

## **"There's Something Rotten in Denmark:" Frank Olson and the Macabre Fate of a CIA Whistleblower in the Early Cold War**

"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 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>

Prior to his death, Dr. Olson cryptically told his wife, Alice, that he had "made a terrible mistake." Although we don't know exactly what he meant, Dr. Olson may have recognized he had placed himself in danger through the perception that he was a security threat; that his colleagues perceived him as unreliable and someone capable of exposing government secrets. CIA consultant Stanley Lovell

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<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).

referred to Olson as “having no inhibitions. Baring of inner man,” meaning he had wrongly spoken out, violating the CIA’s code of Omerta.<sup>3</sup>

The United States at the time was in the throes of what Tom Engelhardt called the “Post-World War II Victory Culture” when people believed the Stars & Stripes was on the side of the angels and that Soviet perfidy necessitated the adoption of unethical means to achieve noble ends.<sup>4</sup> American popular culture also long heralded the creation of scientific wonder weapons that saved the nation from evil. One of the most popular science fiction stories at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a racist fantasy by famed socialist writer Jack London, “The Unparalleled Invasion” in which germ warfare helps liberate the Western world from invading Chinese “hordes” and ushers in a new era of peace.<sup>5</sup>

The patriotic and apolitical Olson may have read “The Unparalleled Invasion” or other like-minded stories as a kid and believed with Vice Admiral Ross T. McIntire that “out of all the horror” at Ft. Detrick “would come some good.”<sup>6</sup> At a certain point, however, Olson appears to have felt the pang of his conscience and prepared to issue his resignation. His bosses now felt he was a security risk who threatened to blow the whistle on deadly Cold War secrets or leak classified information. 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 alas, maverick reporter Seymour Hersh will not out of loyalty reveal his “deep throat” source who told him that Frank had been murdered. Eric says that it does not give him much comfort to know after sixty-five years that his father was killed by the CIA, and that the agency in essence got away with one, since the identity of the killers has never been exposed and nobody was ever punished.<sup>7</sup> In the spirit of his father, however, Eric at the very least has provided a public service by helping to uncover much of the truth about his death while helping to revitalize critical investigation into long buried secrets of the early cold war.<sup>8</sup>

In remarks at the 2016 SHAFR conference in San Diego, Professor Lloyd C. Gardner, author of the book *War on Leakers*, pointed that out that the state reacts harshly towards whistle-blowers like

<sup>3</sup> Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Postwar America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* rev ed. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> H. Bruce Franklin, *War Stars: The Superweapon in the American Imagination*, rev ed. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); Jack London, “The Unparalleled Invasion” in Daniel Metraux, *Asian Writings of Jack London. Essays, Letters, Newspaper Dispatches, and Short Fiction by Jack London* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Shaeffer, “The Deadliest War” *Collier’s National Weekly*, June 15, 1946, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Errol Morris, *Wormwood* (Netflix, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> The son of Wilfred Burchett, an Australian journalist who first reported on the crime, wrote on Counterpunch about how Wormwood has helped to vindicate his father. George Burchett, “Wormwood and a Shocking Secret of War: How Errol Morris Vindicated My Father, Wilfred Burchett,” *Counterpunch*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/01/12/wormwood-and-a-shocking-secret-of-war-how-errol-morris-vindicated-my-father-wilfred-burchett/>

Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden not only because the information they may leak is damaging but also because they challenge the very legitimacy and authority of the state.<sup>9</sup> Frank Olson appears to fit under this rubric. The information he threatened to expose was explosive, and would not be known by much of the American public for decades if at all. By threatening to leak secrets and become a whistleblower, the legitimacy of government policy and the Cold War could be put into question, and so Dr. Olson suffered the most terrible of all fates. His case exemplifies the intolerance for even the possibility of leakage and dissent during the early era of the Cold War and provides a window into a dark underside of the American government and its covert agencies who operated at times just like the Russian KGB.

The public fascination with the Olson case provides an important window also into American political culture in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and distrust in government that has created a crisis of political legitimacy. 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>10</sup> If Olson was indeed murdered, as the evidence suggests, 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 even today, sixty-five years later, and why it has taken so long for the truth to emerge, and there remains so much secrecy and resistance to a full accounting of the facts.

### **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>11</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

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd C. Gardner, remarks at Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations Conference, San Diego California, Panel on Government Whistleblowers in History, June 26, 2016; 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* (OR Books, 2012) describes how Manning was subject to a harsh regimen 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>10</sup> In blasting President Trump for “abdicating 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](http://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>11</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 7.

