**Alexander the Great**

*Was Alexander the Great really great?*

A great conqueror, in 13 short years he amassed the largest empire in the entire ancient world — an empire that covered 3,000 miles. And he did this without the benefit of modern technology and weaponry. In his day, troop movements were primarily on foot, and communications were face to face. Not bad for a kid who became the King of Macedon at the age of 20.

When Alexander came to the throne, he had excellent training and experience for someone so young. He had received a tough, almost Spartan, training from a man named Leonidas. Then, at age thirteen, he was tutored by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who trained Alexander’s intellect as intensively as Leonidas had trained his body. Largely because of his education, Alexander displayed both an incredible physical toughness and intellectual genius.

Many of Alexander's accomplishments were made possible by his father, Philip of Macedon. Macedon, which existed roughly where the modern country of Macedonia lies today, was a kingdom located that lay geographically north of the Greek city-states.

In 338 B.C.E., King Philip of Macedon invaded and conquered the Greek city-states. Philip took advantage of the fact that the Greek city-states were divided by years of squabbling and infighting. Philip succeeded in doing what years of fighting between city-states had not done. He united Greece.

**Conquering the World**

Philip's next goal was to defeat Greece's age-old enemy to the east: Persia. For years, the massive Persian Empire threatened the very existence of the Greek way of life. But before he was able to pursue his second goal, Philip was assassinated.

When his son, Alexander, took the throne in 336 B.C.E., he vowed to complete the plans of his father. In 334 B.C.E., Alexander invaded Persia, which lay across the Aegean Sea in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

After three grueling years of warfare and three decisive battles, Alexander smashed the Persian armies at the Tigris River and conquered the mighty Persian Empire, including the legendary city of Babylon. For many Greeks, this victory marked a moment of sweet revenge against a bitter foe.

At this point, at the age of 25, Alexander ruled an expansive empire. Nevertheless, his ambitions were not satisfied. While fighting the Persians, Alexander conquered Egypt and founded a city at the mouth of the Nile River. This city, which he named Alexandria after himself, became a cosmopolitan, diverse, bustling center of trade, the arts, and ideas.

Alexander's success was largely due to his charismatic personality. He knew thousands of his troops by name, and shared the dangers of battle and the fruits of victory equally with them. He could put down a mutiny with a mere speech reminding his soldiers of their shared exploits, or shame his troops to action by leading an assault alone.

Alexander continued his campaign, driving farther east, until he reached India and the Indus River in 326 B.C.E. At this point, his exhausted troops refused to fight further. They told Alexander that a truly great leader knows when it is time to stop fighting.

Without the support of his army, Alexander had no choice but to turn back and begin consolidating and organizing his far-flung empire. On his way home, Alexander died from disease in 323 B.C.E. The united empire that Alexander created by his conquests fell apart soon after his death.

**Alexander in Hindsight**

Alexander the Great's legacy is both far reaching and profound. First, his father was able to unite the Greek city-states, and Alexander destroyed the Persian Empire forever. More importantly, Alexander's conquests spread Greek culture, also known as Hellenism, across his empire.

In fact, Alexander's reign marked the beginning of a new era known as the Hellenistic Age (*Hellenistic* is derived from a Greek word meaning “to imitate the Greeks”) because of the powerful influence that Greek culture had on other people. Due to his conquests, Greek language, architecture, literature and art spread throughout Southwest Asia and the Near East. Without Alexander's ambition, Greek ideas and culture might well have remained confined to Greece.

Many historians see Alexander the Great in a different light. Although Alexander was both intelligent and handsome, he also had a darker side. He possessed a ferocious temper and from time to time would arbitrarily murder close advisors and even friends. Also, toward the end of his many campaigns, he senselessly slaughtered thousands whose only crime was being in his way.

Was Alexander the Great really great?