

Interviewee: Balliet, Howard
Interviewer: Jack Sigler
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Sigler: Good morning, Mr. Balliet. You understand that this interview is being recorded?

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: Okay, great. Why don't we start with where you were before you joined the service and how you got in, and then just tell your story from there.

Balliet: I was born in Wisconsin and attended a small liberal arts college, Ripon College, which had an ROTC program. I had been interested in joining the army; it was during the Depression and I liked to travel and I liked working outside with men. At the time they had the CCC camps then, the Civilian Conservation Camps, which were organized along the army lines. I visited a couple of those and decided that I'd like to try and get in the army. I didn't have the political contact or science background or the mathematical background to try for West Point, so I went to Ripon College which had a very strong ROTC program. When I graduated from Ripon in 1939, I was given a regular army commission and an honored graduate appointment.

Sigler: Ah, on one of the distinguishable military graduate appointments, yeah. You took this commission in which branch?

Balliet: The infantry, army infantry. I had the choice of going in the army, waiting – I wasn't 21 – or signing a pro basketball contract.

Sigler: And then where did you first report?

Balliet: I first reported to Fort Brady, Michigan.

Sigler: And in those days did they have what later became the officer basic courses?

Balliet: You mean in college?

Sigler: No, when you first reported.

Balliet: When I first reported, I went right into a regular army unit.

Sigler: Let me ask a question here to get our time frame right. What year did you graduate and report?

Balliet: 1939.

Sigler: And so you went directly into an army unit then. What unit was that?

Balliet: That was the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Infantry; I was assigned to I Company.

Sigler: And you became a platoon leader at that point?

Balliet: I was, yeah. As the only lieutenant in the company, I was everything [laughter]. Platoon leader, company administrator, executive, training mess officer, supply officer, everything else. Which was good training for a lieutenant at that time.

Sigler: Oh yes. What was it, only you and the captain in the company?

Balliet: Just the captain and me, that's it. But I remember the instructions the captain gave me. At that time he had a group of non-commissioned officers that had been in World War I, and they were really sort of towards the end of their careers. And he told me, the first instruction he gave me, was "go down and talk to the first sergeant and the other sergeant, and they'll give you what information you need to know." [laughter]

Sigler: And did they? Did you get the information you needed to know?

Balliet: Yes, and when I didn't have it, they made sure I got it [laughter].

Sigler: That's one of the great things about good non-commissioned officers.

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: So by 1939 war had broken out in Europe. Was the U.S. army beginning to prepare for the possibility of war?

Balliet: They just had started to. The army was at its worst situation during the 1930s. It was undermanned, they hadn't been trained as large units, we didn't have the right kind of equipment, tanks or anything else. But in 1939, the fall on 1939, they started to move. And one of the first jobs I held, one of the first jobs my unit had, was to join one of the biggest land maneuvers that the peacetime army had ever had. Which made me move from Fort Brady down to Louisiana, Georgia, and Alabama for several months—

Sigler: Louisiana maneuvers. They took you down by train to—?

Balliet: No, by truck convoy. The battalion moved ahead of the convoy and tried to arrange overnight stays for them in fairgrounds and city parks and things like that.

Sigler: So you went down by truck?

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: And you were with your company or were you with the advance party?

Balliet: I was with the advance party.

Sigler: You did get a lot of experience for a young man [laughs].

Balliet: I got a lot of travel right off the bat.

Sigler: I'll say. So how long did those maneuvers take? They were several months, weren't they?

Balliet: I think it was in time for Thanksgiving – no, it wasn't – in time for Christmas. We spent several months running around the South.

Sigler: And when they were finished you returned to Michigan?

Balliet: Fort Brady, right.

Sigler: And then what happened?

Balliet: Well, the orders for overseas came up in the spring of 1940. And several of the lieutenants — incidentally, we had all gone to summer camp at Camp Custer, Michigan, when we were juniors in college. We knew each other, got along well. There were about six or seven of us that got orders. And I was the luckiest guy in the bunch because several of them, three or four, were ordered to the Philippines and went through World War II in the Philippines, a couple of them as prisoners; a couple of them were killed there. One was assigned to Panama, and his unit went up to Alaska where he was killed. And I was lucky to get ordered to Hawaii.

Sigler: This would have been in the middle of 1940?

Balliet: Yes. I went to Hawaii. I got to Hawaii in August of 1940.

Sigler: Then joined the 24th Infantry Division?

Balliet: It's funny – I was assigned to the 3rd Battalion of the 21st Infantry, 24th Division. The first job I was given was platoon leader in A Company of the 21st Infantry. And a little bit later I was assigned as battalion adjutant for the battalion.

Sigler: Had you been promoted to 1st lieutenant yet?

Balliet: No [laughs]. That was a sore point with the regular army lieutenants. We often had jobs calling for 1st lieutenant or sometimes captains jobs, but the promotion system in the

regular army was different than the reserves and national guards. And I wound up, ultimately, commanding I Company of the 21st Infantry as a 2nd lieutenant wearing 1st lieutenant bars, as a temporary promotion. And I had some 1st lieutenant reserve and national guard in my company drawing more money than I was.

