

“SOMETIMES WE FALL IN LOVE WITH OUR SOURCES”

Fifteen years ago, during the Scooter Libby trial, I had lunch with James Gordon Meek, a national security reporter then at NY Daily News. I remember I was bitching that journalists at the trial continued to treat Robert Novak as credible even though his testimony about what led to his exposure of Valerie Plame’s identity had changed four times by that point. He explained, very matter of factly, that “sometimes we fall in love with our sources,” particularly intelligence sources.

I had little contact with him after that until 2018 or 2019, when we spoke several times about the Russian investigation.

Meek’s comment has, obviously, stuck with me over the years. All the more so as I read Rolling Stone’s story describing how – over the course of ten minutes on April 27 – Meek’s home had been searched, and we’re only hearing about it almost six months later. There’s even a version of what Meek told me years ago in the story: “To his detractors within ABC, Meek was something of a “military fanboy.’” Meek got a lot of stories by being very close to his military sources.

The story has, predictably, generated a lot of concern about Meek’s treatment at the hands of Merrick Garland’s DOJ.

But there are details in the story that offer at least part of an explanation.

First, his attorney is quoted, complaining that this story is out there.

“Mr. Meek is unaware of what allegations anonymous sources are making about his possession of classified documents,” his lawyer, Eugene Gorokhov, said in a

statement. "If such documents exist, as claimed, this would be within the scope of his long career as an investigative journalist covering government wrongdoing. The allegations in your inquiry are troubling for a different reason: they appear to come from a source inside the government. It is highly inappropriate, and illegal, for individuals in the government to leak information about an ongoing investigation. We hope that the DOJ [Department of Justice] promptly investigates the source of this leak."

Meek's lawyer, at least, is not trying to generate the kind of media attention that would immediately raise questions about his treatment as a journalist the way – say – Project Veritas' lawyers did when James O'Keefe and others were searched. If he had concerns about Meek's treatment or the propriety of the search, I highly doubt he would respond this way, by complaining that the search was made public.

Details in the story suggest Meek responded to the search differently than Project Veritas in other ways, too. He appears to have moved.

In the raid's aftermath, Meek has made himself scarce. None of his Siena Park neighbors with whom *Rolling Stone* spoke have seen him since, with his apartment appearing to be vacant.

He withdrew from a project recounting the rescue of former US intelligence partners in Afghanistan around the time of the search.

"He contacted me in the spring, and was really distraught, and told me that he had some serious personal issues going on and that he needed to withdraw from the project," Mann tells *Rolling Stone*. "As a guy who's a combat veteran who has seen that kind of strain – I

don't know what it was – I honored it. And he went on his way, and I continued on the project.”

Mann says he hasn't heard from Meek since.

And – first – his producer on a documentary about four Special Forces guys killed in Niger by ISIS, and then he himself resigned from ABC “abruptly.”

“He fell off the face of the Earth,” says one. “And people asked, but no one knew the answer.”

An ABC representative tells *Rolling Stone*, “He resigned very abruptly and hasn't worked for us for months.”

[snip]

Adding intrigue, sources say another ABC News investigative journalist, Brian Epstein, also abruptly and inexplicably left the network a few months before Meek. Epstein also worked as a director, producer, and cinematographer on *3212 Un-Redacted* (Hulu stopped Emmy campaigning after Meek apparently went AWOL, and the documentary ultimately failed to receive a nomination). Epstein told *Rolling Stone*, “I'm not commenting on this story,” before abruptly hanging up.

Short of ABC turning the two reporters in themselves, resigning while under legal investigation would be the last thing you'd do, in part for the legal protection a big media outlet can offer.

All of which suggests there's something about this story – or perhaps follow-ups – that led Meek and Epstein to withdraw.

As alluded to above, the story claims – citing “sources familiar” – that FBI found classified

information on a laptop.

Sources familiar with the matter say federal agents allegedly found classified information on Meek's laptop during their raid. One investigative journalist who worked with Meek says it would be highly unusual for a reporter or producer to keep any classified information on a computer.

I'm not sure I buy that it's unusual for reporters to keep classified information on a computer – a laptop, after all, can be air-gapped, and fully encrypted information stored in digital form can be safer than papers lying around. But if it *wasn't* air-gapped, it could make the classified information available, even unwittingly, to hostile entities. In the wake of the Nghia Pho compromise, the government has focused renewed attention on such possible modes of compromise. If Meek had obtained classified information in the course of reporting and the government believed the real goal – one he may not have understood – was its compromise, you might see something like this.

Meek and his attorney have, for whatever reason, chosen not to make a public case out of this search. But "sources familiar" just did so whether Meek wanted it to happen or not.