



America's WWII Ghost Army is finally honored: Two top-secret units that saved 30,000 lives by using INFLATABLE TANKS, sound effects and radio trickery to lure Germans away from US units in Europe will be awarded Congressional Medal

## Description

USA: Members of two top-secret World War II military units referred to as the 'Ghost Army' will be awarded the Congressional Gold Medal more than 75 years after their service, under legislation signed into law by President [Joe Biden](#).

Members of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops and the 3133rd Signal Company Special, which only has nine surviving members, will be honored with the Congressional Gold Medal after Biden, 79, passed the bill on February 1.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest honor Congress can bestow and it dates back to the American Revolution. It is unclear when they will be gifted their awards.

The nine surviving members are: Bill Anderson, 97, Kent, Ohio; Bernie Bluestein, 98, Chicago, [Illinois](#); John Christman, 97, Leesburg, [New Jersey](#); George Dramis, 97, Raleigh, North Carolina; Manny Frockt, 97, West Palm Beach, [Florida](#); Nick Leo, 99, Brentwood, New York; Mark Mallardi, 98, Edgewater, Florida; Bill Nall, 97, Dunellon, Florida; and Seymour Nussenbaum, 98, Monroe Township, New Jersey.

'Rarely, if ever, has there been a group of such a few men which had so great an influence on the outcome of a major military campaign,' Army analyst Mark Kronman said, according to the Ghost Army Legacy Project.

The Ghost Army refers to two units that used inflatable equipment, sound effects, radio trickery, and other deceptions in Europe to draw enemy forces away from American units, saving an estimated 30,000 lives. Because of their secret classification, members were not recognized for their heroism.



Members of two top-secret World War II military units referred to as the 'Ghost Army' will be awarded the Congressional Gold Medal more than 75 years after their service, under legislation signed into law by President Joe Biden. An unidentified soldier stands next to an inflatable tank during the war



Members of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops and the 3133rd Signal Company Special – known as the Ghost Army – will be honored with the highest medal Congress can present: The Congressional Gold Medal





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An old photograph shows a large group of the Ghost Army standing in their military uniforms





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Seymour Nussenbaum, Stanley Nance – who is deceased – and Bernie Bluestein sit in their wheelchairs under an American flag

‘What an honor,’ Bernie Bluestein, 98, of Chicago, Illinois, and one of the nine surviving members told the [Ghost Army Legacy Project](#). ‘I never in my lifetime expected anything like this, it completely blasts me. I’m just sorry that there are not more of my fellow soldiers still alive that can be enjoying this as much as I do.’

Bluestein was an art student, like many of the ghost soldiers, when he joined the 1,100-member group – which started out with only 52 soldiers – when he was 18. He was a part of the 23rd Headquarters that worked effortlessly to fool enemy troops away from Americans soldiers after D-Day in 1944 and 1945.

Another ghost soldier that is being honored is the late Mickey McKane, of Keene, New Hampshire, who was also recruited out of art school in 1944.





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The Ghost Army was made up of 'artists, engineers, professional soldiers, and draftees' who created inflatable tanks and used sounds to offset the enemy





Nine of the 1,100 soldiers lined up holding what appears to be drinks during the war

'Being artistically minded, he went to the Pratt Institute, which is sort of a famous art school in New York, and at some point, the US Army was beginning a recruitment process through the art schools, and they came and they spoke and [said] they were looking for soldiers that were artistically inclined, and I think that was something that caught my dad's attention,' his son Keith McKane told the Historical Society of Cheshire County in June 2021.

'The entire McKane family is delighted that this story is now a part of American history,' his son Keith McKane said in a statement this week.

US Representative Annie Kuster of New Hampshire, a Democrat who sponsored the bill in the House, said: 'What made the Ghost Army special was not just their extraordinary courage, but their creativity. Their story reminds us that listening to unconventional ideas, like using visual and sound deception, can help us solve existential challenges like defeating tyranny.'

'She continued: 'Through their courageous, creative, and innovative tactics, the top-secret Ghost Army outmaneuvered and deceived the Nazis, saving thousands of Allied lives during World War II.'

