against Blücher.**

After that the considerations respecting the concentration of the different armies have carried us to the moment when Bonaparte is about to attack General Ziethen we must now more fully consider Bonaparte's plan, how he came to direct his attack this way, & what were the peculiarities of this attack.

Bonaparte must have known in Paris pretty well the cantonments



of both allied armies; but his plan of attack could only found itself on the general situation of the troops not on the position of particular corps e.g. that of Genl. Ziethen at Charleroi; for these positions might easily afterwards have been altered, since his advices must have been eight or ten days old. We cannot therefore assume that his advance on Charleroi was particularly aimed at the 1st Prussian corps. He knew the plan of Blücher to concentrate his forces & post himself behind Fleurus, but with respect to so uncertain a thing as the point of concentration which might have long been altered without his knowing it, he could not form his plan in Paris. Bonaparte could only assume with certainty that Wellington with his army was in & round Brussels, that Blücher was with his on and round Namur. He had probably a tolerable account of their strength, but it is also probable that he considered these accounts as exaggerated. General Sarbliew in his work entitled *de la restauration* relates that when they told him of 200,000 men he shrugged his shoulders & answered that he knew for certain that the English army was 50,000 men that the Prussians were the same as to numbers on the Meuse. Even supposing that Bonaparte by such expressions only meant to encourage his people, we may however fairly suppose that he did not estimate Wellington's army above 60,000 or at most 70,000 men nor Blücher's above 80 or 90,000 altogether about 15,000 men (this figure is as per the manuscript but is obviously incorrect) of which a large proportion he foresaw with certainty would not come into action. If he in his memoirs relates pretty accurately the force of both armies, this must not deceive us, these details are evidently drawn from later accounts & the habit of undervaluing his opponents was too much the habit of Bonaparte for it not to have occurred on the present occasion.

If Bonaparte therefore collecting his forces between Maubeuge & Zivet considered which was the shortest, & as his intention was to surprise, the best he found himself more opposed to Blücher than Wellington & at the same time the great mass of Wellington's army was a march behind that of Blücher. If he passed Charleroi, it could hardly fail that he must meet with Blücher for he must have considered it probable that both generals would remain connected and that Blücher therefore would collect his army on the left & not on the right bank of the Meuse. The road by Charleroi carried

Bonaparte either against Blücher's principal force or against his right wing. To fall upon Blücher & to attack him first was what Bonaparte particularly wished. Partly because he had much more anger against Blücher & the Prussians than against Wellington & the English partly because the Prussians were the strongest & was the most excited & most desirous of the contest. This conjecture of ours of Bonaparte's plans has also been confirmed by his memoirs for he says that Blücher an old hussar & a madly courageous character, would certainly hasten to the assistance of Wellington sooner than cautious Wellington would assist Blücher

If Bonaparte fell upon Blücher's principal force, he hoped to beat him by a sudden attack before Wellington could come to his assistance; if he fell on his right wing, this would not be so well, but he might easily imagine that in pursuing it he should meet with Blücher himself & bring him somewhat later to battle, but thereby he would separate him the more from Wellington. In both cases he had the intention of finding Blücher's force divided as he should meet him on his march to join Wellington as this march being a strategical flank movement out of divided quarters could not admit of the forces being united.

Thus it appears that we must reason & consider the more recent plan of operation of Bonaparte. All the writers who have described this campaign begin by saying he threw himself between the two armies to divide them In reality there is no clear idea belonging to this expression become technical in military language. The space between two armies cannot be the object of any operation; it would be very unlucky if a general like Bonaparte who has to do with an adversary double his strength, instead of falling with united force on one half of his adversary's force should place himself in the open space between the two positions of his adversaries & then should strike a blow in the air, he would thus loose his time whereas it is only by the greatest economy of it that he can increase his strength.

Even the fighting with one army in a direction whereby it will be separated from the other, has always this great danger, even when no time is lost, that you may be attacked in the rear by the other. If therefore this other

is not at such a distance as to insure you from this danger a general will with difficulty resolve upon an attack of this description.

Bonaparte chose therefore the direction between the two armies, not to divide them altho he squeezed himself between them, but because he has reason to expect that in this direction he will fall on Blücher either united or divided

### **The Action near Charleroi**

The French army was placed on the evening of the 14 June four German miles from Charleroi in three columns near Philippville & Beaumont & Solce on Sambre. It is not distinctly said whether Genl. Ziethen observed the forces or whether he collected together his brigades as much as the defence of the approaches allowed. His advanced posts were driven in at four o'clock on the morning of the 15th. The three French columns advanced towards the three passes of Marchienne Charleroi & Chatelet. All three were defended by divisions of the second brigade. The advanced posts of Genl. Zeithen retired but lost the battallion which had defended itself for a considerable time in Thuin on the retreat towards Marchienne by an attack of cavalry.

The advanced posts of General Ziethen were spread from the neighborhood of Binch by Thuin & Ham to the Sambre two miles & a half from Charleroi. This was necessary for the safety of the corps, but when a general is informed of the advance of the enemy & is therefore prepared it is usual to draw in posts that have been so extremely advanced & which it is no longer necessary to expose.

The position of Genl. Zeithen's corps with the principal posts of the brigades was on the morning of the 15th.

1st Near Houtaine  
2nd Near Charleroi  
3rd " Fleurus  
4th " Montier

The reserve cavalry divided between Gossellies, Charleroi, & Fleurus.

We may here consider the 3rd brigade as a reserve. The 2nd as that which positively defended the passage of the Sambre, the 1st & 4th as only covering the flanks

The intention of Genl. Ziethen could not be to undertake a decisive engagement on the Sambre but he had himself chosen the position near Gilly for the 2nd brigade, & he wished to defend the three passes Charleroi, Marchienne, & Chatelet so long as it might be done without danger for the troops so employed. A second resistance was to take place near Gilly & thus time was to be gained insufficient for the brigades on the flank to reach the position behind Fleurus where the whole corps was to unite itself & where its united resistance the necessary time was to be gained for the union of the whole army.

This plan was effected altogether pretty successfully. The 1st brigade met at Gossellies as it was proceeding towards Herpignias? the advanced guard of the enemy's column which had passed by Marchienne & had an action with it; as however it was supported in this action by a regiment which the 2nd brigade had detached to its assistance at Fleurus it was enabled to continue its retreat without great loss to the neighbourhood of Hammer.

The left flank brigade was not attacked by the enemy; probably this is the reason why it drew its advanced posts in much later & only reached Fleurus towards the Evening. It had not therefore suffered any loss.

The circumstances which attended the 2nd brigade were as follows.

At four o'clock the advanced posts were attacked at eight o'clock the attacks on Charleroi first began. This lasted till eleven. Marchienne was

at this time taken possession of by the French, but the column of the French right wing near Chatelet was not arrived. The French now wait the arrival of the 3rd corps under Vandamme which had lost its way, & which only joined at three o'clock. The time from three to five was spent in reconnoitring & in passing thro Charleroi. At length between 5 & 6 as Genl Pirch of the second brigade is about to retreat on Fleurus the attack begins. Genl. Pirch had therefore to maintain an action as he retreats whereby he lost a good many men & before he reached the wood of Lambusart one of his battalions is taken by the enemy's Cavalry. At nightfall the brigades of Genl. Ziethen corps reach the neighbourhood of Fleurus & the Enemy takes a position in the wood of Lambusart

As the enemy had already commenced his attack at four o'clock in the morning & had therefore been in motion the whole night before & the whole day, it was pretty clear that he would not undertake anything further during the night, or even that he would not commence his attack very early the next day. It might therefore be foreseen that if an action was to take place at Sombreffe on the 16 it would only begin after noon & that the armies would therefore have till twelve o'clock to take up their positions.

The loss of Genl. Ziethen on the 15th is reckoned as 1,200 men we might say 2,000 with this sacrifice 1st corps had stopped the enemy's army 36 hours which is no unfavourable result.

It was only the centre & the right wing of the French which followed Genl. Ziethen. Bonaparte gave Marshall Ney who arrived at Charleroi at four o'clock orders to take the command of the left wing to advance with it against the English army on the Chaussée by Frasnes towards Quatrebras & draw back whatever he met & to take post at that cross road.

Ney had found the 2nd corps Rielle near Gosselies, one of its divisions that of Girard detached towards Fleurus, the 1st corps Erlon still between Marchienne & Gosselies. He met at Frasnes with a brigade of the division of Netherlanders of Perponchet & as he learnt from Girard's division that large masses were showing themselves towards Fleurus he had not

resolution enough to advance to Quatre bras partly because he had not got his troops together & partly because he was probably anxious not to get too far away from the principal scene of the action, he therefore contented himself with driving back the brigade of the Netherlanders under Prince Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar from Frasné & with occupying that place with his advanced guard.

The position of the French army on the Evening of the 15th was as follows.

Left Wing (The advanced guard in Frasné  
(The 2nd corps between Mellet & Gosselies  
(The 1st corps between Marchienne & Gosselies

Center (The 3rd corps & the cavalry  
( in the woods before Fleurus  
( The guards between Charleroi & Gilly  
( The 6th corps behind Charleroi

right wing The 4th near Chatelet

Bonaparte's head quarters were in Charleroi, those of Ney on Gosselies.

Situation of things in the forenoon of the 16th

Blücher had given his orders for concentrating his army on the night of the 14th as we have already said. Wellington gave his orders on the night of the 15th therefore 24 hours later.

Blücher's second & third corps begin their movement on the 15th they were therefore after 36 hours march on the field of battle ready to receive the 1st corps. The fourth corps as we have already shown could only reach the field of battle with its advanced guard at noon & with the other

brigades in the Evening. But it did not effect this attack, because by a convenience of circumstances the orders which ought to have reached Genl. Bülow on the 15th at two o'clock afternoon only reached him on the 16th at ten o'clock before noon consequently twenty hours later. Therefore the 4th corps instead of being at six o'clock in the evening at Sombreffe only reached a place three french leagues more in the rear at six o'clock the following morning. A difference therefore arose of about fifteen hours.<sup>7</sup>

### **What happened on Wellington's side?**

Lord Wellington gave his first orders for the countermarch to the left at midnight on the 15th. How far he had collected his forces previously particularly his right wing is nowhere related. This must however necessarily have happened if the right wing really as is asserted was concentrated on the 17 at noon near Hall, for it is clear that it was impossible between midnight on the 15th & noon on the 17th that the orders could go to Newport and the troops march to Hall.

We must leave this undecided, & merely say what we have, that the English army was in the following position on the forenoon of the 16th.

1st The division of Perponchet & one brigade of the cavalry of the Netherlands consisting of eight squadrons near Quatrebras

2 The division of the Netherland troops of Chasse probably with the other two brigades of the Netherland cavalry consisting of twenty squadrons near Nivelles.

3 The division of Picton the brigades of Lambert & Pack the

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<sup>7</sup> Liverpool's note in margin: The expression here in German is drei stunden which I translate 3 french leagues. I believe however that the stund is rather more than a french league which may be reckoned about 2½ English miles.

Nassau & Brunswick troops on their march from Brussels to Quatrebras

4 The divisions of Cook & Alten belonging to the left wing on their march from the neighbourhood of Enghien to Quatrebras

5 The cavalry under the command of Ld Uxbridge on their march out of their quarters to Quatrebras

6 The division of Clinton belonging to the right wing from the neighbourhood of Alt to Liége on their march to Quatrebras.

7 The brigade of Mitchell equally belonging to the right wing on its march from the neighbourhood of Reuaip? - Renaip? to Quatrebras

8 The divisions of Stedman & Anthing, two brigades of the division of Colville (Johnston & Lyon) & the hanovarian Cavalry brigade E'toof? on their march from their Quarters to Hall, where they arrived on the 17th.

Lord Wellington therefore had at noon when the battle near Ligny began & that at Quatrebras might have begun about 8,000 men at Quatrebras. By degrees during the Action & untill nightfall there arrived: the reserve from Brussels & the divisions of Cook & Alten, perhaps also some cavalry & the strength of the Duke may have got up to 40,000 men. The Duke could not resolve to quit the road from Nivelles, which would indeed have been rather dangerous on account of the troops of the right wing continually passing this road as they concentrated themselves to the left. The Duke therefore had had towards Evening not only 40,000 men in march but also of the other 50,000 who were in their positions, 10,000 men, that is to say Chasse's division & twenty squadrons of Cavalry near Nivelles on a point that was not attacked.



## **The battle of Ligny**

Bonaparte's forces were not sufficiently united on the morning of the 16 to commence an attack

The left wing under Ney was what the French call in echelons for a space of two German miles from Frasne to Marchienne, in a similar way the center of the right wing, for the sixth corps was placed behind Charleroi.

