

RTE Programme

IRELAND'S HIDDEN NAZIS

BACKGROUND

On 16 January 2007 RTE broadcast a television series called *Hidden History: Ireland's Nazis* which purported to deal with post WWII Nazis who either permanently or temporarily found refuge in Ireland. The programme included an episode on Albert Folens, a Belgian national, who collaborated with the Germans during WWII and who was portrayed as a potential brutal war criminal without any corroborating evidence.

Folens had built up a formidable educational publishing enterprise in Ireland and it's probably fair to say the Irish public knew nothing of his past and particularly his collaboration during WWII.

The first stirring in the Irish end of the saga was when journalist Senan Molony, who then worked for the Sunday Tribune newspaper, interviewed Folens in 1985 about what he did during WWII. The interview, or part of it, was recorded on tape. The interview descended into a shouting match where Molony claims he was attempting to establish what Folens did during WWII and that, as various accusations were put to him, Folens kept changing his story, or returning to a prepared script, which left Molony with the impression that there was more to all of this than Folens was admitting.

Folens, on the other hand, maintained that Molony had come with pre-conceived ideas which he was reluctant to abandon in the face of the facts which Folens outlined to him.

At some stage, it is not clear whether before or after the interview, Molony had come across the post-WWII CROWCASS list of "War Criminals and Security Suspects" which had an entry for Folens who, in the immediate post WWII period, was then being sought by the Belgian authorities in relation to interrogations. It is important to remember that not all of those listed were war criminals (some were simply being sought for questioning or to act as witnesses).

In any event, Molony's then editor, Vincent Browne, refused to publish material based on the contents of the taped interview on the basis that such evidence as there might be was flimsy and to publish would cause disproportionate harm to Folens' business and grief to his family. And there the matter rested.

Twenty years later, when the programme on hidden Nazis was in preparation, Molony saw an opportunity to revive the matter, and the tape and its contents played a significant role in how the Folens episode was put together. The programme included short extracts from the original taped interview with Folens.

The programme was extensively trailed in the media. Folens had by then been dead for four years and it is possible that the programme makers felt that, as Folens was now dead, there were no limits on what they could say about him, and that they were no longer bound by a guarantee originally extracted by Folens at the time that if any use was made of the material on the tape he would be given a right of reply.

They reckoned without the love, loyalty, and tenacity of Folens widow Juliette who went straight to the High Court and obtained a settlement which obliged the programme makers to give her the right of reply originally promised to her husband.

In the event this “right of reply” was added to the programme as a one sentence statement by the presenter to the effect that Mrs. Folens denied “that Mr. Folens was a member of the Nazi party, was never a member of, or employed by the Gestapo, or ever worked in their headquarters in Brussels”, all of which accusations were included in the original programme and maintained in the broadcast version.

The settlement also required the dropping from the programme of a sequence where Folens was portrayed as an interpreter participating in a brutal Nazi interrogation.

As to the fallout from the programme: it caused enormous grief to the Folens family and extreme distress to Folens widow; it left a lasting impression that Folens was probably a brutal Nazi war criminal; it gave rise to comments by some parents that they did not want their children educated on the basis of books produced by a Nazi war criminal; and it also produced some hate-mail.

That much of this negative perception has continued today is shown by a comment of a contributor to the phone-in Liveline radio programme in 2016 referring to Folens as a Nazi who had been given refuge in Ireland. Folen's daughter, on being made aware of this contribution, phoned in and defended her father, in the process criticising Molony and his interview.

After the programme she was asked (off air) to be on standby to defend her remarks in a confrontation with Molony in the next edition of the programme. When that time arrived, instead of a discussion with Molony, the presenter opened the programme with a statement that Molony had been wrongly criticised in a previous edition and that RTE wished to state that Molony was “an informed journalist and an author of the highest integrity”. And that was that.

A more up to date reference (2023) is a reference in Paul Murray's *The Bee Sting*, a book on the current Booker Prize longlist.

RTE

RTE's role in this whole thing is shameful. They allowed a programme to be transmitted which traduced an honourable man based on spurious evidence which was not corroborated.¹ The programme relied on innuendo, conflation, and guilt by association, all of which should have been picked up by the organisation prior to transmission. That it took a High Court Case to exercise some mitigation of this calumny is a disgrace to the national broadcaster.

¹ At the end of the day, the only “evidence” the programme had was (i) an admission wrung out of a traumatised Folens that he worked for the Sicherheitsdienst, (ii) Staf van Velthoven's (incorrect) assertion that this meant the Gestapo, and (iii) the inclusion in CROWCASS of Folens' name as wanted by the Belgian authorities in connection with interrogations. None of this amounted to evidence that Folens did anything in Brussels beyond the desk translation job he admitted to.

Annotated version of Ireland's Hidden Nazis

Below is a full transcript of the programme.

You can view the episode here: <https://photopol.com/af/hidden%20nazis%20folens.wmv>

I have commented by way of footnotes. That way you can read through the script without interruption. If you hover over the footnote (in MS Word) the text will appear in a tooltip. If you double-click on a footnote you will be brought to that footnote. If you then double-click on the footnote's number you will be brought back to its anchor in the text.

