

Napoleon was born on August 15, 1769 in Ajaccio, Corsica, and was given the name Napoleone Buonaperte. He was the second of eight children of Carlo and Letizia Buonaperte, both of the Corsican-Italian gentry. Before Napoleone, no Buonaperte had ever been a professional soldier. His father Carlo, was a lawyer who had fought for Corsican independence, but after the French occupied the island in 1768, he served as a prosecutor and a judge and entered the French aristocracy as a count. Through his father's influence, Napoleone was educated at the expense of King Louis XVI, at Brienne and the Ecole Militaire, in Paris. Napoleone graduated in 1785, at the age of 16, and joined the artillery as a second lieutenant.

After the revolution began in France, he became a lieutenant colonel (1791) in the Corsican National Guard. However, when Corsica declared independence in 1793, Buonaperte, a Republican, and a French patriot, fled to France with his family. He was assigned, as captain, to an army besieging Toulon, a naval base that was aided by a British fleet, while in revolt against the republic. It was here that Napoleone

Buonaperte officially changed his name to Napoleon Bonaparte, feeling that it looked "more French". It was here too that Napoleon replaced a wounded artillery general, and seized ground where his guns could drive the British fleet from the harbor, and Toulon fell. As a result of his accomplishments, Bonapatre was promoted to brigadier general at the age of 24. In 1795, he saved the revolutionary

government by dispersing an insurgent mob in Paris. Then in 1796 he married Josephine de Beauharnais, the mother of two children and the widow of an aristocrat guillotined in the Revolution. Early in his life Napoleon was showing signs of militaristic geniuses and knowledge for formidable strategy. It was through the application of his skills, and a revolutionary style of spontaneous fighting styles than gave Napoleon the opportunities, which he jumped at, making his the great military leader he is known as today.

Latter in 1796, Napoleon became commander of the French army in Italy. He

defeated four Austrian generals in succession, each at impossible odds, and forced Austria and its allies to make peace. The Treaty of Campo Formio provided that France keep most of its conquests. In northern Italy he founded the Cisalpine Republic, and strengthened his position in France by sending millions of francs worth of treasure to the government. In 1798, to strike at British trade with the East, he led an expedition to Turkish-ruled Egypt, which he conquered. His fleet, however, was destroyed by the British admiral Horatio Nelson, leaving him stranded. Undaunted, he reformed the Egyptian government and law, abolishing serfdom and feudalism and guaranteeing basic rights. The French scholars he had brought with him began the scientific study of ancient Egyptian history. In 1799 he failed to capture Syria, but won a smashing victory over the Turks at Abu Qir. France, meanwhile, faced a new threat, the coalition of Austria, Russia, and the lesser powers allied with Britain. Bonaparte, being no modest soul, decided to leave his army and return to save France. In Paris, he joined a conspiracy against the government. In the coup d'etat of November 9th -10th, 1799, he and his colleagues seized power and established a new regime—the Consulate. Under its construction, Bonaparte, as his first consul, had almost dictatorial powers. The constitution was revised in 1802 to make Napoleon consul for life and in 1804, it made him emperor. Each of these changes received overwhelming assent of the electorate. In 1800, he assured his power by crossing the Alps and defeating the Austrians at Marengo. He also concluded an agreement with the pope, which contributed to French domestic tranquillity and ended the quarrel with the Roman Catholic church that had arisen during the Revolution. In France, the administration was reorganized, the court system was simplified, and all schools were put under centralized control. French law was standardized in the Code Napoleon, (the civil code) and six other codes. They all guaranteed the rights and liberties won in the Revolution, which included equality before the law and freedom of religion.

Considering Napoleon, being the greatest general of his time, with the intentions of France in mind it is clear how the French people respected him, held him in high regard, and even praised him. With that same clarity that we can see how those "enemies of the state", and others not living in France feared Napoleon, and saw him as a power hungry mad man. Opposing generals fueled by hate attempted on many occasion to stop the momentum that Bonaparte and his French empire was gaining. The view by others that he was a ruthless and sadistic leader, who created war for his personal gain was well expressed by Guillamme de Prosper-Barante, "He never wished to be justified. He killed, he killed according to

Corsican traditions, and if he sometimes regretted this mistake, he never understood

this as a crime" (I, pg.38). Another feeling of resentment towards Bonaparte was that he was unorganized, sloppy, and basically lucky. Finally, many people felt that Napoleon was only interested in his own image and power, and essentially used France and its resources as an outlet to achieve this. Napoleon himself would prove all this wrong. By taking the position which France was in at the time, re-vamping the entire political system, and giving equality and freedom to all of France he quickly showed his loyalties. As for being unorganized, sloppy and very lucky, time after time, Napoleon would prove his military superiority in all aspects.

