

# THE WATERGATE STORY

## The Post investigates

"Five Held in Plot to Bug Democratic Offices Here," said the headline at the bottom of page one in the Washington Post on Sunday, June 18, 1972. The story reported that a team of burglars had been arrested inside the offices of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate office complex in Washington.

So began the chain of events that would convulse Washington for two years, lead to the first resignation of a U.S. president and change American politics forever.



Bob Woodward, left, and Carl Bernstein were in their 20s when they began investigating the Watergate cover-up. (Ken Feil - TWP)

The story intrigued two young reporters on The Post's staff, **Carl Bernstein** and **Bob Woodward** who were called in to work on the story. As Woodward's notes show, he learned from police sources that the men came from Miami, wore surgical gloves and carried thousands of dollars in cash. It was, said one source, "a professional type operation."

The next day, Woodward and Bernstein joined up for the first of many revelatory stories. "GOP Security Aide Among Those Arrested," reported that burglar **James McCord** was on the payroll of President Nixon's reelection committee. The next day, Nixon and chief of staff **H.R. Haldeman** privately

discussed how to get the CIA to tell the FBI to back off from the burglary investigation. Publicly, a White House spokesman said he would not comment on "a third rate burglary."

Within a few weeks, Woodward and Bernstein reported that the grand jury investigating the burglary had sought testimony from two men who had worked in the Nixon White House, former CIA officer **E. Howard Hunt** and former FBI agent **G. Gordon Liddy**. Both men would ultimately be indicted for guiding the burglars, via walkie-talkies, from a hotel room opposite the Watergate building.

In Miami, Bernstein learned that a \$25,000 check for Nixon's reelection campaign had been deposited in the bank account of one of the burglars. The resulting story, "Bug Suspect Got Campaign Funds" reported the check had been given to **Maurice Stans**, the former Secretary of Commerce who served as Nixon's chief fundraiser. It was the first time The Post linked the burglary to Nixon campaign funds.

As the two reporters pursued the story, Woodward relied on **Mark Felt**, a high ranking official at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as a confidential source. With access to FBI reports on the burglary investigation, Felt could confirm or deny what other sources were telling The Post reporters. He also could tell them what leads to pursue.

Woodward agreed to keep his identity secret, referring to him in conversations with colleagues only as "Deep Throat." His identity would not become public until 2005, 33 years later.

While Nixon cruised toward reelection in the fall of 1972, Woodward and Bernstein scored a string of scoops, reporting that:

- Attorney General **John Mitchell** controlled a secret fund that paid for a campaign to gather information on the Democrats.
- Nixon's aides had run "a massive campaign of political spying and sabotage" on behalf of Nixon's reelection effort.

But while other newspapers ignored the story and voters gave Nixon a huge majority in November 1972, the White House continued to denounce The Post's coverage as biased and misleading. Post publisher **Katharine Graham** worried about the administration's "unveiled threats and harassment."

As Hunt asked the White House provide money for himself and his co-defendants, **John Sirica**, the tough-talking judge presiding over the trial of the burglars, took on the role of investigator, trying to force the defendants to disclose what they knew. Hunt and the other burglars pleaded guilty, while McCord and Liddy went to trial and were convicted.

As Hunt's demands for "hush money" persisted, **John Dean**, a White House lawyer, privately told Nixon that there was "a cancer on the presidency." When the FBI finally pierced the White House denials, senior officials faced prosecution for perjury and obstruction of justice. In April 1973, four of Nixon's top aides lost their jobs, including chief of staff Haldeman, chief domestic policy adviser, **John Ehrlichman**, Attorney General **Richard Kleindienst** and Dean himself.



When Nixon's press secretary Ron Ziegler said previous White House criticisms of The Post were "inoperative," Woodward and Bernstein's reporting had been vindicated.

## The government acts

By the summer of 1973, the Watergate affair was a full-blown national scandal and the subject of two official investigations, one led by Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, the other by North Carolina Senator Sam Ervin, chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee.



Archibald Cox is sworn in as special Watergate prosecutor by Judge Charles Fahy, left, during a ceremony at the Justice Dept. in May 1973.(UPI)

Cox, a liberal Harvard Law School professor with a crew cut, had served as Solicitor General in the Kennedy administration. He was appointed by Nixon's new Attorney General Elliot Richardson to investigate

the burglary and all other offenses involving the White House or Nixon's reelection campaign.

