



Railsplitter Obituary



Joseph Roger Knack

The obituary of this 19 year old soldier tells a story which is typical of the thousands who never came home from battle. Honor not just this soldier, but all like him.

2 August 1925 – 1 December 1944

Birth: 2 Aug 1925
Rochester, Monroe County, New York, USA

Death: 1 Dec 1944 (aged 19)
Nieuwenhagen, Landgraaf Municipality, Limburg, Netherlands

Burial: Netherlands American Cemetery and Memorial
Margraten, Eijsden-Margraten Municipality Limburg, Netherlands
Section G ~ Row 16 ~ Grave 23



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He was in **Company L of Third Battalion**, in the **334th Infantry Regiment**, which was within the **84th Infantry Division**. As such, he had the honor of participating in the very first day of combat operations ever for the 84th Infantry Division, as his regiment was the first to assault the German town of Prummern, on Nov 18, 1944.

Note that the initial assembly of the 84th Division contained a lot of volunteers that were considered "4F". As such, they were originally designated to be an occupying army in Germany after the war was over, allowing combat armies to come home. Joseph Roger Knack had tried to volunteer twice but was rejected, do to poor eyesight. But as the U.S. ran out of young men, he tried a third time and got in.

As time went on and casualties took a toll on US armies, the 84th Division was moved into combat. The 334th Infantry Regiment was the first in the field. Joseph served as a Private in the 334th Infantry Regiment, 84th Infantry Division, U.S. Army during World War II.

He enlisted in the Army on December 10, 1943 in Rochester, New York. He was noted as being Single, without dependents.

He was "**Killed In Action**" in Germany during the war and awarded a Purple Heart.

Overall unit historical information provided by eight sources:

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/84th_Division_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/84th_Division_(United_States))
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelfth_United_States_Army_Group
- "Railsplitters"
- https://www.lonesentry.com/gi_stories_booklets/84thinfantry/index.html
- "Fortune Favored The Brave" https://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/ww_reg_his/89/
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Queen
- <https://www.med-dept.com/unit-histories/53d-field-hospital/>
- <https://www.fieldsofhonor-database.com/index.php/en/american-war-cemetery-margraten-k/63649-knack-joseph-r>
- War Dept. Historical Film H.R. B-29 called "American Ninth Army-Aachen to the Roer River" viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vwPodSEKJA>.



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History of Movement for Private J. R. Knack (Army serial number 42090685) and his unit, Company L:

His combat unit: Company L of Third Battalion, in the 334th Infantry Regiment (Col. John S. Roosma), was within the 84th Infantry division (Railsplitters , Brig. Gen. Alexander R. Bolling), within XIII Corps, within Ninth Army (Maj. Gen. William H. Simpson), part of Twelfth United States Army Group.

Timeline:

1. 84th Infantry Division was ordered into active military service on 15 October 1942, at Camp Howze, Texas.
2. J. R. Knack successfully enlists on 3rd try (rejected twice for poor eyesight if he lost glasses) on 10 December 1943, leaving Printing Technology scholarship at Rochester Institute of Technology and part time job at Eastman Kodak.
3. Pvt. J. R. Knack traveled to Camp Crowder, Missouri, for Signal Corps training at US Army Signal Corps Replacement Training Center.
4. Pvt. J. R. Knack finishes training as a non-combat Messenger (MOS code 675 per AR 615-26 Civilian and Military Occupational Specialists (15 September 1942)). In August 1944, he shipped out to 12th Replacement Depot at Tidworth Camp, England, to wait for unit assignment.
5. 84th Infantry Division embarked on 20 September 1944 and arrived in the United Kingdom on 1 October, for additional training.
6. Pvt. J. R. Knack is finally ordered to join Company L on 31 Oct. 1944, as they boarded Cheshire troop transport ship in Southampton England. Company L (about 180 men) landed on Omaha Beach, Normandy, on 1 November 1944.
7. The 84th Infantry Division as a whole (16,000 men), landed on Omaha Beach, Normandy, from 1–4 November 1944. The channel crossings were made in LSTs, LCTs, Liberty ships, and the Cheshire troop transport ship.



