

## JOSEPH STALIN

*One of the most powerful and murderous dictators in history, Stalin was the supreme ruler of the Soviet Union for a quarter of a century. His regime of terror caused the death and suffering of tens of millions, but he also oversaw the war machine that played a key role in the defeat of Nazism.*

Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili was born on December 18, 1879 in Gori, Georgia, which was then part of the Russian empire. His father was a cobbler and Stalin grew up in modest circumstances. He studied at a theological seminary where he began to read Marxist literature. He never graduated, instead devoting his time to the revolutionary movement against the Russian monarchy. He spent the next 15 years as an activist on a number of occasions was arrested and exiled to Siberia.



Stalin was not one of the decisive players in the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917, but he soon rose through the ranks of the party. In 1922, he was made general secretary of the Communist Party, a post not considered particularly significant at the time but which gave him control over appointments and thus allowed him to build up a base of support. After Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin promoted himself as his political heir and gradually outmaneuvered his rivals. By the late 1920s, Stalin was effectively the dictator of the Soviet Union.



His forced collectivization of agriculture cost millions of lives, while his program of rapid industrialization achieved huge increases in Soviet productivity and economic growth but at great cost. Moreover, the population suffered immensely during the Great Terror of the 1930s, during which Stalin purged the party of "enemies of the people", resulting in the execution of thousands and the exile of millions to the gulag system of labor camps.

These purges severely depleted the Red Army, and despite repeated warning, Stalin was ill prepared for Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. His political future, and that of the Soviet Union, hung in the balance, but Stalin recovered to lead his country to victory. The human cost was enormous, but that was not a consideration for him.

After World War Two, the Soviet Union entered the nuclear age and ruled over an empire which included most of Eastern Europe. Increasingly paranoid, Stalin died of a stroke on March 5, 1953.

## ADOLF HITLER

Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889 in Braunau-am-Inn on the Austrian-German border. His father was a customs official. Hitler left school at 16 with no qualifications and struggled to make a living as a painter in Vienna. This was where many of his extreme political and racial ideas originated.



In 1913, he moved to Munich and, on the outbreak of World War One, enlisted in the German army, where he was wounded and decorated. In 1919, he joined the fascist German Workers' Party (DAP). He played to the resentments of right-wingers, promising extremist 'remedies' to Germany's post-war problems which he and many others blamed on Jews and Bolsheviks. By 1921 he was the unquestioned leader of what was now the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party).

In 1923, Hitler attempted an unsuccessful armed uprising in Munich and was imprisoned for nine months, during which time he dictated his book 'Mein Kampf' outlining his political ideology. On his release he began to rebuild the Nazi Party and used new techniques of mass communication, backed up with violence, to get his message across. Against a background of economic depression and political turmoil, the Nazis grew stronger and in the 1932 elections became the largest party in the German parliament. In January 1933, Hitler became chancellor of a coalition government. He quickly took dictatorial powers and began to institute anti-Jewish laws. He also began the process of German militarization and territorial expansion that would eventually lead to World War Two. He allied with Italy and later Japan to create the Axis.

Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939 began World War Two. After military successes in Denmark, Norway and Western Europe, but after failing to subdue Britain in 1941, Hitler ordered the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Jewish populations of the countries conquered by the Nazis were rounded up and killed. Millions of others whom the Nazis considered racially inferior were also killed or worked to death. In December 1941, Hitler declared war on the United States. The war on the eastern front drained Germany's resources and in June 1944, the British and Americans landed in France. With Soviet troops poised to take the German capital, Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin on April 30, 1945.



*One day before his death, Hitler finally married his long-time girlfriend Eva Braun. She committed suicide with him by swallowing cyanide. Hitler apparently swallowed cyanide and then shot himself.*

## BENITO MUSSOLINI

*Mussolini was the founder of Fascism and leader of Italy from 1922 to 1943. He allied Italy with Nazi Germany and Japan in World War Two.*

Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini was born on July 29, 1883 in Predappio in northern central Italy. His father was a blacksmith. Employment prospects in the area were poor so in 1902 Mussolini moved to Switzerland, where he became involved in socialist politics. He returned to Italy in 1904, and worked as a journalist in the socialist press, but his support for Italy's entry into World War One led to his break with socialism. He was drafted into the Italian army in September 1915.



In March 1919, Mussolini formed the Fascist Party, gaining the support of many unemployed war veterans. He organized them into armed squads known as Black Shirts, who terrorized their political opponents. In 1921, the Fascist Party was invited to join the coalition government.