Frederick L. Detrick, flight surgeon of the 104st Aero squadron and faculty member at John 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>12</sup>

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>13</sup> Vannevar Bush, MITs Vice-President and head of the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD), which coordinated weapons development during World War II, had suggested in *Science: The Endless Frontier* (1945) that science could function as the equivalent of the old geographic frontier except that it would never close because the exploitation of nature was boundless. Considering post-war atomic fears to have been “exaggerated” by “prophets of doom,” Bush advocated for a dual system designed to produce masses of the best equipment while encouraging “modern scientific innovators” to test new inventions so they could arrive at the “really striking new valuable weapons” that would ensure “striking advantage” over the Russians.<sup>14</sup>

These weapons extended to the realm of biological warfare. The Scientific Advisor to the Pentagon’s Research and Development Board, wrote to Bush in December 1947 that “complete mastery of the techniques of biological warfare are mandatory for our national security both as a deterrent to

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<sup>12</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 42; Scott Shane, “Buried Secrets of Biowarfare,” *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. Subsidiary plants for field testing of biological weapons were established in Pascagoula Mississippi and Dugway Utah while a Naval Center at the University of California at Berkeley received funding to investigate an unnamed infectious disease, centuries old, which was “one of the greatest killers.”

<sup>13</sup> Fletcher Knebel, “Remote Control War: Are We Ready For It?” *Look Magazine*, November 27, 1950, 33-37.

<sup>14</sup> Vannevar Bush, “A Few Quick,” Washington, D.C. November 5, 1951, RG 330, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Research and Development Board, Box 428, National Archives, College Park Maryland (hereafter NA); *Science The Endless Frontier – A Report to the President by Vannevar Bush, Director of the Office of Science Research and Development, July 1945* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945); Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 303.

enemy aggression and as a major weapon in intercontinental warfare where direct contact with large land armies may be either undesirable or impractical.” The adviser went on to suggest that the possibility of using artificial precipitation as an effective biological warfare aerosol should not be overlooked, though agent effectiveness was to that point difficult because of the lack of facilities for conducting controlled experiments on human subjects.” He then emphasized that “biological warfare would be particularly effective if used in conjunction with atomic warfare. For example, prior to known outbreak of hostilities, a debilitating agent extremely difficult to detect or identified as part of enemy plans might be brought to the country by clandestine means. When this disease had caused maximum disruption of industrial military and administrative facilities, it would be followed by a full-scale atomic attack. Concurrently whether before or after the attack, the enemy would be introduced diseases such as a plague which would spread rapidly among surviving populations.”<sup>15</sup>

Taking its cue from doomsday science fiction future war prophecies, this remarkable document epitomizes an embrace of the concept of total war in which the enemy and its population were to be almost completely wiped out to secure victory. Frank Olson’s work in this context was integral to the secret strategy for winning World War III. In his first project, Olson had collaborated with Major Harold Abramson on the development of chemotherapeutic aerosols that could be used in the treatment of victims of toxic gaseous agents. Abramson subsequently recruited Olson into the Office of Strategic Services (OSS – precursor to the CIA) and the two ventured into New York City for meetings revolving around experiments with various formulations of “truth drugs,” designed to get suspects to talk in interrogation.<sup>16</sup>

After World War II, Olson’s work at Ft. Detrick appears to have 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>17</sup> Rosebury terminated his association with Ft. Detrick when he recognized 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>18</sup> Olson appears to have come around to Rosebury’s perspective before his death although it is hard to know for certain.

<sup>15</sup> “Report of the Scientific Advisor” Research & Development Board to Vannevar Bush, December 20, 1947 in RG 330, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Research and Development Board, Box 428, NA.

<sup>16</sup> Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*, 36, 37, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Theodor Rosebury, *Peace or Pestilence: Biological Warfare and How to Avoid It* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1949), 184, 185.

<sup>18</sup> Richard D. McCarthy, *The Ultimate Folly: War by pestilence, asphyxiation, and defoliation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 29, 30.

