

ATSS-BAR

5 April 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR Faculty Advisor, Group Room L04, Fort Bliss, TX  
79918-8002

SUBJECT: The Battle of Austerlitz in 1805

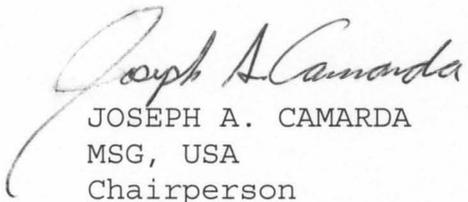
1. Thesis Statement. Many scholars attribute the victory of the French Army during the Battle of Austerlitz to the genius battle plans of Napoleon, however our research indicates that victory actually stemmed from the reorganization of the French Army during the Revolution.

2. Discussion. We will dispute the presumption held by many authors of military history that France's victory at Austerlitz was a result of Napoleon's genius battle plans.

3. Conclusion. We believe that victory during the Battle of Austerlitz resulted from the development and innovations made by France's Grande Armee during the revolutionary period, not Napoleon's genius battle plans.

4. Counterpoint. Napoleon's strategic and tactical genius was the vehicle for his Grande Armee's greatest victory at Austerlitz. Napoleon was indeed a military genius.

5. Haines Award. We do request that the Haines Review Board consider this paper for the General Ralph E. Haines, Jr. Award for Excellence in research. *Writing Research Papers*, Ninth Edition by James D. Lester, is the guide used in the preparation of this research paper.

  
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The Battle of Austerlitz 1805

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## Outline

Thesis: Many scholars attribute the French victory during the Battle of Austerlitz to the genius battle plans of Napoleon, however our research indicates that victory actually stemmed from the reorganization of the French Army during the Revolution.

- I. Napoleon did not invent nor create the new French Formation of the "Grande Armee."
  - A. The French Administration created the Grande Armee following the Seven Years War.
    1. The Seven Years War was the decisive event in the history of France leading to the total reorganization of the French Army.
    2. The overthrow of the monarchy led to the election of the National Convention in Paris in 1792 and became the government for the next three years.
    3. Jean Baptiste Vacquette de Gribeauval (1715-89) introduced far reaching reforms into French artillery.
- II. Napoleon was not the military strategic genius many believed him to be.
  - A. Napoleon learned most strategies and tactics while at Auzonne.

1. One of the most interesting facets of Napoleon's success was his lack of genuine originality.
2. Napoleon's application of tactics and strategies during the Battle of Austerlitz rested on the rapid movement of his forces.
3. Bonaparte rarely encouraged subordinates to use initiative.

III. The Grande Armee faced the Russian and Austrian forces at Austerlitz.

A. French tactics and strategies come of age at Austerlitz.

1. Napoleon's Army represented a new type of military.
2. Napoleon made maximum use of new ways of fighting and elevated them to perfection.
3. Throughout the Battle of Austerlitz, Napoleon used tactics of Fredrick the Great, Chevalier du Teil, and Gribenauval.
4. It was the experience of the French Army that contributed to the outcome of the battle.

IV. Social changes brought about by the French Revolution created an environment advantageous to the French Army.

**Counterpoint**

- I. Napoleon's strategic and tactical genius was the vehicle for his *Grande Armee's* greatest victory at Austerlitz.
  - A. Napoleon possessed an uncanny intuitive understanding of the five elements of combat power and their application to the battle formations and tactics of the day.
  - B. Napoleon clearly out fought his more conservative adversaries at Austerlitz with his innovative application of refined tactics and techniques.

- A. The social victory of democracy empowered the people of France.
  - 1. France adopted a system of conscription known as the famous levee en masse.
  - 2. The environmental changes from a monarchy to a democracy played a key role in the development of the French Army.
  
- B. Forward thinking leaders challenged prevailing military doctrine.
  - 1. The establishment of the War Committee paved the way for the pre-revolutionary theorists.
  - 2. The experience gained during the revolution honed the French Army and it's leaders in new fighting strategies.
  
- C. The French victory at Austerlitz clearly demonstrates the culmination of many forces at work.