By October 1922, Italy seemed to be slipping into political chaos. The Black Shirts marched on Rome and Mussolini presented himself as the only man capable of restoring order. King Victor Emmanuel invited Mussolini to form a government. Mussolini gradually dismantled the institutions of democratic government and in 1925 made himself dictator, taking the title 'Il Duce'. He set about attempting to re-establish Italy as a great European power. The regime was held together by strong state control and Mussolini's cult of personality.

In 1935, Mussolini invaded Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and incorporated it into his new Italian Empire. He provided military support to Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Increasing co-operation with Nazi Germany culminated in the 1939 Pact of Steel. Influenced by Hitler, Mussolini began to introduce anti-Jewish legislation in Italy. His declaration of war on Britain and France in June 1940 exposed Italian military weakness and was followed by a series of defeats in North and East Africa and the Balkans.



In July 1943, Allied troops landed in Sicily. Mussolini was overthrown and imprisoned by his former colleagues in the Fascist government. In September, Italy signed an armistice with the Allies. The German army began the occupation of Italy and Mussolini was rescued by German commandos. He was installed as the leader of a new government, but had little power. As the Allies advanced northwards through Italy, Mussolini fled towards Switzerland. He was captured by Italian partisans and shot on April 28, 1945.

In April 1945, Benito Mussolini and Clara Petacci, his mistress, were captured near Lake Como in northern Italy. They were later executed and the corpses were taken to Milan and placed on public display.

## HIDEKI TOJO

Hideki Tojo was born in Tokyo, Japan, on December 30, 1884. He joined the Japanese Army and his military service included periods in Switzerland and Germany.

Promoted to major general in 1933 he became head of the Kwantung Army's military police in September 1935. After becoming a lieutenant general he became chief of staff to the Kwantung Army (March 1937-May 1938).



In May 1938 Tojo was appointed as the vice minister of war. However, after six months in this post he returned to the armed services and took command of the army's aviation.

Tojo held extreme right-wing views and was a supporter of Nazi Germany. He also feared the long-term plans of Joseph Stalin and in 1938 he advocated pre-emptive air strikes on both China and the Soviet Union.

In July 1941 Tojo was appointed the minister of war. He advocated an aggressive foreign policy and strongly opposed plans by Shigenori Togo to remove Japanese troops from China and Korea.

Tojo became prime minister on October 16, 1941. He initially backed the foreign office's efforts to reach agreement with the United States. However, when convinced that a negotiated deal was possible, ordered the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.



As well as prime minister, Tojo also held the posts of minister of war, home minister and foreign minister. From February 1944 he was also Commander in Chief of the General Staff.

Tojo, aware that Japan was unable to win the war, resigned from office after the loss of Saipan in July 1944. He shot himself in the chest just before he was arrested by the US Military in 1945. Tojo survived and after being nursed back to health was tried as a war criminal. Hideki Tojo was executed on December 23, 1948.



## MAO ZEDONG

*Mao was a Chinese communist leader and founder of the People's Republic of China. He was responsible for the disastrous policies of the "Great Leap Forward" and the "Cultural Revolution".*

Mao was born on December 27, 1893 into a peasant family in Shaoshan, central China. After training as a teacher, he travelled to Beijing where he worked in the University Library. It was during this time that he began to read Marxist literature. In 1921, he became a founder member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and set up a branch in Hunan. In 1923, the Kuomintang (KMT) nationalist party had allied with the CCP to defeat the warlords who controlled much of northern China. Then in 1927, the KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek launched an anti-communist purge.



Mao and other communists retreated to south east China. In 1934, after the KMT surrounded them, Mao led his followers on the "Long March", a 6,000 mile journey to northwest China to establish a new base.

The Communists and KMT were again temporarily allied during eight years of war with Japan (1937-1945), but shortly after the end of World War Two, civil war broke out between them. The Communists were victorious, and on October 1, 1949 Mao proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Chiang Kai-shek fled to the island of Taiwan.

Mao and other Communist leaders set out to reshape Chinese society. Industry came under state ownership and China's farmers began to be organized into collectives. All opposition was ruthlessly suppressed. The Chinese initially received significant help from the Soviet Union, but relations soon began to cool.

In 1958, in an attempt to introduce a more "Chinese" form of communism, Mao launched the "Great Leap Forward". This aimed at mass mobilization of labour to improve agricultural and industrial production. The result, instead, was a massive decline in agricultural output, which, together with poor harvests, led to famine and the deaths of millions. The policy was abandoned and Mao's position weakened.

