

Grouchy at Waterloo

by A. A. Nofi

Marshal Grouchy is one of the people in history who have assumed the role of scapegoat over the years. Historians of the Waterloo Campaign place much of the blame for Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo on his shoulders. The refrain goes something like, "If Grouchy had brought his troops to the support of Napoleon at Waterloo the outcome of the battle would have been changed." Perhaps. But one thing is clear: few of the works on the Battle of Waterloo ever bother to detail what it was that Grouchy was actually doing those fateful June days.

The Waterloo Campaign opened on 15 June 1815 when the first French troops began crossing the Sambre against sharp resistance from minor Prussian formations. Since Napoleon had "stolen a march" on both the Prussians and their Allies his army managed to get across in relatively good order and slept on the field the night of 15-16 June. That night Blucher, the Prussian commander, and Wellington, the Anglo-Allied commander, had their exhausted troops marching as best they could toward the French. [Note: In this article *Prussian* formations will be in *italics* for clarity.]

On 16 June two battles occurred, one at Quatre Bras and one a few miles to the east at Ligny. At Quatre Bras the outcome was basically a draw, with the Anglo-Allied forces left in possession of the field largely through French ineptitude. Ligny, however, was a decisive action. Nearly two-thirds of the Prussian army 'under' Blucher, were soundly beaten, suffering about 30,000 casualties out of a force of no more than 85,000.

The broken, roadless terrain about Ligny, coupled with the lateness of the hour prevented an effective pursuit of the Prussians. Still, Napoleon sent I Cavalry Corps scouting northeast toward Namur along the Prussian line of communication. II Cavalry Corps was instructed to scout in the general direction of Gembloux, a possible alternative line of communication for the Prussians and a small force of cavalry was sent off toward Tilly to try to determine whether the Prussians had fallen back that way.

The respite given them by nightfall enabled the Prussians to recover their strength and cohesion somewhat. Blucher's chief of staff ordered the remnants of I and II Corps (c. 30,000 men) to withdraw towards Tilly while III Corps (c. 20,000 men) was to retreat towards Gembloux. Meanwhile, Bulow's IV Corps (c. 30,000 men and 88 guns) was marching up from Liege. This corps was the only undamaged element in the Prussian Army, having missed the Battle of Ligny. Early on 17 June the lead elements of IV Corps linked up with III Corps.

Bulow assumed command of III Corps and marched both formations towards Wavre on his own initiative. At 1020 this move was confirmed by Blucher. This was probably the single most important strategic decision made by the Allies in the Waterloo Campaign.

By retreating towards Wavre, Blucher abandoned his line of communication, cutting his ties with his base at Liege and his line of retreat back into Prussia. Though badly defeated, the

semi-senile, septuagenarian Blucher was willing to have another go at Napoleon rather than quit. By this decision he completely altered the strategic situation.

While Blucher was retreating, the French cavalry was beginning to report to Napoleon. All reports **seemed** to indicate that the Prussians were broken and falling back towards Prussia. The thousands of straggling troops jamming the roads towards Prussia seemed to confirm this conclusion and Napoleon therefore assumed it was true. To ensure the defeat of the Prussians he entrusted some 33,000 troops to Marshal Grouchy and ordered him to maintain a strong pursuit but to retain his freedom of movement. Since word from Quatre Bras indicated that the situation there was still inconclusive, Napoleon took the balance of his Right Wing with him—although inexplicably leaving one full division at St. Amand and marched to Quatre Bras. Grouchy was on his own.