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>19</sup> Whether these were deployed in Korea and Olson developed second thoughts remains an unsolved mystery. 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>20</sup> The excited language exemplifies a cultural infatuation with super-weapons that reached its apex in the post-World War II Victory culture. 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>21</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>22</sup>

Olson was himself 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 that was of particular interest to Olson timed their deaths.<sup>23</sup>

In 1949, Olson traveled to the Caribbean as part of Operation Harness in which several thousand animals were sprayed with deadly anthrax, brucellosis, and tularemia while floating offshore in containers. Olson’s role in the experiment – which also resulted in the death of 1,000 sheep and 500 rhesus monkeys – was to oversee the effectiveness of the protective suits worn by bacteriologists.<sup>24</sup> Protests outside Ft. Detrick, which began in 1959 aimed to end biological weapons research and also centered on the unethical treatment of animals at the facility and unsafe working conditions. A

<sup>19</sup> Albarelli, *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>20</sup> Rosebury, *Peace or Pestilence*, 50.

<sup>21</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.

<sup>22</sup> Rosebury, *Peace or Pestilence*.

<sup>23</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>24</sup> Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*, 73.

Congressional investigation led by Richard D. McCarthy (D-NY) uncovered 3,000 accidents between 1954 and 1962 including fatal ones where employees contracted anthrax. Alice Olson noted that “the men [including her husband] were always getting shots. I knew about one death. Frank went to the funeral.”<sup>25</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, the TSS Chemical Division’s liaison to SOD and deputy to Dr. Sidney Gottlieb who headed MK-ULTRA (CIA drug testing program) and developed poison pills used in an array of CIA assassination attempts.<sup>26</sup> Working out of laboratories patrolled by armed guards with orders to shoot any intruders, the SOD grew lethal cells and cultured deadly viruses along with “techniques for the offensive use of biological weapons,” according to court documents. 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>27</sup>

George W. Merck, the pharmaceutical executive who was influential in establishing Ft. Detrick, wanted to shut down the SOD, considering it “un-American.”<sup>28</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>29</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>30</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 disburse 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>31</sup>

Olson and his colleagues appear to have violated the Nuremberg code requiring informed consent. Olson partook in experiments in infectious animal diseases on Plum Island, which was located

<sup>25</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 602, 603, 604.

<sup>26</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)

<sup>27</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, *A Terrible Mistake*, 68; Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Scott Shane, “Buried Secrets of Biowarfare,” *Baltimore Sun*, August 1, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Annie Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip: The Secret Intelligence Program That Brought Nazi Scientists to America* (Boston: Little & Brown, 2015), 366.

<sup>30</sup> George C. Wilson, “Army Conducted 239 Secret, Open Air Germ Warfare Tests,” *Washington Post*, March 9, 1977. One test was allegedly carried out in the New York City subway.

<sup>31</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*; Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 74.

off the continental U.S. in order to sidestep federal laws. He also gained clearance by the atomic energy commission to observe nuclear fall-out tests. Additionally, Olson observed tests with living biological agents, munitions and aerosol cloud production and performance at a remote army facility in Utah's Salt Lake desert, where his work was mainly with protective devices, including clothing and masks.<sup>32</sup>

In the years leading up to his death, Olson traveled frequently to Africa where he allegedly carried out experiments in rinderpest, an infectious cattle disease. He also 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>33</sup> Olson had been 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 café and bars.<sup>34</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, 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." These were Soviet spies captured by the Reinhard Gehlen organization (led by ex-Nazi spymaster), now being run by the CIA. "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>35</sup>

We see from this example Olson's connection to some of the Cold War's darkest secrets. Through his work with SOD, Olson knew about to the recruitment of Nazi scientists under the Operation

<sup>32</sup> Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*, 74, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 78; Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 369.

<sup>34</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).

<sup>35</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 367.

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 had 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>36</sup>

According to his Detrick colleague Norman Cornoyer, 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. While it is possible Eric may have earned the distrust of his colleagues because he was considered to have a big mouth and was rumored to have divulged classified information in casual conversations, Cornoyer's comments suggest that he was in fact a whistle-blower.

