Joseph Stalin

Occupation: Leader of the Soviet Union

Born: December 8, 1878 in Gori, Georgia

Died: March 5, 1953 in Kuntsevo Dacha near Moscow, Russia
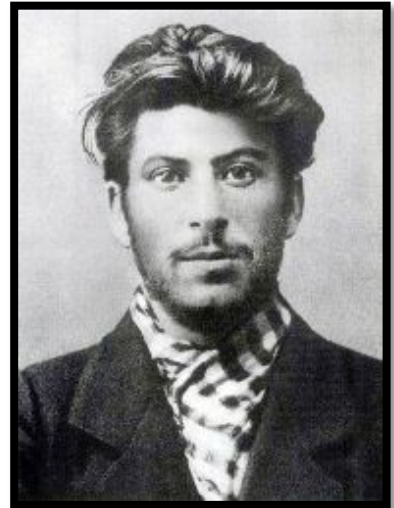
Biography

Joseph Stalin became leader of the Soviet Union after the founder of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Lenin, died in 1924. Stalin ruled up until his own death in 1953. He was known as a brutal leader who was responsible for the deaths of over 20 million people.
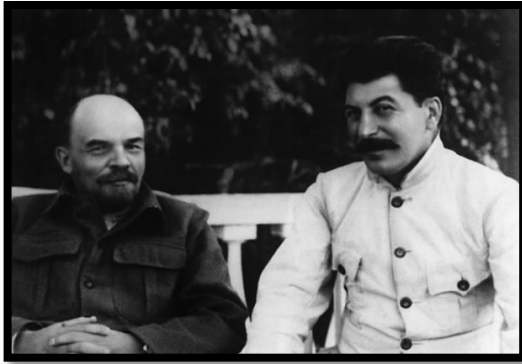
Where did Stalin grow up?

He was born in Gori, Georgia (a country just south of Russia) on December 8, 1878. His birth name was Losif Jughashvili. Stalin's parents were poor and he had a rough childhood. At the age of seven he got a disease called smallpox. He survived, but his skin was covered in scars. He later went to seminary to become a priest, however, he was expelled for being a radical.

The Revolution

After leaving the seminary, Stalin joined up with the Bolshevik revolutionaries. This was an underground group of people that followed the communist writings of Karl Marx and were led by Vladimir Lenin. Stalin became a leader within the Bolsheviks. He led riots and strikes and even raised money by robbing banks and other crimes. Soon Stalin became one of Lenin's top leaders.

In 1917, the Russian Revolution took place. This was when the government led by the Czars was overthrown and Lenin and the Bolsheviks came into power. Russia was now called the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin was a major leader in the government.

Lenin's Death

In 1924 Vladimir Lenin died. Stalin had been General Secretary of the Communist Party since 1922. He had been growing in power and control. After Lenin's death, Stalin took over as sole leader of the Soviet Union.

Industrialization

In order to strengthen the Soviet Union, Stalin decided that the country should move away from agriculture and become industrialized. He had factories built through the country. These factories would help the Soviet Union to fight the Germans in World War II.

Five Year Plans

In the name of communism, Stalin's government seized assets, including farms and factories, and reorganized the economy. These efforts, however, often led to less efficient production, ensuring that mass starvation and famine swept the countryside. To hide the devastating results of the plan to the rest of the world, Stalin maintained export levels, shipping food out of the country even as his own citizens died by the hundreds of thousands. Stalin attempted two more *Five Year Plans* after the failure of the first, all of which came to the same disastrous end. Although these programs were inefficient, Stalin punished any protest of his policies with immediate death or relocation to a gulag (a prison camp in the remote regions of the nation).

Purges and Murder

Stalin was one of the most brutal leaders in world history. He had anyone that didn't agree with him killed or sent to labor camps known as *gulags*. He also caused famines in areas of the country so people he wanted dead would starve. Throughout his rule he would order purges where millions of people he thought were against him would be killed or put into slave labor camps. Historians aren't sure how many people he had killed, but they estimate between 20 to 40 million.

