French TV channel France 3 recently aired a documentary that covered an interesting episode in the long history of CIA abuse of innocent civilians. Although the incident and its context are highly disturbing, it is a testament to the persistence of a select few researchers that their findings are reaching a wider audience.

The show focuses on the 1951 "mass intoxication" case in the French village of Pont Saint Esprit. For one week in August that year, hundreds of villagers suffered from an apparent attack of psychosis that included hallucinations. As a result, seven people died (two of them by suicide) and some sixty were interned in psychiatric hospitals. Just one month after the events, the *British Medical Journal* explained it away as a case of poisoned bread by ergot mold (a psychedelic mold). However, investigative journalist Hank P. Albarelli Jr has convincingly argued in recent years that this was in fact an experiment carried out jointly by the CIA and the US Army, involving the deliberate use of LSD or a similar psychotropic substance.

The nightmarish scenes of the week that began on the 17th of August 1951 were described as follows:

A French newspaper at the time of the bizarre incident wrote, "It is neither Shakespeare nor Edgar [Allen] Poe. It is, alas, the sad reality all around Pont-St.-Esprit and its environs, where terrifying scenes of hallucinations are taking place. They are scenes straight out of the Middle Ages, scenes of horror and pathos, full of sinister shadows." A brief article in *TIME* magazine, then a major U.S. news journal, with extremely close ties to the CIA, stated, *Among the stricken, delirium rose: patients thrashed wildly on their beds, screaming that red flowers were*
described **people throwing themselves from rooftops, women and men throwing their clothes off and running the streets naked, and children complaining that their stomachs were infested with coils of snakes.**

The ergot mold explanation was largely based on the findings of biochemists who arrived from the nearby Sandoz Chemical Company in Basle, Switzerland. As it happens, one of them was no other than Albert Hofmann, the man credited with synthesizing the LSD molecule for the first time in 1938. According to the France 3 documentary, Hofmann initially identified the cause of the villager's madness as LSD, although later retracted his statement, possibly when he realised that his comment implicated both himself and the company for which he worked. At the time, no more than a dozen scientists even knew of the existence of LSD. Equally interesting is that, unbeknownst to the French authorities, Sandoz was secretly supplying the CIA with LSD. The aim was to explore possible defensive and offensive uses of LSD, which included secret experimentation in the US and Europe.

**The death of Frank Olson**

According to Albarelli,

[T]he outbreak at Pont St. Esprit had actually been produced by a top-secret, joint Army-CIA experiment conducted as part of the Project MK/NAOMI, an adjunct project to the CIA's ultra-secret Projects Artichoke and MK/ULTRA. Indeed, the very unit that Dr. Frank Olson directed, the Special Operations Division at Fort Detrick, oversaw the experiment in France.

Here we find an interesting connection. Dr Frank Olson was a bacteriologist at the U.S. Army's top-secret biological warfare center at Fort Detrick, Maryland. He died after falling off the tenth floor of a hotel window in New York City in 1953. A suicide according to the police, the death has long been suspected of having been a murder.

Nine days before the fall, Olson's infamous boss Sidney Gottlieb (head of MK-ULTRA) and his deputy Robert Lashbrook took Olson and a number of CIA colleagues to a retreat at a lodge at Deep Creek Lake, Maryland, and spiked their drinks with LSD. Olson had reportedly expressed moral qualms about the nature of his work and an intention to quit. Gottlieb was reportedly concerned about this. Presumably, the intention was to interrogate Olson under the influence of the drug and/or push him to a psychological breaking point. Upon returning from the lodge, he told his wife Alice he had made "a terrible mistake", although he did not provide any specifics.
Olson asked formally to be dismissed from the biowarfare program a week after the Deep Creek Lake retreat. Instead, the CIA asked him to see a doctor in New York City as he was suffering a nervous breakdown. The doctor, Harold Abramson, was in fact an allergist, who recommended having Olson interned in a mental institution. It was on his last night in the city that he “jumped” from the window of the Hotel Statler, apparently crashing through it, as it was closed. Adding to this bizarre detail, on entering Olson's room, the night manager of the hotel and the police found none other than Robert Lashbrook sitting on the toilet with his head in his hands.

