

Appendix 4

Bertrand's Letter of 10 June 1815

A New Piece in the Puzzle

I

In the first volume of my *Waterloo* I drew attention to Napoleon's abrupt style in command. He could take sudden snap decisions, could order re-organisations, could send away his chief of staff within days of the opening of the campaign, could issue orders, then suddenly change them. This could leave his subordinates puzzled and uncertain of how to resolve conflicting orders and even contradictions. I suggested that it was a material factor in the operations of the *Armée du Nord* in its final desperate campaign, when the short time-schedule, the adverse odds in manpower, the distances involved, and the quality of the enemy's leadership made prompt and crystal-clear orders absolutely vital.¹

While my first volume was in the press a further instance was kindly brought to my attention by Mr Stephen M. Beckett, a newly discovered letter from a sale by Christie's in 2015. Until then we had relied upon Napoleon's Order of the Day of 10 June 1815, an order that I shall here term A. Now we also have a letter from Napoleon's Grand Marshal of the Palace General Bertrand, likewise dated 10 June 1815, written at Napoleon's behest. This letter, that I shall differentiate as letter B, in several respects conflicts with the Order of the Day.²

I referred to the 10 June Order of the Day in summary terms in my Volume 1, Chapter 19, Section V, and I contrasted it with Soult's own orders to the army that seemed seriously to misinterpret the Order of the Day in certain very material aspects. As my friend Philippe de Callataÿ has said, Soult's misinterpretation of a perfectly clear order seemed 'incredible and incomprehensible'. Letter B from Bertrand goes a long way to explain how the confusion arose. But to make the differences plain I shall now print in full, but in an English translation of my own, the texts both of the Order of the Day³ and the Bertrand letter. I shall then draw some contrasts and comparisons,

and will conclude with a somewhat wider consideration of how orders and indeed general correspondence were handled at imperial headquarters.

II

A. The Order of the Day

Paris, 10 June: Order of the Day,

Positions of the Army on the 13th:

Headquarters and *Garde Impériale* at Avesnes;

Artillery and bridging-train before Avesnes on the glacis;

1er and *2e* Reserve Corps de Cavalerie de la Réserve at Beaumont, the *3e* and *4e* between Avesnes and Beaumont;

6e Corps at Beaumont. Its HQ behind [*derrière*]. If attaining Beaumont proves inconvenient it may stop halfway;

1er Corps at Pont-sur-Sambre [6 miles SW of Maubeuge]. This corps will move without passing Bavay. It will march by Le Quesnoy so keeping away from the enemy and its march-route concealed as long as possible. As one assumes that it should not take more than one day from Valenciennes, its march to arrive at the Sambre will not take place until the 13th;

2e Corps behind [*derrière*] Maubeuge in columns, on the route towards Thuin [*sic*], not passing the frontier; it must take care to be seen as little as possible;

3e Corps Philippeville;

Army of the Moselle [*4e* Corps], Mariembourg.

All communication along the frontier will stop. The soldiers will have four days' bread on their backs, a half-pound of rice, 50 cartridges. The batteries will be with the divisions, reserve batteries with their corps. The light cavalry of each corps will be in front of the corps. Each ambulance to its division. Each division will have on its auxiliary or military wagons eight days' bread, biscuits, and a troop of beasts for eight days.

[*signed*] Napoleon: for the Emperor, the Grand Marshal, Bertrand.

[*There was a postscript*]

No change should be made along the frontier. It must not be crossed at any point. Not a single cannon-shot must be fired. Nothing must be done that could alert the enemy. The present order will remain secret.

[*signed personally*] NAPOLEON.

B. The Bertrand Letter

Paris, 10 June 1815: To his Excellency the Chief of Staff,

Monsieur le Maréchal, The intention of the Emperor remains still to depart at 9 p.m. on Sunday the 11th, to be at Soissons at 4 in the morning, leaving at 9, to be at Laon at noon, and to leave in the evening so as to be at Avesnes at 2 a.m. on the 13th.

The Emperor's intention is that that general headquarters should travel to Avesnes on the 12th; that the *Garde Impériale* follows it on the 12th; that Avesnes should be vacated by *2e Corps* which will move behind Maubeuge; that you should bring Gen Erlon [*sic*] close to Maubeuge behind the Sambre and closed-up to *2e Corps*; and finally that likewise you arrange the forward movement [*déboucher*] of *6e Corps* which must be beyond [*avant*] Avesnes [18 miles west of Beaumont], behind the *2e*; that General Vandamme should be on the right; that he closes up and places himself between Beaumont and Avesnes [that is between 14 and 30 miles west of Philippeville] in such a way that the army shall be on the 12th:

2e Corps in the centre,

1er on the left,

3e on the right,

6e in rear,

Garde Impériale at Avesnes,

The mass of artillery and reserve, bridging-train in front [*en avant*] of Avesnes.

