

# The Manchurian Veterans

by Jeff Huber

19 November 2006

Stories of American service members returning from the Middle East wars with physical and emotional scars have focused national attention on the plight of the country's combat veterans.

But still overlooked are G.I.s who suffered severe damage from service to their country as human test experiments.

The tale of the uniformed guinea pigs who participated in America's Cold War mind control program is, perhaps, one of the most disturbing chapters in the history of the country that became the world's "sole superpower."

## The Mind Control Gap

The United States Army established its chemical experimentation facility at the Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland in 1917. But it wasn't until 1954 that Edgewood became a temporary duty station for G.I.s who volunteered to participate in Project MK-ULTRA and more than 150 other projects involved in the Central Intelligence Agency's mind control program.

In the early 1950s, reports of Chinese and Russian brainwashing techniques used on U.S. prisoners of war during the Korean Conflict had reached American intelligence operatives. In 1953, eager to close the perceived gap in mind control capabilities during the heart of the "red scare" era, then CIA director Allen Dulles launched a mind control program of his own.

To head the project, Dulles named Doctor Sidney Gottlieb, a shadowy figure whose personality reflected the bizarre and horrifying nature of the mind control program itself.

## The Sorcerer

Born in 1918, Sidney Gottlieb had a clubfoot and a stutter and he earned a PhD in chemistry from the Chicago Institute of Technology. He became chief of the Central Intelligence Agency's experimental interrogation programs in 1953.

By some accounts, Gottlieb often took LSD, locking himself in his office and taking extensive notes of his psychedelic experiences. Gottlieb is also alleged to have been behind plots to disable or assassinate foreign heads of state, including Fidel Castro, by covertly exposing them to deadly or psychoactive drugs.

Much of what is "known" about MK-ULTRA is anecdotal.

In 1972, Gottlieb destroyed most of his clinical records by order of Richard Nixon's CIA director Richard Helms.

Before he died, Gottlieb testified before Congress that the CIA had administered LSD to at least 40 unwitting subjects who included prison inmates and brothel patrons. Other sources suggest that the real number of unwitting subjects was exponentially higher. Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain, authors of *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD, and the Sixties Rebellion*, state that CIA operatives tested LSD by agreeing among themselves to:

*"...slip LSD into each other's drinks. The target never knew when his turn would come, but as soon as the drug was ingested a ... colleague would tell him so he could make the necessary preparations (which usually meant taking the rest of the day off). Initially the leaders of MK-ULTRA restricted the surprise acid tests to [their own] members, but when this phase had run its course they started dosing other Agency personnel who had never tripped before. Nearly everyone was fair game, and surprise acid trips became something of an occupational hazard among CIA operatives.... The Office of Security felt that [MK-ULTRA] should have exercised better judgment in dealing with such a powerful and dangerous chemical. The straw that broke the camel's back came when a Security informant got wind of a plan by a few [MK-ULTRA] jokers to put LSD in the punch served at the annual CIA Christmas office party ... a Security memo writer... concluded indignantly and unequivocally that he did "not recommend testing in the Christmas punch bowls usually present at the Christmas office parties."*

Experiments with consenting subjects were, if anything, even more sadistic. One group of volunteers was given LSD for 77 consecutive days. Other volunteers were given LSD and locked in deprivation chambers. Some were recorded in therapy sessions while under the influence of LSD, then forced to listen to tape loops of their most degrading moments while confined in straight jackets and again dosed with the psychedelic drug.

Another reported experiment involved injecting subjects with barbiturates in one arm and amphetamines in another. That method was eventually discarded because it often killed the subjects.

### **The Sorcery Unveiled**

MK-ULTRA first came to public attention in a 1974 New York Times article. That launched two government investigations into CIA activities, the congressional Church Committee and presidential Rockefeller Commission probes. In an address to the Church Committee, Senator Edward Kennedy said:

*"The Deputy Director of the CIA revealed that over 30 universities and institutions were involved in an "extensive testing and experimentation" program which included covert drug tests on unwitting citizens "at all social levels, high and low, native Americans and foreign." Several of these tests involved the administration of LSD to "unwitting subjects in social situations." At least one death, that of Doctor Olson, resulted from these activities. The Agency itself acknowledged that these tests made little scientific sense. The agents doing the monitoring were not qualified scientific observers."*

### **The Sorcerer's Apprentice**

Doctor Frank Olson was an Army scientist who worked for Sidney Gottlieb on the MK-ULTRA project. In 1953, he was given a dose of LSD without his knowledge, and shortly afterwards committed "suicide" by throwing himself out of a thirteenth floor hotel window. As a result of the '75 Rockefeller Commission hearings, Congress awarded \$750,000 in compensation to Olson's widow. President Gerald Ford invited Mrs. Olson and her eldest son Eric to the White House and made a personal apology to them.

