Thirteen Critical Decisions at Waterloo

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A modern military leader can learn a great deal about the art and science of warfare by studying the battles of Napoleon. Although the means and methods of land warfighting have changed drastically since the French Emperor's time, many fundamentals—such as campaign planning and maneuvering of large forces—remain much the same. The lessons to be learned from such study take on particular contemporary relevance when the analysis proceeds in terms of the modern Principles of War.[1] Napoleon's Waterloo campaign, which sees its 175th anniversary in June of this year, dramatically demonstrates how one of history's greatest commanders applied these important concepts in reaching his decisions.[2]

During the Waterloo campaign, Napoleon made 13 significant decisions, each of which concerned critical features of the campaign plan or one of the major engagements. These decisions and their applicable principles will be assessed from Napoleon's perspective—concentrating on his options, his circumstances, his apparent rationale for selecting these courses of action. Moreover, the picture of the battlefield will be that of the French as it developed in their command post. Thus our picture will be obscured by the same foggy information that clouded Napoleon's vision at the time.

The events of the campaign encompass four months starting with Napoleon's escape on 1 March 1815 from banishment on the island of Elba and ending with his defeat near Waterloo on the evening of 18 June. Napoleon had been forced into exile on Elba in 1814 as a result of his obsessive attempt to dominate all of Europe. The Bourbon monarchy that followed Napoleon's abdication was neither wise nor effective, and the French people quickly grew dissatisfied. Sensing an opportunity to reinstate his empire, Napoleon returned to France on 20 March to undertake one last grand gamble. He was triumphantly received in Paris, and Louis XVIII fled to Belgium.

The following period came to be known as the Hundred Days—it would be approximately that long until the Bourbons were back on the French throne. Meanwhile, the Seventh Coalition (consisting of Great Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia) was meeting at the Congress of Vienna to reconstruct the map of Europe. Upon hearing of Napoleon's return, the allies declared war against their old enemy. The English Duke of Wellington and the Prussian Prince Blücher von Wahlstadt, with their two armies, were to invade France promptly through Belgium; the Austrians and Russians were to follow later from the east.

• *Decision One.* Napoleon was thus brought to his first decision: the strategy for his campaign against the allies. Only two strategic options were open. Since the allies were moving on him, he could mass troops around Paris and initially defend in place. Or he could seize the offensive and move out to meet the invaders on grounds of his own choosing.

If he chose to defend, he would possibly have until mid-August to prepare, while the allies consolidated and traveled the separating distance. However, a third of his territory and its inhabitants would be left undefended. Besides abandoning resources to the enemy, such a course would have a devastating effect on the already-low morale of the French people.

The second and bolder plan was to attack his enemies before they could consolidate. Napoleon could first take on the English[3] and Prussian armies, who constituted the most immediate threat, then move east to confront the Austrians and Russians. From French sympathizers in the Netherlands, he had a clear picture of the enemy's disposition. The Prussians, with approximately 117,000 men, were dispersed around Liège with lines of communication running to Germany; the English, with approximately 100,000, were spread around Brussels with lines of communication running to the English Channel. It would take the allies at least three days to concentrate their forces. If Napoleon could confront either army individually with his force of 120,000 men, he could defeat each in detail before the two could unite.

His decision was to attack Wellington and Blücher in mid-June. He would split his Armée du Nord into two wings and a central reserve. Because the allied soldiers were mostly novices, the experienced French army—even split into smaller elements—seemingly could prevail over the larger allied forces. Each wing would have one of the allied armies as its objective, while Napoleon would control the reserve to reinforce either wing. His axis of

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advance was to be along the boundary between the two allied armies, a customary weak spot in all composite forces.

Napoleon's decision was consistent with two characteristics displayed throughout the 23 years and some 60 battles of his active military career. First, he firmly believed in the offensive, especially the quick knockout blow.[4] The defensive was anathema to him.[5] And his foremost objective was always the destruction of the enemy's forces.[6] These beliefs correspond with two modern principles of war: seizing the *offensive* to hold the initiative, maintain freedom of action, and achieve results; and directing every operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable *objective*.

• *Decision Two.* Napoleon's second decision was the selection of his immediate subordinate commanders. Historians are near unanimous in disparaging these selections,[7] and Napoleon later blamed three of these generals for his defeat.

Napoleon's scheme of operating with two wings and a separate reserve demanded inspired leadership on the wings and a strong chief of staff. The most able independent commander available was Marshal Nicolas Jean de Dieu Soult. Instead of being given command of one of the wings, Soult was made chief of staff, a post for which he had neither experience nor talent. His appointment may have had a political basis, since Soult had been Minister of War under the Bourbons, and his position in Napoleon's headquarters would convey a united French image.

The command of the left wing was given to Marshal Michel Ney, renowned as a fighter but not as an independent thinker.[8] Ney may have been selected for political reasons also, because he had defected from commanding the Bourbon army to aid Napoleon's triumphant return to Paris.[9] Marshal Emmanuel Grouchy was chosen to command the right wing.[10] Grouchy was originally selected to command the cavalry—a post for which he was well qualified—but was later promoted to command the wing, despite the fact that he had never commanded even a corps.

