

Page 4A | Wednesday, April 29, 2009

State Edition | The Des Moines Register

# At course, veterans share experiences

The first of a five-part class on the Vietnam War was more reunion bonding than lecture.

By DANIEL P. FINNEY  
daffinney@dmreg.com

The topic was the Vietnam War, but there were few war stories.

More than 50 people gathered in a Drake University classroom for the first of a five-part course on Iowa's legacy in the divisive Southeast Asian conflict during which nearly 59,000 U.S. soldiers died.

Yet the mood was less lecture and more reunion bonding — a long-awaited, sometimes emotional com-

ing-together of old soldiers from all wars, each with a yearning to understand their collective service experiences.

"I want to know the Vietnam story," said Ken Popken, a Navy veteran from Clive who was stateside during the Vietnam War. "I lived during that time. I watched it on TV, but when I came here, I had this strong sense of bonding with these people. It's the soldiers' connection."

There was also plenty of

## Class for war veterans

"The Vietnam War: An Iowa Perspective" will continue at 2 p.m. every Tuesday in May in the courtroom of the Neal and Bea Smith Law Center, 2400 University Ave. in Des Moines. The sessions are free to veterans of any war. For the public, course fees are \$25 plus a \$50 annual membership to the RaySociety. For more information, call (515) 271-2120.

old-fashioned learning at the first session of "The Vietnam War: An Iowa Perspective."

Kenneth Quinn, president of the World Food Prize Foundation and former U.S. ambassador to Cambodia, gave the keynote address. He discussed the resettlement of Southeast Asian

refugees to Iowa after the war while he was a member of then-Gov. Robert Ray's staff.

Veteran Dan Gannon, a Marine who was wounded in combat, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and contracted cancer from Agent Orange, gave a detailed history of U.S.

involvement in Vietnam from the end of World War II through the fall of Saigon in 1975.

Yet Gannon, much like Quinn before him, focused on bringing all veterans together through the course, which was offered by the RaySociety, a Drake series of courses targeted for people of retirement age and named after the former governor and his wife, Billie, both Drake alumni.

At the beginning of his hourlong presentation, Gannon asked veterans to stand up by the war in which they served. There were a handful of World

War II veterans and a few Korean War veterans; the majority were Vietnam War veterans.

"Look around," Gannon said. "We've all served our country and made the sacrifice. We are all veterans. Give yourselves a hand."

In coming sessions, which are free and open to veterans of any war, Gannon will address his time as a Marine lieutenant in Vietnam. Vin Vo, who came to Iowa after spending years in post-war interment camps, and Ray will talk about the relocation of more than 14,000 Southeast Asian refugees to Iowa after the war.

## "At course, veterans share experiences"

Clipped By:



kquinn487

Tue, Dec 5, 2017