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Bush pardons moonshining 'Deliverance' actor

By Robert Yoon
CNN Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- By granting absolution to a convicted moonshiner, George W. Bush also earned the unique distinction of becoming the first president to pardon a cast member of the 1972 Academy Award-nominated movie "Deliverance."

Randall Leece Deal of Clayton, Georgia, had a small role in the film about four Atlanta businessmen who have unpleasant encounters with locals during a north Georgia canoe trip.

For the last 16 years, Deal, 66, has worked at the Rabun County Sheriff's Department, a far cry from his life in the early 1960s when he was convicted on two counts of violating liquor laws and one count of conspiring to violate liquor laws.

The crimes are commonly known as moonshining and Deal still disputes the conspiracy charge.

"That really wasn't true," he said. "But anyway, that's what they charged us with."

Deal never served any jail time for the convictions, but the black mark on his record rankled him enough to seek a presidential pardon more than 40 years later. "I just got to thinking about it, you know. Just to get her wiped out if possible," he said.

Deal hired a local attorney and "just filled out the papers and sent it in to the White House, or wherever you send them to, a good long time ago."

Deal's "Deliverance" performance consisted of a single line: "It ain't nothing but the biggest [expletive] river in the state!" For the record, Deal did not play one of the surly locals involved in an infamous rape scene with actor Ned Beatty.

The film also starred Burt Reynolds, Jon Voight and Ronny Cox.

Moonshining was a common practice in the South in the 1960s, Deal said. He also pointed out that he was not in it for the money, but was more interested in the fun and camaraderie of the enterprise.

"I was just helping some friends back then," he said. "It was really just more like a game than anything, to be honest with you. It wasn't a big business deal, fiddling with moonshine. At least to me it wasn't."

'A pretty big old deal'

The Justice Department announced Deal's pardon on Wednesday. "I really didn't have an idea what kind of a deal it would be," he said. "But evidently it's a pretty big old deal to get one."

Deal defies the image of the well-connected, deep-pocketed presidential pardon recipient like controversial financier Marc Rich, who received one of President Clinton's final pardons in 2001.

But Deal has never made a single federal political contribution, according to Federal Election Commission records. When asked if he had any special political connections with the White House, Deal laughed and said, "Oh no. No sir. None whatsoever."

Deal did describe himself as a Bush supporter, pardon or no pardon. Although the pardon doesn't hurt.

"Well, you know, somebody does something for you, it should help your opinion of them, shouldn't it?" he asked. "Isn't that the way it's supposed to be?"

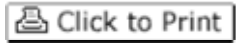
He said his movie career is long behind him. His only post-"Deliverance" acting role was in the little-known 1982 film "Trapped," which he calls "just a little old bitty thing. Nothing to mention." He does still receive the occasional residual check for his brief acting career, each check usually no more than a few dollars.

Also long behind him are his moonshining days.

"There isn't really much of that around here anymore," he said. "In fact, I was thinking here a minute ago, and I believe practically everybody I helped [make moonshine] is dead."

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