Armand Pastore, the hotel manager, asked the telephone operator at the reception whether she had overheard any calls from that room.

Two, she said. In one, a voice had said, "He's gone." The voice on the other end replied, "That's too bad." Lashbrook admitted making two calls but has denied saying anything of the sort.

This was a strangely casual dialogue about the supposedly unexpected and shocking suicide of a colleague.

In 1994, Frank's son, Eric, had his father's body exhumed. A second autopsy was performed, which discovered a large hematoma on the left side of Olson's forehead and a large injury on his chest. Most of the team that performed the autopsy concluded that these injuries did not occur during the fall, but beforehand in the room. This appears to be consistent with Pastore's testimony about finding Olson on the pavement, still alive, his body facing up.

House of Horrors

From Pont Saint Esprit to LSD, Albert Hofmann and Frank Olson, to the CIA, Sidney Gottlieb and MK-ULTRA.

In 1974, the New York Times revealed that MK-Ultra was a CIA mind control program. In reaction to this news, the US Congress established a commission to investigate the activities of the CIA, but by that time the agency had already destroyed most of the public documentation on the program with the bulk of it remaining classified. We do know, however, that Mk-Ultra techniques included the use of drugs, hypnosis, sensory deprivation, verbal and sexual abuse and torture. MK-ULTRA was officially closed down in 1973, although similar programs have evidently continued in secrecy, as we can deduce from the so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques” that have been used more recently in the context of the war on terror. In his interview with RT, Albarelli, mentions both Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld as being part of the cover-up of the Olson case.

To illustrate what mind control research is about, lets consider MK-ULTRA sub-project 68.
During the 1950’s and 60’s, the CIA funded Dr Donald Ewen Cameron, director of the Allan Memorial Institute in the Royal Victoria Hospital at McGill University in Montreal. Ostensibly, Dr Cameron was engaged in an effort to 'cure' mental illnesses by 're-patterning' abnormal behavior. In reality, the CIA was not interested in curing anything. They understood well that Dr Cameron's methods could prove useful in disintegrating and reshaping the personality of a subject. To be fair, Dr Cameron did not seem very interested in the recovery of his patients either. This veritable mad scientist was described as "ruthless, determined, aggressive, and domineering ... He seemed not to have the ability to deeply empathize with their [patients] problems or their situation."

His 'therapy' consisted in techniques that amounted to torture:

Step 1: To prepare them for the de-patterning treatment, patients would be put into a state of prolonged sleep for about ten days using various drugs, after which they experienced an invasive electroshock therapy that lasted for about 15 days. But patients were not always prepared for re-patterning and sometimes Cameron used extreme forms of sensory deprivation as well.

Cameron described the experience: "there is not only a loss of the space-time image but a loss of all feeling that should be present...in more advanced forms [the patient] may be unable to walk without support, to feed himself, and he may show double incontinence."

Step 2: Following the preparation period and the de-patterning came the process of "psychic driving" or re-patterning, in which Cameron would play messages on tape recorders to his patients. He alternated negative messages about the patients' lives and personalities with positive ones; these messages could be repeated up to half a million times.

In 1963, the CIA compiled Dr Cameron's work into the Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation Handbook - a torture manual. Is it a coincidence that during the occupation of Iraq, Iraqis in US prisons and in Guantánamo Bay were broken down by loud or annoying music (such as Barney the Purple Dinosaur's 'I love you' or Metallica's 'Enter Sandman') played repeatedly for several hours?

Equally chilling is the work of Dr Jose Delgado. Delgado was financed by grants from the Office of Naval Research, the Air Force Aero-Medical Research Laboratory, and the Public Health Foundation of Boston. Just a quick glance at the ideas that motivated this monster is horrifying:

Doctor Jose Delgado: "Man does not have the right to develop his own mind."
(Congressional Record, New York Times)

"We need a program of psychosurgery for political control of our society. The purpose is physical control of the mind. Everyone who deviates from the given norm can be surgically mutilated.

