



Prince Alexander Yaroslavich Nevsky

Alexander Nevsky (1221-1263) served as Prince of Novgorod (1236–52), Prince of Kiev (1246–52) and Grand Prince of Vladimir (1252–63) during some of medieval Rus' most difficult times.

He rose to legendary status on account of his military victories over German and Swedish invaders while agreeing to pay tribute to the powerful Golden Horde.

Canonized as a Russian Orthodox Church saint in 1547, in 2008 he was named the greatest hero and the greatest Russian of all time.



"Whoever will come to us with a sword,
from a sword will perish"

Алекса́ндр Яросла́вич Не́вский



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The Golden Horde and *Pax Mongolica*

- The **Golden Horde** were settled Mongols who ruled over Kievan Rus' (Russia), Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and the Caucasus from ~1240 until 1502. When the Mongol Empire fragmented after 1259, it became a separate khanate.



- As Genghis Khan was dying in 1227, he divided his empire into four parts, one for each son. Grandson Batu inherited the part of his father Jochi, who had died six months earlier.
- By 1260, Batu's brother Berke Khan conquered Poland and Lithuania and was close to defeating the Teutonic Knights. The king of Hungary bowed before him and he demanded submission of Louis IX. But Europe was saved by internal Mongol dynastic squabbles.
- Tamerlane defeated the Horde in 1395-6 and appointed his own khan. In 1480, Ivan III (the Terrible) drove the Horde from Moscow and in 1502 the Ottoman Crimean Khanate sacked Sarai.

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Nevsky paying homage to Batu Khan



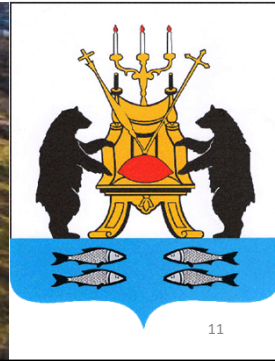
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- **Saint Alexander Nevsky** was born Aleksandr Yaroslavich c. 1220. He died November 14, 1263. He was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1547 and is generally considered the greatest Russian hero of all time.
- The second son of Yaroslav II, the Grand Prince of Vladimir, Alexander seemed to have no chance of claiming the throne of Vladimir.
- At the time, Russia was run by principalities. The first Rus' state was established in 862 by Vikings when the cities Ladoga (near current St. Petersburg) and Novgorod were populated by Scandinavians, Slavs and Finno-Ugrians.
- In 882, Novgorod Prince Oleg seized the largest principality, Kiev, uniting northern and southern lands of the Eastern Slavs under one power. The state adopted Christianity from the relatively near by Byzantine Empire in 988.



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- In 1136, the Novgorod Republic seceded from Kievan Rus' and became an independent Russian principality.
- In 1236, Alexander was summoned by the Novgorodians to become prince of Novgorod and, as their military leader, to defend their northwest lands from Swedish and German invaders.



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- Novgorod and Sweden were competitors both for dominance over Finnic tribes north of the Novgorod lands and for control over access to the Gulf of Finland.
- At this time the Mongols had just completed their conquest of Vladimir-Suzdal' and much of the northeastern Rus' and were preparing their attack on Kiev. Kievan Rus' ultimately disintegrated due to the Mongol invasion, losing about half of the Rus' population in the process.
- In July 1240, an army of Swedes, Norwegians, Finns and Tavastians landed at the confluence of the rivers Izhora and Neva with the intention of conquering the Novgorod Republic.
- The Swedes were led by jarl Birgir (or Birger) Magnusson, son-in-law to the King of Sweden. They were augmented by Norwegian, Tavastian and Finnish troops.

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Житие святого Александра Невского
Рассказ о русском герое XVI века

The Life of Saint Aleksandr Nevskii
A Sixteenth Century Account of a Russian Hero

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This most Orthodox and noble Grand Prince Aleksandr Iaroslavich, greatly adorned by God, and worthy of praise; who was in the eighth generation from the sovereign Tsar and Grand Prince, Vladimir Sviatoslavich, Equal to the Apostles, that had enlightened the land of Rus by holy baptism, and in the eleventh generation from Riurik; did earn by his virtues high and honorable praise not only from men but even from God himself.

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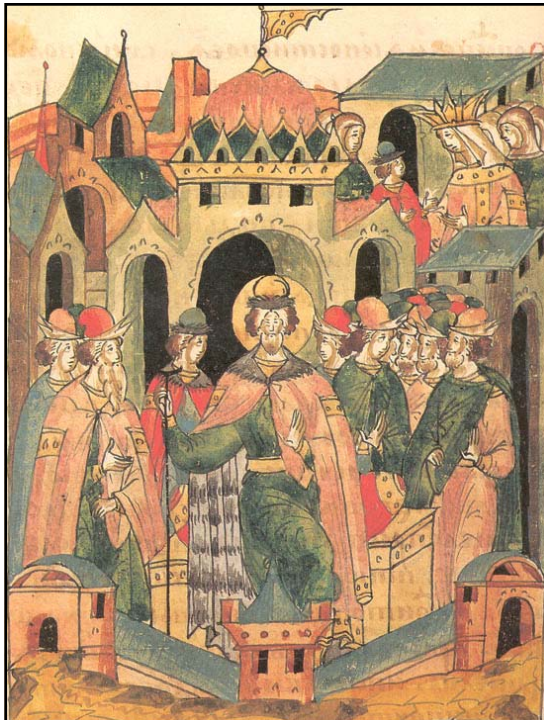
Early in life, as a child of tender years, he was trained in all that is good by his pious father, the sovereign Prince Iarostav Vsevolodovich of godly wisdom, and by his saintly mother, the God-loving Princess Feodos'ia, named Efrosin'ia as she took her vows.

