

Former CIA agent describes the last days with Dr. Olson

F. Pool
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Robert Lashbrook, a former CIA employe and the last person to see Dr. Frank Olson alive, has been located and has told what he remembers of those days in November, 1953 when Olson was given the drug LSD by the CIA and then apparently committed suicide several days later.

The Washington Post reports in its Friday edition, that Lashbrook is now a high school science teacher in Ojai, Calif., 80 miles north of Los Angeles.

Lashbrook told the Post he remembers many details of the meeting at which the hallucinogenic drug LSD was given to Olson and three other top level research scientists at Fort Detrick without their knowledge.

He also remembers accompanying Olson to New York City to see a psychiatrist after Olson had an adverse reaction. And he remembers waking up in their hotel room to find that Olson had plunged through the 10th-floor window to his death on the sidewalk below.

"I woke up because there was a noise," Lashbrook said. "I turned on the light and noticed Frank wasn't there. I saw the shade. It was one of those pull-type window shades and that was going around and around and the window was broken . . . And then I saw him down on the sidewalk below . . . There's a train station there, and a number of people were running from the train station to the sidewalk . . ."

Asked what he did then, Lashbrook said:

"As I recall, I called the (hotel) desk. I don't recall (what I said) except to inform them, and ask them to call someone . . . I put on my clothes and waited . . . I figured the police would arrive sooner or later."

Asked if he left the room, he said, "No, I did not. I stayed in the room. . . . It was 10 floors up, a distance away. If I'd gone down, what could I have done, because as I say, I saw people running over where he was . . . I figured the police would be wanting to ask questions of (me)."

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In the four weeks since the CIA's experiments with LSD were first disclosed, no one has contacted him about the matter, Lashbrook said. The Rockefeller commission did not contact him before it wrote its report on improper or illegal CIA activities. His former colleagues at the CIA have not contacted him, nor have congressional investigators.

And except for one time a week or two after Olson's death, he has not contacted the Olson family in the intervening 22 years, he said.

The Olson family announced at a press conference from their Old Braddock home last week that they are preparing to sue the CIA for several million dollars for "illegally and negligently" administering LSD to Dr. Olson and for subsequent cover-ups of true details and reasons for his death.

Mrs. Alice Olson said at the conference that she just found out about her husband's participation in the LSD experiment a month ago by reading newspaper reports of CIA drug activities.

"For 22 years," she said, "the only details the family knew of the immediate circumstances surrounding Frank Olson's death were that he was taken to New York to see a psychiatrist and that he jumped or fell to his death."

In a two hour telephone interview, conducted by the Washington Post, Lashbrook went step-by-step through some of the things he remembers from that period of his life.

"Of course, the whole thing shook me up quite a lot," he said. "And as a matter of fact, I was leery of getting a hotel room high up in a hotel. If Olson had decided to do something like that, why

couldn't I?"

Lashbrook said he was one of as many as four CIA employees present when LSD was given to four top level scientists from the Army's biological warfare research center at Fort Detrick in November 1953. He did not receive the drug then, he said, but he had earlier.

The drug was administered on the first night of a three-day secret seminar — documents indicate it was Wednesday, Nov. 18 — and the scientists were not told about it until afterward.

By the following Tuesday, Olson had developed such severe reactions that Lashbrook took him to New York. Olson died early Saturday morning.

Lashbrook said he did not tell the New York police investigating Olson's death that LSD was involved because he wasn't sure the drug, administered more than a week earlier, was responsible for the death. " . . . It was certainly controversial as to what the direct cause and effect might have been," he said.

While he waited for the police, he said, he telephoned a fellow CIA employe in Washington, D.C., as well as the psychiatrist, a doctor with a high security clearance who had been doing research on LSD, to inform them of the death.

"I think everybody got pretty frightened at that point," he said. Asked if there was a great deal of fear within the CIA as a result, he replied, "Certainly."

Lashbrook, 57, lives in Ojai with his wife and three children in a three-story house surrounded by a chain-link fence, according to special correspondent Robert Myers. The neighborhood is an attractive, semirural, older section with comfortable houses.

He said the CIA was his principal

employer from 1951 to 1963, after which he went to work for the Ventura Division of Northrop Corp. A chemist by profession, he has a PhD and is listed in "American Men and Women of Science."

