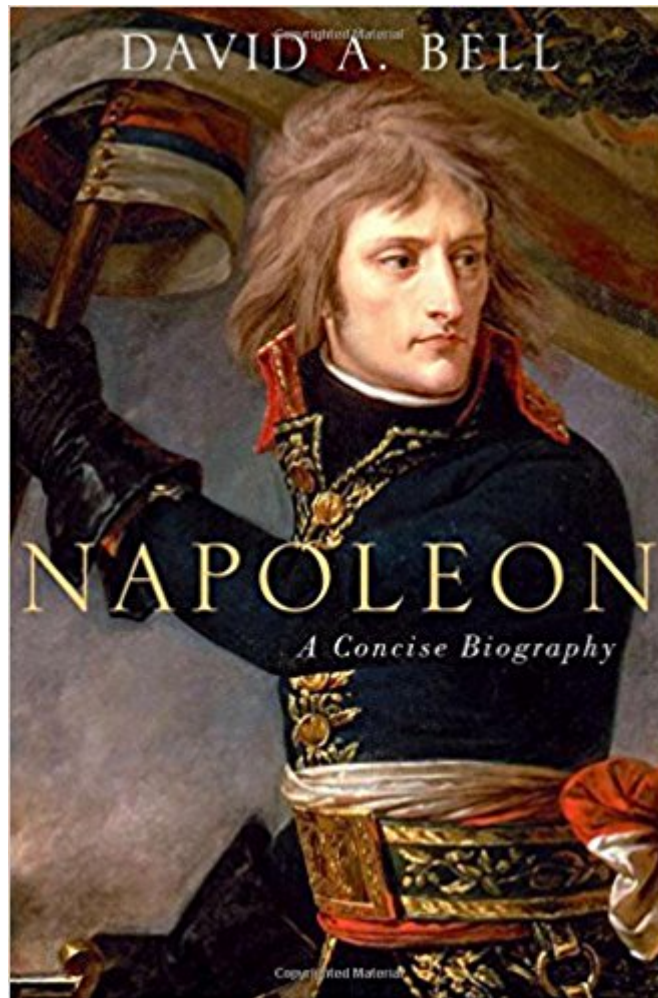




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# Napoleon: A Concise Biography



## Synopsis

This book provides a concise, accurate, and lively portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte's character and career, situating him firmly in historical context. David Bell emphasizes the astonishing sense of human possibility--for both good and ill--that Napoleon represented. By his late twenties, Napoleon was already one of the greatest generals in European history. At thirty, he had become absolute master of Europe's most powerful country. In his early forties, he ruled a European empire more powerful than any since Rome, fighting wars that changed the shape of the continent and brought death to millions. Then everything collapsed, leading him to spend his last years in miserable exile in the South Atlantic. Bell emphasizes the importance of the French Revolution in understanding Napoleon's career. The revolution made possible the unprecedented concentration of political authority that Napoleon accrued, and his success in mobilizing human and material resources. Without the political changes brought about by the revolution, Napoleon could not have fought his wars. Without the wars, he could not have seized and held onto power. Though his virtual dictatorship betrayed the ideals of liberty and equality, his life and career were revolutionary.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It is entertaining to read and discusses the important events and developments surrounding Napoleons reign. \* Michael J. Hughes, European History Quarterly \* A very concise, but very illuminating history of one of the world's greatest generals. \* Steve Craggs, Northern Echo \*

David A. Bell is the Sidney and Ruth Lapidus Professor in the Department of History at Princeton.

Born in New York and educated at Harvard, Princeton and the École Normale Supérieure, he previously taught at Yale and Johns Hopkins, where he also served as Dean of Faculty in the School of Arts and Sciences. He is the author of three prize-winning books, most recently *The First Total War* (2007).

