

CHAPTER
23

PRIMARY SOURCE

Napoleon's Proclamation at Austerlitz

Section 3

Napoleon Bonaparte, emperor of France, conducted a brilliant military campaign to expand the French empire. After French troops crushed a Third Coalition army of Austrians and Russians in the Battle of Austerlitz, Napoleon issued this victory proclamation on December 3, 1805. How do you think a French soldier might have responded to this proclamation?

Soldiers, I am satisfied with you. In the battle of Austerlitz you have justified what I expected from your intrepidity [unflinching courage]. You have covered yourselves with eternal glory. An army of one hundred thousand men which was commanded by the emperors of Russia and Austria has been in less than four hours either cut off or dispersed. Those that escaped your swords have thrown themselves into the lakes. Forty stands of colors, the stands of the Russian imperial guard, one hundred and twenty pieces of cannon, twenty generals, and above thirty thousand prisoners are the fruits of this ever-memorable battle. Their infantry, so celebrated and so superior to you in numbers, has proved unable to resist your charge, and henceforth you have no rivals to fear.

Thus in less than two months the third coalition is conquered and dissolved. Peace cannot be far off; but, as I promised my people before crossing the Rhine, I will conclude it only upon terms consistent with my pledge, which shall secure not only the indemnification [compensation for loss], but the reward, of my allies.

Soldiers, when the French people placed the imperial crown upon my head I trusted to you to enable me to maintain it in that splendor of glory which could alone give it value in my estimation. But at that moment our enemies entertained the

design of tarnishing and degrading it; and the iron crown, which was gained by the blood of so many Frenchmen, they would have compelled me to place on the head of my bitterest foe—an extravagant and foolish proposal, which you have brought to naught on the anniversary of your emperor's coronation. You have taught them that it is easier for them to defy and to threaten than to subdue us.

Soldiers, when everything necessary to the security, the happiness, and the prosperity of our country has been achieved, I will return you my thanks in France. Then will you be the objects of my tenderest care. My people will receive you with rapture and joy. To say to me, "I was in the battle of Austerlitz," will be enough to authorize the reply, "That is a brave man."

from Milton Viorst, The Great Documents of Western Civilization (New York: Bantam, 1965), 201–202.

Discussion Questions

1. **Clarifying** According to this proclamation, what happened to the Third Coalition army in the Battle of Austerlitz?
2. **Summarizing** What did French troops achieve as a result of this battle?
3. **Making Inferences** How would you characterize Napoleon's attitude toward the French soldiers?