Sigler: [laughter] And you were actually holding down a captain's job.

Balliet: [laughter] That's right. But we got along fine, there was no problem there. We were all in the same boat.

Sigler: And at this point, the regiment was stationed where? Scofield Barracks?

Balliet: Scofield Barracks, yes.

Sigler: And your duties were what, primarily just training at that point?

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: So you trained through the rest of 1940 and 1941. And then came December 7.

Balliet: Well, I'd like to say a word just before December 7, and that is, we had two divisions in Hawaii. Those divisions had increased their training – let me start over. My first year in Hawaii was like a paid vacation. You worked hard in the morning, and the afternoons were guard and fatigue duties and the barracks and athletics. And little by little, they started to tighten down and extend the training hours so that by the middle of 1941, we were spending quite a bit of time in the field practicing our command post exercises, reconnoitering the defensive positions that we were to hold in case of an attack, putting in machine gun emplacements, and having coordinated firing exercises with the artillery. So somebody in the army knew something, because we were getting in shape to fight.

Sigler: Is the reservation at Scofield Barracks large enough to conduct maneuvers?

Balliet: We used the whole island; in fact, we used a couple other islands. We had one airlift by my outfit from Oahu to Kauai and the transportation was B-18 bombers [laughter]. And we were airlifted over there to Barking Sands airport in Kauai, went through an exercise, and then spent a day – you might say a day of vacation – and then flew back to Oahu.

Sigler: [laughs] So you got to see a lot of the islands at least. So, by December your unit was pretty well trained up?

Balliet: Yes, yes.

Sigler: And then what happened?

Balliet: Well, the biggest thing that happened besides Pearl Harbor was that I got married in August, 1941, to my college sweetheart who came over. We were at the tail end of our honeymoon when Pearl Harbor hit.

Sigler: She had come from Minnesota?

Balliet: No, she was from Illinois, but I met her at Ripon College. She was two years behind me. So after she graduated, she came over and we were married in August, 1941, at Scofield Barracks. We were on an extended honeymoon there. I couldn't afford it, but the government sent us over there [laughter]. It was like a real vacation; probably cost umpteen thousand dollars to do that now.

Sigler: You were still on leave when the Japanese attacked?

Balliet: When we were married, we went to Waikiki and lived in a little oceanside hut. There were only three hotels on Waikiki at that time, the Royal Hawaiian, the Moana, and the Halekulani. They were where the tourists came in. And at that time we had very little air traffic, but we had two ships a week that would come in and a bunch of tourists would swarm all over Honolulu and Hawaii. But we were lucky, we had this honeymoon cottage. Then about October, I was given quarters at Scofield Barracks, just fairly near the 21st Infantry quadrangle. That's where my wife and I were when our house got bombed and strafed. Well, what happened, on the morning of December 7, I'd gotten up to put the coffee on and to pick up the newspaper, and there was a terrific explosion. The house shook and a hole came through the roof, and Lynn popped out of bed and came to the front door.

Sigler: Okay, so your wife jumped out of bed?

Balliet: And after the bomb went off and the house was being strafed, she wondered what it was. And of course, I didn't know what it was either until I stood on the front porch and watched the Japanese planes make a circle over Wheeler and come on and strafe the quadrangle where the troops were. We happened to be in line when – our house happened to be in the line of one of them, and it set the house on fire. But neither of us were injured. But I naturally joined my company. Incidentally, my company was on anti-sabotage guard in Wheeler Field and the north shore of Hawaii, where we had three or four P-40 planes stashed under the trees and I had to guard them. They were separated from Wheeler. They were the only planes that got in the air. Young lieutenants from Wheeler Field went down there. I think it was Taylor, Rasmussen [??], and Welch, came down in their civilian clothes. We helped them roll them up and get them in the air. They were the only ones that tangled with the Japanese. But a couple things happened. One thing — you remember some odd things after an occasion like that. It was a couple days later that things had settled down, and we wanted to check the pantry where our china was. My wife had a set of beautiful goblets, stemware with flared lips on them. It was the only good thing that we had, gifts from her mother.

Balliet: What kind of a phone are you using?

Sigler: I'm using a fixed land line phone.

Balliet: Well, I don't know why it's fading out.

Sigler: I don't understand it either. I will have them check it out when we finish up. But anyway, your wife went off to check the stemware.

Balliet: And the top, about the top half inch or three quarters of an inch on every glass, you could lift it off with your fingers. Apparently the sound waves from the bomb had shattered the crystal. Unusual.

Sigler: Goodness, yes. Very fine crystal, too.

Balliet: Yes, it was, it was the only good thing we had in the house [laughter]. But during the strafing of our house, it was set on fire. She was very close to being hit. I wasn't, I was several feet out of the way. But other than set the floor on fire and ruin a quartermaster beautiful mahogany dining room table, and the hole in the roof, we came out of it all right.

Sigler: And you were able to get the fire out?

