

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

A SUPPORTING ROLE IN

PATTON'S THIRD ARMY

Corporal Benjamin Berry and the segregated 863rd Quartermaster Fumigation and Bath Company set up showers for combat troops.

If there was one thing frontline soldiers looked forward to after weeks of fighting in Europe's mud and ice, it was a shower and a change of clothes. Making that happen was the mission of Corporal Benjamin Berry and the soldiers of the 863rd Quartermaster Fumigation and Bath Company.

As the 863rd began setting up the tents, showers and other equipment for their temporary oasis, it was Berry who was tasked with locating a local water source. Once the water was decontaminated, Berry would

pump it into a tank and truck it to the company where it was heated by portable units and directed into the showers. Next to the showers, an Army quartermaster laundry outfit set up tents supplied with clean uniforms.

The frontline soldiers showed up looking haggard and dirty. "They brightened up when they saw us," Berry said. They stripped off their dirty clothes and handed them to Berry's team, who would, in turn, give them to the laundry unit. Some soldiers took off

their dog tags, rings, wallets, and watches, while others held on to them. Then Berry and his men handed out towels.

The naked soldiers then filed under the hot showers. Berry's team let them stay in as long as they wanted. "They were happy," he said. When the men finally exited the showers, Berry's company, working with the laundry unit, issued them clean clothes as close to the original size as possible. If a soldier needed a size 38 pants and Berry only had a size 42, he would give the GI the larger pair. "They were

so glad they were clean that they didn't care they were dragging their clothes," he said.

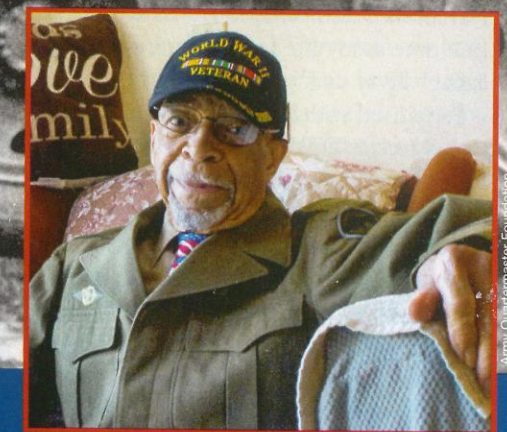
Sometimes the soldiers were so happy about the shower and new clothes they forgot their personal items, leaving Berry's team to find them and return the items before the soldiers returned to the front.

Berry enjoyed his mission. "It was a nice unit, well organized and well thought out, and it worked out great," he said. "And the soldiers were always grateful."

During some of the shower stops, Berry

noticed French civilians washing their clothes in the soapy water that rolled down from the showers. Even more impressive, the GIs in the showers also spotted the civilians and would often let their soap slip and flow downstream for the civilians. "They appreciated it and we appreciated it, too," he said. "Whenever we left the area, they would be out to wave goodbye."

Berry was a 17-year-old high school student working as a dishwasher at the Casa Cani Italian Restaurant in Glenside, Penn-



In support of the advancing U.S. Third Army, the 863rd Fumigation and Bath Company provided essential services that were welcomed by frontline GIs. In this photo, Private John Puller, Jr., and Corporal Russell Robinson check salvageable materials being placed in fumigation chambers near Longueville, France, July 19, 1944. INSET: Corporal Benjamin Berry was inducted into the U.S. Army Quartermaster Foundation's Quartermaster Hall of Fame in 2002. During World War II, Berry served with the 863rd Fumigation and Bath Company in support of Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.'s Third Army operations in France and Belgium.