Transcript

- OS [Cathal O'Shannon]: Another Flemish nationalist who followed the same escape route as Staf van Velthoven would find Ireland an even more welcoming location. He became a hugely successful entrepreneur. His name is Albert Folens, the leading educational publisher in post-war Ireland.
- OS: It is 1947 and the word is out that Ireland is a safe haven for Flemish collaborators who were fleeing the Belgian authorities. Albert Folens, a man who penetrated ² the heart of Irish business was one of those smuggled in here.³
- OS: I have discovered evidence that Folens' wartime career is not all it appears to be. ⁴
- AF tape [Albert Folens]: So how come you are going to have any comprehension for what I have done during the war? So how can you understand that we cooperate whole-heartedly with the Germans. We can only get rescue from the Germans. ⁵
- SM [Senan Molony]: Albert Folens is a person who would have been synonymous with most people's education in so far as he set up a publishing company that was immensely successful in Ireland. They produced text books. They produced copybooks. And he was one of the most successful entrepreneurs that took off in Ireland after the end of the second world war.
- OS: But during the war Folens was a member of the Nazi SS and became part of the SS Security Police, the Sicherheitsdienst. ⁶ The Sicherheitsdienst, or SD were feared across Europe. In Belgium they were responsible for maintaining order and security and for rounding up Jews. ⁷ Mrs Juliette Folens, the widow of Albert Folens, and her family do not accept that Mr Folens was a member of the Nazi party, was ever a member of or employed by the Gestapo, or ever worked in

² An interesting choice of a word.

³ Folens arrived in Ireland in October 1948

⁴ This is the opening statement that sets the tone for the programme. The implication is that Folens has something to hide and that Cathal O'Shannon is going to reveal what this is. The "evidence" as it turns out is in the main a load of innuendo as we will see as we comb through it.

⁵ This question posed by Folens is crucial to understanding Folens' activity during the war. The Germans had "promised" the Flemish some degree of freedom from harmful Belgian overlordship if they won the war. So, in the tradition of Roger Casement, and even Wolfe Tone, Folens was inclined to side with them. In addition, the Germans were fighting "atheistic communism" in the form of Soviet Russia and that would not have been against his principles. It is important to stress though that Folens' involvement in the German military came about by accident but that once in, it was quite another matter to get out.

⁶ This section is so confused that it is hard to unravel it. Folens was not a member of the Nazi party. Nor was he strictly a member of the SS Security Police (Gestapo – Amt. IV). He did work for the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Office – Amt III) which was separate from the Gestapo but reported to the same ultimate boss.

⁷ Note how the duties of the Sicherheitsdienst are described in a way that implies Folens was contributing to all of these including the rounding up of Jews. In fact in the course of his working in Brussels, Folens helped a Jewish family and a Jewish colleague escape the Nazis.

their headquarters in Brussels.⁸

- OS: You knew Albert Folens.
- SvV [Stef van Velthoven]: Je.
- OS: How did you come across him?
- SvV: Well, while I was waiting for my transport to Ireland we arranged you see, I was put into a place where people could come for recuperation and that's where I met Folens. We asked each other "what are you in for?" He said that all during the war he had been working in the offices of the German Sicherheits Dienst.
- OS: and what were they?
- SvV: It's what you call the Gestapo.⁹
- SM: Albert Folens was born in a small village called Bissigem in Flanders in 1916. He grew up in a very religious family. He went away to a quasi-religious boarding school. And after that he entered a seminary. When the Germans overran the Low Countries and came into Belgium, all of a sudden Albert Folens departed the seminary. It's not entirely clear why. He was 23¹⁰ at the time, but his next move was to join the Flemish nationalist unit of the Waffen SS.¹¹
- OS: However Folens never saw front line action. After military training his SS career was cut short by a perforated ulcer.¹²
- SM: After his recovery period he was allowed to go home. He continued to volunteer his

⁸ This statement is the only recognition in the programme of Folens' agreed right of reply. No proper attempt is made to evaluate her statement. This is probably not surprising as it was an insert into the already completed programme following the case taken to the Irish High Court and the out of court settlement which vindicated Folens' (in this case his widow's) right of reply. Viewed in the context of the rest of the programme, the tone is dismissive - she would say that wouldn't she. Mrs Folens was absolutely right. She has stated here that Folens did not work at Nazi headquarters in Brussels. Senan Molony below states with great fanfare that he did work at HQ and on the fifth floor. This assertion is made without a whit of evidence. This assertion is false. That part of the SD which was in HQ was on the 8th to 11th floors. But Folens' translation section was located away from the HQ building and at the back of a shop at the other end of Louizalaan from SD HQ. The shop was a five minute walk from where he was living (both on Avenue Louise, initially, and Livornostraat subsequently). The walk from his residence to German HQ at the other end of the long Avenue Louise is twenty minutes.

⁹ This is loose language from Stef van Velthoven and is factually incorrect. Staff van Velthoven died alone a bitter old man in Galway. During the war he was in the Flemish Legion and in Skorzeny's Nazi commando unit. He knew well that the Sicherheitsdienst was not a synonym for the Gestapo but was having his moment of glory at Folens' expense. This is the dregs that the programme needed to dredge up to support its vile innuendo. Note how O'Shannon uses it to attempt to show that Folens worked for the Gestapo.

¹⁰ Folens was 25 in 1941 when he left the monastery.

