

# National Park Service (NPS)

---

Mariana Islands Wartime Experience through Oral Histories Fellowship  
(WAPA 4170)  
Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Program



Walter Jorgensen  
June 16, 1994

Interview conducted by Daniel Martinez  
Transcribed by Plowshares Media  
Coordinated by Dr Jennifer Craig  
Reviewed by Guampedia Foundation, Inc  
508 compliant version by Michael Faist

This digital transcript contains updated pagination, formatting, and editing for accessibility and compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Interview content has not been altered.  
The original digital transcript is preserved in the NPS WAPA Collections and NPGallery.

This digitization was made possible through the National Park Service by a grant from the National Park Foundation through generous support from the Mellon Foundation.

The release form for this interview is on file at the NPS WAPA Collections.

WAPA Collections  
War in the Pacific NHP  
135 Murray Boulevard, Suite 100  
Hagåtña, GU 96910  
[wapa\\_interpretation@nps.gov](mailto:wapa_interpretation@nps.gov)

Interviewee: Walter Jorgensen

Military Rank: 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 6th Marine Easy Company, USMC

Interviewer: Daniel Martinez

Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands

Date: June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1994

**--00:00:00 - 00:00:21**

[Audio Description] The frame opens with two men seated: the park ranger in uniform with his back to us and Jorgensen facing us, wearing a button-up shirt and shorts. The wall next to them is black and there is a plant behind Jorgensen. As he continues talking, the frame focuses a close-up on him.

**--00:00:22 - 00:00:49**

Q: The following oral history interview was conducted on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1994 at 9:00 in the morning by the National Park Service American Memorial Park in cooperation with Marianas Cablevision. The subject is Walter Jorgensen, veteran of the Marianas campaign and the interviewer is Daniel Martinez, historian for the USS Arizona Memorial in Hawaii. Good morning, Walter.

Jorgensen: Good Morning.

Q: Could you for the record state your full name and then spell your name last name for us?

**--00:00:49 - 00:01:30**

Jorgensen: My full name is Walter Ernest Jorgensen and my last name is spelled J-O-R-G-E-N-S-E-N.

Q: And where were you born?

Jorgensen: I was born in New York. Brooklyn, New York.

Q: Brooklyn, New York. And what date was that?

Jorgensen: June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1921.

Q: So you just had a birthday.

Jorgensen: Just did.

Q: And in Brooklyn were you a Dodger fan?

Jorgensen: No, my dad was a sea captain and operated on the trans-Atlantic run, and he was transferred to the west coast shortly after that and I came from west coast when I was one year old.

Q: Is that right? So you never had a favorite baseball team? But you moved to Los Angeles.

**--00:01:31 - 00:02:00**

Jorgensen: The Dodgers followed me.

Q: What were your parent's names?

Jorgensen: My father's name was Alfred Jorgensen and my mother's name was Christine Jorgensen.

Q: And how many children in the family?

Jorgensen: They had three boys, myself and two brothers.

Q: And you were?

Jorgensen: I was the youngest.

Q: You were the youngest? How many of your family members still survive today?

Jorgensen: Myself and the brother next to me.

**--00:02:00 - 00:02:51**

Q: Since you moved, what town did you actually grow up in-?

Jorgensen: In San Pedro, California, which is Los Angeles Harbor.

Q: And you went to grammar school there?

Jorgensen: I went to grammar, went through K through twelve there.

Q: Okay, and high school was which?

Jorgensen: San Pedro High School.

Q: San Pedro High School. That was the home of the Pacific fleet.

Jorgensen: That's true.

Q: Did you remember watching them?

Jorgensen: Oh, very much so. I was very active with the man who was in command of the ship there. A older- you know, older man.

Q: Sure.

Jorgensen: And used to go to sea with the Fleet when I was a kid.

Q: No kidding? A battleship?

Jorgensen: No, I was on the USS Algorma, a fleet tug. And my good friend was a skipper and I was sort of the mascot, I was eight to nine years old.

Q: So you had this Navy thing in your blood for a long time-

Jorgensen: Way back.

Q: Because your dad was a master of a ship as well, right?

Jorgensen: Right.

**--00:02:51 - 00:03:06**

Q: That's pretty interesting. What was Los Angeles like in those early days?

Jorgensen: Well, Los Angeles, of course, was a much smaller town, but I wasn't that familiar with Los Angeles because it was 20 miles away.

Q: Did you ever take the Red Cars into town?

Jorgensen: Oh yeah, rode the Red Cars a great deal.

**--00:03:07 - 00:03:38**

Q: What was San Pedro like?

Jorgensen: It was a charming town, divided up in the ethnic groups.

Q: What kind of ethnic groups were there?

Jorgensen: Oh, about 20 to 25% Japanese for one thing from Terminal Island were there. Broken down to the fishermen and farmers who farmed the Palos Verdes peninsula.

Q: Yeah, truck farmers.

Jorgensen: Right. There were no houses there then. And we had a big Slavic group from Yugoslavia, Croatians and Slovenes and so on.

Q: Right.

**--00:03:39 - 00:04:00**

Jorgensen: And then we had a big Scandinavian group of which I was a part. And there were few English Irish, but not very many. Good contingent of Italians. It was- it was a melting pot.

Q: Of course. Were there Hispanic Americans, Mexican American in that area?

Jorgensen: Some, not very many.

**--00:04:01 - 00:04:14**

Q: How did all of this work? Did it work well?

Jorgensen: Worked beautifully.

Q: They got along-

Jorgensen: There never- there were no gang wars, no animosity between groups. We were all very friendly with one another.

Q: Well San Pedro is quite different in that area today.

Jorgensen: It is, very much so.