Years later, 54 year old clinical psychologist Eric Olson questioned the government's version of his father's death, and managed to get a court order to have Frank Olson's body exhumed and re-examined. Afterwards, Eric told interviewers that when his father was buried "... the coffin had been sealed. They said he had been so badly mutilated in the fall that it wouldn't be right for the family to see him. But when we opened the casket a lifetime later, I knew Daddy at once. He had been embalmed and his face was unmarked and untroubled. He hadn't been hurt the way they said he had."

The new autopsy confirmed Eric's initial impressions. Conducted by James Starrs, Professor of Law and Forensic Science at George Washington University, it found no evidence of the facial cuts that the original autopsy stated had been caused by Frank Olson's crashing through the window glass. Starr's investigation did find, however, a blood clot on the left side of Olson's skull that had not been noted in the original forensic investigation. Starr believed that the clot had been caused by a heavy blow, probably from a hammer, before Olson's fall from the window. Starr concluded that his forensic discoveries were "rankly and starkly suggestive of homicide."

### **They Were Expendable**

In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower's Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson authorized scientific experimentation on active duty military members in a document now infamously known as the Wilson Memo. Between 1954 and 1975, more than seven thousand Army and Air Force personnel are thought to have participated in Sidney Gottlieb's mind control program. Many of these veterans have sought compensation for the physical and psychological damage they suffered at the hands of Gottlieb and his assistants, but to date the government has balked at honoring their claims.

James B. Stanley joined the Army at age 15. By the age of 20, he was one of the Army's youngest master sergeants. In 1958, while a volunteer at Edgewood, Stanley was given a clear liquid to drink. No one told him the liquid contained a psychoactive drug, nor did anyone explain to him the hallucinations he experienced, or the nature of the emotional problems he consequently suffered that disrupted his life, leading to a demotion two years after his Edgewood service and to his divorce in 1970.

*"I couldn't get along with my family or co-workers or anyone else," Stanley later said in an interview with the New York Times. "Even my children were afraid of me, and I'd always been close to my kids. I was afraid to go see the Army doctors for fear I would be thrown out of the Army."*

Only in 1975 - the year of the Church and Rockefeller Commission hearings - did Stanley figure out what had happened to him when he received a letter from the Army asking him to participate in a follow-up study of former LSD experiment subjects.

Unlike other MK-ULTRA veterans who tried to seek redress through the judicial system, Stanley managed to push his case all the way to the Supreme Court, largely because of his attorney's argument that his covert LSD dosing violated protocols of the 1947 Nuremberg Trials that condemned human medical experiments conducted by Nazi scientists.

Unfortunately for Stanley, a five to four decision ruled that he was barred from suing the government for injuries incurred *"incident to service."* Nonetheless, two justices delivered scathing condemnations of MK-ULTRA practices. Justice William Brennan wrote:

*"The United States Military Tribunal established the Nuremberg Code as a standard against which to judge German scientists who experimented with human subjects.... In defiance of this principle, military intelligence officials ... began surreptitiously testing chemical and biological materials, including LSD."*

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor added:

*"No judicially crafted rule should insulate from liability the involuntary and unknowing human experimentation alleged to have occurred in this case. Indeed, as Justice Brennan observes, the United States played an instrumental role in the criminal prosecution of Nazi officials who experimented with human subjects during the Second World War, and the standards that the Nuremberg Military Tribunals developed to judge the behavior of the defendants stated that the voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential."*

### **They Are Expendable Still**

Many of Sidney Gottlieb's test subjects have gone the way of Gottlieb himself- he died in 1999. Many of them still survive, though, and like Master Sergeant Stanley, they are struggling to gain veterans' benefits for themselves and their dependents.

Subsequent to the 1975 Church and Rockefeller commissions' findings, President Gerald Ford issued an Executive Order that prohibited *"experimentation with drugs on human subjects, except with the informed consent, in writing and witnessed by a disinterested party, of each such human subject."*

Not until 1985, however, did the Department of Defense commission the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to do a comprehensive health study of veterans who had been subjected to chemical tests related to MK-ULTRA and other human experiment programs.

The report was titled: *'Possible Long-Term Health Effects of Short-Term Exposure To Chemical Agents, Volume 3: Final Report: Current Health Status of Test Subjects (1985)'*.

