

Liberals Seek 'War Crimes' Inquiry

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WASHINGTON, March 31 — With the aid of some Vietnam veterans, a group of liberal Democrats sought today to prevail upon the House Armed Services Committee to conduct a public inquiry into alleged American war crimes in Vietnam.

Representative F. Edward Hébert, chairman of the House committee, sought in turn to prevent the liberal group from holding its own informal inquiry if the committee did not proceed with public hearings.

The latest round in the struggle between the Democratic liberals and the conservative committee chairman took place today in a small conference room in the Rayburn House Office Building.

Against a backdrop of television cameras, four of the liberals—Representatives Bob Eckhardt of Texas, Benjamin S. Rosenthal of Queens, John G. Dow of upstate New York and Abner J. Mikva of Illinois—held a news conference to voice their case for public committee hearings into whether United States troops had violated the rules of war in Vietnam.

One purpose of the news con-

ference was to let six Vietnam veterans give brief statements describing various acts of torture and killing of civilians that they said they had witnessed in Vietnam.

The veterans are associated with the Citizens Commission of Inquiry on United States War Crimes in Vietnam, a group of veterans formed shortly after the 1969 disclosure of the My Lai killings of 1968.

Serving as spokesman for the commission, Jeremy Rifkin said that "My Lai is only the tip of the iceberg" and that First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr., who was convicted yesterday of premeditated murder, was being "scapegoated in order to deflect attention from the generals and the politicians."

Exchange of Letters

For several months the veterans group has been attempting to get the Armed Services Committee to hold public hearings into their allegations. Unsuccessful, it turned for help in January to the group of 11 Democratic liberals, headed by Mr. Eckhardt.

Early in March Mr. Eckhardt wrote Mr. Hébert proposing that the committee hold "full-scale public hearings." In a March 22 letter Mr. Hébert sug-

gested to Mr. Eckhardt that if his group had "any specific allegations of possible war crimes or related incidents and care to submit them to me, I will see that they receive the immediate attention of the Investigating Subcommittee staff."

Mr. Eckhardt, at the news conference today, interpreted the Hébert statement as an assurance that the House committee planned public hearings. But that was not the interpretation Mr. Hébert, who noted to a reporter that he had only promised that any allegations would be studied by the staff.

If the committee does not hold hearings, then Mr. Eckhardt said it was the consensus of his group to proceed with an informal inquiry. But Mr. Hébert in his letter noted that House rules prohibit public hearings if the testimony may defame individuals.

At the news conference Steve Noetzel of Floral Park, L. I., said that while serving with the Army Special Forces in 1963-64 he saw 12 Vietcong prisoners pushed from helicopters to their death. He said he also witnessed the use of electrical wiring, water torture and the use of python snakes to terrorize prisoners.