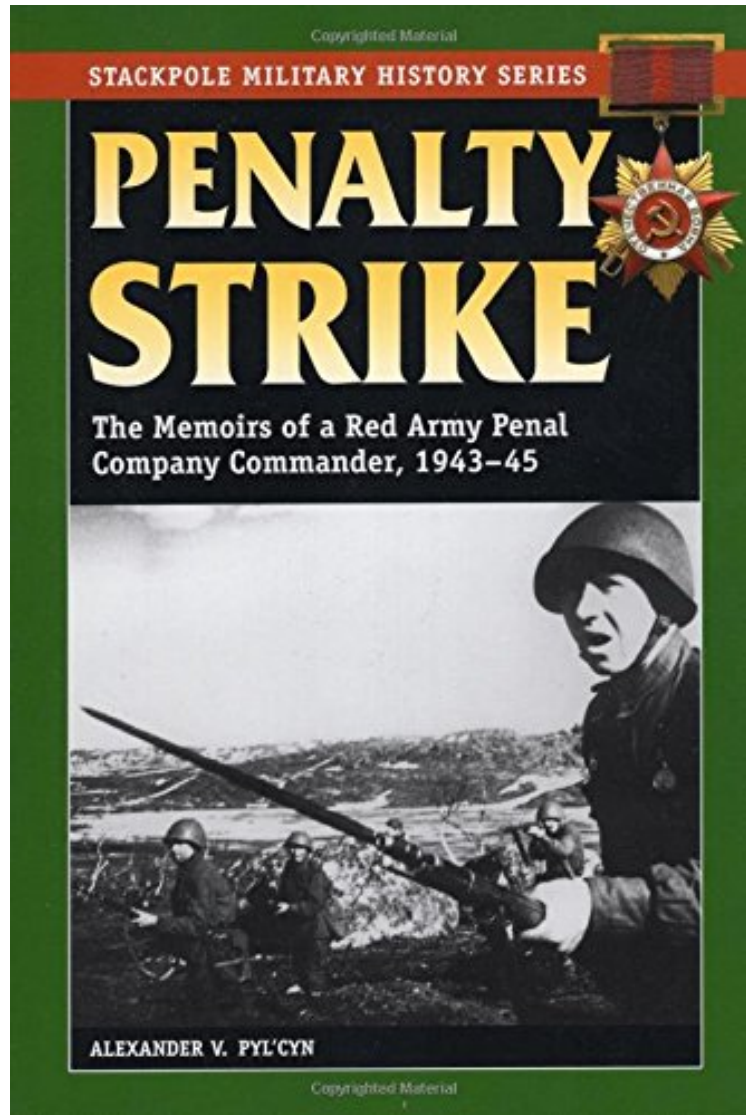


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## Penalty Strike: The Memoirs of a Red Army Penal Company Commander, 1943-45 (Stackpole Military History Series)

Alexander V. Pyl'cyn

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Alexander V. Pyl'cyn : **Penalty Strike: The Memoirs of a Red Army Penal Company Commander, 1943-45 (Stackpole Military History Series)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised **Penalty Strike: The Memoirs of a Red Army Penal Company Commander, 1943-45 (Stackpole Military History Series)**:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Company commander in a Soviet penal battalion  
By ldw120  
First hand experience by a front line penal battalion company commander. The title is a bit misleading but I can see why they did not call it "Penal Strike" instead. The book is actually about a regular officer, trained in the eastern Soviet Union and assigned to a penal battalion composed of disgraced officers serving punishment tours to clear their record. Captain Pyl'cyn has is not being punished, this unit was just where he was assigned. He liked the battalion, liked the men (again, nearly all former officers mostly those that had been captured by Germans early in the war or surrounded) and relates his combat experiences in this narrative. It is not a sweeping narrative of the war against Germany, it is a personalized memoir and he leaves it to your imagination the details of the deadly hand to hand fighting he had to endure. Well worth reading.  
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Amazing Story  
By Thomas Reiter  
I have to say that this was one of the most interesting books I've read about the East Front in some time. After hearing so many vague myths about the "shtrafbats", it was very interesting to read the account of a veteran of such a unit. The author's style, while clearly not that of a professional historian, was refreshingly straightforward and brutally honest. I had the feeling I was sitting with the author on a campstool somewhere while he told his story... It was fascinating to hear about the types of battles that the shtrafbats were used for, and how men ended up in them (and got out of them). It was also interesting to hear about the bonds that grew up between the men in the unit, despite the fact that it was a "penalty" unit, and how commanders at various levels (from battalion to army) affected the morale in the unit. Despite the fact that all of the men in the unit had been declared "traitors" for various (often trivial) misdeeds, most of them considered themselves true patriots, were eager to prove it, and were disgusted by the real traitors and cowards among them. It was also humorous to read how after various confrontations with regular army officers, they would threaten to send the author to a "shtrafbat", only for him to inform them that he was already in one... This is not a "study" of strafbats, nor a professional history, so readers should manage their expectations. There are no maps, and indeed, the author often didn't know exactly where he was, what enemy units he was facing, or even which Soviet units they were supporting. Nonetheless, it is a fascinating personal account of a little-known aspect of the East Front.  
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Discipline in the Red Army  
By James D. Crabtree  
This book tells the story of Alexander Pyl'cyn, a young officer who found himself serving as a cadre member of a penal battalion. This particular unit was composed of Red Army officers who were found guilty of serious infractions during the Great Patriotic War and subsequently punished with 30-, 60-, or 90-day terms in the unit. During this period they had the rank of private. Even though Pyl'cyn doesn't really discuss this aspect, a three-month tour in a penal battalion wasn't a very healthy proposition: penal Battalions were given missions which guaranteed heavy casualties. And Pyl'cyn specifically denied that his battalion had a "blocking company," a unit of NKVD troops usually equipped with submachineguns whose job was not to engage the enemy but rather to gun down Soviet soldiers who tried to retreat. Oddly, he mentions that there was a SMERSH detachment, an NKVD unit normally used to summarily execute "spies." However, penal battalions did provide a way for the officers to get rehabilitated, even to earn Red Army decorations. They could be restored to full or partial rank based upon their conduct as "shtrafniks." As cadre, Pyl'cyn saw many men processed through his company. This is an interesting memoir, not just for a Red Army man but for a leader of men who were condemned and hoped to restore their honor through blood. Illustrated with photos.

Extremely rare (possibly the only) book-length account of a Soviet penal unit in World War II  
Gritty, intense style conveys the brutality of war on the Eastern Front  
Composed of convicts--soldiers who conducted "unauthorized retreats," former Soviet POWs deemed untrustworthy, and Gulag prisoners--the Red Army's penal units received the most difficult, dangerous assignments, such as breaking through the enemy's defenses. So punishing was life in these units that officers in regular formations threatened to send recalcitrant troops to penal battalions. Alexander Pyl'cyn led his penal unit through the Soviets' massive offensive in the summer of 1944, the Vistula-Oder operation into eastern Germany, and the bitter assault on Berlin in 1945. He survived the war, but 80 percent of his men did not.

About the Author  
Alexander Pyl'cyn, drafted into the Red Army at eighteen in 1941 and wounded three times, earned the Order of the Red Banner, the Order of the Great Patriotic War, and the Order of the Red Star for his actions during the war. He lives in St. Petersburg, Russia.