

Early Tests Contradict '53 Claim

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By Brian Moar
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Preliminary results of a forensic examination appear to contradict government assertions that germ-warfare researcher Frank R. Olson, who died in 1953 after unwittingly taking LSD in a CIA experiment, jumped to his death from a Manhattan hotel.

Severe damage to Olson's skull did not appear consistent with a 13-story fall, according to James E. Starrs, a George Washington University professor of law and forensic science.

Starrs, who examined Olson's remains after they were exhumed in June in Frederick, Md., said injuries to the skull and other parts of Olson's body suggested that his death was not the simple suicide that the government has portrayed for 40 years.

Starrs's conclusions add to the Olson family's decades-old suspicion that Olson was slain. Family members believe Olson, one of the nation's top germ-warfare researchers,

was killed because LSD he unknowingly took made him erratic and irrational and a threat to reveal classified information.

"The suspicions are looming much larger," said Starrs, characterizing the death as "curious," or even "sinister." Starrs also has conducted forensic examinations in the cases of Lizzie Borden's ax-murdered parents and assassinated Louisiana Sen. Huey P. Long.

The CIA has denied any foul play in Olson's death, which occurred with a CIA agent present in the room. At the time, the agent told police he awakened to a loud noise and discovered the hotel window smashed and Olson lying on the sidewalk below.

CIA spokesman David Christian said yesterday he was unaware of Starr's team's findings and could not comment. He said the death had been thoroughly investigated and no evidence of homicide ever had been discovered.

The family's suspicions were aroused in 1975, when the CIA released files pertaining to Olson's death to a panel investigating al-

of Researcher's Suicide

legedly improper and illegal CIA activities in the United States.

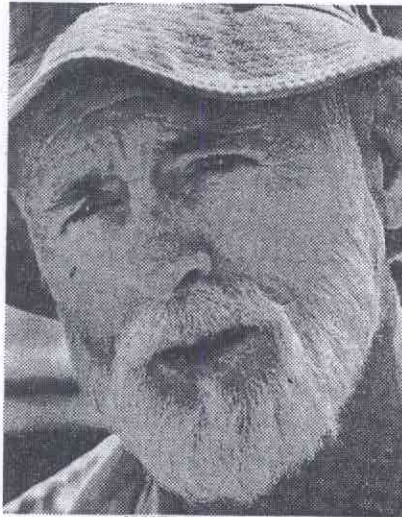
The family learned that Olson was an unknowing participant in a CIA program called MK-ULTRA, a secret program to study the possible uses of LSD and other drugs for intelligence or military purposes.

Nine days before Olson's death on Nov. 28, 1953, a CIA scientist slipped LSD into Olson's after-dinner drink at a secret Maryland scientific retreat, and the normally cheerful Olson became depressed and began behaving erratically.

President Ford invited Olson's family to the White House in 1975 to personally apologize for the CIA's use of Olson in an experiment without his permission. Also, the government paid the family \$750,000 to settle their claim that the CIA was responsible for what was then believed to be his suicide.

The family has fought over the years to obtain CIA documents detailing the events leading to Olson's death, but Olson's son, Er-

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JAMES E. STARRS

... "suspicions are looming much larger"

Family of Researcher Has Always Suspected Foul Play in Man's Death

OLSON, From B1

ic, a Frederick psychologist, said the documents were heavily censored and often contradictory.

Starrs conducted an autopsy on Olson's body and X-rayed the remains for clues to his death.

"There are so many fractures in the skull that it was not possible that he received this type of injury simply from falling out of a window," Starrs said. "It would not be possible unless he were on a trampoline. You don't bounce around like that; when you hit pavement, you hit pavement."

Also, Starrs said his team found no evidence of the glass cuts described in the original New York autopsy report. He said Olson's body was preserved well enough for such cuts to have been visible. If Olson smashed through the hotel window to his death, his body would have been cut, pathologists said.

Starrs said his examination showed that Olson landed on his feet, shattering both legs and causing massive internal trauma that left him dead within minutes. The type of injuries Olson received in his fall seem inconsistent with the skull fractures, Starrs said.

Starrs said he would conduct further tests on Olson's skull to determine exactly how the damage was caused.

Starrs and his team are awaiting results of toxicological studies that could show whether drugs or toxins were present in the scientist's body at the time of death.

Starrs traveled to Manhattan yesterday with five members of his research team to question a key witness and re-create the scene where the scientist plunged from a 13th-floor window of the Hotel Statler, now the Hotel Pennsylvania.

Relying upon the recollections of Armond Pastore, night manager of the Hotel Statler on the morning of Nov. 28, 1953, Starrs etched a chalk body outline on the sidewalk of Seventh Avenue facing Madison Square Garden and Penn Station. The lunch time spectacle brought the Manhattan sidewalk to a standstill as more than 100 New Yorkers gawked at the scientific team taking measurements of a volunteer sprawled on the sidewalk.

Asked whether he believed Olson jumped from the window, Pastore said, "No. I think he had a lot of help."

Eric Olson, 49, said he is most troubled by one omission from the government's original report on his father's death. Olson believes that it is odd that the report did not mention that his father obviously had become a security risk because of his bad reaction to the LSD.

After he learned that he had been given the mind-bending drug without his consent or knowledge, Frank Olson sank into a deep, paranoid depression, according to his son and the government report on his death. He told his wife that he had made a "terrible mistake" and wanted to quit his job as one of the nation's top germ warfare researchers, the reports said.

Olson was taken to New York to meet with one of the



A family snapshot pictures Dr. Frank Olson, a germ-warfare researcher, in the early 1950s.

few doctors then familiar with LSD-related behavior. Olson's behavior grew more intensely irrational. Two nights before his death, Olson threw away his wallet and wandered the streets before being found sitting in the hotel lobby the next morning.

Despite his odd behavior, Olson's CIA handlers provided only cursory supervision.

After his death, instead of calling for an ambulance or police, the CIA agent in Olson's room, Robert Lashbrook, reportedly called a number on Long Island. Pastore said the conversation was overheard by a hotel operator, who relayed it to him.

"Well, he's gone," Lashbrook reportedly said.

"That's too bad," the other man replied, and both hung up, Pastore said.

Reached by telephone at his California home yesterday, Lashbrook said that conversation never took place.

"If I'd said what they claim I said," Lashbrook said, "do you think that the police would have thought it was a suicide and let things go?"