¹¹ The impression given here is that Folens left the seminary to immediately fight for the Germans. These were two distinct actions. He left the seminary in March 1941 because he could not finally abide their petty rules and how he was treated. Albert could not get a job teaching in a State school because his diploma was from a Catholic college and he couldn't teach in a Catholic school because he had left the Brothers. He went back to Bissegem and stayed with his sister Lena for a few months. It is claimed he joined "the Flemish nationalist unit of the Waffen SS". This is misleading. The Flemish Legion was separate from the Waffen SS although later incorporated into it despite earlier guarantees of independence by the Germans. He actually joined what he understood to be a sports camp in Germany, partly to get some income for himself but also to support his impoverished father and then found himself in the Flemish Legion. The Legion was established in June 1941 following Germany formally declaring war on Russia in that month..

¹² The use of the term "SS" career here is prejudicial. I read the boys' wartime comics in my youth and would have considered the use of "SS" on its own as synonymous with the Gestapo. More innuendo here. There was nothing to stop Molony referring to "military" or "combat", but "SS"? The only saving feature of Molony's comment is that he allows that Folens never saw action on the Eastern front and so never literally took up arms against the King and his Allies (including Russia).

services to the German forces. He became involved with the Sicherheitsdienst which means literally “secret service”.¹³

- Prof Bruno de Wever [BdW]: When a member of the Waffen SS, who are Flemish volunteers in the Waffen SS, could not fight at the front they were sent back to Belgium serving at the home front against the Resistance and so on and some of them got transferred to the Sipo SA to the intelligence service and the police force or the SS in occupied territory.
- SM: Albert Folens from the time Belgium was liberated became a wanted man. He withdrew xx far of Brussels and Antwerp¹⁴ and so on back into Greater Germany¹⁵ and he was finally arrested, as I understand it, by the British troops. He was interned¹⁶ by the British who eventually repatriated him to Belgium where he was wanted for treason.
- BdW: For this military collaboration he was convicted by Belgian justice after the war to ten years of imprisonment but after 2 years he flees and in 1948 he went into Ireland.¹⁷
- OS: Folens followed the same escape route into Ireland as Staf van Velthoven, being smuggled here by Trappist monks. He became one of Ireland's leading entrepreneurs establishing a renowned publishing business.
- OS: But Folens remained an elusive figure. However before his death he gave an interview in a Flemish publication in which he described himself as, and I quote, “a war criminal in an honourable cause”.¹⁸ In this article he made a reference to a controversial interview he had given

¹³ These two sentences suggest that Folens was discharged from the army and free to do whatever he wanted and that he then chose, from scratch, to volunteer for the Sicherheitsdienst in Brussels. As Professor Bruno de Wever points out later in the Programme, soldiers who were not up to fighting on the Eastern front were sent back to Belgium and transferred to an appropriate unit. After Folens was sent back to Belgium following his recuperation from the ulcer he went to see family and shortly afterwards received a letter from the Legion instructing him to report to the SD in Brussels. And, just by the way, Sicherheitsdienst translates directly as “Security Office/Service” and not “Secret Service”. Another attempt by Molony to link Folens to the Gestapo.

¹⁴ The inclusion of Antwerp is interesting here. When Folens was with the De La Salle order he taught in Antwerp. Two of the brothers there accused him of inciting his students to join the Flemish Legion and to collaborate with the Germans. Juliette investigated all of this and it emerged that the bulk of the brothers, including one brother-member of the Resistance contradicted this. [It is not clear if the Court Martial gave any credence to these accusations in the charges against Folens, though the verdict does refer to propaganda on his part.]

¹⁵ Göttingen, where Folens “withdrew” to is in the heart of Germany. It's hard to understand the reference here to “Greater Germany” unless it is simply to impress the viewer. And in any case, he didn't withdraw, he was reassigned to Göttingen.

¹⁶ “Interned” here doesn't quite describe the situation. The first Allied force to arrive in Göttingen was the Americans, they were followed by the British and there was also a presence from the Belgian Security Service. Folens worked for all of these during that year in Göttingen. He supplied extensive information on the structure and activities of the SD and Gestapo there and also undertook dangerous missions inside the Soviet zone for the Belgian Security Service. For a brief spell during this period he was actually imprisoned. While locked up he became aware of rapes and brutal interrogations by British Forces and was terrified that he might end up on the receiving end of this treatment. In February 1946 he was finally arrested by the British and handed over to the Belgian authorities who brought him back to Brussels for Court Martial. The programme makers can argue that they knew nothing of this but then they should not have included what they did in the programme..

¹⁷ It's important to carefully consider the use of the word “justice” here. At the time, the Belgian authorities were embarked on an orgy of vengeance and ten years simple detention would have been considered a light sentence. Folens certainly did consider it as such as he had feared being sentenced to death despite his “minor” role in collaboration. The Prosecutor was looking for twenty years. He was convicted in November 1947, escaped from jail in August 1948, and came to Dublin in October 1948. His conviction was a gross miscarriage of justice which becomes abundantly clear when you consider the incompetent conduct of the Court Martial and his betrayal by the Belgian Security Service.

