

Hill urged to probe Olson death

Traficant questions CIA's explanation

7/15/94 By DAN BURNS
News-Post Staff

WASHINGTON - An Ohio congressman on Thursday called for Congress to investigate the death of a Fort Detrick germ warfare researcher, whose fatal 13-story fall 40 years ago following his unwitting participation in a government experiment with hallucinogenic drugs is being investigated by a team of forensic scientists.

Rep. James Traficant, a Democrat from Youngstown and a frequent critic of the Central Intelligence Agency, said recent news reports of the forensic investigation into Dr. Frank Olson's death have raised serious doubts about the CIA's official explanation for the scientist's plunge from his room in the Statler Hotel in Manhattan in November 1953. He has asked the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence to investigate the matter.

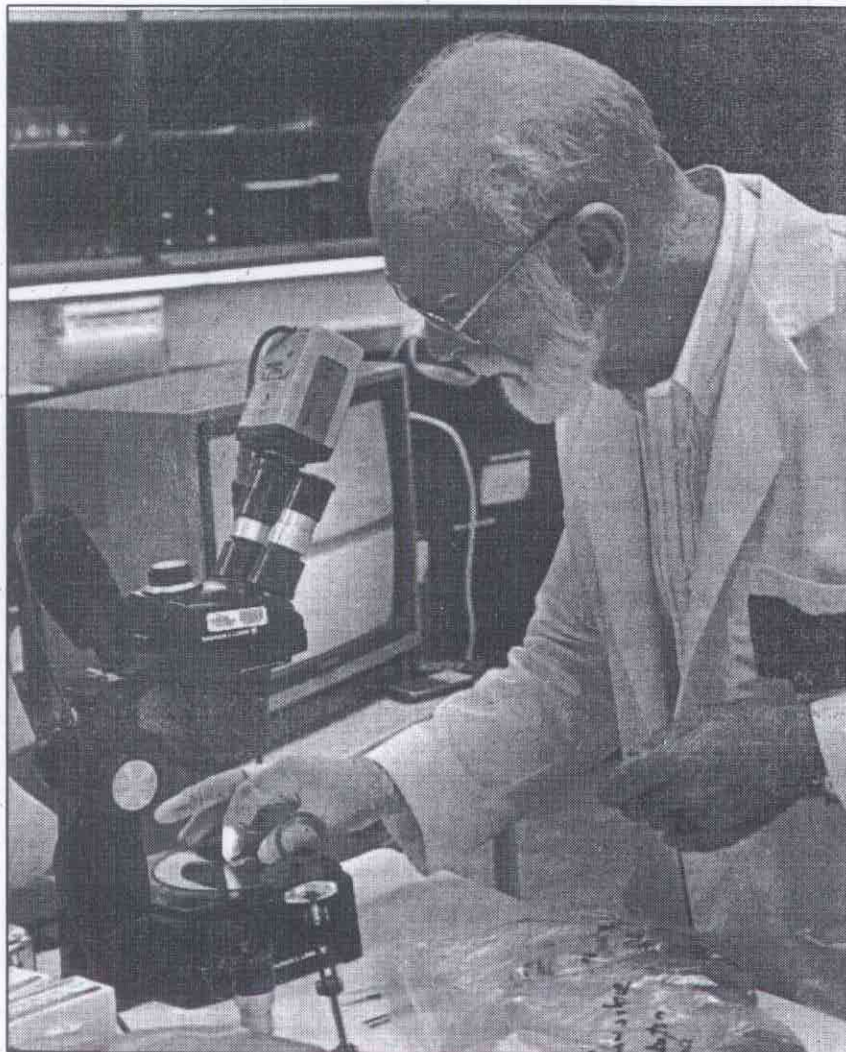
Dr. Olson's body was exhumed from its Frederick grave last month and, at the request of his two sons, Eric and Nils, is being studied for evidence that he may have been murdered. News reports earlier this week said that investigators' early findings may contradict official explanations for his death - first termed a suicide and later labeled accidental after it was revealed he had been the unwitting subject of a CIA experiment with LSD.

"Frank Olson was an unknowing participant in a secret CIA experiment. The CIA said he committed suicide by jumping through a hotel window, but glass fragments were never found on Olson's body, and the hotel's night manager said that Frank Olson did not commit suicide 40 years ago," Mr. Traficant said when he took the House floor. "Whom do we believe?"

"The CIA said it knew nothing about mining Nicaraguan harbors. It said it knew nothing about Iran-Contra," he said in his letter to the Intelligence Committee requesting an inquiry. "The Olson family needs to know the truth. The American people need to know the truth."

The family has never accepted the official explanations for Dr. Olson's fall, which occurred days after CIA agents surreptitiously slipped 70 micrograms of LSD into his drink while he was attending a secret conference at Deep Creek Lake.

The fact that the CIA and LSD were involved in his death was not known for some



Staff photo by Bill Green

Dr. James Starrs, professor of Law and Forensic Sciences, uses a microscope to examine the underside of a fingernail removed from the exhumed body of Dr. Frank Olson in a lab at George Washington University on Thursday.

22 years, until a 1975 congressional investigation into the CIA's domestic activities revealed the agency was secretly experimenting with the drug. President Ford invited the Olsons to the White House to apologize personally for the incident, and Congress later awarded the family \$750,000 for its pain and suffering.

Meanwhile Thursday, the chief of the forensic investigating team was emphatic in stating that while some of his preliminary

findings appear to be inconsistent with the official explanation for Dr. Olson's death, it is far too soon to begin calling it murder.

Dr. James E. Starrs said his early discoveries, such as a surprising number of fractures to Dr. Olson's skull and a lack of the facial lacerations that were described in the original autopsy report, naturally give rise to speculation that foul play and a cover-

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Olson_____

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up were involved. But tissue analyses have not been completed, and there is no hard evidence to dispute the official finding of accidental death, he said.

During an interview at his office and lab at The George Washington University National Law Center, however, Dr. Starrs welcomed the notion of a congressional investigation, even if it is based on exaggerated press reports.

"A congressional hearing would be wonderful," he said. He said Congress ought to be more successful than he has been at obtaining original documents relating to Dr. Olson's death, such as the report of the CIA's internal investigation.

In a letter to Dr. Starrs from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, responding to his request for documents, committee General Counsel L. Britt Snider said the panel might arrange for the classified documents to be retrieved from the National Archives and made available to the forensic investigators. However, the papers must first be "sanitized" by the CIA, the counsel said.

"What we need are the unredacted documents," Dr. Starrs said.

Eric Olson, the elder son and the one closest to the investigation, could not be reached for comment Thursday.

But last month, Mr. Olson contended that the CIA had plenty of motive to want to silence his father, who was one of the government's top researchers into biological warfare at the height of the Cold War.

"They had created a Frankenstein. They had destabilized him,



Scientists will use photos of Dr. Frank Olson to help reconstruct his facial features at the time of his death.

demoralized him and now angered him. What were they going to do with him at that point?" Mr. Olson said.

Dr. Olson returned home from the LSD experience at Deep Creek Lake a disgruntled and depressed man who wanted very suddenly to quit his highly sensitive job, his son said. Noting his depression in the days following the LSD experience, CIA officials took him to New York to see one of their doctors who had some knowledge of the drug. He fell to his death on the Saturday after Thanksgiving.