

Excerpt from

# Napoleon Complex



by Karen Baicker

1 In the fall of 1799, General Napoleon Bonaparte arrived in France to wild cheering. He had spent the last 14 months trying to conquer Egypt, and the French people greeted him as though he had succeeded. Cannon fire boomed in Paris. Bands paraded through the streets.

2 In reality, the 30-year-old general's campaign in Egypt had been a miserable failure. But at the moment, that didn't matter. The French people needed a hero, and Napoleon was certain he was the man.

3 France had been in turmoil for ten years. In 1789, the people had launched a revolution against their government. Within a few years they beheaded their king and queen. They turned France into a republic—a country ruled by elected leaders. “Liberty, equality, and brotherhood” was the revolutionaries’ rallying cry.

4 But the lofty goals of the revolution were soon drowned in violence. Enemies at home and abroad kept France in a constant state of war. The new leaders in Paris turned out to be as brutal as any king.

5 France was on the brink of disaster, and Napoleon seemed like a savior. The cocky young general instilled discipline in his soldiers. He got things done.

On November 10, Napoleon decided the time was right to seize power. Surrounded by his officers, he burst into the legislature and announced that he had arrived to save the republic.

6 The reaction wasn't what Napoleon had hoped it would be. Angry legislators attacked Napoleon until a group of his followers hustled him out of the room.

Napoleon's soldiers stormed the building with their bayonets drawn. Terrified lawmakers fled through the windows. That night, three consuls were chosen to rule France. The First Consul would be Napoleon.

7 Napoleon promised to protect the ideals of the revolution, but he hinted that democracy would not be part of the deal. “The Revolution is over,” he proclaimed. “I am the Revolution.”

8 Napoleon Bonaparte had finally made himself the most powerful man in France. It was more than even he could have dreamed possible. He had grown up on the island of Corsica, a French colony. At his military school in France, his wealthy classmates made fun of his shabby clothes.

9 But he had shown them all. He had worked his way up through the army and proven his brilliance on the battlefield. And now, he had won control of France itself.

- 10 Napoleon wasted no time in taking charge. He and his wife, Josephine, moved into the Tuileries Palace, where generations of French kings had lived. He imposed a new constitution on France. It allowed the First Consul to make all laws and appoint all government officials. Napoleon had made himself a king in everything but name. “I had been nourished by reflecting on liberty,” he said, “but I thrust it aside when it obstructed my path.”
- 11 Now it was time to return to the battlefield. France had been under siege by the kingdoms of Europe since 1792. One of these kingdoms, Austria, had sent an army toward the French border. Napoleon saw a chance to crush the Austrians and force them to make peace.
- 12 On May 15, 1800, Napoleon launched one of the most daring invasions the world has ever known. He marched his men over the towering Alps and into Italy. His soldiers took apart cannons and packed them into hollowed-out trees. They dragged the sled-like trees over snow-covered passes.
- 13 Pushed on by Napoleon, the army made the crossing in just five days. They met the Austrians near the Italian town of Marengo. By midday, the Austrian commander had left the battlefield, certain that he had won. Just then, however, one of Napoleon’s generals appeared with reinforcements. “This battle is completely lost,” he told Napoleon. “But it is only two o’clock. There is time to win another.”
- 14 Napoleon blasted the Austrian line with artillery. Then he finished them off with a cavalry charge. Within 24 hours, the Austrians had agreed to withdraw from Italy. Both Austria and Britain signed a peace treaty with France.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**QUIZ**  
*Napoleon Complex*

*Directions: Circle the best answer.*

1. The fact that Napoleon thought he was the hero the French people needed after returning from Egypt shows that he was
  - a. ambitious and overly confident.
  - b. tired but ready to fight again.
  - c. frustrated by his defeat.
  - d. a master of deception.
  
2. The word turmoil in paragraph 3 means
  - a. recession
  - b. chaos.
  - c. sadness.
  - d. retreat.
  
3. Why did Napoleon and his wife move to Tuileries Palace?
  - a. It was the most luxurious palace in France.
  - b. It was the historical home of French kings.
  - c. It was convenient to the French capitol.
  - d. It was a quiet place to rest after battle.
  
4. Which quotation explains what Napoleon meant when he said “I am the Revolution”?
  - a. “Liberty, equality, and brotherhood.”
  - b. “I have been nourished by reflection on liberty but I thrust it aside when it obstructed my path.”
  - c. “The battle is completely lost.”
  - d. “Give me liberty or give me death.”
  
5. Why does the author include a flashback in the middle of the text?
  - a. to describe Napoleon’s education
  - b. to explain why Napoleon wore shabby clothes
  - c. to illustrate how far Napoleon had risen
  - d. to argue that Napoleon was destined for success