

# Class, Race and Corporate Power

---

Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 3

---

2020

## “There’s Something Rotten in Denmark:” Frank Olson and the Macabre Fate of a CIA Whistleblower in the Early Cold War

Jeremy Kuzmarov

Tulsa Community College, jkuzmarov2@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/classracecorporatepower>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kuzmarov, Jeremy (2020) "“There’s Something Rotten in Denmark:” Frank Olson and the Macabre Fate of a CIA Whistleblower in the Early Cold War," *Class, Race and Corporate Power*. Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 3.

DOI: 10.25148/CRCP.7.2.008926

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/classracecorporatepower/vol8/iss1/3>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts, Sciences & Education at FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Class, Race and Corporate Power by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dcc@fiu.edu](mailto:dcc@fiu.edu).

---

## “There’s Something Rotten in Denmark:” Frank Olson and the Macabre Fate of a CIA Whistleblower in the Early Cold War

### Abstract

This paper examines the case of Dr. Frank Olson, a CIA biochemist who worked at the Ft. Detrick facility in Maryland where germ and chemical warfare capabilities were developed. In November 1953, Dr. Olson died after allegedly falling from a thirteenth floor window in New York’s Statler hotel. Initially, his death was ruled a suicide. In 1975, however, the CIA admitted that Olson had been unwittingly drugged with LSD which led to his death and paid the family a lofty financial settlement. However, in 1994, Frank’s son Eric ordered the exhumation of Frank’s body and hired a forensics experts who found that the cause of Frank’s death was a blow to the head. The New York District attorney subsequently changed the classification of his death from suicide to unknown. This paper examines the circumstances surrounding Olson’s killing, his son’s quest to undercover the truth, and speculates about the programs that Olson may have threatened to expose, which led to his death. The paper further addresses the social and political significance of the Olson case to modern American history and seeks to analyze why it remains resonant to Americans over sixty five years after Frank’s death.

### Keywords

Frank Olson, CIA, Unsolved Mysteries

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

### Cover Page Footnote

About the Author: Jeremy Kuzmarov has taught at numerous colleges and is the author of four books on U.S. foreign policy, including: "The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs" (Massachusetts, 2009); "Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation Building in the American Century" (Massachusetts, 2012); "The Russians are Coming, Again", with John Marciano (Monthly Review, 2018), and "Obama’s Unending Wars" (Clarity, 2019).

“Frank Olson is flying and it’s a long way down,” - David Clewell, *CIA in Wonderland*.

In September 1994, the NBC hit show *Unsolved Mysteries* aired an episode on Dr. Frank Olson, a CIA biochemist at the Ft. Detrick laboratory on germ warfare who had supposedly jumped to his death from the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of the Statler Hotel on the night of November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1953 after being unwittingly drugged with Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD). Host Robert Stack noted that certain facts, however, bred suspicion that Dr. Olson was murdered and that his murder was covered up. Strange was the behavior of Olson’s colleague Dr. Robert Lashbrook of the CIA’s Technical Services Division. He could not recall whether the window was open or closed and did not leave the room after Olson allegedly jumped or call the police. Instead, Lashbrook made a manually recorded phone call to an unidentified source in which he said: “he’s gone.” The person on the other end replied: “well that’s too bad” and hung up. Hotel doorman Armand Pastore told *Unsolved Mysteries* that “nobody jumps through a window and dashes through the drape [as Olson was alleged to have done], there’s no sense to that.” Referencing also Lashbrook’s suspicious phone call, Pastore told *Unsolved Mysteries* that it “was Hamlet who said ‘there’s something rotten in Denmark’...It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that there was something rotten at the Pennsylvania hotel in New York that night.”<sup>1</sup>

So what actually happened and who was behind Olson’s death? And who really was Dr. Olson and who may have had incentive to kill him and for what purpose? The Olson family has devoted considerable time and effort over decades trying to answer these questions, which are not of parochial interest. Dr. Olson was involved with secretive government experiments in drug testing and chemical and biological warfare and the behavioral sciences during the early years of the Cold War. These experiments entailed collaboration with Nazi scientists under the Operation Paperclip, resulted in the mistreatment of animals and human guinea pigs and poisoning of civilians, and led to the apparent adoption of germ warfare by the United States in the Korean War, which the U.S. government has long sought to deny.<sup>2</sup>

In June 1975, the Rockefeller commission, which was created to investigate CIA misdeeds, advanced the theory that Olson’s death resulted from an adverse reaction to LSD. The Olson family met with CIA director William Colby and President Gerald Ford who released some pertinent documents, issued a formal apology and awarded the family a \$750,000 settlement. However, after the death of Frank’s widow, Alice, son Eric had Frank’s body exhumed by pathologist Dr. James E. Starrs from Georgetown University, who found a hole in Frank’s head that came from the butt of a gun and not a fall from a thirteenth-floor window. The autopsy also revealed a lack of cuts or lacerations, which meant he had to have gone out of an open window as glass from the window would have cut his skin. The New York District

---

<sup>1</sup> *Unsolved Mysteries*, September 27, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> H.P. Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake: The Murder of Frank Olson and the CIA’s Secret Cold War Experiments* (Walterville, OR: Trine Day, 2009); Gordon Thomas, *Secrets and Lies: A History of CIA Torture and Bio-Weapon Experiments* (Old Saybrook, CT: Konecky & Konecky, 2007). On the latter see Dave Chaddock, *This Must be the Place: How the U.S. Waged Germ Warfare in the Korean War and Denied it Ever Since* (Seattle: Bennett & Hastings Publishers, 2013).

Attorney subsequently changed the designation of Frank's death from "suicide" to "unknown."<sup>3</sup> According to two confidential CIA sources interviewed by investigator Hal P. Albarelli Jr., when a late-night attempt was made to remove a subdued Olson from his room in the Statler to transport him by automobile to Maryland, "things went drastically wrong. The short and entire explanation is that [Olson] resisted and in the ensuing struggle he was pitched through the closed window." These same sources note that Lashbrook apparently was awake the whole time, though out of the way. They said that Olson wasn't "cut out for the type of work he was doing. He was in way over his head, and he knew it at last."<sup>4</sup>

Errol Morris' 2017 film, *Wormwood*, chronicles the Shakespearian tragedy in which Frank's son Eric gives up a promising career as a psychiatrist to pursue the truth about his father's death. At the end, he comes close to uncovering the identity of the killers, though maverick reporter Seymour Hersh will not reveal his "deep throat" source who told him that Frank had been murdered. The Olson case remains significant today because it exemplifies the harsh treatment towards whistle-blowers whose threat stems not only from the information that they may leak or threaten to leak, but also from the fact that they challenge the legitimacy and authority of the state far more gravely than any political radical or criminal.<sup>5</sup> That the American public has remained fascinated with the Olson case over sixty five years later reflects a deep-seated mistrust in government institutions. American national identity has long been predicated, and the pursuit of overseas empire legitimated, on the belief that the American democratic system is morally virtuous compared to illiberal rivals like China and Russia and that agents of the government would never kill their own citizens like in those nations.<sup>6</sup> President Donald J. Trump punctured this myth, however, when in response to a question by Fox News about killings by Russian President Vladimir Putin, he responded: "There are a lot of killers. We've got a lot of killers. What, you think our country's so innocent?"<sup>7</sup> The Olson case affirms Trump's assessment and suggests that we are not who we say we are, and have no legitimacy in colonizing the globe with military bases. This is why the case is so explosive and why, beyond the protection of individual reputations, there remains so much secrecy and resistance to a full accounting of the facts.

