

# The History and Deeds of Napoleon Bonaparte

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## Napoleon's Childhood

Prior to shaping the world with his deeds, Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) needed to win the struggle against the social and attitudinal forces that were all staked against one genius with a will of steel.

He was born into the name "Napoleone Buonaparte" (the name was altered to its more familiar state in 1796) on August 14, 1769, in the city of Ajaccio on the Mediterranean island of Corsica, one year after the island had been incorporated into the Kingdom of France. He was the second child of eleven, of which only eight had survived early childhood.

Napoleon's father, Carlo Buonaparte, was "an anti-French lawyer" ("A Paper on Napoleon", Norfolk Academy, VA, 1). Prior to marrying Napoleon's mother, Leticia, Carlo fought for the Corsican Independence Movement, led by rebel leader Pascuale Paoli. However, recognizing the fruitlessness of the cause, he settled down to raise a family.

Paoli retained a lifelong grudge against his former comrade and extended his hatred to even Carlo's children. Although Napoleon's family enjoyed the title of minor Corsican nobles, they suffered from a lack of funds and thus, poverty. The *Encyclopedia of World Biography* states that "following the annexation of Corsica by France, Carlo was granted the same rights and privileges as the French nobility" (306).

Although this did not solve their financial dilemma, it opened up new avenues to success for the younger generation of Bonapartes, who were now permitted to attend the same prestigious educational facilities as the cream of the Parisian elite. Perhaps this was the reason for Carlo's abandonment of the struggle for Corsican independence, seeing that his family had ampler chances at prosperity under French rule.

Thus, Carlo Buonaparte sent his children to obtain an education on the mainland. Napoleon remained in Corsica until the age of nine. Having obtained an "elementary education at a boys' school in Ajaccio, he was sent in January 1779 with his older brother Joseph to the College of Autun in the duchy of Burgundy. In May of the same year, he was transferred to the more fashionable College of Brienne, another military school, while his brother remained at Autun.

Here Napoleon's stature earned him the nickname of the 'Little Corporal.'" (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 307). He was also mocked and ridiculed for his Italian accent and abstinence from rowdy public gatherings. While his peers threw away their lives at parties, Napoleon remained buried in volumes of mathematics and philosophy.

## Napoleon's Education and Gradual Ascent

At an extremely young age, Napoleon introduced himself to the study of trajectory as well as the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau. These two categories would subsequently transform him into a brilliant commander of artillery as well as an ardent revolutionary.

"The French students laughed at him because he had dreams of personal triumph and power." ("A Paper on Napoleon," Norfolk Academy, VA, 1). His peers did not at that time realize that twenty years later, they would be greeting that same man as "His Majesty, the Emperor of the French." Yet he had surpassed them far before ascending to such heights.

"In October 1784 he earned an appointment to the *École Militaire* of Paris. The royal military school of Paris was the finest in Europe in the years before the revolution, and Napoleon entered the service of Louis XVI in 1785 with a formal education that had prepared him for his future role in French history." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 307).

The program at the *École Militaire* was designed so that a student would spend three years in his attempts at completing it. Napoleon, however, through early demonstrations of his work ethic, graduated in only half the required time. He left the school for an artillery unit in Valence, where he would serve as lieutenant, being only sixteen-years-old.

The next eight years of his life can be summarized as a gradual ascent up the hierarchical ladder of French society. Between 1785 and 1792, he developed the foundations for his genius, continuing his studies in trajectory and topography, which later led to his appointment to the Bureau of Topography for the Committee of Public Safety.

This period of Napoleon's life, during which he gradually elevated himself from lieutenant to captain, is more interesting in terms of the events that occurred in his homeland. In 1786, Carlo Buonaparte died suddenly and prematurely, and the seventeen-year-old Napoleon was burdened with maintenance of his family, which in turn led to his return to Corsica.

Thus Napoleon traveled back and forth between Ajaccio and the mainland in the following years, during which his social position was on the rise. The Revolution of 1789 inaugurated a change from a royalist government that evaluated people based on birth instead of merit, thereby giving Napoleon a chance to rise on the basis of his personal talents.

The more objective leaders of the French Republic took Napoleon into consideration for his ardent devotion to the new regime: "Georges Lefebvre wrote that the [future] Emperor was '...a pupil of the philosophers; he detested feudalism, civil inequality, and religious intolerance.' ..." (Holmberg, 1).

## **Napoleon's Return to and Final Departure from Corsica**

As the French Revolution unfolded and headed toward ever greater turmoil, Napoleon was quick to choose sides. He made the mistake of allying with the Jacobins, the bloody and socialistic instigators of the infamous Reign of Terror. "R.R. Palmer has observed that Napoleon considered the Jacobin government of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety the only serious government of the Revolutionary period." (Holmberg, 1)

Indeed, not even the widespread executions of 1793 and 1794 seemed to shake Napoleon's allegiances. "During the 'Reign of Terror' Napoleon was strongly identified with the Jacobins. His dialogue published in 1793, *'Le Souper de Beaucaire,'* championed the Jacobins over the

federalist Girondins. What Napoleon admired were the Jacobins' strong centralized government, their commitment to deal decisively with the problems facing the fledgling republic, and their attempt to forge a strong stable France while winning the war against its enemies." (Holmberg, 1).

Of course, this idealistic young man was the prime candidate for the Republican government's agenda to spread its new regime to one of its most distant outposts, Corsica. In 1790, Napoleon was sent to return there, accompanied by Joseph Bonaparte, in order to organize and supervise elections for local government officials.

However, the Republican ideals faced strong opposition from a hardcore group of former Corsican independence activists, led by his father's ex-compatriot and Napoleon's own role model, Pascuale Paoli, whose courage and military skill inspired the young Bonaparte and fueled his enthusiasm toward the fighting profession.

The old retired general was not receptive toward a system imposed from abroad, no matter how liberal it was, and this anger, backed by the masses in Corsica, nearly led to a military revolt. Instead, however, the people elected Paoli the Governor of Corsica, which still endangered Napoleon.

After several meetings and discussions, the young Bonaparte managed to make an enemy out of his hero, although it was none of his fault. Napoleon wrote Paoli letters of his most profound admiration, but the latter refused to even read them while approaching Napoleon with an external coldness and disdain. In reality, however, the irrational Paoli held a deep hatred for Napoleon as a result of the actions of Carlo long before 1769.

By October, 1792, the lives of the entire Bonaparte family were on the line. In time to avoid physical persecution by Paoli's agents, Napoleon and his kin fled to Paris, never again to return to their homeland.

## **Return to France and the Siege of Toulon**

Upon his return to France from Corsica in 1792, Napoleon distinguished himself during the storm of the Tuileries Royal Palace, during which the ambitious young man at the head of the masses offered a radical suggestion (which was nevertheless not employed) to use his cannon against the palace walls. This instance was the first during which the world perceived Napoleon's emphasis on artillery, a branch of the armed forces that would furnish his ascent to power.

It was then that France, having virtually imprisoned its king and placed him on death row, suddenly found herself facing armed opposition from nearly every nation in Europe. The rag-tag Republican Guard divisions and civilian militia troops became France's only defense against overwhelming numbers of some of the most able fighting men of the time.

