

# **HALL OF EVIL**

**5-MINUTE  
VIDEO  
SCRIPTS**

**MAO ZEDONG**



**JOSEPH STALIN**



**VLADIMIR LENIN**



**ADOLF HITLER**



**POL POT**



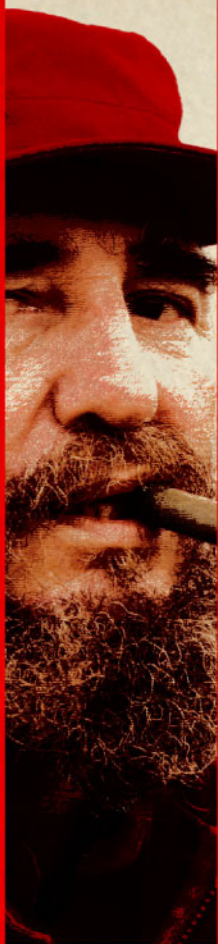
**FIDEL CASTRO**





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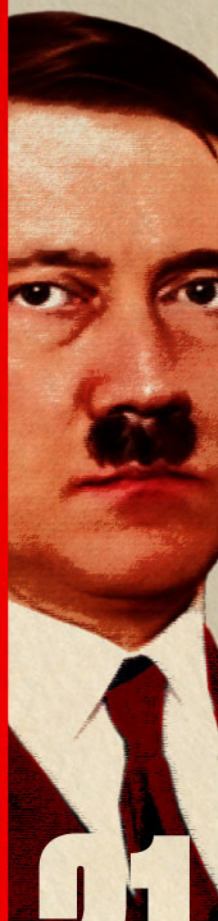
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**H A L L O F**



**FIDEL CASTRO**

**C U B A , 1 9 7 6 - 2 0 0 8**

If you consider how many people Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and Pol Pot killed, Fidel Castro is small potatoes. Yet, he merits a vaunted position in the twentieth century's Hall of Evil.

Here's why:

He imprisoned the entire nation of Cuba.

He destroyed its economy, impoverishing millions while enriching himself.

He arrested, tortured, and murdered political opponents.

He energetically exported his Marxist ideology throughout Central America, South America, and parts of Africa, spreading death and suffering well beyond the borders of his own country.

And he almost precipitated a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Had he succeeded in that ambition, he would have even surpassed the grim body count of Stalin, Hitler, and Mao.

Thankfully, even dictators don't always get what they want.

Born on August 13, 1926, Fidel Castro grew up in comfort and privilege. His father, an immigrant from Spain, was a prosperous sugarcane farmer.

Always in a hurry, Castro was only 27 when he made his first stab at revolution. In 1953, he attempted to overthrow the government of Cuban President Fulgencio Batista. The badly undermanned, poorly executed rebellion was

easily thwarted. For his troubles, Castro got a 15-year prison sentence, but served less than two.

Throughout much of the 1950s, his defenders portrayed him less as a Marxist-Leninist than a garden-variety populist and anti-imperialist. According to one of his biographers, “As if leading a consumer revolt, Castro protested high electric bills and inadequate telephone service.”

In any case, his rebel movement languished in the Cuban hills, hanging on by the thinnest of threads. To say he had one hundred followers would be a generous estimation. Then, out of the blue, he found a savior: *The New York Times*.

In an exclusive 1957 interview with *Times* reporter Herbert

Matthews, Castro promised that “Above all, we are fighting for a democratic Cuba...” Matthews portrayed Castro’s program as a “new deal” for the island nation.

“He has strong ideas,” Matthews wrote, “of liberty, democracy, [and] social justice...”

Matthews’ influential reporting breathed new life into Fidel’s movement. Right-hand man and future chief executioner Che Guevara later said, “When the world had given us up for dead, the interview with Matthews put the lie to our disappearance.”

It also helped that President Batista kept killing the heads of other rebel groups in his attempt to hang on to

power.

Castro was the last rebel standing.

On New Year's Day 1959, he achieved the goal he had long sought. Batista fled the country. The island nation now belonged to Fidel.

Many Cubans celebrated. They and Western leftists insisted that Cuba had found its own George Washington. In April 1959, Castro appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press," where he declared that "democracy is my ideal...I am not a communist..."