The occasion of this was that the french troops had attacked the Prussian outposts at four o'clock on the morning of the 15th they had therefore probably marched all night, & they had been engaged the whole of the 15th till after nightfall or had been marching, it was therefore important that an attack should take place on Blücher at Sombreffe or on the Netherland troops at Quatrebras on the 16th before noon. Bonaparte had convinced himself of their particulars near Sombreffe & it therefore did not occur to him to begin the action there before noon; but the very same circumstances had taken place at Quatrebras the reproach that he makes Ney of not having occupied Quatrebras with his whole force either on the Evening of the 15 or early in the morning of the 16 is frivolous and unfounded.

If the real military attack by the principal french force against the principal Prussian force could have taken place on the forenoon of the 16, it would have been an enormous fault to have delayed it for Blücher was not united, this Bonaparte knew, & as the whole force of the Prussians was very superior to the 75,000 men which he could dispose against them, nothing could be of more consequence than to commence the action before the whole was collected. The 3rd corps of the Prussian army arrived only on the field of battle at ten o'clock. But the French troops wanted time to rest, to get victuals, to dress their food, & when all this was done to draw themselves up closer, all this could not be done in a short summer night, & it is not therefore a matter of wonder that in this way the forenoon of the 16 was thus employed.

Between eleven & noon the french troops advanced again against Genl. Ziethen, he had already sent back his brigades into the position allotted

to them & continued himself still with his cavalry in the Plain of Fleurus. The movement continued till one o'clock by which this cavalry was never back upon the position. Bonaparte then reconnoitred the Prussian position & the real attack only began at 3 o'clock.

Blücher's disposition before said, originally intended to occupy the position from Sombreffe along the road to Brussels, & whilst Bonaparte developed his attack on this position to fall upon his flank with the greatest part of the Prussian force when the army was collected near Sambres on the morning of the 16, it was thought unsafe not entirely to occupy the side on which the Duke of Wellington would arrive with a portion of his force. A position was therefore chosen for the 1st & 2 corps between St Amand & Sombreffe but it was also thought that the space between Sombreffe & Vallatro must not be left unoccupied, because Genl. Bülow was advancing by Gembloux; orders were therefore given to the 3 corps to take this position. There was therefore two front lines which formed an inverted right angle. Probably it was through that the enemy would make the right flank which was thus exposed the principal object of his attack because the Duke of Wellington with a considerable force was expected on that side in case the Enemy made a secondary & less powerful attack on this side it was thought that against such an attack this flank was pretty secure on account of the line of villages which stretch from St Amand to Wagnies.

The principal mistake was that the Prussians supposed that they had the whole force of the enemy opposed to themselves & therefore they might calculate on a certain assistance from Wellington with a force of 40 or 50,000 men. In reality a flank may with security be exposed when 40 or 50,000 men are in echelon behind it. They thought therefore that Bonaparte wd. attack both the flanks of the Prussian position whereby he would thus place himself in a very disadvantageous position. This expectation was not realised & there would have been time during the action to have repaired this error.

**Dispositions in the front of Ligny.**

The front from Amand to Sombrefe was occupied in the following manner.

The first corps formed the front lines the second was in reserve behind the height

The first corps had placed its troops some what promiscuously which perhaps accident did circumstances may have occasioned.

Whilst the first brigade had three battalions in Bry the other six stood behind St. Amand.

On the contrary the third brigade had three battalions in St Amand whilst it formed with the six others the extreme reserve.

The exact representation was as follows.

By three bat of the 1st  
St Amand 3 of the 3rd  
Ligny 4 of the 4  
Brigade -

That the remaining six battalions of the 1st brigade were placed as a first division in two lines just behind St Amand. (B)<sup>8</sup>

The right battalions of the 2nd corps (one battalion had been lost) with the two battalions of the 4th corps in a second division between Bry & Ligny. (C & D)

Lastly the six remaining battalions of the 3 corps in a third division just behind the 2 & 4th. (E)

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<sup>8</sup> Liverpool's note in margin: These letters are the references to Wagner's plan of the battle.

The reserve cavalry of the 1st corps stood at first behind the villages in order to observe the enemy & placed itself afterwards as a reserve close before the 3 brigade. (JV)

The second corps stood as the great reserve along the Brussels road the brigades next to each other (H I K L ) in the order of battle prescribed for them in columns of three divisions. The reserve cavalry was mostly with the brigades, the three heavy batteries of the 1st corps alone was advanced between Ligny & St Amand.

The intention was only to maintain a temporary contest in the villages of St Amand & Ligny in order to waste the enemies forces & then as soon as they should advance from the villages to attack them.

### **Disposition on front of Sombreffe**

The third corps had its ninth brigade placed for the defence of the scattered villages of Sombreffe & Montpotrinne as well as of the ridge on which they are situated, the eleventh brigade for the defence of the chaussee near Point du Jour, the tenth for the defence of the ridge near Tongrines? & the 12th brigade & the reserve cavalry was placed as reserve behind. The ninth brigade occupied in front the village of Montpotrinne with one battalion only the other eight battalions were placed in reserve behind the village (P) The eleventh brigade took up its ground in front with one battalion (R) & the other four were placed behind (one battalion was left at the advanced post at Meuse.

The artillery was principally divided between the height before Montpotrinne on the chaussee before Point du Jour, & on the heights near Sonprinell?

### **Arrival of the Duke of Wellington**

These arrangements were completed quietly towards midday as the enemy might have foreseen could not begin his attack before noon & did not in any way impede the retreat of Genl. Ziethen from Fleurus into this position.

At one o'clock the Duke of Wellington joined Marshall Blücher near the windmill of Bry. The Duke said to the Field Marshall that his army was at that moment collecting itself at Quatrebras & that he would hasten thither in a few hours to his assistance. \*A quatre heures je serai ice," were his words as he spurred his horse.

That the Duke could arrive in a few hours with his whole army would have been a foolish proposition. Wellington only meant by the expression his left wing united with his reserve, which were however from 40 to 50,000 men. Both generals thought that the whole French force was opposed to the Prussian position & their force was estimated at 130,000 men. Blücher had in position about 80,000 men, if the Duke joined with 40 to 50,000 the forces would have been about equal. They calculated also on Bülow's arrival, altho not without uneasiness on this point; if these 35,000 men came up the victory seemed pretty nearly secure. Even supposing that these circumstances was not so advantageous as the great superiority of numbers might have justified the expectation they were however satisfactory, & a retreat of both armies was connected with difficulties on account of the different directions in which this retreat of each army must take place. If they had been united each or either of them might have abandoned their own line of communications for a short time to have turned to that of the other, but they were not united & a combined march to the rear would have still more impeded their union, besides making a bad impression on the troops & the country. These were the grounds which were indeed sufficient to decide Field Marshall Blücher to join battle. The battle was therefore undertaken with the opinion that at first the Prussians would have to meet a great superiority of numbers but that towards the end of the day the superiority would be on their side & that the decision wld depend upon persevering in resistance till that period.

### **Bonaparte's plan of attack.**

Bonaparte had as we know on the 15 put forward the 1st & 2nd corps, the light cavalry of the guards, & a division of cuirassiers, altogether 48,000 men under Ney on the road to Quatrebras. As the division Girard belonging to the 2nd corps in the advance of this mass of troops from Marchienne where it passed the Sambres at Gosselies was employed against Genl Steinmetz at Gosselies & in pursuing this Genl at Herviginnies? approached nearer again to the center, Bonaparte retained this force himself. The principal army therefore which was advancing against Blücher consisted about 75,000 men. The following were the dispositions which it received from Bonaparte.

The third corps (Vandamme) in conjunction with Girard's division & supported by the brigade of light cavalry of the guard altogether 24,000 advanced by Wagnelie to the attack of St Amand.

The fourth corps (Girard) 15,000 men made a wheel to the left & advanced to the attack of Ligny.

Grouchy with two corps of cavalry & some infantry (No one says from what corps but probably from the 4th) advanced against Tongrinelle & Point du Jour the guards were placed in reserve to the left of Fleurus, & the sixth corps which arrived rather later & Milhaut's cavalry were placed in reserve on the right of Fleurus.

These reserves & Grouchy's cavalry which only acted as corps of reservation make altogether a force of 36,000 men.

Bonaparte knows nothing of the position of the 3rd Prussian corps, he thought that the three Prussian corps were in position between St Amand & Sombreffe. & he so much the more thinks the force that he held in

H,I,K,L, & P which with a large force in the villages might easily form the whole force of 80,000 men which he had before him. Whether he knew for certain that the fourth Prussian corps was not arrived we cannot judge. He afterwards asserted this & by this means gave his plans of attack a species of favourable colouring, but it is scarcely possible that he could have had any certainty of this, as the very prisoners which he made at the beginning of the action could not have known it. We leave this then in uncertainty, & pursue the matter as he represents it. He saw the Prussian army in a position in which it had the Chaussee from Brussels behind it, consequently it entirely gave up its original line of retreat & exposed to him its right flank.

It was true that the principal direction of the Prussian position even without considering the corps of Thielman's was not so situated but the chaussee from Brussels was rather parallel to it than perpendicular but Bonaparte did not see it in this light. This mistake is very pardonable as it was very difficult to form an idea of the direction of the whole from the appearances of the many separated masses of the Prussian brigades & it was very natural to imagine that the line from St Amand to Ligny & even the line of this last village as the most advanced occupied posts was the real line of the whole. This position of the Prussian army astonished him, & he drew the conclusion that Blücher did not expect an action on that day, but that he had chosen this extraordinary position under the present circumstances in hopes of gaining time till the next day & then of seeing the English army taking up its position in a line with the Prussians that he attributed the maintenance of this position in front of the French army partly to the bold character of old Blücher who by his conduct wished to impose, partly to his own apparently inoffensive position near Fleurus where a portion of his troops were concealed.

Now Bonaparte thought himself pretty secure that Wellington could not advance & on this head he could easily be better informed than respecting Bülow besides he thought that he had provided for this by the orders he had given Ney. He depended entirely on Ney who having delayed on the 15 he thought wd press forward as quickly as possible on the 16th as far as Quatrebras that he would by this means keep back everything that might

come from Wellington & that then Ney himself would be able to dispatch 10,000 men into the rear of the Prussian army by the Chaussee from Quatrebras to Namur. In his enthusiasm respecting this plan he said to Genl Girard who had come to him for instructions "il se peut dans trois heures le sort de la guerre sort decide. Si Ney execute bien ses ordres il ne s'echappera pas un canon de l'Armee Prussienne elle est prise en flagrant delit".<sup>9</sup>

### **Eventful moments of the battle of Ligny.**

In the process of the battle itself there are three different Acts to distinguish but which happened at the same time.

The first of the three Acts was the most bloody, the second the most consequential, the third unimportant in itself, but to be considered as an essential demonstration of the French.

In the Action for the village of St Amand we may describe the events as follows.

1st The south village that is the real village of St Amand was attacked at 3 o'clock by Lefol's division of the 3rd French corps. The 1st Prussian brigade which is placed with six battalions behind it supports the three battalions of the 3rd brigade which was placed in it & maintains the Action with many changes of taking & retaking for an hour, during which it brings forward & consumed the three battalions placed in Bry. At four o'clock this village is lost & the 1st brigade is no longer able to keep up the Action, it

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<sup>9</sup> Liverpool's note in margin: I have omitted a discussion occupying from pages 71 - 78 & containing all Bonaparte's orders to Ney during the action at Ligny on the 16 & furthermore it concludes with a statement of the impossibility that Ney should have done what Bonaparte expected which was to repulse the English Army at Quatrebras & send 10,000 men into the rear of the Prussians.



is withdrawn & collects itself behind Bry. (J) Probably the advance of the division of Girard into the village of St Amand la Haye has contributed to the decision of this result

2nd Field Marshall Blücher determines on a strong attack in two columns in order to retake the villages of St Amand & St Amand la Haye.

One column consisting of the second brigade which was placed with its eight battalions in reserve near Bry, was to attack St Amand la Haye on the extended side which Genl. Jurgas with the 5th brigade & 17 squadrons of cavalry, that is to say ten that belonged to his own brigade & those (of the brigade Marwitz) which was taken from the third corps, was to advance by & alongside of the village Wagnelie so that they might attack the division Girard which defended St Amand la Haye in the left flank. thus it was hoped the Prussians would recover possession of St Amand la Haye & consequently also St Amand itself.

Genl. Pirch made two attacks. The first failed entirely, the second conducted by Blücher went right into the village & ended in obtaining possession of the church yard. Genl. Jurgas also made two attacks which however do not appear to have been sufficiently combined with those of Genl. Pirch. In the first Attack the 25 regiment which led the advance out of the village of Wagnelie fell very soon into disorder & the attack must be considered as having quite failed. Genl. Jurgas renewed it with the same troops which he collected again in the rear & he was now more fortunate, i.e. he pressed forward into the neighbourhood of the village of St Amand Le hameau & here the Action was maintained for a considerable time.

