

WASH POST  
6/11/05

# Throat Clearing

*The Best-Kept Secret in Washington Nearly Stayed That Way*

By PAUL FARHI  
*Washington Post Staff Writer*

Vanity Fair's big scoop almost didn't happen. It started with a cold call two years ago from John D. O'Connor, a prominent lawyer in the San Francisco Bay area, to the magazine's editor, Graydon Carter. O'Connor, according to David Friend, an editor at the magazine, said he had a client "who is Deep Throat, and he wants to come out in the pages of Vanity Fair."

And so began the drama that led to Vanity Fair's revelation yesterday that former FBI official W. Mark Felt was journalist Bob Woodward's famed anonymous source on the Watergate scandal. Woodward's subsequent confirmation filled in what former Post executive editor Ben Bradlee yesterday called "the last act, the last unknown fact" about the events that led to the downfall of President Richard Nixon.

Guessing at the identity of Deep Throat has been a Washington parlor game and journalistic sub-industry for almost 33 years. Many have tried to unmask the man who was perhaps the most famous whistleblower ever. A few have actually gotten it right.

The problem for Vanity Fair, Friend said, was that O'Connor wanted the magazine to pay Felt

See MEDIA, C7, Col. 3



## "I'M THE GUY THEY CALLED DEEP THROAT"

Despite three decades of intense speculation, the identity of "Deep Throat"—the source who leaked key details of Nixon's Watergate cover-up to *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein—has never been revealed. Now, at age 91, W. Mark Felt, number two at the F.B.I. in the early 70s, is finally admitting to that historic, anonymous role. In an exclusive, JOHN D. O'CONNOR puts a name and face to one of American democracy's heroes, learning about the struggle between honor and duty that nearly led Felt to take his secret to the grave.

**O**n a sunny California morning in August 1998, Joan Felt, a busy college Spanish professor and single mother, was completing chores before leaving for class. She stopped when she heard an unexpected knock at the front door. Upon answering it, she was met by a courteous, 50-ish man, who introduced himself as a journalist from *The Washington Post*. He asked if he could see her father, W. Mark Felt, who lived with her in her suburban Santa Rosa home. The man said his name was Bob Woodward.

Woodward's name did not register with Joan, and she assumed he was no different from a number of other reporters, who had called that week. This was, after all, the 25th anniversary of the resignation of President Richard Nixon, disgraced in the scandal known as Watergate, and hounded from office in 1974. The journalists had all

and Felt's family for the story — a condition the magazine would not agree to.

O'Connor — who had become acquainted with the Felt family through Felt's grandson, a Stanford classmate of O'Connor's daughter — decided instead to publish Felt's account as a book. But after a year of trying to find a publisher, Friend said, O'Connor was back at Vanity Fair's doorstep.

Therein began a long and secretive process to render Felt's story into print. Although O'Connor was the lead writer, the magazine supplemented his work with research and fact-checking. It corroborated Felt's account by getting his daughter, his son, his daughter-in-law and a former companion to confirm that he had previously revealed his identity as Deep Throat.

About 15 Vanity Fair editors and staff people were eventually assigned to the story, which was code-named WIG (a corruption of "Watergate"). All of those involved signed confidentiality agreements that bound them not to reveal Felt's identity if the piece didn't meet publication standards.

The concern about leaks was such that Joan Felt, Mark Felt's daughter and a key source on the story, began referring to her father as "Joe Camel" — an alias for a man with one of the most famous nicknames of the past 30 years. As the magazine moved toward publication, the editors used a dummy cover line to shield their story as it went to the printer: "The Car Door Slams."

Friend said neither Woodward nor his Watergate reporting partner Carl Bernstein — a Vanity Fair contributing editor — knew about the story until Friend emailed them a copy of it yesterday morning. "We felt that if we let Bob or Carl know, The Washington Post would be out before us," said Friend, who was the lead editor.

In fact, The Post was scooped, after keeping Felt's secret for more than three decades.

