



Chapter 14

Napoleon and his Options

Spring 1815

I

WHATEVER NAPOLEON'S HOPES on landing at Golfe Juan, by the time he reached the Tuileries he knew that support was dangerously fickle. While the army was deliriously happy, the people were tired of the fleeing Bourbons and unenthusiastic about the change: '*ils m'ont laissé arriver comme ils les ont laissés partir*'.

The garrison of Antibes' rejection of his call on 1 March was the first shock. His subsequent decision to widen his appeal resulted in the old Revolutionary and Jacobin elements coming onto the streets calling for renewed attacks on the aristocracy, the rich and the priesthood. Napoleon hated *la canaille* and was disgusted at the excesses he saw in Lyons on his journey, yet he was for the moment reincarnated as the child of the Revolution. But the ministers whom he gathered round him on the night of 20 March were no longer idealists, let alone revolutionaries. They were functionaries and administrators who had done well out of the First Empire, with estates and fortunes to protect, and who feared for the future. Even the two most redoubtable had changed with time: the great Revolutionary hero, Carnot, who was persuaded to take the Interior portfolio as a patriotic duty, was now a Liberal at heart; the old regicide Fouché, again Police Minister, had no faith in Napoleon's star and kept in close touch variously with the Allies, with the Duc d'Orléans, and with Louis XVIII's court.

Napoleon had promptly ordered messages of peace to be sent to the European sovereigns in a diplomatic offensive. Austria might be prepared to support a dynasty the heir to which was half Austrian; the Tsar might swing back to friendship, since he had already got everything he wanted from the Vienna congress and he heartily despised and disliked the Bourbons; Prussia would probably do little without Russian backing; the British might accept a *fait accompli*, especially as Napoleon pandered to their obsession



by a decree summarily abolishing the French slave trade (a trade abolished in 1794, re-introduced by him in 1802, and defended by the Bourbons in 1814, who had haggled obstructively against British arguments). To shake the alliance he circulated the hitherto secret text of the defunct treaty of 3 January.

None of Napoleon's *démarches* succeeded. The assurance that he sought peace was not believed. The Tsar was determined to remove him come what may, even though he was not convinced that the Bourbons should be restored. Napoleon's request to the Austrian emperor for the return of his wife and child was ignored. The letter addressed to the Prince Regent was returned unopened. The Prussian king's proclamation showed that nothing was to be hoped for there. On 14 April Caulaincourt publicly announced the failure of the diplomatic offensive by quoting the various replies, but even before that the realities of the situation had been made plain to Frenchmen.

In the last week of March the frontier guards of the Allied powers were stopping travellers at the border and were involved in incidents with French customs officers and border patrols, and from 30 March French diplomatic couriers carrying the Emperor's and Caulaincourt's messages were refused passage. The French Ministry of Marine on 22 March had ordered ships to continue to fly the Bourbon colours, but this attempt to protect French overseas commerce was unsuccessful: by mid-April fifty merchant ships and fishing vessels had been stopped by the Royal Navy in the Channel and the Atlantic and sent to British ports, to await later release.¹

II

The internal situation required urgent attention. The Restoration of 1814 had effected considerable changes in the administrative personnel throughout the country. The prefects, key officials in the Napoleonic Empire, had largely been replaced, so that if Napoleon was to grip the country he needed to remove most of the eighty-seven Bourbon appointees. But by mid-April twenty-two still held office, while the replacements chosen by Carnot were sometimes incapable or without sufficient experience, so that personnel changes (and their consequent disruptions) continued right up to the end of the Hundred Days. But the problem went deeper, down to the thousands of communes. In Houssaye's words, 'The prefects were bad. The *maires* were worse.' Many were of the rural gentry and had a sentiment of loyalty to the Bourbon family and believed the promises of 1814: their lack of enthusiasm and ill-disposition were remarked on by Davout on 20 April, but Napoleon kept changing his mind on what to do about this, issuing a decree to change

the mayoral system but then cancelling it a few days later. The clergy were thought generally hostile to the Empire.²

Paris seemed to accept the change of regime quite easily, but the fears of renewed war soon began to affect commerce and many industries. Napoleon instantly recommenced an enormous programme of prestigious public works that gave employment to the labouring classes in the capital, and his immediate stimulus to trades such as the manufacture of muskets, munitions and uniforms further assisted in this. But the true barometer of public confidence was always the performance of the Funds (*la Rente*), and the message was clear.