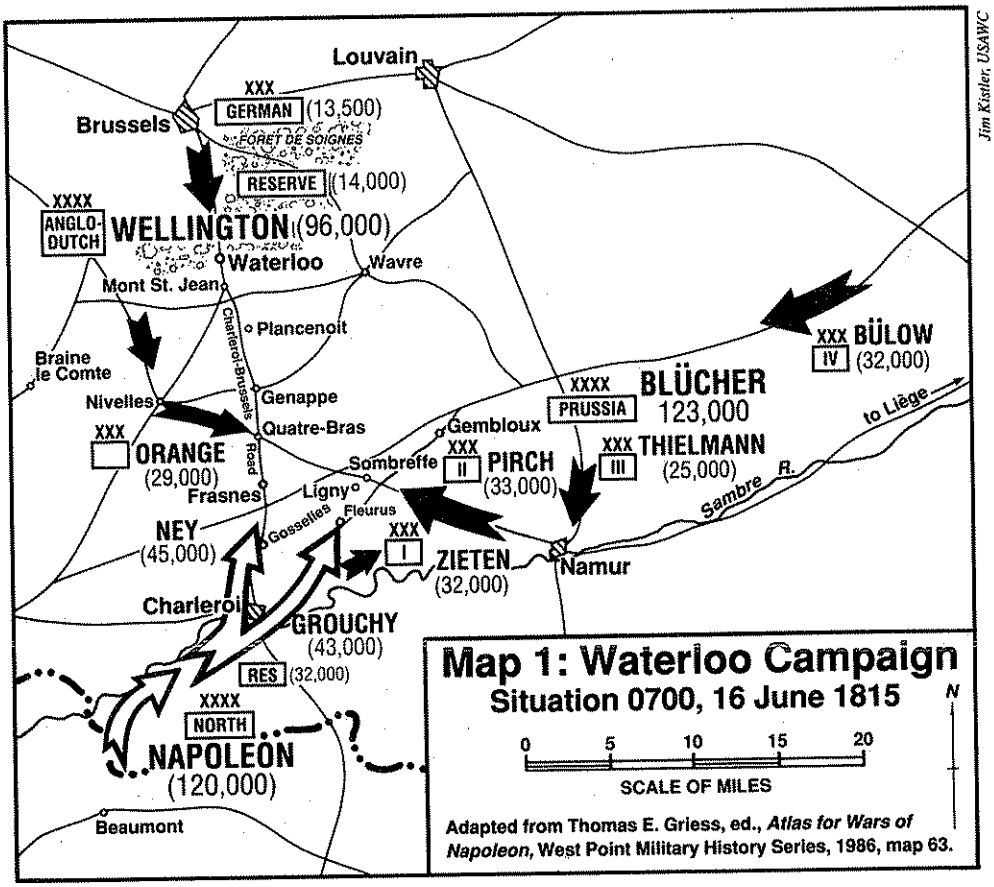
If, as most historians believe, there were more suitable officers available, why did Napoleon choose so poorly? Apparently he believed he had made adequate appointments under the press of time. After all, each of the trio was a capable, experienced officer. Hindsight shows that the primary problem was the inappropriate role each was assigned. Moreover, Napoleon may have thought that he could compensate for any of their weaknesses by his own presence at every critical engagement. His insistence on unifying command in his own hands was the foundation of his many victorious campaigns.[11] The modern principle of *unity of command* has a similar purpose, ensuring that all efforts are focused on a common goal.

• *Decision Three.* Napoleon's third decision was his choice of the time and place of his initial engagement with the allied forces occupying the

Low Countries. Judging that they would not be ready to advance before 1 July, Napoleon decided to assemble his army in secret near the Belgian border, then strike suddenly across the Sambre River at their main junction and defeat each in turn.

The concentration of the Armée du Nord was a masterpiece of speed and secrecy. It involved the movement of five corps,[12] the Imperial Guard,[13] and the reserve cavalry into a zone 30 kilometers square from a dispersal area of more than 200 kilometers.[14] On 14 June, Napoleon arrived to assume command. At 0200 hours on the 15th, the French force began moving over the border, taking both Wellington and Blücher almost completely by surprise.[15] In our age of sophisticated surveillance technologies, striking the enemy unaware or unprepared becomes more difficult, but such strategic *surprise* remains an especially important and effective principle.

Upon crossing into Belgium, the French advanced north and by 1500 took Charleroi. The two wings pushed ahead while the reserve concentrated in and around Charleroi itself. Ney, who had just received command of the left wing, headed in the direction of Wellington's army and reached Gosselies at about 2000, but not his target of Frasnes. On the right, keying on Blücher,



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Grouchy's men reached the outskirts of Fleurus, but failed to take the town before darkness.

By nightfall on 15 June, Napoleon had concentrated his army at the very hinge pin of the Prussian and English forces. He also retained full liberty to make his main effort on whichever flank presented the maximum advantage.

• *Decision Four.* The next step was to drive the two enemy armies away from each other by causing each to fall back on its line of communication. Here Napoleon made his fourth decision. On the 16th, Ney's left wing was to attack Wellington to inflict heavy damage and drive him away from Blücher. Simultaneously, Grouchy's right wing was to attack the Prussians, seize Gembloux and Sombreffe, and sever the crucial allied juncture. Napoleon intended to throw his might initially against the English, believing that Wellington was more likely to stand and fight a decisive battle than Blücher. Additionally, if Napoleon could defeat or drive through Wellington, the Emperor might successfully occupy Brussels.[16]

About 0600, Napoleon dictated dispatches to his subordinate commanders. The letter to Grouchy explained his role for the day and told him to be prepared late in the day to swing part of his force down the lateral road to assist Ney in the day's main conflict against Wellington. The dispatch to Ney summarized Grouchy's instructions and gave specific instructions for the placement of some of Ney's units. In conclusion, Napoleon ordered Ney "to remain constantly on the alert, ready to take the road at once and march rapidly and unhindered on Brussels."[17] These orders may have led Ney to think that he was not to move on his own initiative, for he made no attempt to take Quatre Bras during the morning. But surely he must have known that this was one of his main objectives.