In truth, Castro cared as much about democracy as Lenin, Stalin, or Mao did. He only cared about getting power and keeping power. Once he had it, he announced who he really was all along. "I am a Marxist-Leninist and shall

be one until the end of my life."

Castro created a totalitarian communist dictatorship — the most militarized, repressive nation in the Western Hemisphere. He banned freedom of speech, press, property, assembly, religion, and even the right of people to leave the country.

He staged show trials and launched purges. He tossed countless souls into his jails, from dissidents to priests to homosexuals.

He also brought death.

*The Black Book of Communism*, the authoritative catalog of communist atrocities, states that in the 1960s alone, Fidel arrested 30,000 people for political reasons and executed

7,000 to 10,000.

That doesn't count the 33,000 who drowned in shark-infested waters trying to get to the United States.

The overall death toll grew to 100,000 by the time Fidel "retired" in 2008.

Castro's idea of equity was to make everyone equal by making everyone poor. He limited salaries across professions—from janitors to doctors to baseball players—to under \$200 per year. By contrast, according to *Forbes* magazine, his net worth was estimated at nearly a billion dollars.

None of this mattered to the cadre of left-leaning politicians, journalists, and celebrities who, like Herbert Matthews, were dazzled by Castro's personal charm. Dan

Rather, the famed CBS news anchor, called Castro "Cuba's own Elvis."

Fidel's fan club invariably praised the island's high level of literacy and "universal" healthcare. But being literate is no substitute for being free, and Cuba's low-tech healthcare is certainly nothing to celebrate. It's universal and bad. The proof: who goes there for medical care?

It's impossible to know, of course, what Cuba would be like today if Castro and communism hadn't destroyed it.

But based on its economy in 1959, when it ranked fifth in per-capita income in the Western Hemisphere, and based on how Castro's exiles have so thrived in the

United States, it would undoubtedly be far more prosperous than it is now.

And infinitely more free.

I'm Paul Kengor, professor of political science at Grove City College, and editor of *The American Spectator*, for Prager University.



**H A L L O F**



**POL POT**

**C A M B O D I A , 1 9 7 5 - 7 9**

**O**n April 17, 1975, the Communist Khmer Rouge took control of Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. That same day, they ordered the evacuation of the entire city.

The inhabitants were allowed to take only what they could carry.

It didn't matter if you were sick or infirm, young or old; you had to leave. No exceptions.

Where were you going? The soldiers couldn't tell you.

If you protested, you'd be beaten with rifle butts or simply shot.

The Khmer Rouge had a slogan for troublesome people: "To keep you is no profit; to destroy you is no loss."

Cambodia's communist revolution would prove to be, per capita, the most radical, bloodiest revolution of the twentieth century, maybe of any century.

About two million people, or 25 percent of the Cambodian population, perished during the Khmer Rouge's four years in power. Countless were murdered outright; countless more were worked or starved to death.

Not even Mao on his worst day could match that ratio.

The Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian communist party, was led by the enigmatic figure Pol Pot. His real name was Saloth Sâr, but like his hero, Joseph Stalin, he took a revolutionary nom de

plume. Fittingly, “Pol Pot” has no meaning in Cambodian. Nothing in his revolution ever made sense.

He was born on May 19, 1925, the eighth of nine children. Well off by Cambodian standards, he received a privileged private education, including at both Catholic and Buddhist schools.

In 1949, the 24-year-old Sâr went to Paris to study “radio electricity.” There he quickly fell in with a group of Cambodian communists. Radicalized by their French professors, their goal was to throw off Cambodia’s French colonial past and establish a new socialist government along Marxist-Leninist lines. In 1953, Sâr returned to Cambodia to lead the revolution.

That same year Cambodia did achieve independence from France, but Sâr had nothing to do with it. The man responsible was the cagey, chameleon figure, Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

The prince played the US off against the Soviet Union and China to keep himself in power. For a while, he succeeded, but in 1970, while he was visiting Moscow, he was ousted by his prime minister, Lon Nol, who opposed Sihanouk’s leftward tilt.

Nol, supported by the US, led the country for five years. That support abruptly ended when Richard Nixon resigned following the Watergate scandal and liberal Democrats swept Congress.