At the end of August 1814 the French Funds had stood at 79 francs, dipped in the autumn to 72–74, were at 78 in February 1815, and at 78.75 on 4 March (just before the news broke about the Return). On the day of the King's departure they were at only 68.25, but the next day, at Napoleon's approach, they surged well over 7 per cent to 73.50, then drifted slowly towards 68–67 between then and 12 April. On that day came the proclamation that the army was henceforth on a war footing. Two days later Foreign Minister Caulaincourt published the results of his unsuccessful attempts to persuade the powers to accept Napoleon's peace offers. At that the Funds fell to 58. They never recovered under the Empire, continuing to slide gently through April and May until, on 10 June 1815, they reached 54, a loss of over one quarter of their value since 20 March. (Once the news came of the disaster of Waterloo they went only a fraction lower, to 53 – itself a sign of how gloomily the prospects had been judged beforehand. They reached 64 on 29 June, an improvement of nearly 21 per cent in less than a week, when the Provisional Government under Fouché published the news that Napoleon had left Malmaison that morning for the coast, and exile.)³

III

On the march north Napoleon had promised a new constitution. The difficulty was that such a reform, if truly conceived, required consultation; it would entail the collection of opinion, grievances, ideas; a draft for examination and debate; and eventually a vote. It would take several months for such a process, and there was simply no time for such niceties. Moreover the outcome of such a process might not entirely suit the ruler. Hence Napoleon decided that the old Imperial Constitution that was the summation of the plebiscites of 1802 and 1804, plus the various *sénatus-consultes* rulings on specific matters, should be supported by an Acte Additionnel. The final article (No. 67) was to incite considerable discontent among former royalists who had 'rallied'

to Bonapartism, for it declared that no one should have the right to propose the restoration of the Bourbons *even if* the Napoleonic line became extinct. The Emperor circulated his text among his inner circle of constitutional commissioners, but found that instead of giving a smooth approval they raised queries and reservations. To regain lost time he foreclosed the process. He issued the Acte on 22 April, just a month after regaining power, with the country having the right to vote on it during the following weeks.

This pleased nobody. Everyone decried it. At best it was received with indifference. It was not what had been promised at Lyons, and so the demand for a National Assembly was maintained. The Emperor was forced to give way. He ordered elections, but the result was that out of 629 seats in the lower *Chambre* only about 80 were won by Bonapartists, between 30 and 40 went to Jacobins, and some 500 were gained by Liberals. The leading opposition senator of recent years, Lanjuinais, was elected the *Chambre's* president with 277 votes, while his nearest rival, Lafayette (a famous Revolutionary personality), won only 75. All this threatened deadlock for the future. Only in the newly created *Chambre des Pairs* (Peers) could Napoleon be reasonably sure of support. It had 117 seats, but 53 were given to loyal marshals, generals and admirals, with high functionaries and ministers making up most of the rest. As for the Acte Additionnel, the votes cast by the nation between the end of April and early June showed disillusion. It was accepted by a popular vote of only 1.5 million, under half the turn-out of previous plebiscites.⁴ Fouché saw at once how much this weakened Napoleon's hold on the country. He told an ex-minister now languishing unemployed, that sooner or later Napoleon would fail militarily and then power would pass to him, and he might even save France from the worst consequences of the adventure. It was a portent.⁵ And the curious fact was that Napoleon detested and distrusted Fouché, saying more than once that as soon as he had secured victory he would hang his Police Minister, yet meanwhile he left this dangerously able schemer in post.

