

*Guide to the Microfilm Edition of*

**The Pentagon Papers:  
United States-Vietnam  
Relations, 1945-1967**

*The Hébert Edition*

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PERHAPS NO OTHER GROUP of official U.S. government documents caused quite as great a sensation as the Pentagon Papers upon their unauthorized release in June 1971. The papers were part of a larger study ordered by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in 1967 and commissioned by the Department of Defense. The department had hired the Rand Corporation to do much of the document analysis and compilation of the study, which analyzed U.S. government involvement and the decisions made by government officials that led toward the escalation of the war.

Shortly after the forty-seven-volume study was completed in 1968, Daniel Ellsberg, a co-author, began to photocopy large sections of it. Ellsberg, a former Marine who had served under McNamara earlier in the decade but who at the time was an employee of the Rand Corporation, passed the photocopies along to Senator William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. During the spring of 1970 he also sent copies to the *New York Times*, where articles based on the documents began to appear in mid-June. The articles caused an instant sensation throughout the country, as the documents revealed a vast difference between what the U.S. policy was in Vietnam and how it was presented at home. The fact that Ellsberg was a former Washington insider who had begun to express his reservations about U.S. policy in Vietnam added intrigue to the story; after leaking the papers to the press, Ellsberg became one of the leading antiwar advocates.

The Nixon administration obtained an injunction against the *Times*, but other newspapers continued to publish articles about the leaked documents. What the study revealed, among many other things, was that the situation in Vietnam existed because of a faulty decision, based on bad advice, by President John F. Kennedy to commit U.S. armed forces to quell the Vietnamese Communist insurrection. Once that decision was made, however, neither Kennedy nor his successors in the White House would listen to even the best advice on the situation for fear of being the president who "lost" the war.

Ellsberg was indicted for illegal possession of government documents, using government property for his own use, and violation of the Espionage Act. Although his trial raised significant issues about a private citizen's rights against the government, whether or not Ellsberg violated the Espionage Act without providing information to a foreign government, and whether or not he illegally furnished secret government documents that

were improperly classified "Top Secret" in the first place, none of the issues was addressed. On May 11, 1973, near the end of testimony, Judge William Byrne dismissed the case on the grounds of "improper government conduct" when it was discovered that Nixon administration operatives had burglarized Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office in an attempt to uncover any damaging information on Ellsberg, presidential assistant John Ehrlichman had offered Byrne the directorship of the Federal Bureau of Investigation during the trial, and FBI wiretap transcripts of telephone conversations of Ellsberg from 1969 and 1970 were missing.

Since their release, the Pentagon Papers have been published in three versions. The first, the twelve-volume "Hébert edition," entitled *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, was released by the Government Printing Office in 1971 and is reproduced in this microfilm edition. F. Edward Hébert, chairman of the House Committee on Armed Services, requested the Department of Defense to declassify the study, which by that time had become a focal point of interest for the American people, in order to make it available to all who wished to read it. The Hébert edition is generally acknowledged to possess the greatest range of documents and to be the most comprehensive, but it has deficiencies both in coverage of the 1964-1965 period and in many deletions of official documents, which were a factor of the speed with which the Department of Defense had to comply with the declassification request. Forty-three of the forty-seven volumes in the study were made available in the Hébert edition; the last four volumes were not included at the time because they concerned negotiations that were taking place during the period of the report's release.

Other editions of the papers, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam* (Boston: Beacon, 1971; 5 volumes, also known as the "Gravel edition") and *The Pentagon Papers as Published by the New York Times* (New York: Bantam, 1971; one volume, also known as the "New York Times edition"), compensate for some of the deficiencies of the Hébert edition but do not approach it in size or coverage. Also, diplomatic aspects and State Department involvement in the war, which were not included in the three versions of the Pentagon Papers, are covered in two publications: *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin: University of Austin Press, 1983) and *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers* (Washington: GPO, ongoing; the

## INTRODUCTION

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latest volume on Vietnam covers August-December 1963). Although the outline of events is covered in the Pentagon Papers, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series clarifies the roles of agencies and key individuals in formulating policy.

This microfilm edition of *The Pentagon Papers: United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967* was filmed from the holdings of the Navy Department Library at the Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. The roll contents listing that follows this introduction parallels the outline of the study; the frame number cited beside each volume or report refers to the cover page of that volume or report. Detailed tables of contents can be found directly after the cover page.

Terry Lynch  
Microfilm Editor

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