

## EIRFeature

IT DIDN'T START WITH ABU GHRAIB

# Dick Cheney: Vice President for Torture and War

by Jeffrey Steinberg

In a rare display of editorial candor, *The Washington Post* devoted its lead editorial of Oct. 26, 2005 to Vice President Dick Cheney. Under the banner headline “Vice President for Torture,” the *Post* editors wrote: “Vice President Cheney is aggressively pursuing an initiative that may be unprecedented for an elected official of the executive branch: He is proposing that Congress legally authorize human rights abuses by Americans. ‘Cruel, inhuman and degrading’ treatment of prisoners is banned by an international treaty negotiated by the Reagan administration and ratified by the United States. The State Department annually issues a report criticizing other governments for violating it. Now Mr. Cheney is asking Congress to approve legal language that would allow the CIA to commit such abuses against foreign prisoners it is holding abroad. In other words, the vice president has become an open advocate of torture.”

After reviewing the evidence of ongoing CIA and military torture of prisoners in Afghanistan and Iraq, resulting in four known deaths, the editorial turned back to the subject of Vice President Cheney: “It’s not surprising that Mr. Cheney would be at the forefront of an attempt to ratify and legalize this shameful record. The vice president has been a prime mover behind the Bush administration’s decision to violate the Geneva conventions and the U.N. Convention Against Torture and to break with decades of past practice by the U.S. military. These decisions at the top have led to hundreds of documented cases of abuse, torture and homicide in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr. Cheney’s counsel, David S. Addington, was reportedly one of the principal authors of a legal memo justifying the torture of suspects.”

The editorial reported on Cheney’s threats to have President Bush veto the defense spending bill if Congress included language banning torture. But the U.S. Senate, by a bipartisan, veto-proof vote of 90-9, passed an amendment sponsored by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), containing precisely such a ban. “So now,” the editorial concluded, “Mr. Cheney is trying to persuade members of a House-Senate conference committee to adopt language that would not just nullify the McCain



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*The torture and cover-up team in the Oval Office in April 1975, when Dick Cheney (left) was deputy chief of staff and Donald Rumsfeld (right) was chief of staff for President Gerald Ford (back to camera).*

amendment but would formally adopt cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment as a legal instrument of U.S. policy. The Senate's earlier vote suggests that it will not allow such a betrayal of American values. As for Mr. Cheney: He will be remembered as the vice president who campaigned for torture."

And how did Vice President Cheney respond? Following the Federal indictment and resignation of Cheney's chief of staff and top national security aide, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, on Oct. 28, for his role in the Plamegate leak, Cheney turned around and named the very same David Addington of torture-memo infamy as his new chief of staff. The message from Cheney could not have been any more blunt. He *is* the Vice President for war and torture—and he flaunts it. Cheney's behavior, now more than ever, makes his immediate removal from office a precondition for the United States to shed its current, unfortunately well earned, image as the world's leading rogue state.

### **It Didn't Start With 9/11**

Some people who have known Dick Cheney for a long time say they are perplexed by his open embrace of perpetual war and torture, since he took charge of the Bush Administration from his Vice Presidential perch in January 2001. Some say that the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 traumatized the man, and that Cheney went through a marked personality change after that. Other Cheney apologists describe him as living on borrowed time, always facing sudden death from his serious degenerative heart disease, and therefore, a man in a hurry to complete his life's mission, with no patience for anyone standing in his way.

But a more careful review of Cheney's past suggests that he went through no such radical personality change. In fact, the very first time he found himself in a top White House post, he moved heaven and earth to cover up a long-standing CIA program of torture: crimes against humanity, as spelled out at Nuremberg; and what one close observer called "a national security assassination."

Based on *EIR*'s investigation, Dick Cheney comes across as a man obsessed with torture and war for more than 30 years, who has carefully used the power of his office to trample on the U.S. Constitution, international law, and the most basic concepts of humanity.

### **A White House Coverup**

On July 11, 1975, then-Deputy White House Chief of Staff Dick Cheney penned a memorandum for his boss and sponsor, Donald Rumsfeld, President Gerald Ford's Chief of Staff. The memo dealt with "The Olson Matter/CIA Suicide," and was written in response to a press conference the previous day by the wife and three children of a deceased U.S. Army chemist, Dr. Frank Olson.

Dr. Olson had died under mysterious circumstances in November 1953. He had plunged from a 13th-floor window of the Statler Hotel in New York City, at 2:30 in the morning of Nov. 28, while in the company of a CIA officer, Dr. Robert V. Lashbrook. At the time, his death was ruled a suicide, and no thorough autopsy was conducted. The Olson family remained clueless about the true circumstances of Dr. Olson's death until June 10, 1975, when the "Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States," chaired by Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller, publicly released its report.

MEMORANDUM FOR: DON RUMSFELD  
FROM: DICK CHENEY *R. Cheney*  
SUBJECT: The Olson Matter / CIA Suicide

Attached is a proposed brief statement for the President to use at his Press Conference. It would be best for him to use it in response to a question, although if he wished, he can use it as an opening statement.

There is also attached a four page memo prepared by the Civil Division, the Department of Justice, based upon information obtained from the CIA regarding the events surrounding Mr. Olson's death.

Rod Hills has questions concerning the last paragraph of the Justice Department memo which expresses the Justice Department opinion that court action against the U. S. would be barred. He will pursue the matter with the Attorney General.

