

# Illness Defeats Napoleon

(Continued from page eight.) based to some extent at least on imagination.

One may wonder today why the duke of Wellington, a celebrated Irish leader of British forces for many years and a veteran of many campaigns, was not better prepared for eventualities, why he did not employ scouts in the territory far south of the Sambre, and why he was not acquainted with the movements of the enemy.

Perhaps the answer would be that Wellington was not the only famous general to have been surprised at some stage in his career. Indeed, what one was not? Then, too, there was no telegraph then, no automobiles, no motorcycles for speedy courier service. The swiftest agent for delivery of a message was a rider on the back of a galloping horse. Information traveled slowly.

Fortunately for Wellington, Grouchy and Vandamme were delayed by a Prussian brigade at Gilly, on the north bank of the Sambre and east of Charleroi. Lobau and Milhaud still were south of the Sambre. Despite certain miscarried details of his program, Bonaparte occupied a dominant strategical position. He was situated within a square measuring roughly twelve miles on each side and so placed that he could strike either at Wellington or at Bluecher. In fact, he had at this time placed himself between the two enemy armies.

The night of June 15 found the Armee du Nord distributed as follows: The left wing was strung out between Franes and Marchienne; the right wing was before Fleurus and astraddle the Sambre at Chatelet; the center or reserve, minus Lobau's corps and Milhaud's cuirassiers, was between Gilly and Charleroi. Lobau and Milhaud still were south of the Sambre. Despite certain miscarried details of his program, Bonaparte occupied a dominant strategical position. He was situated within a square measuring roughly twelve miles on each side and so placed that he could strike either at Wellington or at Bluecher. In fact, he had at this time placed himself between the two enemy armies.

The emperor's plan of carrying the war against the allies in the terms of two wings and a center, or reserve, contemplated the use of a wing and center to crush one of the enemy armies while the other wing held off the other enemy army. This plan on the night of June 15 still remained so flexible that it could have been worked for the destruction of either enemy force. How close it came to succeeding the following day, despite a certain lack of explicitness in orders and a vacillation of D'Erlon, was seen in the actions at Quatre Bras and Ligny.

It has been said that on the morning of the 16th Ney could have mastered Quatre Bras easily and then co-operated later with his superior, and that he waited, however, until 2 o'clock in the afternoon to lead most of Reille's corps (about 19,000 men) against the 8,000 Dutch and Belgians under the prince of Orange at Quatre Bras. This is a nice picture to alibi Napoleon, but a serious half-truth. Ney could not have known how many of Wellington's troops were in front of him. His conduct in waiting for the bulk of his troops before engaging was the standard practice of the recognized masters and is the doctrine of all military authorities. The bare facts are that he kept Wellington from Ligny and suffered a smaller loss than his enemy.

The force of the prince of Orange had only 16 pieces of artillery. The Dutch troops, greatly outnumbered, recoiled before Ney's attack. An hour after the beginning of the attack Ney's force was increased by 6,000 men under Prince Jerome. Ney's enemy fell back farther; the crisis was at hand. Wellington arrived on the scene, and a few minutes later a Dutch and Belgian cavalry brigade and a division of British and Hanoverians with 12 guns reached the scene. Wellington's force at Quatre Bras thus was increased to 17,000 men, as against 25,000 then available there for Ney. Further reinforcements at 4 o'clock brought Wellington's force up to 21,000. An hour later it was increased to 29,000. Ney had missed his chance for victory. Night settled over the scene, but still by the aid of the moon the artillery continued firing.

An accurate summation of the results at Quatre Bras, not considering for the moment that Wellington was kept from going to the aid of Bluecher, would be that the French troops themselves were victorious but that their leader, Ney, was beaten. Wild-eyed, bewildered, and storming, he was completely exhausted after the fight, as he was two days later at Waterloo when, as the engagement drew to an end, he shouted to D'Erlon:

"If we get out of this we shall be hanged!"

In contrast to Ney's exhausted and despairing appearance at Quatre Bras was that of old Bluecher, the leader of the Prussians, who at the same time was taking a licking on a battlefield but a short distance away. Twice ridden over by cavalry at Ligny, Bluecher remained a man of iron courage and determination.

While Ney was fighting the Anglo-Dutch force at Quatre Bras, Bonaparte encountered the Prussians at Ligny. With 71,000 men, the emperor partly sur-

rounded Bluecher's 83,000 Prussians. With D'Erlon's corps present he might have beaten Bluecher so decisively and completely that he would have been in position to settle with Wellington later without any fear from the Prussians. But D'Erlon's corps was not there to help him. Neither was it present at the action at Quatre Bras.

