

Mblem

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Words From Nick

RVC Column

Nick Sanford

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This month I will be talking about the results of the December American Mensa Committee (AMC) meeting.

A big issue that was put to rest was how to fill a vacant RVC position. The prior method was for the AMC to appoint the new person, but that means the region with the greatest interest gets no vote. A motion was passed for vacant positions to be filled by a vote of the Local Secretaries of the affected region. This isn't a perfect solution, but it is cost effective, fast, and leaves the decision in the hands of those that are concerned.

After a long debate I voted for the alcohol motion. As originally written it did not eliminate the liability borne by American Mensa as a whole, and it placed heavy liability on the local group and members. Eventually the motion was trimmed down to recognizing that alcohol can and will be served, asked that members help those that are intoxicated, and suggested serving non alcoholic drinks and some form of food in addition to alcohol. As is I think the motion is harmless.

I voted against adopting the vision statement and goals, but lost by a lot. I think having these is great, but they do not belong in the Actions Still In Effect (ASIEs), and in my entire history of watching the AMC I have never seen a strong indication of actively pursuing a strategic plan. John Recht is leading the Planning Committee and I sincerely hope that his vision is accomplished. I don't think that it will, but I will fully back him in trying. In a nutshell the goals are to increase testing, embrace the internet, restructure the AMC, decrease the dependence on dues income, encourage member participation in the national organization, and increase diversity. I wish the best of luck to you John.

The golden nugget of the meeting was the passing of the "avenues of redress" motion. This is a list of suggested actions to take in escalating order in the event that a member has a complaint or problem with another party. It is possible to enter at any point along the list and to move up or down as necessary. This is a sorely needed document and one which I believe would have prevented any number of members from not renewing. I have been promised that it will be available on www.us.mensa.org with minimal searching.

In February I will be traveling to the finance committee meeting. The next regularly scheduled AMC meeting is the last weekend in March.

**MEditor Column
Shiangtai Tuan**

If you have not noticed yet, we are having less and less activities because people are busier and busier. We just lost another volunteer who hosted Let's Discuss.

I waited for two month to see if anyone would come out coordinate Mblem printing and mailing. Since no one did so far, I had to apply for a Mensa Account at Office Depot myself so I can print Mblem there. I have it printed and send to my house so I can do the labeling and then send it to the Post Office. If any one would not mind spend two or three hours once a month, please step forward.

The System Works (or, How to Work the System) David Skaar

I've been thinking about loopholes lately, for reasons I'll get into later. Exploitation of loopholes seems to be built into human nature, it's kind of a practical intelligence test, like I previously wrote about. The concept certainly comes naturally to children, who are experts in following the letter of the law, but no more. I know someone whose mother forbade him from watching TV, then caught him sitting in front of the TV playing video games, since that isn't watching TV (by his logic). His mother did acknowledge that he had a point, so she rather than killing him then and there, she revised the ban to all forms of entertainment that are electronic in nature, and promised to kill him if he broke the new ban. Revising the rules to get rid of loopholes is fine for autocrats, but when there's legalities involved in revising the rules, a tremendous amount of abuse is possible before the rule givers get caught up.

One everyday area that is ripe for manipulation is grocery store coupons. Doubling and tripling of manufacturer's coupons to attract customers is a pretty common ploy for grocery stores. The assumption of the store is that most people don't use coupons anyway, the people who do use coupons will only have a few that get multiplied, and they will spend more money on other items to make up for the discount anyway. However, with sufficient effort and research, the store can really be taken advantage of, and practically wind up paying the customer for taking the food away. Few enough people do this that the stores don't care, but be assured, if too many people start doing this, the coupon rules would change rather quickly.

Another example that I'm very familiar with are contests with "no purchase necessary to enter". A game that requires a fee to enter is technically gambling, and with the exception of non-profit raffles, state governments have ruled that only they have the right to make a buck on this kind of gambling (how convenient for them). That's why on any ad for a product tie-in contest, the no-purchase disclaimer must be made, and the option for getting a free game piece must be given. This usually involves mailing off a self-addressed stamped envelope. If the expected payout exceeds the price of stamps and envelopes, then its worth sending in a stack of requests.

