

From Emperor to Prisoner:

The Conflict and Compromise throughout Napoleon Bonaparte's life

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The world suffers a lot. Not because of the violence of bad people. But because of the silence of the good people.

-Napoleon Bonaparte 1769-1821

Who would have thought that one man could change European history forever. Many people have heard of Napoleon Bonaparte, the emperor of France who was exiled to St. Helena, but did you know that when Napoleon was in Helena he befriended a thirteen year old girl named Betsy Balcombe? Imagine a general of the French army, Emperor of France and at one point the most powerful man in Europe spending most of his time in Helena with a little girl that he just met. What makes the situation more astonishing is that Betsy Balcombe was English and the English were Napoleon's adversaries all through his life. Not only did they get along well, but she treated Napoleon like an uncle. They even gave each other nicknames. The conflict between the Battle of Waterloo and what to do about Napoleon after he was captured was efficiently compromised by sending Napoleon to St. Helena. In Europe the battle with Napoleon was over, but in St. Helena Napoleon was fighting his own battle because he didn't realize he would never fight another war again.

Napoleon's Rise to Power

Napoleon was born in Ajaccio, Corsica on August 15, 1769. His family consisted of eight children, and his father and mother¹ were part of an Italian noble family.

Napoleon's family was tragically poor and consequently had trouble surviving. Amid the

¹ Napoleon's mother was Letizia Ramolino who was born on August 24, 1750 and died on February 2, 1836

time Napoleon was growing up, Corsica was under French control and his father² supported the rebels battling the French which is very ironic because his son grew to be the most powerful leader of France.

After graduating from a military academy, Napoleon was a young military leader inclined in the art of war who came of age during the French Revolution³. During the reign of terror⁴ the Jacobins⁵ were striking fear into many of the civilians of France. This was Napoleon's chance to ascent to power. Napoleon provided the citizens of France with stability and he was the key to ending the French Revolution. Napoleon overthrew the french directory and named himself the first consul adequately making him the leader of France. After the French Revolution, Napoleon elected himself emperor of France in 1804, and he rebuilt Paris. Furthermore Napoleon founded the French banking system and created a civil, modern legal code called the Napoleonic code.

The Napoleonic Wars

Napoleon, now leader of France, owned the whole French army and he was only 26 years old! Napoleon started off as captain then converted into commander and finally in 1795 was promoted as general of the French Army. During his reign Napoleon invaded nearly every country in Europe. Napoleon fought wars in Italy, Austria, the

² Napoleon's father was Carlo Buonaparte who was born on March 27, 1746 and died on February 24, 1785

³ The French Revolution (1789-1799) was a crisis in government which culminated in the overthrow of monarchy and establishment of a republic.

⁴ The reign of terror was a period of time during the French revolution that was led by the Jacobins. The enemies of the Jacobins would be slaughtered by a guillotine.

⁵ Jacobins were members in a democratic club led by Maximilien Robespierre

Netherlands, Malta, Egypt, and Syria. In 1798, Napoleon defeated Egypt at the battle of the Pyramids, but during the battle of the Nile the same year in Egypt Napoleon's army was stranded. In 1799 the next year Napoleon launched an invasion in Syria that was unprosperous. During the Napoleonic wars⁶ the treaty of Amiens established peace between Britain and France in 1802.

Napoleon's first Exile on Elba

In 1812 Napoleon thought Russia was conspiring with England to form an alliance. Napoleon didn't want Russia to be a substantial threat to him so he launched an invasion against the Russians. The invasion proved to be futile when Napoleon's troops had to retreat from Moscow and eventually surrender in 1814. With most of Europe now aligned against him and his military power greatly weakened, Napoleon offered to step down from his throne in favor of his son. Napoleon's offer was rejected and he was forced to abdicate his throne nonetheless in a compromise by his enemies that forced Napoleon into exile on the Mediterranean island of Elba⁷ in the treaty of Fontainebleau.