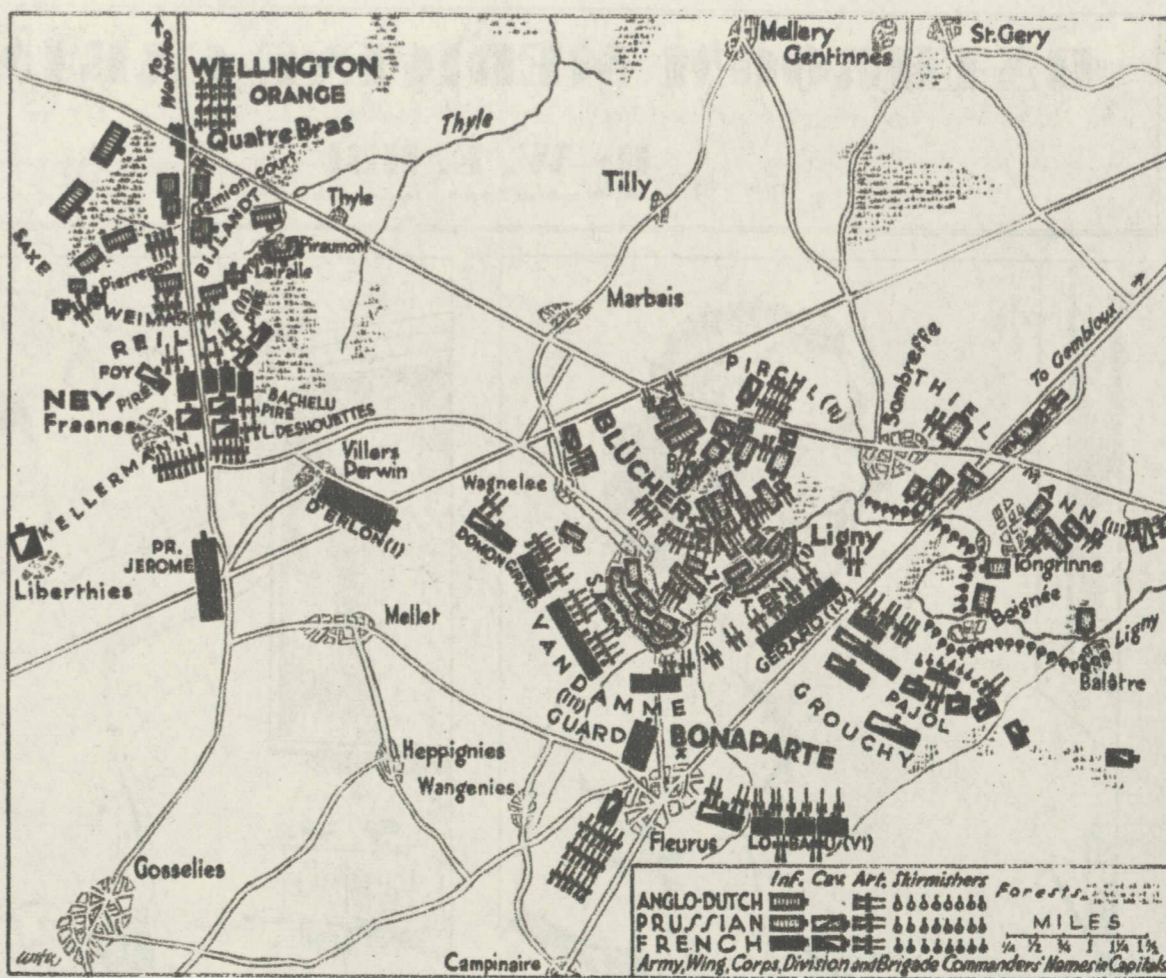
Ney, however, refused to consider D'Erlon's recall. As it was, Bonaparte did defeat Bluecher at Ligny. When Ney's force fell back from Quatre Bras to Franes that night Bluecher's Prussians were streaming away from the field of Ligny. They had been able to extricate themselves, although their losses were 12,000 men and 21 guns, as against French casualties of 8,500.

The early morning of June 17 found Bonaparte too ill to be in the saddle. Accustomed by long schooling to passive obedience, Soult and Ney allowed golden minutes to slip by. Bluecher's defeat the day before left Wellington's position at Quatre Bras untenable. The duke decided to fall back to Mt. S. Jean that day. And at 11 o'clock in the morning Bonaparte finally reached a decision as to the pursuit of the beaten Prussians. Vandamme's and Gerard's corps, with an additional division and some cavalry (33,000 men and 110 guns), were placed under

Bluecher that two corps and possibly four of the Prussians were available that day to aid him against the French. Gneisenau, Bluecher's chief of staff, had been more concerned with keeping open Prussian communications than giving assistance to Wellington. In fact, it has been said that Gneisenau seriously considered the thought of a Prussian retirement. He felt that Wellington should have come to the aid of the Prussians at Ligny, although, as has been shown, Wellington at the time was completely blocked at Quatre Bras by Ney. The stout-hearted Bluecher and his other leaders overcame Gneisenau's argument—the Prussians were pledged to aid the duke.

