

NAPOLEON

Overview

To the troops he commanded in battle Napoleon was known fondly as the “Little Corporal.” To the monarchs and kings whose thrones he overthrew he was “that Corsican ogre.” Some believed him a great reformer. Others thought him a monster. Friend and foe alike, however, could agree on one fact: Napoleon I, emperor of the French and for 16 years master of most of Europe, was one of the greatest military geniuses of all time.

Growing Up



Napoleon Bonaparte was born in Ajaccio, on the island of Corsica, on Aug. 15, 1769. It was by chance that the future ruler of France was born a French citizen. His family was Italian and had moved to Corsica just before the French took control of it. As a boy he hated the French, whom he considered oppressors of his native land. His father was a revolutionary who wanted to get rid of the French from Corsica. Napoleon was exposed to the ideas of how to organize revolutions from a young age.

When he was nine years old, Napoleon attended a French government military school. A sensitive, lonely boy, Napoleon was constantly bullied by the other French students, who resented his gloomy, melancholy ways. Their cruelties, however, only made him withdraw into dreams of personal glory and military triumphs.

In 1784-85 he attended the École Militaire in Paris. There he received training as an artilleryman and as an officer. When his course was completed he joined the French army as a second lieutenant of artillery. He was 16 years old.

Changes in the Tide

The next few years of Napoleon’s life were exceedingly difficult. His father had died, leaving young Napoleon with the responsibility of providing for the large Bonaparte family. He endured poverty and humiliation. This time proved even more difficult for a person of ambition, since there was little chance to advance your career if you did not come from the Second Estate.

In 1792 Napoleon’s fortunes began to change. He had been stationed in Paris during the French Revolution. With the signing of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the death of King Louis XVI, the chains holding Napoleon’s career back had been removed. The door was now open for Napoleon to get ahead. Most of the French officers had remained faithful to the king. Napoleon, however, viewed the Revolution as an opportunity for advancement.



The new republic was faced with foreign and civil war. It desperately needed able and loyal officers. In the “little Corsican” it found a willing recruit who quickly showed his quality as both a soldier and leader. In 1792 Napoleon was made a captain and assigned to silence dissenters within France. Napoleon was placed as the lead Captain over the forces in Italy. Much of his advancement he owed to the Jacobins, the powerful, radical French political organization. This became a problem when the Jacobins lost favor with the French people (and were beheaded). Napoleon lost his command position was viewed as an “enemy of the Republic” by the new government leaders. Napoleon's situation looked hopeless.

From Defensive to Offensive

In October 1795 a great opportunity came his way. The people of Paris were tired of war and poverty. They rose against the new French government, whom they blamed for their troubles. Napoleon was appointed to put down the revolt. Coolly, he took complete control. Without hesitation he ordered the rebels shot down in the streets. The Convention was saved, and a new government was formed.

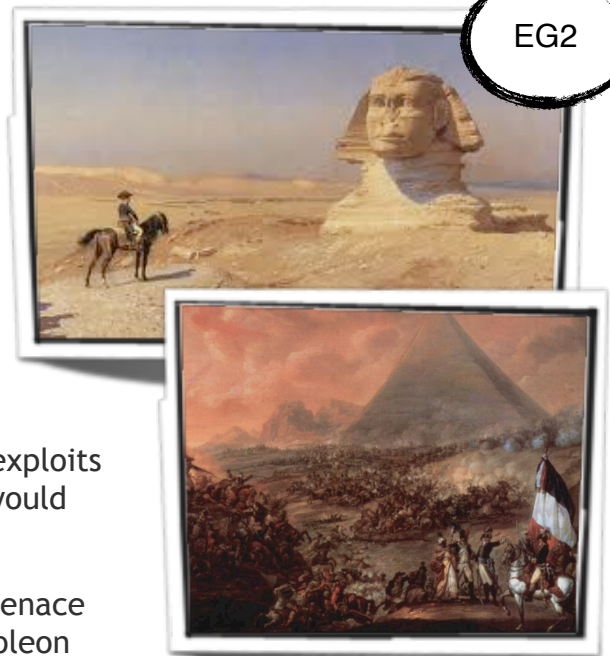
Napoleon was again made commander of the army in Italy. The French were still fighting the Austrians and their allies in Northern Italy. The Italian campaign showed Napoleon's military genius. His quick mind seized every geographical detail which might help or hinder his operations. He was prompt to guess the plans of his enemies, whom he bewildered by his rapid movements. Napoleon's forces were made up of compact, highly mobile, units that could move quickly and strike powerfully. His favorite tactic was called Divide and Conquer. This is a strategy where you cut the enemy's army in two and then to throw his whole force against one of the halves before the other could rejoin it. By this method in 1796 he defeated enemy troops five times in 11 days and forced the king of Sardinia to sue for peace.

What had begun as a war of defense now became a war of aggression. Napoleon had halted all the invading countries and had turned eastward to invade into Austria. It was his first large-scale operation. He quickly advanced to within 80 miles of Vienna, the capital of Austria, when the enemy surrendered.

