

C.I.A. in the Early Nineteen-Fifties Was Among Pioneers in Research on LSD's Effects

By BOYCE RENSBERGER

The Central Intelligence Agency was one of the pioneers in studying the drug LSD, having begun its research eight years before Dr. Timothy Leary swallowed his first dose of the powerful mind-altering substance.

Plunged to His Death

The C.I.A., a review of the history of LSD research indicates, began its experiments with the drug at about the same time the Army and Navy began their studies of what was then, in the early nineteen-fifties, a mysterious drug with extraordinary powers to modify perception, thought, emotion and behavior.

Switzerland

LSD's potential utility as a chemical warfare agent was obvious from its earliest days in the laboratory in the late nineteen-forties. Standard reference works on chemical warfare agents list LSD as one of a handful of "psychochemicals" under study

by the chemical warfare research laboratories once housed at Fort Detrick and at Edgewood Arsenal, both in Maryland. Chemical warfare research at these centers has since been phased out.

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research at Fort Detrick. Dr. Olson, when he began his research at Fort Detrick, was given LSD by C.I.A. experimenters, plunged from a New York hotel to his death 22 years ago, the drug had only been available to researchers in the United States a few months earlier by the Sandoz Laboratories of Switzerland.

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hen of the University of California at Los Angeles, another pioneer in LSD research, the drug disrupts the brain's normal ability to sort and code incoming information, thereby permitting an overflow sensation and a loss of one's "sense of self." Visual and tactile hallucinations are common.

In the early days, Dr. Cohen said, LSD was of interest to military and intelligence agencies because it was thought it might be a way of "breaking down a person's defenses" during interrogation. There was interest in the drug's usefulness as such an agent and in finding an antidote to protect American military and intelligence personnel.

The drug would also have obvious value as a way of temporarily incapacitating individuals. Because extremely small doses of the drug are effective, LSD is almost impossible to detect in body tissues. The drug was also studied by chemical warfare scientists for use in a gas or aerosol form

to knock out enemy armies. Accounts of Dr. Olson's death have indicated that he apparently committed suicide more than a week after receiving LSD. All trace of the drug is ordinarily broken down by the human body and excreted within 24 hours. For this reason, Dr. Cohen and other authorities said the suicide could hardly have been a direct result of the drug.

Rather, Dr. Cohen suggested, the drug probably stirred up such a storm in Dr. Olson's mind that some long repressed memory or other information became conscious and had a depressing effect on Dr. Olson's mood. Dr. Olson's wife has said that after taking LSD he seemed "very melancholy" and talked of quitting his job because of some mistake he had made.

Dr. Cohen suggested that although the immediate effects of LSD had long subsided, the drug had long depressed them. Dr. Olson became suicidal.

Dr. Judd Marmor, president of the American Psychiatric Association, issued a statement yesterday saying that giving LSD to a person without his full informed consent is unethical, even if done in the purported interest of "national security."

"Once you open that door," Dr. Marmor said, "you open the door to the potential for the ruthless modification of people's minds on the grounds of national security. I think that . . . would be a very dangerous thing from the standpoint of a democratic society."

LSD's Effects

From 1953 to 1966 the National Institute of Mental Health granted \$7.5-million to fund 84 research projects studying LSD. Some scientists examined the drug's chemical properties, some studied its effects in animals and a few gave it to human beings. The C.I.A.'s research on LSD is said to have continued from 1953 to 1973.

From the early nineteen-sixties on, it was increasingly apparent that quantities of LSD were being diverted from legitimate research by such persons as Dr. Leary, who upon expulsion from the Harvard faculty, went on to become a drug cult hero.

In 1965, faced with a growing barrage of publicity about drug abuse, Sandoz stopped production of LSD and the pace of research on the drug declined. It has now virtually ceased, even though some scientists such as Dr. Cohen believe LSD may still have a role to play in psychotherapy. Despite Sandoz's move, illicit sources of the drug, which is only moderately difficult to make under clandestine circumstances, continues to supply a reduced number of recreational users of LSD.