

# Howard Keskitalo made a Knight in the French Legion of Honor

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BATAVIA - The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA) today announced that Mr. Howard O. Keskitalo, 97 years old, has been named a Knight in the French Legion of Honor. He was awarded this honor by Deputy Consul General of France Frédéric Chol  at a ceremony held in Batavia, Illinois at the VFW Post (number). The French government has extended the distinction of Knight to Keskitalo for his service during World War II. Initiated by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802, the Legion of Honor is the highest award presented to non-French citizens in recognition of military, cultural,



scientific or social contributions to France.

It was discovered by an IDVA employee, Karen Redding that Mr. Keskitalo had not received this honor from France when reviewing his DD-214. Ms. Redding and fellow Veteran Service Officer (VSO) Wesley Yi contacted the French Consulate in Chicago to see if he was eligible for the Legion of Honor medal. The consulate confirmed he was eligible and final paperwork and arrangements were made for the ceremony. "I am so proud of Karen and Wesley for working so hard to make sure our Illinois Hero, Mr. Keskitalo is receiving this high honor," said Erica Jeffries, Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. Keskitalo served with the 388th Bomb Group and the 563rd Bomb Squadron from May 6, 1944 to November 5, 1944. He was a First Lieutenant in the Army Air Force and served as a navigator on a B-17. He flew 35 missions in four different battles and campaigns including the Air Offensive Europe, Northern France, Normandy and Rhineland. He also received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal in recognition of his service. “Mr. Keskitalo is a testament to the bravery and courage that was needed during WW II,” said Director Jeffries.

Keskitalo joins a select group of Americans who have received the French Legion of Honor, including General Colin Powell, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Robert Redford and Clint Eastwood.