



BATTLE OF WATERLOO

During the French Revolution, towards the end of the 18th century, a soldier named Napoleon rose through the ranks and seized control of the French government. In 1804, he became emperor and set about conquering most of Europe. Through a series of wars, he expanded his empire to include most of western and central Europe, but the British Isles remained out of reach. It was one country that he hoped to seize.

It hadn't all gone Napoleon's way. In 1814, he had been forced to give up his position as emperor. He was exiled to a small island off the coast of Italy called Elba. However, Napoleon wasn't going to allow himself to be beaten that easily. In February 1815, he sailed back to France with 1,000 supporters. He returned to Paris in March where thousands more supporters cheered him on. The new king, King Louis XVIII fled and Napoleon regained the throne. Once he was back in power, he set out on what became known as his Hundred Days campaign.

Nobody was particularly happy that the blood-thirsty Napoleon was back in charge. In particular, the British and Prussians were fed up with his bullying ways. Together, they began to prepare for war. Napoleon got wind of their plan and began to quickly raise an army so that he could attack them first. His plan was brilliant - he intended to defeat each country on their own before they had a chance to join forces.

At first, it seemed like he might be successful. In June 1815, Napoleon attacked British and Prussian troops who were camped in Belgium. It was named the Battle of Ligny, and Napoleon was victorious. However, he didn't manage to defeat the entire Prussian army. Two days later, it all came to a head near the village of Waterloo just outside of Brussels.

Napoleon's army was bigger than the British, though not by much. He commanded 72,000 men whereas Britain had 68,000. The British army wasn't only made up of British men - there were Dutch, German and Belgian troops as well. The whole army was commanded by the Duke of Wellington who was already famous for his battles against France some years before.



Had Napoleon attacked first thing in the morning, there is a good chance he would have beaten the British and the world would be a very different place. Unfortunately for him, the ground was waterlogged, so he ordered his men to wait until midday: when it would be dry. During those few hours, the remaining Prussians who had survived the Battle of Ligny were able to join Wellington's army. There were over 30,000 of them, so this swung the balance massively.

Napoleon fought bravely, and his men gave a good fight, but once the Prussians joined the battle, they fled in chaos. It was reported that the French lost over 33,000 men to the British 22,000. Napoleon allegedly left the field of battle in tears. He never led the army into battle again.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Write a definition for the word "conquering".
2. Which word tells you that Napoleon made his empire bigger?
3. What does the phrase "blood-thirsty" tell you about Napoleon?
4. What does the word "waterlogged" tell you about the battlefield?
5. If Napoleon's army fled in chaos, what image do you have of them?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

Men from which other countries fought in the British army?

R

Who led the British army?

S

Why did the delay help the British?

S

What happened at the Battle of Ligny that came back to haunt Napoleon?

I

Why was Napoleon's first plan brilliant?

Answers:

1. Taking control of
2. Expanded
3. He liked to fight and go to war
4. It was covered in water and mud
5. Accept answers that understand it was disorganised and running in all directions/desperate to get away

R: Dutch (Holland/Netherlands), Germany, Belgium

R: The Duke of Wellington

S: It meant that the Prussian army could arrive to help them

S: He didn't defeat the entire Prussian army

I: He wanted to attack each army on its own so they were weaker and easier to defeat