

Napoleon as a Military Commander: the Limitations of Genius

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Napoleon was one of the greatest military minds in the history of warfare. He expanded the conquests of France from her revolutionary borders to that of an Empire that stretched from Spain to the steppes of Russia. Napoleon's genius lay not in revolutionizing of warfare itself, but in the refinement of existing means. He did not propose any drastic changes in tactics nor invent a new method of waging warfare, instead he excelled at the tactical handling of the armies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Napoleon established himself as a great leader of men during the revolutionary period with the siege of Toulon and his triumphs in Italy in 1796. These talents were refined and reached their height during the battles of Ulm, Austerlitz and Jena in the period of 1805-1806. Towards the end of the Empire the weaknesses of Napoleon as a military commander became more evident. His insistence on the micro management of the army and the awarding of Marshal batons to those who excelled under his leadership, but who possessed no great talent for individual command, worked to his detriment. The strategic failures of the decisions to invade Spain and Russia and the inability to keep the other major European powers divided proved disastrous. The increasing size and static nature of armies and the increasingly murderous nature of warfare during the latter part of the Empire revealed Napoleon's inability to adapt to the changing shape of war. It is in the light of his triumphs and later failures that Napoleon's traditional reputation as a great military leader must be judged.

Historiographical interpretations of Napoleon's military abilities have undergone several changes. In his epic work The Campaigns of Napoleon David Chandler accurately portrays how the "wheel has turned full cycle several times" as to the impressions of Napoleon's abilities. He had been regarded from at best a "talented thug", to a military genius. General James Marshal-Cornwall, a contemporary of Chandler, regards Napoleon as "...a master of the conduct of war; he was the supreme craftsman of his trade, who knew how to make the most effective, though not the most economical use of the tools and techniques which he found ready to his hand." Like Chandler he regards Napoleon's military genius as stemming from his use of the 'tools at hand' but, he is also aware of Napoleon's weaknesses as a military commander.

Another contemporary historian Owen Connolly argues in Blundering to Glory, despite his more negative attitude to Napoleon, that he was "probably the greatest commander of all time", but again he emphasized that this genius must be placed in context and Connolly's admiration is certainly not biased. Geoffrey Ellis in The Napoleonic Empire, agrees with Connolly and his argument that Napoleon's successes held a certain makeshift quality and herein lay his talent and genius.

Russell Weigley argues a slightly different point in The Age of Battles. Weigley is concerned generally with the obsession of the European powers in gaining the destruction of the enemy's army in a single climatic battle. Weigley regards Napoleon as the most proficient strategist since Gustavus Adolphus in achieving this masterstroke and the battle of Austerlitz as its crowning achievement during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic epochs. Weigley argues that the result of the Battle of Austerlitz and the destruction of the Austro-Russian army was the worship of battle among European soldiers as the means to annihilation. Weigley regards that despite this belief among European soldiers and statesmen the period after 1806 and Austerlitz was dominated by the change from the battle of annihilation to the battle of attrition. As a result the search for a decisive result in a single climatic battle was futile, although it still dominated the minds of European soldiers during this period and in particular Napoleon. Weigley goes on to argue that the inherent weaknesses in Napoleon's genius were his over-extension of the Empire and himself, as well as his megalomaniac personality. He believes that Napoleon was more the "instinctive genius than the professional."

Robert Epstein puts forward a similar argument to Weigley. Epstein differs in that he regards that there were two distinct eras in Napoleonic warfare. The first, consisted of the period of 1805-1807. It was during this time period that Napoleon had enough political autonomy to enforce his military plans and the full-scale adoption of the army corps system. Epstein regards that the army corps and the Napoleonic command and control structure allowed for the decisive battles of annihilation that accrued between 1805-1807. The second period, that of 1809-1815, is marked by the modernization of the armies of Napoleon's adversaries, principally Austria and Prussia. The result was that from the time of the 1809 campaign against Austria and the battle of Aspern-Essling, where Napoleon suffered his first defeat on the battle field, the key factor in warfare became firepower through the increasing scale of men and in particular

artillery. As a result the scale of warfare increased and Napoleon did not keep pace. The end result was that the "...one time god of battles (was) overthrown by the dynamics of warfare that he had unleashed but failed to comprehend."

