



The Post, a great reminder of Vietnam deceptions

Description

The true story of the Washington Post's attempts to publish the Pentagon Papers

By **Byron Toben**

I loved this film. However, despite its fine acting, crisp editing and excellent script, I fear lots of its references and facts will be lost on young viewers of the Twitter generation to whom US involvement in the Vietnam war (1965-1975) might as well have been the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage (264 BCE-146 BCE). After all, it shows rotary phones, linotype presses, rolling presses and delivery trucks in 1971, all so ancient means of distribution.

The main story is the copying of **The Pentagon Papers** by inside analyst **Daniel Ellsberg** (actor **Matthew Rhys**) and the difficult release of them to the public by the New York Times, through reporter **Neil Sheehan**, and the Washington Post, through owner **Kay Graham** (actor **Meryl Streep**) and Editor **Ben Bradlee** (actor **Tom Hanks**). Besides the marquee popularity of these superstars, the direction and producing by **Steven Spielberg** should gain it a few numbers at next Tuesday's Oscar nominations.



Modern journalistic propaganda for war probably began with concocted stories by both publishers William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, leading to the American Spanish War of 1898, the phrase “yellow journalism” and the term “manifest destiny”.

Fast forward to the discredited Gulf of Tonkin attack of 1964 which allowed massive increase in US troops under President Johnson, from the initiation by President Kennedy (assassinated in 1963), even further increased by President Nixon.

Government attempts to enjoin the publication led to a 6-3 Supreme Court decision on June 30 1971 allowing publication.



Even though not mentioned in this wide ranging film, the court decision was probably made easier by Alaska senator **Mike Gravel** reading the Pentagon Papers into the Congressional Record the night before and hence further protecting the newspapers from charges of disclosing secret government information. Several [YouTube videos](#) show the serious but sometimes comical measures Gravel (a US-born politician of Quebec descent) went through to achieve this result.

Math-minded US Secretary of Defence **Robert McNamara** (actor **Bruce Greenwood**), who served under all three presidents, was shown to be lacking big picture vision in the documentary *Fog of War* by Errol Morris.

The film has an amusing scene where a Post officer finally makes contact with Ellsberg through a coin phone but drops his coins and pencil to call back.

There are huge numbers of whistle blowers ranging from Karen Silkwood to Edward Snowden. Sadly, the need continues as time marches on.

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Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.



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