

New Study Yields Little on Death Of Biochemist Drugged by the CIA

By Brian Moar
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Scientists investigating the 1953 death of Frank R. Olson, an Army biochemist who plunged 13 stories after the CIA drugged him with LSD, announced yesterday that they doubted his death was a suicide but had uncovered no evidence to prove a murder.

Olson's family enlisted the group of forensic researchers led by James E. Starrs, a George Washington University law and forensics professor, which announced its findings yesterday, the 41st anniversary of Olson's death. The six-month investigation yielded little new information and did nothing to shake long-standing suspicions by Olson's family that he was killed by the government.

"The scientific evidence we have garnered gives no strong comfort to either those who maintain that Dr. Olson committed suicide nor . . . those who are convinced his death resulted from a homicide," said Starrs, who conducted similar investigations into the deaths of Lizzie Borden's ax-murdered parents and assassinated Sen. Huey P. Long of Louisiana.

However, Starrs said his team's "nonscientific" investigation—which included interviews with police inves-

tigators and witnesses—was "starkly suggestive of homicide."

Starrs cited numerous inconsistencies in accounts of Olson's death at a New York hotel, and he questioned why a suicidal man would leap through a closed window with a drawn blind. The forensic experts found no cuts on his body nor traces of LSD, although it quickly dissolves in human tissue.

"I am exceedingly skeptical of the view that Dr. Olson went through that window on his own," Starrs said. "That leaves the strong probability, in my view, that he went through at the hands of someone else. [But] I cannot say that with the scientific evidence alone."

Olson's sons, Eric and Nils, declined to comment yesterday on the findings of the scientific panel.

Members of Olson's family, who live in Frederick, Md., did not learn until 1975 that he had been drugged. They later received a \$750,000 settlement from the government and a personal apology from President Ford. But as family members read declassified documents in the years that followed, they were left with more questions than answers.

When their mother died last year, Eric and Nils Olson decided to have their father's body removed from a

Frederick cemetery and reburied beside her in another cemetery nearby. Before moving the body, they asked Starrs to perform an autopsy.

Starrs said it now would be up to the Olson family and prosecutors to decide whether the case should be reopened, but he added, "It is clear to me there is a desperate need for subpoena authority."

Dave Christian, a CIA spokesman, said the agency was not inclined to investigate the matter, which was reviewed by Congress in the 1970s. But he said the CIA would cooperate if police reopened the case.

Olson's body was exhumed in June and underwent extensive testing to pinpoint the cause of death. The pathologists determined he struck a wooden barricade outside the hotel before hitting the pavement feet first.

Starrs said some team members were troubled by a wound above Olson's left eye that appeared to suggest a blow to the head.

Olson plunged from a room at the Hotel Statler on Nov. 28, 1953, nine days after the CIA gave him LSD without his knowledge. The experiment was part of a CIA program known as MK-ULTRA to study the effects of LSD and other drugs for intelligence and military purposes.

After learning he was given the



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James M. Frost, left, a forensic pathologist, points during a slide presentation about the autopsy of Frank R. Olson. Seated in front of Frost are James E. Starrs, a forensics professor, and Jeffrey C. Kercheval, a forensic chemist.

mind-bending drug, Olson sank into a paranoid depression. He told his Army superiors he wanted to quit his job as one of the nation's top germ-warfare scientists, and his family now believes he was slain because he had become a security risk.

Olson was taken from Fort Detrick, in Frederick, to New York to meet

with one of the few doctors then familiar with LSD-related behavior. Though Olson reportedly was behaving oddly, CIA handlers provided him with only cursory supervision.

Robert Lashbrook, the CIA employee who was with Olson in the hotel room on the night of his death, told police he was awakened by the

sound of breaking glass. Reached by telephone yesterday at his California home, Lashbrook said he hoped the panel's conclusions would end suspicions that have dogged him for years.

"Sure I'm relieved," Lashbrook said. "I don't see that they had anything to begin with."