

BENITO MUSSOLINI (AXIS POWERS)



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 II.

Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini was born on 29 July 1883 in Predappio in northern central Italy. His father was a blacksmith. As a child, Mussolini was violent. He gained a reputation as a bully. He led a gang of boys and they would raid farms. 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 Germans. He was installed as the leader of a new government, but had little power. As the Allies advanced northwards through Italy, Mussolini fled. He was captured by Italians. His own people eventually killed him; shot, kicked, spit on, and his body was hung upside down on meat hooks for civilians to see.

JOSEPH STALIN (ALLIED POWERS)

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 (nearly 3 decades). His regime of terror caused the death and suffering of tens of millions of his own people, but he also oversaw the war machine that played a key role in the defeat of Nazism. In addition, he turned the Soviet Union into a superpower that could only be rivaled by the United States.



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 (mended shoes) and Stalin grew up in modest circumstances. He studied at a seminary to become a priest but was eventually kicked out for reading banned books. He never

graduated, instead devoting his time to the revolutionary movement against the Russian monarchy. He spent the next 15 years as an activist and on a number of occasions was arrested and exiled to Siberia. In his 30s he changed his last name to Stalin, which means “man of steel.” In addition, he was only 5’4”, which led to President Harry Truman nicknaming him, “little squirt.” In addition, he was a huge film buff and loved to watch American Western movies. One of his favorite movie stars was American actor, John Wayne, who played a cowboy in several movies.

Stalin was not one of the major players in the Bolshevik seizure of power from the Romanov family in 1917, but he soon rose through the ranks of the party. In 1922, he was made general secretary of the Communist Party. After Vladimir Lenin's (leader of the Bolshevik Revolution) death in 1924, Stalin promoted himself as his political heir and gradually outmaneuvered all his rivals. By the late 1920s, Stalin was effectively the dictator of the Soviet Union.

Russian farmers were not producing enough to feed the entire population, so Stalin declared that that villages would unite their farms (called collectivism). The idea was to have large government owned farms. The peasants hated the idea, so they burned their crops, destroyed tools and killed their animals rather than turn it all over to the state. This led to more famine. Stalin declared war on the peasants and they were executed or sent to prison camps. By 1939, 99% of farms had been collectivized by Stalin's government. Later, 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 slave labor camps.

These purges severely depleted the Red Army, and despite repeated warnings, 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. According to some sources, during WWII Stalin refused to negotiate with Germany to rescue his son, Yakov. The German's held Yakov in a concentration camp and offered to release him in exchange for another soldier but Stalin refused. His son died in the camp in northeast Germany in 1943.

After World War II, the Soviet Union entered the nuclear age and ruled over an empire that included most of Eastern Europe. One of Stalin's most famous quotes was, “I trust no one, not even myself.” Increasingly paranoid, Stalin died of a stroke on March 5, 1953. Although known throughout the West as a cruel cold tyrant, Stalin was actually nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize twice, in 1945 and 1948, for his involvement in bringing the Second World War to a close and was featured as Time Magazine's Person of the year twice.



HIDEKI TOJO (AXIS POWERS)

Hideki Tojo was born in 1884 and died in 1948. Hideki Tojo was Prime Minister of Japan when the attack on Pearl Harbor took place plunging the Far East into a war, which was to end with the destruction of Hiroshima in August 1945. For his part in leading Japan into World War Two, Tojo was executed as a war criminal.

Tojo was born in Tokyo and decided on a career in the army. He did well at military college and served as a military ambassador in Germany shortly after the end of World War One. Tojo became the leader of the militarists in Japan and despised what he considered to be weak civilian politicians. His views were shared by many in the public and in the 1930's the army and all it represented was held in much greater esteem than politicians in general. This became even more so after the army's victories in Manchuria, China from 1931 on.

