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# The Ritchie Boys

*a film by*

Christian Bauer

Running time: 92 minutes

US DISTRIBUTION

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THEY HAD ESCAPED THE NAZIS. BUT RETURNED IN AMERICAN UNIFORMS: TO FIGHT THEIR OWN KIND OF WAR.



# The Ritchie Boys

a film by Christian Bauer



TANGRAM PRESENTS A CHRISTIAN BAUER FILM THE RITCHIE BOYS A TANGRAM AND ALLIANCE ATLANTIS PRODUCTION

IN COOPERATION WITH BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK, WESTDEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK, MITTELDEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK, HISTORY TELEVISION AND DISCOVERY WINGS

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# Praise for The Ritchie Boys

**One of the most soul-searing portraits. An intense personal journey, as rich in historical detail as it is in humanist resonance... A strong contender for an Academy Award nomination.**

*Denis Seguin  
Screen International*

**It hardly seems possible, yet outstanding documentaries on World War II continue to be made. Christian Bauer's *The Ritchie Boys* is one of the best.**

*Kevin Thomas  
L.A. Times*

**Here's a war story that even History Channel has never told. A fascinating documentary with high entertainment quotient thanks to the fact that the film's surviving subjects prove to be some of the most articulate, not to mention wittiest, octogenarians around.**

*Michael Rechtshaffen  
The Hollywood Reporter*

**Engaging... the stuff of a Hemingway novel. A great human tale flecked with a delicious sprinkling of sweet revenge.**

*Robert Koehler  
Variety*

**This is a tremendous document. The Ritchie Boys fought for what they believed in with great commitment and enthusiasm. An important lesson for today, tomorrow and future generations.**

*Dr. Ruth Westheimer  
Media Psychologist*

**It's a wonderful movie - a wondertale of a war within a war: German-Jews who fled Germany then return in American uniforms to haunt and defeat the country that rejected them so violently.**

*Ambassador Alon Pinkas  
Consul General of Israel*

**A work of incredible research, maturity and finesse, *The Ritchie Boys* is, above all, an incredible story of espionage and courage. For the first time, the surviving 'boys' speak on camera about their rigorous intelligence training, their experiences on the frontlines and their unit's special assignments.**

*Karen Tisch  
Hot Docs*

## — The Ritchie Boys —

This is the untold story of a group of young men who fled Nazi Germany and returned to Europe as soldiers in US-uniforms. They knew the psychology and the language of the enemy better than anybody else. In Camp Ritchie, Maryland, they were trained in intelligence and psychological warfare. Not always courageous, but determined, bright, and inventive they fought their own kind of war. They saved lives. They were victors, not victims.

### SYNOPSIS

They were young; and the world's most unlikely soldiers. As teenagers they had escaped the Nazis. They trained in intelligence work and psychological warfare, and returned to Europe as US soldiers - with the greatest motivation to fight this war: They were Jewish. They called themselves "The Ritchie Boys".

Christian Bauer's film "The Ritchie Boys" tells a story that's never been told before. It begins in Camp Ritchie, Maryland, the birthplace of modern psychological warfare, and it ends with the defeat of Germany in May of 1945. After D-Day the Ritchie Boys became a decisive force in the war. Nobody knew the enemy, his culture and his language better than they. Their mission: ascertain and break the enemy's morale.

The surviving Ritchie Boys are in their eighties now. They never met for reunions, they did not join veteran associations. When the war was over, their German accents and unusual histories did not make them welcome in the usual veterans circles. In the end, the Ritchie Boys quietly left the war behind them and went on to enjoy quite remarkable careers - in arts and politics, in business and academia. They never forgot the war. They just never spoke about it.

In "The Ritchie Boys" these remarkable, funny, sharp, brave men share their memories with us. They tell about a war, quite different from the one we have known so far, a war of words. They had no idea what it would be like to see their homeland again, they did not know what had happened to the families and friends they had left behind. On the front lines from the beaches of Normandy onwards, the Ritchie Boys interrogated German prisoners, defectors and civilians, collected information of tactical and strategic importance: about troop size and movements, about the psychological situation of the enemy, and the inner workings of the Nazi-regime. They drafted leaflets, produced radio broadcasts and even published a German newspaper dropped behind enemy lines. In trucks equipped with amplifiers and loudspeakers, they went to the front lines and under heavy fire tried to persuade their German opponents to surrender.

The Ritchie Boys were in Paris even before its liberation. They fought in the Battle of the Bulge - in danger of being shot as spies by the Americans because of their accents, and by the Germans who might find out about their backgrounds. They were among those who liberated the concentration camps. They worked for the Nuremberg Trials and determined the policy for the de-nazification of Germany.

Ritchie Boy Fred Howard: "felt rage at what had happened to Europe, I felt rage at what happened to Jews - Europe was raped, by a very powerful, very disciplined, well oiled military machine". Victor Brombert, Professor Emeritus at Princeton adds: "Our teams were bright, available, not always courageous - not always expert warriors, but certainly our heart was in it." Guy Stern, Distinguished Professor at Wayne State University in Detroit agrees: "We worked harder than anyone could have driven us. We were crusaders. This was our kind of war." Fred Howard, who later invented "leggs", panty hoses in eggs, again puts a different spin on it: "We were all basket cases - kids! But these friendships were very wonderful!"

Their stories are as much breathtaking, as they are funny and moving: How Fred and Guy invented the capture of Hitler's latrine orderly, and the swift reaction of the Pentagon. How Werner Angress decided to parachute into enemy territory on the evening of D-Day - his first jump ever - just to stay with his buddies and to be like them. How Victor goes AWOL to be in Paris, his hometown, before its liberation, and how he loses his division in the wake of the celebration. How Philip is captured during the Battle of the Bulge and his life in a German camp for POWs. And, how Morris is still haunted by his reaction to the survivors of a concentration camp...

Their effort shortened the war and saved many lives on both sides. However, the story of their heroism, their achievements and their long-term impact on military tactics remained forgotten. The film "The Ritchie Boys" not only tells the story of their bravery, it also reveals the contribution the Ritchie Boys made to the victory over Nazi-Germany. This is a deeply personal account of a decisive moment in history given by the last of the surviving Ritchie Boys. In "The Ritchie Boys" they once again show their determination, courage, humor, and imagination.

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## CREDITS

### **THE RITCHIE BOYS**

Written and Directed by CHRISTIAN BAUER, Producers DAGMAR BILLER, DONNA ZUCKERBROT, Film Editor DAVID KAZALA, Director of Photography DIETRICH MANGOLD, Composers AARON DAVIS, JOHN LANG, Assistant Director ANNA ZOELLNER, Narrator MICHAEL HANRAHAN, Sound Recordist HARALD STUCKMANN, SEBASTIAN WAGNER, Executive Producers, CHRISTIAN BAUER, PATRICIA PHILLIPS, A TANGRAM and ALLIANCE ATLANTIS PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK, WESTDEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK, MITTELDEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK, HISTORY TELEVISION, DISCOVERY WINGS. Financially supported by: FFF FILMFERNSEHFOND BAYERN. With the participation of the CANADA FILM AND VIDEO PRODUCTION TOX CREDIT. Developed with the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union. Distributed by TANGRAM and ALLIANCE ATLANTIS. A Germany-Canada Co-Production

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**Christian Bauer**  
director/producer "The Ritchie Boys"

Qualified in German & English Literature, American Affairs & History at university. He has lectured at the University of Munich and was a professional film critic, working for major German newspaper publications.

Bauer has been an independent filmmaker and producer since 1980, directing close to sixty documentaries and producing many more. His work has many times been nominated for the Adolf Grimme Prize (German equivalent of an Emmy). He won in 1993, for his film about the last days of an American military garrison in Bavaria ("Farewell Bavaria").

Bauer's last feature documentary "Missing Allen" (2001) tells the story of his search for Allen Ross, a filmmaker and DoP from Chicago. Bauer and his friend Ross had made seven films together, the last one just before Ross' mysterious disappearance.

The search for Ross takes Bauer into the dark world of religious fringe groups and UFO-believers – to Waco and Oklahoma City. In a strange twist of fate, Bauer discovers that Allen Ross was murdered and buried under his house, in Cheyenne, Wyo.