In the context of these dispositions the Emperor on the day of the 13th will see Generals Reille, d'Erlon, Vandamme, and will go forward on the 14th either by Maubeuge on Mons in the hope of attacking the English, or in marching by his right so as to follow the Prussians rapidly from Charleroy.

It is therefore necessary that the army corps [plural] should be placed so as to advance either by Maubeuge to attack Mons or towards the right.

I have the honour to send you the order of the day indicating the position of the army on the 13th; this order must be kept secret. I am sending it to Generals Reille, d'Erlon, Lobau, Vandamme, and I request that your Excellence should communicate it to Marshal Grouchy, to the commissary-in-chief and to the commander-in-chief of the artillery.

General Drouot has sent an order to the Marshal Duc de Treviso [Mortier] concerning the *Garde Impériale*.

The equipages of the Emperor's household are being ordered to move to Avesnes.

Will you please order that no cannon salvo shall be fired at Avesnes or Maubeuge, so that the enemy does not notice any movement. You may fire at Laon.

I remain, etc

Le grand maréchal, [signed] BERTRAND

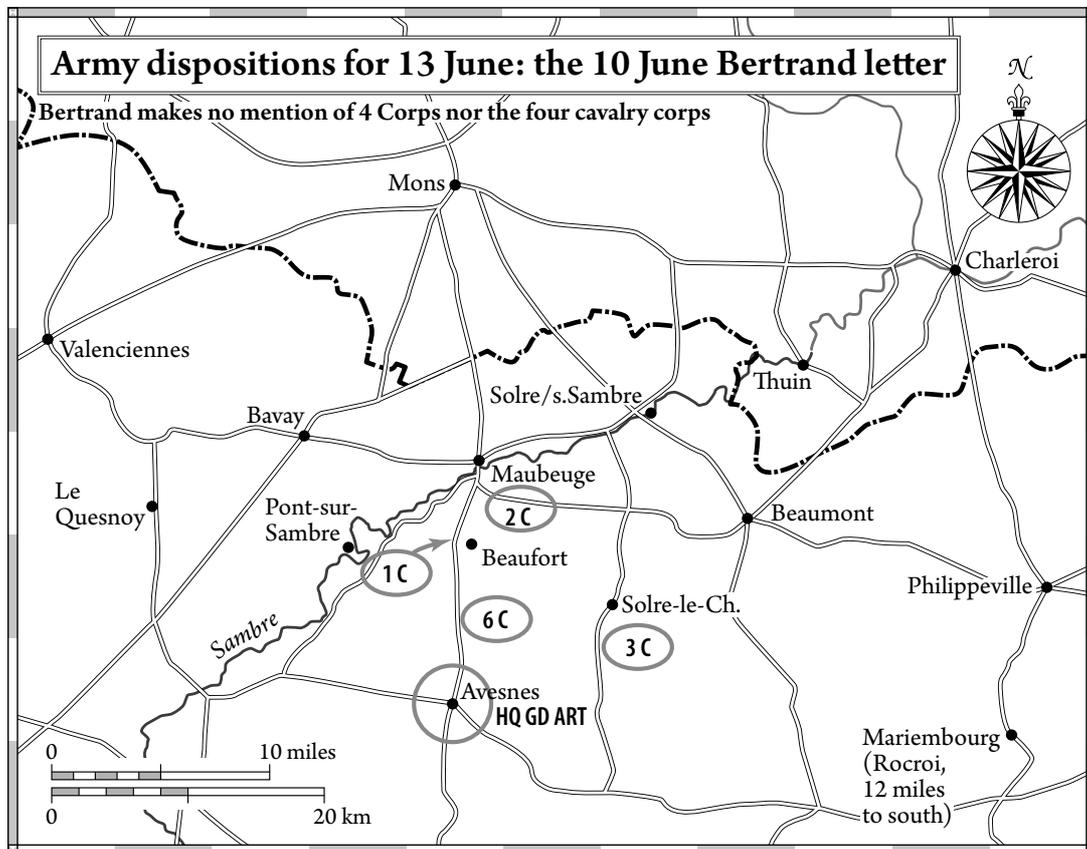
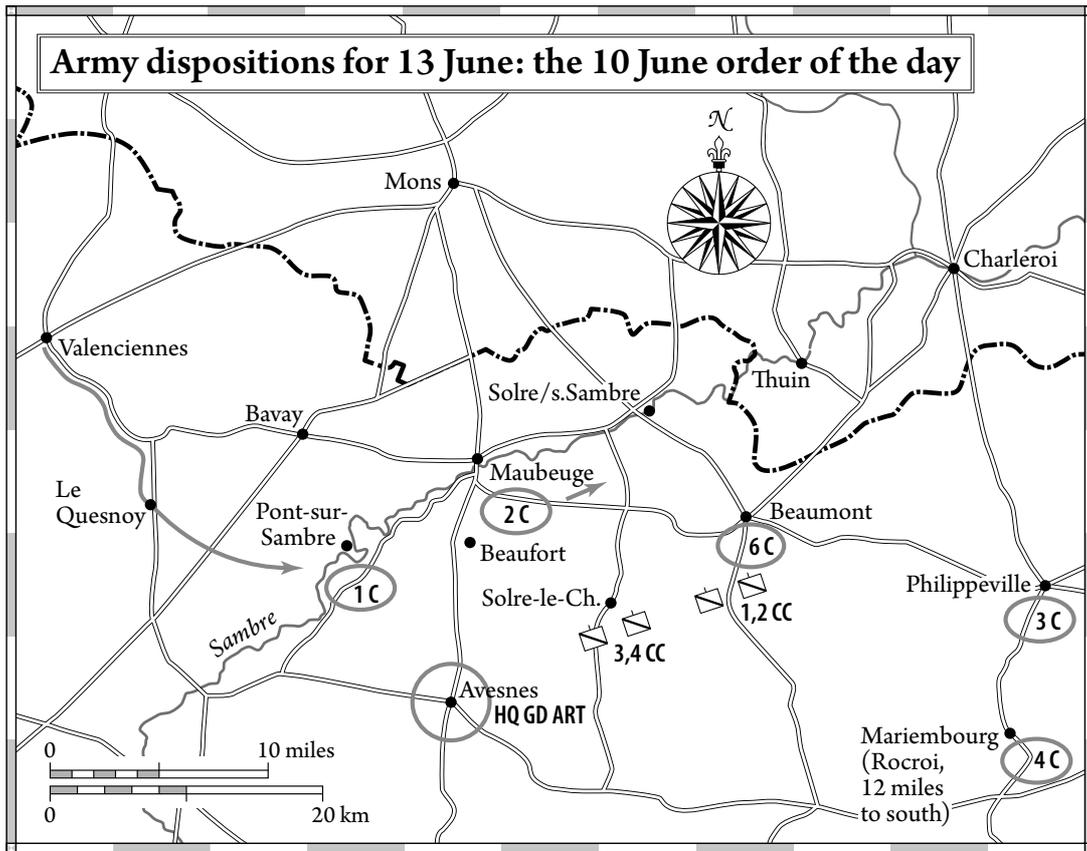
III

