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Order of the Red Banner, Type 1, Variation 2, Sub-variation 2 (Durov & Strekalov classification), #2953, awarded on 25 October 1938 to Private Nikolai Kuzmenko (Николай Трофимович Кузьменко), 39th Rifle Corps, for the Battle of Lake Khasan.

Silver gilt, enamels. Measures 39.9 mm in height (from the top of the flag to the bottom of the wreath). 36.1 mm in width; weighs 24.1 g not including the screw plate. The screw post is approx. 4.6 mm in diameter. A Type 1, Var. 2 according to the McDaniel classification, this piece manufactured in 1933 at the Leningrad Mint features a reverse with relatively smooth lines of the counter-relief. The area for the serial number is flat and smooth, slightly "sunk in", and has well-defined borders. Note the serial number, which is very low even for the "Mirror Reverse" Red Banner.

In fine to very fine condition, well above average for a "Mirror Reverse" Red Banner of such an early, pre-WW2 vintage. The red enamel on the banner has no repairs and presents well overall. It has several relatively small chips in the upper corners of the banner and along its lower edge, as well as some tiny flakes along the edges and minor amount of rubbing throughout. There are however none of the usual repairs or major enamel losses. The enamel on the red star is missing on the left and lower arms and has chips and flaking on the right arm. The red enamel on the plaque with the "СССР" near the bottom has only a couple of tiny flakes and some microscopic contact marks. The white enamel is essentially perfect, having only a few microscopic contact marks completely invisible to the naked eye.

The details of the wreath are beautifully crisp and show practically no wear. There is a nice patina to silver on the obverse, but a good amount of the original fire gilt finish is nevertheless clearly visible in the recesses of the wreath - an uncommon occurrence for a "Mirror Back". The order has not been converted to suspension and retains its original, full length screw post measuring approx. 13 mm long. Comes with an original 32-mm silver screw plate, correct for a "Mirror Reverse" Red Banner in its serial number range. /V. Durov, N. Strekalov, *The Order of the Red Banner*, pp. 118, 121-122/.

According to the rather scant information available in the Russian archives, Nikolai Kuzmenko was born in 1914 to an ethnic Ukrainian family. A collective farmer prior to military service, he was drafted in 1936 for a two-year stint in the military. An infantry private of the 39th Rifle Corps, he took part in the Battle of the Lake Khasan - or more precisely, a series of skirmishes between Soviet and Japanese troops that took place on the Soviet Far Eastern frontier from late July through 11 August 1938.

The fighting, as the facts showed later, was actually provoked by the Soviet political leadership who had hoped to snatch and fortify a chunk of seemingly unclaimed hilly terrain along the border with Manchuria, a vassal state of Japan. The specific locations seized by the Soviet border guards were the two hills (locally referred to as *sopka* in Russian) named *Zaozyornaya* and *Bezmyannaya*.

The almost unopposed initial Soviet move however was countered by a successful Japanese surprise counterattack that routed Soviet border guard units and retook the disputed territory. This development was becoming a political embarrassment for the Kremlin and called for a major escalation. The Soviet high command then threw into the fray the 39th Rifle Corps, comprising the 40th Rifle Division, 32nd Rifle Division, and 2nd Mechanized Brigade. Initially, this was to no avail: the numerically superior but poorly coordinated Red Army troops immediately ran into a quagmire. The outcome was ultimately decided by a simultaneous assault by the entire corps, led by Grigoriy Shtern, a highly capable officer of both the Russian and Spanish Civil War fame who had taken over the command of the operation on 3 August. In the final effort which began on 6 August, the 40th Rifle Division of the 39th Corps stormed *Zaozyornaya Hill*, capturing within two days in desperate fighting, often at close quarters. On the following day, the 32nd Rifle Division followed up by taking *Bezmyannaya Hill*. On 11 January, the fighting subsided, and in the next two days Japanese and Soviet sides reached a ceasefire agreement.

Although the Soviet offensive ultimately reached its goal thanks to the sheer weight of numbers, the eventual gains proved completely inadequate to the Red Army's losses. According to modern estimates, over 1200 Soviet soldiers were killed or went missing in action and over 3000 got wounded or fell sick in two weeks of fighting, while the Japanese losses were slightly over 500 men killed and under a thousand wounded. The Red Army also lost at least five tanks and several airplanes. The Soviet propaganda duly declared a major defensive victory against the "aggression of the Japanese militarists", but the Soviet commanders in the field knew better. The hard lessons they learned at Lake Khasan were later put to good use in the Battle of *Khalkhin Gol*.

As is nearly always the case with pre-Patriotic War decorations, no award commendation for Private Kuzmenko's Order of the Red Banner could be found in the archives. Nevertheless, the date of the Supreme Soviet award decree and the fact that he served with the 39th Rifle Corps point out unequivocally that the award was indeed for the Battle of Lake Khasan. Moreover, the award record card states that the fighting for which the award was bestowed took place at *Zaozyornaya*. Judging by that, Kuzmenko almost certainly served with the 40th Rifle Division which was in action from the beginning of the conflict and suffered the greater share of the losses. Kuzmenko was discharged from active service in 1938 and during the following year, joined the VLKSM (Communist Youth League.) The archives show no information about his military service later on, and we can only surmise that he either died or was found unfit for duty prior to the Patriotic War.

It must be said in the conclusion that any awards for the Battle of Lake Khasan are very scarce. It applies in particular to the Order of the Red Banner, the second highest Soviet award at the time, which was awarded for that battle to slightly over 2,000 individuals. It is of course a tiny number in comparison to the total of 72,000+ of all screw back versions ever issued, or the total of over 305,000 issues of the Order of the Red Banner during the Patriotic War. Moreover, most of the pre-WW2 recipients were career servicemen or were drafted into the military early during the Patriotic War. Many of them got killed - and their decorations lost - in the subsequent four years of the war.

Research Materials: b/w photocopy of the award record card.

Item# 44447

\$2,800.00







1) Фамилия Кучаженко ✓

2) Имя, отчество Николай Трофимович

3) Год рождения 1914.

4) Военное звание красноармеец

5) Должность и часть 39 сд

6) Вид награды **ОРДЕН "КРАСНОЕ ЗНАМЯ"**

7) Дата и место отличия 30.03.1942

8) Указ Президиума Верховного Совета СССР о награждении 25/1/38г

9) Приказ НКО СССР № 19
о награждении

ПРИКАЗ ПОДПИСАН
29/1/38 1938 г.
№ 646

10) Орден № 2953.

11) Грамота № ВВ-517

12) Орденская книжка № _____

13) Национальность украинец

14) Социальное положение Колхозник

15) Партийность ВЛКСМ с 1939г

16) Служба в РККА с 1936г по 1938г.

17) Прочие сведения и последовавшие перемены _____

Тит. НКО. 2326—38

- 10) Орден № 2853
- 11) Грамота № _____
- 12) Орденская книжка № _____
- 13) Национальн. _____
- 14) Социал. _____

1) Фамилия Кузнецко ✓
2) Имя, отчество Николай Трофимович
3) Год рождения 1914
4) Военное звание контр-адмирал
5) Должность и часть 39 сд



6) Вид награды _____
7) Дата и место отчисления 3003срнад
8) Указ Президиума Верховного Совета СССР о награждении
25/1 38

9) Приказ НКО СССР № _____ 19 _____ г.
о награждении

ПРИКАЗ ПОДПИСАН
29/1 1938 г.
№ _____