Harold Parker in his articles on Napoleon, his impact on the French army and the course of the Empire places greater emphasis on his personality as a window to events. Parker emphasizes a psycho-biographical approach of Napoleon placing him into the Corsican, French and European society that he moved in. Parker sees Napoleon's second home as that of the French army. Parker's articles although not dealing explicitly with Napoleon as a military commander offers an alternative insight to his personality and reflections on some of the motivations behind his military triumphs and failures.

Writing at the turn of the century historian Maximilien Von Wartenburg regarded Napoleon as a military genius, arguing that Napoleon had "no equal as a general", but at the same time he was eminently aware of the limitations of Napoleon's personality. Wartenburg regarded this as the "predominant factor of our (and in particular Napoleon's) fate." William Morris, writing during the same period, regarded Napoleon as possessing "extraordinary gifts as a warrior," but during the later part of his reign he was "like a thundercloud streaming against the wind, and doing violence to the forces of nature..." The French historian Albert Sorel in Pieter Geyl's Napoleon: For and Against, simply follows Napoleon's presentation of events, while Thiers, and Bignon see a significant difference after 1806-1807 when they argue that Napoleon's ambitions diverge from those of France. George Lefebvre goes as far back as 1801 and the peace Luneville to argue the existence of this divergence. In the overall historical interpretation of Napoleon as a military commander it is generally agreed that he was a great military leader, but what must taken into consideration is his limitations and the reasons for his decline.

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Napoleon dominated the art of warfare amongst the European powers in the period 1796 to 1815. In order to judge Napoleon Bonaparte as a great military leader it is essential to look at the rational behind his great triumphs of the early period (1796-1806) and the reasons for the decline of his prominence in military affairs (1807-1815). Napoleon was a military genius in the strategic and tactical handling of armies and although he provided no large scale reforms of armies, or their equipment and techniques, he excelled at the refinement of an art that already existed.

The Napoleonic wars were a mere continuation of those of the revolutionary era with regards to tactics, organization and weaponry. Bonaparte inherited these elements as well as a professional French officer corps, seasoned and trained veterans and new rules for the recruitment of rank and file from the revolutionary wars. Most of the reforms that were used to such great effect under Napoleon's generalship had actually been introduced at the end of the old regime in France. It was the Republican armies under the guidance of Generals Kellerman, Jourdan, Moreau and others that refined the infantry tactics of Guibert and the artillery reforms of Gribeauval and the Du Teil brothers that dominated the Revolutionary and Napoleonic epochs.

Napoleon's personality had a significant impact throughout his career. Many factors helped him rise to fame and enhance his abilities; his almost hypnotic power over his contemporaries; his intellectual capacity; the ability to work for long periods continually; his iron will and irresistible charm all helped during the early part of his career to establish himself at an early age as a very competent general. The later point was especially significant when he took command of the Army of Italy in 1796 at the age of only 27. Harold Parker goes so far as to say that Napoleon's personality and its desire to please Josephine effected his performance during the Italian campaign of 1796, that his tendency at this time toward a sexual union "with a woman no doubt accentuated his drive for power and accomplishment". An interesting theory but one that is difficult to determine.

Napoleon had an unbelievable range of intellectual ability. His power of concentration was enormous as was his memory for detail and facts. It is argued that when on campaign in 1805 one of his subordinates could not locate his division, while his aids searched through maps and papers, the Emperor informed the officer of his unit's present location, where he would be for the next three nights, the status and resume of the units strength as well as the subordinates military record. This out of an army with seven corps, a total of 200,000 men, with all the units on the move.

Napoleon also possess an incredible capacity for work. He continually worked an eighteen to twenty hour day. When necessary he could work for up to three days without rest. He took great interest in even the smallest measures under his command and used his mental abilities to think out military problems days or even months in advance. More importantly he possessed the ability to inspire others. All of these personality traits were to prove invaluable to him in the period up to 1806. It was after this date that things started to work against him.

