

Russo Weeps, Tells Of Copying Papers

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LOS ANGELES, April 9—Anthony J. Russo Jr. readily acknowledged under oath today that he helped to Xerox the top-secret Pentagon Papers in the fall of 1969.

Later, as he set out to explain why to the jury trying him and Daniel Ellsberg on charges of conspiracy, espionage and theft of government property, he burst into tears on the witness stand.

The emotional moment—which also brought tears to the eyes of many spectators in a crowded federal courtroom here—came while Russo was recounting how, as a researcher for the Rand Corp., he became disillusioned over the American role in Vietnam.

Tracing his work on a Rand study that analyzed the "motivation and morale" of the Vietcong, Russo recalled his interview with an elderly Communist prisoner at the "National Interrogation Center" in Saigon in the spring of 1965.

"He was the strongest man I've ever met in my life," he said, "an education cadre who had joined the movement in 1948."

Russo remembered the prisoner as "very committed and sincere. . . . We talked for two days in his jail cell. He explained a great deal to me about the Americans in Vietnam, about what the people in the villages thought."



ANTHONY J. RUSSO JR.
... remembers VC prisoner

"He said that he would never give up, no matter how much he was tortured—and he had already been badly tortured," Russo continued. "He told how the French had once wiped out his whole village."

On the second day of the 1965 interview, Russo said, after the two men had developed rapport, the prisoner "recited poetry and sang a song to me. He said the poem was one that he always recited when he was downhearted."

Suddenly, Russo's voice broke and as the courtroom fell silent, he buried his face in his hands and sobbed.

U.S. District Court Judge W. Matt Byrne Jr. asked the court clerk to give Russo a

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cup of water. The defendant raised his head and, with a nervous laugh of embarrassment, suspended the story.

Responding to questions from his attorney, Leonard I. Weinglass, Russo turned to explaining that he left Rand's motivation-and-morale project in 1966 because "the results of the study were being altered . . . lies were being told right and left."

Later, talking with reporters outside the federal courthouse, Russo explained that "every time I remember that guy (the prisoner he interviewed), I get choked up. It is a very strong image, a very strong memory."

Russo, 36, testified as the 25th defense witness in this controversial case, which grows out of the 1971 newspaper disclosure of the Pentagon Papers, a Defense Department history of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia.

He and Ellsberg do not deny duplicating the then-classified documents in 1969, but say

they broke no law by doing so. Both defendants are taking the witness stand, in part to explain their "state of mind" about the war at the time.

As soon as he had taken the oath and answered a few perfunctory questions this morning, Russo's attention was directed by Weinglass to 10 volumes of the Pentagon Papers.

"Have you ever had occasion to hold those 10 exhibits in your hands before?" Weinglass asked.

"Yes," Russo answered quickly, "back in the fall of 1969, when I Xeroxed them."

He described the duplicating as taking place in a second-floor Hollywood advertising agency over "a period of several weeks," after Ellsberg brought the documents there from the top-secret safe in his office at the Rand Corp. in nearby Santa Monica.

Russo acknowledged that on one occasion Vu Van Thai, a former South Vietnamese ambassador to Washington who was then a Rand consultant, visited the advertising office and "sat in the next room" while the copying took place.

The South Vietnamese national read "a couple pages" of one of the volumes, Russo said, after Ellsberg "came in from the Xerox room and said, 'Hey, Thai, look at this.'"

(Earlier in the trial, a retired FBI fingerprint expert testified that he had found on the documents some of the prints of Thai, who is named as a co-conspirator in the case, but who is not charged with any crime.)

"I said to myself at the time," Russo testified, "My goodness, those things have top-secret markings and we should be more careful. . . ."

Byrne cut the defendant off at that point, and Russo then described his education at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and Princeton University and his work for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in the early days of the space program.

He said he went to work for Rand on his graduation from Princeton in 1964, because "its ideas had great influence on the Defense Department in the early 1960s [and] I had become interested in Vietnam."