

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Robert Balliet
Radio Operator, Army Air Force, World War II
2000

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Balliet, Robert. (1924-2012). Oral History Interview, 2000.

Master: 1 video recording (ca. 58 min.); ½ inch, color.

User: 1 Audio cassette (ca. 58 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Robert Balliet, a native of Appleton, Wisconsin discusses his service with the 776th Squadron, 464th Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, United States Army Air Force in the European theatre during World War II. Enlisting in the Army Air Corps in December 1942, Balliet received basic training in Florida, was sent to radio school in Illinois, and finished his training at gunnery school at Tyndall Field (Florida) before teaching radio and being assigned to a squadron in San Antonio (Texas). The full squadron assembled in Idaho and was assigned the B-24 that they would remain with until a fateful mission over Austria. Balliet outlines the progress of his squadron through South America and Africa to its basing in southern Italy in November 1943 following missions flown from Tunis (Tunisia) in support of the invasion of Italy. From base in southern Italy the Fifteenth would fly missions against munitions plants, aircraft factories, transportation facilities, oil refineries, and provide bombing support for Allied ground troops in southern Europe. Balliet imparts a sense of the dangers faced as well as the routines performed during these missions. Shot down (May 29, 1944) on his 18th mission, bombing the Wiener Neustadt aircraft factory near Vienna (Austria), a wounded Balliet parachuted into Yugoslavia. Balliet relates his harrowing escape from the damaged plane, and conveys a riveting saga of capture, interrogation, solitary confinement, a German prison camp, forced march, frostbite, friendly fire, and liberation (May 6, 1945) by passing British tanks and abetted by a friendly German guard. He provides a colorful account of POWs heading for France, the arrival at a “Lucky Strike Camp” and an impromptu visit to Paris. Arriving back in the US via Liberty ship, Balliet received a furlough at Camp Sheridan (Illinois) and a discharge in San Antonio three months later, having accumulated enough points and the war with Japan recently concluded. Balliet married in 1947. He expresses regret that he did not utilize the GI bill to fulfill a prewar pledge to attend Notre Dame University. He instead resumed work for the telephone company. Nonetheless, he finds reward in his forty-three year career and his membership in veterans and ex-POW organizations.

Biographical Sketch:

Balliet (1924-2012) served with the 776th Squadron, 464th Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, United States Army Air Force in the European theatre during World War II. He was shot down and parachuted into Yugoslavia, held as a prisoner of war, and sent on “The March” over hundreds of miles in Pomerania (now Poland) and Germany. Liberated in May 1945, he was discharged later that year in Texas.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000
Transcribed by Linda Weynand, 2014
Abstract by Jeff Javid, 2015

Interview Transcript:

McIntosh: Okay, off and running. Talking to Bob Balliet, and it's 20th September, year 2000. Where were you born, Bob?

Balliet: Appleton, Wisconsin.

McIntosh: When?

Balliet: 3/28/24. 1924.

McIntosh: When did you enter military service?

Balliet: In December of '42.

McIntosh: '42. You enlisted in the Air Force [then the Army Air Corps]?

Balliet: Right, yes.

McIntosh: Rather than being drafted in the Army?

Balliet: Well, I just—we—a bunch of us wanted to go, and—.

McIntosh: Did you go with another bunch of guys from your high school class?

Balliet: Well, there was—yeah, yeah, a good buddy of mine and I went. Above the post office was recruiting offices, and we were going to go in the Marines. So just unbeknown to my mother and dad and his mother and dad, we both went up there, and we got [laughs] upstairs in the post office, and the Marine recruiter was gone. So the Air Force guy says, "Have you guys ever been to Texas?" He turns across the hall. And we said, "No, we've never been to Texas." He says, "Have I got a deal for you." You know [both laugh]. So anyway, he said right away, "Come on in, and we'll talk about it." He says, "I got a group going to Texas in this next month," and he says "We'd like to have you in it." So we says, "Okay." So we went home and told our folks and this and that. All of a sudden we were on the train going down to Milwaukee at the Juneau Hotel, I'll never forget that, and they gave us an exam. The one thing this recruiter said, "Now listen, you guys want to stay together, don't you?" "Yeah sure, that's what we're here for." "Okay, I'll guarantee that you two stay together the whole deal." "Okay, swell." Well, that's the last time I saw him was down at the Juneau Hotel [laughs]. He went one way, and I went the other.

McIntosh: Laughing all the way.

Balliet: Right, yeah. So that's when I enlisted then in '42, yeah.

McIntosh: Your first training was in Texas?

Balliet: No, I never got to Texas till I [laughs], till I—.

McIntosh: There's another mistake.

Balliet: Yeah, that's right. I first was down in St. Petersburg [Florida], had basic training, and then from there we went to Radio School at Scott Field, Illinois [Scott Air Force Base] out of St. Louis and picked up radio, and then from there I went from there to Tyndall Field [Panama City], Florida for gunnery.

McIntosh: How did they get you channeled into radio?

Balliet: I guess they needed radio operators at that time. It was just what they needed at the time.

McIntosh: It wasn't a question.

Balliet: Oh no. I didn't pick it. I was there, and that was the way I— .

McIntosh: They had a big radio school in Madison, too.

Balliet: I know it. I don't know why I couldn't get there. They had one in Sioux Falls [South Dakota] and in Madison and Scott.

McIntosh: So how long was that training, Bob?

Balliet: Jeez, I don't know.

McIntosh: Well, roughly—several months?

Balliet: Yeah, four months, three months.

McIntosh: Was it difficult?

Balliet: I picked it up very—the code was—no, I don't know, I had—I enjoyed it. In fact they gave you an extra day off on weekends if your grade was over a certain—I mean, if you had an A grade I guess it was.

McIntosh: I see. So you had to learn to take the code over the radio and written also—

Balliet: Oh yeah.

McIntosh: So you could handle it either way.

Ballet: Yeah.

McIntosh: You had to write it and—.

Balliet: I had to always write it. Not—what do you mean by--.

McIntosh: The dot-dots came by radio though?

Balliet: Oh, yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: No other way.

Balliet: No. So anyway then I could go home these weekends. [laughs] You know, hitchhikin' then was easy. You just stood—I got a ride from the garbage truck. I got ahold of the guy, and I asked him, “On Friday I gotta go and this and that.” And he says, “Okay, I’ll take you out to the gate.” So he took me out, and then I started hitchhiking home, and I’d come home for the weekend and come back on Tuesday. I’d have off on Monday then, and I’d come back on Tuesday. So that worked out nice.

McIntosh: So when you finished that, what then?

Balliet: It was down to Tyndall Field, Florida. That was where Gunnery School was. We were there for six weeks I think it was—Gunnery School.

McIntosh: Okay, was that difficult?

Balliet: No, no. It was—.

McIntosh: You were destined to become a waist gunner?

Balliet: Yeah, that’s right.

McIntosh: As the radioman you obviously were in the front of the ship.

Balliet: No, on our mission I was upper turret. The reason I was upper turret is the engineer usually took the upper turret, but we were so banged up at this time. We had lost—the cables were cut and everything else, and he was there trying to fix everything, and then I had to work up there and take his place.