**--00:04:16 - 00:05:05**

Q: How did you come about, I guess, a natural extension being with the Navy? When did you decide to go into the Navy?

Jorgensen: Well, I kind of decided to go into the Marine Corps. I really had in mind going into the Navy and I enlisted the Marine Corps reserve when I was 17

Q: And what year was that?

Jorgensen: In 1938. Because there were appointments available for the Naval Academy through that- from that source and then they mobilized the reserve right away. And being that I was in college at that point, so being in college I was transferred out because I was also enrolled in a platoon leaders class, which was a Marine Corps Officers procurement program that was in effect prior to World War II.

**--00:04:06 - 00:05:46**

So, I finished the first two years of college and then went to platoon leaders class in '40 and then, the second class was in '41 and we were- we finished our training in August of '41 and it was a rather a nice, elite group of young people at the San Diego Marine Corps basin. We wondered why they let us go and the war was raging in Europe and so on, but they did and I went back to

college and then when war was declared I was ordered, you know, to active duty immediately.

**--00:05:46 - 00:05:58**

Q: Right, where were you going to school at the time?

Jorgensen: Occidental College.

Q: Occidental College, I have been there. I know it.

Jorgensen: Nice school.

Q: Very nice school. Tradi- It has some of the traditional looks of eastern schools, with an architecture section.

Jorgensen: Lovely school.

**--00:05:59 - 00:06:29**

Q: Well, the clouds of war are gathering in the Pacific. Did you and your fellow reservists have any ideas or talk about what was going to happen out there?

Jorgensen: Oh, a great deal. It was one hundred percent volunteer organization group and you know, also inclined to the military or we wouldn't have been there. And we knew that we were going to get in that war and we felt that we would soon but we had no idea when.

Q: Did you have a pretty strong feeling who that opponent would be?

**--00:06:29 - 00:06:56**

Jorgensen: Oh sure, the Japanese were the obvious enemy, but we didn't know we would be committed to the Pacific either at that time.



Q: Anybody had opinions on how you could handle the Japanese prior to the war?

Jorgensen: Well, I'm afraid that we were rather smug about it.

Q: Thought it would be over quickly?

Jorgensen: Well, not so much the land troops, but the Navy thought they could polish off the Japanese in a week and it didn't quite work that way.

Q: They almost polished us off in a day.

Jorgensen: I know.

**--00:06:58 - 00:07:39**

Q: Well, where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Do you remember it? Remember where you were and what you were doing?

Jorgensen: I do. I had been out to a college dance the night before and had come home to San Pedro for the weekend and my mother came of the bedroom and said we are at war, early Sunday morning on December 7<sup>th</sup>.

Q: Did she tell you where we are at war?

Jorgensen: Oh yeah, then we got up and listened to the radio, there was no TV or anything.

Q: You know, the fleet was stationed there at Pearl Harbor. Did you- any thoughts- think about what happened to those poor fellows you knew on those ships?

Jorgensen: Oh sure. Of course, a good many years had gone by since I had gone up on that ship.

**--00:07:40 - 00:08:12**

Q: All those majestic battleships.

Jorgensen: Oh, well I was familiar with all those ships because they were stationed at San Pedro prior to going to Pearl Harbor.

Q: Right... How long did it take the Marine Corps to get a hold of you?

Jorgensen: I got a wire in about a week and I was ordered to the Philadelphia Navy Yard to report April '42.

Q: Had you ever been back east from the time when you were a child?

Jorgensen: Well, no I don't think so. I think it was my first trip as an adult back there.

Q: So what was your feelings when you got on the train to go?

Jorgensen: Well, I was delighted and I did get on the train.

**--00:08:13 - 00:09:02**

Q: Right out of Union Station?

Jorgensen: Right, and it was interesting we were commissioned before we left, which is a bit unusual. They typically commission you after.

Q: So you were in uniform?

Jorgensen: No. No, we bought our uniforms back there and we went back there and it was a last class of basic school which was the peacetime Marine Corps officer training school.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: And after our class, it dissolved, the whole school and from that time forward, all the Officers Candidates went to Quantico and it had been running parallel with the school for maybe a year at that time. So, I- we had a very good three months in Philadelphia.

Q: Right. What was the train ride like going across the country?

**--00:09:02 - 00:09:32**

Jorgensen: Well, it was sort of a revelation. I remember with the sunset I asked the porter where the bed was and he said, you are sitting in it.

Q: Oh, is that right?

Jorgensen: A chair car, I had no idea.

Q: No Pullman car for you.

Jorgensen: No Pullman, no.

Q: So stiff necks and all of that?

Jorgensen: Well I think I was too young to have that.

Q: But the scenery – I mean, American unfolds.

Jorgensen: Oh, it was exciting to go back east and report in.

Q: Something that is lost in this generation is train travel.

Jorgensen: Right, I know.

**--00:09:33 - 00:09:48**

Q: So you get back to Philadelphia and you start working, what was, what were they- after they got you there, where did they ship you from Philadelphia?

Jorgensen: Well I went to the Camp Elliot at San Diego.

Q: Back to San Diego.

**--00:09:48 - 00:10:24**

Jorgensen: That's prior to the time Pendleton was operating and I was assigned 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 6th Marines. Easy Company... and we trained there and put the regiment together and the 6th regiment had just come in from Iceland, the regiment I joined. And we filled it out with personnel and went overseas in October '42.

Q: What was your job when you were in- at Camp Elliot?

Jorgensen: I was the Executive Officer of Easy Company. I was a second lieutenant.

Q: What does an executive officer do?

**--00:10:24 - 00:10:49**

Jorgensen: Well, a rifle Company has seven officers. The commanding officer, the executive officer and four platoon leaders.