One of the most important factors of Napoleon's personality and its effect on his abilities as a military commander was his genius to inspire others. Contrary to the beliefs of Count von Wartenburg, Napoleon

was eminently aware of the impact of morale on modern warfare. He believed in the maxim that "morale is to the physical as three is to one", further emphasizing the point while in exile on St Helena: "Moral force rather than numbers, decides victory." It was through his system of awards appealing to soldiers "soul in order to electrify the man" that Napoleon was so successful in obtaining unquestionable obedience from his rank and file. This position is supported by Rothenburg who argues that "He (Napoleon) inspired Frenchman and foreigners alike with fierce loyalty and devotion."

Napoleon's personality and the system of personal loyalty that he adopted demanded the substitution of the 'Army of Virtue,' established under the revolution and appealing to sacrifice for the good of the people and state, with the 'Army of Honour'. This 'Army of Honour' appealed to the interests of the soldier and established a link to the Empire and Napoleon through a system of awards and preferment's. John Lynn argues that it was not true "that the soldiers of the Empire were devoid of public spirit and incapable of self sacrifice. Rather, it was a question of which strings those who governed choose to pull..."

Napoleon inherited an officer corps that was both militarily professional and transformed by the revolution. The corps was no longer restricted to the old nobility, but was established on the revolutionary principles of merit, talent and elections amongst peers for promotion. Whilst he adopted the first two reforms, Napoleon abolished what he saw as the anarchist policy of elections. This furthered his ability to encourage loyalty to himself as he promoted those who performed well regardless of their social background, thereby inevitably linking the fortunes of his officers to his own continual success and maintenance of power.

Napoleon asserted influences and changes to the French army during this period that were instrumental towards his victories. In tactical organization Napoleon widely introduced the use of the *corps d'avant-garde* or *corps d'armée*. First seen in his Italian campaign of 1796, the army corps replaced the division as the main tactical organization. In effect the corps was a miniature army comprised of infantry, artillery, and cavalry numbering anywhere from ten to thirty thousand men. This was not an original concept as General Moreau had experimented with the corps system during the revolutionary era. Each of these self contained *corps d'armée* was capable of holding off greatly superior forces for several hours until help arrived. As a consequence, it allowed an army made up of various corps, to move in widely separated units. This allowed greater mobility, was deceptive to the enemy, and eased the burden of logistics. As a general rule, Napoleon dispersed his corps on the march so that they were in mutually supporting positions and able to come to the aid of each other in the event of concentration for battle or to ward off superior forces. This emphasized Napoleon's dictum of march divided, fight united. In a letter to Eugene Beauharnais in 1809 Napoleon highlighted his belief in the tactical advantages of the corps system:

"Here is the principle of war - a corps of 25,000-30,000 men can be left on its own. Well handled, it can fight or alternatively avoid action, and maneuver according to circumstances without any harm coming to it, because an opponent cannot force it to accept an engagement but if it chooses to do so it can fight alone for a long time.

This system of army corps gave Napoleon a great advantage over his opponents during the consulate and early empire.

During the campaign of 1796 in Italy, General Bonaparte introduced the reorganization of his cavalry and artillery forces that he would adapt later universally throughout the French army. Napoleon streamlined the existing system, distributing a cavalry division to each army corps and forming the remainder, principally the heavy cavalry, into a virtual corps of its own as a part of the army reserve. This corps was held exclusively under his command for commitment at the decisive point on the day of battle. These changes greatly improved the cavalry's efficiency. One of the most famous of French cavalry officers of the period, General Marbot, regarded Napoleon as the "...best light cavalry officer in any European army...Both in irregular warfare and major operations he was a most remarkable officer." Like the cavalry Napoleon also organized an artillery reserve under his personnel command for the commitment at the decisive moment on the battle field.