McIntosh: Well, that was one particular mission.

Balliet: Yeah. But you're right. Radio operators usually took the waist gun because the radio was right there.

McIntosh: Nearby.

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. So, now you're a gunner—radio operator they put you into a squadron?

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: Where?

Balliet: And that was in Pocatello, Idaho.

McIntosh: [laughs] One end of the country and then—.

Balliet: I know it, isn't that something? And then we were there—.

McIntosh: What was that group?

Balliet: Well, we were issued an airplane, and we practiced and flew our missions here in the States on this airplane. In fact, we had that airplane, took it overseas and went down with the same damn plane; we were with it all the time—the same plane.

McIntosh: The same 24 [B-24]?

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: You only flew 24s?

Balliet: That's all, yeah.

McIntosh: What was your group?

Balliet: 464th.

McIntosh: 464th. Bomb Group?

Balliet: 776. Bomb Group was 464. Squadron was 776.

McIntosh: So your Bomb Group was 464?

Balliet: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: Okay. And the squad?

Balliet: 776.

McIntosh: 776. And it was formed then in Idaho, and you transferred to the east?

Balliet: Yeah, we were in two places in Idaho: Mountain Home, Utah and Pocatello, Idaho. From there we were formed as a group. Well, we got together actually in San Antone [San Antonio, Texas]. I was teaching radio down in San Antone, and they were getting a navigator and a co-pilot and all those together down there. And then we went from there up to Pocatello, and that's when I met the rest of the crew.

McIntosh: You flew with the same crew?

Balliet: Mm-hm, went down with the same bunch.

McIntosh: That's unusual to stay—.

Balliet: It is very unusual.

McIntosh: Okay, because that'll make a more interesting tale. So how did you get overseas? Just jumped across the country, and you flew over back—flew to England?

Balliet: No, no, we flew—we were in Africa.

McIntosh: Oh, went to Africa and then up.

Balliet: We went to Miami. Then Miami we went to Waller Field, Trinidad and Trinidad we went to Fortaleza [Brazil], which was in South America. From there we flew over because that's the closest distance on the oceans. We flew to Dakar [Senegal], and then we went to of all those places, Marrakesh [Morocco] and wound up in Tunis [Tunisia]—right out of Tunis a little place called Oudna. In Oudna we flew these missions up into Italy.

McIntosh: Oh, you were on the 15th Air Force?

Balliet: 15th Air Force, right.

McIntosh: Got it.

Balliet: 15th Air Force and we flew—.

McIntosh: So you lived in the desert?

Balliet: [Laughs] Yeah. Cold, oh my God, it was cold.

McIntosh: Well, we have to talk about that.

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: How long were you there in Tunis?

Balliet: We were there until, I think, after the invasion of Italy.

McIntosh: That was in July.

Balliet: Yeah. And then from there we moved up to the heel of Italy and Gioia [del Colle]. Yeah, Gioia was the name of the town. In fact the next day, May 29th, the next day they were gonna move up—the whole group was going to go to Cerignola, which was another place up north of Italy, northern Italy—central Italy, I guess. Then we were there living in tents, and we didn't have a—just slit trenches and ate out of a mess kit. It was just a—it wasn't a good deal at all.

McIntosh: You finished the war there?

Balliet: Well, I finished the war in prison camp.

McIntosh: Okay, well then we don't want to get too far ahead.

Balliet: Oh.

McIntosh: Okay.

Balliet: Yeah. I—.

McIntosh: I have a good friend who was a radio operator, trained at Scott Field, in the 15th Air Force. He was shot down in the water. He was the only one who got out of the plane. He's from Madison. Bud Smith, he's my closest friend.

Balliet: Well, no kidding. How'd he survive then? He—.

McIntosh: [inaudible] Oh, he just popped out.

Balliet: He was just lucky.

McIntosh: Yeah, he said just all of a sudden, you know, the plane was filled with water, and then I popped out.

Balliet: He had his Mae West [life jacket] on and stuff?

McIntosh: Yeah, and then he just popped out, and everybody else was gone.

Balliet: Oh, ooh!

McIntosh: He never liked flying again [??]. I think he was on an airplane once, and he was scared. He got off and was afraid to ever get on an airplane after all [inaudible]. But anyway, so tell me about Tunis now before we get too far ahead.

Balliet: Well, Tunis—.

McIntosh: Living on the desert you say is cold.

Balliet: Oh!

McIntosh: You always think of the desert as being hot.

Balliet: Oh, I know it, but we just—we wore everything. We'd take a barrel—a full size barrel—and cut it in half and then put the barrel there, and then we'd go out in the desert where these airplanes were crashed and all the garbage was around. We'd take the tubing out of it, and then we'd get the [laughs] hundred octane gas and put it outside the tent. Can you imagine hundred octane out there and ran that tubing in? And then we'd pinch the end, you know, real tight and then lit it. Well, that hundred octane just—that barrel would get red, red hot.

McIntosh: How the hell that didn't blow up, I don't know.

Balliet: Well it did. [McIntosh laughs] There was—the group next to us, I mean, the squadron next to us, six guys were in there, six enlisted men, and that thing went—the guy got up to it—.

McIntosh: When you had [inaudible] there, what were you heating up?

Balliet: Well, just heating up the air, yeah. And then, well, this guy got up to go to the bathroom next, I mean, to the slit trench next to us, and he stumbled over that damn tubing. And psssss—he just started the whole thing, and I don't know, they just got burned badly. That was Tunis--in Oudna--we flew those missions.

McIntosh: Generally you're flying where, from Tunis?

Balliet: Tunis, we'd go up into Bologna—I think that's how you pronounce it—Italy.

McIntosh: Bologna, yeah.

Balliet: Bologna. And then different places we'd go to so the guys could make their invasion easier.

McIntosh: Right, okay. And how many missions did you have down there?

Balliet: About eight, six or eight, yeah, something like that.

McIntosh: Before you moved to Italy?

Balliet: Before we moved onto Gioia [del Colle]. Gioia is in the heel of Italy, right down in the—

McIntosh: I know another guy who was a pilot of a 24. He lives in Madison: Bill Carow. He flew twenty-five missions from that base [inaudible].

Balliet: Oh, is that right?

McIntosh: Yeah. He was in on the Ploesti [Romania] raid and that. Okay, now we're in Italy. Did you have better accommodations in Italy?

Balliet: No, we had six-man tent in Italy; that's the same thing we had down there.

McIntosh: Yeah, but it was warmer.

Balliet: Well, yeah, it was a little warmer, yeah that's right. It was—accommodations were—.

McIntosh: Well, it didn't have the sand. Didn't the sand bother you in Tunis?

Balliet: Yeah, it sure did. We had to clean the radio equipment all the time. What the heck did we clean it with? We took it apart because of all the sand and the dust and stuff like that. That was it. So now we are up in Italy I guess, and we flew our missions. Well, we'd go to Ploesti.

McIntosh: Go a little further north then.

Balliet: Yeah, and we'd take—.

McIntosh: You survived the Ploesti raid?

Balliet: Yeah, guess we were beat up a little bit, but we survived.

McIntosh: 24s—lost a lot of ‘em.