The new Republican President, Gerald Ford,



predicted disaster if the Democrats cut off aid to Nol, but they ignored him.

Even Ford had no idea how bad it would be.

For a brief period, after Nol fled the country, Cambodia had no government to speak of. Sar—now Pol Pot — stepped into the chaos. He was as shocked as anyone when his militia, the Khmer Rouge, took over the capital city virtually unopposed.

Most Cambodians believed Pol Pot would be a variation on the Sihanouk/ Nol regimes, maybe even an improvement. No surprise, *The New York Times* thought the same thing.

Correspondent Sydney Schanberg wrote four days before the Khmer Rouge took over that,

“Wars nourish brutality and sadism...but it would be tendentious to forecast such abnormal behavior as a national policy under a Communist government...”

Of course, *The New York Times* thought Castro would be great for Cuba.

Instant utopia. Not tomorrow. Today. That was Pol Pot’s fever dream.

And that could only happen if everything from the “old world,” the world the day before the revolution, was wiped away.

Everything.

Money, mail, markets, music, law courts, property, newspapers, sports, cosmetics, even toys were banned. The human being as an individual, marriage, the family, all simply erased.

Even the calendar was reset—1975 was declared Year Zero.

Thus, Pol Pot hurled Cambodia backwards into a new dark age.

“Cars, including Mercedes and other luxury vehicles,” writes one Pol Pot biographer, “were cut in two by village blacksmiths: the metal... was melted down to make ploughshares...the wheels were attached to ox carts.”

Doctors, religious leaders, business owners, teachers, government workers, academics and intellectuals were marched into the countryside to become peasant farmers.

Within months, much of Cambodia was starving. Bo Meng’s story is typical. He lost six siblings and his father in Pol Pot’s “killing fields” where a bowl of

watery rice or a spoonful of corn kernels served as a family meal.

In classic communist fashion, Pol Pot blamed famine and the breakdown of Cambodian society on the “parasites,” the “counterrevolutionaries.”

For them, Pol Pot built over 100 concentration camps—death camps really—where prisoners were subject to hideous tortures before being executed.

While the world remained largely ignorant of Pol Pot’s atrocities—he had cut the country off from all external communication—horror stories began to seep out.

After four of the worst years any country has ever endured, it finally came to an end. Pol Pot got into a border dispute

with Vietnam. In 1978, the Vietnamese army invaded, and sent Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge into exile.

It would be another fourteen years of sporadic fighting before Cambodia re-established itself as an independent country.

As for the mass murderer, Pol Pot, he died in his bed, aged 72. He never acknowledged he had done anything wrong.

The evil never do.

I'm Paul Kengor, professor of political science at Grove City College, and editor of *The American Spectator*, for Prager University.



**H A L L O F**



**VLADIMIR LENIN**

**R U S S I A , 1 9 1 7 - 2 4**

**T**he Russian Revolution of 1917 should never have happened.

The reason it did was because one man, and one man alone, insisted that it must.

That man was Vladimir Lenin.

All the death, misery, and incomprehensible suffering that resulted from the creation of the first totalitarian state in human history would not have been possible without him.

Attempts to disassociate Lenin from the horrors of Soviet communism are disingenuous. First, and contrary to his apologists, there were no “good intentions” behind Lenin’s insatiable quest for power. Second, since those intentions never existed, it was impossible for Lenin’s successor, Joseph Stalin, to

distort them. Stalin merely completed what Lenin started.

Lenin was born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov on April 22, 1870, in a small town on the banks of the Volga River.

By his own account, he had a happy childhood.

A brilliant student, young Vladimir won almost every academic contest he entered. He seemed to be fated for a successful career in the law.

His future took a sudden and fateful turn when his older brother Aleksandr got caught up in the anti-Czarist fervor sweeping Russia in the late nineteenth century. For his part in an audacious plot to assassinate the Czar, Aleksandr was executed in 1887. Many have speculated that his execution

radicalized young Vladimir. Following in his brother's footsteps, he soon became a full-time revolutionary.

For the next three decades, Lenin honed his craft, writing pamphlets, gathering supporters, and agitating for a Marxist revolution. Evading the Czar's secret police, the Okhrana, was a full-time job. In this, Lenin was only partly successful. In 1897, he was exiled to Siberia for three years.