Missing Allen was shown at numerous festivals around the world. It won a host of awards, including a nomination for the European Film Awards 2002, and Best Documentary in Montreal and Venice.

### **Praise for "Missing Allen"**

**A deeply personal query into how well we really know the people we think we know best, and a look at how easy it can be to disappear into America.**

*Scott Foundas, Variety*

**Motivated by sorrow and loss, Bauer has made a fitting and often deeply unner-ving tribute to his friend, while shining a light into some of the darkest crevices in America's fundamentalist heartland.**

*John Patterson, LA Weekly, Los Angeles*

**„Missing Allen“: a heartbreaking investigation of a friend's death ... an homage to the borderless and timeless nature of true friendship.**

*Andrew Patner, Chicago Sun Times*

**Bauer has made a compelling, haunting, and ultimately unforgettable film.**

*Carol Nahra, International Documentary Magazine*

**A truly superb piece of filmmaking and a movingly personal tribute to Allen.**

*Michael Rabiger, Author of „Directing the Documentary“*

Christian Bauer is a member of the European Film Academy. His most recent film "The Ritchie Boys" was the opening film for Hotdocs, International Documentary Festival in Toronto in 2004.

# San Francisco Chronicle

## In World War II, Jewish emigres helped undermine the Nazis. A new film tells their tale.

By Annie Nakao

It was October 1944, and Staff Sgt. Rudy Michaels, part of the American Fifth Armored Division, was about to cross the River Sauer. Behind him was liberated Luxembourg. Ahead, the first German soil he'd set foot on since leaving his homeland six years before as a Jewish refugee.

"There I was -- in the American Army, with a pistol in my hand, two grenades in my belt and a sergeant with a machine gun at my side," Michaels says. "I bet they didn't think I'd come back like this."

Now, the 88-year-old retired lawyer and administrative law judge lives quietly with his wife, Ann, in a lovingly preserved Eichler home in Sacramento. But of late, the Michaels household has been atwitter with excitement, thanks to a recent film about his World War II exploits as part of a little-known group of German-speaking, mostly Jewish emigres who served as U.S. interrogators and psychological warfare experts.

The German-made documentary "The Ritchie Boys" was short-listed for an Oscar nomination. It recently opened Toronto's Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival and drew sellout crowds on its pre-Oscar nomination rounds from Palm Springs to New York's Tribeca. The German-Canadian production will screen in San Jose and Sacramento in March. Despite the passage of nearly 60 years since the war ended, little-known tales of that conflict continue to surface, and "The Ritchie Boys" is one of the more poignant. What makes this movie unusual is that it was conceived by 57-year-old German filmmaker Christian Bauer.

"For my generation, the war was ever present," Bauer says in a phone interview from Munich, where he lives. "I tried to reconnect with those who had to leave Germany during the war, because I felt an invaluable part of Germany was killed or driven out of our country."

Bauer had a devil of a time uncovering training records, because archival information on Camp Ritchie had been destroyed years ago in a fire. But it was mostly the lack of funding that stretched Bauer's project into a 15-year odyssey. He'd nearly given up when a colleague came across long-buried papers about it and told him, "You've got to make this film."

Mostly German or Austrian Jews who fled Hitler's Europe, the Ritchie boys got their name because they were among the estimated 20,000 GIs who trained in bucolic Camp Ritchie, Md., near the Blue Ridge Mountains between 1942 and 1945. The exact numbers will never be known because of the records fire. Isolated in a remote area, yet fairly close to Washington, D.C., Ritchie was well-suited for its mission. Although many recruits were classified as enemy aliens, the Army had decided that they had language skills and cultural knowledge that might be useful in the war.

The tale of the Ritchie boys recalls the secret military intelligence training of Japanese American soldiers at San Francisco's Presidio.

But the Ritchies' focus was clearly Nazi-overrun Europe. Many had only recently left Germany or arrived via England and France. They were in their teens or early 20s -- far younger than the first wave of famous German refugees such as Albert Einstein, Marlene Dietrich and Thomas Mann.

Morris Parloff, one of the few Ritchie boys born in the United States, was already a sergeant when he was ordered to Ritchie. "I was stunned," recalls Parloff, 86, who talked by phone from his home in Bethesda, Md. "This was a bunch of accented characters. What is this, I thought?"

Like Parloff, Michaels was already in the Army -- he was drafted in 1941 -- when he got orders for Ritchie, where, as one Ritchie boy put it, "the strangest collection of people" awaited him.

"Compared to all the other units I was in, it was a circus ... but a good circus," Michaels says. "The rumor was that you couldn't get promoted as an enlisted man unless you had a German accent."

Some of the recruits were decidedly unusual. Si Lewen was an artist; Klaus Mann, Thomas Mann's son, was a writer, as was Stefan Heym and publicist Hans Habe. Often, barracks discussions swirled around politics, Europe and philosophy.

Klaus Mann, writing to his mother, said, "Italian, German, French, Polish, Czech, Norwegian are spoken all over the place. And there are so many familiar faces! The place is jumping with old friends. You might think

you were in a club or a cafe in Berlin, Vienna, Paris or Budapest.”

Once, Michaels peered at a bunk, only to have a childhood friend from Leipzig pop his head from underneath the blanket. “This happened all the time at Ritchie,” Michaels recalls. “It was like a family.”

The camaraderie among the refugees, many of whom left families behind, went deep. “We were committed to this war, for personal reasons as well as ideological ones,” Guy Stern says in the film. “A spirit of messianic zeal pulsed through that outfit.”

Classes were intense, with recruits learning how to interpret aerial maps and use Morse code. They also had to memorize the entire history of German military units, including the names of officers and German equipment and tactics. They were taught interrogation techniques, as well as how to kill quickly. There were even U.S. soldiers impersonating German troops, complete with German uniforms, cardboard German tanks and even a Nazi rally at a camp hall. War games startled more than one Maryland farmer who thought the invasion had already taken place.

By D-Day in 1944, Ritchie boys, Michaels among them, were among the thousands of GIs who hit Omaha Beach in the Normandy invasion and muscled through France, interrogating captured German POWs. Others, like Werner Angress, parachuted behind enemy lines. Parloff first went to England, to be trained in psychological warfare; he ended up in Aachen, the first German town to fall to Allied forces, where his team conducted the first survey of German citizens. The study became a model for the Allied “denazification” program.

Attached in teams of six to combat divisions at or near front lines, the Ritchie boys were armed. Michaels’ team had a 30-caliber machine gun mounted to their jeep.

But their real weapons were typewriters, on which they drafted swift reports of enemy activities. Even then, it was dangerous. Lewen, who broadcast appeals to surrender in German, he dodged blasts aimed at his loudspeakers.

If war was hell, the Ritchie boys did their jobs, sometimes with humor. Stern and fellow interrogator Fred Howard played cat and mouse with German POWs, who were terrified of Russians. Stern would disguise himself as “Kommissar Krukov,” cursing in broken German. Howard played the role of the good cop and “rescued” the prisoner from “Krukov.”

Their creativity, however, always adhered to the Geneva Convention. When hearing of the revelations of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, Michaels and other Ritchie boys were shocked. “People have forgotten basic truths,” he says.

At least once, their information was ignored, allowing Germans to break through Allied lines in the Battle of the Bulge, disguised as Americans.

Speaking English with German accents proved dangerous. One Ritchie boy was fatally shot by a guard when he responded with the password in a German accent. There were other dangers -- such as of capture by German troops, especially since dog tags indicated religious faith.

At times, being Jewish in their situation, Parloff says, was just “different.” At Nordhausen, a slave labor camp he helped liberate, Parloff found inmates so completely brutalized that he could not identify with them as human beings, let alone fellow Jews. “One of them climbed up on a huge pile of ashes to show me, saying, ‘I am standing on a pile of Jewish ashes.’ I shouted at him to get off. When I got up to speak to them, I started speaking in German. Then I stopped and decided I would speak in Yiddish. But to my utter astonishment, I had completely forgotten the words. ... I’d blanked it out. I was no longer Jewish, not like that.”

After the war, the Ritchie boys picked up their lives, just as millions of GIs did. But they did it with their own flair.