'More than 75 years after defeating fascism in Europe, it's time these soldiers receive the highest honor we can award: the Congressional Gold Medal.'

The legislation in the House was co-led by Republican Representative Chris Stewart of Utah. In the Senate, the legislation was led by Senator Edward Markey, a Democrat from Massachusetts, and Susan Collins, a Republican from Maine.

Rick Beyer of the Ghost Army Legacy Project worked for seven years to get the bill passed. 'I am thrilled these deserving, brave and intrepid warriors of deception have at last been awarded this high honor.'

'Armed with their wits and guile these men saved lives and helped win the war,' he said in a statement. 'Their story is an inspiration to all of us!'

The Ghost Army started at Stratford-Upon-Avon in England – where Shakespeare lived – where they set up trials for the equipment in 1944 before ending their series of deceptions in Luxenberg in 1945, according to Keith.

'[They] literally designed clothing, and draperies, and furniture setups in a room and it went from that inflatable tanks, and wooden frameworks with large draperies of camouflage,' Keith told the Historical Society of Cheshire County.

'I remember he would tell how they spent days building wooden structures that looked like a row of trucks or tanks and then cover it with a large canopy with leaves and colored materials to make it camouflaged. And then what they would do – after all that effort – was take one shiny gas can and accidentally leave it outside of that camouflaged structure, so that the enemy aircraft that might be surveilling overhead would spot that.'



Only nine members are living, including Bernie Bluestein, 98, (left) and Bill Anderson, 97, (right)







John Christman, 97, and George Dramis, also 97. are also living







Seymour Nussenbaum, 98, (middle) and Bill Nall, 97, was a member of the Ghost Army and is surviving today







Mark Mallardi, 98, who is surviving, also helped deceive the Germans

'The idea was to allow the enemy to believe that there was a large division there and move their armaments there and prepare for something there, instead of what was really happening,' Keith told the Historical Society.

They even staged dummy airfields, according to the Record Courier who spoke to survivor Bill Anderson in 2013, to give the Germans the impression that a full-scale movement was underway, playing sound recordings that could be heard up to 15 miles.

'We'd move in at night in blackout conditions and one company had soundtracks, speakers and wire recorders on the back of a half-track. We'd simulate a division, which is about 10,000 men,' Ghost soldier Bill Anderson told the Record Courier in 2013. 'That night, we'd all pack up and leave, the Germans would come through, and the real outfit would come back and trap them. We fooled them.'

Another ghost soldier, Anderson Wilson, who passed away in 2020, told [Right at Home](#): 'Most of our operations were done within 100–300 yards of the front line. We didn't have any kind of artillery — only trucks to move the unit out in a hurry. But we didn't have as many casualties as you'd think for that kind of outfit.'

The soldiers were in different groups, such as fake communications, sound, physical setup and design of the structures and they moved throughout surrounding cities and neighborhoods as they set up their traps throughout France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, and Germany. They also moved constantly and wore other unit's patches and changed the insignias on their military vehicles as they passed in and out of towns.





John Jarvie, Arthur Shilstone, Seymour Nussenbaum, and Nick Leo recreated a photo taken when they were younger at an unknown time. Only Nussenbaum and Leo are still living

The Ghost Army – which its existence was only known by top officials – staged 20 deceptions and after the war, they were sworn to secrecy. Records, as well as their stories, were sealed away until the 1996



– 51 years after their service, according to the Ghost Army Legacy Project.

‘It was classified, we couldn’t talk about it. People would ask, “What did you do?” and I’d say, “Well, I’m with special troops,”’ Anderson told the [Record Courier](#) in 2013.

‘They’d say, “Oh, you played in a band?” “Yeah, I played in a band.” I didn’t have to go through a lot of explanation. It didn’t bother me,’ Anderson, who did know how to play the drums and played in one of the bands on the boat ride to England, said at the time.







