

The Napoleonic Wars were a series of conflicts fought between France under the leadership of [Napoleon Bonaparte](#) and a number of European nations between 1799 and 1815. They followed on from the [War of the First Coalition \(1793-97\)](#) and engaged nearly all European nations in a bloody struggle, a struggle that also spilled over into Egypt, America and South America. During the Wars (for during this period the fighting was not constant) warfare was to change and move towards modern warfare leaving behind forever the idea of war as a sport of kings and moving towards the concept of Total War and the nations in arms. Weaponry also evolved though at a much slower rate than the ideas of the nation at arms and conscription. By the end of the period most European armies had riflemen and the British made the first large scale use of [Congreve Rockets](#) in a European war. The period starting with bright uniforms but by the end of the period dark blue or green uniforms had become common for skirmishers, the beginnings of military camouflage. The period also saw the British Army under the leadership of the Duke of Wellington become renown as the best in Europe.



Europe in 1812

The first campaign of the Napoleonic wars was the War of the second Coalition - with Bonaparte absent in Egypt fighting the British a new coalition formed against the French in 1798. This consisted of Russia, Great Britain, Austria, Portugal, The Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Naples. The fighting took place mainly in Northern Italy and Switzerland, with the Russians under General Aleksandr Suvorov being successful at first undoing the damage done by [Napoleon's](#) victories in Italy. The French defeated the Russians who pulled out of the coalition. Bonaparte offered peace but the coalition refused and in 1800 he crossed the Alps and defeated the Austrians at the [battle of Marengo 1800](#). Other French victories followed and soon only Britain remained to stand against the French. After a failed attack in Holland, Britain made peace (1802). this was not to last long.

In 1805 the War of the Third Coalition broke out, with Britain joined by Russia, Austria and Sweden. Napoleon defeated the Austrians at [Ulm \(1805\)](#) and finally at [Austerlitz in 1805](#) (known as the battle of the three Emperors). Once again the coalition reformed this time with Prussia but without Austria in 1806. Napoleon quickly moved against the Prussians and crushed them at the [battle of Jena in 1806](#). By 1808 Napoleon was master of all Europe but he was now to begin a series of mistakes that would lead to his defeat. Dethroning King Charles IV of Spain he made his brother Joseph Bonaparte King, causing a revolt and what was to be known as a [Guerrilla](#) war in Spain. During the [Peninsular war](#) (1808-1813) the Spanish Guerillas aided by British troops under Wellington and Portuguese allies drove the French out and eventually invaded southern France. A [fifth Coalition](#) formed but the Austrians were defeated at the [battle of Aspern](#) and [Wagram](#) in 1809.



Europe in 1812

With large numbers of his troops tied down in Spain, Napoleon decide to [invade Russia in 1812](#) with an Army of 500,000 men and although he defeated the Russians at the [battle of Borodino in 1812](#) and took Moscow he was forced to retreat due to weather, costing him most of his army and marking the beginning of the end. Surrounded by enemies on all sides with his best troops dead Napoleon was forced to abdicate in 1814. As the members of the Fifth coalition decided the fate of Europe, Napoleon staged a daring return to power and tried to reverse the outcome of the war at the [battle of Waterloo \(18 June 1815\)](#). Waterloo was a bloody battle which saw his remaining elite guard destroyed and Napoleon exiled to St Helena from where he was never to return, marking the end of the Napoleonic wars.

