

THE ENTIRE
LIFE STORY
OF



HITLER AND STALIN

TWO PREDATOR LEADERS

ADOLF HITLER AND JOSEPH STALIN

Two Predator Leaders During The World War II

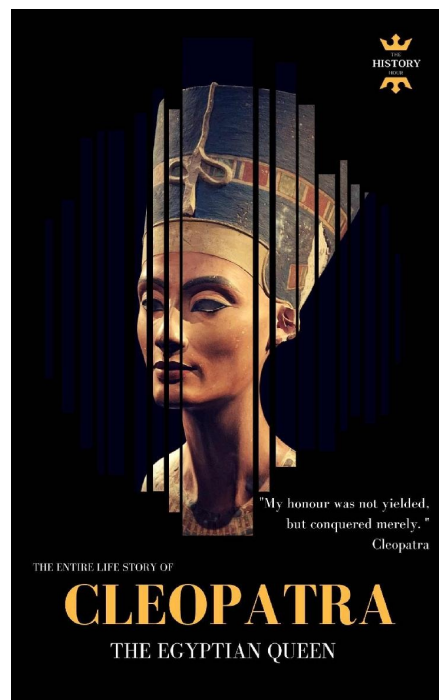
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ADOLF HITLER

DER FUHRER

I

INTRODUCTION



Strength lies not in defence but in attack.
Adolf Hitler



Adolf Hitler is a name most people are familiar with. When you hear the name you likely think of an infamous villain and a dictator, who ruled with an iron fist, leading people to do his bidding—attempting to eradicate an entire religious, cultural, and ethnic group. However, if you picked up this book, you must be wanting to know more about Hitler, perhaps stories that are not so well-known.



Most people, although familiar with the name Hitler, and familiar with his terrible actions, do not know much about the man himself. Many know what he did once in power, but know nothing of how he got there. This book will increase your knowledge of Hitler and will help you understand how he claimed power.



In the first part of the book, the focus will be on Hitler, the person. Like anyone else, he was born, had a childhood, and grew up. As a youngster, Adolf likely had no idea what his life would bring, nor did anyone else. In fact, his life brought great tragedy and pain to him. As you learn about the experiences he had, you will better understand how Adolf got to be the way he was. This is not necessarily intended to develop some sympathy for him, only to increase your understanding for who he was, who he became, and perhaps, theoretically, how it could have been prevented. You will have to stay tuned to the Conclusion to fully take away some lessons for how to avoid such traits in your own self.



In the second part of the book, Hitler's rise to power is reviewed and analyzed. Many forget that he did not end up as the most powerful and influential villain of modern times by himself. He had a lot of help from others with like-minded ideas. There was no one day where suddenly he was in charge. It took time, steps, and planning to get him there. It also took political cunning and violence. Hitler's own views on how to use his power also developed over time. His life, his personality, and the sociopolitical climate he was in, eventually led him to a point where he ordered the extermination of the Jewish people.



Part three of the book will discuss Hitler's most well-known and heinous acts. It will not be an easy read, but you will likely learn a few details about his role in events prior to and during the Holocaust that you did not know before. You can consider them from a new viewpoint, in light of Parts One and Two. As you continue reading on through the Conclusion, you will also gain knowledge for what came after the war. Hitler's actions were influential on small and massive scales across the entire world. He left legacies that influenced several fields of academic study. Thanks to historians and researchers there is now more knowledge than ever about how to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

II

JUST A MAN



Success is the sole earthly judge of right and wrong.
Adolf Hitler



Most everyone has heard of Adolf Hitler and the atrocious acts he committed. While his dictatorship and the genocide he inflicted on the Jewish people are well-known, his origins and early life may be less familiar to you. Yet, it is important to know a person's beginnings to better understand their ambitions and motivations. Understanding the why can help to prevent repetition of the past.



Hitler's childhood and early adulthood are understood through historical records and accounts. He also wrote his work, *Mein Kampf*, as a biography, which provides additional information on his life and his thoughts on his life.



Adolf Hitler was born in Braunau am Inn, Austria, on April 20, 1889. He came into the world, just like any other person, as a seemingly innocent baby. In the past, many psychologists and biologists believed that people start out largely as a “blank slate” ready to be written on by their experiences and relationships. Over time, they become fully formed adults. Now, scientists are more aware that biological factors and social factors both influence a person’s development.

ADOLF'S PATERNAL ROOTS



Adolf's father, Alois Hitler, was originally named Alois Schicklgruber when he was born in Austria. His mother (Adolf's grandmother) was a 42-year-old unwed peasant (Maria Schicklgruber). At his baptism, there was no father named for Alois and he was considered "illegitimate." In that time and place, such a situation was viewed rather negatively. Alois spent his early years living with his mother and grandfather (Johannes Schicklgruber).



When Alois was 5-years-old, his mother married Johann Georg Hiedler. At age 10, he was sent to live with Hiedler's brother. Alois then lived on a farm in the nearby village of Spital. He attended school and learned practices in shoemaking. At age 13, Alois left Spital and went to Vienna to become an apprentice shoe cobbler. He worked in Vienna for five years.



In 1855, Alois responded to recruitment efforts from the Austrian Government to become employed in the Civil Service. He was age 18 at that time. He started working in the Austrian Finance Ministry within the customs service. Over the next few years, he progressed in his work as a customs official. His job required frequent moves to new places around Austria.



After five years of service, Alois achieved the rank of Finanzwach-Oberaufseher. He continued training and completed more exams to progress further up the ranks. By 1875 he had become an inspector of customs in a post at Braunau am Inn. Once he became full inspector of customs, he could progress no further, due to his lack of formal education.

THE BIRTH OF A NAME



Alois Schicklgruber had seen success, and despite stigmas at the time, his progress was seemingly not held back by being born out of wedlock. Yet for reasons that are not entirely clear, he chose to change his last name. Historians believe his motivation may have been to expedite legal processes to gain inheritance. Nonetheless records indicate that in 1876, Alois stood before a priest to become legitimized as the son of his stepfather. This meant his last name would become Hiedler. However, somewhere in the process, an official transformed this into Alois Hitler (also for reasons that are not entirely clear).

ADOLF'S MATERNAL ROOTS



Adolf's mother, Klara Polzl, was born in the Austrian village of Spital to Johann Baptist Polzl (father) and Johanna Hiedler (mother). Her family were hard-working peasants. As a child, Klara was described as being quiet, sweet, and affectionate. In 1876, she was hired as a household servant to her relative, Alois Hitler and his wife Anna Glasl-Horer. Due to Alois's legitimization as the son of Johann Georg Hiedler, he and Klara were related as first-cousins-once-removed.



Klara worked for Alois and his wife Anna, until they separated (Anna later died). Then, Klara worked for Alois and his second wife, Franziska Matzelsberger, until her death. Meanwhile, Klara and Alois had struck up a relationship of their own. Soon, they found she was pregnant. They wished to marry; however, they were considered legally related. Alois filed an appeal for a humanitarian waiver from the church. They were soon granted permission to marry.



On January 7, 1885, Alois and Klara married in a brief ceremony, followed by a brief meal. Afterward, Alois went to work. Klara lamented the brevity of the

event. Just a few months later, Klara gave birth to her first child (Gustav). In 1886, she gave birth to a daughter (Ida). Both children soon died from Diphtheria. In 1887, Klara gave birth to another child (Otto), who died within just days. In 1889, Adolphus (Adolf) was born. Another child (Edmund) was born in 1894 (unfortunately, he died from measles at age 5). Klara had her final child, Paula, in 1896. Only Paula and Adolf lived to adulthood.



Records indicate Klara's life was spent like most women's lives were spent at that time. She raised her children (and step-children from Alois's previous marriage) and kept house. Some historians have even described her as a devoted mother, which would match that caring nature described when she was a girl. Records suggest, Alois was not particularly involved with their lives together or very interested in spending time with Klara (instead devoted to his work). Further, historians believe he was a harsh and perhaps abusive father.

A TROUBLED CHILDHOOD



Adolf was born into a family already rife with tragedy. He was the fourth of six children born to the union between Alois and Klara. However, all his older full-siblings had already died. Two older children did reside in the household. Alois Jr. (born 1882) and Angela (born 1883) were from Alois's second marriage.



When Hitler was three-years-old, his family moved to Passau, Germany. In 1894, the family returned to Austria. A year after, Alois retired and the family settled in Hafeld. Alois became a farmer and a beekeeper. Meanwhile, Adolf started attending the state-owned school of Volksschule in Fischlham. Alois was not successful in his efforts at farming. The family moved again to Lambach for a time, before moving permanently to Leonding.



In 1900, the family faced great tragedy again when Adolf's younger brother, Edmund died. Records indicate that prior to the loss, Adolf had been a confident, outgoing, and conscientious student. However, afterward, he became morose and detached. He started fighting frequently with his school teachers and father. He was young, and he had already faced so much loss, within a dysfunctional

family, it started to change him as a person.

DREAMS OF THE FATHER



Not only did Adolf face great tragedy during his childhood, he also struggled in a contentious relationship with his father. Hitler became undisciplined in school because he was more interested in the arts and religion. He sang, participated in the choir, and considered entering the priesthood. These ambitions did not align with Alois's goals for Adolf and the two had intense conflicts.



Records indicate that like many fathers, Alois hoped his son, Adolf, would follow his career into a life of Civil Service. However, Adolf did not feel particularly close to his father and did not share that dream. Historians write that, at that time, Adolf did not want to spend his life enforcing rules.



Adolf wanted to attend a classical high school and become an artist. However, his father sent him to the Realschule instead. There, he intentionally performed poorly. Adolf hoped his father would see his lack of progress and let him leave that school. Historians believe that when Alois would attempt to push Adolf in one direction, Adolf consistently did the opposite of whatever his father wanted.

DREAMS OF THE SON



In 1903, Alois died suddenly, leaving Klara to rely on a government pension. Hitler's school performance further deteriorated. His mother allowed him to leave. She moved with Adolf and his only surviving sister, Paula, to Linz, where they lived on meager means. In September 1904, Adolf enrolled at Realschule in Steyr and performed well. In 1905, he passed his final exam and left school with no clear plans for his future education or career.



Soon, he chose to leave home and to study art in Vienna. He sought admission to the Academy of Fine Arts there. Unfortunately, he was rejected twice. His art was criticized, with one person stating the drawings showed "unfitness for painting." Hitler was advised to study architecture instead. He had some interest in this path, but could not pursue it because he had not finished secondary school. Soon, his art ambitions became relatively less important anyway.

DEVASTATING LOSS



Adolf faced more challenges and loss in 1907. His mother discovered a lump in her breast. She initially ignored it, but when chest pains started to interrupt her sleep, she finally sought medical attention. Her doctor knew nearly immediately that she had breast cancer. However, rather than tell Klara directly, the doctor left that task up to Adolf. At this time, he was just 17-years-old. He was young man, telling his mother that she had breast cancer and the prognosis was poor.



Klara faced the diagnosis with strength, relying on her faith in God. She submitted to a radical mastectomy. It was her only hope. Unfortunately, the doctors discovered the prognosis was even worse than they initially thought. The cancer had spread to the tissue in her chest. Her condition was terminal.



Adolf moved home to care for his mother and begged the doctor to try whatever he could to prolong her life. Klara underwent chemotherapy. It was futile. She died on December 21, 1907. The loss was immense for Adolf. He was now an orphan, having lost both parents, and his only support. He was stricken with grief. Adolf later wrote he had “honored my father, but loved my mother.”

LIFE MOVES ON



After the death of his mother, Adolf returned to Vienna to resume the chase for his art dreams. Facing limited success, he soon ran out of money. He had to live in a men's hostel and later homeless shelters. He made ends meet by working as a day laborer. He sold paintings of tourist attractions around Vienna. He continued endeavoring to pursue his passion for architecture and music.



While immersing himself in the beauty of artistic creation, Adolf also started being exposed to racist rhetoric. Leaders at the time were developing a climate of German Nationalism and Anti-Semitism. Soon, he was immersing himself in literature from politicians, philosophers, and theoreticians, including: Karl Lueger, Georg Ritter von Schonerer, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Charles Darwin, Gustave Le Bon, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Arthur Schopenhauer.



In 1913, Adolf received his father's estate, which allowed him to move to Munich. He was called upon to join the Austrian-Hungarian Army, but did not pass the medical examination. He later claimed he did not want to join because of the mixture of races in that army and his belief the empire would eventually

collapse.

RISE TO POWER



Who says I am not under the special protection of God?
Adolf Hitler



Hitler was a product of his time and the place he grew up in. During his childhood and young adult years, many Austrian Germans were developing German Nationalist ideals. Hitler similarly adopted these ideals and expressed his loyalty to Germany. When he started reading popular works of the time and following particular leaders, it was easy for him to adopt more of those ideas.



The development of Hitler's Anti-Semitism, which grew alongside his Nationalist views, is less clear. He wrote in his own Autobiography and Political Treatise, *Mein Kampf*, that he had developed such views while living in Vienna. However, others observed him to have fair dealings with Jewish businessmen and customers. Historians now think that his Anti-Semitic views grew more from the defeat of Germany during World War I and a paranoid, blaming,

explanation for the situation. Hitler, like others, thought that some people betrayed the nation of Germany by agreeing to peace at the end of World War I.



Nonetheless, as he rose to power, Hitler strengthened and carried his views into a rhetoric that he used to fuel his success and spread hatred. Before that, though, he himself participated in World War I, which gave him a vested interest in the outcome and left him with some troubling experiences.

JOINED THE FORCES OF WORLD WAR I



In August 1914, Austria-Hungary and the German Empire started the First World War. Hitler was just age 25 at the time. After failing his physical exam for the Austrian Army, he sought permission to instead serve in the Bavarian Army. Although, he likely should have been deported back to Austria, he was actually able to enlist. It seems likely that this was due to an error in paperwork. While in the army, he shared his German Nationalist ideals with his fellow troops.



Hitler served in the 16th Bavarian Reserve Regiment in France and Belgium during the war. During the first Battle of Ypres, he was an infantryman in the 1st company. He was lucky to survive as almost 3000 men from his regiment perished in that battle. His own company shrank from 250 troops to 42. Hitler was promoted from Schutze (Private) to Gefreiter (Lance Corporal) after the battle. He was assigned to be a regimental message-runner.



Hitler's regiment fought in several more battles: the Battle of Somme, the Battle of Arras, and the Battle of Passchendaele. Hitler was decorated for his bravery in battle, twice. This included the Iron Cross Second Class in 1914 and the Iron

Cross First Class 1918. The latter was awarded after he navigated an attack in open warfare, transmitting messages when they were most-needed. Yet, records indicate he refused to be considered for a promotion.



During the Battle of Somme (October 1916), Hitler was wounded. A shell exploded at the entrance of his dugout area. It wounded him in the left thigh. Records indicate he begged his superiors not to evacuate him. Instead, he was sent to a Red Cross Hospital for two months to recover. He was then ordered to return to Munich. However, he again pleaded with his commanding officer to recall him back to the frontlines. He did not want to be in Munich, when he knew his fellow troops were fighting. He returned to the frontlines in March 1917.



