

The Final Hours of Napoleon Bonaparte 1821



By Michael Vanro

Table Of Contents

Prelude to Exile	01
Arrival at Saint Helena	03
Longwood House	05
Isolation and Surveillance	07
Daily Routines	10
Napoleon's Inner Circle	15
Political Reflections	17
Correspondence and Writings	19
Relations with British Captors	21
Memories of Glory	23

Table Of Contents

Betrayal and Bitterness	25
Spiritual Contemplations	27
Final Projects	29
Last Illness	31
The Death-Watch	33
Legacy Contemplations	35
Funeral and Burial	37
Aftermath and Myths	39
Charles Tristan- Marquis de Montholon	41
Sir Hudson Lowe On St Helena	42

Prelude to Exile

In the years leading up to Napoleon Bonaparte's final exile, the landscape of Europe was an intricate tapestry of shifting powers, fractured alliances, and exhausted empires. The aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars saw the former Emperor of France transition from an indomitable force of conquest to a dethroned monarch ensnared by the machinations of international diplomacy. 'Prelude to Exile' delves into the crucial period spanning the end of the Hundred Days and the subsequent surrender, illuminating the tumultuous events that precipitated Napoleon's banishment to the remote island of Saint Helena.

Following his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815, Napoleon's empire crumbled, and the tide of European politics turned irrevocably against him. He abdicated for the second time in just over a year, realizing that any further resistance would result in unnecessary carnage for his already war-weary nation. His abdication on 22 June 1815 marked the definitive end of his reign, paving the way for the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy.

During this interlude, Napoleon initially harboured hopes of asylum in the United States, seeking refuge far from the vengeance of his European foes. However, this plan was thwarted by the vigilance of the British navy, which patrolled the French coastline, keenly aware of the potential threat he could still pose. Lacking the means to escape unnoticed and pressured by the approach of the advancing Prussian and British forces, Napoleon had little choice but to surrender.

On 15 July 1815, Napoleon was taken aboard the HMS Bellerophon, a British warship, under the command of Captain Maitland. As the formidable vessel made its way across the English Channel to Torbay, the presence of the once-mighty Emperor, now a prisoner, caught the imagination of the English public. Crowds gathered to catch a glimpse of the diminutive yet legendary figure whose ambitions had cast a long shadow over the continent.

Negotiations regarding Napoleon's fate had begun long before his surrender, driven by a coalition of European powers intent on ensuring he could never again destabilize the continent. The British government, under immense pressure from the allied powers, resolved that exile to a remote and isolated location was the only option to secure lasting peace. The initial suggestions of confinement include locations such as the Azores or the Isle of Wight, were dismissed in favour of a more remote and secure destination.

Saint Helena, a solitary volcanic island in the South Atlantic, over 1,200 miles from the nearest landmass, was selected for its geographical isolation and inaccessibility. The island's remoteness ensured that any attempt by Napoleon to escape or stir political unrest would be virtually impossible. The harsh and desolate conditions of Saint Helena further symbolized the stark contrast between his former imperial grandeur and his current diminished state.

As preparations were made for his exile, Napoleon's thoughts and demeanour evolved. Initially hopeful for leniency, he faced the reality of his situation with a mix of resignation and defiance. The days leading up to his departure from Europe were a blend of melancholy and acceptance, reflecting the irrevocable change in his circumstances.

On 17 October 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte set sail for Saint Helena on the HMS Northumberland, marking the beginning of his final and most profound period of exile. The weeks-long voyage was laden with a sense of finality, as the vast expanse of the Atlantic separated him from the world he once dominated. The isolation of Saint Helena would become the stage for his ultimate decline, where political intrigue, personal reflections, and physical and emotional struggles would coalesce in the poignant final act of his storied life.

The 'Prelude to Exile' captures the essence of Napoleon's fall from power, setting the stage for the subsequent chapters that explore his life in captivity and the myriad facets of his enduring legacy.

