

Ethics

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Well, here is Steven Glass revisited, this time in the prestigious *New York Times*, another lying journalist, Jayson Blair.

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Jayson Blair, who worked for The Times for four years before resigning on May 1.

This article was reported and written by Dan Barry, David Barstow, Jonathan D. Glater, Adam Liptak and Jacques Steinberg. Research support was provided by Alain Delaquérière and Carolyn Wilder.

CORRECTING THE RECORD

Times Reporter Who Resigned Leaves Long Trail of Deception

A staff reporter for The New York Times committed frequent acts of journalistic fraud while covering significant news events in recent months, an investigation by Times journalists has found. The widespread fabrication and plagiarism represent a profound betrayal of trust and a low point in the 152-year history of the newspaper.

The reporter, Jayson Blair, 27, misled readers and Times colleagues with dispatches that purported to be from Maryland, Texas and other states, when often he was far away, in New York. He fabricated comments. He concocted scenes. He lifted material from other newspapers and wire services. He selected details from photographs to create the impression he had been somewhere or seen someone, when he had not.

And he used these techniques to write falsely about emotionally charged moments in recent history, from the deadly sniper attacks in suburban Washington to the anguish of families grieving for loved ones killed in Iraq.

In an inquiry focused on correcting the record and explaining how such fraud could have been sustained within the ranks of The Times, the Times journalists have so far uncovered new problems in at least 36 of the 73 articles Mr. Blair wrote since he started getting national reporting assignments late last October. In the final months the audacity of the deceptions grew by the week, suggesting the work of a troubled young man veering toward professional self-destruction.

Mr. Blair, who has resigned from the paper, was a reporter at The Times for nearly four years, and he was prolific. Spot checks of the more than 600 articles he wrote before October have found other apparent fabrications, and that inquiry continues. The Times is asking readers to report any additional falsehoods in Mr. Blair's work; the e-mail address is retrace@nytimes.com.

Every newspaper, like every bank and every police department, trusts its employees to uphold central principles, and the inquiry found that Mr. Blair repeatedly violated the cardinal tenet of journalism, which is simply truth. His tools of deceit were a cellphone and a laptop computer — which allowed him to blur his true whereabouts — as well as round-the-clock access to databases of news articles from which he stole.

The Times inquiry also establishes that various editors and reporters expressed misgivings about Mr. Blair's reporting skills, maturity and behavior during his five-year journey from raw intern to reporter on national news events. Their warnings centered mostly on the errors in his articles.

His mistakes became so routine, his behavior so unprofessional, that by April 2002, Jonathan Landman, the metropolitan editor, dashed off a two-sentence e-mail message to newsroom administrators that read: "We have to stop Jayson from writing for the Times. Right now."

After taking a leave for personal problems and being sternly warned, both orally and in writing, that his job was in peril, Mr. Blair improved his performance. By last October, the newspaper's top two editors — who said they believed that Mr. Blair had turned his life and work around — had guided him to the understaffed national desk, where he was assigned to help cover the Washington sniper case.

By the end of that month, public officials and colleagues were beginning to challenge his reporting. By November, the investigation has found, he was fabricating quotations and scenes, undetected. By March, he was lying in his articles and to his editors about being at a court hearing in Virginia, in a police chief's home in Maryland and in front of a soldier's home in West Virginia. By the end of April another newspaper was raising questions about plagiarism. And by the first of May, his career at The Times was over. A few days later, Mr. Blair issued a statement that referred to "personal problems" and expressed contrition. But during several telephone conversations last week, he declined repeated requests to help the newspaper correct the record or comment on any aspect of his work. He did not respond to messages left on his cellphone, with his family and with his union representative on Friday afternoon.

The reporting for this article included more than 150 interviews with subjects of Mr. Blair's articles and people who worked with him; interviews with Times officials familiar with travel, telephone and other business records; an examination of other records including e-mail messages provided by colleagues trying to correct the record or shed light on Mr. Blair's activities; and a review of reports from competing news organizations.

The investigation suggests several reasons Mr. Blair's deceptions went undetected for so long: a failure of communication among senior editors; few complaints from the subjects of his articles; his savviness and his ingenious ways of covering his tracks. Most of all, no one saw his carelessness as a sign that he was capable of systematic fraud.

Mr. Blair was just one of about 375 reporters at The Times; his tenure was brief. But the damage he has done to the newspaper and its employees will not completely fade with next week's editions, or next month's, or next year's.

