



By Bill Callister



The journey down road to waterloo started in Corsica, and it began on 15 August 1769

On this day was born a son to a minor Italian aristocratic family by the name of Buonaparte, and they named him Nabulion.

Nabulion was from an early age convinced that he was destined to be a great leader. However, he suffered from several drawbacks that might hinder his ambition:

1. As aristocrats go, his family were quite poor.
2. While Corsica had recently come under French rule, they were neither culturally nor linguistically French.
3. Nabulion did not have a particularly imposing stature (it has been suggested that he suffered from 'small man syndrome'). I think that this is fallacious.

The Painting depicts him crossing the Alps via the great St. Bernard Pass in 1800. It depicts him as he saw himself, and how he wanted the world to see him. In fact he made the crossing several days behind the leading troops, and on the back of a mule (I think that bears a more than passing resemblance to Freddy Mercury)



His father Carlo Maria, and mother Letizia Buonaparte had until a few months before the birth of Nabulion, been members of an anti French resistance army.

Nabulion grew up a passionate Corsican patriot who nourished a no less passionate hatred of the French as alien oppressors.

With the collapse of Corsican independence, his father decided to make the most of his new status as a member of the French noblesse.

He used his charm and diplomatic skills in wheedling favours out of the local French administration. Managing to secure for his son Giuseppe entry into the church, and Nabulion into the ecoles militaires.

On 1 January 1779 the two boys were delivered by their father to the collage at Autun. Giuseppe to prepare for the priesthood, and Nabulion to spend three months learning basic French.

At the age of nine Nabulion arrived at the Ecole at Brienne in Champagne. Next to his name on the list of admissions appears a terse reference to his fathers finances 'three children, no fortune'.

He was not to see his father again for another five years (and then only once before he died in 1785), and his mother for eight!



NAPOLEON BLOWING UP HIS COMRADES

This is an English lampoon by George Cruikshank, and though the incident portrayed is fictitious he was a lonely misfit noted for 'gloomy and savage nature'.

He hated his dependence on French charity, and one of his fellow pupils was to write:

The idea of dependence had for him something demeaning about it and, when often offended by his comrades' jokes on the union of Corsica and the French monarchy he would reply indignantly, 'I hope one day to be able to restore her freedom'.

He was an unpopular pupil, and descriptions of his personality at this time find many parallels with those of both Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. He had a high opinion of himself, and was not a person one should cross.

He took refuge in reading, and while this did little to soften his natural egotism or develop his social or moral strength, it forced on the growth of his mental powers.

He shone at history and mathematics and, in later years was to say of Brienne 'it was the homeland of my thought; it is there that I experienced my first impressions as a man' —a comment that may be read in more ways than one.



École Militaire Paris

On 30 October 1784 Napoleon left Brienne for the École Militaire in Paris.

His first wish was to join the Navy, but found that he was not sufficiently qualified, and so joined the Artillery.

Also during this time, he polished the art of being able to assume different roles, and different personalities to suit the occasion.

As a military commander and later Emperor, he had the ability to make men love and respect him, while he in fact merely saw them as existing to further his own destiny. At one time referring to the annual rate of conscription as his income; and calculated the rate at which he could afford to expend their lives in order to achieve his aims.

During the period leading eventually to Waterloo, he spent at least one million of them!

He graduated in 1785 and was posted to Valence, now with the status of an adult.



In June 1788 Louis XVI under pressure of France's worsening financial and political crisis convoked the States-General or parliament, which had last met in 1614. Within a year, the Bastille had fallen, an event at once a symbol and a trigger.

For Europe the Revolution was to mean the destruction of a civilization; for Lt Buonaparte (who scorned both the monarchy and the church) it was to be an unimaginable opportunity.

In September 1789 (amidst mutinies in the armed forces) he applied to go to Corsica on leave, where he intended to ride the wave of revolution as a faster mode of progress than waiting for promotion in a dying military hierarchy.

In Corsica he entered into revolutionary politics and gained a reputation as a zealot.

He eventually returned to mainland France, and was posted to the 4th Artillery Regiment at Valence, when only four days later Louis XVI and Marie - Antoinette attempted to escape from France.

As one consequence of this disastrously unlucky adventure, the National Assembly required officers to swear an oath to only follow the Assembly's instructions.

Most Royalist officers resigned, this proving as good as a war in opening up opportunities for promotion for those who remained.