Q: And so you kept – you worked for the XO-

Jorgensen: You work for the- you run the company from an administrative standpoint for the commanding officer-

Q: Okay.

Jorgensen: Who was a classmate, also a second lieutenant.

Q: Is that right?

Jorgensen: Right.

Q: How old were you then?

Jorgensen: 21.

**--00:10:50 - 00:11:16**

Q: A young man. And you had a bunch of younger men ahead- below, right? What was the average age, you think, of some of those people in your platoon?

Jorgensen: Well, we had ourselves. We were early 20's and we had three platoon sergeants who were possibly 30. We thought they were old men. But notwithstanding, the average age of our company was eighteen. So that means that all the men were 17 or most of them.

**--00:11:17 - 00:11:33**

Q: So you get shipped overseas, where are you headed?

Jorgensen: New Zealand. Left San Diego and went to Wellington.

Q: Beautiful country, New Zealand?

Jorgensen: Absolutely beautiful, I had a wonderful experience there. Heavy training. Guadalcanal was raging at that time.

**--00:11:33 - 00:11:54**

Q: What kind of- when- I heard this term, "heavy training," and for those listening to this interview, can you describe-

Jorgensen: Well, we didn't work a normal week, we worked six days on and one day off. You rotate that through, that's a lot of days per month.

Q: So you would be doing lot of hikes and-

Jorgensen: A lot of field training and field problems. A lot of weapon firing.

**--00:11:57 - 00:12:19**

Q: What was the standard weapon for the Marine Corps?

Jorgensen: At that time? The 1903 Springfield rifle.

Q: World War I.

Jorgensen: World War I.

Q: Pretty good rifle, though.

Jorgensen: Oh yeah, first rate, but it wasn't quite like the M-1 that we got later.

Q: Right, well nothing is quite like that, the M-1 Garand. Were your men trained- did you have machine gun companies in there?

Jorgensen: Yes.

Q: And mortar companies?

**--00:12:20 - 00:13:16**

Jorgensen: Well, each rifle company had a weapons platoon. A weapons platoon-

Q: Okay, so it's not correct to call them machine gun companies. They'd be?

Jorgensen: No, no. We had a machine gun company also.

Q: Oh, you did?

Jorgensen: Each battalion has a weapons company that is comprised of 24 heavy machine guns and 481 millimeter mortars and presumably, tank weapons but we never had much of that.

Q: That comes later.

Jorgensen: Well, we have- there were very few Japanese tanks than we were equipped for them.

Q: When you say heavy machine gun, we're talking 50 caliber water cooled?

Jorgensen: Well, we had a few, no. We had- I think there was maybe a couple of 50 caliber air cooled guns, but 24- 30 caliber Browning heavy machine gun that is water cooled.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: Plus 24 Browning lite machine guns, which were air cooled, and actually, we used the air cooled guns mostly.

**--00:13:16 - 00:13:37**

Q: In those early days, was it tough to get equipment?

Jorgensen: Oh, it was a big problem but we were fairly well equipped for the time.

Q: Where did you- from New Zealand? Where did you go from-

Jorgensen: From Wellington to Noumea and then Noumea into Guadalcanal.

Q: Was that your first combat?

Jorgensen: First combat.

**--00:13:37 - 00:14:09**

Q: What was that like for you?

Jorgensen: We were all a little nervous. We landed within an existing perimeter because the battle had been going on for two to three months and we landed in December of '42. And I went up on the President Jackson, which was an APA, an attack transport, and it was a part of a transitive transport that was famous in the Pacific. The Unholy Four. First rate ships. The Jackson, the Adams, and the Hayes, and the Crescent City.

**--00:14:09 - 00:14:46**



Q: Now, had the Battle of Savo Sound already taken place?

Jorgensen: That had taken place about two weeks prior, or three.

Q: So you came in when it was really still very touch and go there?

Jorgensen: No, to be fair, it was touch and go because the Japanese had air superiority and so on, but the- there was still considerable resistance on Guadalcanal and our men there were exhausted from both combat and illness.

Q: I talked to a veteran and they said that- when he was a replacement at Guadalcanal, one of our interviews here, and said that the men looked like ghosts. They were-

Jorgensen: Absolutely.

Q: They had lost weight, their eyes were hollowed.

**--00:14:46 - 00:15:13**

Jorgensen: Our battalion relieved the whole 8th regiment. Took a whole- our battalion took a regimental sector and was better- we were better men than they were. They were just really decimated. Then, we attacked and went north to Cape Esperance and finished the campaign off.

Q: Right. What was the fighting like?

Jorgensen: Well, like, you know, infantry tactic skirmishes and fights and-

Q: But jungle fighting is different than fighting in-

**--00:15:13 - 00:16:21**

Jorgensen: It- it is, but we had good artillery and good transporta-, good supply. The- we swept up the beach. Guadalcanal has a spine running down the middle of it, and it's very difficult to get inland. And it was considerable, rough terrain and that was supplied either with men carrying rations and ammunition on their backs, which was a big problem.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: Or by Jeep and then we ran into an Army mule train outfit and they worked for us. And they were superb.

Q: Good way to get supplies.

Jorgensen: A mule can get anywhere.

Q: Right. It's interesting, the mule trains were -

Jorgensen: I never saw another mule in the Pacific later on. And how they ever came to work for us, I don't know.

Q: You had men under you and one of the responsibilities of having men under you is looking out for their welfare.

Jorgensen: That is true.

Q: And a lot of the GIs that I have talked to, Marines who were here in Saipan, note the officers they remember, the officers that took care of them and-

**--00:16:21 - 00:17:05**

Jorgensen: Well, it was your first concern. Not yourself, it was your command and your people.