In October 1918, Hitler and his fellow troops were blinded, and he lost his voice, due to an attack by the British. The physical ailments were the result of mustard-gas. He was again hospitalized to recover. While in hospital, on November 10, he learned of Germany's defeat in the war. The news made him ill. He was thoroughly upset about the Treaty of Versailles, a document in which Germany was forced to admit to starting the war. The treaty also deprived Germany of several territories, demilitarized some areas, and imposed economic sanctions.



When reflecting on his thoughts at that time, Hitler himself wrote

“When I was confined to bed, the idea came to me that I would liberate Germany, that I would make it great. I knew immediately that it would be realized.”

Yet, it is unclear if that was the true start of his political career.

JOINED THE DEUTSCHE ARBEITERPARTEI



After the war ended, Hitler still wanted to be in the army. However, Germany's armed forces were nearly completely disbanded. He was sent to Munich for demobilization. Still a lance corporal, Hitler participated in "national thinking" courses, which were run by Captain Karl Mayr in the Education and Propaganda Department of the Bavarian Army. He soon became an agent of the Department.



In July 1919, Hitler was given new roles—that of Verbindungsmann (intelligence agent) and Aufklärungskommando (reconnaissance commando) of the Reichswehr. These roles would allow him to influence other soldiers. Hitler was also charged with infiltrating the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP, also known as the German Workers' Party, what later the Nazi Party).



While monitoring the activities of DAP, Hitler became increasingly attracted to their Anti-Semitic, Nationalist, Anti-Capitalist, and Anti-Marxist ideas. The groups' leader, Anton Drexler, was equally impressed with Hitler. Drexler was also particularly drawn to Hitler's public-speaking skills. He invited Hitler to formally join the DAP. Hitler officially joined on September 12, 1919. He

quickly stepped up into their top post. He took on political leadership over Bavarian “patriotic associations” (the Kampfbund).

GROWING TENSION BETWEEN KAHR AND HITLER



Following political turmoil and violence, on September 26, 1923, the Bavarian Prime Minister Eugen von Knilling declared a state of emergency. Gustav von Kahr was appointed Staatskomissar (state commissioner) with powers to govern the state. Kahr, along with Colonel Hans Rigger von Seisser and Reichsweher General Otto von Lossow created a ruling triumvirate.



In response to this change in leadership, Hitler declared he would convene 14 mass meetings, starting on September 27, 1923. Kahr moved to ban the meetings. Hitler felt he needed to come back with an equally strong response. He, other leaders in the Kampfbund, and the Nazi Party, decided to march on Berlin and take power. Hitler hoped to work with Kahr; however, Kahr developed a plan to create his own nationalist dictatorship without Hitler.

THE BEER HALL PUTSCH



Inspired by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's successful March on Rome, Hitler and his followers developed a plan to take power from the Bavarian state government, by kidnapping Kahr and some other politicians. Upon learning that Kahr would be giving a speech to a crowd at Burgerbraukeller (a large beer hall in Munich), Hitler decided to take his followers there.



On November 8 and 9, 1923, Hitler led the coup attempt known as the Beer Hall Putsch, to overthrow the Bavarian government and take power. Hitler had some of his followers surround the beer hall. Hitler and 20 of his top leaders entered the hall. There, they confronted police and the Reichswehr. Hitler shot a gun at the ceiling and then declared a "national revolution." General Ludendorff arrived and convinced Kahr and the other Bavarian leaders to give into Hitler's demands.



It appeared that the coup was working. However, later that night, Hitler left the beer hall to address problems elsewhere in the city. His followers had been charged with taking over other government buildings, but their attempts had mostly failed. While Hitler was gone from the beer hall, General Ludendorff

mistakenly allowed the Bavarian leaders to leave the beer hall.



General Ludendorff attempted to correct the failed situation by organizing a spontaneous march on the city center. He, along with 3000 Nazis marched into Munich's downtown area. The marchers were blocked by state police officers. The groups shot at one another. 16 Nazis and 4 Police Officers were killed. Hitler was injured, with a dislocated shoulder. However, Hitler managed to escape arrest and ran off to hide in the countryside. The coup had failed.

OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK



Eventually, Hitler was found and arrested. He was tried in a 24-day trial. He was found guilty of treason. He was sent to Landsberg Prison for five years. Yet, he was released after only nine months, on December 20, 1924. While in prison, he wrote *Mein Kampf* (translated as “My Struggle” or “My Fight”), which was part autobiography and part political treatise. It describes Hitler’s life and how he came to develop his beliefs and plans for a better future for Germany. The text was published in two volumes during 1925 and 1926.



Despite the seeming failure and losses from the failed coup, Hitler perceived benefits in the efforts made during the Beer Hall Putsch. First, through newspaper headlines all over the world, Hitler was given initial attention. His platform grew during the course of his trial. He had an opportunity to publicize his Nationalist (Nazi) sentiments. He also felt he gained some increased understanding by now seeing a better path to power through legitimate means rather than force. He decided to redirect Nazi tactics to develop and further his plan and propaganda.

SEIZING POWER THROUGH ELECTIONS



With an eye on a new path towards power through legitimate means that could not be challenged with legal recourse, Hitler focused initially on re-establishing his position as leader of the Nazi party (after his release from prison). Meanwhile, Hitler needed to rely on uncertain election results to gain more legitimate power. Lucky for him, a series of elections and other political disputes generally also worked out in his favor.



In 1925, the reformed Nazi Party was no longer banned. They contested that year's election results. However, they irrefutably won only 12 seats in the Reichstag. That was however, just the start of progress for the Nazi Party.



In May 1928, the SPD and the KPD parties of Germany both made gains in the election. The SPD achieved 153 seats but failed to gain a clear majority. This left Hermann Muller in charge of a coalition government. Muller brought together members of the SPD, the German Democratic Party, the Centre Party, and the German People's Party. Of course, this mixed group was troubled by divisions as each person was more concerned about their own party's interests rather than the interests of the government. Amid the trouble, Muller asked President Paul

von Hindenburg for emergency powers. When Muller was refused his request, he resigned. This marked the end of the democratic government.



Due to the challenges of the 1928 election, Hitler later wrote a second book, *Zweites Buch* (translated as “Second Book”), which was intended to improve the public’s understanding of his ideas. The book expanded on his plans for foreign policy. He hoped that with this, there would be more support from the public during future elections. However, the book never went to print and was only discovered, locked in a safe, after the war had ended.



Starting in 1929, Germany started seeing the effects of the Great Depression. Unemployment increased and industrial production decreased. This caused the German people to grow uneasy with the state of things and the state of the government. They wanted their politicians to do more for them.



During 1930, the pro-republican parties started to fall apart. Hindenburg attempted to appoint a minority government, that could govern through his emergency powers. In September 1930, the SPD and Zentrum saw no major wins or losses. The most dramatic result of that election was a rise in NSDAP (Nazi Party) wins. The Nazi Party took more than 100 seats, while the KDP took an additional 23 seats. A parliamentary government was now impossible.



In March 1932, during the presidential election, Hindenburg (pro-democratic) ran against Hitler, and Thalmann (Communist). Hindenburg won; however, months later he dismissed his Chancellor and appointed another (Papen). The Reichstag did not like the new Chancellor and were moving to dismiss him. However, Papen persuaded Hindenburg to dissolve the Reichstag and elect new members. This served to protect Papen from his own dismissal.



In July 1932, federal elections were held to create the new Reichstag and the Nazi Party again saw substantial gains. They were now the largest party in parliament, though they still lacked a winning majority. However, along with other pro-republican parties, they had more power. Papen's actions had unintentionally given the Nazi Party an increase in power.



In November 1932, more elections were held. This election resulted in a reduction in votes for the Nazi Party along with increases for the DNVP and Communist parties. However, it was the last fair election because the Nazis would soon seize power, in part through voter suppression of opposing parties. In the end, these election results did not truly matter because it did all work out in favor of the Nazis, which led to Hitler specifically also gaining power.

CHANCELLOR HITLER



Following the November 1932 election, Papen continued to urge Hindenburg to govern through emergency decrees. Following coalition talks with Hitler, in January 1933, Papen sought Hindenburg's consent to form the Hitler cabinet, in which Hitler was appointed as Chancellor. This put the Nazis into a position of power. Hitler quickly called for dissolution of the Reichstag and new elections.



Through early February, the Nazis “unleashed a campaign of violence and terror that dwarfed anything seen so far.” They attacked trade unions and KPD offices. They attacked Social Democrats, even physically beating up speakers and audience members. Centre Party supporters were dismissed from their offices. They attacked people's personal homes. Newspapers were banned for criticizing the new government. Using the law, only the Nazis and DNVP (another group of right-wing nationalists) could campaign for the upcoming election.

THE REICHSTAG FIRE DECREE



On February 27, 1933, a fire broke out in the Reichstag chambers. The circumstances of the fire were unclear, although it was alleged that the Dutch Communist Marinus van der Lubbe set the blaze. Hitler and his supporters used the situation as a way to quickly consolidate their power and increase German support of the Nazi Party. Hitler blamed the KPD as the cause. Dozens of Communists were thrown into jail. This helped to suppress the Communist vote.



Officials began to discuss ways to justify those arrests. It was decided that an emergency presidential decree should be made. Under Article 48 of the Weimer Constitution, the president could take any necessary measures to protect public safety, without the consent of the Reichstag. A decree was drafted and edited with an additional clause that would allow the cabinet to seize control of state governments, if they otherwise failed to maintain order.



This clause was made by Nazis, who had achieved powerful positions in the German government and who wanted to squelch any opposition towards them. They essentially constructed the Reichstag Fire Decree to use it as the legal basis

for imprisonment of anyone, who might be considered an opponent of the Nazi Party. For this reason, the decree is now considered one of the essential steps in establishing the one-party Nazi state of Germany.



On February 28, 1933, Chancellor Hitler advised President Paul von Hindenburg to issue the Reichstag Fire Decree. The decree nullified key civil liberties for the citizens of Germany. These included: habeas corpus, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, the right of free association and public assembly, the secrecy of the post and telephone, as well as protection of property and the home. There were also penalties described for offenses, including the death penalty for arson of any public building.

THE ENABLING ACT



Hitler and the Nazis continued devising more ways to legally claim more power. On March 24, 1933 the Enabling Act was signed by President Paul von Hindenburg. This was a Constitutional amendment that gave plenary powers, to the German Cabinet (essentially Hitler). With plenary power, he could enact laws without consulting the Reichstag. This Act was renewed twice by the Reichstag. As this Act followed on the heels of the Reichstag Fire Decree, the two laws had a combined effect of turning Hitler's government into a legal dictatorship.



One might wonder why the Reichstag would approve and renew such an Act. However, it is important to understand, that at the time, members of the Reichstag were being suppressed and not allowed to vote. This included many non-Nazi members, such as Communists and Social Democrats.



With the Act, the government had the authority to pass laws without any other checks and balances. These laws could even deviate from the country's Constitution. In a way, once the Act was enacted, the Reichstag no longer mattered, because anything they might want could be overridden. Indeed, the

Reichstag became merely a stage for Hitler's speeches and no longer had any significant purpose, through the duration of World War II.



Hitler continued to extend his power by forcing any political party, aside from the Nazi Party, to dissolve. By July 14, 1933 the Nazi Party was the only party legally permitted in the country. With just a few legislative moves, Hitler was solidly in charge over the country with unfettered power. In 1942, another law was passed that gave Hitler the power over the life and death of every citizen in the country.

NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES



Although, Hitler and the Nazis had determined to control elections and seize power through “conventional” routes to appear as though they were operating within the law, they had not entirely given up violence. In 1934, from June 30 to July 2, working outside the law, the Nazis carried out several executions. These were done to further consolidate Hitler’s power.



These political executions were done with leaders of the Sturmabteilung (SA), who were actually members of the Nazi paramilitary organization. Others were part of the left-wing Strasserist faction of the Nazi Party. Some of these men had stood in opposition to Hitler. However, some were supporters and allies of Hitler.



Hitler ordered these executions because he saw these people as a threat to his own political power and/or he did not agree with their views. The move also served to appease leaders of the Reichswehr. Finally, these deaths were actually intended to improve the public image of the Hitler government because some saw these particular men as thuggish and threatening.



The SS and the Gestapo (Nazi secret police) were the executioners. In the end, many people died during these executions. There is no solid number. It was at least 85, but possibly as many as 700. While the Night of the Long Knives accomplished many goals for Hitler, most importantly, it established him as “the supreme justiciar of the German people,” giving him even greater power.

FUHRER HITLER



In August 1934, President Paul von Hindenburg died. Hitler quickly enacted a new law. It combined the offices of President and Chancellor, and transferred that combined office to Chancellor Hitler. Essentially Chancellor Hitler had appointed himself as Fuhrer (translated to leader). This put him in the position of being an absolute dictator over Germany and the German people.



Hitler made the German Officer Corps and German Army swear a new oath of allegiance to him:

I swear by God this sacred oath: I will render unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the Fuhrer of the German Reich and people, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and will be ready as a brave soldier to risk my life at any time for this oath.

Now, these people had pledged themselves to serve and obey Hitler, not Germany. Suddenly, they were his personal weapon. A propaganda campaign was started to encourage a vote of confirmation in an upcoming staged election.

THE NUREMBERG LAWS



Hitler knew he wanted to use his power to carry forth his plan for German domination. On September 15, 1935 the Reichstag held a special meeting during the annual Nuremberg Rally of the Nazi Party. There, they developed two new laws, collectively called the Nuremberg Laws.



One law was the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor. This law made marriage and extramarital intercourse between German and Jewish people, illegal. It also forbade any German female, who was under age 45, from working in a Jewish household (likely to reduce contact between German and Jewish peoples).



The second law was the Reich Citizenship Law, which said only Germans (and their blood relatives) could become citizens of the Reich. Anyone else (such as Jewish people living in Germany) were instead considered subjects of the state with no rights as citizens.



On November 14, a supplementary decree defined who was Jewish. The laws were further expanded on November 26 to include Romani and Black people. These categories of people were considered “enemies of the race-based state.”



Although the laws were in place, Germany did not actively prosecute people under the guise of these laws until 1936. They held off because of the 1936 Summer Olympics, which were held in Berlin. Once the laws were fully instituted, there were severe penalties for those who violated them. People were typically imprisoned. If they completed their sentence, the Gestapo often found some excuse to re-arrest them and send them to concentration camps. Eventually, non-Jews entirely discontinued their contact with Jewish people. It was seemingly safer for both parties.

A PRETENSE OF SHOW



The Nazis had seized power, and yet they moved forward with the pretense of parliamentary elections. Years earlier, in November 1933, voters were given a list of options including Nazis and their guests (people from other right-wing political parties who fully supported Hitler's regime). Voters were under threat to vote and to vote for the Nazi Party. The new Reichstag was composed entirely of Nazi Party members. Hitler also moved to pull Germany from the League of Nations.