And he was also taught by them to follow all good precepts. And so the fear of God was lodged in his heart together with the yearning to respect God's commandments and keep them in everything, and he held in great esteem both priests and monks.

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abstinence, keeping himself clean in soul and body, courting meekness, and shunning vanity. And he took much care to avoid gluttony, knowing that satiety of belly will destroy chastity, slacken vigilance, and hinder all other virtues. And he constantly had in his mouth the divine words that were sweeter to him than mead and honey; having read and absorbed them with eagerness, he was zealous to realize these precepts in his actions. And his family, seeing him exert himself in these virtues, strove hard to do good, and sought to please God in everything, as he pleased God in all manner of ways. And he, burning with a desire for things divine and heavenly, set at nought all that men value and esteem honourable. Yet never would he reveal the treasures of his soul ¹⁷ before men's eyes; but in his great



Though invested by God with the dignity of an earthly ruler, and having a wife, and being father of children, he nevertheless achieved greater lowly wisdom than any man. And he was very tall of stature, and his face was as beautiful to look at as that of Joseph the Fair. And his strength was such as if the strength of Samson had passed on to him. And his voice could be heard in the assembly like a trumpet.

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And his valor was equal to that of the Roman king Vespasian, son of Nero, who captured the whole land of Judaea, and arrayed his troops and commanded them to begin an assault on the town of Antipata; and the citizens, making a sally, destroyed his troops; but he came forth, and single-handed drove their force back to the city gate and said to his men, laughing: "Wherefore did you leave me alone?" So, too, this Grand Prince Aleksander Iaroslavich; always a victor, and himself never defeated.

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And he did many acts of mercy, like his father Iaroslav, in whose steps he did follow most faithfully, sending much gold and silver to the Horde for King Batu, as ransom for the men of Russia who had been led into captivity by godless Tatars, and delivering them from cruel slavery, and many evils and hardships.

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trembled at the sound of his name. And he had from God the wisdom and keen mind of Solomon. But above all he loved justice; and he would often teach his nobles to be just, quoting passages from the Holy Scripture; that they first and foremost pray to God for wisdom, and abstain from drunkenness, and humble themselves before God; that they fail not to judge righteously, showing no partiality to the great, nor seeking unjust gain; that they oppress no one, but deliver the oppressed out of the hands of their oppressors; and accept nothing over and above their due, but content themselves with their proper wages. And thus he would talk to them time and again, sometimes threatening them with the dread of his power, and sometimes reminding them of the eternal retribution which will come when, on the Day of Judgement, Christ will render to each according to his deeds. And his nobles and all the common people, seeing the wisdom

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And his glory having spread to distant lands, many had a desire to see him.

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And word then also spread everywhere that the godless King Batu, by God's will, was doing much evil to the great Russian land. But to Novgorod the Great, where this blessed Aleksandr and his father Iaroslav ruled at that time, these pagans were prevented from coming by some divine power which forbade them to approach not only the borders of Novgorod the Great, but likewise the other lands in which the Novgorodians might happen to sojourn while waging war against their foes and adversaries, the Lithuanians and Germans. And nowhere, by the will of God, did those cruel Tatars attack them.

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And then there came certain men from Western lands, those who according to the writings of Mefodii of Patara called themselves servants of God. And there came with them a noble man, Andriash by name, to see the wisdom and valor and the wondrous stature of the blessed Aleksandr Iaroslavich, grandson of Vsevolod, great-grandson of Iurii Dolgorukii, great-great-grandson of Vladimir Monomakh; being descended from Vsevolod, Iaroslav, and from Vladimir the Great. And like the Queen of the South in ancient days, who came to see Solomon and be convinced of his wisdom, so this Andriash, as he saw the saintly and great Prince Aleksandr, marveled much at the beauty of his face, and at his miraculous height. And when, moreover, he perceived his wisdom and his steadfast judgement he knew not what to call him, and stood amazed.

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And when he left him and returned home, he spoke of him with wonder: "I have journeyed," he said, "in many countries and among many peoples, and nowhere did I see a king among kings, nor a prince among princes, who could vie with Grand Prince Aleksandr in beauty and courage."

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On hearing these words of praise for the valor and wisdom of the blessed Aleksandr, the king of a country of Roman faith which lay in the north was filled with envy and hatred, and he waxed arrogant in his mind; when the right time came -- and he knew that Batu was then ravaging Russian lands on all sides -- the king, on his part, hoped to conquer all that remained of Russia. And in his pride he spoke thus: "I will go and seize Novgorod the Great and all other cities, and all the Slavs will I reduce to slavery. And I will overcome Grand Prince Aleksandr himself, and take him alive with my hands."

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And he assembled many men, and his Masters and Bishops, and Swedes and Murmans, and Suomi and lam, and filled many ships with his troops. And he set out in great strength, breathing war; and crossed the sea. And he entered the Neva River, drunk with madness, wishing to seize Ladoga, and Novgorod the Great, and all Novgorodian lands as far as Valaam.

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But God the Most Gracious, Merciful, and Man-loving, such being His will, did protect and defend His own against the evil intent of the aliens. In vain did the fools strive contrary to God's will:

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for the report that Swedes were on their way to Ladoga came before their arrival. And they sent their envoys to Aleksandr Iaroslavich to say this: "Withstand me if you can; I have already come to you, and I will capture you, and you shall be my slave, and so shall your sons."

