**Benito Mussolini**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Joseph Stalin**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Hideki Tojo**

Hideki Tojo was born in 1884 and died in 1948. Hideki Tojo was Prime Minister of Japan when the attack on [Pearl Harbour](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/pearl_harbour.htm) took place plunging the [Far](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/fareast.htm) [East](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/fareast.htm) into a war which was to end with the destruction of [Hiroshima](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/hiroshima.htm) in August 1945. For his part in leading Japan into [World War Two](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/WW2.htm), Tojo was executed as a war criminal.

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

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

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

The huge success enjoyed by the Japanese Army in the months immediately following [Pearl Harbor](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/pearl_harbour.htm), strengthened Tojo's standing in Japan - especially when the British Army surrendered at [Singapore](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/fall_of_singapore.htm) and [Douglas MacArthur](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/douglas_macarthur.htm) withdrew American forces from the Philippines.

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

In November 1948, Tojo was put on trial as a war criminal. He was accused of instigating Japan's aggressive foreign policy in the early 1940's and of permitting the appalling abuse of prisoners-of-war, contrary to the Geneva Convention. He was found guilty and hanged.