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B-WIRE

26-FEB-89 06:24

USSR - LIVING IN CHERNOBYL'S SHADOW, THEY DEMAND THE TRUTH
 WASHINGTON, FEB. 26 (SPECIAL) - THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE BY STEVE
 GOLDSTEIN APPEARS TODAY IN THE KNIGHT-RIDDER NEWSPAPERS:

KIEV, U.S.S.R. - IN THE AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT OF NARODICHSKI, 50 MILES WEST OF THE CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR REACTOR, RESIDENTS RECEIVE A MONTHLY WAGE SUPPLEMENT OF 30 RUBLES, OR ABOUT \$50, TO BUY UNCONTAMINATED FOOD AND MILK.

THE UKRAINIAN FARMERS CALL THE MONEY "NA GROF" - "THE COFFIN BONUS."

THE BLACK HUMOR RINGS HOLLOW. HALF THE DISTRICT'S 26,000 PEOPLE HAVE DEVELOPED THE ENLARGED THYROID GLANDS OF RADIATION POISONING. COWS AND PIGS ARE BORN DEFORMED. WOMEN ARE ADVISED NOT TO GET PREGNANT. AND, FOR ALL THE TALK OF "GLASNOST" IN THE SOVIET UNION, NO ONE CAN FIND OUT JUST HOW BAD THE RADIATION POLLUTION IS.

NEARLY THREE YEARS AFTER THE WORLD'S WORST NUCLEAR ACCIDENT, THE PEOPLE OF NARODICHSKI - JUST 30 MILES BEYOND THE EVACUATED NO MAN'S LAND AROUND CHERNOBYL - STILL LIVE IN A ZONE OF SECRECY AND MENTAL TORMENT, UNSURE OF THE THREAT TO THEIR LIVES AND ONLY NOW BEGINNING TO EXPRESS THEIR OUTRAGE AT THE LACK OF INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THEIR GOVERNMENT.

THE SECRECY IS SO COMPLETE THAT THE OFFICIAL ECONOMIC PLAN FOR MILK AND MEAT PRODUCTION FOR THE REGION HAS NOT BEEN ALTERED SINCE THE EXPLOSION AND FIRE AT THE CHERNOBYL PLANT IN APRIL 1986. THUS, NARODICHSKI'S FARMERS ARE STILL PRODUCING PRE-ACCIDENT AMOUNTS OF FOOD - AND THEY AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE CONSUMING IT - EVEN THOUGH THE FOOD IS ALMOST CERTAINLY CONTAMINATED.

THE OUTCRY FOR MORE INFORMATION HAS COALESCED AROUND A POWERFUL 20-MINUTE DOCUMENTARY TITLED "MICROPHONE," WHICH HAS BEEN SCREENED FOR CITIZENS' GROUPS IN THE UKRAINIAN REPUBLIC IN THE LAST SIX WEEKS; AND AROUND ANOTHER FILM ON THE ACCIDENT, "THRESHOLD," WHICH HAS BEEN BANNED FROM POPULAR THEATERS IN THE SOVIET UNION.

"THE REAL TRAGEDY IS THE GAP BETWEEN THE OFFICIALS' KNOWLEDGE AND OURS," SAID GYORGY Y. SHKLYAREVSKY, THE DIRECTOR OF "MICROPHONE."

SHKLYAREVSKY, 52, A FORMER MEDICAL DOCTOR WHO HAS BEEN MAKING FILMS FOR 21 YEARS, DECIDED TO MAKE A FILM ON CHERNOBYL AFTER ATTENDING A CONFERENCE LAST MAY SPONSORED BY THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY.

"THE CONFERENCE HAD A VERY CONSOLING SPIRIT, LIKE EVERYTHING WAS OK," SHKLYAREVSKY SAID. SO HE DECIDED TO VISIT A DISTRICT THAT WAS MENTIONED IN THE CONFERENCE LITERATURE AS ONE WHERE RADIOACTIVE CESIUM HAD BEEN FOUND IN "INSIGNIFICANT" QUANTITIES THAT DID "NOT DIFFER MUCH FROM NATURAL RADIATION LEVELS."

THE DISTRICT WAS NARODICHSKI.

