



Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War

Svetlana Alexievich

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Winner of the Nobel Prize: “For her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time.” ?Swedish Academy, Nobel Prize citation

From 1979 to 1989 a million Soviet troops engaged in a devastating war in Afghanistan that claimed 50,000 casualties?and the youth and humanity of many tens of thousands more. Creating controversy and outrage when it was first published in the USSR?it was called by reviewers there a “slanderous piece of fantasy” and part of a “hysterical chorus of malign attacks”?*Zinky Boys* presents the candid and affecting testimony of the officers and grunts, nurses and prostitutes, mothers, sons, and daughters who describe the war and its lasting effects. What emerges is a story that is shocking in its brutality and revelatory in its similarities to the American experience in Vietnam. The Soviet dead were shipped back in sealed zinc coffins (hence the term “Zinky Boys”), while the state denied the very existence of the conflict. Svetlana Alexievich brings us the truth of the Soviet-Afghan War: the beauty of the country and the savage Army bullying, the killing and the mutilation, the profusion of Western goods, the shame and shattered lives of returned veterans. *Zinky Boys* offers a unique, harrowing, and unforgettably powerful insight into the realities of war.

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