

The Richie Boys,

The Jews who escaped the Nazis and returned to fight Hitler

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Many years ago, while I was a student in our local public schools, I watched a TV special about the Holocaust. At that young age I just couldn't imagine how the German people could allow such an atrocity to happen. As I continued my education I came to realize that Hitler and the Nazis had made the Jews the scapegoat for all the ills that happened in Germany as a result of World War I. He frequently denounced international capitalism and communism as part of a Jewish conspiracy.

But it's a big leap from bad mouthing Jews to the Holocaust. The Jews in Germany were subjected to many forms of discrimination, especially after Hitler rose to power in 1933. Jews who worked for the government lost jobs. Other Germans began boycotting Jewish businesses. Selected synagogues were shuttered as the German population began believing Hitler's lies. Soon Jews could only withdraw limited funds from their bank accounts and they began to plan ways to exit Germany. Some sought refuge in other parts of Europe but with limited funds many were stuck in Germany. Many of those tried to get their eldest sons out to safety. England and the U.S. were the most popular destinations. England accepted many but the U.S. required a host family for these minors who would be a financial drain on the host family. Still many young German or Austrian Jews found their way to the U.S. and became what history calls "*The One Thousand Children.*"

My presentation this evening is about a sub-group of these matured children who came to be known as the Ritchie Boys.

Fast forward to the early 1940's, and these young or mid teens had matured and wanted to return to Europe as part of the Allied fighting forces to work against Germany, check on family or to just do their part in the war effort. Problem was they were considered "Enemy Aliens" due to their countries of origin. If they were allowed in the military, it was usually in non-combat jobs such as cooks, supply or medical units. They were not even allowed to use real weapons or live ammunition during their training.

However it wasn't long until the U.S. military saw them in a different light. Many of them were intellectuals, professionals and students who had faced horrid discrimination under the Nazi regime. Despite being initially labeled as "Enemy Aliens" in the U.S., their unique backgrounds, language skills and cultural knowledge made them valuable assets.

Camp Ritchie was established in 1942 and was named for the then Governor of Maryland. It became the primary training ground for military intelligence and psychological warfare during World War II. The Ritchie Boys received extensive training in interrogation techniques, intelligence analysis, map reading, and language proficiency. Languages taught at the camp included German, French, Italian and other languages relevant to the European Theater. During training The Jewish Ritchie Boys were taught to use their knowledge of the German culture and language to infiltrate enemy lines and gather crucial information.

The Jewish Ritchie Boys were qualified for these tasks because they knew the German language and understood the German mentality and behavior better than most American-born soldiers. The role of these soldiers was therefore to work in the front lines, at strategic corps and army levels, at interrogation, analyzing German forces and plans, and also to study and demoralize the enemy. The majority of them went on to work as members of the U.S. Counter Intelligence Corps.

Camp Ritchie also trained over five hundred second generation Japanese Nisei (Ne-say) for the Pacific Military Intelligence Research Service program to translate documents for the U.S. Navy. In July 1944 fifteen crates of documents, captured in Saipan, were sent to Camp Ritchie for training purposes and were not considered to have any military intelligence. One Nisei, Kazuo Yamane, dug into a crate, retrieving what he believed to be a textbook, but soon discovered it to be meeting minutes from a gathering of all of Japan's armories. The notes contained locations of the armories, the number of weapons held by Imperial Japan, spare parts held, and indicated that Japan had half the number of

weapons available to it in 1944 as it did in 1943. Yamane immediately contacted his superior, who contacted the War Department, which translated the text into English. The U.S. then located and destroyed the armories. Yamane called this act his "Proof of Loyalty" because he claimed he could have easily not reported the document to his superiors.

The first of the Ritchie Boys to see action in Europe entered on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Others followed over time. Shortly after reaching land, they left their units and pursued their special tasks. They were usually deployed with headquarters or infantry units and were used in interrogating German prisoners. Through their efforts they were able to feed the Allies valuable information.

A classified postwar report by the U.S. Army found that nearly 60 percent of the credible intelligence gathered in Europe after D-Day came from the Ritchie Boys. The Ritchie Boys helped break German resistance by demoralizing them in both open and covert operations. They interrogated POWs and defectors to obtain information about German force levels, troop movements, and the physical and psychological state of the Germans. A common interrogation tactic was to use the Germans' fear of transfer into Soviet custody. On more than one occasion a Ritchie Boy donned a uniform of a Soviet officer and the others would threatened to turn uncooperative German prisoners over to the Soviets officer if they didn't cooperate. The plan usually worked!

During the Battle of the Bulge, two Ritchie Boys were captured and recognized by former POWs who had been returned to the Germans in a prisoner exchange. After their identity was reported to German officer Curt Bruns, he ordered them both to be summarily executed, saying "The Jews have no right to live in Germany." Bruns was arrested, tried, and executed for these murders on June 15, 1945.

Ritchie Boys were attached to the earliest units that liberated the concentration camps and on more than one occasion they discovered the fate of friends or family while poring over the well kept records kept at the camps.

After the war ended on May 7, 1945 the Richie Boys continued their work in other ways. They were instrumental in rounding up high ranking Nazis in post war Germany. On one occasion a woman grabbed a man on the street by the arm in Boizenburg and called for his arrest by nearby American soldiers, one of which was Richie Boy Manny Seinfeld. Manny took both the man and the woman into custody. It turned out that the man had been the senior Gestapo chief at Ravensbruck, the only Nazi concentration camp built for women. In a camp known for notorious methods of torture, the man, Ludwig Ramdohr was especially noted for his personalized torture methods. He was arrested and along with nine other officials from the camp found guilty of war crimes and executed in May 1947.

After the war, many of the Ritchie Boys served as translators and interrogators. Their efforts helped to bring many of the most notorious Nazis to justice. Several of them played key roles as translators during the Nuremberg Trials.

After the war, virtually all of the Richie Boys returned to the U.S. Unable to find any of the family they had left in Europe they returned "home." Many took advantage of the GI Bill and completed the education most had started before the war. Their future careers included Ambassadors, CIA agents, a Senator and a congressman. There was an architect, several journalists, college professors, scientist, authors and many more. One became a national security advisor to LBJ. Another, an inventor, went on to be known as the Father of Video Games. There were some who played in the NFL and Major League Baseball. William Krimer served as an interpreter for four U.S. Presidents. Another, Marvin Resnik, fathered an astronaut Judith Resnik. In short, they returned to their adopted home and became part of what has come to be known as The Greatest Generation.

However, to this day the exploits and strategic importance of the Richie Boys are little known. They took part in every major battle and campaign of the war in Europe, collecting valuable tactical intelligence about enemy strength, troop movements, and

defensive positions as well as enemy morale. In the course of the war, tens of thousands of newly captured Third Reich soldiers were interrogated by teams of these German Jewish soldiers. Yet there has been no publication of their operations or complete roster of these men made public. As members of Military Intelligence, they were warned not to reveal their branch of service or their training or duties during the war, and similar restrictions applied postwar to any documents, reports, or notes they may have retained. They held no reunions and were disinclined to join veteran's organizations, as their German accents made them unwelcome in the usual circles of U.S. veterans. Their story is one of the last great untold sagas of World War II.