"It's a huge black eye," said Arthur Sulzberger Jr., chairman of The New York Times Company and publisher of the newspaper, whose family has owned a controlling interest in The Times for 107 years. "It's an abrogation of the trust between the newspaper and its readers."

For all the pain resonating through the Times newsroom, the hurt may be more acute in places like Bethesda, Md., where one of Mr. Blair's fabricated articles described American soldiers injured in combat. The puzzlement is deeper, too, in places like Marmet, W. Va., where a woman named Glenda Nelson learned that Mr. Blair had quoted her in a news article, even though she had never spoken to anyone from The Times.

"The New York Times," she said. "You would expect more out of that."

The Deception Reporting Process Riddled With Lies

Two wounded marines lay side by side at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. One of them, Jayson Blair wrote, "questioned the legitimacy of his emotional pain as he considered his comrade in the next bed, a runner who had lost part of his leg to a land mine in Iraq."

The scene, as described by Mr. Blair in an article that The Times published on April 19, was as false as it was riveting. In fact, it was false from its very first word, its uppercase dateline, which told readers that the reporter was in Bethesda and had witnessed the scene. He had not.

Still, the image was so compelling, the words so haunting, that The Times featured one of the soldier's comments as its Quotation of the Day, appearing on Page 2. "It's kind of hard to feel sorry for yourself when so many people were hurt worse or died," it quoted Lance Cpl. James Klingel as saying.

Mr. Blair did indeed interview Corporal Klingel, but it was by telephone, and it was a day or two after the soldier had been discharged from the medical center. Although the corporal, whose right arm and leg had been injured by a falling cargo hatch, said he could not be sure whether he uttered what would become the Quotation of the Day, he said he was positive that Mr. Blair never visited him in the hospital.

"I actually read that article about me in The New York Times," Corporal Klingel said by telephone last week from his parents' home. "Most of that stuff I didn't say."

He is confident, for instance, that he never told Mr. Blair that he was having nightmares about his tour of duty, as Mr. Blair reported. Nor did he suggest that it was about time, as Mr. Blair wrote, "for another appointment with a chaplain."

Not all of what Mr. Blair wrote was false, but much of what was true in his article was apparently lifted from other news reports. In fact, his 1,831-word front-page article, which purported to draw on "long conversations" with six wounded servicemen, relied on the means of deception that had infected dozens of his other articles over the last few months.

Mr. Blair was not finished with his virtual visit to Bethesda. Sgt. Eric Alva, now a partial amputee, was indeed Corporal Klingel's roommate for two days. But the sergeant, who is quoted by Mr. Blair, never spoke to him, said Lt. Cmdr. Jerry Rostad, a medical center spokesman. And a hospitalman whom Mr. Blair describes as being down the hall, Brian Alaniz, was discharged five days before Corporal Klingel arrived.

"Our records indicate that at no time did Mr. Blair visit N.N.M.C. or interview patients," Commander Rostad said.

As he would do in other articles, Mr. Blair appears to have stitched this narrative by drawing at least partly on information available in the databases of various news organizations. For example, he describes Hospitalman Alaniz as someone who "not only lost his right leg, but also had a finger torn off, broke his left leg and took shrapnel in his groin and arms." His description seems to mirror one that had appeared in *The Washington Post*.

Mr. Blair's deceptive techniques flouted long-followed rules at *The Times*. The paper, concerned about maintaining its integrity among readers, tells its journalists to follow many guidelines as described in a memo on the newsroom's internal Web site. Among those guidelines: "When we use facts gathered by any other organization, we attribute them"; "writers at *The Times* are their own principal fact checkers and often their only ones"; "we should distinguish in print between personal interviews and telephone or e-mail interviews."

In addition, the newspaper uses a dateline only when a reporter has visited the place.

Mr. Blair knew that rule. In March of last year, an editors' note published in *The Times* about an article by another reporter prompted Mr. Blair to e-mail a colleague the entry in *The Times*'s stylebook about "dateline integrity." In part, the stylebook explains that a dateline guarantees that the reporter whose name appears on the article "was at the specified place on the date given, and provided the bulk of the information."

But for many photographers assigned to work with Mr. Blair, he was often just a voice on the phone, one saying he was on his way or just around the corner.

On April 6, for example, he was supposedly reporting from Cleveland. He described a church service attended by the Rev. Tandy Sloan, whose missing son, an Army supply clerk, had been pronounced dead in Iraq the previous day. There is no evidence that Mr. Blair was either at that service or at an earlier one also described in his article.

