

RODDIE EDMONDS

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds (1919-1985) of Knoxville, Tennessee, served in the US Army during World War II. He participated in the landing of the American forces in Europe and was taken prisoner by the Germans. Together with

other American POWs (prisoners of war), including Jews, he was taken to Stalag IXA, a camp near Ziegenhain, Germany. In line with their anti-Jewish policy, the Germans singled out Jewish POWs, and many of them on the Eastern Front were sent to extermination camps or killed.

Sometime in January 1945 the Germans announced that all Jewish POWs in Stalag IXA were to report the following morning. Master Sergeant Edmonds, who was in charge of the prisoners, ordered all POWs—Jews and non-Jews alike—to stand together. When the German officer in charge saw that all the camp's inmates were standing in front of their barracks, he turned to Edmonds and said, "They cannot all be Jews." To this Edmonds replied, "We are all Jews." The German took out his pistol and threatened Edmonds, but the Master Sergeant did not waver and retorted, "According to the Geneva Convention, we have to give only our name, rank, and serial number. If you shoot me, you will have to shoot all of us, and after the war you will be tried for war crimes." The German gave up, turned around, and left the scene.

Lester Tanner witnessed the standoff between Edmonds and the German officer. Tanner had been captured in the Battle of the Bulge (a German offensive campaign on the Western Front, December 16, 1944–January 25, 1945). Tanner remembered Edmonds well from his training period. "He did not throw his rank around. You knew he knew his stuff, and he got across to you without being arrogant or inconsiderate. I admired him for his command... We were in combat on the front lines for only a short

period, but it was clear that Roddie Edmonds was a man of great courage who led his men with the same capacity we had come to know him in the States."

Tanner told Yad Vashem that at the time, they were well aware that the Germans were murdering the Jews. They therefore understood that the order to separate the Jews from the other POWs meant that the Jews were in great danger. "I would estimate that there were more than one thousand Americans standing in wide formation in front of the barracks, with Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds standing in front of the formation with several senior noncoms [noncommissioned officers] beside him, of which I was one...There was no question in my mind or that of M/Sgt Edmonds that the Germans were removing the Jewish prisoners from the general prisoner population at great risk to their survival. The U.S. Army's standing command to its ranking officers in POW camps is that you resist the enemy and care for the safety of your men to the extent possible. M/Sgt Edmonds, at the risk of his immediate death, defied the Germans with the unexpected consequences that the Jewish prisoners were saved."

Chris Edmonds, Roddie's son, told Yad Vashem that his father had kept a diary in the camp, where he also had other POWs write down their names and addresses. Food rations were very small, and the POWs were hungry, so Edmonds with some other friends planned to open a restaurant after the end of the war. Edmonds, who was artistically talented, made drawings of the restaurant and sketched its logo. These plans were abandoned after his return home.

Edmonds was recruited again during the Korean War.

On February 10, 2015, Yad Vashem recognized Master Sergeant Roddie Edmonds as Righteous Among the Nations.

Source: Yad Vashem, The Righteous Among Nations Featured Stories: Roddie Edmonds,
www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/edmonds.html