

HAGGADAH SUPPLEMENT

The following should be read after singing Dayyenu.

READER: Throughout the year, we remember how despots have sought the exile and annihilation of the Jewish people. At Pesach, we tell of Pharaoh. At Hanukkah, of Antiochus. At Purim, of Haman. At Yom HaShoah, of Hitler. We speak of past oppressors, hoping that through awareness we may prevent future tyrants from attaining power.

But we also give thanks for those in every generation who came forward to lead our people out of the darkness. We recognize heroic rescuers from every generation, hoping that the memory of their strength will fortify us if confronted with similar evil.

READER: We remember Moses, who, with both vision and courage, led his people from slavery to freedom. We remember the Maccabees, whose strength and determination saved the Temple and Jewish life in the Land of Israel. We remember Esther, who interceded to save fellow Jews from destruction. While we commemorate the heroes of the past, we also remember modern heroes who saved Jews from the Holocaust.

READER: At this Passover Seder we recount the story of Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds, an American soldier. Edmonds saved the lives of 200 Jewish GIs who had been captured by the Germans.

READER: The 106th Infantry Division landed in France some ninety days after D-Day. The division, which consisted of the 422nd, 423rd, and 424th Regiments reached eastern Belgium near the German border by December 10, 1944, and took up their positions, with the 422nd Regiment taking up a forward position. On December 16, 1944, the 422nd was attacked by the Germans as part of their counter offensive, which became known as the "Battle of the Bulge". The Regiment was quickly cut off and surrounded. The afternoon of December 19, 1944, parts of the Regiment, including Headquarters Company, in which Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds served, were captured by the Germans.

READER: The Germans captured more than 20,000 GIs during the Battle of the Bulge. The men of the 422nd Regiment were loaded into box cars and arrived at Stalag IXB in Bad Orb, Germany, on Christmas Day. Upon arrival, all Jewish POWs were separated and put in a Jewish barrack. After several weeks in Bad Orb, the American POWs were divided into three groups – officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and enlisted men. The NCOs were taken to Stalag IXA in Ziegenhain. There were 1,292 men in this group.

READER: The Jewish enlisted men that remained at Bad Orb were sent to Berga Concentration Camp where many died from inhumane conditions.

READER: The highest ranking NCO in Stalag IXA was Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds from Knoxville, Tennessee. Upon their arrival in Ziegenhain, the commandant of Stalag IXA, Major Siegmann, ordered all Jewish POWs to present themselves the next morning. Master Sgt. Edmonds ordered all 1,292 American POWs to stand in formation.



Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds

READER: The next day, when Major Siegmann saw that all 1,292 GIs were standing in front of their barracks, enraged he turned to Edmonds and demanded: "They cannot all be Jews!" To this, Master Sgt. Edmonds said, "We are all Jews here." Siegmann drew his pistol and pressed it into Edmonds's forehead. Roddie Edmonds did not back down and replied: "According to the Geneva Convention, we only have to give our name, rank and serial number. If you shoot me, you will have to shoot all of us, and when we win this war you will be tried for war crimes." Siegmann turned around and left. There were 200 Jewish GIs among the 1,292 American POWs. This act by Master Sgt. Edmonds saved the lives of these 200 Jewish GIs.

TOGETHER: Let the story of Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds inspire us to do right when faced with evil. How can we pass this spirit on to future generations?

READER: First, let us honor rescuers like Master Sgt. Edmonds by learning from his deeds and dedicating ourselves anew to fulfilling the traditional Jewish commandment to be responsible for the safety and well-being of our neighbors.

READER: Second, let us also honor these rescuers by dedicating ourselves to assisting those among them who need our help. As Jews, we must ensure that these heroes live out their remaining years in dignity. We have the ability to make an enormous difference in their lives.

READER: Tonight, let us commit to learning the stories of these righteous men and women who saved thousands of Jews from death. As we recall those who rose up against us in every generation, let us also remember those who stood apart from the evil. On this night of Passover, we recall Shifra and Puah, the two Egyptian midwives who defied Pharaoh's edict to drown the male children of Israel in the Nile. We recall the daughter of Pharaoh who violated her father's decree to drown the infants and who reached out to save Moses. Just as we remember and praise these first rescuers of Jewish children, let us ensure that the stories of those non-Jews who rescued Jewish children and adults during the Holocaust are remembered and passed down to our children and our children's children.

A postscript to Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds's rescue story: Master Sgt. Edmonds was the fifth American recognized by Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Authority, as a Righteous Among the Nations. Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds died in 1985. While The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR) did not support Master Sgt. Edmonds, we thought it appropriate to feature the story of Master Sgt. Roddie Edmonds this Passover – an American soldier, who upon being captured by the Germans, saved the lives of fellow American POWs who were Jewish.

Master Sgt. Edmonds and the Americans POWs held at Ziegenhain were liberated by an American armored division on March 30, 1945, the second night of Passover. The JFR produced a documentary on Master Sgt. Edmonds, "Following the Footsteps of my Father." As part of the documentary we interviewed four of the Jewish GIs who were saved by Master Sgt. Edmonds. The documentary can be viewed on the JFR website – www.jfr.org/reunion2016.

About the JFR – The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR) was established in 1986 by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis to fulfill the traditional Jewish commitment to *hakarot hatov*, the searching out and recognition of goodness. The JFR honors and supports Righteous Gentiles, non-Jews, who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. The Foundation provides monthly support to more than 400 aged and needy rescuers in 20 countries. Through its national education program, the Foundation educates teachers and students about the history of the Holocaust. In the past twenty-five years, the JFR has distributed more than \$38 million to aged and needy rescuers. We must continue to thank and support these extraordinary individuals who were the lone lights in the darkness.

In sharing the stories of the Righteous, we strive not only to honor their place in history, but also to stress the importance of their example for these times. These men and women remind us that in the midst of unspeakable evil, each human being has the capacity to act humanely and to make a difference, a lesson that is often eclipsed by the legacy of hatred, brutality, and suffering that dominates contemplation of the Holocaust.

For more information about the work of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous or to learn more about other rescuers like Roddie Edmonds please visit our website at www.jfr.org or contact us at the address listed below.