



*Liberté • Égalité • Fraternité*  
**RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE**

CONSULATE GENERAL OF FRANCE IN ATLANTA

**Cérémonie de remise de la Légion d'Honneur à des vétérans de Caroline du Nord**

**Mercredi 15 juin 2016 à 14h00**

**Levine Museum of the New South - Charlotte, NC**

**DISCOURS**

As Consul General of France to the Southeast, it is with a great pleasure that I welcome you this afternoon to the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte as we honor 10 American WWII veterans with the French Legion of Honor in the name of the President of the Republic of France.

I'd like to begin by thanking our veterans, their family and their friends who came from all over the State of North Carolina, and even maybe beyond, for joining us for this afternoon's ceremony.

And of course, I'd like to thank sincerely Ms. Alina McNichol for her beautiful and moving rendition of the American and French National Anthems.

As you may already know, the French Legion of Honor was created two centuries ago by Napoleon the 1<sup>st</sup>. It is the highest distinction France can confer on a citizen or a foreigner. It recognizes exceptional services to France and rewards eminent military and civil merits.

Since taking on my role as Consul General to the Southeast 4 years ago, it has always been a great privilege for me to preside over many such ceremonies throughout the Southeastern United States, like the one we are having this afternoon. In particular in North Carolina, I presided over 6 ceremonies and was honored to bestow the French Legion of Honor to 67 WWII veterans.

Each time, I can assure you that I was and I am deeply humbled and moved by the opportunity to meet those veterans and express them officially the eternal gratitude of the French for their brave service more than 70 years ago.

One could think that 70 years is a long time. It is, indeed, only yesterday, as shown to us by these veterans. Few days ago, we celebrated the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the allied landing in Normandy.

What is the meaning of a ceremony, like the one we are having today? One could even think it comes late.

In fact, it is never too late to pay homage to these veterans. It is never too late to recall the legacy of their courage and their fight for freedom in time of darkness and despicable ideologies that came to power in Europe.

It's thanks to the sacrifice made by these young gentlemen that we have celebrated on May 8<sup>th</sup> the 71<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the end of WWII on the western front. It is thank to them, who fought against tyranny and for a free world, that we were able to celebrate the peace restored to a democratic Europe. I'd like to remember here that 8 487 soldiers from North Carolina were killed during WWII.

Dear veterans,

You embody the long lasting French American friendship from Yorktown and Lafayette to the battlefields of WWI, and from the beaches of Normandy and Provence to the liberation of France.

I'd like to stress again here that our bilateral relations have never been so good, so strong and so confident. Just as French and Americans were close allies during WWI and WWII, we remain close allies today in fighting against terrorism in Iraq, in Syria and in central Africa.

Dear veterans,

In recognition of your heroic actions and extraordinary accomplishments, the President of the Republic of France has appointed you to the Legion of Honor with the rank of Knight.

I will now highlight your main heroic deeds during WWII, before bestowing the French Legion of Honor upon you one after the other, by order of seniority.

## **1/ Major Richard Woodson III**

You joined the U.S. Air Force in February 1943. You were assigned to the 96th Bombardment Group of the 8th Air Force and left for the European Theater of Operations in September 1944. As a B-17 pilot, you participated in numerous missions over France, the Netherlands, and Germany. In April 1945, you completed several bombing missions over Royan, on the Southwest coast France.

It is also worth noting that, at the end of the war, on May 16, 1945, your bomb group helped repatriate 3,000 French soldiers who were being held at a concentration camp near Linz, Austria.

In recognition for your service, you were awarded the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters.

*Major Richard Woodson III*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

## **2/ Staff Sergeant Jerome M. Schwartz**

You were inducted into the United States Army on June 11, 1943. After completing training at Fort Benning, you were assigned to Company A, 379th Regiment, 95th Infantry Division. As an Infantry Squad Leader, you completed several missions in France, including the Battle of Metz.

You also participated in campaigns in Southern France, the Rhineland, and Central Europe. In recognition for your service, you were awarded several medals, including the Purple Heart, the Good Conduct Medal, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Medal with four Battle Stars.

*Staff Sergeant Jerome M. Schwartz*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

### **3/ Staff Sergeant John W. Newman**

You were inducted into the United States Air Force on January 18, 1943. You were assigned to the 94th bombardment group of the 8th Air Force as a Flight Maintenance Gunner, and arrived in France in April 1944. Between May and August 1944, you completed 25 missions in Normandy, Nord-Pas de Calais in the North of France and the region of Lyon. On D-Day, you completed a mission over Le Havre.

In recognition for your service, you were awarded the European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal with three Bronze Stars, the Good Conduct Medal, and the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters.

*Staff Sergeant John W. Newman*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

### **4/ Staff Sergeant Lewis E. Herron**

You joined the U.S. Army on September 11th, 1943. After basic training and gunnery school, you were assigned to the 100th Bomb Group of the 8th air force as an aerial gunner.