Napoleon's employment of Grouchy's force is comparable to the modern principle of *economy of force.* Although Grouchy would have his whole force initially to attack whatever Prussians he encountered, shortly thereafter he would send a portion to beef up Ney, continuing his own mission at scaled-down strength.

At about 0800, Napoleon received a message from Grouchy reporting that his cavalry screen had spotted strong columns of Prussian troops advancing toward Sombreffe. Napoleon rode to Fleurus to see the situation for himself, arriving at 1000. The disposition of the Prussians convinced him that it was no rear guard but a force covering a general allied advance.

• *Decision Five.* Because of these developments, Napoleon made his fifth decision. His main attention on the 16th would be directed against Blücher at Ligny;[18] Ney's operation would be subordinated. Napoleon's plan was to contain Blücher's left with cavalry, then engage the Prussian center and right frontally, compelling Blücher to commit and exhaust his reserves. An element of Ney's would be ordered to arrive at 1800 to fall upon the rear of Blücher's right wing,[19] then the reserve would smash through the center.

Napoleon expected to destroy two-thirds of Blücher's army and force the remaining third to fall back on Liège, away from Wellington.

Still featuring an *economy-of-force* action, decision five also included an excellent tactical application of the principle of *maneuver*, another characteristic of Napoleon's style of combat. The object of maneuver is to concentrate or to disperse forces in a manner designed to place the enemy at a disadvantage, thus achieving results that would otherwise be more costly in men and materiel.

At 1400 the French troops began moving forward.[20] By 1430 the cavalry was containing the Prussian left, and the bulk of Grouchy's force was attacking. Because resistance was stubborn, by 1515 Napoleon had sent for early augmentation from Ney.[21] However, by 1700 Blücher appeared to have exhausted his reserves and was weakening. Napoleon called up the Imperial Guard from reserve. Just as he was about to administer the coup de grace at 1800, an unidentified column of troops appeared on the left flank, causing Napoleon to suspend the Guard attack. The column turned out to be d'Erlon's corps, the support from Ney, which had gotten out of position. Before they could be redirected, they were ordered back to Quatre Bras. As a result of this confusion, Napoleon's master stroke was delayed an hour. Then, as darkness closed in, the Prussians counterattacked. The French repulsed this effort and, by 1930, had launched the grand assault in a heavy downpour. Under the tremendous impact of the assault, the Prussian line broke at 2000 and Blücher's army was driven from the battlefield.[22]

• *Decision Six.* It appeared that Napoleon had achieved a great victory, but it was not complete. He should have ordered an immediate pursuit to exploit his success and ensure that he had indeed reduced the Prussian army to a disorganized rabble. Decision six, then, was not to exploit the Prussian defeat. Napoleon believed the Prussian main body to be incapable of further large-scale resistance. Additionally, there was every reason to expect that the battered remnants of Blücher's army were falling back on their lines of communication toward Liège.[23] Above all, Napoleon had received no news from Ney since mid-afternoon, and it appeared prudent to delay the follow-up on the right until the left wing's fortunes had been determined. Consequently, Napoleon ordered Grouchy merely to have the enemy pursued at daybreak.[24]

Exploitation and pursuit highlight an important dimension of the principle of the *offensive*. Exploitation seeks to keep the enemy under pressure, compound his disorganization, and erode his will to resist. The object of pursuit is annihilation of the opposing force. Both phases reinforce success and ensure that the objective of the offensive is fully accomplished.

Nonetheless, the 16th had been successful for Napoleon. The exception was Ney's failure to take Quatre Bras which, in turn, interfered with his support of the Emperor at Ligny. Ney had not issued his orders for the 16th until 1100, and his forces had not started advancing until 1400. At 1500 Ney's

attack was succeeding, but at that point Ney received Napoleon's revised plan, which envisaged Ney swinging over to help at Ligny. Consequently, d'Erlon's corps was sent to Ligny.[25] A short time later the English counterattacked and Ney sent an order to d'Erlon to return immediately.

It was not until 1830 that Napoleon's 1515 dispatch arrived and Ney understood that his sector had been relegated to second priority. In any event, lacking d'Erlon's corps,[26] Ney had no recourse but to settle for a stalemate at Quatre Bras. The French and English ended the day in the same positions they had held in the morning.[27]

While the Emperor was at breakfast on the morning of the 17th, he received confirmation that Wellington was still in position at Quatre Bras and not falling back to protect Brussels as expected. Napoleon decided that the day's aim would be to defeat or drive through the English.[28] He had Soult send a warning order to Ney,[29] then went to Grouchy's headquarters to visit the wounded. Between 1000 and 1100, he learned that the Prussians were massing at Gembloux.

• *Decision Seven.* Three possible courses were now open to Napoleon. He could go after Blücher with the right wing and the reserve, force a second engagement, and complete the work of the previous day, while Ney watched Wellington. Second, the Emperor could leave Grouchy with a skeleton force to maintain contact with Blücher and fall on Wellington with a superior massed force. Finally, he could detach Grouchy with his full complement of 33,000 men to harry Blücher, then mass the remaining 69,000 against Wellington. Because Napoleon remained committed to his strategic intent, the last option—decision seven—was chosen.

