

The Military/Political Genius of Napoleon Bonaparte

How many of you have heard of Napoleon?

Many, that's good. And how many of you have heard that he was short? Yeah, I thought so. Unfortunately, nowadays, this is all people know about him. Throughout this presentation, I hope to help all of you better understand the man, admire the Statesman, and respect the General. Also, I want to address the issue of his height. Contrary to popular opinion, He wasn't that short! He would often surround himself with tall bodyguards, hoping to appear shorter than he was. That way, he was always underestimated. Also, there was a mistake in the conversion between the French measurement system and the English measurement system, 5'6 in France - which was above average for the time - translated to 5'2 in England. Just wanted to get that question out of the way because I knew it would be coming. Napoleon Bonaparte was born in Corsica, a French colony in the Mediterranean, on the 15th of August 1769.

Despite his supposed French birth, his name was originally Italian, Napoleone Buonaparte. His father Carlo Buonaparte was a lawyer and a descendant of the Tuscan nobility in Italy. Carlo was a Corsican rebel when Napoleon was born but, once French victory was assured, he gave up the fight. The future Emperor, Napoleon, never forgave him for this, believing his father to be a coward. This is his mother on the left, who Napoleon actually respected the more. As the 2nd child in a family of 13, Napoleon grew up fighting for love and craving attention. Later in life, His mother would boast that she had given birth to the Emperor of France, three kings, three dukes and a prince.

Feeling like an outsider in Continental France - as I mentioned Corsica had only recently been absorbed into the kingdom at the time of his birth - he was nevertheless educated there from the age of nine. He attended three separate schools, Autun, the military college of Brienne, and the military academy in Paris. At the latter, he graduated 42nd out of a class of 58th, which I found pretty ironic all things considered. Arguably the world's greatest military strategist finishing in the bottom half of military school is quite frankly hilarious.

His poor finish wasn't helped by the fact that he hated Brienne and was a loner in school. His fellow students thought that he was dour and boring, fretting over geopolitical issues and the like while his peers wrestled and fought in the mud. While no historian can validate this claim, I believe that the social exclusion Napoleon suffered as a boy was fundamental in the development of his character.

After Brienne and Autun, like in Corsica, he craved glory and attention. He always needed to go step further, to earn the respect of his generals and soldiers. This mindset is where the term 'Napoleon Complex' actually comes from. Someone with a Napoleon complex is overly domineering and aggressive to overcompensate for their lack of height. At any rate, in 1785, aged just sixteen, the young Corsican officially joined the French military.

This wasn't particularly surprising. At the time, Europe was intensely jingoistic - meaning 'warlike' and 'obsessed with glory.' Napoleon had his own reasons for wanting to gain glory and power, but he bought into this nationalistic French army culture, nonetheless. More than anything, though, Napoleon wanted to change the world. There are a lot of things I could talk

about during this presentation. Napoleon's lingering - and paradoxical - inferiority complex, his infamous relationship with skilled Seductress Josephine and his sixty plus battles, of which he lost only a handful. Unfortunately, we don't have the time for that, and to be honest, throughout the entirety of my research I'm convinced I didn't learn everything about the guy.

Instead, throughout this presentation, I will be analysing two major political events that defined Napoleon - one before he became Emperor and one after - and two of his defining military campaigns. Obviously, I'll do my best to provide the necessary context in order to paint a more detailed picture for you all here tonight.

Firstly, we must learn a little more about the circumstances that created Napoleon. Decades of unrest in France had finally culminated in the years of 1788-1789, leading in the summer of 1789, to the Storming of the Bastille - an infamous French prison viewed by many to be a symbol of monarchical oppression - and the formation of the National Assembly.

As an avid reader of Voltaire and Rousseau, two prominent writers in favour of social and political change, Napoleon believed that change was necessary in order for the system to survive. He was too pragmatic to be a radical and recognised the virtue in buying into the revolution. After floating between France and Corsica, struggling with his identity, and offending everyone with his 'delusions of grandeur' (that's actually a direct description) Napoleon joined a very influential society in revolutionary France.

The Jacobin debate club. Viewed by the royalists - those in support of the French Monarchy - as radical and hyper left-wing, the Jacobin debate club was heaven for the ambitious and ardent youths of France. I mean, if you think that you and your mates have heated arguments, you should have seen these guys. People apparently brought knives and bats to the debates just in case the opposition didn't get the message. It was common for speakers to get verbally and physically abused just for the sake of it. Here, the usually quiet and reserved Napoleon flourished. After giving speech after speech condemning nobles, monks, and bishops, he was elected President of the Club.