Fortunately for him, security was so lax—a mistake Lenin would learn from—he was able to run his communist clique remotely.

In 1900, he self-exiled to Europe where he continued to agitate and organize.

For all his efforts, he got nowhere. The Okhrana

kept its eye on him but considered him little more than a minor annoyance.

And then, in 1914, World War I broke out. The war was a disaster for Russia. As the conflict dragged on for months and years, millions of poorly equipped Russian soldiers died on the front; millions more deserted. The hopelessly incompetent Czar Nicholas II took the blame, and in March 1917 chose to abdicate.

Lenin saw his chance. Ironically, it was the Germans—Russia's World War I enemy—who helped him seize it. Hoping Lenin would further destabilize the provisional Russian government and thus allow them (the Germans) to fight a one front war in the West, they put him on a special sealed train and deposited him in St.



Petersburg.

The German plan worked and then some.

On October 25, in an act of incredible boldness, Lenin and his band of Bolsheviks took control from the provisional government. Bolshevik means “one of the majority” in Russian, but Lenin’s rebels were anything but. No matter. Lenin never let the truth get in his way. He promised the Russian people, “peace, land, and bread.” He took their land, there was no peace, and soon there was no bread.

In November, yielding to popular pressure (it still meant something then), Lenin allowed a national election.

He knew he would lose.

He was right: the

Bolsheviks received only 24 percent of the vote. This, however, was not a problem for Lenin.

When the Constituent Assembly, Russia’s new parliament, met in January 1918, and voted to reject the Bolsheviks’ takeover of the government, Lenin seized the building. Russia’s experiment with democracy was over before it began.

How would Lenin rule? Never one to mince words, he told the party leadership. “We can’t expect to get anywhere unless we resort to terrorism...”

Within months of taking power, he established his own secret police, known as the Cheka, an early form of the KGB. To lead it, Lenin appointed his trusted fellow Bolshevik,

Felix Dzerzhinsky, a maniacally ruthless and efficient killer, a prototype of a kind of soulless bureaucrat that totalitarian systems never seem to lack.

The Czar's Okhrana was bad; Lenin's Cheka was ten times worse.

It wasn't long before civil war broke out. A motley assembly of opposition parties, Czarists, and disenchanted peasants were on one side, and the Bolsheviks on the other. The Whites vs. the Reds.

Lenin welcomed the conflict: it allowed him to justify any action to consolidate his control. He shut down freedom of speech, assembly, the press, and religion. He carried out mass arrests, held show trials, and had whole villages massacred.

He declared all-out war on the "kulaks," a word that he applied to land-owning farmers, but it really referred to anyone Lenin didn't like. Before it was over, hundreds of thousands had died for the Marxist utopia.

By 1922, Lenin had Russia—now the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—firmly under his thumb. The Bolsheviks—the Reds—ruled the largest country on earth.

Ordering mass murder, torture, and terror didn't take any toll on Lenin's conscience, but it did on his body. In 1922 and 1923, he suffered a series of strokes. He died on January 21, 1924, age 53.

There was no "good" Lenin. He was a monster.

Unfortunately for Russia

and the world, another monster would soon take his place.

I'm Paul Kengor, Professor of Political Science at Grove City College and editor of The American Spectator, for Prager University.

**H A L L O F**



**ADOLF HITLER**

**GERMANY, 1933 - 45**



**T**here have probably been more books written about Adolf Hitler than any single person in history.

They all pose the same question: what animated him?

No one has come up with a satisfactory answer.

Everyone knows, for example, of Hitler's obsessive hatred for Jews. But no one can explain exactly where that hatred came from. There's no evidence that he hated Jews as a young man or that some Jewish person cheated or hurt him or his family. In fact, the doctor who took care of his beloved mother was Jewish, and by most accounts, Hitler never blamed him for her death.

The one conclusion we can draw about this man is

this.

He was pure evil—a demonic lunatic.

Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889, in a small Austrian town near the German border.

