

**Volume 3**

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**Stalin's Butcher - Lavrentiy Pavlovich  
Beria - Part III**

**Lead:** After clawing his way to the top of the ailing Joseph Stalin's pyramid of bureaucratic terror, Lavrentiy Beria seemed set to succeed the maximum leader.

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

**Content:** In 1938 Stalin brought him to Moscow after Beria had distinguished himself as the bloody enforcer of the Great Purges in Georgia and other southern Soviet provinces near the Caucasus

**Mountains. He became assistant to Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the NKVD, in the waning days of the purge, and after Yezhov's fall from power and execution, Beria took his place. He became a candidate member of the Politburo and during World War II he sat on the five-member State Defense Committee, which, with Stalin, directed the war effort. Beria was responsible for internal security as well as foreign intelligence operations and the network of forced labor camps he ruled, the Gulag Archipelago, turned out much of the raw material for the Soviet war industry.**

**During the war he organized special battalions of NKVD troops who eliminated German collaborators and**

**deported whole non-Russian populations thought to be disloyal such as Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans and the Chechens, thus aggravating ethnic resentment for generations to come.**

**In the early 1950s Stalin's health began to decline and Beria aggressively promoted himself as successor to the dictator. The increasingly paranoid Stalin, always suspicious of ambitious underlings, began to demote Beria and his allies but this process was cut short by the Great Leader's death in March, 1953. Within the resulting power vacuum, Stalin's closest associates began to circle around each other in a thinly disguised struggle for power. Beria**

**controlled the state police apparatus which made his fellow leaders, prominent among them Malenkov, Bulganin, Molotov and Khrushchev, very nervous. He also began to liberalize his position on policy matters in hopes of softening his public image after years as Stalin's sinister security chief. It did not work. On June 26, 1953, his enemies, along with leading army marshals, secretly arrested Beria and several of his police allies, accused them of treason and anti-party criminal activities, tried them in secret in December 1953, and shot them the same day. Stalin's butcher had come to his end.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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**Knight, Amy W. *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.**

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