Lewen became a noted painter, though the war forever changed his art. Parloff became chief of the psychotherapy research at the National Institute of Mental Health. Stern became a distinguished professor of German literature at Wayne State University. Howard became a businessman in New York City and the inventor of L’eggs pantyhose. Another Ritchie boy, Richard Schifter, represented the United States on the U.N. Security Council.

Michaels had a distinguished law career, first as an Alameda County public defender and then as an administrative law judge and chief counsel for the California Department of Social Services. With his Stuttgart, Germany-born linguist wife, he raised two sons and they now have two grandchildren.

Michaels’ once lush head of dark brown hair is thin and graying. But he still has a gleam in his eye and a way of peering at you, as if to make a point.

“Ninety percent of these refugees were Jewish,” he says. “Yet most of them didn’t view this as an intellectual vengeance against the Third Reich. Instead, they served effectively and went home, and no one talked about it. But we did do something that made a tiny bit of difference.”

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“The Ritchie Boys” is being screened as part of the Cinequest Film Festival on March 9 and 10 at 6:45 and 9:30 p.m., respectively, at Camera 12 Cinema, 201 S. Second St., in San Jose, (408) 295-3378 or [www.cinequest.org](http://www.cinequest.org), and on March 13 at 1 p.m. as part of the 2005 Sacramento Jewish Film Festival at the Crest Theatre in Sacramento, 1013 K Street, (916) 442-5189 or [www.thecrest.com](http://www.thecrest.com).

# Screen

## The Ritchie Boys

By Denis Seguin

*Dir/scr. Christian Bauer. Ger-Can. 2004. 90mins.*

**The Ritchie Boys is the documentary ideal: at once a broad canvas and an intense personal journey, as rich in historical detail as it is in humanist resonance. The film profiles the experiences of several emigre German Jews who fled their nation during Hitler's 1930s rise to power and made their way to the US, only to return to their country in the service of the US Army as key members of its psychological operations unit. Who better than a German, and a highly motivated one, to fight the Nazis?**

The title refers to Camp Ritchie, the base where this large and enthusiastic group were given their field training before being sent overseas to take part in D-Day and the ultimate defeat of Hitler's Germany.

Packed with a mesmerising intellectual and emotional heft, this is a film with potential well beyond a conventional TV release. A strong contender for an Academy Award nomination (it is one of the 12 shortlisted films), a victory at Oscar time will put it squarely where it belongs with a multi-market theatrical release. Backed by strong critical evaluations and driven by inevitable word of mouth the film should spin out to broad international distribution and lucrative ancillary. First premiered at the Hot Docs festival at Toronto in spring, it plays the Palm Springs Festival from Jan 6.

Through painstaking research Munich-based director-writer Christian Bauer has assembled a remarkable collection of subjects, many of them highly-cultivated who went on to pursue brilliant careers in science, business and the arts. Each different from the other but each is a natural raconteur. Either alone or paired for maximum effect, these elderly gentlemen are nothing short of a historian's brain trust. Their sharp-witted observations on military intelligence (an oxymoron would be the consensus), human foibles and man's inhumanity to his fellow man make for one of the most soul-searing portraits of life during wartime.

The anecdotes range from the hilarious to the horrifying to the mordantly funny. One duo, best described as a comedy double-act, worked together debriefing German PoWs. Capitalising on the Germans' fear of falling into Russian hands, one posed as a Russian liaison officer in a classic good cop-bad cop method of extracting information. Another, who spent his childhood in Paris, tells of his decision to drive with a group of army pals into the city before its official liberation by French general Charles de Gaulle. It's an intoxicating joy-ride that any viewer can relish vicariously: four young heroes in a jeep and all of Paris wide open.

As good as his talking heads are, Bauer doesn't rely entirely on them. One of the Ritchie Boys went on to become a successful artist. In a brilliant piece of narrative framing, Bauer follows him through his atelier as he executes a work inspired by his experience. As a lief motif it's a high-risk gambit, but the strength of the artwork and the power of the artist's reminiscence lifts the whole film to higher plane. He describes the sensation of war – "When a body explodes all the insides, all the shit flies out," he says, "If you just smell it you would become a pacifist."

Indeed, none of the interview subjects shy away from the harsh facts of war, from the bowel-loosening fear to the liberation of skeletal PoWs and the horrors of the concentration camps. One of the striking aspects of the piece is the absence of any glorification of the military. Not surprising, given that a number of Ritchie Boys died at the hands of trigger-happy US soldiers, confused by German-accented brothers in arms.

More than anything, it's also a testament to the tenacity of Bauer who first began researching his subject 15 years ago, and returned to in 2000 after abandoning the project through lack of funding.

**Prod co:** *Tangram Films*

**Int'l sales:** *Alliance Atlantis*

**Prods:** *Dagmar Biller, Donna Zuckerbrot*

**Cine:** *Dietrich Mangold*

**Ed:** *David Kazala*

**Sound:** *Harald Stuckmann*

**Mus:** *Aaron Davis, John Lang*



## The Ritchie Boys

(Docu - Germany - Canada)

By Robert Koehler

*An Alliance Atlantis release (in Canada) of a Tangram presentation of a Tangram and Alliance Atlantis production in cooperation with Bayerischer Rundfunk/ Westdeutscher Rundfunk/ Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk/ History Television/ Discovery Wings. Produced by Dagmar Biller, Donna Zuckerbrot. Executive producers, Christian Bauer, Patricia Phillips. Directed, written by Christian Bauer. With: Werner Angress, Victor Brombert, Philip Glaessner, Fred Howard, Si Lewen, Morris Parloff, Rudolf Michaels, Richard Schifter, Hans Spear, Guy Stern. Narrator: Michael Hanrahan. (English, German dialogue)*

**Christian Bauer's engaging „The Ritchie Boys“ captures the excitement, ironies and „good war“ feel of World War II. While documaker's unsettling „Missing Allen“ investigated a man who went missing in America, Bauer's new production rediscovers stories about the war on Fascism that are missing from history books. „Boys“ explores European refugees who came to the U.S. and were recruited for an elite intelligence force that used its collective knowledge about Germany to fight against Germany itself. A semi-finalist in the Oscar documentary race, pic should rouse considerable aud and distrib enthusiasm before launching a brawny cable invasion.**

Describing the film as a combination of talking-head interviews and wartime archival footage seems to diminish its worth as a great human tale flecked with a delicious sprinkling of sweet revenge.

Bauer's real achievement -- and great luck -- was to recruit a wonderful cadre of veterans, almost all of them brilliant, witty and fine raconteurs. Many of them went on to first-rate careers in academia, the arts and business after the war. Hearing their memories is like listening to a loved one's wartime tales around the campfire.

Before the U.S. joined the war in 1941, Europeans fleeing Fascism found refuge Stateside, but they were considered security risks. Somewhere along the line, however, the D.C. bureaucracy concluded these same suspicious emigres could be uniquely valuable in the war effort.

The Military Intelligence Training Center at Fort Ritchie, Md., an anonymous row of barracks in bucolic farmland (but crucially close to the capital), was set up to train men fluent in at least one major Euro language in the skills of everything from interrogation to slitting the enemy's throat.

Because many of the men were both German intellectuals and Jewish, explains vet Guy Stern, „a spirit of missionary zeal filled the outfit.“ The men

describe a bond that formed, both because of their intense drive to rid their homeland of Hitler, and a sense, as cohort and artist Si Lewin terms it, that they were all misfits in a macho all-American army. Some, like Stern and Fred Howard, remained paired together to the end of the war -- and remained friends in the peace.

Training is vividly described, and filled with amusing details (shown in archived footage) of „the Boys“ participating in surprise war games with fellow Yank troops dressed up as Nazis -- the costumed troops inadvertently scared the pants off unsuspecting civilian neighbors.

This is just the tip of a treasure-trove of anecdotes that should have savvy screenwriters and producers scrambling to devise a dramatic feature version of these Euro-Americans' adventures.

Bauer's camera loves these guys. As they relate their first contacts with battle (some at Normandy on D-Day), however, the easy smiles and jokes fade and fear becomes visible on their wizened faces. Werner Angress' account of his first-ever parachute jump over Normandy and his betrayal by a French farmer is worthy of an episode of „Combat,“ just as Victor Brombert's tale of going AWOL to see his hometown of Paris just after liberation is the stuff of a Hemingway novel.