Distracted by the domestic problems in France, Napoleon could not give sufficient time to military matters. He himself was working 15–16 hours per day, but the centralising passion that ruled him, his consuming interest in detail, and his habit of instantly dictating decisions on a dozen matters all one after the other, created friction. This had been apparent even in previous years, as an instance from January 1814 may show. Certain reinforcements had been intended for the much battered *4e Corps*, part of Morand's force defending Mainz, but then the Emperor decided otherwise. Consequently Berthier, 'according to your [Napoleon's] orders', issued instructions for the reinforcements no longer to march to Mainz but to join instead Marmont's

6e Corps, which was retreating on Metz. By chance Berthier discovered that the War Minister, Feltre, 'by Your Majesty's particular orders', had been instructed to send the reinforcements not to Marmont's *6e Corps*, but to Mortier and the *Garde* at Paris and Metz.⁶

Age and years of unbridled authority had worsened matters. Napoleon had bullied and berated his subordinates for making decisions, for not making them, for following what he had ordered but had then counter-ordered. His circle of reliable men was shrinking and his judgement of men was becoming less insightful and more questionable. This may be seen in the instances of the marshals he employed in 1815, and the way in which he too often misused his War Minister Davout, a subject at which we shall look more closely in Chapter 19. Even Davout's strength of character was not always enough to carry his arguments to success, and so what could lesser men and feebler ministers achieve against the instant judgements and fierce impatience of their over-worked master?

Nonetheless, in spite of some misjudgements and reversals of decisions, what Napoleon actually accomplished was remarkable. On 20 March he found at most 210,000 soldiers under arms. He recalled men on leave and old deserters, and by early June this had brought in 76,000 men. To raise a further 200,000 men he needed to call out the classes of 1806–14 and 1815, but such a move would be deeply unpopular. So although it was decided by 28 March to place the Army on a war footing, fear of unsettling the rural peasantry delayed the decree's signature by a fortnight; and by that time royalist revolt was a fact in the south and was expected in the Vendée. Mustering the classes began as late as 25 April.

The new temper in France was shown by the Council of State's refusal to approve conscription (23 May 1815), declaring that it was a matter for the legislative *Chambre*, whenever it should meet. This setback was by-passed through a procedural subtlety – the 120,000 class of 1815 would be considered as troops on leave and thus liable to recall at some future time. Early in June they were recalled, and by the 11th (four days before Napoleon attacked the Prussians) over 46,000 had come in. The National Guard stood officially at 200,000 men but Carnot believed he could increase it to 2.5 million men, and by new decrees all citizens had to register. It was organised in two '*ban*', divided at the age 40, and into 'mobile' and 'stationary' (*sédentaire*) units. At 15 June 234,700 men had been thus summoned and 150,000 were enrolled. Sailors, pensioners, foreign battalions and volunteers increased the auxiliary force.

I shall have more to say on this when the campaign is about to open.

IV

What the Emperor himself made of the situation and possibilities is not quite certain. The 'Hundred Days' volume of the *Correspondance de Napoléon* (Volume xxviii, of 1869) is packed with daily detail but contains very few general statements or reflections;⁷ for those we have to turn to the memoirs written on St Helena (in Volume xxxi). However, the memoirs have two defects: first, the Emperor could not refer to his papers and had to rely upon his own and his entourage's recollections; and secondly, he was (understandably) at pains to demonstrate that the decisions he had taken in 1815 offered a reasonable prospect of success and that he had not desperately and recklessly gambled away the best interests of France and the French people.

This second consideration was essential for a future Bonapartist revival or for the posthumous myth. The gamble of 1815 had led to the disaster of 1815. It had entailed the loss of territories previously saved in 1814 (and the loss of some even acquired at that time), the forced relinquishment of artistic treasures taken from defeated European states during the previous twenty years, the imposition of massive financial penalties, and it had risked – if certain powers had only had their way – a major dismemberment of the country. All that was hard fact. It was vital that Bonaparte and Bonapartism should not be blamed for any of this.

Hence the memoirs are silent over certain material considerations. For instance, Chapter 3 of the memoirs, *The Campaign of 1815*, tends in places (but not always) to reduce Allied manpower figures and to improve those for the French armies, so that the adverse imbalance shrinks and the odds appear less daunting; and little is said about munitions and equipment production, and nothing on financial constraints. The later researches of Houssaye and Couderc de Saint-Chamant provide a useful corrective in this respect. However, it is still possible to extract from the memoirs the elements conditioning Napoleon's options. The following summary follows Napoleon's own text quite closely,⁸ but with some additions drawn from later historians.