¹⁸ It is outrageous to quote that phrase as though it meant Folens was admitting guilt to serious war crimes. The phrase used was “Oorloogsmisdadiger, honoris causa”. Honoris Causa is used these days when a title is bestowed on someone as a mark of honour, as in an honorary degree by a university. It does not necessarily relate to work done in the precise area of the degree. Remember that the article was published in 1989, relatively shortly after Molony had designated Folens a war criminal. Folens reference was not an admission of guilt, it was actually a dig at Molony

Irish journalist Senan Molony in 1985 about his wartime activities. This interview has never been published or broadcast before,¹⁹ but it and other evidence raises serious questions about how active a Nazi Ireland's leading educational publisher really was.²⁰

- SM: Albert Folens had a plausible story made out, a script to which he attempted to stick as we went through what he did during the war. And as he was confronted with various things he had a line a fallback position in relation to what he actually did.²¹ He denied that he was in the Waffen SS, he conceded that he was a mere foot soldier on the Eastern front, had been invalided out, and then he claimed that he had lived quietly for the rest of the war.²²
- AF tape: So the Flemish Legion was formed on the understanding that we would have our own Flemish Legion, our own insignia²³ and everything would be independent.
- SM tape: And you're saying you were set up by the Waffen SS?
- AF tape: And gradually they started to incorporate us into the Waffen SS.
- SM: It later descended into something of a rant. He made a point from his outlook that what had the Allies gained by waging and winning the second world war. He made a claim that in fact they'd sown the seeds of their own destruction because they had given away too much territory to the Red Army.²⁴
- AF tape: I still think that the Americans are stupid and criminal to have asked for a complete

who had bestowed the title on him without the requisite evidence, hence "honoris causa". It would be the ironies of ironies if Molony was subsequently to take it as an admission by Folens that he was in fact the war criminal Molony had made him out to be. Folens did not consider himself a war criminal. Collins' dictionary defines Honoris Causa "as a mark of respect". Where these idiots came up with "in a noble cause" is beyond me unless they were trying to link Folens to the Holocaust.

¹⁹ It would have been interesting to have inserted here the reason why the interview had never been broadcast before, namely that it was too flimsy as evidence and its publication could have disproportionately damaged Folens business and caused grief to his family. This was a decision taken by Tribune editor Vincent Browne at the time and it is equally valid today. It is understandable that Molony was very anxious over the twenty years since the interview to have it published. It was his scoop of the day. It is less clear why O'Shannon bought into it. He did have a grudge against the Irish state for accepting collaborators into Ireland after the war while during it he, who was serving in the RAF, was not allowed to wear his RAF uniform at home in neutral Ireland. Nor is it clear why RTÉ allowed this scurrilous programme to be broadcast, though the more recent experience with Fr Reynolds suggests that standards were sometimes not what they ought to have been.

²⁰ The tape suggests nothing of the sort and nor does any other "evidence" unless what is being referred to here is CROWCASS which is discussed later.

²¹ The more likely scenario here is that Folens was trying to explain what he actually did against successive accusations from the interviewer. To be fair to Molony, it does look as though he got Folens to admit to his work for the SD which does not appear to have been public knowledge up to that point.

²² The Waffen SS comprised combat units. Strictly speaking he never joined it. He originally joined the separate Flemish Legion. He did not join the Waffen SS as such. He ended up in the initially "independent" Flemish Legion and had left before the Legion was absorbed into the Waffen SS. On the basis of the cruelty he saw while in training and the Germans reneging on every promise they had made about the Flemish Legion, he wanted out of it and that came about through his ulcer. He had never been a member of the Waffen SS as such and had an absence of a tattoo to prove it. And he had nothing to do with the Waffen SS for the greater part of his work for the Germans as a translator in Brussels. Compared to what he would have experienced on the Eastern front he certainly did have a quiet, almost "normal" existence in Brussels, though he was risking his life there working clandestinely for the Resistance.

²³ It is also revealing that the programme showed a "Folens" wearing a uniform with the SS runes on the collar, whereas the Flemish Legion uniform explicitly avoided these at least while Folens was in it.

²⁴ It's not at all clear what this is about unless its use is just an attempt to discredit Folens. Folens was not questioning the waging and winning of the war, he was specifically referring to the terms of the surrender. While we're on the subject of a rant. Let me just reflect on something here. Folens and his wife had been through hell during WWII. At times he had been daily risking his life working under cover. She had been losing babies. Prison conditions had been horrible. Today they would be seen as suffering from PTSD. So they suppressed the bad. Put it behind them. And in comes this blundering journalist picking at old sores and resurrecting the trauma. Nuff said.'

surrender. But no, to please Stalin they wanted a complete surrender and a complete vacuum in Middle Europe, so that the Hungarians and the Chechs and so on are now under Russian domination. And that's the stupidity of the Roosevelt. A sick man with a sick mind and ignorant. ²⁵

- OS: But the interview became even more extraordinary ²⁶ and intriguing when Folens was asked about his life with the SD, the SS security police. ²⁷ Folens claimed that he had a minor role with the SD, and that he was not involved in any police work, interrogation or war crimes. ²⁸

- AF tape: So that in the SD I was in Abteilung, or in department, 3CB²⁹ that was “lectoral”. Now the whole Abteilung III consisted of no police work whatsoever. It was only keeping an eye on the future development of Flanders and of Belgium. Gathering information on people who might be useful for this, and for that, and for everything. ³⁰

- OS: Was Folens really a minor player or a more active Nazi? Twenty one years ago Senan Molony came to Brussels to investigate Folens' wartime career. ³¹

- OS: At Cotes-Soma archive, one of Europe's leading archives of World War II, Senan shows me a list of security suspects wanted by the Allies after the war. This list is known as the Central Registry Of War Criminals and Security Suspects or CROWCASS. The Allies called the CROWCASS lists the Nazi hunters' bible. ³²

- SM: So here we can see this is a long lists of suspects involving thousands of names, hundreds and hundreds of names under every letter of the alphabet. Folens is here and there is a file number and he's down as an interpreter with Sipo, Sipo the Sicherheits Police in Department 3B at the Gestapo building in Brussels. ³³

²⁵ Again, what is the point of including this. There is still today a widespread view that the severity of the Treaty of Versailles after the first world war eventually led to the rise of Hitler. I wonder what Molony's view of this is. And why include this piece from the tape. Is the implication that criticism of the US and Stalin makes Folens a Nazi?