He was still an officer in the army, however the significance of his position in the revolutionary organization far outstripped his military standing. From here, several things happened in quick succession.

Firstly, the French Monarchy was toppled, allowing the Jacobin ``Girondin" faction to seize power. Now Napoleon personally knew the rulers of France. The Jacobins then declared war on Austria, hoping to strike pre-emptively against any invading force - France was vulnerable after the radical political change of the last decade and could not afford to lose the initiative. And finally, most likely because of his position within the Jacobin Debate Club, Napoleon was appointed Captain of the Artillery. Around this time, he officially changed his name to the more familiar, French sounding Napoleon, turning his back on his Corsican and Italian heritage in favour of the new world order.

So far, I have provided some context with regards to the emperor's early life and painted a picture of the time. It is well known that the years following the French Revolution - the 1790s - were bloody and chaotic. The Reign of Terror, which addresses the period between 1792 and

1794, was the most obvious example of this. In a few short years, more than 17,000 political dissenters - either royalists or those in favour of the deposed Girondin movement - were fed to the guillotine. During this time of blood and strife however, Napoleon shone.

In early 1793, the British seized control of the port of Toulon. Despite being home to 1/3 of the French fleet, royalist rebels - in fear of the terror - handed over control of the crucial port settlement to the British in fear of the Terror. Moreover, prior to his imprisonment and eventual execution, Louis XVI had requested aid from his European neighbours. Britain, in typical fashion, couldn't resist the opportunity to weaken France. The National Convention Army - within which Napoleon was a captain - marched out and besieged the city. Here's a brief video explaining the situation. For a while, the French waited.

They were unwilling to storm the city for fear of sustaining too many casualties, but the British were too well supplied to be starved out. Napoleon, in trademark fashion, acted when no-one else would. As a Captain of the Artillery - he started out as an artilleryman, believe it or not - he used the guns under his command to target the incoming British Ships, preventing the enemy from resupplying the besieged while boosting the morale of his own troops (Shine Laser on Ships in Harbour). When the time came to assault the city, many of the men under his command refused to move into position, believing that the British guns would blow them into oblivion. In response, Napoleon nicknamed the barricade 'The Home of the Brave' and volunteered to lead the men himself. All of a sudden, eager to impress their commander, the French artillerymen were falling over themselves to volunteer for the position. Needless to say, the assault on Toulon was a success, and it cemented Napoleon's burgeoning reputation as a military leader. Following the French victory, the army's commander - brother to French ruler Maximillien Robespierre - praised Napoleon's 'transcending merit' on the battlefield and promoted him to the position of Brigadier General.

For a few years, Bonaparte was successful fighting under Andre Massena - a man who would later become one of his marshals, and even devised the strategy responsible for pushing a Piedmont Sardinia led coalition out of France. After this, he returned to Paris and was ordered by Paul Barras, an influential revolutionary politician, to put down an insurrection in Paris.

He ruthlessly dealt with the royalist perpetrators, ordering his men to fire into the mob only when they could 'see the whites of their enemies' eyes'.

The new French government, called the Directory, were so pleased with his performance that they finally gave him his own autonomous command: The Army of Italy.

Part 1: The Italian Campaign:

But, after being handed command of the Army of Italy in 1796, Napoleon realised that he had been set up. Of the thirteen active armies fielded by the French Republic at the time, the Italian front was in by far the worst shape. Although theoretically containing 107,000 men, only 30,000 were available to fight. Worse, despite his experience serving under Massena in the theatre, it did not appear that Napoleon had any chance of ending the conflict. Clearly, the resources of the state were stretched too thinly to bolster his army, despite the fact that they were heavily outnumbered by the Piedmont Sardinia - Austrian Coalition. In contrast to his

30,000 men and 60 artillery pieces, the 'Allies' as they were called, had 50,000 men with well over 100 artillery pieces. Given this disparity in combat assets, many expected him to sit and do nothing. But Napoleon lived his life by a very simple code: If you don't like how the table is set, flip the table. Similarly, His whole MO for the Italian Campaign can be summarised by this quote. "Give me allies to fight." He knew that he didn't stand a chance in a pitched battle against the Italian-Austrian force, so he didn't seek one. Instead, he sought to separate and divide them. He recognised that he needed to defeat the Sardinians first.

