



Surviving family of Frank Olson: Lisa, left, Eric, his widow, Alice, and Nils, at their press conference.

By Douglas Chevallier—The Washington Post

Family Blames CIA for Father's Death

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By Austin Scott

Washington Post Staff Writer

OLD BRADDOCK, Md., July 10—Twenty-two years ago, the CIA gave Frank Olson and four other scientists some after-dinner cordials—without telling them the drinks were laced with LSD. One week later, Frank Olson was dead.

His son, Eric, who was 9 years old, doesn't remember that November week when his usually happy, loving and outgoing father suddenly turned moody and withdrawn or when his father was put into a CIA-supplied car and driven out of his family's life.

Four days later, a 2 a.m. telephone call informed them that Olson, a civilian chemist working on a secret CIA project, had plunged to his death through a 10th floor window of a

New York City hotel room, an apparent suicide.

The family—Olson's widow, Alice, sons Eric and Nils, and daughter, Lisa—held a news conference at their home here today to outline how they felt at learning 22 years later some of what really happened.

They said they will file a lawsuit against the CIA, perhaps within two weeks, asking "several million dollars" in damages from the agency for "illegally and negligently" administering the LSD.

"I think that the CIA and any other agency has to become accountable for its actions," Eric said.

Throughout the 22 years of not knowing what really happened, or why, the family had rejected the idea that Olson committed suicide. Mrs. Olson described him as a very warm, family-

loving man who underwent an abrupt personality change after a CIA meeting.

"I was convinced that my husband's death was not a deliberate or willful act," she said. "I felt that he must have plunged through that window in a state of panic brought on by I knew not what. This was the impression I tried to convey to my children."

As the children, all under 10 at the time, grew older, the family began discussing Olson's death, trying to puzzle out what had happened.

Last Thanksgiving, when they gathered for a family dinner, they brought the subject up again, turning it over, looking for clues.

The family said that at the time Olson died, Nov. 28, 1953, the only

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Family Blames CIA in Death

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person with him was Robert Lashbrook, an employee of the CIA, who had taken him to New York to see a "politically reliable" psychiatrist about the apparently strong and lingering after-effects of the drug.

Their first clue to the real story came June 11, 1975, when Mrs. Olson read the Rockefeller commission's disclosure of a 10-year CIA program of experiments using LSD (a hallucinogenic drug) on unsuspecting persons in which a person died.

The commission did not publicly identify the man who died as the result of those experiments. But the dates were right, and so were the details. A relative telephoned one of Olson's former colleagues, who, Mrs. Olson said, "confirmed to us that the man we were reading about in the newspapers was my husband."

Neither the CIA, nor the Rockefeller commission, which knew Olson's identity, has contacted the family since the story came to light, she said.

The family refused to disclose the name of Olson's colleague, but it was learned he is retired Army Col. Vincent Ruwat who was Olson's boss. He also was one of the five scientists given LSD.

"We are one family whose history has been fundamentally altered by illegal CIA activity," Eric, now 39, said in a statement that the family took turns reading today.

"In this we have something in common with those families in Chile whose hopes for a better life were destroyed by CIA interven-



FRANK OLSON
... civilian biochemist

tion in elections, in attempted economic reform, and in the effort to establish a noncapitalist form of government.

"We have something in common with those families in Cuba whose struggles for a better life, free of the dominating exploitation of multinational corporations, has been made so much more difficult by CIA plots and schemes.

"And we have something in common with those families in Southeast Asia whose heroic efforts to be free of foreign interference have had to cope with CIA subversion."

While the family is aware of "the difference between struggles undergone in relative affluence and those endured in poverty and war," the family statement said, "we think it is crucial to point out the connections between American treachery and immorality abroad and those same tendencies evident at home . . . The

CIA that participates in the assassination of foreign leaders is the same CIA that infringes the rights of American citizens."

In many ways, Eric said, what they know now does not make sense. They hope the full story may emerge as a result of their lawsuit.

"This (drug) was given to five high-level scientists," Eric said. "We are asked now to believe that the CIA took an incredible risk with these scientists and we don't know why."

Olson and his four colleagues were working at nearby Ft. Detrick, in the Army's bacteriological warfare laboratories, Mrs. Olson said. "Under extremely stringent secrecy and security regulations, Frank and his colleagues did research on the most lethal microorganisms known to humanity, those that transmit such diseases as bubonic plague."

The New York psychiatrist who saw him, Dr. Harold Alexander Abramson, according to Lisa, "said he was totally irrational, yet he was not placed in a hospital. He was housed on the 10th floor of a hotel in New York."

"I feel pretty confident there are a lot of things we still don't know . . . In this case there's another possibility. There may have been some intent . . . We have no reason to believe they wanted to kill my father, but it's possible," said Eric.

