



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George M. Borrello

Seneca Nation Member and World War II Veteran Ralph Bowen Selected by Senator Borrello for Veterans Hall of Fame

GEORGE M. BORRELLO June 30, 2020

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ALBANY – Jimersontown resident and Seneca Nation member Ralph Elliot Bowen, a sergeant in the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II, has been selected for induction into the New York State Senate's Veterans' Hall of Fame by Senator George M. Borrello. Mr. Bowen, the last surviving World War II veteran from the Seneca Nation's Allegany Territory, was an aerial gunner who fought in the European Campaign and helped liberate France and Europe from Nazi occupation.

“Just weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, a young Ralph Bowen showed up at a U.S. Army recruiting office in Buffalo and enlisted. He didn’t know what dangers awaited him, he only knew America needed his help in combatting the forces of tyranny and oppression that were threatening the liberty of people around the world,” said Senator Borrello. “Trained as an aerial gunner, he and members of his squadron had the dangerous mission of targeting factories, refineries, oil fields and other high-value assets despite challenging weather conditions and vast geographic distances.”

The young airman would begin his overseas tour in Tunisia, North Africa for assignment as a gunner aboard a Consolidated B-24 Liberator heavy bomber. He was a member of the 15th Air Force’s 450th Bombardment Group, 723rd Bombardment Squadron, nicknamed “the Cottontails.” The unit would fly west across the Tyrrhenian Sea, Corsica, and Sardinia to French targets, northward over the Alps to Austria and Germany, and eastward over the Adriatic to the Balkans, Carpathian Mountains and Greece.

While flying combat missions in support of the invasion of Normandy and Operation Dragoon, the invasion of southern France, he would achieve the rank of sergeant. Approximately six months after Germany’s unconditional surrender, Sergeant Bowen would return to the United States in November 1945 and be discharged at Fort Dix, N.J., concluding a tour of three years and 11 months.

He had earned aerial gunner wings, the Distinguished Unit Citation, Good Conduct Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with four campaign or service stars, the World War II Victory Medal, and the M-1 Rifle Marksman Badge.

Following his military service, Mr. Bowen would return home to Western New York, making significant contributions to the Seneca Nation and community while working for the Erie Railroad as a union laborer and ironworker.

In July 2019, he was presented with France's highest award, the French Legion of Honor, for his role in liberating France from Nazi occupation. Mr. Bowen is the first Seneca and only the second Native American to receive the appointment of Knight in the Order of the Legion of Honor.

Mr. Bowen, who turns 98 on August 8, is currently the oldest living member of the Seneca Nation. A member of the Snipe Clan, he was raised in the Coldspring community, Allegany Seneca Territory and now lives in Jimersontown. His service to the Seneca Nation includes five terms as Tribal Councilor as well as tenures as Peacemaker and Seneca Nation Surrogate Judge. He would also serve as Seneca Nation Marshal and pastor for the Red House Baptist Church. He is the father of Jacqueline, Rebecca and Dennis Bowen.

The New York State Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame was created in 2005 to honor those veterans who have distinguished themselves in their military service and continue to devote themselves to serving their neighbors, communities and country – all qualities that define Mr. Bowen.

"As our nation prepares to celebrate July 4th, the birth of America, we also remember all the courageous men and women throughout history who have risked their own lives for this nation and the ideals of liberty and opportunity upon which it was founded," said Senator Borrello. "Ralph Bowen is one of those extraordinary individuals. His life has been one of service, beginning with his valiant contributions in World War II and continuing with his decades of dedication to the Seneca Nation. He is tremendously deserving of the 'Veterans Hall of Fame' recognition, which will ensure his achievements and example endure to inspire others."

Senator Borrello will honor Mr. Bowen at a special event later this summer.

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