

**The original documents are located in Box 6, folder “Intelligence - Olson, Frank” of the Richard B. Cheney Files at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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SENT: 11/2025 EDT.

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*Flash*

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

*Secret*

July 11, 1975

~~SECRET~~

MEMORANDUM FOR: DON RUMSFELD  
FROM: DICK CHENEY  
SUBJECT: The Olson Matter / CIA Suicide

*R. Cheney*

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 16, 1983

By DAD NARS date 5/20/83



Therefore, Marsh, Hills and Cheney strongly recommend that the President limit his remarks to an expression of regret over this tragic event and a willingness to meet personally with Mrs. Olson and her children to offer an apology on behalf of the Government. Any discussion that goes beyond those issues raises questions which we are not yet in a position to answer.

In response to any questions which go beyond the above, we would recommend that the President indicate that the entire matter, both with regard to the adequacy of compensation and circumstances surrounding Mr. Olson's death, are under review by the Justice Department.

Attachments

cc: Jerry Jones



As An Answer To A Question or An Opening Statement

The recent disclosure of the facts concerning the death of Dr. Frank Olson are of great concern to me. I am equally distressed by the fact that the full details of Dr. Olson's death were not made known to Mrs. Olson and other members of his family.

Mrs. Olson and her family deserve our deepest sympathy. I hope to meet with the family at the earliest opportunity to personally extend an apology on behalf of the United States Government.

Justice Department Report

The Rockefeller Report states on p. 226:

"In the late 1940's, the CIA began to study the properties of certain behavior-influencing drugs (such as LSD) and how such drugs might be put to intelligence use. This interest was prompted by reports that the Soviet Union was experimenting with such drugs and by speculation that the confessions introduced during trials in the Soviet Union and other Soviet Bloc countries during the late 1940's might have been elicited by the use of drugs or hypnosis. Great concern over Soviet and North Korean techniques in 'brainwashing' continued to be manifested into the early 1950's."

Dr. Frank A. Olson, a bio-chemist, was a civilian employee of the Army working at Fort Detrick in a cooperative effort with the CIA. On November 19, 1953, at one of the periodic meetings of Ft. Detrick and CIA personnel, a dosage of LSD was placed by CIA personnel in drinks consumed by Dr. Olson and others, all of whom were members of the group. Prior to receiving the LSD, Dr. Olson had participated in discussions where the testing of such substances on unsuspecting subjects was agreed to in principle. However, neither Dr. Olson, nor any of the others was made aware that they had been given LSD until about 20 minutes after the fact.



During the next several days Dr. Olson developed side effects, as a result of which he was taken to New York City on November 24, 1953, to be treated by a doctor who was a consultant to the agency on drug-related matters, Dr. Harold A. Abramson. On November 24, 25 and 26, he met with Dr. Abramson.

After seeing him on the 27th, Dr. Abramson believed that hospitalization would be in Dr. Olson's best interest. Arrangements were made for a hospital room near Dr. Olson's home (in the Washington area), but his room could not be prepared until the following day. Consequently, Dr. Lashbrook, of CIA, and Dr. Olson stayed at the Hotel Statler in New York on the night of November 27.

Dr. Lashbrook reported that during cocktails and dinner Dr. Olson appeared cheerful and spoke freely of his forthcoming hospitalization. Lashbrook and Olson retired at about 11:00 PM. They occupied separate twin beds in the same room on the tenth floor. At approximately 2:30 Saturday morning, Lashbrook was awakened by a loud noise; he reported that Olson had crashed through



the closed window blind and closed window and had fallen to his death.

The CIA General Counsel rendered an opinion that the death resulted from "circumstances arising out of an experiment undertaken in the course of his official duties for the U. S. Government.

The Bureau of Employee's Compensation adopted this view, thus awarding survivor benefits to the widow and children. To date \$143,582.22 have been paid to the widow and three children. These tax-free benefits continue to be paid in the current total amount of \$792.00 per month. The payments to the children terminate when they reach majority (as two already have), but the widow's benefits continue until death or re-marriage, and are periodically adjusted for cost of living increases.

The CIA has never made any contact with the family. Prior to the publication of the Rockefeller Report, no government representative has ever disclosed the full details concerning Dr. Olson's death.





Upon a preliminary review of the facts, it is the opinion of Justice Department lawyers that any tort action against the United States arising out of the above-stated facts would be barred by the Federal Employees' Compensation Act, and specifically 5 USC 8116(c). This Act would not bar suit against any individuals.



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