"The news we received on June 11, 1975, had a dramatic effect on this family," said Lisa.

"Suddenly we learn that Alice Olson's being left in early adulthood to raise a family alone, we children left to grow up without a fa-

ther—we learn that these deprivations were not necessary at all. And we suddenly learn that for 22 years we were lied to, led to believe that my father had a fatal nervous breakdown."

The family said that two weeks before his death, Olson attended five days of meetings with members of his Special Operations research group at a mountain retreat. The LSD was administered there on a Friday. According to the Rockefeller commission report, the five subjects were told about 20 minutes later that they had been given a drug as subjects in an experiment, and their reactions would be observed.

"He came back to this house right after noon and he was very quiet, he was an entirely different person," Mrs. Olson said. "I didn't know what had happened. I just knew that something was terribly wrong. The entire weekend he was very melancholy and talked about a mistake he had made. He said he was going to leave his job."

Olson went to work the following Monday prepared to resign, but was reassured by his colleagues, and came home in better spirits. Tuesday morning he went to work, but came home about 10 a.m., saying he had been advised to see a psychiatrist, and that his colleagues feared he might hurt his wife.

That same morning, a car driven by a Special Operations Division employee arrived at the Olson home to take Olson to Washington, where he would be flown to New York to see a psychiatrist. His family never saw him alive again.

LSD Fatality Is Linked to Detrick Unit

7-11-73

By Bill Richards

Washington Post Staff Writer

FREDERICK, Md., July 10

— Like Chinese boxes, the super-secret biological and germ warfare research and development program that the U.S. Army conducted for years at Fort Detrick here contained secrets within secrets.

Before being phased out during the early 1970s, the program employed 1,685 persons, most of them civilians, who worked in the shadows of the Catoctin Mountains on bacteriological research projects that are still classified secrets today.

One whitewashed cinder-block laboratory, Building 459, was the home of the program's Special Operations Division, described by a military spokesman as "a program within a program," also classified. About 50 bacteriologists and biological chemists worked under an Army colonel in Building 459 in research on disease agents as deadly as the bubonic plague.

Within Building 459, in the most secret project of all, a handful of researchers were entrusted with a contract let to the Special Operations Division in 1953 by the Central Intelligence Agency.

No one mentioned the CIA's name — even among themselves, according to one member of this group — and no one in the group really knew what any of the others was doing in his work on the contract. But one of the substances the group was studying for the CIA was LSD.

Periodically, according to a member of the group, the researchers on the CIA contract met to confer in ou

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of-the-way spots in western Maryland and West Virginia. It was at one of those gatherings in 1953 that a CIA agent slipped LSD into the after-dinner drink of Dr. Frank Olson, according to sources here.

The experience left Olson, who was known to his colleagues here as an outgoing, friendly man and a brilliant researcher, emotionally shaken and led to his apparent suicide when he jumped or fell from a 10th-story hotel window in New York, according to the account given by his wife and children at their press conference here today.

Olson's family said they believed he was accompanied to New York to see a psychiatrist by a CIA agent, Robert Lashbrook, and two of Olson's colleagues from the Special Operations Division at Fort Detrick.

Sources here familiar with the project said in interviews today that one of the Special Operations researchers who went with Olson to New York was Vincent L. Ruwet, 59, then Olson's supervisor and now a bacteriologist for Micro-Biological Associates in Bethesda, Md.

The sources said that Ruwet was, along with Olson, among those Special Operations researchers who were given LSD without their prior knowledge at the

meeting with the CIA in 1953. After the incident and Olson's death were mentioned, but without Olson's name, in the Rockefeller Commission report on the CIA's domestic activities, Ruwet confirmed the story and Olson's part in it to Olson's family last month, according to the sources.

Ruwet refused to confirm or deny this tonight, but he said he sought legal help from the Army today after learning that his name was connected with the LSD incident and that the Olson family was planning to sue the government over Olson's death.

"I'm seeking legal counsel for advice, not because I've done anything wrong," said Ruwet, who was an Army colonel at the time of the LSD incident. He retired from the Army after serving nine years ago as commander of the entire germ warfare installation at Fort Detrick.

"I believe I'm almost certain to be called either for the defense or for the government," Ruwet said. "I asked the Army to provide me with legal counsel as a retired officer. I'm not going to spend my hard-earned money on this."

Ruwet said his family was close to the Olson family and that he has spoken about the LSD incident with several members of the Olson family. He refused, however, to provide any information about the Special

Operations Divisions activities or about the events that led up the Olson's death.

Other sources familiar with the project said here today that the CIA contract was so secret that members who were working on various aspects of it did not even discuss their work with each other, which was unusual in the close-knit Special Operations Division.

