

Witness Details LSD Death

Recalls 1953 Fatality

7-18-75
By Austin Scott
Washington Post Staff Writer

Robert Lashbrook, a CIA employee who helped test LSD on unsuspecting subjects and was the last person with the only test subject known to have died as a result, has surfaced after 22 years as a high school science teacher in Ojai, Calif., 80 miles north of Los Angeles.

Located by The Washington Post, Lashbrook said he remembers many details of the meeting at which LSD, a hallucinogenic drug, was given to four top-level research scientists without their knowledge in November, 1953.

He also remembers accompanying one of the scientists, Dr. Frank Olson, to New York City to see a psychiatrist after Olson had an adverse reaction. And he remembers waking up in their hotel room to find that Olson had plunged through their 10th-floor window to his death on the street below.

"I woke up because there was a noise," Lashbrook said. "I turned on the light and noticed Frank wasn't there. I saw the shade. It was one of those pull-type window shades and that was going around and around and the window was broken . . .

And then I saw him down on the sidewalk below . . . There's a train station there, and a number of people were running from the train station to the sidewalk . . .

Asked what he did then, Lashbrook said:

"As I recall, I called the [hotel] desk. I see OLSON, A8, Col. 1.



Dr. Frank Olson; biochemist died after 10-story fall.

OLSON, From A1

don't recall [what I said] except to inform them, and ask them to call someone . . . I put on my clothes and waited . . . I figured the police would arrive sooner or later."

Asked if he left the room, he said, "No, I did not. I stayed in the room . . . It was 10 floors up, a distance away. If I'd gone down, what could I have done, because as I say, I saw people running over where he was . . . I figured the police would be wanting to ask questions of [me]."

In the four weeks since the CIA's experiments with LSD were first disclosed, no one has contacted him about the matter, Lashbrook said. The Rockefeller commission did not contact him before it wrote its report on improper or illegal CIA activities. His former colleagues at the CIA have not contacted him, nor have congressional investigators.

And except for one time a week or two after Olson's death, he has not contacted the Olson family in the intervening 22 years, he said.

In a two-hour telephone interview,

Lashbrook went step-by-step through some of the things he remembers from that period in his life.

"Of course, the whole thing shook me up quite a lot," he said. "And as a matter of fact, I was leery of getting a hotel room high up in a hotel. If Olson had decided to do something like that, why couldn't I?"

Lashbrook said he was one of as many as four CIA employees present when LSD was given to four top level scientists from the Army's biological warfare research center at Ft. Detrick, Md., in November, 1953. He did not receive the drug then, he said, but he had earlier.

The drug was administered on the first night of a three-day secret seminar—documents indicate it was Wednesday, Nov. 18—and the scientists were not told about it until afterward.

By the following Tuesday, Olson had developed such severe reactions that Lashbrook took him to New York. Olson died early Saturday morning.

Lashbrook said he did not tell the New York police investigating Olson's death that LSD was involved because he wasn't sure the drug, administered more than a week earlier, was responsible for the death. ". . . It was certainly controversial as to what the direct cause and effect might have been," he said.

While he waited for the police, he said, he telephoned a fellow CIA employee in Washington, D.C., as well as the psychi-

atrist, a doctor with a high security clearance who had been doing research on LSD, to inform them of the death.

"I think everybody got pretty frightened at that point," he said. Asked if there was a great deal of fear within the CIA as a result, he replied, "Certainly."

Lashbrook, 57, lives in Ojai with his wife and three children in a three-story house surrounded by a chain-link fence, according to special correspondent Robert Meyers. The neighborhood is an attractive, semirural, older section with comfortable houses.

He said the CIA was his principal employer from 1951 to 1963, after which he went to work for the Ventura Division of Northrop Corp. A chemist by profession, he has a PhD and is listed in "American Men and Women of Science."

Another CIA employee who was in the room when Olson was given LSD, Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, is listed in the same publication as a biochemist who, from 1951 on, was a "consultant, U.S. Department of Defense."

Lashbrook said Gottlieb was the agent he telephoned in Washington to inform him of Olson's death.

Lashbrook said he was only one of "a number of" CIA operatives who acted as liaison with a wide variety of LSD testing projects in the Army, and in the National Institutes of Mental Health.

The CIA reportedly has refused to comment on any aspect of what happened in those drug-testing programs.

A July 11 letter the CIA to John Marks of the Center for National Security Studies here notes:

"Please be advised that the CIA did not provide any documents or any other written material on this topic to the Rockefeller commission. It is signed Charles E. Savage for Robert S. Young, Freedom of Information Coordinator.