The victory at Valmy in December of 1792 helped retain the country's solidarity, but due to the retirement and/or desertion of a majority of higher-ranking commanders -- namely Jourdain, who resigned shortly following Valmy, and Lafayette, who fled to Austria, both having done what

they did to maintain secure ties between their heads and the remainder of their bodies-- the military always hung on the edge of an abyss.

In the spring of 1793, an expeditionary force of British, Austrian, Neapolitan, and Spanish troops landed in southern France and occupied the crucial trading port of Toulon, pressing ever further into the mainland. A French corps under the General Carteaux, (a former artist!), was ordered to intercept and neutralize the invasion force.

During the siege of Avignon on the way to Toulon, the French artillery commander, General Dommartin, was injured by the British. The task of leading the Republic's cannon was transferred to his second-in-command, the twenty-four-year-old Captain Bonaparte.

From the beginning, Napoleon's mind concocted an ingenious scheme of events that, if followed, would ensure French triumph. His plan was simple; to obtain a hold of the three elevated hills around the port and place artillery pieces at those key strategic locations. This would instill panic into the Allied ranks and cause the British navy to withdraw from Toulon's harbor due to fear of long-range bombardment from elevated spots.

Unfortunately, Carteaux lacked the military experience necessary to recognize the value of artillery and neglected Napoleon's insightful suggestions. In the meantime, the Allies continued to maul the French forces and break out of the encirclement. Captain Bonaparte gathered the courage to report Carteaux's incompetence to the government in Paris, knowing very well that he was at risk for losing his head if events proceeded in the wrong way.

However, the representative of the Jacobins, after inspecting the situation, reassigned Carteaux to another location far from the battle. Yet Carteaux's successor, the ex-medic Doppet, objected to Napoleon's plan after one assault on the hills claimed the life of one of his adjutants. Doppet was soon relieved of his duties as well.

Napoleon was free to carry out his scheme and did so following only several decisive days, which terminated the previously stagnant conflict and offset the Allied occupation of southern France. The enemy withdrew their forces, as Napoleon had predicted. This was his first major military success, and the French Republic, recognizing an ardent supporter where it suspected so many others of treason, made a celebrity of him in addition to promoting him to the exalted rank of General.

## **Service Under the Directory and Marriage to Josephine**

Napoleon's fame after his victory at Toulon was short-lived. "The overthrow of the Jacobin regime on 9 Thermidor (July 1794) led to Napoleon's imprisonment in Fort Carre on August 9. When no evidence could be found linking him to the British, Napoleon was released after ten days of confinement." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 307).

Nevertheless, due to the new Directory's suspicious behavior toward the advocates of the former Jacobins, at the age of twenty-four Napoleon was forced to surrender his generalship and retire from the military. This, too, was not to last. Due to a lack of able commanders, he was

"employed in the defense of the Mediterranean coast throughout the winter of 1794-1795." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*,307).

Napoleon received numerous assignments throughout the following year, all of which had been cut short as a result of poor health, notably the malaria he had caught in the swamps of southern France. Yet Napoleon was able to reconcile his differences with the Directory on October 5, 1795, when a mob of angry royalists stormed the Tuileries Palace in an attempt to provide for a swift return to the feudal order of pre-revolutionary France.

General Paul Barras, the head of the Directory, was caught unprepared for this turn of events. Fortunately, General Bonaparte happened to be present in the city, resting in between his travels. He called upon his comrade, Colonel Joachim Murat, to deploy artillery pieces near the palace while Napoleon's devoted troops fired upon the counterrevolutionaries without second thoughts.

This act was viewed as heroic by the government of the Republic and by a vast majority of French citizens. The Directory was saved. Napoleon had earned back his place in the public eye. "In gratitude he was appointed commander to the Army of the Interior and instructed to disarm Paris." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 307).

It was while he disarmed Paris that Napoleon encountered the young nobleman, Eugene de Beauharnais, who begged the General to permit him to retain his dead father's sword, an ancestral heirloom. Knowing that the weapon served a decorative purpose rather than a military one, Napoleon accepted the request. Eugene's mother, Josephine, later visited Napoleon to thank him for this act of generosity. This was their first meeting. They married on March 9, 1796.

Josephine was six years Napoleon's senior and mother to two children, Hortense and Eugene, offspring of the Viscount Alexandre de Beauharnais who had been executed during the last days of the Reign of Terror. These children would ascend to wealth and power as a result of their associations with their stepfather. Beginning in 1804, Eugene was assigned to act as Napoleon's viceroy in Italy. This marriage was one of the final episodes of this stage of Napoleon's life. "Within a few days Napoleon left his bride behind in Paris and took up his new command at the head of the Army of Italy." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 308).

### **The Italian Campaign of 1796-1797**

When he arrived to head the Army of Italy, what Napoleon encountered in Nice, his new headquarters, was a malnourished, diseased, semi-capable force of untrained conscripts that he would, through years of combat and charisma, mold into the core of his *Grande Armee*.

"Soldiers," he addressed them, "you are insufficiently clothed, malnourished; the government owes you much but is unable to repay you anything. I wish to lead you into the most fertile valleys of the world. Wealthy regions, large cities will be under your power. You will find in those parts honor, glory, and riches."

The men were moved by Napoleon's charisma and devotion to his cause. They permitted him to lead them on to accomplish the impossible, cross the Alps into Italy through a narrow ledge that

bordered the Mediterranean. As a result on Napoleon's calculated risk-taking, none of the British vessels that patrolled the area had been able to detect the passage.

On April 10, 1796, the French dealt a surprising blow to a far superior Austrian force at Montenotte with practically no casualties on their part. It was then that the soldiers realized that Napoleon was capable of fulfilling his ambitious promises and thus increased their admiration of him and their willingness to follow his lead. As Napoleon himself would later reminisce, "We began at Montenotte."

The French forces drove on into Northern Italy, decimating their first opposition with little resistance as a result of the element of surprise being on their side. Napoleon's strategy, summarized by his statement, "You must never surrender your initiative to the enemy," was the key factor in these early victories.

By the time the Austrians ordered the substantial armies of Alvinczi and Wurmser to enter Italy, Napoleon's army had already occupied the northern region of Piedmont. The first major battle of the campaign occurred at Lodi over a crucial bridge leading to the city of Milan. A decisive assault by the French grenadiers at the Austrian artillery managed to break the enemy defense and give Napoleon the edge crucial for his victory.

During the summer of 1796, the army of Wurmser finally entered into action and recaptured the fortress of Mantua from the French. However, as a result of victories in the region, Napoleon was able to cut Wurmser's supply lines and trap him within the fortress. Austrians led by General Alvinczi attempted to lift the siege by breaking the French encirclement. However, as a result of skillful maneuvering and obtaining terrain advantages (particularly from the swamp land in the area) the outnumbered French managed to defeat the Austrians at Castiglione, Arcole, and Rivoli.

The most noted is the battle of Arcole, where circumstances played out to create a similar situation to that of Lodi: the battle concentrated itself upon one crucial bridge. In this case, however, Napoleon personally led the decisive assault, coming within a hair of losing his own life. Only a mortally wounded officer saved him by throwing himself at General Bonaparte and intercepting a potentially lethal bullet with his own body. Already the twenty-seven-year-old warrior had been able to win such admiration that, in the eyes of his followers, surpassed their own lives. Both Alvinczi and Wurmser were forced to surrender.

