Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers

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specialized and foreign terms used in the book, at exactly the right level of detail.

In sum, *The Other Side of the Mountain* is a unique and valuable contribution to the study of unconventional warfare. In view of the ongoing U.S. operations in Afghanistan, the editors would be performing a civic service were they to produce a revised and reedited version for general publication.

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For Americans who were adults during the Vietnam War, the name Daniel Ellsberg is portentous; it either suggests a whiff of treason or connotes heroic patriotism. Ellsberg is a Marine Corps veteran, Harvard Ph.D., former senior official in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, a highly regarded analyst for the RAND Corporation, and a civilian observer of platoon-level combat in Vietnam who defiantly chose to “walk point” with the troops he was observing. In March 1971, Ellsberg released to the *New York Times* a seven-thousand-page, highly classified Department of Defense history of American involvement in Vietnam. Covering the war from the Truman administration through the Tet offensive of early 1968, this study became known as “The Pentagon Papers” when the *New York Times* began publishing it on 13 June.

Ellsberg’s action earned him federal felony indictments and a protracted criminal trial. On 11 May 1973 the judge abruptly dismissed the government’s case, because in the last few weeks evidence had materialized showing that agents of the Richard M. Nixon administration had denied Ellsberg his right to a fair trial by burglarizing his psychiatrist’s office in search of material with which to blackmail him into not releasing more documents. This revelation became part of the unfolding drama of the Watergate scandal, the surreptitious forced nighttime entry into the Democratic Party headquarters by the same agents of the administration. President Nixon attempted to buy the silence of one of the burglars, E. Howard Hunt, with a seventy-five-thousand-dollar bribe. Facing impeachment for attempting to cover up the break-in, Nixon wailed about Ellsberg: “The sonofabitching thief is made a national hero... And the *New York Times* gets a Pulitzer for stealing documents.”

*Secrets* is a book that must be read by anyone seeking to understand how the United States formulates its strategy and policy. Ellsberg demolishes the “quagmire” thesis favored by such influential liberal interpreters as Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. By that interpretation, beginning with Harry S. Truman up to the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson, each president made a deeper commitment of American military power and clandestine activity, under the conviction that his actions would achieve a South Vietnamese victory over the invaders from the communist North.

From Ellsberg’s perspective, there was no quagmire, only endless presidential deception of Congress and the public, who were led to believe decade after decade that surely the next step would result in the successful establishment of a permanently independent South
Vietnam. Ellsberg served as the action officer for Vietnam, reporting personally to John McNaughton, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara’s principal assistant for Vietnam. Ellsberg became convinced that every president knew that his commitments would prove insufficient to accomplish the goal of preserving South Vietnam’s independence. However, none of them could withdraw American support—because a communist victory in South Vietnam would create an unbearable political liability in the Cold War climate of “wars of national liberation” backed by the Soviets and China.

Ellsberg went to work as McNaughton’s aide for Vietnam on 4 August 1964. On that day his office was receiving live reports of North Vietnamese patrol-boat attacks on the U.S. destroyer Maddox, the presence of which off North Vietnam was one of several provocations staged by the Johnson administration to elicit a military reaction from Hanoi. The administration publicly claimed that two distinct sets of attacks were made, first on the Maddox and a short time later on the Maddox and a sister ship, USS Turner Joy. Drawing on his direct experience in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Ellsberg demonstrates that Maddox’s skipper raised doubts about the second set of attacks within a few hours of announcing them. The Johnson administration nonetheless went to Congress describing both attacks as bona fide, because together they appeared to justify a long-planned escalation of the air war. Once armed by Congress with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Johnson made a few direct retaliatory air strikes and then posed as the presidential peace candidate. He was running against Republican Barry Goldwater, who was advocating precisely the kind of sustained air campaign that Johnson had already planned and would begin once safely reelected president.

One can applaud or condemn Daniel Ellsberg for what he did in 1971. What one cannot do is ignore the power his memoir has to inform Americans about how the executive branch conducted its foreign policy and military strategy from the 1940s until 1974. As the United States apparently heads (at this writing) toward another major war, the skeptic is entitled to wonder if things at the top have really changed.

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The collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of major Russian archives have provided an opportunity to add greatly to our understanding of the character of the Soviet navy. Eminent researchers Jürgen Rohwer and Mikhail S. Monakov have contributed much to this understanding with their study of Soviet naval shipbuilding and strategy when Josef Stalin controlled the development of the Soviet Navy, from 1935 until his death in 1953. They have uncovered extensive details of the massive shipbuilding program, most of which never came to fruition. Strategy, however, remains as murky as ever. This study complements but does not replace Monakov’s series of articles on...