First there was the internal state of France. Clausel at Bordeaux and Grouchy on the Rhône had crushed royalist military operations in the south-west and south in April, but some discontent continued to simmer there and consequently the administration in such places used a heavy hand: some of Napoleon's generals like Decaen governed in the south with considerable brutality. The Vendée had been in open rebellion since mid-May and, unless checked, this contagion might spread. Hence no fewer than 13,000 regular troops were diverted to crush it. In the north there was considerable anti-

Bonapartist feeling. It was in the east of the country, the part of France that had suffered invasion in 1814 (Ardennes, Lorraine, Alsace, Burgundy), that Bonapartism was strongest.⁹

Conscription had been abolished by Louis XVIII in 1814, perhaps his one really popular act, and the country wanted peace, even if veteran soldiers did not. Moreover Napoleon had publicly undertaken to act within a new constitution that limited his sole authority. The Emperor was hampered by the new organs of state (Council of State and anti-Bonapartist legislative *Chambre*) and consequently could only rebuild his army by a series of selective and carefully phased acts. If he launched an aggressive war and did not secure immediate success, political opposition could mount and might wreck him. If he waited for the Allies to invade France the provinces might rally to the call '*La Patrie en danger*' and the war become a war of national resistance, but then again some provinces might declare against him when he could least spare troops to deal with them.

Secondly, there was the problem of trained manpower. It had been possible to re-establish Napoleon's regular forces fairly rapidly, so that a field army of some 200,000 seasoned men was currently under arms. This force was backed by auxiliary troops of variable quality but certainly capable of operating behind fixed defences if well armed. He claimed that the field army grouped round Paris would have grown to 240,000 men by August, backed by 116,000 auxiliary troops inside the fortifications, with a further 60,000 regulars around Lyons. Any invasion would, he believed, divert some 250,000 (from a total 650,000) Allied troops to besieging the frontier fortresses or garrisoning them once taken, thereby reducing the invaders' field force very materially. Thus the adverse numerical imbalance would fall to a ratio of only 1.5 to 1.

But in fact he had already gathered in nearly all the trained men, and the conscription measures now cautiously re-introduced would produce mainly raw recruits, requiring time to turn them into soldiers capable of facing Prussian, Russian, Austrian and British armies. His numbers of first-class troops had reached a plateau by early summer and probably would not rise significantly before late autumn.

A decisive victory was necessary, and in the very near future, since funds for the army's pay were running out. That was an administrative reason. There was also an undisclosed political one. With a decisive victory he could dispense with Council and *Chambre* and impose taxation by the old methods. On St Helena a few months later, General Gourgaud recorded Napoleon's admission that during the Hundred Days he had wasted valuable time on constitutional discussions, 'more especially as my intention was to send the gentlemen of the *Chambre* packing once I had beaten the enemy'.¹⁰

What would the Alliance do? The Allies had declared their sole objective was Napoleon's overthrow. His diplomatic efforts to divide them had been without result. Left to themselves they would certainly invade France, albeit after many delays. By contrast, if he attacked them in a key sector and defeated them, the several armies might split asunder and possibly their governments would lose heart. A peace might result, leaving him as ruler of France. (He could then revise the constitution as he pleased.)

Napoleon had thought hard about Allied readiness and quality. He judged that the Allies on the Rhine were still not assembled, but there were already some 240,000 mustered in Belgium. Could a French veteran army of 125,000 be certain of destroying 111,000 Anglo-Dutch and 130,000 Prusso-Saxon troops, or was the numerical imbalance too great? The answer he gave was that fighting quality evened the balance: 'one Englishman was worth one Frenchman, but one Frenchman was worth two Dutchmen, Prussians or German confederates'. This estimate probably affected his eventual choice of first target.