²⁶ What is all this “extraordinary” stuff? It would only be so if there was firm evidence that Folens was not what he said he was and there isn't.

²⁷ And where is this reference to the “Security Police” coming from? The SD Amt III is not the Security Police. Folens was in the information gathering end of the Sicherheitsdienst and in a desk job doing paperwork at that. The separate Sicherheitspolizei was included on his original charge sheet before the court but it was explicitly changed to Sicherheitsdienst in the verdict when the distinction was pointed out to the court.

²⁸ It is important to keep constantly in mind that Folens role was purely a paper one. He was a translator and not an interpreter nor an active operative in the field. This the more so as the programme is carelessly throwing around terms that imply guilt by association in war crimes.

²⁹ Albert appears mistaken here. There is no Department III C B I the available organisation chart. Just III C. And III B is a different department to the one he worked in. C is cultural. B is political.

³⁰ There is no evidence to contradict this. Even CROWCASS, despite having him in the wrong section of the Sicherheitsdienst, does not have him in the Gestapo (Abteilung IV).

³¹ Who financed this trip or was Molony in Brussels on other business? What of significance did he actually learn there?

³² It is important to get the significance of a listing in CROWCASS right. It was a shopping list originally compiled by Allied HQ to assist the UN War Crimes Commission and Allied governments. It was compiled mainly on the basis of requests from the relevant states. It is not a Nuremberg indictment. There is no question but that Folens was being sought by the Belgian state. There is no reason to suppose that they were familiar with the details of his work, namely, that it was not interpretation but translation. He was therefore being sought as an interpreter. He was initially assigned as an interpreter for the Gestapo, but never took up this role. He talked his way into a purely translating job.

³³ Sipo, as O'Shannon carefully points out below can be a name encompassing both the SD and the Gestapo. SD Amt III, where Folens worked, was separate from the Gestapo, Amt IV, which you wouldn't think from the implications in the rest of the programme. CROWCASS states that Folens worked in Brussels, which he did but it does not specify the HQ building. It lists him as an interpreter, as explained above, and it also states that he is of German nationality, which if it were true would mean he could not be guilty of treason. In his finger trip across the CROWCASS ledger at the Belgian archive, Molony conveniently skips the reference to Folens as German.

- OS: The Sicherheits Police or Sipo was the name of the combined force of the Gestapo and the SD. From its headquarters on the Avenue Louise in Brussels the Sipo/SD carried out its work against the Resistance in Belgium. ³⁴
- SM: So here we are Cathal, twenty one years after I was last here at number 453 Avenue Louise. This was the Gestapo headquarters during wartime which was responsible for the security and surveillance of the entirety of the Belgian capital of Brussels. So this is where Folens worked on the fifth floor. ³⁵
- OS: When it says that he was an interpreter on those documents what did that mean?
- SM: Well, Albert Folens always said of course that he was a translator as if he was just copying things from one piece of paper to another but an interpreter as we all know does exactly what we're doing now involved in talking and the human interaction.
- OS: In fact, an interpreter in the Nazi SD could have been involved in talking to Resistance suspects and captured Allied airmen some of whom may be facing interrogation. ³⁶
- SM: There's a little plaque just to the right of the door that commemorates the fact that this was a very dark place indeed. ³⁷
- OS: But Folens remains an enigma. And questions remain unanswered ³⁸ about the wartime career of Ireland's leading educational publisher.
- OS: One of Folens' fellow countrymen, another Nazi collaborator, would have a major impact on the business and political life of this country. His name is Albert Luyx. ³⁹

³⁴ In the context of this programme, this is a sloppy and confused statement though it is factually accurate. O'Shannon here recognises the difference between the SD as a whole and the Gestapo but attempts to continue the conflation which is present throughout the programme where every opportunity is taken to imply that Folens was a member of the Gestapo. This statement reveals the underlying bias of the whole programme.

³⁵ There is no basis for this spurious detail. It is a piece of televisual shit, but the temptation to use it could not be resisted. Yes that was Gestapo headquarters, but Folens did not work there, much less on the fifth floor. He worked at the other end of Louizalaan, over 2km away.

³⁶ This is guilt by association. The sleight of hand is breath taking. It has not been shown that he was an interpreter, so saying what an interpreter might have been involved in is spurious. The inclusion of a reference to Allied airmen here is interesting as O'Shannon had been in the RAF. I wonder how he would feel if he was accused by association of being implicated in the carpet bombing of Hamburg & Dresden. Maybe he'd have approved, who knows? It is well to remember at this point that following Mrs. Folens' court case and at the eleventh hour, the programme was forced to drop a reconstruction of a brutal Nazi interrogation at which it had portrayed Folens as the interpreter. CROWCASS informs us that Folens was wanted in relation to interrogations. This is based on him being classified as an interpreter. Ironically, the only real interrogation here is that by Molony of Folens, and given Folens' trauma, that was brutal by any standards.

³⁷ This is a weird statement. The plaque reads "In daylight / on the 20th of January 1943 / this building, which housed the Gestapo / during the war 1940-45, suffered / the avenging fire of the guns of the plane of / Captain Baron Jean-Michel /de SELYS LONGCHAMPS / of the 1st Guides Regiment / Flying Officer of the Royal Air Force". I don't know what Molony thought it said.

