

*Articles from*  
*The Jewish*  
**Veteran**

The Official Publication of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA

Volume: 59, Year: 2006 • Number: 5, Season: End of Year

---

## Lest We Forget the Ritchie Boys

By Jerry Kasten

Thousands of German Jews who escaped from Hitler's wrath in the 1930's, and who later joined the US Army as America prepared to fight in Europe, underwent specialized psychological warfare training at Camp Ritchie, Maryland, before returning to their native country in the '40's as American soldiers trained to fight Hitler's army. They became known as, "The Ritchie Boys."

The "weapons" which these "Ritchie-soldiers" used to help defeat the German Army in 1944-1945, were not the rifles and machine-guns which combat soldiers usually carried, but instead their skilled use of the German language for propaganda purposes.

Camp Ritchie processed as many as 10,000 soldiers through the military intelligence training program during the war. Among these troops were thousands of German and other European Jews who were considered extremely useful when it came to the interrogation of German soldiers, the design and wording of propaganda leaflets, the broadcasting of propaganda at the front lines, and the interpretation of German documents and maps.

One of the members of JWV Post 256, Rudy Baum, was himself one of the "Ritchie boys." What follows is an interview with Rudy about his experiences.

Interviewer: Where were you before you came to the United States?

Rudy: I grew up in Frankfort, Germany with my sister and parents. Life was sweet with few instances of direct anti-Semitism against me or my family. But all that suddenly changed on January 30, 1933, when Hitler came to power. From then on, discriminatory acts against Jews increased, both in number and intensity. My future looked dim, and I began to yearn to live in America where people were free to better themselves. With my parents' help and blessings, and with the assistance of a distant cousin living in America whom I didn't even know existed, I was able to eventually get admitted into the United States under the quota system. On a bleak November afternoon in 1936, at the age of 21, I arrived in New York City on the Cunard liner "Berengaria," anxious to start a new life in the United States.

Interviewer: How did you get into the military? Were you drafted, or did you enlist in the Army?

Rudy: In a way, both. I had registered for the draft in 1940 and got drafted in June, 1941, for one-year. Six months later, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor changed everything and I was in "for the duration." My company wanted me to get a deferment, but I felt an obligation and a responsibility to do my share. I told my boss, "If anyone had a reason to fight, I had a reason." When the US declared war on Japan and its axis allies, I, like all Japanese and German aliens was

automatically classified as an "enemy alien," but six months later, I proudly stood with four other soldiers before a federal judge in Denver, taking the oath to become a naturalized citizen.

Interviewer: How did you end up at Camp Ritchie, Maryland?

Rudy: After five months at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, I was sent to Denver to help open a new reception center. The people of Denver were very friendly, inviting me into their homes and later helping me with letters of recommendation which I needed when I applied for OCS (Officers Candidate School). As a German, I had difficulty getting past the lengthy FBI background checks, but I was finally accepted into the program and sent to school at Camp Lee, Virginia. While at Camp Lee, I was ordered to report to an unnamed office in Washington, D.C. It turned out to be the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). They were recruiting volunteers (who could speak German and had lived there) to be parachuted behind enemy lines. I graciously declined the offer, considering I did not feel physically fit for what was required.

After other brief assignments, I requested a transfer to and was accepted into the Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie, Maryland, where I was from November, 1943, until February, 1944.

Interviewer: What was life like at Camp Ritchie?

Rudy: My arrival at Camp Ritchie was like a homecoming, since many, around 125-150, of the soldiers were German refugees like myself. Some of us came from the same town. We had much in common. We had all gotten out of Germany in time, and we were now American soldiers, preparing to fight the Nazis. We trained in all phases of psychological warfare. We prepared propaganda leaflets designed to be dropped from planes or fired from artillery cannon, usually designed to try to get German soldiers to surrender. Broadcast messages were written, designed to be read from mobile speaker systems we had to quickly set up, mounted in the field on military vehicles or available stationary objects, with the same intent--to get German soldiers to surrender. One of the leaflets we designed was a "safe conduct pass" which promised warm food, clothing, and shelter. It was later widely used in the European theater.