For several years, Best Buy was involved in the annual Monopoly game run by McDonalds. Certain items at McDonalds carried Best Buy coupons that were worth at least \$1. Several years, there were also \$3 and \$5 coupons mixed in, raising the expected return per request, with a return of \$1.67 one year. Subtracting the cost of postage and envelopes, and assuming that my time is not worth very much (for addressing all those envelopes) and that I don't get glue poisoning, this gives me a huge discount at Best Buy. Now for the big loophole. The wise lawmakers of the great state of Vermont decreed that requiring return postage was the same as requiring an entry fee (gambling!), so, if a company wants to run their contest in Vermont, they must pay the return postage for Vermont residents, reducing the entry fee to one stamp. This loophole is, of course, tremendously abused. The Vermont law also states that non-residents of Vermont attempting to use Vermont addresses (usually a friend or a post office box) for this purpose are committing a crime. This doesn't stop anyone. Every year that Best Buy was involved in the Monopoly game, the abuse got worse, and every year, the rules were changed in response to the previous year's abuses. Best Buy finally quit the game, probably out of frustration. Their original assumption was probably that only a small percentage of the coupons would be used, since most people buying fries at McDonalds would just throw out the \$1 coupon, rather than take the effort of getting to a store to use it. But, when people like me request hundreds (or thousands) of pieces each, that's millions of dollars they weren't planning on giving up. Also, the employees didn't seem to be very happy counting 300 coupons at a time when I brought them in (repeatedly).

The preceding is actually a rather lengthy digression from the thought that actually got me onto loopholes in the first place. At a recent Mensa games night, the topic of presidential nominees came up, and I mentioned the events from Tom Clancy's book Debt of Honor, in which Jack Ryan is the President's choice to replace the Vice President who was forced to resign. Jack was meant to be a placeholder for just a few months, as the next election was coming up, and a new Vice President would be on the ticket. However, it was implied that by being Vice President, Jack would be ineligible for any other presidentially appointed Executive branch position, ever again, thereby getting him out of government service, as pay-back for his years of misery. Now, I know that there are other government options available for ex-Presidents or Vice Presidents. John Quincy Adams and Andrew Johnson were both elected to congress after being president, and William Howard Taft served as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court after his time as President (and was much prouder of being Chief Justice than he was of being President). In my short researches, I could not find any rule that would restrict government service options for former Presidents or Vice Presidents, so I can not verify the Clancy scenario here.

Another possibility that I raised in this games night discussion was that of a former President running for Vice President, as this had been semi-facetiously suggested for both Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, after each had been elected to two terms, and was therefore ineligible to run for re-election as president, according to the 22nd amendment. However, going further back, the 12th amendment clearly states that no person constitutionally ineligible to be President is eligible to be Vice President. At the time, this referred to the age, citizenship, and residency requirements, but is phrased in such a way to be inclusive to subsequent rules (like the 22nd).

(Continued to next page)

(Conti. From Page 2)

It was in the course of my constitutional readings that I discovered a number of loopholes, and other restrictions to high offices. First of all, the rules for presidential succession are not extensively established in the constitution. In the original text, Article II section 1 states that should the President not be able to do the job anymore, "the Same shall devolve upon the Vice President". What this could mean was (and is) debatable, i.e. does the Veep become President in fact, or just *act* as president while the office remained vacant? When John Tyler became president after William Harrison died, that set the precedent, but didn't answer the question. It wasn't until the 25th amendment was adopted in 1967 that things were clarified. The 25th states that the VP becomes President in fact, and also establishes the method for replacing a Vice President. Up to this point, when a President had died, the VP became President, but the office of Vice President remained vacant until the next election (likewise, if the office of Vice President was vacated, it too stayed empty). Fortunately, there were no incidents in which both offices became empty, requiring reaching further down the chain.