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As Prince Aleksandr Iaroslavich heard these words, his soul was aflame. And he entered the Church of Hagia Sophia and knelt before the holy altar, and with tears in his eyes prayed to the Lord our God, and the Most Pure Mother of God, to grant him assistance. And then he said: "O Lord our God, Thou who hast commanded that none should seek his neighbor's possessions, judge between him and me, and forbid him to seek his neighbor's possessions."

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And then he rose and went and bowed before Archbishop Spiridon, and received his blessing, and left the church. And he heartened his troops, saying: "Not in force does God reside, but in truth." And he mounted his charger, and went forth against the enemy. He had not even time to send tidings to his father, for the adversaries were at hand. Even many of the Novgorodians had not time to join him because of the urgency of the march. And he approached the enemy force on Sunday, 16 July, the feast day of the 630 holy fathers of the Council of Chalcedon, and of the holy martyrs Cyricus and Iulitta, and of Grand Prince St Vladimir who took the baptismal name Vasilii, and who baptized the whole land of Rus.

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OF PELGUSY THE MAN OF IZHORA. There was among Aleksandr's commanders a certain man, an elder of the land of Izhora, called Peigusy, Philip being his baptismal name. And he was set to guard the coast. This man had great faith in the holy martyrs Boris and Gleb, but he lived among his own people who were pagans, yet he fasted every Wednesday and Friday, abstaining from food and drink. And for this' God vouchsafed him the awesome vision which we shall now briefly recount.

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This Pelgusy, having observed the enemy host, set out to meet Prince Aleksandr Iaroslavich, so as to report to him on the great strength of the Varangians.

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He stopped by the edge of the sea, watching both the ways, and kept awake all night long. And as the sun began to rise, he heard an ominous noise coming from the sea. And he saw a single rowing-boat approach; and standing in the middle of the boat were the holy martyrs Boris and Gleb in scarlet robes, their hands laid on each other's shoulders. And the oarsmen sitting in the boat seemed to be clothed in darkness. And Boris said to Gleb, "Brother Gleb, do command them to pull harder, that we may aid our kinsman, Grand Prince Aleksandr Iaroslavich." Seeing this vision, and hearing these words of the holy martyrs Boris and Gleb, Peigusy stood trembling in great fear until the boat had moved out of his sight, going towards [Valaam].

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And then he went in all haste, and was met by Grand Prince Aleksandr Iaroslavich. And he, regarding the Prince with joyful eyes, revealed to him alone all that he had seen and heard. And the Prince said to him, "Brother, tell no one of this until God has wrought His will."

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And so, hastening still more, he encountered the enemy in the sixth hour of the morning. And there was a great battle with the Romans, and infinite numbers of them were slain. And the Prince set his seal, with a sharp sword, on the face of the king himself. And here, too, six men of valor who battled gallantly by his side distinguished themselves among the troop of Grand Prince Aleksandr.

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The first was named Gavriilo Oleksich. This one forced his way to a *snäcka*, and saw the king's son, supported on either side, being run up on board. And he rode after them up the plank, right into the ship itself. And they were on deck before him, and turning upon him, threw him off the plank, mounted as he was, into the sea. But by God's will he came up uninjured

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and went into battle again, and fought gallantly with the commander himself in the midst of his troops. And here was killed their commander Spiridon, and also their bishop.

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The second was named Sbyslav Iakunovich, a man of Novgorod. This one threw himself into battle again and again, having no weapon but a single axe. He had no fear in his heart. Many fell from his hand; and all were amazed at his strength and courage.

39



he third, Iakov of Polotsk, was the Prince's Master of the Hunt. He cut through the enemy ranks with his sword, and fought bravely. And the Prince praised him.

40



The fourth was a Novgorodian called Misha. This one, fighting on foot, attacked the Romans, warships at the head of his men, and destroyed three of them.

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The fifth was of the Prince's junior troop, a certain Savva. This one, dashing into the king's great gold-roofed tent, cut down the pillar, and the tent collapsed. And the troops of Grand Prince Aleksandr Iaroslavich, seeing the tent fall, rejoiced.

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The sixth was Ratmir, a servant.
This one fought on foot. And
multitudes of Romans fell on him
on all sides, and he sank under
many wounds, and so died

All these things have I heard from
my lord, Prince Aleksandr
Iaroslavich, and from others who
were then in this battle.

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And there happened at that time a
wondrous miracle, as in the days of
antiquity, during the reign of King
Hezekiah, when Sennacherib, King
of Assyria, waged war against
Jerusalem, wishing to capture the
holy city. And suddenly the angel
of the Lord went forth, and slew a
hundred and eighty-five thousand
in the host of the Assyrians. And
when men arose in the morning,
they found only the bodies of the
dead. Thus was it too after the
victory of Grand Prince Aleksandr
Iaroslavich; when he vanquished
the king, great multitudes struck
down by God's angels were found
dead on the opposite bank of the
Izhora River, where the troops of
Grand Prince Aleksandr Iaroslavich
had not been; even there lay many
bodies of the slain.

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And the remainder of the army took to shameful flight. And they cast the dead bodies of their commanders into three big ships, and sank them in Lake Nevo.

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And for their other dead they dug common graves, and flung them in without counting. And of the rest, many were wounded, and fled that same night.

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And of the Novgorodians,
Konstantin Lugotinich fell here,
Yurata Pinyashchinich, Namest,
Druchilo, Gnezdilov, son of a
tanner; in all, some twenty
warriors fell, Ladoga men included,
or even fewer, God knows.