Storming of the Tuileries Palace

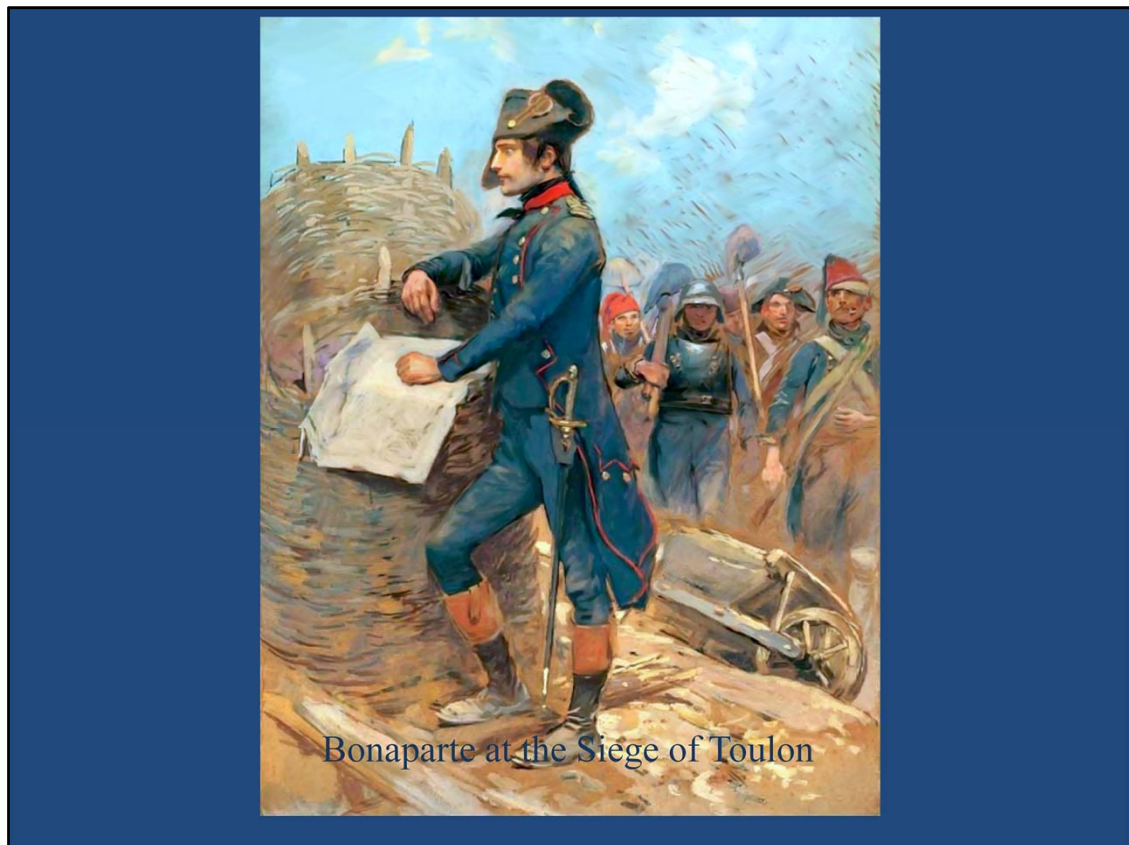
Nabulion returned again on leave to Corsica, where he contrived to have himself elected as Lt Col of a local militia regiment. He and his family kidnapped on of the electoral board members.

However, he eventually fell foul of some of his erstwhile political allies, and returned to France. Arriving in May 1792. The following month, the Assembly declared war on Austria and this was the first step towards twenty years of general European strife.

On 10 August Napoleon was an eyewitness to the second and most serious attack on the Tuileries Palace, when some 800 nobles and Swiss Guards were killed.

He had been reinstated to his artillery regiment, and even promoted to Capt. But used the excuse of escorting his sister (who was at school in St. Cyr) home to gain permission to return to Corsica. Retaking command of his Militia Bn. He also gave some consideration at this point of joining the British Army an Bengal!

On 21 Jan 1793 Louis XVI's head dropped into the sawdust, marking the beginning of the 'Terror', and in Feb. Nabulion took part in an amphibious assault on the Sardinian island of Maddalena.. He learned a lot about how not to conduct a campaign from this misadventure. (At exactly this same time, the young Arthur Wellesley was learning the same lessons in Flanders).



