

ARMITAGE, A REVIEW

About 6,204 people have emailed me news of Armitage's *mea culpa* on Blitzer. The admission of stupidity is really nothing new—Armitage said something similar when he came forward to speak with David Martin last fall.

Since a lot of people have asked what memo he learned of Plame's identity from—here it is. As you can see, the memo itself is Top Secret, presumably because the fourth paragraph, which details the objection to the claims about Iraq's use of aluminum tubes, is Top Secret. Also, some of the attachments that were not included with the version of the memo introduced at the trial may be Top Secret. The paragraph including the description of Valerie is classified Secret, likely because Joe Wilson's trip itself was classified Secret (see the trip report included with the INR memo).

The paragraph describing the famous February 19, 2002 meeting (and the notes on which that paragraph are based) includes Valerie's first name, but not the name Plame. Neither description of Valerie notes her covert status, and I've never seen any indication Douglas Rohn, who wrote the notes, knew Valerie was covert. These details don't exonerate Armitage for blabbing about Valerie—as someone with a lifetime experience working with and (reportedly) in intelligence, Armitage knew he had an affirmative responsibility to clear information before passing it on. But the details are critically important for reasons relating to the investigation and charging decisions.

First, so long as Armitage could prove this memo was the sole source of his knowledge of Valerie's purported role in Joe's trip, then he could assert he had no idea that Valerie was covert. I strongly suspect Armitage made a much stronger case on this point than Libby and even Rove did, which is probably one of the reasons Armitage escaped charges.

Second, this memo is not by itself enough to serve as the source of Novak's leak. It doesn't include the name Plame nor does it reveal that Valerie was covert. Therefore, those trying to understand this story have two choices: They can believe Novak's story that he found the name "Plame" in "Who's Who" (and for some obtuse reason used Valerie's maiden name in his column) and that he used the word "operative" to describe a CIA employee solely because he uses the word "operative" to describe political figures frequently (Novak once claimed that Valerie was just like someone running a Congressional campaign in Wyoming, and that's why he used the word "operative," which has always sounded more like a subconscious admission of a former Wyoming Congressman's involvement in this smear than a credible explanation for his use of the word). You can believe this story, in spite of the fact that Novak first told it—and tentatively, at first—only after it became clear his source may have violated the IIPA. And if you believe this story, then you can believe that Armitage was the first and only source for Novak on Valerie's identity, that Rove gave Novak no further details, and neither did Libby when he spoke to Novak in the July 9, 2003 conversation that both hid for over two years.

Or you can believe that Novak had a source in addition to Armitage, who might be either Rove (on July 8 or 9) or Libby (on July 9). One of them almost certainly shared information they knew to be classified—the trip report—with Novak, so there is reason to believe they were knowingly spreading classified information. Also, the FBI apparently suspected someone had told Novak of Valerie's identity before he spoke with Armitage, which would correlate logically with some reporting on the Frances Fragos Townsend smear he was doing on July 7, almost certainly with one of the two people who propagated the smear, David Addington or Scooter Libby.

One final, important, point about Armitage. I've

seen assertions that Armitage "leaked Valerie's name." That's certainly possible—the INR memo uses her first name. But that point is under dispute—or at least it was in Fall 2004 when Fitzgerald was pursuing the testimony of journalists. Here's how Fitzgerald described the ongoing disputes in August 2004:

Novak and Armitage agree on several important facts, such as the time, date and place of the meeting during which the conversation took place, and the fact that Wilson's wife and employment by the CIA was disclosed to Novak by Armitage in response to a question by Novak as to why the CIA had sent Wilson on the trip. **Their testimony diverges as to whether Armitage provided the first name of Ms. Plame, though both agree the last name, "Plame" was not provided.** Novak recalls being told by Armitage that Wilson's wife worked in the area of weapons of mass destruction —[redacted] Armitage does not recall discussing the area in which Wilson's wife worked. Novak and Armitage give differing accounts of other materials not germane to the instant motion. [my emphasis]

The issue is relevant, among other reasons, because Novak appears to have used Valerie's name when he blabbed about Valerie's role at the CIA to Joe Wilson's friend. He claims he hadn't spoken to Rove (or anyone else) at this point, so if Armitage is telling the truth (there's reason to distrust both Novak and Armitage), then it would all but confirm that Novak is lying about when he learned of Valerie's identity and from whom.

So in summary: this "admission" is nothing new. And it doesn't excuse Armitage. But it is also no reason to make unsubstantiated claims that ignore the unanswered questions about the leak.