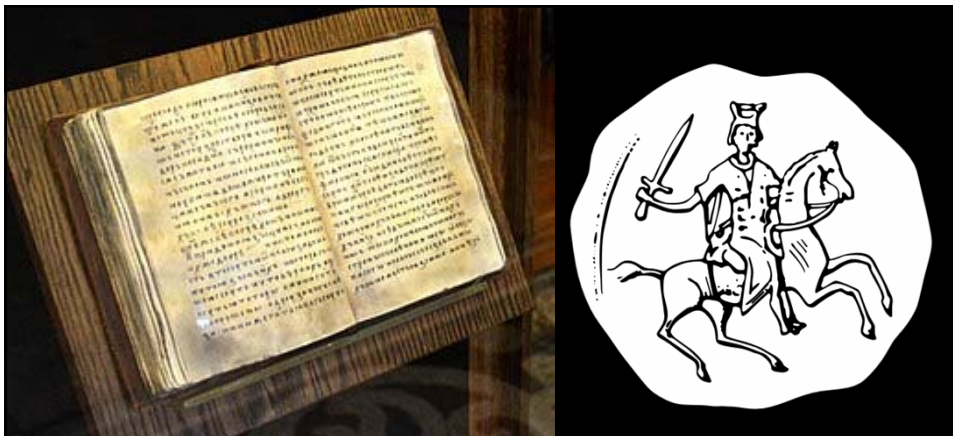
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But Grand Prince Aleksandr
Iaroslavich returned victorious,
and glorified God, and gave
thanks, saying thus: "Thanks be to
Thee, O Lord Most Gracious; I
praise Thy most holy name; for I
called to Thee on the day of my
distress, and Thou forsook not me
Thy slave but delivered us from our
foes. They have collapsed and
fallen; but we have risen and stand
upright. For Thou hast mercy on all
that repent fervently, and Thou art
near to all that seek Thee with fear
and love; and Thou despisest not
those who look to Thee alone, but
art good to them. And to all that
worship Thy majesty with all their
hearts, Thou dost grant their
prayers, if they be meant for the
good; and exaltest those that
glorify Thee. For Thou art the sole
dispenser of blessings; and we give
glory to Thee, O Father and Son
and the Holy Spirit, now and for
ever and for all time. Amen."

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Новгородская первая летопись The Chronicle of Novgorod, 1016-1471



According to the chronicle, on receiving the news of the advancing Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish and Tavastian fleets, the 20-year-old Prince Alexander Yaroslavich of Novgorod quickly moved his small army and local men to face the enemy before they had reached Lake Ladoga. The chronicle described the battle.

"Swedes came with a great army, and Norwegians and Finns and Tavastians with ships in great numbers, Swedes with their prince and bishops, and they stayed on the Neva, at the mouth of the Izhora, willing to take Ladoga, and to put it short, Novgorod and all of its lands."



But still protected the merciful, man-loving God us and sheltered us from the foreign people, and the word came to Novgorod that Swedes were sailing to Ladoga;

but prince Alexander did not hesitate at all, but went against them with Novgorodians and people of Ladoga and overcame them with the help of Saint Sophia and through prayers of our lady, the Mother of God and Virgin Mary, 15 July, in the memory of Kirik and Ulita, on Sunday, (the same day that) the 630 holy fathers held a meeting in Chalcedon;

and there was a great gathering of the Swedes; and their leader called Spiridon was killed there; but some claimed that even the bishop was slain;

and a great number of them fell; and when they had loaded two ships with the bodies of high-born men, they let them sail to the sea; but the others, that were unnumbered, they cast to a pit, that they buried, and many others were wounded; and that same night they fled, without waiting for the Monday light, with shame.

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Of Novgorodians
there fell:

Konstantin Lugotinitch,
Yuryata Pinyashchinich,
Namest Drochilo,
Nesdylov son of
Kozhevnik,

but including the
people of Ladoga 20
men or less, God
knows.

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"But prince Alexander came back
home with Novgorodians and
people of Ladoga, all well,
protected by God and Saint Sophia
and all the prayers of the holy men."

In honour of this miraculous great victory,
Prince Alexander Jaroslav
earned the new name



Александр Невский
Alexander Nevsky
Alexander of the Neva






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Невская битва (Battle on the Neva)


15 July 1240, Neva River, near village of Ust-Izhora (St Petersburg, Russia)

Belligerents

 Novgorod Republic
 Supported by:
 People of Ladoga

 Kingdom of Sweden
 Supported by:
 Finns
 Tavastians
 Norwegians

Commanders and leaders

 Prince Aleksandr Jaroslavich
 (1221-1263)

Jarl Birger Magnusson (son-in-law of the king)
 Thomas, bishop of Finland (r.1234– 1245)

Strength

- Alexander's *druzhina*
- Novgorod militia
- Finno-Ugrian tribesmen

Vikings - unknown

Strengths probably similar, but weapons and training favoured the Vikings.

Casualties

Estimated 4 named Novgorodians
 20 Padoga levies

Disastrous casualties

- Several boatloads escaped
- Three boatloads of dead nobles
- Everyone else in mass graves

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- During the 12th century, the Swedes wanted to dominate and convert people in Finland and launched many Crusades against the Finns. They also managed to dominate the territory for some time, but, eventually, were defeated.
- Danish forces created a Duchy in northern Estonia which lasted about 120 years.
- In the early 13th century, the Germans intruded upon the Baltics on behalf of the Pope to spread Catholicism. The poorly equipped native tribes didn't stand a chance. By 1231, Germans ruled most of the Northern Baltics.
- In 1218, the Swedes mounted an invasion of Estonia. They landed near the native fort of Lihula, conquered it, and started to take other lands nearby. However, when the fleet returned with the loot, the locals turned against the Swedes and reconquered the fort. The Swedes did not gain any territories from the Baltics.