Post Executive Editor Leonard Downie Jr. said yesterday that Woodward "did the honorable thing by sticking by his confidentiality agreement" with Felt. "He had agreed not to reveal his iden-



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mark Felt, shown in a 1976 appearance on CBS's "Face the Nation," had repeatedly denied he was Deep Throat.

ed to confirm Vanity Fair's story yesterday because "Felt's family and lawyer made their decision for him, and we had no choice," Downie said.

The mystery and celebrity of Deep Throat grew for three reasons: His revelations were critical in keeping Woodward and Bernstein focused on the Watergate story; his shadowy portrayal by actor Hal Holbrook in the Oscar-winning "All the President's Men" in 1976; and the fact that his identity was so closely held for so many years. Bradlee said that until recently, he, Bernstein, Woodward and Woodward's wife, Elsa, were the only people other than Felt who could confirm Felt's secret.

Bradlee said neither Katharine Graham, the late chairman and chief executive of The Washington Post Co., nor her son and successor, Donald Graham, asked him for Deep Throat's identity. "I don't think I would have told them if they had," he said. "It's classy that they didn't ask."

Vanity Fair's story hinted at but did not answer a key journalistic question: Was Felt, who is 91 and in ill health from a stroke, of sound enough mind to have confirmed his identity to O'Connor, or to have told Woodward that their agreement had ended?

The Vanity Fair story muddies the issue somewhat. O'Connor notes in the story that Felt told him, "I'm the guy they called Deep Throat," but the context is lacking. For one thing, O'Connor played a dual role: He was providing the Felt family with legal advice while also writing a magazine story, which meant that Felt's revelation may have been information provided under attorney-client privilege and therefore not subject to unilateral disclosure.

What's more, as O'Connor makes clear in his story, the Felt family was seeking to profit from Felt's secret identity and there-

fore had an incentive to pressure a clearly conflicted Felt into going public.

Up until yesterday, two of the best investigations into Deep Throat's identity have come from former Washington Post journalists, both of whom worked for the paper during the Watergate years, 1972 to 1974.

James Mann, now an author-in-residence at the School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, published his speculation in the Atlantic magazine in 1992, around the 20th anniversary of the Watergate break-in. Mann didn't know who Deep Throat was, but he narrowed the field to an FBI official — in part, because Woodward himself had mentioned this fact in conversation, according to Mann.

But Mann added his own corroborating analysis: "For a senior FBI official like Deep Throat, talking to Woodward and The Post about Watergate was a way to fend off White House interference with the [FBI's] investigation. The contacts with the press guaranteed that information developed by the FBI's Watergate investigative team would not be suppressed or altered by Nixon Administration officials. And, more broadly, the leaks furthered the cause of an independent FBI unfettered by political control."

Deep Throat, wrote Mann, "could well have been Mark Felt, who admitted that he harbored ambitions to be the FBI director [but was thwarted when Nixon appointed L. Patrick Gray]. . . . Felt was known in Washington as a person willing to talk to the press." Mann's speculation about Felt was subsequently championed by Slate's Tim Noah, in a series of columns dating back to mid-1999:

Problem was, despite personal and professional reasons to leak to Woodward, Felt has long denied that he was Deep Throat. He

denied it when Noah asked him directly in 1999, just as he denied it in his 1979 memoir, "The FBI Pyramid." Wrote Felt: "I never leaked information to Woodward and Bernstein or to anyone else!"

Tantalizing clues have emerged over the years. In his book, "The Bureau: The Secret History of the FBI," Ronald Kessler, a former Post reporter, recounted a meeting between Woodward and Felt in the summer of 1999. Woodward had shown up unexpectedly at the home of Felt and his daughter, Joan, in Santa Rosa, Calif., parking his limousine several blocks away in an apparent effort not to be seen and thus raise questions about his relationship with Felt. Kessler's anecdote also leads off Vanity Fair's story.

Over the years, other writers have misfired in identifying Deep Throat: Nixon's White House counsel, John Dean, has made several guesses since 1975, all of them wrong. The University of Illinois, in a journalism project involving faculty and students, named Nixon deputy White House counsel Fred Fielding in 2003.

