

Family Plans to Sue C.I.A. Over Suicide in Drug Test

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FREDERICK, Md., July 9—The widow and children of a researcher who committed suicide in 1953 after being made an unwitting participant in a Central Intelligence Agency drug experiment said today that they planned to sue the agency for his "wrongful death" death.

In an interview at their home here, Alice W. Olson and her three children said that they learned the circumstances of Frank R. Olson's death after the Rockefeller commission disclosed last month that C.I.A. files showed a suicide had occurred during a 10-year agency program of administering the drug LSD to unsuspecting subjects to learn its effects.

The commission's report did not identify the victim, who worked for the Army, but his family identified him today, and later, David W. Bellin, director of Vice President Rockefeller's panel looking into C.I.A. activities, confirmed that Mr. Olson had been the victim.

"I'm very angry at the C.I.A., because they let us grow up thinking our father had 'inexplicably' committed suicide," said Eric W. Olson, 30 years old, the eldest son, who is now a graduate student at Harvard.

After weeks of family discussions, Mr. Olson said, the fam-

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ily decided "to get the story out, so our father's friends and colleagues—and also our friends—could know what the C.I.A. has done."

Until last month, the family members said, all they were told about Mr. Olson's death was that he "jumped or fell" to his death on Nov. 18, 1953, from the 10th floor of the Hotel Statler in New York.

At no time since then, Mrs. Olson said, did the C.I.A. get in touch with her to explain the true circumstances of her husband's death.

"I was stunned" after learning of the C.I.A.'s experiment on her husband, Mrs. Olson said. "It never occurred to me that there could be foul play."

William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, could not be reached immediately for comment, but a spokesman for the agency declined to comment on the authenticity of the report.

In a statement to be distributed at a news conference tomorrow,

the family relates that Mr. Olson, then a 43-year-old high-level civilian researcher in biological warfare at nearby Fort Detrick, suddenly began showing symptoms of anxiety and became "uncharacteristically withdrawn" after a week-long work conference.

Series of Meetings

The conference was one of a series that Mr. Olson and some of his colleagues held with C.I.A. personnel in the office of the 'special operations' division at Fort Detrick, apparently to discuss C.I.A. needs in biological warfare research.

Not until publication of the Rockefeller commission's report and subsequent discussions with one of Mr. Olson's former colleagues, the family's statement said, "did we learn that Frank Olson had, without his knowledge or consent, been given LSD by two C.I.A. employes during the research meeting."

"Shortly after dinner one evening during the meeting, Frank Olson and four special operations divisions scientists were told that they had been given lysergic acid diethylamide, and that their reactions would be observed," the statement added. "We do not know what occurred during the remainder of this meeting."

Mr. Olson continued to exhibit signs of imbalance at work the next week, the family statement continued, and a colleague—who was not identified by name—called two C.I.A. liaison men and made plans to fly the scientist to New York to see a psychiatrist, Dr. Harold A. Abramson, who held appropriate security clearances.

A few days later, the statement said, the family was told of Mr. Olson's death.

"An employe of the Central Intelligence Agency had been with Frank Olson in his hotel room the night he died," the statement said. Olson's widow was later told that her husband's escort had awakened about 1:30 A.M. to see Olson going at a full run toward the window. He said he saw Olson go through both the closed window and a drawn shade.

Compensation Pledged

"We have agonized over the question of what kind of horrid 'nightmare' or 'event' could have driven him to hurl himself at a full run out of a 10th-story window, and how this 'suicidal nervous breakdown'—the term we have always used—could have developed so suddenly, so devoid of connection to anything we or his friends had known of him."

The family was notified shortly after the death that they would be paid compensation, because the death was the result of a work-related accident.

For the next 22 years, the family recalled in today's interview, the Olsons were unsure

whether to call the death a suicide.

There was some shame, too, over their father's death, the children recalled.

"We friends would ask 'How did your daddy die?'—that's always been a tough one," said Mrs. Lisa W. Hayward, the 29-year-old married daughter of Mrs. Olson.

"I used to say, 'He died of a concussion,'" Nils W. Olson, the younger son, a 27-year-old dental student at the University of Maryland said.

In the statement, the family described the impact of the recent disclosures, saying:

"Since 1953, we have struggled to understand Frank Olson's death as an inexplicable 'suicide.' At the time he died, Frank Olson's wife was 38 years old, his eldest son was nine years old, his daughter seven and his youngest son five. Now, 22 years later, we learn that this death was the result of C.I.A. negligence and illegality on a scale difficult to contemplate."

"Suddenly, we learn that Alice Olson's being left in early adulthood to raise a family alone, her children left to grow up without a father—we learn that these deprivations were not necessary."