The main differences between these documents are clear, both in dispositions and in style. If we plot the instructions on a map, we see at once that there is a great change of emphasis between the two documents.

The Order of the Day places a mass [*2e* and *1er Corps*] close to Maubeuge but with a directional indication north-eastwards towards 'Thuin', that is in the direction of Charleroi. This mass will be supported by the small *6e Corps* at Beaumont, south of Charleroi, and further east was to be *3e Corps* at Philippeville with the 'Army of the Moselle' (*4e Corps*) to its south at Mariembourg. The *Garde*, the artillery and bridging train remained with headquarters at Avesnes. Beaumont, Philippeville and Mariembourg are not well-suited positions for a main attack on Mons. But a force close to Thuin, Beaumont and Philippeville clearly menaces Charleroi and will have only a left flank looking towards Mons.

By contrast the Bertrand letter B pulls the weight of the army well to the west. As in the Order, the two-corps mass near Maubeuge remains there, but with *6e Corps* drawn west by 18 miles, about a day's march, to stand to the south of Maubeuge and near Beaufort, backed also at Avesnes by the *Garde*, artillery and so on. Vandamme's *3e Corps* is also drawn west by some 20 or more miles, and *well west* of Beaumont, yet is still deemed 'the right wing'. However, nothing is said about the rest of the proposed right wing or the cavalry. Indeed, as the letter states that it serves as covering note to the Order of the Day and as it requests Soult to forward the Order of the Day to Grouchy as commander of the cavalry, and to certain others, they would appear to be left confusingly in ignorance of the Emperor's revised dispositions as given by Bertrand's letter.

The indication from letter B is that on 10 June Napoleon was equally disposed to attack Wellington at Mons or Blücher at Charleroi, whereas the enclosed Order of the Day implied a main thrust at Charleroi. Some 24,500 infantry, 1,200 cavalry and 76 guns [*3e* and *6e Corps*] might need to move an extra (full day's) march depending on whether the 'western plan' was followed or not. Which instruction was to take precedence? Even if – perhaps even though⁴ – Napoleon in his innermost thinking could have sensed



certain reasons for developing one set of ideas as against another set, yet that does not dispose of the problem of two imperial instructions of the same date setting out conflicting movement orders.

Grouchy was ignored with respect for a plan for an attack on Mons, and yet surely he needed to be included in any such plan. We may say the same concerning Gérard's *4e Corps* ('Army of the Moselle'): that it was specified to be at Mariembourg for the attack on Charleroi, but was not mentioned in the Mons plan and Gérard was not among the commanders to be called to meet Napoleon. The explanation may be that he was still simply too far distant, still marching from Lorraine, and so could not be with the *Armée du Nord* in time for the attack on Mons.

But that in turn leads to a further consideration.