Back in the CIAs office at Detrick Building Number 439, Olson contemplated leaving his job, telling his family he was considering a new career as a dentist or in private industry manufacturing chemicals for use in scientific research.<sup>37</sup> At the time, there was no legal protection for whistle-blowers; no social movements or skeptical crusading journalists to turn to. Nevertheless, the truth could have gotten out. William Sargant, a psychiatrist who advised British intelligence on brainwashing techniques reported to British intelligence that Olson was a security risk after he had expressed misgivings about his work with Artichoke to him; a report Sargant said his superiors would have informed Richard Helms and Sidney Gottlieb about.<sup>38</sup> The CIA indeed placed a memo in Olson's file claiming he may have violated security restrictions, which his sons believe led to his murder.<sup>39</sup>

### **"Key to Your Father's Death:" Korea and Germ Warfare**

Besides the unethical interrogation practices, Olson's sons believe their father was murdered because he threatened to potentially expose the use of biological weapons during the Korean War.<sup>40</sup> Fulfilling science fictions fantasies like "The Yellow Danger" (1898) and Jack London's "The Unparalleled Invasion" (1907) where biological weaponry saves the West from Chinese invasion, the Truman administration appears to have unleashed parasitic flies, anthrax and diseases in North Korea and over Northeast China. The goal was to create a contamination belt so as to stop the movement of soldiers

<sup>36</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>37</sup> Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 369.

<sup>38</sup> Ronson, *The Men Who Stare at Goats*, 234; Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 672. When informed of Olson's death, Sargant came to the immediate conclusion he was murdered.

<sup>39</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>.

<sup>40</sup> James Risen, "Suit Planned Over Death of Man CIA Drugged," *New York Times*, November 26, 2012.

and supplies across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel dividing North and South Korea. Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the CIAs “doctor death” 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.” He compared their potential to the atomic bomb, which had ended the last war.<sup>41</sup>

The top-secret order JCS 1837/26 dated September 21, 1951 from the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Command authorized the field-testing of anthrax weapons in Korea. Survivor testimonials confirm the presence of flies not native to the region and that North Koreans died from disease outbreaks, including of the bubonic plague. 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 led by other top-flight scientists, which concluded the U.S. carried out experiments with “vector insects like yellow-fever carrying mosquito capable of transmitting disease from one body to another.” This charge was corroborated by a team of international jurists who found flies infected with cholera in North Korea, which they believed were linked to a cholera outbreak.<sup>42</sup>

Captive POWs 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>43</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 confessions by virtue of the precision of the detail and fact that some of the pilots genuinely felt bad about what they had done, particularly since they had been well-treated in captivity. Chaddock also details how the CIA mounted a psychological warfare campaign promoting the myth that the Chinese had adopted brainwashing techniques to discredit the allegations while planting stories in media outlets “exposing” the claims as fake.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas, *Secrets and Lies*, 47, 51; H. Bruce Franklin, *War Stars: The Superweapon in the American Imagination* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007) and Daniel A. Métraux, “Jack London: The Adventurer-Writer who Chronicled Asian Wars, Confronted Racism—and Saw the Future,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 4-3-10, January 25, 2010.

<sup>42</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 Buchanan, “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>43</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>44</sup> Chaddock, *This Must be the Place*. The agency further arranged for the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to appoint a committee led by Dr. Detlev Bronk of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research to discredit Needham’s report - even though the State Department privately conceded that the scientists who signed it were “highly competent” and that the evidence presented “could not be demolished. Wayne Madsen, “U.S. Germ Warfare Apology to DPRK Could Advance Dialogue,” *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, December 20, 2017, <http://www.21cir.com/2017-12/us-germ-warfare-apology-to-dprk-could-advance-dialogue.html>; Tom Buchanan, “The Courage of Galileo: Joseph Needham and the ‘Germ Warfare’ Allegations in the Korean War,” *The Historical Association*, 2001, <http://www.cpp.edu/~zywang/needham.pdf>.

Some historians claim to have unearthed documents proving that the Soviets assisted the DPRK in creating fake contaminated zones, though others have questioned the authenticity of the documents and note that they pointed to possible manipulation in only two of 13 sites.<sup>45</sup> The tantalizing documents, it should be noted, have never been seen by Western scholars who rely on second hand reports by a Japanese journalist writing for an extreme right-wing newspaper whose last name happens to be the same as that of Ishii's deputy (Ryochi).<sup>46</sup> Olson and his colleagues at Ft. Detrick had developed a capacity for producing and delivering bacteriological weapons through expertise acquired secretly from Japanese scientists such as Gen. Shiro Ishii, commander of the Kwantung army's Unit 731 whose human experiments in World War II had killed an estimated 585,000 Chinese. Ishii allegedly made several visits to South Korea during the Korean War while collaborating with Ft. Detrick scientists.<sup>47</sup> According to Professor Masataka Mori who has studied the activities for Unit 731, there are striking similarities between the diseases and weapons used by the Japanese military in China [in World War II] 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>48</sup>

