

NAPOLEON I

BONAPARTE



BIOGRAPHY 1769–1821

Napoleon was born on the 15 of August in 1769 in Ajaccio (Corse). His family had toscan ascendance, which had become rich thanks to the benefits of agricultural production and trading. Because they were wealthy economically, the family father searched a political position as noble. The Bonaparte family had 8 members (Napoleon was the second one). Napoleon was brought up in a full–authority and serious childhood. The Bonaparte family has fought several times in favour of Corsican independence from France. But Napoleon´s father made good relations with the new french local rulers, whose influence let Napoleon himself going to a military academy in Brienne before ending this military studies in an another more important one in Paris.

When he exit from the academy, he started a boring life as a leutenant in several barracks until he fought for the corsican independence taking advantage of the french revolution. His plans failed and all Bonaparte family was forced to live in France.

Napoleon followed his militar career and little by little he won prestige receiving each time a more important charge.

He married in August 1796 with Josefina de Beauharnais, a widow of a french noble guillotinated. The marriage causes were love and posible Napoleons acquired influence.

Soon after of his wedding, he went to Italy because he needed to take control of the french division in the zone as chef commandant. This army was bad organized with non well prepared troups and bad material. In spite of all these problems, Napoleon drived his troups to several successes and recolected goods from Italy helping to recover a crisis in France sending them to Paris. Napoleon´s popularity increased impressively.

He decided to abandon his army and to return to France to save the country before the crisis of the Directory. When he arrived to Paris he united to a conspiracy against the government , giving a coup d'etat in November of 1799. This way they established a new government type, the Consulate. Napoleon that first consul had been

named, had almost dictatorial powers. In 1802 his charge as consul became for life, dictated by himself. In 1804 he declared himself emperor using his popularity and the electorate showed absolute support to each one of its reforms. As emperor, Napoleon started conquering adjacent countries as Austria, Prussia, Spain or North Italy. But his expansion ideas fell when he tried to invade Russia in 1812, the burned earth tactic and the Russian winter destroyed almost the entire French army.

Napoleon was made prisoner by the British forces and he was sent to the Elba isle in the Mediterranean sea. He stayed few times there, until he managed to escape in 1815 and return to France using his popularity to reach power again. It started the 100 days empire.

He prepared more troops to start reconquering the adjacent countries, trying to defeat the allies' army. The French defeat now became definitive with the Waterloo battle in Belgium, which won the English with Prussian reinforcements' help in the last moment.

Now Napoleon's exile was the Santa Elena isle in the Caribbean sea. He lived there until his death in 1821, soon after writing his memories. He was poisoned by English spies.

NAPOLÉON'S MILITARY TACTICS

Napoleon was an excellent general and created lots of new military tactics and methods.

Most of these tactics were considered so modern, never seen before. Napoleon usually defeated enemy armies which had superiority in number of soldiers, sometimes even in quality of material or formation of the troops, but never in organization and motivation.

Napoleon revolutionized the way of making the war and modernized the organization of the army. During the Ancien Régime an articulate army had been developed that moved in line and that it was unable to occupy an extensive land and consequently of forcing the enemy to accept the battle or of maneuvering if the operation was defensive. With the Revolution, the troops of the army increased and the war of masses began. The generals were forced to leave their troops in divisions to make them more governable. During the Directory period it was formed an unit called army body, formed by a quantity that oscillated between the 14.000 and the 40.000 soldiers that also was formed by several divisions. Napoleon, in the campaign of Marengo designed an army body, composed by two or three divisions, with few cavalry and constituted in his majority by independent bodies, and an artillery reserve under the direct control of the general.

But it was in the maneuver of this army where Napoleon showed his best military skills. He put his soldiers by a way that the enemy could not move easily, but at the same time he put the forces so close between them that was easy to regroup them in any moment of the battle. He also guided the different army bodies orientated to a point located behind the enemy front, so that when the French troops advanced toward the enemy they wrapped them. Furthermore, the Napoleonic strategies were not very rigid, he let to his soldiers a high percentage to their imagination and improvisation depending on the concrete circumstances and the scenario where the action were happening. The surprise was one of Napoleon's favourite cheats so he liked to decide his movements secretly. In the battle field he preferred to make the enemy become tired attacking to their flanks or their rearguard and with the smallest possible waste in his troops. With the artillery he contributed to reduce the enemy's moral, and when he believed that the enemy was almost falling it was when he threw his new fresh troops that finishes with the enemy army taking advantage of the differences in the fatigue of both.

But Napoleon's skills in the war was not enough to win in all the fronts where his expansionary desire took him. There was an important limitation, and this appeared by the available economic resources to sustain the campaigns. While the war happened in Italy, where the distances were short and the supply hadn't big problems to reach the front, because also the fertility of the Italian floor allowed the army feed itself without serious difficulties, Napoleon could increase his prestige sending goods to Paris reducing a French economic

crisis. The problems began when the distances became bigger in the wars of Germany, Poland and in Russia (mainly). The marches became something very tiring and the supply became more and more full of problems. The need of distributing the troops in so vast territories, separated the army that, also, it was punished hardly by the rigour of the climate. The Napoleonic strategies were not so successful far from the Mediterranean sea.

NAPOLÉON AS CIVIL EMPEROR

Napoleon was a very contemporary man, not only as general or military genius, he also introduced very important reforms, most of them available nowadays.

Napoleon was named first consul, obtaining almost dictatorial powers. The Constitution of the year X, dictated by the own Bonaparte in 1802, gave character vitalicio to his consulate and, finally, proclaimed himself emperor in 1804 without complaints or revolutions, in a splendid ceremony in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, in which he took from the Pope's hands the crown to place in his own head.

As French ruler, Napoleon became famous when he implanted a hard political system, without freedoms and too hard against the opponents, he unified the Church and the State, founded the franc coin, established the system of prefectures and founded the secondary schools. Also, he ordered to edit the well-known civil code as Code of Napoleon.

He signed the Concordat of 1801 with the Pope Pius VII so he was able to calm the complaints inside the country when he put the end of the confrontation with the Catholic Church, originated from the beginning of the Revolution.

In the military environment, he founded the Grand Armée the largest army and the feared ever seen at its time.

Basically, his main reforms were:

- He reorganized the administration of the French economy.
- He simplified the judicial system.
- He subjected all the schools to a centralized control.
- The French civil legislation was written in Napoleon's Code and in other six codes that guaranteed the rights and freedoms formed during the revolution of 1789, including the equality in front of the law and the cultural freedom.