The Battle of Austerlitz in 1805

Many scholars attribute the victory of the French Army during the Battle of Austerlitz to the genius battle plans of Napoleon; however our research indicates that victory actually stemmed from the reorganization of the French Army during the Revolution. Closer examination of French tactical and strategic development following the Seven Years' War clearly proves the tactics and strategies Napoleon employed at Austerlitz to be those of other French military theorist. The dramatic reorganization of the French Army following the Seven Years' War through the year 1794 definitely provided Napoleon a tool with definite advantages over any army the allied forces could muster. Napoleon used these tactics, strategies, and this revamped army to beat his enemies at the Battle of Austerlitz without adding any personal strategic or tactical revelation to the battle itself.

The Seven Years' War was the decisive event in the history of France and led to the total reorganization of the French Army. The nation had entered the conflict without enthusiasm, fought without distinction, and emerged without victory. This long struggle inevitably weakened the monarchy and took the nation on its course in 1789, the French Revolution. The French Army suffered to a large degree from the weakness of the

monarchy, making it ineffective. When victory eluded the armies year after year, a wind of reform began to blow. The strain of the Seven Years' War revealed the shortcomings of the royal government. The royal government's inability to deal with military matters, financial crisis, and political instability led to revolution within the country. This revolutionary period marked the beginning of great intellectual ferment in France, and what has come to be known as the French Revolution.

The bases for the reformed new Grande Armee were the professionalism of the Soldiers and Noncommissioned Officers. The regular enlistment period for a soldier was six years. The long period of training and a policy of long-term enlistment developed the soldiers and Noncommissioned Officers of the old regime into professionals. Conversely, the majority of the French officers were essentially amateurs; most were aristocrats and lacked military schooling or experience. The combination of poor leadership and outdated tactics and strategies led to the inescapable conclusion by military reformers that France waged war with methods that were dangerously outdated. This opened the door for some of France's most innovative military thinkers.

One of the most famous and influential reformers was the Conte de Guibert, who in 1772 published his "Essai General de Tactic". Giubert felt firepower to be the most important element in 18<sup>th</sup> century warfare and supported a "thin" formation of three

ranks to make maximum use of firepower. The basic principles, which Giubert sought to include in his formations and deployments, were flexibility, maneuverability, and mobility. He wanted to integrate infantry, cavalry, and artillery on the battlefield to support one another. He also saw the advantage of attaining faster movement by dividing forces (Chandler 136).

Other progressive military theorist, like Carnot, Saxe, and Bourcet advocated forces capable of rapid movement. To accomplish rapid movement, the armies needed to be organized into divisions capable of marching separately, and then converge on the enemy at a decisive point. This organization greatly simplified both tactical command and military administration. Divisions allowed for a more flexible strategy and would force a decision on the battlefield through concentration of forces against weak points using surprise and deception. These principles of mobile warfare were fully and systematically developed and applied during the revolutionary period.

The overthrow of the monarchy led to the election of the National Convention in Paris in 1792 and became the government of the nation for the next three years. One of the first problems they faced was military reorganization. They created the "Committee of Public Safety" responsible for the reorganization. The head of its "War Section" was Lazare Carnot (Chandler 142). An engineer officer, Carnot reorganized the

chaotic armies of the First Republic. He created a General staff (Le bureau de Topographique) to direct the efforts of the various armies. He closely followed Giubert's doctrines. He disbanded the mass of volunteer formations and created a total of 198 "line", and 15 light brigades. Supported by 213 battalions in reserve, the cavalry army was similarly reorganized into demi-brigades of four squadrons each (142). As for the artillery, Carnot encouraged the retention of the Gribeauval system and vastly increased the number of horse artillery batteries.

Jean Baptiste Vacquette de Gribeauval (1715-1789) introduced far-reaching reforms into the French artillery (Haythornthwaite 44). He redesigned all aspects of French artillery, standardizing the field guns into 4, 8, and 12 pounders, supplemented by howitzers. New designs of the three basic types drastically reduced their weight and consequently improved mobility. The horse artillery was increased to a strength of nine regiments. The tactical employment of horse artillery took advantage of its greatest asset, mobility. Based on mobility, horse artillery companies were attached to cavalry formations. The speed of horse artillery companies while galloping, could provide fire-support for cavalry charges, and get in close to the enemy (50).

Carnot and his "War Section" succeeded in laying an effective framework of military organization. He built the morale of the troops while providing the armies with the supplies required to be successful in battle. With these modifications, the Convention took the beaten, demoralized army of 1792 and developed it into an irresistible instrument of conquest.