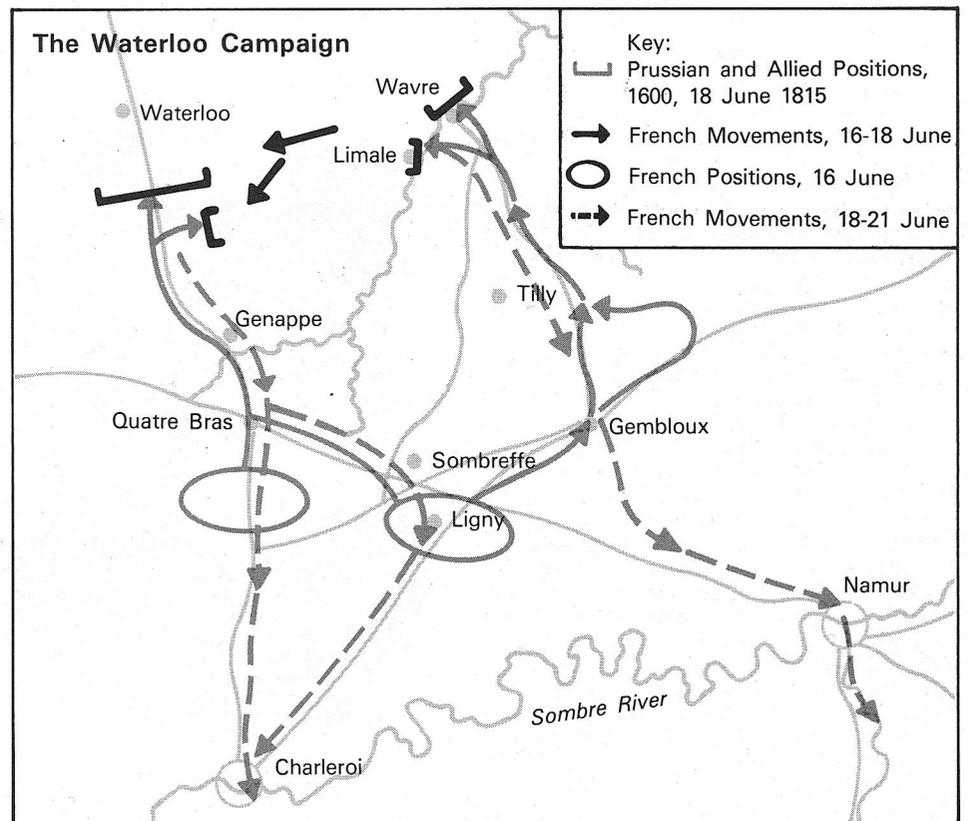
There were heavy rains all that day and these, combined with poor staff work resulted in the gradual loss of contact between Grouchy's cavalry patrols and the retreating Prussians. Attempts to re-establish contact were frustrated by the weather and by 1900 Grouchy gave up and bedded his troops down in the vicinity of Gembloux. Here he conveyed to Napoleon incorrect reports from his scouts that the Prussians had broken into two columns, one falling back on Liege and the other on Wavre. He indicated that he would pursue the larger, which appeared to be headed for Wavre. This evaluation of the situation was completely wrong. The **entire** Prussian Army was falling back on Wavre. The troops seen heading for

Liege were a large, disordered mass of stragglers. The situation was serious since the Prussians were reconcentrating but the French didn't know it.

Blucher reached Wavre with most of his army the night of 17-18 June, while Grouchy's troops slept. Early the next morning he ordered his forces, by now numbering around 80,000 men, to join Wellington's forces in the vicinity of Mont-St-Jean. The march was late in getting started because a massive traffic jam ensued which took hours to clear up.

Grouchy, meanwhile, delayed his morning orders and did not finally move out until 0730. With II Cavalry Corps scouting ahead and I Cavalry Corps covering his left and attempting to link up with Napoleon and the main body, he advanced on Wavre with his two infantry corps. Some historians have stated that Napoleon ordered Grouchy on this morning to fall on Wellington's flank if the opportunity presented itself. While there exists **no** evidence substantiating this order, it is reasonable to assume that, if it **was** issued, Napoleon expected Grouchy to recognize that his primary mission was to keep **between** Blucher and Wellington at all times. **But** this is precisely what Grouchy failed to do.

Advancing carefully but aggressively Grouchy's cavalry encountered and skirmished for about an hour with elements of Prussian **II Corps** below Wavre beginning about 0930. Prisoners revealed that Blucher was sending the bulk of the Prussian Army to join Wellington, and the commander of II Cavalry Corps immediately dispatched this unpleasant information to Grouchy. By this time Grouchy had reached



Walhain with III Corps and IV Corps was just a little behind. Settling down for lunch, the Marshal's mess was disturbed at 1130 by the sound of artillery fire coming from the direction of Mont-St-Jean, about a dozen miles to the northwest. The commander of IV Corps and several other senior officers demanded that Grouchy immediately move to support Napoleon, who was obviously engaged in a major battle. Grouchy refused, pointing out that his orders required him to pursue the Prussians. Had he moved at this point he would probably have arrived on Napoleon's right flank about 1900 hours, just in time to fall on the Prussian *IV Corps* as it engaged Napoleon's troops near Placenoit and also in time to support the attack of the Old Guard. Undoubtedly, Grouchy could have influenced the course of the battle, but it is not necessarily the case that his arrival would have turned Waterloo into a French victory. The luncheon went on, only to be interrupted again at 1230 when the messenger from II Cavalry Corps finally arrived, having taken two hours to cover about six miles. He told Grouchy that the Prussians were preparing to fall on Napoleon's flank.

Grouchy immediately, and belatedly, moved into action. I Cavalry Corps was ordered to take the village of Limale followed by IV Corps, while III Corps marched for Wavre screened by II Cavalry Corps.