At this point, we do not have enough information to be certain we know all of the details of this incident. Furthermore, there are serious legal questions that will have to be resolved concerning the Government's responsibility, the possibility of additional compensation, and the possibility that it might be necessary to disclose highly classified national security information in connection with any court suit, or legislative hearings on a private bill intended to provide additional compensation to the family.

Determined to be an administrative marking  
Cancelled per E.O. 12356, Sec. 1.3 and  
Archivist's memo of March 10, 1983  
By            DATE           

*The July 11, 1975 memo authored by Cheney to Rumsfeld on the Olson revelations, shows Cheney's commitment to government cover-up 30 years ago (and barely a year after President Nixon's resignation for covering up the Watergate crimes).*

Buried on page 227 of the Rockefeller Commission report were the following three paragraphs, inserted in a section describing the CIA's secret experiments on mind control drugs, in which American citizens were used as guinea pigs, sometimes without their consent:

"The Commission did learn, however, that on one occasion during the early phases of this program (in 1953), LSD was administered to an employee of the Department of the Army without his knowledge while he was attending a meeting with CIA personnel working on the drug project.

"Prior to receiving the LSD, the subject had participated in discussions where the testing of such substances on unsuspecting subjects was agreed to in principle. However, this individual was not made aware that he had been given LSD until about 90 minutes after it had been administered. He developed serious side effects and was sent to New York with a CIA escort for psychiatric treatment. Several days later, he jumped from the thirteenth floor window of his room and died as a result.

"The General Counsel ruled that the death resulted from 'circumstances arising out of an experiment undertaken in the course of his official duties for the United States government,' thus ensuring his survivors of receiving certain death benefits. Reprimands were issued by the Director of Central Intelligence to two CIA employees responsible for the incident."

The next day, June 11, 1975, the *Washington Post* published a front-page story by Thomas O'Toole, detailing the Rockefeller Commission findings, and, for the first time, the Olson family got some indication of the actual circumstances of the death of Dr. Frank Olson. Or did they?

The Rockefeller Commission revelations would trigger a 30-year odyssey for then 31-year-old Eric Olson, the oldest son of Dr. Olson, a Harvard-trained psychologist, who has since devoted much of his life to getting to the bottom of the circumstances surrounding the death of his father. Gradually, over the course of three decades, Eric Olson has peeled away more and more of the layers of the cover-story, and now, for the first time, has something approximating a true picture of the events surrounding his father's death more than a half-century ago.

### The Cheney Memo

The first obstacle that the Olson family ran up against, after the Rockefeller revelations, was Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. At the time, the Olsons had no idea of this. In fact, it was not until a quarter of a century later that the Olsons learned about the existence of a treasure-trove of

White House documents on file at the Gerald Ford Presidential Library, that shed light on what happened in July 1975. By then, the access to those documents had been restricted by a George W. Bush Presidential order, signed early in his first term. An historian, Kathryn S. Olmsted, who had written about the mid-1970s investigations into the CIA and FBI, made the documents available to Eric Olson in late Spring 2001.

On July 11, 1975, Cheney wrote a memo to Rumsfeld on the Olson revelations. "At this point," Cheney wrote, "we do not have enough information to be certain we know all of the details of this incident. Furthermore, there are serious legal questions that will have to be resolved concerning the Government's responsibility, the possibility of additional compensation, and the possibility that it might be necessary to disclose highly classified national security information in connection with any court suit, or legislative hearings on a private bill intended to provide additional compensation to the family."

Attached to the Cheney-to-Rumsfeld memo was a four-page Justice Department chronology of events leading to Dr. Olson's "suicide," and a proposed one-paragraph statement for President Ford to deliver at a scheduled press conference later that day, including an invitation to the Olson family to visit the White House to receive an official apology from the President for Dr. Olson's death and the 20 years of govern-





Courtesy of Eric Olson

*Frank Olson, who in 1953 paid with his own life for being a patriot who believed that the United States should not sanction torture and murder.*



Courtesy of Eric Olson

*It took Eric Olson, Frank's son, more than 30 years to push through the U.S. government's obstacles and lies, and learn the truth about his father's death.*

at all clear that we can keep such evidence from becoming relevant even if the government waives the defense of the Federal Employees Compensation Act. Thus, in the trial it may become apparent that we are concealing evidence for national security reasons and any settlement or judgment reached thereafter could be perceived as money paid to cover up the activities of the CIA."

Just a little more than a year after the resignation of President Richard Nixon for covering up the crimes of Watergate, top White House officials, including Dick Cheney, were candidly discussing a coverup of the Frank Olson case, "for national security."

Even as memos were flying back and forth between the White House, the CIA, and the Justice Department, shaping a damage control and pay-off strategy, President Ford did hold his Oval Office apology session with the Olson family, on July 21, 1975. Two days later, the Olsons had lunch with then-CIA Director William Colby. At the lunch, Colby personally handed over approximately 150 pages of redacted CIA documents, all pertaining to the death of Dr. Frank Olson. At that time, the Olson family had no idea that Frank Olson had worked for the CIA. They thought he was employed by the U.S. Army, as a civilian chemist at Fort Detrick, the home of the military's biological and chemical weapons laboratories.

In fact, Olson had worked for the CIA, and was brought in on some of the Agency's most secret efforts to develop "truth drugs" and brainwashing techniques for interrogations. Those top secret assignments set into motion, step by step, the events that led to the Statler Hotel, and Dr. Frank Olson's murder.