Olson’s involvement in the Korean War germ warfare experiments remains clouded in mystery. Norman Cournoyer told Olson’s son Eric that “Korea is 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>49</sup> According to British author Gordon Thomas - who interviewed Cournoyer and CIA agent William Buckley - 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

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<sup>45</sup>The theory also presumed the Soviets, DPRK and Chinese had the technical expertise to mass produce plague infected fleas, and could coordinate to manipulate world opinion while fighting a war against the world’s dominant superpower. Powell, “Biological Warfare in the Korean War;” Sheila Myoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 256; 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. Jager misleads her readers by confidently concluding it was all hoax when she does not cite or weigh the evidence presented by Endicott and Hagerman or discuss the findings of Al Jazeera’s 2010 investigation.

<sup>46</sup> See George Burchett, “Wormwood and the Shocking Secret of War,” *Counterpunch*, January 12, 2018. See also, *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 interviewed peasants in Chukdong on the border of the neutral zone who discovered clumps of flies and mosquitoes that were unnatural to the area and found mosquitoes when the area was still under heavy snow. Burchett also claimed to have seen flies that were identified by Chinese laboratories as belonging to the hylemia species infected with anthrax while traveling to POW camps near the Yalu River, and said that one was accidentally swallowed by a black GI whose symptoms he later recognized to have resembled descriptions in a Ft. Detrick study cited by Seymour Hersh in his book, *Chemical and Biological Warfare*.

<sup>47</sup>Jeffrey A. Lockwood, *Six-Legged Soldiers: Using Insects as a Weapon of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 126, 172; Ed Regis, *The Biology of Doom: The History of America’s Secret Germ Warfare Project* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 110, 128; Sheldon Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945 and the American Cover-Up* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>48</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. Years after issuing his report, Joseph Needham said he was “97 percent convinced the charges were true.” Hugh Deane, *The Korean War, 1945-1953* (San Francisco: China Book, 1999), 155.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas, *Secrets and Lies*, 18; Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*, 679.

where Olson and his colleagues tested them on guinea pigs, rabbit, rhesus, monkeys and pigs in order to establish their suitability to form the basis for biological weapons.<sup>50</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. After his trip to Tokyo, Dr. Gottlieb traveled to Koje-do island prison in South Korea and promoted "enhanced interrogation" techniques including brainwashing and drugging as part of a program to recruit defectors who were tattooed with anticommunist slogans and sent on dangerous clandestine missions into North Korea. The psychological effects of torture combined with ideological indoctrination resulted in a level of "fanaticism in combat" according to one historian, "seldom found in any army."<sup>51</sup> Dr. Gottlieb may have further overseen medical experimentation as a prelude to his work at Bien Hoa mental hospital in Vietnam where tiny electrodes were planted in a suspected Vietcong's brain in an attempt to program him, and another prisoner was kept in an air-conditioned room for four years to exploit his fear of the cold.<sup>52</sup>

We do not know if Olson was ever in Korea. All we can confirm is that he was part of the army biological warfare program and thus would have probably known if it was activated. Alice Olson told her kids that "Korea really bothered your father." Norman Cournoyer 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." Eric believes that his father, "for all his loyalty to his country and his readiness to perform his duty as an apostle of the biology of doom had 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>53</sup>

When then-CIA Director William Colby appeared before Congressional hearings in the 1970s he said the CIA records for its biological warfare program were "very incomplete" because many had been destroyed in 1972-1973, though he could not recall why they were destroyed. It was possible they included the full details of the mysterious dysentery outbreak among Korean prisoners and unethical

<sup>50</sup> Thomas, *Secrets and Lies*, 48.

<sup>51</sup> Wilfred G. Burchett and Alan Winnington, *Koje Unscreened*, [www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/archive/koje.pdf](http://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/archive/koje.pdf); Young, *Name, Rank and Serial Number*. 42; Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*; Michael Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow: UN Special Operations During the Korean War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000). 55, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam*, rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 31, 38; Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 65; Thomas, *Secrets and Lies*.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*, 51.

medical experimentation.<sup>54</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 and in its aftermath. 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>55</sup>

The cover-up surrounding biological warfare coincided with the suppression of wide-scale extrajudicial massacres by South Korean army and police forces in the Korean War along with many other unsavory practices such as the strafing of refugee columns, bombing of civilians and burning of villages and shooting North Korean and Chinese POWs who defied prison authorities by singing revolutionary songs.<sup>56</sup> Donald Nichols was an American intelligence operative and confidante of Syngman Rhee who witnessed wide-scale torture and massacres by the South Korean army, ran bounty hunter operations, threw POWs off helicopters and ran suicidal covert espionage missions into the North and possibly a currency manipulation scheme. He was subjected to electroshock treatment after the war in order to erase his memory and confined to a mental hospital after being falsely diagnosed as schizophrenic. Like Olson, Nichols was a man who knew too much and was also silenced, though in a different way.<sup>57</sup> The treatment of the two exemplifies the lengths the government would go to prevent exposure of "deep state" operations, which could jeopardize America's moral standing.

