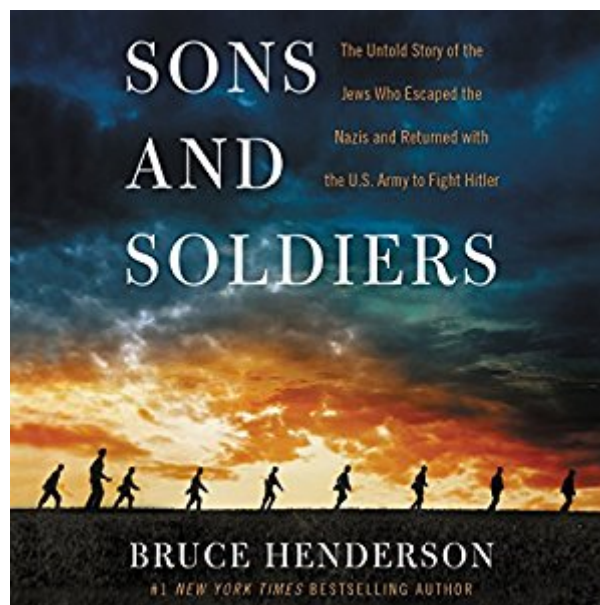




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# Sons And Soldiers: The Untold Story Of The Jews Who Escaped The Nazis And Returned With The U.S. Army To Fight Hitler



## Synopsis

Joining the ranks of *Unbroken*, *Band of Brothers*, and *The Boys in the Boat*, the little-known saga of young German Jews, dubbed the Ritchie Boys, who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s, came of age in America, and returned to Europe at enormous personal risk as members of the US Army to play a key role in the Allied victory. In 1942 the US Army unleashed one of its greatest secret weapons in the battle to defeat Adolf Hitler: training nearly 2,000 German-born Jews in special interrogation techniques and making use of their mastery of the German language, history, and customs. Known as the Ritchie Boys, they were sent in small, elite teams to join every major combat unit in Europe, where they interrogated German POWs and gathered crucial intelligence that saved American lives and helped win the war. Though they knew what the Nazis would do to them if they were captured, the Ritchie Boys eagerly joined the fight to defeat Hitler. As they did, many of them did not know the fates of their own families left behind in occupied Europe. Taking part in every major campaign in Europe, they collected key tactical intelligence on enemy strength, troop and armored movements, and defensive positions. A postwar army report found that more than 60 percent of the credible intelligence gathered in Europe came from the Ritchie Boys. Bruce Henderson draws on personal interviews with many surviving veterans and extensive archival research to bring this never-before-told chapter of the Second World War to light. *Sons and Soldiers* traces their stories from childhood and their escapes from Nazi Germany, through their feats and sacrifices during the war, to their desperate attempts to find their missing loved ones in war-torn Europe. *Sons and Soldiers* is an epic story of heroism, courage, and patriotism that will not soon be forgotten.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The second most astonishing thing about this account is that after deducing that someone (or doubtless several highly-placed someones) in the bowels of the Big Green Army Machine in the early days of WWII had the good sense and forethought to utilize that very specialized human capital presented to the US Army in the form of young male German-Jewish refugees in the most useful possible manner is that it took this long to produce a book focusing on their experiences. There was a well-received film documentary *The Ritchie Boys* in recent years, but since the work done by the so-called "Ritchie Boys" was in the service of military intelligence, well, loose lips sink ships, and people doing quiet work behind the scenes usually are prone to keep on being quiet for years afterwards. Camp Ritchie was the wartime training facility for US Army Intelligence. Any serviceman who was discovered to be fluent in German, French, Russian, Italian, Polish or other useful languages were sent there for special training; intelligence operations, counterintelligence, interrogation, psychological warfare and interrogation. Almost fifteen percent of those who passed through Camp Ritchie were German-Jewish refugees, fresh from the Old Country, rather than second or third-generation descendants of ethnic Germans who had held onto their original language. This narrative concentrates on the experiences of six of them; all of whom had escaped from Germany as boys and teenagers, some by the skin of their teeth. Most had left parents, siblings, and close kin behind, one had been briefly imprisoned in Dachau after Kristallnacht. They were united in their patriotism as newly-naturalized Americans, as well as in their hatred for Hitler and the Nazi system a regime which had persecuted their families, reduced them to poverty and exile and finally denied them any rights to be considered German citizens. This account is very sensibly and logically organized; the first chapters relate the backgrounds of the six all very different, from small-town to cosmopolitan and the details of their various journeys from Germany to the United States. There, many of them settled with relatives, and continued with their schooling until the war began. And since the military had a need for their particular talents, and personal knowledge of German culture and habits of mind they were assigned to the training programs at Camp Ritchie. All of them highly intelligent and motivated they usually graduated with high ratings. The Army had the good sense to reward them with rank, expedited their citizenship, and provided a cover story in their personnel records which accounted for their fluency in German, even going so far as to change the religious classification on their dog tags. There were fears for German-born soldiers being shot

