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Robert D. Novak

Mark Felt's Motives

'Deep Throat' Didn't Act Out of Pure Nobility

Mark Felt, finally revealed as the "Deep Throat" who divulged the Watergate scandal, is wearing the hero's laurel 32 years later. But that designation comes across as peculiar to those of us who lived through those turbulent times.

Felt deserves praise for breaking the rules as FBI associate director, providing Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of The Post with the guidance to determine whether they were on the correct path in uncovering the machinations of President Richard Nixon.

However, Felt was considered by reformers at the FBI to be part of the problem rather than the solution. He was viewed as a sycophantic lieutenant of lifetime FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, and a manager who came down hard on any agents who tried to bring change to the bureau.

Everyone knew that Felt was leaking information to Woodward and Bernstein about the Watergate investigation. The reporters made no secret of the fact that they were getting leaks from inside the FBI, and it was presumed that Felt was one of the leakers. Felt was very unhappy with the Nixon White House, partly for reasons that were not necessarily noble or patriotic.

Indeed, Felt often was rumored to be Deep Throat. But the general feeling inside Washington was the super-source described by the reporters in "All the President's Men" had to be closer to the scandal than a senior FBI bureaucrat.

Consequently, major figures in the Nixon White House over the years were listed as Deep Throat candidates: Alexander Haig, David Gergen, Leonard

Garment and John Sears. Any of them would seem more dramatic than Mark Felt.

Felt unquestionably provided an invaluable service to Woodward and Bernstein in pointing them in the right direction. But his motivation may not have been as noble as his family now makes it out to be.



MARK FELT IN 1976/ CBS WORLD WIDE INC. VIA GETTY IMAGES

As a high-ranking FBI official, Felt helped clean out of the bureau the critics who stood up to the dictatorial Hoover. One of the victims Felt helped to purge was Assistant Director William Sullivan, Hoover's arch foe and considered one of the FBI's most liberal leaders.

Felt was known to be angry with Nixon for naming a political appointee, Patrick Gray, as FBI director after Hoover died. Gray was all too willing to do

whatever Nixon wanted and was forced to resign in 1973 when he became entangled in the administration's unfolding scandals.

Gray's successor was the high-minded William Ruckelshaus, the first head of the Environmental Protection Agency. Felt was around for less than a month of Ruckelshaus's tenure before he quit. During that period, Felt offered only obstruction to efforts by the new FBI director to investigate Watergate. The FBI effort got poor grades from unbiased agents who wanted a well-run investigation.

Felt might have been more interested in leaking to Woodward than in conducting an investigation that Nixon was trying to obstruct. Whether that makes him a hero will be the judgment of history.

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