

Aides Explain Nixon's Pentagon Papers Assertion

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 24 — White House sources offered an explanation today for President Nixon's assertion that The New York Times in three installments of its presentation of the Pentagon Papers had published "a majority" of documents not included in the 47-volume Pentagon study.

In answer to questions, the sources said Mr. Nixon was referring to texts of Government documents that, while not physically appended to the study, were mentioned in it or cited in its footnotes. The sources added that Mr. Nixon's assertion was based on "a meticulous study by the Defense Department."

President Nixon made his comment on Tuesday in his statement describing what he called national-security justifications for domestic investigations at issue in the Watergate case.

The editors noted that no documents were published textually by The Times that were not either quoted from or footnoted in the Pentagon study.

Told of Surprise

Referring to the start of The Times's Pentagon Papers articles on June 13, 1971, the statement declared:

"Not until a few hours before publication did any responsible Government official know that they had been stolen. Most officials did not know they existed. No senior official of the Government had read them or knew with certainty what they contained.

"All the Government knew, at first, was that the papers comprised 47 volumes and some 7,000 pages, which had been taken from the most sensitive files of the Departments of State and Defense and the C.I.A., covering military and diplomatic moves in a war that was still going on.

"Moreover, a majority of the documents published with the first three installments in The Times had not been included in the 47-volume study—raising serious questions about what and how much else might have been taken."

Team's Narrative Described

The Times's first three installments, each occupying more than six pages of the newspaper, consisted of articles describing a Pentagon historical team's narrative on the origin and growth of American involvement in Vietnam over 3 decades, with accompanying texts of or extracts from 45 Government documents.

Morton B. Halperin, a for-

mer Pentagon official who was on the Pentagon team that prepared the study, said yesterday that the compilers had originally intended to produce a volume of source documents—such as Government memorandums and cablegrams — along with the narrative based on those documents. But limitations of clerical staff and facilities prevented this, he said.

Members of The Times team that edited the papers said the documents were obtained, along with most of the Pentagon study, by Neil Sheehan of the newspaper's Washington Bureau. Mr. Sheehan is on leave of absence from The Times and is in Vietnam doing research for a book.

Nixon View Questioned

Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, who was tried on charges of espionage, theft and conspiracy in the disclosure of the Pentagon Papers and whose case was dismissed on May 12, took issue today with the President's assertion that the publication of the papers caught the Administration by surprise.

In an interview, Dr. Ellsberg said agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation had visited his employer, the Rand Corporation, more than a year before the articles appeared. The agents warned, he said,

that a wide variety of documents about Vietnam, entrusted to Rand for secret research, were being photographed and shown to antiwar senators.

Today, President Nixon once again underlined his contention that the publication of classified documents threatened national security. Addressing 450 former prisoners of war at a White House reception, he declared:

"Let me say it is time, in this country, to quit making national heroes out of those who steal secrets and publish them in newspapers. We must have confidentiality; we must have secret communication.

"I can assure you that I am going to meet my responsibility to protect the national security of the United States of America insofar as the secrecy is concerned. It is not that we are concerned about every little dribble here or there; but what I am concerned about is the highly classified documents in our National Security Council files, in the State Department and in the Defense Department.

"I say it is time for a new sense of responsibility in this country, and a new sense of dedication for everybody in the bureaucracy in this country, that if a document is classified keep it classified."