Bonaparte on this strengthened his left wing by a division of the Young Guard & the French renewed their attacks. As the 2nd brigade had consumed its ammunition & was exhausted, four battalions of the 6th brigade which was placed behind Bry were advanced & Genl. Pirch retired with the 2nd brigade behind this village. In the same manner the 7th brigade advanced to reinforce the 5th. In no relation does it sufficiently appear what results here took place on either side probably the Action was confined at a pretty small

space fluctuating mutually backwards & forwards. Both sides may have been nearly a similar situation. Since each occupied a portion of the village of St Amand la Haye. From all we can collect of the relation it would appear that the battle always continued on that side of the small brook on which the villages of St Amand are situated.

Of the effect & of the application of cavalry & artillery we cannot say anything clear & certain because the account of the use of these arms is too unconnected, it is possible that its application was in reality unconnected as many divisions of these arms do not even appear in the relations of this action. If we reckon together the reserve artillery of the 1st corps as well as the batteries of the 1st 2nd 5th & 7th brigade which were undoubtedly there this makes ten batteries or 80 pieces; probably there were also in activity here several reserve batteries of the 2nd corps & all this together will produce the number of 100 pieces which engaged in a space of 3000 paces.

The French artillery of the 3rd corps consisted of 38 guns, that of the division Girard 8 guns, if we add to this 30 guns as belonging to the Guards & the reserve cavalry, the number of french guns will only have amounted to 76. [n all cases the french artillery was considerably less numerous than the Prussian. When not withstanding this we must allow that the loss of the Prussians in killed & wounded was considerably greater, this is in part to be accounted for by the circumstances that we keep too much artillery in reserve & we relieve a battery as soon as it has expended its ammunition. This is the reason that they often expend their ammunition as speedily as possible.

Cavalry seems to have been very little employed on either side & rather to have observed one another. On the French side there regiments attempted to turn the Prussian right wing, but was checked by eight squadrons which were opposed to them by Genl. Marwitz.

3rd Lastly we must consider it as a third & principal Act in the Action about St Amand, when Field Marshall Blücher believing on account of the movement of the French Guards that the French Army was going to retire

conducted the last disposable battalions e. g. three from the 8th brigade to St Amand in order in a manner to compleat his success. This resolution gives us the explanation relative to the Action at St Amand that we must consider it as having been maintained with equal success for otherwise the idea dividing it by fresh troops could not have arisen.

If we collect the result of this whole Action it will appear that on the Prussian side at various times 40 battalions therefore perhaps 28,000 infantry. On the side of the French the 3rd corps Girard's division of the 2nd & Duhesme's division of the Guards altogether about 24000 men infantry was employed to maintain the action for six hours, for the Prussians held possession of the villages till 9 o'clock. On the whole we may reckon the Prussians. as having had somewhat the worse, in as much as they lost St Amand entirely & St Amand la Haye partly, that they had men killed & wounded & above all that they were more weakened having more exhausted troops & fewer that they could employ than the French. For it is probable that all the French battalions had actually been in fire. It was therefore a disadvantage to us that we had already made greater sacrifices in this contest than the enemy. But this result was plainly not decisive but only an almost imperceptible turn of the scale.

We will now turn to Ligny here the contest is still more simple than near St Amand it consists of a contest with fire arms maintained principally in the village itself for five hours during which the French were generally in possession of the village which lay on the right bank of the brook & the Prussians were in possession of the other half.

The attack on Ligny was made by the 4th french corps commanded by Gerards & was decided by the guards commanded by Bonaparte himself.<sup>10</sup>

It began a little later than the attack of St Amand. We may

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<sup>10</sup> Liverpool's note in margin: observe this is not Girard but Gerard.

consider the following as the most important occasions.

Ligny was occupied by four battalions of the 4th Prussian brigade; the attack took place in three columns consisting of the three divisions which formed the 4th French corps, but we must consider that the Greater part of the division was retained as reserves, the two remaining battalions of the 4th Prussian brigade advance upon this the first attack was repulsed.

2nd The French renewed the attack, the fourth Prussian brigade begins to be too weak to resist, the 3rd brigade having left two battalions to protect the artillery advanced to the support of the 4th brigade with four battalions into the village. Genl v. Jagow attempts to advance out of the village and to attack instead of standing take the offensive, but the fire of the enemies batteries make it impossible to & debouche out of the village. Upon this disorder takes place in the village itself which was probably the occasion of the loss of one half of it.

3rd In order to avoid losing the other half the other four battalions of the 6th brigade (one was already at an earlier period consumed in Ligny & four others employed by Genl Pirch in the attack on St Amand) & five battalions of the 8th brigade follow these at a later period of the Action which 8th brigade had been previously moved out of the neighbourhood of Sombrefe to the Mill of Bry. Of the remaining four battalions of this brigade one remained near the mill the other three were those which Field Marshall Blücher led to St Amand. With respect to the use of cavalry & artillery we learn even less than near St Amand. Supposing that the Prussian artillery at St Amand consisted of 100 pieces that at Ligny cannot have exceeded 60 as the whole artillery of both corps consisted only of 160 pieces.

The fourth French corps had forty pieces of artillery; it is however probable that a portion of the artillery of the guards as well as that of the cavalry reserves was here employed. Therefore it appears likely that there was no superiority of artillery on the Prussian side

The Prussian cavalry was principally drawn away to the right wing for when subsequently the French cavalry broke through only three regiments was on this point.

The contest in Ligny was now carried on in a very small company & with the most bloody exertions. The mass of Prussian infantry employed there amounted to 20 battalions, that is about 14,000 men. The third French corps must have been equally strong in infantry.<sup>11</sup>

Field Marshall Blücher had at about three o'clock given orders to Genl Thielman to send a brigade of his cavalry of reserve, this had taken place & Genl Marwitz was put under the command of Genl Jurgas as we related when treating of the Action near St Amand. About four o'clock Genl Thielman received orders to send a brigade of infantry also, in conformity with this the 12th brigade marched off to Ligny. This was placed in reserve between Sombreffe & Ligny in the place of the eighth. This brigade had pushed forward its sharp shooters as far as the brook of Ligny & by a pretty sharp engagement had covered the left flank of the troops in Ligny, it had not however suffered considerably & was therefore still to be considered as a reserve. Bonaparte had resolved with the principal part of his guards to force the position of Ligny & by this means to decide the Action. This attack occurred at about 8 o'clock & concluded the Action at Ligny.

(4) Eight battalions of French guards & between 3 & 4000 cavalry advance to the division of Ligny & drive the Prussian troops quite out of the Place. The French cavalry pushed through the center of the Prussian position which is nearly deprived of infantry. The cavalry of reserve of the Prussian 1st corps hasten in brigades to attack the enemy's cavalry & infantry but it is everywhere repulsed. In one of these attacks at the head of which the

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<sup>11</sup> Liverpool's note: It is third in the original but it ought to be 4th as it was that commanded by Gerard.

Field Marshall was placed, his horse is wounded & he escapes only by luck being made a prisoner.

### **The Action of the third corps of the Prussian Army.**

Two corps of French cavalry & some infantry, probably from the 4th French corps which was commanded by Grouchy was employed to make demonstrations against the Prussian troops placed between Sombreffe & St Vallatre & to occupy them. The object was so far attained as the 10 & 11th brigades with eleven battalions & the 2nd brigade of the cavalry of reserve with six squadrons all by this means detained. On the other hand the 12th brigade & the other two corps of the Prussian Army & the 9th brigade placed behind Sombreffe is to be considered as a reserve.

The Action of the infantry took place only on the ground occupied by the 10th brigade between Tongrinville & Boignee & was in itself unimportant.

Between 7 & 8 o'clock as Genl Thielman saw the sharp shooters of his 12th Brigade which was placed between Sombreffe & Ligny going over the rivulet & when he also observed the cavalry which had been opposed to him nearly disappearing, he imagined that the enemy was retiring & wished to advance beyond the defile with his remaining brigade of cavalry. Two squadrons was sent in advance & a battery of horse artillery followed there incautiously too near. Scarcely had these troops approached the neighbouring heights, when two regiments of the enemy threw themselves on the two squadrons & troop from the battery of horse artillery which instead of turning about & getting off had unlimbered five of its pieces the three others had time to get away

If we now consider the picture of the whole battle together, it is like all modern battles a slow consumption of the forces opposed to each other in the front line where they approach each other, in an engagement with fire arms which lasts many hours & which is only subject to very small results, untill at last one side has an evident superiority in the reserves that is in fresh

masses of troops with which it gives the decisive blow to the already tottering strength of its opponent.

Bonaparte advances with about 75 000 men against Blücher whose three corps, which he had together composed an army of 78 000 men the armies was therefore equal.

With about 30,000 he engaged from 3 o'clock to 8 o'clock the two principal points of Blücher's position St Amand & Ligny. He disposes of 6000 men for the occupation of the 3rd corps of Prussians & with 33 000 he waits quietly in reserve far behind the line of the engagement. Of these again he disposes of about 6000 to maintain the contest at St Amand. Already at six o'clock he decided upon giving the decisive attack with his guard on Ligny. At that moment he receives intelligence that a considerable corps shows itself at the distance of a French league on his left flank.<sup>12</sup>

Bonaparte stops his movement, as this may be an enemy's corps coming from Brussels. It is Erlon, who, for reasons not yet known, marched from Frasne towards St Amand. Persons are hastily sent to reconnoitre this corps, but two hours nearly elapses before the news is brought back that this is the 1st corps of the French Army. On this account the attack on Ligny begins at 8 o'clock.

Even this attack Bonaparte does not make with the whole mass of his reserves but with only half of it, that is with the remainder of the guards, whilst the 6th corps again remains behind in reserve.

Blücher had employed the 1st corps 27 000 in the positions of Ligny & St Amand, & the 3rd corps 22,000 men in the position from Sombreffe to Vallatre & had only placed behind in reserve the 2nd corps 29 000 men. It is true that if the 3rd corps had been collected together it might have been considered as a reserve; and as the enemy did not attack it vigorously it is

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<sup>12</sup> Liverpool's note: in the original it is eine stund that is as I have said before rather more than a french league.

true also that Blücher reckoned on the approach of Bülow; but neither of these circumstances occurred & thus the condition of the Prussian reserve was always unfavourable.

By degrees as we have seen the 2nd corps (which was the reserve) was employed in maintaining the engagement nothing remained therefore to decide the Action, even if the Action had been quite equal or even if it had showed itself favourable to the Prussians.

As the day fell the position of the opposite forces was nearly as follows.

Blücher has consumed 38 000 men of infantry in the two villages which had very much suffered, which had partly consumed their ammunition & which must be considered as remains in which there was no longer much strength. 6 000 men infantry stood behind the villages scattered in single battalions which had not yet been engaged. The remainder of the 56 000 men composing the first & second corps of the Prussian army consisted of cavalry & artillery, of which only a small portion was still fresh.

If the 3rd corps of the Prussian army had been united or if measures had been taken in time for this purpose, this was a reserve of 18 000 men, it might therefore be said that when the last effort was made Blücher had still a reserve of 24 000 men. Bonaparte although at the beginning some thousand men weaker than Blücher had now notwithstanding some thousands more fresh troops than him. The cause of this was his keeping back his troops more, and a greater economy of his strength in the action with fire arms.

This small superiority of numbers in the French reserve would not have decided a great deal, it is however to be considered as the first ground of the victory.

The second ground was the unfavorable result which the contest with fire arms had till then produced. It is true that when Bonaparte made



his last attack on Ligne we still held possession of a part of this village but we had lost the other part, & it is true that we still maintained reserves between Wagnelee & St Amand but here also we had lost villages & ground. The battle had therefore everywhere turned a little to our disadvantage & in such cases the decisive blow is already prepared.

But the third & most important ground was indisputably that Blücher had not got the troops who had been engaged under his hand. The 12th brigade it is true was close to him, but this was too little. The 9th was not very distant, but sufficient attention had not been paid to this as well as to the whole of Thielman's corps & on this account the 3rd corps as far as respects any decisive movement was as if not present & could only be useful in respect of the retreat. Perhaps however & extremely probably we may consider this scattered position of Thielman's corps as an advantage to the whole. If the 3rd corps had been at hand it would have been used with the rest without giving a prospect of a successful decision, which from the turn which things had taken could only be obtained by a massive majority such as the arrival of the corps of Bülow would have given. Had the third corps been so employed it is probable that the loss in the Action wd have been greater by 10.000 men.

