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Russel L. Hofvendahl
June 14, 2004

Interview conducted by Rose Manibusan
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Interviewee: Russell L. Hofvendahl

Military Rank: 2nd Marine Division, 2nd Battalion, 10th Marines

Interviewer: Rose Manibusan

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Saipan

Date: June 14th, 2004

--00:00:01 AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Narrator: The frame opens with a closeup on Hofvendahl. He is tanned white, wearing a pineapple button-up shirt, with organic shell and wood necklaces. Behind him are yellow curtains with white diamond overlay.

--00:00:18

Q: The following oral history interview was conducted by Rose Manibusan, Chief of Oral Interpretation at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Saipan on-June 14th, 2004, at 6:35 to record an oral history interview with Mr. Russell Hofvendahl who served in the United States 2nd Marine Division, 2nd Battalion, 10th Marines during World War II. This interview is being made by the National Parks Service for the American Memorial Park. For the record, could you please state and spell your full name?

Hofvendahl: Russell L. Hofvendahl. H-O-F-V-E-N-D-A-H-L.

Q: Russell, I understand that the National Parks Service has permission-to make this recording and to maintain all literary and property rights deriving from that?

Hofvendahl: That's correct [Clears throat].

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Q: May I call you Russell?

Hofvendahl: Russ is what I'm more used to, yes.

Q: Russ, Russ, okay.

Hofvendahl: When I was a little boy, whenever my aunt was on my case she called me Russell, you know? [Light laughter]

Q: Oh, okay I'll call you Russ.

Hofvendahl: I'm more comfortable with Russ.

Q: Could you please tell us where you were born and the date of your birth?

Hofvendahl: San Francisco. December 5th, 1921.

Q: And did you grow up there?

Hofvendahl: Yeah.

Q: And also go to school there?

Hofvendahl: No, I went to school at San Jose State. I graduated in-June of 1942, and then after the war I went to Stanford Law School. I got my law degree there in '48.

Q: And tell me about your family.

Hofvendahl: Well, [Laughs] now that you ask — see I told you my wife should have been here. Bev and I will be married 62 years this September 6th. We were married just a week short of one year when I shipped out. We've got four children, two older daughters, two younger — well I — the girls came first; two girls, two boys. We have thirteen grandchildren. We lost one grandson in an-accident, and this month we will be having our fifteenth great-grandchild. Right about now, I think. Okay? What else do you want to know Rose?

Q: [Laughs] Could you tell us where you were? Let's go back to 1941.

Hofvendahl: Say again?

--00:02:36

Q: Let's go back to 1941.

Hofvendahl: Yeah.

Q: Could you tell us where you were, and what you were doing when Pearl Harbor —

Hofvendahl: Yeah

Q: — occurred. Where you were at Pearl Harbor during the bombing?

Hofvendahl: Yes. I- I was in college. San Jose State. And I had a NYA job. I was a police major, and myself, and another close friend-still today. Also an ex-Marine. Not an ex-Marine, there are no ex-Marines. Another Marine. We guarded the science building at San Jose State. [Clears throat] And I had the duty that Sunday morning, and I was there at the science building on December 7th, '41. Somebody- charged up and said they bombed Pearl Harbor.

Q: And how'd that make you feel?

Hofvendahl: Well...amazed more than anything else, really. I mean, I — a little difficult, to retrieve those reactions after all these years, but uh... I don't remember being all that indignant. I-I was just surprised that they did it, mainly. I mean, that's the fundamental reaction I think I had.

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Q: And Russ, when did you join the military service?

Hofvendahl: Well as a college graduate, I was able to sign up for the-Candidates Class, which meant ten weeks in Quantico, Virginia, and if you survived [Clears throat] you were commissioned, a 2nd Lieutenant. [Clears throat] And then another ten weeks, in the ROC, which was the Reserve Officer's Class. The end of that time, you got your orders, and I had put in for artillery school, so I stayed another three months in Quantico and became a Skilled Artillery Officer, 2nd Lieutenant.

Q: Can you describe your basic training experience?

Hofvendahl: [Laughs]

Q: As if you were telling it to a young man today?

Hofvendahl: Well, it was heavy. I mean they, the Non-Coms who ran the Candidates Class knew that for each one of us who survived, we were going to be 2nd Lieutenants and outrank them, and I — my perception, which may be a little biased, was — my perception is that they were going to take one last shot at us — but uh-basically small infantry unit tactics, which convinced me I didn't want to spend my career in the Marine Corps in the infantry, if possible. That's when I decided to uh-uh-put in for Artillery School, and the Reserve Officer's Class was just another elevation up. And again; scouting, patrolling, everything, and it, it was a rugged, rugged go - believe me. We were in good shape when we were through [Laughs].

Q: Is there anything that you remember most about the training?

Hofvendahl: Well, I can remember when I was in uh... I don't know how significant this is, Rose, at all — but when I was in Reserve Officer's Class they had Battalion parades, every week, and just by the luck of the draw somebody became the Regimental Commanding Officer. And Ol' Lucky Pierre [Points to self] drew it this particular time, and I was about halfway through. And the guy that had had it the last time blew it, and so our instructors really put the thumbscrews on me and said 'Don't screw this up, Russ', you know? And it was [Clears throat] it was a very impressive occasion for me, because, you know, you've got thousands of all the officers instead; all the Reserve Officer's Class — maybe a couple of thousand, whatever it was [Clears throat] — but — and all very presentable young men. Uh-the uniforms fit well because we bought them ourselves, you know, with the allowance, and I-I was very proud to be in that particular position. I don't know how significant this is, but I remember that very vividly. I also remember that my acting adjutant froze up on me. See, the way the drill went, I would give a command, and he'd do an about-face and repeat it. Military wise, I would say "Right shoulder arms" and he's do an

about-face and “Right shoulder arms!” you know? And he just froze. So [Laughs] I gave the command. Nobody, really noticed it or anything though, so it worked alright.

