

## A Puzzling Situation

*By Mike Harris*

Not many of us sitting at this table came from relative wealth. Most of our backgrounds are modest, make do. In the two years since I started to participate we have all revealed ourselves in biographical snippets. I have tried hard to keep things non-biographical, but all of our tomorrows are affected by our yesterdays. I have been told without malice that I am more than a little bit rough around the edges. I do not show very much sympathy for some peoples failings. When I look into a mirror, wrongly or not I am quite happy with the man that looks back at me. The world in which I lived these many years has not been especially rewarding. I am the last man standing of the peers of my youth. Incidentally those peers ran the gamut of wealth, success, and education, and without bragging, I was the envy of almost all. My secret was and is "be happy." I learned early on that chasing anything to excess led to failure, be it money, education, or whatever.

So to get back to a puzzling situation. During World War Two, I along with millions when accosted by Uncle Sam with "I WANT YOU," we responded, "You called. WE ARE HERE!!!" Inducted at Fort Dix in New Jersey three days later I found myself in Miami Beach, Florida, summer temperatures in the upper 90's, humidity – you could squeeze water out of the air, and recruits marching up and down the hot streets and fainting in the ranks. One day, my fourth in the army, I decided this was crazy. I could see no benefit for me or the army in marching on hot streets in Miami Florida in July. Here, I will not tell you how, only that I was not going to be one of those that passed out while marching, I went A.W.O.L. But remember what I said earlier, "All our tomorrows are affected by our yesterdays."

On the streets of New York City "STREET SMARTS" dictated the rules of survival. No matter what rules of society one bends or breaks, the puzzling situation was "DO NOT GET CAUGHT!"

I spent three and a half years in the service. I am not saying this proudly but, it is true, circumstances demand on many occasions independent actions. I was a sergeant. I am proud to say my platoon always (always!) fared just about better than any other squad in our outfit. We ate better, slept dryer, and were the platoon to beat. Yes I am rough but after two and a half years in the European Theater I had not lost a man. We chased Rommel out of North Africa and in so doing saved Montgomery's back side. We drove the enemy out of Sicily, and were in the forefront at Casino and we did what had to be done and survived. A little rough around the edges?

My platoon set the standard for whatever was asked. "We Delivered!" We bent and broke the rules, as they did not fit exactly to a given situation.

I remember towards the final phase when our P-38's were being replaced by P.51's because some jackass in Washington made a stupid decision. We began having casualties among our pilots. The twin boom, twin engine P-38's ALWAYS CAME HOME! Not so the sleek looking, single engine P-51 Mustang. The proven work horse replaced by a pretty sport car not up to the job!

Yes it was puzzling how decisions were being made by people who were not conversant with reality. However we did win the war. A lot of us came home, many succeeded in picking up our lives, but in our arrogance we proceeded to make the same mistakes that other great powers throughout history made. We started telling the world how they should live. It does not work! Mind your own business, America!!!