#### **Critical remarks on the whole Action. Blücher.**

The great fault of Blücher appears to have been a certain confusion of plan out of which the occupation of a double front & the neutralising of 20,000 men arose. The position from Sombrefe to Valatre was a good one if it was decided to preserve the retreat open towards the Meuse but in this case it was necessary to abide by this front, to consider the connection with Wellington only as having to deal with a common enemy but not to look to any immediate union. In so open a country where every thing could be seen in case Wellington should advance from the road of Quatrebras an immediate union was so little necessary that it was even disadvantageous. In this case Wellington wd have fulfilled the object of a corps sent against the enemy's flank a species of attack which is everywhere sought with the greatest

eagerness & what we are justified in considering the most decisive whenever we are the strongest & are possessed of the most extended base.

If however it was intended in the last extremity to give up the retreat on the Meuse the position of Sombreffe in this case was quite unnecessary or at most to be maintained by a single brigade in order to keep the enemy in a narrow place. The occupation of this position was evidently not necessary for the junction of Bülow, for 35000 men if they (as we supposed in the former case of Wellington) should Act as a corps on the flank of the enemy, would have obtained a passage over the Ligny brook even if the enemy had occupied this position which is not even probable.

Nothing appears so essential in the arrangement of so great an affair as a battle as clearly to consider the general circumstances, & of these none is of so much consequence or of so much influence as the line of retreat for it decides movement in the battle. Blücher remained here most truly in a situation of half measures i.e. placed between opposite measures.

Even in the course of the Action i.e. between four & five o'clock orders might have been given to Genl Thielman to collect his corps to advance from Montportrienne & Point du Jour against the right flank of the enemy, in that case Gerard's corps must either have given way or must have been sooner supported by the guards & then Genl Thielman being attacked by Grouchy & the guards had been obliged to retire over the brook, still the French reserve would have been sooner employed & the attack in the centre of Ligny would probably not have taken place. The battle would then probably not have been decided on the evening of the 16 or at all events the French army would have been much more weakened by it.

With respect to the defending the villages the defence of St Amand properly so called<sup>13</sup> appears to have been a mischievous work of self supererogation If it was to be considered as an advanced post we must assert that such posts are to be justified only on two accounts.

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<sup>13</sup> Liverpool's note: to distinguish it from St Amand la haye.

a. If they are of considerable strength & therefore oblige the attacker to bestow upon them an immense force whilst he cannot let them alone, but even then it is necessary that they should be so placed that they may be supported by reinforcements more or less from the front of the army; if the advantages do not exist such posts are immediately overcome by the surrounding attack of the enemy, they are soon lost & if we attempt to recover them we often involve ourselves in an engagement without any object & very disadvantageous.

b. Sometimes we are obliged to occupy a point that is in front of the line on account that it would give too much protection to the attacking party in their approach. In this case it is a necessary evil. The particular advanced post St Amand had in itself no particular strength, it could not be reinforced from the front of the army & it did not ever command this front sufficiently for example to prevent an attack on Ligny. In respect to the first consideration it ought certainly not to have been occupied by the Prussians. Under the second consideration it may be included on account of its connection with the village St Amand la haye the defence of which it rendered more difficult, but its connection with this village was only at its narrowest and in the neighbourhood of the castle where this castle offered the means of cutting off the line of defence. In respect of the front between Ligny & La haye the village of St Amand was by no means inconveniently situated; it rather strengthened the front of the Prussian position as the French must debouche from it at the distance of 800 paces under our fire of Grape? when advancing to attack. In fact the French never advanced from it against the heights. The defence of this village consumed a whole brigade it probably caused no proportional loss to the French & its loss produced the mischievous impression of a loss of ground.

The early attempts at taking the offensive against St Amand le hameau & of another attack from Ligny are by no means in harmony with the whole affair. The party which is on the defensive must introduce into his

defence a certain offensive principal, it must connect resistance with a retaliatory attack, but this attack must only take place when & where it can take place with advantage. If the enemy by his advancing had placed himself in the middle of our forces, when he has tolerably disordered himself & can only just maintain himself. In reality therefore when his strength is exhausted by our resistance. The attack of General Jurgas by Wagnelee on St Amand le hameau took place evidently too soon even to produce any decisive result on this point alone. If this general advanced as was the case with his attack into the rear of La haye he must necessarily then come to the top & must find himself in a very disadvantageous position for defence. If the Prussians had compleatly occupied Wagnelee & particularly provided it with artillery La haye could not have been occupied by the enemy, Wagnellee would have been a much more important point it would have been on account of its being situated more in the rear very inconvenient to the French commander. But even after la haye was occupied by the French it appears that it would have been better for the Prussians to have contented themselves with Wagnelee & thus checkmate the occupation of Lahaye. So long as Wagnelies, Bry, & Ligny was in our hands it was impossible for the enemy to debouche out of the two villages of St Amand. The whole position appeared well suited to gain time & to occasion great losses to the enemy. Only when the decision of the whole battle came into consideration would it be time to advance beyond Wagnelee, but even then it must be executed with more decision. But if the circumstances showed themselves such that a revolution on the whole battle was not to be expected from a retaliatory attack, it would be better to omit it altogether, for in simple resistance the forces could be more advantageously employed in defence.

Still less does the attempt of Genl Jagow to advance out of Ligny allow itself to be justified; the most fortunate result would have been that Genl Jagow would have found himself in the open plain & in the very middle of the French division in a situation in which he could not have maintained himself & where he would have greatly suffered.

Our generals have too much the idea that to advance is better than to stand fast & fire. Each of these Actions belong to its proper occasion.

We consume our troops in standing fight too quickly. Our officers call too soon for support & it is too easily given them. The consequence is that without gaining ground we sacrifice more troops than the French, that we have more killed & wounded & that we thus reduce the fresh masses into exhausted remnants.<sup>14</sup>

We need not observe that it is very easy with plans & remarks of all sorts before us & with the events having occurred it is easy I say under these circumstances to find out the real causes of want of success & after thoroughly considering all the combination of circumstances to exhibit those which may be decided as faults, but all this cannot be so easily effected at the time of execution. The conduct of war is like moving in a difficult element, common talents can hardly obtain the line of moderate success; therefore is it that criticism in respect of military matters should be employed only to discover the truth & not to censure.

If we consider the above mentioned faults, we must also consider that the Prussian troops consisted mostly of Landwehr who were just making their second campaign, that amongst them was many new corps formed out of Provinces which had either never before belonged to Prussia or at least not during the later years, that the French Army although newly formed yet consisted of elements which had belonged to the best army in the world, that Bonaparte was the greatest general of his time with these reflections the events of Ligny cannot appear surprising to any one. It is a battle which 73,000 men lost against 75000 by a very slight turn of the scale after a long action & without any brilliant result to the conqueror; for his trophy consisted of 21 pieces of cannon & at the most a few thousand prisoners.

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<sup>14</sup> Liverpool's note: the word in German is *Schlacken* which is lees or dross. F. Egerton's note: The same as slack in our mines.

## Bonaparte

The simplest connection which we can form of Bonaparte's original order of attack is as we have already said that he himself advanced with two thirds of his army (75000 men) against Blücher & that he sent one third (40000 men) against Wellington. The thought that Ney could cooperate in their battle could not have occurred to Bonaparte in Charleroi on the 15 or 16, for it arose out of Blücher's position which surprised Bonaparte himself & which appeared to have been what called forth in him the idea that if Ney detached into the rear from Quatrebras towards Namur he would be enabled to make the victory at Ligny more decisive. We find this idea first of all declared in the 3rd order of three we have inserted.<sup>15</sup>

But as this cooperation appears only as a subsidiary order in the communication & as this could not be otherwise according to the general nature of the thing because Bonaparte could not know whether Ney was in a condition to spare a single man & as this order was written at 1/2 past two & on knowing of the great distance of the two fields of battle three french leagues made it very uncertain whether the cooperation of Ney was possible on account of the time, it is therefore impossible to consider this cooperation as an original part of his plan of battle (as Bonaparte wishes us to believe) & also that it was an unlucky accident a failure in his original plan that the Prussian army was not attached before & behind at the same time which Bonaparte considers would have occasion total & inevitable destruction.

That Bonaparte instead of turning the right flank of the Prussians & instead of making a column advance by Wagnelee preferred attacking Ligny with the 2nd column & made the principal attack in this direction cannot be considered as a plan which proceeded from the idea of an attack in the rear of the Prussians by Ney & which in connection with this should tend to the destruction of the Prussian Army but this direction of his principal attack was

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<sup>15</sup> Liverpool's note: these orders are in the original but I have omitted them with the whole of the chapter which discusses Ney's conduct at & before Quatrebras.

occasioned by the following circumstances.

a. As Bonaparte saw the Prussian position the Prussian Army had its right flank in St Amand properly so called, its center in Ligny, & its left wing in Sombrefe. St Amand la haye appeared to lay in the rear of the right wing. He therefore thought that when he attacked St Amand & when he sent a division round to St Amand la haye that by this mode of attack the right wing was turned; he wished also to connect with this his attack on the centre in order that the contest might not be confined to too small a space by which the resistance of the Prussians might have been too obstinate & too persevering.

b. The attack on Ligny must be dangerous to the Prussian right wing; it was therefore to be expected that it would paralyse the resistance there. It might all easily happen that by this a portion of the right wing would be entirely cut off.

c. By the attack on Ligny the natural line of retreat of the Prussian army was threatened & in case it was determined to maintain this line of retreat the Prussians must be exposed to great losses.

d. Lastly St Amand & Ligny was the nearest points of attack to the first position of the French army at Fleurus. A wider circuit by Wagnelie would perhaps have delayed the attack a whole hour; noon was however passed when Bonaparte reconnoitred the Prussian position, there was not therefore much time to lose.

In this manner the reasons for this form of attack appear to have been sufficiently determined by the impending circumstances & these impending circumstances are in war always what mostly govern the determination.

But if we choose to consider the matter in a more enlarged point of view, we must ask ourselves whether Bonaparte did better by attacking Blücher in such a manner that he drove him towards Wellington, or whether it would prove better if by his attack he had separated them, the answer to this

will plainly be that the last would have had the most decisive result on the whole campaign.

If Bonaparte had attacked St Amand with his right wing, Wagnelie with his left & had advanced with a third column on the chaussee of Brussels, the Prussian army in case it lost the battle would have been obliged to retreat along the roman road that is towards the Meuse & a union with Wellington in the next few days would have been very uncertain perhaps impossible.

If Blücher had arrived in the afternoon, which was possible, & if he then in conjunction with Thielman had been employed in an attack from Point du jour, Bonaparte would thus have been obliged to fight with a superior enemy in the most disadvantageous position, that is having both flanks turned, on the left from Wagnelie, on the right from Point du jour. As therefore Bülow was to be expected on the side of Point du jour coming from Liege, this might have been a fresh ground to induce Bonaparte to turn the right flank of the Prussian army.

Whether Bonaparte ever made these reflections or whether his apprehensions of being attacked on the side of Brussels notwithstanding his detachment of Ney may have influenced him we cannot say. If this last supposition is true then his mode of attack is sufficiently justified. If however he had no such apprehension & if he directed the attack totally by the other considerations, we may observe that this plan is not quite worthy of him & did not meet the necessities of his dangerous position.

We are in total uncertainty of the causes of the movements of the 1st French corps. Gamot the apologist of Ney is convinced that Bonaparte himself ordered its advance from Frasné, but he is not however able to produce any proof of this. Bonaparte thought that Ney from fear of his communications had left it behind. That Bonaparte had ordered it forwards is almost impossible, for how in this case could its appearance have created uneasiness in him & a suspicion of as being English? How could Erlon again have returned & how was it possible that in the dispositions & orders given to Vandamme no mention should have been made of this corps? We may however



ask why Bonaparte as these corps was once near him he did not avail himself of it to surround Blücher? Most probably it was too late. He seems to have first received the news of the appearance of this corps at half past five, it was seven o'clock before news was brought him that it was Erlon; it would have required an hour to send the order to Erlon & perhaps another hour before he could reach the neighbourhood of Bry.

But this is only an attempt to explain the matter & it cannot be denied that in consequence of the defective explanations of the movements of this corps a certain surprise arises against Bonaparte. Gamot names Col Laurent as the man who brought the order. Why does not Laurent produce some explanation? It cannot be from regard to Ney's memory, for even if Col Laurent should declare that he had carried no order for the further disposal of the 1st corps, much blame would not arise from this against Ney. We can only explain this darkness by supposing that the respect & attachment to the former Emperor closed the mouths of those who could speak.

At all events this unnecessary moving backwards & forwards of 20000 men at a moment when all the forces were so necessary to be employed, is a very great fault, which even if Bonaparte had not himself recalled the corps still in some degree falls back on him insofar as that we must believe that the instructions given to Marshall Ney were not sufficiently clear and precise.

If we consider all these circumstances we may infer that from the 16 Bonaparte was no longer equal to the task which fate imposed upon him.

### **The Action at Quatrebras.**

We have already seen how the troops commanded by Ney were situated on the morning of the 16th. Ney left his 2nd corps near Gosselies & gave Genl Reille the commission to wait Bonaparte's orders, he himself hastened to his advanced guard at Frasny & reconnoitred the enemy. Which before noon consisted only of the greatest part of Perponchet's division & two

regiments of cavalry that is to say between 6 & 8000 men.