Napoleon ordered his reserve to Marbais to support Ney's attack. Next, he dictated letters to Grouchy and Ney. He told Grouchy to pursue the Prussians and determine their intentions.[30] Ney's letter told him to attack the enemy at Quatre Bras and drive him from his positions using the reserve force at Marbais.[31]

The actions assigned to Grouchy parallel the modern principle of *security*. In addition to providing protection from hostile acts of violence, security also includes measures taken to protect against surprise, interference, or any situation that affords the enemy an unexpected advantage.

When Napoleon arrived at Quatre Bras at 1300, he found Ney's troops preparing lunch while Wellington's army was carrying out an unhindered withdrawal.[32] Although the left wing was immediately galvanized into activity, it was not until 1409 that the French were ready to advance; then a colossal thunderstorm burst and the ground became a quagmire. The French could only trail after the English army along the Brussels road. By 1830 Wellington had successfully escaped to a position just beyond the ridge of Mont St. Jean south of Waterloo. Ney's inactivity on the morning of the 17th had again been crucial.

• *Decision Eight.* By early evening Napoleon was sure that Wellington was establishing his army at Mont St. Jean, with the apparent intention of fighting the next day. At 0400 on the 18th, Napoleon received a dispatch from Grouchy reporting that the bulk of the Prussian army was at Wavre. The message concluded, "I shall follow them so as to prevent them gaining Brussels and to separate them from Wellington."[33] Napoleon saw no reason to reply to this message until 1000. Just prior to dictating that reply, Soult advised the immediate recall of Grouchy, believing there could not be too many French troops to face Wellington. This angered Napoleon, who retorted, "Because you have been beaten by Wellington [in the Peninsular campaign] you consider him a good general, but I tell you that Wellington is a *bad* general and the English are breakfast."[34] In addition to refusing Soult's recommendation, the Emperor also declined repositioning Grouchy to better protect the right flank.

The refusal to send revised orders to Grouchy constituted Napoleon's eighth decision. Historians have made much of the reasons for Napoleon taking this stance, since this failure to properly guard against intervention by Blücher also contributed to the French defeat. Based upon the intentions Grouchy expressed in his message, Napoleon's belief that Grouchy's force of 33,000 would hold off the Prussians seems reasonable. However, the Emperor's stubborn refusal coupled with his emotional outburst against Soult lends some credence to suspicions that physical and mental illness interfered with Napoleon's ability to command effectively at Waterloo.[35] Nonetheless, the dispatch Napoleon sent to Grouchy at 1000 reinforced the requirement to maintain contact and to keep the Prussians busy.[36]

The battlefield covered a front of no more than four kilometers, between Paris Wood in the east and the village of Braine l'Alleud in the west. The principal features of the terrain were two low ridges, a little over a kilometer apart. Wellington's defensive positions were on the reverse slopes of the northern ridge, but there were outposts, about 500 meters to the front, at the chateau at Hougoumont and the farm at La Haye Sainte. Across the valley, Napoleon's line ran along the south ridge, with the village of La Belle Alliance close behind the center of the ridge. The road from Charleroi to Brussels bisected the English and French positions. Napoleon had 48,950 infantry, 15,765 cavalry, and 7,232 artillerymen with 246 guns—a total of 71,947 men. This was fairly close to Wellington's 67,661, which consisted of 49,608 infantry, 12,408 cavalry, and 5,645 artillerymen with 156 guns.[37]

• *Decision Nine.* On the morning of the 18th, an experienced artillery officer advised Napoleon to postpone his attack for two to three hours because the ground was still too wet to allow the guns to maneuver easily or to employ the ricochet effect of their shots. Napoleon immediately agreed, constituting decision nine: to delay the main assault until 1300. Although this delay seemed reasonable, historians cite it as another prime contributor to the French defeat.[38]

• *Decision Ten.* At about 1100 the Emperor dictated his general attack order, his tenth decision of the campaign. Because of the damp ground, there would not be any fancy maneuvers. The plan called for a single massive frontal offensive supported by the merest handful of preliminary attacks. Some historians assert that the French should have attempted to turn Wellington's right flank rather than indulge in so straightforward an assault, but Napoleon needed a quick victory, and the fast sledgehammer blow had worked successfully in the past. He had a great deal of confidence in his plan, declaring, "We have ninety chances in our favor, and not ten against us."[39]

The attack was a clear example of the tactical application of the principle of *mass*. Napoleon believed that the experience of his troops gave him a clear advantage, despite both armies being about numerically equal. By concentrating superior power against Wellington's line, the Emperor was confident that he would achieve the breakthrough and the decisive results he needed.

At 1136 hours, the French batteries opened fire and a diversionary attack of Hougoumont was launched by a division from Reille's corps with the intention of drawing in Wellington's reserves and weakening the sector of the English line to be attacked. Unfortunately, this action got out of hand and lasted well into the middle of the afternoon.

At about 1300, as d'Erlon's corps was preparing to begin its assault, a Prussian force was spotted entering the Paris Wood. They were identified as Bülow's corps. Two light cavalry divisions and Lobau's corps were sent from the reserve to hold Bülow in check and secure the right flank. Orders were then sent for Grouchy's recall.

At 1330 Ney began his attack. D'Erlon's corps advanced with some success on their right, but could not clear La Haye Sainte on their left. Their momentum exhausted, they were taken in the flank by English cavalry and were thrown back down the slope of the English position. The English broke through the attackers and plunged toward the French central battery, but French lancers and cuirassiers drove them off.

