

★ KNIGHT, JAMES ROBERT ("J.R.") SN: 34 338 052

James Robert Knight was born November 26, 1921. He died June 6, 1944 (D-day) in service to the country.

Father: Luther Harvey Knight.
Mother: Cordie (Keeton) Knight.
Brothers: William Knight, Ernest Knight.
Sisters: Irene Bradford, Hester Wilborn,
Sue Goggans.



J.R. was inducted into the US Army August 17, 1942 from Fort McClellan. When he was killed in action, he had advanced from the rank of private to the rank of private first class.

After a period of basic training as an infantryman, Knight was sent to the European Theater, assigned to the 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division— known as “The Big Red One.”

The 16th Infantry Regiment landed in North Africa with the Big Red One on November 8, 1942, going to shore east of Oran. The division attacked as a concentrated whole for the first time on March 16, 1943, east from El Guettar. It took Sakket on April 3, and relieved the British 4th Division near Beja on April 16. After attacking along the Medjez el Bab-Tunis highway, the 16th regiment began its attack on Hill 523, and was actively engaged in Tunisia until May 9, 1943.

The division assaulted Gela Sicily July 10, 1943, and after fending off a German armored attack on July 11, it pushed inland and took Mazzarino and Niscemi on July 14, and Barrafrance on July 16. The battle-weary troops continued the fight as the division seized the Salso River crossings east of Galtanissetta, and repelled a German counterattack at Gangi July 25. After a series of sharp battles over difficult terrain, it made an all-out attack on Troina August 1, but the assault failed until the Germans withdrew during the night of August 6, allowing Troina to fall into the hands of the American forces. The division left Sicily October 23, and was sent back to England to train for the upcoming invasion of northern France.

Surrounded by his staff of American and English strategists, General Dwight David Eisenhower, as commander of the Allied forces, had amassed the most powerful group of fighting men of all times. Private First Class James Knight was one of them. Backed by airpower and warships, their mission was to carry out “Operation Overlord.” No operation of this nature and size had ever been attempted. On June 6, 1944, Knight participated in one of the deadliest amphibious landings by Allied forces during World War II—the assault on Omaha Beach. There were approximately 3,000 Allied casualties on D-day, most occurring within the first few hours.

Like many of the soldiers who assaulted the beaches of Normandy on D-day, Knight was young, and in military terms—“green.” The Allied forces faced a well-trained and seasoned German army. The long beach was protected by cliffs and reefs which favored the enemy. Anticipating the attack, the Germans had constructed an elaborate system of obstacles along the tidal flat, designed to wreck or block off landing craft.

Many allied troops making amphibious landings were killed by enemy sniper gunfire as they attempted to make it to Normandy’s “Omaha Beach.” Knight’s unit must have made it inland. His family said they were told that he and some other soldiers were approaching a group of Germans who had hoisted a surrender flag. It was a trap, and as they drew near, the Germans opened fire, mowing them down. J.R. Knight was among the many soldiers who lost their lives on June 6, 1944—D-Day in France.

Knight’s family received a telegram from the US Army informing them that J.R. had been slightly wounded in action. His mother was terrified when she received the message, thinking it was the dreaded one informing her of her son’s death. She was relieved to hear that he had just been wounded, but it wasn’t long until she did receive the “dreaded” knock on the door..

Perhaps J.R. had a premonition, because he had written his mother a letter shortly before he died advising her not to let his brother, Willie, “come into this man’s war.”

Medals awarded: Combat Infantryman’s Badge, Purple Heart Medal, Oak Leaf Cluster, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with three Bronze Battle Stars (for Tunisia, Sicily and Normandy), Arrowhead (for (?), World War II Victory Medal.

John McCrae, a Canadian who was killed in the First World War, wrote a scrap of verse while treating casualties behind the lines that is meaningful to any family who has a loved one buried on foreign soil, especially in France. The familiar verse is entitled *In Flanders Fields*:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

James Robert Knight left his hometown of Fyffe to serve his country. He is buried in the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, France, Plot G, Row 26, Grave 23, among rows and rows of white crosses, and perhaps where poppies grow.