"The individual may think that the most important reality is his own existence, but this is only his personal point of view. This lacks historical perspective."
"Man does not have the right to develop his own mind. This kind of liberal orientation has great appeal. **We must electrically control the brain. Some day armies and generals will be controlled by electric stimulation of the brain.**"

These were the remarks of Dr. Jose Delgado as they appeared in the February 24, 1974 edition of the Congressional Record, No. 262E, Vol. 118.

As crazy as it sounds, Delgado made real progress towards achieving his goal. In the following video we see a charging bull stopped on his tracks at the push of a button on a remote control device:

Other programs related to **MK-ULTRA** include **Project Paperclip** which was designed to 'smuggle' Nazi scientists (some of whom were conducting human experiments in concentration camps) into the US, to let them continue their research undisturbed, under the auspices of a new boss.

Project **Artichoke**, previously known as Project **Bluebird**, sought to "get control of an individual to the point where he will do our bidding against his will and even against fundamental laws of nature, such as self-preservation" aka a "Manchurian Candidate" or mind-controlled assassin. It has been alleged that such CIA projects were the work of 'a few bad apples' and that they were never successful in creating such mind-controlled slaves. There is evidence, however, to suggest otherwise. For example, Sirhan Sirhan, the killer of Robert F. Kennedy, claims that to this day he cannot remember what he did, and according to professionals who have examined him, he is sincere. (For an amusing take on the apparent reality (and ease) of mind control, I recommend popular British hypnotist **Derren Brown's 'experiment'** on hypnotizing someone into becoming an assassin. Unless you conclude Brown's subject is a paid actor, the technique works and with relative ease!

Of course, human experimentation was not exclusive to the CIA. US Army Colonel and psychiatrist **James S. Ketchum** worked for the army at Edgewood Arsenal on the Chesapeake Bay between 1956 and 1976. His area of research was psychochemical warfare; the objective, in the words of a ranking officer, was to produce a "**selective malfunctioning of the human machine.**" He tested drugs on hundreds of military "volunteers" - if they can be called such given that they were routinely misinformed about the risks involved.

Other experiments included those conducted on unsuspecting civilian targets. The list is long...
Was there any rationale behind such madness? By the time the 'flower power' movement bloomed in the US, the CIA had sold this bioweapon to the population as a 'mind-expanding recreational drug', just in time to dampen revolutionary currents during the Vietnam War & Civil Rights years.

In 1950, to simulate bacteriological warfare, two aircraft flew over San Francisco and sprayed a large amount of powder containing the bacteria Serratia marcescens, causing many residents to contract pneumonia and die. These experiments with the bacterium Serratia marcescens continued until 1969.

In 1955 in Florida near Tampa Bay pertussis bacteria were scattered, which immediately caused a massive epidemic of the disease. At least 12 people died.

In 1956 and 1957 in Georgia and Florida the CIA implemented another secret operation, during which millions of mosquitoes infected with yellow fever and dengue fever were released.

From 1963 to 1969 within Shipboard Hazard and Defence Project (SHAD) several types of bacteriological and chemical weapons were released on US Navy ships, and the crews suspected nothing when they began to be inundated with sarin, VX gas, and cadmium salts.

In the late 1960s, during another secret US intelligence operation, called 'Study of the Vulnerability of Subway Passengers to Covert Attack with Biological Agents', hay bacillus bacteria were released into New York and Chicago subways.

CIA philosophy: "It's not personal, you understand, it's just that we own this country, which means that you all are our property, and what we do with and to you is none of your damn business."

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A secret medical research of the government of the United States on the inhabitants of the Marshall Islands - 'Project 4.1' is also well known: during the experiment people were exposed to radiation after the nuclear tests at Bikini Atoll on March 1, 1954. As a result of radioactive contamination, among women in the first five years after the tests the number of miscarriages and stillbirths doubled, and many of the newborns who survived soon developed cancer.