Moreover the Emperor knew many of the weaknesses of Allied military leadership, and suspected that there were others. In the north Britain and Prussia pulled in different directions politically (and geographically) and Napoleon knew Blücher was personally bold but no strategist. The one Allied leader he did not know at first hand was Wellington. Despite the fact that the Duke had beaten Junot, Victor, Ney, Masséna, Marmont, Jourdan and Soult, the Emperor still thought him an over-rated general who would be lukewarm, unhelpful and selfish in a coalition campaign. Would Wellington really help the Prussians? Turning to the Rhine front, the Allied leaders (Tsar Alexander, Frederick William, Metternich, Marshal Schwarzenberg) had a long and proven reputation for caution and indecision, of internal rivalries and differing objectives: when threatened they became discouraged and thought of retreat or armistice almost at once. This had certainly happened in 1814, but Napoleon now slanted his version of the outcome of that campaign, for he insisted in his memoirs that in 1814 he had repeatedly beaten a vastly superior enemy in a great defensive campaign, which was true – but not the whole truth. He then slanted it further by declaring that but for 'treason' among the marshals, he and France 'would have triumphed' in 1814. The facts were otherwise. Was this merely post-Waterloo propaganda, or did it show Napoleon falling prey to that weakness he had so signally condemned, 'painting pictures' and not facing facts?

Finally, there was the question of *time*. If Napoleon left the initiative to the Allies in 1815 he expected that they would await the arrival of the 150,000–200,000 Russians in the battle-line before moving. Thereafter they would

begin the general advance sometime in July. However slowly they marched, the two wings would close on one another by August. But Napoleon (despite his later claims) would be little better placed in August than in May, in terms of trained, equipped, experienced field troops. Indeed by August 1815 difficulties over pay might be a de-motivating factor to a fighting force becoming depressed by inaction.

V

Thus we may sum up the defensive option as follows: a waiting game and a defensive campaign in the late summer and autumn would attach to the Allies the odium of initiating war, and must strengthen his support inside France. Invasion of *la Patrie* could produce a surge of loyalty to Napoleon and hatred of the invaders – and some of the populace had memories of mistreatment in 1814. Delay would give time for further recruitment and training. It might allow additional munitions and equipment manufacture – if money was forthcoming. Each day's grace would enable the Emperor to strengthen his grip on the nation and crush any remaining resistance (as in the Vendée – where opposition in fact collapsed early in June). Moreover Napoleon's genius had shone more brilliantly in the 1814 campaign than for many years past, and a victory in such circumstances might shake and divide the Allied leaders and lead to a peace reasonably favourable to his regime.

Read carefully, this option was essentially a set of political judgements. The second or offensive option was based on military considerations, and it can be summed up as follows.

Upon reflection, the political arguments underlying the defensive option did not convince Napoleon. However great was the military imbalance against him in May 1815, he could not hope for large improvements on his side in the near term. By contrast the Allies would grow enormously in size during June and would be ready to advance from Belgium and from the Rhine by July. The imbalance would worsen.

Napoleon could not simultaneously fight a war on two fronts, given the forces at his disposal. He could dash at the enemy beyond the Rhine – a coalition of jealous and mistrustful Austrians, Germans and Russians – and tumble them; but in that case he must run the risk that the forces in Belgium meanwhile might strike south at Paris or at his own back. Alternatively Napoleon could attack Belgium and strike at first one army and then the other – armies which when united enjoyed a ratio of 2 to 1 superiority over him – hoping to destroy them individually and successively. In this case he



could reasonably assume that succour would not be forthcoming very quickly from the Rhine.

Napoleon had most of his own first-line force already in northern France and very few troops in Alsace, so that movements for a major and immediate strike could be more easily concealed in the north than in the east. In throwing his entire veteran northern army against only one of the two armies in Belgium Napoleon would be fighting at a numerical equality, and probably with a qualitative advantage, with all that meant for his chances. This improvement, however, was dependent upon the time it took for the second Allied army to come to the other's support and restore predominance. The margin of time was bound to be extremely short; every minute would count. In his mind the impulsive Blücher was more likely to rush to Wellington's assistance, than the 'cautious and selfish' Wellington was likely to hasten to Blücher's: hence the Prussians should be Napoleon's first objective.

