

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

The 
Fusilier
Museum

NAPOLEON IN EXILE



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NAPOLEON

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

Napoleon In Exile tells the story of Napoleon Bonaparte who became one of France's most formidable military leaders and Emperor of France. This exhibition focuses on Napoleon's final years whilst he was under house arrest on the island of St Helena. Whilst here, Napoleon was guarded by the 20th Regiment of Foot until his death in 1821.



NAPOLEON'S EARLY LIFE

Napoleon Bonaparte was born on the island of Corsica on 15 August 1769 to a family of minor Tuscan nobility. Around the time of his birth, the French occupation of Corsica had led to local Corsican resistance. Napoleon studied at a military academy at Brienne-le-Chateau and in 1784 he attended a military school in Paris, where he trained to become an artillery officer. Napoleon served in Austria and then returned to France where he fought against the Monarchy alongside the politically influential Maximilien de Robespierre, who helped Napoleon to become head of the French Army in Italy. Under Napoleon's direction, the army won several major victories against Austria and Italy, which helped to expand the French empire. Napoleon also squashed attempts from within France to re-instate a king to the French throne. These successes made Napoleon one of the French Army's best leaders. Despite these victories, the French Army were then defeated by the British in Egypt. On his return to France in 1799, Napoleon staged a coup, overthrowing the French Government, and declared himself First Consul of the French National Assembly.



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THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

The Napoleonic Wars, 1803-1815, were a period of conflict between France and the ever-changing alliances between different European countries.

In 1804 Napoleon became the first Emperor of France. At the height of his power, Napoleon controlled large parts of Europe, having led the French Army to victories against various European powers. Early successes for Napoleon and the French Army meant that France enjoyed a brief period of dominance across Europe. In 1805, the British Navy defeated the joint naval forces of France and Spain at the Battle of Trafalgar, often seen as Britain's greatest naval victory. France's early dominance did not last, and following several losses, Napoleon was forced to abdicate in 1814 and was exiled to the island of Elba.

Following his escape from Elba, and a brief period reinstated as Emperor of France, Napoleon was finally defeated at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 and sent into exile again, where he would remain for the rest of his life.



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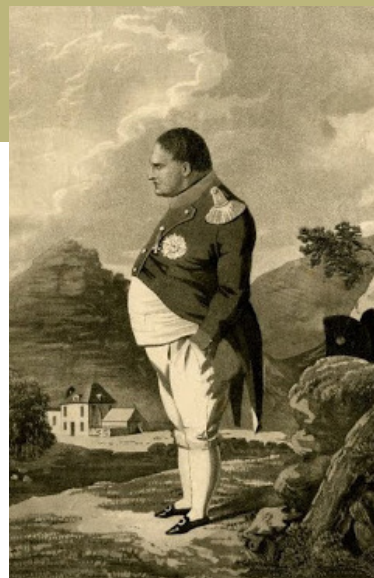
NAPOLEON

NAPOLEON IN EXILE

Napoleon was exiled twice during his lifetime. The first time, following several military defeats for the French Army across Europe, Napoleon was forced to abdicate his throne as Emperor of France in 1814. Napoleon was exiled to the island of Elba. After nine months on Elba, Napoleon escaped and made his way back to Paris where he reinstated himself as Emperor of France.

In 1815 Napoleon was exiled again, following his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo. Napoleon surrendered to the British and was put onboard HMS Northumberland which sailed for the island of Saint Helena in the south Atlantic Ocean. It was hoped that this was so far away from mainland Europe, that it would stop Napoleon from escaping and disturbing the peace in Europe again.

Whilst on St Helena, Napoleon was put under house arrest at Longwood House where he remained until his death. The British Army was sent to guard Napoleon and in 1819 the 20th Regiment of Foot arrived on St Helena to take up this duty. Napoleon spent much of his time gardening at Longwood House and dictating his memoirs to his secretary.



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NAPOLEON'S LAST YEARS

As Napoleon's health declined, he was treated by several doctors each of which he refused to see again. Surgeon Major Archibald Arnott was the surgeon attached to the 20th Regiment of Foot. Arnott began treating Napoleon in 1821 and Napoleon began to trust him. Napoleon appears to have taken a liking to Arnott and they had things in common. Both men were a similar same age, and both were veterans of several military campaigns. It was Arnott's maturity and experience that recommended him to Napoleon. Towards the end of his life, Napoleon gave Arnott a silver snuff box as a way of thanking him for his service. Arnott was there when Napoleon died on 5th May 1821, and he also performed the autopsy on Napoleon's body. Arnott reported that Napoleon had died from stomach cancer. There have been suggestions that Napoleon died from arsenic poisoning, but no signs of this were found at his autopsy.

Napoleon asked to be buried in France, but he was buried on St Helena in an unmarked grave. Napoleon's body was placed in four coffins, each inside the other and these were covered by his cloak. The carriage bearing his coffin was pulled by four horses and this was followed by his household, British Naval and Army officers and those that lived on the island. There were bands playing specially written music and 3,000 soldiers lined the route from Longwood House to his burial site. Napoleon's body was finally returned to France, nineteen years later, and he now rests by the River Seine at Les Invalides in Paris.

