

DEFINING PATRIOTISM:  
DANIEL ELLSBERG'S STRUGGLE BETWEEN DUTY AND CONSCIENCE

COLE CHESTER

DR. GOSCH

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## INTRODUCTION

On the evening of October 1, 1969, Daniel Ellsberg walked out of the RAND Corporation (a private consulting firm with close ties to the Defense Department) headquarters in Santa Monica, California carrying a briefcase.<sup>1</sup> This briefcase contained the first of over 7,000 pages of an infamous government report on the extensive United States government involvement in the Vietnam War. Ellsberg removed these top secret documents from the RAND Corporation with the explicit intent of eventually copying every page and revealing their secrets to the American public. Formally entitled "History of U.S. Decision Making Process on Vietnam Policy," the Pentagon Papers were an internal Defense Department study commissioned by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in June 1967, documenting the history of American involvement in Vietnam. This controversial report would serve as a reason for the American public to question the actions of their government in the past, present, and future.

Like many Americans in the 1960's, Daniel Ellsberg had grown tired of the ongoing Vietnam War. Only days before Ellsberg began copying the Pentagon Papers in 1971, he attended the April 23<sup>rd</sup> rally in Washington D.C. with goals of bringing the city, and therefore the American government, to a halt.<sup>2</sup> Accompanied by some 500,000 protestors, Ellsberg and his compatriots were prepared to go to jail in order to end the war in Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> In fact, at this point in his life Ellsberg was so passionate about ending the

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<sup>1</sup> Ellsberg, Daniel, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Penguin, 2003), xi.

<sup>2</sup> Lytle, Mark Hamilton, *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 359.

<sup>3</sup> Lytle, 395.

war in Vietnam that he recalls thinking “What could I do, what should I be doing, to help end the war now that I was ready to go to prison for it?”<sup>4</sup>

Thoughts such as these were not uncommon in America in the 1960’s. Thousands of protesters were arrested and jailed during this era due to their strong convictions about ending the Vietnam War. Why should Daniel Ellsberg stand out? Why is his anti-Vietnam conviction so interesting? This interest in Ellsberg lies in the era itself. The 1960’s was a time of immense polarization. Figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., the Weathermen, and Hippies personified the left of this polarization. In their minds they represented peace, free love and harmony. On the other end of the spectrum lie Richard Nixon, war hawks, and ‘anyone over thirty.’ These people of the right enjoyed the status quo, backed their government, and believed in structure, law, and order. These two polar opposites wholeheartedly disagreed with the other side’s views and would go to the ends of the earth to advance their own.

This polarization made the United States in the 1960’s look like a brand new tuxedo, with the black dinner jacket running a sharp contrast to the white oxford shirt. Daniel Ellsberg fits perfectly into this American tuxedo, as he began his adult life on one end of the spectrum, a staunch ‘cold warrior.’<sup>5</sup> Approximately fifteen years later in his adult life, Ellsberg would find himself on the other end of the spectrum, releasing top secret government documents to the New York Times with the aim of toppling a presidency and ending three decades of American involvement in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> This makes Ellsberg’s life a sort of microcosm for America in the 1960’s. By examining Ellsberg’s reasons and rationale for ‘switching sides’ in the middle of his adult life from cold

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<sup>4</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 272.

<sup>5</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 289.

warrior to radical, one can learn why the 1960's were so polarized, why this era was one of the most controversial in United States history, as well as reasons why people viewed the world in the 1960's as they did.

Dan Ellsberg began his adult life at Harvard. There, Ellsberg would compile a brilliant record as a student and even work on his doctorate with Henry Kissinger.<sup>7</sup> Ellsberg would continue from Harvard to enlist in the United States Marine Corps in 1954 as an officer.<sup>8</sup> After the Marine Corps, Ellsberg enjoyed a brief stint at the previously mentioned RAND Corporation in Santa Monica, California. After impressing many at RAND with his intellectual prowess (one coworker even went as far as to call him a 'super genius'),<sup>9</sup> Ellsberg decided to pursue his goals and work in Washington as a special assistant to the assistant of the Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.<sup>10</sup> Ellsberg would be serving directly under Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, John McNaughton.<sup>11</sup> Ellsberg would begin viewing top secret cables and documents, choosing which were important enough for McNaughton's attention.<sup>12</sup> This ensured Ellsberg was the prototypical conservative cold warrior climbing his way up the ladder; impressing everyone he passes, destined for big things within the high levels of American government.

Then something happened. The more Ellsberg viewed cables from Vietnam, the more he learned. The more he learned, the more disillusioned he became with the war in Vietnam and the more he distrusted the American government. Ellsberg read top secret

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<sup>7</sup> Lytle, 359.

<sup>8</sup> Wells, Tom, *Wild Man: The Life and Times of Daniel Ellsberg* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 114.

<sup>9</sup> Wells, 136.

<sup>10</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

government documents which urged disengagement in Vietnam, leading Ellsberg to state “I don’t believe there is a way to win [in Vietnam]. It doesn’t exist.”<sup>13</sup> Ellsberg could see that the American government was consciously hiding these reports and findings from the American people. Ellsberg took it upon himself to do something about it.

Throughout the course of this paper, I will explore *why* Ellsberg took it upon himself to do something about it. Namely, what drove a man with an extremely promising career in the United States government to throw it all away? What prompted him to change his lifestyle from “secret keeper”<sup>14</sup> to that of “radical civil disobedience?”<sup>15</sup> In order to ascertain answers to these questions, I have looked at many different sources. The most helpful source was Ellsberg’s memoirs entitled Secrets: a Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers. This book contains rich descriptions of Ellsberg’s thought process throughout every step of his journey. Ellsberg writes of his time in the Department of Defense, Vietnam, and RAND as well as his time spent on the lam evading the FBI while distributing the Pentagon Papers. This book can be best described as an ‘inside-out’ look at Ellsberg. I also drew heavily from Tom Wells’ book Wild Man: the Life and Times of Daniel Ellsberg. Wells takes an ‘outside-in’ look at Ellsberg as he writes this unauthorized biography. Wells conducted a nauseating amount of interviews with anyone and everyone associated with Ellsberg in order to get a firm grip on who he is. Wells interviews schoolyard mates, college cronies, and professional colleagues in order to gather as many opinions on the man as possible. These interviews need to be read critically, as according to Wells “Many of Ellsberg’s former colleagues had been angry at him for releasing the Pentagon Papers to the press in 1971, and thus

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<sup>13</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 234.

<sup>14</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 399.

they might have reason to get back at him.”<sup>16</sup> Also, Ellsberg has written a host of books and articles on topics from whistle-blowing to Vietnam to current day Iran. Many helpful interviews have also been conducted with Ellsberg, including a Walter Cronkite interview held while Ellsberg was still in hiding (after releasing the Pentagon Papers). The last type of source worth note are the scores of interviews with Daniel Ellsberg. These interviews after 1971 help the reader realize the conditions under which Ellsberg’s beliefs were forged. As I described before, Ellsberg himself is the epitome of polarization; as a result, so are the articles written about him. Some authors view him as a saint and others as the devil. Reading both sides of this story proved to be very helpful in discovering who Ellsberg really was and still is to this day.