Lashbrook's account does not square in several important respects with an account given yesterday by Armand D. Pastore, who was assisting the doctor at

New York's Statler Hotel in 1953. Pastore is now manager of the Diplomat Motor Hotel in Ocean City, Md.

Lashbrook said the police arrived in probably not more than 10 minutes, and that he was awakened by Olson's accident sometime after 3 a.m.

Pastore said it couldn't have been after 3 a.m. because the doorman who notified him of the accident went off duty at 2 a.m.

"Sometime before 2 a.m. the doorman came to me and told me someone came out the window," Pastore said. "He was lying on the sidewalk when I got there and he was still alive and trying to mumble something but I couldn't make it out. It was all garbled and I was trying to get his name. We got a priest, and he stopped mumbling before they got him in the ambulance.

"I went and checked at the desk and saw there were two people there. I went up and started to knock and then decided there might be trouble so I sent down for the police and waited . . . waited about one half-hour and then I went in with the police. We opened the door and there was

this fellow sitting in the bathroom with his head in his hands. He had on his undershorts or his pajamas. He wasn't dressed."

Pastore said that "on the sidewalk Olson was broke up something awful."

Lashbrook said he was told at the time that the scientists he worked with had agreed among themselves in advance that they would be given LSD, but without knowing exactly when it would be administered.

"It was my understanding that everyone involved had agreed in principle," he said. "I was not present when this was done."

Some of the scientists had taken LSD before, and for some it was their first time, he said. Olson, he said, was a first-timer. He did not recall whether a doctor was present, but said, ". . . There would have been one immediately available."

Lashbrook said he did not attend any other meetings where Olson or the people who worked with him were given LSD, but he refused to say whether he had participated in other meetings where people were given LSD.

The meeting on Nov. 18, 1953, began with a technical discussion that included the subject of LSD, Lashbrook said. In the evening, when work was over and the scientists were in a "free period," not discussing business, the LSD was administered. "I think it was in an after-dinner liquor or something like that."

Lashbrook said he was "not too sure" whether someone on the inside, or the outside, decided who should be given LSD "and in any case, I don't really want to name them."

He didn't want to comment on whether the drug was put in the drinks before or after they were brought into the room.

"You see, I don't really know a lot of things . . . I don't really know what I should say and what I shouldn't."

As Lashbrook recalled it, Olson acted "no different from anyone else" after being given LSD. "The general effect is some agitation, confusion. In general the effect is such it makes it difficult for a person, at night to go to sleep, and as I recall, that went on. People jabbered away until late at night and early the next morning."

He recalled no emotional upsets or tendencies toward violence.

Early the following week, Lashbrook said, he learned that Olson was showing signs of being upset. ". . . Somewhere, and I don't know exactly where, the decision was made that Dr. [Harold] Abramson [a New York psychiatrist] was probably in the best position to help out. He was familiar, he had done pioneering work with the material . . . I guess arrangements were made for Olson to see Dr. Abramson."

Although Lashbrook knew Abramson, they said little to each other, he said.

because someone had briefed Abramson on the case before they arrived.

"We just didn't walk in cold," he said.

Lashbrook said he saw no signs of undue disturbance in Olson on the Friday night before he died.

"If he had, I would have stayed up all night with him," he said. "We had dinner at the hotel together. He seemed quite normal . . . just small talk. He didn't talk about anything that bothered me. . . .

What probably happened was that this sort of brought out something in the past that bothered him, and I never really was able to determine just exactly what this was."

GIs Got Drug in 1960

By Bill Richards

Washington Post Staff Writer

The CIA monitored or took part in several LSD testing projects run by U.S. agencies during the 1950s because it feared the drug might be given to U.S. diplomats operating abroad, according to a former CIA chemist who was the contact with one of these projects.

In addition, said Dr. Robert Lashbrook, who was the intelligence agency's contact with an LSD-testing project at Ft. Detrick in central Maryland, the CIA also conducted what he called "pencil and paper experiments" in administering the drug to foreign diplomats.

"They were very theoretical programs to determine whether it was feasible," said Lashbrook during an interview from his home in Ojai, Calif. "I'm not aware that it went any further."

Lashbrook said the CIA maintained liaison contacts with LSD testing projects being conducted by the Army at Ft. Detrick, Edgewood Arsenal and the Aberdeen Proving Ground, both in northeast Maryland, and by the National Institutes of Mental Health in Bethesda.

It also was learned yesterday that the Army tested LSD on soldiers in 1960 at Ft. Benning, Ga., and that at least one Army officer has since complained that he may have developed epilepsy from being exposed to the drug. According to one participant, this LSD testing was conducted by researchers flown to Georgia from Aberdeen Proving Ground.

