

NYDailyNews.com

**DAILY NEWS** Crime**War crime: FBI targets fake heroes**BY THOMAS ZAMBITO  
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Sunday May 6, 2007, 4:00 AM

Federal agents are taking aim at phony war heroes who tell tall tales of battlefield valor and pin bogus medals upon their chests, the Daily News has learned.

The FBI's Washington headquarters receives at least 15 tips a week about fake heroes - and most of the information comes from veterans who are furious that the scam artists are demeaning real sacrifices, said FBI Special Agent Michael Sanborn.

Sanborn said the charlatans are an insult to the nearly 200,000 veterans who have perished in faraway battles and earned their medals posthumously.

"These guys gave their lives for their medals," he said. "These other guys bought theirs off eBay."

The FBI investigates all the tips and, on average, more than a hundred each year lead to pretenders who tout their bogus heroics at Memorial Day rallies and other military galas, said Sanborn, a Marine Corps captain who has been hunting impostors for a decade.



The FBI is using a new law to nab phonies like Georgia's Richard Thibodeau, who was outed as a fake marine.

The latest to be accused is Louis Lowell McGuinn, a 62-year-old Vietnam vet from Flushing, Queens. Prosecutors say he promoted himself from private to lieutenant colonel and wore the Army's highest medals for valor on his dress blues during an October gala at the Hotel Pierre.

McGuinn became the first person in the nation to be prosecuted under a new law, the Stolen Valor Act, which exposes convicted fakers to a year in prison.

McGuinn's lawyer says he plans to defend his client by attacking the merits of the law.

"They're going to be sitting in the jury box waiting to hear about the crime that was committed," said attorney Paul Dalnoky. "He served and this is how the government thanks him?"

Dalnoky would not acknowledge that his client broke the law. But the lawyer added, "We all do it. With women. Applying for a job. It's all puffery."

Authorities say McGuinn wrongly parlayed his medals into lucrative security consulting contracts.

"This is a problem that has gone on as long as there have been soldiers," said Doug Sterner, a military historian who keeps track of medal winners and helps the FBI ferret out the phonies. "Soldiers tell war stories."

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JUN 25 2012

