

2 Networks Rejected

Pentagon Papers

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At least two of the major television networks were offered the Pentagon papers last June, but both decided not to use the documents.

Both CBS and ABC said rejection of the documents had nothing to do with the networks' ownership of federally licensed radio and television stations. This consideration "didn't enter it one bit," Richard Salant, president of CBS News, said in a telephone interview yesterday from New York.

The networks' involvement with the Pentagon papers was casually raised yesterday by Nicholas Johnson, member of the Federal Communications Commission. Both Johnson and Commission Chairman Dean Burch testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, which is holding hearings on freedom of the press.

Salant said his network was offered portions of the papers on June 17, two days after a U.S. District Court in New York honored a Justice Department request to halt the New York Times temporarily from using the documents.

The documents, Salant said, were offered "on an immediate release basis from sources who were in a terrible rush to get these things published."

CBS declined because it wanted to study the documents "and put them in journalistic context," he said. The offer of the papers, however, did lead to a Walter Cronkite interview with Daniel Ellsberg—the source of the documents—on June 23, Salant said.

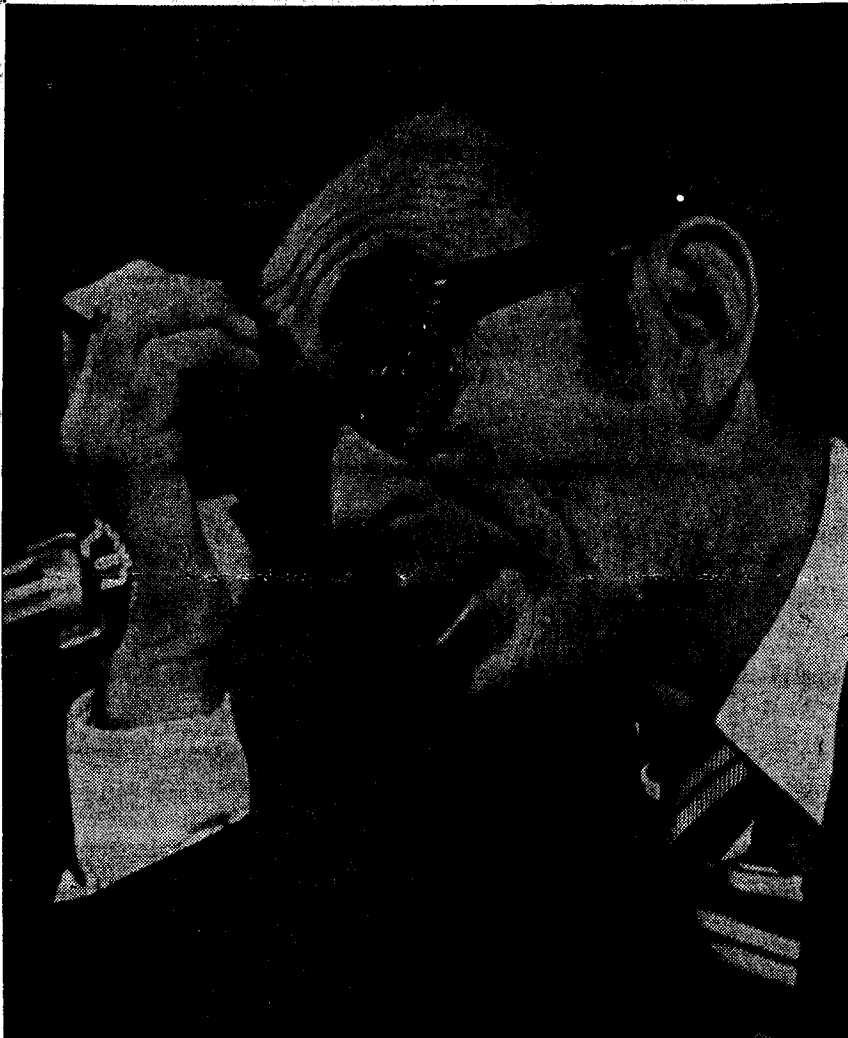
As for ABC, it was offered "1,000 pages of fresh papers" on June 23 or June 24, according to William Sheehan, vice president and director of television news.

But before the papers would be delivered, Sheehan said, the network would have had to agree that it would not let existing injunctions against newspapers inhibit it from using the papers.

ABC's lawyers raised precisely that objection, however. If Sheehan's dating is correct, injunctions had been issued against The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Boston Globe when the offer to ABC was made.

"They (the network's attorneys) felt the precedent was there," Sheehan said, and raised the prospect of citations for contempt of court.

At NBC, Donald Meaney, vice president for news, said: "I've canvassed everyone here, and, to our knowledge, they (the documents) were never brought to our attention."



Associated Press

Dean Burch, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, testifies before the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, which is looking into press

freedom. Burch testified that government intervention in radio and television programming could be more dangerous than the stations rigging the news themselves.