### **St. Anthony's Fire: The CIA, LSD and the Pont Saint D'esprit 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. Albarelli Jr. told me that Norman Cournoyer stopped working at Ft. Detrick before the Korean War and retracted some of his statements before his death, saying that what he said to the media about Korea had been "manipulated and misquoted."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Endicott & Hagerman, *The United States and Biological Warfare*, 142; Thomas, *Secrets & Lies*, 50.

<sup>55</sup> Albanelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 680.

<sup>56</sup> For details, see Jeremy Kuzmarov, "Barbarism Unleashed: The Korean War." <http://peacehistory-usfp.org/korean-war/>; Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New American Library, 2010). The shooting of unarmed POWs is detailed in Col. Claudius O. Wolfe, UN Zone Staff Judge Advocate and Major Donald C. Young to Commander General, "Review of Report of Proceedings of a Board of Officers Appointed Pursuant to Article 121 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of POWs, August 12, 1949," National Archives, College Park, MD, RG 338, Records of the U.S. Army Commands, 1942-, "Korean Communist Zone, 1951-1952," Box 509.

<sup>57</sup> Blaine Harden, *King of Spies: The Dark Reign of America's Spymaster in Korea* (New York: Viking, 2017). Nichols' nephew said "the government wanted to erase [Nichols' brain] – because he knew too much." Lt. Richard Robinson was subjected to FBI surveillance and personal harassment after he reported on the adoption of torture methods by U.S. trained police in South Korea. He was a whistle-blower of sorts who was silenced.

<sup>58</sup> Albanelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 81; author's correspondence with Hank Albarelli Jr., February 1, 2018.

Olson's connection to the germ warfare outbreak in Korea can be considered plausible nevertheless, given Olson's research expertise and work with Gottlieb in the SOD, and it is possible Cournoyer retracted any statements because he got cold feet or was threatened or at an advanced age was suffering from dementia. Albarelli Jr. 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>59</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 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>60</sup>

Fuller's book contained a brief section noting 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'esprit 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, the village was

<sup>59</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 350; John G. Fuller, *The Day of St. Anthony's Fire* (New York: The McMillan Co., 1968).

<sup>60</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.

chosen because it was on the outs with the French government of Charles de Gaulle and had a number of communists living there.<sup>61</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. This magic psychochemical would thus transform war by making it possible to conquer an enemy without wholesale killing. Major General William M. Creasy, former chief of the army chemical corps, wrote in *Reader's 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>62</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>63</sup> He bases this conclusion on interviews with now-deceased former Ft. Detrick and CIA employees. They told him 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 Stanley Lovell's remarks about him 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>64</sup> CIA agent Ike Feldman, who interviewed NYPD, BNDD and CIA agents, said powerful "people wanted [Olson] out of the way as he talked too much and he was telling people about the things

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<sup>61</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>62</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>63</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 61, 366-371.

<sup>64</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 689-691.

he had done which is [an] American secret. If you work on a top government secret, a city secret, a state secret and it spills out to people who should not know, there is only one way to do it: kill him.”<sup>65</sup>

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

After Frank Olson’s death, his wife Alice had been visited by Frank’s superior, Lt. Col. Vincent Ruwet. He said there had been “some sort of accident” and that Frank had either fallen or jumped out of a window. Further suspicious is the fact that 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>66</sup>

After the funeral, Robert Lashbrook and Sidney Gottlieb had come over to the Olson home to express their condolences.<sup>67</sup> For the next twenty-two years, Alice Olson and her sons were left to wonder what had really happened, as they did not believe Frank had been depressed and would commit suicide. In June 1975, the Rockefeller commission - created to investigate CIA misdeeds after Watergate - released a report claiming Olson was given LSD at the Deep Creek Lodge unwittingly as part of MK-ULTRA and developed various side effects resulting in his jumping from the Statler hotel room 1018A window. 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.