Leonard Garment, a special counsel to Nixon during the Watergate years and author of the 2000 book "In Search of Deep Throat," speculated in his book that the source was John Sears, a former deputy special counsel to Nixon. "I would have to apologize to John Sears for any embarrassment I caused him," said Garment, reached by phone yesterday at his home in Manhattan. Garment, who said he had not read the Vanity Fair story, added that Felt was considered a "prime candidate by many people" and that he himself had not spoken to Felt.

"When all is said and done, it will be a relief to everyone to have this settled," Garment said.

*Staff writer Mark Leibovich contributed to this report.*

tity until [Deep Throat] released him from his pledge or the source died, and he did that."

Although Woodward had checked in with the Felt family periodically, and is writing a book about his relationship with Deep Throat, Downie said Woodward was never told by Felt or his family that he was going public. "Bob was really kind of helpless" because Felt never indicated that their agreement was over, Downie said.

Woodward and The Post decid-

## Essay

# The Illuminating Experience of Being Kept in the Dark

By HANK STUEVER  
*Washington Post Staff Writer*

The idea of Deep Throat has slipped away. The man lives, according to Vanity Fair and confirmed by The Washington Post, reduced to just that — an old man, W. Mark Felt, with his moldered and complete Washington résumé, including a presidential pardon, liv-

ing with his daughter in California, allowed two glasses of wine with dinner.

What's gone is the last best secret, wrested from the grip of the select few who'd vowed to keep it. The hiding of Deep Throat's identity took on a larger mythic status than any scoop Deep Throat provided, and much of Washington — media, officialdom, even tourists who snapped the Watergate

complex — guarded the almost holy belief in Deep Throat. He was the perfect, nameless god. It was the idea that reporters (and their background sources) could save the world, and that trust was still trust, and truth was still true. People now go to parking garages to get their cars.

What could be more of a let-down than finding out who Deep Throat is? Finding it out in Vanity

Fair? And not really finding it out in Vanity Fair so much as feeling it crash-land across the Internet and the cable news networks, days before the magazine even hits the stands? Finding out that you don't care anymore? Watching it not resonate among people younger than 30?

The concept of Deep Throat

---

See ESSAY, C7, Col. 3

# Stepping Out of the Garage and Into the Light

ESSAY, From *CI*

once set the rules of the town. People practiced Deep Throat etiquette (let's meet at an out-of-the-way place), Deep Throat ways (don't call me on this phone), Deep Throat marvel (how'd they get that?). There was great industry in the clandestine, in whispering.

It helped that it had a dirty, porny nickname, which came right from the swagger and irreverence of journalism's then-new era, asserting itself while cracking wise.

Journalism schools were suddenly overcrowded with people who all wanted to find the next Deep Throat. Neckties were wide. Robert Redford, IBM Selectrics, pay phones, the clutter, the drabness and wonder of the '70s: Everyone wanted a piece of it, and some days you can still get a whiff of what it might have felt like. It was possible, our ancestors inform us, to go to a bar and tell a girl that you were a reporter for *The Washington Post* and she might go home with you. That was part of the allure of the Deep Throat culture — the reporter as chick magnet. (Now she would tell you that she doesn't really ever look at the paper. Or worse, she only looks at it online.)

People soon got over their lust for reporters, but they still want Deep Throat, or something very much like him, and they demand that reporters still go looking for him. It's like sending signals in the sky to a Batman who never answers.

Aggrieved readers beseech reporters and editors to swoop in and shine the beacon of unstoppable truth, always aided by the well-



WARNER BROS.

With his back to the camera, Deep Throat meets with Bob Woodward (Robert Redford) in "All the President's Men."

placed, anonymous source. *Expose the bastards*. Bring down the president every four or five years, every month, every week, every day. To be a reporter now is to get all kinds of e-mail: *How come you guys aren't looking into [blank]?! When are you going to blow the lid off the obvious [blank] of the [blank]?!* Newspapers launch vast ships of investigative reportage and still all anybody is really looking for — in any of the five, six, seven installments of the series — is the paragraph that will approximate the Deep Throat thrill.