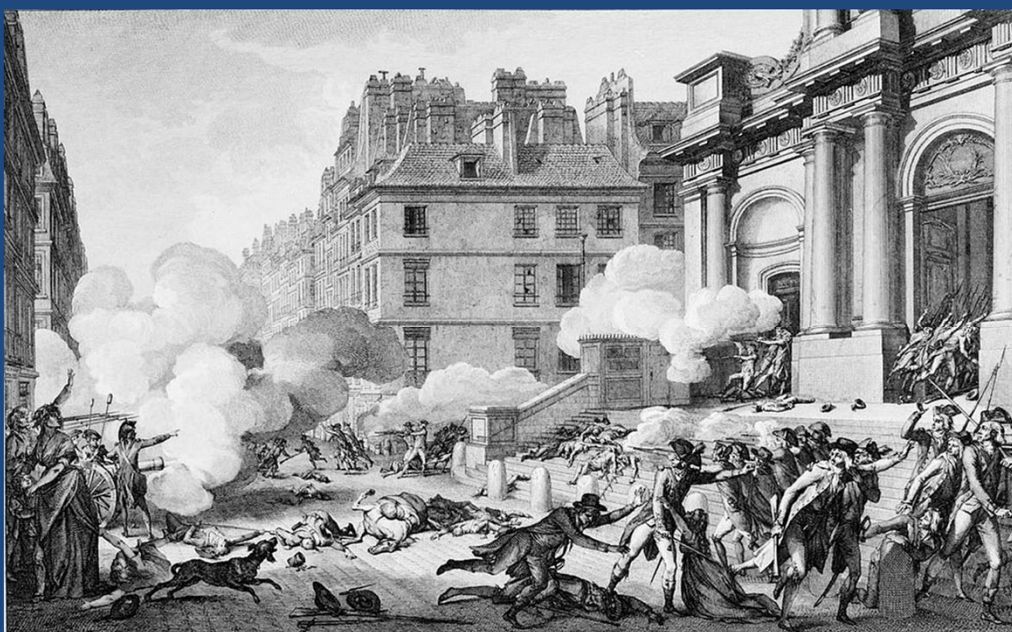
Due to various political misadventures on the part of his family, Napoleon had to flee Corsica for France. Leaving behind his Corsican-ness and finally becoming an avowed Frenchman. He did this not out of any new-born love of France but out of expediency, and he performed this swap of patries with all the emotional upheaval of a man changing his hat!

The port of Toulon, which had been occupied by the Royalists, British and Spanish was under siege by the forces of the Republic. The Republican artillery commander had been wounded and due to the influence of a friend Napoleon was appointed to command it.

The army at Toulon was in a shambles and due to his professionalism (and very good political connections) Napoleon was able to shine.

Carrying out a plan of attack devised by Napoleon himself, the Republican force captured forts commanding the port's inner roadstead forcing the Royal Navy's supporting fleet to withdraw, taking as much of the besieged garrison as they could.

Napoleon being central to the recapture of Toulon (and being wounded in the action) became a military darling of the revolution. He was promoted to Bde. At the age of 24 and he was on his way up.



13 Vendémiaire

Napoleon now suffered several highs and lows. His fortunes rising on making influential friends, and falling when those friends themselves fell from grace. He was incarcerated after the Robespierre brothers were executed, only to then be released as a valuable officer of the revolution.

On 5 Oct. (13 Vendémiaire in the new Republican calendar) there was another uprising in Paris (this time largely Royalist) and Napoleon was given the task of smashing it.

He did this by placing artillery at key points along the route that he knew the rebels would take in their march on the Convention.

The outcome was bloody, and for Napoleon was one of his most important victories. The Paris mob, since 1789 the ultimate arbiter of governments had given way to the military, henceforward the ultimate arbiter instead. Napoleon was appointed C-in-C of the Army of the Interior, and of the Paris Military District

For the time being France now enjoyed a new regime in the form of the 'Directory', and its chief Director Barras was Napoleon's patron.

He also inherited Barras' mistress, Josephine Tascher de la Pagerie, the widowed Viscountess de Beauharnais.



This painting depicts their wedding by the Holy Church just before their coronation in 1804, but in fact they had been married in a civil ceremony in 1796.

Two days after the civil wedding, he left his wife behind to take up his new post as commander of the army in Italy.

Napoleon's Address to the Army at the Beginning of the Italian Campaign, March, 1796

"Soldiers, you are naked and ill-fed! Government owes you much and can give you nothing.

The patience and courage you have shown in the midst of these rocks are admirable; but they gain you no renown; no glory results to you from your endurance.

It is my design to lead you into the most fertile plains of the world. Rich provinces and great cities will be in your power; there you will find honour, glory, and wealth. Soldiers of Italy! will you be wanting in courage or perseverance?"

This Order of the Day from Bonaparte to his new command epitomizes in more ways than one, the romantic legend of his Italian campaigns of 1796 and 1797. A legend which served as the foundation for the greater legend of Bonaparte as hero and genius.