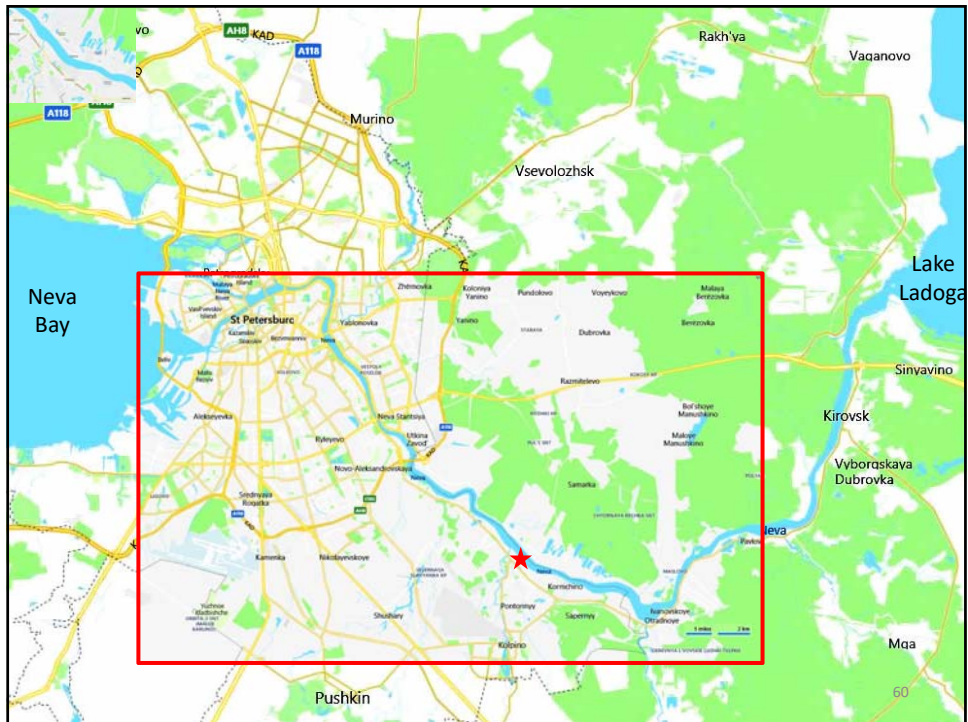
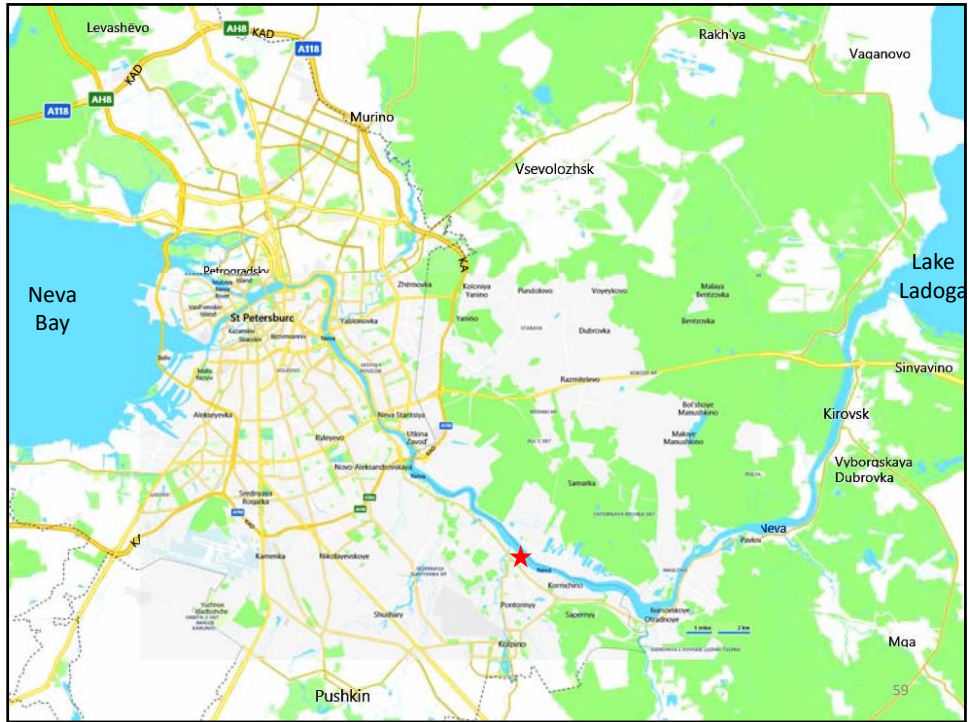
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- The Swedes knew of the riches in Estonia and the Baltics as trade routes. In 1240 they landed to take possession of the lands around Lake Ladoga and, eventually, of Novgorod itself.
- The Swedish army was mostly made up of noblemen, although the Russian chronicles claimed that both the Norwegian and Finnish reinforcements were along the Swedish force. The Swedish force would be a typical northern army, hoping the infantry would win battles. However, there was definitely a contingent of heavy cavalry.
- The Novgorodian army was made up of boyars, led by Aleksandr and and by the people's militia of Novgorod, which they summoned during troubled times. Also, the people from the city itself joined the army, enlarging it's numbers.
- It is generally thought that the two armies were of similiar size, although the Swedes should have had the upper hand in numbers and in equipment.