There is a curious confirmation of this intention in a letter that an Englishman then resident in Paris wrote home on 29 May.¹¹ John Cam Hobhouse, a close friend of Byron, a radical, and an admirer of Napoleon, had hastened to Paris early in April and left there for Switzerland on 13 June, returning to Paris as soon as he heard of Waterloo. His letters were circulated by Byron, and were collected and published in London in 1816 as *The Substance of Some Letters from Paris*; they provide a insight into events between April and July, as observed by an inquisitive if partisan radical, and they contrast with the very different views of another English resident, Miss Helen Maria Williams, whose *Narrative of Events* is also well known. On 29 May Hobhouse wrote of visiting one of the Emperor's ADCs, whom he found mapping details of the Belgian frontier.

[Hobhouse] was asked by him whether a separation of the Prussian and English armies and a rapid march upon Brussels would not surprise our politicians in England. 'We can beat Blücher first, and then', added he, smiling, 'we shall try your Wellington. No one doubts the undaunted bravery of English soldiers, but the loss of 20,000 men would make the people of London look a little pale. You are rather sparing of your own blood, though I cannot say that you care about that of your friends.'¹²

It is strange that a French general should have been so careless in his talk, and it is as baffling that Hobhouse expressed no scepticism about the ADC's view, just as it is baffling that neither he nor his London friends passed this comment to anyone in authority either in London or Brussels. Perhaps it was deemed part of a double-bluff game. But it does show how dangerous it can be



for receivers of information to edit, or adjudicate on, or withhold the scraps that they pick up. That must be for the users of intelligence to decide.

There is also something displeasing, something slightly arrogant, in the way that such a high-ranking officer disclosed the war plan to a foreigner: that almost criminal disclosure (to a subject of an enemy state) of a first strike against the Prussians. And the hint that the British were in for more of a drubbing than their public would stand for, reminds one of the premature arrogance that, a century later, would speak of their contemptible little army. What overweening confidence it showed among the Emperor's inner circle. Did they under-estimate the cost? For even in securing the first victory Napoleon must suffer considerable casualties, together with wastage of munitions and equipment, before turning on the second, fresh (and 'undaunted') army.¹³ That was a military consideration. But there was a political factor to take into account also. While for Napoleon decisive victory in the north and the fall of Brussels might shatter the enemy's political will, a serious defeat would bring upon him all his domestic enemies in the government and the *Chambre*.

And then there were the two enemy commanders. Napoleon had beaten Blücher in the past, and he might do so again, but he knew that Blücher was not frightened by a beating: 'that old devil always attacked me with the same vigour. If he was beaten, he showed himself ready again for combat the next moment.'¹⁴ To put the Prussians out of the campaign an overwhelming victory, a total destruction of Blücher's army was necessary, with nothing left to chance. As to the other, it was Wellington's reputation that Napoleon had to aim for. The Duke's repeated successes had given him immense prestige in Britain and throughout Europe. Napoleon thought that reputation undeserved, and that he was a poor general.¹⁵ Destroying Wellington's reputation in battle might well break the British nation's nerve, and if that broke, then what would remain of the Alliance's nerve?

Nevertheless, whichever option Napoleon chose, the gamble would be colossal. The loss of one day's time was not disastrous in itself, but it added to the enemy's chances; losing a second, or third, might compromise the whole scheme of operations. But the size of the Allied contingents meant that Napoleon could not count on any margin of safety when it came to fighting, so that every combat had to succeed if the grand objective of taking Brussels was to be attained.

VI

Napoleon came back to a France where the war industries were no longer geared up, to a country disillusioned by defeat and disenchanted by the Restoration. In many ways it was doubtful and tired. The ministers whom Napoleon appointed had lost faith in his star; and so it was necessary to drive them all the harder. This he did. But while the extraordinary breadth and depth of his probings and the torrent of instructions and exhortations continued just as before, there was a difference. In part it was an alteration of mind, in part the price that his physique had to pay for the years of toil and travel, of long days, snatched sleep, and the grinding effect that endless campaigning had had on him. His doctors found that harsh winds, fog, rain and humidity were real dangers for him in bivouac. There had been a serious bladder attack in 1812, and it sounds as though it was not the first.