Apart from confirming that Napoleon intended from the outset to attack one or other of his enemies and not merely to manoeuvre between them (see Chapter 20, third paragraph), it indicates that although Wellington was ill-advised not to issue some warning order on 14 June he was wise in his remark to van Reede on the 15th that before marching he would wait until sure of Napoleon's intentions. His army could have been in position north of Mons and around Braine or Enghien in sufficient time.

Secondly, the actual attack on Charleroi, including both *4e Corps* and Grouchy's entire force of cavalry, was launched on 15 June with some 120,000 men and 350 guns under command. Reverting to the plans, if in the Mons case *4e Corps* was so far to the east as to be left out of account, Wellington would be attacked by fewer than 100,000 men and 300 guns, for Mons would have to be masked by a detachment⁵ – and would *4e Corps* by itself at Mariembourg and Philippeville, even aided by the Reserve Cavalry, really have been sufficient to keep the Prussians in check? If Napoleon was well informed of Wellington's cantonments he could scarcely expect to reach the Duke's principal concentration line from Audenarde via Ath to Nivelles within 24 hours, and what of the Prussians meanwhile? Napoleon recognised Blücher's love of the headlong offensive whatever the risk. Would it be sensible to discount a Prussian march upon Nivelles, or perhaps more importantly upon Maubeuge and Mons and thus threatening Napoleon's line of communication within a couple of days?⁶

So what was to be done with Gérard's 15,500 infantry, 1,200 cavalry and 38 guns of *4e Corps*, and Grouchy's 12,100 cavalry and 48 guns? Nothing was said. Was it not dangerous at this late stage in the preparations to leave in confusion the intentions for no fewer than 55,500 men and 162 guns?

IV

The Order of the Day was short, staccato and imbued with the style of the Emperor, and while the Order was actually signed on the Emperor's behalf by the man at his side, the Grand Marshal of the Palace, the postscript was signed by Napoleon himself.

The Bertrand letter B was much smoother, more polite, elegantly scripted and without erasures or corrections (except for one word, '*les*' and the slip over the '*d*' in '*d'Erlon*'), and served as a gloss on the Order that it enclosed. It was written in the hand of one of Bertrand's usual staff, right down to and including '*Le grand maréchal*'; only the signature was by Bertrand.⁷ Given the Emperor's rapid method of dictation the final version was clearly a fair copy of an initial draft by Bertrand.

Bertrand was a practical engineer officer and had commanded a corps in the later campaigns of the Empire. He was trusted and performed daily duties at the heart of the imperial establishment. He was no novice at war. Once Napoleon had ordered Soult away to the north on 7 June 1815, Bertrand was the officer in closest attendance on him, and would therefore have been the ideal man to take dictation on 10 June. In later years he said that he could on occasion induce the Emperor to change his mind when his reasoning was leading him astray. But here, on 10 June he signed the Order of the Day and then the covering letter despite plain inconsistencies and even contradictions between them. Either he did not notice them, or he left it to Soult to puzzle out the Emperor's ideas. He cannot have raised them with his master.⁸

V

There are two additional letters from Bertrand that shed some further light on his sense and his capacity when repeating orders: one dated 10 June and now made available by the anonymous purchaser from the Christie's sale, the other dated 11 June, first printed in 1913 by the Napoleonic scholar Arthur Chuquet.

On 10 June Bertrand again wrote from Paris to the Chief of Staff, who was then touring the northern provinces. To distinguish it from the letter previously quoted I shall term this letter C:

Monsieur le Maréchal, Although I am sending an officer to Valenciennes [d'Erlon's *1er Corps* HQ], I require [*engage*] Your Excellency to send a duplicate of the order that will arrive sooner perhaps by the road from [or via? *route de*] Laon.⁹ I pray Your Excellency to deliver to General Vandamme

the order which I leave unsealed [*cachet volant*]. I remain, etc, *Le grand maréchal*, [signed] Bertrand.

Chuquet printed a Bertrand letter of 11 June, addressed to Reille of *2e Corps*:

The Emperor's intention is that headquarters should go to Avesnes on the 12th; that the *Garde Impériale* should be there on the 12th; that your corps should vacate Avesnes and go behind Maubeuge, but that you personally remain so as to provide information as the Emperor is due to arrive at 2 a.m. on the 13th. It is very important that you place your corps behind Maubeuge so that the enemy perceives nothing. Forbid most strictly all communication.¹⁰

From letter C and Chuquet it is plain that Bertrand sent d'Erlon, if not the twelve copies of a message that Berthier was alleged always to have issued, at least two. More importantly, in all matters concerning Reille's corps he was completely faithful to the Order of the Day (and to its covering letter B). We see also that Reille as commander was informed only of what concerned him personally. Soult was to read Bertrand's instructions to Vandamme before sending them on. And it was not the orders to Reille but those to Vandamme where the mystery resides. Bertrand was totally accurate in relation to Reille's orders, but were his separate instructions to Vandamme *in conformity with the Order of the Day or with the 10 June covering letter B*, both of which stated unequivocally that they represented the Emperor's intentions?¹¹