Napoleon was also responsible for the introduction of a new corps d' elite, the Imperial Guard. This formation provided Napoleon with a strong reserve of elite troops always at his immediate disposal and ready to be committed at the decisive point and moment. Although these changes were instrumental in the success of the French armies under Napoleon they were in no way revolutionary. Napoleon merely streamlined the system to achieve a higher degree of proficiency.

The most outstanding feature of the Napoleonic system of warfare was undoubtedly its flexibility and limitless variation. The insistence on speed and mobility was the basic features of his campaigns from Italy in 1796 to Waterloo in 1815. It was this emphasis on speed and mobility that also contributed greatly to the confusion and unsettling of his opponents. This aspect of Napoleonic warfare is best summed up by the French infantryman, "the Emperor has discovered a new way of waging war; he makes use of our legs instead of our bayonets." This was epitomized in the first Italian campaign when General Augereau's corps marched 50 miles in 36 hours. In 1805 Napoleon moved the whole of the Grand Army, 210,000

men from its camps at Boulogne to the Rhine. From the Rhine he marched to the Danube and then the outskirts of Ulm in 17 days. Marshal Soult's corps covered 275 miles during a period of 22 days. At Austerlitz Davout drove his corps 140 kilometers in 48 hours to join the battle and gain a decisive result in favor of the French. Historians including David Chandler regard Napoleon's fusion of battle with maneuver in this way as Napoleon's "greatest contribution to the art of war".

This fusion had one specific purpose in mind, a decisive battle. All of his units and his strategic maneuvering were achieved with the specific incentive of bringing the opposing army to a decisive battle in which it could be destroyed. This was in opposition to Napoleon's eighteenth century forerunners who made great distinctions between maneuver and battle, a legacy that many of his opponents were yet to overcome. These principles of speed, offensive action and concentration at the decisive point often led to Napoleon's opponents being both surprised and demoralized. This was essential as Napoleon's first priority in a campaign was the destruction of the enemies field army. Everything else was secondary.

To create the necessary favorable battle position Napoleon used three main strategic concepts. Firstly, there was the indirect approach or *La manœuver sur les derrieres*, which was employed more than thirty times between 1796 and 1815. This maneuver envisaged the pinning of the enemy by a feint attack and then marching by a concealed rout, either natural, or a cavalry screen, to fall on the enemies rear or flank. This proved Napoleon's most successful stratagem and it was only after a decade and a dozen major defeats that his opponents learnt a counter measure. Secondly, when faced by two or a series of enemy armies Napoleon favored the "central position." This meant that although he might be inferior in numbers to the enemy he would engage each element separately to achieving battlefield superiority, as during the Waterloo campaign. Faced with two opposing armies, Napoleon first attacked Blucher's Prussians while Marshal Ney's Corps dealt with Wellington. After Blucher's defeat Napoleon turned all his attention on Wellington's Anglo-Dutch army. The third Napoleonic maneuver was the "strategic penetration." The smashing of the enemies corridor of defenses followed by a rapid march deep into enemy territory to seize a city or town to be used as a base of operations for the next phase of the campaign. Although these methods proved formidable, as Rothenburg argues, the pattern of Napoleon's maneuvers eventually became predictable and allowed his opponents to turn his own methods against him.

What must not be underestimated in this process was the effectiveness of Napoleon's subordinates. The generals under the Consular regime and the marshals under the Empire formed a decisive and influential element of Napoleon's army. During the Italian campaign of 1800 it was the timely arrival of General Desaix, who had marched on his own initiative to the "sound of the guns" that had saved the day for Napoleon and lost Desaix his life. In the campaign of 1796, General Massena had proved a godsend for Napoleon. At Auerstadt Marshal Davout with only 26,000 men defeated a Prussian army more than twice its size. For the cost of 8,000 casualties Davout had captured 3,000, killed a further 12,000 and completely routed the enemy.

Napoleon's reforms and their adaptation to his ideas of strategy along with his personality were all instrumental in the French army, achieving dominance during this period, and it was these methods that complimented and made the Napoleonic system of warfare possible and so effective.

