

## What Was Said?

*By Hap Hansen*

Many of us hear what has been said about us or our friends. Unfortunately, few of us really listen to what has been said about us. We jump to conclusions about what we have heard, but if we had taken the time to really listen with our ears to what had been said, we very likely would have reached a better conclusion. Most of us hear well. Few of us listen well. Does that mean we have a problem with our ears? Probably the best example of someone who both heard and listened, came from a comment by Ralph Waldo Emerson about some of his contemporaries. At the end of a dinner, he said, "The louder they talked of their honor, the faster we counted our spoons!" He knew how to hear and he knew how to listen.

Another good example of someone who heard, but did not listen, comes from the military. It seems a new soldier was on prison guard duty for the first time. The Private was instructed that if prisoners were running away in an escape attempt, he should shout, "Halt!" three times, and if they didn't stop, he was to fire a burst over their heads. Sure enough, on his first night on guard duty, five prisoners broke out and were running away. Following precisely the instructions he heard from the Sergeant in charge, the guard shouted, "Halt three times!" He then promptly emptied his carbine rifle in a burst over their heads. The prisoners fell to the ground and immediately surrendered! The Private heard the instructions, but didn't listen properly with his ears. Fortunately, his instructions were to fire the gunshots over their heads and not *at* their heads!

Hearing is pretty easy for most of us. Listening isn't. In order to truly listen, we must not only hear the words being spoken with our ears, but we must listen to the emotion behind the words. We should also listen for the voice's inflection. We must also be conscious of the body language which, though silent, may be screaming loud and clear at our senses.

In this age of instant communication, with the aid of electronics, our ears can hear the sounds of millions of people. Telephones, E-mail, television, radio and other communications make it much easier to hear what others have to say. But unless we see them face to face and use our ears properly, we may miss the underlying ideas they are trying to impart. We may only be hearing the words and ignoring the meaning. Listen carefully, use your ears, so that when someone talks loudly of their honor, we will know whether or not to count our spoons!