VI

What was Soult to do on reaching Avesnes on the 12th, and reading the Order of the Day and letter B – especially as Bertrand was meanwhile sending the Order directly to various subordinate commanders? Which document was the one to follow, which held priority? Soult was facing a virtual *fait accompli* by the time he opened the packet of papers and discovered the complications. This is how he treated matters in a series of instructions dated 12 June.¹²

Soult ordered Vandamme's *3e Corps* to march to Beaumont, and he also informed Napoleon of this. In other words he followed letter B and not the Order of the Day. To Gérard of *4e Corps* he wrote that, as they were behind schedule and would only reach Rocroi on 15 June although the Emperor wished to have 'the whole army on the Sambre' by the 14th with the intention possibly to attack on that day, so Gérard should aim at Beaumont because Vandamme should be forward of that place. Again that disposition corresponds largely with the Bertrand letter B and not the Order. The

6e Corps was no longer to be at Beaumont but to have its HQ at Beaufort, that is to say between Avesnes and Maubeuge, as Bertrand had required. As to Grouchy, Soult ordered him to move the *1er* and *2e Corps de Cavalerie* to Solre-sur-Sambre (whereas the Order of the Day had said Beaumont), the *3e* and *4e* to Solre-le-Château (which roughly corresponds to the Order of the Day's 'between Avesnes and Beaumont'). It would seem (though this is my personal opinion only) that he considered that letter B modified the Orders in A.

On reaching Imperial Headquarters on the 13th Napoleon disagreed with Soult's dispositions, as we saw in Chapter 19. Fresh orders were issued. 'Order, counter-order, disorder'.

It is all so very odd that it raises the wider question of how the Napoleonic headquarters habitually functioned, and while the subject goes far beyond the scope of my book, some consideration of it cannot be avoided here.

VII

When at the Tuileries the Emperor kept a room close by him for his Chief of Staff, though on campaign they were lodged further apart. In Napoleon's own private inner room or *cabinet* his secretary occupied one corner. As he himself said, he treated his relays of secretaries 'as a writing machine', working day and night to prepare his letters and orders, till they collapsed under the strain. Whole books have been dedicated to the subject – those of Méneval and Fain and in one sense the multi-volume *Correspondance* – but for my purpose, I shall limit myself to the views of three French authorities, beginning with the testimony of Baron Fain in the 1820s.¹³

Fain recorded that Napoleon kept beside him a set of bound booklets (*livrets*), each for a different topic, regularly updated fortnightly or monthly by the minister in question: war (comprising army, navy, foreign armies and navies, amounting to eighteen volumes in duodecimo and quarto), finance, merchandise prices and availabilities (corn being a special preoccupation). These *livrets* he studied incessantly ('the army states are the most agreeable literary works in all my library and the books that I read with the greatest pleasure when taking rest'), and they explain in part how he seemed always to be master of every subject. The most important of the war *livrets* was that of the army. It contained several series. A tabulation by regiment gave names of their senior officers, current strength, recruitment, depot situation, and a weekly schedule of its marches; another was by the Military Divisions into which the Empire was divided; another by brigades and divisions and army corps; another the lists of all generals; yet another the data on artillery and

engineers. As these states had been drawn up by the War Minister and/or the Chief of Staff, it meant that all the high officials and the Emperor were cognisant of the same information.¹⁴

In a long passage on Napoleon's habits Fain remarked¹⁵ that in taking down dictation at break-neck speed blanks had to be left simply to keep pace with the torrent of words; that in gathering up the papers that Napoleon threw down after dealing with them the secretary would scan them for clues as to names, places, figures, meaning, so as to improve and give proper accuracy to the dictated letter. Two hours' dictation meant a full day's secretarial work, and in writing out fair the documents emerging from the day's scribbles, it was not always possible to tidy those scribbles still to be copied from the previous day's work:

There was no way of getting him to repeat anything ... All his thought process would have been upset. One had to follow as best one could if one was not to be too overwhelmed by the phrases that fell pell-mell; the art was to leave blanks to keep up constantly with the train of thought. Later one went back over it once the rush had passed and the links between the ideas helped fill in the gaps; but it needed intelligence concerning the matter in question; it was indispensable for remedying misunderstandings, avoiding phrases bearing two different meanings, and for rendering clear the vague phrases. In this sense it could be said that the secretary was obliged to have as good a grasp of the day's affairs as did the Emperor himself.¹⁶

When the Emperor did not want to write himself, either because the matter was not worth the trouble, or for reasons of not wishing to enter too directly into correspondence, he had the letter written in his secretary's name and often [*souvent*] he dictated the letter that opened with these sacramental words, 'The Emperor has charged me', etc.; and it also happened when matters pressed and the Emperor could not wait and so was unable to sign the letter, the secretary would write this at the bottom where Napoleon's signature should be, and sign it himself.