„The Ritchie Boys“ conveys all the emotional contrasts of terror and comedy shown in good war movies.

*Camera (color), Dietrich Mangold; editor, David Kazala; music, Aaron Davis, John Lang; sound, Harald Stuckmann, Sebastian Wagner; supervising sound editor, Paul Germann; research, Helen Weiss, Anna Zoellner; assistant director, Anna Zoellner. Reviewed at Laemmle Music Hall, Beverly Hills, Dec. 19, 2004. (In Palm Springs and Cinequest film festivals.) Running time: 92 MIN.*

# The Hollywood Reporter

## The Ritchie Boys Intriguing documentary

By Michael Rechtshaffen

Here's a war story that even History Channel has never told: While WWII was raging overseas, back on U.S. soil a group of German-Jewish refugees who had fled the Nazis -- some as young as 15 -- were being trained in intelligence work and psychological warfare at Camp Ritchie in Maryland. They were then sent back to Europe as uniformed U.S. soldiers on a mission to break the enemy's morale.

About 60 years later, their exploits are at last revealed in „The Ritchie Boys,“ a fascinating documentary with a high entertainment quotient thanks to the fact that the film's surviving subjects prove to be some of the most articulate, not to mention wittiest, octogenarians around.

Currently making the festival rounds (it opened this year's Hotdocs Festival in Toronto, where it received a standing ovation), the German-Canadian co-production should have no trouble snagging a distributor as well as further kudos.

While director-writer Christian Bauer makes the most of whatever archival stills and footage are available, he wisely spends most of his time with the band of extremely eloquent Ritchie Boys, who would be the first to admit that they weren't exactly lean, mean, fighting machine material.

when interrogated by the enemy or posing as high-ranking Russian officers to coax information out of their own rattled prisoners.

All of Bauer's interviewees lucidly recall their long-buried Ritchie Boy pasts, but it is two in particular -- Guy Stern, a distinguished professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, and businessman Fred Howard, who would go on to invent L'eggs pantyhose -- whose colorful camaraderie and razor-sharp recollections lend this intriguing documentary its spirited spark.

## Film of Fort Ritchie' secret role in WWII may get Oscar nod

By DAVID DISHNEAU Associated Press Writer

CASCADE, Md. (AP) The Oscar buzz is building for a documentary with Maryland roots that plays like a World War II adventure film.

„The Ritchie Boys“ is about a group of German-speaking Jews who fled Europe for America before the war, received intelligence training at a secluded Army post in the Blue Ridge Mountains and went back overseas as interrogators and psychological warfare experts. These young draftees from cultured backgrounds embraced the chance to help defeat the Nazis, even though for some it meant participating in the destruction of their hometowns. „I had run away the moment Hitler came in. I felt I had to get back and do what I could,“ Si Lewen says in the film, which was screened Sunday at the former Fort Ritchie Army post in Cascade, about 60 miles north of Washington.

Two of the film's subjects, now in their 80s, attended the event. Guy Stern, now a professor of German literature at Wayne State University in Detroit, and Philip Glaessner, a retired government economist who lives in Bethesda, reminisced, signed autographs and marveled that their war stories might be Oscar-worthy. „I would really be cheered by it,“ Stern said.

The movie, written and directed by German filmmaker Christian Bauer, is among 12 documentaries from which the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences will select five nominees Jan. 25. Unlike competitors such as „Super Size Me“ and „Tupac: Resurrection,“ Bauer's film hasn't been released commercially. Bauer said an Oscar nod could seal a distribution deal. The 90-minute, English-language film has won favorable reviews, including praise from Variety that it „conveys all the emotional contrasts of terror and comedy shown in good war movies.“

The thousands of young men who trained at Fort Ritchie – then called Camp Ritchie – from 1942 to 1945 experienced a little bit of Hollywood at the post. Props, including plywood German tanks and a replica of a German village, were built to help prepare them for the war zone. U.S. soldiers played enemy troops in German, Italian and Japanese uniforms. And an Army captain portraying Adolf Hitler gave rousing speeches in the same auditorium where the movie was screened. „Nothing that happened to me came as a surprise after that training in Ritchie,“ Morris Parloff, one of the few American-born Ritchie Boys, says in the film.

They experienced plenty. D-Day. The liberation of Paris. The opening of the concentration camps. Some met Marlene Dietrich; others became prisoners of war. In the film, Lewen, now a New York artist known for his Holocaust-themed drawings, vividly recounts the beach landing at Normandy. Once ashore, he used a loudspeaker to persuade German troops to surrender – a risky job. „All the Germans had to do was just shoot toward where the sound came from.“ Stern and fellow Ritchie Boy Fred Howard were interrogators attached to an infantry unit. They developed a good cop-bad cop routine that included Stern posing as „Commissar Krukov,“ a supposed Russian army liaison to whom captured German soldiers were told they would be referred unless they cooperated. Howard, now a New York-based industrial designer, said the Ritchie Boys strictly adhered to the Geneva Convention governing treatment of POWs. By comparison, the treatment of some Iraqi detainees by U.S. forces at Abu Ghraib prison was „shameful,“ he told The Associated Press. „It was done by people with no imagination,“ Howard said.

Bauer acknowledged that „with the war in Iraq, suddenly the experiences of these old guys took on a second meaning.“ He said he worked for more than 15 years on the film, which stemmed from his research on the exodus of intellectuals and artists from Germany to America in the 1930s and early 40s. „I'm celebrating what is good about America,“ Bauer said. „The Second World War is one the most outstanding events in the history of the 20th century, and I think when we look ahead 300 to 500 years, the Second World War will still be that one decisive moment in the history of the 20th century.“

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On the Net: „The Ritchie Boys“: <http://www.ritchieboys.com>

# The Washington Post

## Unsung Heroes of World War II Feted in Film Refugee Soldiers Provided Insight Into German Culture

Mary Otto, Washington Post Staff Writer

CASCADE, Md. Yesterday afternoon, octogenarian Guy Stern found himself back in the gymnasium at Fort Ritchie where, more than 60 years ago as a young German Jewish refugee-turned American GI, he prepared to go to war against the Nazis.

He was the one member of his family who escaped Europe alive. And here at what was then known as Camp Ritchie, an Army intelligence school set in the hills 70 miles northwest of Washington, he and other unlikely yet courageous young men were trained to penetrate the evil that had taken hold of their homeland -- with typewriters, with language skills, with sometimes antic gifts for subterfuge.

They were Ritchie Boys. Many of them, like Stern, were Jewish intellectuals who fled to the United States. Although officially considered „enemy aliens,“ they also became an essential element in the Allied war against fascism because they brought with them an intimate knowledge of the enemy culture. „We were fighting an American war, and we were also fighting an intensely personal war,“ Stern recalled. „We were in that war with every inch of our being.“

Now their story has become a celebrated documentary film. „The Ritchie Boys“ is short-listed for an Academy Award nomination. And in another unusual twist to an unusual story, the film -- which has not been released commercially -- received a premiere yesterday at the now-closed Fort Ritchie in this rural western Maryland community where the Ritchie Boys' training began.

The film, made by German director Christian Bauer, has won praise for its poignant exploration of these men, their lives and allegiances. And the project has been credited with helping revive a subtle and little-told story of World War II, one personally important to Bauer, 57. When he was growing up, the director said, he was haunted by the „cultural gap“ created by the Nazi years: the loss of „all the wonderful, creative people who were killed or had to leave.“ „I wanted to bridge that gap I felt so vividly,“ the director said in a telephone interview.

When Bauer heard about Camp Ritchie, he began to track the refugees who were trained in military intelligence there. The Ritchie Boys could have been victims of the Nazis, he said. Instead, by dint of creativity and courage, „they were victors.“ By questioning prisoners

of war and working with civilians in occupied towns and cities, they were able to provide the Allies with crucial information because of their insights into German life. „That's what has been missing in Iraq,“ Bauer said. „That's what the Ritchie Boys had.“

After the war, many of them returned to the United States and went on to a variety of successful careers. Stern settled in Detroit and became a professor of German literature. In Stern's days at Camp Ritchie, Nazi propaganda speeches were reenacted in the gym, and war games were played out in a mock German village on the grounds. Yesterday, the crowd that filled the gym to watch the film offered a standing ovation to Stern and another veteran Ritchie Boy, Philip Glaessner, a Bethesda economist who also attended the premiere. Glaessner said he feels a great empathy for the soldiers deployed in Iraq, struggling to understand that country. „My heart goes out to those guys,“ he said.

