Witness Says Papers 'Utterly Useless'

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LOS ANGELES, Feb. 28—The first defense witness in the Pentagon Papers trial, a retired admiral, testified today that disclosure of the top-secret documents could not have caused "injury to the United States" or "advantage to a foreign nation."

Rear Adm. Gene LaRocque said that operational plans discussed in the papers were "hopelessly out-of-date and utterly useless" by the time Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony J. Russo Jr. photocopied the documents in late 1969.

But when he was asked to describe the subject of one of the operational plans, Admiral LaRocque invoked its security classification as a reason for not doing so.

"No sir, I'm not at liberty to discuss that," the witness told Leonard I. Weinglass, Russo's attorney, who questioned him about "Operational Plan 32" of U.S. Pacific Forces. "That's a top secret document."

LaRocque, who retired last April after 31 years in the Navy, is director of the Center for Defense Informaton in Washington, an independent research organization which studies military issues.

The former commander of a destroyer division and a guided missile cruiser and once a lecturer on strategic planning at the Naval War College, he is Ellsberg's and Russo's answer to Lt. Gen. William G. dePuy, assistant to the Army vice chief of staff.

DePuy, as a prosecution witness, told the jury that the U.S. "national defense" could have been seriously affected by disclosure of one of the documents duplicated by Ellsberg and Russo, a 1968 report by Gen. Earle C. Wheeler, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, assessing the results of the Vietnamese Communists' Tet offensive.

But Larocque disagreed in every detail.

He testified that the Government Printing Office in early 1969, contained "more extensive" information on the military situation in Vietnam than the classified document disclosed by Ellsberg and Russo.

Like some of the other military officers who have appeared in the case, LaRocque kept his eyes almost constantly trained on the jury box and gesticulated with his hands as he tried to reduce complex technical concepts to everyday vocabulary.

As he testified, the jurors were permitted for the first time to read copies of one volume of the Pentagon Papers.

Some jurors seemed so absorbed in their reading that U.S. District Court Judge W. Matt Byrne Jr. had to interrupt them and remind them to listen to the testimony.

The questioning of Larocque was suspended before chief prosecutor David R. Nissen began his cross-examination because defense attorneys had not yet made their complete exhibit list available to the prosecution. Byrne ordered that they do so by Thursday morning.

Wheeler report was probably "of little use" to foreign intelligence analysts, and he characterized the document as a brief in support of a request for more ground troops by Gen. William C. Westmoreland, then U.S. commander in Vietnam.

The retired Navy officer observed that another report, written by Westmoreland and released publicity by the Gov.