Building an Empire

Napoleon's return from Italy to Paris was a triumph. No other general of the Revolution had received such a welcome. He persuaded the Government to send him and a large army to Egypt. There he expected to duplicate the exploits of Alexander the Great by winning an eastern empire that would include Egypt, India, and other Middle- and Far-East lands.

Egypt was the first step. By possessing it, Napoleon could menace the route to India, one of England's prized possessions. Napoleon envied the English empire and wanted to thwart the English Empire while building his own. He won the battle of the Pyramids in July 1798. Napoleon's fleet of ships, however, was destroyed by the British in the battle of the Nile by the British commander Horatio Nelson. The French were cut off from reinforcements. Napoleon was fought to a standstill with the Turks and the English with no way of getting his troops out of Africa. Shortly after, Napoleon secretly left his troops to settle political unrest back in France.



The French government had fallen into disarray... again. Napoleon seized the opportunity to get into politics. By 1802, now called himself Napoleon I, with complete military and political power. Napoleon had secured peace treaties with the Germans, English and Austrians. For the first time since 1792, France was at peace with its neighbors.

Napoleon did not take defeat well. He was unhappy with his failure to build an eastern empire and was bitter at the English for interfering. Napoleon used this time of peace to plan to build an empire that would span four continents. To build this empire, he first needed to fix the problems at home in France.

Reforms

Napoleon also devoted himself to badly needed reconstruction work in France itself. He restored friendly relations with the Pope (after the revolution had kicked the church out of France). He established the University of France and reformed the educational system. He founded the Bank of France and changed the tax code.

Above all he gave to the nation the Code Napoléon. It was the first clear, compact statement of French law in centuries that did the following: removed all privilege based on birth, allowed freedom of religion, built modern roads and canals, government jobs assigned based on the abilities of the person, and laid the foundations for public education. It became a model for law reformers throughout the world.

War Resumes

The peace meantime was an uneasy one. In May 1803 war broke out again between France and England. Russia, Austria, and Sweden joined Britain in what was known as the Third Coalition. It was to no avail. Austria, Russia, and Prussia were crushed mercilessly as Napoleon's forces moved East. Napoleon arranged the Peace Treaty of Tilsit which brought the conflict with these defeated foes.

Only England stood in the way of his complete mastery of Western Europe. In 1805 he had planned to invade Great Britain. The favorable moment never came. England's navy, under Adm. Horatio Nelson, who had thwarted Napoleon in Egypt, had destroyed the French fleet at Trafalgar, Oct. 21, 1805. Napoleon was forced to look for other means to defeat his enemy.

These activities had not caused him to neglect his own personal position. In 1804 he had secured a popular vote changing the French government from a consulate to an empire. As "emperor of the French" he assumed the right to hand down the throne to his descendants. He had created an empire. Now he needed an heir—one of undeniably royal blood.



PC2

His marriage to Josephine de Beauharnais had been childless. He divorced Josephine in 1809. In 1810 he took as his bride Marie Louise, the 18-year-old daughter of the emperor of Austria. The Hapsburgs of Austria were one of the proudest royal families in Europe. Within a year she had given him a son.

During this time Napoleon also reorganized Europe. At the height of Napoleon's power the French Empire included from Spain, down to Italy and over to Germany. Napoleon also gain control of the colonies of the countries he controlled. More than 42 million people were subject to his will, including peoples on four continents. Only Britain, Russia, Sweden, and Turkey were outside his influence.



The Beginning of the End

Russia, however, was on very friendly terms with him. The czar Alexander I had been won over to Napoleon's plans following the Peace of Tilsit. Between them they were to divide Europe and share its territories. In return Alexander was to aid Napoleon in his "Continental system." The purpose of the "Continental System" was to keep European countries from buying English goods. This would help bankrupt Britain and force "that nation of shopkeepers," to seek peace. Most countries objected to the system because they needed goods from England and found methods of evading Napoleon's decree. Even Russia soon abandoned it.

In 1812, Napoleon realized then that until Russia was subdued his vast empire was still unsafe and all hopes of avenging himself on England were at an end. He decided to invade Russia. It was not the best time to do so. In Spain his troops were having difficulties fighting the Peninsular War. The Spanish, aided by English troops, had pushed the French back beyond the Pyrenees. Austria too had renewed the struggle for freedom. Although it had been repeatedly crushed, the threat of Austrian revolt remained. Napoleon ignored these danger signals. He felt himself invincible. With a Grand Army of 500,000 soldiers drawn from 20 nations Napoleon plunged boldly into the vastnesses of Russia.

A brief interlude about Russian seasons. Russia has a pleasant "summer period" from May until July. From late August until late November, there are heavy rains that made the mud roads unusable. In November the ground freezes, before being covered by up to three feet of snow. The snow lasts until March, which leaves the ground muddy until the end of April.