Another Ritchie Boy veteran, psychologist Morris Parloff of Bethesda, was recovering from a fall and could not attend the premier. But he said in an interview from his home that his wartime experiences are seared in his memory. Because he was American-born and fluent in German, he was placed in charge of a unit of the refugee soldiers. „They were brilliant, wonderful people,“ he said. „There was immediate trust. These were fellow Jews,“ Parloff said. „There was a camaraderie.“

The premiere was a bittersweet triumph for Cascade resident Karl Weissenbach, who helped bring the film to his home town. Weissenbach, himself German-born and a history lover, is director of the Nixon Presidential Materials staff at the National Archives. He said he fell in love with the film for its sensitive treatment of a local history story with worldwide significance. Weissenbach is also the head of the Cascade Committee, a citizens group interested in preserving the historic value of Fort Ritchie. The Army closed the base in 1997, and the property was sold in the summer to Columbia-based Corporate Office Properties Trust, which plans to develop the site.

Weissenbach obtained a copy of the film and organized a premiere here as a „community celebration“ to honor the Ritchie Boys and Fort Ritchie. „I want people to come here, sit in the gym that is falling apart and think: ‚This is our legacy.‘ „

# The Boston Globe

## MFA screens Oscar hopeful ,The Ritchie Boys'

By Rebecca Ostriker

You have surely been there: It's Oscar night, and the bejeweled actress with the big envelope is saying: "The nominees for best documentary are . . ." She squints into the distance and reads a list of films you never saw.

Here's your chance to see one. "The Ritchie Boys," by Germany's Christian Bauer, is among 12 feature documentaries short-listed for Oscar nominations, and it's getting a quick round of pre-release screenings before the end of the year. Locally it's at the Museum of Fine Arts tonight at 7.

The film tells the story of an elite World War II US intelligence unit of mostly German Jewish refugees trained at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. These were young men who'd fled Nazi-occupied Europe, and their knowledge of the German language and psyche made them well suited to the psychological warfare and information-gathering they'd conduct. They'd grown up with Germans, played on the same sports teams; now they were going back in American uniforms. But they were no soldiers, as several of them -- now in their 80s, gathered to reminisce on screen, and apparently as quick-witted as ever -- admit.

"Our teams were bright, available, not always courageous, not always expert warriors, but certainly our heart was in it," says Victor Brombert, whose teenage years in Paris are perhaps reflected in his stylish cravat. "In any other military setting we would have been misfits, outsiders," adds Si Lewen, now a white-whiskered artist, who served dangerous duty on the front lines, urging German soldiers to surrender from a truck equipped with loudspeakers.

The documentary is full of striking period footage, some of it never seen before. There's a dreamlike flotilla of parachutes dropping into a Normandy orchard, a snow-blind scene from the Battle of the Bulge, the firing-squad execution of captured German spies.

But the anecdotes -- both entertaining and chilling -- form the film's heart. One Ritchie Boy says he felt invulnerable, like a character in a cartoon strip who would always come back the next week. Another relates how he saw Marlene Dietrich entertaining US troops and swept her off in a Jeep to see German POWs, who fell all over themselves in a riot of clicking heels to kiss her hand. Guy Stern and Fred Howard, who interrogated prisoners together, laughingly recall their good cop, bad cop routine, in which one played a frightening Russian "Kommissar Krukov."

Lewen, whose art is haunted by the death and destruction he witnessed, puts some of the horror in graphic terms. When fear took over, he says, color disappeared. "The sky, which a minute ago could have been blue, suddenly is just white. Blood is not red, but black," he says. "Maybe that's why in much of my work, which deals with war, it's mostly black-and-white."

# THE JEWISH JOURNAL

## The 'Boys' at the Front

By Tom Tugend

Werner Angress was attached to a U.S. paratroop platoon winging behind German lines on D-Day, when the sergeant told him he'd be the first to jump. "But I've never jumped before in my life," Angress protested. "That's OK," the sergeant said, "the newest guy always goes first."

Angress was one of "The Ritchie Boys," a special Army unit made up mainly of young Jewish refugees from Germany, whose World War II exploits have been recorded for the first time in a documentary by German filmmaker Christian Bauer.

The German-Canadian co-production is one of 12 documentaries still in competition for Academy Award honors.

The Ritchie Boys got their names from Camp Ritchie in Maryland, where the ex-refugees reported for duty at the Military Intelligence Training Camp. From the beaches of Normandy until the end of the war, the men served on and behind the front lines as interrogators, psychological warriors, authors of anti-Nazi leaflets and broadcasts, experts on the inner workings of the German war machine and liberators of concentration camps.

Urging German soldiers to surrender from trucks equipped with loudspeakers, they became a favorite target of enemy artillery, but they encountered their greatest danger in the Battle of the Bulge. During a last desperate push, the Wehrmacht infiltrated English-speaking German soldiers in GI uniforms into the U.S. lines. The infiltrators often spoke English with the same German accent as the boys. In the heat of the battle, the Ritchie boys were likely to be shot by their fellow GIs or, worse, by the Germans.

Ten of the Ritchie veterans, now mostly in their 80s, recall their experiences in the 90-minute film. Not all the recollections are grim. With the fall of Berlin, some of the boys concocted a story that they had captured Hitler's personal toilet and latrine orderly, which made headlines across the world.

"The Ritchie Boys" documentary adds a little known chapter to the story of Jewish service in the fight against Nazi tyranny.

# Los Angeles Times

## New Light on WW II

By Kevin Thomas

Sixty years after D-day, it hardly seems possible, yet outstanding documentaries on World War II continue to be made, each illuminating yet another hitherto nearly forgotten aspect of the conflict. Christian Bauer's „The Ritchie Boys“ is one of the best. Its title refers to Camp Ritchie in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Maryland, which in the summer of 1942 became the Military Intelligence Center, where more than 6,000 young European immigrants, mostly German Jews, received intensive training in combat and intelligence and then were sent back to Europe to participate in the invasion of Normandy.

By and large, the Ritchie Boys were intellectuals, and the men, still vital in their 80s, interviewed by Bauer went on to postwar careers in the arts, sciences and business and government as U.S. citizens. After landing in Normandy they served as translators and interrogators, and their introduction of psychological warfare saved lives and shortened the war.

Most of Bauer's interviewees, including two who survived capture by the Germans, are blessed with the sustaining gallows humor of survivors. Yet they remain shaken to this day by all they encountered, especially the destruction of their hometowns and above all the liberation of the concentration camps as they were confronted with the horrors of the Holocaust.



## The Ritchie Boys

By Karen Tisch

It's the winter of 1942-43 and the Allies are feverishly preparing for D-Day. Stateside, the army is forming an elite intelligence unit at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. The members are primarily German Jewish intellectuals who fled to the US to avoid Nazi persecution and have now volunteered to return to Europe to provide a window into the mind of the enemy. Their mission: to break the German army's morale.

In his latest feature-length documentary, veteran filmmaker Christian Bauer brings to light the extraordinary and little known story of the Ritchie Boys, the inventors of modern psychological warfare. For the first time, the surviving 'boys' speak on camera about their rigorous intelligence training, their experiences on the frontlines and their unit's special assignments, including the creation of propaganda intended to persuade German soldiers to surrender.

The film's rich visual style melds archival footage, newsreels and training films from the era with photographs, artwork and mementos from the boys' personal collections. A work of incredible research, maturity and finesse, *The Ritchie Boys* is, above all, an incredible story of espionage and courage, revealing the hidden history of a band of unlikely soldiers brought together by their dazzling minds and passionate commitment to fighting Nazism.

REPORTAGE

**The long journey back home**  
As a teenager Werner Angress escaped Hitler, as a young man he fought for America against Nazi-Germany. As an retired man he returned to the city where he was born: Berlin. The 83-year old former professor for history is one of the very few Ritchie Boys who live in Germany today.