Strangely, less is more in this extraordinary biography of Napoleon. David Bell takes only little more than 100 pages to tell the remarkable story of the last great emperor of Europe. It takes full control of the facts about the rise and fall of Napoleon, facts that draw on his military genius, the chaotic state of European politics in the early-19th century, and a supine French government more than willing to crown a little known boy from Corsica as its "Emperor". Along the way, Napoleon virtually redrew the map of Paris, changed the structure of its government, fused rural and suburban France into a functioning European power, and came close to ruling all of Europe. As Professor Bell says in the opening lines of his book, bookshelves are groaning under the weight of biographies of Napoleon. His contribution is to describe only the most pivotal moments of Napoleon's life, relate them to the context of European history at the time, and move his story rapidly to its sad conclusion "sad for Napoleon, who stood at the top of Europe's power structure and ended all but forgotten on a remote island in the middle of the South Atlantic ocean. This is a familiar story but Professor Bell makes it understandable by fitting it effortlessly into the broader history of Europe in the early 19th century. One cannot come away from this short book in awe of what a talented individual Napoleon was. He was a superb and inspiring leader, a genius at picking his battles and then executing them almost without any major errors, a great leader of a complicated nation recovering from a bloody revolution that ended in the decapitation of a king and queen. All this is packed into just over 100 pages. It is a great little work of history.

It is exactly as it claims to be: a concise biography of Napoleon. And a very good one it is. It is an engaging read for both a first time reader and a Napoleonic "veteran". Not just a list of battles, it ties together both battles and international politics with his family and dynastic ambitions. The life-career of The Emperor is given plausible connections. Bravo!

Nice and concise.

I needed a quick tour of Napoleon's life and times, and this was an adequate if superficial journey.

A quick read that gives insight to one of the most influential man of history. Napoleon Bonaparte's lust for power affected all of Europe, and thus the world. David A. Bell tells of his rise and fall, using evocative language and description that would not be out of place in a novel. At the end, he places Napoleon in historical context, too, discussing how history views the man and emperor. Thus, despite its concise nature, the biography manages to put Napoleon in context, both in his time and ours. I received a copy from the publisher via Netgalley. They got an honest review and I got a great book.

David Bell has written a great and concise biography of Napoleon. There are no wasted words in this 113 page book that includes a detailed introduction and ending epilogue. With only 5 chapters to the book, Bell provides the reader with, among other things, with the birth of Napoleon in Corsica; France before and after the French revolution; Napoleon's military accomplishments and battles (some won and some lost) in Europe and the Middle East; Napoleon's ruling of France and the creation of the Napoleonic Code; and Napoleon's downfall before and after the Battle of Waterloo. Bell's work is fair and objective; and he has conveyed to the reader both the "good with the bad" of the rise and fall of Napoleon. The concise biography is splendid reading and can be read in a matters of a few hours. Bell also provides a section of "further reading" and "index" for easy reference. Highly recommend this book on the life of Napoleon. Nice resource book as well of the many works written on all facets of the life and accomplishments on Napoleon.

Bell distills one of the most remarkable figures in recent centuries into just over a hundred pages, and makes it not only very readable, but provides context about how Corsica became French, about the Revolution and about Napoleon on St. Helena and Napoleon as a figure still looming in history. There is also a short but useful annotated "further reading" section at the end. There are even a few illustrations. This would be a good place to start reading about Napoleon and his era or for a review of his life and times. There isn't anything new here, but an admirable summary. Bell does say that Napoleon was taller than the famed 5 foot 2 inches (people used to metric may find this amusing), rather, more like 5' 4" or 5' 5", close to the average height at the time. Apparently there are inconsistencies and issues in older French and English measures and interpretations.

The title says it all - this is the ultimate concise biography of Napoleon. When countless in-depth biographies have already been written about a quite extraordinary, larger than life historical figure,

the choice of where to start reading is daunting. I would recommend this for people interested in Napoleon, and who wish to learn about all aspects of his life rather than concentrating on one area. This is an excellent overview of Napoleon, and would be interesting for everyone high school aged and above. \*\*eARC netgalley\*\*

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