## **Robbed and Cheated**

Unbeknownst to the Olson family at the time of the Ford and Colby meetings, the House Government Operations

Committee, under the chairmanship of Rep. Bella Abzug (D-N.Y.), held several days of hearings, beginning July 22, 1975, at which CIA General Counsel Lawrence Houston was grilled about a Memorandum of Understanding, dated March 1, 1954, between the Justice Department and the CIA, exempting all CIA personnel from criminal prosecution for actions they undertook in the national security interest of the United States.

At one point, Houston was explicitly asked, by Abzug, if the exemption included the murder of Dr. Frank Olson. Decades later, it would be made clear that Abzug was much closer to the truth than she probably suspected at the time.

From the official House transcript:

**Ms. Abzug:** Would you please tell me what the decision was which was made with respect to the 1953 LSD-induced suicide of Mr. Frank Olson in New York? Was there an internal investigation conducted by the CIA?

**Mr. Houston:** There was an internal investigation conducted by the CIA at the direction of the then-Director, Mr. Dulles.

**Ms. Abzug:** Was this matter ever referred to the Department of Justice?

**Mr. Houston:** I do not recall that it was referred to the Department of Justice. My only dealings with the case was with the Bureau of Employee Compensation.

**Ms. Abzug:** It may very well have been a State offense if there was foul play. Was it ever referred to the New York Police Department or State authorities for consideration?

**Mr. Houston:** Not that I recall.

**Ms. Abzug:** In other words, this memorandum of understanding, in your judgment, gave authority to the CIA to make decisions, to give immunity to individuals who happened to work for the CIA, for all kinds of crimes, including possible murder?

**Mr. Houston:** It was not designed to give immunity to

individuals. It was designed to protect operations or information of the Agency, which was [sic] highly sensitive.

**Ms. Abzug:** Was that not the effect of the actual interpretation made by the CIA and their advisors?

**Mr. Houston:** It could have that effect, yes.

**Ms. Abzug:** Did it not have that effect?

**Mr. Houston:** In certain cases it did.

Dick Cheney continued to be a central player in the White House efforts to bury the Frank Olson story. On Aug. 4, 1975, Roderick Hills wrote another memo to Cheney, warning, "The attorneys for the Olson family are pushing very hard for information and are claiming a lack of cooperation with the CIA and DOD. I cannot be certain, of course, but it appears to me that they have been increasingly belligerent. . . . Accordingly, I believe that sometime in the next week or two we should attempt to contact the attorneys with the help of the Attorney General or perhaps through an intermediary (Mitch Rogovin, Special Counsel to the CIA, has a partner at Arnold and Porter who is quite close to the Olson children) to see if a settlement might not be arranged."

Three days later, on Aug. 7, 1975, Mitchell Rogovin, Special Counsel to the Director of the CIA, wrote to Director Colby, reporting on his attempts to negotiate a settlement with Olson family attorney David Kairys. "David Kairys, the attorney for the Olson family, called this afternoon somewhat distressed," Rogovin wrote. "The family has reviewed the materials we had made available and appears to believe that Frank Olson was killed by the CIA. Their theory is bottomed on the assumption that Frank Olson was a security risk. Kairys says that the file seems to be more concerned about security than how Olson actually died." The memo itemized all of the questions raised by the family, after reviewing the CIA documents, and noted, ominously: "Kairys insists that the family wants to know what happened to Frank Olson. To facilitate this lack of information from the files, Kairys wants to take sworn depositions of CIA people as well as Lashbrook, Abramson, and Gottlieb."

"Abramson" referred to Dr. Harold Abramson, an allergist, who was secretly employed by the CIA in its experiments on LSD and other mind-altering drugs. Following Frank Olson's drugging on LSD at Deep Creek Lake in western Maryland on Nov. 19, 1953, he was brought by CIA official Lashbrook to New York, for "psychiatric" treatment by Dr. Abramson—who had no psychiatric training or degree.

"Gottlieb" referred to Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the chief chemist of the CIA's Technical Services Staff, and the head of



*To Mrs. Alice Olson, with deepest gratitude  
and appreciation and with warmest best wishes,  
Gerald R. Ford*

*President Gerald Ford (center) meets with Mrs. Alice Olson and her four children in the Oval Office, July 21, 1975, to make a personal apology—in accordance with the Administration's cover-up and damage-control strategy.*

Project MKULTRA, one of the CIA's psychological warfare research and development projects, to develop "techniques that would crush the human psyche to the point that it would admit anything." Dr. Gottlieb was the person who covertly administered the LSD to Olson at Deep Creek Lake.

On Oct. 29, 1975, CIA Director Colby wrote to President Ford, complaining that the Justice Department was balking at a private settlement with the Olson family, on the grounds that attorneys there believed the government would win a lawsuit. "Under the circumstances," Colby wrote, "this would not appear to be in the best interests of the nation or the Olson family. I believe in good conscience that the circumstances of this case require an equitable response from the government." Colby recommended that the family be paid \$1,250,000 through a private bill in the Congress.

Two days after writing the letter to President Ford, Bill Colby was fired as CIA Director in what came to be known as the "Halloween Massacre." Colby was replaced by George H.W. Bush as CIA Director. As for Dick Cheney, when his mentor and boss, Don Rumsfeld, was named as Secretary of Defense, he was promoted to White House Chief of Staff, where he would continue to preside over the coverup of the death of Frank Olson.

It would take two more years for the government to reach a settlement with the Olson family. When a private bill was finally introduced into the Congress, Rep. John T. Rousselot (R-Calif.) objected, and insisted that the deal be renegotiated.

One year later, in Autumn 1977, the Olson family agreed to accept half the amount—\$750,000—to close this sad and frustrating chapter in their lives.