# At War Against Their Home

By Christian Bauer

**Marching through bullets**  
On June 6, 1944 at 6:30 am Allied forces land in Normandy.





**Operation "Liberation"**

For four months lasted Werner Angress' training at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. Shortly before D-day he was assigned to an Airborne Division. He knew that he would have to jump behind the German lines.



**Jump into the unknown**

The night before D-Day, 23-year old Werner Angress got on board of a C47 for his very first parachute jump. The landing was soft. But Werner lost contact with his unit.

# Country

*On D-Day the secret mission of the "Ritchie Boys" began: German emigrants in US uniforms fought against Hitler's Wehrmacht*

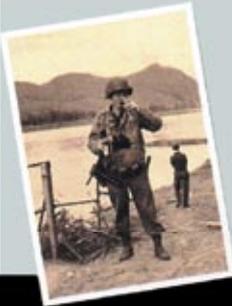


**Swimming to the frontlines**

For months the soldiers had practised for this day: Photographer Robert Copa, pioneer of the embedded journalists, shot about 100 pictures of landing at Omaha Beach. Only few are preserved today.

**The war in sketches**  
In three sketchbooks soldier and artist Si Lewen kept his impressions. Balloons protected the invasion fleet against the German air force.

**The art to survive**  
A gun instead of a paintbrush: Artist Si Lewen served on the Western front – At the Rhine, border between Germany and France



"I wasn't a real soldier – and I did not want to think like a soldier."

**T**he paratroopers of the 508th Regiment on board the C47 have blackened their faces and swallowed pills to overcome their fear. They're on their way to France, destined to jump in behind the German lines. The nose of their aircraft is decorated with a cartoon: Donald Duck in swimming trunks, ready to dive. The caption reads: "Son of the Beach". Staff Sergeant Werner Angress knows that it's not going to be that easy. It's the early hours of June 6th, 1944 – D-Day.

In only a few days Werner Angress will be 24. Seven years ago he fled Germany and enlisted in the United States military. Now he is sitting beside the open door of a C47, waiting to make his very first jump, at night, under fire, without any training at all.

Over the Normandy coast the enemy anti aircraft fire is becoming determined and deadly. Werner Angress is watching as the airplane next to them is being hit and plunges. He could easily have chosen a safer way to France. He has a special assignment: He's a Ritchie Boy, a German fighting against Germans.

They called themselves Ritchie Boys because they had graduated from the Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie, Maryland – a school for intelligence, propaganda, and psychological warfare. For those who knew Ritchie, this camp was the most unusual of all US Army installations during the Second World War. Many of the trainees were young emigrants from Germany and Austria, most of them of Jewish origin. Surprisingly their story has remained untold until today even – though it is of the kind from which heroic epics are fashioned. They were hounded by the Nazis, fled their homeland under threat of death, and returned to Europe in American uniforms.

Werner Angress hasn't swallowed his pill. He will need all his senses. He has the right to refuse to jump this first time. If he loses his courage he would be taken back in the empty C47 to England. But then he would have deserted his comrades who have become a second family to him.

Dropping through the air under his chute he has a dream-like vision. Below him in the light of the full moon is an orchard. A terror-stricken white horse is galloping between the apple trees, tearing its way from fence to fence, trapped. Werner Angress' parachute settles into a tree, tangled in the branches. His landing is soft, but he is alone. He will find out much later that his pilot had panicked and veered from the prescribed course, dropping Werner's unit far from its target.

June 6th 1944 is the day for which the Ritchie Boys had yearned and prepared themselves for years. They had escaped the Nazis and helplessly they had to watch as Hitler's war machine conquered Europe piece by piece. Only when Germany declared war to the USA three days after Pearl Harbor, they were released from their agonizing wait. No longer would they flee. Now they could defend themselves with weapons in their hands.

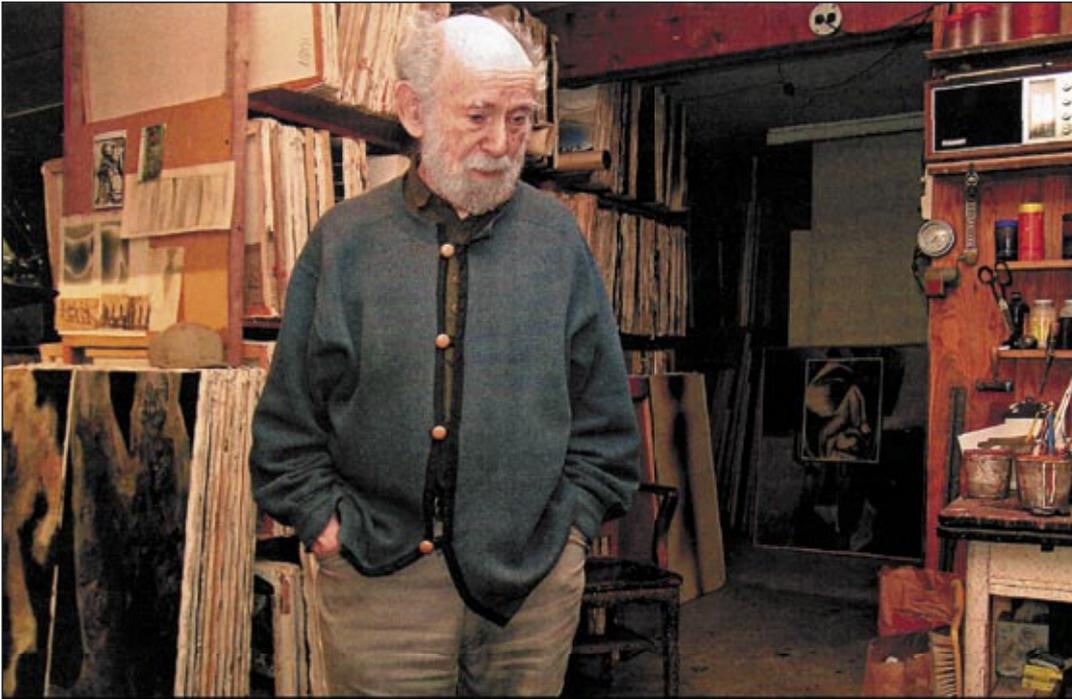
It was not a given of military thinking that German-speaking emigrants like Angress would be sought and chosen for training at Camp Ritchie. They were "enemy aliens" after all. German agents could be among them. But the Pentagon recognized the potential of these young men. They were highly motivated. America had saved their lives, and they understood the language of the enemy and his psychology better than anybody else. ▶

## The Ritchie Boys: The untold story of wartime heroes.



### Military training for intellectuals

In Camp Ritchie, Maryland, young immigrants from Europe prepared for their mission. The prominent writers Klaus Mann and Stefan Heym were part of the team.



### The intellectual soldier

After Si Lewen joined the US Army, he was trained in propaganda and psychological warfare in Camp Ritchie.



### The dead never sleep

Si Lewen's experiences at the frontlines, and his visit of Buchenwald have marked him for life. War has always been a subject of his art. Now, at 85, the artist is working on an autobiographical series of paintings.

**I wanted to do my job as good as possible.** - Si Lewen

Most soldiers at Fort Ritchie spoke English with a heavy accent, but their IQs were far above the average of other American units. "In any other military setting we would have been misfits, outsiders," explains Si Lewen, a painter who grew up in Berlin. "Instead of the usual gossip, we discussed politics, philosophy and art. We were intellectuals." The punch-card machines at the Pentagon sent the elite of the exiles to Camp Ritchie. One of them was Klaus Mann, the son of the Nobel Prize winner Thomas Mann. In a letter to his mother he wrote, "Italian, German, French, Polish, Czech, Norwegian are spoken all over the place. And there are so many familiar faces! The place is jumping with old friends! You might think you were in a club or a café in Berlin, Vienna, Paris, or Budapest." Among the leading figures in Ritchie were also the publicist Hans Habe and the writer Stefan Heym who had just sold his novel *Hostages* to Hollywood. Many years later Heym became the chairman of the first German Bundestag after the reunion.

