

Napoleon I, also called Napoleon Bonaparte was the greatest military genius of his era and maybe the greatest general in history. He created an empire that covered most of western and central Europe

## EARLY LIFE

Napoleon was born on August 15, 1769 on the island of Corsica in the Mediterranean Sea. Because the island belonged to France Napoleon was a French citizen.

At the age of 9 he entered a French military school. While he was an average student in most subjects he was extremely good at mathematics. At 16 he graduated and became an artillery officer in the French army.

## MILITARY CAREER

During the French Revolution Napoleon was stationed in Paris. This was a critical time for France because the country was at war with many European countries. In that year the monarchy was overthrown and France became a republic. During the revolution Napoleon defended the new government and joined the Jacobins, a radical political group in France



## RISE TO POWER

In the years that followed Napoleon fought many battles in most of Europe. In 1796 he became commander in chief of all French forces in Italy. From Italy Napoleon invaded Austria, France's most powerful enemy. As Napoleon approached Vienna, the Austrians surrendered and were forced to give up Belgium to France. Napoleon's victories made him very popular with the French people. He was able to convince France's government - the Directory - that he could cut off British trade to Asia by occupying Egypt. But the British commander Horatio Nelson defeated Napoleon in the Battle of the Nile in 1798 and most of his fleet was destroyed.

## CONSUL AND EMPEROR

In 1799 Napoleon returned to Paris. With the help of his followers he overthrew the French government, which was very unpopular at that time because it had lost other wars. A consulate of three men was created to govern France, but Napoleon, who was the First Consul, held all the power.

As soon as he was in control of France Napoleon began to reform the country. He modernized the government, founded the Bank of France and reorganized higher education. But his greatest achievement was the Code Napoleon, a collection of laws that allowed people many liberties they had received during the Revolution. The code still forms the basis of civil law in France.

In 1804 Napoleon changed France from a consulate to an empire. He became emperor and crowned himself at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

When Napoleon seized power he began to concentrate on his dream of controlling all of Europe. In the Napoleonic Wars he fought against Prussia, Austria, Great Britain and Russia.

In 1805 Napoleon's fleet was defeated again by Admiral Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar, off the coast of Spain. In retaliation Napoleon tried to ruin England's economy. He forbade countries that he controlled to trade with France but this didn't work because they needed British goods. Although he had to give up his plan of conquering Great Britain he continued winning against other European armies on the ground.

Napoleon put his relatives on the thrones of the conquered territories. After his first marriage had ended in divorce, the emperor married Marie Louise, daughter of the emperor of Austria. Within a year they had a son whom he gave the title king of Rome.

In 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia because the Russians did not want to help blockade Britain. It turned out to be the biggest mistake of his career. When the French moved forward the Russian army retreated and burned down everything that the French might be able to use. When Napoleon finally reached Moscow, a huge fire broke out, destroying much of the city. Napoleon could do nothing but turn back. When the winter came and it started to snow most of Napoleon's soldiers died. It was the greatest disasters in military history.



## NAPOLEON'S DECLINE

Napoleon's enemies saw their chance. One by one they rose against him. Britain, Austria and Prussia joined Russia in their fight against Napoleon. The French were defeated in the Battle of Leipzig in today's Germany. In 1814 the enemies captured Paris and Napoleon had to give up his throne.

The French became a monarchy again and the country once again had a king, Louis XVIII. Napoleon was banned on the island of Elba near Corsica, where he stayed for only 10 months. In March 1815 he escaped from prison and, together with his old supporters began a march on Paris. The king fled and for a short time Napoleon once again ruled France. This period, known as the Hundred Days, ended on June 18, 1815 when Napoleon was defeated for the last time at the Battle of Waterloo, Belgium.

## FINAL YEARS

After this final defeat, Napoleon was taken prisoner by the British who put him on the tiny island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic. He stayed there until he died in 1821.

## WORDS:

- achievement = something important that you have done and you will be remembered for
- although =while
- approach = to come nearer to, to move towards
- artillery = large guns that are moved on wheels or fixed in a certain place
- average =usual, normal
- ban = forbid
- battle = a fight between armies in a war
- blockade = to stop things that enter or leave a place
- citizen = a person who lives in a country and has rights there = Bürger
- civil law =the rules that private people have to follow
- collection =set, group
- commander = an officer who is in charge of a group of soldiers
- commander in chief = someone who has a high rank and is in charge of all of or most of the military organizations of a country
- conquer = to get control, of an area by fighting
- consulate = kind of government in France

- **convince** =to talk someone into something
- **create** = make, found
- **critical** = here: very important and dangerous
- **crown** = to make a person king or queen
- **cut off** =separate
- **defeat** = to win against someone in a fight , battle or game
- **defend** =protect, guard
- **destroy** =damage completely
- **disaster** = an event that causes a lot of damage
- **divorce** = the end of a marriage
- **economy** =the financial system of a country; the way it buys and sells goods
- **emperor** = a man or woman who is the ruler of an empire
- **empire** = a group of countries that are ruled or governed by one person
- **enemy** = someone who hates you and whom you fight against
- **era** = time, phase, period
- **escape**= to get away from
- **flee-fled** = same as escape
- **fleet** = a group of ships that belong to a country's navy
- **follower** = a person who believes in a system and helps the leader of such a system
- **forbid** = not allow
- **force** =make someone do something your want
- **genius** = a person who has a very high level of intelligence
- **goods** =products
- **govern** = to rule
- **graduate** = to get a degree when you have finished school
- **higher education** =schools for pupils aged 14 or higher
- **in control** = to be in charge of ...
- **invade** = to take control of a town or country by using force
- **join** = to become a member of; to get together with others
- **law** = the set of rules that a country has
- **liberty** = freedom
- **marriage** =the relationship between two people who are married
- **Mediterranean Sea** = the sea between Europe and Africa
- **occupy** = to enter a country with soldiers and keep control of it for a longer time
- **one by one** = one after the other
- **overthrow** = to remove a leader from government
- **popular** = liked by many people
- **prison** = a building where you keep people if they have done something wrong
- **Prussia** = a German state in northern Europe that was very powerful between the 17th and 19th centuries
- **reach** = get to
- **relative** = a person who is a member of your family
- **retaliation** = to take action against a person or a country that has done something bad against you
- **retreat** = to move back
- **seize** = to take hold of or control of
- **station** = to send a soldier to a military place for some time
- **supporter** = someone who helps a person
- **surrender** = to give up
- **throne** = a special chair used by a king or a queen to sit on
- **tiny** = very small
- **trade** = to buy and sell things
- **victory** = when you win against someone