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Neil Sheehan of Times Receives The First Drew Pearson Prize

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 13 — Neil Sheehan of The New York Times was awarded the first annual Drew Pearson Prize for excellence in investigative reporting today at the National Press Club.

Mr. Sheehan, a reporter in the paper's Washington bureau, won the award for his reporting on the Pentagon papers, the Defense Department's secret study of the Vietnam war. Mrs. Drew Pearson said at the award luncheon that Mr. Sheehan had written the articles last spring "at considerable risk" to himself and had set "a very high standard" for future recipients of the \$5,000 prize, which is given by the Drew Pearson Foundation. The foundation memorializes Mr. Pearson, the columnist, who died in 1969.

In accepting the award, Mr. Sheehan said in part:

"We are told that in writing the First Amendment, that 'Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press,' the Founding Fathers meant to give us a mere privilege to report and publish, a license that can be revoked or restricted when those who govern us see fit to revoke or restrict it for what they believe to be the greater good of the nation.

'Imposed Upon Us a Duty'

"Those who hold this view will learn that journalists who take their work seriously will reject it, regardless of the personal consequences. The Founding Fathers did not give us a privilege, a license that is held at the convenience of government. Rather, in writing the First Amendment, they imposed upon us a duty, a responsibility to assert the right of the American people to know the truth and to hold those who govern them to account.

"In the pursuit of this responsibility, some of our colleagues, a number of them my friends, have given their lives in Vietnam. No one intimidated them and no one is coming to intimidate us. When The New York Times printed the Pentagon papers, my publisher and my editors also sought to do that duty, to fulfill that responsibility.

"I can take great pride in this award today, not just because of my own contribution to the publication of these documents, whatever that may have been, but because in honoring me the Drew Pearson Foundation honors my newspaper and all of my colleagues who work for The Times for seeking to live up to the ideals of our craft. And I accept this award in their honor.

"Some would have us believe



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Neil Sheehan

that in publishing the Pentagon papers we committed theft and treason. Words like theft and treason have a certain tinny ring in courtrooms and from political platforms.

"I believe that in publishing this history of the Vietnam war, we gave to the American people, who had given to those who governed us 45,000 of their sons and \$100-billion of their treasure, a small accounting of a debt that can never be repaid. But if to report now be called theft, and if to publish now be called treason, then so be it. Let God give us the courage to commit more of the same."

The publication of some of the Pentagon papers led to an attempt by the Government to suppress publication of the remainder of the material. This attempt was ultimately defeated by the Supreme Court, which held that any attempt by the Government to block news articles before publication bears "a heavy burden of presumption against its constitutionality."

Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, who has said he gave the Pentagon study to the press, has been indicted by a Los Angeles grand jury on charges of unauthorized possession and use of secret documents. A Grand Jury in Boston was reported to be investigating both Dr. Ellsberg and Mr. Sheehan. The Times and Mr. Sheehan, who obtained the papers, have refused to discuss their source.