Balliet: Yes. Now, about the same time, I had a call from my 1st sergeant and he told me what was going on, what he had left the barracks. He said, "I got 16 men, cooks and bakers and the runners, the bugler." "What do you got them doing?" "They're on the roof shooting automatic rifles and machine guns at these low flying Japanese planes." I said, "I'll be down very shortly." I said, "How about our other people, the ones at Wheeler Field? Any casualties?" "Not yet." "How about our patrols on the north shore? Are you in contact?" "Yes." "And how about the ones at Wahiawa?" "Yep, we're in contact there. Everything's okay so far." So I went down, and about the time I got down there, the Japanese planes had disappeared, they were gone then.

Sigler: How were you communicating with the platoons that were on the north shore and at Wheeler, by radio?

Balliet: We had those, yes.

Sigler: So then things quieted down and the Japanese did not attack Wheeler again that day?

Balliet: No. The air attack came a little bit ahead of Pearl Harbor. And I assume after reading the history and running into some of the Japanese aviators later on in the 1950s in Japan, they only wanted – they wanted to get the Wheeler Field pursuit aircraft grounded so that they could have their way about bombing Pearl Harbor. They really hit the airfields a little ahead of Pearl Harbor.

Sigler: What was the general reaction after the attack was over?

Balliet: Try and list your casualties. That's the first thing. Second thing was, they had an evacuation plan from Scofield just in case, and the order came down about ten or ten-thirty that day, "Have your dependents get ready to be evacuated." Well, we didn't quite know where, but later on they said they were going to be evacuated after dark, which they were, and they sent them down to a school in Honolulu. And I said goodbye to my wife when I went to the company, and we didn't know when we'd see each other again. But she and the women went down to this school and the army wives got together and organized themselves along army organization. They had one lady act as squad leader and there'd be six or seven women that were assigned different duties, like feeding the rest of the people, taking care of babies, working with the Red Cross, getting blood for the wounded and so forth. And they spent about, oh, I think maybe nine days down there. My wife kept a log of that and it was interesting. I never knew she was doing it, but she did, and the details are interesting. She kept a log on the duties, what went on while they were down in Honolulu. And it was about nine days later that they could return to their quarters in Scofield. Things had quieted down then. And next thing was, "Are the Japanese gonna attack the ground troops or whatever? Are they gonna follow up Pearl Harbor?" But they didn't.

Sigler: Your wife's log, do you still have it?

Balliet: Yeah. As a matter of fact, it was published in a local paper here, and I've got a copy of it.

Sigler: Oh, that'd be a fascinating document. Because you know that's a part of the history that people don't see.

Balliet: I've got a couple copies of that and I'll send a copy of it to you.

Sigler: Okay, let's go back. The family returned to the quarters in Scofield Barracks, you were there. Had they moved the troops out into defensive positions around the island?

Balliet: Yes. Well, we had actually been occupying them, but not fully. We still had reserves. In my own company I had beach patrols running 24 hours a day and I had anti-sabotage guard around Wheeler, and I had a couple of rural communication centers that my troops were on anti-sabotage guard. Yeah, they were still there.

Sigler: For how long did the army stay on that kind of alert in Hawaii?

Balliet: I'm trying to think – I probably didn't get my company back, all of them together, – December 7 – until around Christmastime, just before Christmas. And then it was obvious that the Japanese were not going to attack, and that things had quieted down. We still had the internal problem because over 37 percent of the people in Hawaii were Japanese. That's one reason we had the anti-sabotage guard.

Sigler: Were there many incidents of Japanese sabotage on the island?

Balliet: Very few; very few. I don't recall my company ever running into any. For several days after Pearl Harbor, it was hard to find a Japanese anywhere. They were in their houses, they were in their jobs. In fact, a very good restaurant right outside of Scofield barracks, we loved it, used to go over there for lunch, was closed up tight. It wasn't till about maybe ten days or two weeks before it was open again. It was run by Japanese. And it is still going, incidentally.

Sigler: Were the Japanese on the island ever interned like they were in California?

Balliet: No, nope.

Sigler: So by Christmastime, things had begun to get back to normal. Then what did you and your unit do?

Balliet: Well, the first thing was to arrange to ship your dependents back to the States. I think Lynn left – the dependents were shipped out typical military style – general officers' and colonels' wives and kids and pregnant women first. So my wife had the – I say good luck of staying with me until April of 1942. And she left, I think it was April 1942, just a little ahead of the time, when my unit was headed for Australia, so it worked out fine.

Sigler: When did the regiment move out to Australia?

Balliet: 1943. I'm trying to recall the exact dates. We were encamped in Sydney, then we moved to Brisbane, and then we moved up to the training area in northeast Australia and prepared to go into New Guinea.

Sigler: Then you then took part in the invasion in New Guinea?

Balliet: I'm trying to think of the exact date from the Hollandia invasion, which was the – it was in late '43 we invaded Hollandia.

Sigler: Can you tell me a little bit about it?

Balliet: It wasn't a fierce fight like our troops had had in Buna Gona. When we went into Hollandia, we had a really overwhelming force compared to what the Japanese had holding it. We had great air and navy support.

Sigler: You're back. You had great air cover?

Balliet: And great naval support for the initial landing.

Sigler: And you were still with your infantry company?

