

Badge of a Veteran of the 26th Army, circa 1970-72 issue.

Aluminum, paint, lacquer. Medallion measures 46.7 mm tall (incl. eyelet) x 43.4 mm wide. The inscription reads "Veteran of the 26th Army, Karelian Front". The suspension has colors of the ribbon for the Medal for the Defense of Transpolar Region. The reverse of the suspension shows a trademark of the Moscow Training and Production Enterprise #2 of the Moscow City Chapter of the All-Russia Society of the Deaf. The factory apparently used this specific trademark only from 1970-72, which allows to pinpoint the period of manufacture of the badge. The badge is in excellent condition, with perfectly preserved paint and finish.

The 26th Army was initially formed in July 1940 as part of the Kiev Special Military District which saw the largest concentration of Soviet ground troops in preparation for the impending war with Germany. The army faced the full brunt of Nazi onslaught early during the Barbarossa offensive and had already been severely depleted by the time of the battle of Kiev. In September 1941, it was almost completely destroyed along with most of the Soviet Southwestern Front in the huge encirclement at Kiev; some of its lucky survivors that made it out of the cauldron went on to join other Soviet units.

The army was rebuilt during the following October in time for the Battle of Moscow, suffered terrible losses near the town of Mtsensk in the German Operation Taifun, and once again had to be disbanded and rebuilt from scratch. Its third formation joined the Volkhov Front and got transformed into the 2nd Shock Army in preparation of the offensive aiming at breaking the blockade of Leningrad (The offensive ended in disaster, and the army commander General Vlasov was captured by the Germans; later he collaborated with the Nazis and led the infamous Russian corps under German command.)

The fourth and final formation of the 26th Army took place in April 1942 in the far north, under the Karelian Front. The army was mostly used in static defensive role until the German withdrawal from Leningrad area. It then pursued the enemy to the Finnish border and once Finland was out of the war, was once again relegated to passive role guarding the frontier through the end of 1944. In January 1945, it briefly joined the 3rd Ukrainian Front in the final stage of storming Budapest and then took part in stopping the last German offensive of the war at Lake Balaton. Its final operation of WW2 was the capture of Vienna.

During the last years of the war, the 26th Army was in all likelihood constantly understrength - especially during the periods when it was at the quiet sectors of the front. That, and the fact that there were few survivors of its early battles, would seem to explain the fact that its veteran badge is extremely rare in comparison with veteran badges of most other Soviet armies.

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