A freelance photographer whom Mr. Blair had arranged to meet outside the Cleveland church on April 6 found it maddening that he could not seem to connect with him. The

photographer, Haraz Ghanbari, was so intent on a meeting that he placed nine calls to Mr. Blair's cellphone from 9:32 a.m. to 2:07 p.m., and kept trying six more times until 10:13 p.m., when he finally gave up.

Mr. Ghanbari said he managed to reach Mr. Blair three times, and three times Mr. Blair had excuses for why they could not meet. In one instance, Mr. Ghanbari said, Mr. Blair explained that he had left the church in the middle of the service "to get his cellphone fixed" — that was why so many of his calls had gone unanswered — "and was already on his way back."

"I just thought it was weird how he never showed up," Mr. Ghanbari said. The article that Mr. Blair eventually filed incorporated at least a half-dozen passages lifted nearly verbatim from other news sources, including four from The Washington Post.

Some of Mr. Blair's articles in recent months provide vivid descriptions of scenes that often occurred in the privacy of people's homes but that, travel records and interviews show, Mr. Blair could not have witnessed.

On March 24, for example, he filed an article with the dateline Hunt Valley, Md., in which he described an anxious mother and father, Martha and Michael Gardner, awaiting word on their son, Michael Gardner II, a Marine scout then in Iraq.

Mr. Blair described Mrs. Gardner "turning swiftly in her chair to listen to an anchor report of a Marine unit"; he also wrote about the red, white and blue pansies in her front yard. In an interview last week, Mrs. Gardner said Mr. Blair had spoken to her only by phone.

Some Times photo editors now suspect that Mr. Blair gained access to the digital photos that Doug Mills, the photographer, transmitted that night to The Times's picture department, including photos of the Gardners watching the news, as well as the flowers in their yard.

As he often did, Mr. Blair briefed his editors by e-mail about the progress of his reporting. "I am giving them a breather for about 30 minutes," he wrote to the national editor, Jim Roberts, at one point, referring to the Gardners. "It's amazing timing. Lots of wrenching ups and downs with all the reports of casualties."

"Each time a casualty is reported," he added, "it gets tense and nervous, and then a sense of relief comes over the room that it has not been their son's group that has been attacked." The Gardner family, who had spent considerable time on the phone with Mr. Blair, were delighted with the article. They wrote The Times saying so, and their letter was published.

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Mr. Roberts was also pleased. He would later identify Mr. Blair's dispatch from Hunt Valley, Md., as a singular moment: this reporter was demonstrating hustle and flair. He had no reason to know that Mr. Blair was demonstrating a different sort of enterprise.

He was actually e-mailing from New York.

The Reporter
An Engaging Air, a Nose for Gossip

He got it.

That was the consensus about one of the college students seeking an internship at The New York Times. He was only 21, but this Jayson Blair, the son of a federal official and a schoolteacher from Virginia, got what it meant to be a newspaper reporter.

"I've seen some who like to abuse the power they have been entrusted with," Mr. Blair had written in seeking the internship. But, he had added, "my kindred spirits are the ones who became journalists because they wanted to help people."

Whether as a student journalist at the University of Maryland or as an intern at The Boston Globe, the short and ubiquitous Mr. Blair stood out. He seemed to be constantly working, whether on articles or on sources. Some, like a fellow student, Catherine Welch, admired him. "You thought, 'That's what I want to be,' " she said.

Others considered him immature, with a hungry ambition and an unsettling interest in newsroom gossip.

"He wasn't very well liked by the other interns," said Jennifer McMenamin, another Maryland student who, with Mr. Blair, was a Globe intern in the summer of 1997. "I think he saw the rest of the intern class as competition."

Citing a U.S. News and World Report researcher, The Washington Post reported yesterday that while reporting for The Globe, Mr. Blair apparently lied about having interviewed the mayor of Washington, Anthony Williams.

His interest in journalism dated at least to his years at Centreville High School, in Clifton, Va., where he asked to interview the new principal for the school paper within minutes of her introduction to the faculty. "He was always into the newspaper business, even here," the principal, Pamela Y. Latt, recalled. "He had a wonderful, positive persistence about him that we all admired."

Mr. Blair's Times supervisors and Maryland professors emphasize that he earned an internship at The Times because of glowing recommendations and a remarkable work history, not because he is black. The Times offered him a slot in an internship program that was then being used in large part to help the paper diversify its newsroom.

During his 10-week internship at The Times, in the summer of 1998, Mr. Blair wrote 19 news articles, helped other reporters and never seemed to leave the newsroom. "He did well," recalled Sheila Rule, a senior editor who oversees the internship program. "He did very well."