"Finally, in the spring of 1797, Napoleon advanced on Vienna and forced the Austrians to sign the Treaty of Campoformio (October 17, 1797). This treaty gave France the territory west of the Rhine and control of Italy." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 308). "Napoleon made the rich lands that he conquered feed, house, and pay the soldiers. Plus he made the people send millions of francs to France that helped the poor economy tremendously." ("A Paper on Napoleon," Norfolk Academy, VA. 2).

## The Egyptian Campaign of 1798

With Austria and, subsequently, Spain and Sardinia, out of the war in 1797, France still faced a significant threat from the greatest naval power of the time, Great Britain. After realizing the impossibility of crossing the English Channel due to weather constraints, Napoleon consulted the crafty Foreign Minister, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, for a design that involved seizing Egypt in order to separate Britain from its overseas colonies. "This base was to serve as a stranglehold on British-owned India, which is where Britain got most of its income." (Smith, 2).

On May 19, 1798, the expedition commenced, with its first destination the island of Malta, which was besieged and occupied on June 11-12. The British fleet of Admiral Horatio Nelson was misled by this deception and altered its course toward Malta instead of monitoring the bulk of Napoleon's fleet that managed to reach Alexandria with no intervention from the enemy.

The Mamelukes, the wealthy horsemen that composed the elite of Egyptian society, provided fanatical resistance to a French force that they outnumbered by far. However, as a result of superior French equipment and Napoleon's infantry tactics, most notably the "square" formation to counter cavalry charges, they were devastated at Alexandria and, mere months later, at the Pyramids.

Egypt was a proving ground for officers, young and old, who would later become Napoleon's most trusted subordinates. The Battle of the Pyramids saw ingenious maneuvers executed by Murat, Desaix, and Kellerman. After three French divisions took advantage of a subtle detour around the Egyptian positions, the Mameluke commander, Murad-Bey, surrendered his forces and swore an oath of loyalty to a man whom he considered worthy of becoming his new sovereign.

"Napoleon reorganized the government, the postal service, and the system for collecting taxes; introduced the first printing presses; created a health department; built new hospitals for the poor in Cairo; and founded the Institut d'Egypt. During the French occupation the Rosetta Stone was discovered, and the Nile was explored as far south as the Aswan." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 308).

Napoleon familiarized himself with the inhabitants of Egypt and addressed their concerns as a progressive ruler should. He and his assistant, the General Cleuber, brought Egypt out of Medieval darkness and into a state where its people could enjoy state-of-the-art European culture and technology. Two short years in the country caused the people of this land to remember their governor from abroad with pride and pleasure. When an Islamic Fundamentalist fanatic murdered Cleuber in 1800, the people came to his grave by the thousands, bearing flowers to pay homage to their deceased benefactor.

## Return from Egypt and the Coup D'Etat of 1799

After Napoleon's troops occupied Egypt, the remaining obstacles to the French promise of Egyptian security were the British fleet and the forces of the Ottoman Empire.



The Ottoman Sultan sent an expeditionary corps to encounter the French near Aboukir Bay, while the fleet of Horatio Nelson assailed the unprepared armada of Bruaise on August 1, 1798.

While Napoleon directed and achieved victory in the land battle, Bruaise lost his fleet to British cannon fire as a result of indecisiveness and a lack of initiative. Vice-Admiral Villeneuve managed to escape to France with the remaining ships, yet the defeat was crippling to French interests in the region. Napoleon was unable to preclude this turn of events, yet throughout Europe they were perceived as a demonstration of his fallibility.

Austria re-entered the war, introducing into it its ally, the vast Russian Empire. During Napoleon's absence, the experienced and adamant commander of the Russian armies, Fieldmarshal Alexander Suvorov, managed to cross Alps through the Saint-Gottard Pass and recapture a significant portion of Italy. As he furthered his preparations for an assault on Paris itself, the Directory was crumbling.

The royalists began to grumble in Paris and scheme for a counterrevolution in hopes that such would terminate the war. Seeing that the military situation in Egypt had stagnated, Napoleon realized that there was only one means of defeating this crisis.

Leaving General Cleuber in command of the French armies, he secretly departed from Cairo and headed for Paris after receiving a letter from Director Paul Barras that promised him the chief administrative role within the French government, that of First Consul.

However, upon his arrival in the meeting hall of the National Convention, Napoleon was rudely thrown out by hostile delegates who shouted derogatory expletives at him.

Realizing that he had been taken advantage of by those who wished woe and misery to France and to his own career, Napoleon resolved that the promise they had given him would be carried out still. He instructed Generals Ney and Murat to prepare his fabled cannon and station them around the centers of Parisian government.

Angered and bloody (for the delegates of the Convention attempted to disfigure his face as they rushed him during the meeting), he used his silver tongue to stir up the masses and create popular support for the November 9, 1799, coup d'etat. Eventually, the Directory, encouraged by Barras and Talleyrand, agreed to submit themselves to Napoleon's authority and call for national elections to the new Consulate.

## **The Consulate and Victory at Marengo**

In 1799, the three men who were chosen by a nearly unanimous vote of the people to rule France were Napoleon and two of his political supporters, Sieyes and Roget.

Upon assuming office, the First Consul declared, "We have finished the romance of the Revolution. We must now begin its history, only seeking what is real and practicable in the application of its principles, and not what is speculative and hypothetical." (Holmberg, 1).

Thus began the period of the Consulate, during which Napoleon attempted to, in the words of Tom Holmberg, "consolidate the gains of the Revolution." However, before he could begin any true reformist activity, it was essential that he eliminate the external threats to his country's welfare.

The brilliant Russian commander, General Alexander Suvorov, died in the spring of 1800 and Russia, having lost its most able commander and simultaneously quarreled with Austria, had withdrawn from the war. British efforts in Egypt were checked by the French garrisons there, which managed to defeat the enemy during the Second Battle of Alexandria (1801), when a French bullet claimed the life of General Ralph Abercrombie.

Thus, Austria remained the only able foe of France during this period. Napoleon marched his forces through the Saint-Bernard pass into Northern Italy in order to reclaim the territory that had been allotted France as a result of the Campoformio treaty. The Austrian commander, General Otto Melas, was caught off-balance by Napoleon's audacious act, which equaled that of Suvorov one year earlier. Thus, his numerically superior force was, for a time, irresponsive to the French liberation of Piedmont.

However, as Napoleon pressed further south, the Austrian resistance intensified. Half of the French force under Desaix remained behind to secure the new foothold while the First Consul, with the remaining 15,000 soldiers, encountered 60,000 Austrian troops near Marengo on June 14, 1800.

At first the enemy grenadiers were impregnable, holding their ground while the stationary Austrian cannon bombarded French positions. Several assaults, including one by the veteran Republican Guard, were repelled with heavy casualties. Melas became so confident of his triumph that he departed for Vienna to report it to the Emperor Francis I.

Fortunately, General Desaix arrived with much-needed reinforcements and conducted an all-out infantry charge that collapsed the Austrian ranks while Kellerman's dragoons devastated the enemy's flanks and rear. Yet Desaix himself was shot dead toward the end of his triumphant assault. Napoleon spent the remainder of the battle weeping over the corpse of his comrade. Thus he returned to his subordinates the same compassion and value that they had given him.

