

Unpublished military documents about the 1815 Campaign

The military papers left to his family by Lieutenant-General Baron Hulot were very kindly handed over to me by his sons. They also agreed to me selecting the most interesting documents and we are thus lucky enough to publish here what we consider as its most important pieces. We are convinced that the reader will find a huge historical value in it.

During his whole life, General Hulot's immense taste for moderation and conciliation prevented him from taking sides in the violent and passionate arguments which divided his contemporaries on the burning subject of the disastrous Campaign in Belgium. Until the end, he indeed resisted writing his own impressions about the three days that lasted the Ligny-Waterloo battles. He was happy enough with handing over his memories, writing about them to a few fellow veterans and he also wrote, about these memories, a few intimate notes that his family kept. His children, sharing the same scruples about military confraternity, kept his precious archives intact and, going through it, we found an original and unpublished document, which we believe has an immense importance, as much for the subject it is dealing with than for the impartiality and the great competence of its author.

The document is a detailed report, sent by General Hulot, Commander in Chief of the French Army's third division of the fourth Corps, to General Gérard, Commander in Chief of the same Corps during the Ligny battle.

The report comes with bits of correspondence, which cast light on particular details, pointing responsibilities.

After a 75 year controversy between historians and the writers of a new legend and after the 'new Waterloo of 1870' which changed so deeply the basis of our existences (both civilly and militarily), it seemed that the Nation's political passions had changed and that people's opinion had settled down, especially since Colonel Charras' book on the three fatal days which put an end to Napoleon 1st and his empire was published. Thus, it seemed to us that since Waterloo's legend was definitely written, it was not a problem anymore to publish in the name of the author, texts, which were also used in parts by General Hulot's correspondents.

We managed to convince the person who is depositary of these texts (as well as his brothers) to share them and it is with their agreement that we copied here the following documents.

Hulot was one of the main characters of this dramatic event, as well as one of those who for sure managed to keep calm and for whom no feeling of ego nor personal ambition came to alter his military virtues, even in critical circumstances. Therefore, his testimony will help confirm the authentic and definitive version of the 1815 Campaign. It will also help to shed a new light on details which were until now less known (or badly presented) and will thus help to bring new conclusions on this catastrophe, as well as patriotic lessons for the next war which might soon settle Europe's destiny, and thus our own as well.

These pages were written by a General Officer who was among the most educated and generous persons of the Imperial army. These documents thus allow us to clearly see the mistakes which were made during the last days of the Empire, as well as they also show to which unpredictable factors the tragedy of Waterloo was due. Just a few precipitate steps, as well as a few common neglects changed an almost certain victory and triumph into a complete and irremediable disaster!

In order to condensate the narration, we will suppress the passages with repetitions from General Hulot's manuscript. He judged it necessary in order to have his readers' attention, but today it will not bring anything more to our readers.

Moreover, wishing to respect General Hulot's reserved character, which he maintained during his whole career, we agreed, together with his sons, to omit the passages in this report in which General Bourmont is mentioned. These omissions do not alter the narrative's clearness, and anyhow, the readers know these facts already and so these few cuts will not change this work; we would like it to be without any possible controversy. Let us only write here that after the third division of the fourth Corps heard about the sad incident which surprised them as soon as they entered Belgium ("The news lead them to the highest point of exaltation and their ardour to fight was transformed into a kind of fanaticism..."), General Hulot found their ethics and value absolutely intact. This is the real impact that the event had on the division.

Regarding the historical fact that this specific division was commanded by General Hulot during the beginning of the hostilities, the story told here by the General Officer will not add anything to the other testimonies, specifically those published and discussed from 1830 to 1845 in G. Sarrut and Saint Edme's Biography of the men of the day. See for example: the entry on Bourmont in the third volume and then Marshal Bourmont's justification published by his son the Count Bourmont at the end of the same book's volume 2. One could add here the debates which went with the law suit the Marshal intended to the National and the information on this famous episode will then be complete.

E.B.

Presentation of the operations for the fourth Corps' third division (14th division of the army), from the beginning of the 1815 Campaign, until the Paris truce¹

The infantry for the fourth Corps was: the 12th division of the army (first of the Corps), the 13th division (second of the corps) and the 14th division (third of the Corps). The fourth Corps was called 'Armée de la Moselle' because it was formed in Metz. General Vandamme commanded the third Corps and General Grouchy the fourth Corps of Cavalry.

On June 14, 1815, the fourth Corps of the army (called the *Armée de la Moselle*) was assembled on Philippeville's glacis, where the Lieutenant General Count Gérard, its Commander in Chief, gave orders regarding the positions for the whole division. The third, commanded by Lieutenant General Count de Bourmont, was sent: for its first brigade to Florenne (commanded by the Camp-Marshal Hulot) and for its second brigade to Walcourt (commanded by Camp-Marshal Toussaint). Bourmont established his headquarters in Florenne.

I received his orders for my brigade's troops. The hostilities had not yet started; the order was given to charge the arms, to be ready to start the combat, etc. The Lieutenant-General went on reconnaissance in the villages around and gathered much details. At eleven at night, I left him and a little bit after midnight I received a letter from him with the last orders given to him by the General in Chief. In this letter he told me that since he would not be there the next morning, I was to make sure that Count Gérard's orders were executed, and if any incident were to happen, I was to make all the decisions he would have made himself, being responsible for it.

The troops took up arms on the 15th at four in the morning. At half past five, one of my camp aids told me that Mr. de Bourmont and all the officers belonging to his general staff were already riding their horses but I did not give any attention to this fact. Around six o'clock, two soldiers came to find me and to be under my orders, on behalf of the division General. I asked them where they had left him and they told me: "near the outposts".

Half an hour later, the brigadier came back with four chasseurs. He gave me on behalf of Mr. de Bourmont two letters for the General in Chief Gérard. The brigadier had also received an order from the division General; he was to warn me that the division General was joining the king Louis the XVIII and that I was to hand in as fast as possible the two letters he gave me to the General in Chief. I immediately informed the latter. I also immediately informed the two colonels from the 9th Léger and the 111th de Ligne and I gave the order to keep their troops ready for combat. I went quickly to give the news myself to the two regiments and, wanting to gain their trust in this critical moment, I solemnly swore to them, holding my sword, that I would fight with them France's enemy until the last moment of my life. They welcomed my oath with many acclamations showing their commitment and their trust, and I shall always remember this. As I had just received the marching order from the General in chief, I immediately went with my brigade to the meeting point of the Corps, on the road to Charleroi. I also passed on the other orders for the whole division.

The General in chief Gérard came to the meeting point for his Corps; he reviewed the troops and saw by himself that they were all with the best intentions. There was not a single deserter² in the whole

¹ This report was sent in 1818 to the General-Lieutenant Gérard who used it in parts for his book.

² One should note here that for the first time since the beginning of the Empire's wars, Napoleon only had French soldiers in his army, and no foreigners.

division, nor was there a single act of disobedience. Never perhaps had the officers and the soldiers shown a commitment more unanimous and stronger.

The Corps started marching on the road to Charleroi, the third division being in front of the column; we didn't meet any enemy. Reaching Chatelet, we went on the right and crossed the Sambre. The third division went ahead of the town and camped together with a Dragoon Corps in the orchards outside a big village, which I think was Chatelineau.

