

ZDZISLAW RURARZ

# Perfidious disinformation to obscure Katyn's fate?

A recent television documentary, "Russia: Off the Record," forcibly reminds us that Soviet disinformation is continuing despite General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost.

The documentary takes us on a guided tour which includes a Soviet shrine at the Byelorussian village of Khatyn. This is a memorial to those who died there and in other Byelorussian villages during the Nazi occupation from July 1941 to September 1943.

According to the Soviet Byelorussian Encyclopedia of 1974, the village of Khatyn, near Minsk, was razed by the Germans on March 22, 1943. It claims that 149 inhabitants, including 75 children, perished and that 26 homes were burned. This report is not confirmed by German war records. The German military was usually quite meticulous about reporting such events.

There may be reason to question whether Khatyn was razed as the Soviets say, leaving only a single survivor, a man memorialized at the shrine with a statue of him carrying his fatally wounded child. But that is not the issue. There is no doubt that the Germans did raze Byelorussian villages. What is interesting is why the Soviets have chosen to build a memorial at the obscure village of Khatyn and take foreign television crews and dignitaries to see it.

The television documentary suggests the answer. The name "Khatyn" is pronounced "Ha-teen," since in the Cyrillic alphabet it starts with the letter "X," which is pronounced more like the English "H" than like "K." But in "Russia: Off the Record," the village is referred to as "Katyn," beginning with the "K" sound, and it is even spelled that way on the screen.

Many people in the West have heard of the Katyn massacre, which was perpetrated in the Katyn forest

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near Smolensk in April-May 1940, when the region was occupied by the Soviet Union. More than 15,000 Polish Army officers and officials were taken prisoner by the Red Army when it invaded Poland in 1939. They were allowed to send postcards to their families while they were in the Soviet POW camps, but nothing was heard from them after April 1940.

In April 1943, mass graves containing the bodies of 4,143 of these Polish prisoners were found by the Germans near the Katyn forest where they had been shot by their Soviet captors. The Germans exhumed the bodies before the eyes of representatives of the International Red Cross.

The evidence that the massacre had been the work of the Soviets was indisputable, but they tried to blame it on the Germans. What the Nazis did to the Poles is well-known, but this particular crime was not their job. A U.S. congressional investigation in 1952 confirmed that the massacre was committed by the Soviet Union. This was a great embarrassment to the Soviets, and it explains why they built that memorial in the obscure Byelorussian village of Khatyn.

Khatyn is a Soviet invention, something like a disinformation forgery, designed to confuse public opinion by diverting attention from the massacre of the Polish officers at Katyn. "The Great Soviet Encyclopedia" published in 1953 had an entry for Katyn. It described the discovery of the graves and blamed the massacre on the Germans. There was no entry for Khatyn.

The next edition of the encyclopedia, published in 1973, had no entry for either Katyn or Khatyn. In the 1978 edition, an entry for Khatyn appeared. The article explained that nine years earlier, on July 5, 1969, the Khatyn memorial had been unveiled in Soviet Byelorussia, and a picture of the memorial was included.

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cyclopedia," Khatyn appeared in the "Soviet Byelorussian Encyclopedia," with the account of the Nazi's razing the village. Strangely enough, only Khatyn was singled out for memorialization, even though the Soviets claim that 627 Byelorussian villages suffered a similar fate. Several of these suffered far greater loss of life than Khatyn, according to the encyclopedia. Motal lost 2,000 inhabitants, Bayki 927 and Borki 711.

It is also strange that even though the German military kept meticulous records of such events, to the best of my knowledge the German wartime records contain no mention of reprisals being visited upon Khatyn village, which was inhabited mainly by Poles.

It is obvious that Khatyn was chosen from among all those Byelorussian villages for the honor of memorialization for one reason: It could be used to confuse Westerners, at least, as to Katyn, which had been banished from the Soviet encyclopedia because of its association with one of the monstrous crimes of the Soviets.

Belatedly, in February 1979, the

magazine Soviet Life, which is published in English for distribution in the West, was brought into the information campaign. It carried an article about a man who was supposedly the sole survivor of the Khatyn massacre, a man who had climbed out of the ruins of the village and stumbled upon his 15-year-old son riddled with bullets. The man was said to have died in his arms, and the statue at Khatyn is of a father holding his son in his arms. The man's name was given as Isif Kaminsky and his photo was published, but such details as his age were not given, and the man was never interviewed. The Kaminsky had never been mentioned previously in any traceable source. It is too bad that Isif Kaminsky has never been available for interviews by reporters. Perhaps he could tell the true story of Khatyn.

But even if the story of Isif Kaminsky is genuine, it does not excuse the transparent Soviet effort to use it to distract attention from the Katyn massacre.

Last April, Gen. Jaruzelski issued a communique on Polish-Soviet relations during his visit to the U.S.S.R. which reported the establishment of a Polish-Soviet commission to investigate the Katyn massacre. This commission is to fill all "blank spots" from history concerning the two nations.

The Polish mass media reported that "the fate of Polish officers in the U.S.S.R." may also remain to be seen if under the U.S.S.R. will admit the Katyn massacre (and there are reports of hundreds of corpses buried in Germany to be discovered) was the deed of Stalin and Lavrenti Beria.

Katyn was not discussed at the first meeting of the commission in Moscow. A second session was held in Warsaw in December. Perhaps it will be raised there. In the meantime, the Soviets are trying to muddy the waters of the Katyn massacre with their telegenic memorial at Khatyn, while the site of the massacre remains closed to tourists.

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But even if the story of Khatyn and Iosif Kaminsky is genuine, that does not excuse the transparent Soviet effort to use it to distract public attention from the Katyn massacre.

Last April, Gen. Jaruzelski signed a communique on Polish-Soviet relations during his visit to Moscow which reported the establishment of a Polish-Soviet commission of historians. This commission is to remove all "blank spots" from history concerning the two nations.

The Polish mass media meekly reported that "the fate of Polish POWs in the U.S.S.R." may also come up. It remains to be seen if under glasnost the U.S.S.R. will admit that the Katyn massacre (and there are thousands of corpses buried in graves yet to be discovered) was the decision of Stalin and Lavrenti Beria.

Katyn was not discussed at the first meeting of the commission in Moscow. A second session will be held in Warsaw in December. Perhaps it will be raised then. In the meantime, the Soviets are continuing to muddy the waters of history with their telegenic memorial at Khatyn, while the site of the Katyn massacre remains closed to all visitors.