Holding the line of the Dyle River, between Limale and Wavre, was Prussian *III Corps* (c. 17,000). Fighting began at 1630, when II Cavalry Corps arrived in front on Wavre, closely followed by III Corps. The French cleared the near side of the river handily but got into a difficult position doing so. From the heights of the left bank Prussian batteries shot up the French badly. Although the Prussian defense was improvised it was highly effective. Ironically if the French had delayed a bit longer the Prussians would have been out of the position entirely, marching for Waterloo. Indeed, one brigade had already marched off, but had been replaced by a wayward brigade of *I Corps* which took up position in Limale.

Meanwhile, Blucher, by this time closer to Waterloo than to the action at Wavre, had a difficult time convincing his officers to continue to march to support Wellington. Fortunately for the Allies, he was successful. Unlike Grouchy, Blucher recognized what his primary mission was and did not permit secondary considerations to influence his judgement. Defeating Napoleon was far more important than the fate of one corps at Wavre.

While Blucher was making this decision, the situation along the Dyle grew heated and bloody. In a short time I and II Cavalry Corps and III Corps were hotly engaged and IV Corps was moving up rapidly, though because of a confusion in orders it was turning up at Wavre rather than Limale. At 1700 Grouchy finally received orders from Napoleon to assist the main body at Waterloo. Ordering III Corps and II Cavalry Corps to keep up the pressure at Wavre, Grouchy assembled IV Corps and marched for Limale, but not before wasting more time by making one final attempt to take Wavre.

At Limale I Cavalry Corps, supported by a cavalry division from IV Corps, had just succeeded in siezing the village at the charge when Grouchy arrived with the balance of IV Corps. The Prussians made a serious effort to retake the place but were repulsed by IV Corps

Napoleon at Waterloo: Some Variant Scenarios or Marshal Grouchy to the Rescue?

If Grouchy had performed more competently at Waterloo he might have gone down as one of history's greatest "clutch players." This module enables players to modify SPI's *Napoleon at Waterloo* to include a burst of genius on Grouchy's part. Additional pieces needed for the modified game are shown in the Reinforcement Unit Chart. These may be made from blank counters or players may cannibalize a set of *NAW* counters and select units of equivalent strength. To use the secret "die roll" tables players should each tear up a small sheet of paper into six pieces, number the pieces 1 to 6 and select one from a container held by the opposing player. Each player should keep his number secret until the time comes when the results of it apply to the game.

"No Change", of course, indicates that the player in question must get along with his basic forces. For the French, this means the troops actually on the mapsheet, for the Allies this means the troops on the mapsheet *and* the regular contingent of Prussians arriving turn 2.

The outcomes which provide for a reduced or late arriving Prussian contingent, or no Prussian contingent at all, indicate merely that Marshal Grouchy has managed to hold the Prussians in place somewhere east of the main battle area. [Prussian outcomes 2, 3 and 4].

The outcomes which provide for increased Prussian contingents [Prussian outcomes 5 and 6] indicate that Grouchy was more incompetent than usual and managed to let all of the Prussians slip through his fingers.

French outcomes 4 and 5 provide for the possibility that Grouchy heeded General Gerard's demands that his corps be immediately dispatched to support Napoleon.

French outcome 6 indicates that the Marshal made the right choice and managed to come on with all his forces.

REINFORCEMENT CHART

Additional French Units (under the command of Marshal Grouchy)

10  6-4	8  5-4	11  5-4	12  5-4
13  4-4	14  4-4	21  2-4	
9  2-5	10  2-5	4  1-5	7  1-5
III  3-3	IV  3-3		

Obviously, the outcomes will occur in patterns, complementing each other. Thus if Prussian outcome 5 combines with French outcome 1 it means that Grouchy has managed to get himself totally lost. On the other hand, Prussian outcome 2 combined with French outcomes 4 or 5 mean that the Marshal has managed a brilliant holding action. And if combined with outcome 6 it means that he has proven to be one of the finest generals of the age.

Secret "Die Roll" Tables

Allies

1. No change.
2. No Prussian reinforcements arrive at any time.
3. Regular Prussian reinforcements arrive on turn 4, rather than turn 2.
4. Prussian reinforcements arrive on turn 2 but only one 5-4, one 4-4, one 3-5, and one 3-3.
5. Regular Prussian contingent arrives on turn 2 and additional reinforcements of one 5-4, one 4-4, one 3-5 and one 3-3 arrive on turn 4.
6. Regular Prussian contingent arrives on turn 2, and all additional Prussian reinforcements arrive turn 4.

French

1. No change
2. No change.
3. No change.
4. French Player receives on 5-4, two 4-4's, one 2-5, and one 3-3 turn 4.
5. French Player receives one 5-4, two 4-4's, one 2-5, and one 3-3 turn 4.
6. All French reinforcements shown on the Reinforcement Chart arrive turn 4.

All reinforcements arrive anywhere on the eastern edge of the mapsheet, not more than five hexes apart from each other. Reinforcements not taken in one turn may be taken in the next.