On the next day, the 16th, the fourth Corps gathered at ten in the morning, went towards the windmill on the right of Fleurus via Lambussart; the third division being in front of the column. After a very long rest, the whole Corps started walking again and went a bit on the left, in order to be before Fleurus. During this march, I received the order from the General in Chief to provide a battalion which was to go immediately towards the woods near Tongrinne; a General Staff officer was in charge of conducting it. The 50th regiment being the nearest to me at the moment I received the order, Colonel Lavigne was sent to the specified place with his first battalion. He commanded it during the whole day.

From Fleurus and before this town, I was given the order to attack with the third division the villages of Sombreffe and Tongrinne. I was told that the direction was the two bell towers that I could see. The two other divisions were to go towards Ligny. Seen from Fleurus, the two bell towers looked like they belonged to the same village but when nearer, one could see that the two bell towers were actually about a quarter of a league from each other. These points of attack had a large number of infantry, which was advantageously stationed in the fields between the two villages, and behind the rather deep stream of Ligny which runs through the villages. The heights behind and above the villages, which go around them and dominate, concentrated a large number of artillery, as well as strong columns and lines of infantry and cavalry, and they went on our right until opposite the woods and beyond, where the first battalion of the 50th regiment was stationed.

Thus, the third division with the cavalry, commanded by Marshal Grouchy, formed the extreme right wing of the army. Its squadrons came together opposite Tongrinne and Sombreffe and behind those villages.

As soon as they reached these two positions, the General in Chief in person gave the order to attack. The two battalions of the 9e Léger went, for one on Sombreffe and for the other on Tongrinne; one battalion from the 50th and the two from the 44th protected and supported the attacks. The majority of the artillery from this division was stationed on a plateau between the two villages and two pieces of artillery directly on Sombreffe's main road. In some distance behind, I put the 111th in reserve, so that it would be able to go wherever necessary according to the circumstances.

The two battalions from the 9e Léger, after the enemy's outposts retreated, went frankly on Sombreffe and Tongrinne. The main road to the first of the villages was barricaded and the enemy fought back with obstinacy. The village was taken for a while but new troops took it back again. Tongrinne, which is more easily accessible, was first taken from the enemy, which in turn also took it back. During the whole day, for each success that our troops had, the enemy's columns came down from their position or sent big detachments to regain what they had lost and thus stay on these two points of attack. This is how the whole action on the right side evolved.

The division's artillery could perfectly see the Prussian lines and they were kept constantly under a very strong fire. This must have caused many losses. The artillery was also forced to counterattack the enemy's battery, for whom the field was more in their favour, and who managed to go around our troops on the right. Our artillery had to fight with all its merit and all of its dedication to be able

to stay on Sombreffe's plateau. Its occupation had become an absolute necessity for the army's whole right wing. The enemy went on relentlessly with this offensive effort on the plateau but they were always pushed back.

I was particularly concerned about this and thus had a few detachments along the stream on my left, in order to guide me towards the village of Ligny, on which the General in Chief directed the attacks of his other two divisions. Tongrinne was watched closely by General Toussaint. As for Marshal Grouchy, he had the movements of his cavalry match those of the infantry battalion which was fighting on the field.

Thus, the division infantry was on the line as follows: from Tongrinne until the woods and after, where the first battalion of the 50th was manoeuvring under the orders of Colonel Lavigne; this battalion, two from the 44th and one from the 9th Léger. Opposite Sombreffe, on the right and on the left, I had one battalion from the 9th Léger, one from the 50th, two from the 111th and the whole artillery. I believe the field from my right to my left was about 1,000 to 1,200 toises in distance.

At about seven, in order to reinforce the troops, the General in Chief sent me one battalion from the 30th de Ligne, from the Third Corps, which had been very much weakened by its participation in the Ligny battle. At the same moment, the enemy's reserve came closer and attacked. This reserve was the whole third Prussian Corps, as it was arriving on the battle field. From then on, the 111th, which so far had only given its detachments on different points of attack, had to participate in its entirety. It first pushed back the enemy's battalions, so that the position opposite Sombreffe was kept until nine in the evening.

Under these circumstances, the division troops which were on the extreme right also made a last effort to keep their positions and to protect the movements of the cavalry, which was then able to execute several charges. And so, although the last attacks from the enemies were tough, the whole right wing managed to keep the control of the battle field. The battalion from the 30th, although being extremely tired, also joined the fight at night and was very active. At about half past nine, a division from the 6th Corps came to join us but the fire had ceased.

In the report that I handed out to the General in Chief on the 17th, I estimated that the enemy's troops, which I had been able to observe on the plateau of Sombreffe, and which were in front of us on this spot, could be of 20 to 25,000 soldiers from the Infantry and 30 pieces of cannon. The enemy's reports have since then become public and they can testify if I exaggerated or not. I had 5,000 soldiers in my division and 1,200 were unable to fight. Three battalion chiefs, among the best ones, were killed in front of Sombreffe: one was from the 9th (I cannot remember his name), Mr. Mondon was from the 50th and Mr. Danjoie was from the 111th. There was also an extremely big loss for the officers; nearly all of them from the Corps and from the General Staff lost their horses and most of us had their clothes with holes from bullet balls.³

In my report, I said to the General in Chief that I would not give any specific names for the higher rank officers which had fought particularly bravely, because in this case, I should name them all. Today, now that our brave regiments do not longer exist, I would like to name General Toussaint,

³ General Hulot, in order to lead his troops and to watch the Prussians' movements, was on an unprotected eminence and was like a target for the enemy. He forbade the officers who came to get his orders to get close to him, otherwise they would get killed. Adjutant Major Aupick, who later became Division General, did not listen to the warning and was badly wounded on this very spot. (This information was given to us by General Hulot's sons, who themselves heard it from General Aupick).

commanding the second brigade of the third Division and the colonels which commanded these regiments and showed in these circumstances the brightest and the most devoted merit.

I can assure you that never in my life have I seen troops fight with more ardour, constancy and dedication. If one should make but one reproach, it would be that they fought the enemy with too much fury, forgetting themselves. Had they been calmer, success would indeed have been easier to achieve and many brave soldiers' lives could have been saved.

The regiments spent the night from the 16th to the 17th behind the field where they had fought. On the 17th, when the day broke, the General in Chief gave orders for the third Division to be rallied behind Ligny and on its right. The morning was spent cleaning the arms, as they were nearly all out of order. Towards one in the afternoon, the Divisions were given the order to be ready to march; the third Division was to follow immediately the third Corps on the road to Gembloux. Around three, as the Third Corps had cleared the road and as the fourth was able to march, the third division was very close behind the Third Corps, which was marching with all of its artillery, its train and carriages.

Half an hour before we arrived in Gembloux, an officer from the General Staff came to tell me that the General in Chief had decided which was the position for the third Division. It was to be posted on the right, in the orchards of the houses which were a quarter of a league behind the town. I sent a battalion from the 9th Léger before the ravine, on the right of Gembloux, to do the reconnaissance. Everything coming from that Division came during day time to the position and the outposts were in place before the night.