One of the most interesting facets of Napoleon's success was his general lack of genuine originality. With certain comparatively minor exceptions, Napoleon was not an innovator in his own right (Chandler 136). He drew his strategical and tactical ideas from earlier thinkers and war leaders. His knowledge was based on strategies from Fredrick the Great, the famous 18<sup>th</sup> century ruler and general of Prussia, and military theorists such as Baron du Teil, a famous artillerist, and Conte de Guibert. (137). He added little to the art of war, or the armies of France, except victory. Napoleon was victorious by transforming theory into actuality (136).

Napoleon found time to read military books while at the Artillery Training School at Auzonne. Consequently, it was from books, rather than actual experience in the field, that Napoleon initially drew his major military ideas. The commandant of the Artillery School was the celebrated artillerist, Baron du Teil. Under his guidance and encouragement, Napoleon undertook studies of the military art of artillery, and Gribeauval's tactics and

strategies (138). Next, he studied Fredrick the Great, and above all, re-reads the famous "Essai General de Tactique" by Jacques Antoine Hypolite, Comte de Guibert and his subséquent work, "Systeme de Guerre Moderne".

Napoleon's application of tactics and strategies during the Battle of Austerlitz rested on the rapid movement of his forces, and the organization of his armies into divisions. Divisions were capable of marching separately or converging on the enemy at a decisive point. He concentrated his forces against weak points, and through the use of surprise and deception, won the battle. Pre-revolutionary strategist such as Saxe, Bourcet, and Guibert were the "fathers" of these tactics and strategies (Watson 351). Napoleon benefited from these new methods and revealed the full potential of this new system during the battle of Austerlitz. This realistic, brutal, and calculating approach to warfare was a rude break from the more gentlemanly military conventions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Napoleon drew much on the philosophy of Fredrick the Great. The great Prussian leader advocated "...our wars, should be short and lively, for it is not in our interest to protract matters". He then added "...you will compel the enemy to fight you on your approach, by means of forced march, you will place yourself in his rear and cut his communications, or, you will alternatively menace a town whose preservation is vital to him" (Chandler 141). These concepts

were prominent in Napoleon's strategy during the Battle of Austerlitz.

Napoleon used a book called "The New Artillery in Practice", written by Chevalier du Teil, the younger brother of General du Teil (138). It was here that Napoleon learned of the importance of numerical superiority, the concentration of efforts, the demoralization of the enemy by the elements of surprise, and rapidity of movements.

Napoleon rarely encouraged subordinates to use initiative (Haythornthwaite 10). Even though his "fighting leadership" was experienced in battle and very professional, the majority of his marshals were not. Most were capable of following Napoleons orders, but when something unexpected occurred, they did not possess the knowledge or fortitude to face those situations. Napoleon preferred to be solely in charge during battles to issue orders and directives. The major weakness of the "Grande Arme" was the communication in the field. Communication depended on the speed of a horse to pass this information from command to command (Haythornthwaite 13). Napoleon was what we would refer to today as a "micro-manager". He ruthlessly enforced his wishes and was mostly successful, as the Battle of Austerlitz shows. When he was forced to fight simultaneous battles on large fronts, he had to rely on his marshals and was

unable to control the events. Eventually, when confronted with multiple allied armies, the French would lose many battles.

When examining Napoleon's tactics during the Battle of Austerlitz, it is easy to realize that nothing Napoleon did was of his own making. His tactics and strategies were based on the ideas and strategies developed by others. When these ideas were employed together with the "Grande Armee", it was just about guaranteed certain success. His armies were comprised of experienced soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and most of all, very experienced line officers with outstanding abilities. These two factors in conjunction with the outdated strategies and tactics used by his opponents, were the blueprint Napoleon used throughout most of his campaigns. Unfortunately, after the French retreat from Russia, most of the experience was either wounded or had fallen in battle (Haythornthwaite 10). Allied strategies and tactics changed, and since Bonaparte was not a military genius as many thought, he could not adapt to the new and changing environment of war. His inability to adapt to change, led to the inevitable, the defeat and surrender of the French armies.