However, the English had resisted the first assault, and the battlefield quieted until 1500 except for the fighting at Hougoumont. About this time Napoleon received an 1130 dispatch from Grouchy, revealing his position and making it clear that there was no hope of his reaching Napoleon during the day.[40]

• *Decision Eleven.* Napoleon now had two options. He could call off the battle and regroup to attack again on the next day or at a later date. Or he could fling everything he had in hand against Wellington in the hope of destroying him before significant Prussian assistance arrived. Since the initial assault had left the English no better off than the French, Napoleon saw no reason to retire, and thus decision eleven was to continue the battle.

Reasoning that the key to Wellington's position was La Haye Sainte, Napoleon ordered Ney to take it at any cost. If he could next take the farm at

In this painting by E. Chaperon, Marshal Ney rallies the 95th Infantry: "Come and see how a marshal of France dies."

Mont St. Jean, he would be able to cut off the English line of retreat and block any Prussian assistance.

Because of various problems, Ney was able to attack with only two brigades. Although they were repulsed, Ney thought he saw the beginning of a retreat in the English rear. Ney immediately ordered Milhaud's two divisions forward; Charles Lefebvre-Desnouettes' division instinctively followed the forward movement. As a result, 5,000 horsemen were thrown into the fray prematurely.

During all this, Bülow's corps moved out of the Paris Wood and by 1700 had taken Plancenoit. Napoleon sent the Young Guard to assist Lobau's corps in retaking it. The Emperor's central reserve was dwindling fast.

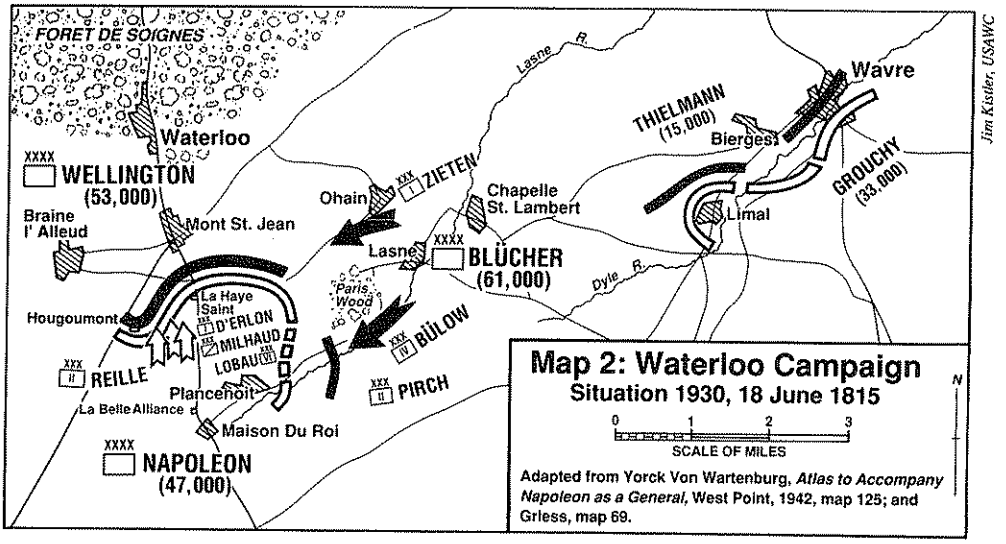
Meanwhile, Ney's charge of 5,000 cavalry had resulted in exposed horsemen milling about the English line. To extricate Ney's cavalry, Napoleon

ordered some of the cavalry reserve forward. This movement got out of hand, causing a second massed cavalry charge which overcrowded the field with horsemen. Realizing that the cavalry charges had failed, Ney committed two divisions of Reille's corps at 1800. Eventually La Haye Sainte fell to a combined attack of infantry, cavalry, and artillery. Ney then called for additional troops to exploit his success.

• *Decision Twelve.* Napoleon rejected Ney's appeal, saying, "Troops! Where do you expect me to get them? Do you expect me to make them?"[41] Lord Chalfont, echoing the conclusions of several historians, called this the critical moment of the Waterloo campaign: "Had Napoleon agreed to send in the Guard, then the battle might well have been won."[42] Not to do so became decision twelve.

But the decision was more than just a refusal to reinforce Ney. Napoleon was choosing instead to protect his right flank and rear because the Young Guard had been thrown out of Plancenoit again. Of the 14 Guard battalions available to him, Napoleon formed 11 into as many squares and posted them east of the Brussels road facing Plancenoit. He kept one battalion to guard his headquarters and sent the remaining two to retake Plancenoit, which they did. However, the time spent stabilizing the French right flank had given Wellington a half hour of grace in which to strengthen his defensive line.[43]

• *Decision Thirteen.* The moment had arrived for decision thirteen. Many historians have maintained that at this point, about 1900 hours, Napoleon should have withdrawn his army while it was still intact. But retreat was not in his concept of warfighting. "In a retreat," he said, "besides the honor of the army, a command often loses more men than in two battles."[44] Moreover, he had little choice but to continue the battle. In spite of his best efforts of the previous three days, the English and Prussians were completing their junction; other allied



armies were fast coming up to aid them in a march on Paris.[45] A victory at Waterloo appeared to be Napoleon's only alternative to absolute ruin. In his mind, the moment to snatch success was at hand. "The fate of a battle is the result of a single instant," he wrote. "The decisive moment comes, a moral spark is lighted, and the smallest reserve accomplishes victory."[46]

At 1900, Napoleon personally took forward four to eight battalions of the Guard (accounts vary) and turned them over to Ney to crack the English center. The elite Imperial Guard, which had never failed in an attack, moved forward and assaulted. Wellington's troops met them as they reached the crest of the ridge, and fierce hand-to-hand fighting ensued.

