

What do we know about

Alexander Menshikov?

- He was born **16th November 1673**.
- Early years: - Due to Menshikov changing his story to glorify himself it is difficult to know the truth.
- What is known is that he was of lowly origin. He was a servant at the court of the young Peter Romanov and may have been a stable boy.
- He was quick witted and charming and had an excellent memory. He stood out from other servants and became the **childhood friend** of Peter.
- He helped Peter create what is known as the “**Toy Army**” – a regiment of noblemen’s sons who dressed up as soldiers and fought practice battles, but who, once Peter grew up, became his personal guard and the foundation of a new, Westernised military.
- He joined Peter on the **Grand Embassy** and maintained a close relationship with the Tsar throughout his life.



- **Military Career**

- He was **joint commander** along with Count Sheremetyev in the Great Northern War (1700-1721) against Sweden.
- He was an impulsive but **brave cavalry commander**, Menshikov often led the troops into battle himself, and on one occasion had three horses killed underneath him.
- He played a key part in the victories in the Battle of Kalisz (1706) and the decisive Battle of Poltava in 1709 which left the routed Swedish Army of King Charles XII thousands of miles from their homeland, forcing the foreign king into exile.
- He was promoted and became Russia's second-ever **Field Marshal**.
- He was the **first governor** of the newly founded St Petersburg and coordinated the massive engineering work needed to erect a new European capital in the desolate swamp, at the cost of a large part of Russia's budget and tens of thousands of lives.

- **He was corrupt and stole from the State?**

- Under various pretexts he would confiscate lands and embezzle money from government projects – his wealth consisted of 90 thousand serfs, six towns, and more than a ton of gold cutlery.

- He built a residence outside of St.Petersburg that mirrored that of Peter himself, the only man in Russia wealthier than Menshikov.

- A series of high-profile investigations found Menshikov guilty of corruption both at war and in peace time, but no fundamental sanctions followed.

- Although the Tsar was aware that his closest ally was stealing from the crown, he refused to punish him, saying **“I have one hand that I control. It is a thieving hand, but the only one I can trust”**.



The Menshikov Palace, St Petersburg

The palace of Prince Menshikov was the first large stone building erected in St. Petersburg, and is also the only private city structure to have survived from the beginning of the 18th century. As part of the State Hermitage, it is now used to display some of the museum's vast collection of European and Russian applied art from the early 18th century, as well as contemporaneous sculptures and paintings, all of which blend harmoniously with the beautifully restored interiors.

- **After Peter**

- The death of Peter the Great in **1725** did not mark Menshikov's downfall, but only made him more powerful.
- When **Catherine, Peter's wife, became Empress**, Menshikov became de-facto ruler.
- He had Catherine alter the succession to Peter's grandson – Peter Alekseevich – and he took the boy under his wing and had him betrothed to his own daughter Maria.
- **Catherine died on 6th May 1727**. Peter II was proclaimed Tsar.
- At first Menshikov managed to keep him under his control – he also planned to marry his son Alexander to Peter's sister Natalia.
- When Menshikov became ill and was absent from court other nobles began to plot against him.
- In 1727 a group of his enemies had Menshikov arrested on charges of embezzlement and tyranny and he was banished to Siberia. He died there in wretched circumstances in **November 1729**.