

No early Jewish cemetery can be more than a short carriage ride from any downtown area, and that is certainly the case here in Altoona. The Mount Sinai ground dates back to 1873 as part of the earliest area congregation. Founded in 1874 as the Orthodox Ahavath Achim ("brotherly love"), the congregation moved to adopt Reform liturgy almost right away. By the turn of the century the congregation was renamed Mountain City Hebrew Reformed Congregation. The congregation changed its name to Temple Beth Israel in 1922.

The Agudath Achim ground, and it's 1150 graves makes it the largest between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh in any one cemetery, and combined here on Red Hill makes the 1700 graves far more than in any Pennsylvania town west of Harrisburg, with the exception of those within Allegheny County.

No doubt a testimony to the engines of the Pennsylvania Railroad that drove Altoona's economy, with the Jewish community being part and parcel of the region's growth and industrial success.

220 men and women served in the military and are buried here-150 in Agudath Achim and 70 in Mt. Sinai, showing how young the community was at one time, and also showing, as Jewish Americans have always shown, a disproportionate percentage served as it relates to the total population.

From the American Revolution where our fellow Jews served with and were close to George Washington to the Civil War where thousands served and hundreds died to preserve the Union, Jewish Americans have been awarded 17 congressional medals of honor for bravery. At places that are a part of our American military history: The Wilderness, Vicksburg, in the Argonne Forest and in the Battle of Saipan in the Marianna Islands. Our menschen charged up San Juan Hill with Teddy Roosevelt in the Spanish-American War. 250,000 Jews served with Allied Forces in WWI, and 650,000 Jewish Americans served in WWII. Of those, 50,000 received medals. We take a backseat to no one in terms of service to our country.

Jewish War Veterans, the JWV, was created in 1896 by 63 Civil War veterans to raise awareness of contributions made by Jewish service members. Many had heard anti-semitic cracks and insults that Jews had not served. Simon Wolf, a Washington, DC attorney and an adviser

to Republic presidents, produced a huge volume listing Jews who have served in US wars. The book is a treasure trove. The JWV is the oldest active national veterans' service organization in the US. It has an estimated 7,000 members, ranging from World War II to current conflicts as well as active duty personnel.

This hallowed ground here is a testimony to the love and attention that both congregations have for their cemeteries. Jewishly to this day, Altoonans have much to be proud of be it this service held annually as no one else does it, including in Pittsburgh, to the fine film festival you have and the other good works done by this fine community. And of course nothing happens without leadership, and Michael Cohen and Bill Wallin are 1 and 1A as you all are blessed with these stellar individuals and with a great board...mensches who care about not only all within the Jewish community but how the community represents itself within the general community. I understand you all have assumed care for the Jewish cemetery in Huntingdon, another example of your sensitivity.

Agudath Achim Memorial Park in Huntingdon dates back to 1950, holds 38 graves including at least two veterans: Major Martin Katz, MD who served with the US Army's 13th Air Force in World War II, and 1st Lt. Robert Paul Katz, Korean War, US Army Air Corps.

And it is only fitting that we mention the decades of service that Henry Weinberg, of blessed memory, provided to the cemetery and to this annual memorial service.

The region has long had a rich history of service to and in the military, both the general community and the Jewish community. Fort Roberdeau was established to guard the area's rich lead mines. US troops were placed at the Horseshoe Curve and the Gallitzin Tunnels to safeguard them after the WWII German spy ring invasions in Jacksonville and on Long Island had them as targets.

And thousands of area troops fought in all of our wars, well documented at Baker Mansion's military exhibits. The Blair County Honor Guard is another example of the depth of the region's commitment to our veterans as is the Wall that Heals. The Vietnam War had its share of Jewish Blair County veterans, 16 of them buried here.

And around this Memorial Day, few stories embody the ecumenical spirit of our glorious American melting pot more than that of the Four Chaplains, religious leaders who went down with their ship, the USS Dorchester, in the North Atlantic. And with that a local connection, and a Jewish connection.