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Q: Now what was your first assignment after basic training?

Hofvendahl: Well, basic training would be Candidates Class and ROC. For me, it was Artillery School, okay? Then my orders were immediate replacement overseas.

Q: To— and to where?

Hofvendahl: I didn't know. Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Okay? We went — see we were sent to San Diego and we stood by for our specific orders. And from uh-San Diego we went on a um-pocket aircraft carrier, unescorted, ‘USS Copahoe,’ which was subsequently lost. I mean, it was just a floating time bomb with the ammunition and everything else on it and — but we got there safely, to Noumea, New Caledonia. [Clears throat] \

We'd shoved off one week before my first anniversary with Bev, not knowing whether I'd ever see her again, and vice versa.

Q: And where, where — where did you take — where did that lead you to?

Hofvendahl: [00:08:44:00] We went to Noumea, New Caledonia, and uh-my small group — there were about a half dozen of us — were assigned further orders to the 2nd Marine Division in...Wellington, New Zealand. And the, we were all artillery officers; a small group by then, and uh-our artillery regiment was out at Paikakariki, New Zealand. Want me to spell that for you? Paikakariki?

Q: Sure, that one's a hard one. [Laughs]

Hofvendahl: [Laughs] P-A-I-K-A-K-A-R-I-K-I. Maori name.

Q: And then from there?

Hofvendahl: From there.... we had a practice landing at Hawk's Bay, New Zealand. Which was really, ironically enough, it —It-I'm not being critical of our leadership or anything — but the scouting left something to be desired. We had um-Amtraks going in and hitting sandbars and Jeeps driving off and descending into water seven feet high and it, it was real bad but, you know, the Division, no other — we had no casualties or anything. We recovered all our equipment, but I can remember some of my shipmates saying "Well Jesus, I'll never screw up like-that in actual combat," and of course the next combat operation, which we didn't know then, was Tarawa, and that, that was a horror, as far as the landing was concerned. You know, with the — um-as you probably know, we — the reef, and the tide and everything just made it real bad.

--00:10:50

Q: If there was one thing you could say about your experience in Tarawa, what would that be?

Hofvendahl: Well I was very fortunate. I didn't hit uhh-the beach at the worst part of it by a large side. I went ashore with the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marines, but what I remember very vividly, which I shall never forget, is that there was a machine gun nest firing, at us, which got taken out quickly, thank God, by fighter planes strafing it, but that feeling going in, in chest high water, with somebody firing a machine gun at you, you know? Like a, a nightmare. I don't know if you ever had a nightmare where you want to hit somebody or want to run fast, but it's like you're moving in molasses; very close. I remember that very vividly, and I remember a very good looking young uh-Japanese Marine, naval landing force — whatever they were — he had been wounded, and I don't know how in the hell we got ahold of him, but he died, as I watched him die, you know, and I, it just made an impression on me. God. [Shrugs]

Q: And where did you go after Tarawa?

Hofvendahl: After Tarawa, we — the 2nd Division — went up to Kamuela Hawaii — Camp Tarawa, and the Marine Corps really had to search hard and long to find that goddamn place. But we'd been in the tropics, see, for weeks. We did another practice landing in Efate in the New

Hebrides. So, you know our — we were — I have heard as a layman that your blood thins out in the tropics. Whatever it is, we were acclimatized for the tropics, [clears throat] and have you been in the islands Rose? You haven't, you haven't been there. Alright, well Kamuela is not a high elevation, about 3,000 feet. Now I grew up in San Francisco, and the weather is very much like the Richmond district in San Francisco in the summer. Cold, overcast, windy, and I mean it — you know, living in tents in that environment was not comfortable. Of course, we made good liberty. I was an officer so I was able to make some good liberties down in...the Kona district, which is not recognizable. When we, when we were there, the Kona Inn was the only facility, and it was lovely, and then the Manago Hotel. I believe you've heard the Kalakakua? Where the little fish go swimming by?

Q: No.

Hofvendahl: You haven't? Alright. Well actually Kalakakua was up on the, up the mountain from the Kona area, and they had a Japanese hotel there, The Manago Inn, and they had wonderful steaks, because it was the Parker Ranch and- so. Yeah. [Shrugs] So I used to enjoy that. Once in a great while we'd go down to Hilo, but Hilo was a long ways away from our camp. It was a long, arduous drive.

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Q: And then what campaign did you go to after that?

Hofvendahl: Well, the next one was Saipan. Marianas.

Q: Can you describe, um-in detail, what it was like as you prepared for the invasion of Saipan?

Hofvendahl: Well it was hard work. Um-the training accelerated, and I will say in retrospect that the...planning was excellent. I remember — of course we never knew, until we had our last landfall behind us, where we were going, and the speculation ran all the way from Truck, which we had heard of, to the Philippines. Saipan City we'd never heard of. I hadn't either. But anyway [Clears throat] our Division planning staff, I can remember, about the last training operation, they-found a terrain feature on the, volcanic slopes, Mauna Kea I think it is, on the Big Island, which pretty well, simulated Saipan, and I was an Artillery Liaison Officer, with two forward

observation sections, attached to the — my Battalion was in support of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, and that was the way, the military — well actually, my Battalion supported the entire 8th Marine Regiment. Uh-I was uh-assigned, with my forward observation section, my liaison section, to the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, but the point is, thee... last training exercise, I remember very vividly — ashore there in Hawaii was at this location where, which, was a pretty good simulation of, of this island. And then of course we had a... a practice landing on Maui before we took off, and then that worked better than Hawk's Bay did in New Zealand. [Laughter] I don't think we lost any Jeeps or anything there.

Q: Do you recall your last briefing before the assault on Saipan?

