

CIA's use of LSD cited in biochemist's death

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Dr. Frank R. Olson, a former biochemist at Fort Detrick, has been identified by his Frederick family as the civilian employe of the U.S. Army who committed apparent suicide after being secretly administered LSD by Central Intelligence Agency personnel in November, 1953.

The truth behind Olson's death, hidden from questioning co-workers and his bereaved family for nearly 22 years, is finally coming to light following the June 10, 1975 release of the Rockefeller Commission report investigating CIA activities within the United States which included an account of Olson's bizarre death without identifying him.

Olson's family, announced Thursday

by their attorney, David Rudovsky of Philadelphia, will file, within the next two months, a "several million dollar law suit" against the CIA for "negligently and illegally" administering LSD to their husband and father and for subsequent cover-ups of the true details and reasons of his death.

A former colleague of Olson's in Fort Detrick's Special Operations division revealed that he and three other researchers besides Olson had been given LSD by CIA employes on at least one occasion.

The disclosures by Olson's family now confirmed by David W. Bellin of the Rockefeller Commission make true suspicions of some of Olson's co-workers that he had died as a result of drug tests by a secret government agency.

The Rockefeller report on the CIA states that a man (Olson) was given LSD while attending a meeting with CIA personnel working on a project that involved the administering of such drugs to Americans.

"This individual was not made aware he had been given LSD until about 20 minutes after it had been administered. He developed serious side effects and was sent to New York with a CIA escort for psychiatric treatment," the commission report said.

"Several days later he jumped from a tenth floor window of his hotel room and died as a result."

Olson's family was told only that he "fell or jumped" from his tenth floor Hotel Statler room in New York at 2:30 on the morning of Nov. 28, 1953.

His wife, Mrs. Alice Wicks Olson of Old Braddock, stated in the prepared statement Thursday that her husband had returned from a meeting with other members of the Special Operations division research group conveying "self-doubt, self-recrimination and great anxiety."

At the time Mrs. Olson attributed her

husband's mood to the nature of his highly secretive work in chemical germ warfare research. But during the

ensuing week Olson failed to improve his irrational behavior and was advised by persons at Fort Detrick to seek psychiatric help.

Dr. Olson was taken to New York by Special Operations employes and CIA liaison personnel and never seen again by his family. According to a colleague of Olson's at least four other Special Operations employes were also given doses of LSD by CIA agents.

Olson's colleague, who came to the family to verify that the recently publicized 'LSD suicide victim' was indeed Frank Olson, has not been identified.*

Rudovsky said he expected, if subpoenaed, the colleague would come forward to testify in the Olson's court case.

Rudovsky said he also expected that several CIA officials and perfunctories would be called to testify in the court case.

Olson's family said it did not become

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aware of the CIA inspired details surrounding his death until they read accounts of the Rockefeller Commission findings in the June 11, 1975, newspapers.

According to the Rockefeller report the CIA conducted its drug experiments on unsuspecting subjects until 1963. The report also states that all CIA files related to the drug testing were ordered destroyed in 1973.

Several of Dr. Olson's co-workers at Fort Detrick disclosed that many rumors and suspicions surrounded reports of Olson's death in 1953.

"There was a lot of discussion about it," said one co-worker, "and one of the stories which circulated had it just about the way it happened. Of course we didn't know what LSD was back then."

"Whenever anything happened like that," said another co-worker, "there were suspicions and we wondered about what might have really happened."

The Special Operations research division at Detrick was deeply involved with chemical biological warfare and was carried out under Defense Department classifications for tight security and secrecy.

Olson's family says they have reason to believe that other CIA activities surrounded the Detrick research group and at least two CIA agents were permanently assigned to the Special Operations division.

The Rockefeller Commission also

reported that the CIA "explored much larger programs for controlling human behavior including electrical shock, radiation, psychology, psychiatry, sociology and harassment substances."

"In light of these patterns of CIA activity we have concluded that the CIA, envisioned as an organization to protect the freedom and security of Americans has in fact substantially threatened these values," the Olson family said in their prepared statement Thursday.

Present at a news conference in the Olson home in Old Braddock Thursday afternoon at which several representatives of the national media

attended were Dr. Olson's three children, Lisa Olson Hayward, Nils Olson and Eric Olson and his wife, Alice.

Olson's superior at the time of his death, Dr. John L. Schwab, who headed the Special Operations division at Fort Detrick, said, when contacted, he had "no comment" regarding the Rockefeller commission reports of CIA links with the germ warfare research unit and with Olson's death.

He said he knew of no unusual circumstances surrounding the biochemists' 1953 death although several of Olson's fellow workers disclosed that rumors of a CIA induced LSD drugging had occurred.

Schwab said as far as he knew, details and arrangements of Olson's death were handled in a usual manner through Army public relations.

Vincent L. Ruwet of Frederick was a superior of Olson's at the time of his death and was charged with notifying the family of the biochemist's death.

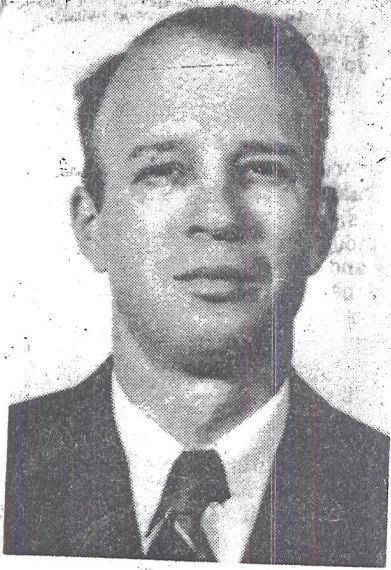
When asked what official explanation he had given the Olson family, Ruwet gave only a "no comment."

Ruwet was also asked what the Special Operations group had been involved with and if recent Rockefeller Commission findings were related to Olson's death and the germ warfare research group. He said: "I am not authorized to talk to you (News-Post)."

Shortly after the death according to the Olson family account and the Rockefeller Commission report, the family received word that the death resulted from "circumstances arising out of an experiment undertaken in the course of his official duties for the United States government."

The Olsons subsequently received employe's compensation (two-thirds of Olson's salary) because the death was declared work-related.

Dr. Olson who held M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in biochemistry from the University of Wisconsin and first came to Frederick in 1943 to begin the biochemical research at Detrick was buried in Frederick's Memorial Park at Linden Hills on Nov. 31, 1953.



Dr. Frank R. Olson in 1952



The Olson family today

Mrs. Alice Olson (speaking) wife of the late Dr. Frank Olson, who died 22 years ago, announced that she and her children (l. to r.) Lisa W. Hayward, Eric W. Olson and Nils W. Olson, are suing the CIA for his death. — (Photo by Neil Sandler)



The Olsons—23 years ago

Dr. Frank R. Olson posed for this photograph with his family about a year before he died. Next to him is his wife Alice Wicks Olson and in front (l. to r.) are Eric W., Lisa W. (Hayward) and Nils W. Olson.