Joining England's Thorpe Abbots Air Base, you carried out 33 missions over Brest as well as the north of France. You participated in bombings over the Ardennes, Germany, and Poland.

You received numerous decorations in honor of your service. You were awarded the Air medal with 4 Oak Leaf Clusters, the European African Eastern Campaign medal with 3 stars, and the Good Conduct Medal.

*Staff Sergeant Lewis E. Herron*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

#### **5/ Sergeant Vincent Corsini**

You joined the US Army in July 1943. On June 6, 1944 you landed on Omaha Beach as a private in the 116th Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division. Your job was a 60 mm mortar ammunition carrier. During the landing, you made one trip across the beach and rescued a wounded lieutenant who had broken both legs. Promoted to “acting sergeant” until the actual promotion went into effect, you led a unit of 15 men and participated in the liberation of several towns around St. Lo.

With your unit, you went on to participate in campaigns in Northern France and the Rhineland.

You received numerous decorations in recognition of your courage, including the European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal with three stars and an arrowhead, as well as the Purple Heart.

*Sergeant Vincent Corsini*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

#### **6/ Sergeant Mervin E. Hogg**

You joined the U.S. Army on September 23, 1943. In January, 1944, you left for the European Theater of Operations with the Anti-tank company of 358th Infantry Regiment in the 90th Infantry Division.

As a pioneer, you were responsible for laying and clearing mines fields, disarming and removing booby traps, demolition, and removing road blocks and other obstructions. In this capacity, you participated in missions in Normandy, Northern France, and the Lorraine Region.

In recognition of your service, you were awarded with the Bronze Star and the European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal with five bronze stars and one arrowhead, among others.

*Sergeant Mervin E. Hogg*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

#### **7/ Sergeant James M. Bond**

You enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force on March 24, 1943 and received training in radars, air craft machinery and aerial gunnery. In January 1945, you left for the European Theater of Operations and joined the 8th Air Force in England.

With the 385th Bombardment Group, you flew 24 missions as a tail gunner on a B-17 flying fortress and participated in campaigns in the Rhineland and Central Europe. On April 14, 15, 16, you participated in air raids on Royan, France, which had been bypassed by the ground forces but then needed to be taken to open another seaport on the French coast.

In recognition of your meritorious service, you were awarded the European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal with two bronze stars and the Air Medal with two oak leaf clusters, among others.

*Sergeant James M. Bond*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

## **8/ Private First Class James R. Inman**

You joined the U.S. Army on February 10th, 1943. As a part of the 551st anti-aircraft battalion, 3rd army, you left for the European Theater of Operations in May 1943.

Serving as an anti-aircraft artilleryman, you operated machine guns mounted on a half-track. On Utah beach, you were responsible for destroying all enemy or hostile aircrafts and maintaining the equipment. While serving your battalion, you participated in numerous battles throughout Normandy, the north of France, the Ardennes, Rhineland, and also Central Europe.

Throughout your service, you received numerous decorations including the European African Middle Eastern Campaign medal with 5 bronze stars, the American Theater Medal, the Good Conduct medal, as well as the Victory medal.

*Private First Class James R. Inman*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

## **9/ Private First Class Charles J. Jones**

You were inducted into the United States Army on June 1, 1943. You were assigned to the Cannon Company, 263rd Infantry, 66th division, and landed on French soil in late December 1944. As a 105 Howitzer operator and light truck driver, you completed missions in St. Nazaire, Lorient, and Marseille.

In recognition for your service, you were awarded the Combat Infantry Badge, the European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal with a Bronze Service Star, the Good Conduct Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal.

*Private First Class Charles J. Jones*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

**10/ Private First Class Julius N. Watlington**

You were incorporated into the United States Army on May 10, 1943. Assigned to Company I, 272nd Battalion, 89th Infantry Division, you participated in campaigns in Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes, and Rhineland.

In July 1944, you landed on Omaha Beach and participated in combats in Normandy for two weeks as a machine gunner. After an injury, you continued combat as a jeep driver. You went on to participate in the liberation of St. Lô, then the North of France, before continuing combat in Belgium and the Rhineland.

In recognition for your service, you were awarded several medals, including the Purple Heart, the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, and the Good Conduct Medal.

*Private First Class Julius N. Watlington*

*Au nom du Président de la République, nous vous remettons les insignes de Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur.*

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Finally, I would also like to recognize two North Carolina WWII veterans who were unable to join us today. Anthony Joseph Buccieri from Apex, NC and Murray Lorber from Raleigh, NC have also been newly named to the National Order of the Legion of Honor.

Dear veterans,

You are our heroes. By fulfilling your duty to your country, you helped ensure liberty and democracy for the French people, and we will never forget that.

Ladies and gentlemen, before we adjourn for a small reception, please give these newly inducted Knights in the National Order of the Legion of Honor another warm round of applause.

Thank you./.