Hofvendahl: [Chuckles] Very vividly. I was on a ship. I — damned if I can remember-the name of it Rose, but I remember -

Q: The 'SS Smith?'

Hofvendahl: Hmm? I don't, I don't think I identified the vessel - maybe I did. But -

Q: 'WH Smith?'

Hofvendahl: Oh no, no, no, no, no. That's my schooner.

Q: Yes, that's right.

Hofvendahl: That's my schooner, no. The name of that transport I cannot retrieve from my memory, of course it's only been sixty years, but what I remember very vividly was that it was a-command ship; we had a lot or rank on it, and a lot of specialists, like me. Now our guns were not aboard, but my forward observation liaison sections were, and uh-I...had my pack, my carbine, and so on, and I'm starting down to find my quarters, and I get down about three goddamn decks, going 'well it could be worse,' and I start to drop my gear, and an officer there standing says "I'm sorry lieutenant, this is field officer country." [Laughs] So I went down about three more decks, and right up in the bow — I mean I can't say anything in this lovely hotel room that simulates it — but it was very narrow quarters. Does that answer your question?

Q: Uh-hmm.

Hofvendahl: Okay.

--00:17:46

Q: Can you describe your first impression of the island of Saipan? You said you were training in Hawaii -

Hofvendahl: Yes.

Q: - and it looked so similar to it?

Hofvendahl: Well, no. I... I say the terrain features that our operations people selected for that last-ashore training — not the assault, or not the practice landings or the assault landings, of course — was a pretty good simulation of Saipan, but my overwhelming impression of Saipan on D-Morning was uh... it looked very forbidding. We were a long way out by then, as we headed in on Higgins boats, but, uh-there were clouds over the peak. It just looked ominous as hell to me, of course it might have been my own frame of mind [Laughter], I don't know.

Q: And what was it like uh- being on the Higgins boats?

Hofvendahl: In—well -

Q: Being in the Higgins boats.

Hofvendahl: We weren't in the Higgins boat too long. We left the uh-APA...down cargo landing nets in the Higgins boat. From the Higgins boat we traveled out to a reef quite a ways off shore, and we transferred from there to an Amtrak, an amphibious tractor, and the amphibious tractor took us all the way into the beach. And one of the chaps I was traveling with now, Don Crane — I've reconfirmed my memory of all that out there because it takes a little time to get all of these people out of the Higgins boat; the gear, and into the Amtrak, and meanwhile the Japanese are bombing the hell out of us, on that reef. And Don and I agreed that that wasn't the best planning in the world. I mean, it had to work that way, I don't know what-alternative there was, but the

Japanese had these islands since World War I, and as an artilleryman I was acutely aware of the fact that they had every square inch zeroed in, and obviously they knew what was going on out there, and we took quite a shelling-going in. And Don Crane, incidentally — it blows my mind — he spent all his career as a 2nd Division “amphib” driver. He was in the first wave at Tarawa. He lost his two Marine assistants, one on each side of him. He was in the third wave at Saipan and he survived without a scratch. And, you know, those guys — I mean once we got ashore, no matter what it was like, at least we were ashore. Those amphibious tractor drivers went back and forth, and back and forth [Laughs]. D-Day lasted a long time for them.

--00:20:40

Q: Can-can you describe in detail your experience on the morning of D-Day? June 15, 1943.

Hofvendahl: Well... there are some memories that I — are very strong. We were going in. Not, not too far. Well, I guess after, we fought in the Amtrak there, a young Marine — I was an old man; I was twenty-two, and most of these kids were [sad breath in] — anyway, for some reason, he said “You know, I’ve been through the canal, and I’ve been through Tarawa, but this goddamn thing’s going to be worse,” [weak laugh] you know, and we didn’t need that. Not me, or anybody, you know? So I got him quieted down, and I, I didn’t know Rose, not — you know, you’re, you’re tensed up.

Q: And what was your Division’s objectives?

Hofvendahl: Huh... They didn’t tell me what the Division objective was, see. My orders were very limited - to get the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, to which outfit I would be committed, had a special meeting, a special mission D-Day. [Clears throat] I don’t know precisely what it was, but they were to land pretty much on the flank of the 8th Marines and wheel, and go one direction or another, and of course the Navy guide got them all screwed up; they didn’t land where they were supposed to land. All I was supposed to do was to get my people to the Regimental Command Post, 8th Marines, and eventually our guns would get in, the 8th Marines would be on the line, and we would join them; but uh-they didn’t acquaint the lieutenants like me, I had made 1st by then, but I wasn’t privy to the Division objectives. It was a very “worm’s eye” view of the war, if you will.

Q: Can you kind of take us back in time -

Hofvendahl: Pardon me?

Q: Can you kind of take us back in time, when you were — here it's June fifteen, you had hit the beach, and then kind of share your -

Hofvendahl: Well -

Q: - battle experience and the direction you took?

Hofvendahl: Colonel Juhan had uh-briefed the specialists aboard ship, and he had uh-informed us that we were going to take this goddamn island, but it was probably going to be rough. And I remember his precise words, he said "Gentlemen, I know you're all specialists — artillerymen, engineers, and so on — but you're all line officers, and if it gets bad enough I expect you to take over. As an infantry officer, and take care of these people." Which didn't please me too much, because that's why I was in there for field artillery [laughs]. Had the utmost admiration for those infantry officers, but anyway, uhh-he also said "All you have to do, Lieutenant, is find the 8th Marines Headquarters. As you know things look a little different on the beach." And boy they sure as hell did, because I-I just had a terrible time orienting myself.

