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Rebuttal Witness Supports Ellsberg

Los Angeles

The judge in the Pentagon papers trial allowed a government rebuttal witness to switch roles in mid-testimony yesterday, becoming a supportive witness for the defense case of Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo.

Leslie Gelb, a former Defense Department official who had testified against the defendants on Friday, gave support yesterday for several defense contentions—that Ellsberg did not intend to

copy the Pentagon papers when he first gained access to them and that the papers were classified top secret without any consideration of whether the documents needed guarding.

Gelb, who helped classify the papers "top secret-sensitive," admitted his training was limited. "The only instruction I believe I had was a movie I was required to attend which said to beware of blondes who are excessively friendly and may be Russian spies."

Ellsberg, 42, and Russo, 36, are charged with espionage, conspiracy and theft for copying the Pentagon study of the Vietnam war in 1969. The government says the documents were so sensitive that the defendants endangered the national security by copying them.

But Gelb, supporting testimony by a previous defense witness who headed classification of the papers, said he gave no consideration to contents of the study. Rather, he said, he and the others hastily decided to give it the same marking as some of the older source documents because "the volumes were being typed up and the secretaries wanted to know what classification to put on them."

On questioning by defense attorney Charles Nisson, Gelb said he did not evaluate the dozens of volumes separately, but made one decision for all.

He said he was aware that some volumes were based on "unclassified sources" such as books, newspaper reports and public documents.

Associated Press