

GPU of Ukraine Award Badge for Enlisted and NCO Participants of the 1928 Relay Race of Border Guards.

In silver-plated brass and enamel; measures 35.8 mm in height, 29.3 mm in width; weighs 11.0 g not including the screw plate. The writing in large font at the top is "From GPU of U(krainian)SSR". The scroll near the bottom of the star says "For the Relay Race of the Border Guards". The inscriptions diagonally in the upper left and lower left corners are perhaps the most interesting part: "Poland" and "Romania", respectively.

The badge is in outstanding, excellent condition. The enamel is perfect and shows beautiful luster. The silver plating is exceptionally well-preserved throughout. There is a bit of verdigris on the obverse that is barely noticeable to the naked eye and certainly not visually detractive (it can probably be cleaned off if desired.) The reverse is essentially pristine. The screw post is of full length, well over 12 mm, and includes original screw plate maker marked "Gravyuchas Workshop, Kiev".

The badge was issued by the GPU i.e. State Political Directorate formerly known as Cheka. In 1923, GPU agencies of the Soviet republics were combined into a "United" OGPU under centralized control, but its departments within the four original republics of the USSR apparently retained some measure of autonomy (hence the Border Guard Relay Race badge with the atavistic inscription "GPU of Ukrainian SSR"). The agency took over state security, counterintelligence and espionage functions from the NKVD and gradually obtained full precedence over the latter - to such an extent that NKVD policemen and other employees became subordinate to local OGPU agents. The much-feared OGPU merged with NKVD in 1934 at the beginning of the Great Purge - which it ran as the Main Directorate of State Security within NKVD. Later, it evolved into a separate NKGB (Narkomat of State Security) and then MGB and eventually KGB. Almost needless to say, any early badges mentioning GPU or OGPU are exceedingly rare - especially in view of the fact that the NKVD upper- and mid- level echelons were decimated when the organization itself got purged in the late 1930s.

The artwork of the badge is really fascinating: it shows a GPU Border Guard essentially stepping over the Soviet national border into Poland and Romania (rather than protecting the Soviet national frontier). Both of these countries were indeed attacked by the Soviet Union a decade later, the former at the very onset of World War II and the latter less than a year afterwards. It was reportedly the annexation of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina from Romania in the summer of 1940 that alerted the Nazis to the Soviet grand design for Europe: Soviet borders had now moved dangerously close to the Ploesti oil fields, Germany's only major source of oil at the time before synthetic oil became reality. Basically, the USSR was now in position to inflict a strategic defeat on Germany in one bold strike, either by massive bombing of the refineries or armored thrust - and the Soviet military was by then perfectly capable of both. Moreover, it signaled clear intention for an offensive war, something the Soviets indeed had been planning for years - and the "relay race" badge may be just a hint of that attitude. This realization apparently greatly influenced Hitler's decision to put Plan Barbarossa in motion as soon as he did, before the Great Britain was conquered or at least neutralized.

Item# 36735

\$4,800.00