Ghost Army soldier Mickey McKane, deceased, (pictured) as well as the other fallen will also be honored for their service

'On the boat going from the U.S. to England they had a band I played in. I was so damn seasick, I was playing and getting sick at the same time.'

The Ghost Army was created by Colonel Billy Harris and Major Ralph Ingersoll, who curated a group of 'artists, engineers, professional soldiers, and draftees' to participate in their top-secret missions. They were led by Colonel Harry L. Reeder.

The men drafted were considered to have 'one of the highest IQs in the Army with an average of 119, the National World War II Museum said.

## **The nine surviving members of the Ghost Army**

Out of the 1,100 men who were apart of the top-secret Ghost Army, only nine remain to receive the prestigious honor of the Congressional Gold Medal.

Bill Anderson, 97, Kent, Ohio







Bill Anderson, 97, of Ohio, used to tell people he was a drummer in the war, as he was bound to secrecy until 1996, when the records were unsealed.

But what he actually did during World War II was helping set up dummy airfields, filling inflatable tanks, and setting up traps against the German under the disguise of nightfall to protect American troops.

'We'd move in at night in blackout conditions and one company had soundtracks, speakers and wire recorders on the back of a half-track. We'd simulate a division, which is about 10,000 men,' he told the Record Courier.

'That night, we'd all pack up and leave, the Germans would come through, and the real outfit would come back and trap them. We fooled them.'

Despite being a part of the hidden group, Anderson said saying he was a drummer wasn't too far off.

On the boat ride from the US to England – where they tested their deceptions before moving silently across Europe – he did play in the military band. He played in the band, even while seasick.

After the war, he went on to marry his wife Oleta and continued to serve in the military. He attended the National War College in Washington DC and served in the National Defense Executive Reserve for 30 years.

He began collecting classified documents about the Ghost Army to one day publish a book, but it has yet to be seen by the world. He has hundreds of documents showing maps, movements, and operation details, letters, photos, and a list of casualties, and more.

Bernie Bluestein, 98, of Chicago, Illinois







Bernie Bluestein, 98, joined the Army when he was 18 years old.

He was an art student recruited to help fool the Germans and a member of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops, who worked in the camouflage unit.

He recounted to ABC 7 Chicago about his time spent using inflatable rubber tank, trucks, artillery, and airplanes to fool the enemy and used his art skills to make it look real.

'All you had to do was attach an air hose to them and blow them up. I mean inflate them,' he told ABC 7 Chicago.

The Ghost Army used 500lb speakers to boom sounds to up to 15 miles away and used fake recordings and radio operators to send transmissions to be intercepted.