This would force them to withdraw to their capital at Turin, ultimately forcing the Austrians to withdraw as well in order to protect their supply lines to Milan. Emerging in Northern Italy before the armies facing him could concentrate their forces, he went on the offensive. Smaller and more mobile, Napoleon's forces decimated small fractions of the enemy in various small engagements. This was the first iteration of the now famous Napoleonic war strategy, known as 'Defeating Your Enemy in Detail.' Defeating Your Enemy in detail was unheard of in military parlance at the time, but has been used on multiple occasions to this very day. Not only does it demoralize your enemy, but it also keeps them on the back foot because they are inevitably and constantly being forced to retreat. This worked better than Napoleon could have hoped. After only three weeks and five engagements, the Sardinians were forced to withdraw from the First Coalition. They handed Savoy and Nice back to France, allowing Napoleon to focus fully on the threat posed by the Austrian-Milanese. Remember, during this time Italy was not yet a country, which is why I make the distinction between Sardinia and Milan. The Austrians were allies of these Italian states, but they were beginning to pale in face of Napoleon's revolutionary battlefield tactics. He had designed an incredibly effective way to protect his infantry from cavalry, widely viewed to be the most effective tool of war. Instead of standing in a thin line, he had his men form hollow squares.

Once his men had fixed bayonets (or attached them to the front of their rifles), they created a four-sided wall of steel. No horse, no matter how well trained, would be able to charge down a solid wall of steel, and so with one minimal change in formation Napoleon neutralized the force that had terrorized European battlefields for millennia.

After moving along the Po River with staggering speed, Bonaparte was victorious at the Battle of Lodi in the early May of 1796 and pursued the battered Austrian host through Venice and into the northern Papal States, all of whom signed an armistice in the June of that year. Two Austrian armies descended on Napoleon from the North, one, under General Wurmser, headed for Mantua, where the remaining Austrian forces were penned up, and another under the command of Peter Vitus, who moved West across the Peninsula to threaten Napoleon's communications and supply lines. It appeared that the young general was caught between a rock and a hard place, however once again Napoleon defied expectations. Instead of finishing the siege - which most generals would have done - he abandoned it and split his forces, leaving his rear-guard to check Wurmser's advance while he drove back Vitus at the Battle of Lonato. He then, merely two days later, brought all his forces to bear to send Wurmser reeling.

This fast moving, lightning form of war allowed Napoleon to constantly surprise his enemies, and he ultimately managed to secure the Italian Peninsula and strike 80km deep into Austria. In less than a year, Napoleon had revolutionized warfare. Commanding vast armies over vaster fronts, he introduced the concept of 'Defeating the Enemy in Detail' as well as demonstrating the importance of manoeuvrability and speed. The Great European Powers didn't yet know, but it was a sign of things to come.

Part 2: Politics before Coronation.

Politically, Napoleon Bonaparte was sharp. Dangerously ambitious with an appetite for risk, few had the audacity to seize the moment like him. One such example was the Coup of 17 Brumaire. Just before I move on, the French revolutionary government changed the names of the months and totally messed up the usual dates because they wanted to break completely from the past. It probably seemed like a good idea at the time but now, we're stuck with names like that. Anyway, During the war of the Second Coalition - a war Napoleon would eventually go on to win after his Coup - The Directory had sacrificed the majority of its political capital with the populace. Angered by the resumption of hostilities - France was yet to establish a lasting peace, they felt that the Directory no longer represented their interests. This proved to be fertile ground for the ambitious Napoleon.

Abandoning his campaign in Egypt - he was there to cut off British supply lines from India - when British ships briefly lifted their blockade of French ports, he quickly marched to the capital, initially planning to support Emmanuel Joseph Siéyes in bid to overthrow the directory. A director himself, Sieyes believed that the decentralised system of power weakened France and did not do the values of the country justice. Napoleon met in secret with Siéyes to discuss the dissolution of the directory, making plans to place themselves at the head of the new government. At this point, Napoleon told Siéyes - who sat on the Directory - and his brother Lucien - who sat on the other legislative body of France, the council of 500 - to inform their respective organizations that there was a plot against the government and that they needed to be moved for their own safety. They did so, and the councillors listened. They were unaware that Napoleon had placed himself in charge of their protection.

