

Leonard Ballard

Inspector, United States Capitol Police (1947-1984)

Preface

by Richard A. Baker

Leonard H. Ballard's 37-year-career with the [United States Capitol Police Force](#) spanned an era of profound change for that organization as well as for the body it serves -- the Congress of the United States. The interviews in this volume provide an insider's account of the dimensions of that change. Colorfully and candidly, Ballard recalls the newsmaking events and personalities with which he was associated over the course of four decades. They include inaugurations, state funerals, Capitol bombings, terrorist attacks, and protest demonstrations. When he joined the force on May 16, 1947, the police rolls carried the names of 157 men. Of that number, Ballard observes in these interviews, "there were only about 100 of them working. About 50 never came to town." He explained, "Now, I know a lieutenant who was a lieutenant for 18 years. I saw him twice. He operated a restaurant in Biloxi, Mississippi. He was under Senator [Jim Eastland](#). He came up here a couple of times and brought us some shrimp!" Among the remaining 100 who were present for duty in 1947, most were either college students or retired policemen from other jurisdictions supplementing their pensions. Serving a Capitol Hill population of 2,000, the department in that postwar era conveyed an image perhaps not unlike that of its predecessor in the years after the Civil War.

One observer described the Capitol Police of 1869 as "thirty-three bored, yawning, inexpressibly idle men about the Capitol."

That image had vanished by the time Ballard completed his service on May 16, 1984 -- exactly exactly thirty-seven years from the day of his arrival. Operating with an annual budget of \$32 million, the department had expanded to 1,200 men and women, serving a congressional community in excess of 20,000. During these years, Ballard rose quickly through the ranks holding every grade from private to acting chief. Although he spent his last decade in the senior grade of inspector, his proudest promotion occurred in 1962 when he became the first man selected from the ranks to hold the position of captain.

Leonard Ballard's choice of a police career was purely accidental. To kill some time in May 1947, during a visit to Washington, he paid a courtesy call on Senator [Chapman Revercomb](#), the junior senator from Ballard's native West Virginia. The senator agreed to expedite Mrs. Ballard's request for a transfer from her wartime job in Washington back to West Virginia. He also offered Ballard a temporary Senate position until that transfer came through. In these interviews, Ballard recalls what happened next.

He called Louis Reed, his administrative assistant, who came and got me. He took me through the office building and over to the Capitol. I didn't know what I was doing--didn't question it. I went to one room--held up my hand, signed my

name here, you know. Over to the Disbursing Office and so forth. You see, I didn't plan to be here more than a few days anyhow, so I didn't care what it was. I took that attitude. We went down to the basement, down the corridor, and here's a sign, "Capitol Police." Of course, naturally, I said, "What are we going to do here, Mr. Reed? Get fingerprinted?" I figured everybody who goes to work for the government gets fingerprinted. And he said, "No, no, you're going to join the Capitol Police Force." Well, I had a cane! I said, "Capitol Police! Now, I'll tell you, that senator's known me since I was six years old, and I have no police experience. I don't want to get into anything that would embarrass him. Also, to tell you the truth, Mr. Reed, all my experience has been on the other side of the law."

By 3:00 o'clock that afternoon, Ballard was standing roll call in the uniform of a Capitol Policeman. Two weeks later, he told his wife to cancel her transfer request. "This job is a good job, it is an interesting job. It suits me and I think I'll make a career out of it."

The key to Ballard's successful accommodation to the vast changes that occurred within his working environment over nearly four decades can be found in his understanding of the special nature of police work on Capitol Hill. He observed, "I was never a policeman. I wasn't cut out to be a policeman. Because, up here it is not police work. It is public relations." Disdaining the trends of modern police work that place a premium on electronic security systems, narcotics squads, and extended technical training programs, Ballard believes that the special nature of the congressional community prescribes a simple but basic mission for the Capitol Police. That includes support of members, kindness to staff, and courtesy to tourists. It ought to exclude, in his opinion, such peripheral functions as chasing speeders and issuing parking tickets. He believes that ultimately there is no defense against anarchy or terrorism and that additional police personnel and equipment serve only a symbolic rather than substantive purpose.

These interviews were conducted in Ballard's third floor office at police headquarters located in the old Plaza Hotel near the Dirksen Senate Office Building. They took place over a five-month period beginning in August 1983. The following transcripts demonstrate Leonard Ballard's gifts as a story teller. His superior memory and ability to illustrate significant points with appropriate anecdotes have combined to create a document that will deepen our understanding of the Senate's institutional development since World War II.

Mr. Ballard died on December 31, 1994, in Lewisburg, West Virginia.

About The Interviewer: Richard A. Baker is director of the United States Senate Historical Office. A graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, he received masters degrees from Columbia University and Michigan State University, and his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. Prior to becoming Senate Historian in 1975, he held positions as reference librarian in the

Congressional Research Service, acting curator of the Senate, and research director for the Government Research Corporation. He has prepared a biography of former United States Senator Clinton P. Anderson (D-NM), articles related to research in congressional history, and is co-author of *First Among Equals: Outstanding Senate Leaders of the Twentieth Century* (Washington: CQ, 1991).
