



The Napoleonic Empire 1804-1815

Napoleon Bonaparte, French military leader and emperor conquered much of Europe in the early 19th century. After seizing political power in France in a 1799 coup d'état, he crowned himself emperor in 1804. Shrewd, ambitious and a skilled military strategist, Napoleon successfully waged war against various coalitions of European nations and expanded his empire. However, after a disastrous French invasion of Russia in 1812, Napoleon abdicated the throne two years later and was exiled to the island of Elba. As attempts to take over Europe go, Napoleon's can be seen as a fairly positive event in

many ways. He was responsible for centralizing government, instituting reforms in banking and education, supporting art and science and most famously the Napoleonic code which is the foundation of French civil law.

And what you ask, does this have to do with food/herbs?

When Napoleon was busy expanding his empire it was not to capture local cuisine. However he did have several dishes created for him, Chicken Marengo and Lobster Thermidor. He is also noted to have said "an army moves on its stomach."

Lobster Thermidor is a classical dish where lobster meat is

sliced, sauced and served in the lobster-tail shell. Although home cooks aren't likely to have this on their everyday menu, during the 1950s it had enough snob appeal to be served at top American restaurants such as Sardi's and the Waldorf-Astoria, as well as formal White House dinners.

"Legend has it that Napoleon named Lobster Thermidor after the month in which he first was served it. Evidently Thermidor was the eleventh month of the Republican calendar used for a short time after the French Revolution."

However, other food references including the respected food encyclopedia, "Larousse Gastronomique" (Clarkson Potter, 2001), say it was created in 1894 at Marie's, a famous Paris restaurant. Other authors attribute it to Leopold Mourier of the Cafe de Paris, where chef Tony Girod, his assistant and successor, created the recipe used today. There is, however, a



Napoleon connection: the dish was purportedly created for the premiere of Victorien Sardou's

Culinary Letter - (cont'd) Sharon Harrington



play, "Thermidor," about the French Revolution. Thermidor was the month in the French Republic's calendar, and the "Thermidorean reaction" refers to the political machinations that led to the execution of Robespierre, ended the Reign of Terror and helped propel Napoleon to power.

Chicken Marengo, legend has it, was created by Napoleon's cook, Dunand, to celebrate the 1800 French victory over the Austrians at the battle of Marengo in northern Italy.

Napoleon's custom was to eat nothing before a battle, but

afterward, he was ravenously hungry. The cook was without the supply wagons, so he had to scrounge around to get a chicken, some crayfish, a handful of eggs, a few tomatoes and some garlic. The chef cut up the chicken and fried it with the garlic, adding the chopped tomatoes and some brandy from Napoleon's flask.

He fried a ration of army bread along with the eggs, and the cooked crayfish were served on the plate as a garnish.

The story goes that Napoleon liked this "victory dish" so well

he wanted it prepared after every battle, and when Dunand later tried to substitute white wine for brandy, or delete the crayfish, Napoleon refused to eat it.

