

Statement by Senator Tom Harkin
On Ambassador Kenneth Quinn's Receipt of
The Air Medal for Combat Service
January 12, 2009

Mr. HARKIN: Mr. President, during a long and distinguished career in many fields of public service, Ambassador Kenneth Quinn has received countless awards and honors. But I dare say that the award he will receive tomorrow from the Department of Defense is the longest delayed and hardest earned of his distinctions. Ambassador Quinn will become the first civilian ever to receive the Air Medal for Combat Service, an award created during World War II to honor courageous and meritorious service in aerial combat.

From November 1968 to June 1973, Kenneth Quinn served as a Foreign Service Officer in Vietnam. For his first two years in that country, he was assigned to Advisory Team 65 in Sa Dec Province, replacing an Army major as senior advisor to the team. In that capacity, he took part in the same military activities and combat operations as his military predecessors. All totaled, he participated in some 250 hours of helicopter combat operations. He served in night helicopter patrols over Viet Cong-held sectors, and took part in helicopter operations to insert and extract troops from the battlefield. On other occasions, he directed helicopter gunship operations from a command-and-control helicopter flying just several hundred feet above the battlefield, repeatedly coming under enemy fire. On still other occasions, he participated in ground combat operations, night ambushes, and brown water naval combat operations.

Mr. President, this is just one chapter in the remarkably accomplished career of this Dubuque, Iowa, native. He served for more than three decades in the Foreign Service, becoming one of the most decorated and respected American diplomats of his

generation. Ambassador Quinn was one of the U.S. government's top experts on Indochina, having written his doctoral dissertation on Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia. Indeed, he is widely acknowledged to have been the first westerner to discover and report on the holocaust being perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge. Later, while serving as ambassador to Cambodia, he played a key role in the 1999 capture of the last remaining Khmer Rouge general. Upon his retirement as ambassador to Cambodia, he was presented the Secretary of State's Award for Heroism and Valor for protecting Americans citizens exposed to danger in Cambodia, and for his participation in four life-saving rescues in Vietnam.

The common theme in Ambassador Quinn's career has been his commitment to serving causes higher than himself. He has undertaken humanitarian missions that have saved countless thousands of lives. In 1978, under a special exchange program with the Foreign Service, he was allowed to return to Iowa to join the staff of Governor Robert Ray. He played a lead role in the Governor's program to resettle Indochinese refugees in Iowa, and he served as executive director of the 1979 Iowa SHARES program, which sent Iowa medical personnel, supplies, and food to Cambodia during a period of mass starvation there.

Following his retirement from the State Department eight years ago this month, Ambassador Quinn returned to Iowa to assume leadership of the World Food Prize Foundation, the Des Moines-based organization dedicated to fighting hunger around the world by promoting a nutritious and sustainable food supply. The World Food Prize, initiated by Nobel Prize-winner Dr. Norman Borlaug and Iowa business leader-philanthropist John Ruan, is the most prestigious international award recognizing

individuals for exemplary work in improving the quality, quantity or availability of food in the world.

Mr. President, Ambassador Quinn has served our Nation as a diplomat, a warrior, and a passionate humanitarian. At every stage of his brilliant career in public service, he has embodied America's highest ideals, and he has earned renown for his courage, initiative, and intellectual independence. I join with my colleagues in the United States Senate in congratulating Ambassador Quinn as he becomes, tomorrow in Washington, the first civilian ever to be awarded the Air Medal for Combat Service.