By 2000, Blücher's main force arrived to alter decisively the balance of strength. At about 2015, Wellington ordered a general advance, and the French were crushed between the converging allied forces.[47] Realizing failure, Napoleon fled from the battlefield, leaving behind the shattered remains of his army.[48] He arrived in Paris on the morning of 21 June and on the following day abdicated for the last time. A "single instant" had indeed decided the fate of Waterloo, but that instant was not Napoleon's.

What had caused the total defeat of one of history's greatest commanders? Aside from selecting ill-suited subordinates, Napoleon's initial decisions had been flawless. His campaign strategy and the undetected concentration of his army near Belgium are judged by many historians as brilliant. Surely, his defeat was not the result of misapplication of the fundamental concepts of warfighting; throughout the campaign he applied the soundest principles of warfare. Thus his decisionmaking rates high marks.

Yet on the 18th, Napoleon seemed to commit a series of mistakes that sealed his doom. The biographer William Milligan Sloane summed up that performance in a nutshell: "He began too late; he did not follow up his assaults; he did not retreat when beaten; he could attend to only one thing at a time; he failed in control of his subordinates; he was neither calm nor alert."[49] More than anything else, Napoleon's defeat stemmed from his failures in controlling the time-space factor, a necessity of leadership which he had preached repeatedly. As American historian John Elting points out, "His greatest defeats came from his failures to follow his own teachings."[50]

At the core of those teachings was Napoleon's concept of the Principles of War. Consequently, to the student of military art and science, Napoleon's exploits are most instructive when the modern equivalent of those principles are used as the yardstick for measuring his performance. Napoleon himself would have probably agreed with this notion: it was he who once wrote, "All the great generals . . . have been successful only by adapting themselves to these rules, whatever in other ways the boldness of their undertakings and the extent of their operations may have been."[51]

NOTES

1. Like the armed forces of most nations, the US Army has evolved its own version of such principles. Today's Army recognizes nine principles: objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity. US Department of the Army, *Operations*, FM 100-5 (Washington: GPO, 1986), p. 173.

2. Many historians claim that Napoleon denied the existence of any group of concepts such as the Principles of War. His statement, "There are no precise or determined rules," is often cited. (*La Correspondence de Napoléon Ier* [Paris: Henri Plan, 1858-70], XXXI, 365.) They point out that rather than principles, Napoleon believed the key to battlefield success lay solely with the genius of the commander. "He alone," Napoleon wrote, "by his will and superior insight can conquer and overcome all difficulties." (*Correspondence*, XXIX, 341.) However, another statement by Napoleon may more clearly portray his beliefs about the relationship between the genius of the commander and the use of warfighting principles. He wrote, "All the great generals . . . accomplished their great deeds by obeying the rules and principles of the art, that is to say, by the correctness of their combinations and a careful balancing of means and results, efforts and obstacles." (*Maximes* [Paris: 1874], no. CXII.) In fact, Napoleon had hoped to compile these principles. He said, "If one day I can find the time, I will write a book in which I will describe the principles of war in so precise a manner that they will be at the disposal of all soldiers, so that war can be learnt as easily as a science." (Maréchal Gouvion Saint-Cyr, *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire Militaire sous la Directoire, le Consulat et l'Empire* [Paris: n.p., 1829], IV, 149.)

3. Wellington's so-called English army was a heterogeneous Anglo-Dutch mix. About a third were British troops, most of whom had never been under fire; another third were Dutch-Belgians who had been serving under Napoleon little more than a year before; the rest were Hanoverians, Brunswickers, and about 6,000 men of George III's German Legion. Lord Chalfont, ed., *Waterloo: Battle of Three Armies* (New York: Knopf, 1980), p. 10.

4. Napoleon is quoted as saying, "I think like Frederick, one should always be the first to attack." General G. Gourgaud, *Journal de Sainte Hélène* (Paris: n.p., 1899), II, 336.

5. In a political pamphlet called *Le Souper de Beaucaire* which Napoleon published in 1793, he wrote, "In the art of war it is an axiom that he who remains in his trenches will be beaten: experience and theory are in accord with this." In J. F. C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War 1789-1961* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1961), p. 52.

6. Napoleon is quoted as saying in 1797, "There are in Europe many good generals, but they see too many things at once. I see only one thing, namely the enemy's main body. I try to crush it, confident that secondary matters will then settle themselves." In David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 141.

7. For example, Fuller said that these appointments "were the most fatal of all the errors Napoleon committed during the Hundred Days, and it is no exaggeration to say that they were the chief cause of his defeat." J. F. C. Fuller, *A Military History of the Western World* (New York: Funk, 1955), II, 495.

8. Ney's left wing was comprised of d'Erlon's I Corps (19,939 men) and Reille's II Corps (24,361 men).

9. Napoleon may have intended a calculated blow against Louis XVIII's prestige by reemploying the Bourbon's former commander-in-chief. Like Soult, Ney's selection might also have persuaded other former servants of the Bourbons that their desertion of Napoleon in 1814 could be overlooked in return for renewed service to the Emperor's cause. Chandler, p. 1022.