Apart from his role in cutting back the Olson family's compensation payment, Rousselot earned another footnote in the Olson saga. In a contentious meeting with members of the Olson family, the Congressman blurted out that the family should not expect any special payments from the government, because "when someone works for the CIA, they know they are taking risks." Up until that point, no government official had bothered to tell the Olsons that Frank Olson had, indeed, been a CIA agent.

### **Eric Olson's Quest for the Truth**

In a Nov. 2, 2005 interview with this author, Eric Olson recalled that he was so frustrated by the events of 1975-77, that he spent the better part of the next 14 years living in Sweden. However, the distance from his home town of Frederick, Md., also enabled him to put the pieces in place, and chart out a course of action that would lead him closer and closer to the truth about his father's life and death. In 1984, he returned briefly to Washington and convinced his mother and brother (his sister had died in a tragic plane crash, along with her husband and child, in 1978) to launch their own investigation into what had really happened to Frank Olson. Eric and his mother contacted Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, now retired from the CIA, and living in Culpeper, Va., and Col. Vincent Ruwet, Frank Olson's immediate boss at the U.S. Army's Special Operations Division at Fort Detrick. They demanded to meet in person with the two men, and with others who had knowledge of the death of Frank Olson.

Gottlieb agreed to meet with the Olsons. Eric recalls that as he and his mother, Alice, arrived at the front porch of Dr. Gottlieb's home, the ex-CIA scientist greeted them: "I am so relieved you didn't have a gun and shoot me on the porch." It was an unnerving start to a frustrating discussion.

The conversation with Colonel Ruwet was even more frustrating, because the retired Army chemist had been one of Frank Olson's closest and most trusted friends. Ruwet refused to give the family any information, even though the CIA documents provided to the family back in 1975 had clearly identified him as being on the scene for all but the final 72 hours of Frank Olson's life.

In a visit a few weeks later to California, to meet with the man who had supposedly been asleep in the same room when Frank Olson took his plunge from the 13th floor of the Statler Hotel, a critical piece of information slipped out. Dr. Robert Lashbrook nervously admitted that Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the head of MKULTRA, had been in New York during the entire time that Lashbrook and Olson were there, presumably getting psychiatric help from the allergist and CIA LSD experimenter, Dr. Abramson.

Before returning to Europe, Eric Olson made one final trip with his mother and brother. They went to Delaware to interview the night manager of the Statler Hotel who had been

the first person on the scene to try to save Frank Olson after his plunge from room 1018A. Armand Pastore confirmed what Olson already suspected: The account provided by Dr. Lashbrook was "impossible."

Pastore told Olson that his father had still been alive when he rushed out to the front of the Statler Hotel after hearing a crash on the sidewalk. He also told Olson something that deepened Eric Olson's suspicion that his father had been murdered. Within moments of Frank Olson's plunge out the window, Dr. Lashbrook had placed a phone call to a number on Long Island. It was the home of Dr. Abramson. A switchboard operator at the Statler listened in on the brief conversation. Lashbrook said, "He's gone." Abramson replied, "That's too bad."

Pastore added that when he ushered police up to room 1018A, they found Lashbrook seated on the toilet. He had made no effort to call the police, and had not even rushed down to the sidewalk to see if Olson was dead or alive.

### **The New Autopsy**

In 1993, Alice Olson died. Eric Olson returned to America, at this point resolved that he would devote almost every waking moment to getting to the bottom of his father's death. One of the first things Eric did, with the support of his younger brother, Nils, was to contact Dr. James Starrs, a noted forensic pathologist at the George Washington University Medical Center. The Olson brothers asked Dr. Starrs, who was a friend of the family, to assemble a team to conduct an exhumation and new, thorough autopsy on Frank Olson—nearly 41 years after his burial. The Olsons hoped that new breakthroughs in forensic pathology might shed light on the circumstances surrounding their father's death. They proved to be right.

Dr. Starrs agreed to assemble a team of experts, to carry out the exhumation and autopsy. On June 2, 1994, the body of Frank Olson was exhumed and brought to a nearby university laboratory. Dr. Starr's 15-person team spent months, conducting laboratory tests and field investigations. They sent out investigators to interview Dr. Gottlieb, Dr. Lashbrook, Colonel Ruwet, Armand Pastore, and others with information relevant to the reopened forensic probe. In 2005, Dr. Starrs wrote a book, *A Voice for the Dead*, recounting the Olson investigation and a number of other dramatic cases in which he participated.

From the very outset, it was clear to Dr. Starrs's team that there had been a coverup of the circumstances surrounding Frank Olson's death. First, back in 1953, the family had been urged by Olson's colleagues to bury him in a sealed coffin, because the body was "too gruesome" to look at, because of injuries from the ten-story fall. That was a flat-out lie. Second, it turned out that the New York City Coroner had been, in his own words, "taken in" by Dr. Lashbrook, and had not performed a serious autopsy at the time, assuming that there was no dispute about what had happened. It was, according to Lashbrook, an open and shut case of suicide. Dr. Olson

had jumped through the closed 13th-floor hotel window. Dr. Dominic DiMaio, who later became the Chief Coroner of Manhattan, told Dr. Starrs's team that he had considered reopening the Olson case himself after the Rockefeller Commission report. But he never followed through.

Through computer simulations and other new techniques, Dr. Starrs's team recreated the fall, and concluded that Dr. Lashbrook's claim that Olson had plunged through the closed window could not have been true. Most important, Dr. Starrs found a severe hematoma above Frank Olson's left eye, which most likely came from a blow from a blunt instrument. It was certainly *not* the result of the fall.

