

Name: _____

Day: _____

NAPOLÉON SEIZES POWER

Napoleon Bonaparte was born in 1769 on the Mediterranean island of Corsica. When he was nine years old, his parents sent him to a military school. In 1785, at the age of 16, he finished school and became a lieutenant in the artillery. When the Revolution broke out, Napoleon joined the army of the new government.



In October 1795, fate handed the young officer a chance for glory. When royalist rebels marched on the National Convention, a government official told Napoleon to defend the delegates. Napoleon and his gunners greeted the thousands of royalists with a cannonade. Within minutes, the attackers fled in panic and confusion. Napoleon Bonaparte became the

hero of the hour and was hailed throughout Paris as the savior of the French republic.

In 1796, the Directory (the group that followed the National Convention as the government of France) appointed Napoleon to lead a French army against the forces of Austria and the Kingdom of Sardinia. Crossing the Alps, the young general swept into Italy and won a series of remarkable victories. Next, in an attempt to protect French trade interests and to disrupt British trade with India, Napoleon led an expedition to Egypt. But he was unable to repeat the successes he had achieved in Europe. His army was pinned down in Egypt, and the British admiral Horatio Nelson defeated his naval forces. However, Napoleon controlled the press in France and managed to keep stories about his setbacks out of the newspapers and thereby remained a great hero to the people of France.



By 1799, the Directory had lost control of the political situation and the confidence of the French people. When Napoleon returned from Egypt, his friends urged him to seize political power. Napoleon took action in early November 1799. Troops under his command surrounded the national legislature and drove out most of its members. The lawmakers who remained then voted to dissolve the Directory. In its place, they established a group of three consuls, one of whom was Napoleon. Napoleon quickly took the title of first consul and assumed the powers of a dictator. A sudden seizure of power like Napoleon's is known as a coup—from the French phrase coup d'état (KOO day•TAH), or “blow

to the state.”

At the time of Napoleon’s coup, France was still at war. In 1799, Britain, Austria, and Russia joined forces with one goal in mind, to drive Napoleon from power. Once again, Napoleon rode from Paris at the head of his troops. Eventually, as a result of war and diplomacy, all three nations signed peace agreements with France. By 1802, Europe was at peace for the first time in ten years. Napoleon was free to focus his energies on restoring order in France.



1. What led Napoleon to a life in the military?
2. Describe Napoleon’ s first major military success.
3. Discuss Napoleon’ s successes and failures abroad.
4. Why was his failure in Egypt against the British not published?
5. What happened in 1799 (the coup d’état)? Be descriptive.
6. Describe Europe in 1802 and make a prediction regarding what you think will happen next.