Later that day, after telling the trapped government that changes needed to be made to the French government, Napoleon marched into the room with hundreds of grenadiers by his side - think navy seals, but with really thick moustaches - and informed them that he would run the new government.

Furious, members of the council of 500 charged at Napoleon with daggers and chaos erupted in the chamber. This was what Napoleon had been counting on. His brother Lucien used the chaos to dissolve the Council of the 500, and later to abolish the Council of Ancients. With one fell stroke, Napoleon had claimed power for himself, Siéyes and Duco - who was also a contributor, a clear demonstration of his political prowess. But he was not finished. Uninterested in sharing power, Napoleon appointed himself the chief editor of the new constitution and, relying on his supreme popularity, named himself First Consul of the Republic Siéyes and Duco, the original plotters, were forced to serve as his underlings. For Napoleon, this was cunning on two levels.

Firstly, as explained, he possessed enough political wisdom to recognise that the time to act was now and capitalized on France's instability to great effect. Secondly, he declared himself First Consul, thereby preserving just enough of the French Republic to maintain the ruse while in fact functioning as an autonomous dictator. Indeed, it was not until 1804 that Napoleon Bonaparte would declare himself Emperor of the French. Clearly, the coup of 17 Brumaire - November 9th in ordinary time - was the product of a strategic mastermind. Manipulating both his allies and his enemies, Napoleon had achieved the heights of power without so much as a

drop of blood being spilled. It was the perfect coup, a genius political move that served as a warning to all who sought to oppose him in the years to come.

For a few of those years, France enjoyed relative peace. Napoleon famously crossed the Alps to defeat the Austrians and Milanese once more, solidifying his fledgling reputation and France's status as a force to be reckoned with. He also brought order and stability to his home nation, governing strictly but fairly. As stated by Tolstoy in his Magnum Opus, War and Peace, "Napoleon was great because he rose superior to the Revolution, suppressed its abuses, preserved all that was good in it - equality of citizenship, and freedom of speech and of the press - and only for that reason did he retain power."

Part 3: Emperor Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of the French in 1804 in the famed Cathedral of Notre Dame.

His meteoric rise to power was complete and, had Europe swallowed its pride, things may have turned out differently. Unfortunately, this was not to be. The monarchs of Europe despised Napoleon as a product of the French revolution, believing that he set a dangerous precedent that threatened their own regimes. The British in particular hated Napoleon.

For years he had been mustering an army to land on the white shores of Dover. La Grande Armée, as it was called, was a triumph of logistics. His motto was, "Amateurs discuss tactics, professionals discuss logistics." Better than most, Napoleon understood the essence of strategy. Many people believe that a strategy is a step-by-step plan that somebody can follow in order to become successful. People read self-help books that give them so-called strategies and celebrities make millions off books titled 'The Secret of Success'. Actually, it's not that simple. The essences of strategy, according to Napoleon, are time and space. Without logistics, you have neither. Logistics are the chief architect of the desired paradigm. They create the necessary conditions for victory. Without logistics, your army doesn't march. Without logistics, your army cannot coordinate. Without logistics, your army is destroyed. In the past weeks, as we have watched the events in Ukraine, we have seen that what was true in the time of Napoleon, remains true today.

Before Napoleon, armies were organised as follows. There were marching columns, each commanded by a brigadier general. The different branches of the armed forces, the infantry, the cavalry, and the artillery, would be kept apart from one another on the march and oftentimes would fight separately, failing to coordinate in the event of battle. War was still viewed as a sport by the powers of Europe, and it was treated like one, with rules and regulations prohibiting any irregular action. Napoleon was the first to recognise the sheer stupidity of this norm. The goal of war is victory, not good craic. A question I have had for a while, and one that I think everybody asks at some point, is why the soldiers of the 19th century were happy to stand in orderly rows, with no cover, and fire volley after volley into one another. It seems so stupid that it's difficult to take the generals of the day seriously. Napoleon thought similarly. He had an incredibly mobile mind and boundless energy. This allowed him to see beyond the current status-quo' and implement new, innovative strategies. Instead of lining up and waiting to be killed, his men found alternative ways to concentrate firepower. Here's a video showing the breakdown of his army, a template that is still used by the most powerful militaries in the world to this day. So, as you just heard, Platoons and companies were formed within battalions in order to allow for rapid mobilisation in the event of battle, and specialised units, for example the Grenadiers and the Sappers, were created in order to provide more unconventional services.