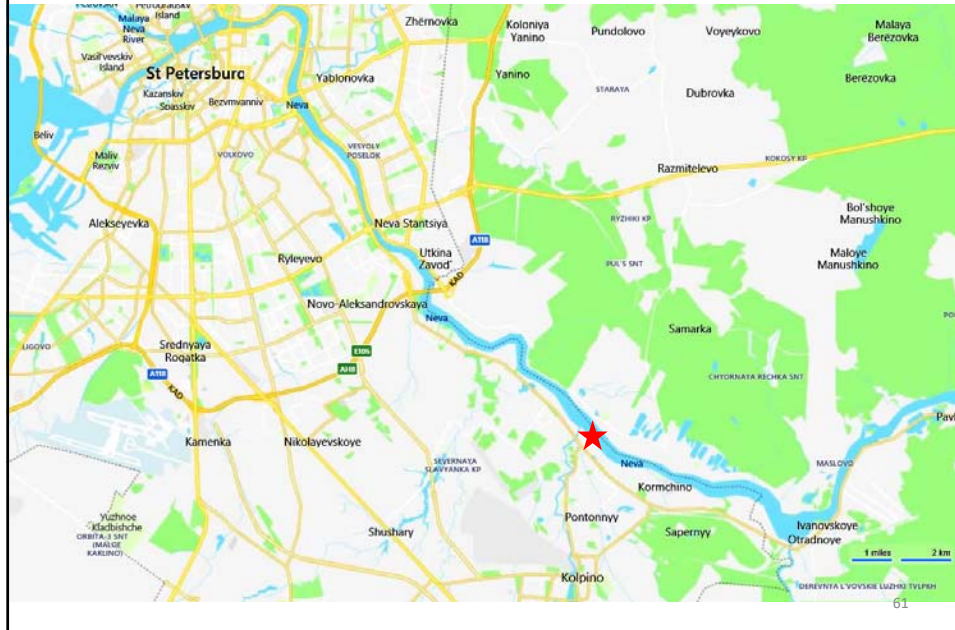
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- Swedish commander Jarl Birger Magnusson was the son-in-law of the Swedish king. He would later be regent, holding the office until a new king was ready to govern.
- Aleksandr Jaroslavich was the son of the kniaz (prince) of Vladimir. In 1236, he was called by the officials in Novgorod to take up the post of Prince at the Republic of Novgorod, a rich and prosperous trading state.
- Novgorod was different from other Rus states, as in most other states, the power resided fully with the prince. In Novgorod, the Prince was elected by the people and could be 'fired' or released of duties.

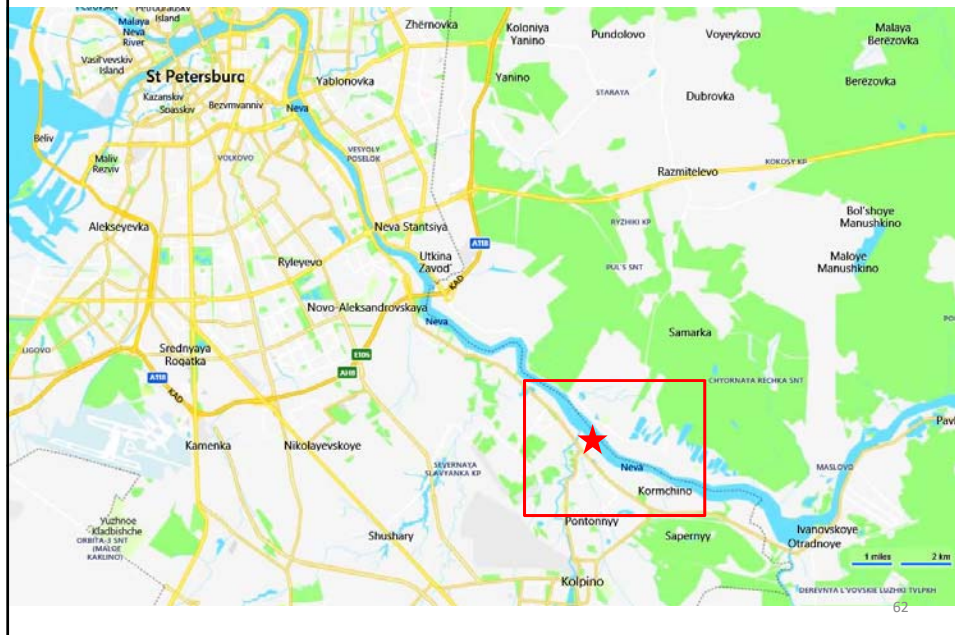
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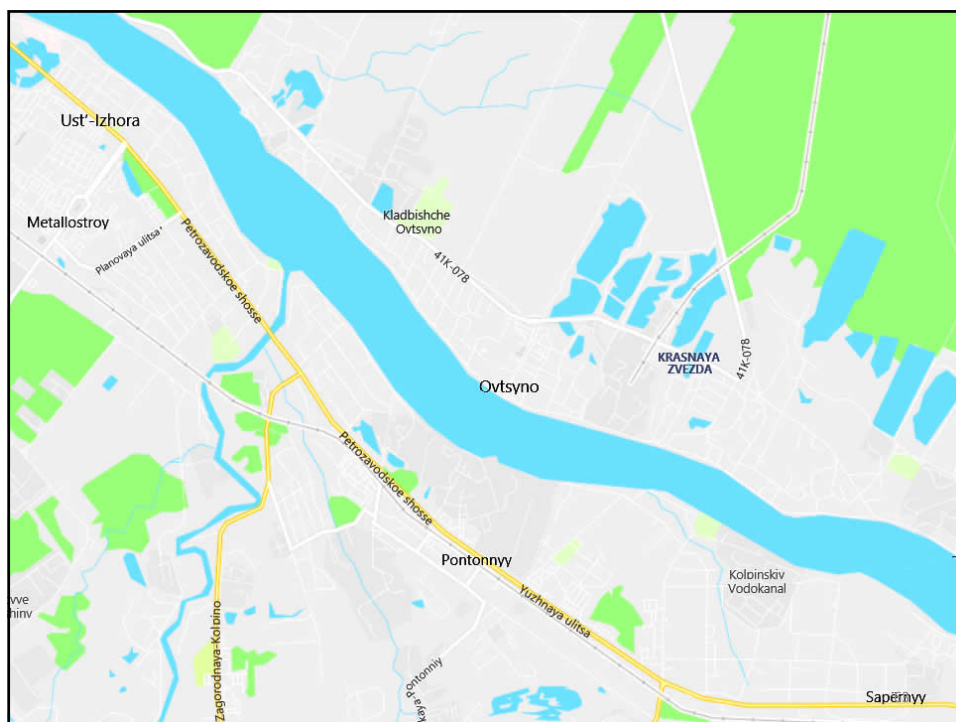