On the night before Borodino, on dismounting from his horse, Napoleon was in such pain that he leant his head on a cannon wheel, for he was suffering in his bladder and could scarcely pass water. His legs swelled, he was racked by a cough, his breathing was difficult and he completely lost his voice. His haemorrhoids also troubled him when this happened. Fever set in. All this lasted until the second day in the Kremlin. His water, when finally he could pass it again, was muddy and full of gravel. His personal surgeon wrote that potions had to be given to Napoleon, but meanwhile 'his intelligence was no longer the same'.¹⁶

On Elba Napoleon, who for several years had been first solid and then plump, grew markedly stouter. Yet Campbell, who watched him closely, thought he was always active and constantly going about. Since then he had endured Alpine tracks in winter and for several stretches of the track had been on foot, actually falling several times. During his journey he had picked up a persistent cough, and by the time he reached the Tuileries he may have run out of adrenalin and been in need of a little time to recuperate. But this he could not afford. He had to force the pace, forcing himself and forcing others; he might still shout and snub soldiers, but in handling politicians and publicists he had to contain himself and waste time with blandishments and soft words for hours and days at a time. It all took its toll.

Napoleon's changed attitude in 1815 was observed by the long-serving Mollien, who described it thus:

During the Hundred Days he was the first to say that destiny had changed for him and that he had lost an auxiliary that nothing could replace. As with his thought, instead of the vast horizon of power upon which he had freely glided, he found himself confined in a narrow space surrounded

with precipices, and in which new interests conflicted with his; his meditations became laboured and distressing, he withstood less well the strains [*contentions*] that were within him ... In 1815 after several hours of work a certain lassitude came over him that he had never known before; he had no other distraction, nor other means of relaxation, than individual discussions; he sought these, and what is so remarkable, for preference he called on those who, in serving him before, had been the least likely to be caught up by that witchery which his fertile mind [*imagination*] so often cast all round.¹⁷

Hobhouse, a stranger who was a close and sympathetic observer moving in the circles around the Emperor, noted how Napoleon looked and bore himself at a long review of the National Guard on 16 April 1815:

His face was of a deadly pale; his jaws overhung, but not so much as I had heard; his lips thin but partially curled so as to give his mouth an inexpressible sweetness. He had the habit of retracting the lips [occasioned by a custom of keeping a piece of liquorice or comfits in his mouth, as a remedy for a cough, which frequently tormented him] ... His hair was of a dark dusky brown, scattered thinly over his temples: the crown of the head was bald ... He was not fat in the upper part of his body, but projected considerably in the abdomen, so much so that his linen appeared beneath his waistcoat. He generally stood with his hands knit behind or folded before him, but sometimes unfolded them; played with his nose, took snuff three or four times, and looked at his watch. He seemed to have a labouring in his chest, sighing or swallowing his spittle. He very seldom spoke, but when he did, smiled in some sort agreeably. He looked about him, not knitting but joining his eyebrows as if to see more minutely, and went through the whole tedious ceremony with an air of sedate impatience.¹⁸

Again, in a letter dated 28 June, Hobhouse wrote that Napoleon 'owned to one of his aide-de-camps, an acquaintance of mine, who observed him several times fall asleep in his carriage when on the road to the army, that he was exhausted by continual application'.¹⁹

Certainly the man who, after several days of campaigning and enduring the nervous strain of a day such as 18 June 1815 could ride horseback overnight the 30 miles from Genappe to Philippeville was not without considerable reserves of energy, but his lassitude on the 17th, and in the days to come in the Elysée and Malmaison, does bear out the ADC's observation, and there is the testimony of Captain Maitland, who from 15 July onwards studied him at close hand for over three weeks, when the adrenalin was no longer flowing:



Napoleon and his Options

225

It is certain that his habits were very lethargic while he was on board the *Bellerophon*; for though he went to bed between eight and nine o'clock in the evening and did not rise till about the same hour in the morning, he frequently fell asleep on the sofa in the cabin in the course of the day.²⁰

This was the mind and physique of Napoleon in the early summer of 1815 as he undertook the last great campaign of his life.