Additional Prussian Units (remnants of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Prussian Corps)

 5-4	 5-4	 4-4	 4-4
 3-5	 3-5		
 3-3			

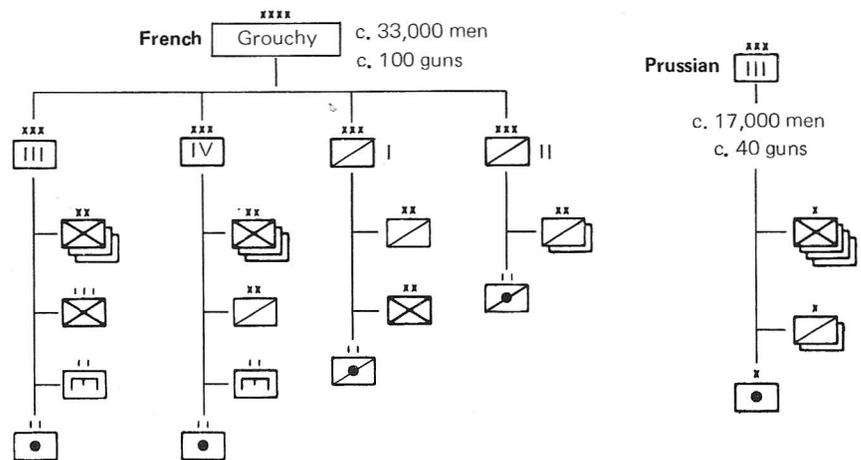
and the fighting died down shortly after the French seized a major ridge a few hundred yards west of the town at about 2300.

The next morning Grouchy renewed the battle and Prussian III Corps was soundly beaten. But then it was too late. Grouchy learned the results of Waterloo at 1030. Rejecting a preposterous suggestion that he fall on the Allied rear he decided to retreat through Namur.

Masterfully breaking off action at Limale and Wavre, Grouchy carried Namur by 1600 and camped there for the night. Early on 20 June Prussian II Corps attacked but was repulsed. Later that same day, as his troops were evacuating the town, the Prussians renewed their attempt to destroy him but suffered some 1,500 casualties at the hands of the rearguard infantry division. Finding Grouchy too tough a nut to crack, the Prussians gave up and marched away to besiege some French frontier fortresses. The next morning he brought over 25,000 undefeated troops into Philippeville where, finding that the main army had already left, he paused only briefly.

Grouchy arrived at Soissons on 25 June and joined Marshal Soult in an attempt to save something from the wreck. Together they had some 55,000 troops and Grouchy assumed command on orders from Napoleon. Having no other choice he marched off towards Paris hotly pursued by Blucher's Prussians, now reduced to about 65,000 men. During this retreat Grouchy's troops engaged, and generally got the better of, the Prussians in a handful of small battles. On 29 June Grouchy's army marched into Paris. ●●

Order of Battle The Battles of Wavre and Limale 18 June 1815



This outline order of battle represents Grouchy's command throughout the period from 17 June, when Napoleon assigned him the task of pursuing the Prussians, through 25 June, when he joined his forces with those of Soult at Soissons. For the Prussians only the corps actually engaged at Wavre and Limale are noted. Normally a French corps had a

cavalry division attached but in the case of III Corps this was missing. Similarly, I Cavalry Corps ought to have had two cavalry divisions, but instead had one only plus a stray division from another corps.

A Prussian corps had no divisional structure, each brigade being almost as large as most French divisions.

Grenadier

Tactical Warfare: 1680-1850

Grenadier is a company / battery / squadron scale game of warfare in the period of the dominance of cannon and musket. The game depicts sixteen famous battles from the introduction of the bayonet to the invention of rifling. Because of the tactical scale of **Grenadier** some of the battles are represented by crucial segments, isolated and simulated. For example, the Battle of Waterloo (1815) is represented by the attack of Napoleon's Old Guard on the center of the British line. The Battle of the Pyramids (1798) is represented by the attack of the Mameluke cavalry on the most exposed French infantry. Several other battles such as Palo Alto (1846) from the Mexican War are covered entirely. Commanders represented include Marlborough, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Ney, Wellington, and Zachary Taylor. Some of the 16 battles depicted in **Grenadier** are Blenheim, Austerlitz, Marengo, and Jena. Attacks are divided into fire (musket and cannon) and shock (bayonet and sabre) modes. There are nine types of infantry units, three cavalry and five artillery. **Grenadier's** combat resolution system depends less on chance (die rolls) than any game yet developed. Available from Simulations Publications for \$6.00.

- Tactical game of musket-bayonet warfare.
- Sixteen famous battles are depicted . . .
- Covering warfare from Blenheim to Palo Alto.

