



**Fred T. Ziegler**  
**Korean War**  
**U.S. Army**

**Korea**  
**6th Tank Battalion**  
**24th Infantry Division**  
**Corporal**



## **Fred Theodore Ziegler**

**Veterans  
History  
Project  
Transcript**

**Interview conducted  
March 30, 2016**

**Niles Public Library  
Niles Public Library District  
Niles, Illinois**

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**Veterans History Project Transcript**

Veteran: Fred T. Ziegler      Rank: Corporal

Branch of Service: U.S. Army      Theater: Korean War

Unit: Headquarters and Service Company, 6<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion  
assigned to 24th Infantry Division

Interview Date: March 30, 2016

Place: Niles Public Library  
Library Lower Level Meeting Room

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder      Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

*This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on Wednesday, March 30th, in the year 2016 here at the Niles Public Library. My name is Neil O'Shea and I am a member of the Reference staff and I am privileged to act as the Veterans History Coordinator at the library. I am fortunate today to be speaking today with Mr. Fred Ziegler. Mr. Ziegler was born on November 10th in the year 1928 in Chicago and now lives in Niles. Mr. Ziegler learned of the Veterans History Project through the annual breakfast, and he has kindly consented to be interviewed for the Veterans History Project. And here is his story.*

*Mr. Ziegler how would prefer to be addressed during this interview? ( Interviewer's words)*

Fred. (Veteran's words)

*We are especially favorably disposed toward Fred because he has made a gift to the libraries of the Chicago area through the Niles library of The Pictorial History of the Victory Division in Korea, the 24<sup>th</sup> and its service in Korea. And after we display it at the library we will convey it to the Pritzker Military Library in downtown Chicago. Thank you for sharing that also.*

*Fred, when did you enter the service?*

September 28, 1950

*And that time you were living in*

Chicago

*Do you recall what you were doing at the time?*

I was working as an auto mechanic

*So at that time you would have been almost 22 years of age?*

Correct. I had just gotten engaged two months earlier so it was a surprise when I got the draft notice. It certainly wasn't wanted at the time.

*And the fact that you were engaged that didn't "cut any ice."*

Not a thing

*And if I may ask where you had gone to high school in Chicago?*

Lane Tech

*The Lane Tech Indians?*

Yes.

*A terrific school*

*You were drafted so you didn't have a choice of service.*

Right

*You were drafted into the US Army.*

Yes

*Do you recall where you were inducted?*

Somewhere along Clark Street is where the place was and I am going to say Barry Avenue. There was a 2<sup>nd</sup> story office up there where they wanted us to come into.

*That would have been North Clark then around Belmont Avenue, maybe a block south.*

Yes, just about.

*Do you recall what your first days in the Army were like? Was it a big change?*

Not much of anything. We went down there. And we had not gotten to the point where they had an outfit aligned for us. So we waited a week; we waited the second week, third week and finally they got a group together. And those guys were sent to Colorado. My name being Ziegler I was at the end of the line so I just waited until they got their quota of men and they went and I just stayed behind. Two of us stayed behind.

*You say you were staying behind. You were staying behind at*

*at Fort Knox.*

*in Kentucky?*

Yes.

*So you went down there by train?*

By train.

*And did you complete your basic training down there?*

Correct. And another outfit was Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. I missed that one too. So apparently they had enough men there to start another company for basic training. And then we stayed at

Fort Knox for the basic training and later we stayed there for the secondary training of, which specialized, which tank was training. I became a tanker.

*When you say tank, you mean a motorized vehicle?*

Yes.

*You don't mean a vehicle carrying oil?*

No

*So the basic training is 6-8 weeks.*

8 weeks

*And then you had the specialized training in the tank, and that also took place at Fort Knox?*

Right, that also was about 8 weeks.

*That must have been a big base.*

It had been closed after World War II, and they were reopening places because of the war in Korea. They needed soldiers and training. We bunked there and everything was old from World War II, you know. We had to be outfitted there with whatever we could get at the time.