In March 1936, parliamentary elections again gave voters few choices. They were asked to approve military occupation of the Rhineland and another list of Nazi Party options for the Reichstag. Again, voter intimidation encouraged turnout and agreement with the prescribed results. Due to the Nuremberg Laws, Germany's Jewish people and ethnic minorities were not allowed to vote. This further strengthened the size of the Nazi wins in that election. A similar outcome occurred in the April 1938 Parliamentary election. Eventually, as war broke out, Hitler postponed additional elections until after the war.

KRISTALLNACHT (NIGHT OF BROKEN GLASS)



During November 9 and 10 in 1938, the Nazi regime carried out its first major violent action against the Jewish people of Germany. Both SA paramilitary forces and even “average” German civilians participated in this action. People attacked Jewish-owned shops and synagogues, among other types of buildings, along with personal homes, with sledgehammers and arson. As they smashed the windows, they left shards of broken glass littering the streets. From this imagery, the name Kristallnacht was used to describe the event.



Sadly, Kristallnacht was about more than just vandalism. Approximately 91 people were killed during these attacks. Another 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and were among the first Jewish people to be placed into concentration camps. After the arrest, many more died while in custody. Additionally, the attacks were followed by more economic and political persecution.



The cause of the attacks? The assassination of a German diplomat by a German-born Polish Jew living in Paris. From the death of one man, Kristallnacht became a turning point for the Jewish people. The persecution they faced

became increasingly violent. It is considered the start of the Holocaust.

IV

INFAMOUS VILLAIN



Great liars are also great magicians.
Adolf Hitler



Hitler rose to power through cunning plans and outright violence. Within a few short years, he was at the top of a ruthless political party. His successes, good and bad, were even honored with the title of Time Man of the Year in 1938.



Hitler, along with the other Nazis, were motivated by their brand of ideals. A brand laid out in Hitler's own *Mein Kampf*. With a certain vision of the world and what the world should be, they set out with destructive plans. Those plans were intended to alter the demographics within Germany by eliminating undesirable parts of the population and to expand the geographic hold that Germany would have on Europe (which also demanded removal of residents).

LEBENSRAUM



One of the ideological principles of the Nazi Party that Hitler certainly ascribed to and which drove his actions was Lebensraum. Loosely translated, it means “living space.” It is a term that encapsulates the Nazi hopes, policies, and practices aimed at ‘settler colonialism.’ It was used as justification for German expansion into East-Central European territories. The Nazi policy (Generalplan Ost, which was the “Master Plan for the East”) was based on Lebensraum.



The belief of Lebensraum underscored the Nazi Septemberprogramm (of territorial expansion). Lebensraum stated that the populations in territories surrounding Germany should be removed. This included Polish, Ukranian, Russian, and other Slavic people. All those peoples were also considered non-Aryan and inferior. This would be genocide based on a belief in eugenics. The Nazis believed that German Aryans were a superior master race and it was their right to claim whatever lands they wanted from otherwise inferior people.



The plan was to destroy these populations by withholding food and starving them, which would also free up resources for the favored German people. The

plan was that once the lands were cleared, Germans would repopulate those areas. Essentially, this was a plan for world domination through death and destruction. It would leave behind what Hitler considered a 'superior society.'

PLAN Z



In early 1939, with plans towards Lebensraum, Hitler ordered Plan Z. This was a plan to re-equip and expand the Kriegsmarine (German navy). The fleet would be used to challenge the naval power of the UK. This was a long-range plan as it would take several years to ready the German fleet. Hitler had planned to put the fleet into action several years later, in 1948.



Unexpectedly, World War II erupted in September 1939 and Plan Z had to be largely abandoned. Some marine vessels were repaired during the war, for use in the fight, but since they were tied up in those battles, they could not be used as originally intended to attack the and seize control of the UK.

THE POLISH CAMPAIGN



Hitler's next attempt at achieving Lebensraum was through the Polish Campaign. He started going after Poland by canceling the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact in April 1939. Next, in August 1939, Germany entered into the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with the Soviet Union (led by Joseph Stalin), which created neutrality between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. It also stipulated that the two countries would eventually equally divide Poland between them. As such, they worked together to launch an attack on Poland.



On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, which launched the start of World War II. During Fall 1939, the Nazis aggressively occupied Poland. As the Nazis invaded Eastern Europe, they were harming and killing the Polish people residing there. Most Germans found this acceptable due to Nazi propaganda that spread the tenets of Lebensraum to the German people.



The propaganda was even spread to youth through pamphlets that extolled the benefits of Lebensraum. Essentially, Hitler and the Nazis convinced the average German person that people unlike themselves were Untermenschen (subhuman).

In fact, Hitler is quoted as saying,

“If you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed. Make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it.”



After Germany worked with the Soviet Union on the invasion, in October 1939, the two countries divided and annexed Poland, so that each country subsumed part of Poland under their rule.

THE MANSTEIN PLAN



During 1940, Germany attacked France, using the Manstein Plan. During the Battle of France, the Germans were quickly victorious as the French army fell in a matter of weeks. On June 22, 1940, in the Compiègne Forest, the Armistice was signed by Nazi officials and officials from the French Third Republic. The Armistice established a German occupation zone in Northern and Western parts of France. The Armistice was done in part to get back at France for the 1918 Armistice, in which Germany surrendered for the end of the World War I.

MAKING ALLIES INTO ENEMIES



Hitler built an allegiance with the Soviet Union through the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the German-Soviet Commercial Agreement, and the German-Soviet Frontier Treaty. The two countries worked together on the invasion of Poland.



However, in 1940, the Soviets invaded Bukovina, which violated agreements with Germany. On June 22, 1941, under Operation Barbarossa, Hitler retaliated and ended the alliance by ordering an attack on the Soviet positions in Eastern Poland. The retaliation was also justified under the principles of Lebensraum. Hitler and the Nazis came to believe they should also conquer parts of the Soviet Union and repopulate them with German peoples.



Operation Barbarossa initially saw great success as Germany forged through the Soviet Union, seizing land and resources. Hitler and the Nazis killed several million Slavs, through a “Hunger Plan” where prisoners were starved to death. Eventually those “successes” soured. The German troops started seeing failures. This led to a downturn in fortune for the entire Third Reich.

NIGHT AND FOG (NACHT AND NEBEL)



On December 7, 1941 Hitler issued the Nacht and Nebel (Night and Fog) decree, which targeted political activists and people in the resistance. Anyone found doing such work would be killed or imprisoned in Germany. Those imprisoned would not be treated with any rights or civility and their family would be left with no information of what happened to them.

WORLD WAR II IN FULL EFFECT



Just four days later, on December 11, 1941, Hitler declared war on the US. He had put the German people against the British Empire, the United States, and the Soviet Union, which meant his opponents collectively had greater reach, more money, and a larger army. He blamed the actions of the US for the declaration of war. Yet, following the attack from Japan on Pearl Harbor, Hitler truly believed that by declaring war on the US, he would have a new alliance in Japan. He hoped that Japan would then help him to defeat Russia.

PERSECUTION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE



While Hitler certainly went after many countries and people under the guise of Lebensraum, he is best known for his relentless and violent persecution of the Jewish people. Hitler's persecution of the Jewish people in Germany started in relatively small ways (when considered against the scope of the Holocaust). He expanded that persecution to include all Jewish people across Europe.



In 1933, Hitler implemented policies for boycotting Jewish businesses. Non-Aryan people (in other words, Jewish people) were excluded from certain jobs, such as the Professional Civil Service. Books that were considered “un-German” (mostly those written by Jewish people) were destroyed. As noted, laws stripped away the rights of the Jewish population and there were violent acts perpetrated against the Jews. Unfortunately, it was nearly impossible for Jewish people to leave the country because they were required to hand over most of their wealth as a tax, when they did try to leave.



These policies were just a prelude to Hitler's “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” With this, Hitler and the Nazi party planned for the total

extermination of the Jewish people. It was a policy that started with deliberate and systematic plans for genocide. It developed into the Holocaust.



During the early stages of the Holocaust, the Nazis were uncertain of the particular details for how to carry out their plan. They eventually determined to kill most Jews at death camps. The Jewish people were transported to these death camps on trains or through forced marches. Of course, many people died on the way or while residing, temporarily, at concentration camps. Some were shot by Nazi guards. Starting in July 1942, mass murders began occurring frequently in the death camps. Occasionally, these kills were done with mass shootings. But most often, the Jewish people were killed in gas chambers that emitted deadly gases. This made it feasible to kill large groups of people efficiently.



In October 1943, after a prisoner revolt, several death camps were closed. Shortly after, the largest German massacre of Jews throughout the entire war occurred. On November 3, in three separate locations, approximately 43,000 prisoners were shot one at a time. One death camp, Auschwitz, remained to hold the final portions of the Jewish population. By the end of the Holocaust, nearly two-thirds of the entire European Jewish population had been killed.

THE END IS NIGH



In 1944, Hitler gave an informal speech reviewing his ideas and work. At the time, he chose to focus on topics of race, nation, German history, and the future of the Nazi Party. Yet, unlike his previous speeches/writings, he admitted that non-Aryan races could be strong and other countries also had good ideas, that he believed the German people should themselves emulate. Historians question this speech, wondering if, in some way, he could see defeat would soon arrive.



On July 20, 1944 Operation Valkyrie was attempted. This was an assassination attempt from Claus von Stauffenberg, who worked with several other conspirators. These men hoped to take political and military control of Germany, and then to attempt to repair relations with the western Allies. Further, they hoped to repair the image of Germans, by demonstrating that not all held the same views as Hitler and the Nazi Party.



On that date, Stauffenberg was to attend a meeting with Hitler. He took into the meeting a briefcase containing a bomb. Then, he received a planned phone call, which gave him an excuse to leave the room. He had left the briefcase in range

for the bomb blast to kill Hitler. However, the briefcase was moved, which protected Hitler from the brunt of the blast. The plot had failed, and as a result of the attempt, the Gestapo arrested or killed nearly 7000 people.



An influential battle that started to turn the war, was the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans initially seemed to have the upper-hand and saw some initial success as they sought to seize more control in the Western front. However, in February 1945 the Allies attacked from all along the Western front. The Germans saw losses in the battle and their reserves became depleted.



As Germany was losing the war, Hitler knew there was little hope for recovery. Yet, he refused to allow his troops to retreat. He hoped that he could use some leverage to negotiate peace with Britain and the US. Further, if the Germans were to be entirely defeated, he wanted nothing left for others to claim. Finally, he believed the German failure meant they were not worthy of survival. Thus, he ordered that the entire nation be destroyed—all industries, communication networks, and transport systems. In this way, Hitler turned his penchant for nihilistic destruction towards his own people. However, that order was disobeyed.

TUMULTUOUS LOVE



Even amid his rise to power and throughout World War II, Hitler made time for love. He first met Eva Braun when she was just 17-years-old. She was working as an assistant and model for his personal photographer. The two began dating two years later. Eva had a volatile nature. Early in their relationship she attempted suicide—twice. It is believed that both attempts were done to gain more attention from Hitler, who was preoccupied with his political machinations.



By 1936, Eva had become a part of Hitler's household at Berghof near Berchtesgaden. She also became a key figure among Hitler's inner circle. There, she lived a sheltered life throughout World War II. Hitler did not want his relationship to be publicly known. He believed that being viewed as a chaste but sexually attractive, eligible bachelor would strengthen his appeal to followers. Eva worked as Hitler's secretary and continued to work as a photographer, which gave her more easy access to his estate, with fewer questions. The plot worked, the German people were unaware of the relationship.



Otherwise, Eva had very little effect on Hitler's political life. She was not a part

of the Nazi Party and had no role in political conversations. She spoke up on political matters only once, when legislation could have banned the production of women's cosmetics and other luxuries. Her arguments to Hitler led to a halt in production, rather than a total ban.



Yet, as a photographer, Eva made her mark—many of the surviving color photographs of Hitler were Eva's photographic work. Hitler and Eva were themselves photographed publicly together on only one occasion, during the 1936 Olympics. In 1944, Eva's sister married Herman Fegelein (an SS Liaison officer on Hitler's staff), which created an easier excuse for her to be seen at official functions. So, Eva began attending some public events.



Even as the Nazi regime started to fall, Eva swore loyalty to Hitler. She traveled to Berlin to support him. Together, they sought refuge in the Führerbunker below the Reich Chancellery. As troops started closing in around them, the two married in a civil ceremony. Knowing their time was drawing to a close and being unsure what they might face if captured, the two soon committed suicide. Eva committed suicide by taking cyanide, while Hitler shot himself in the temple.



Reports indicate that after others in the bunker discovered Eva and Hitler dead, they wrapped the bodies in blankets, took them outside, and lit them on fire. This was in accordance with Hitler's wishes, as he did not want his body defiled by the enemy. When the Soviet troops reached the bunker, they did not realize the charred bodies belonged to Eva and Hitler. They initially buried them.



Later, realizing the bodies' importance, the Soviets dug them back up and took them to be autopsied. A dentist confirmed that the bodies belonged to Eva and

Hitler. The bodies were moved several times over the coming years. Eventually, they ordered the bodies to be destroyed completely.



Yet, a few fragments of Hitler's body were kept. These remains were hidden in a box. Among them, were allegedly pieces of Hitler's skull. However, more modern forensic examination suggests those skull pieces could not belong to Hitler as they appear to have belonged to a young woman. This finding added to some conspiracy theorist's belief that Hitler did not actually die. Some believe he escaped and perhaps lived in hiding until even old age.

POSSIBLE PROGENY



In addition to a questionable skull, Hitler is also alleged to have left behind some children. Some believe that Hitler and a Frenchwoman, Charlotte Lobjoie, produced a son—Jean-Marie Loret. If this is true, Loret himself married multiple times and had up to nine children, whom would be the grandchildren of Hitler. However, the paternal link to Hitler has not been proven.



From Hitler's own family, his half-siblings (Alois Jr. and Angela) both married. Those unions produced children and grandchildren. Future generations chose to change their names, allowing the infamous name Hitler to be left to history.

V AFTERWORD



It is always more difficult to fight against faith than against knowledge.
Adolf Hitler



The average person does not want to be like Hitler. His life and actions are not inspirational. They are instead a cautionary tale for the risks of unfettered power. He left behind not a legacy of greatness but instead great tragedy. The hatred he and the Nazis carried was strong. The actions they carried out happened less than a century ago now. Just 100 years. Within the lifetime of some. For many within the lifetimes of parents and grandparents. It is almost unreal to think that such actions could have happened so recently in the global past. Yet, they did. Millions of people died from the actions that Hitler instigated and enforced. Those lives represent millions of people that cannot look back on the past. Those who remain—historians, politicians, and even the common person, can look back on the past. In their honor, lessons must be learned from Hitler’s life. Lessons that could, perhaps, prevent such global tragedy from occurring again.

What lessons can you learn from Adolf Hitler's life, actions, and the global events he set into action?



