

Local veteran receives French Legion of Honor

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MT. VERNON — Decorated World War II veteran Hallie Lewis was awarded the French Legion of Honor Saturday during a special ceremony at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.

For Lewis, receiving the award was a humbling experience and a great honor. He said he hopes to encourage more young people to

learn about World War II and history in general.

"It's just like these kids nowadays," said Lewis, 90, a Mt. Vernon resident. "One of these days they won't know what an elephant is or a tiger or anything like that. It'll be a thing of the past. There's so much history that's been lost to veterans that passed away since World War II."

The Legion of Honor is the most prestigious award the

French government gives to servicemen, said Earl M. White, southern division field supervisor for the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs. It was established in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte, White said.

U.S. veterans can receive the Legion of Honor if they served in France during World War II.

IDVA officials recently

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discovered Lewis was eligible after examining his discharge paperwork, which showed he had fought in France.

"I'm very enthused because I had no idea," Lewis said of receiving the award. "I'm very proud of what I got and I thank everybody that helped me

get it. Really, I didn't know I was entitled to it until later years."

The award was presented to Lewis Saturday by White and Veterans Service Officer Lynn Brown of the IDVA.

"This is a very special (award) because France is one of the few nations, NATO-wise, that still wants to honor what they consider those who helped them maintain their freedom, obviously from German forces," White said. "Actually, we're very proud as an agency, IDVA, to be able to



Travis Morse/Register-News
U.S. Army veteran Hallie Lewis of Mt. Vernon, left, was presented with the French Legion of Honor award Saturday at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. The award recognizes Lewis' service in France during World War II. Also pictured is Lynn Brown, a veterans service officer with the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs. 5-27-14

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supply missions.

Lewis said one of his most vivid memories from the war was helping German children and other civilians who had been injured in a Nazi time bomb explosion that went off in Munich, Germany. For his role in that rescue, Lewis was awarded a Soldier's Medal for Bravery in Munich.

Lewis also remembers being present for the liberation of the

Dachau concentration camp in 1945.

"When we went through there, they had little railroad cars and they had these people in these cars that they was getting ready to take them in to cremate them," Lewis said.

Lewis earned the rank of Private First Class. He was awarded seven combat stars after the war.

White said honoring World War II veterans

is vital given the fact they are passing away rapidly.

"It's important for the public to know," White said. "The Greatest Generation is dwindling by over 3,000 a day, by virtue of the fact that they're (in their) late 80s, early 90s, mid 90s. And so what we try to do is highlight these special events, talk about their careers and make the public aware of the Greatest Generation."