**“Honneur et Patrie:”**
The Award of the French Legion of Honor to “100 American Veterans” on the 60th Anniversary of D-Day

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**Introduction**

On June 5, 2004, 103 United States veterans of combat in France in World War II assembled on the cobblestone courtyard of the Hotel des Invalides in Paris, France. There, in a unique event of pomp and pageantry, these American men and women received France’s highest decoration, the Legion of Honor, from French Defense Minister Michele Alliot-Marie. This is the story behind that award ceremony: why the French awarded the decoration, the selection process for the award; and who received it, with some details on individual awardees. It is a fascinating story of heroism and achievement.

**History of the Legion of Honor**

Since the Legion of Honor is France’s highest decoration, a brief history of the award is appropriate. The French Revolution (1789-1799) swept away a monarchy (Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette) and a society based on hereditary privileges. In its place, successive “revolutionary” governments sought equality (in theory at least) for all citizens, and promoted the idea that each inhabitant of France, regardless of class or social status, should be rewarded for merit.

In 1799, when Napoleon Bonaparte came to power as the First Consul of France, he realized that the old orders of chivalry no longer represented this new spirit of equality and brotherhood. Something new was needed—a distinctive decoration for deserving citizens of merit. As Napoleon said:

Distinctions used to be awarded in France and still are in neighboring countries, only to the well-born man; I shall give them to the man who has served best in the Army or in the States or who has produced the finest creations. It will be an aristocracy, if you will, but an aristocracy always open to merit, where there would be men who have rendered great services and where there would also be room for other men who are capable of new services.

Realizing that Royal Orders had been abolished by earlier revolutionary governments—and understanding that revival of any such order ran counter to the spirit of the French revolution—Napoleon decided to create a “legion” of honor for men and women of merit. His legislation, adopted by the Council of State and legislature on May 19, 1802, established a “Legion of Honor” to reward all merit, whether military or civilian. Napoleon (who borrowed the idea of a “legion” from Roman Republican history) established three ranks (or classes) of honor. Today, under French law, the Legion of Honor “shall be a reward for eminent merits in the service of the nation [France] either as a civilian or under arms” and it is composed of five ranks (or grades): Chevalier (Knight) (lowest), Officier (Officer), Commandant (Commander), Grand Officier (Grand Officer) and Grand Croix (Grand Cross) (highest); the last two are reserved for prime ministers and heads of state. Finally, “no one who is not a French citizen may be admitted to the Legion of Honor,” but non-citizens may be awarded the decoration if their military or civilian merit serves France. This explains why 103 U.S. veterans of World War II were eligible to be awarded the Legion of Honor by the French government: their combat service in France from 1944 to 1945 qualified as “eminent” merit in the service of the French Republic.

**Figure 1: Obverse of badge of a Chevalier, Legion of Honor.**
The Legion of Honor, Chevalier (Knight)

With the exception of one American, who received the Legion of Honor in the grade of “Officier,” all United States veterans were awarded the Legion of Honor in the grade of Chevalier (Knight). Although it is officially called a “cross,” the insignia of the Legion of Honor in fact is a white-enameled star with five rays. The obverse (Figure 1) of the decoration consists of a gilt medallion in the center, upon which is the profile of a woman facing right (she is France). This circular medallion is ringed by a blue-enamel circle with the words REPUBLIQUE FRANCAISE (French Republic). The medallion, from which the five rays extend, sits in a green enameled wreath of leaves. The cross and wreath are suspended from a second green enameled wreath of leaves, which is attached by a ring to a crimson-red ribbon.

Figure 2: Reverse of badge of a Chevalier, Legion of Honor.

The reverse (Figure 2) of the medal also consists of a gilt medallion, upon which is placed two crossed red-white-and blue flags (the French “tricolor”). This medallion is encircled by the words, HONNEUR (Honor) ET PATRIE (Country/Fatherland)” and 29 FLOREALAN X (29th Floreal [of the] Year 10). These last four words relate to the date Napoleon established the Legion of Honor: French Revolutionary fervor in 1792 had resulted in the creation of a new calendar to mark the birth of a new France of liberty, fraternity, and equality; and so Napoleon’s new decoration was born not on May 19, 1802, but on the 29th [day] Floreal [month] of the Year 10!

The Proposal to Award the Legion of Honor and the Selection Process

The impetus for the award came from the French Ambassador to the United States, Jean-David Levitte. In December, 2003, Levitte asked Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi “for help identifying 100 U.S. World War II veterans to be honored in France during the 60th anniversary of D-Day.” Principi agreed, and assigned the task to Robert F. Elliott, a retired Army colonel and senior executive at the Veterans’ Administration.

