

If You Drink Scotch, Smoke & Read, Maybe You're 'Deep Throat'

Almost Anyone Can Qualify As Capital Tries to Guess Watergate - Story Source

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WASHINGTON—W. Mark Felt says he isn't now, nor has he ever been, Deep Throat.

Of course, says the former acting associate director of the FBI, if he really were Deep Throat, you'd hardly expect him to admit it, now would you? Not that he is, Mr. Felt quickly adds.

No, you certainly wouldn't expect a retired FBI man, or anybody else, to just blurt out that he helped bring the Nixon administration to its knees. Or that he scurried around at odd hours of the night, met furtively in an underground parking garage, provided explosive information on the Watergate cover-up to the Washington Post's investigative team of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, and, ultimately, helped push the President of the United States to the edge of impeachment.

Still, there is this theory. . . .

Well, actually, there are four dozen theories, each concerning the true identity of the shadowy figure who keeps cropping up at crucial stages in the best-selling Bernstein-Woodward book, "All the President's Men." Just about everybody in official Washington seems to have one. But there is the Mark Felt-as-Deep-Throat theory, perhaps a shade more plausible than many, and it goes like this:

"Who (had) motive and opportunity and method? . . . Who had access to all the material? Who had the resources to set up a system to leak it? The FBI, that's who. . . . The old-line (J. Edgar) Hoover people who were being harrassed and offended and fired by Nixon and (John) Mitchell and (L. Patrick) Gray. . . .

". . . Try someone like Mark Felt on for size. A Hoover loyalist and No. 2 man to Pat Gray, he had every reason and resource for leaking the Watergate story and destroying Nixon." So reasons managing editor Jack Limpert in June's Washingtonian magazine.

Good Reasoning, Bad Conclusion

Mr. Felt himself seems rather bemused, maybe even a little amused, at all this. "I don't disagree with the reasoning, but I do disagree with the conclusion," he says. "Because I'm just not that kind of person."

But ever since the Washingtonian came out, he complains mildly, friends keep giving him knowing winks. A New York Post reporter called him up and wanted to know only three things: Does he smoke? (No.) Does he drink? (Socially.) Does he have a background in literature? (No.) The reporter thanked him and went his inscrutable way. (At various points in the book, Deep Throat smokes a cigaret, drinks Scotch and is described as a man who "knew too much literature too well.")

And the other day Mr. Felt, who retired a year ago to lecture, consult and write a bit, got a jocular letter from his booking agent. "Dear Deep Throat," it began. About the only good thing Mr. Felt can see in it all is that the publicity may boost demand for him on the lecture circuit.

Robert Finch, on the other hand, is neither bemused nor amused; he's furious.

That's because another theory casts him as the phantom leaker. The theory belongs to author and onetime Nixon adviser Richard J. Whalen, who wrote (in a Washington Post review of the Woodward-Bernstein book) that "an informal poll of leading Nixonologists turns up two nominees: Robert Finch and (former White House political operative) Harry Dent." The reasoning went that both Mr. Dent and Mr. Finch, the mildly liberal former counselor to the President, "had the necessary position and motivation."

"Libelous," retorted Mr. Finch, currently a Los Angeles attorney, in a stiff letter to the Washington Post last Friday. "I was not even in Washington during most of (the Watergate) period and I am not acquainted with Messrs. Woodward and Bernstein and have never communicated with them in any way."

More Theories, More Names

Still other theories would pin the rap on ex-FBI Acting Director Gray; White House "hatchet-man"-turned-penitent Charles Colson; counsel to the President Leonard Garment; the CIA; ex-deputy counsel to the President Fred F. Fielding; someone in the intelligence community whom Mr. Woodward met while holding a "sensitive" Pentagon job before joining the Post; special counsel to the President Richard A. Moore; or even Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen.

Then again, some think that Deep Throat is just a literary invention, a composite of some or all of the above.

For his part, the Washingtonian's Mr. Limpert is sticking with the Felt theory. Since broaching it, he says, he has received "very solid" supporting information from a former Justice Department official, and readers can look for it in their August issue of the magazine.

And, interestingly enough, Mr. Felt says that Mr. Woodward did once ask him to play a Deep Throat-like role—never volunteering information, just confirming the accuracy of

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information the reporters obtained elsewhere. Mr. Felt says he refused in the presence of an assistant. He thinks that Deep Throat is a composite.

Not true, say Messrs. Bernstein and Woodward, interviewed in the midst of a national promotional tour for their book. Deep Throat "is one individual," Mr. Bernstein says. He says the two reporters want to make that clear because "we don't want anyone to think we're writing fiction or something."

As it turns out, this is about the only thing the reporters want made clear. Citing a reporter's obligation to protect his news sources, they politely turn aside other questions. For example:

—At the beginning of the book, only Mr. Woodward knows the identity of Deep Throat. Is Carl Bernstein still in the dark today? "We have worked that out," Mr. Woodward answers.

—How about FBI man Mark Felt's description of the request for help from reporter Woodward? "Don't draw anything from that," Mr. Woodward responds. People are going to be saying all kinds of things. Someone may even come out of the woodwork and announce that he is Deep Throat, the reporter adds, but that won't necessarily make it true.

"I hate to sound unresponsive, like the White House press secretary or something," Mr. Woodward says. "But. . . ."

That polite "but" is causing some problems for Robert Redford and Bill Goldman.

Robert Redford, of course, is the handsome movie actor. He is also a producer who now plans to make a movie based on the book. He will play the part of Bob Woodward. Bill Goldman is a harried-sounding writer. He is trying to turn the book into a movie script. But if he doesn't know what Deep Throat looks like, how can he write a part for him?

"What can I tell you?" Mr. Goldman bristles over the phone. It doesn't matter what he thinks Deep Throat looks like, he insists, because a scriptwriter is just a hired hand. The important thing is what producer Redford thinks Deep Throat looks like.

But surely Mr. Goldman has had to conjure up some mental image just to write his script, hasn't he? The writer sighs and reluctantly agrees. Well, then, is this image tall or short? Sleazy or distinguished-looking? "What can I tell you?" Mr. Goldman says again.

Finally, though, the writer volunteers that Deep Throat could hardly be "furtive-looking." "He'd have to be someone who makes you believe he knows what he's talking about. Because practically everything Deep Throat said proved to be true in the end, even though it sounded implausible at first." Spencer Tracy, he adds, would have made a dandy Deep Throat.

While writer Goldman struggles with the script, actor Redford is immersing himself in the subject. To get the hang of a reporter's work, he recently spent some time in the Washington Post newsroom, observing reporters at work and sitting in on editorial conferences and the like. But even he, it seems, must remain in the dark in some areas.

According to a spokeswoman, Mr. Redford has never asked the two reporters to violate any confidences, nor does he intend to. But one day, while following Mr. Woodward around, he did casually ask one favor. Perhaps they could at least take a run by that famous underground parking garage?

Mr. Woodward said no. And so, according to the spokeswoman, "Bob (Redford) not only doesn't know who Deep Throat is, —he doesn't even know where the garage is."