The 25th amendment got a workout not long after its adoption. First, in 1973, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned and congressman Gerald Ford was confirmed as the new Vice President, according to the 25th amendment, becoming the first ever replacement VP in American history. Then, in 1974, President Richard Nixon resigned, VP Ford became President, according to the 25th amendment, and Nelson Rockefeller was confirmed as the new VP, becoming the second ever replacement VP in American history.

I also noticed a few other things in my researches. As I said, beyond the office of the President passing to the Vice President, there are no constitutional provisions for replacements beyond that. The chain of succession that passes through the Speaker of the House, president pro tem of the Senate, and the Cabinet members is established by law, and has been changed a number of times. Also, while the VP is required to meet the eligibility requirements for President, none of the other people in the chain need to be. A number of cabinet members have not been native born U.S. citizens, which would mean that were succession to reach them, they would be passed over until an eligible person were reached. An implication of this applies to the tradition that when the entire cabinet is assembled for the state of the union address, or other such occasion, one cabinet member is kept away in reserve, in case disaster were to strike and wipe out the rest. Therefore, a non-native born citizen in the cabinet would never be the one kept in reserve, since they'd be of no use were all the others to die. I'm sure that would make them feel like a valued member of the government.

Next point, the 12th amendment changed how electors vote for President. Previously, electors would cast one vote, and the winner would be President, and the runner-up would be VP. According to the 12th, now electors cast one vote for President, and one vote for Vice-President. Now, the practical application of this is the running-mate ticket system, in which the two candidates run together. However, they don't have to. A person could run for President alone, and leave it to the electors to vote for whomever they felt like for VP (also vice versa, a person could run for VP alone). The amendment also states that at least one of these two candidates must reside in a different state than the elector. This fits in with the tradition of running-mates being from different states, but they don't have to be. If they were, it would just mean that the electors from their state could only vote for one of them, and would have to pick someone else for their other vote. Both scenarios would seem pretty odd to standard tradition, but are legitimate (as far as I can tell).

Finally, the strangest option I've come up with. The 22nd amendment is the term limit amendment, stating that no person may be elected President more than twice. It also states that no person who has served more than two years of someone else's term (i.e. a Veep who takes over the job) can be elected more than once. Here's the loophole I see. Get yourself elected Vice President, and then the President dies at the beginning of the term. You serve >2 years of the term, and can then only be elected President once. But, rather than running for President, you run for Vice-President again, get the new President to die, and repeat. Never having been elected President, you are, according to the terms of the 12th amendment, still eligible to be President, and therefore, according to amendment 12, still eligible to be VP. There is no apparent limit to the number of time a person can be elected Vice President, as long as they are never elected President. So there is no limit to the number of times this repeating VP can assume the Presidency. I think that after a couple repetitions of this scenario, you would become a little too scary for any Presidential candidate to want to associate with you, but it's still legitimate.

I think I've learned more about the constitution and its applications from researching this pointless article than I did from the honors social studies class I took in high school. Proving once again, that if you genuinely want to teach someone to understand a system, encourage them to learn how to manipulate it.

From Disaster to National Holiday Ed Williams

On its maiden voyage in April, 1912, the Titanic was going first to New York, and later, in early May, to VeraCruz, Mexico. It's cargo included hundreds of cases of mayonnaise, which at that time, was made primarily in England.

Part of the shipment was to be dropped off in N.Y., but most was to go to Mexico, where the people loved mayo more than tabasco.. Sadly, as we all know, the ship and its cargo sank. When the news finally reached Mexico, the people declared a national day of mourning which is still observed on the anniversary of the day the news arrived (May 5). It is known as "Sinko de Mayo".

Resolution

David Skaar

It is a new year, (or nearly so, as I write this), and time for resolutions and promises to change for the better. Since my own personal resolutions won't have that great an impact (unless I manage to get elected president), I am making resolutions for the rest of the world, resolutions it can really use. I don't normally write just for the purpose of complaining, but this is a special occasion, and I'll try not to do it again (soon).

<Gripe on>

Quotation marks need to be taken out of the hands of the general population, and should only be used by certified professionals. I've seen references to food that is "good" and "fresh", products that are "new", and I received a bill asking me to pay "the money I owe". I will "gladly" pay them the "money". I'll put a "valid check" "in the mail" "right away", and if it doesn't arrive, I'm "very sorry".