Another CIA employe who was in the room when Olson was given LSD, Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, is listed in the same publication as a biochemist who, from 1951 on, was a "consultant, U.S. Department of Defense."

Lashbrook said Gottlieb was the agent

(Con)

he telephoned in Washington to inform him of Olson's death.

Lashbrook said he was only one of "a number of" CIA operatives who acted as liaison with a wide variety of LSD testing projects in the Army, and in the National Institutes of Mental Health.

The CIA reportedly has refused to comment on any aspect of what happened in those drug-testing programs.

A July 11 letter the CIA to John Marks of the Center for National Security Studies here notes:

"Please be advised that the CIA did not provide any documents or any other written material on this topic to the Rockefeller commission." It is signed Charles E. Savage for Robert S. Young, Freedom of Information coordinator.

Lashbrook's account does not square in several important respects with an account given to the Washington Post Thursday by Armand D. Pastore, who was assistant night clerk at New York's Statler Hotel in 1953. Pastore is now manager of the Diplomat Motor Hotel in Ocean City, Md.

Lashbrook said the police arrived in probably not more than 10 minutes, and that he was awakened by Olson's accident sometime after 3 a.m.

Pastore said it couldn't have been after 3 a.m. because the doorman who

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notified him of the accident went off duty at 2 a.m.

"Sometime before 2 a.m. the doorman came to me and told me someone came out the window," Pastore said. "He was lying on the sidewalk when I got there and he was still alive and trying to mumble something but I couldn't make it out. It was all garbled and I was trying to get his name. We got a priest, and he stopped mumbling before they got him in the ambulance.

"I went and checked at the desk and saw there were two people there. I went up and started to knock and then decided there might be trouble so I sent down for the police and waited . . . waited about one half-hour and then I went in with the police. We opened the door and there was this fellow sitting in the bathroom with his head in his hands. He had on his undershorts or his pajamas. He wasn't dressed."

Pastore said that "on the sidewalk Olson was broke up something awful."

Lashbrook said he was told at the time that the scientists he worked with had agreed among themselves in advance that they would be given LSD, but without knowing exactly when it would be administered.

"It was my understanding that everyone involved had agreed in

things . . . I don't really know what I should say and what I shouldn't."

As Lashbrook recalled it, Olson acted "no different from anyone else," after being given LSD. "The general effect is some agitation, confusion. In general the effect is such it makes it difficult for a person at night to go to sleep, and as I recall, that went on. People jabbered away until late at night and early the next morning."

He recalled no emotional upsets or tendencies toward violence.

Early the following week, Lashbrook said, he learned that Olson was showing signs of being upset. ". . . Somewhere, and I don't know exactly where, the decision was made that Dr. (Harold) Abramson (a New York psychiatrist) was probably in the best position to help out. He was familiar, he had done pioneering work with the material . . . I guess arrangements were made for Olson to see Dr. Abramson."

Although Lashbrook knew Abramson, they said little to each other, he said, because someone had briefed Abramson on the case before they arrived.

"We just didn't walk in cold," he said.

Lashbrook said he saw no signs of undue disturbance in Olson on the Friday night before he died.

"If he had, I would have stayed up all night with him," he said. "We had dinner

principle," he said. "I was not present when this was done."

Some of the scientists had taken LSD before, and for some it was their first time, he said. Olson, he said, was a first-timer. He did not recall whether a doctor was present, but said, ". . . There would have been one immediately available."

Lashbrook said he did not attend any other meetings where Olson or the people who worked with him were given LSD but he refused to say whether he had participated in other meetings where people were given LSD.

The meeting on Nov. 18, 1953, began with a technical discussion that included the subject of LSD, Lashbrook said. In the evening, when work was over and the scientists were in a "free period," not discussing business, the LSD was administered. "I think it was in an after-dinner liquer or something like that."

Lashbrook said he was "not too sure" whether someone on the inside, or the outside, decided who should be given LSD "and in any case, I don't really want to name them."

He didn't want to comment on whether the drug was put in the drinks before or after they were brought into the room.

"You see, I don't really know a lot of

at the hotel together. He seemed quite normal . . . just small talk. He didn't talk about anything that bothered me . . . What probably happened was that this sort of brought out something in the past that bothered him, and I never really was able to determine just exactly what this was."