Gone is a sort of tidy, narrow

definition of evil, of corruption. The gotcha is now a tawdry exercise in minutiae, not a blow against the Establishment, against the Man. "What did he know and when did he know it" puts us to sleep. "Follow the money" is an exercise in Excel spreadsheets, occasionally praised by prize committees, but rarely read.

It turns out being in the dark about Deep Throat was more enthralling than holding it out to the light. Had he lived in this era, Deep Throat might not have lasted long. He'd be blogged to bits. He'd be Drudged, smudged, Romenesko'd.

People would disprove him with their own Deep Throats. His identity would be discovered within a news cycle or two, spun around, and he'd be left holding a book contract.

Perhaps Deep Throat's lovely (and daring) parting gift to Washington, especially to reporters, is simple: He actually exists. He is not fabrication or composite. He is one man, a fact not easily proved had he taken his secret to the grave. That in itself, in an era where trust has been shredded beyond recognition, is something to behold.

# The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

## Deep Throat Speaks

FOR MORE THAN three decades Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and former executive editor Benjamin C. Bradlee preserved an extraordinary secret: the identity of the source known as Deep Throat, who helped inform the stories The Post published in 1972 and 1973 exposing what became known as the Watergate scandal. They kept the secret despite extraordinary pressure on The Post from the White House, including charges that Deep Throat was an invention; through the hearings and impeachment proceedings that led to President Richard M. Nixon's resignation in August 1974; and despite endless speculation about the source's identity in the years afterward. Mr. Woodward, now a Post editor, and Mr. Bernstein, who no longer works here, said that they had made a commitment not to reveal Deep Throat's identity until after his death. Yesterday that pact was finally superseded by the publication of statements by W. Mark Felt, former deputy director of the FBI, confirming that he was Deep Throat. He revealed his role in part because of his family's belief that he deserves to be honored for his actions while he is alive.

The honor is surely deserved. Mr. Felt, now 91, was a dedicated servant of the FBI, and no softie: He was convicted of (and later pardoned for) authorizing illegal acts in pursuit of leftist radicals in the early 1970s. Yet he was also outraged that the Nixon White House brazenly interfered with the FBI's investigation of the burglary of Democratic Party headquarters in June 1972 and by what he saw as Mr. Nixon's attempt to gain control over the FBI for political purposes. Risking dismissal or prosecution, he began meeting with Mr. Woodward secretly to confirm The Post's reporting about the funding of the operation and about other illegal acts by the president's top aides. He was not the only source The Post relied on; Mr. Woodward and Mr. Bernstein tracked down dozens of others, many of whom were named in their articles. Deep Throat was nevertheless crucial to the

paper's reporting of Watergate. Following book and movie depictions of his role, he became the most famous anonymous source in the history of American journalism, and a model for government whistle-blowers.

Mr. Felt was ambivalent about his decision to cooperate with Mr. Woodward. He declined to disclose his actions for years after he retired, denying his role even to his family. By leaking details of the FBI's probe into Watergate, he violated the bureau's standards and arguably the law. Yet in retrospect it is clear that his decision was the right one. Mr. Nixon had set out to subvert the U.S. system of justice: While publicly ordering the FBI to investigate, he secretly directed a coverup intended to prevent the agency from confirming the connections between his campaign and the Watergate burglars. The FBI criminal investigation of senior White House and campaign officials was effectively blocked. Only when the complicity of such figures as former attorney general John N. Mitchell was publicly disclosed with the help of Mr. Felt did Congress begin an investigation that eventually revealed the full scope of the Watergate crimes. Had Mr. Felt remained quiet, Mr. Nixon might have succeeded in one of the most serious abuses of power ever attempted by an American president.

In a small irony, Deep Throat's unveiling comes as the media and Washington officialdom engage in one of their periodic debates about the use of anonymous sources. We think that both the debate and the newly professed cautions about relying on such sources are healthy. As we noted, The Post's reporting depended on many sources, and the truth emerged thanks to the courage of U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica, then-Sen. Sam Ervin and others who rose to the occasion. But it's worth remembering that this landmark victory for the rule of law also depended on the secret patriotism of a source named Deep Throat — that is, Mark Felt. It's nice to be able to honor him by his real name while he still lives.