### **Napoleon's Institution of Religious Toleration and Abolition of Slavery**

The Second Italian Campaign continued into 1801, during which the French armies of Massena and Soult managed to obtain from the Austrian forces of Otto Melas the control of a vast region of Italy ranging from Genoa to Naples.

The following year, Austria affirmed in the Treaty of Luneville the French gains from Campoformio five years earlier. "In 1802 the English and German states were tired of fighting and signed the Peace Treaty of Amiens. It was the first time since 1792 that France was at peace with the whole world." ("A Paper on Napoleon." Norfolk Academy, VA, 3).

The First Consul was now free to concentrate on bringing about an era of prosperity that would affect the world for ages to come. According to H. A. L. Fisher, "It was Napoleon's function in history to fuse the old France with the new." The First Consul wished "to cement peace at home by anything that could bring the French together and provide tranquility within families."

[Tom Holmberg writes](#) that "like Mirabeau, Napoleon didn't see an incompatibility between the Revolution and monarchy. Napoleon did what the Bourbon King could not – reconcile the elements of the monarchy with the elements of the Revolution – which was the failed goal of Mirabeau in 1790. Napoleon was largely successful in attracting men from all parties – from ex-Jacobins to ci-devant nobles – to his government. Signing the Concordat (15 July 1801) allowed Napoleon to reconcile the religious differences which had torn France apart during the Revolution. (At the same time the Concordat insured religious freedom. It recognized Catholicism as the religion of the majority of the French, but it did not make it an 'established' religion as the Church of England was in Britain. Protestants and Jews were allowed to practice their religions and retain their civic rights.) A general amnesty signed by Napoleon (26 April 1802) allowed all but one thousand of the most notorious émigrés to return to France. These two actions helped to bring relative tranquility to those areas of France which had long been at war with the Revolution." (Holmberg, 4).

Napoleon also abolished slavery in all territories under French control as a result of a slave rebellion in Haiti, which threatened French possessions in the Caribbean. However, even when the rebels were granted the civil rights of French citizens, a radical clique, led by the power-hungry Haitian governor, Toussaint L'Ouverture, refused to lay down their arms. L'Ouverture did not care that Napoleon had abolished slavery; he wished to conclusively break away from French rule.

Napoleon was forced to send a military expedition to the island that captured the subversive and imprisoned him (which was rather lenient, considering the atrocities that L'Ouverture committed against white Frenchmen who resided in Haiti). L'Ouverture died behind bars in 1804, this episode having concluded the last internal resistance to Napoleon's abolition of slavery.

Napoleon detested civil inequalities and pledged to ban forced servitude in any nation that came under his control. The Ancien Regime (i.e., the old order) in the remainder of Continental Europe had bound millions of peasants to their land in intolerable servitude to a wealthy luxury class whose members were born into their positions.

Of Napoleon Tom Holmberg writes, "...he promoted equality and opened all careers to those with talent. 'Risen to the throne,' Chateaubriand wrote, 'he seated the people there beside him. A proletarian king, he humiliated kings and nobles in his antechamber. He leveled ranks not by lowering but by raising them.'"

This Napoleon wished to occur in all European nations. Although he was a pragmatist, he used his realistic insight to materialize goals outlined for him by the writings of his philosophical role model, Voltaire, and the ideals of the Jacobin centralized authority. Voltaire's love of freedom and the Jacobins' insistence on concentrated power were diametrically opposite ideas, however, and thus produced contradictions in some of Napoleon's policies.

## Napoleon's Civic Innovations

As First Consul of France, Napoleon Bonaparte undertook an extensive variety of civic reforms. To celebrate his subjects' talents, Napoleon founded the Legion of Honor. Perhaps mistakenly, he transformed education into a "free, compulsory, and secular" institution. (Internal Achievements of Napoleon). He also permitted the former French serfs to gain ownership of the land they cultivated.

Napoleon abolished the military draft, as he despised the concept of forced servitude. Due to the near-divine standing to which the populace had elevated him, he never needed to worry about troop shortages in his *Grande Armée*. He also reformed measurements and currency so as to achieve his dream of a universal standard by which those two concepts could be approached.

The new franc was established and, with it, the National Bank of France to assist in proliferating this monetary unit over the varying and inconsistent provincial systems. The *Système Internationale* (metric system) was devised during the French Revolution to abandon the Medieval methods of measuring relative to the bodily dimensions of King Henry II (of Britain!). The SI, a symbol of the new meritocracy, was spread to all the lands under Napoleon's control; this coherent method of measurement served to fuel the scientific progress of the coming decades.

The First Consul even acted to such an extent as to standardize road traffic (for that time, horse-drawn carriages and other wheeled vehicles) by mandating driving on the right side of the road. During the Ancien Regime, it was customary that the nobility travel along the left while the pedestrian *sans-culottes* were bombarded with dust from the carriage wheels while walking on the right. The old system was ludicrous, since it did not permit for two-way traffic in addition to augmenting social differences.

The new standard, also initiated in France during the Revolutionary era, was well-received by nobles and middle-classmen alike. It soon spread to all the nations of the world with the sole exception of Britain, Napoleon's archenemy.

But to check Britain, Napoleon devised another solution that simultaneously assisted him in gaining much-needed money for the war effort, as Britain renewed hostilities in the fall of 1803. To Thomas Jefferson's United States, the First Consul sold the Louisiana Purchase, which granted him the funds that sustained the *Grande Armée* for the next ten years while bestowing upon the U.S.A. territory without which subsequent American expansion, exploration, and technological developments would not have taken place.

The Americans did not forget Napoleon's generosity. One decade later, during the War of 1812, they provided for a second front to occupy the crack British troops while Napoleon beat back the Coalition in Europe. The Coalition was only able to defeat France after the conflict in North America ended and Britain was able to direct all of its forces against Napoleon.

## The Napoleonic Code and Coronation as Emperor

Napoleon's greatest reform of the Consulate Period was the creation of a universal system of laws that replaced contradictory and antiquated provincial policies. The Code Civil (more commonly known as the Code Napoleon) was compiled, ratified, and signed under the First Consul's direction.

From 1800 to 1804, a commission of jurors worked tirelessly on this project. Finally, in March of 1804, the new laws went into effect. Finally the Reign of Terror had truly come to an end since Frenchmen were now granted the ability to locate and learn all the government's policies and thus ensure that they were not acting contrary to them.

"The Code Napoleon represented a compromise between the customary law of northern France and Roman law of the South. It also compromised both the ideas of the French Revolution and older ideas from the south of France that used the old Roman Law. This new code gave liberty to the people, but kept such ideas as the system of inheritance." ([Code Napoleon](#)).

It was this consolidation of concepts that helped secure the progress made by the Revolution without collapsing the structures needed to maintain order and stability. Thus it seemed optimal for Napoleon to spread this change so that it would benefit his non-French subjects.

The people, realizing that they were under the control of a benefactor instead of a tyrant, elected Napoleon to be First Consul for life in 1802, but their gratitude extended even further. On May 19, 1804, the Senate called for a popular election to decide whether to reward Napoleon's accomplishments by granting him the title, Emperor of the French. Once again, the decision was nearly unanimous. Soldiers, civilians, nobles, bourgeoisie, and proletarians alike selected Napoleon as their sovereign ruler.