*I suppose the equipment was gradually upgraded.*

We went into the winter of 1950 which was pretty cold and we didn't have any field jackets yet. They had to get some from somewhere and ship them to Fort Knox so we could have something that was warm.

*Wow.*

*Was that your first time away from home?*

No, I had been up to Wisconsin several times. I like fishing.

*Were there any memorable drill instructors?*

Yes! The Platoon Leader we had was actually 17 years old. He joined the army underage and he was a very brusque young man, and none of the guys wanted to take it from him because all of us were in our twenties already, but he was good and he knew what he was doing.

*You didn't mind the food?*

No.

*Or the regimen,*

No.

*You were realistic about it.*

Yes.

*So after basic training you went to another...?*

No, I stayed there again.

They never had another assignment again so they assigned to us to the motor pool to drive buses. So what we were doing was driving officers to the tank range for their training and then we would pick them up and bring them back.

And then for another period of time I volunteered to be a KP, primarily, because there was nothing to do and you get bored. That lasted about a week or so. Then after that I volunteered for the Post Office. You had to forward mail. Everybody was being forwarded all the time. You had a lot mail that had to be sent to the guys that had left the camp.

*When did you depart for Korea then?*

That was somewhere in May of 1951. After we got through this training, we finally got our assignment which was the Far East Command. And we got a 30-day leave at that point. We were to go home and leave from Chicago aboard the El Capitan to California. That was about the middle of May.

*So some of the guys in the unit that you went through basic training with, did they go with you?*

Just one, he came to my house in Chicago because we had to leave from Chicago. We went out there together, the two of us.

*In civilian life you had been an automotive mechanic.*

Right.

*And so the Army made a good choice..*

Well, we didn't know that at the time. When you go over overseas, you're blank. And once you get to, Yokahama, by that time they start processing papers, putting everything in order, I don't know what they do. And then from Yokahama we went to the Yellow Sea which is on the west side of Korea.

*Did you make that journey by ship?*

Yes.

*Did you get sick?*

In the north Pacific we did, yes that was fairly rough weather. The one thing that is difficult is going to the bathroom when the ship is going UP and DOWN.

*Was there anyone going stir-crazy on the ship?*

No, not particularly. It's just boring.

*Did you play cards or?*

Yes.

*Then you land in Korea.*

Yes, June 10, Inchon, that was the beachhead several months before. After the Chinese came down and pushed us all the way back down to Pusan. Then they had to come back up again. And that's when, I don't know which outfit when, but at Inchon they went in and cut across and cut them off more or less and then we started to go back north again.

*I think that was reckoned to be a brilliant*

strategic move,

*on MacArthur's part*

very much so the invasion

*So you came in at Inchon after the ...*

invasion.

*At this time do you know if you are going to be in a*

No, we still don't know. We went on a train. We started to go north. We don't know where we are at. You're there and you're gone. And at the terminal wherever we ended up at we got on a truck and on the truck we took another trip to wherever we were going to engage with our outfit. Once I got there they apparently knew that I had been a mechanic and they assigned me to the tank company – the Sixth Tank Company, Tank Battalion, is what it was. At that point they dropped me off there and the rest of the fellows they probably went on up to Infantry, I stayed with the outfit there and that was it. I was there and I stayed there for another seven months.

*Your one buddy who came up with you to Chicago and went out with you, was he with you at this time too?*

No, he split off somewhere else, never saw him anymore.

*When did you get promoted to Corporal?*

I got Private First Class there and then I got Corporal in about a month or so. The thing happening was we are replacing the original soldiers that were there. As the newcomers came in we would replace one-two, one-two and these were the guys who had rank. And as we came we got rank as far as that goes too. I'd say within a period of a month or so we replaced all the soldiers that were there to begin with that started the war in Korea. They came from Texas where the 6<sup>th</sup> Tank originated. And the Division was actually out of Hawaii. And just recently there was an article that the 24<sup>th</sup> was abolished; it was broken up- there's no more 24<sup>th</sup> Division. (*Mr. Ziegler shared a newspaper clipping, dated 8/13/57, reporting the phasing out of the division, a copy appears in the Appendix.*)

We did what we were supposed to do. We got quite a few commendations from Headquarters because most of the tanks we got we got them in and we got them out. We did a lot of work. That

was usually down to an area where they send the material up from, the base you know. In South Korea when we were still there, if a tank went bad, they would put it on a low-boy and they would drive it down to ordnance. And once we got up to North Korea it was all mountains. You couldn't do anything with the tanks. It was just too dangerous to go through the mountain passes to get out of there. So we left the tanks there and when we needed parts we would strip the tank and use those parts to repair the tank.

