

Hideki Tojo: Japan

Hideki Tojo (1884-1948), a Japanese general and premier during World War II, was hanged as a war criminal. He symbolized, in his rise to leadership of the Japanese government, the emergence of Japanese militarism and its parochial view of the world.

Hideki Tojo was born in Tokyo on Dec. 30, 1884, the eldest son in a family of samurai descent. Tojo entered military school in 1899, following in the footsteps of his father, a professional military man who served as a lieutenant colonel in the Sino-Japanese War and as a major general in the Russo-Japanese War. Tojo likewise saw service, though briefly, in the latter war. In 1915 he graduated with honors from the army war college and was subsequently sent abroad for 3 years (1919-1922) of study in Europe. After his return he served as an instructor in military science at the war college.

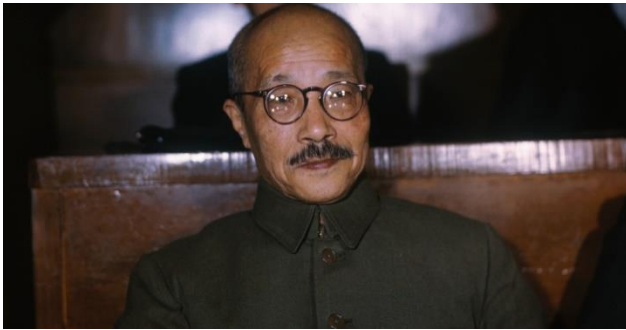
Brusque, scrupulous, and hardworking, Tojo came to be known as *kamisori* (the razor) for the sharp, decisive, impatient qualities that he manifested as he rose rapidly through the military hierarchy. He was assigned first to the War Ministry and subsequently to the general staff and various command posts. Promoted to lieutenant general in 1936, Tojo became chief of staff of the Kwantung Army in Manchuria, where he worked effectively to mobilize Manchuria's economy and strengthen Japan's military readiness in the event that war broke out with the Soviet Union. When full-scale hostilities broke out instead between China and Japan following the Marco Polo Bridge incident, Tojo in his first real taste of combat experience led two brigades in a blitzkrieg that quickly brought the whole of Inner Mongolia under Japanese control. In 1938 he was recalled from field service to become vice-minister of war, a position in which he pressed resolutely for preparations that would allow Japan to wage a two-front war against both China and the Soviet Union.

In mid-1940 Tojo was appointed war minister in the second Fumimaro Konoe government, which proceeded at once to sign the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. Relations with the United States gradually worsened during succeeding months as Japanese troops moved south into Indochina; but Tojo hewed to a hard line. Convinced of the righteousness of the imperial cause and of the implacable hostility of the Americans, the British, the Chinese, and the Dutch, he stoutly opposed the negotiations and concessions that Konoe contemplated. Speaking for the army command, Tojo demanded a decision for war unless the United States backed away from its embargo on all exports to Japan. When Konoe hesitated, Tojo is reported to have told him that "sometimes it is necessary to shut one's eyes and take the plunge." Konoe, however, was reluctant to take the plunge and instead tendered his resignation.



Leadership in War

An imperial mandate was then given to Tojo in October 1941 to become premier and form a new Cabinet. It was thought that only Tojo had full knowledge of recent developments and an ability to control the army. Tojo was given an imperial command to "wipe the slate clean, " review all past decisions, and work for peace. But a reconsideration of Japanese policy failed to reveal alternatives acceptable to the army, and the decision for war was taken. Within hours after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Tojo broadcast a brief message to his countrymen, warning them that "to annihilate this enemy and to establish a stable new order in East Asia, the nation must necessarily anticipate a long war."



Tojo had great power at the beginning of the war and in the West was often likened to Hitler and Mussolini. Besides serving as premier, he was a general in the army, war minister, and, for a short time, home minister. Later in the war he also served as chief of the general staff. In 1942 a tightly restricted national election resulted in a pro-Tojo Diet. Nonetheless, while wielding great power, Tojo was still not a dictator like Hitler or Mussolini. The

senior statesmen, the army and navy general staffs, and, of course, ultimately the Emperor still exercised considerable power independent of Tojo.

Defeat and Dishonor

By early 1944 even though the tide of battle had turned decisively against Japan, and Tojo admitted to the Diet that the nation faced "the most critical situation in the history of the Empire, " he stood firmly opposed to increasing sentiment in favor of negotiation. The fall of Saipan in July 1944, however, put American bombers within range of the home-land, and the senior statesmen together with ministers in Tojo's Cabinet forced him into retirement.

With the end of the war Tojo awaited at his Tokyo residence his arrest by the occupation forces. On Sept. 11, 1945, when Gen. MacArthur ordered his arrest, Tojo attempted to shoot himself. After his recovery he was held in Sugamo prison until his trial as a suspected war criminal by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East began in May 1946. After proceedings which stretched out over 2 years, during which Tojo willingly accepted his responsibility for much of Japan's wartime policy while declaring it legitimate self-defense, he was found guilty of having "major responsibility for Japan's criminal attacks on her neighbors" and was sentenced to death by hanging. The sentence was carried out on Dec. 23, 1948.