In a grand ceremony in the Notre Dame Cathedral on December 2, 1804, the First Consul was crowned Emperor Napoleon I. He lifted his headdress of power off the Pope's hands and onto his head, afterward proceeding to crown his wife, Josephine. Thus the French Empire came into existence.

Having obtained a hold on such tremendous power, Napoleon I possessed the wisdom to entrust some of it to his most devoted followers. He established the rank "Marshal of France" and rewarded with it the most highly distinguished generals in the Grande Armee. Ney, Murat, Davout, Berthier, Soult, Grouchy, Jourdain, Massena, and others provided the competence necessary to implement Napoleon's ingenious tactics on the battlefield.

The Emperor also divided his domain into manageable districts, each of them controlled by a trusted relative. For example, Joseph Bonaparte became King of Spain, Louis was crowned King of Holland, Jerome – the King of Westphalia, Eliza – the Duchess of Tuscany. Joachim Murat, who was married to Napoleon's sister, Caroline, became the King of Naples, having subsequently acquired fame for leading his courageous Neapolitan dragoons and hussars into daring cavalry attacks.

Napoleon's new order would soon face baptism by fire. Austria and Russia entered the war in early 1805, and Prussia was on the verge of siding with them.

### **Victories at Ulm and Austerlitz (1805)**

The naval Battle of Trafalgar in the summer of 1805 disrupted Napoleon's plan for an invasion of Britain. Although the Franco-Spanish fleet incurred heavy casualties and Admiral Villeneuve committed suicide as a result of the battle, the most able British commander, Admiral Horatio Nelson, also perished in the struggle and many British sailors died.

As a result of the encounter, both the French and the British fleet became demoralized and incapable of resuming their operations. Britain's threat had been delayed at least momentarily. To exploit the moment, Napoleon imposed the Continental Blockade system on all the European states under his control. This new regulation aimed to disrupt the British economy by prohibiting nations from trading with the island power.

Napoleon also deployed his Grande Armée and marched into Austria, catching the Austrian General Mack by surprise through a complex scheme of maneuvers and acts of espionage. The Russians, functioning by the Julian calendar while the remainder of Europe followed the Gregorian, could not arrive on time to assist Mack and thus did nothing to preclude the Battle of Ulm, Napoleon's first major victory in the Austrian Campaign.

Mack's surrender cleared the path to Vienna, which Napoleon's forces occupied in November. However, the Russian and Austrian forces, led by the rulers of the two nations, Francis II and Alexander I, along with the Fieldmarshal Kutuzov, a student of Suvorov, had managed to meet and now outnumbered Napoleon three to one.

Kutuzov objected to an armed encounter, planning to retreat and stretch out the French supply lines until they were unmanageable. Napoleon recognized Kutuzov's intentions and utilized his ingenuity to counter them. He created an image of weakness for his army, meeting with a Russian representative and pleading for peace when, in reality, he was gaining much-needed organizational time. He ordered Marshal Soult to withdraw from his fortified position at the Austerlitz castle so as to stage a retreat and lure the Coalition forces into a trap.

For many days Napoleon had studied the land around the Pratzen heights and could wage an optimal battle there. The Coalition generals, having taken the bait and assumed Napoleon's weakness, characterized by his retreat, did not heed Kutuzov's advice and convinced their sovereigns to enter into a battle. The result was the greatest tactical masterpiece of all time... executed by Napoleon!

On December 2, 1805, on the anniversary of Napoleon's coronation, the Battle of Austerlitz ended with a devastating blow to the Coalition. After recapturing the Pratzen heights from the Russian grenadiers, Napoleon stationed his artillery there and fired at the thin ice on the river crossings.

As a result, numerous enemy troops perished during the retreat. Kutuzov himself lost an eye as a sharpshooter's bullet entered into his brain and began to wear away at it until his death eight years later (the results were not immediate, but the eventual gangrene did prevent the aging warrior from participating in the crucial Spring 1813 campaign during which Napoleon erased all the Russian gains of 1812).

"After Austerlitz, Napoleon reached the height of his career. The Treaty of Pressburg (December 27, 1805) stripped Austria of additional lands and further humiliated the mighty Hapsburg state." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 309).

### **Campaigns in Prussia and Poland (1806-1807)**

With Austria withdrawn from the war with Napoleon, the Prussian king, Frederick-Wilhelm II, began to feel increasingly threatened by encroaching French armies and ideas that had the potential of weakening the stranglehold of the Ancien Regime on the people of Prussia.

Frederick-Wilhelm offered Napoleon an ultimatum, threatening to unleash the best-trained military in the world upon France if the latter did not withdraw its forces beyond the Rhine.

Instead of responding, Napoleon, knowing that to surrender all he had worked to earn was not an option, marched the *Grande Armée* into Prussia and overran several enemy garrisons prior to coming into contact with the main enemy force. "The overconfident Prussian army sang as it marched to total destruction at the battles of Jena and Auerstadt (October 14, 1806), and Napoleon entered Berlin in triumph." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 309).

Napoleon's maneuverability and the devotion of his troops outweighed the rigidity and inflexibility of Prussian military discipline. Subsequently, all the major Prussian armies and fortress garrisons surrendered without firing a shot. During one occasion, Napoleon instructed Marshal Murat on the matter of the newest batch of prisoners. "Take away their guns!" he spoke. "They have twice as many as we do!"

Yet the campaign did not end once Prussia signed armistice and consented to an alliance with France. Napoleon realized that Poland, its people long oppressed, censored, and exploited by the Russian nobility, yearned for an independent existence and a national identity in addition to the reformist changes that had recently occurred in France.

While the Russian military under General Bennigsen amassed at the border between Poland and Prussia, Napoleon led his forces on to Königsberg, a wealthy trading port that would serve as his base of operations and a supply point. During the winter of 1806-1807, numerous skirmishes took place, the indecisive Bennigsen withdrawing his forces every time, even when there was a potential for a Russian advantage. On February 8, 1807, the two sides encountered each other at Eylau.

The assaults by Russian grenadiers were commendable, and Napoleon came within a hair of losing his own life when enemy cannon bombarded the cemetery at which he was stationed.

However, the French held their positions and, at the end of the day, the Russians withdrew once more, opening the path to Königsberg.

After resting and replenishing his forces, Napoleon was prepared to begin a full-scale liberation of Poland. At Friedland on June 14, 1807, Bennigsen's indecisiveness proved fatal to the Russian army. While he dallied, Napoleon "drove the Russians from the field." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 309).

### **Campaigns and Political Developments from 1807 to 1810**

After Napoleon's victorious campaign in Poland, Alexander I met with him in Tilsit (June 25, 1807), and the two leaders signed a treaty that promised mutual cooperation and a division of influence in Europe.

Russia entered the Continental Blockade system, thus dealing a crippling blow to the British Empire. In the meantime, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw was forged and an independent Polish government established. The Polish were grateful to Napoleon for having accomplished what years of civil upheaval could not and agreed to supply him with troops and material goods.

An entire corps was thereby generated under the leadership of Marshal Joseph Poniatowski, one of the new progressive Polish elite whose devotion to Napoleon equaled that of the French commanders.