On the 18th, towards seven in the morning, I received the order from the General in Chief that all the troops from the fourth Corps were to begin to march at eight in the morning and in the same order than the day before, so as to go towards Sart-lez-Walhain and following General Vandamme's Corps. I had the division immediately take its arms and start marching on Gembloux's main road. Its paths were in terrible condition. As there were many troops there as well, who came for the distributions or who were still in parades, it took me more than an hour to arrive to the general meeting point for the fourth Corps, which was one quarter of a league before Gembloux. Once there, all the Divisions were united and had a long break in order to wait for the road to be cleared.

As soon as the rear of the third Corps began marching, the General in Chief started the movement for the fourth Corps, asking me to stay as close as possible to the third, which I did during the whole march. The paths were in extremely bad condition, so the march was very slow and hard and the third Corps forced us to stop frequently, as it often happens when the column in front is very long. The front of the third Division arrived in Sart-lez-Walhain around half past twelve; we had been hearing for about half an hour a very loud engagement from the artillery and the musketry.

The General in Chief, who had been waiting for the front of his column, gave me once again the order to have the Corps march quickly and as close as possible, still following the third Corps. Then, the General in Chief moved forward again. Very soon afterwards, or maybe nearly at the same time, the front of the third Corps took an engagement in front of our direction, which didn't stop the march. This happened in Barraques and did not last long. From there, the fourth column's head received the order to go towards the left of Wavre, on the steep heights which are in front of the Bierge mill. This position was occupied by several pieces of artillery belonging to the third Corps; the front of the fourth Corps arrived there at half past three or at four, exactly when the third Corps' troops retired from Wavre.

I received the order to stop behind and beside this artillery; the other divisions gathered behind, between the two woods, about half an hour after I arrived. On these heights, the General in Chief

came himself to give me the order to have a battalion attack the Bierge mill. A battalion from the third Corps had already tried to take this position and I was to replace this battalion.

I immediately took one battalion from the 9th Léger and put myself in charge of this attack. One should describe here the position of the mill on the river Dyle above Wavre: once I was down the hill, the Bierge mill was within firing range. The swamped meadows are organised in parallel lines to the river, with ditches in between them too deep and too large to be crossed. They contained four, five and six feet of water. These ditches are to be found everywhere from Limale to Wavre. There are woods along the river Dyle and the Prussian infantry was hiding in the mill itself and on the left bank of the river. The hillside was full of troops and artillery and their fire, coming also from the mill and the bank of the river, continued in this meadow, which we needed to cross in order to get to the bridge of the mill and to take it. Such were the places and the obstacles as I observed them. A battalion from the third Corps had already tried to cross these obstacles.

I thought that going a little more on the left and passing these ditches a little higher, I would find less water. I thus went in that direction at about fire range and my battalion moved forward. I gave orders for the soldiers to run with their heads down and to jump in the ditches if it was impossible to cross them. The first ones to jump almost drowned and only managed to get out with the help of the others. These multiple obstacles stopped the soldiers and discouraged them; my opinion was that this position could not be attacked in this manner.

As I was going back on the heights to report this to the General in Chief, I met him as he was coming down with another battalion. He saw that I had tried and failed and he told me that he himself wanted to attack once again and that my battalion had to support him by going more forward. The attack was indeed attempted once again. The General in Chief and the officers from his General Staff participated in this last effort. Unfortunately, there was no positive result and only bad consequences. Indeed, the General in Chief received a bullet in his chest.

Marshall Grouchy arrived at this exact moment. He was probably convinced that if we wanted to take the mill, we needed to do it differently, so he gave the order that only the two battalions from the third Division which were there, stay at the foot of the heights. I was also told that General Gérard could not command anymore and that I would receive orders from General Vandamme. The Marshal then headed towards Limale together with the two other Divisions from the fourth Corps. At least two hours had gone by since the third Division had arrived on the heights, it was thus six or six and a half when the movement from this two Divisions began.

In this report, I would like to reply to Marshal Grouchy who said that the attack of the Bierge mill was very weak. I do not believe that anybody could challenge the accuracy of this report. It is not my role here to criticize nor to comment the operations of an ex General for whom I have the most profound respect, but, in regards to these circumstances, would it be permitted to ask the following question? Is it normal to think that the Prussian General, who had done so much to be able to defend the Wavre bridge (so much that the Third Corps failed to take it), would not have taken for sure the same precautions to defend the Bierge mill? Indeed, if the Prussians had lost the mill, we would have had an exit and the General's resistance in Wavre would have been useless. The mill should have been attacked, as the General of the third Division did, at the same time as we were trying to take the Wavre bridge. But, as soon as we gave up attacking the bridge, and that we were sure about the fact that the enemy General still wanted to have the advantage at the Bierge mill, it seems to me that it was only logical to look for other possibilities in order to take these positions. I believe that even if the third Division would have been engaged, and even if the whole army Corps itself would have

been engaged, in the same manner as those two battalions were, I mean fighting frontal, we would have had the same result.

On the 19th, at three in the morning, I received the order to go towards Limale with the third Division. I did so immediately. I joined the two other divisions of the fourth Corps on the heights before this position and the third Division was put on second line. Thanks to the Third Corps who joined the fight, the enemy was chased from all of its positions and they abruptly retreated to Brussels.

There were contradictory suppositions about the result of the battle from the day before. This was due to the enemy's offensive movement undertaken since the morning and their perseverant resistance followed by their quick retreat. It was also due to the fact that no one had news from Napoleon. The generals were looking for each other to communicate their ideas; Marshal Grouchy finally arrived and joined the others. It was about ten o'clock. He confirmed that he had no news from the Emperor.

At that moment, Marshal Grouchy called the generals who were in a distance from the group and he explained that he felt he needed to save his honour by giving explanations about the military dispositions of the day before. He wanted us to know that the instructions he had had left him no choice but to manoeuvre on Wavre. He praised General Gérard's talent and his brilliant value, whom on this matter had a different opinion than General Vandamme and himself. But, whatever was happening to the rest of the army, he had no choice but to act as the orders told him to. Some other generals will probably remember the same words from the Marshal.

Soon afterwards, an officer from the General Staff came to inform us about the Waterloo disaster. Just after this fatal piece of news, Marshal Grouchy decided to have his army leave Namur via Gembloux. He gave orders for all the artillery of the third Corps to start the movement, for the third Division to go again towards Limale's bridge and take a position on the right bank; he watched the parade for the fourth Cavalry Corps and was at its rear-guard. I executed his orders. Only a small part of the Cavalry followed our movement. I arrived in Gembloux at about nine at night and I received the order to follow the two other divisions on the road to Templeuve, where more instructions were to be given. For my division, this march was the most terrible one could imagine. The paths were in a deplorable state, the soldiers were falling down from tiredness and sleep along this long road and finally, the division was united just before Templeuve only on the 20th at five in the morning.

Before eight o'clock, the enemy was at our outposts, but only for reconnaissance. Marshal Grouchy was himself in Templeuve and gave the order to start the retreat movement towards Namur. At that moment, we heard an engagement behind us on the right and we observed that the third Corps had left the main road before the time that was indicated. Consequently, our right was exposed and our retreat road was fired by cannons and by the enemy's troops. Thanks to General Vichery's good dispositions and our firm composure, we were not undermined. During the whole day, we were on the main road to Namur with the third Corps and then on the road from Namur to Dinan, where the fourth Corps camped. On the next day, the General in Chief went towards Givet and from there, via Rocroy, Signy-l'Abbaye, Launois, Rethel, Reims, and on to Soissons where he joined what was left of Waterloo.