But Joyce Purnick, who was the metropolitan editor at the time, recalled thinking that he was better at newsroom socializing than at reporting, and told him during a candid lunch that after graduation he should work for a smaller newspaper. "I was telling him, 'Go learn the business,' " she said.

At summer's end, The Times offered Mr. Blair an extended internship, but he had more college course work to do before his scheduled graduation in December 1998. When he returned to the Times newsroom in June 1999, Ms. Rule said, everyone assumed he had graduated. He had not; college officials say he has more than a year of course work to complete.

Mr. Blair was assigned to work in The Times's police bureau, where he churned out article after article about the crimes of the day, impressing colleagues with his lightning-quick writing ability and his willingness to work long hours. But Jerry Gray, one of several Times editors to become mentors to Mr. Blair, repeatedly warned him that he was too sloppy — in his reporting and in his appearance.

"There's a theme here," Mr. Gray remembers telling the young reporter. "There are many eccentric people here, but they've earned it."

In November 1999, the paper promoted Mr. Blair to intermediate reporter, the next step toward winning a full-time staff position. While reporting on business for the metropolitan desk, editors say, he was energetic and willing to work all hours. He was also a study in carelessness, they say, with his telephone voicemail box too full to accept messages, and his writing commitments too numerous.

Charles Strum, his editor at the time, encouraged Mr. Blair to pace himself and take time off. "I told him that he needed to find a different way to nourish himself than drinking scotch, smoking cigarettes and buying Cheez Doodles from the vending machines," Mr. Strum said.

Mr. Blair persevered, although he clearly needed to cut down on mistakes and demonstrate an ability to write with greater depth, according to Jonathan Landman, who succeeded Ms. Purnick as metropolitan editor.

In the fall of 2000, Joseph Lelyveld, then executive editor, the highest-ranking editor at The Times, sent the strong message that too many mistakes were finding their way into the news pages; someone had even misspelled the publisher's surname, Sulzberger. That prompted Mr. Landman to appoint an editor to investigate and tally the corrections generated by the metropolitan staff.

"Accuracy is all we have," Mr. Landman wrote in a staff e-mail message. "It's what we are and what we sell."

Mr. Blair continued to make mistakes, requiring more corrections, more explanations, more lectures about the importance of accuracy. Many newsroom colleagues say he also did brazen things, including delighting in showing around copies of confidential Times documents,

running up company expenses from a bar around the corner, and taking company cars for extended periods, racking up parking tickets.

At the same time, though, many at The Times grew fond of the affable Mr. Blair, who seemed especially gifted at office politics. He made a point of getting to know many of the newsroom support workers, for example. His distinctive laugh became a familiar sound.

"He had charisma, enormous charisma," David Carr, a Times media reporter, said. Mr. Blair, he added, often praised articles written by colleagues, and, frequently, "it was something far down in the story, so you'd know he read it."

In January 2001, Mr. Blair was promoted to full-time reporter with the consensus of a recruiting committee of roughly half a dozen people headed by Gerald M. Boyd, then a deputy managing editor, and the approval of Mr. Lelyveld.

Mr. Landman said last week that he had been against the recommendation — that he "wasn't asked so much as told" about Mr. Blair's promotion. But he also emphasized that he did not protest the move.

The publisher and the executive editor, he said, had made clear the company's commitment to diversity — "and properly so," he said. In addition, he said, Mr. Blair seemed to be making the mistakes of a beginner and was still demonstrating great promise. "I thought he was going to make it."

Mr. Boyd, who is now managing editor, the second-highest-ranking newsroom executive, said last week that the decision to advance Mr. Blair had not been based on race. Indeed, plenty of young white reporters have been swiftly promoted through the ranks.

"To say now that his promotion was about diversity in my view doesn't begin to capture what was going on," said Mr. Boyd, who is himself African-American. "He was a young, promising reporter who had done a job that warranted promotion."

But if anything, Mr. Blair's performance after his promotion declined; he made more errors and clashed with more editors. Then came the catastrophes of Sept. 11, 2001, and things got worse.

Mr. Blair said he had lost a cousin in the terrorist attack on the Pentagon, and provided the name of his dead relative to a high-ranking editor at The Times. He cited his loss as a reason to be excused from writing the "Portraits of Grief" vignettes of the victims.

Reached by telephone last week, the father of his supposed cousin said Mr. Blair was not related to the family.

A few weeks after the Sept. 11 attacks, he wrote an article laden with errors. Many reporters make mistakes, and statistics about corrections are only a rough barometer of journalistic skills. When considered over all, Mr. Blair's correction rate at The Times was within

acceptable limits. Still, this article required a correction so extensive that it attracted the attention of the new executive editor, Howell Raines.

