

# House Aide Charges Viet Visit 'Whitewash'

New York Times

## Washington

A staff member of a special House of Representatives committee that made a fact-finding tour of South Vietnam assailed its report yesterday as a "whitewash" and said the panel had suppressed significant findings.

The committee, a bipartisan, 12-member group that visited Southeast Asia for two weeks, was "led around by the nose," according to Thomas R. Harkin, a

30-year-old former Navy pilot who attends law school at Catholic University.

Harkin's criticism was directed at the findings and conduct of the House Select Committee on Southeast Asia, which made its formal report Monday.

The brunt of his criticism, however, was aimed at what he called "the existence and use by the Thieu government of inhumane treatment of civilian political prisoners in what are commonly known as 'tiger cages' in the prison on Con Son island."

Specifically, Harkin charged that the full committee had rejected a report prepared by two congressmen who saw the prison conditions at Con Son island. The final, 70-page report contained a brief paragraph on the prison.

Harkin indicated that the exclusion of the detailed findings on Con Son island constituted "an attempt by the majority of the committee to suppress the most significant findings of the entire trip."

The two congressmen who visited the Con Son Island National Correction Center and wrote the rejected report, both Democrats, are Representatives Augustus F. Hawkins of California and William R. Anderson of Tennessee.

They generally confirmed Harkin's allegations of inhumane treatment of prisoners. Anderson, while declining to confirm that the committee had tried to suppress all mention of Con Son Island, said that "some of the members has serious reservations about it."

Hawkins said the full committee had rejected two separate drafts—one longer than the other—of the report on Con Son Island. He said the rejection took place at a committee meeting, although he did not know whether a

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vote was actually taken. "I could see they weren't going to accept it," Hawkins said in recalling the members' initial reaction to the report. He was not present for the entire meeting.

The "tiger cages" described by Harkin were deep pits about five feet by nine feet where, he said, prisoners are kept under "conditions that can only be described as shocking."

At a news conference, Harkin said that the prisoners "are never allowed out, the food is minimal, and they are given little water. Many are forced to drink their own urine. Most of the men could not stand up, their legs having been paralyzed by beatings and by being shackled to a bar about one or two feet off the floor."

The island is located in the south China sea 140 miles southeast of Saigon. It is Vietnam's largest correctional institution, containing about 9500 prisoners. At least 500 were found in the "tiger cages," Harkin said.

Harkin said the team found 86 concrete pits in each of two prison "blocks." Each pit, he said, contained four or five prisoners. He estimated that 200 of these prisoners were women.

## COOPERATION

On the House floor yesterday, Hawkins described the prison as "worse than devil's island."

"Con Son is a symbol of how some American officials will cooperate in corruption and torture because they want to see the war contin-

More Tiger cages news  
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ued and the government they put in power protected," he said.

Anderson said they had been assured earlier by a U.S. foreign aid official, Frank E. Walton, that they would find prison conditions "more like a Boy Scout camp." Anderson said he told U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker that Walton should be sent home aboard the first plane out of Saigon.

Harkin said he had "resigned" from the committee staff because of disillusionment with the report. "I call the whole thing a whitewash of a snow job," he said.

However, Representative G. V. Montgomery (Dem-Miss.), the committee chairman, said through a spokesman that the committee staff had disbanded as of Monday, making the resignation unnecessary.

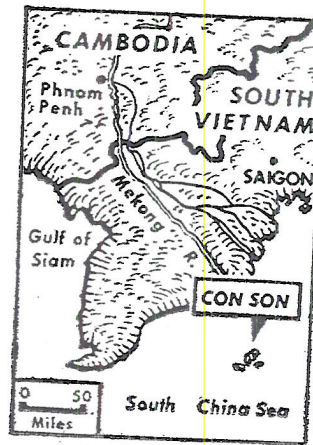
Montgomery, who was in Mississippi and could not be reached directly, rejected the "whitewash" charge as "ridiculous and irresponsible." Members held planned itineraries to a minimum, he said, and conducted some visits with little advance notice.

#### HOUSE

The congressman said he had discussed the situation with ambassador bunker and a subordinate, and that "they promised me a proper investigation would be made of the matter."

Harkin's broader criticism of the committee centered on a charge that most of the information it obtained was from official United States and South Vietnamese government sources.

In addition, he said, the



AP Wirephoto

#### Con Son Island off coast of South Vietnam

"press aide" hired by the committee, Burnett Anderson, is an employee of the United States Information Agency. Harkin charged that Anderson met separately with Herbert Klein, director of communication in the administration, and a member of the national security council prior to visiting South Vietnam with the house panel.

Klein confirmed that a meeting had indeed taken place, but he said it was "just a natural thing" and said it lasted only five minutes or so.

"Nobody here gave him any instructions or attempted to, and he was not picked by us in any way," Klein said.

The alleged meeting with a Security Council staff member could not be immediately confirmed.

# Political Prisoners' Torture



Thomas Harkin, staff member of a House fact-finding team that toured Indochina, brought back to Washington this photograph, which he said he took of political prisoners confined in one of the 'tiger cages' on South Vietnam's Con Son Island

LPT Telephoto