

## Chief Warrant Officer John Mitges, MMM, CD (Ret'd) WW II Veteran Awarded French Legion of Honour

The Canadian Military Engineers are pleased to advise that the Government of France has announced the awarding of the Rank of Knight of the National Order of the Legion of Honour to Chief Warrant Officer John Mitges, MMM, CD (Ret'd), a WW II Royal Canadian Engineer veteran and a participant in the Battle of the Liberation of France who also went on to serve a full post-war career. Some background on this honour is found at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legion\\_of\\_Honour](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legion_of_Honour)



Sergeant John Mitges was a 22-year old Reconnaissance Sergeant for his troop that was part of 18 Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers. He landed with the Nova Scotia Highlanders at Bernieres sur Mer before noon on 6 June. The squadron was with the 9th Brigade that pushed through the beachhead that had been created by the 7th and 8th Brigades. The beachhead was extremely congested at that time and the rally point was Beny-sur-Mer. Once the brigade started pushing out of the beachhead, the tasks for John's platoon were to destroy obstacles and clear mines along the route of advance. His role as the Recce Sergeant was to move out with the lead troops and send information back to his troop about the engineer tasks they would have to work on.

There was heavy fighting all into that first night when the advance was halted north of Caen. When the advance continued over the next several days Sergeant Mitges continued with his recce tasks in support of the lead elements of the battalion. On 11 June he was wounded in the head, chest and leg and was evacuated to a field hospital on the beach where he was treated for ten days. Recovering, he "hitch-hiked" back to his unit instead of going back through the normal channel as he did not want to get hung up in an infantry unit on the way back.

Sgt Mitges stayed with 18 Field Company as they advanced across the Rhine and all the way up to the Baltic Coast where the unit became primarily involved in mine clearance. The Germans had resorted to laying sea mines in the ground as that was all they had left towards the end of the war. It was during the clearing of one such mine - on the last day of the war - that he was again wounded in the leg after the mine detonated while his team was too close to it. He was evacuated to hospital and later re-joined his unit before it returned to England.

John Mitges returned to Canada in December 1945. He was transferred to the small Permanent Force and posted to the Royal Canadian School of Military Engineering at Chilliwack. In 1947, he was one of three RCE personnel seconded to the United Kingdom where he qualified as a Glider Pilot. With this new qualification under his belt, John was posted to the Canadian Joint Airborne Training Centre at Rivers, MB where he did a considerable amount of glider training and indoctrination flights for parachute training students.

John had a full post-war career with the Royal Canadian Engineers. During the Korean War John was seconded to the British Army and had two trips to Korea to erect Nissan Huts. His career was marked by appointment as Sergeant Major of 1 Airborne Troop RCE and as Squadron Sergeant Major of 4 Field Squadron. He was selected for a two-year attachment with Plant Roads and Airfields at the Royal School of Military Engineering, UK his last appointment was as the senior RCE CWO at Mobile Command Headquarters before taking his release in 1976



John currently lives in South Surrey, BC and is eagerly looking forward to arrangements for the formal presentation of this honour.