

**BIOGRAPHY****Childhood**

Napoleon Bonaparte was born in 1769 on the Mediterranean island of Corsica. When he was 9 years old his parents sent him to a military school. Because of his small stature and a thick Corsican accent, Napoleon was mocked and bullied by his classmates. He refused to acknowledge their behavior with any kind of response. He ignored them and instead concentrated on his studies. He did especially well in math, history, and geography.

**At a Glance**

Bullied as a child, Napoleon ended up the ruler of the largest European empire since the Romans.

His work earned him an appointment to the French equivalent of West Point, the Ecole Militaire, in Paris. He finished school at the age of 16 and became a lieutenant in the artillery. When the French revolution broke out Napoleon joined the army of the new republic. When forces loyal to the king tried to regain power in 1795, Napoleon was asked to protect the delegates to the National Convention. He and his artillery gunners fired their cannons upon thousands of angry, rebellious royalists. They fled in panic and Napoleon became a national hero and was hailed by the French people as the savior of the republic.

**Rise to Power**

By 1799 the new democratic government was failing and had lost the confidence of the French people. Napoleon's friends urged him to seize power. In November of 1799 troops under his command surrounded the national legislature and drove out most of its members. The remaining lawmakers dissolved the government and replaced it with three consuls, one of whom was Napoleon. He took the title of first consul and assumed the powers of a dictator. In 1800 a vote of the people approved a new constitution giving all real power to Napoleon.

As ruler Napoleon strengthened the national government and tried to achieve the goals of the Revolution. He got the economy on a solid footing by setting up an efficient method of tax collection and established a national banking system. He took steps to end corruption and inefficiency in government. He set up a public school system that was open to all males from any background. Graduates were then appointed to public office based on merit rather than family connections. He established a comprehensive system of laws called the Napoleonic Code.

**Unmanageable Empire**

In 1804, Napoleon decided to make himself emperor and the French voters went along with it. Dressed in a robe of purple velvet, Napoleon walked down the isle of Notre Dame cathedral and was crowned by the pope. His ultimate goal was mastery over Europe and the Americas which led to a series of wars. His battlefield successes enabled him to build the largest European empire since that of the Romans. But this huge empire was unstable and unmanageable. Napoleon's mistakes both military and personal soon led to his downfall. His final defeat by British and Prussian forces was at Waterloo. He was exiled to the south Atlantic island of St. Helena where he died in 1821, probably of stomach cancer.