Recognizing that there were thousands and thousands of eligible, and deserving, candidates from which to pick, Elliott worked hard to fashion a fair and equitable selection process. First, he identified all the U.S. military units that had participated in the liberation of France between June 6, 1944 and May 8, 1945. This meant reviewing the order of battle for the Normandy, Ardennes, Southern and Northern France campaigns, and compiling a list of Army, Navy, Army Air Forces and Coast Guard combat, combat support, and combat service units that served in those campaigns. (The Marine Corps was principally in the Pacific, and so marines were excluded from the process). Elliott then used the Library of Congress’s Veterans [oral] History Project to find veterans who had served in those units, usually by examining military separation orders (DD 214s) to see if these reflected service in one or more French campaigns. “I spent many late nights here in the office,” Elliott told an interviewer, “putting a list together” that was representative of those who served in France. But even after Elliott had identified a man or woman who he believed would be a top candidate, the process was not over: since the French government intended to present the Legion of Honor in a ceremony in Paris, each veteran had to be physically and mentally capable of traveling overseas. Elliott did about 200 telephone interviews before arriving at his final list of 100 veterans. He sent the list to the French Embassy in Washington, which forwarded the names to the Legion of Honor Committee in Paris, which made the final selection. At the end of the process on May 6, 2004, and with the addition of a few more names to the list of veterans Elliott had selected,
The French Government awarded decorations to 103 American men and women: one Legion of Honor (Officier) and 102 Legions of Honor (Chevalier). The original proposal for an award the Legion of Honor to “100 American Veterans” was now modified as there were to be 103 awardees—but this slight difference in numbers did not alter the fundamental goal of the proposal: official French recognition of the contributions of American combat veterans.

The 103 American Recipients

The 103 men and women who received the Legion of Honor at the Hotel des Invalides on June 5, 2004 were:

In the grade of Officier
Philips, Robert

In the grade of Chevalier
Aldrich, Roger H.
Archer, Lee A.
Bair, Roy
Baugh, Howard L.
Bebout, Paul
Beck, Carl
Black, Charles A.
Black, Edwin
Bonzer, Sally Lou
Borden, Richard W., Sr., Dr.
Brown, Samuel
Bryant, Leslie R.
Burns, Edward
Calbert, William E.
Campbell, John W.
Candelaria, Richard
Carter, Herbert E.
Carter, Roy G.
Cartledge, Carl.
Catt, Paul
Clark, Robert F.
Cohen, Adolph
Cordova, Alfredo
Curley, Charles D., Jr.
Curtis, Harland “Bud” L.
Davis, Dorothy S.
Dedick, Andrew P., Dr.
Dedick, Kathleen G.
Drews, John W.
Dunlap, Glen V.
Fearrington, John T.
Felt, Clarence
Furey, James J.

Gallagher, John
Giudice, Pasquale L.
Goforth, Walter
Goodall, Clifford A., Jr.
Grant, Howard S., Jr.
Grout, Robert
Hostler, Charles W.
Ingrisano, Michael N., Jr.
Kanaya, Jimmie
Karges, Alvin
Kilmer, William H., Sr.
Kirschner, Adam
Koumalats, George
Kramarz, Walter P.
Kuhar, Joseph J.
Kuwayama, Yeichichi “Kelly”
LeBeau, Marcella R.
Marcri, Pat
Madden, Peter A.
Maleck, LeRoy, Dr.
Marsh, Theo B.
McGee, Charles E.
McGovern, George S.
Moreno, John A.
Moretto, Rocco J.
Morisi, Joseph L.
Nichols, Walter W.
Nosek, Thaddeus M.
Odahowski, Steve P.
Palmer, John S.
Paparella, Julia B.
Patterson, Thomas J.
Pasciak, Walter
Pepe, William G.
Pernice, Joseph M.
Perrett, Marvin J.
Pilmore, George
Pine, Edward L.
Plotkin, Abe
Priest, William
Quinn, Elisabeth
Rayman, Walter T.
Reeves, Alan F.
Roberts, James F., Jr.
Roberts, J. Milnor
Ross, Harlan P.
Rossignol, Gerard
Rubino, Peter
Ruby, Burton
Russell, Phillip
Sanchez, Ysidor M.
Sauter, Irene
Schein, Norman J.