

Arthur Edward Balsiger Biography

Pre-WSC Background

Arthur Edward Balsiger was born on October 2, 1923 in Portland, Oregon, the son of Maurice and Marian Degman Balsiger. He was the oldest of four children and the only son; his sisters were Adeline, Winnifred, and Vivian.¹ Maurice had been a private in the United States Army during World War I.² Arthur moved with his family to White Salmon in Klickitat County shortly after his birth, as the 1940 census shows that his sister Adeline, only one year younger than her brother, was born in Washington. Located in Klickitat County's fruit-growing region, White Salmon was a port stop for Columbia River traffic during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Beginning in 1903, the Columbia River and Northern Railroad began service between nearby Lyle and Goldendale, all but extinguishing the need for riverboat operations by 1917.³ The Klickitat Valley's first fruit orchards were planted in 1870, and they remain important to this day to the economy of White Salmon and other nearby towns.⁴

WSC Experience

Balsiger attended Columbia Union High School in Hunters, Washington and enrolled at Washington State College (WSC) from 1942 through 1943 as an agriculture and education major.⁵ While he was at WSC, he entered the United States Army Reserves on October 2, 1942 and was called to active duty on March 1, 1943.⁶ He met Carley Watkins, of Portland, Oregon

¹ 1940 United States Census, Fruit Valley, Klickitat County, Washington, digital image s.v. "Arthur E. Balsiger," *Ancestry.com*.

² "Maurice E Balsiger in the U.S. Veterans' Gravesits, ca. 1775-2006," *Ancestry.com*. Both Maurice and Marian Balsiger are buried at Willamette National Cemetery in Portland, Oregon.

³ Paula Becker, "Klickitat County – Thumbnail History," June 10, 2006, *HistoryLink.org*, <https://www.historylink.org/File/7800/> (Accessed June 25, 2019).

⁴ Becker, "Klickitat County – Thumbnail History," June 10, 2006.

⁵ C. James Quann, *WSU Military Veterans: Heroes and Legends* (Spokane, Washington: Tornado Creek Publications, 2005), 173.

⁶ Letter from Adeline Balsiger to Washington State College, undated, Box 1, Folder 16, Washington State University Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

and a fellow student at WSC, and they were engaged to be married prior to his deployment overseas.⁷

Wartime Service and Death

Balsiger attained the rank of sergeant in the U.S. Army, serving with the 31st Infantry division, 155th Infantry regiment.⁸ He did his basic training at Camp Roberts in Northern California, then from there went to Fort Ord on Monterey Bay in August 1943. He was sent overseas in May 1944. According to his sister Adeline, he served in the Battle of Wakde-Sarmi in 1944 in Dutch New Guinea, as well as the invasion of Morotai, southeast of the Philippine islands, later that same year.⁹ General Douglas MacArthur selected Morotai as a strategic base from which to launch operations against the liberation of all islands in the Philippines, and eventually, the potential invasion of Japan. MacArthur began the liberation of the Philippine Islands in October 1944, taking the island of Leyte and weakening Japanese forces.¹⁰

Mindanao, the second largest island in the Philippines, along with northern Luzon contained the most significant Japanese combat forces left in the country. It presented a formidable challenge due to “inhospitable geography, the extent of the Japanese defenses, and the size and condition of the defending force.”¹¹ Much of the inland terrain consisted of rain forests, crocodile-infested rivers, grassland areas covered with *abaca* trees that limited soldiers’

⁷ Letter from Adeline Balsiger to Washington State College, undated, Box 1, Folder 16, Washington State University Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

⁸ Quann, *WSU Military Veterans*, 173.

⁹ Letter from Adeline Balsiger to Washington State College, undated, Box 1, Folder 16, Washington State University Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

¹⁰ John W. Mountcastle, “Southern Philippines: The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II,” *ibiblio.org*, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-C-SPhilippines/index.html> (Accessed June 25, 2019).

