

The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

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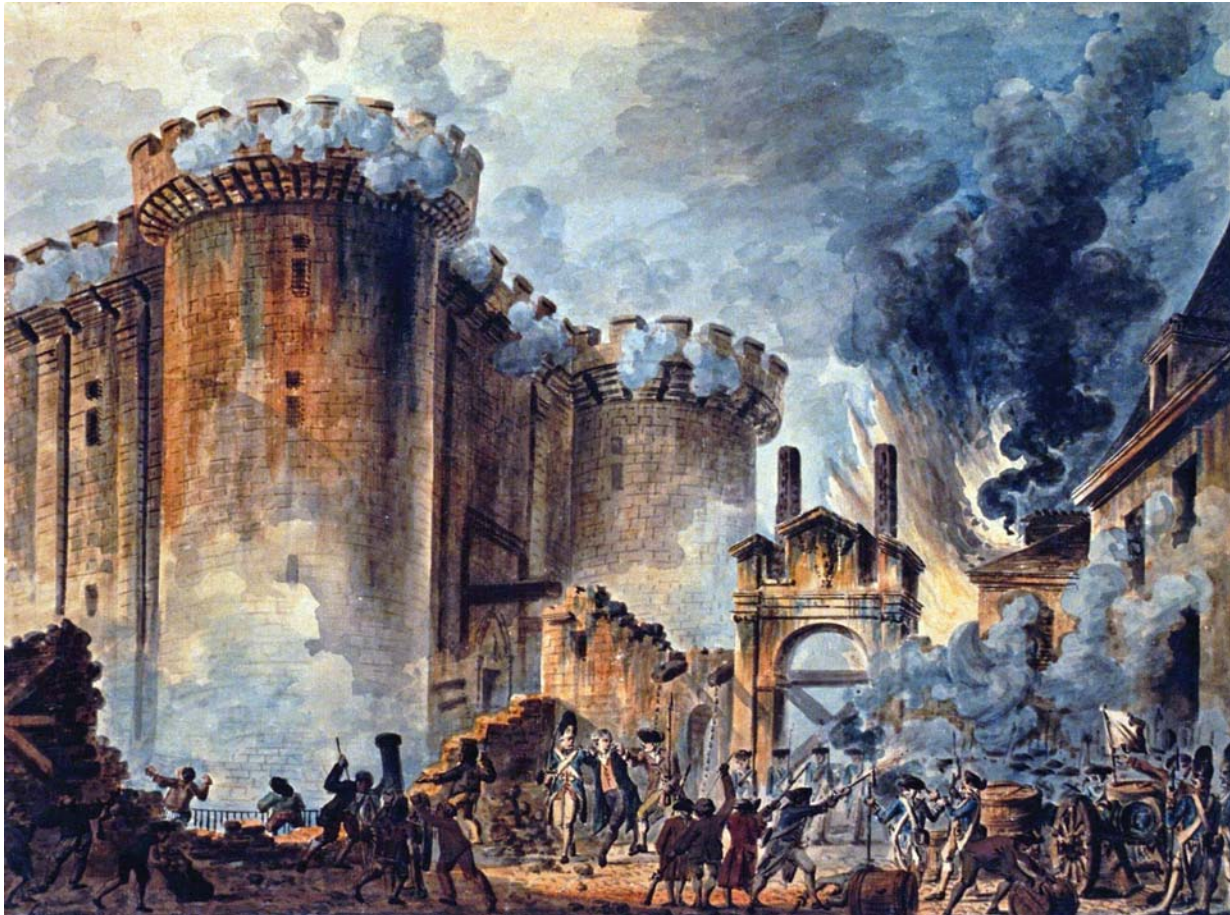


French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte (center) accepts the surrender of General Baron Karl Mack von Leiberich and the Austrian army at Ulm in Bavaria on October 20, 1805. Image from the public domain

In 1789, the French Revolution broke out. The revolutionaries took over the government and imprisoned the king and queen. The revolution changed France and threatened much of Europe. The new French government fought a series of wars against other countries in

Europe. At first, they wanted to protect their power and begin revolutions in other countries. Then they wanted to conquer territory. A successful general named Napoleon Bonaparte was able to take power. In 1804, he crowned himself emperor.

Origins



The new French government declared that everyone was equal. The kings and emperors of Europe were totally opposed to this new way of thinking. In 1791, Austria and Prussia asked other European countries to help put the French king back in power. They did not want war. However, France misunderstood and decided to attack first in April 1792.