The order is in fact spurious. Dictated more than twenty years later on St Helena, which became after 1815 the main centre of production in the Napoleonic myth industry..

Bonaparte began propagating his own legend just as soon as the Army of Italy marched. Feeding Paris with grandiloquent accounts of his successes, exaggerating enemy losses and defeats.

It was also at this time that he dropped the 'u' from Buonaparte to make it sound less blatantly Italian.



Napoleon Gets Really Busy

At age 26, he began his first military campaign against the Austrians and the Italian monarchs aligned with the Habsburgs—winning virtually every battle, conquering the Italian Peninsula in a year while establishing "sister republics" with local support, and becoming a war hero in France. In 1798, he led a military expedition to Egypt that served as a springboard to political power. He orchestrated a coup in November 1799 and became First Consul of the Republic.

Napoleon's ambition and public approval inspired him to go further, and he became the first Emperor of the French in 1804. Intractable differences with the British meant that the French were facing a Third Coalition by 1805. Napoleon shattered this coalition with decisive victories in the Ulm Campaign and a historic triumph over the Russian Empire and Austrian Empire at the Battle of Austerlitz which led to the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1806, the Fourth Coalition took up arms against him because Prussia became worried about growing French influence on the continent. Napoleon quickly defeated Prussia at the battles of Jena and Auerstadt, then marched his Grande Armée deep into Eastern Europe and annihilated the Russians in June 1807 at the Battle of Friedland. France then forced the defeated nations of the Fourth Coalition to sign the Treaties of Tilsit in July 1807, bringing an uneasy peace to the continent. Tilsit signified the high-water mark of the French Empire. In 1809, the Austrians and the British challenged the French again during the War of the Fifth Coalition, but Napoleon solidified his grip over Europe after triumphing at the Battle of Wagram in July.



And Busier Still

Napoleon then invaded the Iberian Peninsula, hoping to extend the Continental System and choke off British trade with the European mainland, and declared his brother Joseph Bonaparte the King of Spain in 1808. The Spanish and the Portuguese revolted with British support. The Peninsular War lasted six years, featured extensive guerrilla warfare, and ended in victory for the Allies against Napoleon. The Continental System caused recurring diplomatic conflicts between France and its client states, especially Russia. The Russians were unwilling to bear the economic consequences of reduced trade and routinely violated the Continental System, enticing Napoleon into another war. The French launched a major invasion of Russia in the summer of 1812. The campaign destroyed Russian cities, but did not yield the decisive victory Napoleon wanted. It resulted in the collapse of the Grande Armée and inspired a renewed push against Napoleon by his enemies. In 1813, Prussia and Austria joined Russian forces in the War of the Sixth Coalition against France. A lengthy military campaign culminated in a large Allied army defeating Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1813, but his tactical victory at the minor Battle of Hanau allowed retreat onto French soil.



Now Not So Much

The Allies then invaded France and captured Paris in the spring of 1814, forcing Napoleon to abdicate in April. He was exiled to the island of Elba off the coast of Tuscany, and the Bourbon dynasty was restored to power..

He had been Emperor of France and ruler of 44 mil. People; and he now found himself governing just 86 sq. miles and 11,000 subjects.

He had plans for this small island, and made many changes which benefited the local population and economy. He wanted to build a new hospital, schools and roads, but there would never be enough money.. He was also well aware of the British and French warships which guarded Elba's coast to make certain he did not leave his Lilliputian kingdom.

Considering that he could be regarded as Europe's (if not the World's) most dangerous man, I can't help but feel that at this point, the British government was negligent in not inserting a Stephen Maturin type into the picture. Napoleon was unwell, suffering from a yet to be diagnosed stomach cancer, and might have been removed from the picture by 'natural causes'.

The opportunity was never taken up, and an appointee of the British Government would soon enough commit an act of negligence that would have dire repercussions for thousands of people.



Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington

In the summer of 1814 His Grace the Duke of Wellington was on his way from London to Paris to take up his appointment as British Ambassador to Louis XVIII.

He travelled via the newly created kingdom of the Netherlands, an awkward invention, half French, half Dutch, half Catholic and half Protestant, which lay to the north of France.

The Duke had been asked to inspect the defences along the border with France.

He was considered an expert on such matters, and for a military commander enjoyed the very enviable reputation of never having lost a battle (either defensive or offensive), and he had fought a great many of them.

He had never however fought one against Napoleon, and was happy to tell anyone who asked that "he was very glad of it".