See LSD, A3, Col. 6

LSD, From A1

Since November, the Army Surgeon General's office has been conducting extensive physical and psychological examinations of all 33 men who were given LSD during the project at Ft. Benning 15 years ago, according to a former Army officer who said he was one of the 33.

An Army spokesman said last night that any medical followup project conducted by the Army is under the authority of the Surgeon General's office. The spokesman said he could not reach anyone from that office last night.

The spokesman said records of the LSD tests at the Army Chemical Center at Edgewood Arsenal, which several civilian researchers in that project said were conducted on hundreds of soldiers and civilians, were ordered reviewed yesterday for possible declassification.

A spokesman for the National Institutes of Mental Health in Bethesda confirmed yesterday that testing of LSD was done during the 1950s at the federal facility. The spokesman said he could not learn late yesterday whether the CIA was involved. The tests involved males and females, he said, and included some conscientious objectors from the Mennonite

Church and Church of the Brethren serving out their alternate military service.

In another development, a state legislator said yesterday that the CIA covertly funded tests of computers and drugs, including LSD, at a state mental health research amphetheamines and barbiturates, but not center in Houston between 1964 and 1971. The intelligence agency was seeking to use the drug and computer tests carried on under the program to develop a "super" lie detector, according to State Rep. Lane Denton of Waco.

Denton said the project at the Texas Research Institute for Mental Science (TRIMS) appeared to have only "marginal relevance" to the treatment or study of mental illness, the tasks assigned the state-supported facility by the state legislature.

Dr. Neil R. Burch, a researcher who composed the polygraph studies in the TRIMS project, said they were funded by the CIA, the Air Force and Navy. He said the results of the program had mental health applications. The CIA has refused comment on the allegations.

Rep. Thomas J. Downey (D-N.Y.), a member of the House Armed Services Committee, yesterday requested a formal investigation by the committee of allegations this week of widespread testing of drugs such as LSD on military bases around the country.

Lashbrook, in a long telephone interview yesterday with The Washington Post, said the primary incentive for the intelligence agency's participation in LSD testing projects in the 1950s was a fear by agency officials that the then-relatively unknown drug might be used on U.S. officials.

Lashbrook and three other CIA employees were part of an LSD experiment conducted in 1953 on Dr. Frank Olson and at least three other scientists at a Western Maryland hideaway.

Olson committed suicide about a week after

he was given the drug without his knowledge. Lashbrook said yesterday that the suicide only confirmed the CIA's fears of the drug's potential and that additional testing of the drug's effects was undertaken by the CIA. He said he was part of that additional testing program despite his own reservations about the hallucinogen.

In addition to the three other CIA employees who Lashbrook said were present at the time Olson was given LSD, the former agent said a number of other CIA agents were also monitored or participated in LSD-research programs in the 1950s.

Most of the CIA's research work in the area of human testing with the drug following the Olson death involved about five psychiatrists, Lashbrook said. He declined to identify any of them.

"At that time," said Lashbrook, "the big emphasis was on the cold war bit and all that . . . There were boogeymen here and there and everywhere."

"At that time very little was known about LSD. And there was great concern as to the possibility of it being used

against our own people. I think the people the agency was primarily worried about were outside the country, diplomats and so forth. They were more or less vulnerable."

Lashbrook said he did not know of any instance of LSD being administered to any American official.

The former intelligence agent said that while he was aware of LSD testing being conducted at Edgewood Arsenal—known at the time as the Army Chemical Center—he did not recall the identity of specific operatives in the project.

Several civilian researchers who took part in the LSD tests at Edgewood said earlier this week that hundreds of civilians and soldiers were tested with LSD in sessions at both Edgewood and at the University of Maryland Medical School in Baltimore.

Maj. Gen. Lloyd Fellenz, a retired Army officer who was in charge of the Edgewood facility during the late 1950s, said yesterday that the tests were common knowledge and that only a few officers and men took part in them.

Several persons who said they took part in the tests called The Washington Post yesterday and said the LSD sessions at the Edgewood base lasted into the 1960s and involved substantial numbers of troops.

One former soldier, who said he took part in such testing in 1958, said that between 45 and 50 men in his group alone were brought in from military bases including Andrews Air Force Base and Fort Carson, Colo.

Richard Wevodau, who is now an employee of the American Postal Union here and lives in Harrisburg, Pa., said that he and the other members of his group were given hallucinogens at Edgewood on three occasions yesterday that 33 men were given group spent there. Wevodau said he and the other group members were presented with certificates signed by Fellenz after completing the project.