There was nothing especially foreboding about his childhood—no stories of him torturing animals; no hint of the monster he would become. Like his fellow mass murderer Mao Zedong, Hitler adored his mother who, by all accounts, doted on him. When she died when Hitler was 18, he was grief-stricken. For the rest of his life, he kept a picture of her next to his bed.

His first ambition was to be an artist, and though he showed some talent, he didn't show enough to make a career out of it.

Alone and adrift, he volunteered to serve in the German army when the First World War broke out in 1914. Wounded at the Battle of the Somme, he was awarded the Iron Cross for bravery.

In November 1918, he was in a hospital recovering from a mustard gas attack when the German High Command surrendered. The humiliating surrender terms as spelled out in the Treaty of Versailles infuriated him, as they did many Germans.

He vowed revenge. But revenge on whom?

The answer turned out to be the Jews. They were the ones who had betrayed Germany. How and why Hitler reached this conclusion remains one of the many mysteries of his life.

In Hitler's warped mind, these Jews were polluting the pure blood of the Aryan race—the only race he believed was fit to rule.

Hitler took this message to the German people and got...nowhere.

In 1923, he tried to overthrow the German government with a small group of like-minded fanatics, the early core of what would become the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or the Nazi Party; "Nazi" being short for National Socialist.

The failed Beer Hall Putsch, as it came to be called, landed Hitler in jail. There he wrote his infamous manifesto, *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"). In it, he laid out his grand plan by which Germany would establish itself as a world power to rival America and Britain.

There were two essential elements to this plan: the first was the elimination of the Jews, who he held responsible for the twin evils of capitalism and communism. For Hitler, the goal of both these economic systems was the same: Jewish domination.

The second element was the concept of living space, or “Lebensraum.” Germany, he believed, needed more land, and that land would be found in the Slavic East, especially in Russia.

Once out of jail, Hitler slowly built up his following, but again gained little traction. That changed with the onset of the worldwide Great Depression. As Germany spiraled into economic chaos, it became ripe for a demagogue who promised to fix the country.

Hitler was the demagogue and Nazism was the movement. His giant rallies mesmerized much of the German populace. Here was the strongman who would save them and lift them to glory.

In 1932, the Nazis won 37 percent of the popular vote, the most of any party. The next year, Hitler was made chancellor. Once in power, he had no intention of ever giving it up. He planned a thousand-year Third Reich.

Hitler’s first action was to rearm Germany in preparation for the war that he knew was coming. He knew it because he was going to start it.

He made his move in September 1939 with the invasion of Poland, crossing the “red line” that brought him into conflict with Britain, starting World War II. In 1940, Hitler moved

against Holland, Belgium, and France, taking all three in spectacular fashion.

His war plan was to knock the Western powers out of the war so he could attack the Soviet Union in the East. This he did in June 1941.

Everywhere the German army went, the German army won. But his spectacular victories in 1940 and 1941 turned into catastrophic defeats in 1942 and 1943. By 1944, the end of Hitler and the Nazis was in view.

Hitler had fatally miscalculated the determination of Britain, the resilience of Russia, and the industrial power of America. But no matter how bad things got, he never wavered in his greatest ambition: to kill the Jews—every man, woman, and child.

He almost succeeded.

The Nazis had murdered two thirds of Europe's Jews—six million souls—by the time the war ended in May 1945. Across the entire continent over 40 million people were dead.

Hitler himself was one of the final additions to that morbid count. Deep in a bunker in Berlin, he stuck a gun to his head and pulled the trigger.

No matter how many more books are written about him, what Hitler did and why he did it will never make sense.

I'm Paul Kengor, professor of political science at Grove City College, and editor of *The American Spectator*, for Prager University.



**H A L L O F**



**MAO ZEDONG**

**CHINA, 1949 - 76**

**T**he morbid distinction of being directly responsible the death of more people than any human being in history belongs to Mao Zedong, the dictator of China from 1949 until his death in 1976.

Born on December 26, 1893, Mao was the son of a prosperous farmer who had lifted himself from poverty. From the time Mao learned to read, he was obsessed with books. His first job was as a librarian, and in his twenties, he ran a bookstore selling Communist Party propaganda.

Mao became a Marxist not out of idealism. His only ideal was Mao. The plight of the Chinese people meant nothing to him—not as a young man, and not as a dictator. For Mao,

other people existed to be used. Their lives didn't matter at all.

