

### **TONE AND TINT – WAR IN DECEMBER**

*“Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose, tiny tots with their eyes all aglow may find it hard to sleep tonight...they know that Santa is on his way.....”*

*To a Christian, there is reason for the season –to celebrate the arrival of the Christ Child so long ago. To others it is a time of gifts, family moments, and peace. For the soldier Christmas is just another time of vigilance, combat, concern, and prayers. Those in Afghanistan perform a sacred duty, honor themselves and their country is proud of them. Those who have been to war remember.*

*December can be a tough time to fight as those of us recall the brutal winter in Europe, 1944, exacerbated by the tenacious German onslaught of armies in the Ardennes to be labeled the ‘Battle of the Bulge’. This old soldier remembers, too, the fight in the Chorwon Valley Korea, 1952 and his arrival in Tuy Hoa, Vietnam, December, 1967 as advisor/liaison to the 26<sup>th</sup> ROK Regiment part of the Korean Capital Division. To eat Kim-che, a Korean staple, was almost as demanding as the fight with the Chinese.*

*I owe my allegiance and memory to those intrepid leaders: Lieutenant Roy Barnett, a remarkable leader of men, Platoon Sergeant Paul Smith who fell at Havert, and Sergeant John Van Ooyen, dead on the Rhine, men of common fortitude and valor. Our cavalry in WWII. Too, honored to assume command of Item Company, 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry from fabled leader, John Wasson killed during the relief on the Boomerang, Korea, 1953. My examples of infantry leaders were personified by two Colonels: Harvey Short and John R.D. Cleland, one of the liaison group and the latter as Commander Task Force South(two US airborne battalions and the Vietnamese 23<sup>rd</sup> Division, Vietnam(1967-8).*

*I have been blessed by the indomitable examples of those whose leadership sustained me and kept me going at moments of stress, turmoil and hesitation. I am humbled by their association and confidence.*

*December was a defining moment for George Washington and his rag-tag 'army' of volunteers whose time of defeat seemed imminent despite a recent victory at Saratoga, when he moved into winter quarters at Valley Forge, after the crossing of the Delaware River on Christmas night, 1776. Blood in the snow, torn clothes, some shoeless, death smell of men and horses, a real time to try men's souls.*

*An early Christmas present was my inspiration for this article: Mount Vernon Love Story by Mary Higgins Clark, known mostly for her mystery novels, yet responsible for a re-issue of something she called, 'Aspire to the Heavens' 1969 and her recall of Washington as leader and father of his country and his love story with his wife.*

*Like the initiation of Southern women to honor both Union and Confederate fallen in the Civil War—a forerunner of Memorial Day— an earlier event (1853) when Louisa Dalton Bird Cunningham saw Washington's once majestic mansion in a state of decay and disrepair and through her family was born Mount Vernon Ladies Association and 150 years of restoration and support.*

*Ms Clark wrote to dispel the false innuendoes about George Washington and found him a man of honor, character, a true leader in time of crisis. "he was a giant of man in every way, at 6 foot 3, the best dancer in the colony of Virginia and had the acclaim of Indians for his horsemanship." He loved his wife dearly and called her Patsy.*

*Let me take you back when I was young, when we were young, and sought answers to life and posterity. Like Stephen Crane's young man I had pangs of hesitation, and early great trepidation of life and limb. In our first brush with the enemy we both fell to the ground and clutched it as though it were our mother's breast. Failure appeared in ghost-like aura. His baptism was a Civil War field and mine was Normandy.*

