This "History and Timeline" provides a summary of noteworthy events in the life of the Danish Admiral Sören Norby. See also, "Ancestry of Pehr Bengtsson Norby," ¹ which examines evidence of a lineal blood relationship between Sören Norby and Pehr Bengtsson Norby. The evidence recounted in “Ancestry of Pehr Bengtsson Norby,” ² strongly suggests that Sören Norby is the great grandfather of Pehr Bengtsson Norby.

Sören Norby was born between 1460 and 1480 in Uggerslevgaard, Uggerslev, Odense, Denmark, to Anders Pedersen Norby and Fikkesdatter Boistrup. There are many variations in the spelling of Sören Norby's name — Sören Andersen Norby, Severin Norby, Sören Norby, Sören Severin Andersen Norby, Severin Andersen Norby and Söffuerin Norby, with the surname Norby sometimes spelled Norrby, Nordby and Nørby.

The Norby family of Uggerslev was of minor Danish nobility.³ Sören Norby had an aptitude for the military and his considerable skills were utilized during the reigns of King Hans I (1481-1513) and King Christian II (1513-1523). Although his service was marred with controversy and political intrigue, Sören Norby also purportedly "served" a third Danish king — King Frederik I, who came to the Danish throne in 1523 following the exile of his nephew King Christian II in the same year. Norby's legacy is marred by his faithful and unrelenting loyalty to King Christian II, even after Christian II was replaced by King Frederik I as the Danish sovereign. Sören Norby appears to be the first in his family to have become a distinguished military leader. Though no relationship has been established, during the reign of Queen Margaret (1375-1412), a General Ficke (Fikke, Winchen or Vicka) Norby served the Danish Queen with distinction.⁴

For over 30 years, Sören Norby was instrumental in expanding and defending Danish national borders. In the end, his fortunes were inextricably intertwined with those of King Christian II. Thus, in 1523, as the curtain was drawing down on the reign of King Christian II, Sören Norby was ramping up his military and political activities aimed first at retaining, and later, at regaining the Danish throne on behalf of King Christian II. By 1526, the cause was lost and Sören Norby was forced to seek refuge in Livonia (now Estonia/Lithuania) and Russia. He had been rewarded handsomely for his loyal efforts on behalf of three Danish kings, but his wealth and power were lost. Among the loyal Admiral's lengthy list of accomplishments (and rewards) were the following:

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³ Norby of Uggerslev <http://www.roskildehistorie.dk/stamtavler/adel/Norby/Norby.htm >; compare, Erik Gustaf Geijer (tr. J.H. Turner, Vols 1-3), The History of the Swedes (Whittaker & Co., London, 1845), p. 122, n1 (Geijer reports that Sören Norby, "... was born a Norwegian." This is probably in error.).

1509 - Sören Norby takes and holds the Finnish province of Åland on behalf of King Hans.5
1514 - He is named lensmand (one who holds lands on condition of allegiance to the King) of Haraldsborg Len (Roskilde).6
1515 - He is named Danish "höfvitsman" (Governor) on Iceland.7
1517 - He is named Danish "länsherra" (Governor with autocratic powers) on Gotland.8
1520 - May thru November; in May the Danish fleet under Sören Norby blocks the entrance of Stockholm harbor9 and Danish forces commence the siege of Stockholm Castle.10 By September, 1520, Stockholm Castle is surrendered11 and in November, King Christian II of Denmark is installed as King of Sweden.12 During the coronation ceremonies Sören Norby is dubbed "knight" of the realm by King Christian II.13 To the surprise of the Swedes, following the coronation ceremonies an ecclesiastic court is convened in the presence of the King. A large number of Swedish nobles, clergy and burghers are charged with heresy and approximately 90 of them are immediately put to death by beheading and other means.14 This atrocity, which was instigated and directed by the clergy, came to be known as the "Stockholm Bloodbath." Sören Norby objects to the executions and reduces the number of beheadings by providing many Swedes with refuge on his ships resting in Stockholm harbor.15
1520 - Sören Norby is named lensmand at Kalmar Castle.16
1523 - King Christian II is forced to flee Denmark and his uncle, Frederik I, succeeds him; however, Sören Norby remains loyal to Christian II and between 1523 and 1526 is unsuccessful in his efforts to restore Christian II to the Danish throne.

