

Secrecy Label Is Used too Often By Pentagon, Ex-Aide Testifies

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WASHINGTON, June 24—disclosure of a secret Pentagon study on the war in Vietnam. A recently retired civil servant who spent many years in the Pentagon reviewing the classification of sensitive documents asserted today that only one half of 1 per cent of them contained genuine secrets that should be kept from the public.

William G. Florence told a House subcommittee investigating secrecy in government that "the disclosure of information in at least 99½ per cent of those classified documents could not be prejudicial to the defense interests of the nation."

Mr. Florence, who retired on May 31 as a senior aide in the Department of the Air Force, said that the practice of stamping papers "Top Secret," "Secret," or "Confidential" had become "so widespread that the defense classification system is literally clogged with material bearing classification markings."

Mr. Florence estimated that "there are at least 20 million classified documents, including reproduced copies," either in circulation or in storage in the Department of Defense alone.

He testified before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Government Information, which is headed by Representative William S. Moorhead, Democrat of Pennsylvania, in the second day of hearings stimulated by press

disclosure of a secret Pentagon study on the war in Vietnam. Representative Paul N. McCloskey Jr., Republican of California and a member of the subcommittee, deferred his planned testimony until he has had a chance to compare the 600 to 700 pages of the Pentagon study in his hands with the complete 47-volume project, which is scheduled to be handed to the Speaker of the House, Carl Albert, on Monday.

Mr. McCloskey said today he doubted there was any information in the documents he has that should remain secret, other than the names of Central Intelligence agents involved in the coup against President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam in 1963.

Mr. Florence, a slender man with close-cropped red hair and a diffident manner, indicated that the cumbersome classification system led to some "utterly ridiculous" practices, unnecessary costs to taxpayers of \$50-million a year, and was the cause of constant wrangles within the Pentagon.

He said that one of the service chiefs wrote a note to the other service chiefs some time ago suggesting that too many papers marked "Top Secret" were being circulated. He recommended that the use of that classification be reduced.

"Believe it or not," Mr. Florence said, "that note itself was marked 'Top Secret.'"

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