I would like here to mention a fact that will honour Colonel Lavigne and his regiment. All of the artillery's guard had been assigned to the 50th since the first day of the retreat. Just after Villers-Cotteret's woods, an infantry unit from the enemy and several cavalry squadrons arrived unexpectedly on the road, with cannons, and they attacked the head of the 50th, which opened the march for the artillery. Colonel Lavigne did not worry about how many they were and only paid attention to what the situation demanded. He immediately had his troops charge so vigorously, that

the enemies were chased extremely rapidly until Villers-Cotteret. There, he kept the enemy in a distance, until a division of the cavalry, which was far behind, came to take part in this action, which stopped at that moment.

After the woods, General Vandamme had the two army Corps go on the left on the road to Meaux. Once he got there with his two Corps, General Vandamme wanted to cross the river Marne and then head to Paris, going along the Marne's left bank. The third Division had already gone half a league in this direction, when they received the order to pass again across the river Marne (backwards) in Meaux and to follow the other Divisions which were in forced march towards Paris, going along the Marne's right bank. Once the fourth Corps arrived in Paris, they were stationed at the bivouac before Vaugirard, the third Corps being on the left side of the line and in connection through its positions with the ones at the Montrouge camp.

Two days after occupying this position, I received the order from General Vandamme to go with the third Division to the Château de Bellevue and to settle there. Once I did the movement and the reconnaissance of the field, which I found was very unfavourable for combat, I asked to go with most of my troops before the woods, in the direction of Versailles, in order to have a better coverage of all the exits of this town, or to leave only two battalions in Bellevue and to take position with the rest on the heights, behind the exits of Sèvres and Meudon. These heights are planted with vineyards and thus gave me a very good defensive position, whereas in Bellevue, I could not do any manoeuvre without being immediately on a very stiff side of the mountain towards the Seine river. Nevertheless, I received the order to stay in Bellevue. I then spread the line from the main road before Sèvres, which a battalion guarded until the Meudon's castle.

Immediately afterwards, on the 1st of July, General Excelmans sent me one of his officers to tell me he was to do a cavalry movement on Versailles and he also asked if I did receive an order to assist him. In fact, I had just received the opposite order, not to leave my position. But I felt that an infantry Corps could be very useful for his expedition, so I decided by myself to order to colonel Paulini (commanding the 44th) to reach the road from Sèvres to Versailles and to follow General Excelmans' orders. Since then, I was very happy to learn from this general himself that this brave regiment had indeed been very useful to him for his brilliant expedition and that it had ensured its success. Colonel Paulini and his troops showed the most total dedication. This regiment joined me in Bellevue only on the next morning, July 2nd.⁴

⁴ Here are several passages from the last volume of *Victoires et Conquêtes*, which deal with the participation of Hulot's division's troops in the battles of Sèvres and Rocquencourt:

July 1st – "At the crossroad between Bièvres and Versailles, boarding the woods of Verrières, General Excelmans met a Prussian vanguard with two regiments of hussars going forth on trotting horses and shouting: *Paris! Paris!* General Vincent's brigade, with the 15th and the 20th Dragons immediately attacked the Prussians... the hussar enemies were soon defeated, chased with sabres until Versailles. They passed through Versailles on galloping horses and reached Saint-Germain through Rocquencourt. There, they found General Piré's ambush. The first and the sixth regiments of chasseurs, which the colonels Faudoas and Simmonneau commanded, attacked this troop of hussars, which was already in total disorder. At the same time, the 44th Infantry regiment was shooting at them from a very small distance. Out of these 1,500 hussars, 1,000 to 1,100 were made prisoners."

July 2nd – the Sèvres battle. "Around eight, infantry soldiers from General Vandamme's Corps, coming from Issy and Vanves, went forth on the left bank of the river, in order to create a distraction from the Sèvres attack, and they hassled greatly the enemy, on the side and behind them. The battle lasted until ten o'clock, when the two parties stopped the fire."

On the July 3rd, the Prussians started again small attacks on both bridges in Sèvres and Saint-Cloud, but then the armistice was signed and it put an end to the hostilities.

Versailles was occupied by the enemy during the night. All the information that I had confirmed that they were planning an offensive movement on us. I communicated this information and then I waited for the enemy, while General Toussaint was with part of his brigade and all of our artillery behind the ravine and the exits of Sèvres and Meudon. All of my outposts were attacked at noon. The 111th battalion, which was covering Sèvres in the front, was strongly attacked. I defended my position only as long as it was needed for my Grand Gardes to come back; they were in the paths before the woods. I did not lose any soldier and only had a few wounded in the 111th.

As I retrieved my troops to form them again on the heights where General Toussaint was positioned, I received an order from General Vichery to come and take the position where his division was, before Vaugirard and on the left of the road. General Morio de l'Isle⁵ was commanding the division and he had taken it on the heights before Issy, where it received the choc of the enemy.

After it had heroically resisted, this division was forced to retreat at night. It was then reformed in Vaugirard. The enemy took Issy very quickly and the outposts of the third Division and the first Division, which were on the road's right, were strongly attacked. There were shootings and canons were roaring during the whole night. We stayed up all night, with the arms.

During the night, the Prussian outposts were in between ours and when the day broke on the next morning, July 3rd, they retreated. The fight started again⁶ and General Vichery had just been wounded, when the French Parliament members signed a truce which put an end to the hostilities. On that day, the third Division, which had received several detachments since the 16th of June battle, still had at least 4,500 men. Order and discipline were still the spirit and it stayed like that until the termination. At the same time, starting on the truce day, many men deserted, which was not the case before. At the moment of termination, the four Infantry regiments only had 2,500 or 2,600 men. The artillery was in perfect state and had not lost anything to the enemy or while fighting.

Signed: General Hulot.

⁵ General Hulot's cousin by marriage.

⁶ In this report, General Hulot does not mention the beautiful result of the strong fight he led against the Prussian infantry on the morning of July 3rd in the parc of Issy. His troops had just captured a brigade when the news of the armistice reached them.

Letter on the Belgium Campaign, on the role of the right wing of the army and in particular on the role of the Imperial army's third division of the fourth Corps in 1815.

Apart from the report General Hulot wrote to General Gérard, Hulot also wrote to General Berton, as we will see below, a letter about the three days Ligny – Gembloux – Wavre, and the letter he wrote was strictly identical to the report. We are thus mentioning this letter just for the record, and we will publish the following document, which is less technical and less hierarchical than the preceding one, but nevertheless as interesting and instructive.

It is the exact reproduction of a letter which was written after Marshal Grouchy's booklet was published. General Hulot wrote it to a colonel whose name is blanked in the manuscript, but who was probably Colonel Janin, a distinguished military writer, who wrote many articles in the *Spectateur militaire*, among which an analysis of Marshal Grouchy and Marshal Gérard's publications about the Waterloo campaign.

This document completes the first one and it summarizes with lots of tact and lots of focus everything that was written on the subject. We do not know anyone else with a brighter character, combining at the same time a very moderate and impartial nature.

