

LOS ANGELES, Jan. 18—An Army staff officer testified today that a top-secret document allegedly disclosed by Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony J. Russo Jr. could have helped the Vietnamese Communists plan their 1972 offensive in South Vietnam.

Lt. Gen. William G. DePuy, assistant to the Army vice chief of staff, said that the North Vietnamese command in Hanoi would have found it "interesting and useful" to have access to a 1968 report by Gen. Earl C. Wheeler, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Eight pages of the report, based on a trip to Vietnam by Wheeler, DePuy and seven other officials to evaluate the effects of the Communists' 1968 Tet offensive, were among the documents that the government says Ellsberg and Russo duplicated in 1969 and distributed to the press in 1971.

Along with the Pentagon Papers and a Rand Corp. study of the 1954 Geneva accords, the Wheeler report figures in the indictment against Ellsberg and Russo on charges of conspiracy, espionage and theft of government property.

The Vietnamese Communists would find the Wheeler report useful, DePuy testified, "particularly if they intend to do it (mount an offensive in the south) again . . . and they did it in 1972."

Starting at the jury of ten women and two men, DePuy said, "my belief is, looking at this document, that it would be of assistance to them in planning a new attack."

There is not expected to be any evidence in the case that the Vietnamese Communists at any point actually gained access to the Wheeler report or the other documents before their publication.

But DePuy's testimony is part of the prosecution's effort to demonstrate that the documents disclosed by Ellsberg and Russo related to the "national defense" and thus could not legally be made public.

On cross-examination, Leonard I. Weinglass, Russo's chief defense attorney, forced a concession from the Army general that "the passage of time means that with respect

to some of the material in the Wheeler report, there is "less potential for harm to the national defense."

DePuy acknowledged, for example, that after a few months there would have been "no value" to the North Vietnamese in seeing that part of the Wheeler report which discussed the 1968 request of Gen. William C. Westmoreland, then commander of U.S. troops in Vietnam, for an extra 206,000 men.

"It never happened," DePuy pointed out, referring to President Johnson's decision not to grant the Westmoreland request for an increase in the troop ceiling to 731,000.

But DePuy said his opinion about the most sensitive aspects of the Wheeler report, as a military expert who himself once had a planning and operational role in Vietnam, would not be altered by the fact that its contents might already have been "available to the general public."

The defense plans to show during the trial that the Wheeler report was extensively discussed in newspaper reports in 1968, long before Ellsberg's and Russo's alleged conspiracy.

Weinglass also alluded to the fact that the Wheeler report was included in a book subsequently published by Walt W. Rostow, who was President Johnson's chief national security adviser.

But the Rostow book was published only in 1972 and the jury is expected to reach its verdict on the basis of the facts as they existed at the time of Ellsberg's actions. DePuy said he was not familiar with the Rostow book.

Weinglass sought to show that many passages of the Wheeler report cited by DePuy discussed only "elementary military strategy, well-known by the North Vietnamese and everyone else."

It discussed, for example, the fact that if the Communists attacked South Vietnamese cities, Saigon's forces would have to defend themselves there and leave the countryside vulnerable.

"Didn't they (the North Vietnamese) know that already?" Weinglass asked.

Witness Says Ellsberg Data Could Aid Reds

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