--00:24:12

The other day, we ended up the tour at Green Beach One, where we had landed, and it looked as — it looks beautiful now, of course — but I mean I-I-I recaptured that moment, and Jesus I didn't know where, where to find these Marine headquarters, but anyway we had aerial maps, and I found a, kind of a declivity inland a way, and I just guessed that this might be it, so I took off with Lively Crawford, my runner— and he was a wonderful guy, wonderful Marine — and the weather that day was just about the way it is now, I mean it was hot, and the combination of the weather and the.... emotional strain just wore me down, and there were a lot of dead Marines on the beach by then. Very few disabled Amtraks, Jeeps, or anything else around, but some, and I had told Lively that we were headed for where I thought the Regimental Headquarters would be

[clears throat] and to stay fifty yards behind me. Anyway — uh-I don't know why in the hell I did this — but I was just worn down, you know? And there as a Jeep half in, half out of the water— it was stalled there, it wasn't damaged — and I just stopped and put my hand on the hood to rest for a second, and old Lively hollered and he said "Lieutenant, that's not a good place to stop!" and he comes charging up, and almost knocked me away from the Jeep. I guess we got about-ten yards... behind it, it took a direct hit. If he hadn't not done that, I wouldn't be here today, talking to you. [Weak laughter]

We found it, we found the Regimental Headquarters, of course. I radioed back for the rest of my people, and they all made it, as it were. Then we joined the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines.

Q: And where did you go from there?

Hofvendahl: Eventually we went up to Mount Tapochau. The 1st Battalion, 29th, which was formed up... to be part of the cadre of one of the new Divisions — they were assigned to us for this operation — they actually took the very top, but we were with them every step of the way, the 2nd Battalion, the 8th, was the flank battalion, right flank battalion [unintelligible]. And we — I don't, I don't know if we actually stood on the very top of Mount Tapochau here, but goddammit we were [smiles and nods].

--00:27:05

Q: Can you explain your experience of getting up there to Mount Tapochau?

Hofvendahl: It — inch by inch. Thee-Battalion Commander of the 2nd Battalion, 8th was Major Chamberlain, a very courageous, very effective battalion commander. I think one of the best in the Division. He had been Executive Officer to Colonel Jim Crow at Tarawa, and they both survived that without a scratch, but D-Day here, Colonel Jim Crow got wiped out. He wasn't killed, but very badly wounded, and Major Chamberlain took over Battalion Commander. [Clears Throat] He was just an outstanding man. I had... was informed, and you never know how accurate these things are, but I was informed that he had been a college professor in civilian life, and he kind of looked it; high forehead, gold-rimmed spectacles, and all that. But a very courageous, very able man, and one of his personal predilections was that out here we always stopped fighting at dark. Believe me, you put up a line — picket line, a line of main resistance,

whatever — and everybody stayed put in their foxholes, and anybody that moved was quite likely to get shot, see?

Well Major Chamberlain, when..... he was setting up his main line of resistance, MLR, every night took his Artillery Liaison Officer along with him to point out the spots where you might want artillery fired in the night if the Japs counter-attacked or something, see? And I remember we were about — and this is not an advisable thing to do, to wander around like that out there, but that was, that was Major Chamberlain, you know? That he survived is [Laughs and shrugs his shoulders] As far as I know he was on the observation post up at Okinawa when the Army General was killed, and he survived that, but anyway, this particular time, I think we were about two days short of Mount Tapochau [Clears Throat]. Major Chamberlain and Lieutenant Hofvendahl were out all by themselves in front of the troops, and all of a sudden we had an artillery round whistle over our head, and I knew from the direction it was coming it had to be the 14th Marines, and, the next instant practically, there was another one behind us, and I knew damn well that some foreign observer had us [motions to face as though looking through binoculars] identified as the enemy and pretty soon we were going to get massed artillery fire.

To digress for a moment, the one thing I've never understood about the Japanese tactics here was that-they didn't mass artillery fire. On the beach it was a horror, but they effectively were sniping at us with heavy artillery, you see what I mean? The American military artillery doctrine was, once you had a target, identify it. Even if you've bracketed it, see? You call in a battalion five rounds, or a regimental ten rounds, whatever you wanted to do.

Well anyway, this particular day that I had felt, saw, and heard that round drop ahead of us and drop behind us I "Major! Get down!," see? And I, you know, this guy was under a lot of pressure as a Infantry Battalion Commander, and all of a sudden, it hit him that his own people were firing at him. [Laughs] He was so indignant and outraged! He started to shake his fist, and I w-, I hit the deck, and I just [makes a quick dropping motion], I went down. I grabbed his dark green jacket and pulled him down with me, and he was still almost frothing at the mouth he was so mad. And I didn't know what the hell we took Rose, maybe, maybe battalion five rounds, it was an awful lot of artillery fire, but at least we were flat, you know? And if you didn't get a direct hit, why you were okay, so -

--00:31:46

Q: And how long did that go on?

Hofvendahl: Well, not very long at all, I mean, uh... you know the 14th Marines were good artillerymen [chuckles]. I would have to — probably just a couple of minutes to deliver. I mean, you know, they're, they're firing these rounds just as fast as they can get the rounds back in the breech, see? And so, battalion five rounds means that every gun in the battalion was loading five times, so I would think that would take about -

Technician: Can I fix your microphone? Your beads are -

Q: We'll stop here a minute. We're going to fix this.

Hofvendahl: Hmm?

Technician: [Comes into frame and rearranges Lt. Hofvendahl's beaded necklaces and name-tag lanyard so as to not interfere with his microphone] Let me just fix this. Your beads are -

Hofvendahl: [00:32:10:00] You're not getting me?

Technician: Oh no, I got you.

Q: Is it still on?

Technician: It's just the beads were hitting the mic.

Hofvendahl: [00:32:15:00] Okay [clears throat].

Technician: [disappears out of frame] Okay.

--00:32:30

Q: Okay, we were talking about the artillery fire that was coming from behind you.