13 Hofberg, Heurlin, Millqvist & Rubenson, Svenskt biografiskt handlexikon, Norby, Sören, supra, p. 189.
15 Nordisk familjebok. 1800-talsutgåvan. 11. Militärkonventioner - Nådaval, Norby, Sören, supra, at p. 1208 (Norby provided refuge on his ships to some Swedes); Sylve Åkesson, Skånska slot och herresätten: Börringekloster (2003), at <http://www.algonet.se/~sylve_a/borringe.htm >.
1524 - Sören Norby enters into an agreement with King Frederik I, which agreement permits him to continue to hold Gotland in fief (i.e., for life).\(^{17}\) The Swedes, led by Bernt von Mehlen, are unsuccessful in wresting control of Gotland from Sören Norby.\(^{18}\)

1525 - March, Sören Norby orders his troops under the command of Otto Stigsson to take and occupy Blekinge and Skåne and, except for the walled cities of Malmö and Helsingborg, he is initially successful in wresting control of these regions from King Frederik I.\(^{19}\) These were the most desirable regions of what is now southern Sweden, but at the time were part of Denmark.

1525 - June 28, Sören Norby enters into agreement with King Frederik I of Denmark whereby he gives up Gotland and in return receives Vixen (old name, Bohuslän) and Blekinge and Sölvesborg Castle, in fief (i.e., for life).\(^{20}\)

1525 - In August, as a consequence of Sören Norby's continued efforts to restore King Christian II to the Danish throne and the considerable unrest generated by his control of Blekinge and Skåne, King Frederik I is forced to take action and his Danish forces successfully attack Norby at Landskrona.\(^{21}\)

1526 - August, after an unsuccessful engagement with the Danish and Swedish fleets,\(^{22}\) Sören Norby escapes with his fleet to Livonia (now Estonia and Lithuania) and then to Russia where he is granted asylum. Against the wishes of Livonia he acts sub silentio as Russia’s maritime arm by transporting Russian merchants and their merchandise throughout the Baltic region.\(^{23}\)

1527 - June, little is heard of Norby for about 10 months after this date.\(^{24}\) It is widely reported and generally accepted that he was imprisoned or otherwise detained by the Russians.\(^{25}\)

1528 - May, Sören Norby is released by the Russians as a result of efforts on his behalf by former King Christian II and Christian's brother-in-law, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Germany, Karl V.\(^{26}\) There were no further Sören Norby efforts on behalf King Christian II.

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17 *Nordisk familjebok* / Norby, Sören, *supra*, at p. 1207.

18 *Nordisk familjebok* / Norby, Sören, *id*.


1530 - A warrior to the end, his last reward came in 1530 when in the service of German Emperor Karl V, he was killed during the siege of Florence, Italy. It is believed that he was buried in the Bridgettine convent on the outskirts of Florence.27

The power and authority of Admiral Sören Norby is not only illustrated by his military accomplishments and holdings, but by the fact that Gotland coined its own money bearing his name (Severin Norbi) and coat of arms. King Christian II went so far as to declare that whatever Sören Norby did would be done by his [the King’s] authority.28

Sören Norby's rule over Gotland was from Visborg Castle in Visby. While there is no record of his having married, he had at least two children, but likely more. The evidence regarding the existence of these children and their names vary. Some writers believe that at least one of his purported sons is evidenced by nothing more than unreliable legend. For a more complete discussion of Sören Norby progeny and related descendancy issues, see "Ancestry of Pehr Bengtsson Norby."29 Following is a brief review of what is known about the Norby children—

OLUF NORBY, born about 1518, probably in Visby. Perhaps because of reciprocal loyalty or out of friendship, King Christian II undertook the rearing and schooling of Oluf Norby, the only historically documented son of Sören Norby. In 1529, Oluf was in the household of Jens Mikkelsen Mønbo,30 Christian II’s Lutheran priest and [former] Magister at Kjøbenhavns University.31 Oluf’s presence in the Lutheran priest/educator’s household was likely in furtherance of his education and training in Lutheran theology.

BERNT NORBY, according to legend, was born about 1524.32 Bernt is generally identified as the...
grandfather of Pehr Bengtsson Norby, from whom the Othberg family is descended. Legend has it that in 1524 Bernt von Mehlen stood as godfather to a Norby son who was given his godfather's name (i.e., Bernt). For reasons discussed in the report, "Ancestry of Pehr Bengtsson Norby," it is more likely that it is Oluf Norby who is the Othberg ancestor. 

The historical facts surrounding the Bernt legend are relevant to determining the weight or credibility which might be attributed to that legend. In late 1523, or early 1524, King Gustav Vasa of Sweden, who became King in 1523, dispatched Bernt von Mehlen, one of his top military leaders, to Gotland to dislodge Sören Norby from his Visborg Castle stronghold. Why Gustav Vasa sent von Mehlen to accomplish this task is a mystery. In 1520, von Mehlen had been a top military commander under the Danish King Christian II and, along with Sören Norby, had been instrumental in the capture of Stockholm Castle and the installation of Christian II as King of Sweden. At the coronation of Christian II, Bernt von Mehlen and Sören Norby were dubbed Knights of the realm by Christian II, so they were at least acquaintances, if not friends. In December, 1521, von Mehlen switched his allegiance from Denmark to Sweden. Thus, von Mehlen was in the service of the Swedes when King Gustav Vasa gave him the assignment to remove Sören Norby from Gotland and take the island for Sweden.