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8. 84th Infantry Division as a whole, moved to the vicinity of Gulpen, Holland, from 5–12 November, as part of the 9th Army.

9. Company L reported (Morning Reports) these overnight locations as they moved peacefully into position: 1-4 Nov. 3 miles south of Mosles France; 5 Nov. 3 miles west of Dreux France; rode through Paris on 6 Nov.; 6-7 Nov. 1 mile west of Laon France; 8 Nov. Vise Belgium; 9-10 Nov. Jalaers Holland (not on modern map); 11-16 Nov. Mechelen Holland; 16-17 Nov. Frelenberg Germany. During this period, Pvt. J. R. Knack was retrained to be a Rifleman (MOS code 745), of which his unit would soon have a great need for.

10. 84th Infantry Division entered combat on 18 November with an attack on Geilenkirchen (mining and transportation center with a population of 20,000), Germany, as part of the larger offensive code-named Operation Clipper, in the Roer Valley.

- a. Two of its regiments were loaned to the Second British Army for Operation Clipper, the 333rd and 334th, and were attached to the Sherwood Yeoman Rangers.
- b. To the 334th went the distinction of being the first 84th unit to enter combat, seizing the initiative in the Geilenkirchen sector on 18 Nov., attacking and capturing Prummern (high ground over Geilenkirchen).
- c. Captured Geilenkirchen on 19 November, which was second largest German town to fall up to that time.
- d. 84th Infantry Division detached from the Second British Army Nov. 23 and rejoined XIII Corps., Ninth Army, for Operation Queen.

11. 84th Infantry Division pushed forward to take Beeck and Lindern (both are northeastern suburbs of Geilenkirchen) in the face of heavy enemy resistance, 29 November.



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12. Company L reported these overnight locations during hostilities: 18-20 Nov. 1 mile east of Geilenkirchen Germany (engaged in action on 19th in Waurichen Germany, and on 20th in Geilenkirchen Germany); 21-28 Nov. Prummern Germany (action there from 21st to 24th); 29 Nov. Waurichen Germany; 30 Nov. 3 miles north of Apweiler, Germany (reported “attacked to gain high ground”).

13. On Nov 30, 1944 (date of Pvt. J. R. Knack being wounded), the 333rd and 334th fought and captured high ground west of Lindern and north of Beeck. Note that in the referenced “Fortune Favored The Brave”, page 29 provides a brief action report from Third Battalion for that date.

14. Note that Democrat And Chronical newspaper (Rochester NY) reported (AP story) on their Dec 1, 1944 front page top headline “9th Army Surges On, Widens Hold on Roer”. Article says, “while the shattering attack by three divisions of the Ninth Army beat back the dug-in Germans”. Assuming that this morning newspaper was a day behind reporting war news from Europe, this is potentially the news report of the battle where Pvt. J. R. Knack was mortally wounded on the 30th, that his family read that morning.

15. Information received by his parents (in received order): Western Union Telegram on 11 Dec. informing them that their son had been “seriously wounded in action” on 30 Nov., from General Dunlop; second telegram on 17 Dec. that their son had died, from General Dunlop; after those telegrams were received, a postal letter dated 1 Dec. arrived from Brig. Gen. Alexander R. Bolling, stating that he died on Dec 1, 1944, in the American Military Hospital in Holland, and wrote he was “a conscientious and courageous soldier” and “during the stress of combat he remained cheerful and cool-headed, and he was an inspiration to his fellow soldiers”; a postal letter dated 13 Jan. 1945, from General Dunlop, states that death occurred on 1 Dec, not on 30 Nov, as was mistakenly reported in the second telegram; a postal letter dated 16 Aug. 1946, arrived from Colonel Charles D. Carle (commanding at the Records Administration Center in St. Louis, MO), stating “he received severe shell fragment wounds of the head in action 30 November 1944 near Apweiler, Germany” and that “death occurred on 1 December 1944”. Due to his company’s self-reported location on 30 Nov, he likely received his fatal wound at least 3 miles north of Apweiler Germany, if not farther north (west of Lindern and north of Beeck).