Lastly, if Napoleon had used France to gain his personal goals he would not have taken the time to change the politics, to protect the rights of the citizens, or to make

sure France was a good place to live, "France has more need for Napoleon, then he for France" (II, pg.243).

In April 1803 Britain, provoked by Napoleon's aggressive behavior, resumed war with France on the seas. Two years after this Russia and Austria joined the British in a second coalition. Napoleon then abandoned plans to invade England and turned his armies against the Austro-Rusian forces, defeating them at the battle

of Austerlitz on December 2nd, 1805. In 1806 he seized the kingdom of Naples

and made his elder brother Joseph king, converted the Dutch Republic into the kingdom of Holland for his brother Louis, and established the Confederation of the Rhine of which he was the protector. Prussia then allied itself with Russia and attacked the confederation. Napoleon destroyed the Prussian army at Jena and Auerstadt (1806) and the Russian army at Friedland. At Tilsit in July of 1807, Napoleon made an ally of Czar Alexander I and greatly reduced the size of Prussia. He also added new states to the empire: the kingdom of Westphalia, under his brother Jerome, the duchy of Warsaw, and others. Through Napoleon experience through these battles he became more of a leader, and was becoming more effective in motivating his soldiers, "There are but two lever for moving men, interest and fear" (II pg. 67)

Outside of his military life Napoleon characterized his regime above all with a strong executive under the control of a single charismatic figure who appointed and dismissed ministers, generals, prefects, and bishops, commanded armies, directed foreign policy, saw to the codification of laws, and reorganized the systems of education, worship, and administration. Meanwhile Napoleon had established the Continental System (a French-imposed blockade of Europe against British goods, designed to force bankruptcy what he called "the nation of shopkeepers"). In 1807, Bonaparte seized Portugal. In 1808, he made his brother Joseph, the king of Spain. Napoleon then awarded Naples to his brother-in-law, Joachim Murat. Joseph's arrival in Spain touched off a rebellion there, which became known as the Peninsular War. Napoleon appeared briefly and scored victories, but after his departure the fighting continued for five years, with the British backing the Spanish armies and guerrillas. The Peninsular War cost France 300,000 casualties and incredible sums of money and contributed to the eventual weakening of the Napoleonic empire. In 1809, Napoleon defeated the Austrians again at Wagram, annexed the Illyrian Provinces (modern day Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, and Montenegro), and abolished the Papal States. He

also divorced Josephine (who was his current wife) and in 1810 he married Habsburg archduchess, Marie Louise, who was the daughter of the Austrian emperor. By this linking his dynasty with the oldest ruling house in Europe, he hoped that his son, born in 1811, would be the more readily accepted by established monarchs. Also in 1810, the empire reached its widest extension with the annexation of Bremen, Lubeck, and other parts of north Germany, together with the entire kingdom of Holland, followed the forced abdication of Louis Bonaparte.

The impact of Napoleon on the political and social structure of Europe was not everywhere the same. It was greater in territories that were annexed than in satellite states, and greater in satellite states than in those which were occupied only with difficulty and by force of arms. Where French Revolutionary armies had passed before, overturning feudal and ecclesiastical institutions, there Napoleonic rule had a firmer grip. French military support for local rulers enabled them to undertake by 'revolution from above' what as minor enlightened despots in the eighteenth century they had failed to achieve. But Napoleon was above all a dynast and conqueror: what he required from subject territories was men and money. If they could be provided without administrative reforms, so much the better. Some states which remained sovereign imitated Napoleon's methods in order to weaken traditional elites or to strengthen state-power. Far more common however was resistance to Napoleon, whether blind peasant hostility to taxes and conscription, the defence of aristocratic, ecclesiastical, and corporative privileges, or liberal opposition to arbitrary, bureaucratic, and foreign rule.