William II of the Netherlands

He was accompanied by 'Slender Billy' aka 'The young Frog' the 23 year old Prince William.

He was the Crown Prince of the new kingdom, and because he had been on the Duke's staff (in the role of an observer) during the Peninsular, War thought himself to possess some military talent.

This would prove very costly during the campaign that was yet to come. Slender Billy appeared to have no smarts, and was naïve in the extreme.

Some Dutch scholars disagree. Claiming this to be British prejudice.

Talk about his sexuality and naiveté.

Talk about grandad's advice



J. M. W. Turner - The Field of Waterloo

It was during this tour of inspection that Wellington noticed the ground which would become the battlefield of Waterloo. He had a very good eye for ground.

The slopes are not in reality as steep as turner depicts them here, but it does accurately convey the small size of the battlefield.

The northern slope which would be defended by the Allies had a reverse slope which could not be observed from the southern slope, on which the French would deploy for battle.

It also had farm buildings which could be turned into strong defensive positions.



While the Cat's away, a mouse may well burn the house down

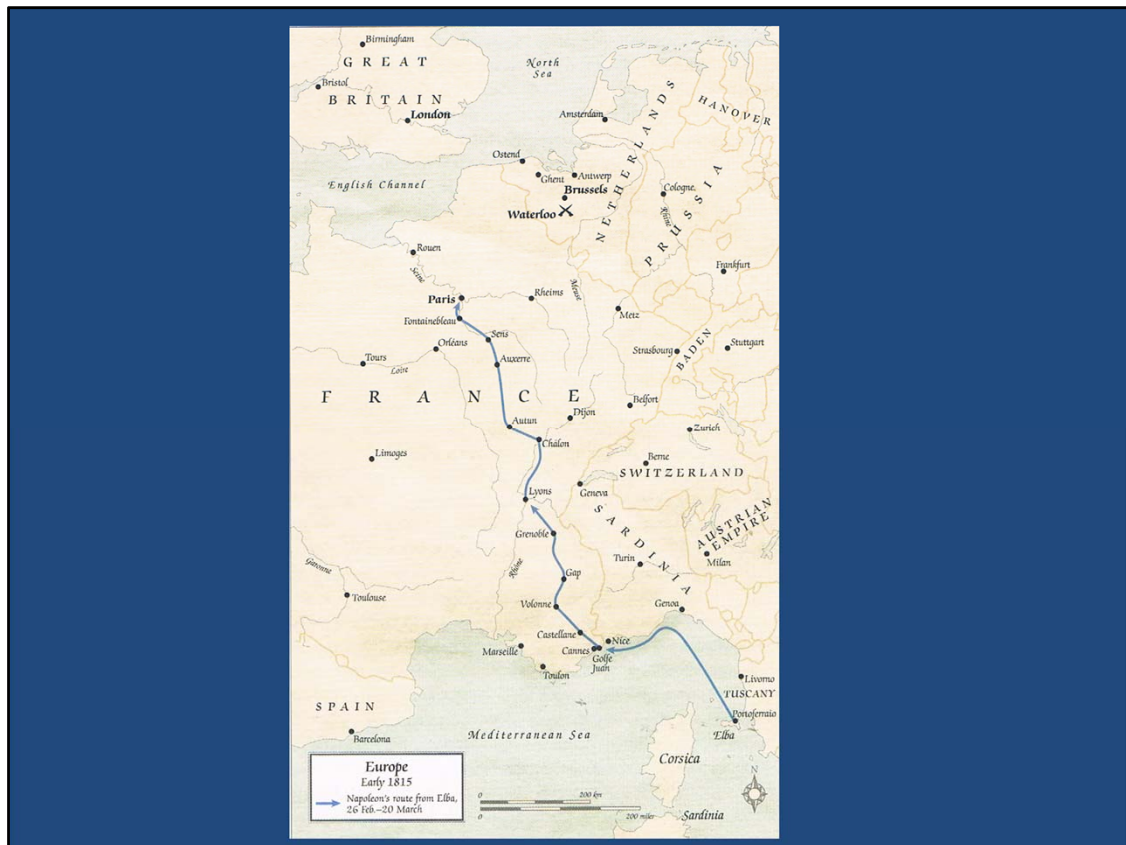
Meanwhile 'back at the ranch', Napoleon had become bored. He missed his wife and son. His now ex wife Josephine, with whom he was still in love, died. Most of his ex supporters, both military and political had turned against him.

Talleyrand, his former Foreign Minister now negotiated on behalf of the French monarchy, and wanted Napoleon sent further away to perhaps the Azores, or the west indies where he might contract yellow fever, or even some speck in a distant ocean such as say, St Helena.