Mr. Blair's e-mail from that time demonstrate how he expressed penitence to Mr. Landman, then vented to another editor about how he had "held my nose" while writing the apology. Meanwhile, after a disagreement with a third editor, Patrick LaForge, who tracks corrections for the metropolitan desk, he threatened to take up the issue "with the people who hired me — and they all have executive or managing editor in their titles."

A lot was going on at that time: fear of further terrorist attacks, anthrax scares, grief. Uncharacteristic behavior was not uncommon among people in the city or in the newsroom. Still, Mr. Blair's actions stood out. He made mistakes and was unavailable for long stretches.

Mr. Landman sent Mr. Blair a sharply worded evaluation in January 2002, noting that his correction rate was "extraordinarily high by the standards of the paper." Mr. Landman then forwarded copies of that evaluation to Mr. Boyd and William E. Schmidt, associate managing editor for news administration, along with a note that read, "There's big trouble I want you both to be aware of."

At that point Mr. Blair told Susan Edgerley, a deputy metropolitan editor, about his considerable personal problems, she said, and she referred him to a counseling service. When he returned to the newsroom after a two-week break, editors say, efforts were made to help him focus on accuracy rather than productivity. But the inaccuracies soon returned.

By early April, Mr. Blair's performance had prompted Mr. Landman to write that the newspaper had to "stop Jayson from writing for the Times." The next day, Mr. Blair received a letter of reprimand. He took another brief leave.

When he returned to the newsroom weeks later, Mr. Landman and Jeanne Pinder, the reporter's immediate supervisor, had a tough-love plan in place. Mr. Blair would start off with very short articles, again focusing on accuracy, not productivity, with Ms. Pinder brooking no nonsense about tardiness or extended unavailability.

Mr. Blair resented this short-leash approach, Mr. Landman said, but it seemed to work. The reporter's number of published corrections plummeted and, with time, he was allowed to tackle larger reporting assignments. In fact, within several weeks he was quietly agitating for jobs in other departments, away from Ms. Pinder and the metropolitan desk.

Finally, Mr. Landman reluctantly signed off on a plan to send Mr. Blair to the sports department, although he recalled warning the sports editor: "If you take Jayson, be careful." Mr. Boyd also said that the sports editor was briefed on Mr. Blair's work history and was provided with his most recent evaluation.

Mr. Blair had just moved to the sports department when he was rerouted to the national desk to help in the coverage of the sniper case developing in his hometown area. The change in assignment took Mr. Landman, Ms. Pinder and others on the metropolitan desk by surprise.

"Nobody was asking my opinion," Mr. Landman said. "What I thought was on the record abundantly."

Ms. Pinder, though, said she offered to discuss Mr. Blair's history and habits with anybody — mostly, she said, "because we wanted him to succeed."

The Big Time New Assignments for a 'Hungry Guy'

The sniper attacks in suburban Washington dominated the nation's newspapers last October. "This was a 'flood the zone' story," Mr. Roberts, the national editor, recalled, invoking the phrase that has come to embody the paper's aggressive approach to covering major news events under Mr. Raines, its executive editor.

Mr. Raines and Mr. Boyd, the managing editor, quickly increased the size of the team to eight reporters, Mr. Blair among them. "This guy's hungry," Mr. Raines said last week, recalling why he and Mr. Boyd picked Mr. Blair.

Both editors said the seeming improvement in Mr. Blair's accuracy last summer demonstrated that he was ready to help cover a complicated, high-profile assignment. But they did not tell Mr. Roberts or his deputies about the concerns that had been raised about Mr. Blair's reporting.

"That discussion did not happen," Mr. Raines said, adding that he had seen no need for such a discussion because Mr. Blair's performance had improved, and because "we do not stigmatize people for seeking help."

Instead, Mr. Boyd recommended Mr. Blair as a reporter who knew his way around Washington suburbs. "He wasn't sent down to be the first lead writer or the second or third or fourth or fifth writer," Mr. Boyd said. "He was managed and was not thrust into something over his head."

But Mr. Blair received far less supervision than he had on Mr. Landman's staff, many editors agreed. He was sent into a confusing world of feuding law enforcement agencies, a job that would have tested the skills of the most seasoned reporter. Still, Mr. Blair seemed to throw himself into the fray of reporters fiercely jockeying for leaks and scoops.

"There was a general sense he wanted to impress us," recalled Nick Fox, the editor who supervised much of Mr. Blair's sniper coverage.