Faced with such a formidable foe less than 21 miles from home, it is no surprise that the British waged a war of gold, whispers, and secret alliances. They found willing allies in Europe. Frances of Austria, Alexander of Russia, and the surviving remnants of the Papal States all leapt eagerly into the fray, hungry for land and power. Little did they know they were beginning the bloodiest conflict in European History up to that point, the Napoleonic Wars.

Part 4: Campaign Two:

The War of the Third Coalition: The second and final campaign I will discuss today is known as the War of the Third Coalition. Consisting of Russia, Britain, Austria and some Italian states, the Fourth Coalition was a force to be reckoned with.

They planned to launch a three-pronged attack on France across a wide front, denying Napoleon a decisive battle. The emperor was not one to wait however, and, abandoning his position on the West Coast of France, he moved East with trademark speed. With his Corps dispersed over a wide front, his forces swept like a tide through France, determined to prevent the Russian and Austrian hosts from combining their strength. Blissfully unaware of Napoleon's movements for the time being, the Third Coalition devised "an ambitious plan for a series of simultaneous offensives against France." Their main blow would come from the combined Austro-Russian Force, with the Kingdom of Naples threatening the newly established Kingdom of Italy. In all, a total of 500,000 men would launch coordinated attacks against French holdings in the region and against France itself. They also planned to gather men at the Prussian border in order to force them into the alliance. Napoleon recognised that he did not have the manpower to fight on every front - his Grande Armée numbered about 180,000 - and could not afford to get pinned down by the Allies Main thrust. He also needed to win a decisive victory in order to deter Prussia from entering the Third Coalition. That way, his northern flank would be secure as he marched East to deal with Austria and Russia.

Lined up against Napoleon were the armies of General Mack - the Austrian commander - and General Kutuzov of Russia. Both were seasoned commanders, but they did not stand a chance against the lightning tactics of Napoleon. As Kutosov's large host moved ponderously across Russia in order to meet up with Mack, Mack's army pushed deep into French-held Bavaria. This was the opening Napoleon had been waiting for. Ordering Murat, his cavalry commander, to launch "feint attacks through the Black Forest in order to keep the enemy distracted, his fast-moving core crossed the Danube River to the North of the Austrian forces and surrounded them. After attempting to break out multiple times, Mack surrendered his entire army. In many ways, this was one of Napoleon's greatest victories. Although Mack was only in possession of about 80,000 men, the French Emperor had proven that his mastery of strategy was so complete that he didn't need to even shed blood to win. It also demoralised the 3rd Coalition, who were not yet six weeks into the war! Kutozov, a wary commander at the best of times, retreated deeper into Austria. Napoleon pursued, but he was unable to surround and destroy the enemy force. Even after taking Vienna - the Austrian capital - Napoleon refused to give up the chase. Ultimately, Kutozov managed to join up with reinforcements from Russia and organise the retreating Austrians. The Russian and Austrian Emperors themselves were present at the town of 20 Olmutz - where this concentration of forces took place - and so Napoleon knew that his enemy would be well supplied and well positioned. In contrast, his Grande Armée was weary after the long pursuit, and winter was fast approaching. The French were deep in enemy territory as well, cut off from reinforcements of their own. They were also

heavily outnumbered, with the allies possessing an army of 90,000 men to Napoleon's 68,000. He'd left the rest to guard against an assault against France.

Regardless, The Emperor sought to force a decisive battle. This would not have been possible against a veteran like Kutosov, who was aware of Napoleon's dire situation and recognised the virtue of not giving battle. However, Alexander the 1st of Russia, obsessed with the glory of war, refused his council. He wanted to crush the Nightmare of Europe once and for all. Napoleon had other plans, hoping to crush the enemy before reinforcements from Russia could arrive.