We also received training in the interrogation of German prisoners and interpretation of German military maps and documents. We even had make-believe Nazi soldiers, dressed in enemy uniforms, with whom we could practice interrogation techniques.

Interviewer: What was your assignment after training at Camp Ritchie?

Rudy: I was assigned to a mobile radio broadcasting company as a Foreign Language Propaganda Officer, training near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. A second front was about to begin in Europe, so we knew that it wouldn't be long before we would have the opportunity to put our training into actual practice.

Interviewer: What were your thoughts upon your return to Europe?

Rudy: Landing at the same British port I had left for the United States seven-and-a-half years earlier, was momentous enough, but after additional training while London was hit by V-2 rockets, it was a relief to receive orders to embark for Normandy, thirty days after D-Day.

My unit landed on the 4th of July, 1944. It was a very emotional moment for me. I was back on the Continent and ready to be part of the war. It wasn't long before I came face-to-face with the first of many German prisoners I was to interrogate. I felt a sense of revenge, for now I was in charge, and it was the German's turn to be afraid. At this, my first interrogation, I think that I was even more nervous than the prisoner.

Interviewer: Did you feel that the training which you received at Camp Ritchie prepared you for what you went through after D-Day?

Rudy: Oh, yes, but nothing could prepare me for the feeling of possibly getting killed or wounded, until I was actually at the front, facing the enemy and trying to set up my mobile broadcasting system.

Interviewer: What are a few of the experiences which you had during the remainder of the war that stand out above the rest?

Rudy: The most exciting and uplifting event of the war for me was the liberation of Paris at the end of August, 1944. Everyone was jubilantly celebrating freedom from the Nazis for many days.

Another memorable event was an emotional entry into my hometown of Frankfort on March 28, 1945. As I searched for familiar places, I found much of the city in ruins. The apartment building where I had lived was still standing, although the top floor had been bombed out. Names on mailboxes were unfamiliar. As I reached for the doorknob to enter the building and search for the apartment we had lived in, I couldn't even turn the knob. I had become too emotional and turned away.

On April 10, 1945, after the camp had been liberated, I entered Buchenwald, never to forget the unfathomable sight before me. Upon seeing the condition of the camp survivors, like the walking dead, the piles of corpses, the still-dying, the terrible stench of the still-burning crematorium and the horrible Nazi "souvenirs" (shrunken heads, lampshades made of human skin, and instruments of torture) which the fleeing Nazis had left behind, our commander, General Patton, ordered that all German-speaking officers, like myself, were to oversee the nearby townspeople who were forced to come to the death camp to view the horror before them. Some fainted at the sight; many turned away, but all were forced to see the horror before their eyes, and all were in denial.

Interviewer: Do you remember what your thoughts were at the time?

Rudy: Oh, yes! These denials of people who lived and worked so close to the camp while this seven-year horror went on made my blood boil, fueling my hatred for all the Germans. I felt that they were all guilty. No experience in my entire life can compare with the impact that Buchenwald had on me.

Note: In April, 1945, First Lieutenant Rudolph Baum was awarded the Bronze Star Medal in recognition of his service.

---

## Sid Gritz, My Rabbi

By Anthony V. Fasolo

I had the distinct honor of serving with BG Gritz in Heidelberg, Germany in 1971 upon my return from Vietnam, when he was the United States Army Europe Adjutant General. I was a Major then and he taught me what it truly meant to be an officer and a gentleman. He never "pulled" rank but instead used his rank to "help" soldiers and their families. Truly he was a Servant Leader and taught me to interpret regulations in order to find ways to "help" people and not stop them from doing what was in the best interests of the Army and the soldier. The focus of his life was service to others.

The dictionary defines a Rabbi as a Jewish Teacher. Although I am not Jewish, my Rabbi or teacher is Sidney (Sid) Gritz. I first saw him at the Patrick Henry Village Officers' Club in Heidelberg, Germany in December 1970. I had just returned from Vietnam and was a Major in the US Army. BG Sid Gritz was the United States Army (USAREUR) Adjutant General (AG) at the time, and I was assigned as staff action officer in his AG Section.

