When Motor Torpedo Squadron #3 arrived in the Philippines in Sept. 1942 there were storm clouds on gathering over the Pacific Ocean. Storm clouds in the shape of aircraft carriers, battleships, troops and aircraft under the flag of the Imperial Japanese military as was between the United States and Japan seemed more likely with each passing day.

Little did Petty Officer 1st Class John Tuggle, a machinist mate on PT 33, realize that less than six months his squadron would be famous across the world, and the enlisted sailor would be an officer in the United States Army fighting a guerilla war.

The odyssey of John Tuggle began on May 11, 1936 when he enlisted in the United States Navy after working for the Civilian Conservation Corps for two years. "I was in great shape, but I was working for a bunch of hillbillies and wanted to move on," he said.

By the time he was sent to the Philippines Tuggle was a long way from his hometown in Lynchburg, Va. "The furthest away from home I'd ever been was Baltimore before heading for the Pacific," he said, his voice soft and carrying the hint of a Virginia Piedmont inflection.

"I guess fighting far from home is in my family though, my great granddaddy, he was from Lynchburg too, was fighting in Tennessee in the Civil War when he was captured by Union troops. He was marched barefoot from there to Ohio as a prisoner of war," he said, the spark of his family's history shinging in his eyes.

Leaving New York City in August 1941, the squadron headed to the Pacific on an oil tanker. "There we were with our six boats on the topside of the tanker and 10 to 15 million gallons of oil and high test gas in the hold. We had to sleep in our boats," he said smiling. "This tanker," he added, "was the first one in the U.S. Navy ever armed with torpedoes, we had them from our PT boats."

As the ship sailed through the Panama Canal the squadron commander, Lt. John Buckley, called his men together and informed them of their destination.

"We were sure we were gonna be in the war, but he called us together and told us we were going on a suicide mission. He said 'You may not come back, so anyone who wants to back out now go ahead.' No one backed out, not a single man," Tuggle said as he sat a little straighter in his chair, pride in his voice.

When they arrived on Luzon Tuggle said the crews got down to the business of patrolling and conducting exercises. With six boats in the squadron, the 31, 32, 33, 34, 35 and 41, the men were, according to Tuggle, "enjoying the island and living well. We were living in a hotel and had servants waiting on us, but that didn't last long," he said smiling.

The days of hotel living ended when the men of Motor Torpedo Squadron #3 were moved to Cavite Naval Base. Tuggle said tensions were running high as the threat of war deepened, but the sailors continued with their daily routines since there was no point in obsessing over what-ifs. "We knew it was gonna happen, we just didn't know when."

On a beautiful Sunday morning, Dec. 7, 1941 the Imperial Japanese Navy launched a daring attack on

the Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, inflicting serious damage on the U.S. Navy. He didn't know it at the time, but Tuggle's brother was stationed on a destroyer tender in Pearl Harbor during the attack.

The next day, Dec. 8, 1941, at approximately 12:30 p.m., the Japanese struck with 54 bombers attacking in two waves. As bombs rained steel and destruction on Cavite Naval Base, Tuggle said the sailors raced to their duty stations and snapped into action.

"As soon as the attack started we jumped in our boats and headed to the center of the bay. We were shooting at them with our .50 caliber machine guns. We thought we were ready for them, but they came in heavy. We weren't as prepared as we thought," he said, a hint of laughter mixed with sadness in his voice.

"The attacks lasted for two hours and by the end of the day it was obvious the Navy ships stationed in Manila Bay would have to be moved further south to Borneo. About 500 men were killed the first day, we had a submarine sunk and the Canaco Hospital, the largest hospital in the Far East, had been destroyed. That was a shame because it was a beautiful building too," he said. "You should have seen the beautiful floors in the hospital, they used to polish them with oil from the coconuts, and the floors were this thick," he said while he held his fingers about two inches apart. "Those Jap bombs just blew the hell out of that place ... it was a real shame ... what a shame," he said shaking his head.

Throughout December and on into March the squadron was used mainly for messenger service, but they were also attacking Japanese shipping when they had the chance. "The PT Boat hadn't really been proven to be a good combat craft, but we started sinking Jap ships and that attitude changed and we started seeing more action," he said.

The action was heavy at times, and Tuggle leaned forward to tell a story of on battle, the enjoyment of relating his tale shining in his eyes. One time this Jap ship shot at us and missed, but the impact was so close it picked the boat up and turned it like this," he said holding his hand flat and turning it 90 degrees. "We hit the water and just kept going. Oh lord was I thrown around that engine room at times," he said laughing.

During an attack on a Japanese freighter the 33 Boat ran aground and had to be burned.

"After that I volunteered to go on patrols on other boats until I was assigned as an engineer on PT 41, Lt. Buckley's boat," he said.

By mid-March the 31 Boat had also been lost and the remainder of the squadron was assigned a mission that would have them on front pages around the world. On March 11, 1942, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, his family and some staff arrived on the dock to be transported to the southern most Phillippines island of Mindanao.

"Everybody, his wife, family and Chinese housekeeper arrived and they all, including the general himself only had one bag, we didn't have a lot of room," he said.

They boarded PT 41, Lt. Buckley's boat, and Tuggle said he couldn't believe who his passenger was. "He was a big man, Gen. MacArthur was. He spent the nights below deck in the officer quarters and the days up on a wicker chair on the deck."

As he stepped aboard the boat MacArthur looked at Buckley and calmly said "You may cast off Buck when you are ready."

As the four PT Boats (numbers 32, 34, 35 and 41) left Corregidor tensions were high according to Tuggle. He said he Japanese navy controlled the waters around the islands, and the crews were never sure where or when it would appear on the 600-mile route to Mindanao.