The structure of my argument begins with Ellsberg as a ‘cold warrior.’ In this first chapter, I will explain how Ellsberg became a cold warrior, what his views were, and what his political/career hopes were. Second, I will explore what caused Ellsberg to change his worldview. In the second chapter, I will look at the *people* who influenced him. Ellsberg’s family, wives, colleagues, and friends all had a profound impact on his views. Chapter three is an insight into the *events* which influenced Ellsberg. Events such as peace rallies, Robert Kennedy’s death, and most notably his experience in Vietnam as a member of the State Department will shine light onto his thinking. Chapter four will loosely explain the logistics of Ellsberg’s release of the Pentagon Papers and the trial which followed. Finally, the paper will conclude with the current status of Ellsberg’s views and the impact which he believes his views have.

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<sup>16</sup> Wells, viii.

CHAPTER 1  
COLD WARRIOR

In order to understand what Ellsberg's thinking became, we must first look at what it once was. A self-described foreign policy "tough guy,"<sup>17</sup> Daniel Ellsberg was quickly 'climbing the ladder' to success in the late fifties and early sixties.<sup>18</sup>

Daniel Ellsberg was born in 1931 and raised in suburban Detroit, Highland Park to be exact.<sup>19</sup> From the very beginning it seemed as if Ellsberg was on the fast track to success. Ellsberg's father was a structural engineer working for a renowned architectural firm in Detroit.<sup>20</sup> Family status gave Daniel the clout and cash necessary to attend the prestigious Cranbrook School in the greater Detroit area.<sup>21</sup> His father's pocketbook was not the only factor which sent Daniel to the school seen as 'a school training the leaders of the next generation.'<sup>22</sup> The young Daniel also displayed immense talents both intellectually and musically. In fact, Ellsberg's great musical talent was showcased at the age of fifteen when he performed Beethoven's third concerto with "most of the Detroit Symphony."<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Ellsberg's academic prowess also became obvious at an early age, as he skipped the entirety of eighth grade at Cranbrook.<sup>24</sup> Ellsberg's vast talents were coupled with his "great drive to prove himself," causing Ellsberg's father to say of

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<sup>17</sup> Young, Michael, "The Devil and Daniel Ellsberg," *Reason* 34, no. 2 (June 2002): 61.

<sup>18</sup> Wells, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Wells, 39.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Wells, 53.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Wells, 68.

<sup>24</sup> Wells, 56.

his son “anything that’s tough, he wants to do.”<sup>25</sup> These factors made it very evident at an early age that Ellsberg was destined for big things.

Prior to attending Harvard, Ellsberg made his views on the Soviet blockade of Berlin and the establishment of Communist Party rule in Czechoslovakia known to anyone willing to listen.<sup>26</sup> This made it evident that even at an early age that Ellsberg supported the views of the United States government. According to biographer Tom Wells, Ellsberg despised communism and believed it was a grave threat to the national security of the United States.<sup>27</sup> Ellsberg was a ‘cold warrior.’<sup>28</sup>

Ellsberg continued to make his academic mark at Harvard. Professors believed he possessed ‘truly exceptional intellectual promise;’<sup>29</sup> this statement holds much sway coming from Harvard professors. One professor, Carl Kaysen, even went as far as to call Ellsberg one of the four brightest students he had in this twelve years at Harvard.<sup>30</sup> Ellsberg’s highlights during his years at Harvard included earning the honor of ‘summa’ from the Harvard economics department (the only one awarded in 1952) and earning his Economics Ph. D. in 1963 after his service in the military.<sup>31</sup>

After graduate school, Ellsberg joined the Marine Corps in 1954.<sup>32</sup> Ellsberg joined the Marines to “test himself,” to see if he was “man enough to be in the Marines.”<sup>33</sup> Ellsberg’s joining the Marines is no surprise. His views on the Cold War,

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<sup>25</sup> Wells, 82.

<sup>26</sup> Wells, 92.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Wells, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Wells, 129.

<sup>32</sup> Wells, 108.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

coupled with his desires to attain an influential government position and to prove himself made him a perfect candidate for the job.

Ellsberg's time in the Marines solidified his stance as a 'cold warrior;' his actions in 1956 illustrate this. Ellsberg was set to finish his Marine tour in June of 1956. He had plans to join the Harvard Society of Fellows<sup>34</sup> after his discharge and work on his doctorate.<sup>35</sup> After reading that there was a good chance of war breaking out in the Middle East over the Suez Canal, however, Ellsberg decided to break his plans and extend his tour.<sup>36</sup> Ellsberg's friend Don Hall remembers that Ellsberg extended his tour "because it looked as if there might be the possibility of some action."<sup>37</sup> Ellsberg was granted his tour extension and was subsequently stationed on a ship in the Mediterranean Sea. While stationed abroad, "unsure which side we would be fighting at that point," Ellsberg remembers thinking "any war was better than none...I was more than prepared to fight any enemy designated by my commander in chief."<sup>38</sup> At this point in Ellsberg's life he was the embodiment of the phrase 'cold warrior.' Ellsberg's willingness to perform any task, unquestioned, which the President has deemed necessary along with his craving of conflict and 'action,' made Ellsberg the prototypical American 'cold warrior.'

After Ellsberg returned from the Mediterranean and completed his Ph. D., he was invited to work in the first of two stints at the RAND Corporation.<sup>39</sup> Here, Ellsberg continued to impress his peers as he was labeled a "supergenius" and a "golden boy."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The Harvard Society of Fellows is a collection of luminaries selected by Harvard University to be given special honors and upon whom various privileges are bestowed. Membership in the society is for life.

<sup>35</sup> Wells, 121.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Wells, 120.

<sup>38</sup> Wells, 121.

<sup>39</sup> The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit think tank which offers research and analysis to the US Armed Forces. RAND is an acronym of 'Research and Development.'

<sup>40</sup> Wells, 136.

Ellsberg's ambitions led him to RAND, as he believed it would be a good stepping stone in achieving his goal of attaining an influential office in the United States government. Ellsberg's colleagues at RAND further encouraged this belief; saying things such as "[Ellsberg] pictured himself as destined for some heroic role" and "being an individual at the *leading edge* who could make a *big difference* was an important motivator for Dan."<sup>41</sup>

Ellsberg's first stretch at RAND proved to be just what he wanted, a stepping stone. John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (one of Robert McNamara's leading advisors), heard about Ellsberg's intelligence and success at RAND and hired him to be his special assistant.<sup>42</sup> Ellsberg took the job hoping this would get his foot in the door at the Pentagon. Ellsberg was excited to be on the inside, near the highest levels of power at the Pentagon, with access to a great deal of important and sensitive material.<sup>43</sup>

Incredibly enough, Ellsberg's first full day on the job was August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1964; the day when the USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy were allegedly fired upon by the North Vietnamese in the Gulf of Tonkin.<sup>44</sup> When Ellsberg viewed the incoming cables describing the situation, it caused him to exclaim "We're going to blast these [North Vietnamese]" and "We're going to really strike these guys... You can't attack an American ship on the high seas, anybody that does has to pay for it."<sup>45</sup> Exclamations such as these would typify Ellsberg's thinking during his first few months in the Defense Department.