Donchery, September 18th, 1819

My dear Colonel,

When I came back home from inspection, I found Marshal Grouchy's booklet and the letter you wrote to me about it. I thank you for both and I agree with you about many of the feelings you had about it. Nevertheless, since you are mentioning General Berton's book, I would tell you that regarding the day of the 16th, I believe as he does that one should not only blame Marshal Ney nor only the Count d'Erlon. I have problems believing that his Corps was left in Frasnes without the Emperor asking specifically for it.⁷

After having read everything that has been written so far about that particular day, here are the questions one can legitimately ask:

One could ask if Napoleon's project for the 16th was to crush the Prussian army or the English army or perhaps both? He probably did not expect to find so much resistance from neither one, and perhaps this resistance made him change his plans? In this case, would it be not the cause for Drouet d'Erlon's hesitations and for the poor results of the two battles, Quatre-Bras and Ligny? General

⁷ "The movements of the first Corps are hard to explain. On the night of the 15th to the 16th, it was wrongly made to stay between Marchiennes and Jumet and then, it went towards Fleurus, on the road from Charleroi to Brussels. Did Marshal Ney misunderstand the order to create a diversion behind the Prussian army, once he was mastering the Quatre-Bras? Or did the Count d'Erlon, when he arrived between Gosselies and Frasnes and heard a strong cannonade on his right and nothing from the Quatre-Bras, think it was better to go towards where he heard the fire was coming from? Otherwise, if he would have stayed on the main road, he would have left this point behind him. This Corps did yet another wrong movement, when on the evening of the 16th, Count d'Erlon learned that the village of Saint-Amand was captured and decided to march again on the side to go back towards where Marshal Ney was. D'Erlon joined Ney at nine in the evening. Thus, this whole Corps was useful nowhere." (p.66, *Campagne de 1815 du général Gourgaud*). Not a single word about Napoleon. One could thus understand from this passage that Napoleon and the Major-General Soult were a hundred leagues away, or that they had given the permission to Drouet d'Erlon to do what he wanted and walk in zig-zags on the battle field.

Gourgaud did not mention these questions. Let us go on with commenting Marshal Grouchy's booklet.

On the 17th, as soon as the day broke, one should have followed Blücher in all of his directions, instead of sending too late General Pajol to Namur and Excelmans to Gembloux.

It is true that the Emperor gave Grouchy the commandment of the whole right wing of the army, but the Marshal, who is a man of great merit, had never commanded such a number of forces, and it is thus possible that he did not have all the necessary self-assurance to impose his will upon his lieutenants.

His mission was difficult, especially since Vandamme was under his orders. Vandamme was chief of Corps; he was tenacious and straight-forward in his judgements; he liked contradiction and independence; and he supported his opinions with eloquence and vehemence. Thus, the people he spoke to sometimes joined him in his opinions, thanks to his more or less specious arguments.

On the 17th, one can also only agree that Marshal Grouchy got his orders too late and that these orders lacked precision. I also remember that General Gérard's Corps was not able to march before three or four in the afternoon.

General Vandamme's Corps was before General Gérard's, which I was touching with the head of my column: this is where one can see Grouchy's enormous mistake. Even if Gérard's would have had supernatural powers, his Corps could not walk on Vandamme's, nor could it go faster than Gérard's. One can ask, what does the Marshal actually criticize in this march? I was positioned with my division behind Gembloux and on the 17th at seven in the evening I was very near, as I was staying in town. You are telling me that it was about ten when Pêcheux, Vichery and myself arrived with our divisions to take position behind Gembloux. You are wrong here. There was still a lot of daylight when I arrived at my position. The officer who had showed me this position also pointed at villages that the General in Chief wanted me to occupy, beyond the ravine and on the right of Gembloux. I showed these points to the Battalion Chief – and we were able to see them clearly – and he arrived there when there was still daylight, although he walked an hour to get there because of the ravine. It is true that the other divisions arrived later, but they could have passed the main road on the same day and Vandamme's Corps could walk two or three leagues more in front of us.

On the 17th, why did not anyone tell me to pass the main road before the end of the day and walk two leagues on Wavre's line? Our whole fourth Corps could do it easily, if only the third Corps would equally move afront, we would have had enough space to go through. It is true though that during the night, the weather was terrible. Nevertheless, although we did not move more on that day, one has to admit that we could have gone on the 18th at four in the morning. The third Corps was cluttering Gembloux and the road before Sart-lez-Valhain⁸ and thus, although we had taken up arms at seven in the morning on the 18th (General Gérard's order, which I am reading right now, was to start marching only at eight in the morning, in order to leave enough time for the third Corps to clear the road), my division passed the town at nine in the morning. Then, the fourth Division stopped for a good while, staying in tight columns, so that the third Corps (once more I came upon its rear on the main road) would have enough time to move forward and make room for us.

During the whole time we marched towards Wavre, I was still touching the rear end of the third Corps with the head of my column. I was thus forced to stop a few times, as it often happens when

⁸ General Hulot had naturally adopted the spelling accepted by French historians of his time; he wrote Sart-à-Valhain. We are relocating to the names of Belgian localities, the general spelling of General Brialmont which we believe should be authoritative in the matter.

an army is marching. We had done about two thirds of the way from Gembloux to Sart-lez-Valhain when we heard gun and cannon shots on our left. They were very loud when we arrived in Sart-lez-Valhain. I saw Marshal Grouchy when it was eleven in the morning or noon, as much as I can remember.

As I stayed during the whole time at the head of my division, I did not know exactly on which point we were marching, and I remember that when I saw General Gérard, who passed in front of me at that moment, I told him how surprised I was that we were insisting so much on the right; he was in a very bad mood and showed his disapproval .

I then spoke with a few officers from his suite, who told me which proposition he made to the Marshal: because the Marshal had refused to go to the cannons, General Gérard was not happy with him. At the same time, the engagement of the Barraques started and I learned that Vandamme's opinion prevailed over Gérard's and the right wing was definitively marching towards Wavre.

Everything that had to do with this wing went wrong at the same moment and everybody spoke about it. I add here that I was convinced that we were doing a manoeuvre that was wrong; officers and soldiers also felt it instinctively; they even said it a bit too loudly.

I interrupt this account here to add a circumstance which could prove that Marshal Grouchy was made blind by all of General Vandamme's arguments. General Excelmans told me in Riom (?) that he recognised and followed with his Dragoons Blücher's Corps' movement on the side as they went towards Waterloo and he said that he reported it to the Marshal. If I am correct, you should be able to check this with Excelmans.

Let me go on: the engagement of the Barraques did not last and I arrived with the first of my battalions on the heights, on the left of Wavre and in front of the Bierge windmill. At the same moment, Vandamme was fighting in Wavre. All of my division came together and made a pause on these heights. The others stopped behind in the woods. As the attack on the Wavre bridge was not a success, the General in Chief gave me the order to attack the Bierge windmill with one battalion. One would need to describe here this windmill's situation and how difficult it is to approach. You know that, as well as you know how many troops and cannons were there to defend it; I do not need to repeat that.

The Marshal pretends that the attack was weak, but General Gérard and himself came to renew it; why did they not have a stronger attack then? It would have been better if Marshal Grouchy would have admitted that the difficulties were too big in order to only arrive in front of this windmill, because of the swamps, the canals and the ditches; it was simply impossible to succeed. The way we attacked the windmill, as the Marshal wanted it, only resulted in men being killed and that was all. When one is used to numerous small wars, one should know that you never attack where the enemy wants you to attack.