Many Ritchie Boys were not just intellectuals, but also, fundamentally, pacifists. Si Lewen had already left Germany on his own in 1933 when he was only fourteen years old. "I hate all wars," he says, "but this was different. I had run away as soon as Hitler came into power. But I knew I had to go back and do whatever I could."

Si Lewen landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy shortly after the invasion had begun. His task was especially dangerous. He was to drive a truck with loudspeakers as close to the German lines as possible, broadcasting an appeal to surrender. Standing on the ship's rail tears were streaming down his face. "In my wildest dreams of revenge I wouldn't have imagined to return to Europe with such an armada of

battle ships, cruisers, destroyers and troop ships." He kept a record of the scene in his sketchbook, the tense faces of the GIs, the dead bodies on the beach. "My whole body was shaking, my heart was racing that I thought my chest would burst. I prayed."

At about the same time Guy Stern landed on Utah Beach. He also had come to the USA alone in 1937 at the age of fifteen. He belonged to an IPW-team, which was to interrogate German prisoners of war. At Ritchie Guy Stern, Werner Angress, and others like them had to memorize the complete history of German units, including the names of their officers. They studied German equipment and tactics and knew them as well as any German sergeant major. Dozens of times they practiced interrogation methods at Camp Ritchie, knowing how to threaten, to flatter, and to fraternize. "We worked harder, both in Camp Ritchie and in the field than anyone could have driven us," says Guy Stern.

While Guy Stern interrogated his first prisoners in Normandy, Werner Angress struggled behind the German lines to find his unit. Every day more and more dispersed GIs gathered around him. During daylight they hid in the woods. Their emergency rations were soon exhausted, and the hunger became unbearable. On the eighth day a French farmer, whom they had paid to provide them with food, betrayed them to the Germans. A German unit surrounded the lost soldiers and opened fire. Werner Angress was wounded on the left thigh.

The German officer who interrogated him after they had surrendered had no idea that this blond-haired, blue-eyed American was a countryman, a Jew, born and raised in Berlin. ▶



### Action, please!

A film team is shooting a mock arrest for a military training film at Camp Ritchie.

### A serious Game

The Germans are coming: US soldiers dressed up in German uniforms give the training a realistic look.





### German for Life

Guy Stern landed in France as an interrogator for German POWs. Today the 82 year old is Professor for German Studies in Detroit.

### Günther turns into Guy

At 15 Guy came to America alone. The family he left behind was murdered by the Nazis. During his High School years in St. Louis he earned his living as a busboy.



"I was terribly squeamish. But when I saw the dismembered bodies on the beach, I was suddenly cured." – Guy Stern

But Angress' name raised suspicion. "Are you of German descent? Where were you born?" Angress didn't want to name a big city like New York or Chicago. Lynchburg, Va. seemed less risky. The German jumped up, excited: "Lynchburg? I was there! In 1926, as a young man!" Angress was shocked. But quick on the uptake he asked, "Have you been back since then?" The German shook his head, and Angress knew that he was saved. "Sir, Lynchburg has changed a great deal since then!" Playing chess in a bunker under siege in Cherbourg, he made friends with his captor.

When the Ritchie Boys returned to Europe they were in far greater danger than the regular GI. Though they were supposed to carry no photos, letters, or souvenirs of their earlier life in Germany in their packs, the American dog tags included the soldier's name, his serial number, and an initial indicating his religion. Werner Angress decided to let his be marked with a "P" for Protestant rather than an "H" for Hebrew. His friends didn't want to accept that and accused him of insufficient pride and courage. He replied dryly, "I'm going to the front, not you." This precaution now saved him from deportation. After twelve days, on Werner Angress' 24th birthday, the Germans surrendered to the Americans. Werner was free. Before he said farewell to the Wehrmacht officer, Werner decided not to reveal his true identity. "I couldn't do that to him. I thanked him and told him I hoped that he would be treated just as well as he had treated us." He never saw the German again.

The Second World War was the first war in the age of mass media. Though the British were a few years ahead in the arts of intelligence and propaganda, the Americans applied their principles of industrial production to the training of officers and troops. Nearly thirteen

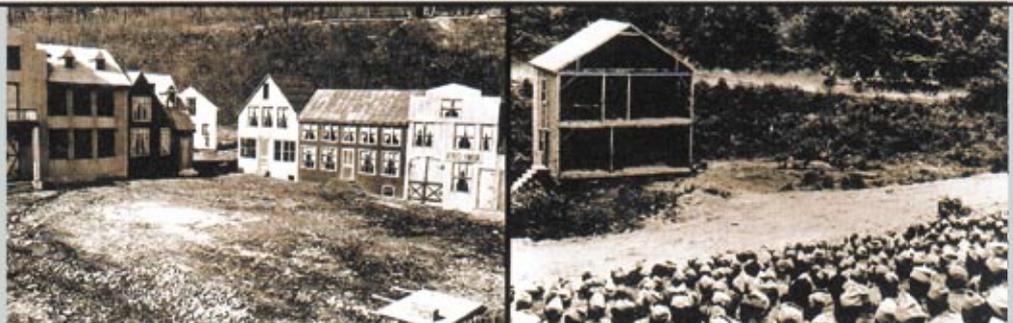
thousand GIs passed through courses at Camp Ritchie between 1942 and 1945. Hollywood-influenced methods of teaching supplemented the industrial assembly line approach. For motivation the instructors showed films like "Kill or Be Killed" by the Ritchie Boy Hanus Burger from Prague. They arranged regular and realistic stage enactments, depicting the dissemination of military propaganda and the interrogation of German prisoners, and trained the future propaganda officers in the plywood scenery of a small German town. In the vicinity of Ritchie suddenly German soldiers would appear out of the underbrush. They frightened the farmers in this little backwater of Maryland. They must have thought the German invasion had already begun. But these were Americans in German uniforms, trained in German tactics, who provided "the enemy" for the Ritchie Boys.

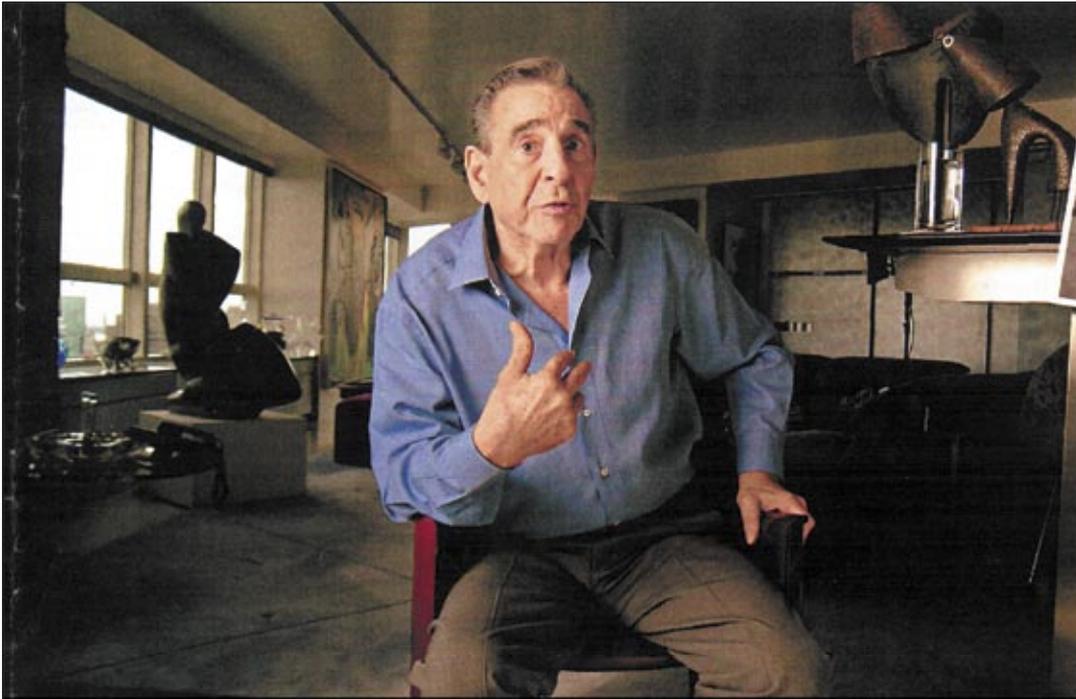
Most unsavory of all was the reenactment at Camp Ritchie of a Nazi Rally. Imitating the Berlin Sports Arena, the Camp's hall was decorated with Swastikas, and Nazi banners were hung from balcony to balcony. Hitler was played by an actor with a glued-on moustache, and Goebbels and Goering were also represented. The Horst-Wessel Song was sung, and the Sieg-Heil salutes could be heard far down the quiet little valley.