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<sup>41</sup> Wells, 140.

<sup>42</sup> Wells, 197.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, p 7.

<sup>45</sup> Wells, 203.

During his first few months in the Defense Department, Ellsberg was described by his colleagues as being a “hawk on Vietnam.”<sup>46</sup> Ellsberg “flatly rejected” the idea of negotiations to end the conflict with North Vietnam.<sup>47</sup> Ellsberg’s chief concern during this time period dealt with the Vietnam War. Vietnam consumed Ellsberg’s life; he turned almost every conversation into one about the war, often resulting in “dining table screaming matches” with friends and colleagues.<sup>48</sup>

Ellsberg’s first months in the Defense Department would prove to be the apex of his ‘cold warrior’ and ‘war hawk’ thinking. The crux of Ellsberg’s argument in Vietnam during this period was “if the United States quits Vietnam, it would hurt U.S. status and influence in the world and benefit the Soviets and Chinese.”<sup>49</sup> This thinking led him to believe the very same thing he would come to despise reading about in the 7,000 page Pentagon Papers: “We can’t win, but we cannot lose.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Wells, 204.

<sup>48</sup> Wells, 205.

<sup>49</sup> Wells, 205-206.

<sup>50</sup> Wells, 205.

## CHAPTER 2

### FRIENDS AND INFLUENCES

Ellsberg's change in thinking from that of a 'war hawk' to a 'peaceful dove' was a gradual process. One of the key factors contributing to the change in his viewpoint on the Vietnam War was who he chose to surround himself with. Ellsberg's family, colleagues, and friends all had impacts of varying degrees upon his thinking. This chapter will explore these figures in his life, selecting the people who proved to be most influential. First, individuals close to Ellsberg, such as his father and wife, proved to have deceptively slight impact upon Ellsberg's views. Also, numerous friends and colleagues impacted Ellsberg's beliefs.

Daniel Ellsberg's father, Harry Ellsberg, was a quiet man whom a young Daniel considered to be a nonentity in the family.<sup>51</sup> However, this type of relationship would not last the entirety of Daniel Ellsberg's life. A tragic car accident on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1946 which killed both his mother and sister would prove to be the turning point. After this accident, Ellsberg recalls "I became very close to my father... we had been much less so before."<sup>52</sup>

In an interview with Walter Cronkite held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1971, Ellsberg states why his father was such an influential figure in his life. Ellsberg states "My father had a favorite line from the Bible, which I used to hear a great deal when I was a kid: 'The truth shall set you free.'... I hope that truth will free us of this war."<sup>53</sup> This quote speaks highly of Ellsberg's admiration for this father, as Daniel was never a religious

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<sup>51</sup> Wells, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Wells, 77.

<sup>53</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 402.

man.<sup>54</sup> In order for Ellsberg to use a quote from the Bible in an interview to be aired on primetime CBS shows a great deal of respect toward the thinking of his father and the influence he had on him.

Ellsberg's second wife Patricia had an even more obvious impact upon Ellsberg's thinking. Patricia Marx (who would later change her name to Patricia Marx Ellsberg after marriage) was staunchly against the war in Vietnam from the first day they met. On their first date, April 17, 1965, Patricia took Ellsberg to his first antiwar protest.<sup>55</sup> Ellsberg, however, did not actively participate in the rally, as his line of thinking was still staunchly pro-Vietnam.<sup>56</sup> This first date, however, still serves as a good example of how strong Marx's anti-war feelings were. Marx would not begin to influence Ellsberg's thinking until she visited him when he was on his State Department mission to Vietnam.<sup>57</sup> During the visit, Marx recalls calling Ellsberg "part of the war," continuing to say "You're part of something that's so awful."<sup>58</sup> In response to this, Marx remembers Ellsberg saying "But I'm trying to stop these terrible things."<sup>59</sup> This conversation proved to be so heated, in fact, that Marx was concerned it would split them apart for good.<sup>60</sup> This also marks the first time anyone recalls Ellsberg saying anything so anti-Vietnam. This argument could mean one of two things; either Ellsberg was attempting to sedate the situation by conceding to his fiancé (which goes completely against Ellsberg's personality) or that Marx may have swayed Ellsberg's opinion for the first time. Either way, it is indisputable that his wife, Patricia, impacted his thinking.

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<sup>54</sup> Wells, 48.

<sup>55</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 74.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Wells, 264. Patricia Marx traveled to Vietnam in order to work on an article for Atlantic Magazine, as well as conduct interviews for her radio program.

<sup>58</sup> Wells, 265.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Ellsberg's friends and colleagues had the most profound and obvious impact upon his thinking. If the thinking of Ellsberg's family had an impact on him, the thinking of friends such as John Paul Vann, Anthony Russo, Janaki Tschannerl, Randy Kehler, and others spun Ellsberg's head around and put his emotions regarding the war in a blender.

Daniel Ellsberg met John Paul Vann during his State Department mission to Vietnam. Vann had been 'in-country' for a few years before Ellsberg came to Vietnam.<sup>61</sup> During this time, Vann had a need to witness the 'real Vietnam' for himself, driving in an Army Jeep with an M-16 constantly pointed out of the driver's side window traveling from hamlet to hamlet assessing the situation himself.<sup>62</sup> These tactics gave Vann a reputation of courageousness and fearlessness as he survived these daring acts.<sup>63</sup> Ellsberg drove around Vietnam with Vann for six weeks, viewing the same things Vann saw on a daily basis.<sup>64</sup> As a result, Ellsberg believed Vann had the best grasp on 'what was really going on in Vietnam.'<sup>65</sup> Vann's grasp on 'what was really going on in Vietnam' made him a forceful critic of US policies in Vietnam, mainly criticizing if the war was winnable.<sup>66</sup>

Ellsberg's experience with Vann reshaped his thinking on the war. Ellsberg now believed, like Vann, that political mobilization to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese was the only way to win the war; military action was only digging us deeper into a hole.<sup>67</sup> Ellsberg was not completely against the war yet, but this marks the beginning of his open questioning of United States government policy.

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<sup>61</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 110.

<sup>62</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 114.

<sup>63</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 110.

<sup>64</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 126.

<sup>67</sup> Wells, 48.