It is Okay to Chase Your Dreams



As a youth, Hitler himself did not aspire to become a genocidal dictator. He had a creative streak and enjoyed artistic pursuits. He wanted to be in choir and paint. Unfortunately, his father discouraged these interests. Alois wanted his son to follow the same path of Civil Service. The disagreement over Hitler's future increased the discord between the two.



Hitler persisted and continued trying to create a career in the arts. He painted and traveled to Vienna. Unfortunately, he was not accepted into the art world. One can only imagine how different the world would be if Hitler had been more encouraged and accepted for his artistic talents. Perhaps the Holocaust would never have happened and millions of people would have lived happy lives.



The lesson to take is that it is okay to pursue your dreams. Hitler certainly tried, so perhaps the message is for parents and caregivers. Children and even adults need encouragement towards their dreams. With even one person playing the role of encourager, it helps people to persist. Hitler did have that in his mother, until her untimely death. Once she was gone, he was lost in grief and dashed dreams, so he became vulnerable to negative political rhetoric.



As long as they are wholesome and do not harm anyone else, it is okay to chase

your dreams—give yourself and others that message. Lead people into what they truly want rather than the bitter back-up plans they might settle on.



Use Your Talents For Good



Although, Hitler's artistic talents may have been lacking, he did have other skills. When the lens of history looks at him more objectively, he was at one time a war hero, who risked his own life for the lives of his comrades. He was considered a good orator (public speaker). He wrote an influential book in *Mein Kampf*. He showed enough potential that the Nazi Party put him at the helm. He was indeed a talented leader—after all, he strategically got an entire country backing him as he led the charge into murdering an entire group of people.



Unfortunately, Hitler used his skills and talents to propagate his malicious views against several groups of people, particularly the Jewish. He believed that Germany and the German people were superior to all others. Based on that belief, he sought to wipe out people, so that he could claim their lands and fulfill the German ideal of Lebensraum. If only Hitler had used his talents for leadership and public-speaking with a different aim, he could have, perhaps, done so much good instead of so much harm.



Everyone has some skills and talents. Some are innate while others develop over a lifetime through experience and practice. Whatever your skills and talents are, do not squander them. Even more importantly, use them for good.



People are Affected by their Situations



Hitler's life and actions illustrate the way one's situation can have a big effect on their development. Hitler came from a dysfunctional family and faced great tragedy throughout his life. His dreams were discouraged and dashed. He lived in a country with turmoil and latched onto a set of political beliefs that gave him some direction. With leadership skills and an increasingly warped outlook, he led the German people into the Holocaust.



While on an individual level, Hitler's situation affected who he became and what he did, the broader Holocaust also illustrated the way that a situation can affect whole groups of people to commit atrocious and heinous acts.



The events of the Holocaust and the actions of the Nazi Party inspired Psychologists and Sociologists to question how and why people could be led to act so badly. Several areas of research findings help to provide explanations for people's behavior and how it can be influenced by the power of the situation.



One factor that contributed to the Holocaust was prejudice and discrimination. Many people hold prejudiced beliefs towards other groups. Oftentimes, those beliefs are due to assumptions and biases. These can even occur at a subconscious level. Further, groups often align and share prejudiced beliefs. It tends to strengthen their solidarity when they can distinguish an in-group (themselves) from an out-group (people who are different from them). When times are tough, people find it easy and comforting to blame others who are different from themselves. Prejudiced beliefs and anger towards others often result in discriminatory behavior. Even prior to the Holocaust, the Jewish people had, for years, been discriminated against. The German people often viewed the

Jewish people as being less than them. When times got tough, the German people took their frustration out on the Jewish people. Hitler also spread his hateful beliefs and attitudes through his propaganda campaigns. Hitler's Final Solution took all his beliefs and actions to their most extreme. However, we can see similar situations in institutions such as slavery and other attempts at genocide that have happened in other parts of the world.



Research on conformity from psychologists, such as Solomon Asch, illustrated that people tend to conform to the behavior of others around them. In the famous Asch experiments, subjects were brought into a lab and asked to answer various questions. There was a catch though, confederates (people involved in the experiment, who were trained to act in certain ways) would purposely give the wrong answer. The researchers found that even when the right answer was obvious, the subject, after hearing the confederates give the wrong answer, would also give the wrong answer. This helped researchers understand that many in the Nazi Party were likely motivated in their actions by conformity. Even if they felt the actions were wrong, they were likely to do them. This drive towards conformity can happen outside of your conscious awareness. It helps to also explain things like peer pressure. However, being aware of it, you can pause and think more about whether your actions are what you really want or if you are engaging in behaviors just to conform. It is an important question and distinction that can help people avoid behaviors such as acts of discrimination.



When given a request for action, people can choose to comply or refuse. Research on compliance (complying with someone's request) shows that often once people comply with one request, it becomes easier to get them to comply with increasing requests. Those additional requests could be bigger, require more work, or be more egregious in some other way. This can be seen in the way that as the Nazi Party grew, their actions became increasingly worse. Compliance works because people become more accustomed to giving into the requests made of them. It can lead to some pretty awful behavior. It seems likely that many Nazis later looked back on their actions and deeply regretted them as not being in line with their actual character. Now that you know about compliance, you

can be more on-guard, questioning before giving into requests.



Famous research from Stanley Milgram examined the role that outright obedience played in the Holocaust. In his studies, Milgram, like Asch, used confederates who acted as part of the experiment. He would bring one subject into the lab. The confederate played the role of a “learner” and the subject was supposed to be a “teacher.” As the “teacher,” the subject was to ask the confederate questions. When the confederate answered wrong, the “teacher” was to give them an electrical shock. With each wrong answer, the shock would get worse and worse. The confederate would act injured and eventually stop responding, giving the impression they had passed out. You might think most subjects would refuse to give painful shocks to another person. Certainly, they would stop once the other person could no longer answer. However, almost all of the subjects did keep giving the shocks. This happened because during the study, an experimenter was present and they would tell the subject to proceed with the shocks. Many of the subjects specifically asked who would take responsibility for the situation. When the experimenter stated they would, the subjects typically went on with the shocks. This study showed the role that authority can play in encouraging people to obey actions, even if they knew those actions were wrong. Certainly, in Nazi Germany, Hitler had plenty of authority and those under him likely felt rather compelled to obey.



Finally, research from Philip Zimbardo examined the way that de-individuation can affect people’s actions. In the famous Zimbardo Prison Study, he involved two groups of subjects. One group of subjects were asked to be “prison guards” and another group was asked to be “prisoners.” Both groups quickly took on their roles. The “prison guards” started mistreating the “prisoners.” The “prisoners” also seemed to forget they were individual people that could walk away from the experiment at any time. The behavior of both groups became so concerning, the study had to be ended early. The study illustrated the way in which de-identifying a group of people can alter their behavior, even making them lose sight of who they are and their own values. In Nazi Germany, Hitler’s troops were dressed in uniforms with swastikas on the sleeves. They were asked

to stand in formation and quickly, most of them lost their sense of being an individual. They were no longer John or Jane, they were a Nazi. Meanwhile, Hitler's Final Solution stripped away identity from the Jewish people. They were marked with the Star of David to label them as part of a group. As the Holocaust built, they were shuttled away into concentration camps like cattle. Not only were their lives in danger, their sense of who they were and even hope was often lost.



The lesson is that, like Hitler and the Nazis, anyone can be affected by their situation. This can happen in small ways such as life leaving you bitter and angry. It can also happen in bigger ways, such as getting swept up in a mass fit of violence. Being aware of these risks, makes it easier to avoid them.



People can Overcome their Situations



In some ways, Hitler's story could be considered one of victory. He came from difficult circumstances and when his dreams failed him, he found a new direction, fighting back to eventually become the most powerful person in the world (at least for a time). Although, we all wish his actions had been for good rather than evil, he certainly left a legacy and in that way, overcame his situation. For better or much, much worse, Hitler's life shows that people can come from any situation and become something unexpected.



More broadly and in much more positive ways, the Holocaust also showed the ability of people to overcome even very terrible situations. There are countless stories of people who risked their lives to protect others. There are also many stories of individuals who survived the atrocities of the concentration camps. Those people did not become depressed or angry at the world. They often went

onto lead lives that truly exemplified the power of the human spirit.



During the Holocaust, several now well-known and some still lesser-known heroes used ingenuity and a lot of bravery to do what they believed was right by harboring Jewish people or helping them to safety. Many are familiar with the story of Oskar Schindler, due to the very popular film *Schindler's List*. He was a German industrialist and a registered member of the Nazi Party. However, throughout the Holocaust, he employed Jewish peoples in his factories, and bribed officials to protect them, which saved over 1200 lives.



Another brave man was Anton Sukhinski. As the Holocaust built, he started harboring Jewish friends in his cellar. It was a risky business and when neighbors learned what he was doing, they threatened to expose him. He became more crafty, digging a small hole for seven people to hide in. Daily, for nine months, he brought them food and kept them safe. At the end of the war, they were weak, but alive, thanks to his efforts. Sukhinski was not recognized for these actions until 1974, when the Israeli Holocaust museum honored him.



In stark contrast to Hitler, some Holocaust heroes truly put religious differences aside to help people based on fundamental moral beliefs. For example, Mustafa Hardaga was a Muslim man, who helped to hide the Jewish Kavilio family and then helped to get them to safety. Maximilian Kolbe was a Franciscan priest, who tried to hide 2000 Jewish people within his monastery. When he was caught and sent to Auschwitz, he offered to sacrifice his life on behalf of another prisoner. He was killed with an injection of Carbolic Acid.



Physician Eugene Lazowski used his training and ingenuity to save 8000 people. He accomplished this by faking a typhus epidemic in a town. The German

soldiers were then afraid to approach and take over. When Lazowski was found out, he managed to flee and made his way to Chicago. When speaking of his own bravery he said, “I just found an opportunity to do something good.”



Roza Robota was in a position to help the Jewish resistance. She did so by smuggling gunpowder to them. When she was caught, she chose to face death rather than turn in any of her accomplices. As she was about to be hanged from the gallows, she cried out, “Be strong and be brave!”



Like Hitler, Witold Pilecki used cunning and planning to create a movement. However, he did use his talents for good. He worked as a secret agent, allowing himself to be arrested and sent to Auschwitz. There, he started building a network of people for the Jewish resistance. He also helped to get information out of Auschwitz to make them aware of the horrible things happening there.



Not only did heroes help others in the Holocaust, but those Jewish peoples who survived or left harrowing stories behind were heroes in their own right. Many are familiar with Ann Frank—a young girl who was kept hidden through several years of the Holocaust before her family was discovered. She died in a concentration camp like so many others, but she left behind a diary. That book revealed the plights of a young girl growing up in a dangerous time. Yet, even in the worst of times she stayed optimistic, writing: “I keep my ideals, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.”



Elie Wiesel survived the horrors of the Holocaust, even being imprisoned in Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps. Wiesel was forced to work as a laborer, barely surviving as his family members died. He shared his first-hand account of his experiences there in his book *Night*, which gave voice to the

experiences and losses people faced in the concentration camps:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.



Hitler's actions created a nightmare for Wiesel. However, Wiesel did not let that nightmare end his life or his potential. When the Holocaust ended, he worked hard to share his story and other stories from the Holocaust. Along with *Night*, he published many other books, most of them being about the Holocaust. He helped to establish the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, so that no stories, no matter how painful would be forgotten. He was active in politics and used his growing influence to help many people. Wiesel was honored for his contributions with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. Despite Hitler's efforts to wipe out the Jewish people and their faith, Wiesel, perhaps spurred on by the pain of the Holocaust, ensured that exactly the opposite would happen.



Finally, Viktor Emil Frankl was another Holocaust survivor, who shared his story in the book *Man's Search for Meaning*. In his experience, his time as a concentration camp inmate helped him to discover the ability to find meaning in any circumstance. This is an incredibly optimistic view brought about through a very difficult experience. He once said, "What is to give light, must endure burning." He believed that without 'meaning' people would become mentally unwell. His ideas about finding and making meaning, were inspirational to Humanistic Psychologists and key to the development of Existential Therapy

and Logotherapy. This therapeutic approach is used today to help people who go through terrible experiences, to help them heal and to go on with their lives.



The lesson is that even though life can affect you in big and small ways, you can overcome whatever setbacks or struggles you face. Like Hitler, you can come from tragedy and become “great.” Yet, Hitler let his tragedies twist him, so that when he achieved greatness, he used his power for evil, rather than good. Everyone has some good and bad in them. You can overcome the struggles in your life and your own internal negative drives, to overcome your situation. Ultimately, be more like Wiesel and Frankl—let tragedy make you stronger, build your compassion, and move you to help others.

ADDITIONAL READING



Consider these texts if you would like to read even more about Adolf Hitler:



Hitler: A Biography
By Ian Kershaw



Becoming Hitler: The Making of a Nazi
By Thomas Weber



*Hitler's Last Days: The Death of the Nazi Regime and the World's Most
Notorious Dictator*
By Bill O'Reilly

JOSEPH STALIN

The dictator of the USSR

I

FROM GEORGIA WITH RAGE



Ideas are more powerful than guns. We would not let our enemies have guns, why should we let them have ideas.

Joseph Stalin



Joseph Stalin.



He is one of the most infamous figures of the 20th Century, lionized by his followers and excoriated by the rest of the world. His name has become synonymous with mass murder and political oppression. His history is bloody, his story is complex, and his influence continues to this day.



Everyone thinks they know him, but who was Stalin, really?

UNLOVED CHILD



The future Stalin was born Iosef Djugashvili in the tiny Georgian town of Gori in December 1879. The exact date of his birth is obscure, partially because of the difference between the Russian and Western calendars, and partially because he himself altered certain biographical details later in his life. He was the only surviving son of Vissarion “Beso” Djugashvili, an unsuccessful cobbler, and Yekaterina “Keke” Geladze, who was a pious woman who worked as a laundress and seamstress for wealthier families. There is some question whether Beso was truly Stalin’s father, and Stalin himself certainly would have been in no hurry to claim him if he was. The future Soviet leader said that his real father was a priest, who remained unnamed.



Beso was a violent man, a raging alcoholic and an abusive husband and father. He beat Iosef repeatedly and often beat Keke in Iosef’s presence. Ultimately Keke took Iosef and left Beso behind, moving in with a family friend, Russian Orthodox priest Father Christopher Charkviani. At the age of 7, he contracted smallpox, a disease which nearly killed him and left his face pockmarked for the rest of his life.



Keke was a pious woman who desperately wanted her only son to be a member of the clergy, and her ambitions for Iosef were encouraged by his intellect and by Charkviani's support. In 1888, at the age of 10, he was admitted into the Gori Church School, a privilege that was normally reserved for the children of clergy. Considering his later assertion, it might be that Charkviani was his true father, but that is only supposition.



He excelled in academics, with special ability in drama, painting and poetry. He was a talented student, but he often got into fights. At 12, he was struck by a horse-drawn buggy, which resulted in a terrible injury to his left arm. The arm never fully healed and was permanently shortened and bent.