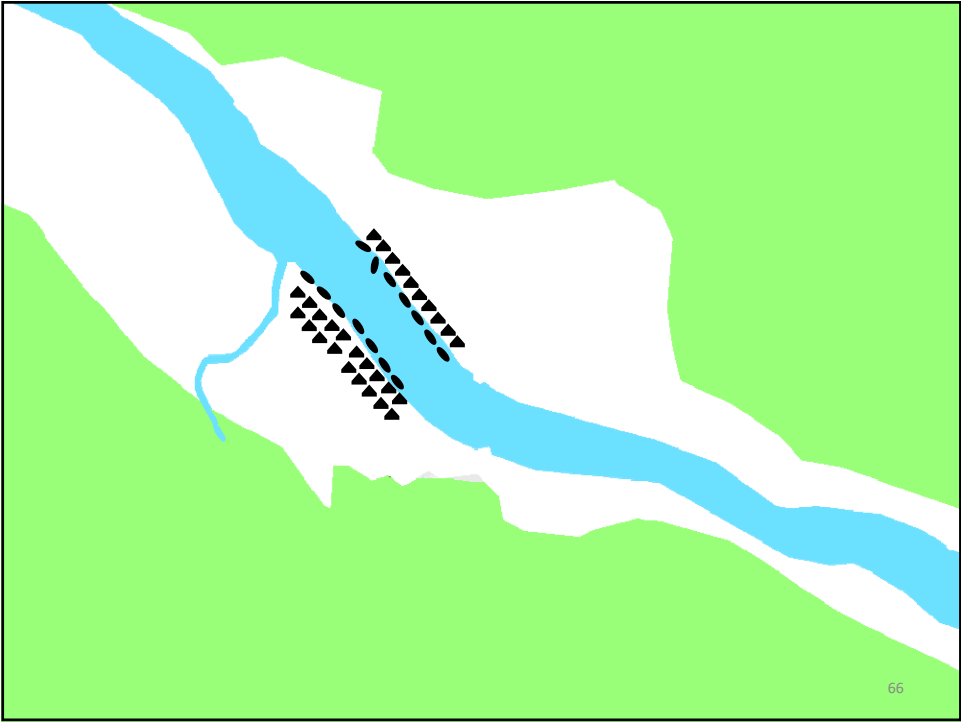
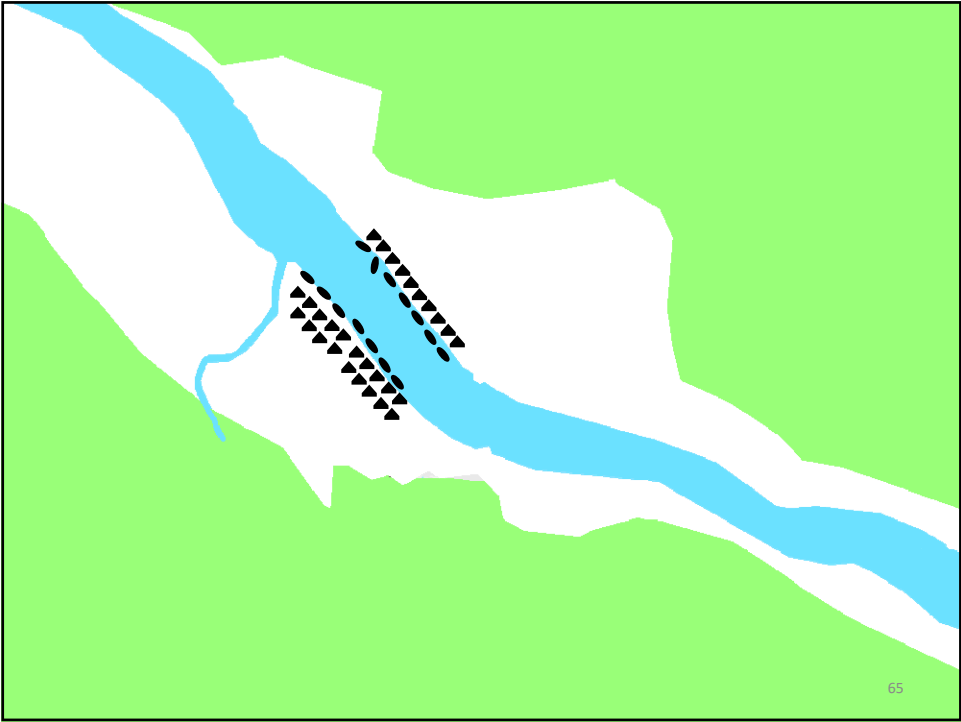
Battle of the Neva