In order to do so, he immediately ordered his corps to concentrate around the small town of Austerlitz. He purposefully seceded the high ground of the Pratzen Heights to the enemy and arrayed his forces in an unusual manner. He thinned out his right flank in order to make it a more enticing target. The enemy, believing this to be a weakness, formulated a strategy of their own. The goal was to punch through the thin line on the right before sweeping leftward to envelop the enemy. Napoleon, however, predicated this, and boldly formulated his own plan based on his correct prediction of enemy movements. As the Austrian left moved off the Pratzen heights, Napoleon's own right wing would sweep through the enemy and cut the allied army in two. His cavalry reserve would then hold off the enemy's own reserve while he decimated the enemy forces on the right before wheeling left to deal with the survivors. Interestingly enough, this entire strategy rested on the speedy arrival of Napoleon's third corps, under Marshal Davout, who had not yet arrived at the battlefield. Without this reinforcement, his right wing would break before his left could successfully surround the enemy. I know that was a lot of strategic talk and battle jargon, so I won't bore you with the play-by-play details of the battlefield.

Long story short, Davout arrived in the nick of time, allowing Napoleon to crush the bulk of the enemy forces with a perfectly timed counter charge led by his Imperial Guard. The Austrian Emperor, Francis, was forced to sue for peace, while Alexander the 1st fled back to Russia.

The Battle of Austerlitz is often referred to as Napoleon's masterpiece. His ingenious prediction of enemy troop movements as well as his ability to coordinate his forces across a 7-mile front cemented his military genius and allowed him to expand his young Empire. Admiral Horatio of Nelson defeated Napoleon's fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar around this time, causing the English Prime Minister William Pitt to remark: "Roll up that map of Europe, we shan't be needing it these next 10 years." Britain and France became known as the elephant and the whale. Both Kings in their own domains, but unable to test each other once and for all. Painfully aware of this, Napoleon moved swiftly to consolidate his Empire, annexing large parts of modern-day Germany, and appointing himself 'Protector of the Confederation of Rhine'.

The signing of the Treaty of Pressburg between France and the defeated allies officially brought the conflict to an end, symbolically significant as the thousand-year-old Holy Roman Empire was officially dissolved by Frances of Austria.

High off his triumphs, Napoleon would go on to defeat Prussia in 1806 - whose Queen didn't like him very much, as you can see - and the combined Russo-Prussian forces at the Battle of Eylau in 1807. The Nightmare of Europe was now King of it, cementing his legendary status at the Signing of the Treaty of Tilsit. He later wrote, "Perhaps I was happiest at Tilsit. I found myself victorious, dictating laws, having Emperors and Kings pay me court." He even put his

brothers on the thrones of Europe, specifically Italy, Spain, and Munich. For a few short years, the Bonaparte's ruled the world and Napoleon had become the new Alexander.

Part 5: Political Genius Event: Emperor.

Funnily enough, it was difficult to find specific examples of Napoleon's political genius following his rise to power. He was surrounded by schemers and snakes, many of whom had cut their teeth in the indiscriminate Terror.

Men like Talleyrand and Fouché ran rings around Napoleon, but neither shared his mastery of symbolism. Symbolism as a political tool is dangerous. Tyrants of days past, including Hitler and Mussolini, cleverly appropriated symbols of past glory to speak to their citizens. Napoleon was no exception.

He forged golden eagle standards - reminiscent of the Roman Empire - for his men to rally around in battle. The fighting was always fiercest at these points, and Napoleon would even bait the enemy by leaving his standard vulnerable before launching a blistering counterattack. The Golden Eagle became the symbol of his reign, giving him an almost divine aura. He was no mere man. He was a Roman general, a king, a fallen seraph carving a bloody path through Europe. The Russians, for their part, literally abandoned cities because they thought he was the Anti-Christ. The Spanish, too, believed that Napoleon was the spawn of the devil. These conflicting symbols and images heightened his allure and increased his personal power. He basically seduced the entire population of France. Now, if that isn't a sign of political genius, I'm not sure what is. In fact, he was so good at symbolism and propaganda, that, after his coup, he managed to convince the entire population of France that it was their idea!

Before we briefly touch on his decline and fall, I have some fun facts about Napoleon to share with you all.

1. Napoleon was ABOVE AVERAGE height for a Frenchman of the time, but purposefully surrounded himself with massive soldiers to make his enemies underestimate him. He was taller than both Churchill and Admiral Nelson.
2. He was two hours late for his own wedding.
3. He wrote a romance novel
4. He would disguise himself and walk in the streets of Paris.
5. Afraid of cats possibly.
6. He discovered the Rosetta Stone

7. The cause of his death remains a mystery
8. Napoleon's Empire attempted to spread religious tolerance
9. Our very own James Wyse shares an ancestor with Napoleon, called Sir Thomas Bonaparte Wyse
10. And Ms Kirwan had a grandad who lived on the Isle of St Helena - where Napoleon would live out the rest of his life following the Battle of Waterloo. But, despite the glory of his first decade in power, Napoleon's Empire would not last very long. In a moment of self-recognition, he said 'Great men are like meteors that strike the Earth,' bright and brilliant in their descent but destroyed in an instant'.