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Many historians including, David Chandler, William Morris, Russel Weigley, James Marshall-Cornwall and Philip Haythornthwaite, consider the year 1806 as the high point of Napoleon's military genius and the battle of Austerlitz as his crowning achievement. Even Owen Connolly in *Blundering to Glory*, regards Austerlitz as showing a "master tactician at work," although he does not regard the campaign against Prussia in 1806 with such acclaim.

With such success in the period up to 1806 why did Napoleon decline after this period resulting in his final downfall in 1815, nine years later? Certainly after 1806 there were still many victories for Napoleon to win, but it was after this period that we see his influence, dominance and his military abilities slowly decline. This decline can be attributable to many factors: the strategic failures of Spain and Russia; the increased efficiency of his opponents; the decreasing quality of his own troops; the personality of Napoleon and the limitations of his subordinates.

Napoleon's strength of personality fell as the years progressed as did his enormous capacity for work. The intellectual force never seemed to be overburdened, but the lack of resolution became more noticeable. He became more irrational and subject to delusion, an all or nothing mentality took hold and it clearly effected a rational decision making process. His iron will and determination turned to stubbornness and with the growing delusion came the distrust of those around him. Napoleon turned from what Chandler describes as, "the foremost realist of his age" to what Von Wartenburg states as, "an apostate from his old belief in facts, and began to believe in things which had no reality."

Napoleon developed an insatiable lust for power that caused ceaseless demands on the resources of France. His belief in his own destiny, and that he was set apart from ordinary man warped his judgment.

Combined with this was the growing deterioration of his physical health. He suffered from piles and bladder trouble and his physical abilities hindered him on at least two battle fields, Borodino and Waterloo. The demands that he retain absolute centralized power over both the military and civil administrations of France during the later period pushed him way beyond the bounds of proper control. The development of his personality during these last years had an everlasting impact on the course of events and his abilities as a military commander.

After the victories of the 1806 campaign the *Grand Armée* became an increasingly cosmopolitan force. By 1807, approximately one third of the force was of a foreign nature and this steadily increased over the years. The creation of the Imperial Guard, the army's elite, had the detrimental effect of draining off the best soldiers from the line regiments, undoubtedly weakening their quality. The superb officer corps that existed in the army suffered increasingly higher casualties in the later years, especially after 1808, as the quality of the rank and file decreased, necessitating more sacrifices from the officers to inspire the men to great deeds or even to hold their morale together. As the years of warfare dragged on the officer corps was filled with every available means, such as promotion from the ranks or commissions granted to newly entered cadets, often with adverse effects on performance. The same acquitted itself with the rank and file who were made up more and more of partial or untrained conscripts during the later years .

After 1806 the size of armies and the French military commitment greatly increased, as did the murderous nature of warfare. At Eylau in 1807 Napoleon suffered approximately 25,000 killed and wounded for a battle that was essentially a draw and solved nothing. In 1808 after finally achieving the decisive victory at Friedland Napoleon turned toward Spain. After achieving an initial victory Napoleon left the affairs of Spain to his Marshals and he was never to return. The French army was destined to fight in Spain and Portugal until 1814 suffering an increasing number of defeats at the hands of the Spanish and British armies. Most importantly of all it provided a continual drain on French resources. Spain was to cost Napoleon an annual commitment of 300,000 men per year fighting in the peninsula and after five years of warfare 260,000 casualties.

As a result of Spain, the Emperor now faced war from 1808-1814 on two fronts. Although this was not continual for these six years it still caused a considerable strain on resources. The Russian campaign of 1812 resulted in the indecisive battle of Borodino at the cost of 28,000 French casualties and culminated in a retreat that cost Napoleon his whole army. The decision for the invasion had been the Emperor's alone and had been taken against continual advice to the contrary. It was the result of Napoleon's obsession with warfare, territorial acquisition and a megalomaniac personality. Harold Parker in his article on the invasion of Russia argues how even one of Napoleon's closest advisers, Caulaincourt, accused him of desiring only mastery: "Undoubtedly your majesty would not make war on Russia solely for the sake of Poland, but rather that you should have no rival in Europe, and see there none but vassals."