---

<sup>3</sup> James E. Starrs and Katherine Ramsland, *A Voice for the Dead: A Forensic Investigator's Pursuit of the Truth in the Grave* (New York: G.P Putnam's Sons, 2005), 131, 148; Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*.

<sup>4</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 693, 694.

<sup>5</sup> See Lloyd C. Gardner, *War on Leakers: National Security and American Democracy, from Eugene V. Debs to Edward Snowden* (New York: The New Press, 2016). Chase Madar in *The Passion of Bradley Manning: The Story Behind the Wikileaks Whistleblower* (New York: OR Books, 2012) describes how Manning was subject to a harsh regiment of punitive solitary confinement designed "as a warning to other prospective whistle-blowers, and used as a way to break him, crush his spirit and force him to implicate Julian Assange [Wikileaks founder] and Wikileaks in espionage charges."

<sup>6</sup> In blasting President Trump for "abdication of the United States' global influence," conservative CNN commentator Fareed Zakaria expressed characteristic fear about the opening of a "power vacuum" that would be "filled by illiberal powers like China, Russia, and Turkey." Quoted in Alfred W. McCoy, "The World According to Trump: Or How to Build and Lose an Empire," January 16, 2018, tomdispatch.com. Many of the allegations against Russian President Vladimir Putin fueling a New Cold War are actually unsubstantiated. Amy Knight in her book *Orders to Kill: The Putin Regime and Political Murder* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2017) cannot confirm that Putin actually killed anyone and can only speculate.

<sup>7</sup> Abby Phillips, "O'Reilly told Trump that Putin is a killer. Trump's reply: 'You think our country is so innocent?'" *The Washington Post*, February 4, 2017.

## Who Was Frank Olson and What Kind of Work Did he Do?

Frank Olson did not fit the pattern of a man at the center of a malevolent government plot lifted straight out of an X-Files episode. He was a straight-laced company man with strong anticommunist views.<sup>8</sup> Olson was born in July 1910 in small town Wisconsin and studied chemistry at the University of Wisconsin where he enrolled in the University's Reserve Officer Training Program. Olson pursued his Ph.D. under the direction of Dr. Ira L. Baldwin, an agricultural bacteriologist appointed Ft. Detrick's first scientific director in 1942. He recruited Olson to work first at the Edgewood Chemical Warfare Arsenal and then at Ft. Detrick, one of the biggest biological laboratories ever built named in honor of Captain Frederick L. Detrick, flight surgeon of the 104th Aero Squadron and faculty member at Johns Hopkins medical school.

Located on the site of an obscure National Guard camp and "cow pasture" airfield, the Ft. Detrick facility was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt after he had read intelligence reports noting that Germany and Japan were stockpiling poison gas and that Russia, Britain and Canada were ahead of America in biological weapons research. The town of Frederick, Maryland was considered a perfect spot for the secret facility because the residents minded their own business and did not gossip too much. Newspaper editor A.T. Bush reported they were making "colored smoke for airplanes" at Ft. Detrick. In reality, they were developing exotic poisons, guns firing darts that could penetrate clothing and skin unnoticed and then dissolve, and weed killers designed to wipe out the enemy's food supply, which the chief of the army chemical warfare services believed would "hasten the end of war."<sup>9</sup>

Nicknamed "Fort Doom," Ft. Detrick embodied the wedding of scientific talent to the dictates of the Cold War National Security State. *Look Magazine* reported in November 1950 that the Truman administration had "summoned scientists...as never before" from their peacetime work-benches to the task of bettering the tools of war. In the Pentagon and in hundreds of labs and proving grounds from White Sands, New Mexico to Aberdeen, Maryland, these scientists are engaged in a vast program opening up awesome vistas of mass destruction and death."<sup>10</sup>

Judged by his superiors to be an "outstanding professional man," Olson's work at Ft. Detrick focused on assessing and improving protective masks and clothing under conditions of biological warfare. One of his mentors was Theodor Rosebury who headed airborne infection projects. Rosebury was investigated by the FBI for exposing secret experiments and published a book, *Peace or Pestilence*, which concluded that the logic for biological warfare was "less compelling" in the Cold War than World War II and that the "smell of evil" had now come to "hang over it [BW]."<sup>11</sup> Rosebury terminated his association with Ft. Detrick when he recognized

---

<sup>8</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 42; Scott Shane, "Buried Secrets of Bio-warfare," *Baltimore Sun*, August 1, 2004; Sidney Shalett, "The Deadliest War" *Collier's National Weekly*, June 15, 1946, 31, 32; Gerard Piel, "BW" *Life Magazine*, November 18, 1946, 118-121.

<sup>10</sup> Fletcher Knebel, "Remote Control War: Are We Ready For It?" *Look Magazine*, November 27, 1950, 33-37.

<sup>11</sup> Theodor Rosebury, *Peace or Pestilence: Biological Warfare and How to Avoid It* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1949), 184, 185.

that there was no way to stop the dissemination of such a weapon, and began urging the conversion of the facility into an “international center for microbiological research.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1947, Olson and Rosebury produced a technical monograph after constructing a special chamber for the study of “airborne clouds of highly infective agents” that recommended the use of airplanes as the “best delivery systems for biological agents.”<sup>13</sup> In May of the previous year, members of Congress hoping to secure support for a \$4.6 million naval appropriations bill, leaked to the Associated Press news about a “new germ spray capable of wiping out large cities and entire crops at a single blow, a secret weapon” deliverable from high-flying planes, “far more deadly than the atomic bomb.”<sup>14</sup> The excited language exemplifies a cultural infatuation with super-weapons that reached its apex in the post-World War II “victory culture.”<sup>15</sup> Considered by critics to be “madmen in the laboratories,” Ft. Detrick scientists conceived of themselves as a “community of saints dedicated to using the most fearful and secret science to defend the republic.”<sup>16</sup> They were among those sent to France, Germany and Japan to assess and begin expropriating Axis biological warfare capabilities. Some of the toxic agents under development were lethal while others merely incapacitating. The military valued the latter for potentially tying up medical personnel and hospital facilities and impeding movement of forces.<sup>17</sup>

Olson was given the field notes of Lt. Col Arvo Thompson who had carried out daily interrogation sessions with Lt. General Shiro Ishii, head of Japan’s infamous Unit 731, which had carried out ghastly experiments in China during World War II. Ishii was allegedly brought to Ft. Detrick to give a series of lectures sometime after 1947. His experiments in the war included live vivisection of human beings, spraying people with anthrax and plague infected fleas, and tying them to trees and then exploding germ bombs overhead while soldiers wearing protective gear of particular interest to Olson timed their deaths.<sup>18</sup>

In 1950, Olson became chief of the plans and operations branch of the CIA’s Special Operations Division (SOD) which connected him with Lashbrook, and the TSS Chemical Division’s liaison to SOD. In that capacity, he served as a deputy to Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, who headed MK-ULTRA (CIA drug testing program).<sup>19</sup> Working out of laboratories patrolled by armed guards with orders to shoot any intruders, the SOD grew lethal cells and cultured deadly

---

<sup>12</sup> Richard D. McCarthy, *The Ultimate Folly: War by pestilence, asphyxiation, and defoliation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 29, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*, 56, 57; Rosebury, *Peace or Pestilence*, 114, 115; Rosebury, T., Olson F.R. et al. *Experimental Air Borne Infection* (Baltimore: The Williams & Wilkins Co., 1947).