Q: In a combat situation, you are taking care of these, in an angle that I haven't been able to talk about until I have had you here, is- what was it like when you had your first- you lost your first one?

Jorgensen: You mean attack?

Q: No, death. Your first death.

Jorgensen: Well, it was devastating, but it happened- it happened- you know, it happened regularly. I mean, we didn't lose all that many people, but it can happen from a variety of causes. We had two destroyers and support. I remember the first day, and they had a couple short rounds that killed one of our men, accidentally of course.

**--00:17:05 - 00:17:27**

Q: Was that the first one?

Jorgensen: The colonel's runner. The first day. And that's a little shattering.

Q: Who writes that letter home?

Jorgensen: The CL. In this case he wasn't in my company, but the CL handles the notification.

Q: Did you ever have to write one?

Jorgensen: But that is the personal- the personal notification. The official notification comes through Headquarters.

Q: Right. Did you ever have to write one?

**--00:17:27 - 00:17:33**

Jorgensen: Oh, I wrote a lot of letters, regrettably.

Q: It's tough.

Jorgensen: Oh yeah, very tough.

**--00:17:37 - 00:17:56**

Jorgensen: Not so many there, but later on here. It got really bad.

Q: Your- your group, which was- you were with the 6<sup>th</sup> Marines then?

Jorgensen: Right.

Q: Your campaigns were- you went side by side with a lot of these other Marine divisions 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, didn't you?

**--00:17:56 - 00:18:32**

Jorgensen: Well, in Guadalcanal, they- we were a newly formed element of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. There weren't any divisions.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: I mean, they were being formed daily or the units of them were. So the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was committed. They are a part of it. And then the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was committed there. But there was no 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Division at that time.

Q: Any near things for you there at Guadalcanal? Were you being shot at?

Jorgensen: Oh yeah.

Q: What's it like to be- I've never been shot, thank God, I hope I never do. What is that like?  
What is that experience like?

**--00:18:32 - 00:19:04**

Jorgensen: Well, you sort of roll with the punches and you perform your duties and you hope that you are not going to get hit at all. You don't expose yourself unnecessarily either, but-

Q: Those bullets are whistling over, that's got to be- there was a Civil War soldier who said there was nothing more horrifying than listening to the bullets that miss you.

Jorgensen: They come whizzing by.

Q: Or listening to a bullet that hit somebody.

**--00:19:04 - 00:19:58**

Jorgensen: The Japs had a number of 57 millimeter anti-tank guns up the beach and they would fire those down the beach and that was an absolutely devastating-

Q: What did it sound like?

Jorgensen: Well, first of all, if you are lucky, you see the flash, if you can see the gun, which is unusual. Then you hear the round go by and then you hear the muzzle, the discharge of the gun going off because the speed of sound. And the- artillery is a frightening thing. That is understating it.

Q: It's a pretty frightening experience. There was- one of our interviews said that he landed on

the first night, got in a foxhole and the mortar rounds came down here at Saipan and he said, there is nothing like that kind of experience.

Jorgensen: There is no way to describe it.

**--00:19:58 - 00:21:02**

Q: Right, it's very difficult. Not to diminish the other things that you were involved in, but could you just list some of the campaigns that led you here to Saipan that you were involved in?

Jorgensen: Well, we finished up at Guadalcanal and Cape Esperance and about the condition of the operation, things were tenuous at best. You never knew when there would be a counterlanding or what. So the same ships came in and picked us up and when we went in, we went in after dark and the ships were gone before dawn. And when we left, we put all our gear on the beach and they came in after dark, we loaded all night and we were out of there before dawn because of air raids. And I remember all the time I was loading our gear aboard and taking care of everything. I was looking forward to those- ordering two fried eggs over easy because they had an excellent mess on that ship. I went up and back on the same ship. The Jackson-

**--00:21:02 - 00:21:29**

Q: What kind of food were you eating out there?

Jorgensen: Well, later, the average transport, you don't order your eggs. You take what is given to you.

Q: But I mean, in the field, you weren't having those kind of-

Jorgensen: Oh, in the field we had C rations and we had I guess some K rations in those days. But we also had B rations.

Q: What are those?

Jorgensen: That is normal fare. The galley cook prepares the food- canned goods, but nevertheless, the bakery is baking bread and so on. We had quite a little of that, really.

**--00:21:29 - 00:22:15**

Q: Now when you came to Guadalcanal, you saw what those guys looked like, when you were leaving. How did you look like going out?

Jorgensen: We looked pretty good. We were there, I think, maybe 60 days, something like that. And we didn't have the exposure they had and our trouble started after we got back to New Zealand. We had 99.9% incidents of malaria.

Q: How about you?

Jorgensen: I was one of the last ones to come down with it.

Q: What is malaria like? Is it different for each case?

Jorgensen: Well, you develop a heavy fever and high fever, 104-105 and then it subsides, and then- It is periodic. It comes- cycles through every 15 or 20 days, something like that. We took-

**--00:22:15 - 00:22:56**

Q: Did you fellas have shots before you went in?

Jorgensen: Well, you don't take shots. They had atabrine, which is a substitute, a chemical substitute for quinine because quinine wasn't available. And they frankly didn't know what to do about it. At first they sent a lot of people home and then they realized that if you just lay them in their bunks for a month, they would recover. So they stopped sending them home about the time

I came down with it.

Q: Wow.

Jorgensen: I wound up in a Naval Hospital in New Zealand, Mob 8, with malaria.

**--00:22:56 - 00:23:21**

Q: Does that flare up throughout your life or is it-

Jorgensen: They say once you have it, you have it. And for the first few years after the war, I had these tremendous headaches and I attributed it to that. They would build over a period of a week and then last a week and then dwindle down.