Balliet: Oh!

McIntosh: A lot of ships then [??].

Balliet: Yeah, that’s right. And then we—.

McIntosh: Total lack of deception, right?

Balliet: Right. Well, look at what they did on the first mission. They flew right over it too low and got in trouble with their own bombing. We didn’t have any escort whatsoever. See, you’d get guys in a B-17 [laughs]—.

McIntosh: Yeah, they always had escorts.

Balliet: Oh hell, they had escorts all the time [both laugh]. No, I never saw an escort plane—never: P-51, any of them. So then we did our bombing, and then on the—.

McIntosh: Those missions, generally you’d start at what time in the morning?

Balliet: Real early. I don’t know—.

McIntosh: Four or five?

Balliet: Seemed [??] four or five in the morning. It was usually an eight-hour mission. If it was longer than an eight-hour we were—.

McIntosh: Four out and four back?

Balliet: Yeah. We were usually in trouble if it was over eight hours because depending on the wind and all that stuff a lot of the guys—.

McIntosh: Now, as a radio operator what was your specific duty?

Balliet: My specific duty was to do exactly what they wanted me to do—the pilot and co-pilot. Like when the fighters came I was yelling for help, you know. Give our location and—.

McIntosh: You were in contact with who is what I’m tryin’ to get at.

Balliet: Oh, nobody at the time. They didn’t want us to use the radios.

McIntosh: Oh they didn't?

Balliet: No, we didn't use the radios then.

McIntosh: I thought maybe you'd contact the air base from time to time to let 'em know what you were encountering—.

Balliet: No, no, unh-uh.

McIntosh: They didn't want that.

Balliet: They didn't want us to—.

Clyde: I'm not listening. [McIntosh laughs]

Balliet: Getting back to that B-17 [laughs].

McIntosh: Well, you could carry more bombs than a B-17.

Balliet: Oh, we went higher, faster, further, and heavier bomb load.

Clyde: And rougher ride [Balliet laughs].

McIntosh: One pilot, a friend of mine—he was a 17 pilot. He said he found that the B-24 was hard to taxi. He said, "Not so bad in the air, but on the ground it was difficult to manage sometimes." I don't know if—.

Balliet: Well, that could be, I don't know. All I know is they had a better deal [Balliet and Clyde laugh].

McIntosh: Right.

Balliet: Yeah, so anyway then we flew those missions, and we had some milk runs [routine, uneventful trip with several stops], and we had some lousy ones.

McIntosh: Tell me about the lousy ones.

Balliet: Well, it's just that we were pretty lucky that we weren't hit too bad on these lousy ones.

McIntosh: The lousy ones, you're talking about German fighters, or are you talking about ground fire?

Balliet: No, I'm talking about flak.

McIntosh: Ground fire.

Balliet: Well, yeah, ground fire. We were getting over the target on the IP [Initial Point], and all of a sudden we encountered flak coming up at us.

McIntosh: Generally, you flew at what level? 20,000?

Balliet: Twenty, right around twenty: twenty-two, eighteen in that—depends upon where you were in the position of the formation.

McIntosh: You'd fly in a large group?

Balliet: Yeah, usually.

McIntosh: Twenty planes or more?

Balliet: Oh, yeah. Sometimes it was the full quota, you know, a hundred—.

McIntosh: The whole squadron?

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: Which was about how many planes?

Balliet: Oh, four times seven: twenty-eight, thirty planes, I think it was.

McIntosh: I see. Okay, and at your base were there any other groups there, or is that just your bomb group?

Balliet: No, just our bomb group was there, the 464th Bomb Group was there.

McIntosh: Okay. So, and how many missions did you have?

Balliet: A total of, what was it, sixteen or eighteen I think it was on the eighteenth mission.

McIntosh: When you got shot down.

Balliet: When I was shot down, yeah.

McIntosh: Was that the only time you were really in trouble, was that particular mission?

Balliet: Yeah, we lost our oxygen once before that and had to go down and—

McIntosh: When you were cut off with the flak?

Balliet: Yeah, flak pierced a tube and—.

McIntosh: The plane suffered much damage before this last mission?

Balliet: No, no, we were pretty lucky. We didn't have that much damage to the plane.

McIntosh: So you survived it pretty much.

Balliet: Yeah, mm-hm.

McIntosh: Okay, now tell me about the last mission.

Balliet: The last mission, we were coming back. We were bombing Aspersdorf which was an aircraft factory out of Vienna [Wiener Neustadt]. Have you ever encountered that before?

McIntosh: No.

Balliet: Oh, anyway it was an aircraft factory, ME-109 aircraft factory. And we were there, and we went over the target and dropped our bombs, and we got hit quite badly with flak. And we formed our own group. There was twelve of us. Twelve B-24s that couldn't keep up to the—.

McIntosh: You were all wounded?

Balliet: We were all wounded. So they always say "Stragglers will die," which is very true.

McIntosh: Who says this?

Balliet: Well, that was the saying, "Stragglers, you'd better stay with the formation or you're in trouble." So we stayed as long as we could, and then all of a sudden we dropped down.

McIntosh: You lost power.

Balliet: We lost power and stuff, but anyway we lost an engine, and the other one was going bad so all of a sudden the other group, the other airplanes followed in, and we formed our own formation, the twelve of us, twelve B-24s. After we had that the fighters came at us. ME-109s came at us and a bunch of them. And all of a sudden they took one at a time. We just had a field day. That's when I went on the upper turret, and I had a hell of a time up there. They were just popping you, coming at you all over. And so then finally—.

McIntosh: Did you hit anything?

Balliet: Oh, I think so.

McIntosh: Uh-huh [??].

Balliet: No, how do you know? The airplane's up, and you're hitting here and that, the plane goes down, and you don't know if it goes continuously. So as far as I'm concerned I got a couple of them.

McIntosh: Now you're looking for a place to land?

Balliet: Yeah. We were coming down over--getting into Yugoslavia now. And what he was trying to do was hit the deck so that he could come back over the Adriatic [Sea] and get back to the base, and we didn't make it. When the fighters came at us they really knocked the heck out of all twelve of us. We were the last one of the twelve to go down.

Clyde: Would you like some coffee, guys?

McIntosh: No, no, I'm fine. Thank you.

Balliet: Nope, thanks, Clyde. So that was when—I didn't know. I'm in the upper turret. Now what in the heck? The pilot--I looked down, and he [both laugh] was pulling on my pants leg. And the pilot, "Get, get." So I says, "Okay." Then I got out, but naturally you can't wear a parachute in a turret, any turret.

McIntosh: He wanted everybody to jump?

Balliet: Yeah, he wanted everybody out. He was gone; he was going too. So then finally I'm in the plane all alone now, and the plane is going down at a pretty—.

McIntosh: All alone?

Balliet: Yeah, they all bailed out.

McIntosh: The pilot left?

Balliet: Yeah. Sure, the pilot—well, he'd pulled on my pants leg when he was—.

McIntosh: He was saying goodbye.

Balliet: Yeah, "See you later. Get out." [McIntosh laughs] So he—.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Balliet: Yeah, he wasn't going to stick around.