The results of the 1524 von Mehlen excursion to Gotland must have been a considerable disappointment to King Gustav Vasa. The historical reports are that von Mehlen and Norby developed such a close relationship that while von Mehlen was on Gotland he stood as godfather to one or more of Norby's children. Von Mehlen returned to Sweden having not accomplished his mission. He probably recognized that his days were numbered in Sweden, so he switched his allegiance to Sören Norby and Norby's ongoing effort to regain the Danish throne for the exiled monarch who had bestowed knighthood upon them in November, 1520, in Stockholm. This is the historical setting out of which the so-called Bernt Norby legend was born.

Laurids (or Leonardus) Norby, may not have been a Sören Norby son, but rather a Norby servant. This issue is left unsettled.

Sidsel Norby - some say that it was this female child for whom Bernt von Mehlen stood as godfather in 1524. It seems to be beyond dispute that Sören Norby in fact had a daughter. The issues of her birth year and whether von Mehlen stood as her godfather are unsettled; however, it is more likely than not that this female child was born in about 1524 and that von Mehlen was in fact her godfather.

The mother (or mothers) of Sören Norby's children is unknown. His only reported romantic interest was with Kristina Gyllenstierna, the young widow of the Swedish regent, Sten Sture. Sture was killed by the Danes in early 1520. Kristina Gyllenstierna, after surrendering Stockholm Castle to the Danes in late 1520, was transported to Denmark where she was held until early 1524. It is reported that during her captivity, Sören Norby was a frequent visitor. It is likely that the relationship between these two was more a matter of political expediency than of romance. Legend suggests that the mother of Norby’s children might be Margit Christensdatter, who was in charge of housekeeping at Visborgs Castle. The dwell in is called Norbys.) Norbys, Stora Wägume and Lilla Wägume (modern spelling “Vägume”), referred to in the foregoing legend, are farms located in Lärbro parish, near Takstens farm. These farms are also located near Fardume farm in Rute parish, where Fardume Castle once stood. Takstens and Fardume are reputed to have once been owned by Sören Norby and/or his descendants. The subject of this reputed ownership and of Sören Norby’s descendants on Gotland are addressed further in the report entitled, "Ancestry of Pehr Bengtsson Norby," supra.


34 See, Niels H. Kragh-Nielsen, Personalhistorisk Tidsskrift 2000:2, Om Søren Norby og hans baggrund, supra, at p. 197.
relationship between Sören Norby and Kristina Gyllenstierna is discussed in more detail in the "Ancestry of Pehr Bengtsson Norby."  

Immediately upon her release from Danish captivity in early 1524, Kristina Gyllenstierna proceeded to Gotland or to Kalmar Castle in Kalmar. At this time Kalmar Castle was held by Sören Norby's good friend Bernhard von Mehlen. It seems that Kristina was intent on unseating King Gustav Vasa and gaining the Swedish throne on behalf of her young son, Nils Stensson Sture. Bernhard von Mehlen and Sören Norby were probably willing to assist her in this endeavor, as King Gustav Vasa was a common enemy and would eventually present an obstacle to their plan to recapture the Danish throne on behalf of exiled King Christian II, or on their own behalf.

In July, 1525, while von Mehlen and Kristina were in Bleking with Sören Norby, King Gustav Vasa's forces attacked and captured Kalmar Castle, which at the time was held by von Mehlen. Among the castle's occupants were Nils Stensson Sture, Kristina Gyllenstierna's young son. Sometime after July and before the end of November, Leonard or Leonardus Norby (a servant and/or son of Sören Norby), Sören Norby's young daughter, and Severin Brun, a Sören Norby aide, fell into Gustav Vasa's hands when the ship transporting them from Visby to Blekinge ran aground and was captured near Kalmar.

It has been reported that every last person at Kalmar Castle, except Nils Stensson Sture, was killed. This exception may have been influenced by the fact that King Gustav Vasa was Kristina's sister's husband. Sören Norby's daughter was never seen again by her father. The fate of Leonardus Norby is unknown. Sewerin Brun, the Norby aide, was executed in the Stockholm Market in February, 1527.

