

LOS ANGELES, July 11—The first person questioned in detail as a potential juror in the trial of Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo said today that he had never heard of the Pentagon Papers, knew nothing of their contents and had no opinion whatsoever on whether they should have been disclosed.

Louis J. Asta, an elderly furniture-finisher from La Crescenta, a suburb on the northern fringe of Los Angeles, insisted that he left the reading and watching of the news to his wife and that he personally had no knowledge of the Ellsberg-Russo case.

"I keep busy working; your honor," Asta told U.S. District Court Judge W. Matt Byrne Jr. during the questioning of prospective jurors for the trial.

No sooner had Asta left the courtroom after his individual interrogation, however, than defense lawyers bitterly criticized the judge for not probing his attitudes and opinions thoroughly enough.

Leonard B. Boudin, chief counsel for Ellsberg, and Leonard I. Weinglass, representing Russo, complained that in order to exercise their challenges to the seating of particular jurors, they would need information on such matters as prospective jurors' attitudes toward the news media, the military and American involvement in Southeast Asia.

They pointed out, for example, that prosecution witnesses in the case are expected to include military officers in uniform and contended that it is important to know how their appearance might affect individual jurors.

Relying on a case decided by the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, the defense urged Byrne to "spare no effort" to secure an impartial jury panel.

But the judge, standing by earlier rulings that rejected hundreds of questions proposed by the defense, seemed reluctant to expand substantially the scope of his inquiry.

Ellsberg and Russo are charged with conspiracy, theft and espionage in connection with the disclosure of the top secret Vietnam war history.

As soon as the special government prosecutors arrived at court this morning, they demanded a special session in Byrne's chambers to complain that a copy of a book of excerpts from the Pentagon Papers, as published by the New

York Times, was "prominently displayed" in front of Russo at the defense table.

Russo, who had declared his opposition to holding even minor proceedings in the case behind closed doors, walked out of the judge's chambers and returned to the courtroom, immediately telling reporters what had taken place in the session.

The judge took no action on the prosecutor's complaint.

Later in the morning, Russo added to his stack of books—which he says he is using to help prepare his defense—a paperback copy of the 1970 report of President Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest.

(Byrne, before he became a federal judge here, was chief counsel to the commission, which was chaired by former Pennsylvania Gov. William W. Scranton. The commission report was sharply critical of the Nixon administration and stressed the importance of open dissent on college campuses.)

Reporters and spectators who arrived today for the second day of proceedings in the Ellsberg-Russo case found courtroom security, which had been heavy on Monday, substantially relaxed.

Signs warning that everyone must sign in and be subject to search, for example, had disappeared.

Although Byrne had overruled defense objections on Monday to the presence of the signs and of a large force of deputy U.S. marshals, he revealed in court today that he was personally responsible for the change.

Early this morning, the judge called U.S. Marshal Campbell into his chambers to complain about the overzealous courtroom control. Later, in open court, he told the deputy marshals there was "no spectator problem" and that free access to the court was to be maintained at all times.

Byrne reassured Boudin that he would not permit a "military atmosphere" to develop in the courtroom during the trial.

But the judge denied a defense request to rearrange courtroom furniture in order to give the "psychological advantage" to the prosecution which defense lawyers contended could develop from the fact that the government lawyers sit closer to the jury.

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What Pentagon Papers, Asks Jury Prospect

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