*So at this time you are actually up in what is now North Korea, but the terrain is not as conducive to the use of tanks.*

Right, we went to Uijeongbu to begin with and then from there we went to Hwachon Reservoir where the second battle was taking place and the third one was Kumwha Valley. That's where we ended up and that was in December of 1951. And that was a real cold winter – 25 below zero. We were frozen - period. In that process we stayed there until they had started the process of trying to make the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, the separation line, as the negotiating was going on at that time between us and the North Koreans and China to try and make that decision.

*Those tanks were the Sherman T-somethings?*

They had Sherman Tanks, there were two of them, but they were used as tank-retrievers. We had gotten the new ones, the M-46s, they were wonderful, really wonderful machines. The thing I always enjoyed was, I didn't any fighting or anything like that, but what they used to do was, they used to have a gyroscope on the gun. In other words, as you went up and down on thing the gyroscope would keep the gun level to where you were going to fire it at. It could really move out, of course, there were not that many places where they could do that. But there was one thing that had happened. This was told to me from the guy before when the outfit was down in Pusan perimeter, that was earlier in 1950, they kept the tanks on train cars because they had to be moved back and forth, you know, and they were firing off the tank cars at the enemy.

*Wow*

And as they got through with the Inchon Invasion, they could move off and they moved them north, facing the North Koreans and the Chinese.

*If you were working on automobiles, then it wasn't difficult to transfer to working on tanks?*

It is a little different. It is called "bull work." Everything was heavy. Everything was heavy.

To pull a tank engine out of that, which was what we had to do, we had to separate it. If a transmission was bad, we had to put in a new transmission because we couldn't send the tank down to ordnance. They sent the transmission up there and we used to separate them from back. That was way beyond what our nomenclature was supposed to be. Ours was supposed to be: start them, clean the battery terminals, things like that. My particular job was adjusting the junction boxes inside the tank floor. It was a little Joe, a small 10 horsepower engine, plus the other one, I think it was a 1300 horsepower, it was a 12 cylinder engine but they had to have a generating system that was strong enough to start these big engines and I had adjust the relays so they would always produce at least 16 volts of power for the batteries to receive them.

*Did the cold weather affect the functioning of the machinery?*

Oh yes, one of the pictures there is in a tent. There is snow on the ground. They put the tent up so we could work inside rather than be outside.

*The maintenance tent*

During the summer there was nothing. You did everything outside. When I got there in June, and in July and August, we worked on the tanks outside in the sun. It was hot, hot metal; it seemed to absorb the sunlight, difficult.

*Did you get any R and R or rest periods in Japan?*

Oh yes, in October, we were rotating, one or two guys at the time. We got 4 days R and R, they flew into Tokyo, and I stayed at the D'Amici hotel, really classy. It had just been redone for all the soldiers to be there. And it is right next to the Imperial Palace. So when I had the time, I walked out and walked around a little bit. I stood outside the Imperial Palace just to look inside because you are not allowed to go inside.

*You liked Tokyo.*

Well, I didn't do much. What you did was you did a little drinking, you know, and you talked to the guys. There was a stadium right next to it. And they were playing football. The Japanese were playing football. So this other friend of mine from our outfit, Willoughby, he and I were the ones who went this time so we sat in the stands. The problem was that we were drinking a little bit.

*Beer?*

Yes, and of course, we had a little too much so we left.

*So how were the rations or food in Korea were, was it good?*

It was good, good food.