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16. Company L Morning Report on 30 Nov. said Pvt. J. R. Knack, MOS code 745, was sent to 111th Evacuation Hospital, which was located in Heerlen Holland at that time. Heerlen Holland was place of his death.

17. Posthumously awarded Purple Heart Medal. Buried in Netherlands American Cemetery and Memorial, Margraten, Eijsden-Margraten Municipality, Limburg, Netherlands: Section G, Row 16, Grave 23. Refer to <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56300612/joseph-roger-knack>.

Historical information provided by 11 main sources:

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/84th_Division_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/84th_Division_(United_States))
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelfth_United_States_Army_Group
- “Railsplitters” at https://www.lonesentry.com/gi_stories_booklets/84thinfantry/index.html
- “Fortune Favored The Brave” at https://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/ww_reg_his/89/
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Queen
- <https://www.fieldsofhonor-database.com/index.php/en/american-war-cemetery-margraten-k/63649-knack-joseph-r>
- War Dept. Historical Film H.R. B-29 called “American Ninth Army-Aachen to the Roer River” viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vwPodSEKJA>.
- “The Big Picture” TV series, episode TV 650 “Tried by Fire -- Part 1”, viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVTveOj6QJg>
- <https://www.goldenarrowresearch.com/> provided from national archive: Company L Morning Reports (daily) from 31 Oct. to 30 Nov. 1944; 334th regiment After Action Reports for November and December 1944.
- 111th Evacuation Hospital location: <https://www.med-dept.com/unit-histories/41st-evacuation-hospital/> and <https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/api/collection/p4013coll8/id/4734/download>
- JRK’s sister, Doris Anne (Knack) Fyle provided family photos, documents (such as telegrams and letters from War Department) and family stories.

11. Posthumously awarded Purple Heart Medal.



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Provided by: *Historical Wyoming*

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Intermediary source: *WWII Gold Star*

Veterans of Wyoming County, NY,

By James Gillen

Original source: sister Doris Anne (Knack) Fyle

Joseph Roger Knack

Pvt., U. S. Army

Joseph Roger Knack was born August 2, 1925. In his school life he was active in student affairs and played on both the football and track teams. He was known as one of the most popular members of his class. A graduate of Perry High School class of 1943, he became the editor of the school newspaper, *The Yellowjacket*, in his senior year. In his two years before graduation he worked at the *Perry Herald* where he was known as "Roge." According to his sister, his dream was to become a journalist. His family moved in 1943 after Joseph R.'s graduation when his father, an employee of the Robeson Cutlery Co., took a job in Rochester.

After winning a scholarship to the Rochester Institute of Technology, Joseph R. studied printing where he obtained a job at Eastman Kodak in Rochester, NY.

He enlisted in December of 1943.

Receiving his training at Camp Crowder, MO, in the Signal Corps, he was then sent overseas in August of 1944. While serving with 334th Infantry Regiment, the 84th Infantry Division on the German front on November 30, 1944, he was killed in action at the age of 19. He was buried in the Netherlands American Cemetery and Memorial in Margraten, Netherlands: Plot G, Row 16, Grave 23.

Survived by:

Parents: Joseph H. & Marie (Schmidt) Knack

Sister: Doris Anne (Knack) Fyle

Provided by: *Democrat & Chronicle of Rochester NY*

(Dec. 19, 1944, page 15)

Pvt. J. Roger Knack, 19, Killed in Action

Pvt. J. Roger Knack, 19, was killed Nov. 30 in infantry action in Germany, his parents have learned.

He was the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Knack, 217 Pardee Rd.

Private Knack was a graduate of Perry High School and was a student at Rochester Institute of Technology when he entered service in December, 1943. He was sent overseas

last August. He leaves his parents and a sister, Miss Doris Anne Knack.



**J. ROGER
KNACK**