In all the new kingdoms created by the emperor, the Code Napoleon was established as law. Feudalism and serfdom were abolished, and freedom of religion established (excluding Spain). Each state was granted a constitution, providing for universal male-suffrage and a parliament and containing a bill of rights. Napoleon who felt that constitutions were the mark of a great society said "Constitution's

should be short and obscure" (III pg. 124). French-style administration, and free public schools were envisioned. Higher education was opened to all who qualified, regardless of class or religion. Every state had an academy or institute for the promotion of the arts and sciences. Incomes were provided for eminent scholars, specifically scientists. Constitutional government remained only a promise, but progress and increased efficiency were widely realized. Not until after Napoleon's fall did the common people of Europe, alienated from his governments by war taxes and military conscription, fully appreciate the benefits that he had given them. It

was evident through these actions of Napoleon that he not only wanted the land for France but he wanted to spread a common lifestyle throughout Europe.

In 1812, Napoleon, whose alliance with Alexander I had begun to disintegrate, launched an invasion of Russia that ended in a disastrous retreat from Moscow. (Thereafter all of Europe united against him, although he fought on brilliantly, the odds were impossible.) In April 1814, his marshals refused to continue the struggle. They had felt Napoleon disrespected his army, and said they were not given the privileges they desired. [Napoleon, although he lived his life with one theory regarding his men, ("When soldiers have been baptized in the fire of the battlefield, they have all one rank in my eyes...") (IV pg.15) therefore felt that his marshals shall be given no special treatment.] Latter allies had rejected his stepping down in favor of his son, Napoleon was abdicated unconditionally and was exiled to the Mediterranean island of Elba. Marie Louise and his son were put into custody of her father, the emperor of Austria. Napoleon never was to see either one of them again, but he himself soon made a dramatic comeback. In March 1815, he escaped from Elba, reached France, and marched on Paris winning over the troops sent to capture him. In Paris, he promulgated a new and more democratic constitution, and veterans of his old campaigns flocked to his support. Napoleon asked peace of the allies, but they outlawed him, and he decided to strike

first. The result was a campaign into Belgium, which ended in a defeat in the Battle of Waterloo on June 8th, 1815. In Paris crowds begged him to fight on, but the politicians withdrew their support. Napoleon then fled to Rochefort, where he surrendered to the captain of the British battleship Bellerophon. He was then exiled

to Saint Helena, a remote island in the south Atlantic Ocean, where he remained until he died from stomach cancer on May 5th, 1821.

The cult of Napoleon as the "man of destiny" began during his lifetime. In fact,

he has begun to cultivate it during his first Italian campaign by systematically publicizing his victories. As first consul and emperor, he had engaged the best writers and artists of France and Europe to glorify his deeds and had contributed to

the cult himself by the elaborate ceremonies with which he celebrated his rule, picturing himself as the architect of France's greatest glory. He maintained that he

had preserved the achievements of the Revolution in France and offered their benefits to Europe. His goal, he said, was to found a European state- a "federation

of free peoples" (V pg. 15). Whatever the truth of this, he became the arch-hero of

the French and a martyr to the world. In 1840 his remains were returned to Paris at

the request of King Louis-Philippe and interred with great pomp and ceremony on the Invalides, where they still lie.

Napoleon's influence is evident even in France today. Reminders of him dot Paris-the most obvious being the Arc de Triomphe, the centerpiece of the city, which was built to commemorate his victories. His spirit pervades the constitution of the Fifth Republic; the country's basic law is still the Code Napoleon, and the administrative and judicial systems are essentially Napoleonic. A uniform state-regulated system of education persists. Napoleon's radical reforms in all parts of Europe cultivated the ground for the revolutions of the 19th century. Today, the

impact of the Code Napoleon is apparent in the law of all European countries.

Napoleon was a driven man, never secure, never satisfied. "Power is my mistress"

(VI pg. 176), he said. His life was work-centered; even his social activities had a

purpose. He could bear amusements or vacations only briefly. His tastes were for

coarse food, bad wine, and for cheap tobacco. He could be hypnotically charming

for a needed purpose of course. He had intense loyalties to his family and old

associates. Even so, nothing or nobody, were allowed to interfere with his work.

Napoleon was sometimes a tyrant and always an authoritarian. But one who believed,

however in ruling by mandate of the people, expressed on plebiscites. He was also

a great enlightened monarch—a civil executive of enormous capacity who changed

French institutions and tried to reform the institutions of Europe and give the

Continent a common law. Few historians deny that he was a military genius. At

St. Helena, he said "Waterloo will erase the memory of all my victories." (VII

pg.345) he was wrong; for better or worse, he is best remembered as a general, not

for his enlightened government, but surely the latter must be counted if he is justly

to be called "Napoleon the Great".

