

Prosecution rests; defense challenges NBC newsman

'Meet the Press' host Russert denies talking to Libby about CIA operative more than three years ago

By MICHAEL J. SNIFFEN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Defense attorneys for Lewis "Scooter" Libby on Thursday won the opportunity to question a journalist they hope will undercut the prosecution's perjury case against the former White House aide.

A battle over the scope of the defense case broke out just after Special Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald rested the government's case in the CIA leak trial in midafternoon. The prosecution

presented 11 days of testimony ending with NBC Washington bureau chief Tim Russert. The familiar host of NBC's "Meet the Press" contradicted Libby over whether they discussed CIA operative Valerie Plame on July 10, 2003, and Russert refused to budge from that under more than a day of cross examination.



RUSSERT

Libby, former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney, is charged with lying to the FBI and a grand jury about his talks with reporters concerning Plame and with obstructing an investigation into how her name and employment at CIA got leaked in July 2003, days after her husband, ex-ambassador Joseph Wilson, criticized President Bush's justifications for the Iraq war.

After the jury was sent home until Monday, prosecutors joined news media attorneys in efforts to limit the defense's ability to call and question other journalists.

U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton ruled that Libby's lawyers can call New York Times managing editor Jill Abramson over objections from the prosecutors and her lawyer, Charles Leeper.

Defense attorneys want Abramson to repeat her out-of-court denials that reporter Judith Miller urged Abramson — then Washington bureau chief — to pursue the story of Plame's role in sending her husband to Niger to investigate whether Iraq was trying to buy uranium there for nuclear weapons.

Miller testified she recom-

mended Abramson pursue the Plame story after Libby told her of Plame's role in the trip, which formed the basis for Wilson's allegations that Bush twisted intelligence to justify the war.

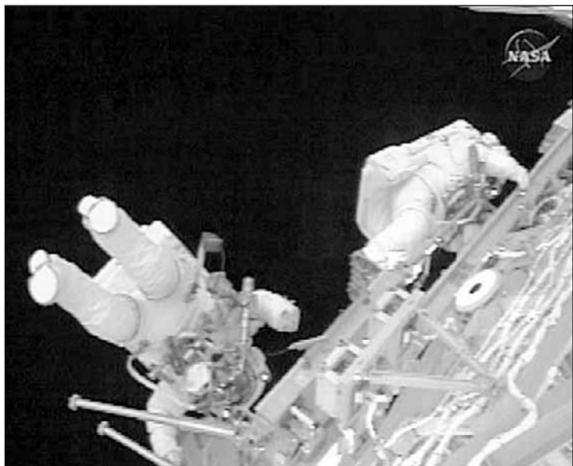
Libby denies telling Miller about Plame's CIA job or that she first proposed his trip. Libby's attorneys believe that calling into question the next part of her story — her talk with Abramson — will cast doubt on her recollection of her talk with Libby.

Walton reserved judgment until Monday on how far the defense can go in questioning NBC

reporter Andrea Mitchell about a videotaped interview she gave Oct. 3, 2003.

In the video, played with the jury out of the room, Mitchell said she and other intelligence reporters who were trying to find out who went to Niger knew that Wilson's wife worked at the CIA.

Because Mitchell worked for Russert, the defense claims this would undercut his story that he first learned about Plame from a July 14, 2003, column about her; and support Libby's story that Russert told him on July 10 that lots of people know about Plame.



NASA TELEVISION

Michael Lopez-Alegria, left, and flight engineer Sunita Williams finish their work during a spacewalk on the international space station Thursday.

Astronaut sets U.S. spacewalking record

By MIKE SCHNEIDER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.

Astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria broke the U.S. record of most time walking in space Thursday as he and another astronaut did maintenance work outside the international space station during their third spacewalk in nine days.

Lopez-Alegria surpassed the previous U.S. record of just over 58 hours midway through his chores with fellow American Sunita Williams. He has a ways to go to claim the all-time record, though, since Russian Anatoly Solovoyov has logged more than 82 hours. Lopez-Alegria's 6½-hour spacewalk ended at 3:06 p.m. EST Thursday.

Lopez-Alegria and Williams finished a primary mission of the their spacewalk: tossing quilt-sized thermal sheets from the international space station.

The two large thermal covers were folded up with smaller shrouds that had been covering an electronics box and were used to prevent parts of the space station from getting too hot or cold. Scientists believe they will burn up upon entering Earth's atmosphere.

"I don't think I could do it any better than that," Lopez-Alegria said to Williams as the first package floated away.

Lopez-Alegria joked that they had an easier time folding up the shrouds than their spacewalking colleagues who helped fold up a stubborn solar array during space shuttle Discovery's mission to the space station in December. "Solar arrays wish they could retract this well!" he said.

In the past, engineers wanted to make sure that jettisoning items wouldn't strike the station, but they have grown more comfortable with the idea.

"We've gotten more proficient in jettison analysis and understanding the safety of jettisoning," lead spacewalk officer Glenda Laws said recently. "We expect the shrouds ... to look like a large bundle of laundry."

The spacewalk marked the first time three spacewalks have been conducted in such a short period without a space shuttle docked to it.

The first two spacewalks had similar tasks, and flight controllers thought they could save preparation time by squeezing them together.

Lopez-Alegria planned to conduct a fourth spacewalk Feb. 22 with Russian flight engineer Mikhail Tyurin.

That spacewalk will be Lopez-Alegria's 10th. The previous U.S. time record for spacewalks was held by astronaut Jerry Ross, who has made nine spacewalks.

Expert: Astronaut's success could have led to downfall

By SEETH BORENSTEIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

From the dawn of the space program, America's astronauts have been treated like stars, saluted as red, white and blue heroes and indoctrinated in NASA's can-do, failure-is-not-an-option ethos.

Could that explain the downfall of Lisa Nowak, the astronaut accused of attempted murder?

No one may ever know exactly why Nowak drove 900 miles to confront a woman who was reportedly her rival for the affections of a space shuttle pilot, but experts say the same traits that make astronauts such high achievers can combine to aggravate emotional problems and strain relationships.

"I really believe that NASA goes overboard in promoting how heroic and super all these people are," said Dr. Patricia Santy, a former NASA psychiatrist and author of the book "Choosing The Right Stuff."

"They themselves have forgotten these are ordinary people and in that kind of celebrity culture, there's a sense of entitlement."

Santy said the astronaut corps is "like a family, but it's almost

like a dysfunctional family when it comes to understanding that these interpersonal issues have profound impacts."

Ex-astronaut Jerry Linenger said astronauts take pride in their self-discipline. "You set a goal and ... you let nothing get in your way," he said.

That single-minded pursuit reminds Linenger of Nowak's drive from Houston to Orlando, Fla., to confront an Air Force captain from Florida who she reportedly believed was involved with the same space shuttle pilot she loved.

However, Linenger said, that's when Nowak's training should have kicked in and led her to reflect on her actions: "To not make a midcourse correction is scary."

Nowak, like many of her colleagues, pursued a career in spaceflight since childhood. Then, after her shuttle trip during the summer, her goal had been achieved, and the prospects for another mission were dim, even though she remained in the prime of her life.

Other astronauts have struggled with similar doubts about their future. Buzz Aldrin, the second man to step on the moon, became depressed and had problems with alcohol.

Aldrin said the space agency "can deal with the physics and engineering and the science of things. They behave according to predictability."

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