



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Jamestown World War II Veteran Basil J. Spitale Honored with Appointment to French Legion of Honor

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U.S. Army Pfc. Basil J. Spitale Honored for Service in Liberating France

JAMESTOWN - For his outstanding record of military service during World War II and his contributions to the liberation of France in 1944-45, United States Army veteran Basil J. Spitale has received the honor of appointment to France's National Order of the Legion of Honor.

During a special New Year's Day ceremony this afternoon at the Jamestown office of Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I - Olean), Senator Young presented Private First Class Spitale with the official medal conferred upon honorees inducted into the Legion of Honor.

The National Order of the Legion of Honor is the highest decoration in France. Appointment to the Order is awarded by the President of France for excellent civil or military conduct, as confirmed after official investigation by the French government. Not limited to French citizens alone, appointment may also be conferred upon American World War II veterans who fought in the liberation of France from the occupying forces of Nazi Germany.

The process of examining which medals and awards Private Spitale should have received but never did began when Senator Young personally visited the home of Private Spitale and his wife Ann with their son George. Private Spitale shared his World War II experiences with Senator Young and a discussion began on whether or not he had received all of his honors. It was learned that he was accepted for appointment as Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor. Although the French government processed Private Spitale's record, which is recognized today, further anticipated decorations that would be granted by the United States, including a Bronze Star Medal, have not yet been finalized.

"I want to personally thank Senator Young for pursuing this," said Private Spitale on his appointment to the Legion of Honor and reception of other awards from the U.S. military that Senator Young is seeking on his behalf.

"Pfc. Basil Spitale joined the Army and answered his country's call to serve at a time when we were engaged in a monumental struggle for freedom and peace in the world. His participation in one of the 20th century's defining military campaigns and victory in World War II deserves our greatest respect. This prestigious award confirms that his contributions to defeating fascism and bringing of freedom to millions has earned him gratitude not only in America, but also in France and throughout Europe," said Senator Young.

Born in Jamestown on March 30, 1924, U.S. Army Pfc. Basil J. Spitale's military service began when he was drafted into the Army on January 23, 1943. Seven days

later he was reporting for active duty at Fort Niagara in preparation to join the fight in Europe as a medic.

Private Spitale arrived in Europe on October 20, 1943 and was assigned to the 58th General Hospital.

With Allied forces stretched thin in repelling the German counter-offensive at the Battle of the Bulge, the 58th General Hospital was deactivated and Spitale sent to a replacement depot. He was reassigned as an infantryman in the 7th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Infantry Division.

The 3rd Infantry Division would go on to endure the highest casualty rate of any American Division in World War II. By war's end, the 3rd had suffered 5,558 killed and 18,766 wounded. Its exploits were exemplified by famed war hero Audie Murphy, who was a member.

When Private Spitale joined the division's 7th Infantry Regiment, the unit was fighting through the Vosges Mountains in France near the German border. By November 26, 1944, they had battled their way to the Rhine River at Strasbourg, France. After maintaining defensive positions, on January 23, 1945, the 7th Infantry helped clear the Colmar Pocket in Alsace, France, of German occupiers. With Private Spitale, the regiment then struck the German defensive "Siegfried Line" south of Zweibrücken, Germany, on March 15.

On March 26, 1945, the 7th Infantry crossed the Rhine River and advanced through the German defenses. The push continued to Nuremberg, where a fierce battle ensued from April 17-20 before Allied forces secured the city in block-by-block fighting.

The push continued as the war drew to a close. The 7th Infantry captured Augsburg and Munich and Private Spitale was part of a contingent that captured Hitler's outpost and mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden, near the German-Austrian border. Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945, marking the end of the war in Europe.

Private Spitale was supposed to return to the United States because of his accumulation of points, however, he was instead assigned a clerk typist and sent

to Austria as an instructor.

He finally returned to the United States in January 1946 and was honorably discharged on January 28, 1946, at Fort Dix, New Jersey, having served three years in the Army. Over two years of that time was spent in Europe.

For his service in the Central Europe and Northern France campaigns, Private Spitale has also earned a Combat Infantryman Badge.

After the war, Private Spitale returned to his hometown of Jamestown, where he and his wife Ann, whom he had married shortly before being drafted, would raise their three sons. Having been married on September 7, 1942, Private Spitale's military service kept the newlywed couple separated for three years shortly after they were wed.

"For the certain difficulties and challenges of this lengthy separation so soon after being married, Ann deserves our admiration and appreciation as well. This past September they celebrated their 71st anniversary," said Senator Young.

"It was quite an experience. I had just got married in September 1942 when I got drafted and went into the service in January," said Private Spitale.

Private Spitale and Ann's sons George, Carl, and Peter all followed in their father's footsteps and served in the Army during the Vietnam War era.

"For the military service of the entire Spitale family, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude," said Senator Young.

"We should all be proud of Pfc. Basil Spitale and the service he gave in defense of freedom. In receiving this honor from the nation of France, he has shown himself to be an ideal representative of our country around the world and a true embodiment of the values and principles we hold so dear as Americans," said Senator Young.

George Spitale, who was present with his father for today's ceremony, agreed.

“It means a lot to him,” he added as he expressed the significance of the honor given to his father and how important it is that his service be recognized.

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