

New '60 Minutes' segment to highlight what The Ritchie Boys did after WWII



Dave Rhodes

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CASCADE — The CBS newsmagazine "60 Minutes" plans to air a second, more in-depth segment about The Ritchie Boys, a group of soldiers trained in intelligence matters at Camp Ritchie in Cascade during World War II.

"We love this story," producer Katherine Davis said. "This is such an interesting part of our history that I think most Americans don't know about, the impact that this group of men had on the Allied victory in the war.

"The more we find out about the story and the more we dig in, the more interesting stories come to light."



Davis said the first segment, which aired as two-thirds of the May 9 broadcast, was well received.

She said it talked about the mission of the group that was responsible for 60% of the Allied intelligence gathered during the war and was an important part of establishing what eventually became the Central Intelligence Agency.

"This small group that is largely unknown had a really big impact on espionage and protecting America," Davis said.



The earlier segment included an interview with Guy Stern, who was 99 years old at the time. He was a Ritchie Boy and World War II POW interrogator who later visited the former military base multiple times and has been a speaker at the Fort Ritchie Community Center on at least two occasions.

Stern escaped persecution by the Nazi regime at age 15 and left his family behind. He learned of their horrific fate years later, according to Herald-Mail archives.

This time, she said, it will focus on what the group did after the war, including tracking Nazi war criminals to be brought to trial at Nuremberg.

It includes an interview with Max Lerner, 98, an Austrian Jew who served as part of the group, she said.



The book "Maryland in World War II" describes Camp Ritchie's mission then as "the training of interrogator, interpreter, translator, order of battle, photo interpreter and counter-intelligence teams."

Many of the troops stationed at Camp Ritchie were young Jewish refugees who escaped Nazi Germany and fled to the United States. This group became known as The Ritchie Boys, who were the basis of a documentary film of the same name.

At Camp Ritchie, the Army took advantage of the men's knowledge of enemy linguistics, geography and mindset. They were trained in interrogation, psychological warfare and counter-intelligence.

The group includes such notables as author J.D. Salinger and banker David Rockefeller, according to Davis.

After the first segment aired, she said, "60 Minutes" received numerous inquiries from people wanting to know if a family member who served in World War II had been a Ritchie Boy. The group had been sworn to secrecy and didn't talk about their service in depth, Davis said.

The show worked with The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., to find answers, she said.

"It was really great, in some cases, to tell these people, 'Yes, your father or your grandfather was a Ritchie Boy,'" Davis said. "I think it meant a lot to people, and it was really cool for us."

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The first show also generated more interest in the Fort Ritchie museum currently housed in a room at the community center, according to Landon Grove.

Grove, director and curator of a larger museum planned for the property, said the current museum saw a rise in visitors, including local people and some from as far away as California and New York.

"It's been really positive for Cascade and the area in general, as the revitalization efforts are going on, to have the boost of energy and people interested," he said.

Washington County government recently sold nearly 500 acres at the former military base, which closed in 1998 as part of a Base Realignment and Closure process, to Cascade resident John W. Krumpotich. His redevelopment plans include homes, lodging and spaces for retail, outdoor recreation, weddings and other events.

More:Segment on WWII Ritchie Boys from Washington County camp to air on '60 Minutes'

Redevelopment:Fort Ritchie master plan: Homes, lodging, retail space

Grove said Ritchie Boys' families have donated artifacts for the museum including medals, documents, photos and even a Walther

P38 pistol and ceremonial sabers confiscated from Nazi soldiers. Copies of the tests The Ritchie Boys had to take during their eight-week training have also been donated.

And interest in The Ritchie Boys' work and mission has also grown since the first program aired, according to Grove.

"We've just gotten so many emails asking questions and trying to learn more about family members (who served) and Camp Ritchie history in general," Grove said.

The growing interest is a factor in the need for a larger museum, he said, as the current space doesn't have enough room for everything and displays must be rotated to show more items.

Grove expects the new "60 Minutes" segment to further boost interest in the former military base and its mission.

"I'm pretty confident we're going to see another big blast of people wanting to come up and visit and learn more about The Ritchie Boys," he said. "This has been really positive for Fort Ritchie and for Washington County too, because more people are coming to the area to see the fort."

Visits to the museum can be scheduled by sending an email to sphillips@thefrcc.org or by calling 301-241-5085, according to its [website](#).

Anyone who wants to donate funds or artifacts can send an email to ritchiemuseum@yahoo.com or call Grove at 301-693-8325.