On Nov. 28, 1994, 41 years to the day after Frank Olson's death, Dr. Starrs and his team held a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. to release their findings. Speaking for the majority of his team members and for himself, Dr. Starrs described the death of Frank Olson as "homicide deft, deliberate, and diabolical."

### **The Mysterious Death of William Colby**

On the strength of the new forensic evidence, the Olson brothers hired attorney Harry Huger to take the Frank Olson case to the Manhattan District Attorney, Robert Morgenthau. Huger's 15-page memo, dated May 12, 1995, summarized the Starrs findings, and itemized a string of anomalies in the case, which could only be solved through a criminal probe, which would allow for witnesses and documents to be subpoenaed. Finally, on April 19, 1996, the District Attorney informed Huger that a grand jury would be empaneled to probe Frank Olson's death. Two Assistant District Attorneys from the Manhattan DA's "cold case" squad, Steve Saracco and Daniel Bibb, were assigned to reopen the case as a potential homicide.

Several days into the reopened investigation, Saracco and Bibb sent a letter to the Central Intelligence Agency, requesting all CIA documents pertaining to the Olson death, and indicating that they wished to arrange to interview a number of former Agency officials about the death of Frank Olson. Among the ex-CIA people listed in the request were: Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, Dr. Robert Lashbrook, and former Director William Colby. The investigators also sought to interview Col. Vincent Ruwet.

The meeting with Colby never took place. Within a matter of days, William Colby was dead, the victim of a bizarre canoeing "accident" that has left many people, Colby's wife Sally Shelton Colby included, perplexed.

According to news accounts, on the evening of April 27, 1996, William Colby was alone at his home in Rockpoint, Md. He left the home, supposedly to take an evening canoeing trip on the nearby Wiconico River. Uncharacteristically, he left a partially eaten dinner and a glass of wine on the table, and left his computer running. When his body was found a week later on May 6, he was not wearing a life vest. Friends and neighbors later told authorities that Colby was a meticulous boater, who never took out his canoe without his life vest



*Former CIA Director William Colby was found dead in April 1996, just days after the Olson case was reopened by the Manhattan District Attorney.*

on. The vest was subsequently found 20 yards away from where the canoe was discovered.

Medical examiners concluded, without a scintilla of proof, that Colby had suffered a heart attack or a stroke, while canoeing, and had drowned. An initial Associated Press story had claimed that Colby had called his wife, who was travelling in Texas, and told her that he was not feeling well, "but that he was going canoeing anyway." An angry Sally Shelton Colby refuted the story in every detail. She had spoken to her husband shortly before he left the house, but he had said nothing about any nocturnal canoeing and had not said he was feeling ill.

The actual circumstances surrounding the death of William Colby may never be clarified. But there is no question that his untimely death came shortly after the letter arrived, asking for an interview on his recollections of the Frank Olson case. A close friend and former Vietnam-era aide to Colby, John DeCamp, confirmed to this author that Colby had spoken to him on numerous occasions about the mind control experiments of the U.S. government, and had encouraged him to pursue his own investigations, first as a Nebraska State Senator, and later as a private attorney.

Ironically, in 1993, through a mutual friend, Eric Olson had received a cryptic message from Bill Colby. Colby said simply that if Eric had any questions about the circumstances surrounding the death of his father, he should give him a call. Cynical that anyone from the CIA would ever tell him the truth, Eric Olson had passed up the opportunity, and Colby took what he knew about the Olson case to his untimely grave.

### **1997**

Two further dramatic breaks in the Olson saga came in 1997. Eric Olson found out that an Irish author, Gordon Thomas, had written a book in 1989 that contained some



startling new information about the Deep Creek Lake meeting where Dr. Gottlieb had spiked his father's glass of Cointreau with LSD. According to Thomas's *Journey Into Madness—The True Story of Secret CIA Mind Control and Medical Abuse*, the third CIA official in attendance, along with Doctors Gottlieb and Lashbrook, was Richard Helms. At the time, Helms was chief of operations for the CIA's Directorate of Plans, the covert action section. He would later be named CIA Director, and, in that capacity, he would order the shredding of the entire CIA file on the mind control experiments.

As Thomas reported on page 160, "The first three days of the [Deep Creek Lake] seminar passed uneventfully, with Dr. Olson explaining and demonstrating, and Richard Helms, Dr. Gottlieb and his assistant, Dr. Richard Lashbrook, listening. . . ."

If, as the CIA claimed, the Deep Creek Lake session was a routine annual review session between CIA officials and their counterparts at the Special Operations Division of the U.S. Army Chemical Corps at Fort Detrick, what was Helms, the boss of CIA covert operations, doing there?

On Nov. 30, 1998, after a year of correspondence, author Gordon Thomas sent a memorandum to Eric Olson, explaining how he came to learn this previously undisclosed, critical detail about the Deep Creek Lake gathering. He identified two men, whom he had come to know very well, as his confidential sources on Helms's presence at Deep Creek Lake: Dr. William Sargant, a noted British psychiatrist who had worked on secret MI5/MI6 and CIA mind control experiments from the 1940s through the 1970s; and William Buckley, the Beirut CIA station chief, who had been kidnapped and tortured to death by terrorists in the mid-1980s. Earlier, as Richard Helms's deputy, Buckley had been directly involved in the mind control program, working closely with Dr. Gottlieb, et al.