I came down from the heights with a battalion from the 9e Léger, in order to lead it (one knows how the 9e was fighting!). Down there, I found another battalion from the third Corps, who had already tried to attack the same point, unsuccessfully. The officers and the chief of this battalion told me what difficulties they encountered. They told me that a few Voltigeurs had drowned and an officer told me, which I believe, that since the bridge was cut off, it was more difficult to pass the river Dyle at that particular point than anywhere else.

I ordered my battalion to attack strongly on the left and at the same time I asked the commander of the third Corps to also renew his efforts, which he did immediately.

But as soon as we attacked the position, we were stopped by very deep ditches which were impossible to cross. The soldiers and the officers jumped into the ditches even if they risked to drown, but the nearer we got to the river, the more obstacles there were. If one adds to these obstacles the enemy's resistance – they were hidden and covered, in the windmill and on the other side of the river Dyle and they were protected by their cannons firing, one will understand that it was thus impossible for this attack to be a success.

As I was going back up to General Gérard, to explain to him why the attack had not been a success, I saw him come down with a battalion. He told me as he passed by me that we needed to attack again. Then Marshal Grouchy came, we indeed attacked again, with also a fresh third battalion which General Gérard was leading. He was at the head of this third battalion with all of his officers when they attacked, but the same efforts and the same obstacles resulted in the same failure.

General Gérard was wounded and had to leave the commandment; General Grouchy who was probably convinced that the attack was impossible, gave up as well, although he did so after two hours! I think it was seven when he decided to take our two other divisions towards Limale. My division slept on the heights and it was only on the 19th, at four in the morning that the division left to join the others.

On the 19th, my division was not engaged in the fighting, although it covered the fourth division's retreat until Templeuve. I knew that all of the position artillery and the parcs had received the order to go back to Namur and no one had thought about them being covered, so I decided to give the order to Colonel Lavigne to escort them with his regiment, the 50th. I was then left with three regiments myself. (The 16th Battalion, which behaved so admirably, did belong to the 50th Regiment – and not to the 70th). I am mentioning this fact because it gave Colonel Lavigne the possibility and the honour to save the big artillery and the parcs in Villers-Cotteret when they were attacked by a very strong cavalry.

The fourth Corps went towards Namur via Gembloux and Templeuve, where my division was complete only at six in the morning on the 20th, because of the march during the night and because I was in charge of the rear guard. The third Corps left Namur through the main road, it left its positions much too early and thus let the enemy penetrate between Namur and Templeuve on the road which we were meant to follow. Fortunately, everybody kept a level head, we needed to re-establish our communication and thus march under fire. Thanks to the good attitude of our troops, we managed to keep the enemy in a distance. Nothing happened from Namur to Givet.

My dear Colonel, I believe this is all you ask from me. From Givet to Paris, the retreat took place in great order, as far as the fourth Corps is concerned.

The incident in Villers-Cotteret shows how much the service was already neglected: there was no cavalry piquet at the head of the artillery convoy in order to open its march and the exact same day, in the morning, a cavalry General had his artillery taken away from where it was! In Meaux, General Vandamme nearly had the same kind of misadventure, in fact this was a prelude to what would happen to his Corps in Paris.

Even though you are asking me about the relation of the operations for the 14th division in the 1815 Campaign, I will not send you the details about the 15th and the 16th since you read my letter to General Berton and you are in relation with him. I suppose he will lend you this letter and you will find there everything I could write on the subject. General Berton had sent me his booklet asking me what I thought about it, but I lost his address and could not thank him for this attention, nor could I tell him what I thought about his booklet. Meanwhile, while I expressed clearly my opinion about the

1815 campaign, I do not pretend that I was able to judge well everything and I feel it is not the time yet to write an account with neutrality. One thousand things carry the heart and the pen away, and until now, no one was able to write for the sole love of the truth, for the honour of the arms and the homeland. Individual considerations about friendships, hatred, predilection for one's arms and comrades influenced the writing. I feel they should have waited for calmer times in order to write about their subject, as it is indeed a subject in which there are too many occasions to ban men with a brilliant reputation, which they acquired thanks to their great exploits.

Briefly, wanting to exclusively blame such or such Emperor's lieutenant for the failure of this campaign, or even for the failure to reconstitute the empire, is in my opinion, like entering a vicious circle. General Gourgaud can speak, he did not convince and will not convince anybody. As far as the military operations are concerned, we lost everything on the day of the 16th; since the first serious hostilities did not result in a huge stroke on any of the enemy's armies, I believe there were very little chances for a final success.

I only read very partially Marshal Grouchy's booklet, but it seems to me he was wrong when he defended himself in another manner than just saying: "These were my orders: I believed it was my duty to respect them to the letter and I did so". He did not support his cause when he denied receiving General Gérard's advice, when he accused him of being slow when marching (when one knows that on the contrary, this General tends to march quicker than what is prescribed) and when he clearly showed a preference for General Vandamme. If he thought for one moment that he could change the orders he had and march to the cannon rather than go to Wavre, one can say it is not because of obedience that he acted wrongly, but only because he was unable to see things and he lacked genius.

I am pleased to learn that General Gérard will not reply to Marshal Grouchy's attacks. Grouchy's book actually contains Gérard's justification, and its narration proves that his rank as 'General of the Army' was above the author's capacity. Never the less, it is worthy of General Gérard to keep quiet about the personal wrongs that a General officer did to him, which on another side is a very estimable, eminent person, who fought bravely and gave to his country evidence of his commitment. Today and precisely because of this commitment, he is miserable and banned.

When I will be a master of writing, I will imitate General Gérard's silence.

Please receive, my dear Colonel, my sincere feelings of cordiality.

Signed: HULOT.

P.S. – I forgot to write to you about General Grouchy's reflexions (p. 19) about our Corps. Truly, he must have lost his memory!

The forced marches. – We were under his orders on the 17th at noon; on the 18th, at seven in the evening, we were still under his orders, in front of Wavre and we had walked along the direct road: we had barely walked ten leagues.

Partial disorganisation. – I challenge anybody to quote anything which could prove this or even something which would resemble it. And in the facts, would a disorganised Corps fight like they did on the 16th?

Due to different causes. – This is very vague; one would need to at least give one of these causes, but I admit I do not understand the sense of this appreciation.

The impression General Bourmont's defection made on the fourth Corps, etc., this made the movements of this Corps slow and not precise at all. – I can hardly believe that General Grouchy himself wrote such a mistake. His personality is far too aristocratic and loyal to write such a sentence, somebody probably wrote it without him knowing it. On my honour, I say that the impression the defection made, far from calming down the troops' ardour, on the contrary triggered a feeling of patriotism. The troops were even looking for the combat.

It was the same for General Gérard's part of Corps who was in charge of taking the mill of the Bierge. – As you saw it, I had only two battalions of the 9th engaged that day, and I did not have one gun shot fired from my three other regiments!

H.

Documentary evidence regarding the preceding documents on the 1815 Campaign.

The following hand written note gives us General Hulot's opinion on a controversial point in history, which caused military historians of the Restoration to waste a lot of time and paper. Was it Bourmont's arrival at the Prussians' headquarters which forced the allies to come out of their torpor? And would this be why Napoleon's surprise, which was so brilliantly prepared, was a partial or total failure?⁹

"Could the General Count de Bourmont have denounced the major movement that the Emperor wanted to execute in the middle of the enemy's cantonments? With such a movement, one understands that the Emperor would have prevented the Prussian army from concentrating (since this movement did point particularly at the Prussian army) and would have thus caused its end.