Anthony Russo, a future colleague of Ellsberg's at RAND and the man who would assist Ellsberg in photocopying the 7,000 pages of the Pentagon Papers, also spent some time in Vietnam. Russo had begun to turn off on the war when he was in Vietnam due to "grossly flawed processes".<sup>68</sup> The two met as Ellsberg's questioning of US policy in Vietnam fed his curiosity of the anti-war movement and hippies.<sup>69</sup> According to a friend, Ellsberg "wanted to meet some hippies" so he approached Russo whom he viewed as one.<sup>70</sup> Russo's anti-war opinion was much more intense than that of Ellsberg when they met in 1968.<sup>71</sup> Russo admired the Vietnamese as a people and believed they were right about the justice of their cause.<sup>72</sup> Russo began to influence Ellsberg's anti-war thinking, causing it to become more intense and even resulted in Ellsberg talking about possibly releasing the Pentagon Papers. According to Russo, "we talked about leaking every day, all the time...I said 'Dan, you've got to leak that stuff.'"<sup>73</sup> Russo's influence on Ellsberg became illustrated when Ellsberg approached Russo on September 30, 1968, asking him to help him copy the papers.<sup>74</sup>

Daniel Ellsberg met an Indian woman by the name of Janaki Tschannerl in the spring of 1968 at a conference on revolution at Princeton University.<sup>75</sup> Ellsberg was immediately taken by both her beauty and her intelligence.<sup>76</sup> Tschannerl was a committed Gandhian and pacifist who strongly opposed any American involvement in

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<sup>68</sup> Wells, 300. Russo was part of RAND's infamous "Vietcong Motivation and Morale Project" while in Vietnam.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 390.

<sup>73</sup> Wells, 300.

<sup>74</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 291.

<sup>75</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 211.

<sup>76</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 212.

Vietnam.<sup>77</sup> Ellsberg was most interested in Tschannerl's Gandhian thought. From this moment on, due to Tschannerl's influence, Ellsberg's political thinking became centered on the ideas of Gandhian thought.<sup>78</sup> Ellsberg's strongest memory of Tschannerl is a quote from her stating "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetuate it."<sup>79</sup> This quote would force him to realize that he was part of the problem in Vietnam. Because of these revelations, Ellsberg has referred to Tschannerl as "the one who had the strongest influence on my life."<sup>80</sup>

Tschannerl most changed Ellsberg's thinking in the area of enemies. During the Princeton conference, Tschannerl stated to Ellsberg "The concept of enemy has no meaning in my life."<sup>81</sup> Tom Wells, states that this "idea floored Ellsberg, as Ellsberg had considered communists enemies for years. It had come as a revelation to him that there was a coherent philosophy of nonviolence, truth telling, openness, and honesty."<sup>82</sup> Tschannerl had convinced Ellsberg that violence in Vietnam was wrong. Ellsberg now believed that the United States' war in Vietnam was criminal; he believed it was murder.<sup>83</sup>

Randy Kehler would impact Daniel Ellsberg's life in an extremely profound and dramatic fashion. Ellsberg first met Kehler in August of 1969 at an anti-war conference in Haverford, Pennsylvania.<sup>84</sup> Kehler's speech on the last day of the conference, August 28, 1969 sent Ellsberg reeling.

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<sup>77</sup> Wells, 308.

<sup>78</sup> Wells, 309.

<sup>79</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 213.

<sup>80</sup> Wells, 309.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 214.

<sup>84</sup> Wells, 317.

When Kehler took the stage, Ellsberg viewed the man as someone who “represented the best of American youth.”<sup>85</sup> As Kehler began his speech, Ellsberg came to realize that the two of them were quite similar, both Harvard graduates, both intelligent, and both anti-war.<sup>86</sup> As Kehler continued, Ellsberg remembers him talking about joining the anti-war movement and “finding a community of people for the first time that not only...were committed to each other, but a community of people that were committed to something larger than themselves, something more noble, more ideal than anything I had been involved in after 22 years.”<sup>87</sup> Kehler then began to speak of his friends going to jail and how he was eventually going to join them.<sup>88</sup> Kehler began to weep tears of joy, stating “I’m really not sad about it as it may seem. There’s something really beautiful about it, and I’m very excited that I’ll be invited to join them very soon.”<sup>89</sup> With that Ellsberg jumped out of his seat and ran to the bathroom. He sat on the floor alone for over an hour crying and thinking.<sup>90</sup> Ellsberg came to the realization that “we were eating our young;” the youth of the nation was destined either to die in Vietnam or go to jail in the United States.<sup>91</sup> Ellsberg views this moment as the moment when his life split in two: the previous half of his life marked by ignorance, and the new half of his life, committed to shortening the war by whatever means necessary.<sup>92</sup>

Immediately after Kehler’s speech, Ellsberg began to think “What could I do, what should I be doing, to help end the war now that I was ready to go to prison for it?”

Ellsberg then began to think about how he could shorten the war he once supported.

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<sup>85</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 270.

<sup>86</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 270.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 272.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3

### INFLUENTIAL EVENTS

In addition to people influencing Ellsberg's change from cold war conservative to liberal anti-war demonstrator there were many events. These events which undoubtedly changed Ellsberg varied in both size and scope. The death of Robert Kennedy rattled the lives of millions of Americans just as it did Ellsberg. Events such as Ellsberg's time in the Defense Department, his experience in Vietnam, and his reading of the Pentagon Papers, however, touched only Ellsberg's life. This chapter will explore how these events shaped Ellsberg as well as why they had an effect on him to begin with.

Although still an admitted cold warrior at the time, Ellsberg's time with the Defense Department began to change him like never before. His position as special assistant to the assistant of the Secretary of Defense lasted for only a year between 1964 and 1965.<sup>93</sup> His limited time in this prestigious position, however, affected his thoughts and actions for years after.

When Daniel Ellsberg entered into his position at the Department of Defense, he was optimistic. Ellsberg saw himself as a "Truman Democrat: liberal on domestic matters, but realistic and tough, though measured, in confronting the Soviet Union."<sup>94</sup> Ellsberg would find himself dealing with the latter half of that statement during his stint under the Secretary of Defense. Ellsberg's boss, Assistant Secretary of Defense John

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<sup>93</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*

<sup>94</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 241.

McNaughton, had Ellsberg working exclusively with the war in Vietnam.<sup>95</sup> Ellsberg's job under McNaughton was to view all cables coming in from the field in Vietnam and screen them, bringing to McNaughton's attention only the most important facts.<sup>96</sup>

McNaughton made sure Ellsberg was granted a security clearance of 'GS-18,' one of the highest security levels granted at the Department of Defense.<sup>97</sup> McNaughton wanted to be positive that Ellsberg would see everything that he saw on Vietnam, ensuring that Ellsberg would be capable to represent him at interagency meetings he would not be able to attend.<sup>98</sup> These factors ensured that Ellsberg would be one of the government's leading authorities on the war in Vietnam.

