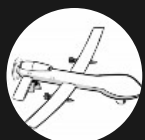


If You Think Your Winter Is Bad, Napoleon Had It WAY Worse

You'll never feel the chill like the French did in Russia



War Is Boring

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Tired of this year's winter from Hell? Sick of blizzards, bitter cold and a polar vortex sucking the warmth from your bones?

Don't feel too bad. Napoleon Bonaparte had it worse. Winter may have left you shoveling knee-deep snow or shivering in the darkness after the electricity went out. But at least you didn't lose *your* empire like Napoleon did in the deadly Russian winter.

1812 was a good year to be the emperor of France. Napoleon's empire was at its zenith, stretching from Poland in the north to Spain in the south. His mighty armies had defeated almost every other power in Europe. But uneasy lies a restless emperor's crown.

Great Britain continued to defy him. At the other end of Europe lay the enigmatic colossus of Russia, which refused to honor Napoleon's demand that it cease trade with Britain and also disputed France's support of Poland.

So Napoleon formed the Grande Armee, an 700,000-strong force of French, Poles, Germans, Italians, Austrians and others. They invaded Russia on June 24, 1812. By September, Napoleon had captured Moscow.

But then Napoleon discovered two painful truths. The first was that feeding 700,000 men and their horses is not easy deep in the middle of Russia, especially when the Russians destroyed their own crops to deny food to the invaders.

For weeks, Napoleon dithered at Moscow in hopes that Tsar Alexander would make peace. But the tsar continued to fight, the French army was starving at Moscow as winter approached. Napoleon decided that it was time to retreat back to warmer climes.

It was then that Napoleon discovered the *second* truth. Winter in Russia is really, really cold. So cold during that winter of 1812 that even ravens froze to death and fell from the sky.

Through icy blizzards, the *Grande Armee* retreated, its soldiers resembling scarecrows as they staggered through deep snow. Wounded men were left behind to perish from frost or experience the tender mercies of the warmly clad Cossack cavalry that hovered around the French army, waiting to pick off stragglers.

There were reports that French troops resorted to cannibalism.

“We drifted along in this empire of death like accursed phantoms,” one of Napoleon’s aides wrote. “Only the monotonous beat of our steps, the crunch of the snow and the feeble groans of the dying broke the vast mournful stillness.”

“Among us was heard neither raging nor cursing, nothing that would imply a trace of warmth,” the aide continued. “We had hardly enough strength left to pray. Most of the men fell without a word of complaint, silent either from weakness or resignation; or perhaps because men only complain when they have hopes of moving someone to pity.”

By January 1813, the *Grande Armee* recrossed into Poland. Of 700,000 men who had entered Russia, fewer than 100,000 returned. But the humans were lucky. Of 177,000 horses that trotted into Russia, almost none came home.