The study objectives, as stated in the report, seemed sufficiently straightforward and comprehensive.

Long-term health effects of interest were excess cancer and adverse mental, neurological, hepatic [liver related], and reproductive effects that might have resulted from experimental exposure of test subjects to chemicals administered at Edgewood.

But the report also contained a compendium of apathetic disclaimers:

*'Considerable discussion and controversy attended the design and analysis problems. Of particular concern [was] the use of a specially constructed but untested questionnaires... Several subjects of concern were not included in the final questionnaire, such as probes for specific symptoms, suicide attempts, diseases, treatments, detailed history of later job-related exposure, accidents ...*

*Briefly stated, it was felt at the outset by the panel reviewing psychochemicals that data obtainable from a survey might add little to our understanding of the long-term health effects of chemicals tested. In other words, the research team admitted from the outset that the study was too flawed to achieve its stated objectives.'*

The plight of MK-ULTRA veterans went back off the radar until 1991 when DAV, the magazine of the Disabled American Veterans, ran a story on them and other test veterans.

Since the tests were conducted under a veil of secrecy, records of many participants are unaccounted for, destroyed or lost. Since the burden of proof in making a compensation claim is on the veteran, many of those who participated in chemical tests find themselves trapped in a "Catch 22" corner, unable to obtain from the government the files the government is requesting of them.

The DAV article also stated that while the Veterans Administration had created files on radiation and Agent Orange test victims, no such file had been created for the MK-ULTRA mind control subjects. In 1993, yet another IOM report titled "*Veterans at Risk*" concluded that the chemical mind control experiments conducted on active duty members "*demonstrated a well-ingrained pattern of abuse and neglect.*" Upon release of the report, the Department of Defense pledged to help the Veterans Administration locate the MK-ULTRA veterans and other former military personnel who had been subjected to human experimentation.

### **Time Passed**

In 2001, President Clinton's Secretary of Defense William Cohen awarded yet another contract to the IOM to locate the Edgewood veterans and other subjects of DoD chemical testing. In a 2003 article published in *Military Medicine*<sup>2</sup>, the IOM reported that it had conducted a survey of 4,022 Edgewood veterans. But this report focused on subjects of Sarin and other chemical weapon experiments, not specifically on the MK-ULTRA mind control program subjects.

Further confusing the issue was a 2004 Government Accounting Office (GAO) report titled *Chemical and Biological Defense: DOD Needs to Continue to Collect and Provide Information on Tests and Potentially Exposed Personnel*. The report covered veteran test subjects in a chemical and biological test program known as "Project 112," but also addressed a Department of Defense mandate to investigate all other human test projects conducted since World War II. The report stated that Army documents identified over seven thousand Army and Air Force personnel who participated in these "*other tests*" conducted at Edgewood and elsewhere, but didn't specifically break out which of these test veterans were involved in Gottlieb's mind control experiments. It also said the GAO had concluded that, "*the scope and the magnitude of tests involving human subjects was not available, and the exact number of human subjects might never be known.*"

The report also said, "*DOD anticipates that it might take up to 5 years to complete the investigation of tests outside Project 112.*" That means it will be 2009 at best before the DOD can determine which Edgewood veterans were involved in Gottlieb's mind control experiments, what damage they suffered as a result of their participation in those tests, and what veterans' benefits they're entitled to.

News of mind control experiments on the troops is the kind of news that military recruiters, under pressure to fill uniforms during a time of an unpopular and seemingly unending war, don't likely want their potential enlistees to hear about.

1 DAV Magazine, "Two Decades of Deception," October, 1991, pp. 8-13.

2 William F. Page, "Long Term Health Effects of Exposure to Sarin and other Anticholinesterase Chemical Warfare Agents," *Military Medicine*, 168, 3:239, 2003, pp. 239-245.

### **About the Author**

*Commander Jeff Huber, U.S. Navy (Retired) was operations officer of a naval air wing and an aircraft carrier, and he commanded an E-2C Hawkeye aircraft squadron. His satires and analyses of military and foreign policy affairs have appeared in *Proceedings*, *The Navy*, *Jane's Fighting Ships*, and other print periodicals. Some of his essays have been required student reading at the U.S. Naval War College, where he received a master's degree in national security studies in 1995. Jeff is a contributing editor with *ePluribus Media* and his commentaries on the current strategic situation are featured at *Daily Kos*, *Booman Tribune*, *My Left Wing and Pen and Sword*.*