In the short time I worked for him he taught me many valuable lessons and showed me the true meaning of what it means to be an officer and gentleman. He always made you feel you were performing an important function, and he never let rank, regulations or formality get in the way of doing what was right for the Soldier. If the regulations did not

forbid something, and it was not illegal, immoral or cost the taxpayers anything, he taught us to do it, if it was in the best interest of the Soldier and the US Army. Some officers wanted to find ways to PROHIBIT doing things, but BG Gritz taught us to find ways to DO something.

For example, one of my duties was the Military Awards Program. A Sergeant Major (SGM), assigned to one of the divisions in Germany, was retiring from the Army in three days. For some reason the award recommendation for this SGM did not reach our headquarters. The unit called BG Gritz and asked for the status of the award. When it could not be found, it would have been very easy for BG Gritz to tell the unit to submit the award and present the SGM with an interim award in three days pending processing of the higher award, but this is not the way Sid Gritz operated. Instead he told the unit to fly a copy of the award recommendation to us at Heidelberg and that I would be at the helicopter pad with the award element and citation, which I would exchange for the recommendation. He then called me into his office and told me to prepare an award citation and to have it with the award element at the helicopter pad in about three hours. He told me the SGM's name, serial number, periods of service and some of the things he had done. When I started to object and pointed out that regulations required a 45-day lead time for such awards, he looked me in the eye and said, "Tony, remember why we are here; to take care of soldiers. If we followed the Timeline GUIDELINES in the regulation, the only one who would get hurt in this instance would be the SGM. Process the award, and I will take care of getting the approvals." What a lesson! Here was a general who truly followed what he "preached," take care of the Soldier!

I tried to follow his guidance for the rest of my career, especially when BG Gritz sent me to be the Adjutant General for the Southern European Task Force (SETAF) in Vicenza, Italy (1971-1974). I had everyone put the word SERVICE on the back of their desk plates and also established a team of administrative personnel that conducted quarterly visits to sites in Northern Italy to help support the US soldiers stationed with the Italian military there. We followed up on all actions and got feedback from the Soldiers. We also had a vigorous welcoming program to include a sponsor for every soldier, regardless of rank. Treating people with respect and taking care of Soldiers are two very valuable lessons that Rabbi Sid Gritz taught me that I will never forget.

I wrote this a few years ago. BG Gritz passed away on December 27, 2005. I was honored to be at his burial at Arlington National Cemetery. I was also honored to accompany his widow and daughter to the Jewish War Veterans Museum [National Museum of American Jewish Military History] in DC recently. His photo has a position of honor in my home office because he was truly an inspiration to me. I left the Army as an officer in January 1980 and as an Army civilian in October 2002. I was in the Pentagon on 9/11 and also heard General Shinseki, the former Army Chief of Staff use the same words that BG Gritz used in 1970. He told us in the Pentagon to never forget why we were there--to take care of the soldiers! He went on to say "Never forget where you came from."

---

## Journey of a Belleville Lad with Jewish Neighbors

By Rev. Msgr. John Gilchrist

I have been asked to write a column on Jewish - Christian relations since the Vatican decree on the Jews, *Nostrae Aetate*, was adopted by the Church on Oct. 15, 1965 (see related story on page one - *The Living Church*).

My response will reach back further back in time - in fact, to my youth. And I am afraid it will not be "politically correct."

You see, I am about to say that I was blissfully unaware of anything called "anti-Semitism" until I heard of it in the seminary.

I grew up in Belleville - 472 Washington Ave. to be exact. My roots are in Belleville. My mother's best friend in her youth was a girl named Florence Jacobsen. She was Jewish. Unfortunately, as often happened in the early 1900's, she died very young. My mother spoke of her with love until she died.

On our block there were at least six Jewish merchants. Mr. and Mrs. Nathan ran a vegetable store on the bottom floor of our apartment house. "Shorty" Shargel ran a haberdashery. Mr. Albert had a delicatessen across the street. Mr. and Mrs. Cohen had the ice cream parlor on the corner. Mr. Miller owned the liquor store. Mr. Holberg ran a paper route from his home. All of us, my brothers and sisters worked in one or another of those stores.