Q: Like migraines?

Jorgensen: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. What other campaigns were you involved in? Let's just kind of step it up to Saipan.

**--00:23:21 - 00:24:09**

Jorgensen: Skip. We embarked from New Zealand to go to Tarawa in November of '43 and my battalion was a division reserve, 2nd battalion 6 Marines with Ray Murray, who was a major at that time. He was the commanding officer. Later retired as lieutenant general. First rate man. And we stayed aboard ship on D-day. We watched that smoke and bombardment and it was something else. But anyway, we landed the following day, in LCDPs on the island adjacent to Biteo, which was the main objective and we brought in behind us, artillery, which they couldn't get into the other- to Biteo.

**--00:24:09 - 00:25:09**



And we interdicted Biteo from there and then we counter landed on- behind the other troops in Biteo and got in on the sweep of the clean up of that, not much combat.

Q: Any Marine I have talked to that has been at Tarawa said it was unbelievable.

Jorgensen: It was dreadful. Dreadful. Just devastation in every direction.

Q: And the Marines that got killed there, they said- one guy said he never got over and still doesn't get over the vision that he was in his way in and he couldn't understand what all that was floating in the water, he thought it was debris.

Jorgensen: I know.

Q: And it was- it was his fellow Marines.

Jorgensen: It was terrible. Because- principally because of that reef condition there. A lot of people were killed at sea, I mean in the boats. Because they stepped off the boats and some drowned and some were shot in the water. Anyway, we then were the least effective battalion in the Division, so we were ordered to make a forced march up the chain of that atoll.

**--00:25:09 - 00:26:26**

Jorgensen: Which is about a 30 mile hike. And we- we waded between islands, or atolls, sometimes up to your chest and sometimes up to your knees. And I think on a three day march, we compressed the remaining resistance up toward the end of the chain and had a short- sharp, short fight at the end. And pretty sharp. We killed about 500 Japs and we lost- 34 killed and about 80 wounded in an hour and a half battle and then it was over.

Q: Real, real sharp fire fight. That was it. Then where did you go from Tarawa?

Jorgensen: Well, then we stayed there and the rest of the division meanwhile had embarked or was embarking to go up to Hawaii where we were to train. And we stayed there for, well, a couple of months. Seemed like forever, but it wasn't. But there were no comforts, we lived in the sand. Or the ground. And we had two or three air raids a night, which shouldn't affect us because we were off of the main objective. I mean, up the chain.

**--00:26:28 - 00:26:57**

Jorgensen: And there was no counter landing of course. And then we went aboard ship and went to Hawaii, went to the camp at kap- Kamuela, which had been set up, rejoined our-

Q: What camp was that again?

Jorgensen: Kamuela.

Q: Okay.

Jorgensen: Between Mauna Ke'a.

Q: Big Island of Hawaii.

Jorgensen: We trained there for this operation, Saipan.

Q: Which is Operation Forager, as I recall it.

Jorgensen: Right. And-

**--00:27:01 - 00:28:31**

Jorgensen: At that time, well, I don't want to drag the story out.

Q: It's alright.

Jorgensen: In my class, 12 people were in the regiment and they were all promoted to captain. So there wasn't room for 12 captains. They didn't have that many vacancies. So they took two or three of us and sent the other nine home. And my colonel called me in and said, Jorgie, I'm going to keep you as my loading officer. I thought, oh, what have I done? My other friends were going home. But anyway, I became the loading officer for my battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines. And I loaded the ship, the Sheridan in Hilo and disembarked the troops here as a TQM, transport quartermaster. And then when the ship was unloaded, I was supposed to go back to Pearl with them and go home. And then a radio message came in, all the ships out there, there were hundreds of them, and each one had a- each attack transport had a TQM, maybe 15, and all TQMs were ordered ashore for replacements. And that is how I came to Saipan. I came in at about D plus 3, all alone at nine o'clock at night with my khaki on. I didn't have any- I didn't have my dungarees or anything. No steel helmet. And I was ordered to report to Division headquarters, General Watson's headquarters, for assignment. And-

**--00:28:33 - 00:29:16**

Q: This sounds like battle of Saipan by accident almost. You weren't even supposed to be here.

Jorgensen: And I landed on about Red Beach, 2 there, right in that area. And I thought- D plus 3, that, you know, things would be quite advanced, but there was a big heavy war going on that night.

Q: You bet.

Jorgensen: And I went about 50 feet in and I was challenged three times and I thought, that is enough of this and I got in a big shell hole and I thought I would get it out for the night. And it was right opposite that little airstrip the Japs had, was right in front of me. And there was a tremendous ammunition dump of ours there and the Japs got a hit on it that night about midnight

or one a.m. and it went up like an atomic bomb.

**--00:29:17 - 00:30:11**

Q: Similar to the fireworks we saw last night? Or more so?

Jorgensen: More so. At any rate, the hole sort of collapsed on me and the next morning I reported to division headquarters and was assigned to replace a captain who had been killed on Charlie Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 29<sup>th</sup> Marines, which had been designated the second independent assault battalion before the campaign and later was re-designated the 29<sup>th</sup> Marines. It was an odd battalion. By odd- it was a first rate battalion, but it was not part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, it was part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division, but didn't become that until later. We were attached tactically to the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division. And operated as their 4<sup>th</sup> battalion. There are three battalions and we operated as the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion.

**--00:30:13 - 00:30:43**

Jorgensen: And I joined this side of Mount Tapochau and took over this company that really had been in some very rough fighting. And then we took Tapochau and-

Q: What was Tapochau like up there? You know, you go up there and look at-

Jorgensen: Well, you are exposed up there, you realized.