Napoleon had been making plans, and taking steps to escape. And he intended to take the small military retinue he had been allowed to keep, and invade France.

Sir Neil Campbell, the British Commissioner on Elba not only failed to notice such steps (such as the ship 'Inconstant' which formed Napoleons only navy being disguised as a British Warship), but he also decide that he needed to take leave from Elba and go to Italy to see his Doctor. The fact that his mistress lived in Leghorn might have had something to do with it, as that is were he sailed to.

Napoleon waived him off, entreating him to return as soon as he could as Napoleons sister was organising a ball. And as soon as he disappeared over the horizon Napoleon 'did a runner'.

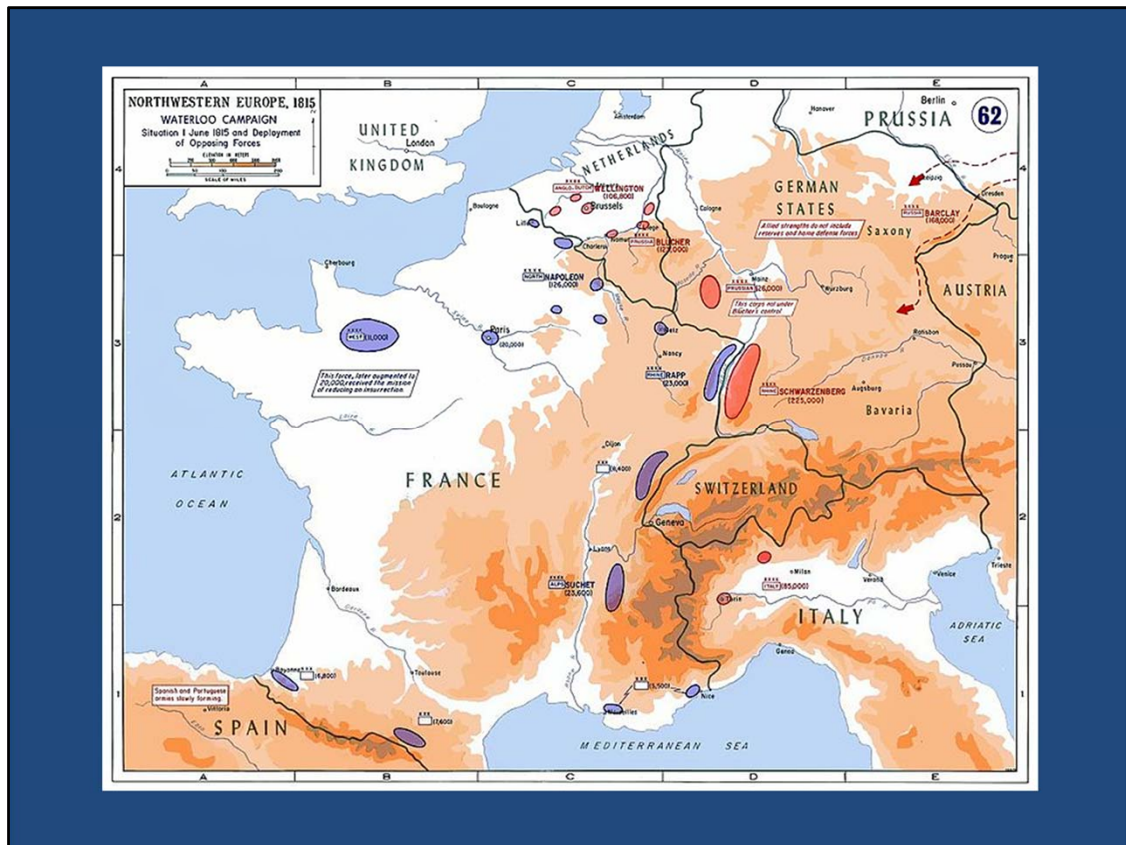


The map shows Napoleons progress from Elba to Paris 26 Feb to 20 March 1815.

Various French forces were sent to block him, but most of these changed allegiance and followed him. The reinstated monarch was for the most part, very unpopular, and Louis XVIII himself 'done a runner'.

When Napoleon reached Paris and declared himself once again the ruler of France, he offered peace terms to the rest of Europe.

They however did not trust him. Nor should they have.



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On 13 March 1815, six days before Napoleon reached Paris, the powers at the Congress of Vienna declared him an outlaw. Four days later, the United Kingdom, Russia, Austria, and Prussia mobilised armies to defeat Napoleon. Critically outnumbered, Napoleon knew that once his attempts at dissuading one or more members of the Seventh Coalition from invading France had failed, his only chance of remaining in power was to attack before the coalition mobilised.

