

'53 LSD Death Still Baffles

By Earl Lane

WASHINGTON BUREAU

Washington — A research team that analyzed the remains of an Army biochemist who died in a plunge from a New York City hotel days after unknowingly receiving a dose of LSD from the CIA said yesterday it was unable to determine if there was any foul play in the 1953 death.

James E. Starrs, professor of law and forensic science at George Washington University, said the scientific evidence in the case of Frank Olson is inconclusive.

But Starrs, leader of the research team, said he remains troubled by nonscientific aspects of the investigation, including a lack of cooperation by some former CIA officials and others who are familiar with the case.

"I am exceedingly skeptical of the view that Doctor Olson went through that window on his own," Starrs said.

Olson's fall from a 13th-floor room of the old Statler Hotel came nine days after he had been given a drink laced with LSD — without his knowledge or consent — by a researcher for the CIA.

Olson's death was considered a suicide by investigators at the time. His family never learned that there might be more to the case until 1975, when the Rockefeller Commission uncovered information about Olson during its probe of illegal CIA domestic operations.

President Gerald R. Ford later apologized to the Olson family for the Cold War drug experiment, and Congress approved compensation of \$750,000. Still, Olson's sons have sought to learn what happened on

the day their father died.

Olson, who unwittingly took the LSD in an after-dinner drink at a gathering of Army and CIA personnel at a secret Maryland retreat, was left extremely disturbed by the experience. He was referred to a doctor in New York by the CIA. An agency employee, Robert Lashbrook, stayed in the same hotel room but said he saw nothing the night Olson died. "I was asleep at the time and didn't see him go out the window," Lashbrook said in a June interview. Starrs said the unanswered questions surrounding the Olson case are "rankly and starkly suggestive of homicide." He cited a large bump over Olson's left eye. There was no underlying fracture, Starrs said, suggesting that Olson may have been stunned by a blow in the hotel room and then thrown through the window.

But Dr. James L. Frost, a member of the research team and deputy chief medical examiner for West Virginia, said the bump is consistent with Olson's "hitting his head and going through that window" of his own accord.

The team exhumed Olson's body in June from a Frederick, Md., cemetery at the request of Olson's sons, Eric and Nils. The findings of a post-exhumation autopsy and other studies were outlined at a news briefing on the 41st anniversary of Olson's death.

Eric Olson said he wanted to read the new report and consult a lawyer before commenting, but he said, "I really appreciate the work that they've done, the quality and extent of it."



Frank Olson