Hofvendahl: Yes. Well, yes. It obviously was coming from the direction of the 14th Marines, I knew generally where they were, AND- you know I probably would've done the same; long distance. The Japanese were very elusive targets; you didn't see many of them. Ever. But the, anyway, I remember that very vividly. I don't think Major Chamberlain ever even thanked me. He was still so pissed off [laughs] at his own artillery people. Shooting at him.

Q: And then, and then where did you go from there? After this?

Hofvendahl: Well, we went up kind of on the eastern [pauses to remember], yes the eastern flank of Mount Tapochau, and we took a lot of fire from the 7th, 27th Division then, when Major "Howlin' Mad" Smith relieved Major Ralph Smith. We were up there; we could see this big gap developing where they were just landing, and incidentally uh-I know that those soldiers were, were damn good men. There's a real difference of opinion about their leadership, but uh-we could see, I mean visually see what was happening down there, they just weren't moving forward. And meanwhile, they were doing the same thing the 14th Marines had done to us, you know? They see that moving up in the hill, they didn't worry too much about who it was, they were just shooting at us, see?

Q: Can you describe that again, a little bit? What you were saying? You had the 14th behind you. You were up, up here, you had the 27th on your -

Hofvendahl: Yeah. The 27th...

Q: East.

Hofvendahl:... was to our immediate right flank.

Q: Right.

Hofvendahl: Okay. At, at that point. See? I think we was about Magicienne Bay, Rose, but I wouldn't swear to that. Anyway, the idea was that the whole line would move forward together, see, but you could look down and see a big "U" developing where the 27th Division was, and that's when General "Howlin' Mad" Smith relieved Army General Ralph Smith, and fortunately we didn't take any casualties from that fire. But anyway, when the 1st Battalion, 29th finally took the peak, we were as I say, right, practically with them. And we were there. And then I got pulled back, and was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines for the final drive through Garapan. And uh-uh, that I think was the only, or at least was the first time in the Pacific War, as far as the Marine Corps was concerned at least, that we had to battle our way through an organized community city if you will. There, there wasn't much left of it by then, but it was still- a small city.

--00:35:49

Q: Can you share with us in detail what that was like - going through Garapan?

Hofvendahl: Yeah. uhh- It was laborious, house-to-house fighting, and of course uhh-the line shortened up so much that we did not fire much ar-, field artillery after about the first day, and I think I mentioned earlier in this interview Rose that everything's secured at night. Well when we were going through Garapan, that was one time when we did not secure at night, because we were so close — what was then I think Tanapag Harbor, I don't know what it's called now, maybe the same thing -

Q: Tanapag.

Hofvendahl: Yeah. Tanapag. We were close enough to the water's edge, and the Japanese were compressed in there, that, you know, there just was no choice. You had to, uh-had to keep going. You couldn't go draw a line then. And — so anyway — but — my artillery people were kind of squeezed out that last night, because we were just too close to the end of the line. I had one very demeaning experience there, I don't know whether you want this on — you can always edit this tape, can't you?

Q: Just the facts.

Hofvendahl: Just the facts?

Q: Your experience.

Hofvendahl: Well -

Q: However it is.

Hofvendahl: I- I don't know whether I mentioned the flies on Saipan before, did I?

Q: No.

--00:37:25

Hofvendahl: They were a horror. From the first day. You couldn't hardly get a bite of C-Ration or K-Ration down without munching on some flies too. I was told, I don't know how accurate this is, that they feasted, the flies, on a mite on the sugarcane, which is a major crop out here, and for that reason — I don't know if they were protected or what — but they sure grew. Well obviously, many of us got dysentery, and I had a real acute attack of dysentery that last night in Saipan, in Garapan, so I left my, all my people, who were just crowded in to a, a wall, you know, [brings hands up in a "V" shape] a section of what was left of a building, moved-a decent distance away out in the street to relieve myself. And I was in the process, with my dungaree trousers down about my knees, and I see this Japanese soldier charging right at me. And I don't think at that moment — I was kind of in the shadows, and I don't think he saw me, but he was, he was aiming for me like "I'm looking at you!," see? It was going to be another second, and he would see me. And all I could think, "Well what a hell of a way to die." And about another ten feet, somebody picked him off, and he just dropped. [Laughs] like I said, that's all.

Q: Did you have any interaction, or were involved with the Navajo code talkers?

Hofvendahl: No I never, I never did, although I think it probably was our field artillery people in Guadalcanal that kind of generated all of this. I met, I've met some of them since, the 2nd Marine Division Association reunions and all, and very interesting group of men, but my general understanding is, uhhh- in the field artillery you lay these little old telephone wires back, and, if you can, they communicate. And I'm told that, because I was not on the canal, that uhh-the Japanese had tapped into these um-wires, and some of them, of course, could speak and understand English, and they were either jamming up the communications or listening in to our fire directions and so on, and somebody developed a very good idea — Rose I'm not sure of the chronology on it, this might have been pre-war, but I believe it all started at Guadalcanal. So they, the concept was, that if we got Navajos talking to each other on each end of the telephone line, let the Nips-cut into it, because they wouldn't understand Navajo. Now that's how it started, I, but I did not, uh-was not directly involved with them at any time.

--00:40:32

Q: So what direction did you take after Garapan? The Battle of Garapan?

Hofvendahl: After Garapan, we thought we were all done, and I was back at my Battalion Headquarters. I finally got a shave... and a sponge bath, and I was relaxing, and all of sudden they said "There's a counter attack. Rejoin the 8th Marines." So we did, for the last banzai- charge, you know. The last charge- down the side of the island. Our 3rd Battalion, 10th Marines really got chopped up.

Q: Can you recall some of your experiences at that encounter?

