



WATERGATE ANONYMOUS SOURCE "DEEP THROAT" COMES FORWARD

June 1, 2005

The mystery man who helped the Washington Post unravel the Watergate scandal that forced President Nixon to resign in 1974 has come forward.

Mark Felt, a 91-year-old retiree, was the number two at the FBI when men paid for by President Nixon's reelection committee broke into the Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate complex in Washington, DC. He gave secret information to reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein that encouraged them to follow the trail from a seemingly insignificant burglary to a cover-up organized by the Nixon administration.

The Post's articles eventually led Congress to investigate the White House and proceed with hearings that would have led to impeachment.

Woodward first referred to the anonymous source as "my friend," but a Post editor renamed the source in honor of a pornographic film of that name that was then a national sensation.

Felt's grandson Nick Jones, a 23-year-old law student, explained that his grandfather was ill and had finally agreed to come forward. "As he recently told my mother, 'I guess people used to think Deep Throat was a criminal, but now they think he's a hero.' "

The Watergate scandal

The Watergate scandal began with a simple burglary on June 17, 1972. Five men were arrested in the act of breaking into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in Washington's Watergate hotel and office building.

A few days later the burglars were connected to E. Howard Hunt, a former White House aide, and to G. Gordon Liddy, a lawyer for the Committee for the Reelection of President Nixon.

Despite the ties to his campaign, the president repeatedly denied any involvement in the affair.

That November President Nixon won reelection to the White House by a landslide, but the story of Watergate would not go away. Throughout the summer of 1973, Congress held dramatic televised hearings that slowly drew out the truth.

Republican Howard Baker of Tennessee crystallized the issue with one simple question: “What did the president know, and when did he know it?”

Through the hearings and stories that appeared in the Washington Post and other newspapers, it became increasingly clear that President Nixon and his aides had broken one law after another to try and cover up their involvement. They paid "hush" money to keep it quiet. They tried to use the CIA to block the FBI's investigation. They invoked "national security" and "executive privilege" to shield themselves from the investigation. And they lied under oath to Congress.

Then in July, came a critical break and a shocking disclosure. President Nixon had installed recording devices in the Oval Office so that historians could study his presidency. Congress said the White House had to turn over the tapes, but President Nixon refused, citing executive privilege. A constitutional confrontation had begun.

For the first time in history, a committee of Congress took the President to court.

After a bitter struggle for the tapes, the Supreme Court ordered the president to surrender all the tapes. On August 5th, newly released transcripts of the secret Oval Office tape recordings proved beyond a doubt the president, himself, had conspired in the cover-up. Three days later, Richard Nixon resigned.

A month later, President Gerald Ford pardoned the disgraced Richard Nixon for all offenses against the United States, but many of the president's closest aides went to jail.

Possible motivations

Although some Washington insiders are skeptical that Felt is the only person who leaked confidential information, he did have access to some 1,500 FBI interview files, and knew all the agents who were involved in the investigation of the Watergate affair.

But the question remains: why did he talk to Woodward?

In 1992, journalist James Mann cited Felt as a suspect in an article for The Atlantic Monthly, in which he theorized that Deep Throat's motive was to defend the institutional power and integrity of the FBI.

Felt spent more than 30 years at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and was devoted to its legendary director, J. Edgar Hoover. When Hoover died in May 1972, President Nixon went outside the agency for a new chief. Hoover had spent decades telling presidents what to do. Suddenly, veterans like Felt were being told what to do by the Nixon White House, and did not like it, according to Mann.

John O'Connor friend of the Felt family, who wrote the Vanity Fair article said Felt was a whistleblower who thought what President Nixon had done was wrong. “He sees this as a way to honor all the people below him who served in the Bureau and were incorruptible through a very, very tough time in our nation's history,” he said.

In their book, "All The President's Men," Woodward and Bernstein painted Deep Throat as a colorful character, "an incurable gossip, careful to label rumor for what it was, but fascinated by it."

They added: "He could be rowdy, drink too much, overreach. He was not good at concealing his feelings, hardly ideal for a man in his position. Of late, he had expressed fear for the future of the executive branch, which he was in a unique position to observe."

--Compiled by Leah Clapman for NewsHour Extra

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