This seems to fit perfectly with Bertrand's letter B of 10 June 1815, in-filling some verbal gaps and using the Emperor's name. But Bertrand was an intelligent engineer, used to exact specifications and practical problems: how did he come to leave the discrepancies between the Order of the Day and the letter?

Perhaps here we need to look beyond the civilian Fain to another military man: at Berthier's practice down the years. Although in one way this takes us far from the Hundred Days' campaign, yet the findings do bear upon the puzzle of 10 June 1815.

VIII

Marshal Berthier holds a very high place as a chief of staff in the estimation of most Napoleonic military historians and I am not directly concerned with that estimation here. I seek only to examine *the conception and transmission of the intentions of the commander-in-chief*. And since there were so many campaigns I have selected the great spring campaigns of 1809 and 1813 as judged by two expert French military historians, General Bonnal in 1905 and Colonel Tournès in 1921.¹⁷ That Berthier did not shine as a field commander is generally agreed, and it may be thought that Bonnal is too severe in his judgements on him. But his verdict on the conception and expression of Napoleon's intentions and how Berthier handled them is instructive.

Bonnal examined in the greatest detail the planning of the 1809 campaign. The Emperor had returned from Spain but was still in Paris, not wishing to raise Austrian suspicions. Meanwhile Berthier had been sent forward to Strasbourg as interim commander of the army prior to the outbreak of war with Austria. The 120,000 French together with allied contingents were dispersed across Bavaria, Davout's forces in the north, and Lefebvre's and Oudinot's along and south of the Danube; Masséna commanded close to the Rhine, and Lannes was returning from Spain. Napoleon despatched his strategic plans to Berthier on 30 March, and sent further thoughts on 1, 2 and 6 April; he reasoned that the Austrians would be ready by 30 March but that they had only two options: to begin operations either before 5 April, or on or after 15 April. His plans followed upon that hypothesis.

Berthier had implicitly trusted the Emperor's 30 March–6 April assessments, although the more perceptive and practical Davout at that time was trying to alert the interim commander to new developments. On 11 April Berthier left for the Danube on learning of the Austrian attack north-west from Austria (launched on the 10th, despite Napoleon's conviction that they would not strike between 5 and 15 April) and the next day heard from Davout that the Austrians had attacked south-west out of Bohemia (on the 9th). Napoleon in Paris learned on 10 April of Austrian moves and immediately sent to Strasbourg modified instructions, with a further amendment on the 12th. Delays in the semaphore telegraph to Strasbourg due to poor visibility, and Berthier's departure from there on 11 April, merely added to the Chief of Staff's problems. It is generally agreed that the Marshal's subsequent orders to the various formations in the field were confused, unfortunate, and 'lacking in grip' but uncertainty and control from over-far were at least in part to blame.¹⁸

Bonnal admitted that:

One has to say that when Napoleon was fired by inspiration, and moreover was dictating with giddy speed, he expressed his thoughts too summarily and with many unspoken assumptions ... Did Marshal Berthier have a lively enough intelligence to understand the spirit of instructions dictated in this manner? One may doubt it ... The impetuosity of Napoleon's thought often led to mental leaps in his orders that could disconcert or baffle those of mediocre foresight or who were shallow thinkers.

Napoleon intuitively saw solutions to fresh problems as they arose; he did not linger to spell out his motivation. He set them down as they came to his mind, without explanations, and without worrying whether Marshal Berthier had or had not the ability to understand them.

In stipulating that Davout's corps should march to Ratisbon *in all eventualities* [*dans tous les événements*] the Emperor had in mind *a delay among the Austrians* [Bonnal's emphasis in both cases], and could not imagine that the expression '*dans tous les événements*' should be taken literally [*au pied de la lettre*] by the Chief of Staff, irrespective of what these eventualities should be.¹⁹

Perhaps only Davout, Lannes and Masséna would have been capable of grasping his meaning and recognising in his messages what was impassioned exaggeration. Be that as it may, Napoleon made a psychological mistake in failing to subordinate his thought process to the need for the man who was to execute his orders to understand them. The authors who have written about these operations have taken an easy pleasure in launching gibes on Berthier's lack of skill but not one has dreamt of blaming Napoleon in this instance for the stupidities [*sottises*] committed by his lieutenant.²⁰

Yet the Emperor and Berthier had worked closely side by side for *thirteen years*, since 1796.²¹ Surely the Emperor by now should have suspected Berthier's limitations and taken some care to express himself suitably. If only the three best marshals were likely to grasp his nuanced meaning, does not that give weight to Bonnal's criticism of Napoleon for not guiding his unfortunate assistant more carefully with properly explained advice?