In 1808, the Peninsular War broke out. Spain, which had previously been a French ally, was in uproar when Napoleon appointed his brother 'Joseph' as the Spanish King. Spanish rebel armies formed rapidly, and the British sent a small army led by the Duke of Wellington to liberate Portugal and ultimately Spain. With Napoleon preoccupied with the invasion of Russia, he sent several trusted marshals to Spain in order to quell the uprising. But the rebels, who were nicknamed guerrillas in honour of their unconventional fighting style, would not die easily. Wellington eventually linked up with the rebel forces, gradually driving the French out of Portugal and slicing through mainland Spain. Furious that his Empire was falling because of the incompetence of others, Napoleon proclaimed, 'If you want something done properly, do it yourself.'

But he was in no position to do that. Despite having assembled the largest army Europe had ever seen, Napoleon's Russia campaign in 1812 was a disaster. Cleverly, the Russian forces refused to engage Napoleon directly and basically attacked everywhere he wasn't. Unable to make any sort of meaningful impact, he planned to regroup in Moscow.

But, after the Russians fled in abject fear of the emperor, he had no supplies and no shelter. Desperate, he began what would be a nightmare retreat, costing him over 300,000 men to starvation, pestilence, hypothermia, and battle. The Russians pursued him doggedly for two months, at the end of which La Grande Armée numbered only 40,000 active combatants out of a previous 612,000.

After arriving in Paris and licking his wounds, Napoleon desperately began to cobble together an army to defend France. The sharks of Europe smelled blood, and they were coming for their due.

Napoleon was decisively defeated at the Battle of Leipzig - he was heavily outnumbered and outgunned - losing control of Germany and Poland. Austria joined the Prussian-Russo alliance, with Britain supplying arms and strategic aid when needed. That's a fancy way of saying buying Yorkshire tea for everyone. Desperate, Napoleon once more tried to 'defeat the enemy in detail,' enjoying some significant success. However, traitors in Paris were working against him, and he would eventually fall victim to their merciless machinations. In a heart-

breaking turn of events. Paris surrendered to the Allies while Napoleon was three days' march away.

The emperor was defeated. He was exiled to the Isle of Elba in disgrace

Only to stage a daring escape less than a year later. In secret, he managed to steal a boat from the docks with 100 men and land on the French mainland. When the French army marched to arrest the fugitives, Napoleon faced them down and bellowed: ""If there were any man among you who would kill his emperor," Napoleon declared, "Here I stand!"" Raucous chants of 'Vive L'Empereur' broke out, and Napoleon went on to depose the despised Bourbon Monarchy for the second time in two decades. For One Hundred Days, he ruled France once more.

Then, famously, he met the combined armies of the Duke of Wellington and the Prince of Prussia, losing narrowly in what would become his last battle. The Commander of his Imperial Guard Pierre Cambronne, surrounded by British troops, epitomised the glory of the Napoleonic wars, shouting 'The Guard dies but does not surrender.' Unfortunately for Napoleon, such valor could not salvage the day, and he was forced to concede defeat.

Overall, the life of Napoleon Bonaparte was wild and tumultuous. A revolutionary, a general and a politician he was perhaps the most remarkable man Europe has ever seen. His daring strategies and awe-inspiring manoeuvres won him glory and fame, but they wouldn't last forever. Exiled to the island of St Helena off the coast of Africa, Napoleon would die from unknown causes on May 5th, 1821. His only son would die soon after, leaving him without an heir. Not all was lost, however. The fallen Emperor became the model for Romanticism in France, embodying its most treasured quality, individualism. "Here was the model of the new man." The pamphlets read, "He was a self-made man and a man of genius. His career was the manifestation of will and intelligence overcoming the greatest imaginable resistance."

Conclusion

Napoleon was not a short, cowardly, ugly goblin. Instead, he was a political and military genius, a man who brought the modern world to its knees using his wits and ambitions alone. He was a man to be respected. He was a man to be admired.

And most importantly, HE WAS NOT THAT SHORT.

Thank you for listening.