Ervin, a conservative Democrat best known for his interest in constitutional law, was chosen by Senate leaders to chair a seven-member investigatory committee. As the Senate Watergate Committee's nationally-televised hearings captured national interest, Ervin's folksy but tenacious grilling of sometimes reluctant witnesses transformed him a household name.

The scandal had spread beyond the original burglary. In April 1973, it was revealed that Watergate burglars, Hunt and Liddy, had broken into the office of the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, the former Defense Department analyst who gave the top-secret Pentagon papers to the New York Times. Seeking information to discredit Ellsberg, they found nothing and left undetected. In May, a Senator revealed that a young Nixon staffer named Tom Huston had developed a proposal for a domestic espionage office to monitor and harass the opponents of the president. The plan, never implemented, disclosed a "Gestapo mentality," said Sam Ervin.

John Dean was the first White House aide to break with the Nixon White House. "Dean Alleges Nixon Knew of Cover-up Plan," Woodward and Bernstein reported on the eve of his testimony. On the stand, Dean disclosed that he had told Nixon that the coverup was "a cancer on the presidency."

But the most sensational revelation came in July 1973, when White House aide Alexander Butterfield told the committee that Nixon had a secret taping system that recorded his phone calls and conversations in the Oval Office. When Nixon refused to release the tapes, Ervin and Cox issued subpoenas. The White House refused to comply, citing "executive privilege," the doctrine that the president, as chief executive, is entitled to candid and confidential advice from aides.



John Dean testifies to the Senate Watergate Committee about

"Thus the stage was set for a great constitutional struggle between a President determined not to give up executive documents and materials and a Senate committee and a federal prosecutor who are determined to get them," said The Post on July 24, 1973. "The ultimate arbitration, it was believed, would have to be made by the Supreme Court."

After protracted negotiations, the White House agreed to provide written summaries of the taped conversations to the Senate and the special prosecutor. Ervin accepted the deal but Cox rejected it. On Saturday, Oct. 20, Nixon ordered Attorney General

Richardson to fire Cox. Richardson resigned rather than carry out the order, as did his top deputy Williams Ruckelshaus. Solicitor General Robert Bork became the acting attorney general and he dismissed Cox. The special prosecutor's office was abolished. The firings, dubbed "the Saturday Night Massacre," ignited a firestorm in Washington. Amid calls for impeachment, Nixon was forced to appoint a new special prosecutor, a prominent Texas lawyer named Leon Jaworski who had been a confidante of President Lyndon Johnson. Nixon's credibility suffered another blow on November 20, when his lawyers informed a federal judge that one of the key tapes sought by investigators contained 18-minute erasure that White House officials had trouble explaining. When Nixon declared at a press conference: "I am not a crook," more than a few Americans found his denial unconvincing.

On Dec. 31, 1973 Jaworski issued a report saying that besides the original seven burglars, 12 other persons had pleaded guilty to Watergate-related offenses and criminal proceedings against four more individual were in progress. Nixon rejected accusations of wrongdoing and insisted he would stay in office.

## Nixon resigns

"One year of Watergate is enough," President Nixon declared in his State of the Union address in January 1974. But the embattled president could not put the issue behind him. Special prosecutor Jaworski and the Senate Watergate Committee continued to demand that the White House turn over tapes and transcripts. As public support for Nixon waned, the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives began to consider the ultimate sanction for a president--impeachment.

Nixon cast himself as a defender of the presidency. He insisted that he had made mistakes but broke no laws. He said he had no prior knowledge of the burglary and did not know about the cover-up until early 1973. To release the tapes, he said, would harm future chief executives. The pressure on Nixon mounted in March 1974, when the special prosecutor indicted former Attorney General John Mitchell, former aides Haldeman and Ehrlichman, and four other staffers for conspiracy, obstruction of justice and perjury in connection with the Watergate burglary. While the grand jury wanted to indict Nixon himself, Jaworski declined to do so doubting the constitutionality of indicting a sitting president.

To mollify his critics, Nixon announced in April 1974 the release of 1,200 pages of transcripts of conversations between him and his aides. The conversations, "candid beyond any papers ever made public by a President," in the words of The Post stoked more outrage. Even Nixon's most loyal conservative supporters voiced dismay about profanity-laced discussions in the White House around how to raise blackmail money and avoid perjury.



