

Key Witness in C.I.A. Inquiry

Sidney Gottlieb

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 19—The scene was an ornate Senate hearing room. The time: a steamy morning last August. The senators' mission: to nail down the elusive details of two decades of secret experiments in which the Central Intelligence Agency gave drugs to human subjects without their knowledge.

Man
in the
News

But all the Senate Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research was nailing down was a sea of blank stares. No one, it seemed, not even Adm. Stansfield Turner, the Director of Central Intelligence, could say how many people had been given the drugs or what had happened to them afterward.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, the subcommittee chairman, glanced up in exasperation. "Every single document the staff reviews has Mr. Gottlieb's name on it," he said. "One thing is for sure; Gottlieb knows." The word went out to the subcommittee staff: Find this man Gottlieb.

Sidney Gottlieb has been found, and if he does indeed know the details of the drug experiments, which were part of a C.I.A. program called MK Ultra that was under his direction, he will have a chance to say so tomorrow when the Kennedy subcommittee convenes to hear him testify.

Caution From Lawyer

His current lawyer, Terry F. Lenzner, a former Senate Watergate committee counsel and no stranger to Congressional investigations, has cautioned against assuming that his client will be able to provide all the answers.

Whether he does or not, Dr. Gottlieb's appearance, in return for which Mr. Lenzner asked that he be granted immunity from criminal prosecution for whatever he may say, will mark the first public emergence of the distinguished-looking scientist since he left the C.I.A. in 1973.

During his 22-year career with the intelligence agency, Dr. Gottlieb was a shadowy figure. Official biographies listed him as a "consultant" to the Defense Department. He lived quietly with his wife, Margaret, and their children on a farm in suburban Virginia, raising goats and Christmas trees in his spare time. No published photographs of him can be found.

It was only after the various Congressional investigations of the C.I.A. and other intelligence agencies two years ago that Dr. Gottlieb became a public figure, or as public as a retired intelligence officer can ever become, when the C.I.A. failed in an attempt to have his name excised from a Senate report.

For most of his 21-year agency career, as it developed, Dr. Gottlieb, who holds a doctorate in biochemistry from the California Institute of Technology, had worked in the C.I.A.'s technical services division, the "gadget shop" where wristwatch radios, exploding tie clips and poison darts the hardware of the tradere developed.

Plots on Foreign Leaders

When he retired, it was after nine years as chief of the division, and subsequent investigations showed that

some of the lethal devices intended for use in the C.I.A.'s plots to assassinate foreign leaders had come from the 'gadget shop' laboratories.

Then it was learned that all of the division's records of the MK Ultra experiments had been destroyed by Dr. Gottlieb, apparently on orders from the director's office, shortly before Dr. Gottlieb retired.

Testimony Two Years Ago

Dr. Gottlieb, who is 59 years old, has testified about the C.I.A.'s drug-testing program at least once before, when he returned to Washington two years ago from India, where he had been working in a leper colony, to appear before a closed session of another Senate committee.

That testimony has never been released, but some of those familiar with it have said that Dr. Gottlieb was unable to recall many of the details of the covert testing program.

Although some of those who knew Dr. Gottlieb in the C.I.A. expressed reservations about his abilities as an administrator, no one questioned his veracity.

"Sid's an honest man," said one former intelligence officer, "but he's a tinkerer. He likes to fiddle with things."

Dr. Gottlieb's fiddling, according to that man and others, was looked at askance by some of the C.I.A.'s operatives overseas, who viewed some of the technical service division's wizardry as ill-conceived, unnecessary or even dangerous.

Another former C.I.A. man recalled the gusto with which Dr. Gottlieb staged an annual "TSD fair," an exhibition of the latest in disappearing inks and false mustaches for the benefit of spies who had come in temporarily from the cold. "It was kind of embarrassing," the man said.

Dr. Gottlieb, who was born in New York City on Aug. 3, 1918, arrived in Washington today from California, where he has been living in a well-kept but unassuming house in a seaside resort town outside San Francisco, near a daughter who is married to a psychiatrist.

Two Physical Handicaps

Friends say he has been spending some of his idle time learning how to teach children to overcome the problem of stammering, one of two physical handicaps Dr. Gottlieb himself conquered earlier in life.

The other, a deformed foot, did not stand in the way of his passion for folk dancing. His extensive repertoire of reels and garottes was developed during his travels in exotic spots on C.I.A. Business.

There has been some speculation that Dr. Gottlieb, in his testimony tomorrow, may be able to trace knowledge of and responsibility for some of the MK Ultra programs to his superiors at the C.I.A., perhaps even to the office of the director himself.

Asked about such a possibility, one C.I.A. officer replied that Dr. Gottlieb had to his knowledge "never made a decision on his own."

"I think that's true," said another friend, someone who likes Dr. Gottlieb a great deal. "He's not a guy who would make waves with authority."

9-20-77

NYT