A coastal passenger steamship requisitioned and operated by the War Shipping Administration, the Dorchester was in convoy from New York to Greenland when it was torpedoed by a German U-boat on February 3, 1943. The ship sank with the loss of 674 of the 904 men on board. The story of four Army chaplains, known as the "Four Chaplains" gained fame and led to many memorials.

These four Army officers were among the military personnel being transported overseas for duty. They were Reformed Church in America minister Clark V.

Poling; Catholic Church priest John P. Washington; York, Pa. Rabbi Alexander B. Goode and Methodist minister George L. Fox,

Reverend Fox was born in 1900, in Lewistown the eldest of eight children. When he was 17, he left school and lied about his age in order to join the Army to serve in World War I. He joined the ambulance corps in 1917, and as a medical corps assistant, he was highly decorated for bravery and awarded the Silver Star, Purple Heart and the French Croix de Guerre.^[7]

Upon discharge, he returned home to Altoona, where he completed high school. He entered Moody Bible Institute in Illinois in 1923. He later graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University was ordained a

Methodist minister in 1934, served parishes in Vermont, and was appointed state chaplain and historian for the American Legion.

In 1942, Fox volunteered to serve as an Army chaplain. He began active duty on August 8, 1942. After Army Chaplains School at Harvard, he reported to the 411th Coast Artillery Battalion at Camp Davis. He was then reunited with Chaplains Goode, Poling and Washington at Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts, where they prepared to depart for Europe on board the Dorchester.

The icy waves were a prowling ground for German U-boats, and one of the Coast Guard cutters accompanying the Dorchester had picked up a shadow on its sonar. The men on the Dorchester were under orders to keep their life jackets on, but down in the bowels of the ship, many disregarded the order because of the heat of the ship and the difficulty of sleeping in a bulky life preserver.

A German U-Boat silently surfaced at 12:55 a.m., hidden by the night. The officer in charge of U-223 took aim and fired three torpedoes at the troop ship. One torpedo hit the Dorchester below the water line, opening the hull to the frigid Atlantic, knocking out the power and with it radio contact with the three Coast Guard escorts. A lookout aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Comanche spotted the flash of the explosion, and radioed for help.

Aboard the Dorchester, men awakened by the explosion had to find their way topside in the dark. Many were killed in the initial explosion; many more were wounded. Most had undressed to sleep, and when they emerged on the tilting deck, they were without lifejackets. This was the Arctic; no one could survive long in those waters even with a lifejacket, but without one, he would be doomed.

According to survivors, there were four rays of light on that dark deck. The Four chaplains: They moved quickly and quietly among the men, calming them and directing them to lifeboats. They prayed aloud for the dying and encouraged the living.

Petty Officer John J. Mahoney tried to go back to his cabin for gloves, but Rabbi Goode stopped him. Goode answered. "Never mind, I have two pairs." The rabbi pressed his own gloves into the young man's hands. Later, in safety, Mahoney realized that Rabbi Goode didn't have two pairs of gloves. The rabbi had already decided that he was unlikely to leave the Dorchester.

The chaplains opened a locker on deck and began distributing life jackets to those who had left theirs below. When all the jackets were given out, they removed their own and handed them out, too.

The Dorchester sank that night, with only 240 survivors out of the 902 souls aboard. Survivors report hearing the chaplains on the deck of the ship, singing together to the very end, arm in arm.

On Dec. 19, 1944, the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross were awarded posthumously to each of the four chaplains. Congress issued a special “Four Chaplains Medal”.

A word about Rabbi Alexander Goode. Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1911, Goode was one of four children son of a rabbi. Raised in Washington, D.C., Goode excelled at sports at Eastern High School. He became a rabbi after graduating from the University of Cincinnati and in 1937 Hebrew Union College (HUC). In 1940, he received his Ph.D from Johns Hopkins University. He was married in 1935 to Teresa Flax, niece of Al Jolson, with whom he had one daughter, Rosalie.