The Gordon Thomas memo opened up far more than the added detail of Richard Helms's presence at the Deep Creek Lake session. Thomas's extensive discussions with Dr. Sargant, whose 1957 book *Battle for the Mind—the Physiology of Conversion and Brainwashing* was a virtual how-to-do-it manual for mass social engineering and brainwashing, dramatically broke open the Olson case. In telling his story to Thomas, Dr. Sargant also confessed his own, pivotal role in the Olson murder.

It is therefore worth quoting extensively from the Thomas memorandum, the full text of which is posted on the website of the Frank Olson Legacy Project ([www.frankolsonproject.org](http://www.frankolsonproject.org)).

"In the 1950-60 period that is relevant to the events surrounding your father, I was a senior BBC writer/producer employed by the Science Department. Dr. Sargant was engaged by me as a consultant for a number of programmes. A relationship developed between us that became close and remained so until his death in 1988. . . . I am assured that because of the highly unusual circumstances of your father's death, the details have remained on file with several of the

above-mentioned agencies, specifically the Mossad. The circumstances surrounding the death are taught as a case study at the Mossad Training School outside Tel Aviv. . . ."

Note, parenthetically, that after the Manhattan DA's office reopened its investigation, one of the Assistant DA's assigned to the case, Steve Saracco, during the course of his investigation, independently corroborated through sources in Israel, that the Mossad did study Frank Olson's death as a picture-perfect, deniable assassination.

The Thomas memorandum continues: "At the time we spoke of your father, Dr. Sargant was Director of Psychological Medicine at St. Thomas' Hospital, London, England. He was also a consultant to the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI5/6), largely because of his work in the eliciting of confessions by the Soviets. . . . He told me he had visited Langley several times and had met with Dr. Sydney Gottlieb, Richard Helms and other senior CIA officials. During those visits he had also met with Dr. Ewan Cameron and, on one occasion, he had met Dr. Lashbrook and your father, Frank Olson.

"Subsequently Dr. Gottlieb and Frank Olson visited London and, according to Dr. Sargant, he accompanied them to Porton Down, Britain's main research centre for biological/chemical research. Dr. Sargant's interest in the work going on there was to study the psychological implications of mind-blowing drugs such as LSD. He told me that he developed a rapport with Frank Olson during a number of subsequent visits Frank Olson made to Britain. Dr. Sargant remarked that 'he was just like any other CIA spy, using our secret airfields to come and go.' Evidence in support of that can be found in Frank Olson's passport. . . ."

"From time to time, he referred to the death of your father and, as I clearly recall, he said his paperwork on the case had been handed over to the competent authorities in the British Secret Intelligence Service.

"Time and again Dr. Sargant expressed the view that, from all he had learned from the MI5 and his own contacts in Washington, there was a strong prima facie case that Frank Olson had been murdered. Sargant believed that Frank Olson could also have been given a cocktail of drugs that included more than LSD. He said he knew that Dr. Gottlieb had been researching into slow-acting depressants which, when taken, could drive a person to suicide.

"He also believed that, from his own meetings with Frank Olson, there was a very real possibility that your father could become a whistle-blower if he believed that what was happening was wrong. . . ."

Then comes the clincher, which revealed Sargant's own role in the events of the final months of Frank Olson's life: "In the summer of 1953 Frank Olson travelled to Britain, once again to visit Parton Down. Sargant met with him. Olson said he was going to Europe to meet with a CIA team led by Dr. Gottlieb. By then Sargant had learned that Frank Olson was acting deputy head of SO (Special Operations). . . ."

"Sargant saw Frank Olson after his brief visit to Norway and West Germany, including Berlin, in the summer of 1953.

1 December 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR: Inspector General

SUBJECT: Use of LSD

1. Pursuant to your request, Dr. William Gibbons, Chief, TSS, was contacted on the evening of 30 November 1953 concerning points hereinafter noted.

2. Dr. Gibbons has impounded all LSD material in CIA Headquarters in a safe adjacent to his desk. No one else has the combination to this safe; the material was so impounded on 29 November 1953.

3. Dr. Gibbons stated that he is stopping any LSD tests which may have been instituted or contemplated under CIA auspices. A cable will be sent to the field on 1 December 1953 to this effect.

4. Only two (2) field stations, Manila and Atsugi, have LSD material. There is none in Germany although Mr. William Hurvey recently expressed interest in the subject. A cable to the field on 1 December 1953 will instruct the field as to non-use and request data as to how much is on hand and who has custody and access.

5. CIA has furnished a limited quantity of LSD to Mr. George White, Chief of New York District, Narcotics Division, Treasury Department. Dr. Gibbons does not now know the exact amount in Mr. White's possession. White is fully cleared according to Dr. Gibbons.

6. In summary, LSD material over which CIA has or had distributive responsibility is located in four places: (a) Dr. Gibbons' safe, (b) Manila, (c) Atsugi, and (d) that in possession of George White. Exact amounts in each location are not yet available.

7. There are several "grants in aid" units and individuals in the United States doing research with LSD. None of these received

"He decided that Frank Olson could pose a security risk if he continued to speak and behave as he did. He recommended to his own superiors at SIS that Frank Olson should no longer have access to Porton Down or to any ongoing British research at the various secret establishments Olson had been allowed prior free access to.

"Sargent told me his recommendation was acted upon by his superiors. He was also certain that his superiors, by the nature of the close ties with the CIA, would have informed Richard Helms and Dr. Gottlieb of the circumstances why Frank Olson would no longer be given access to British research. Effectively a substantial part of Frank Olson's importance to the CIA had been cut off.

