



Walter T. Cholewa

February 13, 1923 - March 28, 2022

Walter T. Cholewa, 99 of Wheatfield, passed away Saturday (March 26, 2022). Walter was born in North Tonawanda on February 13, 1923 to Peter and Victoria Cholewa, Walter is one of 10 children. He was a Naval W.W.II veteran serving on the William Dean Howell as a gunner during the battle of Salerno. He continued his Naval career retiring as an Officer in 1966.

Following his retirement he was employed by Bell Aerospace as an inspector of the air cushions vehicle used in the first moon landing. Walter was an active member of the Navy Fleet Reserves, AmVets and the Eagles Club. In his spare time he enjoyed dancing , listening to country music, turkey hunting and spending time with his grandchildren and great grandchildren. Walter was predeceased by his wife Sophie (Slusarczyk) Cholewa in 2001 and Adelean (Siegmann) in 2015 , daughter Marie Cech, sisters and brothers Julia Wiech, Helen Galas, Hermie Kaminski, Fred, Peter, Matthew, Edward, and John Cholewa. Walter is the devoted father of Patricia (James) Zimmerman, Steven (Cynthia) Cholewa, Larry Siegmann, and son in law Dennis Cech, brother of Dorothy (Bruce) Oswald, Cherished grandfather of Kimberly (Greg) Brennan, Jennifer Hagan, Corey Cech, Adam Cech, Errick (Stephani) Cholewa, Mark (Brenda) Siegmann, and Greg Siegmann, adored great grandfather of 11, also surviving are several nieces, nephews, and friends.

Friends may call Wednesday from 3:30 - 7:30 PM at the Wattengel Funeral Home, 533 Meadow Drive North Tonawanda. Mass of Christian burial will be held Thursday at 9:30 AM from Our Lady Czestochowa Church, 626 Oliver

Street, North Tonawanda. Interment Mt. Olivet Cemetery. Memorials may be made to Niagara Hospice. Wattengel.com

Kindheartedness has been the hallmark of Walter T. Cholewa's life, from the years of his youth to his time today as a doting spouse.

By Staff Buffalo News Article 07/2/2021

Walter T. Cholewa, 91

Hometown: North Tonawanda

Residence: North Tonawanda

Branch: Navy

War zone: Italy

Years of service: 1943-46

Rank: Seaman

Most prominent honor: Navy Commendation Medal for meritorious service against German aircraft at Salerno

Specialty: Aviation ordnance and gunnery

By Lisa Khoury

News Staff Reporter

Imagine wondering what it would be like to think you could die at any moment. Then imagine thinking that almost constantly for six days in a row.

Walter T. Cholewa doesn't have to imagine. Even at age 91, he vividly remembers what it felt like to continuously contemplate the prospect of death from Sept. 11 to 17, 1943, in a World War II battle off the shores of Salerno, Italy. Yet that is hardly his most unforgettable war memory.

Yes, the Navy veteran certainly remembers those days during September 1943. Sometimes, he even feels himself rocking on a ship on the Mediterranean Sea. He still can visualize German planes dropping bombs 5 feet away from him – splashing into the sea instead of onto his ship – as the Allies invaded Italy.

Yet the veteran's most unforgettable war experience occurred while on leave

in November 1943 – the moment he walked inside his family’s North Tonawanda home. They had heard rumors that he was dead. “My mother was dressing my little sister on the chair,” Cholewa recalls as he begins to cry. Choked up, he could barely articulate the rest of the story.

“My little sister was so surprised. She went to school and told everybody, ‘My brother’s home. He’s a hero.’ My dad came home from work, and I tapped him on the shoulder. ...”

His father was shocked, he flailed his arms, and his paycheck went flying, Cholewa remembers.

In the last seven decades, Cholewa has never suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and has barely talked with friends and family about his duty at sea and the invasions of Sicily and the Italian mainland. His take on the war has been simple: He did it to serve his country, and that felt natural to him. He had dropped out of North Tonawanda High School at 17 and found work after his father had been laid off. That, too, seemed the natural thing to do to help out his parents and nine siblings, he said. In fact, his life has revolved around how he can serve others. And he says the war never changed his approach to life.