And still Wellington did not know what Bonaparte would do, although he might have surmised that the plan of the French called for an attack by the French left wing and center while the right wing was employed by Grouchy to hold off the Prussians.

The duke at this point was obsessed with the thought that



Actions at Quatre Bras and Ligny, June 16, 1815, showing how Bonaparte almost surrounded Bluecher.



View from Mt. S. Jean of the battle of Waterloo at the commencement of the Anglo-Dutch charge on the French some time after 7 o'clock in the evening.

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As it turned out, D'Erlon spent most of June 16 wandering aimlessly between the fields of Ligny and Quatre Bras.

Late in the afternoon he reached the edge of the Ligny battlefield, then turned away and arrived at Quatre Bras at night, long after the issue there had been settled. Had D'Erlon been at Quatre Bras earlier Wellington would have been crushed. Had he been in action at Ligny, Bluecher's annihilation would have been assured. The blame for D'Erlon's costly wanderings that day can be laid to a lack of precision in the orders that he received and a lack of co-operation among the commands. In the morning he had concentrated his corps at Jumet, the plan being that it should follow Reille's corps in the advance on Quatre Bras. It was 2 o'clock before D'Erlon passed through Gosselies and 4 o'clock before the head of his column neared Franes. An order of the emperor, not forwarded to Ney, then diverted it in the direction of Ligny. About 5:15 Ney learned that D'Erlon, without his knowledge, had moved eastward to join the emperor. At 5:30 Ney received Napoleon's order to seize Quatre Bras and swing in against Bluecher at Ligny.

"The fate of France is in your hands," the emperor warned.

For such a maneuver he would need every man in his command. Hence Ney peremptorily ordered D'Erlon to proceed to Quatre Bras. It was just as the First corps reached the edge of the Ligny battlefield that its commander received from Ney orders to hurry to Quatre Bras. As D'Erlon was marching to the aid of Ney the latter received word from Napoleon to send the First corps back to him.

the command of Grouchy, who was ordered to follow in the wake of the Prussians.

"Proceed to Gembloux," the emperor's order read, and Grouchy, in the Napoleonic manner, obeyed it literally.

Grouchy's march was slow in getting started and slow in being carried out. When night came his force was encamped around Gembloux, far to the east and south of a straight line running between Wellington's force and that of Bluecher, the last named having moved ahead that night to concentrate astride the Dyle river at Wavre. Grouchy's main fault was that he went too far east in following the Prussians. Had he taken a course inside instead of outside Bluecher he might have been of assistance the next day. He obeyed a specific order of his chief, which took him too far to the east, while at the same time losing sight of his main instructions, which were to keep the Prussians from joining Wellington's army.

The situation by this time had changed. No longer did it favor Bonaparte. The position of Grouchy, off to the southeast at Gembloux, gave the allies a strategic advantage.

Wellington carried out his plan of retiring to the ridge that lay to the south of Mt. S. Jean, and well before the hour of 6 on the morning of June 18 his army was disposed in this position to meet the attack of the French. The duke had been assured by

Bonaparte would strike at the right flank of the Anglo-Dutch army in an attempt to cut it off from the seacoast. This, of course, was not according to Bonaparte's idea of warfare. The French leader's strategy contained basically the idea of keeping the two enemy forces apart so that they could be destroyed separately.

Because of his fear for his right, Wellington weakened his force before Mt. S. Jean by sending 17,000 men to Hal, eight miles to the west, to prevent any turning movement there. Consequently before Mt. S. Jean that morning Wellington had only 67,600 men and 156 guns. The nature of the terrain gave the Anglo-Dutch army a certain defensive advantage. In front of the ridge aforementioned was a mass of skirmishers. Over the crest of the ridge was the main body of troops. No entrenchments had been prepared. Hougomont and La Haye Sainte, two farmhouses of heavy masonry, were strengthened, constituting effective bastions.

Bonaparte, for reasons previously explained, did not have his army ready to strike Wellington early in the morning. Had he attacked at dawn he could have beaten the duke decisively long before the arrival on the scene of the Prussians. At this time of year in Belgium it was light enough at 4 o'clock for the beginning of a battle.

Had he attacked even so late as 9 o'clock he could have assured himself of victory before the intervention of the Prussians.

The excuse that the ground was too soft as the result of the rains of the day before for the movement of artillery seems to have been not a legitimate one. The Prussians that day were able to move their guns fairly early in the morning over terrain as soft as that in the immediate neighborhood of La Belle Alliance. The rains of the day before had been general. Then, too, one should recall that in previous battles neither early hours nor soft ground ever had stood in the way of Bonaparte. Before the battle of Jena he had kept a large part of his army marching virtually all night in order to strike the Prussians early in the morning, and personally brought the artillery up a steep defile.