McIntosh: You mean the attitude of the plane didn't interfere with you getting out?

Balliet: Yes, it did. I couldn't—.

McIntosh: Get out through the bomb bay?

Balliet: Bomb bay, and I was on the bomb bay rack, the walk rack. First of all I had to get my parachute.

McIntosh: Where was that?

Balliet: Well, that was in the radio compartment [laughs]. But anyway I got down there, and it wasn't my parachute. See, they had extra ones in there because depending upon where you were. You had seat chute in the waist gun, and then you also had—.

McIntosh: You could just strap this on?

Balliet: Yeah, but I couldn't get the strap under my leg, and I got one, and that's all I came down with is one strap on the leg. And I couldn't get off the bomb bay because of the, what do you call it—we were going down too fast, and I couldn't push. So I finally pushed and fell under the bomb bay and pulled the rip cord immediately and hit the ground. That was it. That's how fast it was.

McIntosh: You were at about five hundred feet?

Balliet: Five hundred, no five hundred is what the pilot claimed, five hundred.

McIntosh: You were the last out?

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: Well, at least it's nice that they watched you to see whether you got out.

Balliet: Yeah, well, he didn't think I got out 'cause I came out of the tail. He thought it was the guys in the waist gun that came out. But he didn't believe it was me until he met me back in interrogation.

McIntosh: So you come down; how was that experience? It happened so fast you couldn't—.

Balliet: I have no idea. I hit the ground—.

McIntosh: Do you have any memory of that now hardly?

Balliet: No, no. Oh, I have memories every day. I mean, not every day, but a lot of—.

McIntosh: No, but getting' out, I mean the parachute ride was so quick it was—.

Balliet: Oh, it was bing, bing because I don't hardly remember it.

McIntosh: Come down on the ground or in a tree?

Balliet: No, right down on the ground in the mountains right in the top—I mean in the mountains. So then all I remember is I ruined my back and my two legs, my knees, and I was hit in the one leg.

McIntosh: What with?

Balliet: With flak. See, now when you bail out your shoes are gone. My shoe—.

McIntosh: You mean you didn't [inaudible] on it, it just came off?

Balliet: Oh yeah. When you [snaps fingers] you hit the—when the parachute opens up it's such a jolt. And you have these little bunny slippers on anyway, you know, these little electric booties I guess you'd call them.

McIntosh: Was that an electric suit?

Balliet: Yeah, an electric suit we had on, and that was it and then the heavy sheepskin deal.

McIntosh: Right. So there you are on the ground, lookin' around, where is everybody?

Balliet: Yeah, I looked around. It was right around noon, and my watch stopped at 11:20 something. Then finally I looked over, and I saw the parachute, and they tell you right away to get rid of the parachute and hide it.

McIntosh: Right. It's an attraction.

Balliet: So I couldn't walk. I was in such pain. Jeez, I just laid there. I was knocked out for a long time, and all of a sudden I did wake up, and this guy was next to me. He was from I imagine from Yugoslavia. He wasn't a German. He was from Yugoslavia.

Balliet: A soldier?

Balliet: Yeah. They'd get x amount of dollars for each prisoner of war they bring in from the Germans. Or if we're giving more money they get 'em— whatever side they're on. So then we came down the mountain, and— .

McIntosh: How did you move if you couldn't walk?

Balliet: He dragged me. [laughs]

McIntosh: Wonderful.

Balliet: Yeah, he dragged me and dragged me, and then finally we got down to a cabin that was in the woods, in the mountain, and the cabin had a guy from—well, it was surprising. He told me that he used to ice fish on Lake Winnebago, and he stayed at the Conway Hotel, which is a hotel in Appleton [WI], still there. Not as a hotel but as the poor people can live there. They made apartments out of it. And then anyway the guard brought me there, and there were goats. It was nice lawn, and I just collapsed on the grass, and the guy came to me, and he asked me if I wanted any goat's milk, and I says, "I'd appreciate it."

McIntosh: This is still the Yugoslav?

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: Speaking English?

Balliet: This guy—yeah. He was the head chef in the Hotel Stevens in Chicago. Can you imagine that?

McIntosh: No. Nor could you, I'm sure [laughs] [inaudible].

Balliet: I said, "What?" He says, "I used to go ice fishing out there, sturgeon fishing in Lake Winnebago." But anyway—

McIntosh: Jesus Christ.

Balliet: He was nice, and the guard, he gave us a horse to come down. Well, they tied me on the horse, across, and I kept on slipping. You know how the mountain is and the horse. Well, I kept on sliding off the back end, which was—

McIntosh: But you still were in the hands of the enemy?

Balliet: Oh yeah, sure. This guy took me right down, and it was night, very dark. We were still coming down, and we got to this big, huge mansion deal. And I walked in, they brought me in there, and there was a big picture of a swastika, and then he had these phosphorus lights on his desk just like you see in the movies [laughs]. And I came in, and then all these pilots came in. I don't know, there must have been about seven or eight of them came in just to say hello is all they were doing. And the guy asked me different questions, and I told him I couldn't tell him. I says, "I'm really not allowed to talk at all. Name, rank, and serial number. That's all there is." So anyway I stood there, and they brought me into Zagreb [Croatia] then. I went to Zagreb. In a little tiny room they threw me. Took my belt, and I had one shoe left on, and he took that. He pushed me in that room, which was all right, and then they fed me underneath the door. There was a little crack. They'd put a bowl of soup or whatever it was, hot water. Then I was there, and then they'd bring me out and interrogate me the next day, and I told them I couldn't.

McIntosh: Ask you the same questions over and over?

Balliet: Yeah. Well, yeah, but did anybody else tell you what they knew about you? Well, he goes back here, and he says, "Look it, I'm going to tell you—what group were you in?" I told him I couldn't tell him. "Well, let's make a deal. I'll give you the first number, which is four, and the last number, four, and you give me the middle number." And I says, "I can't do it." Well, he says, "All right I'll give you the middle number, which is six, and then four." And I says, "I couldn't do it." Well, he had more information about me than [laughs]—I don't know what the hell that was, in it, but anyway that—

McIntosh: Tell me about your wound. It was a flesh wound; the bone wasn't broken.

Balliet: No, no, the bone wasn't broken.

McIntosh: You could walk with it.

Balliet: Oh yeah, I could walk with it, but it hurt to beat all.

McIntosh: Sure.

Balliet: But anyway, then after I got out of there—I was there for about two weeks in that solitary confinement. From there they took me up to a place called Wetzlar [Germany, site of a POW transit camp] on a train. I went through Vienna, and we went to the Red Cross deal there and had a bowl of soup. I remember that in Vienna.

McIntosh: The American Red Cross?

Balliet: Yeah. Well no, I don't know what Red Cross it was.

McIntosh: International [inaudible].

Balliet: International, yeah, and they fed me, and from there I went to Wetzlar. They gave us a Red Cross parcel. From there we went up to the prison camp. The prison tent was up near the Baltic between Danzig and Stettin, Germany. It was near Poland, right down at Poland. We were at the prison camp then, Stalag Luft IV prison camp. And then February 2nd comes along, and it was windy and cold and miserable. They got us out of the barracks, and we took our little blanket, a real fine blanket, and put it around our neck and tied it, used it as a scarf, and we got up outside. They counted us, and told us we were going to be going on a march, a forced march. And so did you have anybody else tell you—

McIntosh: I've done several of these [interviews of veterans on] forced marches.

