



0. LEAKS TO THE PRESS - Story Preface

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Daniel Ellsberg trusted Neil Sheehan with explosive leaks from a government study which came to be known as "The Pentagon Papers." Here we see Neil Sheehan at his desk at the *New York Times*, circa 1971. Contemporary photo of Sheehan by Barton Silverman, a photographer for the *NY Times*. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

Government officials would claim the study, and all it revealed, should be kept secret. It would be against America's national security to release such information. But Daniel Ellsberg and his colleague, Tony Russo, thought otherwise. At least *Congress* should be told.

When it appeared the Congressional route would not be effective, Ellsberg approached Neil Sheehan, a *New York Times* reporter who had spent time in Vietnam. He was the only journalist Ellsberg thought he could trust.

What Sheehan saw stunned him.

It took three months for Arthur O. Sulzberger (owner of the newspaper) and his team of lawyers to read the documents and decide whether to break the story. They were concerned whether printing the top-secret material would violate any laws.

But there was something that Ellsberg and the press did not know. Something extremely important. Henry Kissinger had made secret peace overtures to North Vietnam in May of 1971.

If the story about McNamara's study were revealed before those initiatives could lead to a peace agreement, America could be embroiled in the war for a longer period of time. (In this RealAudio clip, Nixon and Kissinger discuss the *Times* article for the first time. The White House recording is from 13 June 1971 at 3:09 p.m. and has occasional moments of deletions, especially at the beginning.)

And ... some of the damaging documents (and the government's inability to keep them out of the press' hands) could cause other countries (who were supportive of America's efforts in Vietnam) to withdraw that support.

Many of the "Pentagon Papers" are stored at the National Archives. Some of the more damaging documents are available on-line. Let's examine them via three of the most controversial issues:

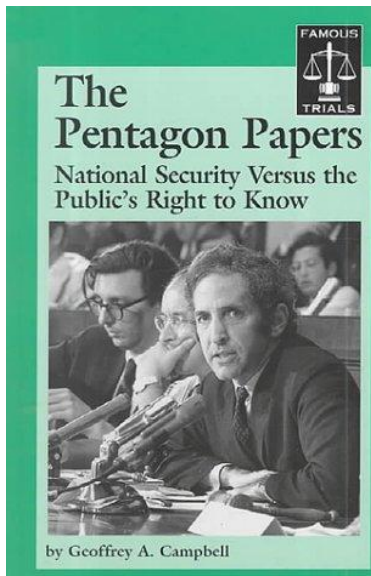
- Did the people of South Vietnam support the war?
- Did the Kennedy Administration know about the coup?
- Did the Johnson Administration lie about the Gulf of Tonkin?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/LEAKS-TO-THE-PRESS-Pentagon-Papers>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/LEAKS-TO-THE-PRESS-Pentagon-Papers>



The Pentagon Papers - by Geoffrey A. Campbell

Image online, courtesy [Amazon](#).

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