Napoleon at one time had boasted, according to a quotation attributed to him, that although he might lose a battle, he never would lose a minute. On that fateful June 18 he not only lost minutes but wasted precious hours.

The French army's bivouac of the night before covered a rather wide zone, as the troops had scattered for forage. The army had little or no commissary. When this force of 74,000 men and 246 guns at last was disposed to suit its commander, who finally had arrived at the front from Caillou, it extended

on a front hardly more than two and three-quarters miles from northeast to west. On the extreme left was a large body of cavalry, next to that was Reille's corps, then that of D'Erlon, and on the extreme right was another body of cavalry. Behind Reille's west lay the mounted troops of Kellermann and Guyot. Behind Reille's east was Lobau's corps, just west of the Charleroi road. To the rear of D'Erlon was the cavalry of Domon, Milhaud, and Desnouettes. Farther back, in reserve, was the Imperial guard (the Old guard, the Middle guard, and the Young guard). The guards were astraddle the Charleroi road.

A mile to the south and in the rear of D'Erlon's corps was the village of Planchenoit. Less than three miles to the northeast of Planchenoit was the Bois de Paris (Paris wood).

The emperor cannot be excused for not having occupied the Bois de Paris with sufficient troops to defend his right flank. A group of sharpshooters in this wood could have held back for a considerable stretch of time any Prussian threat from the northeast—could have prevented the Prussian penetration to Planchenoit which later in the day proved so costly to the French.

Nor can Bonaparte be excused for his failure to take advantage earlier in the day of his preponderance of artillery. It will be recalled that when he invaded Belgium he had 370 guns. Of these Grouchy had taken 110 for his pursuit of the Prussians. Counting for losses and accidents, Napoleon still had 246 pieces, against Wellington's 156. Had he begun the battle earlier he could have crushed the Anglo-Dutch army with superior artillery fire.

But, because he delayed too long in starting the action, he was hurried for time. He did not take advantage of his superiority in artillery as he should have. He actually deprived himself of the time necessary to win the battle. This can be laid, with his other errors of the campaign, to his deplorable physical and mental condition. At 10 o'clock that morning

Bonaparte sent a message to Grouchy ordering his wing commander to march to Wavre. This was in reply to a letter sent by Grouchy from the town of Gembloux the night before informing the emperor that the Prussians were retreating in two columns, one headed for Perwez, the other for Wavre. It was Bonaparte's intention that Grouchy should keep the Prussians from swinging westward to join Wellington, although his message did not precisely convey that idea to his subordinate. It is not unusual for one element of an army to miscarry, as either D'Erlon or Grouchy. Two columns misdirected within two days is bad.

As pointed out before, Grouchy was outside of the Prussians' extreme left. A march from Gembloux against the Prussians at that stage could only detain a rear guard while Bluecher's force continued on toward that of Wellington. Grouchy marched on.

Military experts have divided the battle of Waterloo into five phases and a finale or rout. The first phase covers the beginning of the attack by the French at 11:30 a. m. and the intervention of the Prussians at 1:30 p. m. The battle opened with an attack on Hougomont by one of Reille's divisions, an attempt to draw Wellington's attention to his right. There was no preliminary bombardment by the French artillery, but as the attack was launched against Hougomont skirmishers were thrown forward to cover the French left wing and batteries were moved up rapidly to suitable positions to cover the attack by fire. Then there followed quickly a fierce bombardment by 80 French pieces, begun for the purpose of softening Wellington's center in preparation for the main attack. After 1 o'clock, and just before he delivered the order to Ney to launch the main attack, Napoleon spied a great cloud of dust in the region of Chapelle Saint Lambert, beyond the Bois de Paris. This dust was stirred up by the first reinforcements of the Prussians, Buelow's corps, emerging on the scene. These were relatively fresh troops. They had not been in the action at Ligny. A half hour later the Prussians were close enough to partially upset Bonaparte's plans, yet he never for a moment considered the advisability of calling off the battle. He still was determined to crush his foe.

The second phase of the encounter began with Ney attacking Wellington's center with D'Erlon's corps. No marked success was gained by either side as the result of this attack, and as yet the Prussians had not gone into action.

As an introduction to the third phase Ney attacked La Haye Sainte. When the Anglo-Dutch line drew back because of heavy cannonading by the French, and a large number of Wellington's troops actually broke, Ney struck at the duke's center (4 p. m.) with 45 squadrons of cavalry. Against the

(Continued on page eleven.)



French troops streaming from the field of Waterloo, from a painting by A. C. Gow.