

**SWEARING IN CEREMONY**  
**Kenneth M. Quinn as Ambassador to Cambodia**  
**January 31, 1996**

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***Introduction***

Good morning, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Joann \_\_\_\_\_, Assistant Chief of Protocol, and I welcome you here this morning to the Ben Franklin Room for the swearing in of Kenneth M. Quinn as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States to Cambodia.

Assistant Secretary Winston Lord has graciously agreed to officiate the ceremony. We also are very pleased to have in attendance Ambassador Var Houth, the Cambodian Ambassador to the United States. Welcome, Excellency.

Ken's wife, Le Son, and his children, Davin, Shandon and Kelly, are here today as well as his brothers and sisters-in-law. Welcome, and congratulations.

The ceremony this morning will proceed as follows. We'll open the program with the administration of the oath of office. Le Son will hold the Bible for Ambassador Quinn. These will be followed by remarks by Assistant Secretary Lord and by Ambassador Quinn.

Joann I, Kenneth M. Quinn

Quinn I, Kenneth M. Quinn

Joann Do solemnly swear

Quinn Do solemnly swear

Joann That I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States

Quinn That I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States

Joann Against all enemies, foreign and domestic

Quinn Against all enemies, foreign and domestic

Joann That I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same

Quinn That I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same

Joann That I take this obligation freely

Quinn That I take this obligation freely

Joann And without any mental reservation

Quinn And without any mental reservation

Joann Or purpose of evasion

Quinn Or purpose of evasion

Joann That I will well and faithfully

Quinn That I will well and faithfully

Joann Discharge the duties of the office

Quinn Discharge the duties of the office

Joann Which I am about to enter

Quinn Which I am about to enter

Joann So help me God.

Quinn So help me God.

Joann Congratulations [inaudible].

**WINSTON LORD**

**Assistant Secretary of State**

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Welcome, and special greetings to Le Son and the Quinn family, to the Cambodian ambassador.

It is the worst of times. It is the best of times. Today's ceremony celebrates the tale of the two sides of Ambassador Quinn—the professional and the personal. It is truly a Dickens of a tale. But first, the timing. We gather at the worst of times—the Cowboys have just recaptured the Super Bowl. We gather at the best of times—Magic Johnson has just recaptured basketball.

It is the worst of times for the Foreign Service—shrinking budgets, shrinking futures, and if some on Capitol Hill had their way, shrinking respect. But surely it is also the best of times for the Service when its best is sworn in to represent America to a brave and beleaguered people. At a time of the worst partisanship, Ken Quinn's career reminds us of the best of public service to a series of presidents of both parties. At a time of the worst cynicism, Ken Quinn's character reminds us of the best of human nature. With his career Ken Quinn has fared well. With his character he has healed; by doing good, he has done well.

Just how well has been reflected in an unprecedented parade of awards. Only a few have won the top honors both in the State Department and Defense Department. Fewer still have earned the Presidential Distinguished Service Award. Only three FSOs have ever received both the Christian Herter and the William Rivkin Awards. And when you add the Annie Raphael Award, I'm confident that Ken Quinn stands alone. And I know for sure he is the only officer to garner all these prizes and also be chosen as Iowa Employee of the Month.

Just who is this guy? Garth Brooks? No. He's one of our most dedicated officers whose distinguished service reflects the full circle of America's relations with Southeast Asia during the past three turbulent decades. Ken Quinn spent his first six years in Vietnam, where he took part in 250 hours of combat helicopter operations, was wounded in a North Vietnamese rocket attack, and was personally involved in four life-saving rescues of a nine-year-old whom he rushed to a hospital where they saved his life; driving down an unsecured road at night to bring out Americans and Vietnamese injured in an accident; plunging into a swollen canal to pull out a U.S. Army sergeant who was drowning; and boarding a helicopter and guiding it twice into a remote outpost which had been overrun, bringing out over 30 wounded soldiers and civilians including children.

