

**Castonguay, Joseph Emery**  
**Rifleman**  
**Royal Winnipeg Rifles**  
**Royal Canadian Infantry Corps**  
**C/103181**



Joseph Emery Castonguay was born on Oct. 14, 1918, in Otter Lake, Quebec to French-Canadian parents, Joseph Josue Castonguay (1888-1960) and Celina Alma Deslauriers (1890-1977). The family comprised Raoul (1917-1962), Emery (1918-1945), Joachim (Jacques) (1921-2007), Emerilda (1923-1996) and Emma (1928-2010). His father Joseph Castonguay was a carpenter with his shop in their house in the Town of Renfrew, Ontario.



*The family photograph in 1941 shows from left, sisters, Emma and Emerilda; mother Celina and father Joseph; brother Jacques; wife Theresa, and Emery with baby Evelyn.*

Emery obtained his Grade VII education at a rural school but quit to get a job. He spent four years working in his hometown of Renfrew as a labourer with the O'Brien Woollen Mill, which was a cloth factory, and then worked one and a half years as a mechanic at a local garage.

On June 19, 1940, he married Theresa Eva Etmanski (1913-1985). They had two children, Evelyn born in 1941 and Wallace born in 1943. The newly-wed couple, Emery and Theresa, lived next door to his parents on Baldwin Street, Renfrew.



*Emery and Theresa at 1940 wedding.*



*Emery and Theresa with baby, Evelyn, 1941*

When he enlisted in the army in Ottawa on March 23, 1943, Emery stood five feet six inches and weighed 140 pounds. He was considered a person of "above average intelligence" with "a rather quiet manner but he is thoroughly confident and alert," according to his personnel selection record in his military service file.

His military training was obtained at Cornwall and Camp Borden, both in Ontario and at Debert, in Nova Scotia. After making a six-day trip across the Atlantic Ocean, he disembarked in the United Kingdom on Dec. 21, 1943 and he was stationed there until he participated in D-Day invasion in June of 1944.

He was assigned to the infantry regiment, Royal Winnipeg Rifles in "D" company. Castonguay's unit was involved in many battles starting on June 6, 1944 when the Royal Winnipeg regiment landed on Juno Beach in Normandy and the regiment fought in famous battles such as Caen and the Falaise Gap. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles then fought across France, Belgium, the Netherlands and finally into Germany.



*Emery Castonguay's photo belonging to his daughter Evelyn Giroux.*

Rifleman Emery Castonguay was killed on Feb. 26, 1945, as the Royal Winnipeg Rifles engaged the German army in an assault during Operation Veritable on the Dutch-German border.

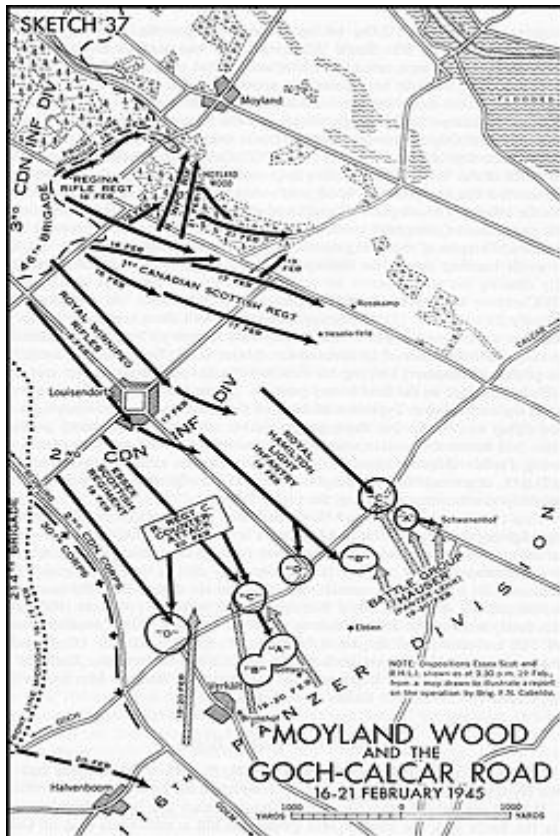
According to military records, the Winnipeg Rifles troops had debussed from well-armoured Kangaroo carriers which had carried them through heavy artillery shelling and rocket fire. Castonguay likely died as the infantry charged on foot to overtake enemy positions in the fortified village of Louisendorf, Germany.



*Winnipeg Rifles troops mounted Kanagaros. Photo by Library & Archives Canada.*

The 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigades, involving numerous Canadian regiments, had mounted a massive frontal attack to assist the British 30th Corps involved in clearing the nearby Moyland Woods and Goch-Calcar Road. The Winnipeg Rifles' objective was clear Louisendorf of its German defenders.





Source: *The Victory Campaign, the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War.*

Castonguay along with two comrades-at-arms who were also killed at the same location were buried in temporary graves on the battlefield in Germany. In March, 1946, the soldiers' remains were moved to the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, The Netherlands. Castonguay's burial references are Plot **XXV**, Row **D**, Grave **1**. His comrades are buried in the same row: L.F. Koenig in Grave 2 and L.W. Gold in Grave 3.

When the Commonwealth War Graves Commission replaced wooden crosses with white natural stone, they asked families to choose inscriptions. The Castonguay family picked this inscription on his tombstone:

Our dear Emery  
 Your smiling face  
 We always remember  
 No one can take your place.



In mid-1946, the Canadian Army sent his campaign medals to the family such as the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp, the War Medal, the 1939-45 Star, and the France & Germany Star, Memorial Crosses for a soldier killed in action were sent to both his mother, Celina Castonguay and his wife, Theresa Castonguay.



Castonguay was awarded similar medals like the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, *the War Medal, the 1939-1945 Star, and the France & Germany Star.*

For a long time after the war ended, his loved ones wrote to the Canadian military authorities to find out the circumstances of his death. In a letter dated May 4, 1945, his wife, Mrs. Castonguay, wrote to Brigadier A.C. Spencer that "I would appreciate if you could send me any details whatever. How he was killed, and where, and also where he was buried. I would rather have the news now than a year or so later." No reply to this letter was included in his official service records.

And his mother, Celina Castonguay also sent the military authorities a similar plea for information. In her April 21, 1946, letter, she wrote "We would be very grateful to receive news concerning his death... "No response is included in his official records.



Biography made available for Faces To Graves, with courtesy of Kurt Johnson.