Balliet: No, I wasn't. I was now a battalion executive of the 3rd Battalion; I moved up from company commander to battalion executive. And I actually had charge of what they call the 21st Infantry task force, which was a bastard outfit where you never knew what you got. You had one company to start with and then they would hook on certain other things, like a couple more platoons – a machine gun platoon or a cannon company or a tank platoon or something like that. And you used it as a regiment or whatever your division commander wanted you to use. You'd go in, wipe out something that was giving him trouble. That was called 21st Infantry task force.

Sigler: And you commanded that?

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: Now, by that time they must've made you captain.

Balliet: Yes, I was. Actually, that task force business started back in Hawaii. I was promoted to captain in February, '42, and major in November, 1942. So as a field grade I still was battalion executive, but I had this independent command of the 21st Infantry task force. And that was a lot of fun.

Sigler: Could you handle both jobs?

Balliet: I only had one. They let me alone on the battalion exec. My main job was training this task force and organizing it and getting these oddball officers to know each other [laughter]. I never knew what I was going to have.

Sigler: Yeah that's right, trying to put very different kinds of units together that hadn't worked together before. Did they actually get engaged in much combat?

Balliet: We did not use them when we went into Hollandia. The regularly organized units handled Hollandia. But it was kept in the hip pocket of the regimental commander so he knew he had something there he could pull together. And ultimately I think that outfit went back to their home regiments and home outfits after Hollandia.

Sigler: With that kind of unit, did you have any artillery or armor attached?

Balliet: Once in a while they'd hook a tank platoon — they never attached artillery. You had artillery as support. You had forward observers with you, and you could get the fire power you needed, but the artillery shunned on being attached. They didn't mind supporting but they didn't want to be attached because that meant they'd be under the command of somebody else [laughter]. It worked out well all along. I don't think you'll find, even in World War II or Vietnam or Korea, you'll find artillery being attached; they're always in support. We had tank platoons attached, but not artillery.

Sigler: Okay, and then after Hollandia, what did the regiment do then?

Balliet: What happened to me at Hollandia was that I was evacuated in the fall with a severe case of malaria. I came back in a hospital ship, back to the States.

Sigler: Had they been issuing malaria medicine?

Balliet: Well, we had what they called Atabrine. It wasn't very good. It turned you yellow, your skin got yellow. The Japanese had quinine, and quinine was the thing to keep your symptoms down, not Atabrine. Quinine was the medicine that worked best. We captured the medical station and got some quinine from it.

Sigler: So you were evacuated back to the States when? This would've been late '43?

Balliet: In '44.

Sigler: And they sent you all the way back to the US?

Balliet: Yes. Seventeen days on an unescorted hospital ship [laughter]. Incidentally, it had a Scottish captain and some other foreigner as first mate, and it was unusual, let me put it that way [laughs].

Sigler: What was it, a converted passenger vessel?

Balliet: Yeah, that's what it was.

Sigler: So you got back to the States, where? San Francisco?

Balliet: We landed in San Francisco and I was assigned to San Antonio, Texas, to the army hospital.

Sigler: How long were you there?

Balliet: I think about six weeks – around a month – between a month and six weeks. They got me straightened up.

Sigler: But isn't malaria a reoccurring disease?

Balliet: It is, yep.

Sigler: And so it can come back at any time almost.

Balliet: Well, yeah, if you let your physical condition get outta whack, it can appear again. I had a couple of recurrences, nowhere near like the original.

Sigler: Then where did they assign you?

Balliet: I went to Camp Robinson, Arkansas, to be put in charge of a training battalion.

Sigler: A basic training unit?

Balliet: Basic training, right.

Sigler: How did you like that assignment?

Balliet: I liked it. I have to admit to you, I liked every assignment I had in the army, and I had a bunch of them. But I liked them, and I had good officers working with me. I had some veterans from both sides of the ocean working, and these young draftees, they took training well. We'd turn them out, four weeks basic and then three weeks advanced individual, and then they went to units who trained them in the unit training.

Sigler: So your basic training was seven weeks. And you feel they turned out pretty good soldiers? [Personal observations not transcribed]

Balliet: Well, apparently they did all right [laughter]. The draftees did exceptionally well. Except for the few that went to Canada [laughter], including one of our ex-Presidents. Of course, the idea behind a volunteer, they want to do it and are going to do their best, and so forth. But I think with good leadership, you can draft them as we did in World War II and they come out just as good. They're excellent soldiers, they performed heroic deeds, and they are team players if they're handled right, if they're led right.

End Side A

Sigler: You were saying that you felt a draftee army works fine, would work fine if it's well led, if the leadership is there.

Balliet: Yeah. I can understand the West Point view. You got to keep in mind that the West Pointers are imbued with what the army leadership and the politicians are saying. They dedicate themselves to integrity and truth and service. But when it comes to political decisions, you'll find them probably with the government more than against the government, the West Pointers. I had a son that went to West Point, graduate, served in Vietnam. Was wounded over there. Didn't make any difference to him whether the troops he commanded were draftees or volunteers, not a bit.

Sigler: Did you then finish up the rest of the Second World War with the training battalion?

Balliet: No. Let's see, when did the war end? 194—?

Sigler: '45. May in Europe and in August in Japan.

Balliet: At Camp Robinson, I was ordered to go to the infantry school at Fort Benning, and be an instructor.