FROM SEPTEMBER THROUGH NOVEMBER, HIS CREW PAID SEVERAL VISITS TO THE AREA. EQUIPPED WITH CAMERAS, MICROPHONES AND A DOSIMETER - A DEVICE FOR MEASURING AMBIENT RADIOACTIVITY - THEY PRODUCED THE HAUNTING "MICROPHONE."

ABOUT A DOZEN RESIDENTS OF NARODICHSKI WERE AMONG THE PEOPLE WHO PACKED KIEV'S HOUSE OF FILMMAKERS TO SEE IT WEDNESDAY NIGHT, THE EVENING BEFORE PRESIDENT MIKHAIL S. GORBACHEV MADE HIS FIRST VISIT TO CHERNOBYL.

THE BLACK-AND-WHITE FILM OPENS WITH A TV CLIP OF A WORKER STANDING BEFORE THE NEWLY BUILT CHERNOBYL REACTOR, PROUDLY PROCLAIMING: "WE DID THIS FOR THE PEOPLE."

MOST OF THE FOOTAGE CONSISTS OF INTERVIEWS WITH RESIDENTS OF THE DISTRICT, A FLAT PIECE OF FARMLAND COVERED WITH EARLY WINTER SNOW LAPPING AGAINST THE SIDES OF WEATHERBEATEN FARM BUILDINGS.

A GROUP OF FARMERS POIGNANTLY DESCRIBES THE BIRTH OF A THREE-LEGGED CALF AND TELLS HOW FOUR PIGLETS RECENTLY FELL OVER AND DIED.

IN THE FILM'S MOST SHOCKING MOMENT, A FARMER HOLDS UP A NORMAL-LOOKING PIGLET, THEN TURNS THE ANIMAL AROUND, REVEALING A DEFORMED EYE COVERED WITH A GROTESQUE MOUND OF SCAR TISSUE. (PTO)

...THROUGHOUT THE FILM, PEOPLE ARE HEARD GASPED.
NEARBY CITY OF ZHITOMIR FOR BLOOD AND OTHER TESTS, BUT THAT SOME
RESULTS ARE NEVER GIVEN TO THE PARENTS. THEY ARE ONLY TOLD THAT
RESULTS ARE "WITHIN REGULAR NORMS."

TEARS STREAMING DOWN HER PALE FACE, THE HEAD NURSE OF THE
INFECTION DEPARTMENT AT THE DISTRICT HOSPITAL SPEAKS MOVINGLY ABOUT
THE RURAL PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME TO HER WITH THYROID PROBLEMS AND OTHER
AILMENTS.

"THESE PEOPLE MAKE THEIR LIVING ON THE LAND," THE NURSE, NATALYA
S. SYCH, SAYS HELPLESSLY.

IT IS THAT BEFOULED LAND THAT REMAINS HOME TO RESIDENTS WHO ARE
TOO OLD, TOO STUBBORN OR TOO UNINFORMED TO BE MOTIVATED TO LEAVE.
ONLY ABOUT 1,500 OF THE DISTRICT'S 13,000 RESIDENTS HAVE MOVED AWAY
SINCE THE ACCIDENT AT CHERNOBYL KILLED 31 PEOPLE AND SPEWED RADIATION
OVER THE WESTERN SOVIET UNION AND EUROPE.

"WHERE CAN WE GO?" SAYS A FARMER IN "MICROPHONE," DISCUSSING WHY
HE AND HIS WIFE ARE STAYING. "WE ARE OLD."

AN OLD WOMAN, HER VOICE WRACKED WITH SOBS, DESCRIBES HOW HER
DAUGHTER AND BABY GRANDSON CAME TO VISIT HER LAST YEAR. A MILITARY
RADIOLOGIST WHO HAD BEEN MAKING TESTS IN THE AREA NOTICED THE
NEWCOMERS ONE DAY, SHE SAYS, AND SOLEMNLY APPROACHED THEM.

"HE TOLD MY DAUGHTER THAT SHE'D BETTER LEAVE THE AREA AND THAT IT
WAS A PITY SHE HAD BROUGHT THE CHILD," THE WOMAN SAYS, BREAKING DOWN.
A SCENE SHOWING A DOSIMETER TEST THAT PRODUCED HIGH RADIATION
READINGS PROMPTED SOME INDEPENDENT ACTION AFTER THE FILM WAS SCREENED
FEB. 2 AT THE INSTITUTE OF NUCLEAR RESEARCH IN KIEV.