In the early 1920s, Mao was one of a small group who joined together to form the Chinese Communist Party. The outlawed party grew slowly but steadily. But the Communists were no match for the Nationalist Party and its armed forces led by Chiang Kai-shek. While Chiang was your classic strongman, the Nationalist movement at least pointed toward a democratic future. No one could say that about Mao and the Communists.

By 1934, Chiang had Mao on the ropes. Mao escaped by virtue of his now-mythical “Long March,” the year-long, 6,000-mile trek, in which his force of 100,000 followers was reduced to a mere 8,000.

Mao's troops may have suffered every imaginable hardship, but Mao himself barely marched anywhere. Instead, he was carried on a litter, a portable couch, held up by a cadre of servants.

Even though only a remnant survived, it proved to be enough to keep the Communist cause going.

Ironically, it was the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 that saved the Communists. Chiang reluctantly diverted his attention away from Mao to fighting the Japanese.

This gave Mao a chance to rebuild his forces in the countryside. By 1949, he had amassed an army of 1.5 million men. That was more than enough to defeat Chiang and establish himself as the absolute

ruler of all China.

Half a billion people—a fifth of the world's population—were thrust into one vast ideological laboratory. In rural areas, families were herded into collective farms. They no longer would work for themselves, they would work for the government.

This was as true for women as it was for men. In a perverse way, Mao believed in the equality of the sexes. If men could do back-breaking labor in the fields and factories, why couldn't women?

Of course, there was no real equality in China for anyone, male or female, and no chance of improving one's condition. If you were assigned to a village, you had to stay in that village. If you were assigned to a city, you had to stay

in that city. Whatever job the party gave you, that was your job. You couldn't say, "I would rather be a teacher than a farmer."

Well, you could say it, but if you did, you'd be shot.

There was also no equality between the proletariat and the elite. Mao lived in total luxury and hedonism. He had a dozen custom-built homes scattered throughout the country. Peasant girls were brought to him for his sexual satisfaction. He refused to bathe, brush his teeth, and had chronic venereal disease. He ate whatever his heart desired: meat, vegetables, and pastries.

Meanwhile, peasants starved in mud huts.

Why couldn't the peasants feed themselves like they had for centuries? The truth was, they could.

Mao was exporting food all through this period. He believed China had to be a great military power, so he traded food for industrial hardware and armaments. The Soviets and Eastern Europe got the grain; Mao got the guns. The peasants got nothing.

And then they got less. From 1958 to 1962, during the Great Leap Forward, Mao pushed the peasants even harder. Their suffering is impossible to describe.

First they ate the dogs, then the rats, then the bark from the trees, then in some cases, human flesh.

According to a contemporary account, "The life we had to endure in those days was worse than the life of primitive societies. We lived like animals..."



Tens of millions died before Mao finally backed off. But he was never far from another disastrous social experiment. In the mid-1960s, he instigated the so-called “Cultural Revolution,” encouraging Chinese college students to denounce anyone not sufficiently “revolutionary.” This included their own parents and grandparents. And then, when he felt the college students had gone far enough, he turned on them. Thousands were sent to labor camps. And, of course, many were tortured and executed. It wasn’t a Maoist purge if that didn’t happen.

After being directly responsible for the murder of between 50 and 70 million of his own people, after impoverishing the most populous country in the world, after killing anyone who opposed him,

Mao died in his bed in September 1976.

It’s hard to think of him having done one good thing in his entire life.

I’m Paul Kengor, professor of political science at Grove City College, and editor of *The American Spectator*, for Prager University.

**H A L L O F**



**JOSEPH STALIN**

**S O V I E T   U N I O N ,   1 9 2 4 - 5 3**

**“**One death is a tragedy.  
A million is a  
statistic.”

That line is attributed to Joseph Stalin, the dictator of the Soviet Union from 1927 until his death in 1953, and perfectly describes his worldview.

Consider this:

Directly or indirectly, he was responsible for the suffering and death of more human beings than any person in history.

He starved to death more than five million Ukrainians in 1932 and 1933.

He signed a nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany in 1939, freeing Adolf Hitler to attack Poland, and thus commence World War II.