I would also like to make it through this election year without hearing the terms "red state" and "blue state" incessantly used as if they mean something. Apparently since our society has become "color blind", the compulsive categorizers needed a new way to lump a group of people together based on superficial characteristics, and assign a set of beliefs and behaviors to all members of this new class. I think that any news-person who uses these terms should have to become Amish. Normal people who use either term (not in jest) should be forced to copy a relief map of North and South America – without any political boundaries. Any person who puts a "red state/blue state" bumper sticker on their car will be sentenced to either working on an Idaho sugar beet farm, or the San Francisco public school system, depending on which color the sticker made fun of. Also, the close relatives of the offender will have to be evaluated for sharing genetic propensities for this sort of foolishness. Now, I know that this may be viewed as infringement of freedom of speech, but I put "red state/blue state" in the same category as incitement to riot and yelling "fire" in a

crowded theater.

Next, the game show Jeopardy! needs harder questions and smarter contestants. Watching dumb people miss easy questions makes for poor entertainment and high blood pressure.

Also, television needs more, and better game shows. Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? was not a particularly entertaining show (by my standards, the only ones that matter), as it had so few questions, and was so slow moving, substituting pointless banter for actual game play. There are enough talk shows on TV, people can watch those if they want angst and human drama; viewers of game shows want to see a game. Deal or No Deal is even worse. The problem in applied statistics is interesting (the first time or two), but again, the human drama does little to make up for what is essentially drawing numbers out of a hat (very slowly). If the television czars don't want to put good trivia games on, I will also accept physical game shows (along the line of Beat the Clock), as long as the physical challenges are challenging, frequent, and most important – do not require pointless conversation (right after writing this, I started seeing ads for a new American Gladiators show, which was a dumb show, but not dull). I've been seeing ads for new game shows that each try to be more over the top than the last, but I don't hold much hope for them, since they seem to be geared towards the sensational instead of good game play.

Gradually moving topics towards the more serious issues, that aggravate me more, I come to newspaper comic strips. In my newspaper of choice (the Raleigh News and Observer), there are eight comic strips that are no longer being done by the original artists. In some cases, the creator is dead and has been replaced (at least twice, in one case), in others, the creator is working with a collaborator (often a son), and in one case, the creator quit and handed the strip over to a replacement. Peanuts is in terminal reruns, and one strip that has been "retired" by the creator, but, for the sake of money, continued as a mixture of both new and 20+ year old comics (hopefully, she only gets paid for the new material).

It strikes me as odd that, as difficult as it is for a new comic strip to become syndicated and picked up by the papers, a different artist can take over an old and pathetically tired strip, and automatically achieve syndication success. It bothers me that the new artists don't have to do any kind of tryout, probably because the strip had run out of good material so long ago that any lame joke fits right in with the previous material. I therefore decree that comic strips be retired with their creator. If the creator hand picks a successor that he/she believes has the right stuff to keep the strip going, the successor should be good enough to create their own strip. With a new setting, they may be able to come up with material that isn't just interchangeable with all the other dead creator strips. In addition, existing strips should have to be re-evaluated every five years or so. In my own opinion, that of other people I've discussed this with, and the online community (a great source of rational and well-reasoned opinions), the newest strips are the funniest, since they aren't out of jokes yet. However, after about five years, the original material specific to the characters and setting seems to run out, and as I already said, generic jokes that could go anywhere take over. An artist should get to keep a strip going as long as it's good, but when the time comes, they need to be put out of our misery.

Finally, one of my biggest gripes. There are certain businesses that state governments need to get out of. I see no good reason for the state to be operating lotteries and liquor stores. If the justification is that private entities should not be supplying people's vices, because the government can handle it more responsibly, we all know that's ridiculous. (That's a straw man for those who are keeping score - I gave an idiotic argument to my opposition, and then called them idiots for using it.) Whether it's a government or private operation, the same crooks are going to wind up in charge, and at least if it's privately run, when the operation constantly loses money, or the administrators skim money and get arrested, it doesn't land on the government for a once.