THE NEXT DAY, THE INSTITUTE DETERMINED TO SEND A SEVEN-MEMBER
SCIENTIFIC GROUP TO NARODICHSKI VILLAGE TO CONFIRM THE READINGS. THEY
FOUND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS HIGH LEVELS OF RADIATION. AT WEDNESDAY'S
SCREENING, ONE OF THE SEVEN, NUCLEAR PHYSICIST EUGENY V. KORBETSKI,
READ A LETTER THE GROUP HAD WRITTEN TO TOP SOVIET OFFICIALS DEMANDING
OPEN ACCESS TO PREVIOUSLY CLASSIFIED MATERIAL ON RADIATION, AND A NEW
OFFICIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE DANGER POSED TO RESIDENTS.

ALSO AT THE SCREENING WAS NURSE SYCH. MANY PEOPLE IN NARODICHSKI,
SHE SAID, CONTINUE TO SUFFER FROM HEADACHES AND DIZZINESS. HALF THE
DISTRICT'S POPULATION HAVE DEVELOPED ENLARGED THYROID GLANDS DUE TO
THE INTAKE OF RADIOACTIVE IODINE RELEASED IN THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT.
DOCTORS SAY THAT SUCH IODINE ABSORPTION CAN PRODUCE TUMORS, AND
POSSIBLY CANCER.

"PEOPLE ARE CONSUMING RADIATION CONSTANTLY BECAUSE THEY ARE
CONSUMING THEIR OWN PRODUCTS," SHE SAID.

THE WOMEN OF NARODICHSKI HAVE BEEN ADVISED BY OFFICIALS NOT TO
GET PREGNANT, SYCH ADDED. "THE MOST ANFUL THING IS WE DON'T KNOW WHAT
KIND OF CHILDREN WE WILL HAVE."

NOBODY IN NARODICHSKI, IN FACT, KNOWS MUCH. INFORMATION ABOUT THE
EXTENT OF RADIATION POLLUTION IN THIS AREA OF THE NORTHERN UKRAINE
HAS REMAINED CLASSIFIED SINCE THE ACCIDENT OCCURRED.

SOME OF THE SCIENTISTS, ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS AND FILMMAKERS
INTERVIEWED HERE CALL IT A COVERUP DESIGNED TO AVOID RESPONSIBILITY
FOR STEPS NOT TAKEN IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ACCIDENT. MORE RESIDENTS
MIGHT HAVE BEEN EVACUATED IF THE FULL EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM WAS KNOWN
- AN EXPENSIVE ENDEAVOR FOR AN ACCIDENT THAT HAS ALREADY COST THE
SOVIET GOVERNMENT MORE THAN \$14 BILLION.

"THE (UKRAINIAN) MINISTER OF HEALTH SAID HE WOULD PROVIDE US WITH
THE INFORMATION, BUT SO FAR WE HAVE NOTHING," SAID PYOTR A.
NUZHBORIN, SECOND SECRETARY OF THE DISTRICT COMMITTEE OF THE
COMMUNIST PARTY, WHO, LIKE SYCH, APPEARED IN THE FILM.

YURI Y. GLEBA, AN EXPERT IN BIOTECHNOLOGY AND AN OFFICIAL OF THE
UKRAINIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, SAID IN AN INTERVIEW THAT THE
INFORMATION RELATING TO CHERNOBYL AND ITS AFTERMATH - MAPS, CHARTS,
STATISTICS ON RADIATION DISTRIBUTION - REMAINED SECRET "NOT BECAUSE
OF SPECIFIC RULES, BUT BECAUSE SOMEONE JUST DOESN'T WANT IT TO GET
OUT."

(MORF)

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B-WIRE

26-FEB-89 06:29

USSR - (2) LIVING IN CHERNOBYL'S SHADOW, THEY DEMAND THE TRUTH
"THERE IS NO LEGAL BASIS FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF THIS MATERIAL
- YOU ARE FIGHTING WINDMILLS," HE SAID. "AND I CONSIDER MYSELF TO BE
CONSERVATIVE IN MY OUTLOOK."

GORBACHEV, VISITING THE CHERNOBYL PLANT THURSDAY, SAID EVERYTHING
POSSIBLE MUST BE DONE TO PREVENT A RECURRENCE OF THE CHERNOBYL
NIGHTMARE. BUT HE SAID THE NATION WOULD CONTINUE TO RELY ON NUCLEAR
POWER AS A SOURCE OF ELECTRICITY.