<sup>14</sup> Rosebury, *Peace or Pestilence*, 50.

<sup>15</sup> See Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Postwar America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*, rev ed. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); H. Bruce Franklin, *War Stars: The Superweapon in the American Imagination*, rev ed. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Michael Ignatieff, “What Did the CIA Do to His Father? Eric Olson’s Lifelong Mission is to Prove That His Father’s Death Wasn’t a Suicide,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 1, 2001, SM156; Wilfred G. Burchett, *This Monstrous War* (Melbourne: Joseph Waters, 1953), 244.

<sup>17</sup> Rosebury, *Peace or Pestilence*.

<sup>18</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 72; Ed Regis, *The Biology of Doom: America’s Secret Germ Warfare Project* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000); Sheldon H. Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945 and the American Cover-Up*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> On Gottlieb’s career, see Jonathan Marks, *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate: The CIA and Mind Control*, rev ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991) and Stephen Kinzer, *Poisoner In Chief: Sidney Gottlieb and the CIA’s Search For Mind Control* (New York: Henry Holt, 2019).

viruses along with “techniques for the offensive use of biological weapons,” according to court documents, and “covert dissemination of biological warfare agents.” Some of the projects requested by the CIA under the code name MKNAOMI (named after Dr. Harold Abramson’s assistant, Naomi Busner) included the development of toxic sprays and poisons, testing various pharmaceutical products, and even exploring the “ability to induce cancer through covert means.”<sup>20</sup>

George W. Merck, a pharmaceutical executive influential in establishing Ft. Detrick, wanted to shut down the SOD, considering it “un-American.”<sup>21</sup> Possessing the top military security Q-clearance, Olson became part of a team that covertly tested how a weaponized biological agent might disperse if used against Americans.<sup>22</sup> According to *The Washington Post*, the U.S. army conducted 239 secret open-air germ warfare tests from 1949-1969, which were carried-out with “appalling deception.”<sup>23</sup> They involved dangerous pathogens such as *Serratia marcescens*, a bacteria similar to anthrax, which was sprayed off the coast of San Francisco, exposing over 800,000 people including an Irish man who died. In Alaska, Olson’s team sprayed bacteria out of airplanes to see how the pathogens would disperse in an environment similar to a harsh Russian winter. “We used a spore,” colleague Norman Cournoyer said, “which is very similar to anthrax so to that extent we did something that was not kosher. Because we picked it up all over the United States months after we did the tests.”<sup>24</sup>

In the years leading up to his death, Olson reportedly visited France, Germany, England and Norway, where an anonymous Ft. Detrick employee said his work “may have been connected to the testing of psychoactive drugs.”<sup>25</sup> This is a field that Olson is known to have experimented in while working with Dr. Harold Abramson in the office of Strategic Service (OSS) during World War II. Olson was issued a diplomatic passport, which allowed him to carry items in a diplomatic pouch that would not be subject to searches by Customs. In Germany, he met with legendary CIA official William King Harvey where plans for the CIA’s Operation Artichoke involving illegal drug testing were discussed. Olson’s scientific knowledge of how to administer drugs and chemicals made him particularly useful to Artichoke, the precursor to the Operation MK-ULTRA. He may have partaken in or witnessed “terminal experiments” being conducted by the CIA on former Nazi SS officers and captured Russian double agents or the slipping of drugs to unwitting guinea pigs in cafés and bars.<sup>26</sup>

On June 12, 1953, declassified documents show that Olson arrived at Frankfurt from the Hendon military airport in England and made the short drive West into Oberursel. There,

---

<sup>20</sup> Eric Olson and Nils Olson V. United States of America, Civil Action No. 12-1924, Plaintiffs Memorandum of Points and Authorities, May 3, 2013; Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*, 68; Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*, 44; Michael Pembroke, *Korea: Where the American Century Began* (London: One World Books, 2018), 177; Kinzer, *Poisoner In-Chief*.

<sup>21</sup> Scott Shane, “Buried Secrets of Bio-warfare,” *Baltimore Sun*, August 1, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Annie Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip: The Secret Intelligence Program That Brought Nazi Scientists to America* (Boston: Little & Brown, 2015), 366.

<sup>23</sup> George C. Wilson, “Army Conducted 239 Secret, Open Air Germ Warfare Tests,” *Washington Post*, March 9, 1977.

<sup>24</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*; Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 78; Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 369.

<sup>26</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 79, 80, 683; Jon Ronson, *The Men Who Stare at Goats* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 231. On Harvey’s career, see Bayard Stockton, *Flawed Patriot: The Rise and Fall of CIA Legend Bill Harvey* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008).

Artichoke experiments were taking place at a SAFEHOUSE called Haus Waldorf. “Between 4 June 1953 and 18 June 1953, an IS&O [CIA Inspection and Security Office] team...applied Artichoke techniques to operational cases in a safe house,” explains an Artichoke memorandum, written for CIA Director Allen Dulles, and one of the few action memos on record not destroyed by Richard Helms when he was CIA director.

The two individuals being interrogated at the Camp King safe house “could be classed as experienced, professional type agents and suspected of working for Soviet Intelligence.” “In the first case, light dosages of drugs coupled with hypnosis were used to induce a complete hypnotic trance,” the memo reveals. “This trance was held for approximately one hour and forty minutes of interrogation with a subsequent total amnesia produced.”<sup>27</sup> Through his work with SOD, Olson knew about the recruitment of Nazi scientists under the Operation Paperclip. Olson was allegedly among a secret group of Ft. Detrick scientists who traveled to Germany to interview Dr. Walter Schreiber, the Nazi’s anthrax expert who tested psycho-chemical drugs on concentration camp inmates, and he may have witnessed Dr. Kurt Blome, the Deputy Surgeon General of the Third Reich, conduct interrogation experiments at Camp King.<sup>28</sup>

According to his Detrick colleague Norman Cournoyer, Olson had a “tough time after Germany....[d]rugs, torture, brainwashing,” Cournoyer explained decades later for a documentary for German television made in 2001. Cournoyer said Olson felt ashamed about what he had witnessed, and that the experiments at Camp King reminded him of what had been done to people in concentration camps. Back in the CIAs office at Detrick Building Number 439, Olson contemplated leaving his job, telling his wife, Alice, that he had “made a terrible mistake.” Although we don’t know exactly what he meant, Dr. Olson appears to have recognized he had placed himself in danger by admitting under interrogation that he had breached security protocols. CIA consultant Stanley Lovell referred to Olson as “having no inhibitions. Baring of inner man,” meaning he had wrongly spoken out.<sup>29</sup> William Sargant, a psychiatrist who advised British intelligence reported that Olson was a security risk after he had expressed misgivings about his work with Artichoke to him. The CIA subsequently placed a memo in his file claiming he may have violated security restrictions, which his sons believe led to his murder.<sup>30</sup>

### **“Key to Your Father’s Death:” Korea and Germ Warfare**

Alice Olson told her kids before her death in 1994 that “Korea really bothered your father.”<sup>31</sup> She was likely referring to his role in germ warfare experiments, which were part of an attempt to create a contamination belt designed to stop the movement of soldiers and supplies across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel dividing North and South. Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the CIAs “doctor death”

---

<sup>27</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 367.

