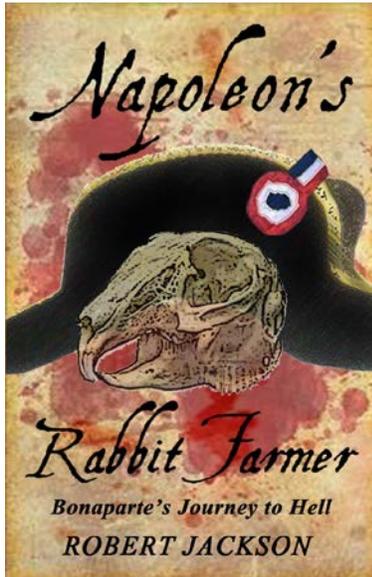


The Napoleon Series

Jackson, Robert. *Napoleon's Rabbit Farmer*. Charleston, S.C.: CreateSpace, 2015. 345 p. ISBN: 9781484014646. Paperback (also available as an ebook). \$12.50



British journalist Robert Jackson's *Napoleon's Rabbit Farmer* is a fictionalized, though firmly based on the historical record, account of Napoleon's exile to the island of St. Helena after his defeat at Waterloo. From the title of the book and a brief blurb of its contents (and from having read or watched, in the case of films, other fictional accounts of Napoleon's time on St. Helena), I was expecting the story to take a certain path which I was pleasantly surprised it did not. The book itself gives a clear and readable account of Napoleon's final years.

The rabbit farmer of the title is Sergeant Francois Robeaud, former rabbit farmer and Imperial Guardsman, who had one talent that set him apart from his fellow soldiers, that of being employed as Napoleon's double, which role he played at Waterloo. After Waterloo Robeaud retired to his family farm near Verdun until in 1818 he is called upon again to impersonate the emperor. The plot involves Robeaud first impersonating a Dutch precious metals dealer in the Cape Colony. Upon arrival on St. Helena he would trade places with Napoleon, who would return to Europe while Robeaud remained on the island. Of course things don't go quite as planned. Jackson also offers up another possible candidate for Napoleon's poisoner.

Though the Napoleonic wars are over, for the exiled emperor the battle against the British goes on and on. Under the petty tyrannies of Sir Hudson Lowe, Napoleon fights a battle of wills for his dignity. Napoleon biographer, Lord Rosebery described Lowe as a "humiliating compound of meanness and panic," while historian David P. Jordan called Napoleon's battle with Lowe as a "war of the powerless against the petty." St. Helena, which Napoleon called "this miserable rock," is an island in the south Atlantic that is 28 miles in circumference and 85 square miles in area, with a population of some 3,400 Europeans. It lies 700 miles from his nearest neighbor, Ascension Island. Napoleon's house at Longwood, overrun by rats and other vermin, lies in cloud more than 300 days a year and has an average daily humidity of 78%.

If the climate of St. Helena itself wasn't insalubrious enough, perhaps it was being forcibly isolated that caused the inhabitants medical problems. After all, everyone, both the French of Napoleon's party and his British captors, were in essence in exile. They

were all prisoners forced to exist on this tiny speck in the south Atlantic. This metaphorical imprisonment perhaps drove everyone a little crazy; which Jackson ably describes. Court intrigue, jealousy and domestic quarrels are rife among Napoleon's companions. Napoleon takes out his pent-up fury on his fellow Frenchmen and women. One can't read an account of Napoleon's time of captivity without being dismayed by Lowe's petty vexations or his paranoia. Nor can one forgive Napoleon's cruel behavior toward his companions, though this sad behavior is understandable.

When Napoleon was exiled to Elba he took as his motto "*Napoleon ubicumque felix*," a boast he could not make when exiled to St. Helena. Napoleon and his party trapped in enforced proximity, isolated from the greater society and so far from France, fall into depression and ill-humor, boredom and melancholy. The distance from anywhere seemed to oppress all like a heavy weight. Napoleon's self-enforced inactivity, one of his weapons in his battle with Sir Hudson Lowe, was probably an error on Napoleon's part, affecting both his mental and physical health.

Colonel Campbell, Napoleon's "jailer" on Elba, wrote of the deposed Emperor, "he appears to take so much pleasure in perpetual movement, and seeing those who accompany him sink under fatigue..." Josephine said of Napoleon, "He has the most unquiet mind, the most active brain, the most fertile in projects, the most ardent imagination, and the most obstinate will in the world, and if he ceased to be occupied with great affairs, he would turn his home upside down every day, it would be impossible to live with him." And Albine de Montholon in St. Helena said Napoleon's "fire, for want of fuel, consumed himself and those around him."

Visit the author's Facebook page at [Napoleon's Rabbit Farmer](#)

Reviewed by [Tom Holmberg](#). 7/15