



News-Press photo by Bob Ponce

DEMOLITION DAIRY

The former Foremost Dairy at Castillo and Carrillo streets is being demolished to make way for a parking lot that will be used by city employees who commute downtown. A longtime city landmark, the dairy had been in operation since 1938. It was opened by the Golden State Co., which later merged with Foremost.

Author discusses Vietnam veterans in the '80s

By Katherine D. Zimbert

"I am blind in one eye, my arm doesn't work, but first of all, I killed 300 people in one day in Vietnam. I now live in the mountains, shoot rabbits and when helicopters fly over I run for cover."

This is what it can be like to be a Vietnam veteran, according to Dr. Walter Capps, a professor of religious studies at UCSB and author of "The Finished War — Vietnam and the American Conscience."

The quote, Capps explained to a group of humanities experts Monday, was taken from a short speech one of his students gave to a class on the Vietnam war. The student had sat quietly in the front row for three weeks before contributing to the class. When he did contribute, Capps said, the class stood up and gave him a standing ovation, and one student said, "I'd like to welcome you back home." The reaction of the class was particularly moving, Capps said, considering that Vietnam was the first war not to have a homecoming parade. It was also the first war America ever lost — "We certainly

didn't win," he said.

In a luncheon talk at the Goleta Valley Adult Education Center sponsored by the South Coast Coordinating Council, Capps addressed the issue of the Vietnam veteran in the 1980s.

There were approximately 58,000 American fatalities in the Vietnam War, he said, 90 percent of whom were killed in combat. He said what he found most disturbing, however, is that approximately 60,000 Vietnam veterans have committed suicide.

"Five hundred thousand veterans are currently experiencing severe emotional distress," he said.

Since 1977, Capps has been trying to track down veterans to get their reactions to the war. A common thing that veterans suffer is post-traumatic stress, Capps said. Symptoms such as startled response, hyper alertness, vigilance, memory loss, depression, survivor guilt, and inability to recognize other veterans by looking into their eyes are common experiences of Vietnam veterans, Capps said.

When suffering from post-traumatic stress, veterans actually believe they are back in Vietnam if they get an appropriate stimulus, Capps said.

"Shame and guilt is a big contributor to post-traumatic stress," Capps said. However, some veterans are reluctant to part with that shame, he found. One man who approached him after a lecture said, "People are always telling me I shouldn't feel guilty about what happened at Vietnam, that I should blame the government, but I can't handle it that way. They're trying to take away my guilt, and guilt is all I have to call my own."

Another veteran Capps spoke with said, "We all took lives in Vietnam, and taking a life is murder unless it's in the condition of war. Vietnam was an undeclared war. Do you look at me as a murderer?"

After his brief talk, members from the audience asked Capps what veterans of Vietnam think about America's involvement in Central America.

Many of them share the attitude that if America is going to do something "we should go in, blast 'em away, and do it right," Capps said. Veterans feel that "America could have easily won the war if it had been treated as a war rather than as the result of political problems back at home," he added.

(Katherine D. Zimbert is a News-Press journalism intern from UCSB.)