Napoleon's Army represented a new type of military, one reorganized throughout the French Revolution. This was an army created in revolution at the moment France became endangered by its neighboring states. The *Grande Armee* represented the

people's resistance to invaders, and the mobilization of a nation. The "citizens in arms" protected their motherland and impressed its character on the new French army. At Austerlitz, clumsy regiments who still maneuvered in rigid, linear formations developed in the 18th century opposed the French Army.

In comparison, the new French Army engaged the slower enemy through the use of more compact formations of columns up to sixteen rows deep. By attacking in columns, the French gained two things, freedom of maneuver, and speed (Chandler 136). The French army was capable of marching at twice the speed of its enemy. The *Grande Armee* used fast marches to reach the heart of the enemy's power and destroy it in a decisive battle.

Napoleon made maximum use of this new way of fighting and elevated it to perfection. Napoleon made the most of his artillery by multiplying its firepower through large concentration of guns. Napoleon did not add or introduce but a small number of tactical and technical innovations to his army (136).

During the battle at Austerlitz in 1805, while being attacked by the allied forces, Napoleon's Army needed to hold the initial onslaught. The *Grande Armee* survived until reinforcements from Marshal Davout's Third Corps arrived just in the nick of time. When Davout arrived, Napoleon used this moment

to launch a counter attack into the center of the allied lines. Napoleon concentrated his forces against the weakest point of the allied lines by using deception and surprise. Aided by the morning's foggy haze, his two divisions of Soult's corps attacked the allied lines in a maneuver come to be known as the "lions leap" (Haythornthwaite 116).

Napoleon then ordered his troops to attack the flanks of the allied armies, to envelop them. The heart of the allied army was now under fire from two sides, in front was Davout's corps, and at the rear the two divisions of Soult's corps. Finally, Marshal Bernadot whom Napoleon held in reserve also advanced. The battle ended with the French shattering an army commanded by the Russian and Austrian emperors in less than four hours (117).

Throughout the battle, Napoleon used tactics of Fredrick the Great, Chevalier du Teil, and Gribeauval. The column formation, which the French employed, was Guibert's brainchild, and maximized the infantry's firepower, allowing it mobility and speed. The allies in contrast, still used the traditional line formations making it difficult to maneuver and change formations at a moment's notice.

During this battle Napoleon also used Fredrick the Great's tactic of compelling the enemy to fight, by means of force march. Napoleon attacked his center, enveloped the enemy, and finally placed his troops in the enemy's rear to cut the

opponent's communications (Chandler 141). Additionally, Napoleon used Gribeauval's redesigned light artillery, "horse artillery" to his advantage by quickly moving and massing firepower on a decisive point in time.

Lastly, it was the experience and professionalism of the French Army, which contributed to the outcome of the battle. The allied forces were composed mostly of mercenaries, whereas the French Army consisted mostly of French citizens and professional soldiers wanting to defend France, who had a personal interest in the outcome of the battle.

During the Battle of Austerlitz, Napoleon was not only the General of the armies, but also the ruler of France. Napoleon's success during this Battle was founded largely on force and a selfish unwillingness to accept the views of others (136). He had a tremendous advantage of unity of command, which ensured his decisions were carried out. His opponent generals did not have this luxury. They had to confer many times over with their heads of state, making their military decision making process a very slow, deliberate, and often times, very painful experience.

As we examine the majority of information available regarding the Battle of Austerlitz, Napoleon quickly emerges as the strategic genius responsible for victory. His accepted status in history as a military and strategic genius is the impetus for this paper. A genius is generally defined as one

possessing natural ability, and a strong inclination for mental capacity and inventiveness. As we have discussed earlier in this paper, Napoleon was responsible for very few strategic and tactical innovations.

History has frequently attributed the seemingly sudden transformation of the French Army from a beaten, demoralized army to the genius leadership and strategies of Napoleon. Deep analysis of the Revolutionary period, which began shortly after the Seven Years' War, and ending in 1794, unfolds a different story. This was a slow period of tremendous growth and development for the French Army, setting the stage for Napoleon's success in the years to follow.