Balliet: Yeah. Well, we said, "Okay, we're going to go." So we got out and started. They had no idea where we were going. They just marched.

McIntosh: Well, they were running away from the Russians.

Balliet: The Russians are coming down here, and they didn't want us to fight with the Russians against them. So they started going and go over to this city and go up here and go this way and around. We never went through a bigger town than—well, you're not familiar with around here but a very little town, if any. So anyway, that's where we slept, in those barns or in the ditches. And the hard part was when we were walking in the road we'd stay together right in the middle of the road. These P-51s would come down and strafe the living hell out of us—three times. Usually three passes and the third pass they'd flip their wings because the Germans would go to the ditches, and we'd stay in the middle of the road and wave our arms like this.

McIntosh: They'd understand?

Balliet: Oh yeah, quite a few. We had [**End of Tape 1, Side A**] oxen pulling a hay wagon in the back of us, and then those that were killed, they'd just throw 'em on the back of the wagon, that was it.

McIntosh: The P-51s couldn't recognize you?

Balliet: No, about the third pass in they'd recognize us. So that was the bad part of it too. But anyway we couldn't have anything to eat but hot water and potatoes. They fed us these potatoes—

McIntosh: No cabbage? Alot of guys had cabbage.

Balliet: No, we didn't have any cabbage. Well, of course it was cold, and they had where they keep their potatoes and I imagine cabbage too but we didn't have any. We had cabbage soup once in a while, kartoffels [potatoes] and cabbage soup once in a while. They had these mounds of dirt and then covered up. That's how they keep the potatoes all year long. Then you can dig in then when they weren't looking and stuff like that. When they stopped the march you'd dig in there and eat those damn potatoes like that. But they fed their—they didn't have any pigs. I didn't see any pigs, but they fed their, ah what would it be, well, yeah it would be pigs. Feed 'em these potatoes. They had these big heaters [??], and they filled 'em up with potatoes, and then they fed them first, which was the top, nice and clean ones [laughs], you know [laughs], and we got the garbage down below. Now we would take that potato, and we had 'em in our hats, and we'd go up there, and they'd throw a handful in there, and then we'd go up in the barn and lay down and suck on those potatoes all night long. So anyway that's—I came out of the walk pretty good. I had frostbite and all that kind of stuff. So then we went 680 miles according to northern Germany, we walked. And we got over by Lubeck, Germany, and all of a sudden we were in this little barn—very little, small—the city was just, it wasn't even a city it was just a little—it wasn't even a village--and we heard all this commotion. We had a tall guard that was Slim, we called him. Of course we had mean ones, very means ones. They'd sic the dogs after us and bite you and all that stuff because we couldn't keep up with the march and stuff like that. They just wanted to be mean, that's all. But Slim was a nice guard, and he could whistle. And so when we were at this barn that one night, the last night, I said, "Slim, 'Indian Love Call'". He loved to whistle "Indian Love Call," and then he'd whistle that, and then finally we heard all this commotion. So I thought, "Well, I can't open up the—there were just the barn doors. And so I opened up the door, and I could see the tanks going by from—the British tanks were going through, and oh, what a thrill. And so then Slim gave me over there, and he gave me his gun, and he held up [laughs] his hands. He gave up to me, and I had his gun so, but anyway we didn't know what to do. What the heck are we going to do? Where are we? We don't know where we are.

McIntosh: Your loose and with no weapons.

Balliet: Yeah, that's right.

McIntosh: You didn't know where the hell you were.

Balliet: Oh, hell no. We had no idea. All we did was march; went here, and here and then through the woods. We never marched through a city; we never

marched on a highway. We marched always through these heavy woods. In fact we marched late at night when it was snowing and snowing and snowing so damn bad we had nothing but a--we couldn't even see the guy ahead of us. But anyway, then Slim gave me his gun, and we went out there, and these tanks threw food out to us: D bars [D-ration: chocolate bars made by Hershey Corp.] and stuff like that. They had the Germans on the run, and they were really moving. Then we didn't know where to go so we just packed up and went towards Epinal, France.

McIntosh: At least you knew enough to go west, right?

Balliet: Yeah, that's right we knew enough to go west. So then we got on—we'd take a—there were four of us together: one from Minneapolis and Bill Crystal from Milwaukee, from New Berlin, and another guy from Indiana, but anyway the four of us would stick together, and we'd take a truck, and if we had any gas left in the truck we would take it or a motorcycle or anything just to go, get out of there.

McIntosh: These are just lying around?

Balliet: Yeah, yeah lying around. They left everything, and they evacuated. So then we got in an airplane. We got to an airport, and they had these C-47s there. [laughs] The guy says, "Where are you going?", and we told him, "We need a ride to Epinal, France." He says, "Okay, get in". So a whole flock of us got on in the damn airplane, and he took off, and we're landing at Epinal, and the war was over. You know, the people were celebrating so they were all over the runway, and he kept on—so what does his co-pilot do? He opens up his window and shot the—you know the Very pistol [a flare gun] is?

McIntosh: Ah, yes.

Balliet: [laughs] He shoots the Very pistol, and hell—none of us had a parachute [laughs] of course, and what does it do? It lodges right in the engine, right in the engine. So here is all this doggone red coming out of the engine. [McIntosh laughs] It wasn't—and I thought, "Oh, jeez we're done again!", you know. So anyway he got ahold of the—he was warning the people. Why he shot the Very pistol is because he had wounded aboard, and you usually shoot the red Very—.

McIntosh: Right.

Balliet: So anyway we landed at Epinal, France, and then we were—it's like a college town. It had dormitories, like Lawrence [University, Appleton, WI] here in town, but anyway we were there, and then they tried to feed us up with—oh, we had eggs and malted milks, as much as we wanted.

McIntosh: Keep it down?

Balliet: Yeah, no, that was hard. They looked so good, and then we'd eat and I all—.

McIntosh: Ate too much and you couldn't—.

Balliet: And couldn't keep it down at that time. Trying to clean us up is what they were doing. We were all full of—.

McIntosh: Full of lice and stuff?

Balliet: Full of everything.

McIntosh: Did a lot of guys have the trots?

Balliet: Oh, well, we had that all the way through. What you do you just went in your pants because you couldn't stop. The guards would throw the dogs at you if you stopped on the march. We had our bellies, you know, hung down like this. We were just on potatoes; that's all we had on the march.

McIntosh: How much weight do you think you lost?

Balliet: I weighed 149 when I went in the service, and, I don't know, I was right around 100 pounds I think right—that march.

McIntosh: Jesus, you were really skin and bones.

Balliet: Yeah, that's all; I was skin and bones. But anyway we'd take a shower, and then they'd take the clothes away from us. And then take another shower and clean us up. We had these—.

McIntosh: They'd spray you with the DDT [insecticide].

Balliet: Yeah. Then I had a beard down to here, you know.