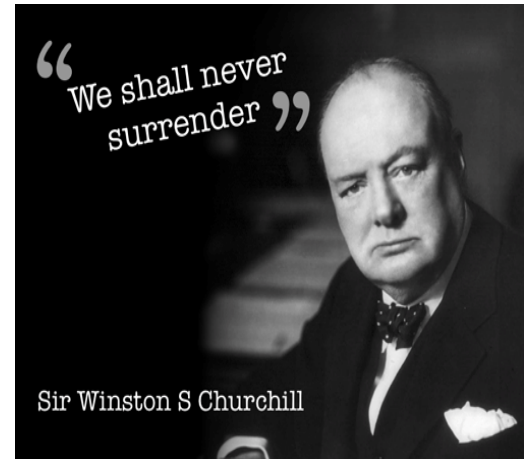
In an attempt to re-assert his authority, Mao launched the "Cultural Revolution" in 1966, aiming to purge the country of "impure" elements and revive the revolutionary spirit. One-and-a-half million people died and much of the country's cultural heritage was destroyed. In September 1967, with many cities on the verge of anarchy, Mao sent in the army to restore order.

Mao appeared victorious, but his health was deteriorating. His later years saw attempts to build bridges with the United States, Japan and Europe. In 1972, US President Richard Nixon visited China and met Mao.

Mao died on September 9, 1976.

# WINSTON CHURCHILL

Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born on November 30, 1874 at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire. His father was the prominent politician, Lord Randolph Churchill. As a young child in school, Churchill was ranked last in his class and was considered lazy. Churchill attended the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, before embarking on an army career. He spent time in Cuba, India, and Egypt. When he was twenty-four he decided to leave the Army and pursue a writing career. While working as a journalist during the Boer War he was captured and made a prisoner-of-war before escaping. When he finally arrived home, he learned he had become world-famous overnight. This helped him to launch his political career.



In 1900 the voters elected him to Parliament, an office he would occupy the greater part of his life.

When World War I came, Churchill was one of few men who recognized the threat Nazi Germany posed to the world. He was in a position as lord of the admiralty to build up the British navy. People disapproved, but the fleet was ready when it was needed.

When World War II broke out in 1939, it became clear that Churchill's warnings about the threat had been right on target. In May 1940 Churchill became the prime minister. His refusal to surrender to Nazi Germany inspired the country. He worked tirelessly throughout the war, building strong relations with US President Roosevelt while maintaining a sometimes difficult alliance with the Soviet Union.

As well as his many political achievements, he left a legacy of an impressive number of publications and in 1953 won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Churchill died on January 24, 1965 at the age of ninety after suffering a stroke.



The cigar, along with the "V for Victory" hand sign, became his trademark.

## FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

*Roosevelt was the only US president elected to office four times and led his country through two of the greatest crises of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – The Great Depression and World War II.*

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was born on January 30, 1882 at his family's estate in New York State. His father was a businessman. He attended Harvard and Columbia University Law School, but had little enthusiasm for the legal profession. In 1905, he married Eleanor Roosevelt, a distant cousin and niece of President Theodore Roosevelt. Five years later, Roosevelt was elected to the New York Senate, where he quickly came to national attention as a rising Democratic politician. From 1913 to 1920 - which included the years of World War One - Roosevelt was assistant secretary of the navy, where he achieved a reputation as a capable young administrator.



In 1921, Roosevelt suddenly fell ill with polio and was left unable to walk without braces or a cane. It seemed to signal the end of his career, but through his determination and the support of his wife, who often acted as his substitute at political meetings, he returned to work. In 1928, Roosevelt was elected governor of New York and in 1932 became the Democratic nominee for president, winning by a landslide. He came to power when the Great Depression was at its worst. He ushered in the 'New Deal' program (1933 - 1938) to provide relief for the unemployed, and then jobs, as well as attempting to reform and strengthen the American economy.



Roosevelt won a second term in 1936 and an unprecedented third term in 1940. While initially keeping America out of World War Two, he provided financial assistance and equipment to Britain and its allies. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour brought America into the war and Roosevelt took the lead in establishing a grand alliance among the countries fighting the Axis powers. He also devoted time to the planning of the post-war workload, particularly the establishment of the United Nations. Full economic recovery, which had not responded to Roosevelt's efforts throughout the 1930s, was achieved as a consequence of massive government spending on war production. Roosevelt died in office on April 12, 1945, less than a month before Germany's unconditional surrender.