*Was that Korean or American?*

American food all the way, always three meals a day, once in a while, if you were away, and they didn't have anything, every vehicle had a ration pack in it, so you could break open a couple of cans and you'd always have something to eat.

*Were there any USO Shows or visiting entertainers?*

There was one close by at one point. Not everybody could leave so we had to find out who is the one who is going to leave, have raffles, but I'm sure Bob Hope was in one of them.

*You mentioned the football in Japan, do you recall any other particularly humorous, unusual event?*

That was probably a highlight of being in the service, being somewhere else.



*You left Korea before the Armistice was winged.*

Oh, yes, we left Korea about January 10, 1952. And then we went to Japan. I stayed in Japan until about May or June. And then I was sent home because my time was running out. We only had to stay in 21 months. My girlfriend was getting our particulars together to get married at the Church, all the stuff.

*Those four months you were in Japan was that in Tokyo also*

No, that was about 10 miles from Camp Fujiyama, it was north Camp Fujiyama, about 10 miles from Mount Fujiyama. We could see that every day. But they had north camp and a south camp. We stayed there. There was nothing expected of us to do, except the one guard duty. We rotate every week or so. And nothing was expected of us. We did go out to the barn where they had our tanks because it was a training field as well. I found a small, a light tank, just to work on, just to have something to work on. It had two Cadillac engines in it. I could drive it around and then come back again. At some point they were all taken out to the shoreline. I wasn't there then but they took all the tanks down to the shoreline; they were being shipped somewhere. We didn't know where they went.

*Was it hard to stay in touch with people at home, your fiancée?*

No.

*Letters came during that time.*

My wife, she sent letters practically every day.

*Nothing censored going back and forth?*

No

*You come back to the United States from Japan by ship into?*

You know, I don't even remember that. I think I flew all the way home. All I remember is landing at O'Hare. And then from there we went to Fort Sheridan. And Ft. Sheridan has got the elevated all the way out there so we just got on the elevated and came all the way down to Belmont Avenue, then took the bus and I was home.

*So you were discharged at Fort Sheridan?*

Yes, I did have to go back. I got another delay in route. I mean I could go home. We had another probably 10 to 15 days to eat up and then I went back for about 4 or 5 more days until the end and then they would say "You're discharged."

*You had already been working and were going to get married so there was no thought of making a career of the Army?*

No-o, No-o, although a friend of mine who had been over there too because we came from a group of boys around the corner. He had been south of me and worked out of the railroad; he was on the rail road all the time. But we talked about it once we got home and said, "Maybe we should have stayed in the Army. We would have had so many years in by now. We would have definitely been Sergeant or

something". Once you get up in the rank, you don't have to do a heck of a lot. You get everybody else to do the work. Of course that was only "comme ci," we never did anything about it. We let it go.

*Your fiancée she saw you in uniform, then?*

Oh yes.

*When you mentioned the boys at the corner, there a neighborhood you used to, what was it called?*

Yes, School and Southport. You know the Ashland-Lincoln-Belmont intersection. It was a very busy site at one time when we were kids.

*Was there a Wieboldt's store there?*

There was a Wieboldt's there, there was a Goldblatt's there, the Belmont Theater, the Lincoln Theater, the City Theater. Oh gosh, it was very, very busy as kids.

*I think I read once that next to State and Madison it was ...*

You're right. It was that busy. There was a bank there Lake View Trust and Savings Bank that survived the Depression. It was that survived outside of Downtown. When the economy caved in on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October. The only that stayed open.

*Was there a tradition of military service in your family?*

Well my father was in the war in Germany. He and his brother were machine-gunners. They got in the Army when they were 16 years old. And where they were situated, nothing ever happened so he was ok with that. He had a horse step on his foot so he did have a slight limp.

*And then Ziegler is a German name probably?*

Yes, southern Germany.

*You did have any trouble transitioning back into regular life?*

No, I went back to where I had the job before and he took me back. It was a small auto repair shop. We did trucks as well as cars. There used to be an area called George Street. It was a lot of meat-packing, provisions, all kind of stuff like that was going on so there was always work to be done.