³⁸ No they don't, not if the programme makers had done their research properly and not given over to presumption and bias. In fact, Folens' court documents, recently accessed, show that the answers are exactly the opposite of the vile myths instigated by this despicable programme.

³⁹ Note the insertion of the word Nazi in this sentence to round off the commentary and the use of "another". My English teacher in school gave us an extensive lesson on using that word.

Well-known publisher was a suspected Nazi

war criminal *Irish Independent*

3 Jan 2007⁴⁰

Senan Molony Political Correspondent

IRELAND'S top educational publisher was wanted as a suspected war criminal, an RTE programme is set to reveal.

Albert Folens, who founded the company of the same name, was detained and sentenced to death in Belgium after World War II, but escaped from prison and later emerged in Ireland.

Mr Folens, who died in 2002, was a volunteer in the Flemish legion of Hitler's Waffen SS and served on the eastern front until invalided out to a hospital in Carlsbad. Returning to Belgium, he joined the Gestapo secret police.

In an interview never broadcast before, Mr Folens claimed he worked as a translator at Gestapo headquarters in the Avenue Louise in Brussels.⁴¹

Mr Folens' names and details appeared on successive versions of the US Army's Crowcass list anacronym for the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects.

He fled Belgium after the 1944 Liberation, but was arrested in Germany by the British Army.

On arrival in Ireland after his escape, he started his new life as a teacher in Scoil Mhuire,

⁴⁰ Note that this was trailed almost two weeks before the actual broadcast. It was sufficiently explicit to alert the family. In the event, two short extracts from the taped interview were played on air.

⁴¹ In fact, while he worked on the Avenue Louise, he did not work in Gestapo headquarters on the same street.

Folens widow settles action over programme

*Originally Published / Monday, 15 Jan 2007 RTÉ (no byline)*⁴²

An action by the widow of the educational publisher Albert Folens to prevent an interview with her husband being broadcast has been settled at the High Court.⁴³

The programme, called 'Ireland's Nazis', will be broadcast on RTÉ 1 tomorrow. However, some changes will be made as a result of the settlement.

Juliette Folens was trying to prevent the programme from using material from an interview given by her husband 20 years ago to journalist Senan Molony.⁴⁴

Mr Molony then worked for the Sunday Tribune and an agreement was signed between a representative of the Tribune, Mr Molony and Mr Folens, that would allow Mr Folens to see any article before it was published and would give him a right of reply.

As part of the settlement agreed today, a statement from Juliette Folens will be broadcast as part of the programme and a short segment will be edited out.⁴⁵

Afterwards, Mr Molony said the settlement was a victory for free speech. He said his interview contained 'explosive allegations'.⁴⁶

Mr Folens died four years ago at the age of 86. In a statement issued on behalf of the Folens family, Mrs Folens said she wished to make it absolutely clear that Albert Folens was not a member of the Nazi Party, was never a member of or employed by the Gestapo and never worked in their headquarters in Brussels.

In the statement, Mrs Folens said Mr Folens who was originally from Belgium, had been a member of the nationalist Flemish Legion and was sentenced to ten years in prison as a result.

She said he had been employed as a translator, translating newspaper articles from Flemish into German.

She said he had never been an interpreter and the Folens family found his portrayal as being

⁴² *Note: this is the day before the broadcast.*

⁴³ My understanding is that the case was to enforce an agreement between Senan Molony, Vincent Browne, and Albert Folens that were Molony's taped interview to be used, Albert Folens would have a right of reply. I don't think Mrs. Folens was in a position to stop the programme as such, but she clearly did not want to see it go out without the inclusion of a reply to its accusations. I am surprised that RTÉ, among others, allowed this scurrilous programme to be broadcast in the first place.

⁴⁴ See previous footnote.

⁴⁵ The statement simply reported that Mrs Folens averred that her husband was not a member of the Nazi party, did not work for the Gestapo, and did not work at Gestapo headquarters in Brussels. The programme was making, and continued to do so, the accusations denied by Mrs Folens and do so without a shred of proof. The "short segment" being edited out was a reconstruction of a brutal Nazi interrogation in which Folens was portrayed as the interpreter. The deletion of this segment not only undermines the programmes wild accusations but also shows the lengths to which the programme makers were prepared to go to vilify Folens.

⁴⁶ A victory for free speech, is it? What a piece of contemptible shite. And, by the way, anyone can make explosive accusations, the tragedy is that they are not held to account when these prove to be unsubstantiated vilification. If there is any victory for free speech here it goes to Mrs Folens. She got Albert a right of reply, however grudgingly implemented by the programme makers. She got an unbelievably vicious reconstruction of an interrogation, for which there was no evidence, dropped from the programme. Yet it is she, who is presented as the witch who attempted to suppress free speech. The programme, of course, persisted in peddling its vile and unsubstantiated accusations. If that is seen as a vindication of free speech by the journalist then it is difficult to see where the "informed journalist and author of integrity etc." comes from. But RTÉ said it so they must know what it means.

engaged in interrogation and torture totally reprehensible.⁴⁷

<https://www.rte.ie/news/2007/0115/84605-folens/>

⁴⁷ Once there was a smell of court proceedings in the air the gutless programmers dropped their reconstruction of a brutal Nazi interrogation at which “Mr Folens” was present as an interpreter. They hadn't a leg to stand on and they knew it.