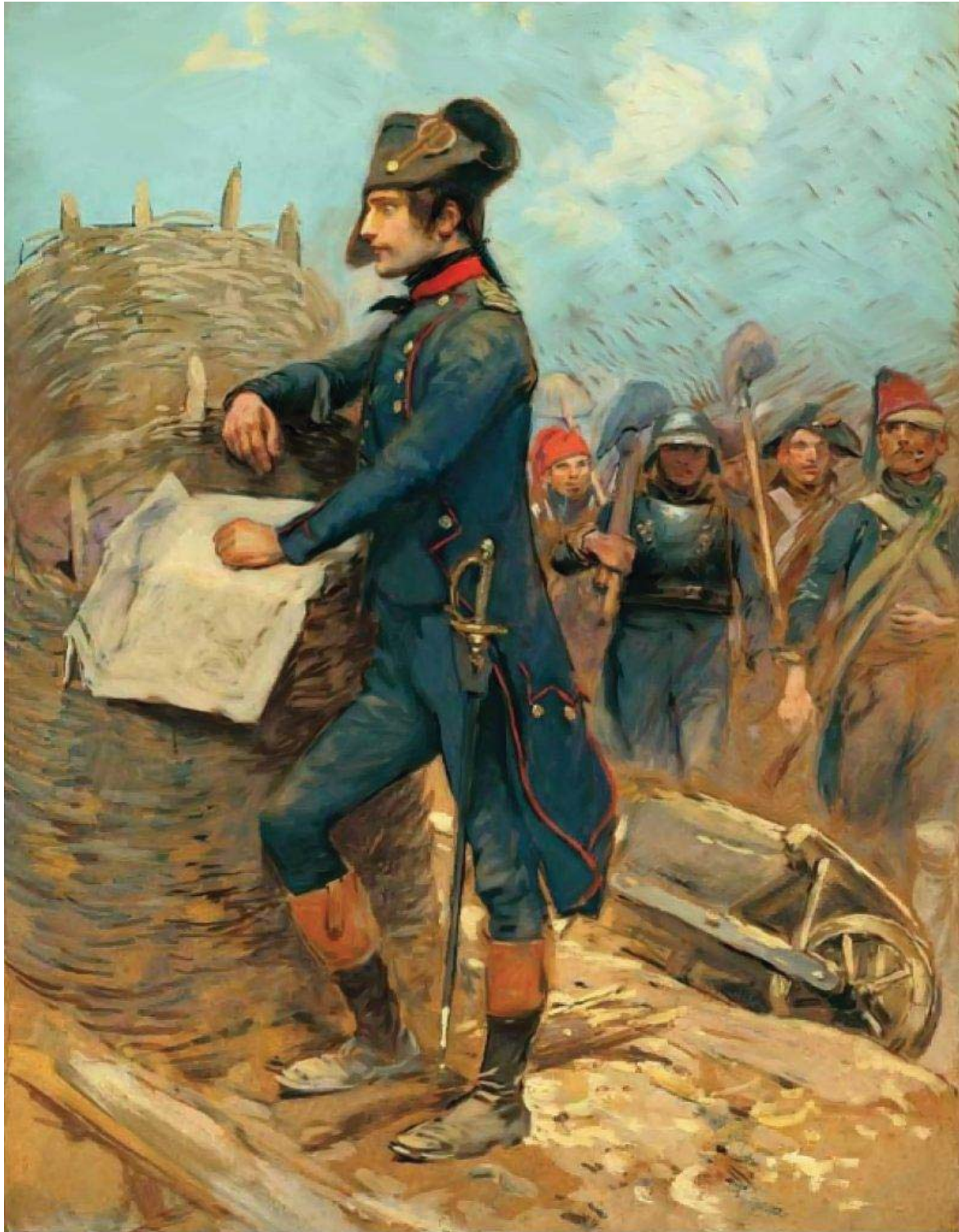
The French Revolutionary Wars

On November 1792, the new French government announced that it would bring its revolution to other countries. It promised to help everyone who wanted freedom.

France decided to oppose, or overthrow, every king to keep itself safe.

In 1793, a group of European countries came together to fight against France. It was called the First Coalition and was made up of Austria, Prussia, Spain, Britain and the United Provinces, now The Netherlands. By the time Napoleon was finally defeated in 1815, there were seven coalitions.