Sigler: Let's back up just a little bit about something personal. When you came back from the hospital ship and went on to San Antonio, did your wife then meet you?

Balliet: I met her – I got a three day pass and met her in Illinois, at a hotel in Illinois. And I stayed with her 72 hours and then I went to San Antonio to the hospital. She almost fainted when she saw me [laughter]. If I had flat eyes, I'd have been a Japanese [laughter].

Sigler: The Atabrine color. Was she able to join you with the training battalion?

Balliet: Yeah, we were in Arkansas, we had a home in downtown Little Rock while I was with that battalion.

Sigler: So you were there through the end of war, and then you went over to Fort Benning for the infantry school instructor. How did you like that?

Balliet: Yeah, I loved it.

Sigler: You were doing what, the officer basic courses then?

Balliet: Yes, and sometimes advanced, senior officers course. Because we were introducing at that time, if you recall – the recoilless rifle made its appearance. Don't know if you're familiar with it or not.

Sigler: I've fired it.

Balliet: Well, you know what it is? As much comes out the back as comes out the front. That was interesting, teaching that. That was brand new. And I guess it was first used in Okinawa in combat. But my main weapons were mortars and the recoilless weapons.

Sigler: Was the infantry then using the 4.2 inch mortar or just the 81 and 60.

Balliet: No, we had the 81 and 60, but we also had the 4.2. We always had 4.2 mortar support.

Sigler: How long were you at Fort Benning?

Balliet: Fort Benning — I left there in 1948. I was '46 to '48 there. In 1948, I went to become a professor of military science and tactics at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Sigler: By now you were what, a lieutenant colonel?

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: So, okay, so you're still in teaching mode. And how did you like running an ROTC program?

Balliet: I loved it. And that ROTC program was not required. My ROTC program at Ripon was required for the first two years. Wofford did not require it. And so it was voluntary. I had an outstanding deputy, a Captain Lance from Georgia Tech who got the Distinguished Service Cross at the Arno River crossing in Italy. He and I got together and we said, "Let's build this thing up and get some people in here. We want enough at least for a drill team." [laughter] And he'd start working on the kids, and I got a couple professors who were pro-military, and it wasn't long, another year, and we could have a company of cadets. And the drill team came along and we took several prizes for that. But the whole atmosphere of that ROTC thing picked up. And I couldn't understand why anybody would not want to do that. If you know where Wofford College is situated, they ought to go to Wofford because it's right across a ravine from a girl's college [laughter], Converse College. That made dating very easy [laughter].

Sigler: Yes. Another question – because it was perhaps about that time that I became an ROTC freshman. And one of the reasons we did it, the draft was still there. People were still getting drafted and if nothing else, the argument was it's more fun to be an officer than it is to be a private.

Balliet: Yep, that's true. In your third year you start getting paid, in ROTC.

Sigler: Exactly, and that was very welcome, too, the \$27 a month. I went to a private school too, it was an all boys school, but I suspect that almost half the undergraduate students were in one of the three ROTC programs. But anyway, so you built the program up. And how long was the assignment, three years?

Balliet: I worked three years, but I got pulled out to go to London to an organization called the Joint American Military Advisory Group. Its purpose in life was to work with the NATO countries and help them in getting their officers trained and a supply of weapons. In other words, you visited the military people in those countries and programmed what they thought they needed and what our government could afford to give them. And that's where I spent the next couple of years.

Sigler: And you were based in London?

Balliet: Yep. For about 18 months. And then transferred to Frankfurt, Germany. And a year and a half later or so, transferred to Paris when the headquarters moved to Paris, and became part of SHAPE – Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe.

Sigler: So you just stayed with them through these transitions.

Balliet: I didn't have any choice [laughter].

Sigler: What kind of jobs did you do with that organization?

Balliet: I traveled quite often. Once or twice a week we were going to a different country, sometimes two or three countries. [connection disappears]

Sigler: Did you have to deal with the French very much? [connect disappears]

Balliet: — we dealt with them. Of course, they're an oddball outfit to deal with when it comes to military, and we would have to remind them once in a while about who won the war [laughter]. The story goes that a friend of mine was traveling and landed in France, and they demanded that he show them his passport. And he said, "Americans don't have to show our passport." "Yes, you do; you can't get on." And the friend said, "Well, I got a passport. But when I landed on Omaha Beach, there wasn't anybody to show it to." [laughter] And the punch line was, "You could hear a pin drop."

Sigler: So you finally ended up living in Paris as the last part of this assignment. How did you like that?

Balliet: I liked it very much.

Sigler: Were you able to take your family with you?

Balliet: My wife came and kids visited, including the one that was in the academy, and my other son who was going to Ripon, following in my footsteps. They visited. We had great friends in Paris. We lived on a French economy, lived in an apartment. Very nice.

Sigler: You were there then until, what, '50, '51? In Paris? [connection disappears]

Balliet: '50. London, Frankfurt, Germany, and then into Paris till '53, the latter part of '53. Then I was ordered to Norfolk, Virginia, to the Armed Forces Staff College.

Sigler: So you were basically in Europe through most of the Korean War.