Another, possibly most infamous biomedical experiment on the residents of the United States in American history could be the study of syphilis in the city of Tuskegee, Alabama, which lasted from 1932 to 1972 and was conducted under the auspices of the US Public Health Service and was designed to investigate all stages of syphilis in African-Americans. During this 'study' American scientists hid the existence of penicillin from the subjects, and continued testing experimental materials, ostensibly in search medicine. As a result, many people were affected, some died of syphilis and infected their wives and children.

Recently, the US government was forced to apologize for a 1946-1948 "research study" in which people in Guatemala were intentionally infected with sexually transmitted diseases by the US Public Health Service:

One wonders what other apologies the public might receive in sixty or seventy years when no one cares anymore.

A note on debunking

In looking into the background on the France 3 documentary about Pont Saint Espirit, I came across a web site that claimed to "debunk" the claim that the CIA deliberately spread whooping cough in Florida in 1955. The author of the page is unhappy that a Wikipedia entry on human experimentation offers three references for the alleged incident in Tampa Bay, and that two of them repeat the claim without specifying a further source, while the third refers to the following 1979 article:
Our debunker complains:

So the entire story seems to be based on a propaganda campaign by the Church of Scientology. They did not even claim to have any direct evidence that anything was spray, simply some accounts of an unknown quantity of bacteria, and a bunch of unrelated things like animal cages. They noticed this was a year when the whooping cough cases were higher than the last year, so they tried to paint a picture.

So there's no really evidence of what did, or did not happen. But it's nowhere near as clear cut as the Wikipedia references claim.

The first sentence is unreasonably dismissive. For the purposes of finding the most probable truth about this case, it is irrelevant that the people who stole the documents (and who were convicted for it) were Scientologists or that they planned to use them for a "propaganda campaign".

We learn from the UPI article that the Scientologists had four solid clues: 1) a dramatic increase in whooping cough cases in Florida that year, 2) documents proving that the CIA bought whooping cough bacteria shortly before the outbreak, 3) receipts of equipment and animals consistent with a field experiment spreading a biological agent, and 4) evidence of CIA MK-ULTRA related activities in Florida between 1953 and 1955. Knowing what we know of the history of the CIA, it is therefore perfectly reasonable for the Scientologists to state that "while no direct, causative link has been found in the heavily-censored CIA material, there is a disturbing coincidence between activities cited in the file and a sharp outbreak of whooping
For anyone seeking to learn the truth, this evidence and dot-connecting makes CIA criminality probable enough to make us want to get to the bottom of it, to find confirmation if possible, or to explore similar cases that will help us understand the bigger picture. Had our erstwhile "debunker" been interested in the truth or possessed of an unbiased perspective, he would have admitted that the whooping cough case, while not proven as far as the UPI article goes, is indeed possible and even probable given the larger context. He could have also sought to clarify why the other two references did not seem to offer a proper source, either by examining the texts or by contacting their authors, or he could have consulted alternative sources of his own.

The problem with debunkers is that they are not really interested in getting to the bottom of things. Their objective is only to "debunk" and they make no secret of it (notice the name of the site: Metabunk.org), so they satisfy themselves with picking single, isolated cases and claiming that there is no 'smoking gun', therefore 'winning the argument' and implying that the whole topic is merely paranoid thinking. In doing so, they ignore the cumulative evidence of hundreds of cases and the fact that the object of study, by its very nature, makes it unlikely that any 'smoking gun' evidence will be found - although such evidence does appear from time to time. Remember, the CIA works in secret and is highly motivated to keep things that way. For this reason, the fact that so much material has already come to light should give us a hint about what really happens behind the scenes.

The information is readily available

The difficulty in writing this article consisted in reading articles and watching clips on unbelievably sadistic and unethical human behavior. It is hard for me to imagine crimes more nightmarish than the ones exposed above. The good news is that finding the information was relatively simple. It is encouraging that mainstream TV programs are increasingly taking an interest in looking at the research and bringing it to a public audience. How are we to demand justice and prevent future horrors if we do not even know they exist?

The France 3 documentary can be watched here (in French):

You may also be interested in this National Geographic show:
Make sure you do not miss Sott Talk Radio's interview with Dr Colin Ross:

And Sott Talk Radio's interview with Hank P. Albarelli Jr:

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