(Conti to P. 5, Resolution)

Elections for Executive Committee Coming Up

Ed Williams

The one-year-plus-one-year terms of the members of the MENC Executive Committee are coming to an end. The ballot will appear in the March MBLEM. The following people have agreed to stand for election to the new ExComm:- (alphabetical order) Fran Greenstein, Ann Lewis, Kim Oliver, Dan Singer, David Skaar, Shiangtai Tuan, and Ed Williams. A write-in line will be included on the ballot.

Since Ed Williams is standing for the ExComm, he can no longer be the Elections Chair. Nancy Lee has agreed to take on this duty.

(Editor's note, Suggestion for write-in candidates: Start a discussion on the discussion e-mail list and encourage supporters to write in same name. Since the vote count has been low you have a good chance to be elected this way.)

(Conti. From P. 4, Resolution)

Regarding lotteries, the state claims the moral authority for running it by giving any leftover money to the public schools. I don't buy this, since the schools in states that have had lotteries for many years don't seem to be doing significantly better than those in states without lotteries. When North Carolina started its lottery, projections for ticket sales painted a rosy future, but then came up short (very short). Turn out that the citizens either have better self control, less throwaway cash, a better grasp of statistics, or less concern for the education of the children than previously thought.

Once upon a time, lotteries were neighborhood affairs, operated by friendly locals that everybody knew, legitimate businessmen who were all members of a fraternal association made up of men of shared Mediterranean ancestry. Back then, these "lotteries" had the honest name of "numbers games". If the lotteries are given back to the private businesses, and taxes on the earnings given to the schools, the schools will probably get more money than they do from the current system. Another bonus is, that when people start getting arrested for skimming money, or other such shenanigans, no one in the state capitol is going to fall all over themselves trying to get clear of the fallout when the governor's buddy goes to prison.

But that's a small annoyance to me, since I don't buy lottery tickets. My big complaint is state run liquor stores. As you may know, here in North Carolina, beer and wine may be sold in normal stores, but liquor can only be sold in state owned stores. (Also, until recently, beer had to be under 6% alcohol, for old

reasons that were questionable in the 1930s, and completely irrelevant since the advent of \$2 a jug of fortified wine.) Again, what right does the state have to give itself a monopoly on liquor sales? Certainly not by outstanding skills in business, customer service, or honest dealing. The selection for all stores across the state is the same, decided once a year by government flacks at a convention where they are bribed by liquor distributing companies. Any product that is the slightest bit unusual just isn't stocked. The employees don't really care about sales, since the store isn't going out of business, not matter how bad business is. Unfortunately, the NC liquor stores actually got straightened out enough to turn a profit, which is a dangerous precedent. Now the state may decide that anything that's unhealthy (and profitable) is their business. Sugar, carbs, caffeine, and red meat may be next, and remember, if some people who haven't cooked their own food in 30 years decide that people don't need cheddarwurst, there won't be any cheddarwurst.

But, no matter how bad I thought North Carolina was, I learned it's got nothing on Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, only specialty beer stores can sell beer, and they have to sell it by the case. Both wine and liquor can only be sold in specialty state run stores, and as best I could find determine, for the greater Pittsburgh area, there is exactly (wait for it) ONE of these stores. Business and government have been scrambling for years to try to reverse the population loss in Pennsylvania, and revitalize the cities. Well, I think I've cracked the mystery that has stumped the experts. If you want people to live in Philadelphia, and won't let them buy a sixpack at the

grocery store, that gives people even more time to pay attention to Philadelphia.