Q: It doesn't look to be a lot of vegetation from the photographs up there, so it looked like it was fairly open.

Jorgensen: Well, most of the vegetation had been blasted away.

Q: So what were the Japanese up there doing?

**--00:30:43 - 00:31:28**

Jorgensen: Well, by this time, they took Tapochau and they were down below on the river slope of it and my company attacked on the right of Tapochau and swept down into Garapan and I think another two weeks and they secured the island. And-

Q: That must have been an amazing experience for you. I mean, you had not been involved with a rifle company-

Jorgensen: Well, it was, it was because I came on the scene and there were a lot of old-timers that had left and the survivors and there were three officers left out of seven.

Q: How did the men respond to you? I mean-

**--00:31:29 - 00:32:04**

Jorgensen: Very well.

Q: That's great. But it must have been- I'm trying to place myself in this position, but I would have a terribly uneasy feeling.

Jorgensen: Well, you have to fit. The first thing you have to do is gain their confidence, so you have to handle things right, or else you are ostracized. But we had a number of- I will never forget the morning of the July 4<sup>th</sup> or the night of July 3<sup>rd</sup>. I thought if I'm ever going to have gray hair, it's tomorrow morning. Horrible night. I got up and got my little steel mirror out to look. I still had brown hair.

**--00:32:06 - 00:32:36**

Q: Why was it such a horrible night?

Jorgensen: Well, the Japs were all around us and it was a particularly bad night with close-end

fighting and all that sort of thing.

Q: Are you talking about hand to hand fighting?

Jorgensen: Yeah, there was a lot of that. Sporadically a lot of it, not- not ordinarily.

Q: You know, no one talks about that. I have interviewed a lot of folks and when it comes to hand to hand, there is something that- And I would like- what is hand to hand fighting like? What happens?

Jorgensen: Well, I didn't actually do any hand to hand there.

Q: But your men did.

**--00:32:36 - 00:33:12**

Jorgensen: Some of the men did. Well, one of the officers that was wounded before I got there had a Japanese officer jump in the hole with him, a shell hole, with his sword. Swung at him. And this lieutenant grabbed the sword, tore it out, cut the Jap's head off and in doing so, cut two of his fingers off. Grabbing the blade. So that is hand to hand fighting, but most hand to hand fighting is either, you know, slugging it out with a rifle butt or shooting him.

**--00:33:12 - 00:33:16**

Q: Right. What about bayonet?

Jorgensen: I don't think any of them actually-

[video cuts, audio jumps]

**--00:33:18 - 00:33:22**

Q: Well, heavy in the training, you had heavy training with the bayonet.

Jorgensen: Oh, I know that.

Q: So when it comes down to real basic -

[video cuts, audio jumps]

**--00:33:24 - 00:33:48**

Jorgensen: Real basic, it's nice to have eight rounds in your clip. Or a pistol. One of the two.

Q: Right. But Marines were trained at hand to hand combat also without a weapon, right?

Jorgensen: Right. But I didn't see any of that. I supposed it happened though.

Q: Hand grenades.

Jorgensen: A lot of hand grenades. But of course if you are close in, you can't use a hand grenade. You have to pitch it out ahead of yourself.

**--00:33:50 - 00:34:23**

Q: Flame throwers. Your company have any?

Jorgensen: We didn't have them at the company level there. Largely because of that terrain around Mount Tapochau, I guess. But a lot of flamethrowers were used on the caves here.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: And I called flamethrowers in, but I think they came in from the engineering-

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: On call.

Q: It's a horrific weapon.

Jorgensen: Oh yeah, devastating. Devastating. But effective.

**--00:34:23 - 00:34:56**

Q: What is your most vivid memory of Saipan? For you, personally?

Jorgensen: Oh, I don't know if I have any one particular memory.

Q: Is there one th-

Jorgensen: That one night, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, was pretty bad, but there was a succession of bad nights.

Q: When you think of Saipan and, you know, you may be sitting at home or perhaps when you were planning your trip here, was there some thought that comes back, reoccurring, that reminds you of Saipan? An impression?

**--00:34:56 - 00:35:42**

Jorgensen: Well, bare in mind, a lot of the heavy fighting had taken place before I took over that rifle company.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: With D plus 3 or 4 or 5, something like that. And so we swept down and then we



became- we occupied Garapan. I stayed there about 60 days. So I have a lot of vivid memories of coming in alone at night and all that sort of thing, and taking over the company and so on. But-

Q: I know you didn't-

Jorgensen: I didn't start with them and the toughest days were the first days.

Q: The first days for you.

Jorgensen: Later on, in Okinawa, I started from day one through the end and that was a little different. Different memories.

**--00:35:42 - 00:36:12**

Q: Yeah. I suppose it's a time when people kinda search their own, their inside- can I do this and I'm trained to do this and I don't know these guys and now I'm going into a combat situation, those kinds of things crossed your mind?

Jorgensen: Oh sure. Elements of- you know, you got to have self-confidence and you had self-doubts too.

Q: Right. That must've been- And you were how old then?

Jorgensen: And you had to set an example.

Q: Of course. You were an officer.

Jorgensen: I was twenty-three.

Q: Twenty-three.

**--00:36:15 - 00:37:10**

Q: You lost a few men here too.

Jorgensen: Oh yeah, we lost a lot of men, we had- when we wound up in Garapan, we had about 70 men out of 220. And of those, half of- a third of them were replacements, including me. I was a replacement.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: And we occupied the Church of Garapan. That was my headquarters, and I told you about the status of my battalion, we were an independent battalion. We were detached from the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines and I stayed in Garapan as a company, not a battalion and was surrounded by the 27<sup>th</sup> Division.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: And I reported to them tactically, and administratively to my battalion, which was way down by Aslito.