In August 1894, he was enrolled in the Spiritual Seminary in Tiflis, one of 600 young aspirants to the priesthood. A religious life was his mother's dream, not his own, and he began to rebel. He was frequently disciplined for lack of respect for his seniors and for announcing that he was an atheist. Stalin continued to excel academically, showing a great gift for memorizing Bible passages, and he began to write poetry under the name of Soselo. His poems, which were very patriotic and nationalist in tone, were published in the newspaper *Iveria* and became quite popular.



His interest in school completely waned, and to satisfy his curious mind, he began to attend a forbidden book club, reading works like *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx and *The Patricide* by Alexander Kazbegi. It was from the latter work that he took a nickname, "Koba", based on the ruffian hero of the work. Given his own history, one can certainly suppose that the title alone held his interest.



Stalin became enamored of Marxism and socialism, no doubt inspired by the

hardships his own family had endured on the lowest rung of the social ladder. It was during this period when he began to attend secret workers' meetings, where he met Silibistro "Silva" Jibladze, the socialist who had founded *Mesame Dasi* ("Third Group"), a Georgian revolutionary unit.



Dissatisfied with his studies and wholly embracing Marxism, Iosef Djugashvili dropped out of the Seminary in 1899.

REVOLUTIONARY ROOTS



In October 1899, Stalin took work as a meteorologist at an observatory in Tiflis. On the side, he began giving classes in socialist theory, and like Aristotle, he began to gather followers to his radical and persuasive message.



When May Day 1900 rolled around, Stalin co-organized a secret mass meeting of workers, where he successfully urged the men to strike. This brought him to the attention of the Okhrana, the Tsar's secret police, who tried to arrest him in March 1901. He escaped their net and went into hiding, living with friends and supporters and sleeping on couches, a habit he would retain until the end of his life.



While still in hiding, he organized a massive workers' demonstration that took place on May Day 1900. Over three thousand workers clashed with authorities. There were no fatalities, but the resulting unrest presaged things to come.



In November of 1901, Stalin was elected to the Tiflis Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), which was a Marxist political faction that had been founded in 1898. That same month, he relocated to Batumi, where he let fly with such violent rhetoric and ideas that the local socialists began to believe that he might be an *agent provocateur* working for the Tsar. Nothing could have been farther from the truth.



He took work at a Rothschild refinery storehouse, and he wasted no time in organizing the workers and convincing them to go on strike two times. Several of the strike leaders were arrested, so he decided to organize a demonstration in protest. The demonstration grew out of control, with protestors storming the prison. The authorities shot into the crowd, and 13 striking workers were killed. In anger, he organized a demonstration at the mass funeral for these 13 men. This time, there were no fatalities.

PRISON



The Okhrana finally caught up with Stalin in April 1902, when he was arrested and sent to Batumi Prison. In short order, he was moved to a more secure prison, Kutaisi. He made himself a nuisance with his rough behavior, and in 1903, he was exiled to Siberia for the first time, being sentenced to three years of internal exile and sent to the town of Novaya Uda.



While Stalin was away, the RSDLP split into two factions: the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, and the Mensheviks, who were led by Julius Martov. For Stalin, who hated many of the men on the Menshevik side, it was an easy choice to align himself with the Bolsheviks.



In the meantime, he had to get out of prison. He made two escape attempts. The first was defeated by a case of frostbite that forced him to turn back, but the second succeeded, and he returned to Tiflis. Once he was there, he began to co-edit the newspaper *Proletariatis Brdzola* (“Proletarian Struggle”) with Philip Makharadze. He attracted the ire of members of the RSDLP by calling for Georgian Marxists to be split from the Russian party, for which he was accused of being contrary to the international hopes of the Marxists, and he narrowly

escaped being expelled from the party.

II

WINDS OF CHANGE BEGIN TO BLOW



The people who cast the votes don't decide an election, the people who count the votes do.

Joseph Stalin



In 1905, during a demonstration in St. Petersburg, Tsarist government troops massacred between 200 and 1000 striking workers (the number is not clear) who marched on the Winter Palace to present Tsar Nicholas II with a petition and demands. Unrest swept through the Russian Empire all the way to Georgia, where ethnic tensions erupted between the Armenians and the Azeri. Stalin was in Baku when the Armenians and Azeri conducted their hate-filled killing sprees, leaving 2000 dead in their wake. Stalin blamed the Tsar for the deaths, claiming publicly that Nicholas II had instigated ethnic unrest with pogroms against the Jewish and Armenian citizens of the Empire in order to prop up his ever-more insecure rule.

A WARRIOR FOR THE FIRST TIME



During the Armenian/Azeri conflict, Stalin formed Bolshevik Battle Squads with the stated aim of keeping the two sides separated. Meanwhile, he used the unrest and the Battle Squads as cover so that he could steal some expensive printing equipment.



As violence spread through Georgia, both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks formed more and more Battle Squads. Occasionally the two groups coordinated their efforts, like when they attacked both government Cossack troops and the pro-Tsar Back Hundreds, an ultra-nationalist group. Most of the time, the Bolshevik Battle Squads occupied themselves with disarming local police and troops, stealing from government arsenals and running detailed protection rackets on local businesses and mining outfits.



The 1905 Revolution ended when Tsar Nicholas II signed the new Constitution of 1906, which created the multiparty state house called the Duma, and which reduced his own role from absolute ruler to a constitutional monarchy. The first true war in Stalin's life was over.

BACK TO POLITICS



In November 1905, Stalin was elected as the Georgian Bolsheviks' representative at an upcoming Bolshevik conference that was to take place in St. Petersburg. When he arrived, he was met by Nadezhda Krupskaya, who told him that the meeting had been moved to the Grand Duchy of Finland, and that her husband wished to meet him. Her husband was Vladimir Lenin.



The two men met for the first time in Finland, and Stalin greatly respected Lenin, and Lenin, for his part, recognized the powerful force of personality that his Georgian contemporary possessed. They soon formed a formidable partnership.



Lenin wanted a Bolshevik candidate to run for one of the seats in the newly-created Duma, but Stalin thought that the concept of working for change from the inside was a waste of time and effort.



Nevertheless, Stalin remained faithful to the RSDLP and attended the fourth Party Conference in Stockholm in April 1906. There the Mensheviks, who controlled the party, criticized his Bolsheviks for using robbery to enrich the party. Stalin, who organized many of these robberies with his group, the Outfit, ignored them, but he took note of the Mensheviks by name.



In July 1906, he married Ketevan “Kato” Svanidze, and in March 1907, Stalin’s first child, a son named Yakov, was born. He did not let his new domestic status distract him from the Party for very long.



From May through June 1907, he attended the fifth RSDLP Conference, which was held in London. Again, the Mensheviks warned against the use of violence, and again the Bolsheviks, with Lenin and Stalin at the helm, ignored their warnings. While at the conference, the Bolsheviks elected their own ruling body, which they called the Bolshevik Center. On the way back from London, in Berlin, Lenin and Stalin met with other members of the Bolshevik wing of the Party. Among those attending were Lenin, Stalin, Leonid Krasin, Alexander Bogdanov and Maxim Litvinov. Stalin, who was increasingly well-known in criminal circles as Koba (the name he’d taken from *The Patricide*), was made responsible for “appropriations” along with Stalin’s childhood friend and Marxist convert, the Armenian Simon Ter-Petrossian (“Kamo”). The Centre decided that Koba and Kamo, should rob the Imperial Bank in Tiflis.



On the day of the robbery, June 26, 1907, the authorities had heard that some sort of action was being prepared by the underground, and an increased presence of guards and troops had assembled in Yerevan Square, near the bank and the Seminary. When the coach carrying money intended for the bank appeared in the square, the Bolsheviks, led by Kamo in a cavalry officer’s uniform, attacked with revolvers and home-made bombs. When the smoke cleared, forty people were dead and the Bolsheviks had made away with some 19,000 rubles. None of the Bolsheviks were arrested at that time, although Kamo was later arrested in

Austria while trying to pass marked 500-ruble notes. He was initially sentenced to death for his activities (which included cutting a man's heart out of his chest) but his sentence was commuted to life in prison due to insanity. He was released from prison after the 1917 Revolution.



Lenin and his wife fled to Finland and thence to Switzerland. Stalin went back into hiding in Georgia, and the other organizers escaped police. Kamo was the only one of the Bolsheviks who ever stood trial.



Stalin's role in the robbery seems to have been in an organizational and supervisory capacity, but in later years the story of his involvement has been somewhat exaggerated.



In later years, Kamo was made an official in Soviet Customs, until he was struck by a car and killed in 1922. Some have speculated that his death was ordered by Stalin.

MORE POLITICS, MORE PRISON



S talin, Kato and Yakov moved to Baku. There he was confronted by Mensheviks in the RSDLP regarding the robbery and other criminal offenses that he and the Outfit had been carrying out, including kidnap-for-ransom and a protection racket. As he had done at the party conferences, Stalin ignored them, but noted their names. In short order, the Bolsheviks took control of the Georgian branch of the RSDLP, and criticism of his methods stopped.



Stalin became the editor of the Bolshevik newspapers *Bakinsky Proletary* and *Gudok* (“Whistle”) and attended the Seventh Congress of the Second International in Stuttgart in August 1907. His personal life took a downturn when Kato died of typhus in November 1907. At her funeral, he told a friend, “This creature softened my heart of stone. She died and with her died my last warm feelings for people.” He left their son with his late wife’s family in Tiflis and returned to Baku, where he and the Outfit continued to extort, kidnap, rob and counterfeit.



His position among the Bolsheviks was gaining power, and in early 1908, he

went to Geneva to meet with Lenin and a prominent Russian Marxist named Georgi Plekhanov. He took a dislike to Plekhanov, but his admiration for Lenin remained unchanged.



The Okhrana caught up with him in March 1908, and he was again arrested and sent to Baitov Prison with other Bolsheviks. He led his fellow party members in discussion groups, and from prison, he ordered the killing of people he suspected were informants for the authorities. He was sentenced to two years of exile in Siberia and was sent to Solvychegodsk in Vologda Province in February 1909. By June 1909, he had escaped from prison, disguising himself as a woman and fleeing to Kotlas, then to St. Petersburg. He was again arrested in 1910 and sent back to Solvychegodsk.



In Siberia, he indulged in love affairs with several women, including his landlady, Maria Kuzakova, who gave birth to his son Konstantin in 1911. Stalin never openly acknowledged Konstantin, who was later compelled to sign an agreement to remain silent about his parentage.



When his exile officially ended, Stalin was given permission to move to Vologda, where he stayed for two months. During this time, he had another affair, this time with seventeen-year-old Pelageya Onufrieva. He returned to St. Petersburg, where he was again arrested in September 1911 and returned to Vologda for another three-year sentence of internal exile.



While he was in prison, the first Bolshevik Central Committee was elected at the party conference in Prague. Afterward, Lenin and Grigori Zinoviev personally invited Stalin to join the Central Committee. It was a position he would hold for the rest of his life.



He escaped from his exile once again and returned to St. Petersburg in February 1912. Lenin, who had hopes that Stalin could bring ethnic minorities to the party based upon his Georgian background, ordered him to turn a Bolshevik weekly newspaper, *Zvezda* (“Star”) into a daily paper called *Pravda* (“Truth”). The new daily was launched in April 1912, and Stalin’s position as editor was kept secret.



It was at this point that Iosef Djughashvili, a/k/a Soselo, a/k/a Koba, took the name Stalin, meaning “Man of steel”.



In May 1912, he was arrested for yet another time. He was sent to Shpatertry Prison, and from there back to Siberia to serve a sentence of exile for three years. He arrived in Narym, Siberia, in July 1912 and took a room with fellow Bolshevik Yakov Sverdlov. After two months, Stalin and Sverdlov escaped and returned to St. Petersburg, where Stalin continued to edit *Pravda*.



In October 1912, six Bolsheviks and six Mensheviks were elected to the Duma. Stalin wrote articles in *Pravda* calling for the two sides of the party to reconcile, something that was sharply criticized by Lenin. Lenin felt so strongly about the subject that he twice met with Stalin in person in the city of Krakow. Stalin withdrew his support for reconciliation after these meetings.



Stalin traveled to Vienna in January 1913 to discuss “the national question” – the problem of how to bring Russia’s many ethnic minorities to the Party. He published *Marxism and the National Question* under the name K. Stalin. The article impressed Lenin and secured his reputation with the Bolsheviks.



He was again arrested in February 1913, sentenced to four years in exile in Siberia, and sent to Turukhansk. The authorities continued to relocate him, sending him ever closer to the Arctic Circle to places more distant and more difficult to escape. After several moves, he ended up in Kureika in March 1914. While he was there, he had another affair, this time with 13-year-old Lidia Pereprygia. She gave birth to a child in December 1914, but the baby soon died. Lidia would give Stalin another son, Alexander, in April 1917.

WARFARE



You cannot make a revolution with silk gloves.
Joseph Stalin



World War One broke out in August 1914 with the assassination in Sarajevo of Austria-Hungary's Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Due to a complicated web of pacts and treaties, the countries of Europe declared war on one another and the hostilities began in earnest. Russia entered the war on the side of the Allies.

REVOLUTION DURING YEARS OF WAR



Stalín and other Bolsheviki were drafted into the army in October 1916, and he arrived at Krasnoyarsk in February 1917 for deployment. He was declared unfit for duty because of his disabled left arm, and because he still had four months of exile to serve, he was sent to nearby Achinsk. In St. Petersburg, the February Revolution forced Nicholas II from power, and the Tsar abdicated the throne. Monarchy was replaced by a provisional government.



Stalin returned to St. Petersburg, now called Petrograd, and resumed editorial control of *Pravda* alongside fellow Bolshevik Lev Kamenev. He was appointed as the Bolshevik representative to the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, a council of the city's workers, and in April 1917, the Bolshevik Central Committee elections resulted in the top three officers being Lenin, Zinoviev and Stalin. His position in the leadership of the Bolshevik Party was cemented.



He organized the July Days uprising, which was a show of strength by the Bolsheviks. The uprising was suppressed by the provisional government, which began to crack down on the Bolsheviks and raided the offices of *Pravda*. During the chaos of the government backlash, Stalin took control of security for Lenin

and smuggled him out of Petrograd to Razliv, where he could remain in hiding.



With Lenin on the run, Stalin served as the de facto head of the Bolsheviks, and he called a covert Sixth Congress. Lenin called on the Bolsheviks to overthrow the provisional government, something that Stalin and Leo Trotsky soundly supported. Kamenev opposed the idea until Lenin returned to Petrograd and convinced them to act.

RED OCTOBER



On October 24, 1917, the provisional government again raided *Pravda* and smashed its printing presses. The next day, Stalin and Lenin met with the Central Committee at Smolny Institute. From there, they oversaw the October Revolution. In later years, Trotsky tried to discredit Stalin by minimizing his role, but Stalin was a senior member of the Central Committee and certainly played a part in the direction of the revolution.



Lenin formed a new government on October 26, 1917, the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), of which Lenin himself was chairman. Stalin supported Lenin's choice not to ally with the Mensheviks, although the Bolsheviks did form a coalition with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. When the dust settled, four men were in control of the government: Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky and Yakov Sverdlov. The four became three when Sverdlov died in March 1919.