On Elba Napoleon became Emperor over the 12,000 inhabitants living there. Napoleon was not under supervision and he could do whatever he wanted on Elba except leave. Overtime Napoleon grew disinterested on Elba because he didn't have very much power and he couldn't fight military battles which was his great passion. Napoleon wanted to leave so he obtained a ship called the *Inconstant* which was

⁶ The Napoleonic wars were series of wars led by Napoleon against other European powers.

⁷ Elba is a small mediterranean island of the coast of Italy. It's 86.49 miles squared.

painted to look like a British vessel. Napoleon didn't mention his escape plans to anyone on Elba except the day before he left. Napoleon was liberated from Elba on February 26, 1815. He stayed on Elba for 300 days only. The *Inconstant* easily sailed to the French coast with no disturbance from Great Britain. Napoleon promptly returned to France thereupon escaping his exile.

Napoleon's return to Paris

Napoleon arrived in Grenoble first. He then advanced on Paris with 1,000 supporters and entered Paris on March 20, 1815. Napoleon was greeted by cheering crowds. The new king, Louis XVIII, fled for Belgium. Napoleon immediately began preparing for war he knew was coming and after two months upon his return to France he already had an impressively large army of 280,000 soldiers and was expecting more instantly. He then commenced the 100 Days Campaign⁸.

Some countries were intimidated by Napoleon and his growing army so they too prepared for war. These European battalions included Austrians, British, Prussians, and Russians. England's Duke of Wellington⁹ led the British with 110,000 soldiers, and Gebhard Leberecht von Blucher¹⁰ with 120,000 men led the Prussians. Napoleon wanted to strike first before the brigade of Europeans invaded France. In June 1815, Napoleon invaded Belgium with 125,000 men. His goal was to split England's and

⁸ The hundred days campaign is the period from Napoleon's exile to the second restoration of King Louis. It started on March 20, 1815 to July 8, 1815.

⁹ Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852) was the first Duke of Wellington. He gained fame by fighting against the French during the Peninsular war.

¹⁰ Gebhard Leberecht von Blucher(1742-1819) was a prussian general who served in the Seven years war and the Napoleonic wars.

Prussia's army so their forces wouldn't be as strong if they weren't together. After Napoleon split the armies his plan was to defeat them separately. His brilliant plan worked beautifully and Napoleon picked Prussia's army as his first target almost destroying Marshal Bucher's army and decreasing the risk of defeat.

The Battle of Waterloo (Conflict)

By targeting the Prussians and almost dismantling their army, Napoleon's last battle had begun. On June 18, two days later, Napoleon accompanied his army of 72,000 French soldiers to Belgium near the village of Waterloo where the British had positioned itself. The British had a legion of 68,000 men. The British army incorporated Belgian, Dutch, and German troops. Napoleon could have won the war by his strategic planning, but he made one pivotal error that cost him his victory. Instead of marching out to Waterloo right away, Napoleon waited to advance until midday. Unfortunately his delay gave his opposing rival Blucher, and his Prussian army a chance to join the Duke of Wellington's armed forces completely outnumbering Napoleon's infantry. Although Napoleon and his calvaries mounted a firm aggression against their opponents, the British and Prussians army exceeded the French's troops causing them to retreat. One thing was for sure Napoleon had lost again and this time it might cost him his life.

Defeat at Waterloo

"Ah! If it were only to be done over again!"

“It was fate; for after all, I ought to have won that battle.”

-Napoleon Bonaparte

Finally the former emperor of France was impounded. Now the problem was what to do with him. Prussia, Britain, Austria, and Russia, had done what many European armies had tried to do over the last decade but now no one could agree on what to do with him. It had only been a year since Napoleon's exile on Elba and already, though he didn't know it yet, he was going to be exiled again, but this time he wouldn't escape. A British prime minister, Lord Liverpool had three resolutions on what to do with Bonaparte. One was to restore Louis XVIII with Napoleon dead, or a prisoner in the hands of allies. The second was the restoration of Louis XVIII, with Napoleon alive in the United States or somewhere else. The last theory was that if there was no way to restore Louis the XVIII there would be a new form of government without him that would also exclude Napoleon and his previous supporters. There were three questions on everyone's mind:

“What is to become of Bonaparte?”