<sup>28</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*; Jeffrey Steinberg, “It Didn’t Start with Abu Ghraib: Dick Cheney-Vice President for Torture and War,” *Executive Intelligence Review*, November 11, 2005, <http://www.frankolsonproject.org/Articles/Steinberg-Cheney.pdf>. Under a secret program called Dustbin, Blome, who had overseen medical experimentation at Dachau, had been hired to teach Americans interrogation methods.

<sup>29</sup> Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*; Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 369.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Schoenberg, “Six Decade Old Murder Subject of CIA Lawsuit,” December 2, 2012, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, <http://www.post-gazette.com/business/legal/2012/12/03/Six-decade-old-murder-subject-of-CIA-lawsuit/stories/201212030192>; Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*; Kinzer, *Poisoner In Chief*, 117.

<sup>31</sup> James Risen, “Suit Planned Over Death of Man CIA Drugged,” *The New York Times*, November 26, 2012.



whom Olson worked directly under, believed that pest-laden bombs would “have a greater effect on the outcome of the war than all the men being called up.”<sup>32</sup>

When the Korean War broke out, the Truman administration increased the biological warfare budget from \$5.3 million in 1950 to \$345 million for the years 1951-1953. A top-secret order dated September 21, 1951 from the Joint Chiefs of Staff Command authorized the field-testing of anthrax weapons in Korea. Another report recommended that the U.S. “be prepared to employ BW whenever it is militarily advantageous.”<sup>33</sup> Survivor and eye-witness testimonials and journalistic accounts confirm the presence of flies not native to the region and that North Koreans died from disease outbreaks, including of the bubonic plague.<sup>34</sup> Cylinders found to have released flies bore remarkable resemblance to those used in field tests within the United States. Dr. Joseph Needham, an expert on Oriental Medicine from Oxford University, headed an investigation, which concluded the U.S. carried out experiments in a type of bacteriological warfare Japan had specialized in which spread “vector insects like yellow-fever carrying mosquito capable of transmitting disease from one body to another.” This charge was confirmed by a team of international jurists who found flies infected with cholera.<sup>35</sup>

During the war, captive American pilots testified that they dropped pest-laden bombs, though their confessions were retracted after their release under the threat of court martial and possibly their subjection to Artichoke interrogation techniques involving psychological torture. POW Kenneth Enoch told Al Jazeera in 2010 that his confession was not coerced but real.<sup>36</sup> Another POW who issued a confession, Walker Mahurin, had curiously visited Ft. Detrick while serving as assistant executive to the Secretary of the Air Force.<sup>37</sup> Dave Chaddock’s *This Must be the Place: How the U.S. Waged Germ Warfare in the Korean War and Denied it Ever Since*, points to the authenticity of the pilot confessions by virtue of the precision of the detail and fact

---

<sup>32</sup> Thomas, *Secrets and Lies*, 47, 51.

<sup>33</sup> Pembroke, *Korea*, 174, 175. The latter memo was removed from the National Archives Record Group 218 with 1431 declassified documents in 2006 as part of what *The Washington Post* called a “secret government program to disappear historical documents from public view.”

<sup>34</sup> See John Butler, *The Red Dean of Canterbury: The Public and Private Faces of Hewlett Johnson* (London: Scale Arts Publishing, 2011), 196-202; See Stephen L. Endicott, *James G. Endicott: Rebel Out of China* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); *Memoirs of a Rebel Journalist: The Autobiography of Wilfred Burchett*, ed. George Burchett and Nick Shimmin (Australia: University of New South Wales Press, 2005), 403, 406; Burchett, *This Monstrous War*, 237-245. In July 1952, Dr. Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury in England, reported that he had seen evidence of germ warfare in China, though was dismissed as an “aged cockatoo of communism” and “wicked and irresponsible old man.” His testimony dovetailed, however, with observations by Canadian Reverend James G. Endicott and Australian journalist Wilfred G. Burchett, who interviewed peasants in Chukdong on the Chinese border who discovered clumps of flies and mosquitoes unnatural to the area and found mosquitoes when the area was under heavy snow.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Endicott and Edward Hagerman, *The United States and Biological Warfare: Secrets from the Early Cold War and Korea* (Indiana University Press, 1989), 194; Commission of International Association of Democratic Lawyers, Report on U.S. Crimes in Korea, March 31, 1952, Pyongyang, Korea, [www.wwpep.org/index/Resources\\_files/crime.pdf](http://www.wwpep.org/index/Resources_files/crime.pdf); Tom Buchanen, “The Courage of Galileo: Joseph Needham and the Germ Warfare Allegations in the Korean War,” *The Historical Association*, 2011, <http://www.csupomona.edu/~zywang/needham.pdf>. British soldiers witnessed a team of men in gas masks placing feathers around a small village which may have been laced with anthrax.

<sup>36</sup> Diarmuid Jeffreys, “Dirty Little Secrets: Al Jazeera Investigates the Claim that the U.S. Used Germ Warfare During the Korean War,” *Al Jazeera*, April 4, 2010; Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*; Thomas Powell, “Biological Warfare in the Korean War: Allegations and Cover-Up,” *Socialism and Democracy*, 31, 1 (2017), 23-42.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen L. Endicott, “Germ Warfare and ‘Plausible Denial:’ The Korean War, 1952-1953,” *Modern China*, 5, 1 (January 1979), 93.

that some of the pilots genuinely felt bad about what they had done, particularly since they had been well-treated in captivity.<sup>38</sup> Military records show that the U.S. Air Force's 3<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Wing dropped leaflet bombs after raids by 36 F-84 bombers followed by four B-26s, which carried leaflet cannisters. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Wing's Commander, Colonel Moore explained that the purpose of the leaflet warnings was to assist civilians before a bombing raid to escape injury and fatalities, which makes no sense coming at the end of an attack. Dropping bombs containing bacteriological agents is more likely in order to prolong the damage by contaminating the bombed area, as the Chinese had alleged.<sup>39</sup>

Olson and his colleagues at Ft. Detrick had developed their capacity for producing and delivering bacteriological weapons through expertise acquired secretly from Japanese scientists such as Gen. Ishii who according to *Reuters*, visited South Korea during the Korean War.<sup>40</sup> Members of his Unit 731, according to a 2001 Japanese language book, worked for a chemical section of a clandestine unit hidden in Yokosuke naval base during the Korean War.<sup>41</sup> According to Professor Masataka Mori who has studied Unit 731, there are striking similarities between the diseases and weapons used by the Japanese military in China and those said to have been deployed by the United States against targets in northern Korea. "The bombs found on the Korean Peninsula were made of metal, while those used in China were ceramic," Mori stated, "but the symptoms reported in North Korea are very similar to those witnessed in China."<sup>42</sup>

British author Gordon Thomas reported that Sidney Gottlieb instructed CIA agent Hans Tofte to obtain a selection of Korea's insect life and small field animals like jungle rats and voles. These were brought back to Ft. Detrick where Olson and the other "madmen in the laboratories" tested them on guinea pigs, rabbit, rhesus, monkeys and pigs in order to establish their suitability to form the basis for biological weapons.<sup>43</sup> Olson is alleged to have subsequently traveled with Dr. Gottlieb to Tokyo to visit the Far East Command's Unit 406 Medical Laboratory in the Mitsubishi Higashi building where researchers assisted by Japanese scientists were working with plague, anthrax, undulant fever and cholera to discover their potential for being used as weapons. Olson according to Thomas helped set up an ultra-high security unit known as 8003 that was active in the development of airborne pathogens.<sup>44</sup> Norman Cournoyer

---

<sup>38</sup> Chaddock, *This Must be the Place*. See also Burchett, *This Monstrous War*, 244.

