

2015/6/3: Waterloo – the almost forgotten „German“ exposure

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The victory of the allied troops at Waterloo on 18th June 1815 was no sole British success. Although the warfare of the coalition was not planned thoroughly and in detail, but it worked because of the mainly appropriate cooperation of the Allies in the course of the decisive double battle of Waterloo/Mont St. Jean and Wavre, when the British/Dutch troops led by the Duke of Wellington held the fort for hours with heavy losses, and when by the initiative of the Prussian troops led by Field Marshal Blucher attacked the French troops down their wings, thus in the end decisively contributing to the defeat of the French troops, which were led by Napoleon. The following paper is by no means supposed to belittle the performance of the British troop command and the courage of the soldiers. On the contrary, it is to present in detail the essential reasons of the success caused by the "interoperation" of the allied troops – because without this cooperation at least this battle, like those of Quatre Bras and Ligny on 16th June in the campaign of 2015 would have been lost. In analysing the order of events of the Battle of Waterloo and the individual actions of the Allies, the following facts can be derived: The stableness of the British and their subordinated allied contingents as well as their phased counter-attacks prevented a breakdown under the violent French attacks until 19:30, and also caused the intervention of the Prussian troops on the left wing of Wellington's army to become successful. From the early afternoon of the 18th June onwards, the Prussian troops engaged greater and greater parts of the French army – from 19 o'clock onwards already more than one corps with strong parts of the guards – in the course of which the centre of gravity of the fights more and more shifted to the area around the village of Plancenoit. The Prussian breakthrough was foreseeable as from 19:15 and would have brought substantial parts of the Prussian corps into the back of the French army in short time, thus cutting off the way of retreat for great parts to Genappe. This breakthrough, together with the failure of the last attack, which was made by the French guards against the British centre of gravity, led to mass panic, implicating the break-up of the greatest part of Napoleon's troops. The tough defence of the own positions by the Prussian III. Corps at Wavre engaged the army group of Marshal Grouchy on 18th and in the early morning of 19th June, when, after violent encounters, the French troops were able to cross the River Dyle near Wavre. In the end, however, they were forced to retreat as well after about 10:30, when Marshal Grouchy received the message about the defeat of Napoleon's army near Mont St. Jean/Waterloo. The extremely heavy losses of the campaigns of the last three years, riots of the own population in West-France, and the renewed prospect of a long war with heavy losses, and in view of the foreseeable intervention of vast Austrian and Russian armies, made the situation for France seem sinister. Italy, too, was lost for the French Empire. Both Wellington's largely defensive conduct of operations and Blucher's actively offensive conduct of operations ensured the success of the Allies on 18th June 1815, and in the end its consequences determined the political-strategic situation in Europe for the following decades.