“What should be done about those who assisted him in regaining power?”

“What should be done with the French armies?”

Countless numbers of people favoured Napoleon's execution along with the Duke of Wellington.

Napoleon's second Exile on St. Helena (Compromise)

After days of bickering about what to do with the former Emperor, the British government finally constituted a compromise. Napoleon Bonaparte would be placed in

exile on the island of St. Helena¹¹ where he couldn't arouse the peace of Europe. He also couldn't correspond or get involved with the world from his soon to be reformatory. Napoleon would have little or no communication so in consequence his existence could be forgotten. The English thought it best if they stationed a British regiment on Helena to take precautions in case Napoleon repeated his abscond a second time. On August 8 1815, the departed emperor left Plymouth harbour on a Royal Navy's ship known as the *Northumberland*. Two months later on October 14th, Napoleon and his suite regarded their new home or rather Napoleon's unfamiliar prison. The next day October 15, the *Northumberland* came to Helena's main settlement of Jamestown. Napoleon's close companions and valet were quick to perceive that Napoleon had no remarks about his new confinement except for a brief contemplation of Helena:

"It seems no charming place to live in. I should have done better to stay in Egypt. I should now have been emperor of the whole Orient."

-Napoleon Bonaparte

Admiral George Cockburn, the commander of the *Northumberland*, and General George Bingham went with Napoleon to find an accommodate that would satisfy Napoleon and his 26 companions.

Napoleon meets Betsy Balcombe

Napoleon requested to see the captain of the *Northumberland* to convey his thanks to the officers and the crew of the vessel for transporting Napoleon safely. In his new home, there were approximately 5,000 people on this minuscule island. The

¹¹St. Helena is an island in the South Atlantic Ocean. It is part of the British overseas territory. St. Helena is a volcanic outpost and it's 46.99 miles squared. Smaller than Elba.

inhabitants of Helena had not heard of Napoleon's escape from Elba, or the Battle of Waterloo. They didn't even know their remote island was picked to imprison a world famous conqueror until a few days before Bonaparte's arrival. Betsy Balcombe, thirteen year old daughter of an East India company superintendent kept a journal during the time Napoleon lived in Helena. Betsy explained that an alarm gun had fired signaling there was a vessel in sight off the island. Two naval officers arrived at her house. Betsy Balcombe noted:

“He requested to see my father, having intelligence of importance to communicate to him. On being conducted to him, he informed him that Napoleon Bonaparte was on board the *Northumberland*.” The occupants of Helena now had heard about the famous former Emperor of France, Napoleon Bonaparte. Most of the colonists living in Helena thought of Napoleon as their enemy. Betsy describes what she thought of Napoleon:

“The earliest idea I had of Napoleon was that of a huge ogre or giant, with one large flaming red eye in the middle of his forehead, and long teeth protruding from his mouth, with which he tore to pieces and devoured naughty little girls” Most newspapers the inhabitants of Helena read distinguished Napoleon as a demon. Just from reading the newspapers and hearing the the majority of Helena talk crudely about Napoleon Betsy had already formed an opinion of him:

“The name Bonaparte was still associated, in my mind, with everything that was bad and horrible.” Almost all the settlers of Helena would wait at the wharf awaiting for the fellow who was once the most powerful military leader in Europe. Most every night

they would go home disappointed. Finally on October 17th the “demon” arrived. Betsy wrote about her surveillance at the wharf:

“It was nearly dark when we arrived at the landing-place and shortly after, a boat from the *Northumberland* approached and we saw a figure step from it on the shore, which we were told was the emperor.” Napoleon walked through the crowd. The throng of people stared, and followed Napoleon in silence though respectfully. Betsy again wrote about the scene:

“I heard him afterwards say how much he had been annoyed at being followed and stared at like a wildbeast.”

