

# House Unit's Report On Vietnam Termed 'Whitewash' by Aide

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WASHINGTON, July 7—A staff member of a special House committee that toured the war zone in Indochina today termed its report 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 now attends law school at Catholic University.

Mr. Harkin's criticism mainly concerned 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."

## Says Report Was Rejected

Specifically, Mr. Harkin charged that the full committee, called the House Select Committee on Southeast Asia, had rejected a report prepared by two Congressmen who saw the prison conditions at Con Son. A brief paragraph on the prison was included in the committee's formal, 70-page report made public yesterday.

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

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# House Unit Report on Vietnam Assailed

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significant finding of the entire trip."

The two Congressmen who visited the island and wrote the report that Mr. Harkin said was rejected are Representatives Augustus F. Hawkins of California and William R. Anderson of Tennessee, both Democrats.

## 2 Congressmen Comment

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

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

"I could see they weren't going to accept it," Mr. Hawkins said in recalling the members' initial reaction to the report. He said he had not been present for the entire meeting.

The "tiger cages" reportedly built by the French during their colonial administration — were found during an inspection trip of the Con Son

National Correction Center by the two Representatives and Mr. Harkin. The island is in the South China Sea 140 south-east of Saigon. It is Vietnam's largest correctional institution, containing about 9,500 prisoners. At least 500 were found in the "tiger cages," Mr. Harkin said.

Mr. 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.

Yesterday Don Luce, an American with a unit of the World Council of Churches, reported in Saigon on what he described as inhuman conditions at the prison. He visited the prison with the two Representatives.

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

But Representative G. V. Montgomery, Democrat of Mississippi, the committee chairman, said through a spokesman that the committee staff had disbanded yesterday, making the resignation unnecessary.

Mr. Montgomery was in Mississippi and could not be reached directly. His spokesman

said he rejected the whitewash charge as "ridiculous and irresponsible." Members had planned itineraries to a minimum, he said, and conducted some visits with little advance notice.

The chairman said he had discussed the prison situation with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in Saigon and a subordinate and that "they promised me a proper investigation would be made of the matter."

## Visit Termed Difficult

Mr. Harkin and the two Representatives agreed that they had encountered considerable difficulty in arranging the visit and inspecting the "tiger cages."

"Only by carefully preparing our investigation, and by certain unique and coincidental circumstances happening at the prison were we able to see them," Mr. Harkin said. He said that the coincidence occurred when a hidden door to the block was opened from inside as his group was standing outside.

In his broader criticism of the committee, Mr. Harkin said that most of the information it obtained was from official United States and South Vietnamese Government sources.

In addition, he said, the press aide hired by the committee, Burnett Anderson, is an employe of the United States Information Agency. Mr. Harkin charged that Mr. Anderson met separately with Herbert Klein, Director of Communications in the Administration, and with a member of the National Security Council before visiting South Vietnam with the committee.