One of the former researchers on the project said they were experimenting with, among other things, the production of a gas that could be laced with LSD to immobilize an enemy force.

"Most of the work the Special Operations group was doing was defensive in nature," said the former researcher, who is now retired. "But this part obviously could have been offensive or defensive in nature."

Several former members of the project said Olson's death had never been adequately explained to them and that a number of rumors surrounded the New York trip.

"We were all shocked," said Dr. Joseph J. Stubbs, a bacteriologist who was a close friend of Olson. Stubbs said he did not previously know of the LSD incident, despite his friendship with Olson.

"I still can't believe that he committed suicide the way they said," said Stubbs. "It's like it's coming out of the blue now. I never heard anyone talk about LSD after Olson's death and I still

think there's something odd about this.

"We were all baffled by it," said Stubbs. "We couldn't look back on any reason why he did it. But we were not trained to understand that sort of thing."

According to the Rockefeller Commission report, the Olson family was told that his death had resulted from "circumstances arising out of an experiment undertaken in the course of his (Olson's) official duties for the United States government."

As Olson's superior, Ruwet said it was his job specifically to notify the family of the death. He declined, however, to say what he told the Olson family in 1953.

Ruwet said today Olson's death definitely resulted from a suicidal or accidental fall from the hotel window. "From the information that I am aware of," he said, "I can definitely say that there was no evidence of foul play in Olson's death and I think I'm in a position to say that confidently."

Following the dismantling of the U.S. biological warfare program, Fort Detrick was converted for use by a cancer research center and other Army uses. Building 459 is now being readied for use by the U.S. Army Medical Bioengineering Research and Development Laboratory, which an Army spokesman said develops medical support equipment like prosthetic devices and materials for Army field hospitals.

CIA Panel Abolition Is Urged

7/11/78
By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The House Rules Committee yesterday recommended abolition of the embattled House intelligence committee and called for a fresh start to the investigation.

By a vote of 10 to 4, the Rules Committee adopted a proposal by Rep. Richard Bolling (D-Mo.) to reorganize the committee and get the dormant inquiry moving.

Republican-sponsored moves to scuttle the entire investigation and then to limit it to the Central Intelligence Agency were beaten down. Similar moves are expected when the issue reaches the House floor, perhaps next week.

The present 10-member intelligence committee was created nearly six months ago to investigate the CIA and the rest of the nation's so-called "intelligence community," but it became bogged down, first in a prolonged search for a staff director and finally in an irreconcilable dispute between chairman Lucien Nedzi (D-Mich.), and fellow Democrats.

Most of the present members are likely to be reappointed to the enlarged 13-member committee, but both Nedzi and his most outspoken critic on the committee, Rep. Michael Harrington (D-Mass.), are expected to be left out.

The fresh choices would be left up to Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) who also made the original selections.

Rep. Otis G. Pike (D-N.Y.), a member of the House since 1961, was reportedly under consideration to replace Nedzi as chairman. In any case, none of the present committee Democrats is expected to get the post.

The Rules Committee met shortly after a final and re-

portedly abrasive meeting in Albert's office with Nedzi and the Democratic committee members who unsuccessfully sought his ouster last month. They had accused him of sitting on evidence of CIA misdeeds and violations of law since 1973 as chairman of a standing House CIA subcommittee and maintained that he could not conduct an effective inquiry now.

The meeting with the Speaker was ostensibly one last effort to patch up the rift, but it was fruitless. At one point there was some shouting, reportedly between Nedzi and Rep. Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.).

In proposing his solution, Bolling told the Rules Committee that Nedzi and Harrington were the "two poles" of the dispute and suggested that both should be dropped. He said the strength of the other Democrats on the committee, even if reappointed, would be diluted by making the new panel consist of 13 members—9 Democrats and 4 Republicans.

Alluding to the sharp division within the House on the issue, Bolling said that one side feels the committee "has done no good and some harm" in its six fitful months while the other side "feels that members of the Rules Committee are conspiring with the Pentagon to cover up the investigation."

Rep. B. F. Sisk (D-Calif.) called Bolling's proposal a "most reasonable and rational approach" and immediately dropped his own suggestion to create a new 10-member committee that would have been confined to investigating the CIA.

Rep. Morgan Murphy (D-Ill.), a member of the intelligence committee as well as of the Rules Committee, and Rep. Andrew Young (D-Ga.) protested that excluding the FBI, the Internal Revenue Service and all the other intelligence agencies from the investigation would indeed smack of a "cover-up" in the public's mind.

Rep. James R. Quillen (R-Tenn.) who said he saw no value in a House investigation of the CIA alone, insisted on a straight vote to abolish the Nedzi committee. It was rejected 9 to 4, with Sisk voting "present."