



# The Battle of Leipzig: The History and Legacy of the Biggest Battle of the Napoleonic Wars

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures \*Includes a bibliography for further reading \*Includes a table of contents Though Napoleon Bonaparte's unquenchable thirst for military adventurism eventually cost him both his throne and his freedom during the Napoleonic Wars of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the French Emperor was not easily defeated even when most of Europe's nations united against him. Two military setbacks on a scale unprecedented in history until then were required before the high tide of Napoleon's success began to ebb towards the final denouement of the Hundred Days and the famous battle of Waterloo. The incredible losses inflicted on Napoleon's Grand Armée by the ill-fated invasion of Russia in 1812 constituted the first setback to switch the Corsican's life journey from the road of success to that of defeat and exile. A huge, veteran, highly experienced force, the French Army of Napoleon perished on the rain-soaked tracks and sun-seared plains of Russia. Napoleon eventually committed over 400,000 men to his Russian project, but at the end of a relatively brief campaign, only about 40,000 men returned alive to Germany, and the Russians took some 100,000 prisoner and largely absorbed them into the Russian military or population. The remainder died, principally from starvation but also through enemy action and the bitter cold of early winter. The failed Russian invasion set the stage for the second defeat at Leipzig, which essentially sealed the fate of Napoleon's empire. The four-day Battle of Leipzig in October 1813, romantically but accurately dubbed the "Battle of the Nations," proved the decisive encounter of the War of the Sixth Coalition and essentially determined the course the Napoleonic Wars took from that moment forward. All the belligerents showed awareness that the European conflict's climax was at hand: "There was keen determination in Prussia to exact revenge for the humiliation visited by Napoleon, but enthusiasm for armed struggle that would bring the eviction of the French found enthusiastic response throughout the German states. [...] To minimize his army's exposure and purchase time to rebuild, Napoleon might have stood on the defensive, but he followed his standard strategy of deciding the campaign with a bold advance to achieve decisive victory in one stroke." (Tucker, 2011, 302). The resultant collision was the single largest field action of the Napoleonic Wars, dwarfing Waterloo in size, complexity, and overall importance. The Battle of Leipzig was probably the combat which involved the highest concentration of men on a single extended battlefield on the planet up to that point in history, and would not be exceeded until the vast struggles of the First World War almost precisely a century later. Its outcome permanently settled what might be called the Napoleonic question, though it could not undo the massive changes Napoleon's conquests brought to the European continent. The old Europe of feudal nobility, absolute monarchs, strong clerical power, and relatively slow technical progress soon gave way to the potent dynamism, enormous new mental horizons, and fresh possibilities of the modern age. The Battle of Leipzig: The History and Legacy of the Biggest Battle of the Napoleonic Wars details the background leading up to the campaign, the fighting, and the aftermath of France's catastrophic defeat. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Battle of Leipzig like never before, in no time at all.

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