"When Dr. Sargent learned of Frank Olson's death—I recall him telling me it came in a priority message from the British Embassy in Washington, Sargent came to the immediate conclusion that Olson could only have been murdered. I recall him telling me that in many ways the staged death was almost classic."

Classic, indeed. In May 1997, around the same time that Eric Olson had begun his correspondence with Gordon Thomas, the *New York Times* had published a front-page story by Tim Weiner, reporting on newly declassified CIA documents about the 1954 CIA-orchestrated coup d'état in Guatemala against the government of

*An excerpt from a CIA memorandum on the use of LSD, obtained by Eric Olson.*

He said he was concerned about the psychological changes in Frank Olson. In Sargent's view, Olson, primarily a research-based scientist, had witnessed in the field how his arsenal of drugs, etc. worked with lethal effect on human beings (the 'expendable' SS men, etc.). Sargent believed that for the first time Olson had come face to face with his own reality.

"Sargent told me he believed Frank Olson had witnessed murder being committed with the various drugs he had prepared. The shock of what he witnessed, Sargent believed, was all the harder to cope with given that Frank Olson was a patriotic man who believed that the United States would never sanction such acts. . . .

"I remember Sargent telling me that he spoke several times in 1953 with Frank Olson at Sargent's consulting rooms in Harley Street, London. These were not formal patient/doctor consultations, but rather Sargent trying to establish what Frank Olson had seen and done in Europe.

"Sargent's own conclusion was that Frank Olson had undergone a marked personality change; many of Olson's symptoms—soul searching, seeking reassurance, etc., were typical of that, Sargent told me.

Jacobo Arbenz.

Among the declassified documents obtained by the National Security Archive, a Washington, D.C. think tank, was a late 1953 CIA assassination manual.

Under a subhead "2. Accidents," the manual read: "For secret assassination, either simple or chase, the contrived accident is the most effective technique. When successfully executed, it causes little excitement and is only casually investigated.

"The most efficient accident," the manual continued, "in simple assassination, is a fall of 75 feet or more onto a hard surface. Elevator shafts, stair wells, unscreened windows and bridges will serve. . . . If the assassin immediately sets up an outcry, playing the 'horrified witness,' no alibi or surreptitious withdrawal is necessary. . . . Care is required to insure that no wound or condition not attributable to the fall is discernible after death. . . .

"If the subject's personal habits make it feasible, alcohol may be used [2 words excised] to prepare him for a contrived accident of any kind."

Several paragraphs later, under subhead "3. Drugs," the

manual noted, "In all types of assassination except terroristic, drugs can be very effective. If the assassin is trained as a doctor or nurse and the subject is under medical care, this is an easy and rare method. . . . If the subject drinks heavily, morphine or a similar narcotic can be injected at the passing out stage, and the cause of death will often be held to be acute alcoholism."

And finally, under subhead "5. Blunt weapons." "Blows should be directed to the temple, the area just below and behind the ear, and the lower, rear portion of the skull."

Among the approximately 150 pages of CIA documents that had been handed over to the Olson family by William Colby in their July 1975 meeting, were two eyewitness accounts of Frank Olson's final days, which took on special meaning when cross-gridded with the CIA's 1953 assassination manual.

The first document was by Colonel Ruwet. Ruwet had accompanied Frank Olson to New York, on Nov. 24, 1953, for psychiatric consultations with Dr. Harold Abramson. The consultation was arranged by the CIA's Dr. Lashbrook, who also travelled to New York with the two Army Chemical Corps men. Ruwet wrote, "We arrived in New York without incident, proceeded from LaGuardia Airport to Dr. Abramson's office; arrived there approximately 5 p.m. We left Dr. Olson with Dr. Abramson who requested us to come back in about 1 hour. After an hour we came back and Dr. Abramson suggested that we go to a hotel and we told him we had reservations at the Statler Hotel. He stated that he would come up to our room about 10:30 with some sedatives and also suggested that we have a 'high-ball.' . . .

"At about 10:30 p.m. Dr. Abramson came and brought a bottle of bourbon and some 'Nembutal' for Dr. Olson."

Dr. Abramson's own account, written on Dec. 4, 1953, made no mention of his instructions to Dr. Olson to take bourbon and Nembutol, two powerfully interactive substances. But he did write the following: "Mr. Olson was in a psychotic state when hospitalization was decided upon with delusions of persecution. There are two aspects in regard to the relationship to the work in which he was engaged. It is well known that it is an occupational hazard to mental stability to be doing the type of work connected with his duties. Guilt feelings are well known to occur to a greater or less extent. Superimposed on these guilt feelings which are certainly an occupational hazard is his participation in an experiment wherein he felt that many of his feelings became overwhelming. It is well known that many drugs produce this effect. For example, I have had a patient of mine recently attempt suicide after taking one capsule of Nembutal. A capsule of Nembutal contains one and one-half grains. This is a therapeutic dose which is taken by thousands of people daily yet this patient's personality structure was so oriented that one dose of this material taken by thousands of people daily was sufficient to have her reach for the box which she did. Fortunately her husband was present and caused her to vomit up the capsules.

It is certainly conceivable and certainly cannot be excluded that Mr. Olson's participation in an experiment in which a drug was administered could in just the same way precipitate a crisis which would upset the mental processes so that disorientation and the lack of mental functioning might be produced with the results readily observed."

## Closure

In early May 2001, Eric Olson received an unexpected telephone call from one of his father's oldest friends and closest collaborators at Fort Detrick. Norman Cournoyer had served with Frank Olson during World War II, when the two men "had designed the protective gear worn by U.S. troops in the Normandy invasion in case they were met by biological weapons" (this quote is from Eric Olson's contemporaneous memo on his three-day meeting with Cournoyer).