Now that I've gotten myself all worked up over unfair government restriction of free enterprise, I'm tempted to demand resolutions regarding other people's attempts to drive me crazy, namely, through bad driving. However, I will cut it short, to avoid excessive meanness and swearing. So, in short, for all the bad drivers out there (none of whom are reading this now, I'm sure, so feel free to pass this on to any bad drivers you may encounter), a few pieces of advice. Turn signals – use them, mirrors – use them, and if your neck turns so you can look to the sides and behind when changing lanes – use it. Stepping on the brake is not the solution to every situation encountered, sometimes speeding up is the better move. If you aren't passing, and you can move to the right, do so. If you see a warning that your lane disappears, get out of that lane at the earliest opportunity, rather than just before you hit the barricades. If you aren't passing, and you can move to the right, do so. If people are merging onto the highway, and you can move to the left, do so. If you're in a lane that goes away, moving over, pulling alongside the car that was in front of you, and staying there, is not cool.

Finally, if you want to drive a car that is deliberately made for high acceleration and high speed, you should either have to pass an I.Q. test and a driving test that actually measures reflexes and driving skill, or post a \$500,000 cash bond to cover the trouble you will cause.

End of gripe, Happy New Year! (according to one of many arbitrary calendar systems)

Chinese New Year's Party

LG Column

Shiangtai Tuan

This year, Shiangtai's twenty sixth Annual Chinese New Year's Celebration in Durham is to be held on Sat-

urday, February 23, 2008. He invites his friends, including Members of MENC to celebrate with him. It is to be a potluck dinner plus party. There are to be non-M friends. Please do not ask guests if they are Mensans. RSVP, BYOB. Family and friends welcome. Please check directions online or call.

Terrorists in Argentina

Ed Williams

In my article on "My Biases" in the September MBLEM, I laid out in general the situation regarding the Marxist terrorist guerrilla gangs in Argentina when I was stationed at the US Embassy in Buenos Aires, 1970-1975. Although Marxist terrorism began earlier, it didn't get really bad until Peron was permitted to return from exile in Spain in 1973. His return set off a war between the two breeds of socialists - the Soviet, Maoist, Castro type and the Fascist, Nazi type (remember, "Nazi" is short for "Nazional Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei" - National Socialist German Workers Party). After all, Peron had gotten his education as a dictator in Mussolini's Italy. Peron was elected President (again) in 1973, but died in 1974, leaving the presidency to his wife, Isabel. The attacks by the Marxist guerrillas, and the counter-attacks by the government increased, and became almost a daily thing, with one small (or large) incident after another.

The terrorists were attacking not only government agencies and institutions but also individuals and installations (such as embassies and consulates) of foreign governments who were presumed to be supporting the government - even if only by trade and commerce. Foreign businessmen, as well as diplomats, were also attacked and sometimes kidnaped for ransom or killed. Most businessmen moved across the Rio de la Plata to Montevideo. Diplomats had to stay.

At that time, some of us at the US Embassy felt a strong need to carry a pistol in our daily comings and goings. The FBI guy at the Embassy (Legal Attache) felt that civilians were not competent to carry guns. At a Country Team meeting on the subject with the Ambassador, I challenged John, the LegAtt, to come with me to the National Shooting Club for a pistol match. (I used to be a member of the Yale Pistol Team.) He did not take up the challenge, but Ambassador Lodge decided that we could carry pistols, and he obtained the formal permission for this from the Argentine government. My (then) wife and I lived in an apartment which occupied the entire 5th floor of an apartment building (parking in a bottom-floor enclosed garage) in one of the northern suburbs of Buenos Aires. She often worked at the Embassy as a secretary, so we would drive together. When we came home in the afternoon, we had a procedure to minimize risk. I would drive up to the garage door and get out with my pistol ready, while she slid over into the drivers seat, I opened the door, keeping a sharp eye open all around, she would drive in, I would close the door, and we would get in the elevator. Very cautious. We knew people who had been kidnaped on arriving home. I'll share with you one interesting incident.

