

Real Life Stories
Pastor's shock discovery shows his dad was real-life WWII Superhero
He saved hundreds of Jewish POWs

While helping his daughter with a history project for college, Tennessee pastor Chris Edmonds began a remarkable journey that led him to discover that his father stood up to the Nazis to save hundreds of Jewish soldiers from being sent to their deaths.

Though Edmonds had read his dad's two wartime journals while growing up, he told *The Western Journal* that his father, Roddie -- a master sergeant in the U.S. Army during World War II -- would never respond to questions about his experiences in the war. Edmonds only knew that his father had served in the 106th Infantry Division and that he had been captured during the Battle of the Bulge.

The war journals sat in a dresser drawer for decades after Roddie died in 1985 -- until Edmonds' daughter Lauren was assigned to interview a family member about a noteworthy experience. Since Roddie had died the year Lauren was born, Edmonds referred his daughter to the journals and offered his help. It was the finished project -- a video about Roddie Edmonds' experience in Battle of the Bulge narrated with portions of his journal -- that prompted Edmonds to look further into his father's story.

One evening in 2009, Edmonds was searching the internet for war records of his father when he found Roddie mentioned in a *New York Times* article about Richard Nixon. The former president had purchased a townhouse from an attorney and WWII veteran named Lester Tanner, who described how Roddie defied a Nazi commander at gunpoint in order to save Tanner's life.

"I was stunned," Edmonds said. He left a comment on the article "simply thanking my father for his heroism -- for doing what was right and living out his Christian values. I included in my comment that I was his proud son, and signed it with my name."

To Edmonds' surprise, Tanner ended up reading his comments a few months later. Edmonds and his wife met with Tanner in New York in March 2013, and Tanner "shared the amazing story of dad's bravery and introduced me to my twenty-something father I knew nothing about," he said.

Roddie Edmonds was born and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee, before enlisting in the Army in 1941. He rose from the rank of private to master sergeant in less than two years and eventually joined the 106th division at Camp Atterbury in Indiana, where he served as communications chief before being shipped to the German front in October 1944.

On Dec. 19, during the Battle of the Bulge, Roddie Edmonds was captured by the Germans and sent to two Nazi prisoner of war camps. He was the highest-ranking American officer at the second camp, Stalag IX-A, a POW camp for non-commissioned officers near Ziegenhain, Germany.

Prior to being sent to Stalag IX-A, Roddie and his men were imprisoned in train cars and marched nearly to death, being starved, beaten and humiliated. When they arrived at the camp, they were forced to witness the brutal murder of a young Russian soldier and were told that all who disobeyed the Nazis' orders would suffer the same end.

Nazi policies required that Jewish POWs were to be segregated from the rest of the soldiers so they could be sent to certain death in a concentration camp. On Jan. 26, 1945, Nazi officers ordered that only the Jewish soldiers under Roddie's command were to report for roll call the next morning. But Roddie immediately informed his men that they were not to obey the order. "We're not doing that," he said. "Tomorrow, we all fall out."

The Nazi commander was filled with rage when he found all 1,292 of the American soldiers standing in sharp formation the following morning. "They cannot all be Jews!" the commander said angrily to Roddie. "We are all Jews here," Roddie replied. ...

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The Nazi commander turned very red and put his pistol to Roddie's forehead. "One last chance," the commander said. "Sergeant, you will order the Jewish prisoners to step forward or I will shoot you right now. But Edmonds stood firm. "Major, you can shoot me, but you will have to kill all of us because we know who you are and you'll be tried for war crimes when we win this war ... and you will pay," Roddie replied.

The Nazi commander hesitated, going pale and shaking, before drawing the gun back and marching away. The commander left the camp, never again asking Roddie for the Jewish soldiers. By standing up to the German officers, Roddie had saved more than two hundred Jewish soldiers from certain death. Tanner told Edmonds that he and the other men cheered for Roddie upon returning to their barracks and thought of him as an inspiration for all the years to come.

Edmonds began pursuing a Medal of Honor for his father the very same month that he had spoken with Tanner. He acquired a congressional team to assemble evidence and affidavits for the Army to review, but the Army has denied Roddie the Medal of Honor twice now, saying that as a POW, he was no longer "engaged in an action with the enemy," as required for that honor.

But Roddie has received a number of other honors, including the title of Righteous Among the Nations, the highest honor given by Israel to people who risked their lives to protect Jews from the Nazis. Roddie is one of only five Americans who have been given the honor; he is also the only U.S. soldier to receive it.

Furthermore, bills are going through the U.S. Senate and House to grant Roddie the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award that U.S. civilians can receive. In November, President Donald Trump spoke of Edmonds' brave actions at the POW camp as "unbelievable and exceptional valor." Trump tweeted about the Congressional Gold Medal bill on Jan. 16, saying, "Looking at this strongly!"

Edmonds documented his father's story of bravery and courage in his book "No Surrender," which was co-written by best-selling author Douglas Century. Edmonds told The Western Journal that he is discussing a film with that he hopes to announce soon.

"I'm just a little guy, but war isn't right," Roddie had written in his wartime journal. "Lives upon lives are lost, people forget God more and more. It seems as if someone should get wise and let God be our Commander and we should all live our lives as he lives his."

According to Edmonds, Roddie was a genuine Christian who sought to show love to everyone around him. Edmonds told The Western Journal that his father's brave actions were driven by his faith in Jesus. Roddie believed that "everybody was somebody" and that since God is good and loves everyone, we should do likewise.

"He lived by the Bible truth that we are our brothers and sisters' keeper," Edmonds said. "I'm confident dad would think what he did wasn't a big deal. I can almost hear him say, 'Son, what's all the fuss? I protected my men, defied the enemy and honored my God. I was just doing my job and did what anyone would have done.'"

Edmonds said his father was an ordinary person, but his righteous actions made a world of difference; it's a lesson that all people need to hear.

"I believe an ordinary life lived well is extraordinary, even heroic. Our ordinary lives matter. They count," he said. "When we do what's right for others selflessly we extend a legacy of godliness to future generations. That's what Dad did. It's the way he lived before the war, during the war, and after the war. It's the way all of us should live."

... Gleaned from Western Journal, Feb. 2020