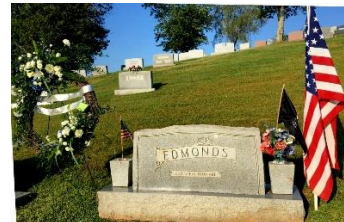


**Master Sgt. “Roddie” Edmonds –**  
**the Non-Jewish, Jewish American Hero**



106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

“The Golden Lions”



By Jerry Klinger

***Edmonds saved over 200 Jewish American POWs from probable death.***

Master Sgt. Rodrick Waring Edmonds was born August 20, 1919, in Knoxville, Tennessee. Knoxville is the Eastern edge of what liberal cynics call flyover, bible belt, country. He preferred to be called Roddie.

Edmunds was called up to service during World War II. He was a master sergeant in the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

December 19, 1944, in the early days of the Battle of the Bulge, two of the three green 106<sup>th</sup> regiments were overrun by attacking Germans. Edmunds was part of the 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. It was forced to surrender to the Germans in the sudden onslaught.

Edmunds was captured and taken to Stalag IX, a prisoner of war camp, near Ziegenhain, Germany. Officers were held in different camps. Edmunds was the highest-ranking non-Commissioned officer, of the 1275 men being held by the Nazis in Stalag IX.

January 27, 1945, it was bitter cold. The captured American POWs had just arrived in the camp. Nazi Commandant Siegmann ordered Edmunds to have all the Jewish G.I.s identified to him by the next morning. It was standard Nazi policy to separate Jewish POWs from the non-Jews for “special treatment.” It was well understood what that meant.

Jewish soldiers had been told, if captured, to lose their Dog Tags. The Dog Tag identified Jews with the letter “H” for Hebrew. Jewish soldiers captured by the Nazis faced probable mistreatment and more likely death if they could be identified.

The next morning Edmunds ordered all 1275 American prisoners of war in Stalag IX to assemble outside their barracks for Commandant Siegmann. All 1275 men assembled.

Siegmann was infuriated. He walked up to Edmunds snarling in English, “I ordered the Jews to be separated, to be identified.” Siegmann pulled his Lueger from his side holster and put it to Edmunds’ head. “You are to identify the Jews, immediately.”

Edmunds did not flinch. “We are all Jews here,” he told Siegmann. Edmunds courageously told the Nazi he would have to shoot everyone if he wanted to shoot the Jews.

Everyone knew the war was near ending. Edmunds coldly looked into the Nazi face and said if any of the prisoners were harmed, Siegmann would be hunted,

tried, and convicted for war crimes. The Geneva Convention required a prisoner only give their name, rank, and serial number, not their religion.

Siegmann's hand dropped. He holstered his Lueger and left. He saw his own body hanging from gallows in the not too distant future.

Edmonds' faced down the Nazi with courage, quick wit and duty to his fellow POW's, Jewish or otherwise. Edmonds saved over 200 Jewish American G.I.s that cold January morning from near certain death.

Three months later, Edmonds and all 1275 Americans who were imprisoned in Stalag IX were freed by Allied forces.

Edmonds returned home. He never spoke about his wartime experiences or how he had saved the Jewish G.I.s. Like many of the "Greatest Generation," he was humble about his war experiences. The years passed; he told his own family little about his time as a POW. He was never given any recognition by the Army for his courage. He never received a medal or a commendation.

Edmonds died quietly in 1985. He was buried with honor, under a simple military-style stone with a Cross that read: Roddie W. Edmonds, M. Sgt. U.S. Army, World War II, Korea, August 20, 1919, August 8, 1985.

After his passing, his son, Chris Edmonds, Pastor of the Piney Grove Baptist Church in Marysville, Tennessee began to piece together his father's story. Little by little, the cobwebs of history peeled away.

December 2, 2015, Yad VaShem recognized Roddie Edmonds as a Righteous Among the Nations. Edmonds, clearly, at the risk of his own life, saved Jewish lives and the lives of generations to come. He did what he did because it was the right thing to do as an American and as a human being.

Six weeks later, January 27, 2016, President Obama attended a ceremony held at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C. In attendance was Ambassador Ron Dermer. Yad VaShem Council Chairman Rabbi Israel Lau presented to Pastor Edmonds Yad VaShem's Righteous Among the Nations medal and a certificate of recognition honoring his father.

It was a very unusual ceremony. Edmonds was only the fifth American recognized for the special Yad VaShem honor. Edmonds saved American Jewish G.I.s from

the Nazis. The U.S. Army has not granted Edmonds any medal for his courageous actions.

Congressional legislation, introduced in 2016, recommended Sgt. Edmonds for the Congressional Medal of Honor. The legislation has been since referred back to committee for consideration. Edmonds' heroism did not occur during battle was the objection. Edmonds armed only with courage and moral certitude faced down the enemy of America and all Jewry.

August 20,1919 is Roddie Edmonds 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Some people choose to acknowledge the day a person died to remember them. Instead the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation has chosen to remember the day he was born. If he had not been born, more than 200 American Jewish G.I.s would have been murdered. There never would have been life to live on, to live on after them.

In honor of Roddie Edmond's birthday, JASHP placed a Blue-White flowered wreath at his graveside in his treasured memory. JASHP is pursuing the placement of a State of Tennessee historical interpretive roadside marker for posterity telling his story for the benefit of today and tomorrow. JASHP is funding the effort.

It is the least American Jews can do for a non-Jewish, Jewish American Hero.