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Ex-C.I.A. Employee Says He Took LSD As a Reluctant 'Guinea Pig' in Tests

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER

A former employe of the Central Intelligence Agency says that he reluctantly agreed to serve as a "guinea pig" in agency experiments with LSD because he was made to feel "it was expected of you."

Robert V. Lashbrook, who worked for the C.I.A. for 12 years as a research scientist and is now a substitute high school science and mathematics teacher in California, said in a telephone interview Thursday that he had never directly been ordered to participate in drug tests but that his superiors and colleagues indicated "that you were expected to."

As part of his agency duties, Mr. Lashbrook said, he escorted Frank R. Olson, another Government scientist, to New York for psychiatric examinations after Mr. Olson had received LSD in an agency test, and was alone in a 10th floor hotel room with Mr. Olson when he plunged to his death 22 years ago.

In a report that for the first time linked the death to C.I.A. drug experiments, the Rockefeller commission said that the LSD had been administered to a person later identified as Mr. Olson, "without his knowledge."

But Mr. Lashbrook, who is 57 years old, said in the interview that he had been told that Mr. Olson and about a dozen other senior government scientists along with him at a technical meeting in November, 1953, "had agreed they might be potential guinea pigs at some point."

Didn't Like His Role

Mr. Lashbrook said he had consented to being a test subject during the meeting but that he had not been one of those given LSD then.

He said he had been administered LSD in experiments by the agency several times and that he did not like it but he felt under pressure not to say no.

"I don't know that anyone stood up and said, 'take this or you're fired,'" Mr. Lashbrook said, but he indicated that he felt he had no option.

Mr. Lashbrook said that the experiments with LSD had been considered dangerous because so little was known about the drug, and added, "Certainly I and everyone else considered it not something you would just do because you wanted to."



Associated Press

Robert V. Lashbrook

Mr. Lashbrook said he could never predict how he would react to LSD and crossed his fingers every time he was given the drug.

"It's not too bad if you're in a familiar setting. But if the plan calls for you going out on your own, you're unsure of yourself."

Olson 'Perfectly Normal'

Mr. Lashbrook said he had known Mr. Olson for a little more than a year and that he believed Mr. Olson's only experience with LSD had been at the technical meeting in November, 1953, after which he began to develop serious side effects. "Before that, as far as I know, he had been perfectly normal," Mr. Lashbrook said.

Last week the Olson family announced its intentions to sue the C.I.A. for what it called the "wrongful death" of Mr. Olson, and yesterday Police Commissioner Michael J. Codd said the family had asked for a full-scale investigation into the incident by the New York authorities.

Commissioner Codd said in an interview that he had ordered the detective bureau to "look at the whole matter as to just what may have been the totality of circumstances under which Mr. Olson died."

A spokesman in the detective bureau said the case had been referred to Deputy Chief William J. Averill, the chief of detectives in Manhattan, and that he was personally handling the initial review.

Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau said the family had asked him, among others, to investigate the case and that he was "looking into certain aspects of it," but he refused to elaborate.

The initial police investigation of the incident was concluded a few hours after the death, with most of the information in the police report coming from Mr. Lashbrook, who did not mention either the LSD or his affiliation with the C.I.A.

Dr. Dominick Di Maio, the acting chief medical examiner, has accused Mr. Lashbrook of withholding major facts in the case, but Mr. Lashbrook said that if there were omissions it was because he was not asked the right questions.