Q: That's interesting.

Jorgensen: And I had [unclear, audio cuts] issues there for 60 days that were more pleasant than the combat, of course.

**--00:37:10 - 00:38:11**

Q: Garapan, we- you know, I drive down there. You know, you walked down in the parade yesterday. What was Garapan like in '44?

Jorgensen: Well, there was nothing there. The streets were identifiable, but just rubble. Tin. The buildings were tropical tin roofs and tin construction and they were all down. And the Japanese had buried a lot of 100 and 500 kilogram bombs upside down- dig a hole and stick the fuse out, pull the pin, put a piece of tin over it and if you walked on the tin, off you went. And they were all around that church where I was.

Q: Booby-traps.

Jorgensen: Booby-traps. And a lot of duds. 60 inch, 14 inch, 5 inch from the naval bombardment. And I had a lot of interesting experiences then, but it was after combat. It was after the island was theoretically secured but a lot of people don't realize that roughly 4 or 5,000 Japanese were killed after the island was secured.

**--00:38:11 - 00:38:36**

Jorgensen: And we had a war every night.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: When the sun set, there were tracers arching up and down the street.

Q: So the activity-

Jorgensen: Picked up.

Q: Picked up.

Jorgensen: Because there were stragglers coming in to get food and minor attacks.

Q: Right.

Jorgensen: So you were never- you were always armed to the teeth, there was no such thing as relaxing.

Q: And that has its own stresses, huh?

Jorgensen: Oh, yeah.

Q: Did you witness any of the civilian populous suicides?

**--00:38:36 - 00:39:58**

Jorgensen: No, no that was up- out of my zone.

Q: Why- I mean, I'm sure- You said you had a lot of interesting stories that happened afterwards. Can you relate what you think is one of your favorite stories?

Jorgensen: Well, at Tanapag, which is just north of where I was, the Seabees battalion, underwater clearance battalion, and there were hundreds of wrecks out in the bay and their job was to clear the harbor for shipping and build docks. And they had two enormous stacks of either dynamite or TNT. Each stack was the size of at least a- at least a basketball court. And the Japs came in one night and wired 'em up and one went off and I was in Garapan, what, three to five miles away, and the church- part of it let go- it was pretty well destroyed anyway. Some of the beam structures let go and they were swinging- it was about two o'clock in the morning and there were whitewashed beams swinging, and I thought, this is it. The whole thing is coming down on us.

**--00:39:48 - 00:40:52**

Jorgensen; And then I got a phone call immediately, go up there and see what's happening. So I threw together what I had. I had a Jeep and a trailer and I put two machine guns, two mortars, a

couple BAR men, myself and my exec. I had a tremendous exec. Les Bateman, first lieutenant. And we went up to see and the whole place up there was in an uproar in the middle of the night. And troops, stevedore troops were in the hills up behind there, that were working the ships- our people. And they broke and ran, they were a colored group, and they were in the water there, and anyway, we restored order all ourselves and I had my illumination with 60 millimeters and whatnot and we calmed everything down and – we were the only tactical people there.

Q: So you shot up star shells to illuminate the area?

Jorgensen: Yeah and we had enough firepower to have a small war.

Q: The Black stevedores were in disarray because their job-

**--00:40:54 - 00:42:12**

Jorgensen: They thought there had been a breakthrough, but what happened was that one or two Japs went in there and they wired this thing up, apparently- and two or three Seabees were killed in that event. And I met the- some of the officers of that battalion. One was named Bennett from Houston, a terrific guy, very experienced in civilian construction and so on. A lot of the Seabees were that way. And he had a little problem. He had come out with his battalion on a ship and the men got into the beer on the way out and he was the accountable officer and had signed for ten thousand cases of beer and then men had drunk twenty-five hundred cases.

Q: Twenty-five hundred cases of beer?

Jorgensen: Well, it's a big ship with a couple thousand men, so- he said, I don't know what I'm going to do, I have to pay for this. When you sign, you sign. I said, well how much does beer cost you? And he said, about a dollar and a half a case. I said, I will take care of it for you. You sell me twenty-five hundred cases for three dollars and you will be even. So he said, you've got twenty-five hundred cases. So I jumped in the Jeep and ran down to see my colonel and told him,

how about it, should we take up a collection? He said, fall everybody out, we will take up a collection right now. So we had the only beer on the island.

**--00:42:13 - 00:42:49**

Q: Is that right?

Jorgensen: Yeah.

Q: What kind of beer was it?

Jorgensen: Oh, I think Pabst or Eastside, either in stubbies or-

Q: And you guys didn't- could you get it cooled or was it-

Jorgensen: Well, my people and my battalion people didn't. There were no facilities for that, but the Seabees had a big refrigeration outfit, so we had cold beer at Garapan.

Q: Wow. There's nothing like a cold beer out here, I bet. I'm sure there is a number of stories. That is a great story. Why was it important for you to come back here for this anniversary?

**--00:42:50 - 00:43:39**

Jorgensen: Well, I have, you know, I have memories. I spent a lot of time in the Pacific. And I actually thought I would like to- I retired two years ago. I didn't have the time or money before, really. And I thought I would like to start at New Zealand and work up on my own. And that would be extremely difficult and-

Q: Kind of follow your trail?

Jorgensen: Yeah, and it would be expensive and a dream. So this, I got a mailing on this tour

here, this anniversary. And I thought it would be a good idea, so I just came. But it was a lingering thought to return anyway, but I'm glad I came. It's a first rate group of people in our group, there are about 90 of us.

