

Disasters for Napoleon

By 1809, Napoleon held Europe firmly in his grasp. He annexed the Papal States and incorporated Holland into his vast empire. Parts of northern Germany, including the ports of Bremen, Lubeck, and Hamburg were under his control. He ruled much of the territory from the North Sea to the Bay of Naples and eastward to the Adriatic. Napoleon was not only emperor of the French empire but king of Italy and the protector of the Confederation of the Rhine. Austria and Prussia were tributary states. His siblings ruled the thrones of Spain, Westphalia, and Naples. No one held greater power in Europe than did Napoleon.

But his empire was always an awkward house of cards. It remained in place at the barrel of a gun. And Napoleon's military might was beginning to falter. Despite a legacy of great victories in battles such as Austerlitz, Jena, and Friedland, he had expended millions of francs on his army and navy and destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of young French soldiers. Many of his old loyal troops—those who had been with him during the days of the Revolution—were now gone. French conscription laws were allowing younger and younger boys to enlist in the military.

His Continental System was not popular. While designed to destroy English trade, it was damaging the economies of its member nations. Widespread economic ruin was the result. Yet Napoleon did not respond or take such problems seriously. This led to great bitterness and hatred against the French leader.

In addition, his personal judgment was starting to deteriorate. Overwhelmed with details, heavy paperwork, and executive decisions, Napoleon was personally overextended. Some even felt he was losing touch with reality.

All these factors came into play and resulted in disaster for Napoleon in 1812 when he launched his campaign against Russia. Angered by the Russian tsar's refusal to support the Continental System, Napoleon launched a massive military campaign against the sprawling east European state. This campaign was intended as the last great victory for Napoleon, a capstone to his great imperial career.

By June 1812, he gathered a huge army of 600,000 men. However, only one in three soldiers in his Grand Army was French. Others included Austrians, Prussians, Spaniards, Italians, and Dutch. Napoleon hoped to defeat the Russians with this force of vast numbers. But two factors kept him from ultimate victory: (1) his army was too large to be supported deep in enemy territory; and (2) the size of his forces limited Napoleon's capacity for speed and mobility.

By late June, Napoleon had advanced 300 miles into Russia without serious battle. But he had already lost one-third of his forces through disease, starvation, and desertion. The Russians advanced ahead of Napoleon, destroying everything in his path to limit his available food and supplies. In September, he engaged the Russians in the battle of Borodino, less than 200 miles from Moscow, losing 30,000 men, including 47 generals. (The Russians lost 45,000 men.)

When Napoleon entered Moscow on September 14, he found the city had already been burned. Then the weather turned on him as huge snows and plummeting temperatures trapped his men in winter. Food became scarce, and in one week, his troops lost 30,000 horses to the cold.

In December, Napoleon abandoned his army, rushing back to Paris to raise another to rescue them. By then, his 600,000-man Grand Army was reduced to 100,000. Half of his original force had been killed or taken prisoner, and another 200,000 had died of starvation, disease, and exposure to the cold. For Napoleon, events were beginning to turn against him.



The End for Napoleon

After rushing from Russia to Paris through the wintry year of 1812—sometimes traveling by sleigh—Napoleon attempted to raise another army. But it was too late for the troops remaining in Russia. By the end of the year, roughly 20,000 men staggered out of Russia alive.

With Napoleon's forces destroyed in the Russian campaign, his enemies looked on events with great hope. Great Britain, Prussia, Sweden, Spain, and, of course, Russia, joined forces once again in an alliance against Napoleon. (Fighting was already taking place in Spain, where a quarter million French troops had been bogged down in guerrilla fighting for several years.)

By the spring of 1813, Napoleon managed to raise another army—a force numbering 300,000. But many of them were new, inexperienced soldiers, no older than 17. In the months that followed, despite their lack of battle experience, Napoleon managed some costly victories. On May 2, at Lutzen, Napoleon rallied his men against an allied army and won. Yet the engagement cost him 12,000 casualties. Three weeks later, French troops beat back the enemy at Bautzen.

