

## DEEP THROAT, ON THE RECORD

### Ex-FBI official steps forward as the famous anonymous source who helped break open the Watergate scandal that led to Nixon's resignation

By Michael Tackett, Tribune senior correspondent. Tribune staff reporter Tom Rybarczyk contributed to this report

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WASHINGTON -- The world's most famous anonymous news source outed himself Tuesday.

W. Mark Felt, a 91-year-old retired FBI official living with his daughter in California, revealed perhaps Washington's best-kept secret--that he was Deep Throat, the secret source for the reporting by The Washington Post's Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein that helped break open the Watergate scandal leading to the resignation of President Richard Nixon in 1974.

Periodically suspected but never proved to be Deep Throat, Felt answered one of the capital's enduring mysteries in an interview with Vanity Fair magazine and a statement read by his grandson. And Tuesday evening, Woodward, Bernstein and their former editor, Ben Bradlee, confirmed Felt's role.

Felt's disclosure lays bare one of the longest-running secrets of Washington, a town that often runs on anonymous tongue wagging, and rarely with greater stakes than during the Watergate scandal three decades ago.

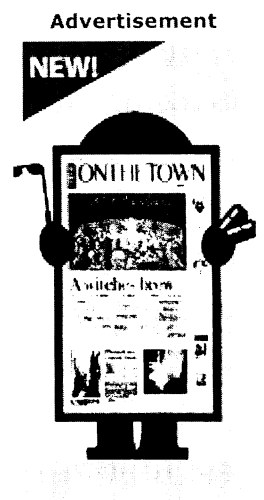
"My grandfather is pleased he is being honored for his role as Deep Throat with his friend Bob Woodward," Felt's grandson, Nick Jones, told reporters outside a family home in Santa Rosa, Calif.

"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,'" Jones said.

If Felt is a hero, he is a long silent one. Woodward and Bernstein, on the other hand, became icons for a new breed of investigative reporting. Their book, "All the President's Men," was made into a movie starring Robert Redford as Woodward and Dustin Hoffman as Bernstein, a moment that probably ushered in a new era of celebrity journalism as well.

In a statement, Woodward and Bernstein 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."

Indeed, a mythology has developed around the roles of the Post and Deep Throat that belies the other significant investigations that also pressured Nixon into resignation, not the least of which were the televised Senate



hearings that brought Watergate into the American living room, offering a disturbing portrait of abuse of power by an American president.

Numerous books and articles, and one entire journalism course at the University of Illinois, have been dedicated to the proposition of unmasking the identity of Deep Throat.

While Felt periodically was mentioned, he was hardly the most prominent in a list of suspects that included Diane Sawyer, Patrick Buchanan, Fred Fielding and the late Washington power lawyer Edward Bennett Williams, among others.

William Gaines, a retired Tribune investigative reporter and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, oversaw the Illinois journalism class that erroneously concluded two years ago that White House lawyer Fielding was Deep Throat.

"We are accepting the fact that we are wrong," Gaines said Tuesday. "I am relieved that Deep Throat has been identified and I think Woodward did the right thing in identifying him. They did a real good job of concealing their source. The information they provided was misleading."

Felt is in declining health and his family asked that he not be subjected to questioning, though his daughter Joan suggested that he was preparing for an interview.

Though the identity of Deep Throat has at once been one of Washington's favorite parlor games along with one of its best-kept secrets, Felt often had been the subject of speculation. "The thing that stuns me is that the . . . secret has lasted this long," Bradlee told the Post.

As far back as 1974, a Los Angeles Times story said that Felt might have resigned from the FBI because he was suspected of leaking Watergate-related documents--not to The Washington Post, but to New York Times reporter John Crewdson. (Crewdson, now a Tribune senior correspondent, declined to comment.)

The Los Angeles Times story said that Felt, the FBI's No. 2 official and once considered a candidate to succeed J. Edgar Hoover as bureau director, was the subject of an internal investigation related to the leaking of documents.

At the time, Felt called the investigation "ridiculous," and said it likely was prompted by speculation that he was Deep Throat.

"I did not leak any information to Woodward or Bernstein," Felt told the newspaper. "I'm not Deep Throat."

That didn't stop others from suggesting that he was, including a story published in Washingtonian Magazine in 1974 along with several articles and books over the last 30 years. In Felt's own memoir, published in 1979, he again denied being the source for Woodward and Bernstein.

Felt was not known to have a political agenda. In fact, he was not above some of the same tactics used by the Watergate burglars.

Felt was convicted and fined \$5,000 for authorizing FBI agents in the early 1970s to illegally break into the homes of members of the Weather Underground, a radical anti-war group in the Vietnam War era that had claimed responsibility for bombings at the Capitol and Pentagon.

President Ronald Reagan in 1981 gave Felt a "full and unconditional" pardon in the case.

In a statement at the time, Reagan said, "The record demonstrates that they acted not with criminal intent but in the belief that they had grants of authority reaching to the highest levels of government. America was at war in 1972 and Messrs. Felt and [co-defendant Edward] Miller followed procedures they believed essential to keep the FBI director, the attorney general and the president advised of activities of hostile foreign powers and their

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collaborators in this country."

During Felt's trial, the government called Nixon as a rebuttal witness. The former president said he had initially approved the Weather Underground break-ins but revoked the approval four days later. A lawyer associated with the case said that Nixon's testimony actually was helpful to Felt.

In a 1992 article in Atlantic Monthly, author James Mann reported that Felt was the most likely person to be the Post's most famous secret source.

On July 28, 1999, the Hartford Courant published a story that Bernstein's son, Jacob, had told a friend during summer camp in 1988 that Felt was Deep Throat. In an interview with the Courant, Felt again denied being Deep Throat.

"I would have done better," Felt said. "I would have been more effective. Deep Throat didn't exactly bring the White House crashing down, did he?"

Still, suspicion about Felt had reached the highest levels of the Nixon White House. In a transcript of White House tape recordings from Oct. 19, 1972, chief of staff H.R. Haldeman told Nixon that the leaker of information worked at the FBI.

"Somebody in the FBI," Nixon said.

"Yes, sir," Haldeman said. "Mark Felt."

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