*When you were at Lane Tech High School, did you take any shop or tech courses that prepared you for ...?*

Yes, they had a Smith-Hughes Course. In the last year of high school, you got four periods a day of auto shop for the whole year which was really focused on something. I got good very good marks.

*So then after the war, did you stay in contact with any of your buddies?*

I wrote to one of them and I think I got an answer back but then that kind of just died.

*Did you join a veteran's organization?*

Not right away. This fellow who was there in Korea at that time, he joined an outfit, his dad owned a tavern. He belonged to one and so he wanted him to sign up so then he got me to sign up. Well, I never went to a meeting or anything like that. Another one of my friends, he stayed in Japan. He never got to

Korea. He was a machinist and he joined an outfit because of his brother-in-law and then he asked me to join and I belonged to Highland Park #4737. You know Senator Kirk, that's his outfit.

But I never went up there for a meeting, but I went up there for lunch or dinner once.

*That's a VFW Post?*

Correct.

*And the 24<sup>th</sup> Division they can't have reunions because as you said*

It broke up.

*Fred, I sense that we are nearing the end of the interview and the Library of Congress recommends that we pose these questions to all the veterans. Fred, how do you think your military service and military experiences affected your life?*

Hmmm, it promotes a lot of thought as far as having been there and happenings over there. You can't help it. The impact on your life that you don't know. One thing was a lot of fear and you don't know what the fear is but you know there's fear. No matter what you are doing or where you're at. One of the fellows picked up what we thought was a mine but it was a canister for a Thomson machine gun and everybody told him to leave it alone and he wanted to touch it - nothing happened but that was the kind of thing you always worried about. When the engineers came to get us a new area, they would have to clear all the mines out. In other words, "Don't go past that area. That's your place; stay there!" You could go along the road. You had to be consciously aware.

*Do you think your experience in the military has influenced your thinking about war or the military in general?*

I don't think so. Of course, you always come up with ideas that you think would be helpful. You know in the event of the war and controlling it or doing the best thing for it. Yet, I am not in position to make that kind of a judgment. It's only that I think that I know, but I don't

*Some of the veterans feel that reintroducing the draft would not be a bad idea.*

I thought of that a long time ago. And it would only be a draft for a year. You get to your basic training; you do it, and then you go back. I think they do that in Israel. Everybody gets in to the draft. Even if you are not physically able you can do something. I think it would settle people down. I think what we are trying to do is living precariously in our lives. In the old days when you got through with school you advanced nobody of our group ever went to college. Nobody had the money to do it. But if you do that, you can go to college, then you go in the army but you serve which is really a good thing for a person to do. You know there is the old saying, in giving of yourself, you're helping somebody. And I can think you can help yourself; you can understand more.

*Fred, is there anything you would like to add to the interview that we may not have covered?*

Well, there was a period when we had to go down to the D Company. We had to replace the transmission in it and I've got dysentery and I've got dysentery bad. And there was a MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital Unit) and they gave me some penicillin, got me on a plane and shipped me down to Pusan and I was down there for two weeks. But I improved and I went back to my outfit. That was terrible.

*I bet you lost weight.*

I did lose weight, not much though.

*And the medical care was good?*

Yes.

*The dysentery was brought by a germ or a bug?*

Probably by something I had eaten.

The only other thing I can remember was when we were sitting on that ship out in the Yellow Sea and all you have to do was inhale and it smells like the outhouse in the forest preserve.

*Why is that?*

Because they use all the waste for the fertilizer; they call them honey buckets. They get the buckets and they have these boards and they carry them right out to the rice fields. They don't have any that they can buy so they use that so the whole country smells like shit.

*That would be a memory.*

O my goodness, yes. But you got used to it.

*South Korea is an impressive nation today.*

They had the Olympics, I don't recall, probably 10 years ago. It was amazing to see what they had built up.