At eleven o'clock Genl Flaharet Bonaparte's adjutant came to Gosselies with the order that Ney with his corps should advance & attack. This is probably the order of which Bonaparte speaks respecting which he says that at 1/2 past eleven, it was placed in Ney's hand. Before the 3rd division of the 2nd corps reached Frasne it was one o'clock.

At this time Ney was at Frasne with 3 divisions of infantry of the 2nd corps) & three divisions of cavalry (Kellerman & the cavalry of the 2nd corps) altogether about 23000 men forty eight guns near Frasne. He had left the light cavalry of the guard behind Frasne because Bonaparte had specifically ordered this & the first corps was still on its march.

On the side of the allies the division of Perponchet was alone opposed to him. The Duke of Wellington was personally with Blücher at this time; he then first convinced himself that the principal force of the enemy was opposed to Blücher & it appears that it was now that he first sent orders to his reserve (which had remained at the entrance of the wood of Soignies since ten o'clock to move on Quatrebras. In this manner it will be perfectly clear why the first division of this reserve namely that of Picton did not arrive before five o'clock. For from Bry to Waterloo are three German miles & from Waterloo to Quatrebras more than two German miles.

The engagement began at three o'clock & divided itself into three movements of importance.

In the first Perponchet's division is driven from the ground which it has taken up halfway between Quatrebras & Frasnés. It loses on this occasion four guns & falls back partly into the wood of Bossu.

In the 2nd movement Picton's division which arrived about four o'clock restores the Action takes up a position along the Namur chaussee & occupies again the village of Pierremont on their left flank. The Brunswickers arrive a little later, advance on the Chaussee of Charleroi where they occupy

a sheep fold. Now both parties are nearly balanced for Wellington by now about 20,000 men the only difference is that Ney has about 4000 men of cavalry & Wellington only 1800.

The engagement continues undecided for two hours. The French retake the village of Pierremont & maintain themselves in the farmhouse called Gemioncourt which is situated on the Chaussee. Ney receives the later very pressing order of Bonaparte to advance to overcome what is opposed to him & in short to take part in the battle of Ligny. He brings forward his reserve Jerome's division into action, & makes the utmost effort with his superior cavalry to penetrate on the Chaussee towards Quatrebras. He probably sends at this time the order to Erlon to join him upon which Erlon returned about eight o'clock from the neighbourhood of Villers Perrinn. The exertions of the French cavalry occasion the taking of 6 or 8 guns two battalions are rode over & they partly penetrate into the second line of Picton. But they produce no general result. Pire as well as Kellerman are obliged to retire when the fire pours upon them from all sides. Notwithstanding the advantage in this Action appears upon the whole to show itself on the side of the French; they continue to advance in the wood of Bossu.

Third period. The division of Cook & Alten arrive between 7 & 8 o'clock which form the right wing of the Prince of Orange's corps. Cook's division is employed on the right wing in the wood of Bossu & Alten's division on the left wing towards the village of Pierremont; both overpower their enemies & thus decide the general fate of the action. However the resistance of the French is very obstinate & it is not till ten o'clock that the allies are masters of the farm of Gemioncourt. Ney retires to a position which he takes up in front of Frasné. The loss on both sides was pretty nearly equal & was estimated at between 4 & 5000 men.

### **Reflections.**

Bonaparte & all the critics after him have raised a violent cry because Ney has delayed to gain possession of the part of Quatrebras till an overpowering english force advanced; just as if the point of Quatrebras had

been a fortress which having been once gained completely fulfilled the object of the attack. The expression 'Post' is in this place one of those expressions which if a man uses them blindly like formula of Algebra lead to hollow phrases & empty suppositions.

Ney was directed to stop everything which could come from Wellington to the help of the Prussians. This was to be effected either by his defeating the corps that had this intention, & by his stopping it so as to make its advancing impossible. For the first purpose a superior force was necessary for the last a good position.

As to the force against which Ney would have to contend it was difficult for him to estimate it, it was in 'reality' not only all what could be collected against him in the course of the 16 but also what might be collected till noon of the 17th. We have seen that this was pretty much nearly the whole united English & Netherland army or at least might be 80000 men of it. At first he met with very few troops both at Frasnés & at Quatrebras this he must have foreseen, at least much fewer troops than he himself had, if he had defeated this small force this would have been but a small advantage, but would this have been so effectual a preface to a general victory that he could consider it as the warrant of it? This was impossible! We will submit that he had defeated & pursued that part of Perponchet's division which he had before him either on the Evening of the 15 or early on the 16th, in that case an officer like Wellington would have taken his measures accordingly, he would have chosen a position somewhat near the rear with the first reserve which reached him here, he would have received the beaten division & by resistance have gained time to draw together his other divisions & corps. The further Ney advanced the more he hastened the time when Wellington's forces would be united. However bold & fortunate therefore he might be this must lead to a great inequality of forces & to a very dangerous position.

Not to adopt this conclusion, we must suppose that the army of the Duke of Wellington was completely separated by Ney was quite put into disorder single divisions entirely destroyed & a supposition which would be completely illusory.

We see by pursuing these reflections that Ney never could have thought by acting on the offensive to overcome the enemy who should advance on this side; but that his object could be nothing else but to gain the possession of Quatrebras & to drive back what might be already there, Bonaparte did not require any more from him - We come therefore so far as to consider the point of Quatrebras as a very good position by means of which the French Marshall was enabled to stop a superior enemy during the course of the 16th.

Is then the point of Quatrebras such a position? When the expression `But' is cryed it seems implied but this supposition is quite gratuitous, for no one has proved it, no one has ever asserted it, nor has any one even spoke of it in this sense. Such an unfounded supposition cannot be allowed to exist in criticism.

In order to judge of the point of Quatrebras as a position one ought to have been there, for positions cannot be judged by plans but there is not even a good plan of this place. In general however we must say that such cross roads are injurious to a position because it is impossible to have the line of retreat in the rear. But even admitting that the point of Quatrebras was a real good position, it certainly was not a strong one & as Ney had not time to establish himself in it, so much advantage could not be expected from this position as to bring a fortunate resistance against a superior enemy.

Bonaparte directed Marshall Ney to the point of Quatrebras because in that place the two Chaussees met & therefore the road from Brussells to Namur that is from Wellington to the Prussians would be cut off. Nothing was more natural than these orders & if it had depended on Marshall Ney to fulfill them without danger he would have been wrong to have omitted doing so. But as Wellington by this appearance of Ney near Frasnay was hindered from going to the assistance of the Prussians by the chaussee of Namur this neglect of Ney's has produced no bad consequences & we can from the reflections we have here made boldly assert that whatever Ney could have

done on the evening of the 15 or the morning of the 16 the events which could have taken place in 'reality' would not have been different from those which really occurred or would have been much more unfavorable to the French army.

Ney fully attained his object of stopping the assistance of Wellington; the idea of his cooperating in the battle of Ligny occurred to Bonaparte much later, that is to say after his reconnoitring Blücher's position & because he had not then heard of any considerable force being opposed to Ney. It was then too late to execute this project. If he had had this idea on the evening of the 15th it would have been absurd to have made Ney's corps so strong; He wd rather have sent a corps down the Roman road to attack Blücher in the rear. It would have been most perverse to have made Ney strong at first then to have weakened his force, for at first he might have maintained himself with a weak force but every hour increased the numbers of his adversary.

This whole cry of Bonaparte's against Ney is only a devise of making his plans appear more brilliant & splendid than they really were at the time of evacuation; his intentions were far more simple & ordinary & it was impossible for the Marshall to conduct himself by conclusions which only arose from subsequent circumstances.

Ney could easily have driven back Perponchet early in the morning & have remained at Quatrebras, he could easily have sent a corps by the Namur chaussee against the right flank of the Prussians without supposing that the events at Quatrebras would have turned out much more unfavourably for him; but that he could have done this, we all of us see now, after having put together all the concurrent circumstances which could not then be foreseen.

#### **Movement made by the troops on the 17th. Blüchers.**

The retreat of the 1st & 2nd Prussian corps took place partly in

the night of the 16 partly in the morning of the 17 by Tilly to Wavre. Most of the 3rd corps which began only between 4 & 5 of the morning of the 17 was directed to Gembloux & thence to Wavre.

The 1st & 2nd corps reached Wavre about noon on the 17th & took their positions on both sides of the Duke having left their cavalry as a rear guard two leagues behind them. The third corps remained at Gembloux till two o'clock afternoon & then proceeded towards Wavre which is reached in the Evening. The 4th corps had passed the night of the 16th near high & low Bodecée two leagues behind Gembloux & went in the course of the 17th to Dion le mont while it placed itself so as to receive the other corps

Whilst the Prussian corps completed the greatest part of these movements that is to say until noon of the 17, very little happened on the part of the French towards their pursuit.

Bonaparte had given orders in the night of the 16th to Genl Pajol with his corps of cavalry & Teste's division belonging to the 6th corps to pursue Blücher. This General put himself in motion in the morning of the 17th & sought the Prussians first of all on the road to Namur. It is inconceivable that the French did not see the 3rd Prussian corps take the road to Gembloux as it moved off in full day light, & the persuasion they seem to have had that Blücher would retire with his whole army on Namur is still more inconceivable. This idea was partly occasioned by the circumstances of a field battery belonging to the 2nd corps, which arrived from Namur just so as to learn the loss of the battle & which having then attempted to return thither was taken on the road. However it would appear that Grouchy from whom Pajol received his more detailed instructions was the cause of this absurd idea - Grouchy himself was to follow the same way, but as the troops required some hours rest Bonaparte did not hurry himself in the dispatch of this general but took him in the forenoon of the 17th to the field of battle & did not let him go before twelve o'clock. Gerard & Vandamme's corps the division Teste of the 6th corps the corps of cavalry of Excelman & half of that of Pajol was just under Grouchy's orders all which together made a force of 35000 men.

Pajol was as we have clearly said put in motion early, Excelman was sent somewhat later on the road to Gembloux, but the two corps of Gerard & Vandamme were still at 3 o'clock in their old Bivouac near Ligny & St Amand & it was evening before Grouchy was able to collect them near Point du Jour.

The object of Bonaparte was so to push Marshall Blücher by means of Grouchy that he should not be able to immediately to think of supporting Wellington, he himself however resolved with the remaining thirty thousand men to unite himself with Ney & having thus created a force of 70,000 men attack & defeat Wellington.

As he was obliged to allow his troops to rest till noon on the 17th he therefore could not approach Wellington before the evening of the 17th & he could not fight this 2nd battle before the 18th.

Bonaparte must have instructed Marshall Grouchy to place himself between Blücher & the road from Namur to Brussels; for the second battle must take place on the road, & there was therefore every probability that under these circumstances Grouchy might cooperate in it. But no trace is left of any order in conformity with this idea except in the relations made by Bonaparte himself & those who have written at his dictation to which little credit is to be attached. The statement which Grouchy makes of the movement of the 17th carries with it the characteristics of a natural truth so as to be perfectly worthy of belief; by this Bonaparte's instruction was generally & entirely directed towards the pursuit of Blücher & its expressions were of a very general character. On the morning of the 18th indeed at ten o'clock Bonaparte gave a further order of this description to Grouchy, but how could this be effectual? It reached Grouchy when he was already before Wavre.

Bonaparte never thought, as he wishes us in his memoirs to believe, that Blücher would go towards Wavre in order to unite himself with Wellington but he beforehand supposed that this General would first wish to



unite himself with his 4th corps & then would fall back on the Meuse. He thought that the Prussians in the first few days would not allow 35000 men under a resolute commander to approach them he would therefore have time to fight his battle with Wellington without having anything to apprehend from them.

It is a circumstance worthy of remark that the Prussian army was not pursued in the direction of Tilly & Gentines in which the two corps had retired on the morning of the 17th but were pursued in the direction of Gembloux where one corps was gone & in the direction of Namur where none were gone. We can explain this extraordinary circumstance no other way than by considering that Bonaparte gave the pursuit to Marshall Grouchy whose two corps of cavalry had stood the whole day opposed to Thielman & had their faces turned towards Gembloux. Had he given this pursuit to the cavalry of the guard & to that of the 3rd corps they could have followed the track better. The maniere large in which he performed everything hindered him from giving Grouchy any more detailed instructions. Even Bonaparte appears himself to have been too much prepossessed with the idea that Blücher must go to the Meuse for him to have thought of any other direction as for example that of Gembloux or along the roman road. At last we see from a letter from Soult to Ney edited by Gamot dated Fleurus 17th that the pursuit on the two roads of Gembloux & Namur must have been the intention of Bonaparte because it is so mentioned. There were plainly directions in which to disturb the Prussian army in its way to the Meuse but by no means to cut off its junction with Wellington. If Bonaparte had imagined that Blücher meant to go to Wavre, it would have been more natural to have sent a strong corps thither on the left bank of the Dyle.