**--00:43:40 - 00:44:08**

Q: Did you meet anybody that you knew during that time?

Jorgensen: No. No, neither does anyone else.

Q: So in a sense you have come to this kind of reunion and you have met new friends.

Jorgensen: Exactly. And now that we are about to go home tomorrow, a lot of us have become friends and it's too bad that we didn't have an icebreaker the first day instead of towards the end.

Q: These things happen that way.

Jorgensen: But they are all first class people.

Q: How do you-

Jorgensen: They have aged well.

**--00:44:10 - 00:44:40**

Q: Yeah. Well, you've got your gray hair.

Jorgensen: Yeah, I finally got it. It's brown, isn't it?

Q: Yes, sir. Come to think of it, it's more on the brown side than the gray. I'm trying to be diplomatic. There is one lingering story here that veterans have made a choice whether to meet

with the Japanese or not. What is your feeling about that?

Jorgensen: I wouldn't seek it out, particularly, but I wouldn't object to it and I went to the Japanese Memorial Service, I thought it was beautifully handled.

**--00:44:40 - 00:45:21**

Q: What was your impression of that?

Jorgensen: I thought they were victims in the whole thing, just as we were, in a way. I mean-

Q: Not policy makers, but soldiers just like you.

Jorgensen: Oh yeah. Well, there were a couple of captains there. There weren't many survivors, but a couple were there. And I spoke to one, and said hello. I didn't get into a conversation, but they were doing their duty and it's regrettable that it ever happened, but it did. But I don't hate them.

Q: How do you feel about yesterday and the commemorative activities?

Jorgensen: I thought it is a fitting thing to do. I thought it was wonderful.

Q: And the Memorial?

**--00:45:21 - 00:46:05**

Jorgensen: And the Memorial. I think that-

Q: Is that what you envisioned for these guys that died here?

Jorgensen: No, no. Well, of course you have respect and memories and all that, but I'm very



pleased that we have erected a memorial so that it won't be forgotten.

Q: Saipan is much different place, but -

Jorgensen: Oh, hardly recognizable.

Q: But overall, coming back to Saipan, you are going to have new memories now with those fellows, new friends and such.

Jorgensen: Yeah, I'm amazed at the development here.

Q: Little different 50 years ago.

**--00:46:05 - 00:46:19**

Jorgensen: It is, truly.

Q: But then of course if we go back to our own communities, San Pedro and the places where you were, Brooklyn- they have changed too.

Jorgensen: They have changed too. That is true.

Q: And you've changed.

Jorgensen: Regrettably.

Q: Maybe not. You are pretty reflective about all of this.

**--00:46:20 - 00:46:55**

Jorgensen: Well, you know, all of us here are survivors. I don't mean just here, but at our age, we

are all survivors. In our peer group, we are survivors.

Q: How do you feel about your contribution and the Marines contribution? Was it all worth it?

Jorgensen: Oh sure, it had to be worth it and in the broad scope of things, if we just laid back and said, okay, take it all, they would have. The Germans and the Japanese.

Q: So it really wa-

Jorgensen: And the Japanese, you know, that was an entirely different government than they have today.

**--00:46:55 - 00:47:36**

Q: So when you look back at World War II and younger people, like myself, look back at World War II, what perspective should we have about it? What is the lesson you pass on to our generation?

Jorgensen: Well, I don't know about being that philosophical, but if you have a job to do, you have to do it. And you have to do it- whatever is indicated at the time. I can't tell you what is going to happen three years from now, but I can tell you what happened three years ago.

Q: Right. Well, it's been a wonderful opportunity to meet you and is there anything that we haven't covered that you wanted to talk about or share with us?

**--00:47:37 - 00:48:17**

Jorgensen: No, but it's interesting. All the people that I have met here and in our group and everything, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division stayed here- I left here and went to Guadalcanal to train with the 6<sup>th</sup> Division, which formed up and you speak to people in this group and they all went in different directions, all over the Pacific. Lot of people transferred here and there. A lot of

activity.

Q: Saipan was really the beginning of the end right here, this was the decisive battle that brought the war to Japan.

Jorgensen: Well, this was sort of the Japanese fleet headquarters, or at least for supplying.

Q: Perhaps this was the other Normandy.

**--00:48:18 - 00:49:41**

Jorgensen: Well, I'll make a comment on that. We were steaming into here, the convoy, holed down in the horizon in every direction, a lot of ships. This was a big operation. Three divisions in assault. Two in assault and one coming right in behind. That is a lot of people and a lot of ships. And the skipper came on the PA system, which the PA system ran continuously aboard ship and he said, I've got something to tell all of you, we have an announcement to make. We landed on Normandy that day, with an enormous force that dwarfed our force. And I looked around at all of these hundreds of ships and wondered, how in the-

Q: How could it dwarf this?

Jorgensen: No, not that, but how in the world could we get our act together the way we had to do this. Because two thirds of what I saw around me had been built since December 7<sup>th</sup> '41.

Q: Showed the tremendous industrial strength of this nation. Admiral Yamamoto remarked that he could run wild in the Pacific for six months, but after that, he guaranteed nothing because of the industrial might and spirit of the American people.

Jorgensen: That's true, they did run wild for the first year or two. They were exceedingly successful.

Q: But in the end-

Jorgensen: In the end, they were destroyed.

**--00:49:42 - 00:50:00**

Q: Well, I would like to thank you for this interview.

Jorgensen: Thank you very much, Dan.

Q: It's been an experience for me to listen to all these different things and, in particular, your story.

Jorgensen: Each person has a different angle.

Q: Everybody does.

Jorgensen: Different experience.

Q: Thank you very much.

Jorgensen: Thank you very much, Dan.

[END OF SESSION]