



VETERANS

★★★ HALL OF FAME ★★★

RALPH ELLIOT BOWEN

Ralph Elliot Bowen, a member of the Seneca Nation of Indians and the last surviving World War II veteran from the Allegany Territory, served our nation valiantly as a member of the United States Army Air Corps during World War II. An aerial gunner who fought in the European Campaign, Mr. Bowen helped liberate France and Europe from Nazi occupation, serving from 1941 to 1945.

Mr. Bowen enlisted in the Army Air Corp on December 30, 1941, just weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. A member of the 15th Air Force, 450th Bomb Group, 723rd Squadron — nicknamed “The Cottontails” — he was stationed at Manduria Air Base in Manduria, Italy. The aerial gunner operated a .50 caliber machine gun on a B-24 “Liberator” bomber airplane and achieved the rank of sergeant while flying combat missions in support of the Invasion of Normandy and Operation Dragoon, the invasion of southern France. The unit ranked at or near the top consistently for its record of bombing accuracy.

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.

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. During a tour of three years and 11 months, he would serve one year and five months overseas, and one year, 11 months in the United States.

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

Mr. Bowen, who turned 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 Jimerson Town. 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 Dennis, Rebecca and Jacqueline Bowen.



RALPH ELLIOT BOWEN WAS SELECTED AS
A 2020 VETERANS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BY
SENATOR GEORGE M. BORRELLO.

20
20