10. Grouchy's right wing was comprised of Vandamme's III Corps (19,160 men) and Gérard's IV Corps (15,995 men).

11. Méneval, a member of Napoleon's staff, said of him, "He took not only the initiative in thought, but also attended personally to the detail of every piece of business. . . . [H]is genius, superhuman in its activity, carried him away; he felt he possessed the means and the time to manage everything. . . . [I]t was he who did everything." *Memoires*, III, 50-51.

12. This force included the four corps of the two wings and Lobau's VI Corps (10,465 men) assigned to the reserve.

13. The Imperial Guard was the *corps d'élite* of the army. Originally it sprang from the personal escort of General Bonaparte, to which were added selected members of the Guards of the Directory and the Legislative Assembly. At the time of Waterloo its strength was 25,870 soldiers. The Guard comprised three distinct sections. The Old Guard (the original nucleus) consisted of foot grenadiers (infantry), *grenadiers à cheval* (heavy cavalry), dragoons (cavalry capable of fighting mounted or on foot), lancers (light cavalry), Mamelukes (cavalry of Oriental and Turkish descent), *gendarmes d'élites* (Emperor's bodyguard), Marines of the Guard (used for river operations), gunners, and sappers (engineers). The Middle Guard had been added in 1806 and was made up of fusiliers (infantry) regiments to which were eventually added two regiments of flankers (gameskeepers), noted as crack

shots. In 1809 the Young Guard was founded, comprised of light infantry, *voltigeurs* (infantry capable of running as fast as horses), and *tirailleurs* (skirmishers).

14. A security ban was imposed on the frontier area starting 7 June. As operational forces were moved from frontier positions, their places were discreetly filled by National Guardsmen. Civilian traffic was carefully controlled, the mails suspended, and fishing boats were ordered to keep port.

15. Wellington did not learn of Napoleon's invasion until the Englishman was informed while having supper on the 15th with the Duke of Richmond in Brussels. They went into the study to examine a map. Wellington said, "Napoleon has humbugged me, by G— ! He has gained twenty-four hours march on me." When Richmond asked what he intended to do, Wellington replied, "I have [will ?] ordered the army to concentrate at Quatre Bras; but we will not stop him there, and if so, I must fight him here (at the same time passing his thumb-nail over the position of Waterloo)." Quoted in Fuller, *History*, II, 503.

16. The historian Edward Creasy believed that the protection of Brussels was justly considered by the allied generals to be a matter of primary importance: "If Napoleon could, either by manoeuvring or fighting, have succeeded in occupying that city, the greater part of Belgium would unquestionably have declared in his favour; and the results of such a success, gained by the Emperor at the commencement of the campaign, might have decisively influenced the whole after-current of events." Edward S. Creasy, *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1960), p. 397.

17. *Correspondence*, XXVIII, 291.

18. Blücher was 73 years old and had received many decorations and honors from all over Europe. Known as the "Red Hussar," he was intemperate and illiterate, but made up for what he lacked in formal military education by fiery zeal and courage.

19. The orders that Soult sent to Ney said, "His Majesty's intention is that you shall attack whatever force is before you, and after vigorously driving it back, you will turn in our direction, so as to bring about the envelopment of those enemy troops which I have already mentioned to you [i.e. Blücher]." Marshal M. Ney, *Documents inédits du Duc d'Elchingen* (Paris: n.p., 1833), p. 40.

20. Napoleon had 68,000 troops deployed; Blücher had brought his number up to 84,000. Fuller, *History*, p. 507.

21. The message that Napoleon had Soult send to Ney read in part, "His Majesty desires me to tell you that you are to maneuver immediately in such a manner as to envelop the enemy's right and fall upon his rear; the fate of France is in your hands. Thus do not hesitate even for a moment to carry out the maneuver ordered . . . so as to cooperate in a victory that may well turn out to be decisive." Ney, p. 42.

22. The casualties of the Prussians in killed, wounded, and captured amounted to about 16,000 and those of the French to between 11,000 and 12,000. Fuller, *History*, p. 509.

23. What Napoleon did not know was that, although the Prussian center had been shattered, both wings remained relatively intact and extricated themselves in an orderly manner. Elting points out that in the darkness it was impossible to tell which road the Prussian elements took. (John R. Elting, *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grand Armée* [New York: Free Press, 1988], p. 539.) The retreat was not directed toward Liège as expected, but rather towards Wavre to maintain contact with Wellington in accordance with the original allied plan. This was to have dire consequences for Napoleon two days later when the Prussian army was able to reinforce the English.

24. The apparent validity of Napoleon's decision was confirmed the next morning at 0700 when he learned that a cavalry unit of Grouchy's reported an 0400 observation of the enemy in full retreat on Liège. Actually, the cavalry squadron had come across thousands of Prussian deserters fleeing from Ligny.

25. This was the mispositioned column that appeared on Napoleon's left flank at 1800 and caused the one-hour delay in the Emperor's executing his master stroke against Blücher.

26. Because of the confusion in communications, d'Erlon eventually returned to Quatre Bras without seeing any action for the day. His 20,000 men probably could have ensured a total French victory on either battlefield.