Sören Norby was eventually overwhelmed by the combined efforts of Sweden, Denmark and the Hansa. In 1526, he was forced to flee to Livonia (now Estonia and Lithuania) and on to Russia. In Russia, Norby in effect became Russia's informal maritime presence on the Baltic. He departed Russia for Brandenburg in May of 1528. It appears that for a short time prior to his departure Norby was imprisoned or otherwise detained by the Russians. The Russians released Norby following intervention on his behalf by exiled King Christian II and the King's brother-in-law, Karl V, German King and Holy Roman Emperor. In November 1528, Norby arrived in the Netherlands for a reunion with his old friend, Christian II. There is an oil painting by Vilhelm Rosenstand (1900) depicting that reunion. This is obviously a dramatized version of the reunion, as Sören Norby appears to be much younger and more robust than his approximate age of 60 years would suggest. What is believed to be a more authentic likeness of Sören Norby can be found in the Photos section of Ruth McGowen's web page at <MedievalRoots.com>, and in her Family Tree Maker genealogy software under Media/Stories associated with Soren Norby. This painting is also found in Sören Norbys räkenskapsbok för Gotland 1523-24.  

Probably in repayment for Emperor Karl V's assistance in gaining his release from the Russians, Sören Norby took up service in the Emperor's military. Shortly thereafter, in 1530, he was killed during the Emperor's siege of Florence, Italy.

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Sören Norby was buried in 1530, probably in a Bridgettine convent near Florence, Italy. The text of his epitaph is contained in a work by Henrici Ranzovii, and in a book entitled, "The History of Gustavus Vasa, King of Sweden: With Extracts from His Correspondence."  

The numerous references to Sören Norby as a "pirate" seems to be overblown partisan rhetoric aimed at discrediting him and his efforts on behalf of exiled King Christian II. Lost in the rhetoric is the fact that, from about 1490 to 1526, Sören Norby was a leading Danish military figure who acted on behalf of three Danish Kings. During this period there were persistent military encounters and turmoil involving Denmark, Sweden and the Hansa.  

It may very well be that at various intervals between 1523 and 1526, when there was uncertainty as to whether Sören Norby was in the service of King Frederik I of Denmark or the service of exiled King Christian II, he engaged in activities which some might call piracy. For example, he is reputed to have intercepted and boarded Swedish and Hansa ships in the Baltic. He would confiscate whatever was of value to his continuing efforts on behalf Christian II and send the empty ships and crews on their way. Of course, his enemies were at the same time being deprived of goods and materials they needed in order to wage war against him. Norby's activity can be justified on the basis that during this time frame he was continuing to act under the auspices of Frederik I, or in furtherance of his (Norby's) continuing effort to regain the Danish throne on behalf of Christian II. King Christian II, made it clear to the world that whatever Sören Norby did, he did with the King's authority. It is conceded that his activities in 1526 and 1527 on behalf of Russian merchants present a much closer case for the charge of piracy. The piracy issue depends greatly on whether he was acting on behalf of the Russian government and/or whether there was just cause for boarding ships and confiscating merchandise. There were hostile encounters between Norby ships carrying Russian merchandise and other ships. Allegations that merchandise was confiscated emanated from both sides of these encounters. The matter of who was pirating from whom was never adjudicated and is left unsettled.  

It should also be remembered that until 1526 the Hansa was acting in concert with Sweden (and at times with Frederik I) to remove Norby from his holdings on Gotland and Bleking. As the autocratic ruler of Gotland, Norby arguably had the right to engage in a proactive defense of his territory and to take the battle to his enemies. It may be that while "visiting" Russia during 1526 and 1527, Norby took the opportunity to recoup some of his losses from his old Hansa adversary in the hope of eventually mounting an attack to regain some of his holdings. As noted above, the issue of piracy is left unsettled.  

Pirate or not, two hundred and fifty years later, King Gustav III of Sweden (1772-1792) wrote approvingly of Norby's principled sense of duty as a soldier. When Norby was ordered by King Christian II to assassinate a Swedish lady of rank who had fallen into the King's hands, according to Gustav III, Norby replied:

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'No, Christiern, this employment is not suited for me. I am a soldier, not an executioner. I have learnt to obey you, but without shame, and without crime. Command me, and, if it be necessary, I will brave a thousand deaths; spare neither my property nor my life, for they belong to my king - my honour alone belongs to myself.'

This passage eloquently "... draws the line of obedience, even to a military chieftain; and it asserts that a soldier, because he is under absolute command, is not bound to sacrifice his honour." This is hardly the kind of praise one would expect from a Swedish king on behalf of a Danish "pirate."

For a more complete discussion of Sören Norby and related descendancy issues see, "Ancestry of Pehr Bengtsson Norby," This report also contains a summary of the role played by Sören Norby in the tumultuous political and military relations of Denmark, Sweden and the Hansa in the first quarter of the 16th century.

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