

302 / us  
FILE / SUBJ  
DATE /  
MAY  
1996

By Bernard Edinger

PARIS, May 28 (Reuter) - An American who earned France's highest World War Two award as an officer in the French Foreign Legion before embarking on a 25-year career in the CIA is to be personally honoured by President Jacques Chirac.

John Hasey, 79, has been invited to the Elysee palace in Paris on June 18 to be decorated with the rosette of officer of the Legion of Honour, France's national order, in a new recognition of his wartime services to France.

"I'm really very pleased. It's nice to be remembered," a surprised Hasey told Reuters in a telephone interview on Tuesday on learning of the award at his home in Arlington, Virginia.

The official French notification had not yet reached him.

Hasey is to be honoured with about 100 other Companions of the Order of the Liberation, an award given to only 1,086 men and women deemed by wartime leader General Charles De Gaulle to have done the most to help free France from German occupation.

About half the awards were posthumous. Reserved for French nationals, the Order's green and black ribbon was granted to only half a dozen foreigners including Britain's wartime King George VI and Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Two Americans received it: Supreme Allied Commander in Europe General (and later president) Dwight Eisenhower and Hasey, then a 25-year-old Captain in the 13th "Demi-Brigade" of the Foreign Legion.

Hasey was nearly a posthumous recipient having been hit in the face and chest by four machine-gun bullets during the 1941 allied conquest of Syria, ruled by France's collaborationist Vichy regime.

"What made an American join the Legion before the U.S. entered the war? A taste for adventure, I guess," Hasey said.

A native of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, Hasey worked for the luxury jeweller Cartier in Paris before the war mainly because he could speak English and French.

When France fell in June 1940, he fled to London where the first volunteers were joining General De Gaulle's Free French movement, including Foreign Legionnaires.

Hasey joined as a second lieutenant and fought in French West Africa, against Italian forces in the conquest of Eritrea and later against Vichy troops in Syria.

"The U.S. government wasn't too thrilled. The U.S. consul in Jerusalem took my passport away though I got it back later," he said. The United States was neutral at the time.

After a year in a U.S. hospital having his face re-shaped from his wounds, Hasey ended the war as an aide to General Pierre Koenig who from London commanded the "maquis" underground in occupied France.

French publications say Hasey became a U.S. diplomat after the war. "Well, I suppose I can say so now, that was just a cover. I was really in the Central Intelligence Agency all over the world including Laos at the start of the Vietnam War. I retired in 1974," he told Reuters.

Asked whether his family had inherited his taste for travel and adventure, Hasey said: "Well my son travels too. He's a major in the U.S. Marine Corps."

13:07 05-28-96