On October 18 Napoleon went to examine the longwood house which would be used for his home. He wasn't too enchanted by the building, he knew it needed to be renovated and enlarged for him and his suite. Bonaparte did see however a house that he liked. This was the Briars, home to Betsy and her family. Napoleon asked if he could stay there and the Balcombes agreed commencing Bonaparte's and Betsy's friendship. Betsy could speak French and she called Napoleon Boney as in Bonaparte. Napoleon “Boney” called Betsy rosebud of Helena. Napoleon was Betsy's playmate and he often gave her gifts and treats that were prepared by his pastry chef. Napoleon lived there until December 10, 1815 when he moved to Longwood house. Moving did not end Napoleon's and Betsy's friendship, Betsy would still visit Napoleon continuing their unique companionship.

Napoleon's Death

Sorrowfully in 1818, the Balcombes were ordered to leave the island by the Governor of Helena, Hudson Lowe, who feared they were assisting Britain's number one enemy. Napoleon lasted 6 years on Helana before he died on May 5, 1821 from stomach cancer. Twenty-two years later Betsy wrote a memoir about her time spent with Napoleon.

Conclusion

Now after reading about Napoleon and his life-long story what do you consider when I say the words: Napoleon Bonaparte? Do you think of a man who made himself emperor and chose to attain as much power in the world as he could? A man who started many wars, and was exiled two times? Or do you think of him as a man who stopped the French revolution and saved France from destruction. A man who rebuilt France as best as he could, and was a gentle playmate to a thirteen year old girl who he called the rosebud of Helena? It's hard to determine if Napoleon was a good person who tried to make things better for France, or if he was a bad person starting wars all the time, and invading countries. No matter what you think of this emperor of France he was definitely good at one thing: he was an outstanding military general and superb at strategic and civil planning. Because of this brilliance, he had many victories throughout his life and was even able to declare himself emperor over most of Europe and alter the course of its history profoundly. To this day the legacy of Napoleon Bonaparte can still be evidenced in Europe. The Napoleonic code is still in use today in France and some

national boundaries are the result of Napoleon's conquests. His battlefield tactics are still studied in military academies across the globe.

"Great ambition is the passion of a great character."

-Napoleon Bonaparte

Annotated Bibliography

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Primary Sources:

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/528/>

This site is a journal one of Napoleon's personal aides wrote about the battle of Waterloo. He put in small details on Napoleon as he was getting ready for the battle.

<https://shannonselina.com/2013/11/could-napoleon-have-escaped-from-st-helena/>

This website had a letter written by the governor of Helena about how hard it would be for Napoleon to escape Helena. There is also an observation about Napoleon and the ship he was transported to Helena in by a naval captain.

<https://shannonselina.com/2014/01/louis-xviii-oyster-louis/>

This source had information on King Louis XVIII and it had an entry on what he said about Napoleon. It had information on if King Louis was going to be restored or not, and what would happen to Napoleon. It had entries on what Louis XVIII said during his life as a king.

<https://shannonsel.in.com/2015/10/napoleons-arrival-at-st-helena>

Shannonsel.in.com was about Napoleon's arrival on St. Helena and what the people there thought of him. It had observations of people with Napoleon at the time such as: his valet, the British naval surgeon, and Betsy Balcombe the English girl Napoleon met in Helena. This network also provided material on Napoleon's trip to Helena on a ship called the *Northumberland*.

<https://shannonsel.in.com/2016/02/how-did-napoleon-escape-from-elba/>

This primary source had information on how Napoleon was exiled to Elba and it had entries on what the Russians thought they should do with Napoleon because they were the ones that captured him. It had a lot of information on Napoleon life on Elba, and there were diaries kept from soldiers who were with Napoleon ON Elba.

https://shannonsel.in.com/2014/08/10_napoleon-bonaparte-quotes-context/

This website had quotes Napoleon said throughout his life. It had quotes on what Napoleon thought about his exiles, the Napoleonic wars, and his life on Helena.

<https://shannonsel.in.com/2015/05/napoleons-last-words>

This helpful source was about Napoleon's death. It had people he were with Napoleon during the time he was sick including his second Valet, his grand marshal, and his doctor.