*We had a Remembering the Korean War Exhibition here put together by a Mr. Jin Lee. He and his associates were so thankful to the American veterans for saving their country.*

You know I don't doubt that he came over to our house once. I couldn't get over there. I wasn't feeling good at the time. There was a Korean husband and wife. They came in. We were selling whatever they had. We had just moved and we had stuff to get rid of. And my sister was there and she mentioned, "Hi, where are you from?" And he said from Korea. And then she said, "My brother was in Korea during the war." And he said, "Oh yeah," and then he came over and gave me a gigantic hug. I mean it really, right here. touched me. You know most of the time people forget about "the Forgotten War" - it's the forgotten war. They always talk about World War I, World War II, Viet Nam War, Iraq, everything. They forget about Korea. There were some 34,000 guys died there.

*Fred, have you made that Honor Flight. Was that a consideration for you to go to Washington DC?*

No, my wife passed away about three years ago. My son did six months later or he died first and then my wife later. I have COPD and I can't walk a lot. And you know they want you to go to different places. That would be difficult; no I'm just not interested.

*Well, Fred, thank you for a very interesting interview. Your contributions today help us keep the Korean War alive and make people aware of the sacrifices that were made. Thanks very much.*

Thanks, Neil

(and I also remember the time)

And the oil that's inside the tank compartment and it showed the one fellow. "You're not going to get any if you try to order anything. You'll have to repair them." And that's what we did. I wasn't there this

time but some of the other guys they took a turret off. This definitely ordnance and even some of that work would go back to Japan. Let's take the turret off and take another one and put it on to fit and put it back on line. The idea is to get it back online.

*When you were sailing into Inchon, did you know what you would wind up doing?*

No. Everybody is fearful of being infantry. You're right on the line. But I remember they said something in basic training – only one man in ten actually gets up to infantry. Everyone else is in a support unit. Not that that made any difference because you could be that unlucky guy! I was fortunate. We were in a combat zone. We were within three miles of the front all the time. We could see the stuff going out. At the end of Kumwha Valley you could see them trying to go up the hill with tracers. And you'd watch them

At and at night time you'd see the planes overhead, not see them but hear them overhead. And one of the guys would say, "That's the egg man" "Boom-Boom-Boom" They'd be going after Pyongyang, bombing it.

Every once in a while you would hear a light plane go over and that was "Bed-check Charlie." That was Koran, we had to drive a Piper Cub. They would turn off the motor and glide. Take out a hand grenade and throw it down at you. There weren't any by us. But that was the storyline - very, very interesting.