Two years later, Sidney Gottlieb was granted legal immunity in exchange for his testimony about Olson before a Congressional probe chaired by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA). Gottlieb claimed there was only causal connection between the LSD and Olson’s suicide because it had been taken a week before and was otherwise evasive. Kennedy concluded that the hearings “closed the book on this sorry chapter [the Olson affair].” Four years earlier, “the liberal lion” refused to subpoena another member of

<sup>65</sup> In Richard Belzer and David Wayne, *Dead Wrong: Straight Facts on the Country’s Most Controversial Cover-ups*, afterword by Jesse Ventura (New York: Skyhorse, 2012), 11.

<sup>66</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 34, 35; 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; Eric Olson and Nils Olson V. United States of America, Civil Action No. 12-1924,PLaitniffs Memorandum of Points and Authorities, May 3, 2013. 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>67</sup> Vincent Ruwet also visited Alice regularly to console her, though by his own admission to encourage her to “think things that were not true about Frank’s death. Eric Olson and Nils Olson V. United States of America, Civil Action No. 12-1924,PLaitniffs Memorandum of Points and Authorities, May 3, 2013

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 Lashbrook, who also committed perjury at the hearing, reflected another example of Congress failing to hold executive branch authorities accountable for their abuses of power, commensurate with the breakdown of democracy in the United States.<sup>68</sup>

The LSD story may have been concocted by the CIA in an attempt to play off sensational media accounts focused on people allegedly committing suicide after taking LSD when credible research and government financed studies have determined that even adverse reactions to LSD do not normally result in violent acts such as hurtling oneself through a window.<sup>69</sup> The link forged between LSD and Olson's "suicide" was also useful in helping to undermine the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s, which considered LSD as a consciousness-expanding drug and pathway to a more spiritual and peaceful society. After his arrest on marijuana smuggling charges, LSD High priest Timothy Leary was subjected to Artichoke-style torture and ceased LSD proselytizing thereafter.<sup>70</sup>

Eric Olson did not believe 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 experiment that went wrong but was

<sup>68</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 2012, 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). On 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>69</sup> Carl Hart, *High Price: A Neuroscientist's Journey of Self-Discovery That Challenges Everything You Know About Drugs and Society* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2013); Albarelli Jr., *A Terrible Mistake*, 618. There is debate in the literature about the occurrence of flashbacks induced by LSD and whether these can result in violence.

<sup>70</sup> Martin A. Lee & Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD, the CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1985); Joanna Harcourt-Smith, *Tripping the Bardo with Timothy Leary: My Psychedelic Love Story* (North Charlston, SC: Creative Space Independent Publishing, 2013), 314.

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. 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>71</sup>

In 1994, after his mother Alice’s death, Eric Olson had Frank’s body exhumed by pathologist Dr. James E. Starrs from Georgetown University. He found a hole in Frank’s head that he concluded 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. In a related curiosity, hotel doorman Armand Pastore stated that the window shade had been fully intact, further contradicting Lashbrook’s original story (Lashbrook first stated that he was awakened by a flapping window shade after Olson went out the window. However, he subsequently 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.”) Surprisingly, tests for LSD in Frank’s system proved inconclusive. No evidence furthermore ever emerged to confirm he 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>72</sup>

In April 1996, after receiving a thick dossier about the case from Eric, New York District Attorney Robert Morgenthau decided to open a criminal investigation, assigning it to the cold case unit headed by seasoned assistant D.A. Steve Saracco. The designation of his death was changed from “suicide” to “unknown.” Morgenthau was astounded to discover a number of odd deaths that befell people linked in some way with the Olson case, including CIA agent George White’s close friend Rudolph Halley, 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). Another was the executive director of the Rockefeller commission, David Bellin who may have been part

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<sup>71</sup> 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>.

<sup>72</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 Ruwe found nothing that would lead him to believe Olson was of “unsound mind.”

of the cover-up. 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>73</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, if Olson had crashed through the window, it would have required a running start, something impossible in light of the size of the hotel room, and surely would have made a sound!<sup>74</sup> Olson’s bed-sheet and clothes had been pulled back furthermore in a manner consistent with someone ripping him out of bed forcibly.<sup>75</sup> Lashbrook never reported anything to the desk or went to check if Olson was still alive after he allegedly crashed through the window. 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?”

