Familiarity with the organization of enemy forces was one prerequisite for effective interrogation. Knowing how to question individual prisoners was the other. Though interrogators at theater- and U.S.-based strategic interrogation centers could deploy informants and electronic eavesdropping devices, most interrogations involved face-to-face encounters with everyone from terrified teenaged recruits to the German military’s most experienced NCOs and its highest-ranking officers. As trainees completed the courses at Ritchie versed in the provisions of the Geneva Convention—an introduction to which formed the first part of an interrogators’ formal training—they had to learn how to convince a prisoner to proffer information willingly. German-speaking Ritchie Boys learned and then developed in the field a method that relied on a combination of verbal persuasion—“ways of influencing people and making friends (the Dale Carnegie approach applied to [prisoners of war]),” as an official camp history put it—and myriad forms of psychological pressure and ruses like good cop/bad cop routines and empty threats.

The Ritchie Boys proved to be highly effective in the field. The collection of tactical intelligence was crucial to the effective fighting capacities of Allied armies from the army group level down to individual regiments, and the most consistently reliable source of actionable intelligence came from German prisoners of war. U.S. Army intelligence officers surveyed immediately after the war concluded that IPW teams collected one-third of combat intelligence in the European theater and that the quality of this intelligence was the highest provided by all branches of military intelligence. Survey respondents also estimated that perhaps 33–50 percent of all information received at the corps level was produced from prisoner interrogations and most divisions surveyed concluded that prisoners provided a steady stream of valuable information from D-Day to VE Day, with one division noting that prisoners provided 90 percent of information obtained by its regiments and battalions. Intelligence officers from the First, Third, Ninth and Fifteenth Armies similarly reported that the interrogations of prisoners proved to be “by far the most important single source of intelligence.”

After VE Day, the men and women of “Generation Exodus,” as Walter Laqueur called them, formed a deep talent pool for war crimes investigations and would play prominent roles as interrogators and translators in every important case. It was not only Perl’s background, then, that made him indispensable to Fanton’s team. By the end of the war he had become an expe-