The movement of Pajol first in the direction of Namur, then towards St Denis between Namur & Gembloux & then again back to Magy is still too little explained. Whether Grouchy or Bonaparte ordered this wonderfull movement remain unexplained; but the result was that Pajol having wandered about with his corps & with Teste's division the whole of the 17th without any object found himself on the evening still near Magy that is pretty nearly on the field of battle.

Even Grouchy with the 3rd & 4th corps could not reach the neighbourhood of Gembloux sooner than ten o'clock where they must pass the night, whilst Excelman's was pushed forward towards Sart a Walhain. But even this corps occupied quarters & had only two regiments as an advanced guard.

The entire result of this day & on his side is therefore that the French as it were did not pursue the Prussian Army, that Blücher unimpeded reached Wavres & was enabled there to assemble his forces.

If we here appear to meet with conduct so very different from that which was formerly pursued by the French, we must carefully consider the difference of the positions. The extraordinary energy of pursuit to which Bonaparte owes the most splendid result of his earliest campaigns; was simply the pressing very superior forces in the pursuit of an enemy who has been totally defeated. Upon this occasion he was obliged with his principal force & particularly with his freshest troops to turn himself against a new Enemy, over whom a victory was still to be obtained. The troops who were to pursue the Prussians were the 3rd & 4th corps exactly those two which had been engaged in the most bloody contest untill ten o'clock in the Evening & now necessarily wanted some time to get themselves into order, to strengthen themselves, & to furnish themselves with ammunition. The corps of cavalry had it is true not suffered & could therefore have been pressed upon the Prussian rear guard; it may have been an error that they did not do this, but the cavalry alone could not have produced similar results to those which the advance of the whole French army in their former victories had occasioned, for the country is too intersected for cavalry alone to produce much effect

Blücher had abandoned his natural line of retreat in order to remain in communication with the Duke of Wellington for as the first battle to a certain degree had been bungled, he was resolved to have a second & informed the Duke of Wellington that he would come with his whole army to his assistance.

Blücher had formed the natural idea that Bonaparte had turned himself & his whole force against the Duke of Wellington, as his rear had not been at all pressed by the French & he did not otherwise know what had become of them; he determined therefore to leave very few troops in the defence of Wavre in order to join the Duke with the whole of the remainder.

This resolution of Blücher is indisputably worthy of the greatest praise against all representations which in similar cases rules brought forward for this purpose & false prudence might suggest, he followed the rules of common sense determined to turn himself on the 18th towards Wellington & sooner to go away in a certain degree from his own scene of warfare than to take up with half measures. The battle which he had lost was no overthrow, it had only diminished his forces altogether one sixth, with nearly 100,000 men he could decide the Action which was impending with the Duke of Wellington into an undoubted victory; to this must be added the necessity of washing out the spot which the honour of his arms had received on the 16th & to gain the honour of having supported his ally of having supported that ally beyond all expectation, which ally on the former occasion against all expectation had not been able to support him; no motives could exist more magnanimous or which at once combined more fully the best qualities of heart & head.<sup>16</sup>

We will relate the movement of Blücher on the 18th when we consider the part he took in the battle of the 18th.

#### **Wellington on the 17 & 18.**

Wellington had on the evening of the 16 the corps of the Prince of Orange & the reserve near Quatrebras together, with the exception of

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<sup>16</sup> Liverpool's note: this passage seems somewhat to reflect on the Duke of W as respects Quatrebras.

Chasse's division & the brigade of Netherland cavalry which remained at Nivelles. In the night & in the morning of the 17 Clinton's division & a brigade of Colville's division arrived from the corps of Lord Hill which had formed the right wing. The remainder of Hill's corps collected under Prince Frederick of Orange near Hall.

Wellington therefore had on the morning of the 17 near Quatrebras & Nivelles an army of about 70000 men. He learnt Blücher's retreat at seven o'clock made his troops take their meal & began at ten o'clock his retreat to the position of Mont St Jean before the wood of Soignee, where he had resolved to give battle if Blücher could come to his assistance with two corps that is with about 50000 men.

Ney was to have advanced in the early part of the morning of the 17 against the rear guard of Wellington, but as the Duke did not leave his position before ten o'clock Ney could not advance. As the Duke left his numerous cavalry between 7 & 8000 men behind, the French did not immediately observe his retreat; therefore Ney remained quietly in his bivouac near Frasne till one o'clock.

Bonaparte had put in motion on the chaussee from Namur to Quatrebras at noon the 6th corps, the guards, Milhaut's cavalry, a division of the corps of Pajol, Domon's division of cavalry belonging to the 3rd corps that is to say his whole force, except the one division of Girard, which according to what Bonaparte says was intentionally left near St Amand because it had suffered too much, but there is no doubt that this division was forgotten, which is the easier explained as this division belonged to the second corps, therefore none of the other commanders of corps troubled themselves about it & Genl Girard who had commanded it was severely wounded. To have left it behind intentionally would have undoubtedly been a much greater fault than to have forgotten it.

At two o'clock this mass of troops advanced from the neighbourhood of the village of Marbais Ney was with reproaches bidden to advance at the same time. The English cavalry continued their retreat the two

French columns united on the road to Brussels & advanced in pursuit, untill towards evening they met with a strong resistance at Mont St Jean & Bonaparte convinced himself that he stood before the English army. Torrents of rain, extraordinary bad roads both on the chaussee & off it had delayed the March & had very much fatigued the troops so that the idea could by no means be entertained of giving battle on that day. Bonaparte placed his army before Planchenois his headquarters in Caillou.

### **The battle of Belle Alliance. Wellington's Position**

Wellington had collected his army with the exception of the 19000 men which stood near Hall, on the morning of the 18th 68000 men near Mont St Jean.

His position was at the Moment that the battle began with his right on the chaussee from Nivelles, with his center behind the Haye Sainte, & with his left wing behind the buildings of Smouhen, Papelotte, & la Haye.

Between the two chaussees a gentle slope of the ground & on the left of the chaussee from Namur a hollow way furthered the hinderances to the approach in front. In reality the two wings had no real defences but the right was pretty well protected by the places Merbe Braine & Braine la Leude & the left by the ground near Frischermont. Behind the front at the distance of about a league was the wood of Soignies which Bonaparte & many other critics considered as an abyss for Wellington's army in the event of his losing the battle; which however cannot have been so circumstanced as they imagined as otherwise so cautious a general as Wellington would not have placed it so near to his rear, a wood which is traversed by a great many roads appears to be a great means of preservation to a beaten army.

The position of the Duke was in general so that the Front consisted of 5000 paces on which 30 battalions stood as a first line, about 13 battalions as a second line, sixty squadrons in third & fourth lines. & that besides 38 battalions & 33 squadrons were placed on other points either on the

flanks or the rear & might be considered as reserves. The position of the troops might therefore be considered as very deep.

Before the front lay three points: the farmhouse of Hougoumont one thousand paces before the right wing, La Haye Sainte 500 paces before the center on the chaussee & Lay Hay 1000 paces before the left wing. All three were occupied by Infantry & more or less prepared for defence.

Wellington expected to be attacked by the whole French Army as it was possible that Bonaparte had only left some cavalry opposed to Blücher. He would then have had to defend himself with 68000 men against about 100,000 & must depend upon Blücher's cooperation. Of this he had already received the promise on the 17th. Everything therefore depended on his continuing his defence until Blücher should arrive. The cooperation of Blücher when once arrived produced its natural effect partly by supporting the left flank of the Allies, partly by an attack on the right flank of the French. The cooperation of Blücher was in each case of an offensive nature & therefore was it the more desirable that Wellington should confine himself to the defensive & should thereby try to exhaust all the advantages of the ground. Wavre is two German miles distant from Wellington's field of Battle. From the moment that the Duke of Wellington saw the enemy appear in his front till Blücher's arrival six or eight hours would elapse, if Blücher had not put himself in motion sooner, but in this period of time a battle cannot be engaged fought out & decided; it was not therefore to be feared that Wellington could be beaten before Blücher's arrival.

### **Bonaparte's plan of attack**

Bonaparte makes his troops break up their bivouacs rather late, as he would lead us to believe in order to allow the wet ground to be somewhat dried. He then loses two hours forming them before Belle Alliance in two forces of infantry & a third & fourth of cavalry parallel to & 25000 paces distant from the English position. All this is at length completed at eleven clock.

This passing in review at the recollection of which he afterwards seems to rejoice, is somewhat remarkable. It was quite unusual, for it will

not be found to have taken place in any of Bonaparte's battles it was quite useless for the corps must afterwards again form columns to attack. Instead of concealing as much as possible his forces from the enemy as is usually done & so approaching him unperceived, he deploys them as broadly & systematically as possible as if he was going to attend a public execution. We can only make three suppositions. Either he wished thereby to increase the confidence of his own people, or he wished to impose upon his antagonists, or it was the extravagant folly of a mind no longer under proper control.

It is impossible to say from the measures that were taken or from the turn the action took or still less from what Bonaparte himself says respecting his plans whether it was intended to have been a parallel attack all along the line or whether Bonaparte intended to break thro the center or to drive in one of the wings

According to the disposition of the forces & the first advance it appeared to be a parallel attack all along the line; according to the greatest efforts which were made in the progress of the action the wish was to break thro the center. This last however rather appears to have been the suggestion of momentary necessity than to have been an original plan & we have only the following not very characteristic circumstances to relate from the arrangements for the attack.

The 2nd corps (Reille) supported by the cavalry corps of Kellerman & the division of cavalry of the guns Guyot's, in all three divisions of infantry & four of cavalry attack the enemies right wing.

Two divisions of the 1st corps (Erlon) supported by the 6th which had only two divisions together (Lobau) supported again by two divisions of cavalry, two corps of cavalry of Milhaut's & a division of cavalry of the Guard, in all four divisions of Infantry five divisions of cavalry are directed against the center.

Two divisions of infantry of the 1st corps & a division of cavalry were intended for the attack of the left wing

The infantry of the guard remain in the rear of the center in reserve.

Any other reflection as to the arrangement of this attack is found no where. At least no intelligible one, for what Bonaparte himself says of his intention of attacking the left wing of Wellington is in contradiction with itself & with the events of the battle, as we shall hereafter see.

Of the armies & cooperation of Blücher Bonaparte had not at all thought, as is proved by all his arrangements. He had on the contrary due as at Ligny in some measure reckoned on the cooperation of his detached wing. He had here given orders to Grouchy as he had there to Ney but here as there too unprecise, too late - is too little in conformity with space, time, & circumstances. We will speak of this later & we only notice this at the present moment because it partly belongs to the plan of the battle, but certainly only in part, for in 'reality' Bonaparte does not appear to have reckoned much on this cooperation.

#### **The most interesting moment of the battle.**

Wellington's defence.

The battle divides itself evidently in two separate acts: the resistance of Wellington & the attack of the Prussians on the right flank of the French. The battle that is to say the resistance of Wellington began about half past four & the battle ended with nightfall that is to say between 8 & 9 o'clock.

The attack of the French on Wellington's position may be grouped in the following manner.



Reille's corps attacks the farm house of Hougomont with its left flank division (that of Jerome) whilst the two others remain in reserve at twelve o'clock. The French got possession of the small wood but not of the building. The post is supported by detachments from the English guards which belong to Cook's division of Wellington's right wing. Foi's division (the middle one of the 2nd corps is employed in supporting the attack, but the French never get possession of this position & it remains a contest with fire arms. It appears almost as if this had been only a feint attack & as if Reille had ?<sup>17</sup> husbanded his strength. The division of the right wing is at all events kept as reserves & later is ?<sup>18</sup> in the center.

This attack had no result except that it absorbed the right wing of both lines of the English army & also the Brunswickers who were here employed as a support.

Two hours after this & after Bonaparte was informed of the March of Bülow & when he had sent the six corps & the two divisions Subervic & Domon against the Prussians I say about two o'clock the attack of Erlon's corps begins. The principal attack which is made with three divisions is directed against La Haye Sainte & that part of the center of the allies which is placed to the right of the chaussee as respects the French & which has the hollow way before it; the 4th division advances to the attack of la haye, Pappelotte & Smouhen. This last attack has quite a different character from that on the center We separate it therefore from the other & will first of all consider it.

Those places were only occupied by the light infantry of the 2nd brigade Perponchet who formed the extreme left of the Army. They lost this point sooner or later, this is not clearly decided but it is certain that the French never advanced against the main position, but were satisfied to continue an engagement with fresh arms. They remained in possession of

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<sup>17</sup> The manuscript is torn here and only the first few letters of the word are left. It appears to be "perhaps."