<sup>39</sup> Pembroke, *Korea*, 179. After the opening of the Soviet archives, historians claimed to have unearthed documents proving that the Soviets assisted the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in creating fake contaminated zones. These documents, however, which have never been seen by western scholars but only by a right-wing Japanese journalist, pointed to possible manipulation in only two of 13 sites. Powell, "Biological Warfare in the Korean War," Stephen Endicott and Edward Hagerman, "Twelve Newly Released Soviet-era Documents and allegations of U. S. germ warfare during the Korean War," *H-Diplo*, July 5, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey A. Lockwood, *Six-Legged Soldiers: Using Insects as a Weapon of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 126, 172; Regis, *The Biology of Doom*, 110, 128; Harris, *Factories of Death*.

<sup>41</sup> Ban Shigeo, *Rikugun Noborito Kenkyujo no shinjitsu* [The Truth About the Army Noborito Research Institute], Tokyo: Fuyo Shobo Shuppan, 2001, reviewed by Stephen C. Mercado on CIA website, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no4/article11.html>

<sup>42</sup> Endicott and Hagerman, *The United States and Biological Warfare*; Julian Royall, "Did the US Wage Germ Warfare in Korea?" *The Telegraph*, June 10, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, *Secrets and Lies*, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Wilfred G. Burchett and Alan Winnington, *Koje Unscreened* (Chinese-American Friendship Association, 1952), [www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/archive/koje.pdf](http://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/archive/koje.pdf); Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*.

told Eric in May 2001 that “if biological warfare was used in Korea your father definitely would have known it. Being in special operations at Detrick...oh yes, he would have known it.” Cournoyer stated further that Korea was “the key to your father’s death. It was where the two secret CIA programs – mind control experiments and the use of biological weapons – came together.”<sup>45</sup>

When then-CIA Director William Colby appeared before Congressional hearings, he said the CIA records for its biological warfare program were “very incomplete” because many had been destroyed in 1972-1973.<sup>46</sup> Olson’s death may very well have been another key in preventing the truth from getting out, thus allowing the U.S. to maintain a moral high ground in the Cold War. Eric Olson wrote: “the question of biological warfare in Korea was, from the American side, the biggest state secret of the Cold War. Settling this issue in the affirmative would mean that the U.S. was not only the first nation to employ nuclear weapons, but biological ones as well. According to my father’s old colleague and dear friend [Cournoyer], this is quite probably what got my father murdered.”<sup>47</sup>

### **St. Anthony’s Fire: The CIA, LSD and the Pont Saint D’ésprit Plague**

Hal Albarelli Jr., author of the deeply researched book *A Terrible Mistake* remains skeptical of Eric Olson’s emphasis on the importance of germ warfare in Korea, suggesting that Frank was in Europe at the time of his alleged trip with Dr. Gottlieb. He believes that Olson’s threatened whistleblowing centered on unethical CIA mind control and drug experimentation and the agency’s connection to the outbreak of a mysterious plague in the southern French town of Pont Saint D’ésprit on August 16, 1951.

On that day, two hundred and fifty townspeople suddenly became wildly disoriented, babbling incoherently while mired in hallucinations. Hospitals became overflowed with stricken victims and patients had to be forcibly tied to their beds. Others suffered from insomnia. A journalist reported “terrifying scenes of hallucination... taken straight out of the middle ages, scenes of horror and pathos, full of sinister shadows.”<sup>48</sup> Seven died from the outbreak including a twenty-five-year old man previously in good health, and many more had to be committed to the insane asylum. Many of the towns’ animals died as well.

At the time, people believed the bread had been poisoned with ergot by mold on some of its grains as in medieval plagues known as Anthony’s Fire, or that the water supply had somehow been contaminated. Reviewing the first book-length account of the disaster, *St. Anthony’s Fire*, by American journalist John Fuller in the *British Medical Journal*, author

---

<sup>45</sup> Thomas, *Secrets and Lies*, 18; Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*, 679.

<sup>46</sup> Pembroke, *Korea*, 180. Colby stated that he could not rule out that bacteriological weapons had been used “in an aggressive way against someone to kill someone.” The records may have included information about alleged testing of germ microbes on Korean prisoners at the Koje-do prison, as was alleged by the prisoners after they seized the camp Commandant Francis T. Dodd. See ie. Ted Barris, *Deadlock in Korea: Canadian at War 1950-1953* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2010), 155; Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*; Burchett, *This Monstrous War*, 214; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “The U.S., Japan and the Undercover War in Korea,” In *The Korean War in Asia: A Hidden History*, ed. Tessa Morris-Suzuki (New York: Routledge, 2018), 182.

<sup>47</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 680.

<sup>48</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 350; John G. Fuller, *The Day of St. Anthony’s Fire* (New York: The McMillan Co., 1968).

Griffith Edwards noted: “The official explanation [of the outbreak] was of flour having been contaminated by an organic mercury fungicide but much of the evidence points to a variety of ergot poisoning. The similarity of the symptoms to those of LSD effects is startling.” Fuller had rendered the same conclusion quoting a physician-expert who said “there is one and only one cause of the tragedy. Some form of ergot, and that form has logically got to be akin to LSD.”<sup>49</sup>

Fuller’s book noted the presence of Sandoz Company researcher Dr. Albert Hoffmann in Pont Saint D’ésprit during the summer of 1951 (Sandoz supplied LSD to the U.S. army and CIA). Hoffman mentions the outbreak in his own book, *LSD: My Problem Child* in 1979, but leaves out that he was in town in the days immediately after. Evidence from Frank Olson’s passport and those of his SOD colleagues’ shows that they happened to be in France at that time as well. George H. White referred to the “secret” of Pont Saint D’ésprit in an agency memo; other declassified documents show that Sandoz and CIA officials engaged in discreet, ongoing discussions about Pont St. D’ésprit which was referred to as “an experiment” and not an accident. According to Albarelli Jr., the village was chosen because it was on the outs with the French government of Charles de Gaulle and had a number of communists living there.<sup>50</sup>

The U.S. army at the time considered LSD a potential secret weapon that when added to the drinking water could make an army of soldiers disoriented and psychotic, hence incapable of fighting. Major General William M. Creasy, former chief of the army chemical corps, wrote in *Readers Digest* in September 1959, that psycho-chemical agents were preferable to conventional bombing to recapture [enemy-held] positions and could deliver a town unharmed “once the population has recovered from a brief period of lunacy.” The army, Creasy said, had the capacity to deliver psycho-chemicals through aerosol bombs [Olson’s specialty] or in liquid and powder form by “sabotage methods” such as contamination of water and food supplies, which could have been tested at Pont Saint D’ésprit.<sup>51</sup>

CIA doctors such as Henry K. Beecher who reported to the TSS Branch and Dr. Gottlieb are known to have proposed contaminating a battleship with LSD and putting LSD in the water supply as a way to test its effects. Albarelli Jr. suspects that this occurred at Pont Saint D’ésprit under an Operation Spann.<sup>52</sup> He found a secret FBI document that pointed to an experiment involving chemical agents that was planned for the New York subway system, and was told by a former Fort Detrick biochemist that the New York City experiments “were delayed until after the experiment was conducted in France.” The results of the latter, he said, were “good” but yielded “an adverse effect or what would now be called a ‘black swan’ reaction. That several people died was unexpected, completely unexpected. It wasn’t supposed to turn out that way.”<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Griffith Edwards, “Poison in Pont-Saint-D’ésprit,” *British Medical Journal*, May 3, 1969, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1983173/pdf/brmedj02030-0064a.pdf>; Fuller, *St. Anthony’s Fire*, 301.

