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## Tapes: Nixon suspected Felt

### Discussed possibility that FBI No. 2 was reporters' source

**WASHINGTON (CNN) -- President Nixon and his aides suspected early on that FBI official W. Mark Felt was helping The Washington Post with its stories on the Watergate affair, according to transcripts of White House tapes.**

In a conversation recorded on October 19, 1972, four months after the Watergate break-in, White House chief of staff H.R. Haldeman told Nixon a secret source had identified Felt as the primary leaker.

"If we move on him, he'll go out and unload everything," Haldeman said. "He knows everything that's to be known in the FBI. He has access to absolutely everything."

Nixon asked Haldeman, "What would you do with Felt?"

Haldeman, who served 18 months in prison for his role in Watergate, said White House counsel John Dean determined Felt could not be prosecuted

"There's all kind of devices. You let him know that you know. Then you transfer him to Ottumwa, Iowa," Haldeman said.

"You know what I'd do with him, the bastard?" Nixon replies.

The reply on the tape is inaudible and Nixon follows up by saying, "That's all I want to hear about it."

Felt, now 91, was the FBI's deputy director in the early 1970s, the No. 2 position in the bureau.

As the source identified this week as "Deep Throat" after more than 30 years, Felt met several times with Post reporter Bob Woodward in Washington area parking garages to confirm information or fill in gaps from other sources. ([Full story](#))

Stories by Woodward and his reporting partner Carl Bernstein and those of others sparked a Senate investigation whose televised hearings riveted the nation in 1973.

In 1974, White House tapes revealed Nixon was behind an effort to cover up the bungled June 17, 1972, burglary of the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office-hotel-apartment complex.

The cover-up was launched because the break-in threatened to expose a White House-directed political sabotage operation to support Nixon's re-election campaign and the illegal activities of the so-called "Plumbers," a unit founded to plug leaks to the media.

After the House Judiciary Committee passed articles of impeachment against him, Nixon resigned in August 1974.

## Felt's motivation

In a second conversation taped February 28, 1973, Nixon discussed the possibility with Dean "that Felt comes out and unwraps the whole thing. What does it do to him ... everybody would treat him like a pariah."

"He can't do it," agreed Dean, who would later tell the Senate committee about Nixon's involvement in the cover-up and serve four months in prison.

Felt retired from the FBI that year.

Watergate scholars had long considered Felt a candidate for Deep Throat, a designation Felt denied for three decades.

Woodward, Bernstein and former Post executive editor Ben Bradlee had vowed to keep Felt's identity a secret until his death.

Felt's revelation in a Vanity Fair magazine article this week that he was Deep Throat let them off the hook, and they confirmed it in an article on the paper's Web site.

It was Felt's unhappiness with the way the Nixon administration meddled with the FBI's investigation into the Watergate break-in that led him to help Woodward, who he had known for a while, Vanity Fair reported.

Felt was a protege of legendary FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover, who died in May 1972, more than a month before the Watergate break-in.

Nixon replaced Hoover with an administration insider, L. Patrick Gray, and he and his aides suggested Felt was unhappy at being passed over for the top job.

In an interview Thursday night on CNN's "Larry King Live," Woodward and Bernstein added some details about Felt's contributions to their reporting.

Bernstein said he never met Felt and that he didn't even know his name in the early months of working on the story.

He said Woodward met with Deep Throat less than a dozen times.

While not downplaying Felt's importance, both reporters said much of the Watergate coverage was from "shoe leather" -- knocking on doors, making phone calls and following leads.

Woodward said Felt "would only guide us and steer us. And when we would find out something, he would confirm it."

"It's very important to understand that he provided us, at some very crucial moments, with context and certitude," Woodward said.

"One of the things that Deep Throat did was at several crucial moments -- we knew we were right when we had a couple sources - - and then Deep Throat would say, 'That's right.' "

## 'Where would Felt have gone?'

Several Nixon administration veterans have criticized Felt for helping the Post.

G. Gordon Liddy, who helped plan the Watergate break-in as a member of the White House Plumbers unit, said Felt "violated the ethics of the law enforcement profession" by talking to the newspaper rather than turning his information over to a grand jury.

Bradlee said critics like Liddy, who served four and a half years in prison for his roles in the scandal and the Plumbers' activities, have little credibility.

"Where would Felt have gone?" Bradlee told CNN. "He saw something wrong in the government, and what should he have done?"

"He couldn't really go to his superior, who was L. Patrick Gray, who was busy throwing documents into the Potomac River from the bridge. He couldn't go to the attorney general, who was on his way to jail himself."

Attorney General John Mitchell resigned in 1972 to take over the Committee to Re-elect the President.

A court later revealed that Mitchell, while still in office, approved a secret campaign fund of \$250,000 for the Watergate burglary. Mitchell served 19 months in prison for his role in the scandal.

Mitchell's successor as attorney general, Richard Kleindienst, was also found guilty of not testifying accurately in his Senate confirmation hearing.

He resigned on April 30, 1973, the same day Dean was dismissed and Haldeman resigned.


Asked whether Felt could have taken his concerns to the president directly, Bradlee scoffed.

"A person goes to Nixon? Give me a break," he said.

*CNN's Robert Yoon and Stephen Bach contributed to this report.*

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