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, according to Albarelli Jr., snuck in and out of the 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 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>76</sup>

Though he told investigators otherwise, Sidney Gottlieb was near the Statler hotel at the time of Frank’s death and the one Lashbrook had called. The question remains as to whether top agency officials such as Allen Dulles were involved in the plot, or simply assisted in the cover up of the rogue Gottlieb group in its aftermath. In the days before his death, under the recommendation of Dr. Harold Abramson, Frank was scheduled to be admitted to Chestnut Lodge psychiatric facility for rounds of shock therapy and chemical treatment because he was considered a serious security threat. According to two CIA sources interviewed by Albarelli Jr. – the same ones whose identity is being protected by Hersh - when a

<sup>73</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 637, 654. Belin 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>; John Prados, *William Colby and the CIA: The Secret Wars of a Controversial Spy Master* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 492.

<sup>75</sup> Starrs, *A Voice for the Dead*, 130.

<sup>76</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 689-693, 775. Eric Olson interviewed by Errol Morris in *Wormwood* (Netflix, 2017).

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>77</sup>

If true, these comments suggest that Olson was indeed a forerunner of whistleblowers within the agency like Philip Agee, L. Fletcher Prouty, Ralph McGehee, Victor Marchetti and John Stockwell who underwent a similar conversion from true believers in the Cold War to outraged voices of conscience and dissent.<sup>78</sup> Olson had an all-American background and religious mooring like these men. He too appears to have undergone a personal crisis and transformation, however, at a time when the political climate was intensively conservative and oppressive. When Olson realized he was in trouble, he had no one to call or nowhere to turn – neither a sympathetic anti-establishment journalist, nor leftist social movement, which did not exist at the time.<sup>79</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>80</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>81</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

<sup>77</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 693, 694. Lashbrook though was allegedly involved in the planning.

<sup>78</sup> See Philip Agee, *Inside the Company* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1975); Ralph McGehee, *Deadly Deceits: My Twenty-Five Years in the CIA* (London: Ocean Press, 2002); L. Fletcher Prouty, *The Secret Team: The CIA and Its Allies in Control of the United States and World* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973); Victor Marchetti and Jonathan Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974).

<sup>79</sup> On the oppressive climate of the early Cold War, see Jeremy Kuzmarov and John Marciano, *The Russians are Coming Again: The First Cold War as Tragedy, the Second as Farce* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018).

<sup>80</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>81</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 Frank Olson, November 30, 1998, Frank Olson Legacy Project.

costs mentality” from the time they are young.<sup>82</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>83</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 in Washington from 1934-1944 and then diplomatic adviser to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, died after 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 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>84</sup>

James Forrestal, the former Defense Secretary also plunged to his death with a coard 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>85</sup>

Mainstream historians and political scientists are often loathe 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 CIAs 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, the derision is part of an engrained ideology of American exceptionalism that attributes acts of

<sup>82</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>83</sup> See Miles Copeland, *The Game Player: The Confessions of the CIAs Original Political Operative* (London: Aurum, 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>84</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 23.

<sup>85</sup> See Cornell Simpson, *The Death of James Forrestal* (Boston: Western Islands, 1966). Author Daniel Hopsicker alleges - based on interviews with CIA drug pilot Barry Seal’s lawyer and the lawyer of two Medellín cartel operatives - that George H. W Bush and Oliver North were behind Seal’s murder. Seal allegedly threatened to blow the whistle on Contra drug smuggling operations after the IRS wanted to seize \$30 million from him. The lawyer overheard a phone conversation between Seal and Bush where Seal asked Bush to get the IRS off his backs or else he would expose the operation. Daniel Hopsicker, *Barry & the Boys: The CIA, the Mob and America’s Secret History* (Mad Cow Press, 2001), 42.

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>86</sup>

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 mobilization 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>87</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>88</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

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<sup>86</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,” *New York Times*, October 26, 2017. On the suspicious facts in the Robert Kennedy assassination case, 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).

<sup>87</sup> Robert Schaffer, “The Christian Century: Protestants Protesting Harry Truman’s Cold War,” *Peace & Change*, 42, 1, January 2017, 93-127.

<sup>88</sup> Dickson Hartwell, “The Abundant Mr. Wallace,” *Colliers Magazine*, September 20, 1947, 113.

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>89</sup>

Olson after years after searching for the truth about his father 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, setting the groundwork for the harsh treatment of other whistleblowers who have exposed the evil of our ways.

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<sup>89</sup> Albarelli Jr. *A Terrible Mistake*, 699.