McIntosh: That's right. You didn't have any—.

Balliet: So then when people say, "Well, where did you go to the bathroom?" you [laughs]—.

McIntosh: You couldn't say, "I was standing," right.

Balliet: Yeah, you were just raw down there. You walk because you couldn't stop because there was no way of stopping. There was no water. The only

water we had is when if we could stop we'd gather a bunch of snow and suck on that. But then the rumor came back that the doctor said that we should stop and eat wood—ah, what do you call it—charcoal, burned wood. Well, there was a lot of that we could find.

McIntosh: Who said that?

Balliet: Some doctor told us that, “Eat the wood,” and that would—.

McIntosh: And he was a prisoner?

Balliet: Clog you up. It must have been; I think it was. I don't know. But anyway it came back, “Eat all the wood you want because it'll sort of block you up,” because you're just running out, the potatoes are just running out. So anyway that was—.

McIntosh: A couple pieces of wood weren't too tasty [inaudible].

Balliet: [Laughs] No, they weren't. But anyway then after that my two buddies and myself we were at Lucky Strike Camp now. We when up there, and we were in a six-man tent again. Do you know what Lucky Strike is?

McIntosh: Yes, I do. It's an evacuation point for [inaudible].

Balliet: For—yeah, and so were all waiting there, and all of a sudden I said to the other two guys, “Jeez, we're sitting over here so far and so close to Paris, why don't we go to Paris?” “Okay, so let's get the hell out of here.” So we took off, and we started hitchhiking on the road outside of Lucky Strike Camp—.

McIntosh: What town was that Lucky Strike in?

Balliet: Le Havre.

McIntosh: Le Havre?

Balliet: Yeah. And so anyway we got on this flatbed army truck, our army truck, and the guy stopped, pulled it over, and he says, “Where are you going?” We says, “We're going to Paris”. He says, “So am I. Jump on”. So we [laughs] jumped on. The first thing he did is he went through a brand new tarred road [laughs], and we were tarred [laughs] from head to foot. It just came at us. So anyway we got to Paris, and a jeep—.

McIntosh: How were you going to attract any young friends to get a bath [??]

Balliet: Yeah, we didn't have any stripes, we didn't any wallet, we didn't have a nickel, and we didn't have any identification. We didn't have anything. [McIntosh laughs] So we're in right downtown Paris, and the guy says--of course you wouldn't do that today because you're older, you know. Anyway we're standing there and all of a sudden this jeep comes, this MP [Military Police]. He comes and, "You Americans?" You know, now he starting speaking French to us [McIntosh laughs], and we didn't—try to tell ya, yeah, "Nicht Verstehen" [Do not understand]. But anyway, he says, "What are you?" I says, "We're POWs." We didn't even know what a POW [prisoner of war] was then. [McIntosh laughs] And anyway he says, "You got any money?" "No, we haven't got a damn nickel. We haven't got any identification; we haven't got a wallet."

McIntosh: You had a lot of tar.

Balliet: Yeah, a lot of tar to identify. So anyway he told us to get on the jeep, all of us, and he took us to a bank. It was like a pie-shaped bank on a corner. We went in there; now this is about two o'clock in the morning. The guy in the bank says, "How long were you a POW?", and how long this and that?

McIntosh: You mean a bank—a money bank?

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: At 2:00 a.m.?

Balliet: Yeah, the guy was still in there. He gave us—how long we were POWs and what our rank was. I was a tech sergeant.

McIntosh: He spoke good English?

Balliet: Oh yeah, he was from the United States. He was a finance officer.

McIntosh: Oh, I thought he was a Frenchman.

Balliet: No, no, he was a finance officer. They must have taken over this bank is all I can see. So then he says, "Okay," and he boom, boom, boom gave us each \$300. I think it was \$300 in French money. So we just went to the Champs Élysées and went around. We were sitting at this nightclub, and we were all sittin' here, and all of a sudden the guy at the next table says, "Hey, you guys you're at Le Havre, aren't ya? You're at Lucky Strike?" "Yeah, yeah." He says, "Can you give me a couple of bucks?" He was sitting with this beautiful gal, and he wanted some money. So I says, "Okay," so I gave him \$200 just like that because what the heck. Easy come, easy go.

McIntosh: Well, it's not American money so it isn't real.

Balliet: Yeah, so I gave him the money, and he thanked me, and that was it. So all of a sudden we got back to camp, and there wasn't a tent up. It was all gone; it was just leveled. The hospital was there that was there, and so we went to the hospital and got our barracks bag there; that's all we had. And got on the ship—after they deloused the ship and everything like that, had it ready to go. So we got on the ship and came home. But anyway I got married in 1947, and after a couple of months at home here—my dad was postmaster at the time so all my return mail was in care—Bob Balliet in care of Postmaster, Avalon, Wisconsin; that was the easiest way. All of a sudden Dad called me up after we were married, and he says, “Bob, I'd like to talk to you.” I says, “Okay, Dad.” I thought, “Oh boy, what happened now?” And I went in post office in his office there, and he handed me this letter. I opened up the letter, and here it was \$200—\$250, an extra \$50. This guy found out where the heck I was and who I was and sent me the money. Can you imagine that?

McIntosh: Amazing.

Balliet: My wife says, “What did you do to get this now?” [McIntosh laughs] I said, “Jeez, I can't believe it.” It came in handy then, too. So that was just one of the stories.

McIntosh: What was his name?

Balliet: I have no idea. I got it in a box at home, but I don't remember what his name was.

McIntosh: You never kept—.

Balliet: I never did know it. I never did know the [inaudible] because I didn't know the guy at all. He just reached over and said, “You got a couple of bucks?”

McIntosh: Yeah, you were pimping for him.

Balliet: Yeah, that's right! Jeez. [both laugh]. So then we got on the ship and went over to—and around the horn to Wales and loaded up with ballast, the clay, and then from there took off to New York. So that was about the end of the story, isn't it?

McIntosh: Yeah. Did you get—back to Italy: the food was pretty good there at the camp?

Balliet: No, it was out of a mess kit.

McIntosh: It was out of a mess kit. You didn't have any decent mess hall or anything like that?

Balliet: Oh no, we had nothing.

McIntosh: You were eatin' C- and K-rations.

Balliet: That's all. That's right.

McIntosh: You carried those on the plane?

Balliet: No, I don't remember—.

McIntosh: You didn't carry any rations at all?

Balliet: No, unh-uh, unh-uh. I don't—.

McIntosh: On these flights? [??]

Balliet: Unh-uh, unh-uh. They didn't—just—.

McIntosh: [Directed to Clyde] I forgot to ask you that. Did you ever carry any rations—C-rations or K-rations or anything?

Clyde: No. In case you went down?

McIntosh: Well, just in case, you know, somethin' to eat.

Balliet: If you went down you didn't have time to get it together anyway, would you?

Clyde: No.

Balliet: No, we didn't have anything like that. All we had was—.

McIntosh: You didn't tell me when you got down how they stripped you. What did they take—you said—.

Balliet: Oh, they took my watch and my ring.

McIntosh: This Yugoslav.