Interesting Facts

★ He got the name Stalin while he was a revolutionary. It comes from the Russian world for "steel" combined with "Lenin".

★ Before Lenin died he wrote a Testament where he recommended that Stalin be removed from power. Lenin referred to Stalin as a "course, brutish bully".

★ Stalin created the *gulag* slave labor camp. Criminals and political prisoners were sent to these camps to work as slaves.

★ Before he had the name Stalin, he used the name "Koba". Koba was a hero from Russian literature.
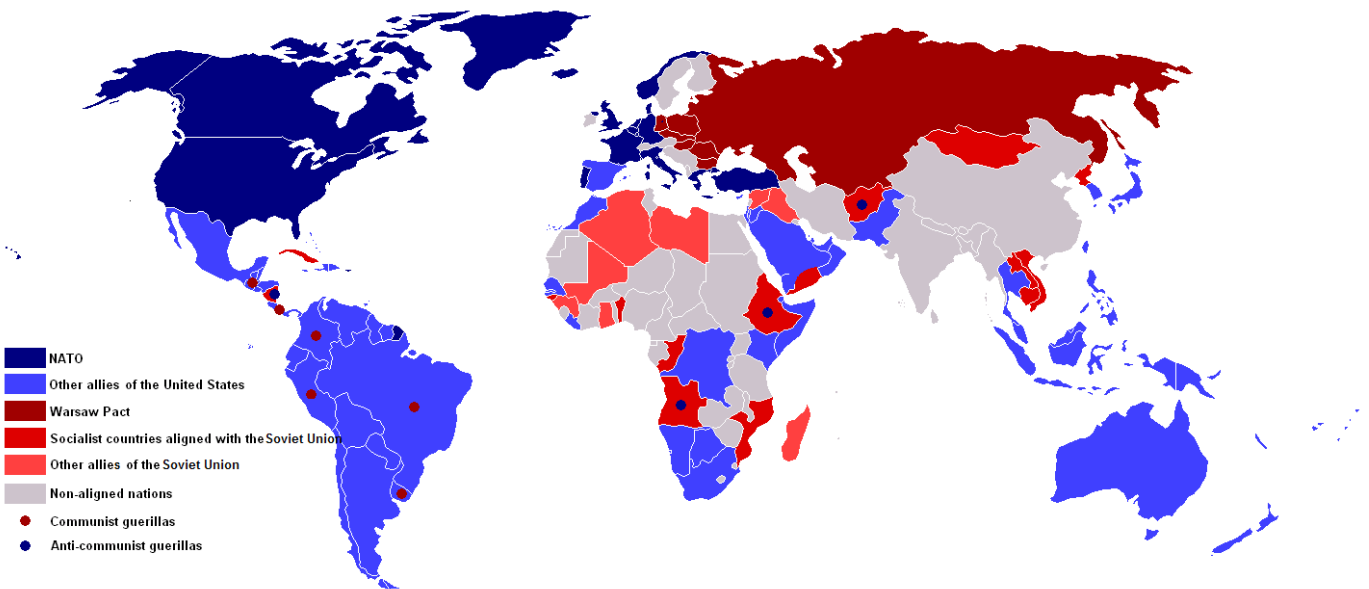
World War II

At the start of World War II, Stalin formed an alliance with Adolf Hitler and Germany. However, Hitler hated Stalin and the Germans made a surprise attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. In order to fight off the Germans, Stalin joined the Allies of Britain and the United States. After a terrible war, where many on both sides died, the Germans were defeated.

Cold War

After World War II, Stalin set up puppet governments in the Eastern European countries that the Soviet Union had "freed" from Germany. These governments were run by the Soviet Union. This started the *Cold War* between the two world superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States. The Cold War was a period of tension between the United States and Soviet Union with no direct warfare. Instead of fighting one another in an open war, Americans and Soviets competed against one another to see which nation could build the most atomic bombs (*arms race*), which nation could first land a man on the moon (*space race*), and which nation could be the most influential world power.

Cold War Nations

The map above shows the competing alliances during the Cold War. The blue nations were democratic nations allied with the United States; the red nations were communist nations allied with the Soviet Union.