Hofvendahl: No. That, that was, for me pretty simple. It was — the psychological impact was heavy, because I, I thought "I'm finally out of this thing now, at least for this operation," [laughs] you know? But they said "Rejoin the 8th Marines. You've got some more fighting to do." So — but as it turned out, by the time we got on the line it was-a terrible, bloody turkey shoot. They just were mowing down the Japanese. And I — we went by the spot yesterday on our tour, and I can't quite identify in my mind. I remember it pretty well north of Garapan. You know, a personal problem I have had Rose, since June 15th, 1944: we landed on the west side of the island, and it always seemed to me like it should have been the east side, and my sense of direction just got

confused, I think, at the beginning. I never — I always have to stop and think “What’s north, south, east, and west?”

Q: So um- you joined back up with the 8th Marines at, at- during the Japanese counter-attack?

Hofvendahl: That’s right. And we, they got -

Q: After it, during, or you were coming — you were involved in that?

Hofvendahl: Yes.

Q: Yes?

Hofvendahl: Yes. We, we stopped it -

Q: You stopped it?

Hofvendahl: -In part, but it was, it was pretty well broken by the time we got up there, see, so it wasn’t all that bad.

--00:42:39

Q: And then, where did you go from there?

Hofvendahl: We went to Tinian, eventually, and uh-that, I have read, was the best conceived and executed island operation in the Pacific, and I believe it. The 4th Division went in-first, and Ol’ Lucky Pierre we — assigned to them for that landing. They got a Presidential Unit Citation for that, and we were with them so we got out second Presidential Unit Citation, after Tarawa. And I can remember we went in in ducks, and again, it wasn’t — well, it was beautiful. We got ashore without anybody firing at us, and uh-I remember, however, my feeling looking out over that duck, which was not armored, and seeing that narrow little beach. And I went down to the foot of it the other day on Tinian, and my God. If one Japanese with a Nambu machine gun at the head of that ravine, and it — he’ll take out a regiment, you know? But we got on up to the top in good shape, and then — I didn’t know it at the time — if I roll on too much here, will you interrupt me?

Q: No, no.

Hofvendahl: Alright.

Q: I'd like to hear what your experience was in Tinian.

Hofvendahl: Okay. We got up to the top, and everybody was uh-digging, including our guns and all. The ground was very hard up there, and one of my 2nd Lieutenants, Larry Schork — wonderful guy. New York lawyer. And, I was coming down with Dengue Fever, and I'd — also known as Breakbone Fever. It's very debilitating. I really was an invalid out here but [Chuckles] I did get a lot of problems. And I said "Larry," it was still light, you know? I said "If they didn't nail us coming up that goddamn draw, they're not going to bother us now, and I just, I don't feel like digging in tonight." And I knew better, Rose, I knew better. And Larry knew better. "Oh," he says, "maybe you're right." And so we just stretched out on the ground on our ponchos. Well, two o'clock in the morning, it started, the Nip counter-attack.

--00:45:08

And my most vivid memory of Tinian was in the flashes of the mortar rounds that were landing all around us I'd look and I'd see Larry looking at me, with that expression on his face like "With friends like you Hofvendahl, I don't need enemies," you know? We didn't dig in. We never got hurt, no. So.

Q: And what was Larry's last name?

Hofvendahl: Larry Shork. S-C-H-O-R-K. A wonderful guy. He was in his early 30's, which made him a real old man, very -

Q: Did you say Sho— did you say Short? Larry -

Hofvendahl: Schork. S-C-H-

Q: Shark?

Hofvendahl: Schork. S-C-H-O-R-K. Buffalo lawyer, and prominent in his community, and I, I think he served on the local Draft Board. He could have easily avoided military service, because he had a dependent mother. But God, he not only volunteered, he volunteered for the goddamn Marine Corps, and those ten years made a difference, in terms of personal stamina and all that. And you could just see him wear down a little faster than the rest of us, but he forgave me, he did. Since we both survived, he forgave me.

Q: And what happened after that?

Hofvendahl: Well, I was evacuated a couple days later, so I didn't uh-see too much as far as Tinian was concerned, although it was uh— our Battalion — I-I think the 8th Regiment, but I'm not sure of this — we tended to stay with the 8th Marines, wherever they were, and I believe it may have been the 8th Regiment that were bivouacked on Tinian, and we were also. And um-I remember that uhh-my Battery, my — Easy Battery, which I had been with since Paikakariki, New Zealand, to Isahaya, Japan — uh-we were in a little Shimura village, and we didn't use much of the quarters —

[Reaches into his pocket] I've got picture here of Lively Crawford here, and me. I think I've got it.

[Pulls out photo and shows it to interviewer] Here. That's where we stayed. And — what do you want me -

Q: No, put it up to you.

Hofvendahl: Oh! [Chuckles] Can you see that?

[Holds up photo so camera can zoom in on it] Hmm?

Technician: Okay.

Hofvendahl: Alright.

Technician: Still, keep it still.

Hofvendahl: Oh, I'm sorry.

Technician: That's you and Lively Crawford?

Hofvendahl: Me and Lively Crawford. He was a wonderful Marine. Anyway, it also shows this little old First Sergeant's office. There were small structures like that. They typically had uh-corrugated roofs, see? And I remember one night, well there was more than one night when it rained, but one night in particular. I had, during my life, I had read references to people who liked to be somewhere where they could hear the rain on the roof, you know? Well I'll tell you, you—in a hut like that, with a corrugated roof, and it rains like it rains out here, it was like being inside a base drum [chuckles]. It was really something else. But anyway, we-we made a very comfortable camp of it, and I think we were there a couple of months, and then returned to Saipan with the whole, Division, where they had built a camp, where we were building our part of it.

--00:48:54

Q: Did you encounter the civilian population on Tinian?