In addition to making Ellsberg knowledgeable of the war in Vietnam, his position also gave him a first row seat to the methods and systems of deception which had been fooling the American public for years. One of Ellsberg's first experiences in governmental lying came in July of 1965. Ellsberg was to write a speech for Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara informing the American public of an increase in American troops in Vietnam from 75,000 to 175,000 by the end of the year.<sup>99</sup> Before Ellsberg could finish writing the speech, he was told he would not need to finish as the President himself would address the nation in a press conference to inform the public of the troop increases.<sup>100</sup> As Ellsberg watched the President's speech on television later that night, however, he heard nothing of the 100,000 troop increase. Rather, President Johnson informed the public of an increase of 50,000 troops, half of the initial number.<sup>101</sup> A

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<sup>95</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 36.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 95.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

confused Ellsberg immediately met with the Joint Chiefs general in charge of scheduling troop deployments and asked him if there had been a last minute change. The general said no, the full troop request was on the way.<sup>102</sup> Ellsberg got his first taste of Presidential lying, it was a bitter taste. Ellsberg remembers that “it was hard to believe [the President] would just lie about *that*.”<sup>103</sup> Ellsberg believed the only reason President Johnson would lie about something so controversial was “to mislead the public..., to conceal that he was taking the country into a major, prolonged war.”<sup>104</sup> Ellsberg felt helpless, he couldn’t tell anyone about the President’s lies; not only had he signed countless secrecy agreements,<sup>105</sup> but leaking a secret as immense as this would surely have lost him his job. The taste of this bitter lie would linger in Ellsberg’s mouth for years; he now knew firsthand how willing the American government was to mislead the American public.

Ellsberg’s time in the Defense Department also forced him to come to terms with his morals. Under McNaughton, Ellsberg knew he couldn’t freely speak his mind on the issues; he needed to speak for McNaughton’s views, which in turn needed to speak for Robert McNamara’s. As a result, Ellsberg found himself involuntarily backing decisions which he deemed disastrous.<sup>106</sup> For example, in February of 1964, Robert McNamara believed that the best course of American action was to begin a large scale bombing campaign on North Vietnam.<sup>107</sup> Ellsberg’s boss, John McNaughton gave Ellsberg the mission of assembling information on North Vietnamese atrocities intended to convince

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 96.

<sup>105</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 303.

<sup>106</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 68.

<sup>107</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 67.

President Johnson that the time had come for a systematic bombing campaign.<sup>108</sup>

Because of his compliance with this, Ellsberg felt that he had, “for the first time, become part of the process of directly persuading the president on a course of action which [he] considered disastrous.” Ellsberg now refers to his actions in this time period as “memories I have to deal with.”<sup>109</sup>

Ellsberg’s involvement in the Vietnam decision-making processes in Washington gave him the drive to visit Vietnam and witness the events first-hand. In August 1965, Ellsberg’s opportunity arose in the form of General Edward Lansdale’s Vietnam team.<sup>110</sup> Lansdale’s mission was “to get South Vietnam on a strong political footing; defeating the North Vietnamese through democracy building and winning the hearts and minds of the people there.”<sup>111</sup> Ellsberg, however, was not too concerned with the team’s mission. He traveled to Vietnam simply to see the situation for himself, to make up his own mind.<sup>112</sup> While in Vietnam, he did make up his own mind. Ellsberg fell in love with the peoples of Vietnam, especially the children. Vietnamese children reminded him of his own kids<sup>113</sup>; this helped to sway Ellsberg’s opinions from war-hawk to peace activist now that the ‘former enemy’ was comprised of faces, not just numbers.

Ellsberg’s time in Vietnam also taught him that political mobilization was more important than military action. Ellsberg admired the North Vietnamese people and the Viet Cong for their resolve. Ellsberg recalls thinking during his time in Vietnam that “this was fundamentally a political conflict, in which technology and mass firepower

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<sup>108</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 68.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Wells, 223.

<sup>111</sup> Wells, 230.

<sup>112</sup> Wells, 223.

<sup>113</sup> Wells, 232.

mattered less than whom and what the two sides thought they were fighting for and how much they cared about it.”<sup>114</sup> Ellsberg sums up this belief with a quote from Ho Chi Minh himself “If we must fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men but we will kill one of yours. And in the end, it is you that will tire.”<sup>115</sup>

The impact Vietnam had on Ellsberg is clearly seen in his later trial. Ellsberg’s lawyer asked him if he could recount his experiences in Vietnam in an attempt to sway the jury. Ellsberg immediately remembered witnessing a burning village with smoke rising to the sky. He saw an old woman sifting through the ashes of what was once her home trying to piece her life back together and a little girl holding a blackened plastic doll.<sup>116</sup> Ellsberg began to weep as he recalled these initial images of Vietnam.<sup>117</sup> His memories of Vietnam would shape his decisions just as his first-hand experience in US decision making toward Vietnam would shape them. He knew that the American public did not know what he knew and didn’t see what he saw.

Another event which had an impact on the thinking of Daniel Ellsberg was the death of Robert Kennedy. Ellsberg recalls that Kennedy was the only politician he ever loved.<sup>118</sup> All of Ellsberg’s hopes for ending the war in Vietnam had been on Kennedy’s shoulders. When Ellsberg learned that Kennedy had been shot on June 6<sup>th</sup> of 1968, he recalls having trouble breathing, crying, feeling out of control, and wanting to beat his head against a wall.<sup>119</sup> Ellsberg felt like he would rather be on the moon than be in a country which “there is no way, no way, to change.”<sup>120</sup> Ellsberg realized that there was

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<sup>114</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 104.

<sup>115</sup> Ellsberg, Daniel, *Papers on the War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 30.

<sup>116</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 132.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 220.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

now no viable candidate for president who favored immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, no candidate which shared his view. This wasn't the moment when Ellsberg realized that he must personally do something to end the war, but it was certainly a moment where he believed the outlook was bleak.

Ellsberg's reading of the Pentagon Papers between August and September of 1969 also changed him profoundly. As he read the volumes of the Papers covering the years 1945 to 1960, he came to the realization that the United States "never had the right to try to win in Vietnam, to impose our political preferences by military means."<sup>121</sup> Ellsberg believed "we were carrying on a war in someone else's country, a country in no way implicated in attacking our own or anyone else's."<sup>122</sup> This was not a war for Vietnamese independence, it was a war the Vietnamese were fighting to throw off a foreign aggressor; the Vietnamese were fighting for their freedom.<sup>123</sup> Ellsberg continued to read that as early as 1946, US Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson received assessments of the situation in Vietnam emphasizing that "given the present elements in the situation, guerrilla warfare may continue indefinitely."<sup>124</sup> Ellsberg realized that as early as President Truman, American presidents knew war in Vietnam would be never-ending. After reading the Pentagon Papers, Ellsberg also believed the United States government knew we were "opposing a nationalist movement whose Communist leader had the support of a considerable majority of the Vietnamese people."<sup>125</sup>

Ellsberg quotes the Pentagon Papers' Department of State Policy Statement on Indochina, September 27, 1948 to illustrate this point.

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<sup>121</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 249.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 252.

<sup>125</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 253.

