

at the same time, using his rearguard as a precaution against a sneak attack by General Kutuzov's Russian army. On October 17th 1805, with the hoped-for Russian help never arriving, the Prussians were taken by surprise and defeated. It was a formidable example of Napoleon's ability to manoeuvre quickly and surround the enemy. Following Masséna's victory in northern Italy, Napoleon proposed to invade Austrian territory.

At Austerlitz, about 120 km north from Vienna, Napoleon waited for the Austro-Russian counterattack. The result of this battle, known as the Battle of the Three Emperors – the Russian and Austrian Emperors were also present on the battlefield – was a great victory for Napoleon. Fought on December 2nd 1805, it was the first anniversary of his Coronation. This time, the military genius tricked his enemies by presenting his army in such a way that he tempted the Allies to collapse his right flank. When they took the bait, Napoleon attacked their centre, breaking their lines and surrounding their left flank. It was a

total defeat for the Allies, and Austerlitz became Napoleon's greatest victory.

Meanwhile, at sea, things never went well for Napoleon. On October 21st 1805, the British fleet, commanded by Admiral Lord Nelson, destroyed the Allied fleets of Spain and France at Trafalgar. This great victory presented Great Britain with absolute control of the seas, preventing Napoleon from ever contemplating the invasion of the British Isles.

Prussia, which had been inactive for a long time, decided to ready itself for war. The proud Prussians were worried about the changes that were happening to the map of Germany. Napoleon was on the march once again. On October 14th 1806, he fought and defeated the Prussian army at Jena. Simultaneously, not far from Jena, at Auerstadt, his faithful Marshal Davout, launched his attack. The Prussians were powerless, and were taken completely by surprise. They were crushed, and Marshal Bernadotte



19th Century European print depicting the meeting of Napoleon I and Alexander I ca. 1807.



"Napoleon visiting the Eylau battlefield" 9th February 1807.

entered Berlin on October 24th, bringing the Prussian campaign to a close.

This left Russia the only power able to face Napoleon on the Continent. The task had to be undertaken. Napoleon marched eastwards to Warsaw, with the aim of watching the Russian movements. The Russians advanced and both armies clashed at Eylau on February 8th 1807. There was no definite victor, although Napoleon claimed victory. Napoleon lost around 10,000 men while the Russians lost around 25,000. Both armies then retreated to their winter quarters. Napoleon had never been so close to defeat since being repelled at the siege of Acre in 1799.

On June 14th 1807, Napoleon finished the work he had started at Jena-Auerstadt. At Friedland, about 45 km southeast of Königsberg, the Emperor took full revenge for what had happened at Eylau. The Russians were defeated and Emperor Alexander I was forced to sign the 'Peace of Tilsit' on the River Niemen, which flowed along the border of Prussia and Russia.

With these victories, Napoleon was at his zenith. At the beginning of 1808, at the peak of the Empire, Napoleon ruled half Europe. His empire stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to White Russia, from the frozen Baltic Sea to the warm waters of the Ionian Sea. From Portugal to Grodno, in the Great Duchy of Warsaw. Its population, citizens of France included, was 70 million. His soldiers adored him, not only because he was a brilliant general, but because of the courage he always showed leading them. His harangues always got the most from his men. They felt very close to Napoleon, as if he was one of them.

Only Britain opposed his power, and the only way to overcome it was by means of an economic war: the Continental System. His main aim was to destroy the British economic rule by blocking all the ports on the Continent to British trade. However, Portugal, ancient ally of Great Britain, continued trading with Britain. Napoleon became very upset with this 'insubordination', and sent French troops, together with those of his ally Spain, to invade Portugal.

Michel Ney (1769–1815)

The 'bravest of the brave', the Prince of Moskowa and the son of a barrel-maker, was the last French marshal to leave Russian soil during the 1812 retreat.

On Napoleon's abdication, Ney joined those who served the Bourbons. On the Emperor's return from Elba, Ney, once more, fell under his master's thrall and fought by his side at Waterloo.

For this perceived treachery the returned Bourbons sentenced him to death. Marshall Ney was shot by firing squad on December 7th 1815.

However, did the story really end there? There is a legend about Ney's 'death'. It is said that, in 1848, in Florence, South Carolina, a dull, but greatly admired teacher of French, on his deathbed, declared that he was Michel Ney, Marshal of France. Many thought this was the delirium of a dying man, but others confirmed that this wasn't the first time the teacher has stated it. Moreover, the teacher's name was Peter Stuart Ney. He related how the firing squad had fired over his head while he, at the same instant, broke a glass bottle containing blood he held in his hand. The story goes that Wellington himself supported the pantomime as he felt that the firing squad was an ignoble death for such an honourable soldier.



Michel Ney, Duke of Elchingen and Prince de la Moscowa.



1. *Petit uniforme à pied. (Lannes).*
2. *Tenue portée en campagne. (Oudinot)*
3. *Petit uniforme à cheval. (Ney).*
4. *Bessières, en colonel-général de la cavalerie de la Garde.*
5. *Tenue en redingote. (Bernadotte).*

Joachim Murat (1767–1815)

Murat, one of the finest cavalry commanders of the period, was an imposing cavalryman who wanted to become a king thanks to his marriage to Carolina Bonaparte, one of the Emperor's sisters. The peak of his career came when he averted a French defeat at Eylau, thanks to his unstoppable cavalry charge against the Russian advance.

He eventually became King of Naples in July 1808 but, when events took a turn for the worse for Napoleon after the disastrous 1812 Russian campaign, he opened secret negotiations with England and Austria. Murat was without scruples and, by August 1813, he was back at Napoleon's side commanding the cavalry at Leipzig. He changed sides yet again in 1814, and even offered Neapolitan troops to fight against France. However, when he tried, once more, to gain the Emperor's favour, Napoleon, exasperated with him, turned down his services. Murat was eventually captured and executed by firing squad.

Murat was a conceited and silly man, who delighted in wearing flamboyant uniforms. He made many enemies in the marshalate, but his men admired him for his courage and dash.



Joachim Murat, King of Naples and Grand Duke of Berg.

6. *Grand uniforme à cheval de maréchal commandant en chef. 1804–1807. (Jourdan)*
7. *Tenue de cérémonie. (Augereau).*
8. *Grand uniforme à pied.*
9. *Grand uniforme à cheval. 1808–1815. (Davout).*



"Napoleón at the battle of Jena" by Horace Vernet.

