

# How did Britain defeat France during the Napoleonic Wars? essay



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The British victory over the French in the 1793-1815 wars is mainly accredited to the strength of the Royal Navy and the various strategies she put into place during her encounters with the enemy. Other factors that also contributed to this victory include economic and financial factors, the Peninsular War, the Russian Campaign and the British-led coalition against Napoleon and France. The geographical location of Britain as an island makes her resources limited and the need of a strong navy in order to protect her trade routes and most significantly her security from external aggression inevitable.

The leaders fully aware of this fact took great strides towards ensuring the continuous effectiveness of this formidable force charged with the country's defence and survival. This decision by Britain was to prove useful during the era in question otherwise known as the era of the Napoleonic Wars. The Royal Navy under the leadership of Admiral Nelson saw a great and drastic change from just a normal strong navy to an outstanding and the greatest of its kind during this period. The strength of this force saw the blockading of European ports that allied itself to France, the protection of Britain's trade routes and also saw to the acquisition of new territories formerly part of the French empire in the West Indies and the battle of the Nile which Napoleon threatened to exterminate British influence in the Mediterranean. The most notable contribution of the Royal Navy was during the battle of Trafalgar when it dealt a great blow to the French and Spanish navy and completely eradicated Napoleon's ambition of invading Britain, this war was to unfortunately cause Nelson his life.

Another great contribution of the Royal Navy can be seen during the Peninsular War when it deployed troops and also made supplies to British troops along the coasts of Spain and Portugal. The acquisition of new colonies in the West Indies immensely opened up new frontiers to British economic activities and also trade routes to British merchants and this boosted her economy. With the French no longer having these territories under her and limiting her economic activities to Europe this made her economy decline into recession. Napoleon lost territories and the possibility of attacking Britain took on a new strategy known as the Continental System in which all nations which he had influence on will seize economic activities with Britain and close her ports to British merchant ships. This new strategy proved to be ineffective with the Royal Navy blockading various European ports and thus preventing commercial activities within the European nations themselves.

Russia decided to pull out of this new policy of Continental System. This also crippled the French economy and limited its financial gains and economic activities. The decision by Napoleon to make his brother Joseph the King of Spain brought the emergence of rebellion against the French inconsiderate of their former alliance against the British, and with this latest development in Spain this also led to anti-French feeling in neighbouring Portugal. The British seized this opportunity to attack Napoleon in both Spain and Portugal. The Spanish and the Portuguese allied with the British against Napoleon. The British were further supported by the locals by making guerrilla attacks on French troops and French supply routes leading to and fro between Paris and Madrid.

The strategy used by General Arthur Wellesley (i. e. ensuring that under each encounter with the French his forces outnumbered the French) proved very effective and this greatly weakened Napoleon's influence in both Spain and Portugal. The other reason was the command of the French forces which were left under Napoleon's lieutenants which proved very ineffective mainly because of the fact that he was concentrating in Eastern Europe. Thus this factors led to the lost of French hold of Spain and Portugal.

Napoleon fully concentrating his forces towards his Russian campaign and giving little or no attention to events in Western Europe. When Napoleon earlier set out on his campaign he had no intention of going beyond Poland because he had underestimated the rebellion and expected a rapid surrender and result into a victory for him. This was to prove difficult as he kept marching his army until he got to Moscow where he expected a quick approach by the Russians for a truce and then he will be able to march back to France and then face the British. However this did not happen as the Russians released criminals from jails in Moscow and urged them to set the city ablaze thereby leaving nothing behind for the French prior to their arrival.

The French arrived at a deserted Moscow and decided to wait there but when the Russians became more determined and started launching guerrilla attacks on the French with the army nearby to support their people.

Napoleon tired of waiting and left with an exhausted army far away from home and men dying due to the unfavourable condition of the weather in Russia and the lack of supply also contributed by guerrilla attacks on supply routes he decided to head back to France and face the British led coalition.  
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The Russians, the Austrians and the Prussians allied with the British and launched serious attacks on the retreating French army. This greatly affected the once strong army that had all the prestige and glamour in Europe, and saw its decline and left it demoralised. Napoleon set out on his campaign with about Six Hundred thousand men but only succeeded in fleeing with about ninety thousand men to France. With the latest development with regard to the failure of the Russian campaign the nations of Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia allied against the French with the intention of getting rid of the emperor.

This they succeeded in forcing the emperor to abdicate and he was sent into exile to Elba with a thousand men selected by him for his personal security. A hundred days later he escaped from Elba and made a return to France with an attempt to take his empire back and also face the British led coalition against him. This coalition of European powers namely; Britain, Prussia, Austria and Russia fought against Napoleon until the final showdown at the battle of Waterloo when Napoleon himself and the great British army General, Wellesley, for the first and last time came into face to face battle against each other and with the support of the Prussian army under Blucher, and with this combined force they were able to deal a death blow to Napoleon's army and finally ensured his army was totally weakened until the emperor fled and was later captured and sent on exile to the far away island of St. Helena. The above detailed factors can be said to be the reason for British victory over the French and Napoleon in person, but most significant of them is the strength of her navy and the strategies implemented by those charged with the responsibility of the royal navy.