<sup>18</sup> The manuscript is torn and part missing.

three places which however they appear to have only lightly occupied until Bülow advanced to Frischermont & defeated troops against these places from his right wing by which they were driven out; but as the right wing division of Erlon had still the greatest part of its force unimpeded it gained possession of this point till two hours later that is between 6 & 7 o'clock Genl Ziethen joined the left wing of the English army & attacked it.

The same thing therefore happened with this advanced part of the English left wing as with the right. What happened here is more like a demonstration or at all events a covering of the flank of the center than a real attack.

We have already said that from the center the attack was made by the three remaining divisions of Erlon. As the 6th corps of the division of Cavalry of Subervic & Domon were already turned against Bülow the French center consisted only of those 3 divisions of Infantry & there was left nothing in reserve but the corps of cavalry & the guards

Erlon's first attack was by all accounts very violent & precipitate so that the second column which fell upon the 1st brigade of Perponchet's division forced it back, but was obliged to retire by the fire of the reserves & the charges of the English cavalry. It suffered upon this occasion as appears a pretty considerable defeat which extended itself to the 3rd columns from the two brigades of English cavalry under Ld Ponsonby & Vandeleur. The French cavalry of Milhaut repulsed on their side the English cavalry & as may be well imagined with some loss.

This first attack of Erlons appears to have been a species of echauffouri which upon the whole threw back more than it advanced the position of the French. As the action was by no means finished that is as the forces opposed to each other was not yet exhausted this circumstance could produce no result. The column of the left flank of Erlon, which advanced against la Haye Sainte appears to have brought the action there to a stand still. This outwork was reinforced by the English army & the action continued with alternate fortune & alternate possession.

Erlon collected his forces again & the engagement continued without any general result & without remarkable events untill between 5 & 6 o'clock. We must imagine it to have been a warm fire of artillery & small arms intermixed with single attacks in columns of battalions or with deployed battalions Occasionally the cavalry advanced to cooperate attacking single battalions which wished to get possession again of la Haye Sainte, thus three battalions of the allies were destroyed & the French cavalry got into the very position of the English but was always obliged to retire again without loss.

After the forces had consumed themselves on one another in an action which lasted three or four hours the Prussians had appeared on the field of battle & had disengaged themselves of the wood. Now Ney tried to obtain his object against Wellington by means of cavalry. As on the right of the chaussee a hollow way prevented its application, he tried to advance on the left of the chaussee with Milhaut's cuirassiers of the division of cavalry of the guards commanded by Lefevre Desnouettes. They came therefore more than once on the bank which formed the position of the first English line were obliged however each time to retire in order to form themselves again. As these corps could not yet obtain their end, the cuirassiers of Kellerman & the other division of cavalry of the guard commanded by Guyot was disposed of in the same way that is in support of the others. At this time also the division Bachelu from the 2nd corps was drawn into the engagement. The further the engagement by the advance of Bülow in the rear of the French proceeded, the more did Ney exert his utmost efforts to pierce thro the Front of the English line. Now the whole mass of the French army with the exception of the infantry of the guard was employed & this contest lasted two hours more that is till seven o'clock without any peculiar result. In this action the mutual strength of both parties was more & more exhausted, & the opinion is pretty general that Wellington could hardly have defended himself from the further efforts of the French & that he was on the point of losing the field of battle.

But this opinion requires a more clear definition. Wellington felt

himself about five or six o'clock probably so much weakened that when he thought of the guards which were still in reserve & when he saw a decisive attack by these directed against himself without its being turned away by the Prussians he might perhaps considered himself as too weak & the whole as in danger. But when you put the guards out of the question & only consider what troops were engaged about six o'clock with each other it would appear that victory rather leant towards Ld Wellington than towards the French. If we also allow that the allied army because it was not composed of such good troops as the French was evidently more weakened, that must not forget that Wellington had 68000 men but that the portion of the French army which was engaged with him was only 45000 men. It also appears that as the French had employed their Whole cavalry that their reserves of infantry was entirely exhausted, & if we think of the boundless confusion in which two hours later everything was thrown there can be no doubt of this. On the contrary Ld Wellington appears to have still had many troops of which part had not been engaged at all, part had been but little engaged as for example Chasse's division the tenth english brigade (in Plan Em) the division of Calaert etc. etc.

We may therefore consider this violent struggle in the center as the last efforts of the contending parties, which was progressed to such a degree of exhaustion that the decisive blow was so much more decisive & the party that was pushed to the ground was not able to raise himself up again. This decisive blow was given by the attack of the Prussians.

But before we proceed to this there remains for us to relate a last Act of despair in the center. Bülow was victorious, Planchenoit was lost, the numbers of the Prussians continually increased on that side, one half of the guards were sent against them & still there was no probability of beating them, at that moment Bonaparte in despair determined to hazard everything in order to break thro the center of Wellington. He conducted the remainder of the guards on the chaussee towards la Haye Sainte in front of the enemy's position; four battalions of these guards made a bloody attack but all in vain.

The advance of Ziethen had entirely pushed together the right wing of the French, the four battalions of guards were forced to give way & the other

eight were not able to put a stop to the stream of flight & confusion. So it happened that the whole army to its very last remains disbanded, was annihilated as an army, that Bonaparte to a certain degree abandoned the field of battle alone.

### Attack of the Prussians.

When Blücher in his retreat of the night of the 16 & in the course of the 17 perceived that he was not disturbed or pursued, he naturally conjectured that Bonaparte had turned himself with his whole force against Wellington. He resolved therefore to leave only some battalions behind in Wavre & with all the rest hasten to the assistance of Wellington who determined to fight a battle on this side the wood of Soignies. These arrangements were never by word of mouth on the 17 & on the morning of the 18 Blücher was able to put himself in motion. The 4th corps (Bülow) was to begin the march & broke up from its bivouac at seven o'clock in the morning, went through Wavre to St Lambert which it reached at noon & there united itself. It was, as it would appear already observed in this position by the French.

The second corps was to follow the fourth & both were destined to advance against the right flank of the French that is to say towards Planchenoit by which their retreat would be greatly endangered. The first corps was to proceed by Ohain towards the left wing of the Duke of Wellington, because the Duke being anxious respecting the exposure of this flank had expressly desired it.

The third corps was to form the rear guard it was to occupy Wavre with some battalions & if no particular enemy appeared it was to take its way by Couture therefore similarly towards Planchenoit; but should the enemy appear in strength near Wavre, this corps was to take up a position there to stop the enemy

There would by this arrangement appear to have been about

20000 men for the immediate support of the English left wing & seventy thousand on the right flank & the rear of the enemy. The whole business could not have been arranged more simply, more naturally or more practically. At most, fault might be found that the first corps which had its bivouac near Bierge was sent towards St Lambert & on the other hand that the 2nd corps which must first cross the Dyle was sent to Ohain; for by this means a crossing of the columns took place which occasioned delay.

The march in general was so slow in consequence of many accidents that the 4th arrived at Frischermont only at 3 o'clock although the distance which it had to go was only 21/2 German miles. Several defiles, a fire that occurred at Wavre, repeated musteringings sufficiently explain this loss of time.

The 2nd corps arrived, because it followed the fourth, naturally some hours later on the field of battle; the first however arrived on account of other considerations still later that is only at six o'clock on the left wing of the Duke.

It may be said that this appearance of Blücher was not for the occasion as it took place, but in a general sense, for the problem, too late. If Bonaparte had attacked in the morning, the battle wd probably have been decided & then an attack on the part of Blücher if it had not been impossible or useless would at least have been less certain. But we must not forget that in this case everything would have been more expedited on the part of Blücher. The greatest part of the delays which occurred, took place before noon & therefore before a shot was fired on the part of Wellington. If the Action with Wellington had begun at eight or nine o'clock forenoon Blücher's first troops would have reached the field at twelve or one o'clock

The third corps was already on the march when the rear guard which was still on the other side of the Dyle was pressed by a formidable enemy's force & considerable masses of cavalry showed themselves - This corps therefore for the present occupied the position behind the Dyle in order to wait for further events.

The French assert that already they perceived Bülow's approach & his first position near St Lambert & Bonaparte at this time orders 6th corps & two divisions of cavalry of Subervic & Domon which stood in reserve behind the center to march in the direction of St Lambert & to take up a position on potence about on a line with his right wing this was observed before Erlon's attack. Whether this position had any military strength is nowhere explained & from the mere examination of a plan we cannot determine this. If it had been intended to have placed any reliance on this positions might have been found more advantageous forwards between Frischermont & Pajeau? & support for the flank would have been found in both these places.

Bülow had arrived at three o'clock with his two first brigades the 15th & 16th in the wood of Frischermont & had there taken up a concealed position which however could not conceal his arrival from the French & in effect did not conceal it. He there waited for the arrival of his other brigades. As however Field Marshall Blücher saw that the French pressed hard upon the English center & had apprehension lest they should penetrate it he ordered Genl Bülow with two brigades & the cavalry of reserves to make an attack on the 6th corps of the French. This took place at 1/2 past four; the two other brigades followed soon after as reserves to the 15th & 16th & thus the resistance of the enemy on account of Bülow's superiority & the very small advantage of the ground was not great, but the 12000 men under Lobau were obliged to retreat fighting in the direction of Belle Alliance. Genl Bülow received orders in his attack to spread himself further to the left so as to reach the village Planchenoit & to make it the object of his attack. But the right wing of Blücher had already engaged the enemy near the village of Smouhen, so that the fourth corps received a species of irregular direction whereby the force of the attack on Planchenoit which might otherwise have received was diminished.

Bonaparte on his side sent the ? division of the young guard to reinforce Genl Lobau as soon as he saw that he was obliged to retreat towards the chaussee. The Action was now stopped because Genl Bülow could not

advance further till he was in possession of Planchenoit. A long contest ensued with various success for the possession of this village. As the two other divisions of the French Guard stood close behind this village & at different times supported it with four battalions, it is easy to conceive the long & doubtfull result on this point, which was not entirely decided for our troops untill the 2nd Prussian corps advanced & disposed a part of its force against this village, whereby it fell permanently into our hands, which may have happened between seven & eight o clock.

During the contest for Planchenoit the efforts of the French cavalry took place against the English center, & on the other side the arrival & the advance of Genl Ziethen against the right wing of the French, & lastly towards eight o clock the desperate & despairing attack of the twelve battalions of the guards to decide the battle against Wellington. It would be very interesting to know whether the Prussians were already firmly in possession of Planchenoit when Bonaparte advanced with this last reserve in order to throw them into the very jaws of destruction; their conduct would in that case have still more the appearance of a gamester become indifferent to all calculation from despair & ruthlessness.

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of the march than from the pressing circumstances of the object; this is acknowledged only by those who have had to do with such things & who have had to contend with the difficulties which present themselves on such occasions.

Weather & the state of the road, want of commissariat & of quarters, fatigue of the troops, want of information etc.etc. may even with the best inclinations reduce a march one half or two thirds from what was thought possible when calculated in a room; we will only remind our readers of an example viz: that the French after the battle of Jena & Auerstadt when they were completely victorious & had the greatest reason to hasten their



movements, in the time also of their best warlike organisation in their march in pursuit did not exceed upon an average 21/2 german miles per day.

If you consider that Grouchy's corps did not leave the field of battle of Ligny before 2 & 3 o'clock, we cannot be surprised that this corps did not reach the neighbourhood of Wavre before 2 or 3 o'clock that is to say in 24 hours, since Wavre is five German miles distant from Ligny by the road of Hohengroy which Grouchy took & upon the occasion of this march very unfavorable circumstances occurred as we have already shown. The cavalry might certainly have followed much sooner; but even if either had not been useless, still it would not have had the consequences which have been argued as like to have been produced by the corps of Grouchy on the battle of Belle Alliance. The only reproach that can justly be made against Genl Grouchy is that his whole corps was moved on one road from which the natural result was that the last divisions of the fourth corps arrived in the Evening.

#### **Genl Thielman's position.**

The third corps of the Prussian army arrived at Wavre in the Evening of the 17th. The first brigade of the cavalry of reserve which had been detached rejoined here. Three brigades the 10, 11, & 12th as well as the cavalry of reserve had gone thro Wavre then encamped near la Bavette on this side as it arrived too late it now formed with the 8th brigade of the 2nd corps the advanced guard towards Grouchy - On the morning of the 18th as the 4th corps put itself in march towards St Lambert, Genl Thielman received orders to form the rear guard of the three other corps also if nothing material took place on the part of the enemy to follow the others by taking the road by Couture, he was however to leave some battalions behind in Wavre, so as to prevent any French patrol from disturbing the road to Brussels whilst the armies were engaged at Waterloo. If however a considerable French corps should show itself before Wavre, Genl Thielman was to occupy the strong position on the Dyle at that place & was to cover the rear of the army.