The rise of Napoleon and the switch in focus



The new French army succeeded against the coalition. It forced Prussia to surrender and pushed the others back. Prussia is in present-day Germany and Poland. In 1796, the French government decided its army in Italy wasn't doing as well as it should. That army was given a new commander, Napoleon Bonaparte.

Napoleon defeated Austria. He gained more territory for France and protected the French allies in north Italy. Napoleon's army, and Napoleon himself, gained lots of wealth by stealing it from kings they conquered.

Napoleon then tried to take over the Middle East. In 1798, he sailed to Egypt with an army. He succeeded in taking Cairo. But then the British attacked French ships in the Nile River. The French army was trapped; it could not get reinforcements and it could not leave. Napoleon soon left this army to return to France to try to take control of the French government.

In 1799, Napoleon became head of France's government. France became the most powerful country in Europe, and Napoleon became a national hero. In 1804, he crowned himself emperor.

The Napoleonic Wars



By 1812, Napoleon had conquered most of Europe. France ruled Holland, Belgium, Austria, parts of Italy, Prussia, Poland and Spain.

Now, much of Europe was now either controlled by France or was an ally of France. Napoleon was the master of Europe. He created new countries and made his siblings kings and queens of them.

The disaster in Russia



In 1812, Napoleon put together the largest army ever in Europe. Looking for a quick victory, Napoleon chased the Russian army deep into Russia. He won a famous battle, called the Battle of Borodino, and then captured Moscow, a major city in Russia. The Russians set Moscow on fire. Napoleon's armies did not have enough food, weapons, uniforms or shelter to last the winter. He was forced to retreat through the freezing Russian winter with his starving army.

The final years

In 1813, a new group of European countries organized to fight Napoleon. The next year, this new coalition entered the borders of France. Many of Napoleon's allies and generals abandoned him. He surrendered and was sent to the island of Elba off the coast of Italy.

The 100 Days



Napoleon plotted his return to power. In 1815, he escaped Elba, gathering an army as he marched to Paris. He soon found himself facing another coalition of nations. This seventh coalition included Austria, Britain, Prussia and Russia. They defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo, in present-day Belgium. He was forced to give up the throne once again. This time, he was sent even further, to St. Helena, a remote tropical island in the Atlantic Ocean. He died in 1821, at 51 years old.

Peace

A new king was put on the throne in France. Napoleon's brothers and sisters were kicked out of power. Of France's 2 million soldiers, up to 900,000 had died in France's wars.

Quiz

1 Read the section "The rise of Napoleon and the switch in focus."

Which sentence from the section shows WHY Napoleon left his army to try to take over the French government?

- (A) In 1796, the French government decided its army in Italy was not doing as well as it should.
- (B) He gained more territory for France and protected the French allies in north Italy.
- (C) The French army was trapped; it could not get reinforcements and it could not leave.
- (D) France became the most powerful country in Europe, and Napoleon became a national hero.

2 Read the section "The disaster in Russia."

In 1812, Napoleon put together the largest army ever in Europe. Looking for a quick victory, Napoleon chased the Russian army deep into Russia. He won a famous battle, called the Battle of Borodino, and then captured Moscow, a major city in Russia. The Russians set Moscow on fire. Napoleon's armies did not have enough food, weapons, uniforms or shelter to last the winter. He was forced to retreat through the freezing Russian winter with his starving army.

What conclusion can you make based on this section?

- (A) Napoleon and his army were not bothered by the Russians setting Moscow on fire.
- (B) Napoleon and his army far outnumbered the men in the Russian forces.
- (C) Napoleon and his army were not prepared for the harsh winter conditions in Russia.
- (D) Napoleon and his army were extremely power-hungry and stopped at nothing to attain it.

3 Read the introduction [paragraph 1] and the final section, "Peace."

What is the connection between these two sections?

- (A) The introduction shows what caused the rise of Napoleon, and the final section shows the aftermath of his fall.
- (B) The introduction shows how stable France was as a country, and the final section shows how it finally toppled.
- (C) The introduction shows how France fared under an emperor, and the final section shows how France fared under a king.
- (D) The introduction shows how Napoleon got started, and the final section shows what he accomplished by the end of his career.

4 This article is organized using chronological order.

Why do you think the author organized the information this way?

- (A) to describe what it was like under Napoleon's rule so the reader could better envision what life was like at that time
- (B) to present the events of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars so the reader could understand what happened and when
- (C) to point out for the reader the contrast between the reign of the French king and queen and the leadership of Napoleon's government
- (D) to explain the historical background to help the reader better understand why France went through so many changes during Napoleon's time