<https://shannonsel.in.com/2015/12/napoleon-longwood-house/>

This website had valuable information on what Napoleon thought of the house he would stay at in Helena. His valet Louis-Joseph Marchand wrote about Napoleon's lack of expression. A general accompanying Napoleon also noted the longwood house and wrote a letter to the governor of Helena telling him the house needed to be renovated and enlarged for Napoleon and his suite.

<https://shannonsel.in.com/2014/01/napoleons-nemesis-duke-wellington/>

This primary source had information on Napoleon's nemesis the duke of Wellington. It had a journal entry from the Duke of Wellington that articulated his opinion of Napoleon. Napoleon had an entry about what he thought of the Duke of Wellington.

<https://shannonsel.in.com/2015/06/what-did-napoleon-say-about-the-battle-of-waterloo/>

This source had quotes Napoleon thought about the Battle of Waterloo. He explicitly explained how he wished he could do the battle over again and this time he would be victorious. Napoleon wished the battle could be done over again.

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/large107708.html>

This site is a letter from a private soldier to his father. He writes about the battle of Waterloo and how the fighting went. He stated how Napoleon got ready for battle, and casually gathered his army together.

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/waterloo.htm>

This website is a journal entry of a captain in the British army. The captain tells about the battle of Waterloo. He has details on what Napoleon acted like and what the Duke of Wellington acted like.

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/wellington-and-waterloo/0/steps/24861>

This website told about the decision to exile Napoleon. It had letters written in it that asked different leaders in Britain what to do with Napoleon. This primary source had notification on what the top three decisions were with what to do with Napoleon.

http://www.mrtredinnick.com/uploads/7/2/1/5/7215292/napoleon_bonaparte_political_cartoons.pdf

This website had pictures from 1805, 1814, and 1815. They were documents of pictures in the newspaper in that time.

<http://www.napoleonicociety.com/english/helene.htm>

This document had entries of many people talking about Napoleon. But it mostly had Napoleon talking about his experiences on St Helena.

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/world-history/breaking-news-wellington-defeats-napoleon-waterloo>

This website is a newspaper in the year of 1815 that reported the news that Napoleon had lost the battle of Waterloo. Duke Wellington the British general defeated Napoleon.

https://www.pbs.org/empires/napoleon/n_josephine/emperor/page_1html

This website had letters Napoleon wrote to his first wife Josephine. It also had letters Josephine wrote to Napoleon about their son.

To Befriend an Emperor

By Betsy Balcombe

This book is written by the little girl who lived on St Helena and befriended Napoleon. The little girl Betsy Balcombe wrote all about Napoleon's life there.

www.columbia.edu/~iw6/doc_nap.html

This primary source had journal entries Napoleon wrote. He explained the way he felt at certain points of his life.

www.pbs.org/empires/napoleon/

Pbs.org enlightened me on quotes that other people said about Napoleon. Three of those people were Thomas Campbell, The Duke of Wellington (Arthur Wellesley), and Ludwig van Beethoven.

Secondary Sources:

<https://shannonselein.com/my-book/napoeleon-in-america/>

This accessible source had information on what would have happened if Napoleon escaped Helena and went to the U.S. It had lots of details on Napoleon's escape and the help he would get. It was strange to see how different everything would have been if Napoleon didn't die in Helena.

<https://www.biography.com/People/napoleon>

This secondary source had a lot of information on the Napoleonic Code and the wars he fought. It also had facts on when Napoleon was exiled on St Elba the first time.

<https://www.biography.com/people/napoleon-9420291>

This website mentioned lots of parts throughout Napoleon's life but it had the most information on Napoleon early life, his family, and his education. It also had videos about Napoleon during the French Revolution and his wife and son.

<https://www.biographyonline.net/military/napoleon.html>

I absorbed Napoleon's personality and all the famous people he knew. I learned things the Duke of Wellington said and many other rich and famous people said about him.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Napoleon-1>

This website had a lot of information on how Napoleon grew up. It also had a lot of background information on Napoleon's family and where he was born.