Ever since Ken Quinn has been rushing down unsecured roads, plunging into dangerous waters, and guiding American policy towards Southeast Asia, in rapid succession I would cite that during the fall of Saigon, he and other FSOs organized a network that saved countless people who otherwise might have been left behind. While living on the Cambodian border, he was the first to put together the real brutality and record from the refugees in Cambodia of the Khmer Rouge.



He spent 2½ years in the National Security Council with special emphasis on the Indochina Refugee Program. He was then Dick Holbrooke's special assistant for a year and a half in EAP—talk about combat duty. He was part of the first U.S. POW/MIA delegation to Hanoi. He was a key witness in an espionage case and later led a group of over 600 FSOs who sent a petition to Secretary Vance about the declining morale of the Foreign Service. This may explain why his next job was a Pearson assignment of four years to Iowa.

But seriously, the state of Iowa was one of the moral leaders with respect to feeding the starving people in Cambodia, and Ken was central to those efforts. He was also Disaster Coordinator for the governor, dealing with two tornadoes, a prison riot and a nuclear power plant. Ken and his wife Le Son said Iowa is a good Foreign Service assignment. The people spoke passable English, and you could drink the water.

Ken then served in a succession of posts—Vienna, where he was narcotics counselor and refugee coordinator, passed through some dangerous frontlines in Lebanon to reach PLO military headquarters. When he was Deputy Executive Secretary here in the Department, he participated in the crises such as the TWA 847, the Achille Lauro, and the Iran-Contra crisis. As DCM in the Philippines, there were two coup attempts against the government, ten official Americans killed, and an evacuation of the embassy staff.

Now at this point the Cambodian Ambassador Var Houth, who honors us with his presence, looks a little nervous, hearing about how war and natural disasters and terrorism and violence seem to follow Ken wherever he goes. Rest assured, Mr. Ambassador, starting in 1990 Ken Quinn, more than any other FSO, skillfully and courageously began to close the circle, began to heal the wounds of our journey with Southeast Asia, working with Dick Solomon; and he helped represent the U.S. in negotiations which led to the Paris agreements in Cambodia. Working with Jack Vessey, he was crucial to all the POW/MIA missions to Vietnam. He conceived of the "Roadmap to Normalization" with Hanoi. In July of '91, he personally negotiated the first access to a Vietnamese prison. He also negotiated the first access ever to Cambodia by search teams for MIAs, and he worked closely with Congressman Pete Peterson and the U.S. Russian Commission on POW/MIAs.

During the most recent phases of this still unfinished journey, I have been privileged to work with him side by side in our nation's movement toward making Vietnam a country, not a war, in our nation's support of the Cambodian people as they strive to emerge from a tragic past to its safer and freer horizons.

On my first Saturday in my present office, I bonded immediately with Ken Quinn as we recognized immediately our shared priorities of family and sports. When I heard that one of his kids was about to pitch in a softball game or swim in a meet—I forget which one it was—I immediately kicked him out of the office with, I might add, absolutely no resistance. Family comes first with Ken, and we are delighted they are with us here today—his wife, Le Son, his children, Davin, whose birthday is tomorrow, no longer a teenager, at Princeton, Shandon, a sophomore in high school, Kelly in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and other members of the family.

Now, his children are both excellent students and championship swimmers. And if genes mean anything, his kids will exhibit a freestyle and a medley of talents. They will keep abreast of human concerns and stroke the backs of those in trouble, whether counseling those who are younger or comforting those who are dying. And when it comes to integrity, they will never take a dive. In short, they will heal as they fare well.

Ken Quinn has honored me today by selecting me to preside over this celebration. The President has honored Cambodia by selecting Ken Quinn as his personal representative. And



so, Ken, as you head off to Southeast Asia, your allegiance of friends and admirers simply say—Hail and farewell. Thank you.