Goode served as a rabbi in Marion, Indiana, and York, Pennsylvania. In 1941, Goode founded Boy Scout Troop 37 in York as a multi-cultural mixed race troop, the first troop in the U.S. to have scouts earn Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant awards.^[2]

In that same year, he applied to become a Navy chaplain but was turned down. The following year he was accepted into the Army, with orders to Harvard where he studied at

the chaplain's school in preparation for deployment to Europe followed by brief service at an airbase in Goldsboro, North Carolina. In October 1942, he joined the other members of the Four Chaplains and was detailed to embark on the Dorchester a few months later.^[3]

In memory of Rabbi Goode, the Alumni Service Window, showing the Jewish Chaplaincy insignia superimposed over an American flag, was dedicated at the Cincinnati campus of HUC on January 12–14, 1948. The inscription on the window reads: “In honor of our colleagues, students and alumni of the Hebrew Union College who served their country in two World Wars, 1917-18–1941-45.”

Veterans of note buried within this hallowed ground include selected individuals that are part of Altoona’s rich history.

Henry Cohn-The only Jewish Civil War soldier buried between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh

Four Goldsteins are buried in Mt. Sinai, having served in WWI. Harry, Henry, Isadore and Russell.

Another veteran from the region of note was Dr. Alfred Bergstein, a Philadelphia native, received the

Distinguished Service Cross and a Purple Heart for action in WWI. Not buried locally, his story is worth mentioning. He cared for wounded under heavy shelling, while wounded himself, refusing to leave the field until all of his men were treated or evacuated. Born in 1891, he and his practice were so intertwined with the nearby town of Gallitzin that he funded the high school band to march in the 1936 Rose Bowl parade. The Gallitzin WWII memorial book to all veterans is dedicated in his honor. Dr. Bergstein died in 1952 in Cresson, and is buried in Pottsville.

Maurice Howard "Babe" Patt, born in 1915, was an Altoona native and Carnegie Tech football player. He played in the National Football League for the Detroit Lions and the Cleveland Rams. He was drafted in the fifth round of the 1937 NFL Draft, and played end on offense and defense.

Babe's best offensive season was 1941. He served in the United States Marines Corps during World War II, and was stationed in the Solomon Islands including somehow sharing a tent with future President Richard Nixon. Babe died in 1961 here in Altoona. He was inducted

posthumously into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame in 1989.

Sid Holzman, mustered into the US Army in March of 1943, and later to become an intown legend at Sid's Townhouse Motel and Lounge. His Friday night Happy Hour's were legendary.

Irv Bregman, Johnstown native, and a Lt. in the US Air Force, Irv was a navigator and bombardier in WWII before becoming a giant in the Handmaker Family's automotive supply business. And speaking of business giants, Don Devorris served in the Korean War.

Bernie Covitch, Cambria County Business Hall of Famer, and the "son" in Ebensburg's J. Covitch and Son's longstanding clothing store, was a captain in the US Army.

Rabbi Herbert Berger, former spiritual leader of Agudath Achim, was a military chaplain in Germany post WWII. He is buried in Cleveland.

Bert Leopold, Culver Military Academy; 1962 grad; Captain, U.S. Army J.A.G. corps, '66-'69, Vietnam War. Former Judge, Blair Co. Court. Past President of Temple Beth Israel. Bert's father Emanuel was a veteran as well.

He wasn't the only Jewish judge with military experience. Judge Samuel Jubelirer served.

Phil Sky said that his experience as a cook in the US Army during the Vietnam War inspired him as an executive within the food industry. And speaking of Vietnam, and as mentioned earlier, no less than 16 patriotic Altoonans served in this war, a rather high number considering college deferments. Phil's cousin Steve Port was a 2nd Lt. in the war.

Irv Seltzer was a Lt. Col. in the US Army Reserves and a member of the military order of Army officers.

Meyer Small made the ultimate sacrifice. Born in 1922, the son of Henry and Minnie Klevan Small, Meyer was a 1940 Altoona High graduate. He entered the service in 1942. He was a decorated private in the US Army, Infantry Corps, stationed in England. Sadly, Meyer was killed in action in Normandy on July 1, 1944. He was awarded the WWII Victory Medal. His name lived on for decades and into the early 1980's as the local AZA chapter was named in his memory.

These soldiers are resting in peace, in this most peaceful and holy ground here on Red Hill. Thank you.