

Wort.lu - Discover the story behind the secret Ghost Army

(CS) During the Second World War a secret US unit was charged with creating battlefield deceptions to fool the German troops – this “Ghost Army” was stationed in Luxembourg for several months in 1944 and a new exhibition and film shed light on this story.

In a case of fact is stranger than fiction, the US army recruited some 1,000 men, including artists, designers and theatre technicians, to create inflatable tanks and other visual effects, as well as sound and radio deceptions, to deceive the German army.

The aim was to hide the location of real troops, make units appear where there were none and generally make intelligence gathering on the German side more difficult.

US author and filmmaker Rick Beyer first stumbled across the story eight years ago. “I met a woman whose uncle was in the unit,” he told wort.lu/en, adding that he immediately caught her passion about the Ghost Army.

A film eight years in the making

Beyer swiftly started raising funds to begin making the film. “I knew I needed to interview the men in the unit as quickly as possible,” he said, with most of them in their 80s and 90s by the time the project got off the ground. Out of the 19 veterans Beyer interviewed, less than half are alive today.

Bit by bit, as more money from a total of 680 individual donors came in, Beyer moved forward with the project, mixing filmmaking and fundraising in an eight-year journey that finally saw the film completed in 2013 and aired on US television station PBS.

Classified until 1996, there were only a few official documents available to Beyer and researching the story became an exercise in preserving history.

But the film *The Ghost Army* and the exhibition on display at the Abbaye de

Neumünster and Fortuna Banque until November 27 are not just about the unit and their cunning tactics. It is also a story about the artists behind the “travelling roadshow of deception,” Beyer said.

From fashion to brothels

From September to December 1944, the Ghost Army was stationed in the Grand Duchy at what is now the Limpertsberg campus of the University of Luxembourg. There, they celebrated Thanksgiving, including a concert by Marlene Dietrich, and in their spare time they sketched and painted.

The results are small but fascinating pieces of art. Bill Blass for example, who went on to become a celebrated fashion designer, sketched women's clothes he saw in Luxembourg, while others took in the vistas of the Grund. Russian prisoners of war feature in the drawings, as does a brothel Madam.

While the strangeness of the deception story was enough to attract Beyer to the project, these insights into everyday life during the war also piqued his interest. We all know the history behind D-Day or the Battle of the Bulge, he said, “but maybe everything you've read about WW2 in a history book is telling only part of the story.”

Bringing these artworks back to Luxembourg, for Beyer, marked a kind of home-coming.

Lecture, exhibitions and film screening

Since the documentary The Ghost Army aired in the US it has been shown in the UK, France and Denmark and even Hollywood has expressed an interest in turning the story into a feature film, Beyer revealed.

A book deal is also in the works, as are more screenings, lectures and a travelling exhibition around the US. Next year, Beyer hopes to bring a group of people from the US to Luxembourg to see some of the original sites linked to the story.

Until then, Beyer will hold a talk on the Ghost Army at the Limpertsberg university

campus in Avenue de la Faïencerie on November 18 at 6pm. The lecture is free and open to the public.

The art exhibitions at the Abbaye de Neumünster and Fortuna Banque continue until November 27, and on November 27 at 7pm there will be a screening of the film The Ghost Army at the Abbaye. There is only limited seating available. Seats will be allocated on a first come first served basis by emailing luxembourgsvp@state.gov.

Alternatively, the film is available on DVD at the Abbaye's giftshop.

For more information visit ghostarmy.org