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: And then the Armed Forces Staff College, it was in where did you say? Norfolk?

Balliet: Norfolk, Virginia.

Sigler: And there you had become a student again?

Balliet: Right.

Sigler: How did you like that?

Balliet: I loved it [laughter]. You worked with navy and marine officers and air corps officers, air force officers. They'd give you a problem, for example, the invasion of Iraq was one problem we had, even before it came around. Everybody had a different view on how to do it, but we finally came up with one and the administration accepted it, so I guess we passed [laughter].

Sigler: So after the Staff College — that later became what, the National War College, didn't it? [connection disappears] And was moved to Washington? What was your next assignment?

Balliet: Well, from there I got ordered to Fort Hood, Texas, because a general that I had worked for in Europe wanted me to come down and join the 1st Armed Division. Well, it's nice to be wanted by a general, but you better damn well watch what he wants you for [laughter]. I walked into his office, saluted, and he says, "Well, glad you're here, Balliet, got a job for you." I said, "Yes sir." He said, "I want you to go down to this 25th Armed Infantry Battalion and get them straightened out." I looked at him and he said, "That's all. Go down and report to the combat command commander and he knows that you're coming and that you're to be given the 25th Armed Infantry Battalion." Well, I reported to the combat command commander and he didn't say anything to me. He said, "I'll take you over there and introduce you to the senior captain and to the sergeant major." So he did that. Come to find out, this was the 670 blacks and Hispanics battalion. They had one of the worse records discipline-wise and training-wise and everything else. And it was just a blot, they wanted to get it cleaned up. Well, it took maybe three or four months. I don't want to sound like I'm bragging, but at the end of 15 months, that battalion had gotten noted as the — we had a large nuclear weapon battlefield test, and that battalion, out of some 50 battalions in that test, was recognized by the people that ran the exercise as the number one battalion.

Sigler: Wow, what a turn around.

Balliet: Absolutely. I had to take some stiff action with a couple of them. But then when the division was ordered to Fort Polk later on, around Thanksgiving time, they let this infantry battalion lead them into Fort Polk. And on parade days, we were given the right of the line, which is the honored position for any unit getting ready for a parade. Right of the line is a distinguished place to be. And this damned battalion got right of the line [laughter].

Sigler: Well tell me a little more about this. What was the cause of the problem in the first place? Weak leadership?

Balliet: Lack of leadership, lack of leadership all down the line. And the company commanders, they had five company commanders in there, and the guy that was commanding

the battalion didn't pay any attention. When I got there, I had a meeting with the company commanders; we decided we were going to improve the outfit, and I relieved a real sour apple in there after about six weeks. He was a lazy – I hate to say this – he was a West Point graduate, but he was lazy, he was never with the troops, he was just missing. And I replaced him with a 37- year-old 1st lieutenant black. And he came into the office — I said I wanted to see him — somebody had told him, “You're gonna get B Company.” And they said he didn't want to come up, didn't want to talk to me. He walked in and saluted and I said, “You are now commanding B Company. Do you have any questions?” [laughter] I didn't give him a chance to ask any. He did say, “Sir, I don't know if I—.” I said, “You can handle it, Williams; that's the reason I'm asking you to do it. Your hands are loose, go down there and straighten that outfit out, you can do it.” And by God, he did. He went down there and it wasn't long before that outfit was right on top of the heap. And their AWOLs were fewer, the arrests were fewer, the battalion area looked better, the guys had their brass polished and their shoes polished. And they could see you 25 yards off, they'd just salute and holler. And he did it, he did it. I was so glad for him.

Sigler: Yeah, because he was a little old to be a 1st lieutenant.

Balliet: Yes, he was, he was just hanging on. But he was a reserve. I have to laugh, I've gotta let you this about a social program we had. Going to have a dance, a party. Well, question is, dancing blacks with blacks, were the white army wives be willing to dance with blacks and so forth. The music started, over came a young black by the name of McGee. He said, “Colonel Balliet, do you mind if I dance with your wife?” I said, “Certainly not, providing I can dance with your wife.” And he looked at me sort of funny, and he took Lynn by the arm and they went on and they danced and I went over and got his wife and danced with her. And pretty soon everybody was mixing it up and having a good time. But that idea of racism was so deeply embedded in some people that they just had a hard time overcoming it. And we had a great party, and got along fine.

Sigler: That's really terrific. And this is in the early '60s?

Balliet: Yeah, uh huh.

Sigler: What about the non-commissioned officers, had they been pretty sloppy, too?

Balliet: I can't think. And this is probably silly because there must have been some. I can't think of a bad non-commissioned officer I had, either in battle group, in my companies, or in this battalion, or what. In fact, when I got command of a battle group — no, when I got command of I Company in Hawaii, their key sergeants had more service than I was old. The platoon sergeant, mess sergeant, supply sergeant, 1st sergeant, all had been in World War I. So they had 22, 23, 24 years service. They knew all the tricks. And the advice my first company commander gave to me was go down there and keep your mouth shut and listen to what the non-coms tell you! [laughs].

Sigler: What particular techniques did you use though, besides replacing the really bad

officers?