At least 40 million dead in Europe alone.

Without Stalin's support,

it's unlikely Mao Zedong could have taken over China in 1949.

At least another 50 million dead.

Throw in his support for the Kim dynasty in North Korea, his brutal takeover of Eastern Europe following World War II, and the millions who perished in the infamous Gulags inside the Soviet Union, and the numbers are beyond comprehension.

They become, as Stalin put it, a statistic.

These were the dead. The living suffered decades of pointless misery, never knowing from one day to the next whether Stalin's secret police would show up and take them away.

The man behind all of this terror was born Joseph

Dzhugashvili on December 18, 1878, in Gori, Georgia, then part of the Russian Empire. “Stalin” was the name he later gave himself when he became a communist revolutionary. It means “Man of Steel.”

His mother wanted him to be a priest, but Stalin never considered it a serious option—certainly not after he fell under the sway of Vladimir Lenin and his vicious brand of Marxism. Stalin was a jack-of-all-trades—whatever Lenin needed done, Stalin would do it, including bank robberies, assassinations, and then by 1912, writing and editing the Communist Party newspaper, *Pravda*.

The one thing Stalin never seemed to possess was a conscience. Killing came easily for him, and once he got started, he could never stop. He had a simple

philosophy: “Death solves all problems. No man, no problem.”

In 1917, Lenin took control of Russia. Stalin was right there with him.

When Lenin died in 1924, Stalin wanted the top job. This wasn’t mere ambition—it was also a matter of survival. Not getting the job meant certain death, a lesson that his chief rival Leon Trotsky learned some sixteen years later, when Stalin had him murdered in Mexico.

In retrospect, it seems inevitable that Stalin would lead the party. In addition to being utterly ruthless, he was also the consummate bureaucrat. No detail was too small for his attention. Novels, screenplays, and editorials had to be submitted



for his approval. Not infrequently, he would rewrite them to make sure they followed the party line that Stalin himself had set.

Stalin learned to govern from Lenin. The ruling principle was this: either you did what he told you to do, or he had you killed or imprisoned. And even if you did what he told you to do, he still might have you killed or imprisoned if he felt you were a threat.

This was the story behind the Great Purge of 1936–1938, in which he had his closest allies from his Lenin days, Grigori Zinoviev, Nikolai Bukharin, and Lev Kamenev, tried and executed on fictitious charges of treason.

All allies became enemies sooner or later with Stalin. Not only was he

not remorseful when he destroyed them—he was positively gleeful. As he himself once said, “The greatest delight is to mark one’s enemy, prepare everything, avenge oneself thoroughly and then go to sleep.”

Over the next two years, he had some seventy percent of the Party Central Committee and the military hierarchy—admirals, generals, and corps commanders—wiped out.

He simply didn’t trust them, and that was enough.

Stalin’s purge would cost the Soviets dearly. When Hitler invaded Russia in June 1941, breaking his 1939 nonaggression pact with Stalin, there were almost no competent generals left to defend

the home front. Millions of Soviet soldiers were slaughtered by the German war machine before the Soviet army was able to recover.

The Soviets eventually triumphed over the Nazis, but not before losing 25 million of their own people—the highest number of deaths of any country in the war—many of them sacrificed to Stalin’s paranoia and incompetence.

But Stalin paid no price. In fact, the war made him more powerful than ever, his cult of personality reaching staggering new heights. Stalin wasn’t the leader of the Soviet Union—he was the Soviet Union.

Initially, his wartime allies, American President Franklin Roosevelt and

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, assumed that once the war was over, the Soviet army would return to Russia. But Stalin had no such intention.

Instead, the infamous Iron Curtain soon descended over Eastern Europe. The Cold War had begun—the United States vs. the Soviet Union.

In March 1953, Stalin, age 74, suffered a massive stroke. The doctors who attended him were afraid to do anything. What if they made a mistake? When they finally started treating him, it was too late.

It took three agonizing days for Stalin to die, but the Soviet Union endured, immiserating millions of people for another four decades—an inglorious

testimony to one of the worst people who ever lived.

I'm Paul Kengor, professor of political science at Grove City College, and editor of *The American Spectator*, for Prager University.



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