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#### **AMBASSADOR KENNETH QUINN**

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Winston, thank you very, very much. I wouldn't have anybody else swear me in except Winston because of the marvelous relationship that we've had, all that he's done to promote me. I know that I wouldn't be here today except for Winston Lord and for that marvelous lesson that he taught me about how important it is to be with your family. Winston, thank you very, very much from the bottom of my heart.

I have to tell you, though, that the real story of how Winston and I got connected—and I think I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for this—it goes back to 1986. George Shultz was visiting China. I was traveling with him as Deputy Executive Secretary. It's a small dinner. I ended up sitting next to Winston. Somehow the conversation got around to baseball, and I must have said something that let Winston think that I thought I knew quite a bit about baseball. And he turned to me to give me the acid test, and he said, "Who was on base when Bobby Thompson hit his famous homerun heard 'round the world in 1951 to defeat the Dodgers?" And somehow out of some baseball trivia (which I've tried to impart on to my kids), I came up with the right answer. And I think except for that, I probably wouldn't have been back here. So you never know what information is going to lead to.

I want to say a very special word of thanks to Congressman Pete Peterson for being here today. I think as my children look back and to remember my nomination, two of the things that will stand out were Senator John McCain, former POW, being with me at the table and introducing me in my testimony in my hearings, my confirmation hearings, and former POW, Pete Peterson being here today. I think of no greater honor for my family and me to have, and I want you to know how appreciative I am of being here. And I hope everybody would join with me in showing our appreciation for his courage and heroism.

We've been talking about crises, and they seem to pop up wherever I'm involved. The most recent one is we drove up this morning, I dropped my family off in the car, and I went to go and park it. And I realized I don't have my Department pass. And I imagined all of you up here, my family arrayed, the blood draining out of Sharon \_\_\_\_\_'s face, wondering where is the Ambassador designate, as he's driving around desperately looking for a parking place. But somehow I got through that and made it up here.

Ambassador Var Houth, thank you so much for being here today.

You heard a little bit about the fact that I'm from Iowa, and a lot of lowans here today. As I thought about my career and how I ended up here today, and if I was going to put a title to it, it would probably be something like "From the Mississippi to the Mekong." Because I remember it was about 31 years ago that I got on Highway 151—and for those of you who know it, it kind of passes from Iowa into Wisconsin just north of Dubuque over an old bridge—and I was driving my 1955 Mercury heading to Madison, Wisconsin, to take the Foreign Service exam. And it was a big dream for a kid who started in the Bronx and moved to Iowa and went to Loras College and seemed very improbable at the time—but it was a time for big dreams. And I remember kind of coming up over a hill and looking out over the beautiful Midwestern countryside and the patchwork quilt of the green and the maize and all the beauty of it and the distinctive silos, and thinking the future seemed hazy, but maybe, just maybe there might be something for me.

reports about the Khmer Rouge back in 1974?" He was indefatigable and one of the people who always kept Cambodia foremost in our minds.

And I remember coming back and telling people about stories of the Khmer Rouge. And it's hard to remember now, but very few people wanted to listen. And I remember one of the people who did want to listen and listened very intently was former Senator Dick Clark from Iowa who was a distinguished member of the U.S. Senate and who was one of the first who was greatly concerned about what was happening there.

And then, when I still thought I was never going to get back to Cambodia, one night Shandon and I were out in a Cub Scout overnight in the Philippines, and somebody knocked on the flap of our tent and said, "There's a call from Dick Solomon, and he wants you to come back to work on Southeast Asia and Indochina." And so once again I was back working on Cambodia and had the marvelous experience of putting together an agreement that allowed a free election and the hope of peace to be restored to Cambodia. And, Dick, you deserve an enormous amount of credit for having the vision for that.