## The Reaction

# Contemporaries Have Mixed Views

By DAN MORGAN  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Prominent figures from the Watergate era expressed a mixture of reactions yesterday, from shock to admiration, upon learning that the number two official at the FBI had guided Washington Post reporters investigating illegal activities by the Nixon administration.

Richard Ben-Veniste, a top lawyer in the Watergate Special Prosecution Force, said W. Mark Felt's acknowledgement of his role showed that "the importance of whistle-blowers shouldn't be underestimated, particularly when there are excesses by the executive branch of government — which in this case went all the way to the executive office."

But Charles W. Colson, a senior Nixon adviser who served seven months in prison for obstruction of justice in connection with Watergate abuses, declared that he was "personally shocked."

"When any president has to worry whether the deputy director of the FBI is sneaking around in dark corridors peddling information in the middle of the night, he's in trouble," said Colson, who founded Prison Fellowship Ministries after leaving jail. "There were times when I should have blown the whistle, so I understand his feelings. But I cannot approve of his methods."

Speaking last night on MSNBC's "Hardball," former Nixon speechwriter Patrick J. Buchanan labeled Felt a "traitor" for having worked with reporters on stories that did severe damage to the administration.

It was those kind of reactions that led Felt to keep secret for more than 30 years his role as source for Washington Post investigative reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

But others credited Felt with having performed a great public service, at a time when many top officials of the government, including officials in the FBI and the Justice Department, were attempting to brush the scandal under the rug.

Terry Lenzner, a senior Democratic counsel on the Senate Watergate Committee, said the special panel "wouldn't have existed if those articles hadn't been written, because the whole thing would have been buried."

Felt's guidance helped Woodward and Bernstein understand that they were on the right track, and it was therefore crucial in keeping up the momentum that eventually led to criminal investigations, a full-fledged Senate inquiry and finally the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon.

"Frankly I think the reason Felt turned into Deep Throat was that he had a sense that [FBI Director L. Patrick] Gray was participating in the coverup and that it would destroy the reputation of the FBI. He was a classic FBI guy," Lenzner said. "His motives were that he had to protect the FBI. And he did."

Scott Armstrong, who worked for Lenzner on the Senate Watergate Committee and helped Woodward

and Bernstein report and write "The Final Days," a book about the end of the Nixon administration, said Deep Throat did not supply detailed facts about illegal activities.

But he was invaluable to the two young reporters who at the outset were alone in attempting to unearth the connections between the White House and the burglary at Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate hotel and office complex. "Only journalists understand how important it is to have someone on the inside," he said.

"My hunch has been that Bob and Carl's stories kept the Watergate story alive and in their way served to draw in other journalists," said Leonard Garment, who served as Nixon's counsel and chief trouble-shooter during Watergate. "A lot of the material was being dug out by the U.S. attorney's office, but Woodward and Bernstein got a jump on the story and Deep Throat [provided] the corroboration that something was going on."

But Deep Throat also had an influence over the practice of journalism that far outlived the Nixon administration, Garment said.

The existence of a mysterious government source for the articles, revealed in the Woodward and Bernstein book "All the President's Men," "gave drama to the investigative reporter and gave rise to a whole generation of prospective Woodward and Bernsteins by the bushel" that sharpened the adversarial relationship between the news media and the government, Garment said.

A long-term echo of that kind of reporting can be seen even now, in the investigative reporting about the relationship between House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) and high-powered Washington lobbyists, Garment said.

Ben-Veniste noted that in going to the press to get the story out, Felt was running a considerable personal risk because he could have been prosecuted for revealing information "if things had gone the wrong way."

"Who could you trust? You couldn't trust the Justice Department. [Top officials] were shoveling information back to the White House," said Ben-Veniste, who recently served on the 9/11 commission.

Felt's boss, the FBI director, was also part of the coverup. Gray destroyed evidence at the instructions of a "White House cabal," Ben-Veniste said. "Clearly there was no reason to think he had an ally in L. Patrick Gray."

For some who have been periodically mentioned as the possible Deep Throat, the end of the mystery yesterday closes a final page on the Watergate affair.

