

Drudging Up Personal Details

By Lloyd Grove

Friday, July 18, 2003; Page C03

Some folks in the White House were apparently hopping mad when ABC News correspondent **Jeffrey Kofman** did a story on Tuesday's "World News Tonight" about the plummeting morale of U.S. soldiers stationed in Iraq.

So angry, in fact, that the next day, a White House operative alerted cyber-gossip **Matt Drudge** to the fact that Kofman is not only openly gay, he's Canadian.

Yesterday Drudge told us he was unaware of the ABC story until "someone from the White House communications shop tipped me to it" along with a profile of Kofman in the gay-oriented magazine the Advocate. On Wednesday, for 6 hours 38 minutes, the Drudge Report bannered Kofman's widely quoted ABC story -- in which enlisted people questioned the Army's credibility and one irked soldier went on camera to call on Defense Secretary **Donald Rumsfeld** to resign -- and linked to the Advocate piece with the understated headline "ABC NEWS REPORTER WHO FILED TROOP COMPLAINT STORY IS CANADIAN."

White House Press Secretary **Scott McClellan** "is having a rough first week," Drudge said. "The White House press office is under new management and has become slightly more aggressive about contacting reporters. This story has certainly become talk radio fodder about the cultural wars-slash-liberal bias in the media."

A network insider was less sanguine about the White House tactic: "Playing hardball is one thing. But appealing to homophobia and jingoism is simply ugly."

Kofman said from Baghdad, where he is covering the 3rd Infantry Division: "This morning I had a meeting with one of the commanding officers and we talked about my report and the response back home. He said he'd read about it on the Drudge Report and had just one question. 'Is it true that you're Canadian?' I just smiled and said, 'My life is an open book.' "

ABC News spokesman **Jeffrey Schneider** told us: "Sadly, when people feel wounded by a truthful report, they attempt to attack the messenger." A White House spokesman, meanwhile, disavowed the incident: "This is the first we've heard of it, and it would be totally inappropriate if true."

Cannibalism on the Right

• The most dangerous place in Washington, it seems, is between Rep. **Joseph Pitts** (R-Pa.), chairman of the conservative Values Action Team, and the Rev. **Lou Sheldon** and his daughter **Andrea Lafferty** of the Traditional Values Coalition.



Pitts, on defense for the team. (File Photo)

Judging by the letter Pitts sent Sheldon and Lafferty yesterday, he'd just as soon strangle them as write to them.

"Dear Lou and Andrea," Pitts began his scorching missive, in which he kicked their group of the Values Action Team. "As you are now well aware, your recent conduct has infuriated the pro-life community in Washington."

Sheldon and Lafferty's staunchly antiabortion group recently sent out direct-mail pieces attacking 25 Republican House members for allegedly letting the abortion drug RU486 into the United States by supporting the importation of cheap pharmaceuticals from Canada. "Your willingness to attack Members of Congress whom you should regard as friends without so much a warning is offensive," Pitts raged. "The spurious nature of the claims . . . shows a lack of regard for the truth. Your unwillingness to return calls or accept an invitation to discuss this matter betrays a lack of forthrightness or good will."

Sheldon and Lafferty didn't return *our* phone call, either.

THIS JUST IN...

- Looks like possible California gubernatorial candidate **Arnold Schwarzenegger** has already won the crucial **Jean-Claude Van Damme** Primary. "Arnold is a cool guy," the fading action star told reporters at the Ischia Film & Music Global Fest near Naples, Italy, yesterday. "He works out in the gym every day. He is very smart and intelligent. He's a pal of mine. I love him. I will vote for him. He's responsible, and that's important in politics." All the Belgian-born Van Damme has to do now is become an American citizen.
- Looking at **George W. Bush's** White House, we can hardly believe there was a time when presidents enjoyed good relations with the news media. Yesterday at the National Press Club, **Jerry Ford** reminded folks that there was indeed such a time. The 90-year-old ex-president, joined by his 85-year-old wife, **Betty**, handed out the Gerald R. Ford Prizes -- for distinguished reporting on the presidency to our Post colleagues **Bob Woodward** and **Dan Balz**, and for national defense reporting to the Wall Street Journal's **Greg Jaffe**. "In four decades as a reporter, Gerald Ford was the nicest, most decent person I ever covered," CBS News veteran **Bob Schieffer** told the lunchtime crowd. "Mr. President, we love you."
- Guess we shoulda czeched, huh? We were the target of a barrage of e-mails, and a few phone calls, concerning yesterday's report on **Laura Bush** lunching with **Craig Stapleton**, whom we identified as "U.S. ambassador to Czechoslovakia." A typical message: "Craig Stapleton is the ambassador to the CZECH REPUBLIC, not Czechoslovakia, which as we all know, split into TWO republics, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, about a decade ago. Moron."

With Anne Schroeder

© 2003 The Washington Post Company