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Penalty Strike: The Memoirs of a Red Army Penal Company Commander 1943-45: v. 1 (Soviet Memories of War)

Alexander V. Pyl'cyn

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The focus of this book are the author's vivid memories of service as a company commander in a Red Army officers' penal battalion on the Eastern Front 1944-45.

During this time, he and his unit participated in the 1944 Soviet summer offensive Operation 'Bagration', the Vistula-Oder operation into eastern Germany, and the final assault on Berlin.

The stories of penal companies and battalions in the Red Army gave birth to legends about men who rushed to the attack across minefields against German machine-guns with one rifle per three men. The author of this book knows from his own experience what a penal battalion is. A common threat during the war, "I will send you to a penal battalion!" meant nothing to him. He was there.

He was a platoon commander and later a commander of an officers' penal company. He was a senior lieutenant having a degraded regiment commander as a second-in-command. He and his company had to carry out the most difficult and dangerous operations in order to break through the enemy defenses. With more than 80% of the men lost his company succeeded in completing their missions. The horrors of war, the hand-to-hand fights with a desperately struggling enemy are described in this book along with a story of a strong feeling between the young officer and a hospital nurse Rita. Thanks to Alexander Rita was appointed a nurse in the penal battalion. She saved dozens of soldiers, carrying them from the battlefield under enemy fire. It was Rita who saved Alexander Pyl'cyn from death, when he was badly wounded near Berlin. She became his wife in the last months of the war. The author is brilliant at detailing the way of life and personal relations in the war. In this horrible slaughter cowardice and treason went side by side with friendship and heroism. In these inhuman conditions people remained as they were: they lived, they laughed, they loved.

Key sales points: High-quality memoirs from Soviet soldiers who served on the Eastern Front are rare - rarer still are firsthand accounts of the Red Army's penal battalions / The author's intense and exciting style produces a fluid and highly-readable account of the brutal reality of war in the East during its most bitter final phase / Includes the author's experiences during the storming of Berlin 1945, and his battlefield romance with Rita, the battalion's nurse, and his future wife.

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