



Stalin's Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II (Modern War Studies) (Modern War Studies (Hardcover))

Kenneth Slepyan

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When the Wehrmacht rolled into the Soviet Union in World War II, it got more than it bargained for. Notwithstanding the Red Army's retreat, Soviet citizens fought fiercely against German occupiers, engaging in raids, sabotage, and intelligence gathering largely without any oversight from Stalin and his iron-fisted rule.

Kenneth Slepyan provides an enlightening social and political history of the Soviet partisan movement, a people's army of irregulars fighting behind enemy lines. These insurgents included not only civilians-many of them women-but also stranded Red Army soldiers, national minorities, and even former collaborators. While others have documented the military contributions of the movement, Slepyan is the first to describe it as a social phenomenon and to reveal how its members were both challenged and transformed by the crucible of war.

By tracing the movement's origins, internal squabbles, and evolution throughout the war, Slepyan shows that people who suddenly had the autonomy to act on their own came to rethink the Stalinist regime. He assesses how partisan initiative and self-reliance competed with and countered the demands of state control and how social identities influenced relations among partisans, as well as between partisans and Soviet authorities.

Slepyan has tapped newly opened Soviet archives, as well as wartime radio broadcasts and Communist Party publications and memoirs, to depict the partisans as agents actively pursuing their own agendas. His book gives us a picture of their day-to-day struggle that was previously unknown to all but those few who personally survived the experience, paying special attention to questions of nationality, ethnicity, and gender to illuminate the sociopolitical relations within this diverse group. Through these varied accounts, he demonstrates that Soviet citizens reinterpreted Stalinism and the Soviet experience in the context of total war.

Offering numerous fresh insights into the partisans' multifaceted relationship with the state, Slepyan's book reveals the ways in which the war simultaneously reinforced and undermined both Stalinism and the Soviet system. Ultimately, his study rescues the Soviet partisans from obscurity to depict the complexity of their lives and underscore their vital contributions to the defense of their homeland.

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