

SOLDIERS, THREE-A TRIBUTE

A needed reprieve from the ‘dance of the puppets’-a quasi Kabuki theater-between our leader and those who seek to replace him. Tragedy if our faux-leader is reelected, but the replacement is better, questionably, as jury still out. Waiting? I find solace in paying tribute to three fine soldiers whose legacy is etched in ‘duty, honor and country’: Dick Cavazos, Joe Clemons and John Cleland.

Cavazos, this Texas Mexican boy, spawned in the aura of the famous King Ranch, a loving mother and father, and Sr. Cavazos who may have swum the Rio Grande became the chief Foreman. There were others who made the family proud.

I met Dick and Joe Clemons at Fort Benning, Georgia in June of 1951. We were equal, perhaps, because we were 2nd Lieutenants, Infantry in the Associate Company Officer class. Dick liked to tease the West Pointers (there were many) and challenged one of them to an Indian wrestle match beating the bigger man, a former tackle on a recent WP football team. Upon graduation Dick and I endured parachute training (Jump School), and found ourselves as Tactical Officers in OCS (Officer Candidate School)...then Korea and the war. We ended our tour as Rifle Company commanders in the 65th Infantry, 3rd Inf Division and Dick’s outstanding service there began his legendary rise as a combat officer.

Before going to Korea, Joe Clemons went through ‘jump school’ and parachute soldiering with the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg –assigned to the 7th Infantry Division. Triangle Hill, a major battle versus the Chinese, found Joe decorated as a platoon leader, and an ACO classmate, Ed Showalter earned the Medal of Honor. Famous battle on Pork Chop Hill found Joe’s rifle company retaking the hill and meeting with beleaguered WP classmate, Tom Harrold, who held on with a few at the company command post. Clemons became famous for his portrayal by Gregory Peck in the movie, Pork Chop Hill.

John R.D. Cleland made a parachute jump with the 187th during the Korean War as a Captain with service in his second war. In WWII he served in Colonel George Jones’ 503rd infantry in the retaking of Coregidor, Philippines.

Mid-fifties found us back at Benning for the Advanced Course, then for some, the Ranger course. Dick Cavazos was our Honor Grad.

Vietnam found Cavazos with the Big Red One (First Division) as a battalion Commander and received his second Distinguished Service Cross for his battle actions there; Clemons was highly decorated while commanding a Brigade in the Americal Division. Cleland served with distinction in the 173rd airborne, then formed Task Force South consisting of two American Airborne battalions and the 23rd ARVN Division. I was honored to be selected as Deputy.

Recently, Cleland's grandfather, General Hines, a former Army Chief of Staff was honored with likeness on a postage stamp.

Cavazos retired a 4 Star General and last word lives in San Antonio with family; Cleland, a two-star General lives in Florida. And, Joe Clemons a retired colonel in North Carolina. Perhaps the gravest injustice is to Clemons who should have made General as most attest. It is my pleasure to share exploits of these remarkable soldiers, now in their eighties. I walk in their shadow. I wrote them Christmas and no answer. I wait and wonder.

“God favors the bold and strong of heart.”