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**Rick
Anderson**

Times staff columnist

C.I.A. research: It's a bonk on the head

In this batch, there was nothing further about the Tanganyikan Crocodile Plan, the gall bladder or the witch doctor. But there was Document No. 21. Steve Kozachik read aloud from it:

"Feasibility of any impact system designed to bring about unconsciousness with low, lethality risk. Considering differences in range, angle of impact, position of head at impact, area of impact, etc."

"See," Kozachik was saying yesterday morning, "here the C.I.A. was trying to figure out the best way to bonk somebody on the head."

The rest of the Central Intelligence Agency documents, sitting on his desk on the 21st floor of the Smith Tower, were not so laughable. One always has the problem of being amazed, and thus a little amused, at the Keystone-cops tactics of the government — one that only a decade ago was planning to extract the poisonous viscera of a crocodile's bladder and, after proper cooking under a witch doctor's recipe, develop a lethal concoction that would likely be untraceable in the body tissues of its intended victim. (The Tanganyikan Crocodile Plan was reported here in February.)

But these 23 documents, dated 1950 to 1970 (some of them never before made public and all of them obtained by Kozachik's Citizens Commission on Human Rights), contain new pieces to the deadly-serious puzzle of government mind control.

And through sometimes-brutal experimentation and research by means of C.I.A.-sponsored pogroms against the mind and sometimes life itself, "The Company's" own documents show there is still much to be amazed about, but little to laugh at — particularly when you read the words of Richard Helms.

Now a former director of the C.I.A., Helms was a deputy director for plans in 1963 when he wrote this "Eyes Only" memorandum on the testing of psychochemicals (mind-controlling drugs):

"Most of our difficulty stems from the fact that, in our opinion, the individuals to be subjected to testing must be unwitting. . . Any testing program which does not attempt to approximate this real situation will be 'pro forma' at best and result in a false sense of accomplishment and readiness. . ."

"In sum, if we are to continue to maintain a capability for influencing human behavior, we are virtually obliged to test on unwitting humans. . ."

Helms proposed testing on unwitting humans in police departments, prisons or prison hospitals, or from foreign lands.

But, he said, security ~~in all these cases,~~ and too much would have to be told to too many about the secret experiments.

However, he said, the Bureau of Narcotics had been successfully bringing the C.I.A. unwitting victims — apparent drug users — for the past eight years, and Helms urged continuing this association.

"So what you have," Kozachik said yesterday morning, "are people being brought in for experiments they knew nothing about: Guinea pigs. But that almost makes it sound nice."

"The C.I.A. wasn't using just mind-altering drugs in these programs. These documents and other research show they used 'black psychiatry,' the whole gamut of electroshock, hypnosis, narco-hypnosis and brutalizing, sometimes fatal, methods."

Document No. 3, written in 1950, tells of attempts to develop an amnesia-producing drug. In it, a doctor writes: "This is, therefore, a unique opportunity to carry on a sterile research program without arousing suspicion."

With the close collaboration of the psychiatric profession, C.I.A. development of brainwashing and mind-control warfare is outlined in a later document. A special testing group, it states, "will consider other special or unorthodox methods such as brain damage, sensory stimulation, hypnosis, so-called 'black psychiatry,' 'Pavlovian conditioning,' 'brain washing,' or any other methods having pertinence for such procedures as interrogation, subversion or seduction."

If done in the name of national security, testing was nonetheless performed, sometimes diabolically, on unsuspecting Americans; at times, even on some of the C.I.A.'s own agents. One document shows an interest in the infamous "icepick method" which, in latter days, was widely used around here at Western State Hospital at Steilacoom.

Reads C.I.A. document No. 7, from the C.I.A.'s chemical branch, research and development:

"Using electroshock to produce anesthesia, a Washington surgeon has many times successfully performed an operation involving piercing the brain just over the eyes with a fine surgical 'icepick' and destroying certain frontal brain tissue, with nervous confusional and amnesia effects. This operation leaves no marks on the skin." The icepick is inserted under the eyelid.

Throughout the documents, the Freedom of Information Act, under which they were obtained, is constantly thwarted by the censor's black pencil. The deletions have only made Kozachik more curious.

"In this paper here," he said, "it appears they are talking about testing L.S.D.'s effects on the human mind to create predictable amnesia. This one line says: 'There is a person available to make clinical test on (deleted).'"

"I counted the spaces in the deletion. The words 'mental patients' fit perfectly. It makes it all that much more interesting since the paragraph ends: 'Dr. (blank) would also perform toxicity tests on animals as a parallel work.'"

"My conclusion is that they seemed to hold mental patients and animals in much the same regard when it came to testing them with acid."

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