Napoleon did not take the weather and timing into account when planning his invasion of Russia. He began the invasion in late June, planning to quickly defeat the Russians, as he had in battles in Germany. Napoleon had planned to feed his troops off the Russian farms and to live in Russian homes.

The campaign was to prove a disaster. Russian military tactic was not to stand and fight but instead to strategically retreat. Russia is massive, covering 11 time zones. As the Russians retreated they implemented a scorched-earth policy. This means that they burned everything to the ground; from farms to fields to homes. The Russians left nothing usable for the invading French. As Napoleon entered Russia he was met with week after week of smoldering rubble. Then, buried deep into Russia, came the rains followed by winter. Napoleon had placed his hopes on arriving at Moscow, the Russian capital before winter fully set in. When Napoleon arrived, Moscow was in smoldering ashes; being burned to the ground by the retreating Russians. Napoleon and his forces now had to face the heart of the Russian winter with no place to stay, no food, and no winter clothing. These were a combination of conditions Napoleon had never before experienced. Napoleon began his retreat on October 19 across the snow-covered plains. The retreat from Moscow was one of the great disasters of military history. Of the nearly 500,000 men who had set out in June, fewer than 20,000 ragged, freezing, and starving men staggered back across the Russian frontier in December.



Now his enemies saw their chance. For almost 20 years the war-weary people of Europe had watched the armies of France under Napoleon crush all resistance before them. With the collapse of those once mighty armies, the nations seized the opportunity to overthrow their conqueror. One by one they rose against him. England, Austria, and Prussia joined Russia in the War of Liberation. Napoleon conscripted new armies and won a few minor victories. However, in the three-day battle of Leipzig—called the battle of the Nations—the French were outnumbered, outgeneraled, and outfought. They were forced to retreat.

On March 30, 1814, the allies captured Paris itself. Napoleon's generals refused to continue the hopeless struggle despite all the emperor's pleadings. He was forced to step down from the throne on April 6, 1814.

Napoleon's Speech: to the Soldiers of my Old Guard (April 20, 1814):

I bid you farewell. For twenty years I have constantly accompanied you on the road to honor and glory. In these latter times, as in the days of our prosperity, you have invariably been models of courage and fidelity. With men such as you our cause could not be lost; but the war would have been interminable; it would have been civil war, and that would have entailed deeper misfortunes on France.

I have sacrificed all of my interests to those of the country.

I go, but you, my friends, will continue to serve France. Her happiness was my only thought. It will still be the object of my wishes. Do not regret my fate; if I have consented to survive, it is to serve your glory. I intend to write the history of the great achievements we have performed together.

Adieu, my friends. Would I could press you all to my heart.



One more Revival & Death

At Fontainebleau on April 20, 1814, Napoleon took leave and left for exile on the Island of Elba. Napoleon stubbornly refused to admit he had lost all power. He remained on Elba for only ten months. In March 1815 he escaped and landed in France. Escorted by a thousand of his old guard he began a triumphal march on Paris, picking up support along the way. Thousands rallied to his side. For a brief time, known as the Hundred Days, Napoleon enjoyed a return to his former glory. It came to an end when Horatio Nelson orchestrated the battle of Waterloo, which was fought on June 18, 1815. Napoleon suffered his final defeat by a combined English and Prussian force, when the Duke of Wellington from England used the “divide and conquer” strategy to defeat the French.



EE2

Napoleon’s dream of world empire came to a close on the tiny island of St. Helena, to which he was exiled on July 15, 1815. The island is located in the South Atlantic Ocean well off the coast of Africa. Napoleon died there, alone and deserted by his friends and family, on May 5, 1821.

Questions

1) Create an Impact Timeline. Using the the following events, map Napoleon’s path to global domination.

- Put the following events in order:

Exile on Elba, Continental System, Attending Military School, Invasion of Russia, Exile on St. Helena, Start of the French Revolution, Birth in Corsica, Crowned Emperor, Retreat from Russia, Fall of the Jacobins, Hundred Days, War in Egypt, Battle of Waterloo, Code Napoleon

- Create the following chart.

- Each of these events had an impact on Napoleons rise and fall from power. Using arrows, graph the impact each event had on Napoleon’s career.

2) **Photo Analysis.** Do the Photo Analysis (Observe, Infer, Question) of all the pictures in the following photo collections :
EG2, PC2, R3, EE2

3) **Map Analysis.** Using Map M1, create a simple timeline of Napoleon’s major military victories.

4) **Passage Reading:** Read Napoleon’s speech.

- Summarize key points in 4 words.

- For whom did Napoleon claim he fought this war? What did he predict would have happened if they had not gone to war? Create a logic tree demonstrating whether you agree or disagree and why?

5) **Logic Tree & Paragraph:** Was Napoleon a “great reformer” or “military monster”? Explain.

6) **Logic Tree & Paragraph:** Explain how Napoleon was the embodiment of the ideas of Romanticism.

