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Medal for Valor, Type 1, Variation 3, #70089, with award document, awarded on 14 September 1942 to Private Iosif Balashev (Иосиф Федорович Балашев), 572nd Separate Sapper Battalion, 211th Rifle Division, 48th Army, Bryansk Front.

The medallion is in silver, measures 42.1 mm in height incl. eyelet, 37.2 mm in width, approx. 2.7-2.8 mm thick at the edge (the so-called "Thick" sub-variation). The suspension measures 25.4 mm wide at the top, 18.1-18.3 mm tall not including the ribbon and the projection for the connecting link. Note the five-digit serial number of the medal, very low for the Variation 3.

The medal is in fine to very fine condition. As is typically the case, the fragile red lacquer in the letters is completely worn-off. There is moderate even wear to the raised artwork but most of the details are still well-defined. There are a few tiny dings, mostly at the edge, but the medallion is free of bumps, nicks, significant scratches or other glaring flaws.

The suspension device is original and complete, including the brass screw plate, hexagon retaining nut, full-size screw post approx. 11 mm in length measured from the retaining nut, and the screw plate with the mint logo. All parts of the suspension show consistent age and patina. The ribbon, albeit not original to the medal, appears to be roughly of the period. It shows a lot of field use and is heavily worn along the edges but remains sound and adds a tremendous amount of character to the award. The connecting link appears to be original; its ends are still joined with solder.

The Medal Certificate, Series A #633187, was issued on 11 September 1947. The Medal for Valor is the only decoration listed. The starting date for special privileges is September 1942 (this appears to be a clerical error: judging by the September date of the award decree evident from the archival records, the award recipient's privileges must have started on October 1st of that year.)

The document is in good condition. Its cover is somewhat faded but has only a negligible amount of wear and soiling. The internal pages have separated and have stains and small holes from the rusted staples that are now missing - a usual occurrence with Soviet booklet-style documents of the era - but remain otherwise intact and clean.

Born in 1914 in a village of the Sumy province of Ukraine, Iosif Balashev took part in the Patriotic War starting from May 1942 (interestingly, the starting date of his service in the army according to the archival file is 14 June of that year, which may mean that he took his military oath of service after being drafted and thrown into fighting or that he volunteered even before reaching the draft age of 18).

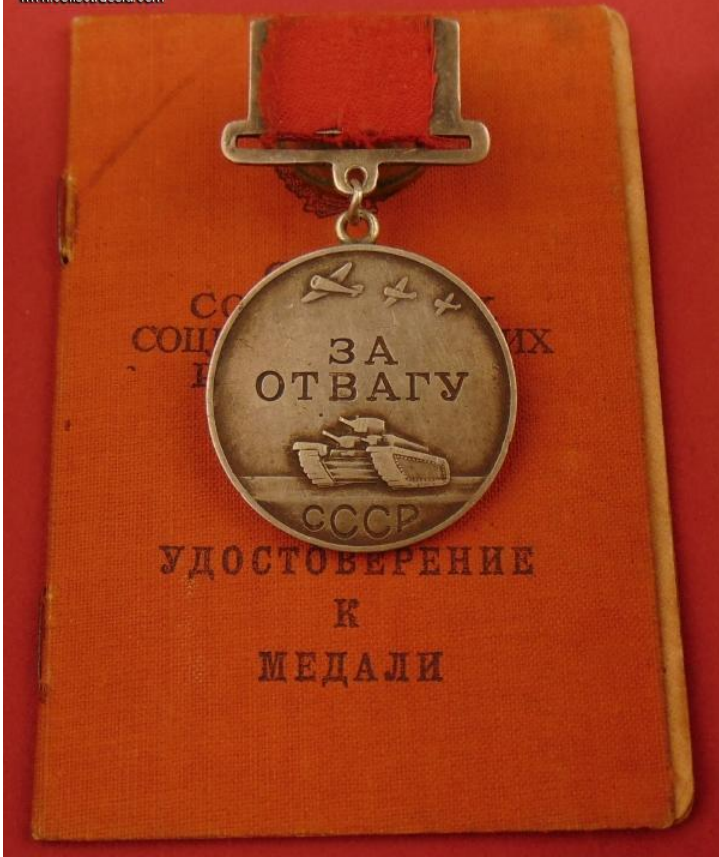
As of the late summer of 1942, Balashev was serving with the Sapper Battalion attached to the 211th Rifle Division. A part of the 48th Army, Bryansk Front, the unit at the time held a defensive line from Zalegoshch to Livny roughly 30 miles east of the city of Oryol (the area later to become famous in the Battle of Kursk). On a number of occasions, Balashev operated with the division's reconnaissance teams assisting the scouts by clearing paths in the enemy barbed wire obstacles. During the night of 29-30 August, his sapper battalion was given a task to strengthen the division's defensive position by setting up a minefield. Despite an intensive enemy fire, Balashev was able to lay 12 antitank mines just 30 meters away from the enemy position near the railroad siding of Dichnya. In the pre-dawn hours of 1 September, his group of sappers came under very intensive mortar fire and were forced to retreat. At the moment the enemy fire subsided, Balashev was the first to once again move forward to the designated area, leading the entire group and inspiring the sappers to complete their task.

Balashev was soon recommended for the Medal for Valor by his battalion commander. The award was bestowed on 14 September 1942 by the general order of the 48th Army. It remained his only decoration of the war, even though he joined the Communist Party during the following year, became a tank mechanic / driver, and was promoted to Senior Sergeant before being discharged from active duty in 1945. As of September 1947, he worked as a collective farm foreman in his native Sumy region.

Research Materials: photocopy and full English translation (by a third party) of the award record card and award commendation. Note that Balashev's documented Valor Medal, being the only decoration on record, is essentially a "complete group".

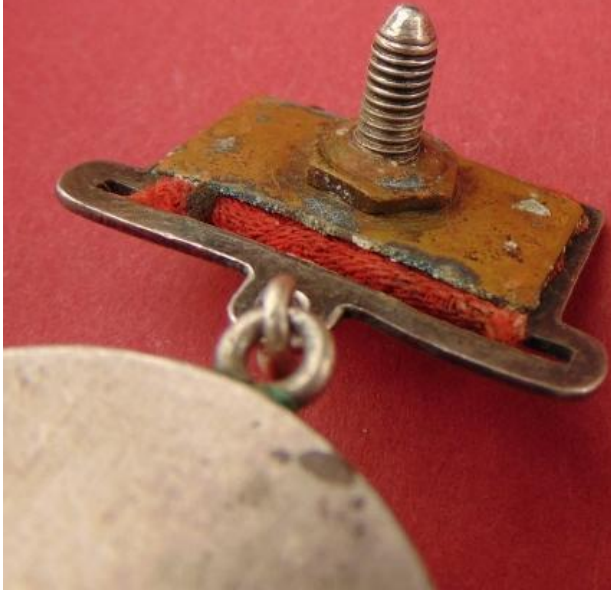
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