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LOCAL

65 years later



Julie Smith/News Tribune

Gilbert Pritzel, middle, poses with Gov. Jay Nixon and a group of WWII re-enactors Tuesday after he was presented with the French Legion of Honor Medal during the ceremony in the governor's office. The re-enactors are the U.S. 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion of St. Louis.

Holts Summit man awarded French 'Legion of Honor' medal

By Bob Watson

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Gilbert Pritzel of Holts Summit now is a "Knight of the Legion of Honor."

Gov. Jay Nixon pinned the medal onto Pritzel's suit jacket during a special ceremony Tuesday morning in the governor's Capitol office.

"This is the highest honor France can bestow," Nixon noted to reporters, military representatives and many of Pritzel's family.

"All of us here are humbled by your service." Napoleon Bonaparte created the Legion of Honor in 1802 to commend civilians and soldiers for their service in and after the 1789 French Revolution.

Jeremy Amick, a member of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and a News Tribune contributing writer, told reporters he nominated Pritzel and seven others for the French honors, after "doing some research on World War II history."

The French originally gave the medal to World

War I veterans, then added World War II vets in 2004 — the 60th anniversary of the Allies' D-Day invasion of German-occupied Europe.

The governor noted Pritzel's service involved more than helping liberate France.

Pritzel, 18, joined the Army in 1943 from his home in Higginsville.

"The next 2½ years put him at the front lines of some of the toughest fighting in the European Theater — against battle-hardened Nazi

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