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By Douglas Chevalier—The Washington Post

Surviving family of Frank Olson, Lisa, left; Eric; his widow, Alice, and Nils, at their press conference.

Family Blames CIA for Father's Death

By Austin Scott
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OLD BRADDOCK, Md., July 10—Twenty-two years ago, the CIA gave Frank Olson and four other scientists some after-dinner cordials—without telling them the drinks were laced with LSD. One week later, Frank Olson was dead.

His son, Eric, who was 9 years old, doesn't remember that November week when his usually happy, loving and outgoing father suddenly turned moody and withdrawn or when his father was put into a CIA-supplied car and driven out of his family's life.

Four days later, a 2 a.m. telephone call informed them that Olson, a civilian biochemist working on a secret CIA project, had plunged to his death through the 10th floor window of a

New York City hotel room, an apparent suicide.

The family—Olson's widow, Alice, sons Eric and Nils, and daughter, Lisa—held a news conference at their home here today to outline how they felt at learning 22 years later some of what really happened.

They said they will file a lawsuit against the CIA, perhaps within two weeks, asking "several million dollars" in damages from the agency for "illegally and negligently" administering the LSD.

"I think that the CIA and any other agency has to become accountable for its actions," Eric said.

Throughout the 22 years of not knowing what really happened, or why, the family had rejected the idea that Olson committed suicide. Mrs. Olson described him as a very warm, family-

loving man who underwent an abrupt personality change after a CIA meeting.

"I was convinced that my husband's death was not a deliberate or willful act," she said. "I felt that he must have plunged through that window in a state of panic brought on by I knew not what. This was the impression I tried to convey to my children."

As the children, all under 10 at the time, grew older, the family began discussing Olson's death, trying to puzzle out what had happened.

Last Thanksgiving, when they gathered for a family dinner, they brought the subject up again, turning it over, looking for clues.

The family said that at the time Olson died, Nov. 28, 1953, the only

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person with him was Robert Lashbrook, an employee of the CIA, who had taken him to New York to see a "politically reliable" psychiatrist about the apparently strong and lingering after-effects of the drug.

Their first clue to the real story came June 11, 1975, when Mrs. Olson read the Rockefeller commission's disclosure of a 10-year CIA program of experiments using LSD (a hallucinogenic drug) on unsuspecting persons in which a person died.

The commission did not publicly identify the man who died as the result of those experiments. But the dates were right, and so were the details. A relative telephoned one of Olson's former colleagues, who, Mrs. Olson said, "confirmed to us that the man we were reading about in the newspapers was my husband."

Neither the CIA, nor the Rockefeller commission, which knew Olson's identity, has contacted the family since the story came to light, she said.

The family refused to disclose the name of Olson's colleague, but it was learned he is retired Army Col. Vincent Ruwet who was Olson's boss. He also was one of the five scientists given LSD.

"We are one family whose history has been fundamentally altered by illegal CIA activity," Eric, now 30, said in a statement that the family took turns reading today.

"In this we have something in common with those families in Chile whose hopes for a better life were destroyed by CIA interven-



FRANK OLSON

... civilian biochemist

tion in elections, in attempted economic reform, and in the effort to establish a noncapitalist form of government.

"We have something in common with those families in Cuba whose struggles for a better life, free of the dominating exploitation of multinational corporations, has been made so much more difficult by CIA plots and schemes.

"And we have something in common with those families in Southeast Asia whose heroic efforts to be free of foreign interference have had to cope with CIA subversion."

While the family is aware of "the difference between struggles undergone in relative affluence and those endured in poverty and war," the family statement said, "we think it is crucial to point out the connections between American treachery and immorality abroad and those same tendencies evident at home ... The

CIA that participates in the assassination of foreign leaders is the same CIA that infringes the rights of American citizens."

In many ways, Eric said, what they know now does not make sense. They hope the full story may emerge as a result of their lawsuit.

"This (drug) was given to five high-level scientists," Eric said. "We are asked now to believe that the CIA took an incredible risk with these scientists and we don't know why."

Olson and his four colleagues were working at nearby Ft. Detrick, in the Army's bacteriological warfare laboratories, Mrs. Olson said. "... Under extremely stringent secrecy and security regulations, Frank and his colleagues did research on the most lethal microorganisms known to humanity, those that transmit such diseases as bubonic plague."

The New York psychiatrist who saw him, Dr. Harold Alexander Abramson, according to Lisa, "said he was totally irrational, yet he was not placed in a hospital, he was housed on the 10th floor of a hotel in New York."

"I feel pretty confident there are a lot of things we still don't know ... In this case there's another possibility. There may have been some intent ... We have no reason to believe they wanted to kill my father, but it's possible," said Eric.

"The news we received on June 11, 1975, had a dramatic effect on this family," said Lisa.

"Suddenly we learn that Alice Olson's being left in early adulthood to raise a family alone, we children left to grow up without a fa-

ther—we learn that these deprivations were not necessary at all. And we suddenly learn that for 22 years we were lied to, led to believe that my father had a fatal nervous breakdown."

The family said that two weeks before his death, Olson attended five days of meetings with members of his Special Operations research group at a mountain retreat. The LSD was administered there on a Friday. According to the Rockefeller commission report, the five subjects were told about 20 minutes later that they had been given a drug as subjects in an experiment, and their reactions would be observed.

"He came back to this house right after noon and he was very quiet, he was an entirely different person," Mrs. Olson said. "I didn't know what had happened. I just knew that something was terribly wrong. The entire weekend he was very melancholy and talked about a mistake he had made. He said he was going to leave his job."

Olson went to work the following Monday prepared to resign, but was reassured by his colleagues, and came home in better spirits. Tuesday morning he went to work, but came home about 10 a.m., saying he had been advised to see a psychiatrist, and that his colleagues feared he might hurt his wife.

That same morning, a car driven by a Special Operations Division employee arrived at the Olson home to take Olson to Washington, where he would be flown to New York to see a psychiatrist. His family never saw him alive again.