"And we suddenly learn that for 22 years we were lied to, led to believe that Frank Olson had a fatal nervous breakdown. Thus, Frank Olson's children grew up under a double shadow, the shadow of their father's suicide and the shadowy inexplicability of that act."

Eric Olson said that the family's lawsuit was "a way of holding the C.I.A. publicly accountable for what they did."

The Olson's attorney, David Rudovsky of Philadelphia, was unable to say when he would file the suit against the agency.

The Olson family also said that it would seek further facts about the role of Dr. Abramson, the New York psychiatrist who had "several long sessions" with Mr. Olson.

Dr. Abramson, reached at his office, refused to discuss the issue.

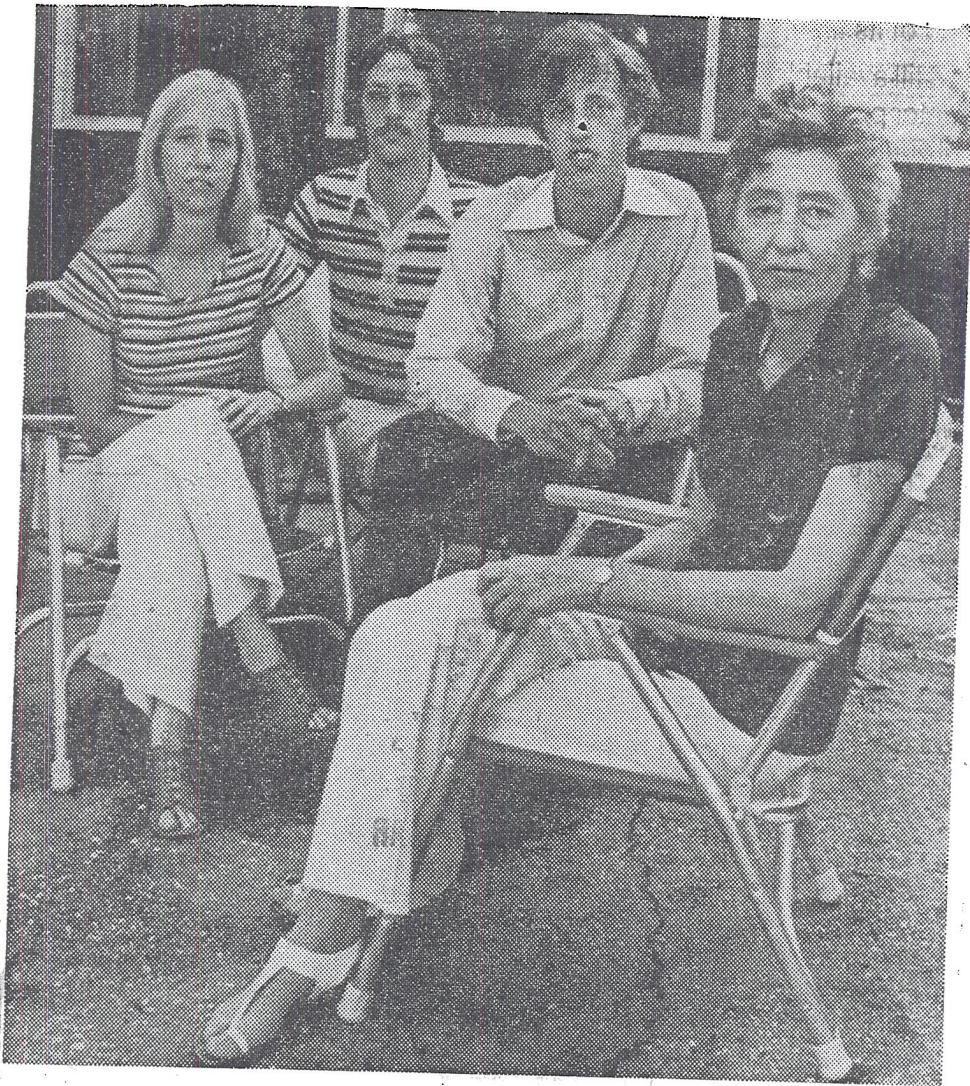
"I'll have to consult a lawyer because this is a serious matter," he said. "I'm being accused of something I did 22 years ago."

The Olsons also charged that investigators for the Rockefeller commission had failed to check out some of the C.I.A.'s information about Mr. Olson and had not informed the family of the true circumstances of the death.

In its report, the commission said in a footnote that there were "indications in the few remaining agency records that this individual [Mr. Olson] may have had a history of emotional instability." The report also noted that two C.I.A. employes had been reprimanded.



Frank R. Olson on his 40th birthday, in 1950, three years before death.



The New York Times/George Tames
Alice W. Olson, widow of Frank R. Olson, with her children, from left, Lisa W. Hayward and Nils W. and Eric W. Olson, at their home in Frederick, Md.