27. The casualties were also about equal, between 4,000 and 5,000 on either side. Fuller, *History*, p. 514.

28. Like Napoleon, Wellington was 46 years old, but was a man of very different breeding and temperament. The "Iron Duke" was as autocratic and dictatorial as Napoleon, but seldom let his imagination run away with his reason. As a strategist he was cautious, steady, and reliable rather than brilliant, and his tactical forte was defense. He encouraged the enemy to attack and, when the enemy was in confusion from the smoke of his muskets, Wellington counterattacked. Also like Napoleon, Wellington did not rely on secondhand information, but tried to see everything for himself.

29. The message said in part, "You should take up your position at Quatre Bras; but if this is impossible . . . send information immediately. . . . If, on the contrary, there is only a rearguard, attack it and seize the position. . . . Today it is necessary to end this operation." Ney, pp. 45-47.

30. In the message to Grouchy, Napoleon told him, "Pursue the enemy. Explore his march and instruct me respecting his manoeuvres, so that I may be able to penetrate what he is intending to do. . . . It is important

to penetrate what the enemy is intending to do." In John Codman Ropes, *The Campaign of Waterloo: A Military History* (New York: Scribner's, 1892), pp. 209-10.

31. The letter to Ney said in part, "His Majesty has directed me to inform you that his intention is that you are to attack the enemy at Quatre Bras and drive him from his position and that the force which is at Marbais will second your operations." Ney, pp. 44-45.

32. Upon learning that Blücher had been defeated at Ligny, Wellington decided to change his course of action. It was obvious that Napoleon's main army would now be directed against the English and a retreat was inevitable. After assuring himself that the Prussian army had retired upon Wavre without French pursuit, Wellington resolved to pull his army back toward Brussels to cover that city, halt on line with Wavre, and restore communication with Blücher. Creasy, p. 407.

33. In Chandler, p. 1063.

34. Ibid., pp. 1007-08.

35. Lord Chalfont (see p. 10) best summarized the controversy over Napoleon's health, saying, "Most historians are of the opinion that he was in poor health. Following the best traditions of the subjective historical approach, different accounts, depending upon the individual author's general opinion of Napoleon, have suggested that he was suffering from piles, cystitis, hepatitis, and venereal disease. . . . Napoleon was almost certainly suffering . . . from the appalling pains of the duodenal-pyloric cancer which was eventually to kill him." At the other extreme, General Fuller said, "Such evidence that has been raked up in support of these contentions is as forced as it is distorted; for he was no better or worse than he had been at Marengo, Austerlitz, Jena, and Leipzig." Fuller, *History*, p. 492.

36. The message to Grouchy said, "His Majesty desires that you will head for Wavre in order to draw near to us, and to place yourself in touch with our operations, and to keep up your communications with us, pushing before you those portions of the Prussian army which have taken this direction and which have halted at Wavre." In Chandler, p. 1067.

37. Fuller, *History*, p. 524. To these figures, Charles King adds the strength that Blücher brought to the field: 41,283 infantry, 8,858 cavalry, and 1,803 artillerymen—totaling 51,944 men and 104 guns. He says that the significance of this was that during the day Napoleon would have to "face and fight 119,000 men and 260 guns." Charles King, *Famous and Decisive Battles of the World* (Caskey, 1905), p. 30.

38. Chandler says it was the most fatal mistake of the day "for had even an inadequately supported infantry attack been launched against Wellington during the morning, the French would surely have won; for Blücher would have been too late arriving on the field to affect the issue" (p. 1067).

39. Ibid.

40. During the course of the day, Grouchy had been slow in moving his men during the morning, refused suggestions to march toward the sound of the guns at Waterloo (which might have saved the French cause), and fought an indecisive action against a single Prussian corps at Wavre. To his credit when he was eventually ordered to retreat, Grouchy was able to fall back to Givet skillfully and safely.

41. Ney, p. 18.

42. Chalfont, p. 19.

43. In the hour following the fall of La Haye Sainte, a second Prussian corps, under Zieten, had begun to arrive on the English left. This made it possible for Wellington to move infantry and cavalry from his left to reinforce his center.

44. In Daniel Savage Gray, trans. and comp., *In The Words of Napoleon: A Collection of Quotations of Napoleon Bonaparte* (Troy, Ala.: Troy State Univ. Press, 1977), p. 81.

45. Napoleon anticipated that by July, Schwarzenberg's 210,000 Austrians could attack the upper reaches of the Rhine. At this same time, Frimont with 75,000 more Austrians and Italians could advance onto the Riveria and threaten Lyons. Shortly thereafter, Barclay de Tolly's 150,000 Russians could be in the central Rhine area. When all these forces were assembled, a simultaneous drive on Paris and Lyons could grind down the balance of the French forces between converging armies. Chandler, p. 1015.

46. Jules Bertaut, ed., *Napoleon Bonaparte: Virilités: Maximes et Pénsées* (Paris: n.p., c. 1912), p. 184.

47. The total losses in killed and wounded are estimated to have been: Wellington 15,100; Blücher 7,000; Napoleon 25,000, to which must be added some 8,000 captured and 220 guns. Fuller, *History*, p. 540.

48. Napoleon was still not acknowledging defeat. On the 19th he wrote to his brother Joseph, "All is not lost. . . . When I reassemble my forces I shall have 150,000 men. [Then the] National Guard . . . will provide 100,000 . . . and the regimental depots another 50,000. . . . But people must help me, not deafen me with advice." In Maurice Hutt, ed., *Napoleon* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice, 1972), p. 66-67.

49. William Milligan Sloane, *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York: Century, 1915), p. 213.

50. Elting, p. 529.

51. *Maximes*, no. CXII.