Impress he did. Just six days after his arrival in Maryland, Mr. Blair landed a front-page exclusive with startling details about the arrest of John Muhammad, one of the two sniper suspects. The article, attributed entirely to the accounts of five unidentified law enforcement sources, reported that the United States attorney for Maryland, under pressure from the White House, had forced investigators to end their interrogation of Mr. Muhammad perhaps just as he was ready to confess.

It was an important article, and plainly accurate in its central point: that local and federal authorities were feuding over custody of the sniper suspects. But in retrospect, interviews show, the article contained a serious flaw, as well as a factual error.

Two senior law enforcement officials who otherwise bitterly disagree on much of what happened that day are in agreement on this much: Mr. Muhammad was not, as Mr. Blair reported, "explaining the roots of his anger" when the interrogation was interrupted. Rather, they said, the discussion touched on minor matters, like arranging for a shower and meal.

The article drew immediate fire. Both the United States attorney, Thomas M. DiBiagio, and a senior Federal Bureau of Investigation official issued statements denying certain details. Similar concerns were raised with senior editors by several veteran reporters in The Times's Washington bureau who cover law enforcement.

Mr. Roberts and Mr. Fox said in interviews last week that the statements would have raised far more serious concerns in their minds had they been aware of Mr. Blair's history of inaccuracy. Both editors also said they had never asked Mr. Blair to identify his sources in the article.

"I can't imagine accepting unnamed sources from him as the basis of a story had we known what was going on," Mr. Fox said. "If somebody had said, 'Watch out for this guy,' I would have questioned everything that he did. I can't even imagine being comfortable with going with the story at all, if I had known that the metro editors flat out didn't trust him."

Mr. Raines and Mr. Boyd, who knew more of Mr. Blair's history, also did not ask him to identify his sources. The two editors said that given what they knew then, there was no need. There was no inkling, Mr. Raines said, that the newspaper was dealing with "a pathological pattern of misrepresentation, fabricating and deceiving."

Mr. Raines said he saw no reason at that point to alert Mr. Roberts to Mr. Blair's earlier troubles. Rather, in keeping with his practice of complimenting what he considered exemplary work, Mr. Raines sent Mr. Blair a note of praise for his "great shoe-leather reporting."

Mr. Blair was further rewarded when he was given responsibility for leading the coverage of the sniper prosecution. The assignment advanced him toward potentially joining the national staff.

On Dec. 22, another article about the sniper case by Mr. Blair appeared on the front page. Citing unidentified law enforcement officials once again, his article explained why "all the evidence" pointed to Mr. Muhammad's teenage accomplice, Lee Malvo, as the triggerman. And once again his reporting drew strong criticism, this time from a prosecutor who called a news conference to denounce it.

"I don't think that anybody in the investigation is responsible for the leak, because so much of it was dead wrong," the prosecutor, Robert Horan Jr., the commonwealth attorney in Fairfax County, Va., said at the news conference.

Mr. Boyd was clearly concerned about Mr. Horan's accusations, colleagues recalled. He repeatedly pressed Mr. Roberts to reach Mr. Horan and have him specify his problems with Mr. Blair's article.

"I went to Jim and said, 'Let's check this out thoroughly because Jayson has had problems,' " Mr. Boyd said. Mr. Roberts said he did not recall being told that Mr. Blair had had problems.

Again, no editor at The Times pressed Mr. Blair to identify by name his sources on the article. But Mr. Roberts said he had had a more general discussion with Mr. Blair to determine whether his sources were in a position to know what he had reported.

After repeated efforts, Mr. Roberts reached Mr. Horan. "It was kind of a Mexican standoff," Mr. Horan recalled. "I was not going to tell him what was true and what was not true. I detected in him a real concern that they had published something incorrect."

"I don't know today whether Blair just had a bad source," he continued. "It was equally probable at the time that he was just sitting there writing fiction."

Mr. Roberts, meanwhile, said Mr. Horan complained about leaks, and never raised the possibility that Mr. Blair was fabricating details.

In the end, Mr. Raines said last week, the paper handled the criticisms of both articles appropriately. "I'm confident we went through the proper journalistic steps," he said.

It was not until January, Mr. Roberts recalled, that he was warned about Mr. Blair's record of inaccuracy. He said Mr. Landman quietly told him that Mr. Blair was prone to error and needed to be watched. Mr. Roberts added that he did not pass the warning on to his deputies. "It got socked in the back of my head," he said.