Beginning in 1807, radical adherents of the Ancien Regime in Spain began to aggressively plot a return to the old Hapsburg monarchy. Their guerilla tactics enabled small groups of partisans to ambush and brutally torture groups of French soldiers. Napoleon's brother Joseph was forced to flee Madrid and appeal to the Emperor for military assistance.

Thus the French armies entered Spain and dealt numerous crushing blows to the subversives. Madrid was soon regained after Napoleon's prized artillery bombarded the city from above. Joseph was reinstated as King, and the rebels were driven into Portugal. But the *juntas* of renegade Spanish nobles began to receive British support as an army led by Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, landed in Portugal and thus created a stalemate that stagnated the campaign for the next four years. In the meantime, the pro-feudal elements in Austria stirred up the masses and prompted a declaration of war on Napoleonic France.

The Emperor of the French was forced to again shift his attention to the Eastern Front in order to devastate the armies of the Archduke Karl at Wagram in 1809. As a result of this, Emperor Francis II dissolved the Holy Roman Empire and entered into an alliance with Napoleon that guaranteed Austrian assistance in France's future conflicts.

It was this alliance that Napoleon hoped to secure when he married Marie-Louise, the daughter of Francis II, for political purposes after divorcing his first wife Josephine. Napoleon believed that he required an heir to his throne in order to secure the government that he had created in the French Empire beyond his lifetime.



In the fall of 1810, Marie-Louise gave birth to Napoleon II, who was dubbed "King of Rome" by his adoring father. However, Napoleon II, despite his subsequent wealth and connections to two ruling families, would never equal his namesake's glory due to his early death by tuberculosis in 1832.

### **Preparations for the Invasion of Russia**

In numerous ways, the year 1811 was the apogee of Napoleon's power. The Continental Blockade system was still secure, and the undersupplied British forces in Portugal were suffering defeat after defeat from Napoleon's more maneuverable veterans. The meritocracy prospered, and numerous individuals born into lower-class families had taken advantage of the opportunity to ascend up the social hierarchy. The Emperor ordered massive fireworks displays over the Seine river to be arranged for the anniversaries of the 1799 coup (November 19) and the 1804 coronation (December 2).

The Grande Armée numbered over 600,000 troops, all either French volunteers or allied soldiers. "[Napoleon] brought much longed for order and stability to France and forged a sense of unity. He attempted to unite under his wing both the revolutionaries and the émigrés – nobles, clergy, and others who chose or were forced to live in exile under the Revolution. ('I became the arch of the alliance between the old and the new, the natural mediator between the old and the new orders... I belonged to them both.' Napoleon.)" (Holmberg, 3).

However, one threat remained to France's welfare that possessed the potential to unravel all that Napoleon had accomplished thus far. Russia's Alexander I, wishing to maintain positive relations with all the nations of Europe, began to lift the Continental Blockade in his own domain and traded clandestinely with Britain.

The French Foreign Minister, Charles-Maurice du Talleyrand, deserted to the Russians along with the Prussian strategist, Karl Clausewitz, in order to convince Alexander I that violating the 1807 Treaty of Tilsit was to Russia's advantage.

Thus, the Russian emperor's disobedience assumed a greater degree of overtness. He halted the wars against Finland and the Ottoman Empire that Russia began in order to demonstrate its willingness to assist Napoleon. The Emperor of the French was taken aback that his ally would abandon him at such a crucial time. Thus he was forced to withdraw a vast majority of his troops from Portugal in order to make possible a punitive expedition into Russia.

In one of the few times of his life when his forces actually outnumbered the enemy, Napoleon was able to field 600,000 troops for his Russian campaign. French, Dutch, Austrian, Prussian, and Polish soldiers joined the Emperor on this invasion. The loyalty of some of them was staunch, but that of others from countries Napoleon had just conquered was dubious. What lay ahead of them was a vast country and a war unlike any Napoleon had ever fought in Western or Central Europe.

## **Invasion of Russia and Occupation of Moscow (1812)**

On June 22, 1812, Napoleon's Grande Armée traversed the Neman River and entered into the vast lands of the Russian Empire. The contingent of Cossacks that they encountered near Vilnius fled the battlefield after a short skirmish.

General Barclay, the commander of the Russian forces, resolved to retreat in the direction of Moscow with only minimal armed encounters so as to gather any troops that he would find along the way and organize an effective resistance force.

However, after Napoleon's successful siege of Smolensk, Barclay was relieved of his command by the impatient Alexander I and replaced by Mikhail Kutuzov, now a crippled, sick old man who nevertheless devised a most controversial strategy to counter Napoleon.

Kutuzov wished to disrupt Napoleon's three-year plan for the invasion of Russia. This crafty leader decided to lure the French into the heartland of the Russian Empire, stretching their supply lines, which partisans would attempt to disrupt even further.

In the meantime, the Russian armies mercilessly devastated *their own* cities and territories so as to destroy any use that they might have had to Napoleon. This scorched-earth policy took a heavy toll on the common man of Russia, and numerous militias, especially from the West of the country, resolved to join the French and contribute to the planned destruction of the Russian feudal regime and the liberation of the serfs that followed every one of Napoleon's conquests.

However, despite the incredible following that Napoleon had, it was of no avail against the starvation and disease that began to take its toll on the Grande Armée. On September 7, 1812, Napoleon drove the Russians from the field at Borodino, inflicting 44,000 casualties while incurring only 30,000. Kutuzov then executed an audacious move, the abandonment of Moscow. Prior to leaving the city, Russia's center of culture, the Russian army set fire to it so as to make it inhabitable for the French.

Napoleon's forces entered the flaming capital on September 13 and quickly established a military government that hunted down the enemy partisans, terrorists, and saboteurs within the city. Marshal Ney, the newly appointed Prince of Moscow, made it a priority to send carriages loaded with food to nearby Russian villages as winter began to set in. However, the remaining partisans managed to intercept and destroy those aid workers, thus contributing to the starvation of their own people. While the Russians could not defeat Napoleon on the battlefield, their guerilla warfare and scorched-earth policy managed to gnaw away at the French forces so as to greatly reduce their manpower and fighting ability.

## The Late Russian Campaign and the Wars of 1813

In late 1812, while the Russian forces under Mikhail Kutuzov retreated toward Kaluga and destroyed everything in their path, Napoleon dallied in Moscow for too long a time, expecting a brilliant end to this campaign and Alexander's consent to yet another treaty.

However, after failing to receive a response, the Emperor set off from Moscow in pursuit of Kutuzov. He left behind five thousand wounded in the Hospital in Moscow, hoping that the Russians would be generous enough to assist their fellow human beings. However, when the partisans re-entered the city, they ruthlessly slaughtered the wounded and nearly burned the capital to the ground.

In the meantime, Napoleon thwarted a Russian attempt to outflank him at Tarutino and encountered the bulk of the enemy forces, now twice his own, at Maloyaroslavets. The city switched hands six times, finally falling under French control. However, Kutuzov retreated his forces across the nearby river and detonated the bridge, precluding the possibility of pursuit by Napoleon.

