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EX-DIPLOMAT SAYS HE MET ELLSBERG

Vu Van Thai Tells of Talk 'in Context of Vietnam'

Special to The New York Times

DAKAR, Senegal, Jan. 3—Vu Van Thai, the former South Vietnamese diplomat who was named as a co-conspirator with Dr. Daniel Ellsberg in connection with the Pentagon papers last week, said today that he and Dr. Ellsberg had been "friends for a long time" and had met "in the context of his activities concerning Vietnam."

Mr. Thai, who is here as a consultant for the United Nations Development Program on a project to develop the Seneg

viewer that he was "completely unaware of the nature of the charges against me."

Mr. Thai, a former South Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States, was one of two persons named as co-conspirators with Dr. Ellsberg and Anthony J. Russo Jr. in an indictment handed up by a Federal grand jury in Los Angeles. Neither Mr. Thai nor Lynda Sinay, also named as a co-conspirator, was charged in the indictment.

"I used to be in the service of Vietnam, but now I am in the international civil service and no longer concern myself with Vietnamese affairs," Mr. Thai said. "Dan and I have been friends for a long time. We met in the context of his activities concerning Vietnam. He was at that time a member of the Rand Corporation, and I was in the United States as Ambassador."

Mr. Thai, who will be 53

years old Jan. 26, served as his country's ambassador here from November, 1965, to December, 1966. An engineer and economist, he served as a United Nations consultant before his ambassadorial appointment. He rejoined the international body "as a special adviser on problems concerning the development of river basins in West Africa," he said.

Commenting on the Ellsberg case, Mr. Thai said: "It is true I am a friend of Dan Ellsberg. As to this case, it is a political affair, and since at the present time I am an international civil servant, rules forbid me to comment on a Vietnamese political affair."

Mr. Thai added: "When I see what I am accused of, I will

determine myself if I ought to make a response."

When asked what his response would be if he were called on to testify, Mr. Thai said: "It is a political affair which is incompatible with the rules of international service. If I must testify, the agreement and authorization of the Secretary-General of the United Nations will be necessary."

Mr. Thai split with the South Vietnamese regime in 1961 because of his opposition to the growing American influence there. Asked about his reported unpopularity there because of his views, he replied: "Who can be popular in Vietnam?"

Daughter in New York

Mr. Thai, born in Hanoi, is

married to a French woman, the former Simone Garoute; they have three daughters. One of their daughters, Mrs. Michael Zelnik, 24, spent the New Year's weekend with her husband in Mr. Thai's country house in Hillsdale, N.Y.

Asked if she felt her father might have acted disloyally in connection with the Pentagon papers, Mrs. Zelnik said:

"After all, it was not his government. I don't know how he feels."

She added in a later telephone interview that her father "approved of what Dan Ellsberg did, communicating the papers to the public," but had told her he had never seen the documents involved.