

Tripp's Privacy Act suits settled for \$595,000

November 4, 2003

NMU	WASHINGTON, D.C.	Freedom of Information
-----	------------------	------------------------

Tripp's Privacy Act suits settled for \$595,000

- ***Linda Tripp settled her lawsuits against the Defense Department over the disclosure of personal information.***

Nov. 4, 2003 — The Department of Defense settled three related lawsuits last week with former employee Linda Tripp, who alleged violations of the federal Privacy Act. Tripp will receive a one-time cash payment of \$595,000 plus other financial benefits.

The Privacy Act, signed into law in 1974, prohibits the government from releasing personal information about individuals without their prior authorization. The settlement, finalized Oct. 31, ends four years of litigation without a court ruling on the viability of Tripp's claims.

Tripp alleged in her lawsuits that the Department of Defense released embarrassing personal information about her in retaliation for her role in the impeachment of former President Bill Clinton. Tripp secretly recorded phone conversations she had with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, who was having an affair with Clinton.

“This is a long awaited first step toward holding the government accountable under the Privacy Act,” Tripp said in a statement. “The government should never be permitted to use Privacy Act protected information to discredit a political opponent.”

In 1998, based on anonymous information from the Pentagon, *The New Yorker* magazine reported that Tripp failed to admit a grand larceny arrest as a teenager on her security application. She had been charged with grand larceny, but the charges were reduced to loitering in a plea bargain at the

time. After the article ran, Tripp sued the department under the Privacy Act for releasing the information.

Stars and Stripes, an independent daily newspaper published by the DOD, reported in 2000 that Tripp had applied for a job at the Department of Defense's Marshall Center in Germany. Tripp was not hired for the position, and said she was embarrassed because the position was a professional step down for her.

Tripp sought the name of the confidential source who leaked her information to *Stars and Stripes*, but a federal judge in Washington, D.C., ruled this past September that the journalist who wrote the story was protected by the federal reporter's privilege.

A related third lawsuit naming the United States of America as defendant was also settled.

In addition to the cash payment, the department will retroactively increase Tripp's pay grade dating back to 1998. Although Tripp will not receive retroactive pay based on the increase, it will affect her benefits when she retires.

Tripp was fired from her job at the Pentagon in 2001 when she refused to follow the traditional practice of resigning with other political appointees at the end of a president's administration.

The settlement avoids a ruling on the merits of Tripp's lawsuits by the court. Jane Mayer, the *New Yorker* reporter who wrote the Tripp story, says the settlement will thus have little if any effect on reporters. "It was a settlement, . . . so the press wasn't party to it," she noted.

(Tripp v. Dept. of Defense) — [GP](#)

Editor's note: This article originally misreported some details of Tripp's arrest and the charge against her, but now appears in its corrected form.

Related stories:

- [Stars and Stripes reporter wins privilege battle](#) (10/2/2003)