

What Killed Napoleon? Mystery Solved-And Myth Debunked

It was not a sinister political conspiracy that killed Napoleon Bonaparte, one of the most powerful men of the 19th century. It was stomach cancer, the same disease that now causes about eleven thousand deaths each year in the United States alone. Theories that Napoleon was poisoned with arsenic have abounded since 1961, when an analysis of his hair showed elevated levels of arsenic. But the most recent review of Napoleon's autopsy report, written shortly after his death in 1821, concludes the original diagnosis of stomach cancer was correct. The report describes a tumor in the French emperor's stomach that was approximately four inches long. Dr. Robert M. Genta of the University of Texas and an international team of researchers, upon reviewing the report, concluded that such a large growth could not have been a benign stomach ulcer. "I have never seen an ulcer of that size that is not cancer," Dr. Genta said. Dr. Genta is a professor of pathology and internal medicine. Further analysis suggested that Napoleon's stomach cancer had reached a stage that would have been virtually incurable even with modern medical technology. People with cancer at a similar stage today wouldn't be expected to live more than a year. Napoleon's stomach also contained a dark material similar to coffee grounds, a symptom of extensive bleeding in the digestive tract. Genta and his colleagues concluded that the massive bleeding was probably the immediate cause of death. Other historical sources have indicated that Bonaparte had lost about 20 pounds in the last few months of his life--another sign of stomach cancer. Some of the conspiracy theories probably arose because of incompetent medical treatment in Napoleon's final days. Doctors who were summoned to treat him may have actually hastened his demise when they gave him regular doses of antimony potassium to make him vomit. It's now known that such treatment would have depleted his potassium levels, and may have caused a lethal heart condition that disrupted the flow of blood to the brain. Whatever the cause, Napoleon died at the age of fifty-two.

About the Author

Singapore healthcare, Singapore medicine, Singapore hospital service, Singapore medical service, Singapore medical care, international.

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