*Yes as you say interesting and the factor of the fear being in a war zone.*

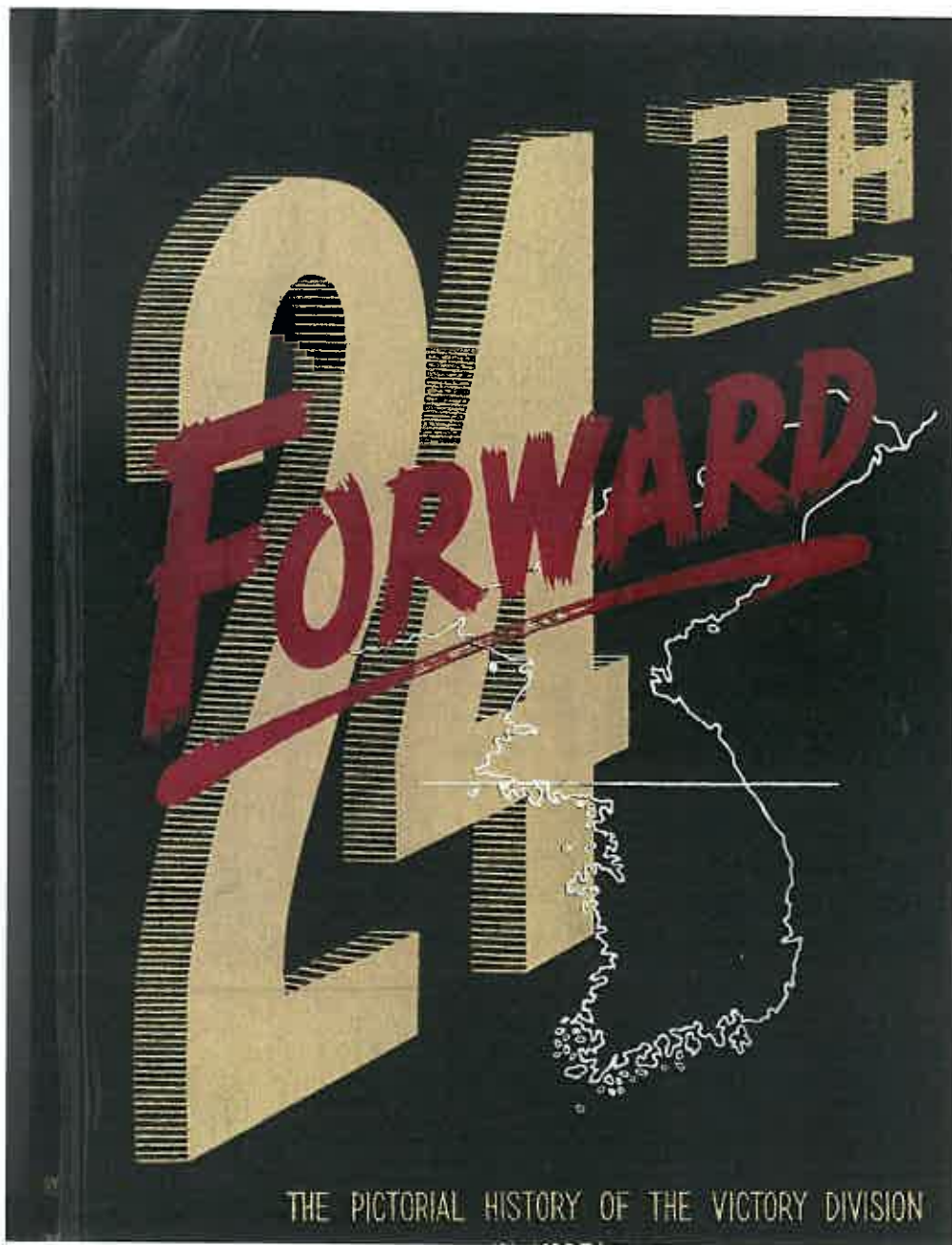
You never know.