"As we began closing on the Japanese blockading fleet, the suspense grew tense," MacArthur wrote in his book Reminiscences. "Suddenly, there they were, sinister outlines against the curiously peaceful formations of lazily drifting cloud. We waited, hardly breathing, for the first burst of shell that would summon us to identify ourselves.

"Ten seconds. Twenty. A full minute. No gun spoke; the PTs rode so low in the choppy seas that they had not spotted us," he wrote.

"Bulkeley changed at once to a course that brought us to the west and north of the enemy craft, and we slid by in the darkness. Again and again, this was to be repeated during the night, but our luck held," MacArthur remembered in his book.

Arriving at Cagayan City, Mindanao, on March 13 Tuggle said he crews were tired but alert, and were surprised when MacArthur presented Bulkeley and every man in the squadron with the Silver Star.

After several days of anxious waiting a plane arrived from to transport MacArthur, his family and staff to Australia. "The general said he'd send a plane back to pick us up, but that never happened. I don't know what happened, but there was a lot going on," Tuggle said, smiling.

After MacArthur left the island Tuggle said the squadron continued limited patrolling, but a lack of fuel kept the trips to a minimum.

Late in March of 1942 the 34, 35 and 41 Boats sped to the island of Negros and picked up President Quezon of the Philippines, his family and staff, transporting them back to Cagayan City. During the trip the engine failure on the 35 boat forced the crew to scuttle it, and they loaded on the 34 and 41 Boats.

With two boats remaining, the squadron attacked a Japanese cruiser on April 8, inflicting damage on it. The next day the Japanese attacked with aircraft and sank the PT 34, killing two sailors. The 41 Boat was the only remaining from the squadron and Tuggle said "We were out of torpedoes and had no place to get new ones."

Late in April the boat was put on a trailer and the sailors began transporting it to Lake Lanao over a mountainous trail with sharp turns and "U" bends in it.

"The boat never made it though, it got stuck in one of the bends and was blocking the road. We took everything usable off it and headed inland. The Japanese eventually pushed the boat over the cliff to open the road," Tuggle said. "It was kind of sad to have the last of the boats destroyed, it was then we knew we'd be there for the duration," he added.

When word reached the sailors, living in a village with other members of the Army, Army Air Force and Navy, that [Lt. Gen. Jonathan] Wainwright, commander of U.S. forces in the Philippines, ordered his forces to surrender, Tuggle said the decision to fight as guerillas or turn themselves over to the Japanese was an easy one.

"We told the officer from Wainwright's staff that came to give us the order to get the hell out of our camp, we were not surrendering," he said.

"It was an easy decision for me. We had given them a hard time with our boats and I didn't want to be captured by them after that. I even threw my dog tags away...I don't mind telling you I was scared," he

said.

Organizing themselves into guerilla forces, Tuggle said men from the different branches of service worked as one team, under an Army lieutenant colonel. We were all made part of the Army and I was commissioned a second lieutenant, MacArthur had given the colonel permission and authority to do this," Tuggle said.

"I was assigned to the 108th Division and we trained and organize the small Moro guerilla bands into one effective unit in the Province of Lanao. (Moros are a tribe in the Philippines.) "We were stationed in the Iligan-Dansalan area and were very effective in denying the Japanese the use of the roads," he said.

While operating as a guerilla Tuggle had what he called "one of the greatest moments" of his life, he met the woman who would be the love of his life, Esparanza. "She was running from the Japanese when I first met her, and I was on my way to join [the guerillas]. Then I ran into her again and she took a liking to me for some reason. We were married by a local priest Jan. 1, 1943," he said, his affection for Esparanza still reflected in his eyes. The two would be married for 56 years until she died in 1998. "We could be separated for long periods of time, and a few times she thought I'd been killed by the Japanese, you know how rumors can go," he said. "But it was nice to have my wife there. I think because I had a good wife that got me through the experience. Some people liked living in the jungle, some hated it...I never minded because I had her. She was the best," he said, his voice tinged with sadness and tenderness.

After making contact with San Francisco in late 1942, and convincing the radio operators they weren't Japanese soldiers feeding disinformation, the guerillas began receiving supplies via submarine from Australia. "We started getting radios and were able to follow the war," Tuggle said.

Moved to"Farm Project No. 2" near Domingog, Tuggle, two other officers, 20 guerillas and 250 laborers began a two-year project of attempting to construct a secret airfield. "We had one tractor and 200 wheelbarrows for heavy equipment," he said.

Finished in the summer of 1944, Tuggle said the airfield was not a thriving aerodrome. "We had one B-25 land," he laughed.

When the airfield was completed, Tuggle was moved to Labo Airfield in early 1945, and remained there until a plane arrived in July when a plane arrived to take him to Leyte. "About a month later a plane was sent and they picked up my wife and two daughters [the first was born in December 1943 and the second in April 1945]. About the same time they asked if I wanted to stay an officer in the Army or go back to being a chief in the Navy. I didn't know anything about being in the Army really, so I wen back to the Navy," he said.

It was after returning to the United States and traveling to Virginia on 90 days leave that he heard about the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. When the second atomic bomb was dropped and the war ended, Tuggle said he felt relieved the war had ended. "I think everyone was," he said.

In 1947 Tuggle ended his military service, and returned to Lynchburg, Va. where he opened his own automat laundry service. Later he would open a vending business, which he said "I sold 10 years later for a nice profit...I did ok."

Looking back at 1941 through 1945, Tuggle said he never felt hatred for the Japanese soldiers. "All's fair in love and war, and I did what I had to in order to keep them from winning," he said. "The first thing I think of is the rough times. I wouldn't trade the experience, but I wouldn't want to do it again," he said.

"All I did was what I had to, anyone would have done the same, and a lot of great men died doing it. It's nothing all that impressive," he said, sincerity in his voice.