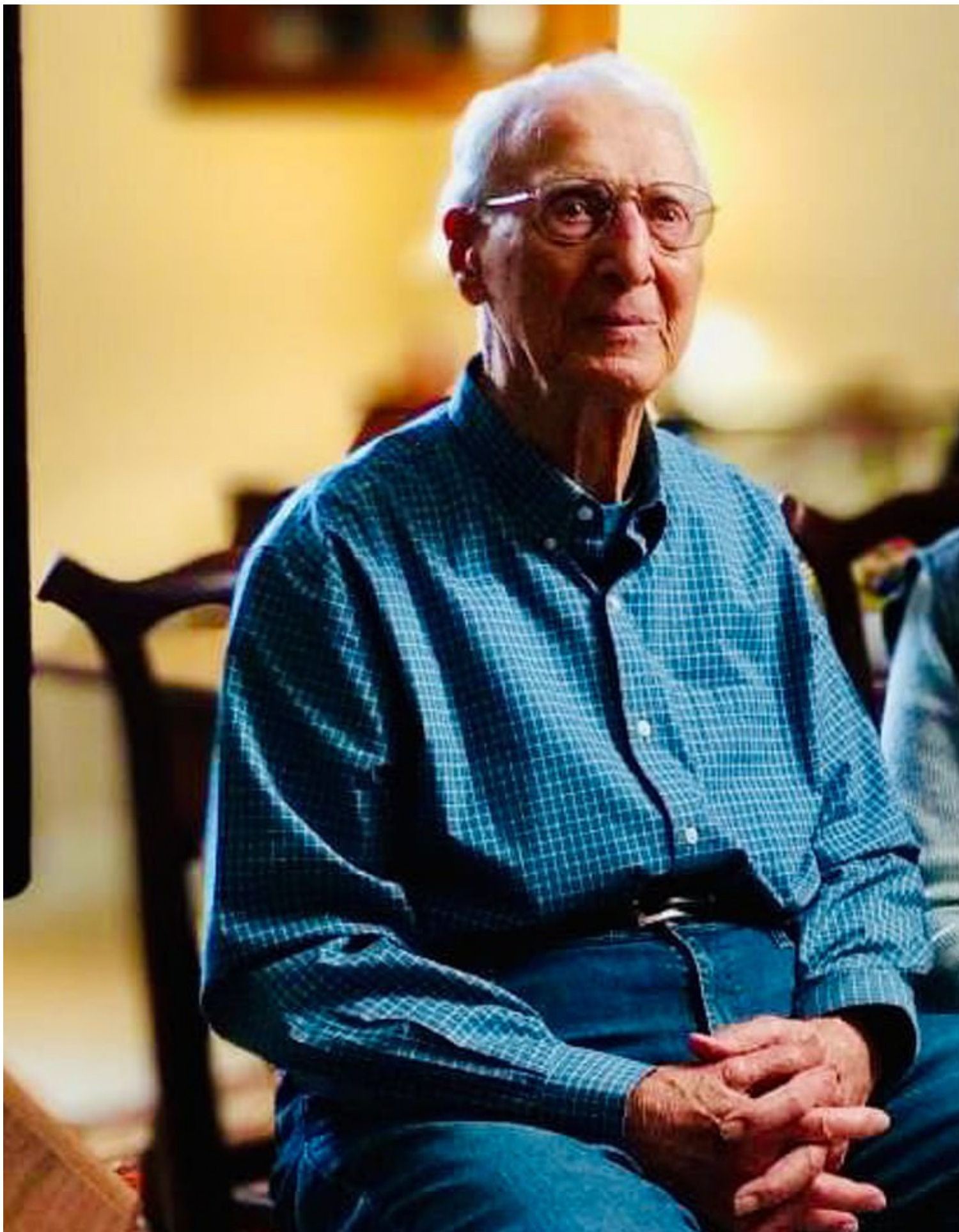
'And of course in the morning when they shelled us, we said, alright. Our mission is accomplished,' the veteran said.

During his time in the war, Bluestein would sketch what he saw and even created a mini tea set out of bullet casing.

He went on to create decades worth of sculptures and paintings, but said he his proud of his time spent in the war.

George Dramis, 97, Raleigh, North Carolina





George Dramis, 97, was 19 when he entered the Army and was a Jeep driver and a radio operator.

'We were a fake army,' he said. 'That's what it was exactly designed to be, to fool the Germans.'

One of Dramis' most serious missions was crossing the Rhine River – one of the few times the entire Ghost Army was assembled in one location.

'Everyone was involved,' he said. 'The camouflage people, the half-track people, the ones that used fake artillery, flash bombs that looked like artillery going off. That was a big deal.'

Seymour Nussenbaum, 98, Monroe Township, New Jersey







Nussenbaum, 98, has kept two detailed scrapbooks of his experience in the Army.

He was an engineer in the 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion and a member of the Ghost Army.

John Christman, 97, of Leesbug, New Jersey







John Christman, 97, was an engineer in the Ghost Army.

Bill Nall, 97, Dunnellon, Florida







Bill Nall was a member of the Ghost Army, which served from 1944 to 1945 in WWII.

Mark Mallardi, 98, Edgewater, Florida





He was a member of the Ghost Army.

Other members:

- Manny Frockt, 97, West Palm Beach, Florida
- Nick Leo, 99, Brentwood, New York

Sources: Ghost Army Legacy Project, Charlotte Observer, Fox 5 DC, Record Courier, Right at Home, ABC 7 Chicago

### **Category**

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