<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/age-jefferson-and-madison/timeline-terms/napoleon-bonaparte>

This website summed up Napoleon's life and how he died. It also helped me find out when he was born.

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/napoleon-exiled-to-Elba>

History.com had lots of information on Napoleon's first exile in Elba. Furthermore this site talked about how Napoleon had to abdicate his throne and be exiled.

<https://www.history.com/topics/napoleon/videos/napoleons-final-exile>

This video had information on Napoleon's exile to Saint Helena. It showed how St Helena became a prison for Napoleon.

<http://www.history.com/topics/napoleon/videos/the-death-of-napoleon>

This site showed how Napoleon died and where he was exiled. I learned that Napoleon died on May 5th 1821.

<https://www.Smithsoniannag.com/history/we-better-off->

This secondary source told about how Napoleon's last battle impacted so many people. It also talked had a lot of Information on the Battle of Waterloo.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/napoleon-betsy-balcombe-and-and-saint-helena-a-dangerous-liasion/news-story/ellf363c354ea4cbdC35e87fea3839eb>

This website had information on Napoleon's and Betsy's friendship. It had background information on Betsy and her family. It told me how Napoleon and Betsy met.

<https://theguardian.com/uk/2006/apr/02/film.filmnews>

This website helped me understand what it was like for Betsy to befriend an emperor. It had information on some of the things Napoleon would do with Betsy and how he would treat her with gifts and toys.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aq_gRfmjgY

This video had lots of information on how Napoleon impacted France. It also said how Napoleon was helpful in History and how he was not.

knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/napoleon.html

_____ This source gave me all the information on Napoleon before he became a general. It said all the things the Napoleon did to become the general of the French army.

public.gettysburg.edu/~tshannon/hist106web/site21napoleon%20web%20pagehtm

_____ This website was mostly on the Napoleonic Code. It also had information on Napoleon before he became emperor and a lot of information on his family and first wife Josephine.

www.bbc.co.uk/timeline/zg9kwmn

_____ This site had a lot of information on Napoleon's early life and his life in France. It had information on Napoleon's school in France.

www.history.com/topics/napoleon#

_____ This website had information and little details on Napoleon's whole life. It was helpful because I got many details on Napoleon. It also had many videos on Napoleon.

www.history.com/topics/napoleon/videos/napoleon

_____ This video showed Napoleon's whole life. It also showed how Napoleon made France better, and how he made it worse.

www.historynet.com/napoleon-bonaparte

_____ This site had lots of information on the battles and places where Napoleon fought. It also had information on how Napoleon rose to power.

www.historyofwar.org/articles/people_napoleon.html

_____ This website had a lot of information on battles Napoleon fought. It had a lot of information on Napoleon when he was in Italy, Egypt, Russia, and Europe.

www.historytoday.com/gemma-betros/napoleon-man

_____ Most of this website is mostly on who Napoleon was and his personality. It had had facts on how people think of Napoleon today.

www.napoleonguide.com/campaign_100days.htm

_____ This website had knowledge on Napoleon's hundred day campaign and the Battle of Waterloo. It had information on how Napoleon gained his army back after

being exiled. It also reported on who Napoleon's enemies were and where there were positioned in Belgium. There was data on the leaders of Napoleon's enemies too.

www.napoleonguide.com/leaders_napoleon.html

This site was on Napoleon's whole life. It had a lot of information when Napoleon was little, when he was exiled on St Elba, his wives, and his connection to Maximilien Robespierre.

www.notablebiographies.com/Mo-Ni/Napoleon-Bonaparte.html

This site was on Napoleon's early years, his military success, and when he was France's leader. It also had information on how Napoleon lost all his glory.

Terrible Exile

By Brian Unwin

This book is on the last days of Napoleon on St Helena. It has a lot of information on Napoleon's life on St Helena.

www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/travels/st-helena-cursed-rock-of-napoleons-exile.html

This secondary source had information on Helena, and how Napoleon made an impact on Helena to this day. It describes how many people think it's cursed because Napoleon was on it.