By this time, the French supply lines were stretched to the utmost. The winter decimated the Grande Armée, and Napoleon could not afford further advances. Thus, he began to retreat from Russia without having lost a single battle! Following the arduous and costly crossing of the Berezina River, Napoleon departed for Paris in order to rally a new force that would relieve the old upon the completion of the retreat into Germany.

As a result of this new boost of manpower as well as Kutuzov's death, the tides of the Russian campaign had turned. At the Battles of Bautzen and Dresden in the spring of 1813, Napoleon tore apart the Russian army, and Barclay, who had been reinstated as the Russian Commander-in-Chief, agreed to unconditional surrender.

In his magnanimity, Napoleon permitted the Russian soldiers to return home unharmed. Once again, order and prosperity became the social paradigms of the French Empire. Once again Napoleon could shift his attention to the war in Spain and to domestic affairs. However, this would not last.

In October of 1813, Russia, once again manipulated by Talleyrand, Clausewitz, and the traitor Moreau, a former Marshal of France, resumed hostilities despite its promise of peace. This time, however, Prussia, Austria, and Sweden (ruled by Bernadotte, another former Marshal of France) also violated their alliances with Napoleon and united to form the Sixth Coalition.

These developments tipped the balance in Spain, and Wellington began to make decisive strides into the Iberian Peninsula. Over a *million* coalition troops had been deployed against Napoleon's 200,000. The two sides fought the decisive battle at Leipzig on October 16-18, 1813. Napoleon managed to gain ground on the first day of the encounter. However, when Saxony backstabbed him and joined the enemy, the Emperor of the French became hopelessly outnumbered and suffered a decisive military defeat.

## Abdication and Exile to Elba

After Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig on October 16-18, 1813, the Coalition forces marched through Europe, suppressing freedom, reinstalling serfdom and the obsolete hierarchy of birth. Despite the death of the traitorous Moreau at Leipzig, the subtle influences on the Allied leaders, especially Alexander I, continued to manifest themselves.

In early 1814, the Coalition forces crossed the Rhine into France. "Napoleon waged a brilliant but futile campaign during the first three months of 1814." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 309). During that time, Napoleon managed to perform miracles with his outnumbered forces, but even those were not sufficient.

On March 31, when Napoleon fought battles far from the capital, Marshal Marmont foolishly surrendered Paris to the Coalition, thus robbing France of any hopes of recovery from the recent turn of events. "The hopelessness of the military situation led the Emperor to abdicate at Fontainebleau (April 4, 1814) in favor of his son Napoleon II. However, the Allies refused to recognize the 3-year-old boy, and Louis XVIII was placed on the French throne." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 309).

"I would embrace every one of you to display my affection," Napoleon addressed his Imperial Guard as he departed for the Mediterranean island of Elba, "but I will kiss this flag, for it represents all of you. But know that I shall return to France when the violets will bloom." There have been numerous interpretations of this quote, the simplest of which reveals to us that even then Napoleon planned to return to claim his rightful place at the throne the next spring.

However, others have been able to locate deeper meanings of the phrase, the "violets" being the desire for civil liberties and the new meritocratic order. Indeed, by the beginning of 1815 the populace became increasingly irritated with the stagnant and deconstructive reign of Louis XVIII, who reinstated many of the old aristocratic privileges while violating in the rest of the populace the rights that common Frenchmen obtained under Napoleon's reign. Riots were becoming increasingly more frequent, and secret organizations planned to coordinate Napoleon's return to France.

During the Congress of Vienna, delegates from various Coalition states squabbled over what Europe's political state after Napoleon's deposition would be. The Coalition was falling apart now that it had no common foe to unite it. Indeed, amid this disarray, the political stage was ripe for Napoleon to execute his triumphant comeback. The violets had bloomed.

## The Hundred Days and the Belgian Campaign

Taking advantage of the turmoil in France and among the nations of the Coalition, Napoleon staged a daring return to power. "Sailing from Elba on February 26, 1815, with 1050 soldiers, Napoleon landed in southern France." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 309).

Near Grenoble, he encountered the first force sent by the royalists to intercept him. Confronting a contingent that could easily blow his humble escort apart, he strode toward the enemy ranks

and declared, "Those of you who wish to fire at their Emperor may do so." No one did. Instead, the troops ran toward their leader, embraced him, and wept for their mistakes.

City by city, province by province, France fell to Napoleon as people everywhere he went hailed him as a liberator. Prior to fleeing France, Louis XVIII managed to obtain a promise from Marshal Ney to return Napoleon to him "in a steel cage." However, upon receiving a friendly note from the Emperor, Ney declared, "The era of the Bourbons has come to an end. The rightful dynasty ascends the throne."

Thus began the period known as the "Hundred Days," during which France had demonstrated an enormous outpouring of support for its monarch. The army was reorganized in mere months, with two hundred thousand volunteers from Napoleon's old veterans along with new contingents from Switzerland and Italy.

However, Napoleon desired peace more than anything else. He realized that time was necessary for his nation to recover from the chaos that infected it following the reign of Louis XVIII. Unfortunately, the Coalition refused to negotiate and fielded its many mighty armies against France. In order to prevent a repeat of the 1814 Campaign, the Emperor resolved to take the offensive once more.

On June 12, 1815, the Armee du Nord crossed the border into Belgium with the aim to fulfill Napoleon's classic strategy, "Divide and Conquer," and separate the British army, led by the Duke of Wellington, from the Prussian forces of Marshal Gebhard von Blucher, a fanatical royalist.

Napoleon defeated the Prussians at the Battle of Ligny on June 16, during which Blucher was knocked from his horse and temporarily excluded from the line of duty. His second-in-command favored a retreat toward the town of Wavre to the north. Unfortunately, Napoleon did not take sufficient advantage of this enemy weakness and ordered a cavalry pursuit too late for it to affect the bulk of the enemy forces. Leaving Marshal Grouchy to monitor the Prussians, the Emperor rushed to the aid of Ney, who had barely managed to force Wellington back from a vital crossroads. The British fell back. Nevertheless, Wellington halted the retreat near the settlement of Mont-Saint-Jean, the landscape around which he had become quite familiar with.

### **The Battle of Waterloo, Second Exile, and Death**

The Battle of Waterloo on June 18, 1815, was Napoleon's final military encounter and a defeat from which he would not recover.

On June 17, 1815, heavy rains struck the area around Mont-Saint-Jean, and the military operations of both the French and the British forces experienced a delay. The next day the land had not dried sufficiently, which crippled the efficiency of the French cannon. Cannonballs during that era were not explosive and reached the enemy by repelling themselves off the ground, an action impossible if the moisture trapped them.

In addition, Napoleon experienced an outbreak of his chronic malaria which hindered his ability to direct his troops. Grouchy, the calculated and cautious marshal, was fighting successfully at Wavre against Thielmann's corps of Prussian decoys, thus unable to attend the battle of Waterloo.

A majority of the decisions on the field would thus be made by the daring but rash and impulsive Marshal Ney. Through tactics that placed French lives on the line, such as a massive cavalry charge unsupported by infantry or artillery, Ney augmented the poor situation of the Armée du Nord, which also suffered from epidemics of cholera and smallpox. Nevertheless, Wellington found it difficult to repel French attacks and was forced to withdraw to his initial positions by the middle of the day.