In my class, Maury Glazier, whose father owned a candy store in the Valley, was my friend. Stuey Lawn was in my class as was Claire Goldsmith and Pearl Gottschalk.

When I was ordained many of these folks were in the Cathedral. They were as proud of me as if they were my family. So who knew anything about anti-Semitism? None of my family did or even heard of it.

After my ordination, I taught in Saint Cecilia High School. It was perfectly natural for Rabbi Sidney Bogner to come to my classes. He taught with me about the Old Testament and Judaism. One day a week I walked up to the synagogue on Kearny Avenue for Hebrew lessons.

We priests serviced West Hudson Hospital. Half of the doctors were Jewish. They were all my friends, and incidentally they insisted that the priest anoint their sickest Catholic patients. So, who knew about anti-Semitism? Perhaps you can chalk it up to my ignorance.

However, I became friends with Msgr. John Oesterreicher and later Sr. Rose Thering. When I became a part of the Institute for Judaean-Christian Studies and later a student in the Masters Program at Seton Hall, it was then that the sad history of Judaism in the Christian world became better known to me. I studied long and hard to get that very difficult degree.

When I was invited to become a part of the Ecumenical Commission for the Archdiocese, I was honored. Naturally, I chose to become part of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue. A whole new world opened up to me. Let me explain.

While on my side of the dialogue, I had no great issues, little did I suspect that on the other - the Jewish side - just under the surface, a 2,000-year history of repressed anger and resentment was simmering.

Nostrae Aetate opened the door for our Jewish friends. For almost 1,700 years the Jewish people had been a small minority living in an ocean of Christians. With the advent of Constantine, these people had been living under constraints and fear.

Yes, the Enlightenment in the Eighteenth Century released them from the ghettos. But they were still under a dangerous shadow. They were very silent about their inner feelings. And the advent of Hitler showed they were correct in being careful.

The Holocaust was the final straw in their repression. The elimination of almost the entire Jewish population of Europe led to Vatican II. Finally, for the first time, Jews truly felt free to speak out.

And over the past 25 years, we in the Catholic - Jewish Dialogue have unlocked the hidden demons of the past. What demons, you ask? They are too manifold to repeat, but here are a few.

It began with the charge of being "Christ killers." Vatican II rejected that charge. But one can understand why the recent film, "The Passion of Christ," could open old wounds.

They were expelled from the Holy Land and Jerusalem was burned. They became the "wandering Jews" always aliens in Christian lands. They were consigned to ghettos and remote areas of Eastern Europe.

Some Church fathers, in their writings, attacked the Jewish religion. Saint John's Gospel seemed to turn the words Hoi judaioi ("the Jews") into a bad word. The Church taught that Judaism in itself was finished as a valid religion. It had been superceded by Christianity. Saint Paul seemed to back it up in his epistles.

All of this is old history you might say - but not for the Jews.

They were expelled from Spain in 1492 with the Muslims. In 1992 while we Americans were celebrating the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, their minds were filled with thoughts of the Spanish Inquisition and their treatment throughout Europe during that period. They were depicted as greedy money changers by Shakespeare and as conspirators to take over the world by the pamphlet "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." It is still being published in Moslem countries today.

The relation of the Jewish people to the Catholic Church is unique. It is almost a love-hate relationship. Pope John Paul II called the Jews "our elder brothers in the faith." Nevertheless, they were unhappy until he and the Vatican signed a diplomatic agreement of recognition with Israel in December 1993.

Everything the Church says or does can cause Jewish people joy or anger. The Convent at Auschwitz, the canonization of Edith Stein, the perceived silence of Pius XII in World War II, the Catechism of the Church (1992), the decree Dominus Jesus in August 2000 on the faith of the Church - all of this and much more can cause a reaction among our Jewish friends.

And so, that is why we must stay in dialogue. I am certain that our Jewish friends have much more on their minds. We must be there to listen; to respond and to try to heal wounds.