Colonel Tournès provided further information on the Emperor's methods. Writing of 1813 he described the overall headquarters structure in the field. It comprised a number of functions each reporting to Napoleon himself, but the two main branches were the 'Imperial Headquarters' and a civilian-run 'Administrative Headquarters'. The 'Imperial Headquarters' was itself divided into the 'Imperial Household', handling intelligence,

mapping, and topography, backed by the personal secretariat or '*cabinet*' run in succession by Méneval and Fain. In attendance upon the Household were the personal ADCs and *ordonnance* officers of the Emperor. Within 'Imperial Headquarters' but quite separate from the Household was the Army Headquarters Staff, the latter under the command of Marshal Berthier during his lifetime.

How then did Napoleon receive his intelligence and issue his commands?

Colonel Tournès's findings may be summarised thus. The first rule at Imperial Headquarters was that the Commander-in-Chief personally took every decision. Each incoming report was shown to Berthier, who read it and then wrote at the top of the paper three or four lines summarising the information received; for matters touching organisation, he joined to it the original documents, leaving to the Emperor whether or not to examine the elements underlying Berthier's appreciation. The paper was sent to Napoleon, who read it in his *cabinet* and then dictated his decision to Fain, and the note, when checked and signed, was sent back to Berthier. Everything was reduced to writing.

The formulation of a decision had nothing to do with Berthier (though Fain may have had some slight influence as draftsman). He merely executed whatever orders his chief gave him; he never acted as counsellor, never on his own took the least decision about operations. Tournès came to a judgement of considerable significance (p. 154) about the limits to Berthier's role, and his words have a bearing on Bertrand and letter B. Berthier 'had only to amplify the instructions emerging from the *cabinet*, and ensure when sending on the orders that he had *retained the original terms used*' (my emphasis), to decide upon the number of different couriers for each message and the routes they were to take, and mark these on the documents.²²

IX

It is time to return to 10 June 1815 after these diversions into other campaigns.

While Berthier's care in multiplying the number of ways by which the orders could reach the intended recipient is rightly famous, witnesses in the army staff of 1815 confirm that the practice under Soult fell short of that standard, though it must be recognised that money was in such short supply that Napoleon himself insisted on a much reduced establishment.

However, Soult's military gifts were vastly greater than Berthier's, and he did occasionally venture an opinion during the 1815 campaign. When this occurred, though, he was almost invariably ignored or snubbed, and his own personality defects made for difficult relations with his colleagues.

The Emperor still stood as sole and unique decision taker.²³ The silent and invariably polite Bertrand, familiar with Napoleon's methods, but less senior than Berthier and Soult, may simply have abandoned any hope of correcting the muddle on 10 June 1815.

The worst mistake on 10 June 1815 was not that of speculating on two quite different options only some ninety hours before the great attack should begin, although these fresh thoughts were likely to lead to confusion somewhere, if not everywhere. And to be sure, the options carried with them logistical and additional marching consequences, straining the troops just when they needed a little time to assemble and prepare. But the great mistake was to leave both options for execution, and not to withdraw one of them. Bertrand either failed to spot the problem or decided to leave it to Soult, and Soult was caught unawares and blundered. It was a bad start.

But it was Napoleon who had dictated both the Order of the Day and the Bertrand letter B. The Emperor ultimately was responsible for the confusion.

Notes to Appendix 4

1. See for instance, volume 1, pp. 321, 325, 328, 343, 345, 360.
2. Mr Beckett saw a Christie's sale catalogue of June 2015, No. 10,414, in which a number of Napoleonic letters were pictured (item 19) displayed in fan-shape, the Bertrand material thus being partially covered. Mr Beckett contacted Mr Pierre de Wit who then partially transcribed the pictured letter in his www.waterloo-campaign.nl, *Preambles, Napoleon's Plans and Preparations, I*, under the date 10 June (NB, where I further cite Pierre's documents it is to this section of his website). They then generously passed their findings to me. Thanks to the assistance of Christie's and of Beattie, The Creative Communications Group, the anonymous purchaser has kindly sent to me full photocopies of all the documents. Hence the entire Bertrand letter can now be published.
3. The order can be read in the original French in Pierre de Wit's site, under the date 10 June. A German version of most of the document was printed by Lettow-Vorbeck in *Napoleons Untergang, 1815* (Berlin, 1904), vol. 1, p. 222, omitting the separate postscript.
4. Pierre de Wit, whose analysis is always acute, judges that the Vendée rising having collapsed by early June, Napoleon by 10 June was calculating on the return from there of the regular units for future action in the north. Thus he was consequently altering his objective from Charleroi to Mons and swinging 3e and 6e Corps westwards. But if it was coming, Lamarque's Vendée detached force did not arrive in time; indeed on 19 June most if not all of it was still thought to be in the Vendée: see chap. 48, sec. I, opening sentences.
5. On 7 June 1815 Wellington had formally warned governors of the fortified towns including Mons that to surrender the town to a French attack before a serious breach had been opened and an assault made on the breach, 'would be an act not merely of military

disobedience but of treason' (*WD*, xii [1838], p. 450 / viii [1852], p. 126). The French could scarcely hope to take Mons by escalade, and they could not risk by-passing the town and leaving its garrison unmasked, ready to strike at their backs.