But the real test for his army came on October 16 through October 19 of 1813 at Leipzig. In a huge fight, called the Battle of the Nations, Napoleon's forces went down in defeat. The remnant of his army barely escaped capture. Over the next several months, Napoleon's military crumbled. Now his campaigns were defensive, not offensive. He raised more troops simply to defend his state. By November 1813, the English general, the Duke of Wellington, led an army toward Paris from Spain. In January, allied forces invaded France from the east.

Napoleon had few troops left other than young boys and old men. Yet he still managed to turn back his enemies, although heavily outnumbered. In February alone, he won ten battles in 20 days. But the end was inevitable. At best, such victories postponed the final allied victory.

Napoleon watched helplessly as his empire and his dreams for France were shattered. His friends and supporters began to abandon him one by one. On March 31, 1814, allied armies marched into Paris. With no place to turn, Napoleon abdicated his

throne on April 11 and left for the Mediterranean island of Elba where the allies installed him as the local ruler. (Elba is just a few miles northeast of Napoleon's homeland—the island of Corsica.)

But Napoleon did not remain in seclusion for long. After about a year on Elba, Napoleon left the island and soon landed in southern France on March 1, 1815. Loyal Frenchmen joined him in a gathering army as he marched into Paris in triumph three weeks later.

Once again, Austria, England, Russia, and Prussia wearily gathered their forces to battle Napoleon. The climax came in the summer when Napoleon faced allied troops at Waterloo, Belgium. This June 18 battle was not one of his best efforts. When a Prussian army arrived on the main field in time to reinforce English troops, Napoleon was crushed.

Again, Napoleon went down in defeat and was again sent to a remote island. On June 29, he left Paris for the last time, bound for the English-controlled island of St. Helena located in the south Atlantic off the west coast of Africa. There he lived out the remainder of his days, writing his memoirs. Napoleon died (probably of cancer) on May 5, 1821.



Review and Write

Chronicle the final years of Napoleon's career (from 1812–1815), including the key events in chronological order. What was Napoleon's biggest mistake during those years and why?

Map Study of Napoleon's Battles

Napoleon fought in the wars of the Revolution and the wars which bear his name—the Napoleonic—for over 20 years. In the course of many campaigns, he led armies from one end of Europe to the other, and beyond. His campaigns took him as far away from Paris as Egypt and Syria.

Hundreds of thousands of troops—many native Frenchmen—lost their lives in the constant campaigns of Napoleon. The fiery emperor required so many to serve him that between 1800 and 1812, over 1.3 million men were conscripted into military service. Another million were drafted between 1812 and 1814.

These men marched to distant locales and faced many different armies: Egyptian, Prussian, English,

Spanish, Russian, German, Polish, Dutch, Austrian, Swedish, Arabian, and many more. Ultimately, Napoleon overextended himself and finally went down in defeat at Waterloo in 1815.

Map Exercise

Using the map on this page and additional resources, appropriately label the following battle sites shown by *: Trafalgar, Marengo, Friedland, Eylau, Hohenlinden, Aspern-Essling, Austerlitz, Leipzig, Jena-Auerstadt, Wagram, Borodino, and Waterloo. Locate and label the following unmarked battle sites: Busaco, Valmy, Rivoli, Arcola, Talavera, Salamanca, and Vimeiro.



The Congress of Vienna

Following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, an artificial calm fell across Europe. A generation of French citizens had experienced difficult yet exciting years of revolution, change, and climactic war. Absolutism had been challenged by the French Revolution and reform movements followed in many corners of the European continent. But, with the threat of Napoleon eliminated, a new era of conservatism took root filling the void left after the collapse of Napoleon's Empire. This conservative movement hinged on a few key concepts and philosophies. One was the idea of legitimacy. This meant the return of pre-Revolutionary states and ruling families across Europe.

During the years of Napoleon's imperial France, several monarchs had been removed from their thrones and replaced with leaders loyal to Napoleon. Several monarchies were replaced by Napoleon's brothers. With the destruction of Napoleon's power, monarchs were restored to their original thrones.

The second of the conservative ideas of the post-Napoleonic age was that of reaction. This concept called for a return not only of dynasties and royal families, but a reestablishing of pre-Revolutionary autocratic governments. In other words, a return to Absolutism. Now restored rulers worked to reconstruct political and social systems to what had existed prior to the French Revolution and Napoleon's continental conquests.

