

— JOSEPH — STALIN



JOSEPH STALIN

A Life From Beginning to End

Series Information: World War 2 Biographies Book 4

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Introduction

When most Americans think of the “Man of Steel,” images of the DC Comics’ iconic Superman no doubt come to mind, the safe and salient American hero who appeared in the pulp fiction pages of American comic books beginning in 1938. However, there was another Man of Steel that had emerged over a decade prior to this superhero’s debut - and this man of steel was forged under completely different circumstances.

Instead of crash landing on Earth from planet Krypton, Stalin’s man of steel was forged in the physical fires of the gulag and the emotional fires of childhood abandonment. He was a man that was often mistreated in life, and as a consequence, he hardened. Every aspect of his personality became as hard as iron, and it was in recognition and dedication to this feat that the man who was born Iosif Dzhugashvili announced to the world that he would be forevermore known as “Stalin,” the “Man of Steel.”

The man who then took on this mantle of emotional disconnection and dehumanization would spend the rest of his life working to inflict his cold vision on the rest of the world. However, despite his wish to be as solid as steel, Stalin would become an increasingly erratic figure. He often contradicted himself; while he had an inborn desire to involve others in the political process, at the same time he was an iron-fisted despot in constant fear of someone else moving against his will.

In his heart he was a true believer in Marxist ideology and wished to see the communist system, with its equal delegation of powers, take off. Yet his inflexibility and refusal to relinquish his dictatorial powers meant his desire for a Marxist paradise would never get off the runway.

Stalin, a lifelong revolutionary, wished to encourage his love of activism in the common people of the Soviet Union, but the instant the very people he encouraged became “too politically active” he had them thrown in prison. Stalin presents himself as a kind of Russian matryoshka doll—the kind that has layer upon layer of different faces and dress underneath— and it’s the complex duplicity of Stalin’s multiple layers has left us digging deeper and deeper into his strange personality. Even doing so has left researchers feeling as if they have just barely scratched the surface.

Chapter One

A Change of Weather

“Catch a man a fish, and you can sell it to him. Teach a man to fish, and you ruin a wonderful business opportunity.”

—Karl Marx

Stalin was born on December 18th, 1878, in a frontier town on the edge of what then comprised the Russian Empire of Tsar Alexander II. The land of his birth was a recent acquisition in what is known today as Georgia. Despite a common Russian animus at the time for anything Georgian, when Stalin would eventually come to power, he fully embraced his Georgian heritage.

However, for the young man born with the Georgian name of Iosif Dzhugashvili – a name that most Russians had trouble even pronouncing - the likelihood that the child of this backwater region would rise up to any sort of prominence at all would have seemed incredibly unlikely. He was the son of a cobbler and a housemaid who barely made enough money to survive.

When the family’s financial situation later moved from bad to worse, his father would turn increasingly to alcohol and the abuse of his family—especially the young Iosif—in order to release the feelings of desperation and rage that he felt. Iosif’s mother became increasingly concerned for her son, and in the midst of their struggle came to the conclusion that the only way for him to escape the turmoil was to send him off to seminary school. This is the impetus that brought Stalin to the town of Tiflis—to one of Georgia’s local Greek Orthodox monasteries—to become a priest.

Iosif’s new peaceful life as a priest got off to a rough start. In 1899 he was expelled from the school after getting into a fight with a local chief of police. Joseph Stalin himself would later claim that he was expelled for disseminating Marxist propaganda. To date, however, it remains unclear whether Stalin’s admission was propaganda in itself because there is no other indication besides Stalin’s own remarks that Marxism had anything