It is not that I would pretend to answer this question, but I want to be sure of the facts and I wonder if it is indeed Bourmont's defection (and only his defection) that warned the enemy they needed to unite.

General Bourmont left Florenne on June 15th at five in the morning and then passed the enemy's outposts between six and seven am. The Emperor's cavalry movement had begun and had gone so far that Bourmont and his suite were nearly captured by Grouchy's scouts. It is indeed true that on the 14th, at eight or nine in the evening, Mr. de Bourmont was told by General Gérard that the Marshal had to bivouac the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Cavalry Corps before Beaumont, and he was ordered to keep the road from Florennes to Charleroi open on French territory, in case that road was cut off. Engineering officer Blévée was sent on reconnaissance during the night.

General Bourmont was accused of intelligence with the enemy during the night of the 14th to the 15th, but even if this supposition might appear somewhat true (which is very contestable), it seems that he arrived too late at the Prussian headquarters on the morning of the 15th to be able to give any useful advice, given that the offensive movement of the Cavalry had started before he was even able to announce it himself. Thus, the movement was indeed a surprise for the enemy, but to speak the truth without any result, and the surprise was more for their generals than for their troops. The troops, once attacked, were redeployed, from cantonment to cantonment without any damage for them. However, the villages are so near to each other in this region and its nature is full of culture and land filled with obstacles, that it would have been really difficult for such an operation (*hourrah?*) to be a success and to lead to the dispersion of an army, even if it would have been very well conducted.

I had dinner with Mr. de Bourmont on the 14th and I left him only at 11pm, after he had received General Gérard's letter (which I just spoke about). We imagined many possibilities for the offensive movement that was to take place the next day, but not once did we think of a Cavalry movement, which would have been in a way isolated amongst the Prussian cantonments.

We felt it was impossible for the enemy to ignore our movements and we didn't even think that they might be surprised. Nevertheless, the state in which we found the Prussian army when first attacked on the morning of the 15th, does show, as any competent officer would conclude, that *the enemy was indeed surprised, both troops and generals.*

⁹ See the *Memorial of Saint Helena* and other military works of the same time.

Thus, one must conclude that General Bourmont did not and could not notify in advance the enemy about Marshal Grouchy's attack. As a matter of fact, as I wrote before, I do have the written evidence that he left Florenne, with the officers who were with him, only on the 15th of June, between five and six in the morning."

At the foot of the preceding note, General Hulot added another one which is not related and summarizes his thoughts about Grouchy's march from the 17th and 18th of June:

"One blames Marshal Grouchy for having lost time, as he slept on the 17th in Gembloux. He also could have gained some precious time on the next day if, at 11 or noon, when he heard the cannons and the musketry on the left, he had decided for the fourth Corps to go along a diagonal line and for the cavalry and part of the third Corps, to go directly on the battle field of the Emperor."

One can remark that when General Hulot wrote the note about the Count of Bourmont, he did not know (and neither did the authors of the *Mémorial*) that the drum major had deserted (or perhaps it was the Guard drummer according to others). This happened during the evening of the 14th, just before the morning when General Bourmont and his general staff left. This does confirm General Hulot's argumentation about the surprise. According to Mudfort, although Wellington and Blücher did imagine that Napoleon could invade Belgium, they did not expect that he would initiate the offensive and they had thus left the allies' forces clumsily scattered.

On the other hand, the Belgian general Brialmont¹⁰ quotes in his book the letter which Wellington wrote to the Emperor of Austria about the invasion of the French territory, on the exact same day that the Imperial army crossed the river Sambre. In this letter, he does not speak about a possibility for the enemy to attack, but he writes that he thinks Bonaparte would not dare to invade Belgium while the Anglo-Prussian forces were there. This explains why the allies were indeed surprised, and as General Hulot confirms, he witnessed it himself. At the same time, this also explains that although there was this first moment's surprise, the allies compensated the effects of the surprise and they repaired their fault by executing very effectively and fast the concentration orders sent by Wellington during the evening of the 15th.

Thus, history does confirm General Hulot's judgement, by explaining what he himself left unexplained, because he was not aware of the drum soldier's desertion.

One should also note how generous it was of General Hulot to ask for mitigating circumstances for his chief of Division, when one would expect more to see him among his main accusers, mostly because of his situation regarding General Bourmont.

¹⁰ *The Story of the Duke Of Wellington*

The evidences for the preceding pieces are: the note directly above, the Movement order and the letters which follows below.

The Army of Moselle – confidential¹¹

Headquarters, Philippeville.
June 14th, 1815.

To: Lieutenant-General Bourmont in Florennes

My dear General,

Marshal Grouchy had to bring the first, second, third and fourth Corps of Cavalry to bivouac, ahead of Beaumont, between this town and Walcourt.

You must stay carefully on your right and ahead of you, mainly in the directions of Charleroi and Namur.

Please contact the custom posts all along the border line, the chief of customs is in Florennes.

Have someone report to you whether the roads are cut off on the French territory, specifically the ones which lead to Charleroi? If some roads are indeed cut off, you should request the right number of inhabitants and have them repair the communications during the next night, in order to have the roads practicable again.

I ask you, my dear General, to send me a report today about it.

The General in Chief, Comte Gérard.

P.S. – Make sure the communications between Florennes to Charleroi are good.

Florennes, June 14th, 1815 at midnight¹²

My dear General,

You know the order I gave regarding the roads, about which the General in Chief writes in the attached letter. As it is possible that I will leave tomorrow morning, could you please send an officer from your brigade, very early, to Hauzinelle and to Hauzinne, via Mériamé, to make sure one is working to repair the Charleroi road.

If ever an incident should happen, I would ask you to give orders in the name of the General in Chief, as I could give them myself, in order to eliminate any inconvenience that could be. You should also report it immediately.

With faithful and lasting dedication,

The Lieutenant General, DE BOURMONT.

¹¹ This handwritten letter was given to General Hulot, at the same time as the following one.

¹² This letter, closed with a seal from General de Bourmont is entirely written by him, text and signature. The envelope has the subscription *Service militaire*: and – To the Field Marshal Hulot, Commander of the first brigade of the 14th division in Florennes. – Lieutenant-General, BOURMONT.

The following letter is added to this report – it was recently discovered in a private collection.

Florenne, le 14 juin 1815

Mon Général,

En conséquence de votre ordre de ce jour, j'ai placé des postes sur la route de Charleroi et celle de Namur. J'ai vu l'inspecteur des douanes et ses brigades nous servent d'avant-poste sur ces deux routes. La route de Namur pour Dinant n'a pas été coupée. Le maire, l'inspecteur des forêts et l'inspecteur des douanes s'accordent sur ce point.

La route de Charleroi a été coupée à [Marinsmé], à Hanzinelle et à Hanzine, j'ai ordonné au nom de votre Excellence aux maires de ces communes de rassembler ce soir tous les hommes en état de travailler à rendre ces routes praticables, j'ai chargé l'administration des douanes et celle des forêts de veiller à l'exécution de cet ordre et demain au point du jour un officier du Génie ira reconnaître l'état des travaux et faire garnir de madriers les passages qui pourraient en avoir besoin.