<sup>50</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 350; Behind the headlines, Hank Albarelli interviewed, July 28, 2013, <https://www.sott.net/article/264434-Behind-the-Headlines-Hank-Albarelli-Interview-CIA-Mind-Control-Frank-Olson-and-JFK>.

<sup>51</sup> William M. Creasy, “Can We Have War Without Death?” *Reader’s Digest*, September 1959, 73-76; Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*; Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*.

<sup>52</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 61, 366-371.

<sup>53</sup> H.P. Albarelli Jr., “CIA: What Really Happened in the Quiet French Village of Pont-Saint D’ésprit,” *Voltaire Network*, Marc h16, 2010, <https://www.voltairenet.org/article164447.html>. Key surviving documents are on the website and in Albarelli’s book.

The same source told Albarelli Jr. that Olson was drugged at a company retreat in Deep Creek Lodge in Maryland several days before his death because he was thought to be “talking to the wrong people” about Pont Saint-D’ésprit including a neighbor he car-pooled with, and the CIA wanted to know the extent of his indiscretions. This, according to Albarelli Jr., explains cryptic references in CIA documents to possible security violations, and remarks by CIA operative Stanley Lovell about Frank having “no inhibitions.” Olson feared for his safety on the eve of his death, telling his wife someone was trying to poison him. Before being checked into the Statler hotel, he was taken to his old boss, Dr. Harold Abramson because the two men knew each other well and it was thought Olson would be forthcoming about the reasons for his security breaches, but to no avail.<sup>54</sup>

### **An Act of State: Piecing Together the Facts and Meaning of Olson’s Murder**

After Frank Olson’s death, his wife Alice had been visited by Frank’s superior, Lt. Col. Vincent Ruwet who said that there had been “some sort of accident” and that Frank had “either fallen or jumped out of a window,” two very different things.<sup>55</sup> The police investigation ended abruptly, and no autopsy was ever ordered. The priest called to administer Frank’s rites was also quietly moved aside. The family was told that Frank’s body was too badly disfigured for viewing - a falsehood that prevented the family from noticing a hematoma on his temple, a wound consistent with a blow to the head omitted from the 1953 medical examiner’s report. Five CIA “investigators” carried out their own inquiry into what agency documents labelled a “suicide,” paying substantial sums to Dr. Harold Abramson and another unidentified colleague who knew the truth.<sup>56</sup>

Robert Lashbrook and Sidney Gottlieb came over to the Olson home after the funeral and Vincent Ruwet made regular visits to “encourage [Alice] to think things that were not true about Frank’s death,” as he put it.<sup>57</sup> Edward Kennedy (D-MA) chaired a 1977 Congressional probe in which Sidney Gottlieb testified that there was only a causal connection between the LSD and Olson’s suicide because it had been taken a week before. Gottlieb otherwise was evasive at the hearing. Senator Kennedy, “the liberal lion” nevertheless concluded that the hearings “closed the book on this sorry chapter [the Olson affair],” which was framed as a “tragic accident.” Four years earlier, “the liberal lion” refused to subpoena another member of the executive branch, William Sullivan, after his committee had determined that Sullivan committed perjury when he stated that U.S. air strikes in Laos did not target civilians. Kennedy’s exoneration of Gottlieb and

---

<sup>54</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 689-691. After watching a film about Martin Luther, Olson went into work to tender his resignation, however he was instead taken by Lashbrook to the house of a former Broadway magician John Mulholland who probably hypnotized him, and Frank again revealed his intentions to blow the whistle.

<sup>55</sup> Frank’s obituary in *The Washington Star* also proclaimed that Olson had either fallen or jumped to his death and noted that Frank was found in his underwear and had crashed through the window. However, falling and crashing through a window are two separate things.

<sup>56</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 34, 35; Starrs and Ramsland, *A Voice for the Dead*, 131, 148; Eric Olson and Nils Olson V. United States of America, Civil Action No. 12-1924, Plaintiff’s Memorandum of Points and Authorities, May 3, 2013; Kinzer, *Poisoner in chief*, 124. James McCord, a former FBI intelligent agent and future Watergate burglar, according to journalist Stephen Kinzer, visited the room to assist Lashbrook in the cover-up. His specialty was making police investigations evaporate.

<sup>57</sup> Eric Olson and Nils Olson V. United States of America, Civil Action No. 12-1924, Plaintiffs Memorandum of Points and Authorities, May 3, 2013

Lashbrook - who both committed perjury at the hearing - was an example of Congress failing to hold Executive Branch representatives accountable for their abuses of power, commensurate with the breakdown of democracy in the United States.<sup>58</sup>

Following the excavation of Frank's body in 1996, tests for LSD in Frank's system proved inconclusive, affirming Gottlieb's statement. No evidence furthermore ever emerged to confirm that Frank had become psychotic in the days leading to his death, only that he had begged his CIA captors to let him go so he could flee some-place.<sup>59</sup> The LSD story appears to have been concocted in an attempt to not only cover up the real circumstances behind Olson's death but also discredit the 1960s counter-culture which promoted LSD as a consciousness raising drug.<sup>60</sup> A 1959 internal Army study had found that there was not one single case of residual ill-effect recorded in the years of LSD tests on thousands of soldiers, and a follow-up study authored by Jerome Jaffe, the drug-czar under Richard Nixon, found that "in man, deaths attributable to direct effects of LSD are unknown."<sup>61</sup>

Eric Olson had never believed the CIA's official story because the documents he was given by the agency were "so riddled with contradictions, omissions and outright lies" it was difficult to have any confidence in them; an assessment shared by the *New York Times*. Dr. Gottlieb previously shredded key documents and had said he was not in New York the week of Olson's death, though Lashbrook later said that he was. Colby had continued to hide the fact that Frank worked for the CIA. Dick Cheney, then Deputy Chief of Staff to President Gerald Ford wrote a memo to Donald Rumsfeld, Ford's chief of staff, noting that the administration had not fully investigated Olson's death and saying he was concerned that a lawsuit could result in the disclosure of classified information.

Eric noted that "in the wake of the Nuremberg trials in the late 1940s, the United States could not afford to be exposed as a sponsor of the sort of research it had prosecuted the Nazis for undertaking." After interviewing some of his father's colleagues, Eric came to the realization that the slipping of LSD into his father's Cointreau at the Deep Creek Lodge was not an

---

<sup>58</sup> Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, *Whiteout: The CIA, Drugs and the Press* (London: Verso, 1998), 194, 189-214; "Human Drug Testing by the CIA," Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Health and Science Research of the Committee on Human Resources, U.S. Senate, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, September 1977 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 1977),

[https://archive.org/stream/CiaCongressionalHearingsOnHumanDrugTesting/CiaCongressionalHearingsOnSecretChemicalsAndDrugs\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/CiaCongressionalHearingsOnHumanDrugTesting/CiaCongressionalHearingsOnSecretChemicalsAndDrugs_djvu.txt); Jo Thomas, "Key Figure Testifies in Private on C.I.A. Drug Tests," *The New York Times*, September 22, 1977. On Sullivan and Laos, see Fred Branfman, *Voices From the Plain of Jars: Life Under an Air War*, rev ed. with new introduction by Alfred W. McCoy (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

<sup>59</sup> Starrs, *A Voice for the Dead* 126-137; Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 612-616; Mary A. Fischer, "The Man Who Knew Too Much," *GQ Magazine*, January 2000. Olson's superior Vincent Ruwet found nothing that would lead him to believe Olson was of "unsound mind."