Hofvendahl: Not much. Not much. I do remember one... I sort of have a tendency to remember these deflating incidents, Rose, but one of the things we did on Saipan as well as Tinian is literally form a skirmish line across the island and go through, flushing out the Japanese. As you know there were some of them that were real hard losers. But I remember this particular day on Tinian. We're down near the end of the island. Suicide Cliff I guess they call it. And it's very tough terrain, rocky, and hard to negotiate and everything, but ... I'm leading this line of hard-bitten Marines across this terrain, and we were literally in a skirmish line, you know? And about fifty feet beyond this particular point, one of my guys says "Lieutenant! What's that?" And I turn around and here's this, I guess maybe Okinawan, they looked Oriental. Young couple, with a little baby, and we had just walked right on by. [Laughs] and, and they, for one reason or another, they

had decided that better to surrender now, you know? And that was just nothing very consequential, I just found it amusing that my good Marines couldn't even flush out those civilians.

--00:50:28

Q: And then you returned to Saipan? You said about two months later.

Hofvendahl: Yeah. Yeah. We rejoined the Division on Saipan where our camp was.

Q: How long were you on Saipan?

Hofvendahl: Well ... we-shoved off for Okinawa, I think it was about early March of '45. We were the 8th Marines reinforced. We were the only troops in the 2nd Division that were ever committed on Okinawa. But we were, and again it was towards the end of that campaign and it wasn't all that bad for us. Although it was a brutal, brutal campaign. And uh-we came back to Saipan, and in August of uh-1945, our ships were being combat loaded for the invasion of Japan. And once again, the Marine Corps was going to — every, every Division, all six Marine Divisions in the Pacific were the assault force for Kyushu, Japan. And thank God the bomb dropped and — so we went up. We unloaded at Nagasaki, which was our objective there.

The one kind of amusing thing that happened just before uh-it all ended: during almost every combat operation I can remember, at some point in time, a rumor would generate. Ger — always very positive. Germany has surrendered. Russia has invaded Japan. Something like that, see? And we were firing our guns out to sea — I was Executive Officer by then of the battery — and we had this young Marine who had just joined us as a replacement come charging up to me; said "Lieutenant! Lieutenant! They just dropped a bomb! Wiped out a whole Japanese city!," and I said "Son, when you've been overseas as long as I have you learn not to pay attention to that goddamn nonsense. Now get back to work." [Laughs] Of course I went back to camp that night and found out that it had really happened, and then a few days later, thank God, the war was over.

Q: Um- you fought in the Saipan Campaign, then Tinian, and then over to Okinawa -

Hofvendahl: That's right.

--00:53:02

Q: Was there any difference in the battles of Saipan, Tinian, and Okinawa?

Hofvendahl: Saipan was a son of a bitch. Tinian was relatively easy - for everybody. Okinawa was not bad for us, because we were in at the very end, but again, on Okinawa, the um— I think it was the 1st and the 5th — I know it was the 1st Division, I think it was the 5th Division on Okinawa. Of course, the 2nd Division was in reserve for once, D-Day at Okinawa, and it was the only unopposed landing in the Pacific. [Chuckles] But anyway, Naha was a good size city. They had to battle their way through that and it, it was a brutal operation, it was terrible. With a series of caves going down the — but I'm not presenting myself as an authority, Rose, on that operation.

Q: [Crosstalk] You have personal experience?

Hofvendahl: Yes. Yes. I knew, and I have uhh — well I guess like most people, some things impress themselves on your mind, you know? I — when the operation was all over, I had a friend with the base defense outfit, anti-aircraft that I wanted to find. So I took off up the island and I can remember being stuck in a Jeep behind, on more than one occasion, these big six by six trucks, with, loaded with dead Marines. They all had name tags, right here [Leans forward and gestures out of frame towards his feet] on their boots, you know? And seeing those goddamn things bounce.....

I've not forgotten it. [Clears throat]

Q: Some water?

Hofvendahl: Hmm?

Q: Some water?

Hofvendahl: Yes, okay. [Takes a drink]

Q: It's now sixty years later -

Hofvendahl: Yes.

--00:55:24

Q: Since the battle for Saipan have — could you please share with us why you felt it was important to return?

Hofvendahl: I've always wanted to come back to this island. Umm-as I say, but for our time on Tinian and our excursion to Okinawa, umm- I spent over a year of my life on this island, and, uh-and I liked it. It was a beautiful island once. Once the shooting stopped, and I'll tell you, Rose, I've been really overwhelmed... by the hospitality. [Filled with emotion] People saying "Thank you. Welcome back," that sort of thing.

Q: If you could-could talk to young people today about WWII, what would you tell them?

Hofvendahl: About war? Well I'll tell you, I don't like this goddamn war in Iraq at all. And, and I, I'll tell you one thing that happened to me on this trip that really got to me. I think I mentioned Don Crane, who survived as an Amtrak driver; didn't I not mention that, you know? And I was lucky as hell. I never got hit, not — I mean I got hit with hot shrapnel, you know shell fragments, but I never got wounded. And then, one of the other guys on this trip, Myron Campie, I think. Two hours, D-Day and he's wounded out. There's just no telling, see? But anyway, I talked to a Continental Airline pilot who had joined this tour, because his father, and his father took a sniper's bullet. It didn't kill him, but it severed the optic nerve, and as this chap told me, he left—he was married at the time — left a healthy, viable young man. He came back, and he couldn't read or write. Now he must have been an outstanding guy, but uh-he's passed away now, but living the rest of his life totally blind, and I think, you know we've only lost a thousand troops in Iraq, but there must be a hell of a lot of amputees, and blinded people. And that's what I would tell the kids. I mean there's no goddamn glamor in it, Rose. It's — and we're lucky, I mean, those of us who survived it intact are so fortunate. And, and to be back here and get the benefit of all this hospitality is wonderful, it really is.

Q: Oh it's an honor for most of us.

