

Volume 3

Number 129

Stalin's Butcher - Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria - II

Lead: Of the henchmen of Joseph Stalin, none struck fear in the hearts of Russians quite like Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Born of Georgian peasant stock in 1899, Beria became a Marxist sympathizer while attending technical college in Azerbaijan. At the fall of the Russian monarchy, Beria dropped out of school to join the Army, apparently to spread Communist ideas and help undermine morale. When the

Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional government in the October Revolution, Beria returned home to finish his studies but was soon caught up in his party's counterintelligence service, the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage, or CHEKA.

In 1922 Beria was named head of the CHEKA in his native Georgia which was then part of the expanding Soviet Union. There he gained a reputation as an efficient administrator of death, carrying out mass executions and deportation of party opponents. He was so good at it that in 1924 he was awarded one of the

Soviet Union's top honors, "The Order of the Red Banner."

By the 1930s Beria had risen to become Party chief in the area around the Caucasus Mountains and there oversaw Stalin's Great Purges in the region. Not to be outdone by rival leaders in their servile submission to Stalin's paranoia, he personally interrogated and had shot hundreds of prisoners accused of "national deviations." He also executed the old line Georgian Bolsheviks who knew the truth about Stalin's humble beginnings.

In July, 1938 Stalin summoned Beria to Moscow where he assisted Nikolai Yezhov, head of the NKVD, in

the final stages of the Great Purges. When Yezhov fell from grace and was shot, consumed by the killing machine he had created at Stalin's command, Beria took his place. A model of deadly precision, he set out to improve conditions in the Soviet labor camps, what Alexandr Solzhenitzyn called *The Gulag Archipelago*, but not for humanitarian purposes. Beria wanted to lower the death rate in order to increase productivity. Dead men can't dig for gold or iron ore, but brutalized men can, and under Beria's lash they did. Next time: Stalin's heir apparent.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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