

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 - 1821)

"On Judgement Day, before God's throne,
There stood at last Napoleon,
The Devil had his list-begun
Of crime the Bonaparte had done.
When God the Father, or God the Son
Cut Satan short, before Gods throne!
"Don't bore us all to death with reading
A German professorial pleading!
If you are bold enough to face him
In your Kingdom you may place him"

-----*(Goethe)*



Napoleon Crossing the Alps, Jacques-Louis David (1800, Oil on Canvas)

Personal Life

- Born in Corsica on 15th August 1769
- Son of Carlo Buonaparte and Maria Letizia Ramolino
- Siblings – Joseph, Lucien, Louis, Elisa, Pauline, Caroline and Jerome
- Attended the military academy at Brienne-le-Chateau
- Married to Josephine de Beauharnais
- Later divorced due to a lack of children and married to Marie-Louise, Duchess of Parma (of the Austrian noble family)

Rise to Power

- As an artillery captain, rose to fame during the French revolution and was promoted to Brigadier General
- Successful stints in Nice, Italy and Egypt established his credentials as a strategist and leader of men
- On returning to France, there was a power vacuum caused by the collapse of the revolution and internal unrest
- Coup to take power and declared First Consul for Life
- Later, became Napoleon I, Emperor of France

Napoleonic Wars (1800 - 1815)

- Series of wars fought between France and her kingdoms against various coalitions of European states
- Coalition at different times included Austria, Prussia, Russia, Sweden and Great Britain
- Napoleon was responsible for establishing France as the most powerful nation in Europe
- Also responsible for having Europe up in flames for the better part of a decade
- Finally concluded with his defeat at Waterloo in 1815

The Third Coalition

- Spanned from 1803 to 1806
- France vs. Austria, Portugal, Russia
- Great Britain also fought France, but was not part of the coalition
- Effectively ended with the Treaty of Pressburg, which ceded control of Austria to France
- At the end, only Britain remained fighting Napoleon
- Two famous battles – the Battle of Trafalgar and the Battle of Austerlitz

The Battle of Trafalgar (1805)

- France was the pre-eminent power on soil, but Britain remained control of the seas
- Napoleon wanted to have naval supremacy to launch an invasion of Britain
- Pierre Villeneuve was in command of the French forces (33 ships) while Nelson was leading the British forces (27 ships)
- End result – Decisive British victory (23 ships sunk without losing a single one) ensuring that France never got a chance to invade Britain
- Nelson divided his forces into two columns, while concentrating his attack on the rear of his enemies forces



Trafalgar Square

- Trafalgar Square in London was named to commemorate this battle
- Lord Nelson was mortally wounded in it – as a homage, the central attraction of Trafalgar Square is Nelson's Column, a 5.5 m sculpture of Nelson atop a 146 m high granite column

The Battle of Austerlitz (1805)

- Considered to be one of Napoleon's greatest victories
- 66,000 French troops battled 85,000 Russo-Austrian troops
- Napoleon intentionally exposed a weak right flank to draw the enemy attack over there, sucking troops out of the centre
- Once the enemy was committed, he had reinforcements bolster the right, and then attacked the centre, splitting the enemies army into two parts
- Comprehensive victory – French losses (8000) vs. Russo-Austrian (27,000)

The Fourth Coalition (1806-1807)

- Immediately followed the Third Coalition, no real time of peace in between
- Coalition consisted of Prussia, Russia, Sweden and Britain
- Prussian forces under Frederick Wilhelm III soundly defeated at the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt, 19 days after the formation of the coalition
- Russian forces defeated at Friedland
- Once again, only Britain remained to oppose Napoleon

The Battle of Jena-Auerstedt (1806)

- Twin battles between the French forces under Napoleon (Jena)/Davout (Auerstedt) against the Prussian forces
- At Jena, the French attacked under cover of the morning mist
- Little initial success, but later, more concentrated attacks led to the flank being captured and encircling the centre
- Marshall Ney's attack without orders proved near catastrophic
- Adaptability of the single chain of command in the French army
- At Auerstedt, Davout attacked a much larger Prussian force destroying it completely

The Russian Invasion (1812)

- Napoleon attacked Russia with around 500,000 men
- Russians set up strong fortifications along the way to slow Napoleon, but retreated past Moscow, after setting it to flame
- French occupied a burning Moscow, then started to retreat in the bitter Russian winter
- Army was devastated by a lack of supplies
- Hitler made a similar mistake in WWII

Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture

- Composed in 1880, commemorates the Battle of Borodino in 1812
- Highlights include a volley of cannon fire
- Antal Dorati's classical recording in 1954, used real cannons instead of the simulated shots that earlier versions had used
- Tchaikovsky himself hated this piece of music since it was much more loud and violent than most of his work

The Battle of Waterloo (1815)

- French forces led by Napoleon attacked the Anglo-Prussian forces under the command of the Duke of Wellington and Marshall Blucher
- Fought near Waterloo, just south of Brussels
- Napoleon attacked both parties individually hoping to be able to defeat them before they could combine forces
- Delayed attack due to bad weather may have ended up costing the French army dearly, and Napoleon his crown
- Historical event which ended up adding to the English lexicon

Death

- Requested asylum from the British after the Battle of Waterloo
- Controversy in the British Parliament, before finally deciding to exile him to St. Helena
- Numerous plots from ex-Grand Armee veterans to try and free him
- In 1821, health began to decline rapidly and died shortly thereafter
- Official cause of death was stomach cancer

Controversies

- Body was found to be in remarkably good condition when moved to France
- Autopsies revealed arsenic concentration of around 100 times the normal levels in Napoleon's hair
- Controversies abound as to whether Napoleon was deemed too dangerous to let live and murdered by arsenic poisoning in his food
- Modern research seems to agree with the original cause stating that high arsenic levels were probably due to prolonged exposure in life

Some Quotable Quotes

Honest to a fault -

- “The best way to keep one's word is not to give it.”
- “I can no longer obey; I have tasted command, and I cannot give it up.”

Not prone to generalizations -

- “England is a nation of shopkeepers.”
- “The French complain of everything, and always. “

And also, at the forefront of women's emancipation -

- “Women are nothing but machines for producing children.”

Other Fun Stuff

- Napoleon's sister Pauline Borghese, nee Bonaparte, became Princess Borghese via marriage to Camillo Borghese
- Amongst other things, scandalized society by posing for art



Pauline Borghese as
Venus, Canova, 1808

Trivia

- Around the Napoleonic era, succession issues in Sweden
- Elect someone who was a soldier and friendly with Napoleon
- One of Napoleon's marshals, Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, who had Swedish ancestry was voted King of Sweden
- The House of Bernadotte is still the ruling house of Sweden

Nostradamus and Napoleon

- Did Nostradamus predict Napoleon? - The prophecy and the facts....
- *An Emperor will be born near Italy, He will cost his Empire very dearly...*
Napoleon was born in Corsica off the Italian coast.
- *From simple soldier he will attain to Empire...Italy, Spain, and the English tremble; he will be greatly attentive to foreign women..*
Rose from an artillery captain to Emperor. Josephine was born in the Carribean, Marie-Louise Austrian
- *For fourteen years he will hold his tyranny...*
Napoleon ruled from 1800 to 1815
- *...the chief adversary will be victorious. The rear guard will make a defense, those who falter dying in the white country.*
The Russian campaign....
- *The great empire will be exchanged for a little...petty place...[to] which he will come to lay down his scepter*
Exile and death in St. Helena