Balliet: Well, to replace bad officers was usually enough on the surface. I mean, if he's supposed to be with his company and his company's supposed to be at point X and he's never, ever around, or he's off somewhere else, or maybe he's sleeping with a corporal or something like that, which happened. You know those things happen. I had an officer like that, and I called him in. I said, "You got your choice. You can ask for a court martial or you can resign from the service right now." He sort of got shaken up a little bit. I said, "What's your choice? Now if you want to go to court, that's fine, we got lawyers for you." He resigned, got out. But you can't let that stuff get along. Got to treat them all alike. For the same offense they get the same punishment. For the same act, they get the same plus. Got to have a sense of humor [laughter].

Sigler: Yeah, that too. So how long were you in command of this company, or this battalion?

Balliet: Till I got ordered to Japan in — I think I was in Japan from 1953 or '54 until '57.

Sigler: And what was your assignment there?

Balliet: Well, again I was assigned to the military advisor group that was working on re-arming the Japanese self defense forces as a bulwark against China. And they had a ground self defense force and an air self defense force and a navy self defense force. And I was assigned primarily to the army outfit, again doing what I did in Europe. Programming what they needed in terms of weapons and training. And arranging for their officers to go to an army school in the States. And of course they all loved that, they all wanted to go to the States [laughter].

Sigler: How did you feel about going to Japan when your first military experience was getting bombed by them?

Balliet: It didn't bother me a bit, but we had people that could not serve there. I had one guy (I didn't have him, he was in the outfit), Maynard, a fellow named Maynard, who'd made the long march in the Philippines. He abused the Japanese help just atrociously. I mean, he couldn't stand the Japanese. He'd swear at them and he'd curse them and trip them when they'd walk down the aisle and so forth. If he had his way, he'd shoot them. But he can't serve if you're trying to work with them. So they sent him back to the States. But he's the only one I know of. I've had several talk to me about, "I wouldn't go with those people at all, I wouldn't give them crap after what they did to our soldiers in Bataan. And our air force people, when they cut their heads off." That's wartime and that's over with and we've got a new job to do here. Incidentally, while talking to Japanese, we'd have conferences with their senior officers. And of course, the old story goes that they never fought the Americans, they fought the Chinese in Malaysia [laughter]. Nobody, no senior general we could find ever fought us in the Philippines.

Sigler: Right, like all the German officers fought on the Eastern Front.

Balliet: Exactly, you're right. Anyway – what was I gonna tell you about? In one of the conferences with the senior Japanese officers, the guy that planned the attack on Pearl Harbor was present. And we got off the track talking to him, and his name was Genda, G-E-N-D-A. Now he appears in the movies, “Tora! Tora! Tora!” or the American version of Pearl Harbor as the military aviator, which he was. But the point that he made, he said he fell out of favor with Nomura because he wanted to have another attack, a follow-up attack on Pearl Harbor. He said he argued for it, he wanted it, and he said he thought it would be very successful. And looking back at it, he was right. Had they not disappeared in the ocean, but had they stayed around and hit us again, I don't think Oahu would've been ours by now. He wanted to hit them again. Because he disagreed with the supreme commander, Admiral Nomura, he was knocked out of the general staff. And we picked him up as a knowledgeable guy to help rebuild the navy, the Japanese navy and air force. Spoke English very well. There's been a book about him written recently.

Sigler: And he discussed his experiences in doing the planning and such with you guys? [connection disappears] So you were in Japan three years correct? And where did you go from there?

Balliet: I went to the Army War College at the Carlisle Barracks.

Sigler: That's one of the wonderful things about the army, you spend a lot of your time getting trained. So, that's what, a year long course?

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: So when that was finished, then what?

Balliet: Then I was assigned to Fort Riley, Kansas, to raise and train a battle group to be airlifted to Korea to replace a battle group already in Korea. It was called the Overseas Unit Replacement Program. And what I did at Riley was to get the initial input of draftees or soldiers that were transferred from other units and train them, put them through the basic, advanced, individual, and unit training. And we took our army training test as a battle group at Fort Riley. And if you passed that, they'd ship you to Korea to replace a battle group over there.

Sigler: The battle group was the organization structure they tried for a few years.

Balliet: The worst thing that Max Taylor ever forced on the army.

Sigler: It didn't last very long [laughs].

Balliet: Of course it didn't last long [laughs]. Too big a headquarters, too many headquarters, too light in combat units. But his concept was that this was a group that could

move rapidly on a battlefield and avoid getting hit by an atomic bomb. You know, it's funny, now they're getting rid of the triangular division. They never should've gotten that one to start with, because it reduced our staying — in Hawaii we had two divisions, 25th and 24th. And each had three regiments, the heavy type regiment. And you could last on a battlefield with that. But when they reduced the capability by giving a triangular division rather than a quadrangular division, you reduced it by what, 25 or 33 percent, the effectiveness of a division just by going from quadrangle to triangle. But we'll work our way out of it.

Sigler: So the Army War College. And after that, what was your next assignment?

Balliet: That was to Fort Riley to train this battle group.

Sigler: Oh, then you were doing the battle group training. And you stayed at Fort Riley at that point?

