



Detective Said Scientist Had 'Severe Psychosis'

NYTimes JUL 11 1975

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER

A civilian scientist who had unwittingly participated in a Central Intelligence Agency drug experiment had been diagnosed as suffering from "severe psychosis and delusions" before he plunged to his death from a 10th floor window of the Statler Hotel in mid-Manhattan 22 years ago, according to a police report of the incident.

The report said that the scientist, Frank R. Olson, a high-level civilian researcher in biological warfare at Fort Detrick, Md., had spent four days in the city undergoing psychiatric analysis immediately before his death and that arrangements had been made for him to enter the Chestnut Lodge sanitarium in Rockville, Md.

Mr. Olson's wife, Alice, and their three children said in an interview with The New York Times on Wednesday that they had not learned the circumstances of Mr. Olson's death until last month when the Rockefeller commission disclosed 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.

Plan to Sue C.I.A.

At a news conference in the backyard of the Olson home in Frederick, Md., yesterday, the family repeated its intentions to sue the C.I.A. for several million dollars for the "wrongful death" of their father and husband.

According to the police report written by Detective James W. Ward, who retired in 1970, Mr. Olson had come to New York on Nov. 24, 1953 with Col. Vincent Ruwet, who was also attached to Fort Detrick, and checked into the Statler Hotel.

Mr. Olson was examined twice by Dr. Harold Abramson, a physician who had offices at 133 E. 58th Street and who had been one of the first Americans to study the effects on people of the powerful mind-altering drug LSD, the report said. Then Mr. Olson and Colonel Ruwet returned to Washington on the morning of Nov. 26.

Detective's Report

Then, on that same afternoon, the police report continued, Mr. Olson returned to New York, accompanied this time by a man who identified himself as Robert Lashbrook, and said he was a consultant chemist who, like Mr. Olson, worked for the Defense Bureau of the War Department.

"They again visited the doctor and as a result of this visit Olson was advised to enter a sanitarium as he was suffering from severe psychosis

and delusions," Detective Ward wrote.

It was at that point—apparently sometime during the 27th—that arrangements were made for Mr. Olson to enter Chestnut Lodge under the supervision of "a Doctor Fort," the detective reported.

That evening, Detective Ward reported, Mr. Olson and Mr. Lashbrook had dinner in the Cafe Rouge of the Statler Hotel and returned to Room 1018A at approximately 9:30 P.M. They watched television for about an hour, the detective said, and then went to sleep.

Then, Detective Ward, said, Mr. Lashbrook told him that at approximately 3:20 A.M. he was awakened by a "crash of glass." Mr. Lashbrook reportedly told the detective that he turned on the light, saw that Mr. Olson was not in his bed and realized that the window facing 7th Avenue was broken.

Mr. Lashbrook told Detective Wards that he had called the hotel operator and "at this time, learned that Olson had jumped out of the window," the detective reported.

Detective Ward said that his report was based on information given to him by Mr. Lashbrook but that he had verified the facts in interviews with Colonel Ruwet and Dr. Abramson.

The detective's account, however, was at odds with a description of the death given Wednesday in a statement by the Olson family in which they said that "Olson's widow was later told that her husband's escort was 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."

Reached yesterday, Colonel Ruwet refused to comment on the death, saying, "I'm seeking legal counsel, not because I've done anything wrong but I've got to know where I stand legally," since the Olson's have made clear they are going to be filing a suit.

Detective Ward, who teamed the death a suicide, in his report, said that an autopsy had been performed by the Assistant Medical Examiner, Dr. Dominick J. Dimaio, who determined that the cause of death was "multiple fractures."

Detective Ward said in his report that "due to the important positions held by the deceased and Lashbrook with the U.S. Government, the facts of this case were related to F.B.I. Agent George Dalen by telephone." The detective made no mention of the C.I.A. and efforts to reach him yesterday were unsuccessful.

Dr. Abramson began working with LSD in 1951, two years before Mr. Olson's suicide and

two years before Sandoz Pharmaceuticals began distributing the drug to American researchers.

The doctor's secretary said yesterday that Dr. Abramson would not comment about the Olson case or his early work with LSD.

In 1959, Dr. Abramson told a scientific meeting on LSD that at the outset many of his colleagues opposed his work with the drug, regarding him as "a sort of psychiatric Dracula."

"Rumors were brought to me of suicides caused by LSD," he said in the published proceedings of the meeting, adding that "I must say that the same case was repeated in different anecdotes for several years."

He did not say that he had personal knowledge of anyone who had committed suicide following LSD, but he conceded that "extremely violent reactions do occur under LSD" and advised that large doses should be given only if a hospital is nearby.

Dr. Abramson, who worked with the drug for more than a decade, was particularly interested in its potential for unraveling the possible biochemical bases for mental illnesses. Prior to his LSD studies, which initially involved persons he saw in his private practice as a psychiatrist, Dr. Abramson had been a psychological consultant for the United States Department of the Army.

The doctor told the 1959 meeting that he himself experienced an adverse reaction following unwitting exposure to LSD, which he may have accidentally inhaled or absorbed through the skin while conducting an experiment on snails.

Suffering from the start of a cold, the doctor related, "I began to fantasize that I had a virus encephalitis. I decided I was going to die." He said he

became increasingly apprehensive until he realized that he was actually suffering from an LSD reaction, and knowing it would soon be over, he relaxed.

His account stimulated Dr. Sidney Cohen, psychopharmacologist at the University of California in Los Angeles, to comment that it is essential that patients be told that they were given a potent drug that could cause psychotic-like reactions.

Dr. Cohen recalled a case in which a woman had been given LSD and then committed suicide immediately thereafter because she had no awareness of why she was becoming psychotic.

In an interview yesterday, Dr. Cohen said that a suicidal impulse can result from LSD when "things change inside and out and the person thinks he is going mad or when some unconscious material is uncovered that is terribly stressful and causes the person to crack up." In a sense, LSD can release previously repressed demons in the mind as well as cause terrifying hallucinations.

Dr. Abramson, who was born in 1899 and studied medicine at Columbia University, is the author of more than 200 professional publications, including a book on the use of LSD in psychotherapy and alcoholism.

Much of the LSD research done by him and others in the nineteen-fifties was sponsored by the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation. Many who conducted LSD research were stimulated to do so by the early findings of Dr. Abramson.

The doctor currently maintains practices in Manhattan and on Long Island and is a consulting research psychiatrist at State Hospital in Central Islip and director of research at South Oaks Psychiatric Hospital in Amityville.

*Phone call to family telling of Olson's death was received at 2 a.m. (presumably 28 Nov 53, the day he died). WXPPost 11 Jul 75, Austin Scott.

See also WXP 13 Jul, Austin Scott and Bill Richards.

See also WXP 18 Jul, Austin Scott.