Napoleon would have triumphed at Waterloo if not for the arrival of the Prussians on the battlefield while Grouchy was preoccupied and could not assist the Emperor. A massive Prussian assault broke through the right wing of the French army, and even a charge of the Imperial Guard could not thwart the onslaught. The soldiers now had within their minds one goal: to form a square around their Emperor and thus allow him to safely escape the carnage. This they did, and Napoleon fled the battlefield to Paris.

The Allied forces pressed into France from all directions and, not wishing to witness any more destruction of the land he loved, Napoleon abdicated the throne a second time. "Napoleon at first hoped to reach America; however, he surrendered to the commander of the British blockade at Rochefort on July 3, hoping to obtain asylum in England. Instead, he was sent into exile on the island of St. Helena. There, he spent his remaining years quarreling with the British governor, Sir Hudson Lowe, and dictating his memoirs. He died on St. Helena, after long suffering from cancer, on May 5, 1821." (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 309).

"Napoleon died of unknown causes. Some say that he was poisoned by the British. Others say that he was sick or died of cancer." ("A Paper on Napoleon." Norfolk Academy, VA, 5). In 1840, his corpse was relocated from St. Helena to an elaborate tomb at the Maison des Invalides in Paris, where thousands of tourists yearly still visit to pay their respects to the greatest military leader of all time.

## **The Accomplishments and Legacy of Napoleon Bonaparte**

Even when the shining star dims, its light continues to reach our eyes for ages to come. Such was the case with the life of Napoleon Bonaparte, brilliant military strategist, political reformer, and Emperor of the French from 1804 to 1815.

After his death, Napoleon's promises of a meritocratic order sparked further revolutions, including the July Revolution of 1830 and the chain of revolts in 1848, during one of which the nephew of the great leader, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte III, finalized the overthrow of the Ancien Regime and restored the French Empire.

Slavery was soon wiped off the face of Europe, and Napoleon's reforms, including the Code Napoleon, the metric system, and driving on the right side of the road, became instituted in many

nations. "Alexis de Tocquerville wrote that Napoleon 'fell, but what was really substantial in his work lasted; his government died, but his administration continued to live...'" (Holmberg, 5). "As a result of the Napoleonic conquests, the Code Napoleon was introduced into a number of European countries, notably Belgium, where it is still in force. It also became the model for the civil codes of Quebec Province, Canada, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, some Latin American republics, and the state of Louisiana." (*Encarta Encyclopedia*. [Code Napoleon](#)).

The SI and driving on the right side of the road are applied virtually worldwide today. Freedom of religion and the abolition of slavery were, too, greatly advanced by the example of Napoleon's reforms in France and in the other countries he conquered. Furthermore, without Napoleon, meritocracy, a relatively unpopular concept during his time, would not have acted to transform societies and unleash the tremendous creative power of individuals born to "lower social classes".

Napoleon sparked nationalist movements in Poland, Italy, Egypt, and Germany directly and encouraged independence movements in Ireland and South Africa. (Internal Achievements of Napoleon). The plight of these peoples became recognized by public opinion as significant in when a strong, privileged leader demonstrated his support out of good will and conscience. Today, their wishes of liberty and meritocracy are evident, for they have all become independent nations.

Napoleon touched on numerous other fields of knowledge. For example, had French forces not attempted to liberate Egypt, the Rosetta Stone would not have been discovered and archaeologists would not have been able to utilize it for the purpose of decoding Egyptian hieroglyphics. However, due to Napoleon's love of the sciences, this discovery opened to us a rich new field of study, Egyptology, which permitted human beings to solve a plethora of mysteries about the ancient world.

Napoleon himself contributed to the world's supply of knowledge through his own writings. During his life he wrote and published numerous essays, literary critiques, stories, dialogues, pamphlets, and, most notably, his *Memoirs*, which gave posterity valuable insight into the life of this genius and the lessons that it had to teach humankind. Tens of thousands of books have also been published about Napoleon, his political influence, and his military tactics. Outstanding commanders, such as Ulysses S. Grant, Winfield Scott, and Robert E. Lee gained much of their expertise from studying Napoleonic warfare.

The Emperor of the French altered the social and military paradigms of his day and established an entirely new order that the French Revolution could not have accomplished without him. "Had the Bourbons come back to power in 1799 instead of Napoleon, they would at that time have had less trouble 'turning back the clock' to the ancient regime than they had in 1814." (Holmberg, 2).

He left us with numerous ideas that caused us to re-examine our values and become more tolerant and courteous toward fellow human beings. "It is the success which makes great men," Napoleon stated, rejecting the old hierarchy of birth and status. "High politic is only common

sense applied to great things," he explained, justifying the theses of Paine and Voltaire concerning a universal sense of right present among all peoples and necessary for progress.

"Imagination governs the world," Napoleon wisely declared, noting how people's inner capacities affect their performance to a greater degree than does their environment. "The heart of a statesman must be in his head," he said, emphasizing the importance of rational thought over impulse and emotion. "Public morals are natural complement of all laws; they are by themselves an entire code," he stated in support of the ideals of courtesy, respect and tolerance.

Napoleon even foretold his own historical importance: "Even when I am gone, I shall remain in people's minds the star of their rights, my name will be the war cry of their efforts, the motto of their hopes."



## About Mr. Stolyarov

Gennady Stolyarov II (G. Stolyarov II) is an actuary, science-fiction novelist, independent philosophical essayist, poet, amateur mathematician, composer, and Editor-in-Chief of [The Rational Argumentator](#), a magazine championing the principles of reason, rights, and progress.

In December 2013, Mr. Stolyarov published *Death is Wrong*, an ambitious children's book on life extension illustrated by his wife Wendy. *Death is Wrong* can be found on Amazon in [paperback](#) and [Kindle](#) formats.

Mr. Stolyarov has contributed articles to the [Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies \(IEET\)](#), [The Wave Chronicle](#), [Le Quebecois Libre](#), [Brighter Brains Institute](#), [Immortal Life](#), [Enter Stage Right](#), [Rebirth of Reason](#), [The Liberal Institute](#), and the [Ludwig von Mises Institute](#). Mr. Stolyarov also published his articles on Associated Content (subsequently the Yahoo! Contributor Network) from 2007 until its closure in 2014, in an effort to assist the spread of rational ideas. He held the highest Clout Level (10) possible on the Yahoo! Contributor Network and was one of its Page View Millionaires, with over 3.1 million views.

Mr. Stolyarov holds the professional insurance designations of Associate of the Society of Actuaries (ASA), Associate of the Casualty Actuarial Society (ACAS), Member of the American Academy of Actuaries (MAAA), Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter (CPCU), Associate in Reinsurance (ARe), Associate in Regulation and Compliance (ARC), Associate in Personal Insurance (API), Associate in Insurance Services (AIS), Accredited Insurance Examiner (AIE), and Associate in Insurance Accounting and Finance (AIAF).

Mr. Stolyarov has written a science fiction novel, [Eden against the Colossus](#), a philosophical treatise, [A Rational Cosmology](#), a play, [Implied Consent](#), and a free self-help treatise, [The Best Self-Help is Free](#). You can watch his [YouTube Videos](#). Mr. Stolyarov can be contacted at [gennadystolyarovii@gmail.com](mailto:gennadystolyarovii@gmail.com).