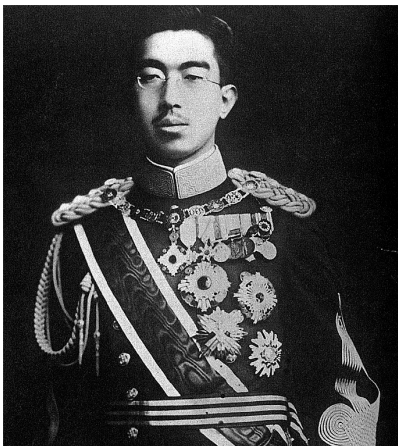
In the summer of 1940, Tojo became Minister of War in the government and he saw that Japan's future lay with the European dictators - especially Hitler - who were much admired in Japan. While the European dictators were admired and respected in Japan, the opposite was true for America. The people of America were thought of as decadent, lazy and without scruples compared to the disciplined workforce of Japan that worshipped their emperor, Hirohito.

As Minister of War, Tojo made it clear that Japan should push south in the Far East and take land owned by European nations. On October 14th, 1941, Tojo was appointed Prime Minister of Japan. By this date, he was convinced that a war with America could not be avoided and he put Japan on a full war alert. He decided that a massive knock-out blow would be sufficient to remove America from the Pacific. As a result, Tojo authorized the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

The huge success enjoyed by the Japanese Army in the months immediately following Pearl Harbor, strengthened Tojo's power in Japan - especially when the British Army surrendered at Singapore and Douglas MacArthur withdrew American forces from the Philippines.

However, it was only a matter of time before the Americans and their allies organized themselves in the Pacific. As the Americans advanced throughout the many islands in the Pacific, Japan came into range of American bombers. With bombing raids reducing a lot of Japan to rubble, the emperor, Hirohito, believed that Tojo had lost control of events and Tojo offered his resignation on July 9th, 1944.

In November 1948, Tojo was put on trial as a war criminal. According to sources, Tojo tried to commit suicide but was arrested before he could be successful. He was accused of instigating Japan's aggressive foreign policy in the early 1940's and of permitting the appalling abuse of prisoners-of-war. Hideki Tojo made the decision to use the prisoners as expendable slaves and was responsible for the policy to "Kill All the Prisoners" upon invasion of the homelands or imminent danger. While he denied the mistreatment of POW's, he was found guilty and hanged.



EMPEROR HIROHITO (AXIS POWERS)

Installed as Crown Prince at the age of fifteen, Hirohito assumed the "Chrysanthemum Throne" in 1926 at the age of 25 when his father died, the Emperor Yoshihito. Because his father had been a weak and sickly man, Hirohito ruled more in the shadow of his grandfather, the great Emperor Meiji, who presided over Japan's late-19th-century. Even before he assumed the throne, Hirohito went on a six-month tour of Europe in 1921, where he picked up a life-long taste for Western food and clothes. This is the Hirohito the world also saw later in 1975, when he finally realized his dream of visiting the United States, where he met John Wayne, was received by President Gerald Ford, and acquired a Mickey Mouse watch he wore for years.

In the decades after the war, it was believed that Hirohito was essentially a pawn of the militarists who gained control of the government shortly after he took the throne. So basically, Hirohito did what others told him to. Hirohito's quiet manner, love of haiku and marine biology, the image of the peace-loving man who was powerless to stop his country's murderous expansion took hold. But after his death in 1989, a more open inquiry into what happened has convinced a number of historians that this version, while partially true, is far from accurate. Hirohito's ability to prevent the militarists was certainly limited -- he was more a symbol of the state than an actual ruler -- but he was not nearly as blameless as his defenders would have it. The decisions that led to the war were made unanimously by the cabinet, the emperor was fully informed about them, they were often made in his presence, he knew in advance of the plan to attack Hawaii, and he even made suggestions about how to carry it out."

On August 15, 1945, the Japanese people heard the voice of their emperor for the first time, and while he avoided using the word "surrender," his meaning was clear. Although his voice was heard far too late -- Japan

had lost 2.3 million soldiers and 800,000 civilians in the war -- in the difficult days ahead the emperor did provide a much-needed measure of national unity. Hirohito did his part to remake Japan along an American model, backing the new constitution, "renouncing" his divinity, and trying gamely to play the part of "Japan's first democrat." By the time his 62-year reign came to an end, Japan had risen like a Phoenix out of the postwar rubble to become one of the world's richest countries. It was in demonstrating this remarkable capacity for change that Hirohito truly became the living symbol of his people.