as traitors – a wholly justified, as it turned out, for two Ritchie-trained Army interrogators were captured in the German breakout at the Bulge, identified by freed German soldiers as being – Jews from Berlin – and shot, rather than being treated as POWs. These six survived, however; survived parachute drops, glider landings, brief capture as a POW, the brutal winter at the Bulge, and the danger of being killed mistakenly by their own side. If not at the very pointy edge of the spear, they were somewhere on the cutting edge, as the American army advanced into Germany. It was a bittersweet come-coming, though. Only one of the six ever returned to Europe for good and all. Overall, a very readable, page-turning account. One useful appendix lists the names of nearly two-thousand German-born trainees who passed through Camp Ritchie’s military intelligence training course during the war.

I think most readers of WW2 histories know a bit about the American and British soldiers who translated for the Allies in occupied Germany after the war. These men often did more than just interpret; many were hunters of war criminals and did other investigative work. Most of these men – native German speakers – were Jewish and had left Germany in the 1930’s and early 1940’s for safety in the United States and Britain. Many left family members behind who were lost in the Holocaust. Bruce Henderson, in his new book, "Sons and Soldiers: The Untold Stories of the Jews who Escaped the Nazis and Returned with the US Army to Fight Hitler" (whew, that some subtitle!) traces the lives of about 10 men who were lucky to leave Germany as teenagers and found safety in the United States. Wanting to give something back to their adopted homeland, many joined the US army and found themselves assigned to Fort Ritchie in Maryland, where they received training in the work they would do in Germany with the occupying forces. As native-German speakers familiar with Germany, they were able to give a valuable service to the US Army. (The British Army also used German-born Jews, but this book is only about the Americans.) Henderson writes movingly about their mission and how they carried it out. Many were also looking for relatives left behind. Bruce Henderson’s a very easy writer and the book is a pleasure to read. I also bet it would make an excellent Audible book.

As both a first Jewish generation post-Holocaust – and as an Honorably-Discharged-Viet-Nam-Era-Veteran – this book by Bruce Henderson – that tells in detail – a relatively heretofore untold story – of a secret-classified operation by the United States military in World War II – to track down and use ONE-THOUSAND-NINE-HUNDRED-EIGHTY-FIVE

German born young Jewish men who had fled Europe to the United States prior to the United States declaration of World War II to be used to interrogate captured Nazi soldiers in their own dialect was captivating. The author does an exquisite job in telling the heroic Jewish young men's stories starting when their families and all Jews were terrorized by Hitler and the Nazis from the moment Hitler took over. It's heartbreaking the individual stories of loving Jewish families making the decision to do everything within their power to get their oldest son to America knowing they may never see each other again in order to keep their family name alive. Your heart will break when these poor parents and siblings say goodbye to their young sons and brothers. The hardships in the trip to America alone after once again truly realizing they may never see their family again along with the discomfort of the trip itself is not lost on the reader. When America puts this plan into action the secret training is done at Camp Ritchie in Maryland thus the reason its Jewish soldiers were called "The Ritchie Boys". The telling of the stories of training and logic put into it is amazing and then it's off to war and the fact that "a postwar army report found that nearly 60 percent of the credible intelligence gathered in Europe came from the Ritchie Boys" says it all! As a veteran the author's writing also makes you never forget the horrors of war itself. The sheer numbers of deaths in World War II is so staggering that if time has dulled the impact at all this book will revive the voluminous tolls in your heart and mind. There are many examples of here one second gone for all eternity the next. There but for the grace of G-d is at every turn. Though an already well known fact it is still despicable to read/hear once again the hatred of Jews by the Nazis all the way down to the lowest level component. The ability of the "Ritchie Boys" to keep their composure almost ninety-nine-per-cent of the time while literally face to face with the less-than-human-anti-Semites while interrogating them to uncover military information that can save untold American and allies' lives while the captured Nazi prisoners still spew unrelenting loathsome vile to their captors. In addition to the step by step blow by blow heartache by heartache accounting of this epic

historical tale. At the end of the book the author publishes the entire list of these ONE-THOUSAND-NINE-HUNDRED-EIGHTY-FIVE-JEWISH-AMERICAN-HEROES. It is only human. I suppose that any Jewish person reading this book finding this list will look through it with a dual emotion of pride and sadness hoping to find your surname etched on this tablet of heroism. I certainly did and found two heroes to thank and wonder about along with the other ONE-THOUSAND-NINE-HUNDRED-EIGHTY-THREE! CHAIM AHM YISRAEL CHAI!!

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