

## DÉTENTE

By Dennis Knight

One of the words that became popular over the last part of twentieth century was détente, which described the different periods of the cold war when tensions between the super powers would be easier. It did not mean the war was over or that peace had been won, but détente is a comforting, positive word that makes the whole world happier, at least for the moment, and it's one I am happy to associate myself with.

I am proud to have served my country well for my three years in the Army, but frankly, I wasn't much of a soldier. I did train and qualify as a Sharpshooter with an M-1 rifle and in the doing received a fine blue medal, but being a Sharpshooter isn't saying much because that is the minimum to stay in the Army, and it is far from being an expert. Every year I was tested again and always met the minimum, barely.

The other standard I had to meet was to be able to run a mile in what I remember was eight agonizing minutes. I did that every twelve months too, but I guarantee I took the corners as tightly as I could, hoped the sergeant had a generous stopwatch, lunged across the finish line and crawled back to the barracks.

In other words, I was suited to the role my fearless leaders entrusted me, that of being a clerk typist. And it wasn't to be in the Infantry, either, but in what in the early sixties was probably the least military group of all, Army Aviation.

To give you the lay of the land, the great Army Air Corps that helped defeat the axis in World War II had become the proud and mighty United States Air Force. That wasn't us. We flew the little bird dog airplanes and helicopters, staying close to the troops on the battle lines, affording them reconnaissance and swift movement.

The Vietnam War, which rose up angrily just as I was ending my military service, proved the importance of that close air support and I will always be proud of the contributions of my friends in Army Aviation, the pilots and enlisted men. But the one thing I wasn't, and never would have become had I stayed in the service, is a mean, lean, fighting machine.

I was the guy in the background who kept the cogs meshed. I was the guy who, when the outfit went into the field to practice their role in warfare, would stay back at the fort and answer the telephone. Or as I used to tell my buddies, I was the guy they left behind to type up the surrender notice. I never actually typed one, of course, but I often ponder whether I would have been asked to type the surrender for my general to sign, or the enemy's general.