

'DEEP THROAT'
REVEALED

At FBI, Reflections On Felt and Loyalty

By DAN EGGEN
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When Bob Gast was a junior agent at FBI headquarters in the early 1970s, W. Mark Felt "loomed large" as the bureau's second most powerful official and an acolyte of the legendary late director, J. Edgar Hoover.

"He was not one of those flashy guys, particularly," Gast recalls. "He wasn't the type of fellow who was in front with PR appearances and all that. . . . He got things done quietly. He was a real force within the bureau."

But Felt's biggest impact turns out to have been his role as "Deep Throat," the unidentified Nixon administration official who helped guide two young Washington Post reporters as they chased the unfolding Watergate scandal.

Tuesday's revelation that Felt was Washington's most famous anonymous source has come as a shock to many retired and current agents at the FBI, some of whom say they are discomfited by a senior FBI executive leaking details of an investigation to the press. In some chat rooms frequented by retired FBI veterans, Felt is even being accused of betraying the bureau.

But for the most part, many current and former agents said in interviews yesterday, Felt is viewed as a reluctant hero who was seeking to preserve the integrity of a criminal investigation that was under political attack from the Nixon White House and its allies.

"Having a senior bureau official go around the system and go to the media is probably something most of us would not condone in general," said Gast, who is president of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI. "But it was also a very difficult time, and the bureau was caught in the middle."

Glenn F. Kelly, executive director of the FBI Agents Association, which represents current bureau employees, said "people are a little bit shellshocked" by

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BY PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS — ASSOCIATED PRESS

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"Agents are typically very loyal to the bureau," Kelly said. "I'm sure that's what he saw himself as doing."

Felt's identity as a key source for reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein was revealed Tuesday with the help of Felt's family in an article for *Vanity Fair* magazine. Woodward, Bernstein and former Post editor Benjamin C. Bradlee confirmed Felt's role.

Now 91 and in poor health, Felt worked for 31 years as the prototypical FBI loyalist. Although Felt hoped to be named director after Hoover's death in 1972, President Richard M. Nixon turned instead to a Justice Department official, L. Patrick Gray III.

Several former FBI agents argued that Felt felt trapped by the presence of Nixon loyalist Gray, who would be identified as a conduit of information to the White House in the Watergate scandal.

Paul V. Daly, a former longtime FBI official who was involved in many of the major Watergate-related inquiries in the 1970s, said Felt's aid to the Post "was done for a noble purpose," though he is not sure whether he approves of the methods.

"I think it was an attempt to see that justice was done and that the investigation was completed," Daly said. "Nobody likes leaks. But this was an extraordinary time and it called for extraordinary steps, at least in his view."



W. Mark Felt was a protege of the legendary Hoover.



L. Patrick Gray worked at Justice before the FBI.



John Mitchell was part of the Nixon reelection team.

Nixon — who had suspected Felt as a leaker in the Watergate scandal — nevertheless testified at the trial on his behalf, and Felt was later pardoned.

Athan Theoharis, a Marquette University professor who has written extensively on the FBI's history during the Cold War, said few should be surprised by the notion that an FBI official engaged in strategic leaks. Hoover's FBI had a history of using leaks and blackmail to manipulate the press, he said.

"Did the bureau leak before? Sure it did — look at Martin Luther King," Theoharis said, referring to FBI efforts in the 1960s to undermine the civil rights leader. "The only thing that's atypical here is that this was directed at the president and the White House. . . . There was a legitimate concern on the part of senior FBI officials that what the White House was trying to do would result in the politicization of the FBI."

Unlike contemporaries of Felt and other FBI hands steeped in the Watergate scandal, however, some current FBI agents view the affair as a historical curiosity. One agent noted that most of his co-workers were no older than 7 or 8 at the time of Watergate.

"It doesn't resonate with them," the agent said.

Jim Roth, who retired in 2000 after 25 years with the bureau and served as chief counsel of the New York field office, said that while some view Felt "as a traitor to the cause," others see him more charitably.

"If he went public and said this is all wrong, would he have been cashiered like Cox?" Roth asked, referring to Archibald Cox, the Watergate special prosecutor fired by Nixon in October 1973. "Would he have had an impact? It's hard to second-guess this sort of thing. . . . He may have viewed this as the only reasonable option or course of action."

FBI agents have rallied around Felt before, but in a decidedly different case. In 1980 Felt was convicted of authorizing illegal break-ins that targeted members of the radical Weather Underground group. At one hearing, more than 500 agents, clerks and friends of Felt stood on the courthouse steps to show their support for him and another senior FBI official. Former president

Staff writer Sari Horwitz contributed to this report.