Social changes brought about by the French Revolution created an environment advantageous for the French Army. Pre-revolutionary France relied on only volunteers to fill the Royal Army (Gibson 2). In 1792, as an attempt to save the nation, France adopted a system of conscription known as the famous *levee en masse* (Watson 362). "Conscription made all French men and women liable for requisition for the duration of hostilities" (Gibson 2). This conscription was very effective in raising the number of soldiers serving in 1792 from roughly 150,000 to 1,108,000 by the end of 1794 (2). Even more dramatic than the total number of soldiers, was the change in attitude of the new recruits. These new patriots now pouring into the French

Army had a personal stake in the Republic's survival and were willing to participate in the defense of France (2). The Phrase "nation in arms" accurately characterized the new phenomenon born during these years from the forces of nationalism and patriotism that the revolution raised to heights of unparalleled intensity up to this point (Watson 352).

Environmental changes from a monarchy to a democracy also played a key role in the nationalization and development of the French Army. New practices of warfare and creative thinking were somehow now more congruous with the attitudes, feelings and values of the great masses of people now contributing to the army and the nation. The rise of democracy created a political fusion of government and people unknown to France prior to the Revolution. "People now felt that they participated in the state, government, and therefore should fight for it loyally and with passion (Palmer 73)." This new era of patriotism produced significant momentum for the Army. "The wars of kings were over; the wars of peoples had begun" (73).

Forward thinking leaders challenged prevailing military doctrine. As part of the re-organization after overthrowing the Monarchy, a special committee of the new government created The War Committee in 1792. The establishment of the War Committee paved the way for pre-revolutionary military theorists who had pushed for drastic modifications in the traditional methods of

fighting wars for years. Strategists such as Saxe, Bourcet, and Guibert were now accepted for their forward-thinking methods and ideas (Watson 351). Finally, progressive military theorists could influence the methods of warfare. "The full potentiality of this new system was revealed by the career of Napoleon, but its possibilities were clearly indicated by its successful application in the early years of the revolutionary wars" (351).

The experience gained during the revolution honed the French Army and their new fighting strategies. The newly formed armies of the revolution under the leadership of Lazare Carnot's "War Section" replaced the aristocratic officer corps. As mentioned earlier, this was fundamental to the reform of the new Grande Armee. These new officers now recruited from within the ranks eliminated the professional and tactical weakness of the old politically unreliable pre-revolutionary officer class (Watson 358). The course of France's revolution had developed the prototype of a modern army (Scott 31). The cadre, commissioned and non-commissioned officers were now professional soldiers committed to their careers and the political system of government they represented (31). This new generation of leaders applied the new principles of mobile warfare fully and systematically during the Austrian Succession and the Seven-Years' War (Watson 351). "The full potential of this new system was revealed by the career of Napoleon, but its possibilities

were clearly indicated by its successful application in the early years of the revolutionary wars" (351).

The Battle of Austerlitz clearly demonstrates the culmination of many forces coming together in victory. This battle is often referred to as the "Zenith of French practices" (Nosworthy 124). Although many scholars and historians attribute this victory to the genius battle plans of Napoleon, our research indicates a much more complex answer. We believe that victory actually resulted from intense development and refinement of the French Army during the revolutionary years. Attributing victory to the genius battle plans of Napoleon is a tragic over simplification of reality. Robert Watson, one of our outstanding scholars in the field of French Revolutionary history said this about Napoleon's Army:

The result of the Convention's efforts was that, in the campaigns of 1794, the Republican armies began their career of conquest, which was to continue under the Directory and later under Bonaparte. Thus the army of Napoleon was essentially the creation of the Convention. The changes carried out under the Convention, made possible by the outburst of Revolutionary patriotism, coincided with important changes in military strategy which had been foreshadowed earlier, but which were not fully realized until the time of the Revolution. These developments

brought about a radical change in the nature of warfare (362).

When considering the Army Napoleon led following the French Revolution, we believe the superiority of the French Army to those it opposed was significant. Napoleon was a brilliantly gifted leader who took the doctrine created by others and applied it masterfully on the battlefield. Author David Gibson said this about Napoleon "...Napoleon was the right man at the right time" (1). Based on the research presented here, we believe that attributing the victory at Austerlitz to the genius battle plans of Napoleon is an over simplification. Victory was the culmination of much more than just one man's genius strategic abilities.

### **Counterpoint**

Many Authors believe that Napoleon's sheer mastery of his profession was a result of his early training, his work ethic, and his ability to inspire troops. Almost all of his notions on war fighting were developed during his early years. As a young subaltern, he studied tactics incessantly, reading every book he could get his hands on, and packaged all of this experience into a product, which facilitated his rise to power. Napoleon assumed his first major command at the young age of twenty-six (Chandler 29).