The march of the 2nd & 1st corps from the position of Wavre lasted till 2 o'clock. As nothing was heard of the enemy at two o'clock the

Prussians so much the more persuaded themselves that Bonaparte had turned his whole force against Wellington. Genl Thielman therefore put his corps into column & was on the point of quitting with the head of it the Chaussee of Brussels when an animated engagement began with the 9th brigade & also with the 8th which was still remaining on the left bank of the Dyle. Genl Thielman halted his troops untill the circumstances were more clearly developed. In the meanwhile the 8th brigade of the 2nd corps drew off entirely; the 1st which had stopped for a considerable time recommenced its march & left near the village of Limale a detachment of three battalions & three squadrons under the command of Col Stengel.?

Genl Thielman occupied now the position near Wavre as follows, the 12th brigade was placed behind the passage of Bierge, the 10th to the right behind Wavre, the 11th on the Chaussee to the left behind Wavre, Wavre was occupied by three battalions of the 9th Brigade & the remainder of this brigade as well as the cavalry of reserve were placed in the neighbourhood of Bavette & were destined as reserve.

The three brigades which were placed in the position remained with the greater proportion of their force in columns of brigades as much covered as possible, & employed only single battalions or lines of tirrailleurs for the defence of the bridge of the river itself, whilst the artillery was with the exception of one battery which was kept in reserve, the remainder consisting of about 27 guns was spread over the side of the valley & was well situated to take advantage of the enemy coming down the opposite bank.

The position of the 3rd corps was 2000 paces wide from Bierge to Needer Wavre it is not therefore too extensive for a corps of 20,000 men. There were four bridges over the Dyle one near Nieder Wavre 2 at Wavre one at the Mill of Bierge the river itself was if necessary fordable. On the other hand the left bank of the valley of the river was rather high that is 50 to 60 feet steep that it might be considered as a good impediment to the approach & still permitted the full effect of fire from this position. As the country in the neighbourhood of the right & left wing was open & more in the rear afforded some further point of support, the position might be considered as one of the

strongest which could be occupied immediately without much preparation

The arrangements of Genl Thielman was directed to this object, to waste as few of his troops as possible, to keep up the action with musquetry with the smallest possible number of infantry, to produce the greatest possible result by the artillery & thus to be prepared, if the enemy should attack the side of the valley by storm in any place to be able to direct a fresh mass of troops against them; the real reserve was to be employed to attack the enemy on his flank whilst he was attempting to turn that of the Prussians

Accident occasioned one of these arrangements to fail.

The 9th brigade which drew off by Needer Wavre after the enemy had shown considerable forces, having occupied Wavre with two battalions & placed a third behind it, marched off with the other six battalions, two squadrons & light pieces of artillery after the other corps instead of remaining as Reserve near la Bavette, in order to go by Neuf Cobaut? to Couture which was the original destination of the whole corps. No person observed this misunderstanding, because at the moment when Genl Both drew thro Needer from the position, the attention of every one was drawn to the appearance of the enemy's force in front.

It was not till about seven in the evening when it was seen that it might be necessary to make use of the reserve & upon occasion of sending some preparatory order to it, that it was discovered that Genl Both instead of remaining near the cavalry of reserve was marched further off. Officers were sent to see whether he had taken up another position in the neighbourhood. As these returned without having found out anything respecting him, Genl Thielman gave up any further enquiry, observing to himself:!! There where was heard the heavy cannonade of a great battle, the business would be decided, whatever might happen on the spot of Wavre would never have any considerable influence on that contest, it might therefore be perhaps better that another division should find itself there.

It thus happened that Genl Thielman on the 18 & 19 had to oppose with 24 battalions 21 squadrons & 25 pieces of artillery altogether about 1500 men. Marshall Grouchy whose strength could not be exactly perceived, because the wood prevented it~ but of whose corps at three o clock about 10 or 12000 men are visible.

### **Grouchy's attack on the 18th & 19th.**

The engagement at Wavre divides itself into two separate Acts, that is to say 1st engagement along the Dyle on the 18th from three o clock till the coming on of night, & the engagement on the left bank of the Dyle on the 18th from three o clock till the coming on of night, & the engagement on the left bank of the Dyle between that river & the wood of Bixansart on the 19th from day break to about nine o clock before noon.

On the 18th Grouchy attempted with the 3rd corps to take Wavre & to force a passage over the Dyle at that place. The 3rd corps which formed his advanced guard attacked Wavre between two & three o clock with its principal force, a little later with a part only it attacked the Mill of Bierge. But two Prussian battalions commanded by Col Zefrelin? which was afterwards supported by two more held possession of the town & both bridges.

The attack on the bridge at the Mill of Bierge was equally unsuccessfull, where the 12th brigade defended the passage only by sharp shooters & by the artillery which was placed on the left bank. When the 4th French corps arrived (Gerard) a part of the 1st division (Hulot) was immediately sent to Bierge, but although the Generals, when they were repulsed at Wavre expected everything from the attack at the Mill of Bierge & on that account were themselves present at it they could not however gain possession of this passage & the division Hulot drew off later between 8 & nine o clock afternoon to Limale where the two other divisions which arrived much later were directed from La Baraque & whither also Pajol with his corps of cavalry & the division of Teste of the sixth corps also proceeded.

All three forces reached Limale just as it was dark, found the place & the passage of the river undefended, probably because Col Stengel was on the point of withdrawing & of following the 1st corps, they went therefore in the dark over the Dyle & pressed themselves in thick masses opposite to Delburgon on the bank of the Dyle forming their first front opposite to the right flank of Genl Thielman.

About ten o'clock at night the 12th brigade gave the information that the enemy had passed the Dyle at Limale. Genl Thielman thought that it was a lesser old column, perhaps consisting of one division & ordered Col Stulpnagel to go thither with all the forces he could collect & drive the enemy back over the river; at the same time a brigade of the cavalry reserve was sent there. Genl Thielman hastened himself to the threatened point. The attack took place in the dark, it could not however succeed, partly because the battalion that attacked was thrown into confusion by a hollow way partly because the enemy was already too strong

Col Stulpnagel was obliged therefore to take up a position close to the enemy in order that he being kept in respect should not be able to extend himself with the first appearance of day the first cannon shots at the distance of 500 paces began. A violent contest now began, in which the French advanced methodically their four divisions under the protection of a numerous line of sharpshooters & in which the 3rd Prussian corps resulted in three different positions

First near the small wood Col Stengel? & the 12th brigade. Then between Bierge & the wood Bixansart fourteen battalions of the 10th 11th & 12th brigades & the cavalry of reserve whilst six battalions remained behind Bierge & Wavre & four remained in Wavre.

The resistance in this second position was the most protracted & it was here that Genl Thielman learnt that the battle of Waterloo was gained, as well as the destination of the 2nd Prussian corps by Gembloux & La Hutte so as to take the enemy with which he was engaged in the rear.

As these points were so far removed from the field of battle that Genl Thielman could expect no result from the cooperation of the 2nd corps, he only hoped that his opponent had also heard of the result of the great battle & thro fear of being cut off would quickly retreat. Genl Thielman made his troops therefore give a loud hurrah & otherwise testify their rejoicings. But this hope was disappointed. The enemy continually advanced, Genl Thielman was obliged to resolve to retire further & at length commence his general retreat, whilst he at the same time ordered Col Zefrelin to retire from Wavre.

Genl Thielman withdrew in the direction of Louvain to St Achtenrode three french leagues from the field of battle & lost nothing but about two thousand killed & wounded. The 9th brigade of the 3rd Prussian corps had marched in the night of the 18th towards St Lambert had passed the night in a wood there had returned early on the 19th towards the cannon fire of Wavre & united itself at length after passing Limale with the 3rd corps at Gembloux.

#### **Battle of Namur.**

Grouchy in reality learnt in the morning of the 19th as it appears about the time that Thielman prepared to retire the news of the loss of the battle of Belle Alliance. This made the retreat of his opponment more easy; for the desire that Grouchy might have for small advantages was abandoned on account of the anxiety he felt for his retreat. He perceived that he could no longer pursue this by Charleroi & resolved therefore to go to Namur. He sent the cavalry corps of Excelman before him at twelve o clock which is said to have arrived at four, this however seemed doubtfull as from the field of battle of Wavre to Namur there are six german miles of road. The infantry followed at night fall in two columns, one by Gembloux, the other by the direct road. The divisions of cavalry of Merin & Sault formed the rear guard.

The french infantry reached Namur between 8 & 9 o clock in the morning of the 20th.

Genl Thielman reached the neighbourhood of Achtenrode about noon on the 19th. He had determined in no case to put his extremely exhausted troops in motion to pursue the enemy on the 19th as they were highly in want of a rest, & it was probable that the enemy's rear guard would not withdraw before night & thus it was impossible to decide anything. He preferred therefore giving his troops their rendezvous at break of day near Ottenburg where his advanced guard was placed on order to advance it in good time in the rear of the enemy. The march was delayed for about an hour & about 5 o'clock the cavalry began its march by Gembloux on the road to Namur. The infantry followed.

The cavalry came up for the first time at Gembloux with the enemy's cavalry which however quickly retired; it was pursued as quickly as possible & on the straight road to Namur but the Prussians did not come up with the enemy till about 3/4 of a french league from that town

Whilst Genl Thielman's cavalry completed the march to Namur in five or six hours the infantry remained at Gembloux.

They met with some battalions of the enemy before Namur with some cavalry & artillery. They were attacked lost three pieces of artillery & drew themselves nearer to the town

On the Chaussee from Namur to Brussels some masses of enemies troops were placed which appeared to cover a retreat. Whilst they were observed, a division of the enemy was seen on the chaussee advancing in column. As soon as this division perceived the cavalry of Genl Thielman, they formed squares drew artillery & sharp shooters out on the left & with this precaution continued their march into the town. It was the last division of the 4th corps which arrived at Namur a little later than the 3rd. Almost immediately after it, came Genl Pirch with the 2nd Prussian corps. This Genl had received orders after the battle to gain the rear of Grouchy by Gembloux. He had marched all night & reached Mellerwax in the morning passing by Maranmont & ? Here he occupied a bivouac & sent out patrols. As however he learnt by these nothing either of Genl Thielman or of the enemy he

remained there during the night, & put himself in motion for Gembloux at five in the morning of the 20 when he learnt that the enemy was retiring by that Place. It thus happened that he exactly attached himself to the tail of the column of the left wing. When this had retired into the town, Genl Pirch tried to get possession of the Brussels Gate itself & the remaining pieces of the ramparts which joined it were strongly occupied by infantry a very sharp Action took place which cost the 2nd corps 1100 men killed & wounded & was not withstanding unattended with any results. The plan was forced to be abandoned the French left the town at 6 o'clock in the Evening retreating towards Domont towards which by orders of Prince Blücher only Col ? brigade of cavalry followed him. Had Genl Pirch continued his march on Namur earlier & had he arrived there before Grouchy's infantry, which might have happened Grouchy would have had no passage over the Meuse. He must have turned towards Charleroi; this would have happened on the 20 on this day the 1st corps of the Prussian army which followed the beaten troops by Charleroi, had again left this place, & it was in the neighbourhood of Beaumont.

It would probably on the news of the advance of Grouchy have given up its advance towards Avesnes & have turned towards Philippeville. But it is very unlikely that it could have put off the retreat of Grouchy's corps as this would have reached Philippeville probably before the Prussians & at the worst might have gone by Zivet? Nevertheless greater losses would have been experienced by Grouchy as single detachments would have been cut off etc etc. It would however have been quite different if the first Prussian corps had received orders on the 19 & 20 to remain on the Sambre to defend this against Grouchy. In this case on the morning of the 21st 50000 men would have found themselves opposed to this Marshall & it is scarcely possible to believe that he, confined by this superior force & by two rivers could have avoided capitulating. Bonaparte himself in a letter addressed from Philippeville to his Brother Joseph says, Je n'ai point entendu parler de Grouchy. S'il n'est point pris comme je le crains, je puis avoir dans trois jours 50,000 hommes. But in reality Grouchy's situation was too little known by the head Quarters of Blücher on the 19th for them to form a principal object of the next operations in cutting him off.



We can hardly approve of the attack on Namur for little would have been obtained even if the Prussians had succeeded in forcing the passage into the town & just behind the town was the bridge over the Sambre which would put an end to all further pursuit. On the other hand if another passage over the Sambre could have been found; as the chaussee from Namur to Dinant runs on the left bank of the Meuse that is to say between the two rivers, in a deep & steep valley, in a perpetual defile the Prussians might if they had gained the heights have greatly impeded this retreat, they might have taken possession from Marshall Grouchy & above all they might have prevented him reaching Laon before the Allies. But it is seldom that everything occurs in war to the greatest advantage & the proposition which is here developed for Genl Pirch's conduct is by no means an ordinary one, but would have required a great degree of energy.