Balliet: Yeah, as soon as—well, this guy that's dropping me off so I can be interrogated here. When we got there--it was a great big building; it had a moat around it and everything like that. So, I don't know who it was, but

anyway as soon as we got down there he got down on his knees, and he undid my escape kit. He took that, which I didn't say a word. He did me a favor. You know, I thought, "What the hell."

McIntosh: You didn't have a .45?

Balliet: No, I had one but I didn't have it there. It was in the plane. And he took that and took the escape kit and the money that was in there. How much was in the escape kit? Do you remember it, Clyde? I don't know, maybe—.

Clyde: A couple hundred dollars.

Balliet: Yeah, I think that's what it was.

McIntosh: Did you—any of your mates aboard the plane—.

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you ever see them again?

Balliet: Oh, sure, sure. We meet together at—.

McIntosh: I mean in France when you came down—.

Balliet: Oh, no. The only time I met—.

McIntosh: You never saw them in prison camp?

Balliet: Yes. There's a little story. Did you ever see what a prison camp looks like?

McIntosh: I've seen several pictures—.

Balliet: Oh, I got some—.

McIntosh: And maps.

Balliet: I got some out in the car. There's a map of—have you got a map of our march through the—.

McIntosh: No. You're gonna give me one?

Balliet: Well, I can make a copy and give you one.

McIntosh: Okay.

Balliet: This is a march all through here.

McIntosh: Most guys never knew where they were. They said, “We marched for days and days and days and wondered [??] where the hell I was.”

Balliet: Well, anyway we’re in prison camp now, and we always wait when new prisoners come in—I was in Stalag Luft IV, Barracks A: the first one that was built there.

McIntosh: I interviewed a guy who was in Stalag IV.

Balliet: Uh-huh. Well, then all of a sudden we were in A, and that was right by the gate coming into the whole camp. And so all of a sudden we’re, “Hey what’s new with the war? What’s new with the war? We heard they’re going to have an invasion. Oh good, oh, great.” That’s the only news we had. We would ask the German guards; they all knew how to speak English by the way. The only thing is they’d speak German, “Nicht verstehen, nicht verstehen.” You know, you’d ask them.

McIntosh: But they understood you?

Balliet: Oh, sure. They were no dummies. They looked like stooped a little bit [??] [all laugh].

McIntosh: Well, they’re Germans.

Balliet: Yeah, yeah. But anyway all of a sudden I yelled, and I says, “Look,” and here’s Al Acknee. Al Acknee was our engineer, and he was there. And then Tommy Monacelli, he was our tail gunner. They came in, and I says, “Tommy, Al, what the hell! Where you guys been?” And you know what happened to them is they got back through the underground. I couldn’t because my back was out. I couldn’t walk, you know—

McIntosh: And they hit the ground ahead of you.

Balliet: When they hit—yeah, they hit—.

McIntosh: They started runnin’.

Balliet: There’s a river there, and whatever side of the river you were on—and I was on the wrong side of the river, maybe the right side now. But anyway they got back through the underground, both of them, and they went up, and they were supposed [laughs] to go to Capri [Island in Naples, Italy] and all this stuff, you know. They didn’t have a chance. They went right back up the next day, and they got shot down again. They wound up in the

same prison camp I was. So they says, “You lucky son-of-a-gun! We got twice now!” And no kidding, so that’s the only thing—.

McIntosh: You never thought anything would be worse than being shot down—.

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: Twice.

Balliet: He was there the whole—.

McIntosh: Within a what—two week period?

Balliet: Within two weeks period, yeah. They got back, and they got rested up and fed up and stuff like that, and away they went again. I guess they were short of people like mad, I don’t know; must have been. But here they were; they wound up in the same prison camp as myself.

Clyde: [inaudible] a big tall guy. He jumped a couple times. We called him “Shroud Line” [all laugh]. He stayed at the door. He said, “Pull your shroud lines when you cross the door.”

McIntosh: I interviewed a guy who was on the [USS] *California* at Pearl Harbor. He was sunk. He got off, and got—then they put him on a cruiser. He was in the Battle of Midway, and he was sunk again.

Balliet: Oh boy.

McIntosh: Twice.

Balliet: Isn’t that something.

McIntosh: [laughs] Ha, ha! In six months.

Balliet: Well now, our nose gunner is from Tigerville, Louisiana; Ben Atkinson. And he was a prisoner, taken prisoner, but he got his feet caught in the shroud lines and came down right on his head. And he was—

McIntosh: Paralyzed.

Balliet: And he was out, out, out. And they finally repatriated him and sent him home, and we were pretty close to him, he and his wife. He was in trouble mentally, and then finally he went through these trials and all this to correct it, and he finally came out okay and went to missionary school, and he became a minister. And he was the nicest, nicest guy. In fact none of us on the crew even smoked or anything. The only thing we drank was

when we came back. They'd give you a bottle, and that's all the drinkin' there was.

McIntosh: But he didn't end up paralyzed?

Balliet: He didn't end up paralyzed. He ended up—.

McIntosh: You'd think he would.

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: He was really [inaudible].

Balliet: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: [inaudible] a fall [??]

Balliet: That's right. Anyway he turned out to be good, and now we got a letter. His wife gave us a complete information deal on our group in our squadron, which was very interesting. She put it together through Washington. She got the information from them; different addresses and stuff. So anyway he turned out all right and died this past year. She called us up on the phone and told me to get the rest of the guys and tell 'em.

McIntosh: So he's the only—what other guys in the crew do you keep contact with?

Balliet: Ahh, well, let's see, yeah, the co-pilot I met two years ago right here at EAA [Experimental Aircraft Association, Oshkosh, WI].

McIntosh: By accident?

Balliet: Just about. No, I got a call, and I got a call at home, and it was from Ray Simpkins. "Ray Simpkins, Bob." "Ray, where the hell are ya?" He says, "I'm in Oshkosh." He says, "I'd like to see you." And I says, "Well, I'd sure like to see you." No, he wasn't at Oshkosh yet; he was on his way to Oshkosh. Because it was so dumb, he says, "I'll wear a green cap." Well, now everybody in town had a green cap [all laugh].

McIntosh: Only about a thousand.

Balliet: Yeah. So he says, "I'll meet you underneath the control tower," and I says, "Okay". So I went there, and I'll be a sun-of-a-gun, I get there, and he and his kid were standing there, and I recognized him. And he recognized me. Now that's forty, fifty years now—'45. So we got a nice talk, and then I invited him over to the house, and I says, "Why don't you stay there?" Well he's pretty successful, and he rebuilds parts for airplanes and stuff.

That's his job. Then he comes up there, and then he sells 'em the stuff. He takes orders. And he's got a ranch, and he's got horses and everything and stuff. He's real successful. But I don't know why, but he slept in a two—it was he and his son were there, and they slept in this tent. They just loved to come up there. And you know how it rained a couple of times [laughs], washed them out. And I told him he can stay at our house. We had plenty of room, my god, heck we'll give you everything you want here. But anyway that was the last time I saw him. And I don't know how old he is. Our pilots got—.

McIntosh: You mean he's gone or he's dead?