Technician: I need to change this.

Q: Okay.

Hofvendahl: Do you edit these tapes for profanity, Rose, or for anything?

Q: We like to keep them real.

Hofvendahl: Huh?

Q: We like to keep them real.

Hofvendahl: Okay [Chuckles] well, that's real.

--00:58:51

Q: Is there anything — well before I do ask you — well is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview that I haven't asked or -

Hofvendahl: Well -

Q: - or is there a particular memory, for you, from the Battle of Saipan?

Hofvendahl: Not Saipan, so much, but [Clears throat] I had — the fact that I survived, without being wounded was, you know, a big number one. But new Zealand was wonderful, the short six weeks I had there, and Hawaii wasn't too bad, but we had quite an Odyssey, that Division, you know we started in Paikakariki, New Zealand, up to New-New Hebrides Efate, Tarawa and the Gilberts, Hawaii, Saipan, Tinian, Okinawa, and eventually up to Nagasaki. And I was interested in seeing Nagasaki, and it wasn't — and I have since visited both Nagasaki and Hiroshima as a

traveler — and Nagasaki, where that bomb dropped, wasn't nearly as terrible as it was in Hiroshima. It was kind of in a ravine or something, but it was very interesting to me. And I had very close friend in the Battalion, Joe Small. Had a little boy, which under the points system made twelve more points that he had over the rest of us, in addition to combat operations and all, so he went home from Saipan, and due to the transportation difficulties at that time, he did not get home a hell of a lot faster than I did.

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Meanwhile, we went up to Japan, and I was only there six weeks, but it was a very illuminating time for me uh. I can remember — we went ashore combat-loaded, because that was the first time that any occupying force had ever been in the home islands of Japan. We didn't know what to expect, but the welcome we got was very warm. Once in a great while, when we'd patrol out — and we had a large area to patrol — once in a while, out in the boonies, why you'd see someone shaking a fist at you, and usually it looked like a man wearing the remnants of a military uniform, and all.

But on the whole, the people were very friendly, and very pleasant. And I remember when we went from Nagasaki by truck convoy to Isahaya, which was this little — then little town. I've since visited and it looks like San Francisco or something, you know? But the Japanese were lining the side of the road. The Marines were throwing them candy and cigarettes from C-Rations. It looked like newsreels I'd seen of the liberation of Paris and Rome, I mean, you know, wonderful. We had a — if I ramble on too much, Rose, just shut me off. I'm a law... I'm a lawyer by trade.

Q: Well I was going to get there.

Hofvendahl: Were we — we talk a lot. We had a fascinating little guy, Mr. Suzuki. He was a Harvard grad. Excellent English. And I really have to test my memory on these things, but I can remember being a little indignant at the people at home who were suggest — insisting on unconditional surrender, I remember that. It worked out with the atomic bomb, of course, but I thought "those sons of bitches," you know? They're insisting on unconditional surrender over our arse. Arses. Plural, see. And then I had a question in my mind about Hirohito. He obviously bore some responsibility for the Japanese war effort, and the decision was made to leave him in. In

place. And MacArthur, of course. Despite him being described as “Dugout Dougs” by the Marine Corps and the Navy was, he was a great officer. And he worked it all out. But I remember one conversation I had with Mr. Suzuki. And he told me — and then they knew by then of course the two atomic bombs — he said “If the Emperor did not tell us to stop fighting, Lieutenant, we would still be fighting.” And it would have been a son of a bitch. And my wife Beverly and I visited Japan, about '96 I guess. I made a particular point of visiting Kagoshima, which is an inland city from where our landing beaches would have been, and that would have been another son of a bitch, I tell you. For sure. So-

--01:03:35

Q: You have mentioned you were a lawyer, and I was going to ask you what direction did your life take after the war?

Hofvendahl: Well I went to law school. Immediately, [laughs] after the war. I-I got in to Stanford. If I hadn't made it when I did I never would've gotten in to Stanford. I had a friend in the 2nd Division — we'd both been accepted at Stanford, but I got started in January of '46 and then — the name was George Rawley. A couple of months in to that program I got a letter from him that said “Verify my status for me Russ.” And I went to the Dean of the law school then, and I said “You've got a George Rawley you're accepting?”

“Oh,” he said, “I'm so sorry but his undergraduate grades won't qualify him now.” And they were almost literally, by then, after the first grade — we got in early, see, as far as Stanford was concerned, but then the great mass of people come out — damn near had to be Phi Beta Kappa to get in. I don't think they're any better lawyers than we turned out to be, but as far as getting in to Stanford, I would never have made it. If, now I hadn't got home when I did. Which was November of '45. Twenty - seven months after I'd said goodbye to Bev.

Q: I understand you recently published a book, “Hard on the Wind.”

Hofvendahl: Not recently Rose.

Q: Oh. This said, oh -

Hofvendahl: Twenty years. Twenty years ago.

Q: I don't have any date on this -

Hofvendahl: Yes.

[Crosstalk]

Hofvendahl: Yes. It's, it's November. November of -

Q: Oh yes. I just didn't see it.

Hofvendahl: November '83.

Q: I'm sorry.

Hofvendahl: The book was published right about then, yes.

--01:05:20

Q: Could you share what that book is about?

Hofvendahl: Yeah. When I was fifteen years old I was a kid in San Francisco, and I really wanted to go to sea. And I shipped out on a cod fishing schooner. Five months from San Francisco, Bering Sea, San Francisco, not one day ashore. Not one minute ashore. That's what the book's about.

Q: Well- we thank you for sharing -

Hofvendahl: Well -

Q: -your experience with us.

Hofvendahl: Being a lawyer, it's hard to get a word out of me, isn't it Rose? [Laughs] I have enjoyed it, you've done real well.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

--01:05:59 AUDIO DESCRIPTION ENDS