At the start of chapter seventy eight of his memoirs Baron De Marbot states: "It has been truly said that in the later campaigns of the Empire the fighting was seldom well managed when Napoleon did not direct it in person. It is to be regretted that the great captain did not realize this, and put so much trust in his lieutenants, many of whom..- were not up to their task." Napoleon's subordinates has served him well up until 1806 and as a reward in 1804, with the creation of the Empire, Napoleon also created the Marshalate. During the early years these marshals served him well and one in particular Berthier, Napoleon's chief of staff, proved invaluable throughout the entire period, but there was also grave drawbacks in both Bonaparte's choice of men and the way that he administered them.

Napoleon required above all else in his subordinates obedience rather than military flair. With the exceptions of Massena, Davout and Suchet who would have risen to high rank in any army, there remained few capable to command above the army corps level, much to the detriment of the later empire, especially in Spain. Napoleon worked on the system of divide and rule. A measure that was to have a great impact on the working relations of the marshals. They were notable for their fits of feuding, quarreling and at times flagrant insubordination. Murat and Lannes undertook a feud from 1799 until Lannes death at Wagram. Berthier despised Davout who in turn had little time for Murat and Bernadotte. Ney argued constantly with Davout after 1805 and Massena after 1810. The situation only became worse as the morale of the marshals slumped in the later years with the onset of defeats.

The inability for the marshal's to perform outside of their master's gaze was extremely detrimental, especially in Spain where their talents for independent command never materialized. They were constantly beaten by Wellington and their attitude and jealousy toward each other left out any possibility for co-operation. It was not unknown for a marshal to refuse to obey the orders of a compatriot that was placed above him in Spain. As Caulaincourt, Napoleon's Chief of Horse recorded in 1814: "they(the Marshals) had become too rich, too much the grands seigneurs and had grown war-weary."

Owen Connolly holds Napoleon's Marshals in much higher regard than many of his contemporaries. He argues that Massena and Desaix were almost the true inspiration in the early Italian campaigns, while Napoleon owes a great debt to Davout for his conduct at Austerlitz and Auerstadt. Connolly argues that in the campaign of 1806 against Prussia it was in fact Davout's action at Auerstadt that was the most

significant and the crowing achievement of the campaign. At the same time Connolly hardly makes mention of the great difficulties amongst the marshals and the command structure in Spain nor does he make much of their conduct in the later campaigns. Although they performed many great and significant deeds for their master the ineptitude of the marshals and their handling by Napoleon must figure highly as one of Napoleon's greatest weaknesses as a military commander.

By 1813, after almost 17 years of continual warfare, Napoleon had failed in the attempt to adhere to the principle of making war a relatively short, quick enterprise and to keep his enemies divided. At Leipzig he faced an army of Prussians, Austrians and Swedes numbering 300,000 to his own 190,000. He abandoned his own rationale of the destruction of the enemy's armies as first priority and became obsessed with geographical objectives such as Berlin and Prague. Furthermore, to achieve these objectives he abandoned his principle of concentration by sending Marshal Oudinot to Berlin with 72,000 men and Macdonald, with 102,000 against the Prussian Blücher. Napoleon's choice of commanders was also far from satisfactory. The only thing that Oudinot and Macdonald did achieve was their own destruction. Vandamme, who had also been detached met with a similar fate. This only further illustrated the break down in the highly centralized Napoleonic system of command. This technique had not changed despite the fact that the size of his armies had increased from less than 50,000 to over 400,000 men.

During the early days Napoleon had commanded armies of up to 60,000. In Italy in 1796 there had been just 38,000. Napoleon consistently increased the size of his armies during the later period of the Empire. Most of the climatic battles were fought with field armies numbering 100,000 men, but Napoleon had marched into Russia with 500,000 of which two thirds was made up of foreign troops. In 1809 at Wagram and at Leipzig in 1813 he commanded 190,000, as a result his enemies countered with larger armies and the scale of war increased. These armies became more static, more cumbersome to maneuver, a nightmare to maintain logistically and the slaughter ever increasing. Without a doubt, Napoleon was at his best when he commanded smaller armies of thirty to sixty thousand in lightning campaigns.

