

Mineral Veterans Day parade to honor fallen Piedmont soldier

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KEYSER, W.Va. — The Mineral County Veterans Day Parade this year will honor a Piedmont soldier who was murdered at the hands of German SS forces on the second day of the Battle of the Bulge.

In its fourth year, the parade traditionally honors a Mineral County native who has distinguished himself or herself in military service to their country.

This year's honoree, TEC4 James "Aubrey" Stewart, was posthumously awarded a Purple Heart after losing his life on Dec. 17, 1944. Stewart was one of 11 soldiers who were tortured and bayoneted to death by the Nazi SS in a frozen field outside Wereth, Belgium.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. James H.



STEWART

Stewart, he was a graduate of Howard High School and a member of Waldon AME Church in Piedmont. He gained local admiration as a pitcher for the Piedmont Giants baseball team, and worked at the Luke mill of the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company (now NewPage) prior to entering the service.

During World War II, he served in England, France, Germany and Bel-

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gium as a member of the 333rd Field Artillery Battalion.

During his tour in Belgium, he and 10 fellow soldiers became separated from their unit as they attempted to elude German armor and infantry units. They happened upon a family farm near Wereth and the occupants of the farm offered the soldiers food and shelter for the night.

As the next day dawned, however, a group of Nazis captured the 11 soldiers and forced them to sit in the cold and mud in front of their Jeep until they decided their fate.

The Nazis then forced the men to march into a cow pasture behind the farm house, where they tortured and bayo-

neted them to death. The soldiers' brutally battered bodies, covered by the snowfall of an especially harsh winter, were not recovered until the spring thaw.

Although the family that had helped the men erected a small memorial on the spot where they died, the sacrifice of the young black soldiers went mostly unnoticed until 1994, when a Wereth villager started the campaign to raise funds for a larger memorial to the "Wereth 11."

That memorial was officially dedicated on May 23, 2004, in Wereth. On the memorial, in addition to a brief accounting of the soldiers' fate, are the names of the 11 men who lost their lives on that cold Belgian winter morning.

Keyser attorney Roy Hardy,

who has chaired the Veterans Day Parade for the past four years, said the parade committee chose to honor Stewart this year because he was part of "an overlooked piece of history."

"He's one of our own, and he deserves to be remembered," he said.

The parade is scheduled for 1 p.m. Nov. 10 so as not to interfere with the various Veterans Day observances to be held throughout the area on Nov. 11.

Hardy is currently seeking participants, including bands, civic organizations, veteran's groups, etc. Anyone wishing to sign up may do so by calling his office at (304) 788-2354.

"The Keyser High School Band has already confirmed that they'll be there," he said.

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