

Release the names of Nazi war criminals in Canada | Sergio R. Karas

By **Sergio R. Karas**

Law360 Canada (October 22, 2024, 11:17 AM EDT) -- On Sept. 22, 2023, a deplorable act of historical ignorance and moral failure unfolded in the House of Commons. During Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's address, former Speaker of the House Anthony Rota paid tribute to Yaroslav Hunka, who is alleged to be a former member of the Nazi Ukrainian Waffen SS, hailing him as a "hero" and prompting a standing ovation from lawmakers.



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This appalling display deeply offended Holocaust survivors, war victims, Canadian veterans and the Jewish-Canadian community and was roundly condemned at that time. Mr. Rota was forced to resign as Speaker. The fallout would have been greater had it not been overshadowed by the terrorist attacks against Israel on Oct. 7, just two weeks later.

This incident not only represents a slap in the face to those who suffered under Nazi oppression, but it also raises questions about how Nazi war criminals and collaborators, especially those from Eastern Europe, were allowed to immigrate to Canada and obtain citizenship.

The Ukrainian Waffen SS, also known as the 14th SS Division Galicia, was an active participant in the mass murder of Jews, earning the praise of their Nazi masters. This organization engaged in crimes against humanity, a task that they carried out joyfully, earning the admiration of their Nazi overlords.

According to David Pugliese in his article "Whitewashing the SS: The Attempt to Rewrite the History of Hitler's Collaborators," published on Oct. 30, 2020, by Canadian Military magazine *Esprit de Corps*, "Over the years some Ukrainian Canadians have staunchly defended the 14th SS Division Galicia. They have falsely claimed that Ukrainians who served in the division were conscripted when in reality 80,000 volunteered and 13,000 were selected. Other apologists argue that the division fought only to protect Ukrainian territory. This too is false." And he writes further that "even a cursory glance at SS Galicia reveals its links to the Nazi campaign of destruction against the Jews and murder of civilians. Its commander was Oberfuhrer Fritz Freitag, a fanatical Nazi, who was directly involved in the mass murder of Jews."

He also notes that "in 2003 a Polish government commission into Nazi war crimes concluded the 14th SS Galicia was responsible for the massacre of women and children in the village of Huta Pieniacka. Based on eyewitness accounts, the Polish Institute of National Remembrance pointed out that members of the 14th division entered the village and began executing civilians."

The Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals, also known as the Deschênes Commission, was established in 1985 to investigate allegations that numerous Nazi war criminals had entered Canada. Part 2 of their report contains the names of approximately 900 alleged war criminals who resettled in Canada after the Second World War, including members of the Ukrainian SS Galicia division. For decades, Libraries and Archives Canada (LAC) refused to declassify the report despite outcry from the Jewish-Canadian community. *CBC News* reported on Oct. 4, 2023, that Prime Minister Trudeau announced that senior bureaucrats were reviewing the Deschênes Commission report to make it more public. However, the government's announcement reeks of insincerity and seems to be a feeble attempt to appease the public, as progress to unseal those names has so far been nonexistent.

On Sept. 6, 2024, *The Globe and Mail* reported that LAC conducted consultations with a small list of its stakeholders in June and July regarding the potential release of the report. However, LAC notably excluded several key groups, including prominent historians, Holocaust and human rights organizations, and Holocaust survivors.

Global News reported on Feb. 22, 2024, that in the decades following the Second World War, Jewish groups notified the federal government about numerous Nazis and collaborators that had resettled in Canada, including an Auschwitz concentration camp commander, a Gestapo member, soldiers and camp guards. The alleged crimes of these individuals involved torture, executions, massacres, liquidation of Jewish ghettos and "participating in the extermination of Jews," according to government records. Helmut Rauca, a former Gestapo member, was found living in Toronto. He was identified by Holocaust survivor Elly Gotz, who remembered Rauca sent thousands of Jews in Lithuania to their deaths. In 1983, the government sent Rauca to Frankfurt to stand trial for more than 11,000 murders in Lithuania, but he died before being brought to trial.

According to an article by *The Washington Post* published on Jan. 24, 2024, approximately six million Jewish men, women and children were murdered by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators, between 1933 and 1945. This was equivalent to two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population before 1933. Most of the survivors alive today were between the ages of three and 12 when the Second World War ended, and the median age for this group is 86 years old. The harsh reality is that the world has already lost many Holocaust survivors, and most will not be with us to tell their stories. The federal government's unwarranted secrecy only deepens their wounds.

Unsealing the names of alleged Nazi war criminals is only the first step to correct this wrong. A thorough investigation must be launched into how these individuals obtained Canadian residency and citizenship. The federal government must scrutinize the processes that allowed war criminals to enter the country and be transparent as to who was responsible for allowing them to immigrate to Canada. The government cannot sidestep its obligation to justice and accountability.

Citizenship is a privilege and as such it must be revoked for any surviving members of the Nazi Waffen SS and any other Nazi collaborator. To continue to allow them the privileges of citizenship is to undermine respect for human rights that Canada espouses. These individuals are not heroes; they are criminals and reminders of a dark past that we cannot ignore.

A public apology must be issued to the Jewish community. An acknowledgment of the pain caused by glorifying a Nazi collaborator is not just a matter of political correctness; it is a moral imperative. The federal government must take a firm stand against antisemitism past and present, making it clear that such hateful ideology is intolerable in our society.

The standing ovation given to Jaroslav Hunka is not an isolated incident; it reflects a troubling undercurrent of ignorance and indifference toward the atrocities of the Holocaust and antisemitism. Canada must confront its past, uphold justice and ensure that such lapses in judgment never happen again. The government's commitment to justice and memory is not just for those who perished but also for those who live on, carrying the weight of history. It is time for Canada to take responsibility, act decisively and declare that we are a nation that stands firmly against antisemitic hatred in all its forms, past and present, and that its promoters and apologists will never be allowed to peddle their murderous ideology in this country.

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