Balliet: Yes, I lived at Fort Riley for a year until the battle group — we trained for about a year and then the battle group went to Korea by air. The Battle Group scored the highest score ever for a unit of this size – 97 points – and the CG said no BG is that good and took one point off the score!

Sigler: And you went with it?

Balliet: Yep.

Sigler: So how long were you stationed in Korea then?

Balliet: Fourteen months.

Sigler: Commanding the battle group—

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: And that was part of which division then?

Balliet: Well, I started out with a battle group – the 2nd of the 12th Infantry of the 24th Division, and then wound up with the 1st Battle Group of the 31st Infantry, part of the 7th Division. So we had to change our mottos and badges.

Sigler: And at that point, were you serving primarily up in the DMZ area, along the DMZ?

Balliet: Yes, right, right.

Sigler: Was that, at that period, fairly quiet or constant little —?

Balliet: Very quiet. You see, we weren't on the DMZ, we were slightly south of the DMZ; the 1st Cav Division was on the DMZ. But it was very quiet. We used to go hunting pheasants in the DMZ, it was that quiet.

Sigler: So when that assignment finished up, then where did you go?

Balliet: Coming back to the States. I was slated for a legislative liaison. Secretary of the Army's office, legislative liaison. And that's where I went there. My duty there was to arrange or help army and defense witnesses appearing before the military affairs committees of Congress. You know, help them, brief them, and give them any information we had with our contacts with Congressmen. Another part of it was to arrange travel for Congressmen, occasionally go along with them and keep them out of trouble.

Sigler: So you actually escorted Congressmen abroad on some of these junkets?

Balliet: Yes, right.

Sigler: Any stories about that, that you care to tell?

Balliet: None that could be printed [laughs]. I hate to use the name, this is for you personally.

Sigler: Okay, let me turn off the recorder.

[Recorder turned off and back on]

Sigler: I can understand why you don't want to put those kind of stories about Congressmen on tape [laughter]. That was an experience. So you had this Washington congressional liaison assignment for what, a couple of years?

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: You hadn't served in Washington before that.

Balliet: No, I had not served in Washington, that's right.

Sigler: What's your feeling about it?

Balliet: I learned an awful lot and I got my master's degree by going to George Washington.

Sigler: Going where, George Washington? Which university? Which university — [connection disappears]

Balliet: GW, GW. George Washington.

Sigler: In what field?

Balliet: International relations.

Sigler: So did you enjoy living in Washington?

Balliet: Yes, we enjoyed it. Expensive but exciting.

Sigler: So what, you were there a couple of years?

Balliet: Yes.

Sigler: And then what was the next assignment?

Balliet: That would've been in, after Washington I went— [connection disappears]

Sigler: That would've been what year, roughly?

Balliet: I'm trying to think, what would that be, another two years, '65 -6-7. [connection disappears]

Sigler: And then when that assignment was finished up, where did you go?

Balliet: Back to Fort Riley. My job in Paris was executive assistant to the chief of staff of SHAPE, and he was an old — I had served with him a couple times before, and my job was to handle the international communications coming in to him. And my counterpart, Burt Mitchell, would handle all the US “eyes only” stuff coming into General Parker. Real interesting. Got to meet all these high ranking officers. But I wanted to come back. I knew that I wouldn't be getting a star, and I wanted to come back early enough for me to get something to do when I retired from the army. Went back to Fort Riley and I was set up to take a PhD program with Kansas State, but then I got a contact from Wisconsin, a friend of the family — he said with your background in administration, we need administrators in the University of Wisconsin system and if you're interested in that, I can arrange to have some appointments made. So he made appointments with four university presidents in Wisconsin, and I went to four of them. One of them wasn't interested at all. One of them wanted me to be a PR officer for the university. And one of them said, “Mr. Balliet, I can offer you a job if you're interested.” And he offered me a job as assistant to the vice president for program development and staffing. And I accepted it. My wife and I went to live in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. I joined the University of Oshkosh and spent 13 years there. And when I left, I was assistant chancellor for administration and deputy to the chancellor [laughter]. All these long beards and PhD's wondering what in the hell, this guy's only got a master's and he hasn't taught anything at university level, what's he doing there? [laughter]

Sigler: Having a very, very successful second career.

Balliet: Yeah that's right, I was having fun. They treated me very nicely, and when I left there they gave me what was called a roast. And most of the faculty and student government and everything turned out and shot barbs at me [laughter].

Sigler: When you retired from there, you moved down to Florida, I assume?

Balliet: Moved, yes. Went to the Palmer Country Club for 22 years. And then my wife and I decided it was time we needed a little more help, so we came to Freedom Village, and we had a nice apartment. And she passed away three years ago and I'm still in the apartment doing fine.

Sigler: I'm gonna turn the recorder off now.

Balliet: Let me tell you one thing though. This is unusual, and I told you before I was the luckiest guy in the world. There are 11 pictures, 11 figures in my wedding picture – every one of them's dead. Every one. Six lieutenants and a chaplain and my battalion commander and the regimental commander and the best man and the maid of honor and my wife have all passed away. So—

Sigler: Well, you're still with us and I hope I can get down to Bradenton and meet you someday soon.

End