Cournoyer had recently seen an April 1, 2000 *New York Times Magazine* story on the Olson case by Michael Ignatieff, and had decided, after much soul-searching, to provide Eric Olson with the missing pieces of the story behind the U.S. government's murder of his father.

Olson travelled to Amherst, Mass. and met with Cournoyer from May 16-19, 2001.

Among the things that Cournoyer revealed to Eric: First, sometime in 1946 or 1947, Frank Olson's career turned onto a "new path." He went to work for the CIA, and was drawn into a program euphemistically called "information retrieval." Under such exotic code-names as BLUEBIRD and ARTICHOKE and MKULTRA, Olson, an expert in chemical and biological weaponry, was drawn into work on interrogation methods, designed to draw information from even the most tight-lipped targets. The drugs and other chemical techniques used in these programs were tied to the most extreme forms of interrogation techniques, often incorporating torture.

For most of his time with the CIA programs, Olson remained in the laboratory at Fort Detrick. But beginning in 1950, according to Cournoyer, Olson began travelling abroad, taking part in live interrogations of "expendables," wartime Nazi criminals, suspected Soviet spies, and double-agents.

Cournoyer told Eric Olson that, following a trip to Europe in July and August of 1953, Frank Olson had come to him in confidence. Cournoyer still maintained his top secret security clearances, so Olson had no qualms about telling his friend that he had been eyewitness to more than one murder-by-interrogation. Cournoyer later told two German documentary filmmakers: "Frank told me, 'Norm, they went to extremes. Did you ever see a man die? I did. People being interrogated died.' He told me he was going to leave. He was getting out of the CIA."

Cournoyer also told Eric Olson that his father had said that he suspected that the United States had used biological weapons against North Korea, a charge later explored by two Canadian researchers in a book-length exposé.



*Prof. Kurt Blome, the Nazi Deputy Surgeon General who was in charge of the biological experiments conducted at concentration camps, was one of the advisors used by the CIA to teach Americans how to use torture in interrogations.*



*Kurt Blome (left) during his trial at the Nuremberg Tribunal. His torture skills gave him the credentials to become a U.S. advisor after the war, under a secret program called "Operation Dust-Bin."*

On Aug. 12, 2002, the German television network ARD broadcast the documentary by Egmont Koch and Michael Wech, titled "Code-Name ARTICHOKE." The filmmakers added another crucial piece to the Frank Olson story, corroborating the accounts of Norman Cournoyer and Dr. William Sargant about Frank Olson's final trip to Europe in July and August 1953.

Koch and Wech exposed secret CIA Cold War interrogation centers in West Germany, including a facility in Oberursel, north of Frankfurt, dubbed "Camp King." Here the CIA conducted torture/interrogation experiments on Nazi convicts and Soviet spies. Among the "advisors" working at "Camp King" was Professor Kurt Blome. Blome had been the Deputy Surgeon General of the Third Reich, responsible for all of the biological experiments conducted at concentration camps like Dachau. Blome had been arrested at the end of World War II and put on trial at Nuremberg, but under a secret U.S. government program, "Operation Dust-Bin," had been recruited to teach the Americans how to conduct innovative interrogations.

According to Frank Olson's passport (he had been issued a diplomatic passport in 1950, another indication of his new CIA employment), he had made several trips to West Germany—to Frankfurt, Heidelberg, and Berlin—between 1950-53. A careful review by Eric Olson of his father's slides and home movies confirmed he had been at the CIA's clandestine headquarters for West Germany, at the old I.G. Farben headquarters in Frankfurt. In August 1953, he had been at the U.S. Army's headquarters in Berlin, where several top Soviet spies were being interrogated by the "rough boys."

Every bit of evidence compiled over the last 30 years now convinces Eric Olson that his father was murdered to prevent him from blowing the whistle on the torture, the drug experimentation, the employment of Nazi war criminals, and the possible use of biological weapons in the Korean War.

Norman Cournoyer agreed with Eric Olson. He told the ARD producers, on camera, with Olson seated in the room: "But there were people who had biological weapons who used them. Was there reason for your dad being killed by the CIA? I believe so."

### **Cheney Revisited**

It took Eric Olson more than 30 years to find his way through the wilderness of mirrors, erected by the U.S. government to hide the secrets that led to Frank Olson's death. He is now certain that he knows what happened. Many of the files remain classified, many have been shredded, and many of the eyewitnesses to the key events of the Summer of 1953 have long-since died, some, like Bill Colby, under equally mysterious circumstances.

What is clear—and what was also clear to Frank Olson in the final weeks of his life—is that he became a target of the very torture/interrogation techniques that he had witnessed in "Camp King," in Berlin, and at other locations. Upon returning from the LSD interrogation at Deep Creek Lake, he told his wife, "I made a terrible mistake." He did not elaborate. What Frank Olson went through at Deep Creek Lake, and later, in New York, was clearly buried under a mountain of lies, many of them codified in false accounts by the only eyewitnesses, when the CIA Inspector General probed the affair.

Only Dick Cheney knows the extent to which he had the real story on what Eric Olson now calls "the national security murder" of his father. What is clear is that Dick Cheney played a pivotal role in the coverup of what has all the earmarks of a government execution, aimed at protecting some of the darkest secrets of the Cold War. And if the past does illuminate the future, then the Frank Olson case sheds some important light on "the Vice President of torture," whose crimes did not begin with Abu Ghraib or even on Sept. 11, 2001.