By Kelley Walker Perry

He’s no ordinary hero.

He never marched onto the battlefield; he carries no scars.

Art Zeigler will be the first to admit he didn’t join the Army for the glory, though. Heck, he never even saw an ounce of combat in all his 32 years of service.

“But I was proud to be in the military,” he said.

It was a day in early May 1962. Seventeen-year-old Zeigler was in Columbus with his family when he decided to venture off on his own for a bit. Next thing he knew, he was signing on the dotted line in a recruiting office.

“It was just one of those spur-of-the-moment things,” he said. “I didn’t really think a whole lot about it.”

Someone in Zeigler’s family was always in the military, it seemed. His father was wounded in World War II; he had cousins in the Navy. Later, his younger brother would end up in Vietnam.

Life in the U.S. Army was an adventure, according to Zeigler – especially for a boy of meager circumstance who had never been further away from home than Kentucky and Ohio. He soon got his chance, though.

Like most everyone in the service, Zeigler took basic training at Fort Knox, Ky.

“It was tough, for a hillbilly,” he said. “One time, I forgot to put a T-shirt on, and it felt like I had to run halfway across Fort Knox to go and get one.”

But that was about the worst of his time in Basic – besides having to endure the attitudes of some of the draftees who looked down on “lifers” like himself.

From there, Zeigler was sent to Fort Sam Houston in Texas, to train as a medic for three months. And then, on to Korea.

“That was 18 or 19 fun-filled days on the ocean,” he chuckled.

Zeigler and his shipmates stopped for a night in Honolulu, Hawaii, and another night in Yokohama, Japan, before finally ending up in Korea. They took a bus to Seoul, where the young Hoosier they called “Ziggy” stayed for the next 13 months working as the first male corpsman in the delivery room at the Army hospital.

“That was sort of a shock,” he admitted.

Most of the patients there were Korean women married to American servicemen who had already been shipped home. The women were scared and alone and afraid of having their babies in an American hospital.

“They carried on enough to make the hair on the back of your neck stand up,” he recalled.

Still, the time he spent in Korea was an interesting one for Zeigler, who turned 18 on that East Asian peninsula. The most memorable thing, he said, was going on a tour of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) meeting in Panmunjom, the truce village in the middle of the Demilitarized Zone that straddles the border between North and South Korea.

He left Korea, hitting San Francisco, Calif. before heading for Indianapolis, then on home to Columbus. He was on leave when President John F. Kennedy was killed.

Soon, though, he was sent to New York, where he took a bus to Fort Dix, New Jersey. He ended up there in the wrong transient company – where troublemakers tended to be sent. It wasn’t such a good time there, he said – kitchen duty one day, washing laundry with G.I. soap the next.

From Fort Dix, he was shipped to Germany, where he took a train to Nuremberg. From his window at a former SS barracks, he could see Congress Hall, the large coliseum Hitler built. He left Germany in January 1964 on a ship run by Merchant Marines.

“The North Atlantic in January was miserable,” he recalled.

Zeigler was discharged from the Army on May 22, 1965. From then until 1968, he just kept his address up-to-date so they could get in touch with him, if the need arose.

For awhile, he worked as a maintenance man doing electrical and plumbing work – and volunteered as an emergency medic for the local fire department. It just so happened that one of the other guys who worked with him was in the Indiana Army National Guard. He asked Zeigler to sign up, as well – if only to drive his Jeep for him.

“A working guy can’t have too many skills,” Zeigler said.

And just like that, he was back in the service again.

In 1983, Zeigler went to work full-time for the Edinburgh Police Department. He graduated from the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy a year later, tenth in his class.

“I was basically a high school dropout with a G.E.D., but what I lacked in education, I made up for in perseverance,” he said.

Of course, it helped that he had been well-trained in the Army. A former U.S. Marine was in charge at the Academy, and he was a stickler for things like properly-made bunks.

And so Zeigler became a police officer, dedicated to the service and protection of his community. But, still a Guardsman, Zeigler headed for Germany for the second time in 1987.

He drove all over Germany and eventually was stationed at a clinic there. Later, he was sent to the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and stayed on the atoll of Kwajalein, although he worked at a hospital on another atoll.

“It was just like going to work everyday,” he said. “I just liked it; I adapted to it.”

He left that unit in 1990 and ended up being stationed at Camp Atterbury in Columbus. He helped process men out who were going overseas.

“To me, it’s sort of embarrassing. I have 32 years in the military and never once went to a combat zone. They went and came back, and here I was, doing paperwork.”

That made it worse, he said.

“It was sort of like I wasn’t doing my part. But with my health, and at my age, I would have probably been a deficit.”

Zeigler needn’t have worried about “doing his part.” He continued to serve his country – and his community – for more than another decade.

In 2002, he retired from the police department. And while he retired just two years later from active duty at Camp Atterbury, he simply couldn’t stay away: he went right back to work there as a civilian, accounting for property for two more years.

Zeigler earned many awards and medals for his long service to his country.

“I’m no hero. I just got ‘em for doing a good job, on my job,” he said modestly. “I didn’t do anything spectacular.”