Nixon points to the transcripts of the White House tapes during a nationally televised speech on April 29, 1974. Nixon announced that he was making the tapes public and turning over the transcripts to the House impeachment investigators. (AP)

Nixon's legal defense began to crumble in May when a federal court ruled in favor of Jaworski's subpoena for the White House tapes. Nixon's lawyers appealed the decision to the Supreme Court. His political position faltered in June, amid reports that all 21 Democratic members of the House Judiciary Committee were prepared to vote for impeachment. On July 24, the Supreme Court unanimously ordered the White House to hand over the tapes to the special prosecutor. Two days later the Judiciary Committee approved one article of impeachment to be voted on by the entire House.

When Nixon released the tapes a week later, a June 23, 1972, conversation showed that Nixon had, contrary to repeated claims of innocence, played a leading role in the cover-up from the very start. Dubbed "the smoking gun" tape, this recording eliminated what little remained of Nixon's support. Even his closest aides told him he had to resign or face the almost certain prospect of impeachment.

On August 8, 1974, Nixon announced his resignation. "By taking this action," he said in a subdued yet dramatic television address from the Oval Office, "I hope that I will have hastened the start of the process of healing which is so desperately needed in America." In a rare admission of error, Nixon said: "I deeply regret any injuries that may have been done in the course of the events that led to this decision." In a final speech to the White House staff, a teary-eyed Nixon told his audience, "Those who hate you don't win unless you hate them, and then you destroy yourself."

Vice President Gerald Ford was sworn into office on Aug. 9, 1974, declaring "our long national nightmare is over." One month later, Ford granted Nixon a "full, free and absolute pardon" for all crimes that Nixon "committed or may have committed" during his time in the White House.

The Watergate affair was over, but its influence was not. The interlinked scandals generated a new and enduring skepticism about the federal government in American public opinion. The lingo of the scandal--"to cover-up," to "stonewall," and "to leak"--became part of the American political vocabulary. The newly assertive Congress passed campaign finance reform legislation and probed abuses of power at the CIA and other national security agencies. Woodward and Bernstein's reporting, recounted in a best-selling book, *All the President's Men*, and a hit movie infused American journalism with a new adversarial edge. Before long, the appointment of special prosecutors to investigate allegations of presidential wrongdoing became the norm in Washington. Watergate had changed American politics permanently and profoundly.

## Deep Throat revealed

On May 31, 2005 one of Washington's best-kept secrets was revealed.

Vanity Fair magazine identified a former top FBI official named Mark Felt as Deep Throat, the secret source high in the U.S. government who helped Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein unravel the Watergate conspiracy. Woodward, Bernstein and the paper's editors confirmed the story.

"Felt's identity as Washington's most celebrated secret source had been an object of speculation for more than 30 years," wrote Post reporter David Von Drehle the next day. The reporters had written about their trusted source in their best-selling 1974 book, "All the President's Men," and the 1975 movie of the same name dramatized his sometimes cryptic advice about how pursue the connection between the Nixon White House and a crew of seven burglars caught in the offices of the Democratic National Committee on the night of June 17, 1972. His true identity, the object of "countless guesses" over the years, remained secret until Vanity Fair's story. "I'm the guy they call Deep Throat," Felt told members of his family.

The day after the story broke, Woodward wrote a first person account of his relationship with Felt, which began with a chance encounter between a junior naval officer and a wary bureaucrat in 1970. Woodward cultivated him as a source. When the Post began to pursue the Watergate story, Woodward relied on Felt for guidance.



In May 2005 Vanity Fair magazine revealed that Mark Felt, pictured above with his daughter, was the source referred to as "Deep Throat." The former No. 2 official at the FBI secretly confirmed to Woodward and Bernstein what they discovered from other sources in reporting on the cover-up. (AP)

"I was thankful for any morsel or information, confirmation or assistance Felt gave me while Carl and I were attempting to understand the many-headed monster of Watergate. Because of his position virtually atop the chief investigative agency, his words and guidance had immense, at times even staggering, authority," Woodward wrote.

But as The Post noted, Woodward and Bernstein also "expressed a concern that the Deep Throat story has, over the years, come to obscure the many other elements that went into

exposing the Watergate story: other sources, other investigators, high-impact Senate hearings, a shocking trove of secret White House tape recordings and the decisive intervention of a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court."

"Felt's role in all this can be overstated," said Bernstein, who went on after Watergate to a career of books, magazine articles and television investigations. "When we wrote the book, we didn't think his role would achieve such mythical dimensions. You see there that Felt/Deep Throat largely confirmed information we had already gotten from other sources."