Had Napoleon succeeded in destroying the existing coalition forces south of Brussels before they were reinforced, he might have been able to drive the British back to the sea and knock the Prussians out of the war. Crucially, this would have bought him time to recruit and train more men before turning his armies against the Austrians and Russians.

THE INTELLIGENCE WAR

- The allies were spread across a hundred miles of country, while Napoleon was concentrating his army south of the River Sambre on the main road which led through Charleroi to Brussels. So why did the allies not detect this?
- In Spain the Duke of Wellington had a superb Intelligence service; indeed his problem had been that he received too much intelligence, but in Flanders, in 1815, he was virtually blinded.

- Before the frontier was closed he had received plenty of reports from travellers coming north out of France, but most of those reports were fanciful and all were contradictory.
- He was also denied his favourite intelligence instrument, his Exploring Officers.
- The Exploring Officers were reliable men who scouted enemy country and depended on their superb horses to escape French pursuit.
- They rode in full uniform, so they could not be accused of spying, and they were extremely effective

- Chief among them was a Scotsman, Colquhoun Grant, and Wellington demanded Grant's presence in Belgium as the head of his Intelligence Department.
- Grant arrived in Brussels on 12, May and immediately set about establishing a network of agents on the French frontier, in which activity he was severely disappointed; because the local population, all French-speaking, was either sympathetic to Napoleon or sullenly apathetic.
- Nor could Grant send Exploring Officers south of the border because, officially, the allies were not at war with France, only with Bonaparte.



Colquhoun Grant

The First Respectable Spy

- Lieutenant-Colonel Colquhoun Grant (1780–1829) was a British Army soldier and intelligence officer during the Napoleonic Wars.
- Of a family from the Scots aristocracy, Grant, the youngest of eight brothers, was commissioned into the 11th Foot in 1795,

- In 1810 he was appointed to Wellesley's personal staff as an Exploring Officer in the Peninsula Corps of Guides, a special reconnaissance unit who spoke the local languages.
- Grant never thought of himself as a spy, and always rode in full uniform, often behind enemy lines, to note the positions and strength of the enemy.

- Grant did have superb contacts in Paris. This was by accident, because in 1812 Grant had the misfortune to be captured by the French in Spain.
- The French, knowing his value to Wellington, refused to exchange or parole him, but sent him to France under close guard; though not close enough. Because, once over the frontier in Bayonne, the Scotsman escaped
- He learned that General Joseph Souham, a French officer who had risen from the ranks, was staying in the town and planning to travel to Paris. In an act of superb bravado Grant introduced himself to Souham as an American officer and asked to travel in the General's carriage.
- He was still wearing the red coat of the British 11th Regiment of Foot, and no one thought to question it. What did Frenchmen know of American uniforms?

- Once in Paris the intrepid Grant found a source in the Ministry of War and contrived to send reports to the Duke in Spain.
- Grant eventually made his way back to England, but his source still existed in Paris and, once established as head of Wellington's Intelligence Service, Grant managed to make contact again.
- The source gave him much valuable information about l'Armée du Nord, but not what he really wanted to know; was Napoleon going to attack? And if so, where?
- The French were not making it easy to guess; the earliest contacts between the armies were on the road to Mons where French cavalry patrols exchanged shots with allied piquet's, suggesting that Napoleon was reconnoitring the direct route
- to Brussels.

Intsum French Orbat

l'Arme'e du Nord

50,700 infantry

14,390 cavalry

8,050 artillery and engineers

252 guns

Total: 73,000

The Orbat supplied to Grant was very detailed, right down to unit command level and strengths, but is far too detailed for our purposes.

Here is a very brief summary of that.

Wellington's army: 68,000

United Kingdom: 25,000 British
and 6,000 King's German Legion

Netherlands: 17,000

Hanover: 11,000

Brunswick: 6,000

Nassau: 3,000

156 guns

Blücher's army:

Prussians: 50,000

Total: 118,000

Here is an equally brief summary of the Allies Orbat.

Important things to note are that the British forces comprised 25k Brits and 6k KGL (also part of the Brit Army).

The Brit Monarch was also Elector of Hannover, who supplied a further 11k.

The Duke of Brunswick (who had reason to hate Napoleon) supplied a further 6k.

The Army of the Netherlands comprised of both Dutch and French speaking Belgian units (some of which only the year before had been part of the French Army). Totalling 17k.