6. These are merely my own hypothetical suggestions, but they surely must have been considered by Napoleon, however briefly. Perhaps that is why he reverted to the Charleroi plan.
7. This amanuensis was a frequent writer of Bertrand's military letters and his envelopes during the campaigns of 1813–14, as can be see from a comparison of this 10 June letter with the facsimiles reproduced in Bertrand's *Lettres à Fanny, 1808–1815* (Paris, 1979). Bertrand's own letters, also illustrated in the book, are in a very different hand. Writing to his wife on 17 July 1813, he notes 'a secretary is not without use and on campaign often saves me the bother of myself writing, or addressing envelopes, finding paper or wax. It is not necessary for a commanding officer, but useful': *Lettres*, p. 271.
8. Bertrand silently accepted rebuke and insult from Napoleon, even to the extent of hearing and recording remarks made in front of the entourage that his wife was a whore ('*catin*') and had sex in ditches with British officers (his *Cahiers de Ste-Hélène* [Paris, 1949], entries for 9 and 21 April 1821). But he was aware of Napoleon's capacity to go 'off course' and in old age he stated that when Napoleon's reasoning was at fault, he might reconsider and revise or totally rewrite an appreciation or order if he saw that the (well-informed and trusted) taker of dictation was uneasy at the result. (I have to say that neither Méneval nor Fain, the successive Intimate Secretaries, give that impression of Napoleon's malleability.) For several such instances of reconsideration see Bertrand, 'Avant-Propos' of 1842 to *Guerre d'Orient, Campagnes d'Égypte et de Syrie, 1798–1799 . . . dictés par Napoléon à Ste-Hélène*, 2 vols (Paris, 1847), at i, pp. xi–xv: at one point there Bertrand notes, 'It sometimes happened that the first draft contained some key ideas that did not reappear in the second and that were difficult to insert because generally Napoleon's dictation was closely reasoned with the ideas linked together'. Did this occur on 10 June 1815?
9. Pierre de Wit shows that d'Erlon received this message by both routes: his acknowledgement at 9 a.m. on 12 June.
10. For this 10 June letter C, see my acknowledgement in note 2. For that of 11 June, see Arthur Chuquet (1853–1925), *Inédits Napoléoniens*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1913), no. 1,684, p. 457; I referred to this 11 June letter in my chap. 19, n. 43, in a different context: as showing how at that date Ney was not mentioned as joining the army so that Reille was expected to report directly to the Emperor. Mr de Wit prints two versions of the Chuquet document (one dated 10 June and the other 11th) and with textual variations due, perhaps, to differing habits of the copyists.
11. Neither of Vandamme's biographers, Du Casse (1870) and Gallaher (2008), makes any reference to this instruction as being among his papers.
12. All the following 12 June instructions are from Pierre de Wit's website.
13. Baron Fain (1778–1837), *Mémoires* (Paris, 1908), and particularly pp. 56–61. His Preface is dated October 1829.
14. Fain's chap. 8 is a guide to all this. See also Méneval, *Mémoires* iii, pp. 415–24. The practice

sometimes fell below the theory: Feltre was upbraided on 8 April 1812 when the latest *livret* for artillery was still that dated 1 February (in the nineteenth-century *Corr. de Nap.*, no. 18,637; in the new *Napoléon Bonaparte, Corr. Générale*, no. 30,415).

15. See note 13 above.
16. Fain remarked that the danger was that as spoken by the Corsican Napoleon the rivers 'Ebre' [Ebro] and 'Elbe' sounded the same, 'Smolensk' like 'Salamanque', the medical term 'hyssop' too like the north Italian fortress 'Osopo'.
17. General H. Bonnal (1844–1917), *La Manoeuvre de Landshut* (Paris, 1905). Lt.-Col. René Tournès, 'Le GQG de Napoléon Ier', *Revue de Paris*, 1 May 1921, pp. 134–58.
18. Bonnal, pp. 48, 57–74.
19. Bonnal, pp. 48 and 51. Bonnal's distinction is perhaps too fine; he meant here that Napoleon's words 'in all eventualities' should apply to French actions within and only within the context of a tardy Austrian concentration. If the Austrians did something else, then those 'eventualities' might not apply. However, I personally think that the fault lay with Napoleon, who should have made his meaning far clearer.
20. Bonnal, pp. 72–3.
21. One recalls the officer who sought promotion from Frederick the Great on the basis of service in many campaigns; Frederick pointed to another that had equally long service: 'But that mule is still a mule.'
22. Tournès, especially pp. 152–4.
23. In the 1815 campaign Pétiet of the French staff wrote of advice proffered on 17 June: 'word spread at headquarters that the Chief of Staff had represented to Napoleon the danger of reducing forces aimed at beating the English army; that the detachment for Grouchy was too large. But the Emperor, used to *the passive obedience of Berthier*, would not listen': *Souvenirs Militaires* (Paris, 1844), p. 202, my emphasis.