

## New Zealand WWII veterans awarded the French Legion of Honour

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Eight New Zealand Veterans were awarded the French Legion of Honour by French Ambassador Florence Jeanblanc-Risler. Back row medal recipients, starting third from left: John Morris, Leslie Munro, Hugh Findlater, Noel Sutherland. Front row: Keith Boles, Clive Estcourt, Ambassador Jeanblanc-Risler, Neil Harton, Roger McLean.

A group of New Zealand World War II veterans have been awarded the French Legion of Honour to mark the 70th anniversary of the battle of Normandy.

The eight war heroes were awarded the honour by the France's Ambassador, Florence Jeanblanc-Risler, at a ceremony at the National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy in Auckland on Tuesday evening.

The award presentations were part of an initiative undertaken by the French President François Hollande to mark the D-Day anniversary.

New Zealand's involvement in World War I and World War II was important, she said.

It was "exceptional" that men travelled from far-off countries like New Zealand and Australia to play a part in the war and the liberation of France.

"Even if we are geographically very far away, we do share the same values."

It was important to share this history with younger generations, she said.

Squadron Leader Keith Marwood Boles, Flying Officer Clive Woodward Estcourt, Flight Lieutenant Hugh Findlater, Lieutenant Neil Harton, Able Seaman Roger McLean, Flight Lieutenant John Morris, Squadron Leader John Leslie Munro and Flying Officer Noel Sutherland received their awards in front of family and friends.

Sutherland stole the show when he told the audience a few stories from his time in France at the end of World War II and express his gratitude at receiving the Legion of Honour.

It was important to remember the eight veterans were only a few of those who played a part in France's liberation.

He enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Air Force in 1942, arrived in the United Kingdom in 1943 and served with 297, 299 and 190 squadrons.

He also completed 28 special duty operations and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1944 for bravery while on a resupply mission over Holland.

Munro enlisted in the territorial Force of the Army in 1940 and was mobilised into the Royal New Zealand Air Force in 1941.

He is the last surviving pilot of the Dambusters raid, an attack on German dams in 1943.

Munro said he was "quite thrilled" to be awarded the Legion of Honour.

"It's quite significant as far as I'm concerned."

The presence of nine of Munro's family members at the award presentation "signifies their pride in their old man", he said.

Other war medals awarded to Munro have also been in the spotlight recently.

The 95-year-old had intended to sell the medals and other memorabilia at a London auction to raise money for the upkeep of the Bomber Command Memorial.

However, the medals were withdrawn from sale after the intervention of British philanthropist Lord Ashcroft and will now be displayed at the Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT).

The Legion of Honour is the highest French honour. It was created by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802.

It was awarded to "very exceptional people for their endeavours", Jeanblanc-Riseler said.

In total about 40 New Zealand veterans who played a part in D-Day in France would be awarded the Legion of Honour, she said.

About 240 people from the Pacific region would also receive the award.

