



Avi Benlolo: Canada's failure on Nazi war crimes

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Vladimir Katriuk died peacefully last week in Ormstown, Que., at the ripe old age of 93. A source close to Katriuk revealed to us only two weeks ago that although his physical health was deteriorating, his mental faculty was quite good. Denaturalization and extradition on the charges of crimes against humanity was still entirely possible up until the day he died.

The Katriuk case exemplifies our national failure to try each and every Nazi war criminal that sought refuge in Canada. It is a stain on our nation's identity as a defender of justice and humanity. Although some examples were made, Canada has repeatedly received failing grades from the Simon Wiesenthal Center for insufficiently addressing Nazi war crimes.

Katriuk was allegedly a member of a Ukrainian battalion of the SS, the elite Nazi storm troops, between 1942 and 1944. One of the most damning allegations against him is that he was an active participant in the massacre of 156 people in a small village in Belarus outside of Minsk named Khatyn. In 2012, Lund University historian Per Anders Rudling revealed in a Holocaust and Genocide Studies report that Katriuk "lay behind a stationary machine gun, firing rounds on anyone attempting to escape the flames of a burning barn."

Just last month, Katriuk was ranked number two by the Simon Wiesenthal Center on the list of Most Wanted Nazi War Criminals. Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, Katriuk had denied involvement in war crimes — preferring to tend to his bee farm. That is not surprising. How many Nazis ever turned themselves in?

In 1999, a Federal Court determined he could be stripped of his Canadian citizenship and denaturalized after it was revealed and that he falsified his name upon immigrating to Canada. But one suspects there was a politicized campaign

that triangulated the Ukrainian community against the Jewish community, with Russia pressing both levers. The Canadian government had to choose.

Sadly, justice lost. The result was an inexplicable government decision in 2007 not to revoke his citizenship or even, at the very least, to explore the allegations further.

On April 25, 2012, I flew in a group of Holocaust survivors from Toronto to Ottawa to appeal directly to Rob Nicholson, then Minister of Justice and Jason Kenney, then Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. We presented the ministers with the new evidence and encouraged the government to re-open the case and take a closer look. This never happened.

The story did not end there. Russia moved troops into Ukraine soon after. The Canadian government, supported by a large Ukrainian diaspora, rightfully came to the political and economic aid of Ukraine. Prime Minister Harper courageously put President Putin on notice. In retribution, Putin declared some Canadian leaders persona non grata in Russia.

The international intrigue continued. Several weeks ago, the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center was asked by the Russians to help encourage the Canadian government to push for Katriuk's extradition. While we agreed with Katriuk's extradition, participating in Russia's game of thrones against Canada was a non-starter. We would press for his expulsion on our own.

Katriuk and thousands of others like him may have lived out their lives. But they were never free and they were never at peace. Alienated from society, they lived often lonely lives in rural communities. They lived in fear — always looking back, knowing that at any moment, someone may come for them. The press never left them alone. The law never left them alone. We never left them alone.

Had Katriuk been innocent, he would have made every effort to clear his name. Instead, his name will forever be tarnished. The memory of the evil he wrought will never be forgiven, or forgotten, and he will never be permitted to rest in peace.