



We Are The Apters... The Original Philip Apter & Son from Newark & Maplewood Since 1902 Services available from \$4695



HOME NEWS

COMMUNITY ABOUT FREE E-NEWSLETTER ADVERTISE SUBSCRIBE CONTACT US

CLASSIFIEDS

Video Jewish Newsreel Commentary Editorial

Op-Eds Letters to the Editor

Nu Online

Our Tribe & Joy

News Statewide

World Greater MetroWest

Middlesex/Monmouth Princeton Mercer Bucks

Life and Times Life and Times

Sports Touch of Torah

Travel

Events Calendar

LifeCycle Events

Submit LifeCycle Events / Obituaries

FREE weekly e-newsletter **Sign up now!** NIN VIN VIV

Home > Middlesex/Monmouth News 'We are all Jews'

Bravery of American soldier who defied Nazis recalled during Yom HaShoah program

by Debra Rubin NJJN Bureau Chief April 30, 2018

We are all Jews," Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds, the highest ranking American soldier held in the Staling IXA Prisoner of War camp in Ziegenhain, Germany, told the Nazi commandant, who was holding a Luger pistol to his head.

The day before he had been ordered by the commandant to give up his Jewish soldiers. Instead, Edmonds told his troops to appear at morning assembly, at which point he made his declaration. As the Nazi cocked his gun, his face turned red and he bellowed in English, "They can't all be Jews. Give me the Jews or I will shoot.

It was January 1945 and Edmonds knew the Allied forces were closing in. He told the commandant, "We all know your name so you will have to kill all of us because you will be tried as a war criminal when we win the war," for violating the terms of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs.

The commandant's face then turned from red to white and his arm began to shake. He lowered the pistol and stormed off.

Pastor Chris Edmonds of Maryville, Tenn. recounted the story of his father's heroism on April 22 at the annual Henry Ricklis Holocaust Memorial Committee's Yom Ha Shoah program at the Monroe Township Middle School. The program was cosponsored by the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey.

Edmond's courage and conviction is credited with saving more than 200 Jewish-American soldiers — more than 1,200 American soldiers were imprisoned at the camp — who would have been sent to concentration camps and likely their deaths.

Gyu. Eamonds of Knoxville, Tenn., lived by a moral code to treat everyone with respect, defend life, and do what is right, according to his son.

He told the crowd of 300 that his father was captured in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 and spent 100 days in captivity, including a days-long march through the bitter cold from Belgium to Germany to the camp for non-commissioned officers. The men, he said, were starved, suffered from frostbite and dysentery, and were covered with lice. His father had been shot, kicked, and hit with rifle butts, yet he never wavered, Edmonds said, and the soldiers, taking their cue from the senior Edmonds, also never faltered.

Krivitzky said, "We need to take hate out of the abstract" because "hate is not abstract. It targets specific groups, and when we see it we have to call it out whether it's anti-Semitic or against black Muslims, gays, or anyone dest.



DONATE

Search NJJN

Follow NJJN



NEWSLETTER STGNUD

FREE weekly Sign up now! WIN UN VIV











Holocaust survivors and family members lit m in honor of loved ones, from left, Ivan and St Mosesman, Celia and Avram Nisenman, and E Levine (hidden) with daughter Andrea and granddaughter Becky. Photo by Debra Rubin







The Germans singled out Jewish POWs, sending them to concentration camps rather than POW camps (for this reason and others the American military instructed captured soldiers to destroy their dog tags to hide their religion). In fact, the Jewish rank-and-file soldiers captured in the Battle of the Bulge were sent to Bergen-Belsen, where most died.

Edmond's father defied the Nazis a second time. As American troops closed in, the German commanders ordered all prisoners to leave because they wanted no witnesses to their barbarity left behind, but Edmonds instructed his men to remain until the exasperated Germans fled.

When American tanks rolled into the camp — coinciding with the second day astonished troops found the contingent of emaciated Americans, all still alive

Edmonds said his father never discussed the war, but kept diaries that were left in a desk draw After his death in 1985, his mother gave Chris the diaries that inspired the Baptist minister to Jewish survivors.

That quest led to "one of the proudest moments of my life" when, after being recognized in 2015 by Yad Vashem-The World Holocaust Remembrance Center as the first American soldier to ever be designated "righteous among the nations," a ceremony was held at the Israell Embassy in Washington on Jan. 27, 2016, attended by President Barack Obama and film director Steven Spielberg. The younger Edmonds was presented with his father's medal by Israel's Ambassador Ron Dermer and Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Yad Vashem council chair and chief rabbi of Tel Aviv.

According to Edmonds, although his father was initially rejected from consideration because his valor didn't occur in combat, Congress is now considering a bill authorizing the president to posthumously award the Congressional Medal of Honor. Another bill to award him the Congressional Medal of Freedom is also being considered.

Edmonds is negotiating with several television networks to air an as-of-yet untitled documentary about his father, parts of which he screened in Monroe. The film will also be submitted to the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences for consideration for an Academy Award. He also wrote a book that will be coming out in the next several months.

The millions of Jews who lost their lives during the Holocaust were remembered during the program through original song and poem, prayer, and the lighting of yahrzeit candles and menorahs by family members of victims.

A handful of Holocaust survivors were escorted into the auditorium by Monroe High School students. One of the students, sophomore Brenda Chavez, read from her award-winning essay selected in the annual Ricklis contest, where she stressed the importance of remembering the six million Jewish lives lost. The contest is open to Monroe High School students to submit essays about the Holocaust.

The cruelty and bigotry they experienced must not be forgotten "because they have a voice that must be heard," read Brenda from her essay, adding that learning about the Holocaust taughth her to appreciate religious differences and ethnic diversity, and "taught me not to be a bystander" in the face of hatred and bigotry directed at others.

"We can change the world for the next generation," she said.

Federation CEO Keith Krivitzky told the gathering, "It's hard to take the lessons of the Holocaust theat if you don't understand why it happened. We say "Never again," but we keep hearing about genoides targeting another group. Hate and evil keep happening."

"We must stand up one for the other," he added, noting federation strives to do that through educational and interfaith initiatives "so that when we say, 'never again' we mean it."

!	Should Israeli Jews enjoy privileged status not granted to non-Jews? Barbecue cook-off pits Jews vs. Jews Must be Jews' Jews for jazz	
E	Back to top	
	Reader Discussion	
]	Leave a Comment	
	Your Email (never published)	
· F	Post Comment New Jersey Jewish News welcomes your comments. New Jersey Jewish News reserves the right to edit or remove any comment that is deemed inappropriate, off-topic or otherwise violating the Terms of Service of the New Jersey Jewish News website.	
	© Copyright 2018 The New Jersey Jewish News All Rights Reserved. 901 Route 10 Whippanny, NJ 07981-1157 973-739-8110 p 973-887-4152 f Webmaster Privacy Policy	
	Home News Community About Free E-Newsletter Advertise Subscribe Classifieds Contact U	5