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Frank Olson's Legacy to America

By CHARLES McC. MATHIAS JR.

No greater tragedy has come to public attention recently than the case of Frank Olson, the Marylander who was the victim of a CIA-related drug experiment that cost him his life 22 years ago.

In situations of the sort that existed when this drug experiment was conducted, it was a deliberate government policy to keep as much of the truth from surfacing as possible. The Olson family was told what amounts to a falsehood simply because so much of the truth was obscured and denied to them.

How much better it would have been if the government had leveled with the Olson family from the very beginning. No vital state secrets that affected national security would have been involved — simply a straight-forward recital of Frank Olson's involvement, and the facts pertaining to his condition. The government would not have been damaged, the national security would not have been prejudiced, but the Olson family would have been given some comfort and some understanding for the otherwise inexplicable tragic blow that fell on them.

I think the government should learn a lesson from the tragic case of Frank Olson. It should learn that we have to do justice to our own people — that above all, we have to level with American citizens. We have to tell them the facts. We have to be honest and straight-forward with them.

This can be the legacy of Frank Olson, and an important contribution to the America for which he worked.