During the campaign of 1814 Napoleon showed great leadership and a return to the tactical flair that had been missing during the campaigns in Russia in 1812 and Germany in 1813. This could be attributed to the limitations of his personality. Napoleon had continually overestimated his own abilities as a field commander since his victory during the Italian campaign at the Lodi bridge in 1796. This was further enhanced by his continuing victories, but during the campaigns of 1812 and 1813 he had suffered disastrous reverses. During the most of the campaign in France in 1814, however, he showed strategic and tactical flair equal to this first Italian campaign. This was a direct result of placing his own limitations into a much clearer context and the fact that he was commanding a much smaller army than in the previous two campaigns. He constantly held the initiative and made lightning strikes against his divided enemies. It was only during the later part of the campaign, after continual tactical victories over the allies did he begin to underestimate his opponents and in the words of F. Lorraine Petre "allowed imagination to master facts."

Napoleon's enemies also became much more capable not only in command but also in organization and quality of their armies. Both the Austrian and Prussian armies had undertaken reforms after their defeats and most Europeans had universally adopted the system of army corps. Napoleon and his subordinates were, during the later part of the Empire, faced with increasingly more proficient enemy commanders, Blücher, Wellington, Schwarzenberg, Kutuzov and Wittgenstein. Furthermore during the campaigns of 1813 and 1814 there was unparalleled co-operation between the coalition powers not previously seen during the French Revolutionary and the Napoleonic Wars. This co-operation between the major powers was to have a great impact on the defeat of Napoleon during the later years of the Empire. During 1813 his German allies started to desert to the allies. Two days before the battle of Dresden two complete regiments of Westphalian hussars sent by Napoleon's brother Jerome defected on mass taking their transport and all their arms with them. A former French Marshal Bernadotte had left Napoleon to become King of Sweden and had joined the allied confederation. On the second day of the battle of Leipzig the Saxon and Württemberg troops of Reynier's corps also defected to the enemy. In 1814 the allies invaded France forcing Napoleon to abdicate and his return in 1815 lasted only a little more than 100 days, ending disastrously at Waterloo at the hands of Wellington and Blücher.

Napoleon does deserve his traditional reputation as one of history's great military commanders. Through his abilities to fuse battle with maneuver, his reorganization of the French army and his flexible and innovated strategic and tactical handling of armies he was able to dominate the European battle field throughout most of his career. It was the declining quality of French forces: his inadequate subordinates; the increasing size and murderous nature of warfare; the improvements of his enemies; the deterioration of his personality; and almost 20 years of continual warfare led to his downfall. This traditional reputation must be viewed not only in regards to his victories, but also his failings as a military commander. It is in this light that judgments must be made on Napoleon's military capabilities.

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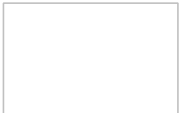
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Napoléon Bonaparte (15 August 1769 – 5 May 1821) was a French military general who rose to prominence in the French Revolution, becoming the ruler of France as First Consul of the French Republic (11 November 1799 - 18 May 1804), and then Emperor of the French and King of Italy under the name Napoleon I (18 May 1804 - 6 April 1814, and again briefly from 20 March - 22 June 1815). Napoleon was a military genius in the strategic and tactical handling of armies and although he provided no large scale reforms of armies, or their equipment and techniques, he excelled at the refinement of an art that already existed. The Napoleonic wars were a mere continuation of those of the revolutionary era with regards to tactics, organization and weaponry. One of the most important factors of Napoleon's personality and its effect on his abilities as a military commander was his genius to inspire others. Contrary to the beliefs of Count von Wartenburg, Napoleon was eminently aware of the impact of morale on modern warfare.