One of those, Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., who replaced H.R. Haldeman as White House chief of staff in May 1973, yesterday blamed former Nixon White House counsel John Dean for starting rumors that he was Deep Throat. As a result he was pestered by reporters for years. "I talked to Bob Woodward just once," Haig said. "And that was after Nixon had resigned."



**Richard Ben-Veniste was a prosecutor.**



**Charles W. Colson advised President Richard Nixon.**



FILE PHOTO OF MARK FELT APPEARING ON CBS' "FACE THE NATION" ON AUG. 30, 1976/ASSOCIATED PRESS

*Richard Cohen*

## A Brave Friend

A long time ago I wrote a magazine piece about how Bob Woodward's famous source, "Deep Throat," could have been a mere Secret Service technician — any one of several people detailed to keep Richard Nixon's secret White House taping system operating. I figured that anyone with access to the system could quickly learn all that mattered about the Watergate burglary: The president's men had done it and the president was covering it up. I showed the piece to Woodward, who would not say whether it was right or wrong, just that it made sense. We both knew, though, that "Deep Throat" was Mark Felt.

Woodward's knowledge was firsthand, up close and certain. Mine was different. It came from having worked with Woodward early in his career. I was looking into rumors that Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew of Maryland, was under investigation by the U.S. attorney's office in Baltimore. Somehow — I can't remember exactly — I worked a bit with Bob on that story. His source, a person he used to call "my friend," had terrific information — stuff that, looking back on it, not

---

*I applaud. We all applaud, or we should.  
Here is a man who did what he thought  
was right.*

---

even the prosecutors in Baltimore had yet learned. Woodward would refer to his notes, and I could see the initials "M.F." They stood either for "my friend" or Mark Felt, whose name almost instantly surfaced. I thought it didn't matter. The two were the same. There was a single source.

Now we know it is Mark Felt. He has confessed, if that's the right word — although given his age (91) it's not exactly clear what he was intending. Suffice it to say, though, that he is the man. He was No. 2 in the FBI back in the Watergate days, and he just could not abide the way the bureau was being abused by Nixon and his White House colleagues. They wanted to use the FBI to block any real investigation into the

Watergate burglary. Felt simply would not permit that.

I applaud. We all applaud, or we should. Here was a man who put his career — and it was a truly great career — on the line. Here was a man who took seriously all that stuff about duty and loyalty and — permit me, please — the American Way. He was, to say the least, no showboater. He did not rush out to write a book or appear on "Larry King Live" or sell his story to the movies, which he could have done. No, he did what he thought was right.

The reason I loved my theory about the nonexistent Secret Service technician is that he was the proverbial little man. He was the guy you don't notice who is appalled by wrongdoing and wants to do the right thing. He asks no reward and he demands no fame. He wants only to show the big boys that the little guys, in the end, cannot be taken for granted. He is always there. He has to be taken into account. He can always go to the media.

Felt was too important to be "the little guy." That made what he did even braver. He was always an obvious suspect. He clearly knew too much.

For more than 30 years I have had people tell me that Deep Throat did not exist. He was invented, made up. Or he was a composite — a piece of this person and a piece of that person with some fiction thrown in. I knew better. I had seen the notes and, besides, I knew Woodward and Carl Bernstein. They would not lie.

We live in a cynical era. The press has been knocked off its Watergate-era pedestal and prosecutors are rounding up anonymous sources because it is more important to seal a leak than to get at the truth. The public either applauds or does not give a damn. Everything is the same. Big government. Big media. What does it matter?

But Mark Felt knew that it mattered. Remember: He was No. 2 in the FBI. Remember: He carried a gun. And remember, too: Despite all that, when he was afraid for his bureau and for his country, he went to a reporter and told his story and changed history. Richard Nixon resigned and countless White House officials went to jail partly because of what Felt told that reporter. That's how it started, anyway.

Now that I know for sure that Mark Felt is Deep Throat, nothing really changes. I always suspected it was him. And I knew, no matter who it was, that I could always paraphrase Woodward: For what Felt did for us all, he was "our friend."

*cohenr@washpost.com*