And so I thought, well, once again, I'm sort of done and Cambodia and I will be finished and I'll go on to other things. But now there is this call again to go back. And I have to say that it is of course one of the proudest moments of my life to be asked to take this challenge, one that humbles me. But I will do everything I can to always make you all very proud of me, and I'll try to do everything to always represent my country, my country's interest to the fullest, while at the same time being the very best friend that I can to the Cambodian people and to Cambodia. Thank you all very, very, very much for being here today. It's a great honor and a great privilege to be here. But most of all it's so wonderful to have so many friends like yourselves who would be here.

And I want to say a special word of thanks, of course, to all the sacrifices that my family has made throughout our career. It's often not easy for them, but in the end family is the most important thing of all. Thank you very, very much.

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Joann

Ambassador Quinn will now sign some papers attesting to his oath of office here at the desk on the right, following which he'll be glad to receive each and every one of you if you would form a receiving line to the right of the podium. Thank you.

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But I have to say, Mr. Ambassador, that in all honesty, as I thought about that I never imagined that it would in any way involve Cambodia or Asia. And as I, like so many others, took my oath of office, my first oath of office, three years later over by those windows in this very room, I mean, I was thinking about Europe—right? That was diplomacy. It was chandeliers and aperitifs and the nuances of foreign policy being discussed with other diplomats. So you can imagine my surprise when a couple months later I ended up getting off a plane in a place called Sadek on the Mekong River not far from the Cambodian border.

But being assigned to Vietnam changed my life. Most importantly, I met my wife in Vietnam—certainly the most important development and significant thing that ever happened to me. Second, it changed my focus to Asia; and, third, it introduced me to Cambodia. And like that drive out of Dubuque and into Wisconsin, one day I drove out of Chau Doc City, and you come up over a hill, and suddenly right before you is this vista of Cambodia. And it's very different—the mountains, the green rice fields laid out before you. And Cambodia was at peace then. War hadn't yet come. And the combination of the Architecture and the beauty of the dress of the people and the music and the dance all went together to form what I thought was one of the most magnificent cultures and societies I had ever seen. And I wanted to know more about Cambodia. It was as mysterious and it was magical.

So I bought a plane ticket to go to Angkor Wat and to visit and to learn more about the country, its history and its people. And before I could use it, war broke out, and the Cambodian people were propelled towards one of the greatest human tragedies ever to befall any people, over the next years. And as I left Indochina, I thought maybe I would never ever get to see Cambodia and to get to know those people.

I did make one stop on my way back, very, very briefly in Kampong Chhnang, Ambassador Var Houth's hometown. And it was one of the most stunning things I've ever experienced. I stood on a hill near the city and looked out over it, and it was completely devoid of human beings. And the stillness and the absence of any kind of human noise and any type of human activity was eerie. The Khmer Rouge had come and attacked the city. They had taken away the population and then had fled, and it was left there, an abandoned ghost town, a harbinger of what was to happen to the rest of the country. For those terrible years.

And I kept that memory with me, and in Iowa I thought, well, I'm far away, but somehow there's always something about Cambodia that pulls me back to it. And there the governors, Governor Bob Ray, who was my boss, took a small delegation of other governors to the Cambodian border in 1979. And we stood at the Sa Kaeo refugee camp, helped there, to get there by Morton and Sheppie Abramowitz and Lionel Rosenblatt, other people working on the refugee program. And we saw 30,000 human beings who were dying at the rate of a hundred a day.

And Governor Ray brought back the pictures of this to Iowa. *The Des Moines Register* published them on the front page. And an unholy alliance was formed, if you will, between the three major religions of the state, the two political parties, and *The Register*—Geneva Overholser is here today, the former Pulitzer Prize winning editor of *The Register*—to form something called "Iowa Shares" to raise money to try to send food and medicine to the Cambodian people and alleviate their suffering. And it was one of, probably one of the finest professional experience that I ever had in doing that.

After that, we had an interlude where we visited some other rivers. We went to Austria and were on the Danube where Kelly was born. We were in the Philippines on the Pasig where Steve Solarz used to come and visit and where, after a harrowing day he grabbed me and pulled me aside and sat me down and said, "How in the world did you come up with all those