Albert Folens' widow gets TV right of reply

'My husband never worked for the Gestapo'

*Irish Independent 16 Jan 2007*⁴⁸

Ann O'Loughlin

THE widow of the educational publisher Albert Folens has been given a right of reply in an RTE documentary on Nazis in Ireland after she settled her High Court action yesterday.

RTE and Title Films said that the Folens family had withdrawn an action regarding the broadcast of the second part of the documentary 'Hidden History: Ireland's Nazis'.

The interview with Albert Folens, central to the dispute, will be carried in its full intended format. RTE said: "The integrity of this documentary has not been compromised."⁴⁹

Juliette Folens had gone to court in a bid to restrain the broadcast of the interview with her late husband as part of the documentary to be shown on RTE 1 tonight.

After two hours of talks between lawyers outside the High Court yesterday afternoon, Mrs Folens, whose 86-year-old husband Albert Folens died four years ago, settled her proceedings against the national station, the film company who made the documentary and a journalist who interviewed Mr Folens on tape 20 years ago.

A statement on behalf of Mrs Folens and her family is to be included in the programme which features her husband, who came to live in Ireland after World War II and founded the Folens publishing company.

In the statement, Mrs Folens says she and her family "do not accept that Mr Albert Folens was a member of the Nazi party or ever a member or employed by the Gestapo or ever worked in their headquarters in Brussels."

It is understood that a short segment of an enactment of alleged interrogation is also to be edited out of the documentary.⁵⁰

In court yesterday, a lawyer for the Folens family told Ms Justice Mary Laffoy that the action had been settled and the matter could be struck out with no order as to costs.

After the court hearing, the Folens family issued a statement announcing the "settlement of the court action relating to Nazi war crime allegations".

The High Court action, it said, had been settled to the satisfaction of the parties. "However, Mrs Folens and the Folens family wish to make it absolutely clear that Mr Folens was not a member of the Nazi Party, was never a member of, or employed by, the Gestapo and never worked in their

⁴⁸ Note that this was published on the day of the broadcast but before the programme was aired.

⁴⁹ What integrity?

⁵⁰ This is a critical piece of information. It confirms that the programmers thought they could say what they liked now that Folens was dead. They were certainly in for a shock on that one.

headquarters in Brussels.”

The family’s statement continued: “His only military involvement was to train as a member of the Flemish Legion. Because of his membership of the nationalist Flemish Legion he was charged, along with 57,000 others, by the Belgian authorities. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison because of this membership and not because of any war crimes. Mr Folens was not guilty of any war crimes whatsoever.”

Mr Albert Folens was employed as a translator, the statement said, and translated newspaper articles from Flemish into German. “He was never an interpreter, as has been suggested, and the Folens family find his portrayal as being engaged in interrogation and torture totally reprehensible. No allegations of interrogation or torture were ever made against Mr Folens and he was never accused of any war crimes,” the family said.⁵¹

Albert Folens: interview to be heard in full.⁵²

⁵¹ This statement is correct. The only public reference to “interpreter” was in the CROWCASS list which in this case was simply a shopping list from the Belgian state, at the time engaged in an orgy of vengeance.

⁵² This is incorrect. There is no way the Folens episode could have supported a 90 minute taped interview. The reporter refers to “full format” in her report of the settlement. I take it that this means it should not be edited in a prejudicial manner. Interestingly, in the programme as aired we hear just five brief extracts from Folens, taking up about a minute and a half in total.

'Soon you will be joining your rotten husband'

JIM CUSACK

GARDAI are investigating threatening hate mail sent to the 83-year-old widow of the Belgian-born publisher Albert Folens, who was one of the subjects of RTE's two-part documentary *Hidden History: Ireland's Nazis* broadcast last week.

The letter, which arrived in the post two days after the programme aired, threatens Juliette Folens and her family stating: "We will give you and your clan six months to leave otherwise suffer the consequences. We believe in an eye for an eye."

It continues: "Remember Eichman [the senior Nazi official who organised the deportation of Jews to the extermination camps who was executed in Israel in 1961] and Mussolini. Soon you will be joining your smelly, rotten husband. We know all about your family and their movements. Israel always get their opponents."

The letter is being forensically examined for possible DNA traces of the sender. ⁵⁴ Sending threatening mail is a criminal offence and the case is being taken seriously.

As the clearly distressed family gathered around Mrs Folens last week they continued to speak against what they say are baseless claims against Albert Folens. The Folens' daughter, Leentje, said: "I personally hold this [programme] responsible for this letter. I blame them more than I blame the person who wrote this letter."

Leentje said the allegations against her father were untrue, and to put them alongside a series of detailed allegations against convicted war criminals who came here after the war was most unfair. She added that Mr Folens was not a member of the Nazi party or Gestapo, as claimed. He was a member of the 300,000-strong Flemish Legion, which was inducted into the SS.

The programme-makers, however, stand over their claims. Presenter Cathal O'Shannon stated last Friday: "We agreed to put a piece [a short statement from the family] in the programme. That is as much as I wish to say."

Journalist Senan Molony, who appeared on the programme to talk about Mr Folens, said: "I think the sending of hate mail is horrendous and serves no purpose." ⁵⁵

Denying her husband was in the SS, Mrs Folens last week said that SS members were identified after the war by a tell-tale tattoo of their blood type on the underside of their left forearm. This was done to all SS members in order to facilitate blood transfusions. After the war many SS members were identified through the tattoo - or the equally telling scar tissue left after it was removed.