The Bolsheviks began to suppress all opposition through mass killings and political repression during what is called the Red Terror. During this time, Stalin co-signed Lenin's decrees shutting down hostile newspapers and was

instrumental in the creation of the Cheka, the Bolshevik secret police. He co-authored the constitution of the new Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic with Sverdlov.



He was appointed the People's Commissar for Nationalities, and in November 1917 he issued the Decree on Nationality that gave ethnic and national minorities the right to secession and self-determination. He traveled to Helsinki and promised independence to the Finnish Social Democrats, which was granted in December 1917. Some members of the party accused him of pushing national self-determination as a smoke screen to conceal Sovnarkom's imperialist policies, but this accusation gained no traction.



He hired a secretary named Nadezhda Alliluyeva, the daughter of one of the Bolshevik party faithful and his long-time friend, Sergei Alliluyev. The two were married in 1919.



In March 1918, the Bolsheviks moved the capital from Petrograd to Moscow, and Stalin took apartments in the Kremlin. Lenin, with Stalin's support, signed an armistice with the Central Powers that allowed Russia to exit the World War. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk cost Russia a great deal of territory but allowed the Bolsheviks to concentrate on domestic matters instead of the foreign war. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries left the coalition government in protest over the loss of territory. The Bolsheviks were now the only group in charge.

CIVIL WAR



The Bolsheviks soon found themselves opposed by both right-wing and left-wing armies, and the Russian Civil War began. Stalin was sent to Tsaritsyn in May 1918 to secure the food supply, and when he got there, he took command of the military forces in the area. He met and befriended fellow Bolsheviks Kliment Voroshilov and Semyon Budyonny, who would be his staunchest military and political supporters from then on.



Stalin was a believer in victory through superior numbers, and as a result, he sent a large body of Red Army troops against the White Russians, who were tsarists. The Red Army took heavy losses, but the White Russians were defeated. He would carry this philosophy with him into the future.



While in Tsaritsyn, Stalin began to display some of the tactics and methods that would make him infamous. He began to execute counter-revolutionaries, often without trials, and he purged the military and food-collection agencies of all middle-class specialists. Some were even executed, again without trials, and against Lenin's orders. He ruthlessly enforced compliance with his rules by torching several villages as object lessons in obedience.



In December 1918, he drew up decrees recognizing the Marxist Soviet republics in Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. These Baltic nations declared independence from Russia, but Stalin refused to allow them to leave. He ignored and discredited these declarations of independence.



In December 1918, he traveled to Perm to lead an inquiry into a devastating defeat of the Red Army by the White Russians led by Alexander Kolchak. When he learned in March 1919 that the Third Regiment of the army on the Western Front had defected, he ordered any captured defectors to be publicly shot.



For his efforts, he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner in November 1919, and in 1920 he was named the head of the Workers' and Peasant's Inspectorate. In 1921, he met his son Yakov and brought him back to Moscow, where Stalin's wife Nadezhda had given birth to another son, Vassily, that month.

THE POLISH-SOVIET WAR



In early 1920, warfare with Poland erupted, and Stalin was moved to Ukraine. The Polish Army invaded Russia, and the Red Army pushed the Poles back into Poland. Stalin became obsessed with taking the city of Lwów, and he concentrated his forces on that target to the extent he even disobeyed orders to send reinforcements to fellow Red Army commander Mikhail Tukhachevsky.



The Red Army counterattacked Poland, but in August 1920, the Poles repulsed the Soviet advance. Stalin was recalled to Moscow, and a peace treaty was signed. The defeat by Poland was an embarrassment. Stalin and Trotsky blamed each other for the failure to take Poland and to encourage the Polish proletariat to rise up. Stalin was angry about the way that the war had been fought, and he demanded to be released from the military. This request was granted.



At the 9th Bolshevik Conference, Stalin stood accused of insubordination and military incompetence based on his failure to support Tukhachevsky. In public speeches, Trotsky blamed Stalin for “strategic mistakes”. The entire affair was bruising for Stalin’s ego.

NATIONALISM



Stalin believed that ethnic minorities, like Georgians, should have limited autonomy within the Russian state. Georgia, like other small countries in the former Russian Empire who had been forcibly Sovietized, wished to have complete autonomy from Moscow.



The argument came to a head when Lenin stated his intention to mesh all of the nations of the Caucasus into one entity, the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. Georgia specifically opposed this and pushed for full-member status within the Russian state. The Georgian Bolsheviks pushing for Georgian autonomy were Filipp Makharadze and Budu Mdivani. They were directly opposed by Stalin and his cohort, Grigori Ordzhonikidze.



According to the Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx, there were no countries, only workers combined in their struggle against the bourgeoisie. The recognition of individual countries brought scorn from Marxists in Moscow, and because of his intention to allow ethnic minorities limited autonomy, Stalin was labeled “un-Marxist” and in league with nationalists.



A power struggle erupted in Georgia. It mimicked the power struggle that was going on in Moscow around the ailing Lenin. Georgian Bolshevik leadership courted Lenin, hoping that he would come to support their cause, but Lenin's illness was distracting him from matters of state. He disagreed with Stalin's tactics, which were to strong-arm the local Menshevik majority, but he did not officially support the Georgian cause.



Stalin, working within his power as a senior member of the Central Committee, removed Makharadze from power and replaced him with men who were more in line with Stalin's attitudes. A Mdivani representative and Ordzhonikidze came to blows over the matter, and the Georgian Central Executive Committee sent a list of grievances to Lenin, hoping to finally woo him to their side.



Lenin sent back a statement supporting Stalin. The moderate communist government in Georgia was swept away, replaced with Bolshevik hard-liners who were in Stalin's pocket. In 1923, the Politburo did away with Mdivani and Georgia was forced into the amalgamated soviet republic it had wanted to avoid, with Ordzhonikidze at the helm.



While all this was going on, peasant strikes and workers' protests spread across Russia in opposition to Sovnarkom's food requisitioning program. Alarmed by the prospect of his regime being toppled, Lenin agreed to economic reforms called the New Economic Policy (NEP). In the debates over this policy, Trotsky pushed for the abolition of trade unions, which Lenin and Stalin fiercely opposed.



Stalin gathered power within the party and began to push out Trotsky, the third man in the Central Committee leadership. As Lenin's health continued to fail, and as Stalin more and more controlled who contacted the leader and for what reason, his advantage over his rival became nearly absolute.

CLOSING THE FIST



Stalin was named as the supervisor of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda within the Central Committee, and at the 11th Party Congress in 1922, Lenin nominated him as General Secretary. There were concerns that this appointment would make Stalin too powerful, but he was put into the office despite those arguments.



Lenin continued to fail, and Stalin continued to control his communications with Sovnarkom. His stranglehold on communication with Lenin angered Nadezhda Krupskaya, and the two had a heated exchange via telephone. When Lenin learned of Stalin's rudeness to his wife, his opinion of his Georgian counterpart slipped, and he began to write notes suggesting that Stalin should be removed as General Secretary. These notes were never delivered, but they were gathered together into his Testament.



The USSR was formed and ratified in December 1922. It ostensibly had a constitution and equal rights of determination among all of the states beneath its umbrella, but all the true power was in the hands of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow – and Stalin controlled the

Politburo.



Lenin died in January 1924, and Stalin wasted no time in positioning himself as mourner in chief. Lenin's body was embalmed and put on display in a mausoleum in Red Square, over the objections of his wife. The cult of personality went into high gear, and Petrograd was renamed Leningrad in the late leader's honor. Stalin presented himself as a dedicated Leninist, even going so far as to give lectures on Leninism at Sverdlov University. His lectures were compiled and published as a book.



At the 13th Party Congress, Lenin's Testimony was read aloud. It excoriated Stalin, who was so deeply embarrassed that he offered to resign. Because of his "humility," he was allowed to keep his position.



Lenin had died without naming a successor, and the struggle to replace him was vicious. Stalin formed an anti-Trotsky coalition with Kamenev and Zinoviev, while Trotsky led the Left Opposition, criticizing the NEP. Stalin built up the Central Committee with people he knew to be loyal to him, and soon the Left Opposition was forced out. The Right Opposition, led by Nikolai Bukharin, now supported Stalin. Trotsky would not gain power.



In late 1924, Stalin removed supporters of Kamenev and Zinoviev from positions of authority, and by 1925 the line was clearly drawn with Stalin and Bukharin on one side and Kamenev and Zinoviev on the other. They bickered publicly at the 14th Party Congress, and the bad blood deepened.



In mid-1926, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Trotsky joined forces as the United Opposition against Stalin. Under duress and facing threats of expulsion from Russia, Kamenev and Zinoviev both recanted their criticisms of Stalin. The reversal was not enough to keep Zinoviev in Stalin's good graces, and in October 1928, Zinoviev and Trotsky were removed from the Central Committee. Trotsky was exiled to Kazakhstan, then deported completely in 1929.



The Central Committee was now made up entirely of Stalin loyalists. The four men in power, after Stalin himself, were Vyacheslav Molotov, the head of government; Kliment Voroshilov; Lazar Kaganovich; and Sergo Ordzhonikidze from Georgia. There was no one to oppose him now.



In 1924, Georgian nationalists launched the August Uprising, which was put down by the Red Army. As a signal of his victory, Tsaritsyn was renamed Stalingrad, a city that would soon gain notoriety it never wanted.

IV

PURGES



Education is a weapon whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed.

Joseph Stalin



In 1927, Stalin turned against Lenin's New Economic Policy. The USSR still lagged behind Western Europe, grain production was down, and he fears invasion from the increasingly militarized Japan, France and the United Kingdom. He needed to strengthen his position and his nation.



Hard-line communists held that the NEP was too capitalist in nature, and they strongly disliked the men who were profiting from it, the affluent peasants (kulaks) and the small business owners (Nepmen).



In the face of looming food shortages, Stalin traveled to Novosibirsk, where he accused the kulaks of hoarding grain. He had the kulaks arrested and all of their grain hauled back to Moscow. Violent “grain procurement squads” were sent out across Western Siberia and the Ural Mountain region. Stalin announced that kulaks and “middle peasants” would be forced to share their grain on pain of arrest or death. Bukharin opposed this policy, feeling it was too harsh and too rash. As always, Stalin ignored the nay-sayers. He only heard what he wanted to hear.



In January 1930, the Politburo approved a measure to liquidate the kulaks. This entire class of people were rounded up and either exiled or sent to concentration camps in Siberia. Many died en route. By July, more than 350,000 had lost everything through his program of “dekulakization”.

COLLECTIVE FARMS AND DISSATISFACTION



In 1929, the Politburo announced mass collectivization of agriculture, forming *kolkhozy*, collective farms, and *sovkhoz*, state farms. Kulaks were banned from joining these collectives, but other peasants were “encouraged” to join up. Many did so out of fear of reprisal, giving up their family land and homes. Production slumped along with morale.



Famine fell upon the Russian people, and the Politburo attempted to redistribute food to the worst-hit areas, but the task was too large and they were unable to give the people enough to eat.



Armed peasant uprisings broke out in Ukraine, the northern Caucasus, southern Russia and central Asia. They were broken by the Red Army. Stalin blamed the unrest on local officials and continued to press for collectivization. Bukharin opposed this policy, and he was removed from the Politburo for his trouble in November 1929.



Stalin attempted to plan the economy using policies based upon short-term goals. The first five-year plan focused on heavy industry, determined to build up the manufacturing sector of the Russian economy. The plan achieved all of its objectives a year early, in 1932. The USSR began to boom with new mines, new cities and a new canal (White Sea/Baltic). Peasants streamed into the city to participate, and urban housing was ill equipped to deal with the influx of people.



The surge in manufacturing came at a cost, and the USSR built up heavy foreign debts through purchasing industrial machinery from overseas. It was decided that these debts would be paid off using the export of grain from the USSR's farms, which left even less food in the coffers for the people.



Not all of the workers who came to the city did so voluntarily. Many of the major infrastructure projects that were completed during this period were created using forced labor. Workers lost control over their industries, and factory managers began to enjoy privileges and perks. Wage disparities were colossal, but Stalin defended these by pointing out Marx's own argument that such wage gaps were necessary in the early phases of socialism.



Despite all of these problems, Stalin presented a Utopian vision of the socialist state, and as defense of his assertions, he pointed to the 1929 stock market crash as proof that capitalism was doomed. He declared that class war between the proletariat and their enemies would grow as socialism matured, and he warned of right-wing threats within the Communist party. He began to see conspiracies and enemies everywhere he looked.

SHOW TRIALS AND THE SOVIET STYLE



The first major show trial of Stalin's scapegoats was the Shakhty Trial in 1928. A group of middle-class "industrial specialists" stood accused of sabotage. Fifty-three people stood accused, and all were convicted. Five were sentenced to death and the rest were imprisoned. One of those killed, Nikolai Karlovich von Meck (nephew by marriage of the composer Tchaikovsky), was accused of "wrecking" the railroads. Wrecking became a capital crime. Workers who did not produce as much as the party believed they should were accused of working with capitalist elements to undermine the socialist system, and they were tried, imprisoned, and sometimes executed. Through 1929 and 1930, more show trials took place, designed both to eliminate political rivals and to intimidate the opposition.



Stalin began to promote ethnic Russians to positions of authority all throughout the country, and the Russian language was made compulsory everywhere in the USSR. Ethnic groups' nationalism was harshly suppressed.



In addition to his Russification projects, Stalin also instituted conservative social policies that were aimed at increasing social discipline and increasing the Soviet

population. There was an emphasis on family and motherhood, and homosexuality was re-criminalized. Limits were placed on abortion and *Zhenotdel*, the section of the Secretariat of the Communist Party that dealt with women's issues.



Formerly “elite” culture – ballet, opera, poetry – was disseminated more widely throughout the country, no doubt spurred by Stalin's own interest in these same things. He pushed for improved universal education in the arts and sciences, as long as what was taught conformed with his own views. “Socialist realism” was encouraged across the arts. This is a form of art that glorifies socialist ideals using realistic imagery, usually within set confines of what is and what is not acceptable. Dissident art was not tolerated.



Perhaps as a reaction to his years of enforced religious schooling, Stalin instituted a virulent anti-religion campaign. He increased funding for the League of Militant Atheists, and Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist clergy were all harshly persecuted. Churches were pulled down all across the USSR. The most striking example is the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, which was destroyed to make room for the Palace of the Soviets – which was never completed.

TROUBLE AT HOME



As Stalin's power grew, his home life became more unsteady. While he was preoccupied with decrying enemies of the state, real and imagined, his family was coming apart.



Yakov attempted suicide in 1929. His father responded with scorn and contempt, making it clear that Yakov should have succeeded if he'd wanted to earn Stalin's respect. Stalin considered the suicide attempt to be blackmail and joked that his son couldn't even shoot straight.