Napoleon's strategic and tactical genius was the vehicle

for his *Grande Armee's* greatest victory at Austerlitz. As Connelly recognized "Napoleon was a military genius, which, by his own definition, required more than superior intelligence" (1). Other personality traits often used to describe Napoleon were boundless energy, quick, decisive thinking, a very charismatic leadership style, and tenacity. Connelly further observed that "Napoleon was a battlefield genius, not a theorist, purveyor of new doctrine or organization, or sponsor of new ordnance. His forte was execution: fighting to perfection with the men and weapons available" (2). At Austerlitz, the opposing army's numerical advantage was discounted by Napoleon and subsequently "the Allies were completely outclassed in respect to generalship, command, control, tactical flexibility, and intelligence" (Epstein 27). Epstein further observed that "Austerlitz was the triumph of a modern Army over an obsolete one: the contrast was clear" (28).

While Napoleon was not by any definition a military scholar, he possessed "... a great ability to see the complete picture of war, to analyze all its components, understand what was essential and what was not, and combine these factors into an integrated war plan and operational campaign plans" (Epstein 17). Often today we appear to draw a distinction between tactics and grand tactics, (i.e. strategy). The term tactics being

applied to the small unit level, whereas the concept of strategy is reserved for the higher levels of political decision-making. "The distinction between tactics and grand tactics did not exist as a self-conscious boundary ... during the Napoleonic period. In order for grand tactical plans to be practical, ... they had to be achieved using the lower level tactical elements that were available" (Nosworthy 26). Napoleon always allowed subordinate commanders to control the elements of combat power on the battlefield. Those elements were maneuver, firepower, intelligence, security, and competent leadership.

Napoleon possessed an uncanny intuitive understanding of the five elements of combat power and their application to the battle formations and tactics of the day. "He did careful planning, paying particular attention to movement and maximizing his numbers. He had an uncanny instinct for the right moves, both strategic and tactical, and his mind when into high gear when the action began" (Connelly 1). Almost always he would attack where he had local superiority.

Napoleon was considered by many to excel at the art of deception, he would maneuver to confuse and then strike where least expected. One of his most innovative tactics was to attack along a broad front to fix the enemy, then send a Corps in a flanking movement to attack the enemy rear and destroy his lines of communications. He would then determine the weak spot on the

front and attack with massed artillery or cavalry. "He often held reserves back until the enemy was worn out; and at Austerlitz he deliberately used this strategy" (Preston and Wise 190).

While Napoleon is perhaps best known for his employment of massed artillery, his extensive use of cavalry for reconnaissance paid huge dividends. "His usual practice on campaign was to sleep until 1 A.M., by which time his cavalry had brought in full reports of the enemy's movements. The information obtained was plotted on the largest map available and Napoleons plans were made" (Preston and Wise 190).

Napoleon clearly out fought his more conservative adversaries at Austerlitz with an innovative application of his refined tactics and techniques. The maturation of the Corps concept, (i.e. a multidivisional unit) allowed for greater command and control of the large armies developing at the time. "The commander-in-chief was freed from distracting minutiae. The specific details of how his orders were to be implemented were left largely to corps and division commanders, allowing the commander-in-chief to focus on the development of the grand tactical plans and the overall coordination of these various forces" (Nosworthy 98). At Austerlitz the Allied Army had no effective staff organization above the regimental level, "...therefore there was no effective way to control and coordinate

the efforts of these large elements" (Epstein 28). Moreover, there had been no effective integration of units to fight as combined arms teams as the French had perfected.

Research demonstrates that while Napoleon had an intuitive feel for tactics and strategy, his "charismatic, magnetic, inspirational quality ... was the taproot of his greatness as a military commander" (Weigley 305). His tactical abilities are often compared with that of Ulysses S. Grant, and motivational abilities with that of Robert E. Lee.

As Weigley observed " ... his campaigns exemplified such principles as the value of concentrating strength at decisive points and of exploiting the interior lines ... but the core of his triumphs were always his intuitive reliance on momentary inspiration and the charismatic magnetism he exerted upon the men who followed him" (308).

Napoleon combined his innate personal magnetism and charm, not to mention "... the fascination of his large gray eyes..." (Chandler xxxiv), to become one of the greatest Commanders of all time.

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