We lived half a block down the street from my chief Assistant Commercial Attache, Peter. One weekend day, Peter telephoned me and asked me to go out on my terrace and look at the park in front of his building. I did so, and saw 3 or 4 young men who looked like university students sitting quietly on a bench in the park across from Peter's building, and seemed to be looking upward at his apartment. Then he came out on his terrace, and they suddenly began chatting and laughing with each other. When he went back inside, they quieted down and once again seemed to be observing. This seemed quite suspicious, and I suggested to Peter that we go and try to get a better look at them. He walked down to my building, and I loaned him a pistol. We then crossed over to the park and went up to where the men had been sitting, but they were gone. We walked around the park but didn't see any of them. The Embassy staff had been advised to vary our times and routes for getting to the office, so Peter and I would agree on who would get there first on which days. Every morning, I would go out on our terrace and look around the area to try to spot anything suspicious. One morning, I saw a man standing on the street corner directly below the terrace, reading a magazine, looking frequently towards the street. That seemed odd. Then suddenly he folded the magazine under his arm and started walking across the street. I saw Peter walking down the street towards the bus stops on the main cross street. The man fell in about 10 yards behind Peter. I grabbed an M-1 carbine which I kept in a closet beside the terrace door, and aimed it at the man's lower spine. I expected that a car would pull up beside Peter, and the man would try to force him inside - in which case the man would have been a paraplegic, because at that distance (roughly 100 yards) I would not have missed. But that didn't happen. Peter got to the corner, and instead of waiting for the 55 bus, he hailed a cab. The man got to the corner and began waving for a cab, but didn't get one. So he turned around and walked back up the street, letting me get a good long look at his face with my binoculars. I was able to identify him as a Montonero from a mug book. The CIA guys told us that their technique was to observe a target for about 3 weeks, getting a good idea of his habits and his routes, and that this was probably towards the middle of their surveillance of Peter. I sent him off on a week's leave, to break up their targeting. I was even more careful after that, knowing they would be looking for another target. So far as I know, I was never specifically targeted, and we couldn't figure out why they chose Peter. I don't recall who the terrorist was. His name meant nothing to me. But, who knows, if I had had to shoot him, I might have been shooting the guy who became President of Argentina - Nestor Kirchner, a former Montonero - whose term just ended in December, and whose wife "the Argentine Hillary", is now President.

I said before, and I'll say again - living with the Marxist terrorists in Argentina in the 1970's was not fun, but it was nowhere near the danger our diplomats face nowadays in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and several other places.

Words From Nick

RVC Column

Nick Sanford

As I write this I am gearing up for the December AMC meeting. I realize it's not the most exciting part of my articles, but it is important to bring these issues to you.

How do you replace an RVC that has stepped down? In the past the Executive Committee would make an appointment and at the next AMC meeting there would be a vote to accept the decision. The problem is that the people who are actually affected have no say in the matter. They don't even have a representative. This is not inline with the applicable laws. The obvious solution is to hold a regional election, but that would cost about \$15,000 and take a lot of time. The motion on the agenda is to allow the Local Secretaries to vote on the position. There have been several other options brought up and as of right now I do not yet know how I will vote.

There is another motion to limit the liability of the national organization against lawsuits caused by the serving of alcohol at official functions. The problem that I have with it is that it requires the other members to take certain actions if a member is intoxicated. My question is if the member did his required duty and got the person a cab, what if the cab crashes and injures the member? What if the member damages the cab? Not only does this motion not limit the liability of the national organization it forces that liability onto the local groups and members. I'm going with a nay on this one.

The AMC is probably going to adopt a vision statement and some goals. I don't like the statement or goals. They aren't clear enough nor do they address the important issues. However, I think the greater issue on hand is that they aren't relevant to anything. The AMC will act as it deems necessary regardless of if it is inline with an official vision statement or goal. This will only add to the length of the Actions Still in Effect (ASIE's).

Now for the diamond in the rough. Sometimes a member has a problem with something or someone. More often than you would think these problems escalate well beyond a level that is appropriate. The plan is to approve a list of escalating "avenues of redress" for a member to follow. The idea is solid, but it needs to be modified to allow a more realistic flow between the different options. This guide will allow a member to find a solution with much less frustration and well before the issue escalates further than is necessary. I expect that this will encourage issues to be addressed quicker. This will not only help keep the affected member active, but will prevent frustration among other members of the group.

Obviously next month will be the debriefing from the meeting. We need an RG sometime in the October – January time frame. Any takers?

(Editor's note: This is the RVC column for 2007 December.)