Stalin's marriage was stormy, with frequent yelling matches. Both Stalin and Nadezhda were temperamental, but her irritability was exacerbated by frequent headaches and a possible case of manic depression. The couple had three children – Vassily, Svetlana, and Artyom, whom they had adopted – but Stalin was distant and frequently harsh. He had a habit of womanizing in front of her, and in November 1932, he ignored Nadezhda in favor of flirting with the young wives of his revolutionary officers. Disgruntled and overtaken by her mental illness, Nadezhda shot herself to death.



Stalin was inconsolable. He threatened suicide, and he turned his bitter grief into hatred of the world, blaming everyone at the party for the sorrow that had driven his beloved wife to suicide. In the days after her death, his emotions seemed to shut down, leaving no trace of compassion behind. That compassion, the little that he'd had, never returned.

TROUBLE IN THE FIELDS



In May 1932, there was such a level off social unrest in the country that Stalin agreed to loosen his economic policies enough for *kolkhoz* markets to be established, where peasants could trade their surplus produce. The surpluses were few and far between. Criminal penalties became harsher and more severe, as in August 1932, the theft of a handful of grain was named a capital crime.



The second five-year economic plan that Stalin devised was aimed at improving living conditions and the production of household goods. The factories filled with workers, all of whom needed to be fed.



Grain was taken from the fields in Ukraine where it was grown and shipped wholesale to the cities. Little to nothing was left behind. Famine gripped the northern Caucasus and Ukraine in the winter of 1932-1933, mostly due to Stalin's policies regarding redistribution of grain. The effects of the hunger were catastrophic. Between five million and seven million people starved to death, many of them in Ukraine. Thousands resorted to cannibalism to survive. Stalin refused to accept that his policies had anything to do with the famine, choosing

instead to blame counter-revolutionaries, wreckers in the fields, and the peasants themselves.



The famine was concealed from foreign observers with subterfuge and outright denial. Today this period is known in Ukraine as Holodomor and is considered genocide by the Soviet government against ethnic Ukrainians. Some have postulated that Stalin in fact did not deliberately starve the people of the Ukraine, but it cannot be denied that he certainly did nothing to help them.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS



In 1934, the USSR joined the League of Nations. When Hitler was elected German Chancellor, he and Stalin exchanged friendly correspondence. Stalin admired Hitler as a man of strength and action, but he did not trust him, and he was wary of the threat of fascism. After Hitler's inauguration, Stalin ordered many factories to shift from building household goods to building armaments.



Stalin signed a treaty of mutual assistance with France and Czechoslovakia, and in 1936, a new constitution was released, but all of its promises and tenets were hollow. All power remained in the hands of the Politburo, and the Politburo answered to Stalin alone.



The Communist International Seventh Congress in July – August 1935 issued a statement encouraging Marxists and Leninists around the world to come together in a united front against fascism. In response, Germany, Fascist Italy and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern (Communist International) Pact of 1935.



The Spanish Civil War erupted in 1936, with right-wing Nationalists on one side, backed by Germany and Italy, and left-wing Republicans, backed by the USSR. Three thousand Soviet troops traveled to Spain to assist with the revolution, but despite their efforts, the Nationalists won the day. Fascism had scored its first victory over Marxism.

V

THE GREAT TERROR



The death of one man is a tragedy. The death of millions is a statistic.
Joseph Stalin



Stalin gave mixed signals in 1933 and 1934. He released minor criminals from prison with amnesty and ordered the authorities to stop conducting mass arrests and deportations. He also ordered the Politburo to investigate false imprisonment. At the same time, he ordered the arrest and execution of workers at the Stalin Metallurgical Factory, who were accused of spying for Japan. With one hand he was meting out justice and clemency, and with the other hand he searched out enemies of the state virtually everywhere.

TIPPING POINT



Senior party member Sergey Kirov was assassinated in December 1934. Leonid Nikolayev entered Kirov's offices at Smolny Institute and shot him in the back of the neck. At the time, Kirov had only four NKVD (secret police) bodyguards, who only accompanied him to his office. They had left the scene before Nikolayev arrived. The assassin was arrested quickly, and on December 29, 1934, he was sentenced to death. He was shot to death that night. Commissar Borisov, the only other person present at the assassination, died the day after the assassination, "accidentally" falling from a moving truck filled with NKVD officers. Nikolayev's family and friends were arrested and sent to labor camps, usually without benefit of a trial. His wife was executed.



Nikolayev, under direct interrogation by Stalin himself, confessed to being an assassin in the pay of a fascist power, and that he was one of many who were seeking to undermine the Soviet Union. Immediately after this dubious confession, 104 people who were already in prison and who could not have been involved in the assassination plot were nonetheless found guilty of collusion and summarily executed.



Suddenly everyone was suspect. Stalin became obsessed with his own personal safety and prioritized his own security above all else. He began to purge the Central Committee, and all opposition members were imprisoned. Opposition leaders who were already in prison were charged with new crimes and shot.



In 1935, the NKVD were empowered to run “troikas”, small units of three officers each who could act as judge, jury and executioner as they saw fit. The secret police were ordered to expel suspected counter-revolutionaries, especially those who had been aristocrats, landlords or business owners before the October Revolution. In Leningrad alone, 11,000 people were eliminated.

BOILING OVER



More show trials began. In August 1936, Stalin's former Bolshevik colleagues Kamenev and Zinoviev were accused of plotting to assassinate Stalin, and they were convicted and executed. Another show trial followed in January 1937, and a third in March 1938 saw old Bolsheviks Bukharin and Rykov standing trial for involvement in a pro-Trotsky terrorist plot. They were executed. By late 1937, through show trials and mass expulsions from the party, all traces of opposition opinions had been purged from the Politburo, and all power rested in Stalin's hands alone.



As the leader of the global Marxist movement, Stalin commanded communist parties in other countries to begin expelling anti-Stalinists. The NKVD began to commit assassinations abroad under direct orders from Stalin himself. One of these assassinations was Leo Trotsky, who was shot to death in Mexico in August 1940. He was the last of Stalin's old opponents to die.



The Purge eliminated all political dissent. The old party members were swept away and replaced with young, dedicated Stalinists who had never known a different leader. They were eager to please, and they performed their parts of the

purge with a will, sometimes exceeding their stated quotas of apprehended spies and enemies of the state. If Stalin was dangerous, the people who killed to stay on his good side were worse.



Once all of his political enemies had been destroyed, Stalin shifted the attention of his purge to the citizenry at large. Between December 1936 and November 1938, the Great Purge swept away all “anti-Soviet” elements: Bolsheviks who had opposed him, Mensheviks, members of the Socialist Revolutionary party, priests, White Army soldiers, and common criminals. With Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the NKVD, Stalin signed Order No. 00447, which listed 268,950 “enemies of the state”. All were arrested, and of this number, 75,950 were executed.



Stalin began to pursue “national operations” designed to ethnically cleanse the USSR of “inferior” ethnic groups, like the Poles, Germans, Latvians, Finns, Greeks, Koreans and Chinese. They were either internally exiled or deported. In all, 1.6 million people were arrested, and at least 700,000 were shot. It’s not known how many people died under NKVD torture.



Stalin personally directed all of it. He took a keen interest in the details of the deaths and confessions of these enemies of the state. His paranoia reached new heights, and anyone could be a conspirator or a potential assassin. Foreign opinion began to turn against Stalin as a result of the Great Purge, even as Germany was clearly building up for hostile action. Fearing that he would be left alone to face the German army if war should come, Stalin made one last sacrifice on the altar of socialism. In April 1939, Yezhov was arrested, and he was executed in 1940. Stalin blamed all of the excesses of the Purge on the now conveniently silenced NKVD director. He could try to deflect the shadow, but the Purge had severely damaged his standing with leftist groups abroad.

THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR



I trust no one, not even myself.
Joseph Stalin



Stalin was not surprised when the Second World War began in 1939. He had been expecting hostilities from Germany and Japan long before that year, with most of his concern being focused to the east. He had entered into a sort of pen pal relationship with Hitler, and he felt that they understood one another. It was his hope that while he was dealing with Japan, his good German friend would overwhelm France and the UK, leaving Russia the dominant power in Europe.



He had hope for a war in which the USSR could benefit without fighting. He remembered the disaster that had been Russia's involvement in the First World War, and he had no wish to repeat them. He tried to remain neutral. All the same, the Red Army more than doubled in the years from 1939 to 1941. As the saying goes, just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean you don't have

enemies.

A NEUTRAL RUSSIA



When tentative offers of alliance with France and the UK were met with rejection, Stalin reached out to Germany. The two countries began to negotiate terms of a treaty in May 1939, a document that proposed dividing Eastern Europe between them. A non-aggression pact was signed with Germany in August 1939, and exactly one week later, the Wehrmacht rolled into Poland. The UK and France declared war on Germany, and the conflict was begun.



On September 17, 1939, the Red Army invaded eastern Poland, alleging to the outside world that its intentions were to “restore order” near its territory. More horse trading with Germany followed, and more territory was exchanged. In return for ceding western Poland to Germany, Lithuania and the Baltic states were granted to the USSR. This German-Soviet Frontier Treaty was signed in Stalin’s presence on September 28, 1939. Germany and the USSR began to trade, which undermined Britain’s blockade.



The Baltic states, which had attempted to declare their freedom from the Soviet Union, were forcefully annexed in August 1939. They attempted to also annex

Finland through an invasion called the Winter War, but the determined Finns held off the Soviet advance despite inferior numbers. The defeat embarrassed Stalin. As a result of the failed invasion, the USSR was expelled from the League of Nations, and it was forced to sign the Moscow Peace Treaty with Finland. To console himself, Stalin ordered the annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovina, provinces in Romania, in June 1940.



Once the Soviets occupied a territory, they wasted no time before cracking down on any signs of dissent. The most egregious of these crack-downs was what came to be known as the Katyn Massacre. In April and May 1940, over 22,000 Polish soldiers, police officers and intelligentsia were shot to death by the NKVD and buried in a mass grave in a Polish forest. The German Army discovered the mass grave in 1943, but the Soviets insisted that Germany was responsible. Russia continued to deny responsibility until 1990 when declassified documents pertaining to the massacre were released.



On the western front, Stalin was shocked by the speed with which the Nazis toppled France. He knew that it was only a matter of time before the Germans pivoted back toward the east and Russia. Attempting to forestall the inevitable for as long as possible, he attempted to appease Hitler to buy time. On September 27, 1940, he signed the Tri-Partite Pact along with the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy and Japan). He floated the idea of Russia joining the Axis in October 1940, but he was rebuffed. They were suspicious of his motives. In an effort to prove his good intentions, he signed a neutrality pact with Japan in April 1941.



He knew war was coming, and he was determined to have control over how the Soviet Union responded. He dismissed Molotov and took the position of Premier of the Soviet Union on May 6, 1941. His dictatorship was now complete.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...



In June 1941, Germany invaded the USSR. Despite his conviction that war was coming, Stalin was still surprised by the timing. In response, he formed the Supreme Command (Stavka) and the State Committee of Defense.



The German blitzkrieg was initially very successful, taking all of the Baltic States, Ukraine and Belorussia in short order. Refugees flooded to Moscow and Leningrad, but some Soviet citizens, those who had suffered under the Soviet system, saw the Germans as liberators. The Germans saw them as subhuman (üntermensch) and suitable only for slave labor. Their misery continued.



In July 1941, the Luftwaffe began bombing Moscow, and the Wehrmacht began preparing an all-out assault on the Soviet capital. The Soviet government made arrangements to flee to the relative safety of Kuibyshev, but Stalin was determined to stay in Moscow to preserve troop morale.



As with Napoleon a century before, the Germans had not counted on the Russian secret weapon: winter. The Germans were inadequately prepared, and their uniforms were insufficient for the rigors of biting cold. Machinery malfunctioned, travel became impossible, and soldiers froze to death within sight of the spires of Moscow. Faced with total annihilation by the forces of Nature, the Germans retreated.

... WHO NEEDS ENEMIES?



In response to the German invasion, Stalin ordered a scorched earth policy. Foodstuffs, villages, bridges and towns were burned before the enemy could reach them. In addition, based on fear of collaborators – a fear that had already informed much of the Great Purge – he ordered the NKVD to kill 100,000 political prisoners in areas close to the German advance. Military command was also scoured of any hint of rebellion or opposition.



As proof of his determination, he issued Order No. 270, which ordered any soldier facing capture to commit suicide or fight to the death. It was declared that any soldier who allowed himself to be taken prisoner would be considered a traitor. One such “traitor” was Stalin’s unlucky son Yakov, who was taken by the Germans and later died in Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp when he was shot in the head by a sentry. Another order, Order No. 227, was issued in July 1942, and it declared that any soldier retreating from battle would be put into penal battalions and used as cannon fodder.



In 1941, the USSR allied with the UK, France, and later with the USA. Help in dealing with the German invasion didn’t arrive until 1942. By then, all Soviet

resources had been thrown into military production.



Stalin may have had an iron fist, but he understood that morale was vital in wartime. He began to tolerate the Russian Orthodox Church more than before, and he even met with Patriarch Sergius, the leader of the Church, in September 1943. He allowed formerly suppressed writers and artists, like Anna Akhmatova and Dmitri Shostakovich, to distribute and perform their works. He also commissioned a new, more patriotic national anthem. He dissolved Comintern in 1943 to allay Winston Churchill's fears of a spread of communism, and he sponsored the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee to garner more Jewish and foreign support for the Russian war effort.

STALINGRAD



In May 1942, the Red Army launched an unsuccessful counterattack against the Germans in Kharkov, Ukraine. Soviet forces led by Marshal Semyon Timoshenko attacked the Germans from a salient the Red Army had forced when they'd repelled the Germans from Moscow in the winter. Timoshenko and other Soviet leaders, including Stalin, believed too much in the abilities of their troops and woefully underestimated the German will to fight. The counterattack was hit hard by air strikes and a messy retreat allowed the Germans to form a pincer that encircled 250,000 Soviet soldiers, who were mowed down by attack from all sides. In the end, over 70,000 Soviets were killed and 240,000 taken prisoner, compared to 20,000 German casualties.



After Kharkov, the Germans shifted their attention south, toward Russian oil fields. Stalin believed incorrectly that this was a feint to lead the Red Army away from its defense of Moscow. Instead, the German Army attacked Stalingrad.



Stalin ordered that the town that shared his name should be held at any costs. He would take it as a personal defeat if the city were to surrender. Hitler, who knew something about the ego of his opponent, put just as much pressure on taking it.

It was a dictator's fistfight carried out by proxy.



The battle raged for months, from August 23, 1942 to February 2, 1943. The opening attack saw the Luftwaffe reducing the majority of the city to rubble. There was desperate hand-to-hand battle in the streets as the armies fought from house to house. The Luftwaffe continued bombing civilian targets, and the Soviets fought with incredible determination to hold the city.



When 91,000 starving German troops finally surrendered and were taken prisoner, the Germans had drawn so many reinforcements from the western front that they were never able to recover. The German defeat, coupled with the massive expenditures devoted to taking Stalingrad in the dictators' grudge match, was a turning point in the war that inevitably led to Nazi Germany's downfall.