“I think I stayed the same; the war didn’t bother me,” he said.

But at any moment during those six days, Cholewa and his 27 fellow sailors on the Merchant Marine vessel SS Williams Dean Howells could have been killed. Working on an upper deck of the ship during the prolonged German attack, he said, he kept his hands glued to his anti-aircraft gun while trying to defend the crew and the ship. That meant limited rest and food. He kept a hammock next to his gun and grabbed some shut-eye at night. Cooks would climb up to his gunnery station to bring him a sandwich if he was hungry. “I saw two of those bombs coming, and I thought for sure they were going to hit us,” he said.

The planes that had carried them were close enough so that Cholewa opened fire. “All of the sudden,” he said, “both those planes disappeared. I don’t know

where they went.” As he sat in the living room of his modest North Tonawanda home, Cholewa paused while sharing his war story. Had he shot the planes? “I don’t know.” The possibility still haunts him, though he knows he was defending himself and his country.

While in the Navy, Colewa sent half of his \$21 paycheck to his family each month. Today, so many decades later, Cholewa is no less kindhearted than he was when he left school as a teen to earn money for the family. Just ask his second wife, Addie, whom he married 10 years ago. She barely has to do a chore in the house. “When I would dust, I would just dust,” she said. “He takes the lampshade and vacuums and cleans the lamp. He makes the meals. He does everything. He cooks, dusts, vacuums, does the wash, washes the floors; he painted the family room – he even shampoos rugs.” And don’t get her started on his delicious homemade pierogi. Life is just heavenly with him, she said, recalling how before she met him at a dance a decade ago, her years had been filled with caring for sickly loved ones who have since passed away. Now, she said, someone is caring for her. All of which has come to symbolize Walter Cholewa: family man, serviceman, caregiver, man of action.

Cemetery Details

Mount Olivet Cemetery

4000 Elmwood Avenue
Town Tonawanda, NY 14120

Previous Events

Visitation

MAR 30. 3:00 PM - 7:30 PM (ET)

Wattengel Funeral Home (Meadow Drive)
533 Meadow Drive
North Tonawanda, NY 14120
(716) 693-0440
wattengelfh@gmail.com
<https://www.wattengel.com>

Mass of Christian Burial

MAR 31. 9:30 AM (ET)

Our Lady of Czestochowa Church
626 Oliver Street
North Tonawanda, NY 14120
(716) 693-3822

Tribute Wall



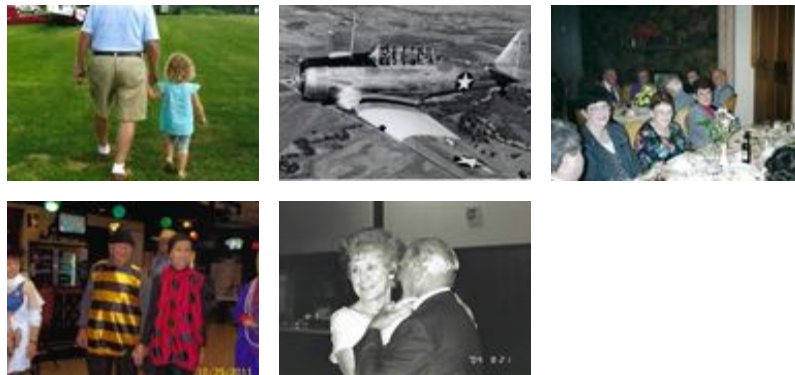
“ 2 files added to the album *Life Tributes*



Wattengel Funeral Home - March 31, 2022 at 05:36 PM



“ 124 files added to the album *Life Tributes*



Wattengel Funeral Home - March 30, 2022 at 01:55 PM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket* was purchased for the family of *Walter T. Cholewa*.



March 29, 2022 at 04:53 PM

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“Remember him from the neighborhood. What a beautiful tribute to the wonderful man that he was. Resting now in God's kingdom!

Esther Stoeckel - March 28, 2022 at 08:49 AM