

# Mementos only link to uncle's fate on Omaha Beach

BY RON DEVLIN  
READING EAGLE

Pfc. Eake DeMarco of Reading was with the Army's storied 1st Infantry Division as it embarked on the invasion of Normandy during World War II.

The exact circumstances are somewhat clouded, but DeMarco, 22, died as his unit hit Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944 — D-Day, 75 years ago today.

He was posthumously awarded a Bronze Star medal for courage in the face of overwhelming odds.

Camille DeMarco, Eake's niece, is keeper of an archive dedicated to her uncle's service in World War II.

On the dining room table of her Sinking Spring home, DeMarco recently laid out a collection of photos, letters and commendations related to her uncle's wartime service.

Among silk banners he sent home were the Big Red 1 patch he wore, his Purple Heart and the American flag that covered DeMarco's casket when he was buried beneath a white cross in the U.S. Military Cemetery in St. Laurent, France.

Together, they amount to a legacy left by one soldier who fought and died for his country on that fateful mission that Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower anointed as "a great crusade."

## A soldier's story

Eake DeMarco was born on New Year's Day 1922 to Frank and Caroline DeMarco in Minersville, then a hard-scrabble mining town in the heart of Schuylkill County's coal region.

He was raised, however, by his uncle and aunt, Amedeo and Giovanna DeMarco, in the 500 block of Weiser Street in Reading.

Camille DeMarco, who's 60, was born about 15 years after her uncle died in combat.

Her image of him is defined by stories handed down by family members.

"He was quite handsome, very popular and compassionate," said DeMarco, assistant director of communications at Kutztown University. "When no one else would, he escorted a disabled girl to the prom at Reading High School."

Old photos show Eake in dress uniform, smoking a pipe



COURTESY OF MICHAEL DEMARCO

An American flag and a floral wreath adorn the grave of Pfc. Eake DeMarco of Reading, who died in combat on Omaha Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944. The wreath was placed by Michael DeMarco, the soldier's nephew, in the U.S. Military Cemetery, St. Laurent, France, in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of D-Day. The family, who live in Texas, are Michael DeMarco, second from left, Lisa Kopp DeMarco, right, and their children Michael and Sophia.

and looking more like a general than a foot soldier.

Eake DeMarco was one of three brothers who served in World War II. James DeMarco, Camille's father, was in the Navy, and Michael DeMarco, her uncle, served in the Coast Guard.

Camille thinks Eake might be short for Edward, but his military papers and the cross on his grave identify him as Eake DeMarco.

Eake enlisted in the Army in November 1942 and was assigned to the 16th Infantry Regiment in April 1943.

Before DeMarco joined it, the 16th received the French Croix de Guerre for its actions at the Kasserine Pass and a Presidential Unit Citation for combat near Mateur, Tunisia, during the North Africa campaign.

Details are not known, but according to family members, DeMarco was with the 16th

when it invaded Sicily in July 1943.

Subsequently, the regiment sailed to England and trained for the Allied invasion of Normandy, known as Operation Overlord.

On June 5, 1944, the 16th left Weymouth harbor and headed for Omaha Beach, one of five landing points on the beaches of Normandy, a region in northwestern France across the English Channel from Britain.

In a scene reminiscent of Stephen Spielberg's depiction in "Saving Private Ryan," troops were killed and wounded as they attempted to get out of landing craft.

One of the spearheading units, the 16th was met by violent seas that thrust some troops into the water upon landing near Colleville-sur-Mer, France, according to a report in *Stars and Stripes*. The 16th, whose motto is *Semper*



READING EAGLE: JEREMY DREY

The American flag that covered Army Pfc. Eake DeMarco's casket when he was buried in the U.S. Military Cemetery in St. Laurent, France, is among the keepsakes his relatives have of his service on D-Day.

Paratus, or Always Ready, suffered an estimated 800 casualties, about a third of its strength.

Accounts of DeMarco's fate differ.

His Bronze Star medal citation, issued by Headquarters Company, 1st Infantry Division, on Jan. 4, 1945, says DeMarco's landing craft struck an underwater mine.

"Private DeMarco swam ashore and procured a rifle from a casualty," according to the citation. "And, despite heavy enemy mortar, artillery and machine gun fire, courageously joined a successful attack upon a numerically superior foe."

Capt. Kim Richmond, his commanding officer in Company I, 16th Infantry, gives a different account in a July 1944 letter to the DeMarco family.

Richmond said that he had been DeMarco's commanding officer for quite some time, and they were in the same small landing craft on D-Day.

"He died bravely and instantly while landing on the coast of Normandy," Richmond wrote. "He was struck down instantly and died from machine gun fire."

Saying he, too, felt DeMarco's loss personally, Richmond added, "But I feel though he has been transferred to a new company."

## A legacy preserved

Camille DeMarco thinks her uncle married a Scottish army nurse when he was in Europe, most likely England.

That's what she was told by family members, and there are photos of a woman in a Scot-



**Online:** Read recollections of D-Day from the Reading's Eagle's 1994 package of stories commemorating the 50th anniversary at [readingeagle.com](http://readingeagle.com)

tish military uniform among Eake DeMarco's effects.

As far as she knows, there were no children in the marriage, if indeed there was one.

With all of Eake's four siblings departed, his legacy resides primarily in Camille DeMarco's respect and admiration for an uncle she never knew.

"When you look through his photos, medals and citations," she said, "you get to know him a little better."

With the ranks of those who served in World War II thinning, Camille worries their stories will be forgotten. That's why she unveiled her uncle's effects, which are normally kept private.

The World War II Museum in New Orleans reports that fewer than 500,000 of the 16 million who served were still alive in 2018.

"You just want to keep their legacy alive," Camille said.

John McCormack, Camille's husband, is amazed at what Eake DeMarco went through in two of the major battles of World War II.

"He was in the battle for Sicily, which was no walk in the park," said McCormack, a captain in Albricht College's security force. "Then, he participated in the invasion of Normandy, the biggest battle of all time."

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