

## Napoleon Bonaparte's Invasion Fleet

Napoleon's knew that the success of his mission to invade Britain depended on his gaining control of the English Channel for long enough for his vast fleet to be able to make the crossing. *The Channel is but a ditch and anyone can cross it who has the courage*, he declared. *Let us be masters of the Straits for six hours and we shall be masters of the world.*

It was Bonaparte's intention to cross either on a foggy night or in the sudden calm after a gale. While the British frigates, driven from the Channel by the storm, were lying becalmed, the great flotilla would slip out of its ports and paddle swiftly to England.

Fifteen hundred barges packed with soldiers were to start from Boulogne, Wissant, Ambleteuse and Etaples, 300 from Dunkirk, Calais and Gravelines, 300 from Nieuport and Ostend and 300 more with a Dutch army from Flushing.

The boats designed were to be of three kinds: large sailing vessels called prams, more than 100 ft long, armed with 24 pounders and each carrying 150 men; escorting *chaloupes*, *cannonieres* with howitzers; gunboats for transporting horses, ammunition and artillery; and - by far the most numerous - 60 ft pinnaces armed with small howitzers and each capable of accommodating 55 soldiers. All were equipped with specially designed landing bridges.

If attacked the flotilla was to defend itself; with the issue nothing less than the conquest of Britain, it would matter little if 10,000 or even 20,000 troops were sunk on the way. Together with artillery, supplies and 6,000 horses, Napoleon planned to transport nearly 120,000 veterans.

Extract from [The Royal Military Canal by P A L Vine](#)