By then, however, those deputies had already formed their own assessments of Mr. Blair's work. They said they considered him a sloppy writer who was often difficult to track down and at times even elusive about his whereabouts. At the same time, he seemed eager and energetic.

Close scrutiny of his travel expenses would have revealed other signs that Mr. Blair was not where his editors thought he was, and, even more alarming, that he was perhaps concocting law enforcement sources. But at the time his expense records were being quickly reviewed by an administrative assistant; editors did not examine them.

On an expense report filed in January, for example, he indicated that he had bought blankets at a Marshalls department store in Washington; the receipt showed that the purchase was made at a Marshalls in Brooklyn. He also reported a purchase at a Starbucks in Washington; again, the receipt showed that it was in Brooklyn. On both days, he was supposedly writing articles from the Washington area.

Mr. Blair also reported that he dined with a law enforcement official at a Tutta Pasta restaurant in Washington on the day he wrote an article from there. As the receipt makes clear, this Tutta Pasta is in Brooklyn. Mr. Blair said he dined with the same official at Penang, another New York City restaurant that Mr. Blair placed in Washington on his expense reports.

Reached last week, the official said he had never dined with Mr. Blair, and in fact was in Florida with his wife on one of the dates.

According to cellphone records, computer logs and other records recently described by New York Times administrators, Mr. Blair had by this point developed a pattern of pretending to cover events in the Mid-Atlantic region when in fact he was spending most of his time in New York, where he was often at work refining a book proposal about the sniper case.

In e-mail messages to colleagues, for example, he conveyed the impression of a travel-weary national correspondent who spent far too much time in La Guardia Airport terminals. Conversely, colleagues marveled at his productivity, at his seemingly indefatigable constitution. "Man, you really get around," one fellow reporter wrote Mr. Blair in an e-mail message.

Mr. Raines took note, too, especially after Mr. Blair's tale from Hunt Valley. By April, Mr. Raines recalled, senior editors were discussing whether Mr. Blair should be considered for a permanent slot on the national reporting staff.

"My feeling was, here was a guy who had been working hard and getting into the paper on significant stories," Mr. Raines said. The plan, he said, was for Mr. Roberts to give Mr. Blair a two- or three-month tryout in the mid-Atlantic bureau to see if he could do the job.

Mr. Roberts said he resisted the idea, and told Mr. Boyd he had misgivings about Mr. Blair. "He works the way he lives — sloppily," he recalled telling Mr. Boyd, who said last week he had agreed that Mr. Blair was not the best candidate for the job.

But with his staff stretched thin to supply reporters for Iraqi war coverage and elsewhere, Mr. Roberts had little choice but to press Mr. Blair into duty on the home front.

After the Hunt Valley article in late March, Mr. Blair pulled details out of thin air in his coverage of one of the biggest stories to come from the war, the capture and rescue of Pfc. Jessica D. Lynch.

In an article on March 27 that carried a dateline from Palestine, W.Va., Mr. Blair wrote that Private Lynch's father, Gregory Lynch Sr., "choked up as he stood on his porch here overlooking the tobacco fields and cattle pastures." The porch overlooks no such thing.

He also wrote that Private Lynch's family had a long history of military service; it does not, family members said. He wrote that their home was on a hilltop; it is in a valley. And he wrote that Ms. Lynch's brother was in the West Virginia National Guard; he is in the Army.

The article astonished the Lynch family and friends, said Brandi Lynch, Jessica's sister. "We were joking about the tobacco fields and the cattle." Asked why no one in the family called to complain about the many errors, she said, "We just figured it was going to be a one-time thing."

It now appears that Mr. Blair may never have gone to West Virginia, from where he claimed to have filed five articles about the Lynch family. E-mail messages and cellphone records suggest that during much of that time he was in New York. Not a single member of the Lynch family remembers speaking to Mr. Blair.

Between the first coverage of the sniper attacks in late October and late April, Mr. Blair filed articles claiming to be from 20 cities in six states. Yet during those five months, he did not submit a single receipt for a hotel room, rental car or airplane ticket, officials at The Times said.

Mr. Blair did not have a company credit card — the reasons are unclear — and had been forced to rely on Mr. Roberts's credit card to pay bills from his first weeks on the sniper story. His own credit cards, he had told a Times administrator, were beyond their credit limit. The only expense he filed with regularity was for his cellphone, that indispensable tool of his dual existence.

"To have a national reporter who is working in a traveling capacity for the paper and not file expenses for those trips for a four-month period is certainly in hindsight something that should attract our attention," Mr. Boyd said.