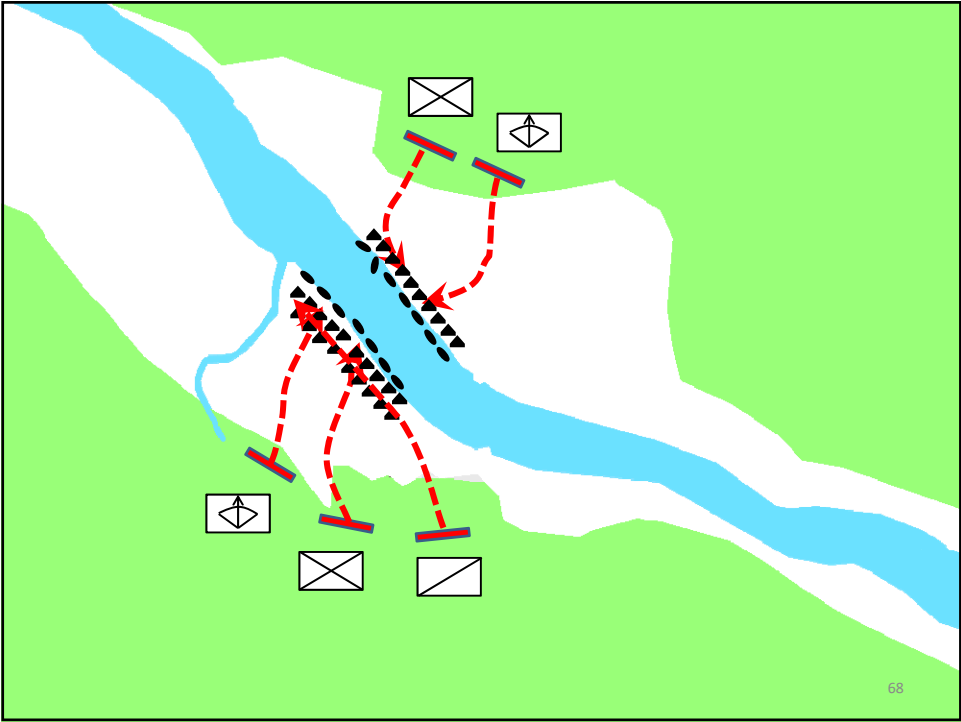
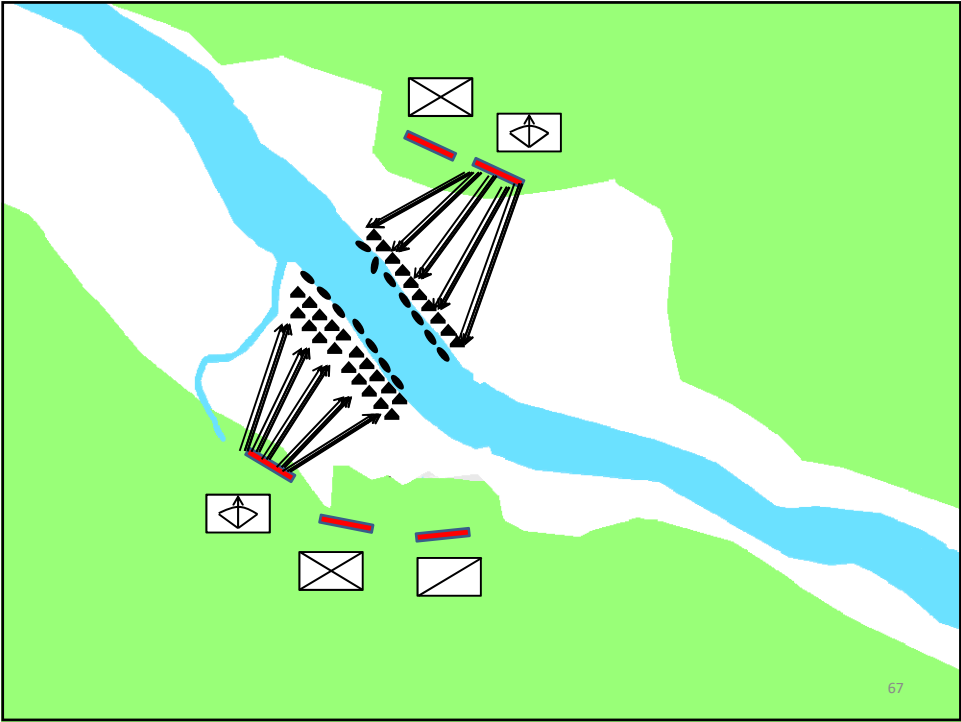


Battle of the Neva









THE BATTLE OF NEVA

- Birger had no time to erect any defensive buildings or to issue any orders. It was a miracle that he survived.
- The Russian druzhina was attacking the center of Birger's guards, when a young boyar cut down Birger's tent, and Aleksandr almost killed him.
- The Russian infantry was supposed to halt the retreat to the ships, but darkness arose and Birger was able to gather his remaining forces. His skill was now shown in the concept of retreating swiftly and with all possible objects.
- The losses of the Swedes are unknown, but, compared to the losses of the Novgorodians, they must have been enormous. From that day on, Aleksandr Jaroslavich carried the nickname of Aleksander 'Nevski', meaning 'of Neva'.

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LEGACY

- The Swedes in were definitively defeated in the bloody battle on the banks of Neva. Corpses of high ranking Swedes were sunk in three boats and others were buried in pits.
- Shortly after this battle, the Novgorodians issued an alliance with Sweden, resulting in neither one attacking the other.
- Because of this battle, Aleksandr was banished from Novgorod as the boyars felt he had too much power for their tastes. Later on, he was recalled to Novgorod.
- This allowed the Novgorodians to concentrate on the Germans, who would soon be defeated by Aleksandr Nevsky in the Battle on the Ice (coming soon to a classroom near you).

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