

Pentagon Papers Expert Says Disclosures Didn't Harm U.S.

By MARTIN ARNOLD

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LOS ANGELES, March 22—The man who supervised the assembling of the Pentagon papers and who was responsible for their being classified "top secret-sensitive" testified today that their disclosure was in no way injurious to the United States.

Dr. Morton H. Halperin, formerly deputy assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense and a staff member of the National Security Council, told the jury in the Pentagon papers trial that "in my opinion the study does not in fact present an authoritative view of thinking at the highest levels [of Government] about the war in Vietnam."

Dr. Halperin, 34 years old, who is on leave of absence from the Brookings Institution in Washington, may turn out to be, after the defendants themselves, the most important witness in the trial.

He said the reason the disclosure had not injured the United States was that the group that compiled the papers did not have access to White House papers on the war, nor to the minutes of White House meetings, nor to the memorandums between the then Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

Bar on Interviews

Group members were not allowed to interview Government officials, he said, and it was, therefore, "not possible to ask people what was in their minds when they wrote documents. One simply cannot look at a memorandum and assume what he [the author] wrote was what he really believed."

Dr. Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony J. Russo Jr. are on trial in Federal District Court here on six counts of espionage, six counts of theft and one count of conspiracy in connection with the copying and ultimate disclosure of the papers.

Dr. Halperin, who was at one time a hawk on the war, has been a defense consultant for many months.

The short, tick-set man with a round, almost cherubic face had started to let his hair grow until it became fashionably long, but for his appear-

ance as a witness it was neatly trimmed, although there were still black curls behind his ears. Gone, too, are the somewhat mod clothes, including the bell-bottom trousers he had been wearing each day. Yesterday he was in a business suit; today in a twill sport jacket with gray flannel trousers.

His testimony is lucid, and delivered so quickly that Charles R. Nesson, the defense counsel questioning him, has to remind him to slow down. The court stenographers find him difficult to keep up with.

Views of the War

Dr. Halperin told the jury that most high Government officials expressed their true personal views of the war in "private conversations" or in memorandums circulated to only two or three persons.

He said one of the themes that ran through the Pentagon Papers was what the Government had to tell the American public "to maintain support of the war."

Another theme, he testified, was the United States' reluctance to begin negotiations to end the war, and, he added, "the volumes relate the use of bombing and military action to interfere with the prospects of negotiations" being successful.

He said that to his knowledge that the disclosure of the Pentagon papers was important because "the outline" of American policy in Vietnam "was publicly available" in 1969 — the year of the alleged crimes by the accused — and that "some of them [the memorandums in the papers] were available, but the details of these documents were not available."

"There may have been one or two individuals who made allegations about these themes in writing," he said, "but the documentation was not publicly available."

Dr. Halperin also said that after the papers were first disclosed in The New York Times on June 13, 1971, he turned his set of them over to the National Archives. Previously, he had already testified, they had been stored at the Rand Corporation in Santa Monica, Calif., and in Washington.