ADOLF HITLER (AXIS POWERS)

Hitler did not do particularly well in school, leaving formal education in 1905. Unable to settle into a regular job, he drifted. He wished to become an artist but was rejected from the Academy in Vienna.

Adolf Hitler was born on 20 April 1889 in the small Austrian town of Braunau to Alois Hitler and his wife Klara. Supposedly, Hitler endured tough treatment under his father.

At primary school, Hitler showed great intellectual potential and was extremely popular with fellow pupils as well as being admired for his leadership qualities. However, competition at secondary school was tougher and Hitler stopped trying as a result.



He also lost his popularity among his fellow students and instead preferred to re-enact battles from the Boer war with younger children. At the age of 15, he failed his exams and was told to repeat the year but he left without a formal education instead. At the age of 18, he moved to Vienna with money inherited after his father's death in 1903, in order to pursue a career in art, as this was his best subject at school. However his applications for both the Vienna Academy of Art and the School of Architecture were rejected.

It was supposedly at this time that Hitler first became interested in politics and how the masses could be made to respond to certain themes. He was particularly impressed with the anti-Semitic, nationalist Christian-Socialist party. During the First World War he volunteered to fight for the German Army. He won several awards for bravery, including the Iron Cross First Class.

In October 1918, he was blinded in a mustard gas attack. Germany surrendered while Hitler was in hospital and he went into a state of great depression, spending lots of time in tears. After the war ended, Hitler's future seemed uncertain.

Did Hitler invent hatred of Jews? No, Hitler built on and used anti-semitic (prejudice against, hatred of, or discrimination against Jews) ideas that already existed. He was Austrian and grew up in Vienna where hatred of Jews was widespread. His hatred of Jews cannot be tied down to a specific event in his life, for example a Jewish childhood friend, as many people think.

In 1919, Hitler attended his first meeting of the German Workers' party, an anti-Semitic, nationalist group as a spy for the German Army. However, he found that he agreed with their ideas while he was there. He disagreed with how they were organized leading him to make a passionate speech.

On 30 January 1933, President Hindenburg was forced to appoint Hitler as Chancellor, given his popular support. Hitler put Germany's unemployed to work on a massive rearmament program, using propaganda and manufacturing enemies, such as the Jews, to prepare the country for war. Initially, other powerful countries ignored Hitler's actions, as they believed appeasement was the only way to avoid a war.

In 1936, Hitler invaded the Rhineland, which had been demilitarized because of the Treaty of Versailles. He then proceeded to annex Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia. Under the Munich Agreement of 1938, the West accepted this. In 1939, Hitler made an alliance with Russia and with Italy. On 1 September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland and WWII began as a result. In April 1940, Denmark and Norway were also taken. France quickly followed. Hitler went onto conquer most of Western Europe.

In 1941, despite their alliance, Germany invaded Russia which was called Operation Barbarossa. It was one of his greatest mistakes. With the German advance slowed by the Russians, the German army found themselves in stuck in the Russian winter without adequate supplies. At the same time, the Allied forces were pushing hard, and began to advance on Germany. In response, Hitler withdrew almost entirely. It was reported he was increasingly erratic and out-of-touch. He was increasingly paranoid. He even had food testers because he was worried his food would be poisoned.

As Allied forces moved into Germany, Hitler hid in his bunker 55 feet under the chancellery building. This bunker had 18 rooms, a water supply, and electricity. Hitler committed suicide (swallowing a cyanide capsule or gunshot) on April 30, 1945, with his long term girlfriend Eva Braun, who he is thought to have perhaps married at the last minute. Germany surrender followed soon after his death.

It is clear that Hitler had an obsession with power. He also had an obsession with his image. He would even have a professional photographer take photos of him giving speeches, so he could see what he looked like. In addition, he spent tons of money on cars, champagne, clothes, etc. Hitler was heavily attached to his dogs, Blondi and Bella.