*Fred, thank you for the interesting postscript.*

### **Reader's Note:**

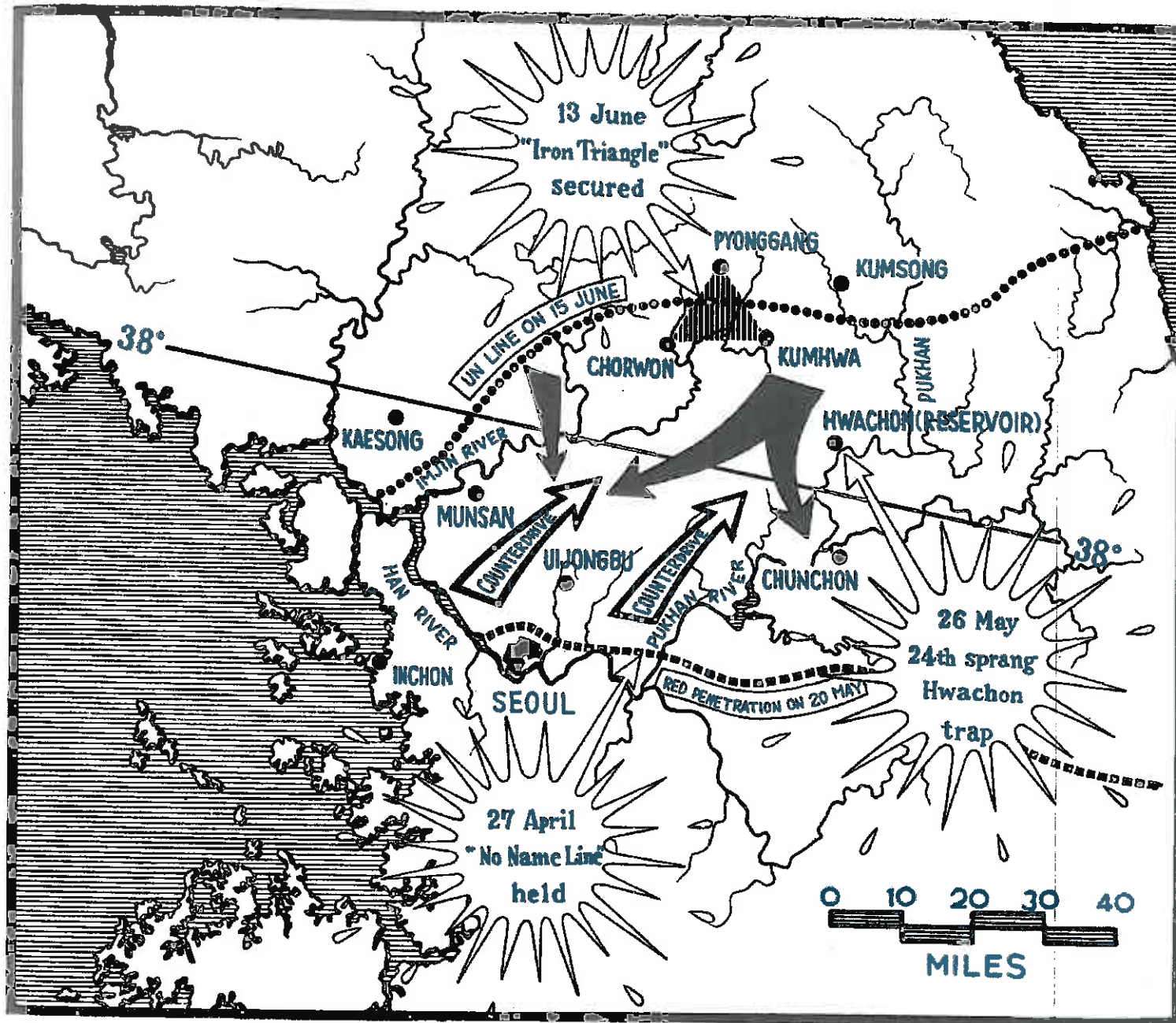
The following five pages present pertinent scans from the *24<sup>th</sup> Forward: The Pictorial History of the Victory Division* in Korea and scans of photographs taken of Mr. Ziegler and an Army buddy.

Fred donated his copy of the 24th's division history with its dramatic cover to the Pritzker Military Library in Chicago.



## DIVISION COMMANDERS

**MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM F. DEAN.** In ten brief months after he took command of the 24th, the husky, graying soldier from Clinton County, Illinois, saw the meager occupation force that had been distributed throughout Japan, stamped into a dedicated, vengeful fighting machine by a never to be forgotten baptism of fire. After his graduation from the University of California in 1922, he accepted a commission in the Regular Army and served in a number of positions until 23 July 1950—the day he was reported missing in action near Taegon, Korea. As the 24th's commander during the early stages of the conflict, he led the first elements of the division in a fighting withdrawal which bought time for friendly forces and enabled them to regroup defenses. The 53-year-old general, a veteran division commander who fought his way across the Continent during World War II, won the Congressional Medal of Honor for his single-handed attack on several T-34 tanks of a Taegon residual.



Helpful Map from the 24th Forward History showing the Division's progress in Spring, 1951



*Me holding up the  
palm trees*

Mr. Ziegler's caption of a photo taken in more pleasant conditions



**"WHAT'S GOOD FOR ME IS GOOD FOR MY JEEP." A FOXHOLE WAS DUG FOR IT'S SAFETY.**



**HEAVY 4.2 MORTARS** went underground too. Excavations studded the hills.



**A FOOT OF DIRT** was just so much body armor. Doughboys broke ground for shelter-half homes.

Scanned page from *24thForward* illustrating conditions testing men and equipment



in front of barracks



North Korea



No  
I may look different to you honey  
but I don't think I've change

Jimmy Platt

Fred worked on tanks in the cold and heat.



*Me working on tank  
engine in maintenance  
tent.*