<sup>60</sup> See Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD, the CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 2013). LSD high priest Timothy Leary was himself subjected to Artichoke torture techniques in prison and thereafter ceased his LSD proselytizing. Use of the drug remained heavily penalized. See Joanna Harcourt Smith, *Tripping the Bardo with Timothy Leary: My Psychedelic Love Story* (North Charleston, SC: Creative Space Independent Publishing, 2013), 314.

<sup>61</sup> Jared Keller, "The Sad Tale of Frank Olson, the U.S. Government's Hallucinogen's Fall Man," *Pacific Standard*, May 14, 2019; Jerry Jaffe, "Drug Addiction and Drug Abuse," in *The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics*, ed. A.G. Gilman et al. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985). See also Tao Lin, *Trip: Psychedelics, Alienation and Change* (New York: Vintage, 2018); Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (New York: Penguin, 2018).

experiment that went wrong but was designed to get him to talk while hallucinating; an effort at enhanced interrogation. Mixed with the LSD was Meretran, a drug designed to make people talk more freely. Eric in turn believes that Frank revealed his whistle-blowing intentions to Gottlieb and other MK-ULTRA men present; the “terrible mistake” he had made. Eric stated that “for all his loyalty to his country and his readiness to perform his duty as an apostle of the biology of doom, [Frank] finally allowed his strong sense of morality to get the better of him. As a result, he had become another ‘expendable’ in the sinister world that Dr. Gottlieb had created.”<sup>62</sup>

After reopening investigation into the case in 1996, New York District Attorney Robert Morgenthau was astounded to discover several odd deaths that befell people linked in some way with the Olson case. They included David Bellin, the Executive Director of the Rockefeller Commission who may have been part of the cover-up, and Rudolph Halley, a close friend of CIA agent George White who knew about White’s work in drugging prostitutes with MK-ULTRA and possibly Olson’s death. (Halley was only 43 and said to have died from pneumonia but he was in excellent health). CIA Director William Colby also died in a suspicious “boating accident” off Chesapeake Bay Island days before he was scheduled to be interviewed by New York’s cold case unit.<sup>63</sup>

Lashbrook’s behavior had been particularly suspicious in that he was found sitting on the toilet having never left the room and told police that he discovered Olson was gone when he saw he was not in his bed. However, Olson’s bed-sheet and clothes had been pulled back in a manner consistent with someone ripping him out of bed forcibly, and the crash from the window would have required a running start (more than was possible in the small room) and made a noise.<sup>64</sup> Doorman Armand Pastore told an interviewer: “[Lashbrook] told the police he didn’t see any reason to go down. No reason, I mean what kind of animal reacts like that?”<sup>65</sup>

In 2000, Hank Albarelli Jr. interviewed Pastore who recalled a mysterious Frenchman named Jean Martin who worked at the Statler the night of Olson’s death. Albarelli Jr. determined that Martin was actually a CIA agent named Pierre Lafitte, who had ties to organized crime and did dirty work for the agency. He and Francois Spirito, a heroin trafficker and ex-Nazi collaborator who had just been released from an Atlanta penitentiary snuck in and out of the

---

<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*, 51; Ronson, *The Men Who Stare at Goats*, 235; Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*; Starrs, *A Voice for the Dead*, 148, 149; Tom Schoenberg, “CIA Accused of Cover-up in Military Scientist’s 1953 Fatal Fall,” *Bloomberg News*, November 29, 2012, <https://eassurvey.wordpress.com/2012/12/06/cia-accused-of-coverup-in-military-scientists-1953-fatal-fall-bipartisan-legislation-to-help-train-child-protection-professionals-to-detect-and-prevent-child-abuse/>; Stephanie Desmon, “In Reburial, Olson’s hope to lay saga of father to rest,” *Baltimore Sun*, August 9, 2002, <http://www.frankolsonproject.org/Articles/BaltSun.html>. Gottlieb testified before Congress about the use of Meretran.

<sup>63</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 637, 654. Bellin died after a freak fall in the shower of a hotel room in Rochester, Minnesota where he had gone for his annual physical at the Mayo clinic. For more on Colby’s suspicious death, see Zalin Grant, “Who Murdered the CIA Chief? William Colby A Suspicious Death,” <http://www.pythiapress.com/wartales/colby.htm>; Randall B. Woods, *Shadow Warrior: William Egan Colby and the CIA* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Starrs, *A Voice for the Dead*, 130. See also Kinzer, *Poisoner In-Chief*, 124.

<sup>65</sup> Pastore stated that the window shade had been fully intact, which contradicted Lashbrook’s original statement that he was awakened by a flapping window shade after Olson went out the window. Later, Lashbrook changed his story and told a psychiatrist Dr. Robert Gibson that “he awoke in the middle of the night and saw Olson standing in the middle of the room and crash through the window.” The latter is impossible because it would have required a running start and the size of the hotel room was too small. Fischer, “The Man Who Knew Too Much;” Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*, 492.

hotel room through a side door. They then struck Frank in the back of the head with a baseball bat or some other object, smashed the window and threw Frank out the window to make his death look like a suicide. A cryptic unsigned letter sent to Assistant New York District Attorney Steve Sarraco on April 17, 2000 from a former CIA employee who “had the luck of the draw to deal directly with Olson’s demise” said that “Mr. Olson’s fateful flight was ventured on wings bestowed by enfants terrible, LaFitte and Le Grande Lydio [Spirito].”<sup>66</sup>

In 2013, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg dismissed a lawsuit by the Olson family on technical grounds (notably that the family had already been awarded compensation by the CIA) though stated that the “public record supports many of [the family’s] allegations, far-fetched as they may sound.”<sup>67</sup> The CIA appeared to be following the modus operandi of its assassination manual published the year of Olson’s death. It recommended drugging somebody, hitting them in the head with a blunt object and then throwing them from a high place while making it look like a suicide as an ideal way of disguising murder. The manual also emphasized the method of the “contrived accident” which when successfully executed, “causes little excitement and is only casually investigated.”<sup>68</sup>

Sociologist David Simon notes in *Elite Deviance* that corruption and criminality are embedded in a competitive capitalistic society such as the U.S. in which people are socialized to accept a “win at all costs mentality” from the time they are young.<sup>69</sup> CIA operatives considering themselves as “game players” trying to outmaneuver their rival (the Russians and Chinese) were socialized into a world where deviant behavior extending to the realm of murder was considered necessary to gain advantage.<sup>70</sup> The national security bureaucracy at the same time prized secrecy and loyalty to one another above all else.<sup>71</sup>

Olson’s killing coincided with some other suspicious deaths resulting from “falls.” Laurence Duggan for example, chief of the Latin American Division at the State Department and a diplomatic adviser to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, died after purportedly jumping from a sixteenth-floor window in the midtown Manhattan building that housed the Institute of International Education, which he headed in December 1948. Only a few days before his fall, Duggan had been vigorously questioned by the FBI about secret contacts he maintained with Soviet intelligence agents while he worked for the State Department. The FBI also wanted to know about his relationship with another departmental employee, accused spy

---

<sup>66</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 689-693, 775. Eric Olson interviewed by Errol Morris in *Wormwood* (Netflix, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> James E. Boasberg, Memorandum opinion, *Olson v. United States*, <https://casetext.com/case/olson-v-united-states-18>; Ryan Abbott, “CIA Murder Claims are Credible, But Too Late,” *Courthouse News*, July 23, 2013, <https://www.courthousenews.com/cia-murder-claims-are-credible-but-too-late/> Eric and Nils Olson v. United States of America, Civil Action No. 121924,

<sup>68</sup> “A Study of Assassination,” <http://www.frankolsonproject.org/Documents/Assassination%20Manual.html>. The Israeli Mossad studied the Olson case as a model for how to carry out assassination and frame it as a suicide. Letter from Gordon Thomas to Eric Olson, November 30, 1998, Frank Olson Legacy Project.