“... We have not urged the French to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh, *even though he probably is now supported by a considerable majority of the Vietnamese people*, because of his record as a communist.”<sup>126</sup>

According to Ellsberg, this statement clearly shows that the United States was not interfering in a civil war in Vietnam (as was a popular critique at the time<sup>127</sup>) between the North and South to stop the spread of communism; rather, the U.S. was committing “a wholly illegitimate unilateral intervention, desperately unwanted by most of those of another nation and culture, designed to determine who should govern them, how they should live, and which of them should die.”<sup>128</sup> In short, the United States was halting a peaceful and democratic exchange of power by creating an unwanted and unnatural civil war in Vietnam. This made the United States’ actions in Vietnam a criminal and imperialist war in the eyes of Daniel Ellsberg. He states “To call a conflict in which one army is financed and equipped entirely by foreigners a “civil war” simply screens a more painful reality: that the war is after all, a foreign aggression. Our aggression.”<sup>129</sup>

Ellsberg believed the office of the President was one of the largest problems in continuing this “illegitimate war.”<sup>130</sup>

“The Pentagon Papers revealed... that the President was part of the problem.

This was clearly a matter of his role, not of his personality or party. The concentration of power within the Executive branch... had focused nearly all responsibility for ‘failure’ upon one man, the President; and at the same time, it gave him enormous capability to avert or postpone or conceal such personal failure by means of force and fraud.

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<sup>126</sup> Ellsberg, *Papers on the War*, 32.

<sup>127</sup> Ellsberg, *Papers on the War*, 33.

<sup>128</sup> Ellsberg, *Papers on the War*, 33-34.

<sup>129</sup> Ellsberg, *Papers on the War*, 33.

<sup>130</sup> Ellsberg, *Papers on the War*, 34.

Confronted by resolute resistance, as in Vietnam, that power could not fail to corrupt the human who held it.”<sup>131</sup>

In short, Ellsberg believed that the office of the President necessitated the continuance of the war in Vietnam. No president wanted to be the one who lost the war; as a result, each president felt the need to continue it, to continue the stalemate costing thousands of lives rather than being remembered for the failure.<sup>132</sup>

Daniel Ellsberg had enough. His experiences gave him knowledge on Vietnam which few people were privy to. Ellsberg believed this was the sort of information which all American citizens needed to know. Americans needed to know the real story of why their sons and daughters were being sent to die in a far off land. Daniel Ellsberg knew he needed to take action. He was now on the opposite end of the spectrum from what he once believed.

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<sup>131</sup> Ellsberg, *Papers on the War*, 34-35.

<sup>132</sup> Ellsberg, *Papers on the War*, 26-27.

CHAPTER 4  
THE PENTAGON PAPERS

Ellsberg began to see the United States' involvement in the Vietnam conflict in moral terms.<sup>133</sup> Ellsberg no longer viewed the Vietnam conflict as a war, but as mass murder.<sup>134</sup> The war in Vietnam was hopeless and was resulting in deaths on both sides that served no useful United States or other human purpose.<sup>135</sup> Through the people he met and his enlightening experiences, Ellsberg believed he could no longer sit idly. He believed he needed to follow in the footsteps of the brave youth he admired. Ellsberg now saw why citizens needed “to make the strongest statement [they] could that the war was wrong, that it should end, and that they would not cooperate with it in anyway...and they accepted prison as a result.”<sup>136</sup> Ellsberg believed the best thing he could do was to accept prison as a result of raising a moral issue of the Vietnam War to his countrymen.<sup>137</sup> Now that Ellsberg was ready to do anything he could, the next step was to figure out what he could do.

Ellsberg thought that the party responsible for the debacle in Vietnam was the Executive branch.<sup>138</sup> Through his reading of the Pentagon Papers, he saw five presidents in a row that had been “mistaken in this stubborn, selfish, foolish war year after year.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Rudenstine, David, “Who Will Tell the People?” *The Nation* (Dec. 23, 2002): 33.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Kreisler, Harry, “Presidential Decisions and Public Dissent: A Conversation With Daniel Ellsberg,” *Conversations With History* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies UC Berkeley, 1998); available from <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people/Ellsberg/ellsberg98-0.html>; internet; accessed 20 February 2007.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

As a result, Ellsberg believed he needed to put pressure from the outside on the executive branch in an effort to end the war.<sup>140</sup>

In Ellsberg's mind, the best method through which he could put this pressure on the executive was to leak the Pentagon Papers. Ellsberg did this in 1971 after putting forth much effort in copying the 7,000 page document. Ellsberg initially wanted to release the document in Congress, believing it would be more effective as Congress had the ability to hold hearings, subpoena witnesses, and use the Pentagon Papers as a basis for questioning those witnesses.<sup>141</sup> Most importantly, Ellsberg believed Congress could call current executive officials in an attempt to unveil Nixon's secret wartime policy, effectively putting Ellsberg's desired pressure on the executive branch to end the war.<sup>142</sup> As a result, Ellsberg approached a handful of Senators in an attempt to convince them to release this top secret document to the rest of the Senate.<sup>143</sup>

After Ellsberg approached Senators McGovern and Fulbright and they refused to help him release the documents on the Senate floor, he realized he needed to release these documents to the public; as a result he approached the New York Times.<sup>144</sup> Ellsberg knew he had a juicy scoop and that every newspaper editor in the country would step over their own mother to reveal the story. He specifically approached the *Times* because he believed only *the Times* could "publish the entire study."<sup>145</sup> Ellsberg met with *Times* reporter Neil Sheehan on February 28, 1971 to discuss the matter.<sup>146</sup> The first article was

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Kennedy, Bruce, "Cold War Chat: Daniel Ellsberg," *CNN Online*, 10 January 1999; available from <http://www.cnn.com/specials/cold.war/guides/debate/chats/ellsberg/>; Internet; accessed 14 November 2006.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 363.

<sup>144</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 364.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

released on June 13, 1971 and carried the headline “Vietnam Archive: Pentagon Study Traces 3 Decades of Growing U.S. Involvement.”<sup>147</sup>

Two days later, on June 15<sup>th</sup>, the Justice Department obtained a temporary injunction ordering *the Times* to stop publishing the Pentagon Papers.<sup>148</sup> This was the first time the U.S. government sued the press to stop it from revealing information for reasons of “national security.”<sup>149</sup> This injunction, however, would not last and the Times would resume printing the Pentagon Papers on June 30<sup>th</sup>.<sup>150</sup>

Soon after the injunction, Ellsberg went underground in Boston, staying with likeminded people. In fact, in order to obtain a place to stay, Ellsberg would merely “reach out to almost any young person and say, ‘I’m doing an action against the war. It may help, it may be important, but it could be dangerous for you. Can you help?’”<sup>151</sup> Few declined Ellsberg’s offer. Eventually, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1971, Ellsberg felt the pressure of “one of the largest manhunts” in recent history and turned himself in to authorities.<sup>152</sup>

After turning himself into authorities, Ellsberg expected “to go to prison for the rest of [his] life.”<sup>153</sup> He faced twelve felony counts which could have put him in jail for 115 years.<sup>154</sup> Ironically enough, Ellsberg’s distrust in the ethics and morals of the

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<sup>147</sup> Wells, 413.