In recognition of the victory, Stalingrad was recognized with the title Hero City in 1945, and Stalin declared himself Marshal of the Soviet Union.

COUNTERATTACK



The Red Army began a fierce counterattack in November 1942 and stayed on the offensive for the rest of the war. There were battles won, and the Germans were distracted from the western front, which eased pressure on the other Allied armies. There were good feelings toward Stalin in the West, and in 1942 he was named *Time* Magazine's Man of the Year. When he learned that some westerners (mostly Americans) were affectionately calling him "Uncle Joe," he was deeply offended at the disrespect.



The effort of keeping Germany on its toes on the eastern front cost the Soviets dearly. By the end of the war, there were nearly 2.5 million Soviet casualties, the most of any of the Allies.



Despite the public's affection for Stalin, there were still lingering suspicions between the leaders of the Allies (Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt). In November 1943, at a meeting of the Big Three in Tehran, a site of Stalin's choosing, they agreed upon the apportionment of the world after the war, particularly with regard to Germany and Eastern Europe. Stalin pressed for and was granted the German city of Königsberg, as well as for Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and

Yugoslavia. Those countries' futures were happily signed away.



Beginning in 1944, Germany began losing ground to the Red Army. They were pushed out of the Baltic States, which were re-annexed by the USSR. The next territories taken by the Red Army were the Caucasus and Crimea, where the ethnic groups there were accused of being collaborators with the Germans and were punished by losing their right to autonomous republics. Nearly a million of these ethnic minorities were internally exiled to Siberia.



In 1945, the Big Three met again in the resort town of Yalta. Again, they discussed the apportionment of the globe in utter disregard of the wishes of the people already residing in those places. The UK and the USA agreed that Germany should be forced to pay \$20 billion in reparations, and that the USSR should be given the Sakhalin and Kurile Islands in return for entering the war against Japan.



Stalin secretly had designs on Poland. When the Poles asked the USSR for help in the Warsaw Uprising, he purposefully withheld it, hoping that the resulting strain would encourage the Polish proletariat to rise up and establish a Marxist state. He also worried that successful freedom fighters would bolster the Polish people against efforts to bring Poland under the USSR's mantle.



When it came to Berlin itself, Stalin wanted to take the city in order to expand his Marxist agenda. Roosevelt didn't see this hidden aim, but Churchill read it plainly. Despite all of his efforts, Churchill was unable to persuade Roosevelt to make a priority of reaching Berlin before the Soviets.

VICTORY AND AFTERMATH



Death is the solution to all problems. No man - no problem.
Joseph Stalin



In April 1945, the Red Army took Berlin, and on hearing the news, Hitler committed suicide. Stalin was put out by this, because he had wanted to capture Hitler and bring him back to Moscow alive. He did the next best thing and ordered his intelligence officers to bring Hitler's corpse to Moscow instead, like some sort of trophy of war.



When Soviet troops discovered the first of the Nazi death camps, they responded by looting, raping and pillaging the German population. Stalin refused to punish the offenders, stating that such outlets of tension were only natural in men who had been subjected to the horrors of war.

THE DAWN OF THE ATOMIC AGE



The Allies' attention switched to defeating Japan. Stalin was well aware that the US had constructed an atomic bomb, and he was determined to occupy the land he had been given at Yalta before the Americans could get there.



On August 6, 1945, the Americans dropped the first atomic bomb in human history on Hiroshima, Japan. Stalin took advantage of the ensuing chaos by invading Japanese-occupied Manchuria on August 8. On August 9, the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and Japan surrendered.



When the Allies moved in to occupy Japan, Stalin wanted to assist by occupying half of the country. The Americans refused to allow this and occupied the entire nation before Stalin's troops could arrive.



The Big Three met in July and August 1945 for the Potsdam Conference. Stalin

attended, along with British Prime Minister Clement Atlee and American President Harry S. Truman. At the conference, he promised not to “Sovietize” eastern Europe, with no intention of keeping that promise. He demanded reparations that were far in excess of the German people’s ability to pay, and he pushed for “war booty” – the right to seize property from conquered countries without limitation. A clause was inserted allowing war booty, with some limitations. Berlin was divided into four parts, each to be governed by a different power (US, UK, France and USSR).

RETURN TO NORMAL



In June 1945, he added “Generalissimus” to his titles, and he openly praised ethnic Russians above all other ethnic groups for the first time. The accusations of Russocentrism that had haunted him during the discussion of the “National Question” were proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. In 1946, his poems and essays were published as *Collected Works*.



The glow of victory wasn’t enough to quell his innate paranoia, and he worried that returning POWs might have been exposed to too many Western ideas and would pose a threat to the Soviet system. “Filtration” camps were established, and all returning soldiers were questioned there to see if they were traitors. Of the 2,775,700 men interrogated, about half were sent to labor camps.



In the Baltic, Stalin ordered the familiar anti-kulak and anti-religious programs he had instituted before the war. Between 1945 and 1949, nearly 142,000 people were internally exiled to Siberia. Meanwhile, he ordered the NKVD to catalog the considerable damage done to the USSR by the war. The scope of the damage was such that he found it necessary to make certain concessions to encourage loyalty among the people. He allowed the Church to continue to operate the

churches they had opened during the war, and he extended the new policy of greater artistic freedom. He instituted economic reforms aimed at encouraging reconstruction, and capital punishment was abolished in 1947 (although it was reinstated in 1950).



Stalin's health began to fail, and he developed a heart condition that required him to take a two-month vacation at his dacha. He became concerned that his apparent weakness would encourage senior political and military figures to try to remove him from power. To forestall this, he prevented any of these possible enemies from gaining power or prestige, and he bugged their apartments to listen around the clock for signs of treason. The political leadership of Leningrad was accused of treason, and it was for these unfortunate individuals that the death penalty was resumed. Almost all of the accused were executed in 1950.



He set about purging the Central Committee of suspected enemies and traitors. He demoted Molotov and appointed his trusted associates Beria and Malenkov to key positions. He brought Nikita Khrushchev to Moscow from Ukraine and made him a Central Committee secretary and head of the Moscow branch of the party.



Famine struck again in 1946, due in part to drought and bad harvests, but also due to Stalin's policies of exporting and stockpiling food. Nearly 1.5 million people died in this iteration of hunger.



The Soviet Union once more began to boom, with many infrastructure projects springing up, almost all of them built with prison labor. There are no figures related to the number of deaths suffered by these virtual slaves.

COLD WAR



When we hang the capitalists they will sell us the rope we use. Joseph Stalin



The deep distrust that had bloomed between the United States and the USSR was intensified when the Soviets performed their first successful atomic bomb test in August 1949. Stalin took an intense personal interest in the development of the bomb, and his bellicose outlook was reflected in the steady growth of the Red Army. In 1949, there were 2.9 million Red Army soldiers; by 1953, there were 5.8 million.



When the United Nations was formed in 1949, the Soviet Union was made a permanent member of the Security Council.

US VERSUS USSR



The United States launched a program called the Marshall Plan, which was designed to undermine Soviet influence worldwide. The Soviets, meanwhile, attempted to extend their influence despite the interference of their western adversary. They attempted to woo the people in the lands they had annexed by recognizing them as independent nation-states beneath the mantle of the USSR, and by waiting to install Soviet governments by force. Stalin believed that by making the Soviet style look appealing, the Marxists in these countries would rise up to support him. Unfortunately, Marxists were thin on the ground, since most of them had been rounded up and murdered by the Nazis during occupation.



During this time period, Stalin rarely left Moscow. Foreign dignitaries were obligated to come to him if they wanted to meet face to face. He did not attend a September 1947 meeting of Eastern European leaders in Syklarska, Poland, that was intended to coordinate communists across Europe. The Communist Information Bureau (“Cominform”) was founded at that meeting.



The matter of what to do with Germany remained a sticking point. Stalin hoped

for a unified and demilitarized state, which ideally would fall under Soviet influence. He was unable to get the UK and the US to agree to leave Germany intact, and to try to force their hands, he set up a blockade around Berlin in June 1948. The blockade was rendered useless by the Berlin Airlift, when the US and UK sent supplies into the city via aircraft. Stalin lifted the blockade in May 1949.



In September 1949, the western powers created the Federal Republic of Germany. Not to be outdone, Stalin declared the existence of the German Democratic Republic. The UK and USA intended for Poland to be a free and independent country, and they attempted to organize an election for a new Polish government. The Soviets combined disparate workers' and socialist parties into the Polish United Workers' Party, then used vote rigging to ensure that the Communists won the election. They pursued the same policy in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, cheating the system so that the Communist parties gained control.



With the formation of the Eastern Bloc, Churchill noted that an "Iron Curtain" had fallen across Europe. The name stuck.

FOREIGN ALLIES AND THE KOREAN WAR



The Communist Party under Mao Zedong took control of China in 1949, and in December of that year, Chairman Mao came to Moscow to meet with Stalin. By January, a new peace treaty had been signed between the two countries. They agreed to mutual support and cooperation, something that would soon be put into play.



The United Nations refused to recognize Mao's China, and for that reason, the Soviet Union boycotted the UN.



Korea had belonged to Imperial Japan prior to the war, and after Japan surrendered, it was partitioned into north and south along the 38th parallel, each with its own government. Both claimed to be the only legitimate government of Korea, and both had heavy clients – democratic South Korea was allied with the US, and communist North Korea had the backing of China and the Soviet Union. The leader of North Korea, Kim Il-Sung, visited Stalin in Moscow in March 1949, asking for Soviet support if he invaded the south. Stalin wavered, but finally agreed in May 1950.



The next month, North Korea invaded South Korea. China funneled support to the North Koreans, but Stalin, more circumspect and wishing to avoid direct confrontation with the US, sent only sparse assistance. The US went to the UN, unburdened by the presence of the boycotting Soviets, and requested assistance in defending South Korea against its invaders. The UN promised troops, and an international force led by the US pushed the North Koreans back to the 38th parallel, where they had begun. Stalin convinced Mao and Kim to hold at that line, and the hostilities ceased without benefit of a treaty or peace plan. Technically, the Koreas are still at war.



In 1948, the Soviet Union was one of the first nations to recognize the new state of Israel. Premier Golda Meir came to Moscow to meet Stalin, and she was greeted by exultant crowds of Soviet Jews. The adoration his Jewish citizens showed was irksome to him, and when relations with Israel deteriorated as Israel and the United States grew closer, Stalin launched an anti-Semitic campaign in the courts and in the press. He dissolved the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and held a show trial for some of its members. He began to see all Jews as part of a counter-revolutionary nation with loyalties to the United States. Anti-Semitism would color all of his policies from that date forward.



At this time, Stalin was frequently in ill health, and he took more and more long vacations at his dacha. He distrusted his doctors, most of whom were Jewish, and when one of them suggested in 1952 that he should retire to spare his health, Stalin had the man deported.



In September 1952, Stalin ordered the arrest of multiple Kremlin doctors who were accused of plotting to kill Party officials. Most of these doctors were Jewish. Stalin ordered them to be tortured to procure confessions, and the

majority of the defendants were exiled.



The show trials continued. In November 1952, the Slánský Trial took place in Czechoslovakia. Thirteen senior communist party officials, eleven of them Jewish, were arrested and charged with being part of a “Zionist-American” conspiracy to destroy the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. He tried Jewish workers in the Ukraine as “wreckers” and purged the Georgian Communist Party, which resulted in 11,000 deportations.

ALL THINGS MUST END



Gratitude is a sickness suffered by dogs.
Joseph Stalin



Stalin was aware that his time was running short. His health had been failing for a long while, and he was concerned with the direction the Soviet Union would take in his absence. He published *The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* in 1952, a book meant to provide instructions for the party to follow after his death.



In October of that year, he gave one of his last speeches to the Central Committee. He described the qualities that a successor should have and denounced the men who were in line to follow him, especially Molotov and Mikoyan.



One of his last acts was to eliminate the Politburo and replace it with a larger version called the Presidium.

DEATH COMES CALLING



On March 1, 1953, Stalin was found on the floor of his bedroom, semi-conscious. He had suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhage that had damaged his ability to move or communicate. He was moved to a couch in his study and stayed there for three days while he was spoon fed and leeches.



His children Svetlana and Vassily arrived the next day, but Vassily was drunk and was sent away. Svetlana stayed by his side. Stalin passed away on March 5, 1953.



His death was announced on March 6, 1953, and for three days his body lay in state before it was transferred to Lenin's mausoleum. There was such a press to see his body that one hundred mourners were crushed to death by crowds. China declared a day of mourning in his honor.

LEGACY



Stalin has been called one of the greatest monsters of the twentieth century, which is something of an accomplishment, considering that he has Adolf Hitler and Pol Pot as challengers for that title. There is no disputing that he had the blood of millions on his hands. The numbers given for his body count range from three million to fifteen million, all victims of Soviet policies that Stalin personally put into practice.



He was a dictator, ruthless, “temperamentally cruel,” resentful, vindictive, paranoid, and a possible sociopath. (Several armchair psychologists have posited that he suffered from sociopathic personality traits at the least and outright insanity at the worst.) He left scars that will never heal.



For all the harm he did, he is also remembered fondly by many in Russia today for his capabilities as a nation builder. He brought the Soviet Union from backwater to world power, a feat that should earn him some admiration, however grudging. He was determined, as his record of escapes from Tsarist prisons shows, and he was charming, a talented actor and an accomplished liar. He was a great organizer and a hard worker, traits that helped him build the USSR from

the ground up.



What is left to be said about Joseph Stalin? He was a mercurial and complex man, but he was also a wounded child. His hatred of the bourgeoisie and the Tsar, his suspicious nature and his tendency to take umbrage at the least offense can all be seen as legacies of his miserable childhood. Children who suffer the trauma of abusive parents grow up to be people who see ulterior motives and dangers in every corner, whether or not these threats actually exist. Stalin's paranoia and grudge-holding are almost hallmark traits for abused children who reach adulthood.



Most abused children who develop pathological defense mechanisms don't achieve the heights of power that Stalin reached. It may be that Stalin's cruelty wasn't the exception; the exception was his ability to visit it upon the masses.

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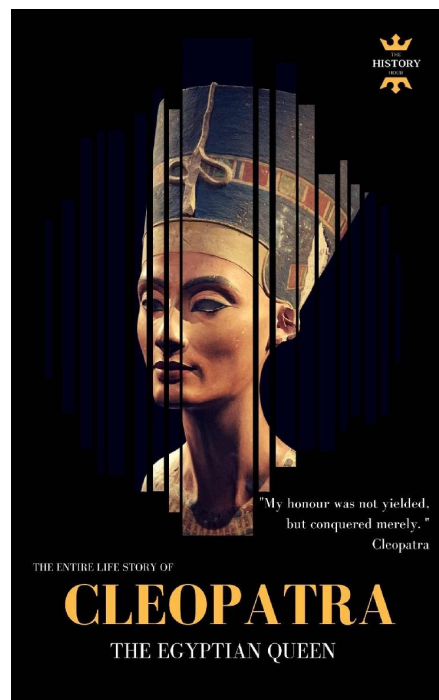
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