<sup>69</sup> David R. Simon, *Elite Deviance* rev ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1999). See also Stephen F. Messner and Richard Rosenfeld, *Crime and the American Dream* 5th ed. (New York: Wadsworth, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> See Miles Copeland, *The Game Player: The Confessions of the CIA’s Original Political Operative* (London: Aururum, 1989). George White wrote to Sidney Gottlieb in 1966 “I was a very minor missionary, actually a heretic, but I toiled wholeheartedly in the vineyards because it was fun, fun, fun. Where else could a red-blooded American boy lie, kill, cheat, steal, rape, and pillage with the sanction and blessing of the All-Highest?” in Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 35.

<sup>71</sup> See Richard Barnett, *Intervention and Revolution* (New York: Mentor Books, 1972).



Alger Hiss who was about to go on trial. Armand Pastore noted: “They ruled Duggan’s death a suicide too, even though he had an overcoat and one galosh on when he fell. I mean, who takes off a galosh and then decides to jump out the window?”<sup>72</sup>

James Forrestal, the former Defense Secretary plunged to his death with a cord tied around his neck after being hospitalized for mental exhaustion at the Bethesda Naval hospital. Forrestal’s brother, Henry, believes his brother was murdered, as there were numerous inconsistencies in the official story and James was looking forward to release from the hospital the next day and to organizing his diaries and writing a new book, which might have exposed state secrets. Like with Olson, the case was hushed up and no thorough investigation was undertaken.<sup>73</sup>

Mainstream historians and political scientists are reluctant to consider the possibility that the CIA or elements working within the U.S. government would engage in violent intimidation or murder to silence whistle-blowers and prevent political change. Those analysts who delve into this realm of “deep politics,” like those who address the CIA’s complicity in the global narcotics trade, may be labelled as conspiracy theorists and deprived choice academic appointments or tenure. However, as Peter Dale Scott points out, this ostracism stems from an engrained ideology of American exceptionalism that attributes acts of political assassination to lone gunmen and refuses to acknowledge a dark and violent underbelly of American political culture comparable to authoritarian states. Scott notes that the Kennedy assassinations, combined with the killing of Martin Luther King Jr. and other liberal heroes in the 1960s, resulted in a major conservative and geographical realignment in U.S. politics and enabled the passage of laws restricting civil liberties. This is unlikely to have been coincidental, especially in considering the contradictions in the official narrative in each case.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 23; “Mid Century Deaths all Linked to CIA? New Evidence in Olson Case Suggests Similarities with Other Incidents,” *World Net Daily*, September 4, 2001, <https://www.wnd.com/2001/09/10682/>. Undersecretary of State Sumner Wells asked police for a complete investigation because he did not believe that it was possible Duggan had committed suicide. That he had only one galosh on suggests the other fell off in a struggle.

<sup>73</sup> See Cornell Simpson, *The Death of James Forrestal* (Boston: Western Islands, 1966); David Martin, *The Assassination of James Forrestal* (McCabe Publishing, 2017). James Forrestal’s spiritual adviser, Monsignor Maurice Sheehy, told reporters that an unidentified Navy warrant officer at the hospital told him that Forrestal “didn’t kill himself.” Martin’s account raises doubt about reports that Forrestal had gone insane beforehand. He bases his analysis on the findings of a secret Navy inquiry which previous historians ignored. Most suspiciously, Forrestal’s room was tampered with after his death. It was alleged that he had transcribed a poem before his death but the poem was not in his own handwriting and the Guard on duty reported that when he looked in his room before his death he was sleeping. In December 1963, Edward Grant Stockdale, Kennedy’s ambassador to Ireland who was said to have known a lot about Lyndon Baines Johnson’s crony Bobby Baker’s shady buildings and LBJ’s possible connection to the JFK assassination, was another one to “fall” from the window of his office on the thirteenth floor of the Alfred I. Dupont building in Miami.

<sup>74</sup> Peter Dale Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). A newly released memo by J. Edgar Hoover gives strong evidence of a cover-up, as he wrote that: “The thing I am concerned about, and so is Mr. Katzenbach, is having something issued so that we can convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin.” Scott Shane, “J.F.K. Files Released, Highlighting Hoover, L.B.J. Among Others,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 2017. On the Robert Kennedy assassination, see Philip H. Melanson, *The Robert F. Kennedy Assassination: New Revelations on the Conspiracy and Cover-Up, 1968-1991* (New York: S.P.I Books, 1994); and on the King case, see William Pepper, *An Act of State: The Execution of Martin Luther King Jr.* (London: Verso, 2003).

The existing evidence shows that Frank Olson's killing – the possibility of a suicide was ruled out by the New York District Attorney - was also covered up and had major political significance. It helped keep secret the fact that the United States government engaged in biological warfare, unethical drug testing, chemical weapon and LSD spraying and medical experimentation, and recruited Nazi scientists. Olson's killing also prevented a potential challenge to cultural assumptions surrounding scientific wonder weapons and the use of science for nefarious purposes in the Cold War, and kept powerful people out of jail. Furthermore, it blocked potential opposition to U.S. foreign policy, which was engaging in the very evil associated with the communists.

Recent studies have pointed out that American public opinion was not uniformly supportive of huge military budgets in the early Cold War, despite large-scale efforts to condition them.<sup>75</sup> After giving a speech in Madison Square Garden calling for worldwide prohibitions on the manufacture of atom bombs, guided missiles and military aircraft and cutting military spending to under 15 percent of the budget, then-Commerce Secretary and later presidential candidate Henry Wallace received over 10,000 letters, 81 percent of which were approving.<sup>76</sup> Had more people known about unethical government programs like those which Olson participated in, the rhetoric of the Cold War would have been rendered hollow, and dissent could have blossomed a generation before Vietnam and Watergate.

In a press conference on August 2002, Eric Olson told the media that his father's coffin had "turned out to be a Pandora's box. It's no surprise that the CIA's unethical human experiments would turn out to be linked to assassination. Once the value of human life has been cheapened, then murder lurks just around the corner. The surprising thing is that it has taken so long to make the connection. Even to historians, these two domains appeared to be discreet areas of endeavor. Now that has all changed."<sup>77</sup>

After years after searching for the truth about his father, Eric had come to recognize something important: namely that the violence of the American Century had come home, as Malcom X. once predicted ("chickens come home to roost"), and that empire was incompatible with democracy. His father was the one to pay the ultimate price.

---

<sup>75</sup> Robert Schaffer, "The Christian Century: Protestants Protesting Harry Truman's Cold War," *Peace & Change*, 42, 1, January 2017, 93-127.

<sup>76</sup> Dickson Hartwell, "The Abundant Mr. Wallace," *Colliers Magazine*, September 20, 1947, 113.

<sup>77</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 699.