Les [coupans] sont dits avec des fossés de [13] [pouces] de largeur, cela doit être comblé en peu d'heures et je ne doute pas que la route soit praticable demain de très bonne heure.

La meilleure route de Florenne à Charleroi passe, à ce qu'on m'assure, par [Marinsmé], Hanzinelle, Hanzinne, Haérez ferme de la [Bierlerre] et Martinelle, mais il y en a d'autres dont on pourrait se servir quoiqu'elles paraissent moins bonnes.

Agréé je vous prie mon Général l'hommage de mon respectueux attachement.

Le Lieutenant Général

L. de Bourmont

Translation :

As a result of your order of the day, I have placed posts on the Charleroi and Namur roads. I saw the customs inspector and his brigades serve as an outpost on these two roads. The road from Namur to Dinant has not been cut. The mayor, the forest inspector, and the customs inspector agree on this point.

The road from Charleroi has been cut at [Marinsmé], Hanzinelle and Hanzine. I ordered in the name of your Excellency the mayors of these communes to assemble this evening all the men able to work and make these roads passable. I have instructed the customs administration and that of the forests to ensure the execution of this order and tomorrow at daybreak an officer of engineers will go to recognize the state of the works and have the passages which might need them fitted with planks. The [coupans] are said to have ditches [13][inches] wide, that must be filled in a few hours and I have no doubt that the road will be passable tomorrow very early.

The best route from Florenne to Charleroi passes, as I know, through [Marinsmé], Hanzinelle, Hanzinne, Haérez ferm de la [Bierlerre] and Martinelle, but there are others that we could use although they look less good.

Please accept, General, the tribute of my respectful attachment.

The Army of Moselle

At the Headquarters in Gembloux,

June 18th, 1815.

To the Field-Marshal Hulot, Commander of the 14th Division.

Order of Movement.

Today, June 18th, at eight in the morning, the Army of Moselle will start marching in the same order as yesterday, to go to Sart-à-Walhain, following General Vandamme's Army Corps.

The troops will immediately receive some brandy and, after their first rest, they will receive a second distribution of brandy.

The General in Chief, Comte GÉRARD.

Letters from the General GÉRARD

The two following letters were written in 1818 (*1820 in the margin*) by General Gérard. They have the same mention: To the Camp-Marshal Hulot, in Donchery-Sedan, Département of the Ardennes.

The parts of the letters which had no historic interest were removed. The excerpts which are published here are the exact reproduction of the original documents.

The first letter's goal was surely to ask General Hulot to send the report about the operations of the third division of the fourth Corps in 1815 which we published at the beginning of this book. The second letter is the confirmation receipt of the report.

Villers-Saint-Paul, near and via Creil,
Département of Oise. – This January, the 30th.

You know for sure, my dear General, what was published about the military events of 1815. You also know that Marshal Grouchy wrote an answer to justify himself about the role he supposedly played in the disastrous results of this campaign, painful to remember. His work is remarkable in the way he mixes up places, distances and time; and the fourth Corps and its chief are treated very severely.

At the time when it was published, several officers asked me to reply immediately and to correct all of the wrong assertions, but I resisted in an obstinate manner. These officers had been the direct witnesses of what had happened and they were angry with how maliciously the Count of Grouchy presented the facts related to my Corps. I even asked a person who very much wanted to clarify the facts and tell the truth to give up the idea. What decided me were ideas related to the interest of my opponent. I found it would have been little generous of me to engage in a public debate with one of our oldest generals being absent, and under a long and rigorous proscription. I myself abhor attracting attention and decided thus to stay modest and silent. Nevertheless, I was waiting for the right moment to speak, the moment when Mr. de Grouchy would be back, to have an explanation with him.

This moment came earlier than I thought, as the new memoirs were published and Grouchy's son added a complaint in the *Constitutionnel*, in which he said, among other things, that General Gérard joined the Commander in Chief on the 18th only at three, and that the advice he gave to march towards the cannon on the left, was bound to be useless since the action was five leagues away.

This letter from Colonel Grouchy made me want to break the silence; I immediately wrote as a reply a letter to him, and this answer was meant to be published in the newspapers. He then quickly replied to me, asking me not to publish my comments and he also proposed to write himself the retraction that I wanted. Moreover, he promised to erase from his father's Memoirs any extract I wanted or that could be unfortunate, either for me or for my troops. Under these conditions, I decided not to print my declaration, although it gave absolute exact facts and it also gave written evidence that one could not contest. I do not enjoy at all public confrontation and this is why this seemed like the perfect solution; I was satisfied on every point.

First, Colonel Grouchy finally agreed about the facts in Sart-à-Walhain; it was *about noon* when I said I wanted to march towards the cannon of the Emperor via the bridge of Moustier. I am now writing to Colonel Grouchy, in order to give him my notes to correct several assertions about the fourth Corps; there is only one missing piece of information which I need to finish this report, you or the officer who was in charge of the battalion going to the mill in Bierge should be able to give it to me. I wish to know, as exactly as possible, the time it was when the battalion attacked the mill. I remember perfectly well that I gave you the order to relay the troops of the third Corps when they had failed.

My dear General, if you could please tell me everything that you know about this movement. Regarding the groundless accusations that my troops were slow and badly organized, I am able to prove that they are absolutely wrong. If things were slow on the 17th and the 18th, it can only be the Commander in Chief's fault. Why did he have 35,000 men on one single dirt path which was in a bad condition, due to the Prussians' retreat and the rain which had been falling for two days?

The truth is nothing can be reproached to the troops; on the contrary they were very brave, full of ardour and dedication. I do not think the troops ever acted more bravely than in Ligny and Sombrefe. Just with your division, you managed to hold this position against more than 20,000 Prussians. One says nevertheless that it was badly organized!¹³

Please be assured, my dear General, of my sincerest friendship,

Count Gérard.

Villers-Saint-Paul, this February 11th.

I am very grateful, my dear General, for the report you kindly sent me. It absolutely matches what I knew already, as well as all the information I was given by people who witnessed what happened at the time. I believe that the Marquis de Grouchy's son, who supposedly wrote his memoirs, will very much regret to have had them published.

He should not have published as he did, hurting and unfair assertions against officers who would have been the first to join him with all of their strength, in order to push back or at least modify the wrongs which have been attributed to the Marshal in these disastrous times. I myself blamed in the past the ones who wanted to draw back the attention on these sad events and the ones who were more or less the cause of these events. When one is struck by such a tragedy, one needs to resign

¹³ It is for those two last paragraphs in particular that I believe it was right to publish General Gérard's letter.

and stay silent. Most, it is important to avoid loud debates which will only make our eternal enemies very happy.

My dear Hulot, I am happy to see that you decided to live in a way which I believe is the wisest; you are in the country, with your family. I decided to do the same since I came back to France. Sometimes, I spend seven or eight months without going to Paris and it is always reluctantly that I go back for the errands which need to be taken care of. I was very fortunate to meet an adorable wife, she already gave me two sons, growing before my eyes. What a sweet life to be leaving among one's family!¹⁴

Please be assured once more, my dear General, of my sincerest friendship,

Count Gérard.

¹⁴ Reading this correspondence, one understands easily the wrong the Restoration's government did to itself, as soon as it came back, when avoiding the services of such unique generals, with such a personality. – General Gérard married General Valence's daughter.