Balliet: No, no. I even, well, I wrote to him, and he wrote to me, and then I decided to call him; that was easier. And then that was the last—oh, let's see, about two months ago I called him, and that was the last time. But our pilot has got Parkinson real bad in very bad shape. He's not a good a—he's down in Florida.

McIntosh: But your squadron meets on a yearly basis?

Balliet: Ah no, we're meeting in Vegas in November, and I don't know if we're going to go. The wife is has got—.

McIntosh: 'Cause that's a yearly thing?

Balliet: No, that would be every five years. Now it's every two years.

McIntosh: Oh, I guess that's what you had said, every two years.

Balliet: Oh, the wife has got a problem. She's—hard to control her bowels, and all of a sudden she's got to go, and when she's got to go she went. You know, one of those deals.

McIntosh: Yes, I know.

Balliet: Tell me—you know all about [laughs] [Note: McIntosh is a physician]. Anyway she's trying to control it, and I hate like heck to get down there and—.

McIntosh: Right. It would be too embarrassing.

Balliet: Yeah, that's the hell of it.

McIntosh: Now, tell me again, how'd you get back home?

Balliet: Oh, we went from New York we went to Teaneck [New Jersey]—.

McIntosh: You picked up another [B-] 24 and flew it home?

Balliet: No, no, no, no. Oh, we got back on a Liberty ship. Yeah, from Le Havre we got on the Liberty ship, and then we came home and went to Kilmer, New Jersey.

McIntosh: You were separated from service there?

Balliet: Yeah, and we were there for—they didn't know what to do with us because Japan was still goin'.

McIntosh: Well, they knew one thing they could do with you: they could put on another airplane and send you east.

Balliet: That's right. We didn't want to do that. They needed experience. So anyway we were at Kilmer, New Jersey, and they fed us eggnog and everything, but they wouldn't let us go home until we gained x amount of pounds.

McIntosh: Oh, really.

Balliet: They didn't want us to come up to my ma and say and she'd look at you, you know. So anyway—.

McIntosh: A bad image for the Air Force.

Balliet: Right, yeah. Look it, they don't feed their [all laugh]—.

McIntosh: Right.

Clyde: Beef 'em up.

McIntosh: Don't send your son to the Air Force, right?

Balliet: So then we were there, and from there we went on a train into Canada and down from Michigan to Fort Sheridan [north of Chicago].

McIntosh: You were separated there?

Balliet: No, not yet. From there they gave us a ninety day furlough. So I got on a train and met my dad. He came down to meet me at the train.

McIntosh: You were still single then?

Balliet: Oh yeah, yeah, sure. And I met my dad, and I came home for ninety days, and then we went back through Chicago. My cousin is in town. You ought to talk to him; that's quite a story. But anyway he also was a POW in the same—he and I were real close all the way through, before we even went in the service. But anyway we got home for ninety days and then went down to—I was in the control tower down in San Antone. I went to San Antone to get discharged. Oh, they didn't know what to do. So all of a sudden they said, "How many points you got?" They came out with a point system, and of course we all had enough. We had plenty of points though.

McIntosh: You got extra points for being a POW.

Balliet: Yeah. So then we got that, and so then finally they said, "Okay, then." Japan was over with, and we came home. So that's how I got home.

McIntosh: So what medals did you earn besides the Purple Heart?

Balliet: Yeah, oh, Air Medal

McIntosh: Air Medal.

Balliet: Uh-huh, I don't know. I guess that's about all.

McIntosh: You have [??] several clusters, I'm sure.

Balliet: Yeah, then we had the European Theater and that sort of stuff [??].

McIntosh: All that usual stuff. And when you got out of the service did you use your GI Bill?

Balliet: Not a bit.

McIntosh: You had something to do?

Balliet: What I did was when I got out of high school I went to work for the telephone company. And now, we really didn't know what we were goin' to do so I went to work for the telephone company, and then when—.

McIntosh: As a lineman?

Balliet: As a repairman then. Well, as a lineman; you start out as a lineman and build yourself up. So I was there until December. I enlisted in the service, and then when I came out they came after me. The company came after me and wanted me to go back to work for them. And I said, "I'm going to go to college." Buddy of mine, we both said this before we went in the

service, “Let’s both go to Notre Dame.” So we were going to go, and all of sudden we were around here, and I went back to the telephone company then, and I stayed there for forty-three years. So I didn’t have to take advantage of the GI Bill. I sort of wish I would’ve, but it turned out all right.

McIntosh: Sure, okay. Did you join any veterans organizations?

Balliet: Sure, the DAV [Disabled American Veterans], the Ex-POW, Legion.

McIntosh: How active is the Ex-POW group?

Balliet: Ah, they’re pretty active around here. I go down to Milwaukee. What we did is—I don’t know if you ever heard of—what the heck’s his name now? He’s a psychiatrist down in Milwaukee with the veterans. We would go down there once a month and be with the Vietnam veterans, and we’d hear their stories and stuff—just to be with them. Murray Bernstein: do you know him?

McIntosh: Never knew him.

Balliet: He is the nicest guy, and he would get us together, and we would hear their side of the story. We buddied up with a guy--like I buddied up with this guy. And he turned out to be a pretty damn nice guy, and I thought, “Oh boy, they went through holy hell.” I mean, we thought we had it rough. But anyway, if half the stories he was telling me was true he did have it rough. But anyway then we were down there. But the veterans organizations, I go out to the Legion once in a while. I’m trying to—my disability, I’m workin’ on that now to see if I can get it up a little—.

McIntosh: What disability?

Balliet: Well, just general illnesses and stuff like that.

McIntosh: General [inaudible].

Balliet: Ah, different things that happened in the frostbite and all that stuff that I had in prison camp.

McIntosh: What kind of damage did you suffer from the frostbite?

Balliet: Well, your nose, I’m cold all the time, my hands are freezing, my feet are—I wear sweat socks to bed.

McIntosh: Did that start right after you got home?

Balliet: Oh yeah. Yeah, it started then, but it [inaudible].

McIntosh: You mean it's hypersensitivity to cold?

Balliet: Yeah, yeah..

McIntosh: That you never had before?

Balliet: No, I never had that before. But anyway we—oh, we're doing all right, and it's gonna be—.

McIntosh: What did they rate your disability at?

Balliet: Well, I was 40%.

McIntosh: Based on the hands and toes?

Balliet: Yeah, yeah, and that's about it.

McIntosh: I'm surprised you got that much.

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: I know of guys who've had more permanent effects with less with similar experience. It's not a consistent thing.

Balliet: I don't know what—yeah, depends upon the guy who is giving you the stuff. I got a buddy that he's got 100% now. He just got it.

McIntosh: And he can't work?

Balliet: He can't work, no. Yeah, the work clause is in there.

McIntosh: Sure.

Balliet: Well, anyway that's about it.

McIntosh: Right. Anything you forgot to tell me?

Balliet: [laughs] No.

McIntosh: Wild and crazy tales?

Balliet: No, I guess not.

McIntosh: Of course what you told me is wild and crazy anyway [??].

Balliet: Yeah [laughs]. That was quite a story.

McIntosh: It's excellent.

Clyde: He goin' to confession.

Balliet: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's what it's like.

[End of Interview]