During combat the Ritchie Boys operated in a team of six people – three men in a jeep each. They were most successful when they interrogate the German soldiers in the shock of imprisonment. "If necessary we interrogated 48 hours straight, keeping ourselves awake with coffee pills or whatever it took," says Guy Stern. The Ritchie Boys gathered information about the strength of the enemy, their equipment, the position of their guns, but also about their fighting morale. ▶

### A German village in Maryland

A fake German village served as training ground for the Ritchie Boys. The new classes watch the action.





**A serious game**  
 Fred Howard in Germany:  
 He interrogated captured SS-men,  
 threatening to turn them over to the  
 Russians – and got the  
 information he sought.

**After the war**  
 Fred Howard, who was Fritz  
 Ehrlicher before his emigration  
 in 1939, is a successful designer and  
 businessman in New York.

**“Europe was raped by a well-oiled military machine.” – Fred Howard**

They forwarded their reports to military headquarters. The typewriter is their weapon – not the gun.

When the constant bombardment of the German supply lines did not show the expected success, Guy Stern interrogated the railway workers amongst the prisoners and learned that the Wehrmacht kept stock of prefabricated railway tracks at their disposal that allowed repairs within hours. When the front moved into Germany, there was fear that the Germans might use gas like in WW I as a last resort. He devised a simple yet very effective method to determine whether the enemy is preparing for gas warfare. He had the prisoners lined up and called: “Everybody with a gas mask: step forward!” Most of the Germans didn’t move. Guy received a Bronze Star for his mass interrogation method.

According to the Geneva Convention the German POWs only had to provide their name, rank, and serial number. But the Ritchie Boys were well prepared for the cat-and-mouse game necessary to pry out more information. Their trump card was every German’s fear of being sent to Russia. Guy Stern disguised himself as “Kommissar Krukov”. He wore a fantasy uniform and carried out the interrogation, shouting and cursing at the POW in broken German. Behind him in his tent was a large photo of Stalin with a forged dedication, “To My Dear Friend Krukov, Joe Stalin.” Guy’s partner Fred Howard, whose name was Fritz Ehrlich prior to 1939, played the role of the good American. He would rescue the German officer from being sent to Siberia in exchange for good information.

Not long after the landing in Normandy Guy Stern discovered in the stack of pay books taken from new POWs the name of an officer

from his hometown who had been a buddy in his sports club. He decided to interrogate him. In the middle of the night the German was brought into Guy Stern’s poorly lit tent. Suspicious by Stern’s detailed questions the man tried to recognize his interrogator in the shadows, but in vain. Just one question Stern didn’t ask, “What has become of my family.

The beginning of the Battle of the Bulge shortly before Christmas 1944 produced the greatest challenge for the Ritchie Boys. All along the front Ritchie Boy teams had gathered information about an impending German attack. But their warnings went unheard. The Germans broke through, and SS units in American uniforms penetrated the American lines. These fake Americans posed a deadly threat for the Ritchie Boys. With their strange accents the Ritchie Boys easily could be mistaken as Germans in disguise. Parols like “whistling thistle” – nearly unspeakable for German tongues – increased the danger.

A trivial incident nearly cost Werner Angress his life: When he saw two GIs washing a plucked chicken in the water supply of a farmer, he calls at them in English but with a heavy German accent: „Leave it – the people here are drinking from it!” Suddenly he stares in the muzzles of two carbines. Only his comrade’s persuasion saves him from being shot as a spy.

A couple of days later Angress himself had the finger on the trigger. He was ordered to threaten a German POW with execution if he did not provide valid information about the size and position of his unit. ▶



**Typically German**  
 Replicas of German  
 tanks, made of wood  
 and cardboard, were  
 part of the training in  
 Camp Ritchie.

**ZWEI WORTE  
 die 850 000  
 Leben retteten**

**„I SÖRRENDER“** sagten allein im Westen  
 850 000 Deiner Kameraden, weil sie wussten,  
 dass ihre Lage hoffnungslos war.

**„I SÖRRENDER“** bedeutete für 850 000  
 Deiner Kameraden, dass sie aus der Hölle der  
 Materialschlacht in Sicherheit gelangten.

**„I SÖRRENDER“** bedeutete für 850 000  
 Deiner Kameraden, dass sie die Heimat nach  
 Kriegsende gesund und wohlbehalten wiedersehen.

**Messages raining  
 from the sky**  
 How do you persuade  
 the Germans to surrender?  
 Drop flyers above their  
 lines. “I surrender” spelt  
 in phonetic German.

### Holocaust horror

Germany had surrendered, but the full horror was discovered only now. Ritchie Boys on a visit at Camp Dachau.



The Ritchie Boys were victors – not victims

A moment that even after sixty years fills the German emigre with shame: "I counted to eight. The poor guy started to talk. But he didn't know any more than we did." Till today Angress is shocked that at this moment he might have become a murderer.

In May 1945, when Hitler's Reich collapsed, Si Lewen arrived in Buchenwald. „I was wondering whether I would know anybody there. But even if so, I could not make them out. They were unrecognizable as human beings." Lewen broke down and checked into the nearest field hospital. Total amnesia shrouds the months after his return to the United States. "For years" he says, I couldn't shake a German's hand at all. "There was always the question: Where were you when all this happened? Only now I came to realize that by saving lives, I saved German lives, too. And, I'm proud of it!"

Shortly after Germany surrendered, Guy Stern drove to his hometown Hildesheim for the first time in eight years. It was a sad return. Allied bombers had almost completely destroyed the town in the last weeks of the war; the streets of his childhood were buried under the debris. Guy Stern still hoped to see his sister, his brother and his parents again. But he had to learn in the months after that they perished in the Warsaw Ghetto.

The Ritchie Boys played an important role in the early years of post-war Germany. They were active in the de-Nazification and at the Nuremberg Trials, in military government and administration, in rebuilding Germany's radio and press.

Only a handful of the soldiers trained in Camp Ritchie stayed in their old home country. Most returned to the USA and started civilian lives, as Americans at last. The beginning of the Cold War cast a shadow over their return. Those who had left Nazi-Germany for political reasons were disappointed that the wartime alliance between the Americans and the Soviets was shattered. They realized that they might have won the war, but not the peace they hoped for.

The Ritchie Boys were successful through their ingeniousness and creativity. They reacted fast and in unconventional ways. Their war was different. What would normally be unacceptable in any army – disrespect for an empty routine and formulaic discipline – proved essential to their success. Perhaps as a consequence they all built

remarkable careers in science, academics, and business. They became professors, attorneys and judges, ambassadors, journalists and media figures.

Fred Howard now lives in New York; he became a successful designer and business man. Guy Stern is Distinguished Professor of German at Wayne State University in Detroit. He has been decorated in Germany with both the Goethe Medal and the German Cross of Merit. Werner Angress was a Professor at the Department of History at Berkeley and SUNY. He returned to his old hometown and today lives in Berlin. His fight against Hitler had a personal happy ending: He found his mother and brothers in Amsterdam where they survived the war in hiding.

Si Lewen was a rising star in the New York art scene in the fifties. But the experiences in the war never lost its hold of him. Up to today he is painting the terrors that torment his soul. "No picture, no movie can recreate war", he says. "There is a smell, a stink to war. When bodies explode and all the insides fly out, together with the gunpowder, there's a terrible stink. If people would just smell it they would become pacifists." ■

**AWARDS FOR *THE RITCHIE BOYS***

*Shortlist Best Feature Length Documentary*

THE 2005 ACADEMY AWARDS

*Audience Award Best Documentary*

PALM BEACH JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL 2006

*Audience Award Best Documentary*

HONG KONG JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL 2005

*Jerusalem Municipality Price,*

*Category Jewish Experience*

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