<sup>148</sup> Wells, 420.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Wells, 465.

<sup>151</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 394.

<sup>152</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 406.

<sup>153</sup> Ellsberg, Daniel, “The Pentagon Papers with Daniel Ellsberg,” *Washington Post Online*, 15 October 2002, available from [http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/zforum/02/sp\\_book\\_ellsberg101502.htm](http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/zforum/02/sp_book_ellsberg101502.htm); Internet; accessed 14 November 2006.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

executive branch would be his saving grace as all charges against him were dismissed on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973, on the grounds of governmental misconduct.<sup>155</sup>

Ellsberg's task was underway. By the time his case was dismissed in 1973, the Pentagon Papers had been analyzed, scrutinized, and just read by members of Congress, the Executive, the military, and most importantly the public. By 1973, multiple books had been published and read by anyone and everyone in America and the World.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid. In one of Nixon's actions against Ellsberg, G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, members of the White House Special Investigation Unit (also called the "White House Plumbers") broke into Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office in September 1971, hoping to find information they could use to discredit him. Due to the gross governmental misconduct, all charges against Ellsberg were eventually dropped.

## CHAPTER 5

### IN HINDSIGHT

In hindsight, Ellsberg believes his actions were helpful, but didn't have quite the effect he had hoped for. Ellsberg hoped his release of the Pentagon Papers would accomplish a number of things, including shortening the war, raising public awareness, and changing 'the system.' He would find that he met his goals with varying degrees of success.

What Ellsberg wanted, above all, was to help shorten the war.<sup>156</sup> Ellsberg believed he was the only man in the United States who was qualified to reveal this information to the public. Ellsberg states that "only the two, then three of us [who had read the Pentagon Papers] knew the story the Pentagon Papers told and had been changed by it... only one, myself, had ever lived in Vietnam, or had Vietnamese friends...and had seen the war close at hand."<sup>157</sup> Ellsberg believed he was the only one who had the ability, knowledge, and drive to do something about these 7,000 pages of information which had been concealed from the public. He believed introducing the Pentagon Papers would begin the process of ending United States involvement in Vietnam.

Ellsberg felt that the public needed to know the contents of the Pentagon Papers in order to act against the war. Ellsberg believed "Only Congress and the public – newly informed by 'authoritative' warnings and, perhaps, by documentary evidence on the illegitimate origins and hopeless prospects of the war (The Pentagon Papers) – might act to dissuade or prevent the President from pursuing the American war in Vietnam carried

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<sup>156</sup> Ellsberg, "The Pentagon Papers with Daniel Ellsberg".

<sup>157</sup> Ellsberg, *Papers on the War*, 38.

on by his four predecessors.” Ellsberg felt that the presidency would never realize its mistakes and end the war on its own; this would go against the nature of the office. The only way the war was going to end was through the rest of the nation’s actions against the president. Ellsberg believed the public would be able to find “loyalties deeper and broader than loyalty to the President: loyalties to America’s founding concepts, to our Constitutional system, to our countrymen, to one’s own humanity.”<sup>158</sup> Ellsberg believed that due to this lack of realization in a “deeper loyalty” that the “American people are part of the problem; that our passivity, fears, obedience weld us, unresisting, into the stalemate machine [of the Vietnam War]: that we are the problem for much of the rest of the world.”<sup>159</sup> He believed this realization by the public could be helped through the information and facts provided by the Pentagon Papers. He believed the release of the Pentagon Papers heightened *understanding* of the situation and the war. Only when the American public comprehends the war will they all rise up against it and demand change.

Shortly after Ellsberg’s release of the Pentagon Papers in the fall of 1971, he felt he had failed to accomplish his goal of helping to end the war. During this time period, Ellsberg called his actions “especially unconvincing and untimely.”<sup>160</sup> Ellsberg felt that his release had come too close to President Nixon’s announcement of the opening to China in July of that year.<sup>161</sup> As a result, he believed the American public mistakenly “read between the lines of Nixon’s spectacular announcement... that a successful deal on [Vietnam] was in the making.”<sup>162</sup> Ellsberg’s warning of the indefinite continuance of the

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ellsberg, *Papers on the War*, 40.

<sup>160</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 414.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

war had become old news, and the public misguidedly believed that the war was coming to an end.<sup>163</sup>

Later in life, after witnessing the final acts of the Vietnam saga, Ellsberg changed his opinion on his impact. In a 1999 interview with CNN's Bruce Kennedy, Ellsberg stated that he believes "the war would have continued at least a couple years longer in the form of U.S. bombing" if the Pentagon Papers were not released to the press.<sup>164</sup> In another interview, Ellsberg would explain that without his release of the Pentagon Papers "there would – flatly- have been major escalation in the air that would have gone on indefinitely... had he not hired the Plumbers to get me, had he not gone with that route, I think the war would have continued for years."<sup>165</sup> Ellsberg believed that the public's heightened distrust of government (brought fourth by Nixon's Plumbers) nourished the Watergate scandal that undermined Nixon's authority in Congress and thus his ability to continue waging the war.<sup>166</sup> Ellsberg would also state that "Nixon's lowest ebb in popularity was caused by Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers."<sup>167</sup>

Raising public awareness was also a goal of Ellsberg's release of the Pentagon Papers. The Pentagon Papers showed that the government had systematically misled the public on Vietnam.<sup>168</sup> Ellsberg believed this course of action to be all too popular amongst presidents in the post World War Two era and the American public was falling 'hook, line, and sinker' for it. Ellsberg's release of the Pentagon Papers was the first important release of documents displaying presidential lying. Ellsberg hoped this would

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ellsberg, "The Pentagon Papers with Daniel Ellsberg".

<sup>165</sup> Wells, 503.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid

<sup>167</sup> Wells, 459.

<sup>168</sup> Wells, 503.

convince both the public and the press to question presidential information more thoroughly.<sup>169</sup>

In the press, Ellsberg hoped the Pentagon Papers' proof of presidential lying "would change the reporting in Washington and make reporters aware that presidents lie as they breathe and that it is essential to find other sources within the administration who are willing to tell the truth in congressional hearings."<sup>170</sup>

In the sixties, according to Ellsberg, it was very hard to get the American public to believe that a president was lying to them.<sup>171</sup> Ellsberg gives an example of this from a 1971 (pre-Pentagon Papers) court case which he participated.

"I once said in a courtroom, in defense of people who were on trial for resisting the draft, that the president had lied... The judge stopped the proceedings... and said to the defense lawyer "If you elicit testimony like that again, I will hold you in contempt. I will not have statements about the president lying in my courtroom." This was in a trial of people who were resisting the war non-violently. And they weren't allowed, in effect, to have witnesses who said anything like that, that the president was lying."<sup>172</sup>

Ellsberg believes that "The Pentagon Papers changed that. Seven thousand pages of documents of presidential lying did establish forever... that presidents lie."<sup>173</sup> Ellsberg feels like he helped limit a position (the presidency) which held too much unchecked power.

