

Transcript of Ellsberg Interview on TV

Following is the transcript of an interview with Dr. Daniel Ellsberg by Walter Cronkite on the C.B.S. Television 7 P.M. news program last night, as recorded by The New York Times:

Dr. Ellsberg: The fact is that in the 7,000 to 10,000 pages of this study I don't think there is a line in them that contains an estimate of the likely impact of our policy on the over-all casualties among the Vietnamese or the refugees to be caused, the effects of defoliation in an ecological sense, nor a calculation of past offense ever, and the documents simply concern the internal concerns, reflect the internal concerns of our officials. That says nothing more nor less than our officials never did concern themselves in writing and I think in no informal way either, with the effect of our policies on the Vietnamese.

I was struck by the cover of Newsweek here. I refer to this super-history of Vietnam—a map of Vietnam with the faces of important people who effected that secret history of Vietnam. You notice they are all Americans. Every one of them. That reflects accurately the way the history of Vietnam emerges from those studies—that is, from the internal documents of the United States.

Was 'Part of System'

It affects the way the Vietnam War is seen from Washington, as to who matters and who doesn't. And there is great realism to that, actually. As I say I'm familiar, I was part of that system. I know how that's looked at. There's realism to that.

The war has been an American war and there is certainly realism to the way that it's been reflecting the actual attitudes of the people make decisions.

Nowhere in those cables or estimates, I think outside of

memos by a few people, General Ansfield being one, I think, will the public find when they read these Vietnamese leader described with concern, friendship, respect or evaluated in any terms other than as an instrument of American policy.

The Vietnamese leaders with whom we've been dealing unfortunately have the character that they tend to see themselves that way and the other Vietnamese know it.

As for Vietnamese who aren't leaders, they're not in the study at all. They're just not there. Only this side and that's a large part of what's been wrong.

I came back then with this sense, an additional sense, of concern then about what we were doing to the people of Vietnam as well as what was happening to this country, a concern that many people shared by '67 and '68.

By '68 I had read most of this study, written in a draft for one volume of it and well, can you imagine yourself what you'd feel like to have read those 7,000 pages judging from the 1,000 or so you've seen summaries or so far? And reading the news to the public every night, not able to tell them of the existence of the study or what it was you'd read.

Felt Very Concerned

I've been reading about myself obviously in these accounts and it's—some of it's—almost amusing, the inferences of my being very tortured by guilt. Actually I had to say I didn't feel guilty for things that I'd done in Vietnam. I felt very concerned. I felt that the knowledge gave me a kind of responsibility that others didn't have.

A very simple explanation came to me as to the impression I apparently have been giving to people over the last year is that I read this history. I read all of it

and I've read it several times. I think it obviously led me to kinds of activity against the war publicity.

It was simply very baffling to my colleagues, none of whom had read the study, almost none of whom knew of its existence or the fact that I had read it.

I think maybe they'll understand some strange things about my intensity that they describe a month from now. I hope we'll see some more intense involvement in ending this war.

I'm sure this story is more painful for many people at this moment than for me, because, of course, it is familiar to me having read it several times, but it must be painful for the American people now to read these papers—and there's a lot more to come—and to discover that the men whom they gave so much respect and trust as well as power regarded them as contemptuously as they regarded our Vietnamese allies.

Cronkite: It's a black history as it's been drawn so far. Are there any heroes in it?

Mylai Soldier a Hero

Ellsberg: I think that a man I read about named Bernard who put his rifle down to the ground at the risk of his life and refused the orders of his superior commander to fire at civilians at Mylai. He's a hero.

Cronkite: You don't find them on a higher level?

Ellsberg: That's a hard question you've asked me. I hate—I hate not to find it easy to answer. I hate as an American not to find it easy to answer. Looking at the record it seems hard for me to find men who have lived up to the responsibilities of their office in terms of not only of what they did but of what they could have done, what they should have done, given their feelings.

Cronkite: What would you expect to be revealed from the documents that might come out in future days or weeks? What's still back there that we can look forward to?

Ellsberg: Well, I think that the real lessons to be drawn are yet to be seen by the public, and they're not from any one period or any one episode. They really come from seeing the whole sweep of the history.

There's never been in a year when there would have been a war in Indochina with American money fueling it. The perception that I had, just like most people in the country, that this was in some sense an ongoing war which we we had joined for good or bad, screened out many of the moral aspects of the conflict, and to discover on the contrary that in Indochina if we had not been supplying money and the napalm and buying soldiers and equipment and finally supplying our own soldiers there would have been violence, there would have been violence among non-Communists, among the sects, political violence, there would have been assassinations, raids, some degree of guerrilla action, Communists against other Communists, the Trotskyites were wiped out by other Communists in Saigon in '45, there wouldn't have been anything that looked like a war, and to say that is to say that Americans now bear major responsibility, as I read this history, for every death in combat in Indochina in the last 25 years, and that's one-million to two-million people.

NYT

6-24-71