On April 29, toward the end of his remarkable run of deceit, Mr. Blair was summoned to the newsroom to answer accusations of plagiarism lodged by The San Antonio Express-News. The concerns centered on an article that he claimed to have written from Los Fresnos, Tex., about the anguish of a missing soldier's mother.

In a series of tense meetings over two days, Mr. Roberts repeatedly pressed Mr. Blair for evidence that he had indeed interviewed the mother. Sitting in Mr. Roberts's small office, the reporter produced pages of handwritten notes to allay his editor's increasing concern.

Mr. Roberts needed more — "You've got to come clean with us," he said — and zeroed in on the mother's house in Texas. He asked Mr. Blair to describe what he had seen.

Mr. Blair did not hesitate. He told Mr. Roberts of the reddish roof on the white stucco house, of the red Jeep in the driveway, of the roses blooming in the yard. Mr. Roberts later inspected unpublished photographs of the mother's house, which matched Mr. Blair's descriptions in every detail.

It was not until Mr. Blair's deceptions were uncovered that Mr. Roberts learned how the reporter could have deceived him yet again: by consulting the newspaper's computerized photo archives.

What haunts Mr. Roberts now, he says, is one particular moment when editor and reporter were facing each other in a showdown over the core aim of their profession: truth.

"Look me in the eye and tell me you did what you say you did," Mr. Roberts demanded. Mr. Blair returned his gaze and said he had.

The Lessons When Wrong, 'Get Right'

The New York Times continues as before. Every morning, stacks of The Times are piled at newsstands throughout the city; every morning, newspaper carriers toss plastic bags containing that day's issue onto the lawns of readers from Oregon to Maine. What remains unclear is how long those copies will carry the dust from the public collapse of a young journalist's career.

Mr. Blair is no longer welcome in the newsroom he so often seemed unable to leave. Many of his friends express anger at him for his betrayal, and at The Times for not heeding signs of his self-destructive nature. Others wonder what comes next for him; Thomas Kunkel, dean of the journalism program at the University of Maryland, gently suggested that the former student might return to earn that college degree.

But Mr. Blair harmed more than himself. Although the deceit of one Times reporter does not impugn the work of 375 others, experts and teachers of journalism say that The Times must repair the damage done to the public trust.

"To the best of my knowledge, there has never been anything like this at The New York Times," said Alex S. Jones, a former Times reporter and the co-author of "The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind The New York Times" (Little Brown, 1999). He added: "There has never been a systematic effort to lie and cheat as a reporter at The New York Times comparable to what Jayson Blair seems to have done."

Mr. Jones suggested that the newspaper might conduct random checks of the veracity of news articles after publication. But Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, questioned how much a newspaper can guard against willful fraud by deceitful reporters.

"It's difficult to catch someone who is deliberately trying to deceive you," Mr. Rosenstiel said. "There are risks if you create a system that is so suspicious of reporters in a newsroom that it can interfere with the relationship of creativity that you need in a newsroom — of the trust between reporters and editors."

Still, in the midst of covering a succession of major news events, from serial killings and catastrophes to the outbreak of war, something clearly broke down in the Times newsroom. It appears to have been communication — the very purpose of the newspaper itself.

Some reporters and administrators did not tell editors about Mr. Blair's erratic behavior. Editors did not seek or heed the warnings of other editors about his reporting. Five years' worth of information about Mr. Blair was available in one building, yet no one put it together to determine whether he should be put under intense pressure and assigned to cover high-profile national events.

"Maybe this crystallizes a little that we can find better ways to build lines of communication across what is, to be fair, a massive newsroom," said Mr. Sulzberger, the publisher.

But Mr. Sulzberger emphasized that as The New York Times continues to examine how its employees and readers were betrayed, there will be no newsroom search for scapegoats. "The person who did this is Jayson Blair," he said. "Let's not begin to demonize our executives — either the desk editors or the executive editor or, dare I say, the publisher."

Mr. Raines, who referred to the Blair episode as a "terrible mistake," said that in addition to correcting the record so badly corrupted by Mr. Blair, he planned to assign a task force of newsroom employees to identify lessons for the newspaper. He repeatedly quoted a lesson he said he learned long ago from A. M. Rosenthal, a former executive editor.

"When you're wrong in this profession, there is only one thing to do," he said. "And that is get right as fast as you can."

For now, the atmosphere pervading the newsroom is that of an estranged relative's protracted wake. Employees accept the condolences of callers. They discuss what they might have done differently. They find comfort in gallows humor. And, of course, they talk endlessly about how Jayson could have done this.