

'Ritchie Boys' Aided Army's Efforts to Defeat Germany During WWII

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As the world observes International Holocaust Remembrance Day, some may remember the so-called "Ritchie Boys," who greatly aided allied forces in their fight against Germany and other Axis nations in World War II.

Early on in the war, the Army realized it needed German- and Italian-speaking U.S. soldiers for a variety of duties, including psychological warfare, interrogation, espionage and intercepting enemy communications. Besides their language ability, these soldiers were familiar with the culture and thinking of enemy soldiers, which would aid them in their efforts.



Many of the 15,200 selected were Jewish soldiers who fled Nazi-controlled Germany, which was systematically killing Jews. The soldiers were sent for training to Camp Ritchie, Maryland, beginning June 19, 1942, where they trained at the Military Intelligence

Training Center – thus their nickname, the Ritchie Boys.

Many of these soldiers landed at Normandy, France, on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and others followed to perform their specialized tasks, which provided advanced intelligence to allied forces regarding German war plans and tactics.



Following the war, some of the Ritchie Boys were used as interrogators during the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals.

Many of the Ritchie Boys went on to have successful civilian careers, including J.D. Salinger, author of the classic book "The Catcher in the Rye."

In 2011, the Holocaust Memorial Center, in Farmington Hills, Michigan, hosted an exhibit of the Ritchie Boys' exploits. Surviving soldiers were among the attendees.



Walter Midener, an attendee, was awarded the Silver Star. In civilian life, he became a noted sculpture and fine arts teacher and rose to the presidency for the Center for Creative Studies at Detroit's College of Art and Design.

Wayne State University Professor Ehrhard Dabringhaus, another attendee, was ordered, shortly after the war, to become the American control officer to Klaus Barbie, the notorious war criminal. Dabringhaus went on to write a book about the experience, called

"Klaus Barbie: The Shocking Story of How the U.S. Used this Nazi War Criminal as an Intelligence Agent."

Dr. Guy Stern, a Bronze Star Medal recipient who attended, said: "It was an emotional reunion, definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It was wonderful to see these people again. This was our kind of war. We worked harder than anyone could have driven us. We were crusaders."



It's important for people everywhere to remember those who perished and those who survived the Holocaust and, in a world increasingly faced with sectarian strife and intolerance, to set forth the lessons of the Holocaust as a model for teaching ethical

conduct and responsible decision-making, Stern said.

"By highlighting those individuals who, in the midst of evil, stood for the best, rather than the worst of human nature, the Holocaust Memorial Center seeks to contribute to maintaining an open and free society," he added.

Fort Ritchie, as it later became known, closed in 1998.

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