AND HE DID NOT ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF CONTINUED CONTAMINATION OF
FOOD OUTSIDE THE EVACUATION ZONE. THE ZONE IS DEFINED AS ABOUT AN
18-MILE RADIUS OF THE NUCLEAR PLANT.

SOVIET AUTHORITIES HAVE REFUSED TO PERMIT THE PUBLIC RELEASE OF
"THRESHOLD" - A FILM THAT WAS PRODUCED BY THE UKRAINE'S LARGEST FILM
STUDIO, DOVZHENKO, AND RAISES THE QUESTION OF WHAT OFFICIALS KNEW
ABOUT CHERNOBYL AND WHEN THEY KNEW IT.

IT IS A LYRICAL FILM, FILLED WITH SONGS OF PROTEST INTERSPERSED
WITH INTERVIEWS AND FILE FOOTAGE OF EVENTS AFTER THE ACCIDENT. ITS
MOST POWERFUL SECTION IS A "HOME MOVIE" SHOT BY TWO RESIDENTS OF THE
ADJACENT TOWN OF PRIPYAT, WHICH SHOWS RESIDENTS BLITHELY WALKING
AROUND THE STREETS THE DAY AFTER THE ACCIDENT OCCURRED.

NIKOLA MASHENKO, THE HEAD OF DOVZHENKO, SAID HE HAD BEEN NOTIFIED
OF THE CENSORSHIP BY YEVGENY N. DEMITRENKO, HEAD OF THE UKRAINIAN
GLAVLIT, THE MINISTRY IN CHARGE OF PROTECTING STATE SECRETS. BUT
DEMITRENKO MADE THE DECISION ONLY AFTER CONSULTING WITH THE ATOMIC
ENERGY MINISTRY AND WITH HEALTH MINISTER YEVGENY CHAZOV - WHO SHARED
THE 1985 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR HIS WORK WITH THE INTERNATIONAL
PHYSICIANS FOR THE PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR WAR.

"THE EXPERTS' CALLED THIS AN ANTI-SOVIET FILM, AND FOR THIS I
CONSIDER CHAZOV A PERSONAL ENEMY," SAID MASHENKO. "THE USING OF TERM
ANTI-SOVIET' SHELLS OF SIBERIA."

"THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH," SAID YURI N. SHCHERBAK, A WRITER AND
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST, "HAS BECOME THE MINISTRY OF SECRETS ABOUT
HEALTH."

SHCHERBAK HELPED ROUSE THE FIRST WAVE OF PROTEST AGAINST THE LACK
OF DATA ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT WITH A SPEECH AT
AN ECOLOGY DEMONSTRATION NOV. 13 IN KIEV THAT DREW 10,000 PEOPLE.

THAT SPEECH IS PART OF "MICROPHONE," AND IT IS ONE REASON FOR THE
TITLE OF THE FILM: DURING THE DEMONSTRATION, SOMEONE TURNED OFF THE
PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM, AND THE CROWD IS SEEN ANGRILY DEMANDING
"MICROPHONE! MICROPHONE!" THE TITLE IS ALSO A PLAY ON THE RUSSIAN
WORDS "MICRO" AND "FON," WHICH TOGETHER MEAN "MICRO-LEVEL," AS USED
IN DESCRIBING LEVELS OF BACKGROUND RADIATION.

IN THE FILM, SHCHERBAK - A KARL MALDEN LOOK-ALIKE WITH AVIATOR
GLASSES - TELLS THE CROWD: "IT'S A PITY WE CAN LEARN MOST OF OUR
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIDE-EFFECTS OF CHERNOBYL FROM FOREIGN
PUBLICATIONS."

AFTER THE SCREENING WEDNESDAY, MUZHGORIN, THE LOCAL PARTY
OFFICIAL, SAID THE SCREENING AND THE COMMENTS THAT FOLLOWED HAD GIVEN
HIM HOPE.

"THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE IT, BUT THE PEOPLE LIVING THERE ARE
HEROES," MUZHGORIN SAID IN A HALL THAT SUDDENLY HUSHED. "WE DON'T
KNOW WHAT WILL BE OUR FUTURE, BUT WE STILL BELIEVE THAT WE CAN
OVERCOME THIS AND HAVE A BETTER LIFE."

PL/TA