Jewish-Christian relations remind me of Bette Davis when, in the 1950 movie "All About Eve," she said: "fasten your seat belts. It's going to be a bumpy ride." Dialogue is kind of like a marriage relationship. If you love your partner in dialogue you work things out. It's all worth it.

We Catholics and Jews are inseparably linked - like it or not. So let's move on to the next level. We'll work our way to eternity together - probably arguing and debating during the whole journey.

---

## The Mission: The Veteran

By Norman Rosenshein

As your National Commander I am excited to share a new initiative that embodies the essence of my goal for my term as your National Commander, "The Mission: The Veteran."

We must not forget that "The Veteran" is not just the veteran of WWII, Korea, or Vietnam." Unfortunately, there are newer generations of veteran to be served, veterans of the Gulf War or of today's Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). We must serve these veterans, whether still in-service or not, to continue our mission of outreach to all of the needs of the veteran community, young and old.

While the veterans of the "Greatest Generation" are confronting the problems brought on by age, a new generation of veterans is coming home to need the services of the VA at a time of dwindling budget resources. Many of the injured veterans of the GWOT have survived wounds that would never have been survivable in previous conflicts and face

daunting medical challenges today and for years to come, first at the service hospitals and in the future at the VA medical facilities. Also, for the first time in the history of the Armed Forces, many of the injured and severely maimed veterans are women, who currently make up 15% of our Armed Forces. We must strive to see that the VA can accommodate the special needs of all of these defenders of our freedom regardless of their gender.

In order to assist these veterans of today and tomorrow, we are urging JWV members to work with the military and VA representatives at those military bases where soldiers from the GWOT are first processed upon their return from duty abroad. My own Department of New Jersey is proud of such a program we are currently implementing at Fort Dix. Please check with military installations in your own area to find other bases where you can help with this vital effort to assist our returning troops.

I am also proud to announce the formation of a Persian Gulf and GWOT Working Committee at the National Level under the chairmanship of COL (Ret) Nelson L. Mellitz, USAFR, Commander of Post 126 in Cherry Hill, NJ. This new committee has two major goals, both of which are consistent with the goals that have motivated the JWV since its founding in 1896. Write to him at National Headquarters with your ideas and suggestions and your willingness to participate.

The first goal of the working committee will be to assist Persian Gulf and GWOT veterans in the same way the JWV has consistently supported all veterans since its founding. The second goal of the group will be to encourage these new and future veterans to become active members of the JWV at all levels of our organization.

In order to accomplish these goals the Working Committee will issue a survey to the greater Jewish community and JWV members at all levels to measure current JWV participation of Persian Gulf and GWOT veterans and guide us in the next step to better serve these veterans. The Working Committee, after its preliminary work, will become a permanent JWV National Committee, serving the immediate needs of these returning veterans and integrating them into the organization.

Our returning soldiers, many of whom come from the National Guard and Reserve components of the military, face a myriad of difficult transitions on their return to civilian life, even if they were fortunate enough to avoid the severe physical injuries faced by so many. They return to lives, careers, and marriages that have been severely impacted by their service and often face problems with such issues as returning to the civilian workforce and dealing with non-physical wounds, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, that can remain dormant for many years.

As the original founders of the JWV, members of the Union Army, joined with veterans of the Spanish-American War to form a larger organization that continued to welcome veterans of WWI and all succeeding conflicts, we must today join with the newest veterans to assist them in any way necessary. Then, in turn, we must ask them to join with us in strengthening the JWV to assist the veterans of the future. In such a way, JWV continues "The Mission: The Veteran." I hope you will all join us as we reach out to these newest veterans, links in a chain that goes back to 1896 and continues into the 21st century.

While you read this, my wife and I, my Chief of Staff, Bob Richter, and my Aide-de-Camp, Jerry Levine and his wife PNP Florence Levine, join with me in briefings at NATO and London as to America's world position and with the leaders of Jewish war veterans from the UK, France, Belgium and other nations seeking to stem terror and anti-Semitism.