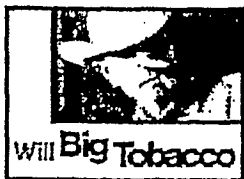
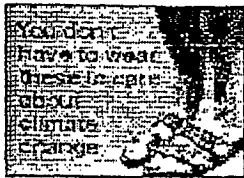




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Defense Dept. Probes Release Of Tripp Data

By Jeff Leen
 Washington Post Staff Writer
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The Defense Department has launched an administrative review into the release of personal information from Linda R. Tripp's 1987 security clearance form, a Pentagon spokesman said yesterday.

The review was announced after Rep. Gerald B.H. Solomon (R-N.Y.) wrote to Defense Secretary William S. Cohen, calling the release an apparent violation of the Privacy Act.

In its current issue, the New Yorker magazine reported that Tripp had been arrested for grand larceny in 1969 and had not reported the fact on her security clearance form nearly 20 years later. The 1969 charge was reduced to loitering, and Tripp was released without a conviction on her record.

But the Pentagon has said it will examine whether Tripp failed to answer a question truthfully on the form about prior arrests.

The White House has denied leaking information to New Yorker writer Jane Mayer, who told The Post she got the information on her own.

The Pentagon's review into the release of information began at the request of a civilian employee in the Public Affairs Office who gave Mayer Tripp's response to a question on the form, said Col. Dick Bridges, a Pentagon spokesman.

"He's a career government employee; he's not a political appointee," Bridges said. "This individual was concerned to the point he asked the lawyers to get involved and conduct a review of what he did. This was not done with malice aforethought. He was not pursuing any political agenda. There is no conspiracy. There is no plot."

Bridges said the employee, whom he declined to identify, thought he was releasing "innocent" information because it merely noted that Tripp said she had never been arrested.

Sources identified the employee as Clifford Bernath, a deputy assistant secretary for public affairs.

"You want to do the right thing for the individual," Bridges said. "This guy did this for all the right reasons. In hindsight, we're not going to do this again."

Tripp's attorneys said they will ask the FBI and the Defense Department inspector general's office to conduct formal investigations into the matter.

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