¹¹ Mountcastle, “Southern Philippines,” *ibiblio.org*, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-C-SPhilippines/index.html> (Accessed June 25, 2019).

visibility, and few workable roads. The Japanese forces on Mindanao totaled 43,000, with much of their defenses focused on Davao Gulf in the eastern part of the island.¹² By mid-April 1945, much of the island was under American control but the Japanese remained confined to garrison towns and major roads. Ground operations for Operation VICTOR V, the name given to the Mindanao campaign, were undertaken by Major General Franklin C. Sibert's X Corps, whose principal combat units were the 24th Infantry Division under Major General Roscoe B. Woodruff, and the 31st Infantry Division led by Major General Clarence A. Martin. American troops established a beachhead in the undefended western part of the island at Illana Bay and drove eastward over the island for 100 miles; it took over two months to wrest the island from Japanese control.¹³

Colonel Walter J. Hanna's 155th Infantry pushed from Maramag on May 13 to resume a northward advance on the Sayre Highway, occupying Malaybalay Bay on May 21.¹⁴ Sergeant Arthur Balsiger was killed in action on May 20, 1945. His sister provided a transcript of a letter received by Balsiger's parents from Captain L.W. Hall of the 155th Infantry regiment, who wrote, "Arthur was killed in action by enemy artillery fire during an advance against the enemy in the vicinity of Malabalay (sic), Mindanao, P.I. May 20, 1945. He died of a fractured skull. Death was instantaneous."¹⁵

¹² Mountcastle, "Southern Philippines," *ibiblio.org*, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-C-SPhilippines/index.html> (Accessed June 25, 2019).

¹³ Mountcastle, "Southern Philippines," *ibiblio.org*, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-C-SPhilippines/index.html> (Accessed June 25, 2019).

¹⁴ Mountcastle, "Southern Philippines," *ibiblio.org*, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-C-SPhilippines/index.html> (Accessed June 25, 2019).

¹⁵ Letter from Adeline Balsiger to Washington State College, undated, Box 1, Folder 16, Washington State University Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

Postwar Legacy

Balsiger is buried at the Manila American Cemetery in Taguig City, Philippines.¹⁶ He posthumously received the Purple Heart. A memorial service was held in July 1945 in the high school auditorium in White Salmon. Commemorations by his fellow soldiers and family members revealed a well-loved, respected young man who performed his duties as a soldier admirably. His sister Adeline reported he “was a fine young man and the entire community mourns his death in the supreme sacrifice for his country.”¹⁷ Captain Hall wrote, “Your son was one of the most splendid soldiers that I have had the privilege to serve with. He was always pleasant and agreeable and performed his duties well. His loss will be deeply felt by his many friends.”¹⁸ Colonel Walter J. Hanna wrote to Balsiger’s parents, as well, stating “Arthur was a fine loyal, efficient soldier who was admired by both officers and men. His determination to act beyond the call of duty and his willingness to execute any assignment have always been an inspiration to those who knew him both generally and personally.”¹⁹ Captain Charles M. Crouch, Chaplain of the 155th Infantry regiment, wrote that Balsiger “...was very faithful in attendance to all worship services and spiritually earnest, therefore it was my privilege to learn to know him rather intimately. Thus his death was a distinct loss to me.”²⁰ Adeline Balsiger noted that her brother was a high school classmate of John Dickey and college roommate of David Woodruff,

¹⁶ “Arthur E. Balsiger,” American Battle Monuments Commission, *abmc.gov*, <https://www.abmc.gov/node/435120> (Accessed June 25, 2019). Balsiger is buried at Plot F Row 10 Grave 36.

¹⁷ Letter from Adeline Balsiger to Washington State College, undated, Box 1, Folder 16, Washington State University Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

¹⁸ Letter from Adeline Balsiger to Washington State College, undated, Box 1, Folder 16, Washington State University Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

¹⁹ Letter from Adeline Balsiger to Washington State College, undated, Box 1, Folder 16, Washington State University Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

²⁰ Letter from Adeline Balsiger to Washington State College, undated, Box 1, Folder 16, Washington State University Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

both of whom were killed in action during the war.²¹ In addition to being memorialized on the World War II section of the WSU Veterans Memorial, Balsiger's name is on the Klickitat County Veterans' Memorial along with eleven other White Salmon men who lost their lives during the war.²²

²¹ Letter from Adeline Balsiger to Washington State College, undated, Box 1, Folder 16, Washington State University Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC).

²² "Klickitat County Veterans' Memorial," Klickitat County Cemeteries, WAGenWeb, <http://wagenweb.org/klickitat/cem/veterans/index.html> (Accessed June 23, 2019).