With Napoleon eliminated, the new powers of the period were, once again, England, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The leaders of these countries set about restoring the old status quo. In France itself, the successful allies restored the Bourbon ruling family to the throne in the spring of 1814. Louis XVIII (ruled 1814–1824) became the king of France.

To ensure that the goals of legitimacy and reaction were firmly established, the allies agreed to meet in Vienna at an international conference to discuss how

best to reestablish the old order of the *ancien régime*. This meeting, called the Congress of Vienna, met in the Austrian capital with great fanfare. Seven monarchs were in attendance—the kings of Prussia, Bavaria, Sweden, Denmark, and Württemberg, the emperor of Austria, and the Russian tsar. Lord Castlereagh and the duke of Wellington (hero of the

Napoleonic Wars) were on hand representing England. France sent Lord Talleyrand (who had served as bishop to Louis XVI) to speak for his country.

Despite the presence of such significant leaders, two men played dominant roles at the Congress—the Tsar, Alexander I (ruled 1801–1825) and Klemens von Metternich, the Austrian minister. The tsar was the most enlightened of them all, speaking repeatedly about liberty and liberalism and the Enlightenment. He frightened his fellow leaders so much with his ideas that they further turned

against the idea of revolution.

The man who gave the Congress much of its direction was Metternich. He feared Russia so much that he was willing to allow the continuation of a powerful France under Louis XVIII to counterbalance Russian power. He also despised any radical idea which might lead to political or social change. He was convinced that any constitutional reform was a challenge to good government. He also mistrusted the middle and lower classes.

Metternich's leadership at the Congress of Vienna helped establish a continental system which relied on a balance of power—meaning no one nation would be allowed too much influence at the expense of its neighbors and control by the aristocratic class, just as it had been prior to the messy days of the French Revolution. This balance of power proved an effective way to avoid widespread war in Europe. Europe went nearly 100 years until its next massive war—World War I.



Klemens von Metternich

Test II

Part I. Matching (Worksheets 16–20)

Match the answers to the right with the statement on the left.

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| _____ 1. Napoleon seized power from this French government in 1799 | A. Corsica |
| _____ 2. The new constitution created when Napoleon came to power | B. Continental System |
| _____ 3. Title established for Napoleon under the 1799 French constitution | C. Bank of France |
| _____ 4. Island of Napoleon's birth | D. the Directory |
| _____ 5. Revolutionary party which included Napoleon in the 1790s | E. Mamelukes |
| _____ 6. Agreement made between Napoleon and the Catholic Church | F. Jacobins |
| _____ 7. Financial institution established by Napoleon | G. First Consul |
| _____ 8. Great French military victory of October 17, 1805, in Austria | H. Confederation of the Rhine |
| _____ 9. Alliance of German states organized by Napoleon | I. Concordat of 1801 |
| _____ 10. Napoleon's plan to cut off European trade with England | J. Peninsular War |
| _____ 11. Campaign in Spain and Portugal which went badly for the French | K. Consulate |
| _____ 12. Egyptian soldiers loyal to Napoleon | L. Austerlitz |

Part II. Matching (Worksheets 21–27)

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| _____ 1. Larger ship model common to European navies in 1800 | A. Waterloo |
| _____ 2. Wooden carriages which held cannons on board navy ships | B. sea services |
| _____ 3. Smaller, sleek warships of the Napoleonic era | C. St. Helena |
| _____ 4. Forces gathered by Napoleon to fight the Russian campaign | D. Borodino |
| _____ 5. Battle between France and Russia on Russian soil | E. Elba |
| _____ 6. Battle of October 16–19 at Leipzig—a loss for Napoleon | F. Battle of the Nations |
| _____ 7. English general during the Napoleonic Wars | G. frigates |
| _____ 8. Mediterranean island of Napoleon's first exile in 1814 | H. Congress of Vienna |
| _____ 9. Last great battle of Napoleon, fought in March 1815 | I. duke of Wellington |
| _____ 10. Final island exile for Napoleon | J. Grand Army |
| _____ 11. 1815 meeting of European leaders | K. Metternich |
| _____ 12. Austrian Minister who supported balance of power | L. ships of the line |

Part III. Respond and Write

Respond to the following statement and give arguments supporting the statement or arguing against the statement: Napoleon Bonaparte was a great leader of the French people.