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**Decades later, 'Deep Throat' unmasked**  
***Ex-FBI official acknowledges his role as secret source in Watergate probe***  
By Paul West

WASHINGTON - The mystery surrounding one of America's most durable journalistic secrets was solved yesterday with the unmasking of an aging, retired FBI official as the anonymous Watergate-era source known as "Deep Throat."

W. Mark Felt, 91, is quoted in a forthcoming magazine article as acknowledging that "I'm the guy they used to call Deep Throat." The article, in the July issue of *Vanity Fair*, describes Felt, who suffered a stroke in 2001, as being in failing health with a "memory for details [that] seems to wax and wane."

Yesterday, Felt, standing with the aid of a walker, appeared briefly at a news conference in Santa Rosa, Calif., smiling and waving to cameras as family members spoke to reporters. His role was confirmed by Bob Woodward, an assistant managing editor of *The Washington Post*, and Carl Bernstein, his former partner, who had promised not to reveal their source's identity until after his death.

For decades, stretching back to the mid-1970s, Felt had denied repeatedly that he was the paper's secret source. His denials helped fuel speculation that at one time or another erroneously identified dozens of top-ranking officials, including future President George Bush, as "Deep Throat."

But it was Felt, at the time the FBI's second in command, who had been the highly placed government contact that helped guide Woodward and Bernstein's path-breaking coverage of the FBI investigation into the June 1972 break-in and bugging of Democratic Party offices at Washington's Watergate complex. The money used to pay for the criminal operation was eventually traced back to President Richard M. Nixon's re-election campaign.

When White House efforts to cover up the scandal unraveled and impeachment loomed, Nixon became the only U.S. president to resign. Woodward and Bernstein emerged from the scandal as celebrities whose exploits influenced a generation of investigative reporters.

In a statement, Felt's grandson, Nick Jones, said his family considers Felt "a great American hero who went well above and beyond the call of duty at much risk to himself to save his country from horrible injustice."

Jones said family members "sincerely hope the country will see him this way as well."

Added Jones, "As he recently told my mother, 'I guess people used to think "Deep Throat" was a criminal, but now they think he was a hero."

Felt, who was already one of Woodward's confidential sources, insisted on leaking information to him on "deep background," meaning that he could never be quoted, even as an anonymous source. A Post editor dubbed him "Deep Throat," after a popular 1972 pornographic movie.

At the same time Felt was talking to Woodward, he was overseeing the FBI investigation of the Watergate case.

"Follow the money," he famously advised the young journalists, whose book *All The President's Men* was turned into a movie starring Robert Redford as Woodward and Dustin Hoffman as Bernstein.

According to Woodward's accounts, he and Felt sometimes held secret, early morning chats in a parking garage, arranged through a series of covert signals. If Woodward wanted to talk, he'd move a flower pot with a red flag in it to the rear of his apartment balcony; if Felt needed to make contact, he'd arrange for a mark to be placed on Page 20 of the copy of that day's *New York Times*, delivered to the reporter's apartment by 7.

Over the years, Felt told few about his identity as "Deep Throat," a secret supposedly known only to Woodward, Bernstein and Benjamin C. Bradlee, the paper's top editor at the time. In a statement, the three said, "W. Mark Felt was 'Deep Throat' and helped us immeasurably in our Watergate coverage. However, as the record shows, many other sources and officials assisted us and other reporters for the hundreds of stories that were written in *The Washington Post* about Watergate."

According to *Vanity Fair*, Felt finally agreed, at the urging of family members, to lift the cloak of secrecy surrounding his role.

In the magazine's article, he is described as having become conflicted over his role as a government leaker. Felt's daughter, Joan, a teacher, said her father once told her that he "wasn't trying to bring [Nixon] down, ... he was 'only doing his duty,'" according to writer John D. O'Connor, a lawyer who had offered to help Felt arrange a book deal.

O'Connor writes, "Deep in his psyche, it is clear to me, [Felt] still has qualms about his actions. ... Felt, having long harbored the ambivalent emotions of pride and self-reproach, has lived for more than 30 years in a prison of his own making."

As early as the fall of 1972, Felt was thought to be leaking secret information. In an Oct. 19, 1972, White House conversation, Nixon was told by his chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman, that Felt had been leaking information to the press.

"If we move on him, he'll go out and unload everything. He knows everything that's to be known in the FBI. He has access to absolutely everything," Haldeman said. Felt, he said, "wants to be in the top spot" as FBI director.

Felt had been a top lieutenant to J. Edgar Hoover, the longtime FBI director, who died a month before the Watergate break-in. Hoover loyalists, including Felt, were intent on preventing the Nixon White House from seizing political control of the FBI.

Sanford Ungar, who interviewed Felt for a 1975 book about the FBI, described him as notoriously adept at the bureaucratic game of playing various sides against the middle.

"He certainly wanted to be FBI director. There was no question about that," Ungar, now president of Goucher College, said in an interview. "He was horrified by Patrick Gray [the acting FBI director appointed by Nixon], and I think he thought maybe something good would come out of it for him" by providing information to Woodward.

Ungar said, "The country was well-served by getting this information about what was really going on." But in today's atmosphere, he noted, in which the use of anonymous journalistic sources is under attack by the government and media critics, "it would be very difficult" for there to be another "Deep Throat." "I think people would demand more information about who the source is."

In a 1992 Atlantic magazine article, a former Washington Post reporter, James Mann, concluded that someone from the FBI was "Deep Throat," citing the bureaucratic warfare over the future of the agency and personal comments that Woodward had made to him in the summer of 1972 about his "friend" at the FBI. Mann's article speculated that Felt could have been "Deep Throat," even though Felt, in a 1979 memoir, had flatly declared that he "never leaked information to Woodward and Bernstein."

Mann, now a writer in residence at the Johns Hopkins University, said: "Everybody understandably focuses on faces and personalities in Washington. But beyond that, there are big institutions and bureaucracies that have their own motivations."

Even before Nixon left office, Washington insiders were speculating that Felt was Woodward's source.

John Limpert, editor of Washingtonian magazine, concluded in a June 1974 article that Felt, a member of the old-line FBI hierarchy that was being "harassed and offended and fired by Nixon," had the "motive and opportunity and method." Two months later, the magazine printed the "urbane and cool" Felt's denial.

"I think you probably have to give Felt some credit for idealism," Limpert said yesterday. "What he thought was going on was wrong."

Felt, an Idaho native, spent more than 30 years with the FBI, retiring in 1973 as associate director. In 1980, he was convicted on federal charges of authorizing illegal break-ins by FBI agents in connection with the government's search for members of a radical antiwar group, the Weather Underground, in the early 1970s. The next year, while the case was on appeal, Felt and a co-defendant were pardoned by President Ronald Reagan, who said they had "acted on high principle to bring an end to the terrorism that was threatening our nation."

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