

# Knoxville soldier who defied Nazis nominated for medal

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USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

WASHINGTON - Roddie Edmonds already has been honored by the Israeli government for an act of bravery credited with saving the lives of more than 200 Jewish Americans during World War II.

Now, he may finally be honored by his own government.

Sens. Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker filed legislation Monday to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Edmonds, who was an Army master sergeant from Knoxville. The two Republicans were joined on the legislation by Democrats Tim Kaine of Virginia and Ben Cardin of Maryland.

Edmonds' defiance against a German Nazi officer targeting Jewish American prisoners of war "is one of the most inspiring stories I know," Alexander said. "The heroism of this 20-year-old East Tennessee soldier is an example for every one of us."

Corker said the courage and foresight shown by Ed-

monds was truly remarkable.

"Even when faced with death himself, Master Sgt. Edmonds and the men under his command stood united to protect their fellow soldiers," Corker said. "His moral fortitude and humility serve as an example for us all."

Edmonds' display of defiance and courage took place in 1945, when he was a prisoner of war. One day, the Germans ordered all Jewish POWs in his camp to report the next morning in front of their barracks. Edmonds, the highest-ranking officer in the camp, ordered all of the camp's POWs — Jews and non-Jews alike — to stand together.

An estimated 1,000 servicemen assembled in front of their barracks the next morning, Jan. 27, 1945. Upon seeing the mass of prisoners, the German officer in charge said, "They cannot all be Jews."

"We are all Jews," Edmonds replied.

Some of the men standing beside Edmonds that day remember him standing his ground, even when the German officer pulled out his pistol and threatened to shoot

him.

"If you shoot me," Edmonds said, "you will have to shoot all of us, and after the war, you will be tried for war crimes."

The German officer gave up and left.

For his bravery, Edmonds, who died in 1985, was awarded last year with the Righteous Among Nations award, the highest honor that Israel bestows upon non-Jews. The honor recognizes the heroics of non-Jewish people who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

At the awards ceremony, held at the Embassy of Israel in Washington, then-President Barack Obama praised Edmonds for going "above and beyond the call of duty."

"His moral compass never wavered," Obama said. "He was true to his faith."

Remarkably, Edmonds' bravery has never been officially recognized by the U.S. government. The Congressional Gold Medal would rectify that oversight.

The gold medal is awarded for lasting achievements in the field of arts, athletics, diplomacy, medicine, military service, public service and others.

Edmonds' son, Chris Edmonds of Maryville, said the family is thrilled he is being considered for the Congressional Gold Medal.

And yet, "his actions are our greatest reward because he did the right thing even in the face of death," said Chris Edmonds, pastor of Piney Grove Baptist Church in Maryville. "The lives he saved — I know those families, and to see their smiles and to know their contributions to the world, that's our greatest reward."

Cardin said Edmonds' actions reminded him of the Talmud's teaching that "whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world."

"At a dark time in humanity's history, Master Sgt. Edmonds was a bright light and did what his heart told him was the right thing to do," he said. "There are families alive today who can be thankful that their very existence is due in no small part to Roddie's service and sacrifice."

Kaine called Edmonds "a true American hero and the embodiment of everything our nation was fighting for against the Nazis in World War II."

## obituaries

### (RET.) SFC JOHN F ANDERSON, JR. Clarksville, TN



from 9:00 am to 10:00 am.

Funeral service for (Ret.) SFC John F. Anderson Jr., age 77 of Clarksville, will be Thursday, Feb 16, 2017 at 10:00 am at Sykes Funeral Home Chapel. Burial will follow in the KY Veterans Cemetery West. The family will receive friends on Wednesday, Feb 15, 2017 from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm at Sykes Funeral Home and Thursday, Feb 16, 2017

### WAYNE OLDHAM Clarksville, TN



R. Wayne Oldham, age 68 of Clarksville, passed away on Sunday, February 12, 2017 at Tennova Healthcare.

A Celebration of Life will be held at 1 p.m. on Friday, February 17, 2017 at First Baptist Church with Carolyn Riggins, Curtis Johnson, and Gregory Smith speaking.

Visitation will be from 10 a.m. until the hour of

# 2017-02-15 Knoxville soldier, Roddie Edmonds, 106th INF Div nominated for CMH

Reference to MSgt Roddie Edmonds was found in 316 newspapers all across the United States.

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