William II was also ruler of Nassau, who supplied 3k.

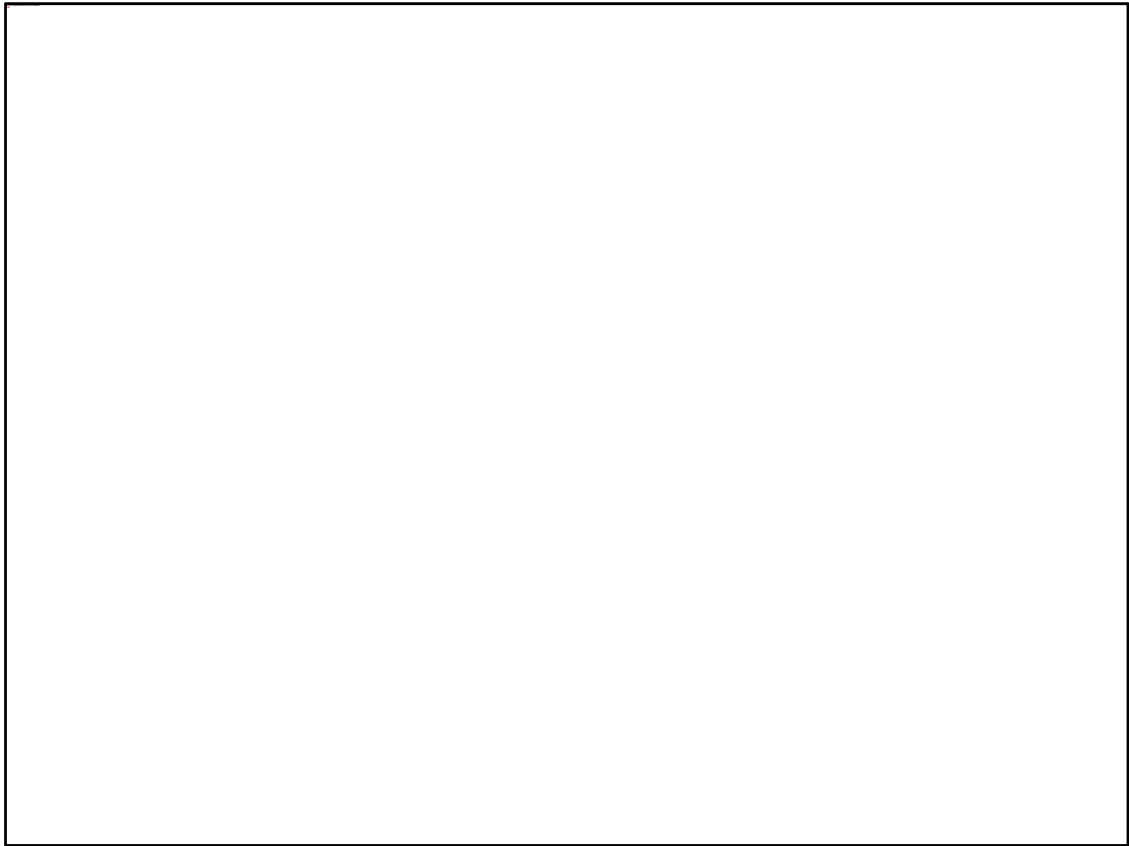
Of all the troops on the Allied side more than half were Germans (regardless of which state they served)

Some (the French speakers) felt that they were fighting for the wrong side.

Blücher's Chief of Staff Gneisenau, disliked and mistrusted Wellington, and constantly advised Blücher not to co-operate with him



The Battle of Waterloo was in fact three battles, fought by three armies over four days



The Duchess of Richmond's ball was held by Charlotte Lennox, Duchess of Richmond, in Brussels on 15 June 1815, the night before the Battle of Quatre Bras. Charlotte's husband Charles Lennox, 4th Duke of Richmond, was in command of a reserve force in Brussels, which was protecting that city in case Napoleon Bonaparte invaded.

Elizabeth Longford described it as "the most famous ball in history". The ball was certainly a brilliant affair", at which "with the exception of three generals, every officer high in [Wellington's] army was there to be seen".

This was rather handy, as this allowed Wellington to hold an impromptu 'Orders Group'.

The proceedings were interrupted soon after the arrival of the Duke of Wellington, when he was notified of Napoleon's unexpected advance on the nearby crossroads of Quatre Bras. This forced him to depart after ordering his officers to leave to join their regiments. Some of the officers would soon die in battle and the poignancy of the drama has provided an enduring theme for artists, novelists and poets.