



# **From Stalingrad to Pillau: A Red Army Artillery Officer Remembers the Great Patriotic War (Modern War Studies (Hardcover))**

*Isaak Kobylyanskiy*

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Strange sounds resembling the remote rumble of distant thunder were audible. Everybody understood: it was the echo of the battle for Stalingrad. . . . A heavy rain began falling.

Stalingrad's outskirts provided Isaak Kobylanskiy, a 19-year-old ethnic Jew from Ukraine, with his first exposure to combat and initiated his long odyssey in the Great Patriotic War against Germany. It would be more than three years before he was finally reunited with his family and his sweetheart, Vera, the schoolmate he had promised to marry.

Kobylanskiy started the war as a 76-mm infantry support gun crew commander for the 300th Rifle Division (and its later incarnations) and celebrated V-E Day as a battery commander. He took part in actions ranging from Stalingrad to the tip of the Zempland Peninsula at Pillau. His combat journey was a long process of exhausting marches punctuated by harrowing moments of intense combat. From the liberation of Sevastopol, through Lithuania's countryside, to the final storming of Königsberg's heavy fortifications, Kobylanskiy's memoir sweeps across the great expanses of the Eastern Front. His narrative is packed with dramatic details—including revealing depictions of forgotten or ignored aspects of certain battles—and insights into the daily life of the Soviet army: the relentless marches to locate and engage the enemy, the prejudicial treatment of female soldiers, and the plight of Soviet civilians.

Kobylanskiy also discusses the role of military political officers (and his own conflicted views on communism), clarifies the place of Jews in the Red Army and discusses how his reaction to anti-Semitic utterances added a sense of responsibility to his fighting, and frames his account with personal glimpses into the stifling repression of Stalinist society, including the brutal collectivization program and resulting famine in Ukraine. But he balances such memories with warm recollections of some of his comrades and especially with an affecting portrait of his courtship of Vera, which sustained him in battle, and concludes with an emotional coda: their wedding ceremony in a war-ravaged but recovering Kiev.

By turns vivid, reflective, intense, and entertaining, Kobylanskiy's narrative charts one warrior's epic journey and joins a select group of memoirs that deepen our understanding of what it was like for Russian soldiers on the Eastern Front.

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