"There was no scar," she said of her late husband, whom she reiterated worked as a translator for the Flemish Legion which was incorporated into the SS and sent to fight in the Eastern Front. He was sent home through illness and worked as a translator at its headquarters in Brussels, ⁵⁶ where she met and married him in 1943. After the war, her husband was among thousands of Flemish Belgians imprisoned for their role in joining the Germans in the Second World War. He escaped prison two

⁵³ *Note that this report was filed just under a week after the broadcast.*

⁵⁴ Note, that this would only be of use if there was a suspect for the letter, or if the sender was already on a DNA database.

⁵⁵ I have no words to describe this statement. The same journalist said in my presence that he subscribed to the Latin tag "de mortuis nihil nisi bonum" which effectively means "never speak ill of the dead". Really?

⁵⁶ No. She specifically said in the broadcast statement that he had not worked at Gestapo headquarters.

years into his 10-year sentence.

Mrs Folens said she and her family had been concerned when the reporter Senan Molony telephoned to ask if he could come to their home to interview her husband in 1987 about his wartime activities.⁵⁷ Three years earlier she and her husband had been held hostage in their home: two armed criminals held her prisoner while her husband went to a bank and withdrew a ransom. She said her husband agreed to do the interview after being assured by the-then editor of the Sunday Tribune, Vincent Browne, that Mr Molony was a bona fide journalist. Mr Molony taped a 90-minute interview, parts of which were broadcast.⁵⁸ At the time of the interview Mr Browne decided not to publish the article. In a letter dated June 2, 1987, he wrote to Albert Folens, saying: "I write to inform you that we have decided not to publish anything concerning your involvement in the Second World War, at present. This decision was taken on the following basis: that, given the absence of harder information⁵⁹ concerning any impropriety it would be wrong to expose you to the turmoil that would inevitably ensue if we published the information which we presently have in our possession."

Mrs Folens said that, contrary to the impression given in the Hidden History programme that her husband had entered Ireland's entrepreneurial establishment, they were in fact penniless when they came here in 1947 and rented a room in Dun Laoghaire, later moving to Walkinstown. Her husband had to retake his university degree in languages. He was working as a teaching assistant and translator when he wrote and published his first textbook in 1958. He then went on to establish a successful textbook-publishing firm.

"Shortly before his final stroke, my grandfather wrote the words Saol fada agus bas in Eireann," added Elske, Albert Folens' granddaughter.

"Neither of my grandparents would ever speak against the country where they finally found peace and raised a family together. Though they met with a lot of kindness here, the process of making a living out of extreme poverty was hard and slow. The setbacks they encountered in establishing Folens publishing were often through the xenophobia of those working in places of power in this country. As an Irish citizen, I am saddened and ashamed that so little has changed."

⁵⁷ Folens always felt that the interview had been obtained under false pretences. It is not clear exactly what the basis for this is. Perhaps he felt that the reporter would be interested in exploring the truth rather than making baseless accusations about him.

⁵⁸ Five short extracts of Folens speaking were broadcast. None of Molony's taped questions/allegations were, but the allegations were made by both Molony and O'Shannon in the body of the programme.

⁵⁹ At least Browne seems to have copped the lack of any significant evidence for the accusations.

by Yank

He aided the Nazis before he shaped the minds of Irish children

Schoolbook publisher Albert Folens

(Irish Independent)

Last night I got my first look at my daughter's booklist for the coming school year. One book in particular caught my eye - *The United States & The World 1945-1989*. My problem with this book is that it's published by Folens, a company founded by a man who aided the Gestapo in his native Belgium during WWII.

Albert Folens escaped from prison and made his way to Ireland under a false passport. Folens then got work as a teacher before setting up his publishing company.

Folens and his defenders claim that he was never in the Gestapo. His daughter says he only joined the Flemish Legion, which consisted of 300,000 men. One to two thousand is probably more like it. If Folens wasn't a Nazi he was one of their fascist first cousins.

It wasn't like he was repentant after the war either. In a 1986 interview – only aired in 2007 – he denied he was anything like a Nazi. Almost in the next breath, however, he put his extreme anti-Americanism out there, calling the Americans "stupid and criminal" for insisting on a "complete surrender" by the Nazis. "And that's the stupidity of the Roosevelt. A sick man with a sick mind and ignorant."

This is the man who set about building Ireland's leading schoolbook publishing company. This is the man whose history books "helped to shape the minds" of generations of Irish school children.

Folens died back in 2003, but his family still owns the company. I see no reason to assume that the culture established by this virulent anti-American will have changed much.

Funny thing is I first got really angry at one of the Folens texts before I heard about his fascist past. I remember hitting the roof when my oldest daughter showed me her 6th grade history book back in 2002. The book's short section on World War II downplayed what the Nazis had done, but turned Hiroshima and Nagasaki into the most unspeakable crimes ever. It was all done in a cunning way, through the fictional memory of a fictional character who was supposedly remembering the horror of hearing about the bombings on Irish radio.

Then when I first learned of Folens' past I was angry about that book from 2002 all over again. I wanted a total ban on Folens' books in this house. That wasn't really practical, unfortunately, but there's no way I want this bigoted anti-American's legacy landing in in my house ever again. My daughter will have to survive with another publisher's text.

⁶⁰ Note that this is some 4 years after the programme was aired.