Ellsberg also aimed to affect the political culture of the United States. In a 1971 interview with Walter Cronkite, Ellsberg expressed his disappointment that [the American public] has been too willing to accept over the last generation... that the

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ellsberg, "The Pentagon Papers with Daniel Ellsberg".

<sup>171</sup> Kreisler.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Kreisler.

Executive branch *is* the government.”<sup>174</sup> Ellsberg hoped that the Pentagon Papers would reveal to the public that the president is not a ‘benevolent dictator,’ that “we are the government”<sup>175</sup> and Americans cannot allow the Executive to determine what the public needs to know.

Ellsberg hoped that his court case would leave “legal precedent for changing laws on government secrecy and the release of classified information.”<sup>176</sup> Just as Ellsberg believed the public was too willing to let the Executive branch *be* the government, he believed the Executive was also dodging their responsibilities. Ellsberg hoped that the Pentagon Papers would force the Executive to “discover that their responsibilities to their citizens... do go beyond getting reelected, and that they’re men, they’re free men who can accept the responsibility of ending this war.”<sup>177</sup> Ellsberg was determined to turn his court case not into a case about his personal freedom (as he had decided that jail was a noble thing in his situation<sup>178</sup>) but into a case against what the political culture of the United States had become. Therefore, the dismissal of Ellsberg’s case was bittersweet as he kept his freedom, but was denied a forum for his testimony against the government.<sup>179</sup>

Ellsberg sums up what he believes he accomplished:

“What we had come back to was a democratic republic – not an elected monarchy – a government under law, with Congress, the courts, and the press functioning to curtail executive abuses, as our Constitution envisioned. Moreover, for the first time in this or any country the legislature was casting its whole vote against an ongoing presidential war.

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<sup>174</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 401.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Wells, 554.

<sup>177</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 402.

<sup>178</sup> Kreisler. “[Protesters going to jail] would find that they had much more power as individuals [going to jail] than they imagine they have if they were willing to pay a price in their own lives.”

<sup>179</sup> Wells, 554. “A dismissal would leave things hazy, and no legal precedent would be set for changing laws on government secrecy and the release of classified information.”

It was reclaiming, through its control of the purse, the war power it had fecklessly delegated nine years earlier. Congress was stopping the bombing, and the war was going to end.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 457.

## CONCLUSION

Daniel Ellsberg has always been a very controversial man. Articles written within the past five years still debate the ethics and power behind Ellsberg's 1971 act. Some believe "[Ellsberg] left virtually no enduring impact on American society"<sup>181</sup> while others view him as a "hero of the antiwar movement."<sup>182</sup> This comes as no surprise, as like many Americans in the 1960's, Daniel Ellsberg underwent a metamorphosis changing him into something new. What separates Ellsberg from the rest, however, is the fact that he changed from one end of the spectrum to the polar opposite. The jump from being a "shoot-them-dead superhawk"<sup>183</sup> and wanting to "kill Viet Cong, the bad guys"<sup>184</sup> to being a man President Nixon called a "sonofabitching thief"<sup>185</sup> who commits acts of "radical civil disobedience"<sup>186</sup> is one of the most extreme of the era. Of course, this will cause people on one side to think of Ellsberg as a traitor who abandoned his country and duty to pursue anti-war activities, as the other side thinks of him as a saint who came to see the situation as right and wrong, not as a gray middle ground.

To this day, Ellsberg is still a contentious figure. Ellsberg has come to view the current situation in Iraq as 'Vietnam II.'<sup>187</sup> In an October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002 discussion, Ellsberg warned the nation of the "Authorization for Use of Military Force against Iraq Resolution of 2002"<sup>188</sup> being an "exact reproduction, in its essentials (different region, of course) to

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<sup>181</sup> Young, 61.

<sup>182</sup> Rudenstine, 33.

<sup>183</sup> Wells, 254.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 457.

<sup>186</sup> Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, 399.

<sup>187</sup> Ellsberg, "The Pentagon Papers with Daniel Ellsberg" ..

<sup>188</sup> Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002. Passed Congress October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006; Signed into law October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006. More commonly known as "Iraq Resolution" or "Iraq War Resolution."

Tonkin Gulf I”<sup>189</sup> of the Vietnam era. Ellsberg’s suspicions turned out to be correct, as this resolution was used by the Bush Administration as a basis for declaring war on Iraq in 2003; much like the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was used by the Johnson Administration as a basis for military action in North Vietnam in 1964. This has caused Ellsberg to return to his sixties and seventies form and speak out against the current administration. Ellsberg frantically tried to warn the American public of the “reckless, disastrous course”<sup>190</sup> which he saw thirty years ago.

When asked about the current conflict in Iraq, Ellsberg stated “sometimes I feel I’m waking up to the world I left 40 years ago.”<sup>191</sup> To Ellsberg, the parallels between the Iraq War and the Vietnam War are obvious and inescapable. Ellsberg states “We were lied into both wars in every aspect – the reasons for going in, the prospects, the length, the scale and the probable cost in lives and dollars.”<sup>192</sup> Ellsberg continues to say that guerillas in both Vietnam and Iraq “turn the strength of a stronger opponent against himself... Villagers who saw relatives killed and wounded joined the other side. So our superior firepower was used against us to create support for the enemy. It’s how the Viet Cong, with their handmade weapons, prevailed against massive U.S. bombing, and it’s also why the Iraqi resistance is not going away.”<sup>193</sup>

Ellsberg has not slowed down since the dismissal of his court case. In fact, Ellsberg has focused nearly all of his attention on writing, lecturing, and nonviolent protests against the current Bush administration. Ellsberg has been arrested for civil

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<sup>189</sup> Ellsberg, “The Pentagon Papers with Daniel Ellsberg”.

<sup>190</sup> Hogan, Ron, “A 60’s Icon Speaks,” *Publishers Weekly* 249, no. 37 (16 September 2002): 58.

<sup>191</sup> Bob Cooper, “Is Daniel Ellsberg Right... Again?” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 February 2004, sec. CM, p. 8.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid

disobedience 70 times in protests against nuclear weapons, Central American interventions, the Gulf War, and the Iraq War.<sup>194</sup>

Ellsberg remains an unapologetic whistleblower, and he encourages others to do the same, believing that if a secret is worth keeping, it's also worth telling.<sup>195</sup> He urges those with access to documents showing government lying to turn them over to Congress and the press.<sup>196</sup> Ellsberg has no doubts that “there are numerous people who have access to such documents.”<sup>197</sup> He realizes that leaking them “may cost them their careers or even jail time, but it could save many lives.”<sup>198</sup>

Ellsberg continues to influence people and events much like people and events have shaped him in the past. Since Ellsberg's conversion from war supporter to war resister, he has dedicated his life to getting others to follow in suit.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> UNKNOWN

<sup>196</sup> Cooper.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

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