

NO PHOTO Cohen, Walter

Wichita Falls, TX

382nd Inf HQ Co 2nd Bn

Walter Cohen passed away on November 28, 2009. He was born on August 17, 1920 in Wichita Falls, the 4th of 5 children. He attended public school in Wichita Falls, graduating in 1938. He attended a reform Jewish Temple where he was confirmed. Like his siblings, he worked to help his mother, a widow, rather than going to college. He first worked at Art Jewelry (1938) and then Zale's Jewelry (1939), which originated in Wichita Falls, and where he worked for 38 years.

He was drafted in 1942 and served in the 96th Infantry Division of the Army. His training was in Camp Adair, Oregon. After 5 weeks in Hawaii, he fought in the South Pacific, including campaigns in the Philippines and Okinawa. He was discharged in 1946 in El Paso, TX.

He worked in Zale's home office in Dallas and then their stores in El Paso, Amarillo, and Lubbock. In 1948, feeling strongly about the Israeli battle for independence, he joined the Machalniks, volunteers from many nations who went to Israel to help them fight, risking their own citizenships. He fought there in the 7th Brigade which conducted a campaign in the Galilee. As the only Texan in his Brigade, he was known as "Tex" Cohen. His detailed journal from that period is a valuable part of the archives which have been collected in Florida and will eventually be available in New York through the American Jewish Historical Society.

Walter was a staunch supporter of the State of Israel throughout his life. After that war, Walter spent some time writing songs in "Tin Pan Alley" in New York City with Frank Perlman, with whom he fought in Israel. One of their novelty songs, "The Lake Song," was actually recorded by Ethel Merman & Ray Bolger, but was never released until the 21st century. He returned to Zale's, working in Austin & Galveston, then managing stores in Harlingen, Laredo, Dothan, Alabama, San Antonio, Puerto Rico, and McAllen. As a bachelor, he was often moved where the company needed him. He was able to practice his Spanish in many of these towns. Walter retired in 1977 and moved back to Austin. Because of his strong love and devotion to his family, he launched a search for his roots on his mother's side (without a computer), which took him overseas and culminated in the first family reunion in Memphis in 1980, including 140 attendees from all over the U.S. and the world. This was followed by 6 more reunions over 20 years. He actually uncovered hidden branches of the family tree in his research, tracing his family roots back to Lithuania.

In more recent years, Walter was a long-time greeter and volunteer at Congregation Beth Israel in Austin. With the ultimate in people skills and a keen interest in people and their family origins, this is a job he was born to do. He was a warm welcoming beacon to newcomers as well as established members. He attended courses in Judaism there to meet many new members. This led him to notice a trend in people with Spanish surnames who were converting to Judaism. He became fascinated with the Crypto-Jews, who dated from the Spanish Inquisition, where they pretended to be Catholics to survive. He attended some of the first conferences of these groups in the Southwest and was invited to speak about the phenomenon. Walter was always awed to see some people choosing Judaism as their faith. Walter is

beloved by members of Congregation Beth Israel, and they previously honored him by naming their foyer where he greeted members as "The Walter Cohen Foyer."

After a head injury in 2006, he lived in the nursing home setting at the Summit at Westlake Hills and later at the Retirement Nursing Center on Burnet Lane. He was a sweet and much beloved patient during this phase of life, retaining his gregarious, humorous and caring nature.

Walter was preceded in death by many beloved family members, including his parents, Rebecca and Lazarus Cohen, his siblings, Daniel "Bub" Cohen, Dorothy "Dolly" Smith, Miriam "Goo" Yaffe, and his in-laws Eva Dale Cohen and Sol Smith. He is survived by his brother, Alfred "Shuggie" Cohen of Ft. Worth, eight nieces and nephews with equally superb memories of their Uncle Walter, and his extended, all-embracing and adoring family and friends.

The family is grateful to Dr. Theresa Albright for her three years of continuous care for Walter and acknowledges the invaluable support of his loyal and caring sitter, Mary Lou Juarez, who brought hands-on quality to Walter's later years and was a terrific resource on his daily patterns and changes. Services will be held on Sunday, November 29th at 3:00 pm at Congregation Beth Israel, 3901 Shoal Creek Blvd., Rabbi Steven Folberg and Rabbi Cookie Lea Olshein, officiating, followed by interment at Cook Walden Capital Park Beth Israel Cemetery III in Pflugerville. In lieu of flowers, those wishing to honor his memory may send contributions in his name to Congregation Beth Israel, "Dolly's Playground Fund," 3901 Shoal Creek Blvd., Austin, TX 78756, or to a charity of their choice. Please join us by honoring Walter's life by visiting <http://www.mem.com>