

# DEAD SILENCE

Bob Coen and Eric Nadler

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## Preface

When the 2001 anthrax attacks hit the US in the days following 9/11, it was like a one-two punch against the Republic. Workers in New York's media center who had seen the planes swoop too low over their heads en route to the Twin Towers were now terrified of their mail. In Washington, DC, Capitol Hill was evacuated and White House staffers were chewing Cipro tablets.

It was our scariest collective nightmare come to life—the attack of deadly invisible bugs. It seemed like a self-fulfilling prophecy, the preceding years filled as they were with scores of films, best-selling books, TV shows, and articles on the coming of “bioterror.” Indeed, for the first time in history, national leaders and the military actually acted out high-tech “germ attack” war games, one of which had a scenario shockingly close to the actual events.

So when the government pledged the most thorough investigation it could muster, we hoped the Feds would get to the bottom

of it all. Thus, we were saddened but not really surprised when the attacks disappeared from public discourse—unmentioned, for example, by any major candidate during the 2008 election contest. And when the FBI announced suddenly last summer that the cold case was red-hot, identifying a lone culprit—US Army Scientist Bruce Ivins, just slain by his own hand, and quickly closed its seven-year investigation, it felt to us, and to most polled citizens, that something was not quite right.

In the thirty years we've covered international politics for newspapers, magazines and television networks, rarely, if ever, had we seen such a big story buried so deep. Relying on our network of government, journalistic and intelligence contacts, it soon became clear that the powers that be were for a variety of reasons loathe to open wide the Pandora's box where the real anthrax answers could probably be found. We made a non-fiction film ignited by the germ attacks of 2001. And we wrote this book with Elizabeth Kiem to fill out a story that our 90-minute documentary could only outline. We hope that the open minds that elected the new president are just as open to what we've learned.

*Bob Coen and Eric Nadler  
Brooklyn, New York  
March 2009*

# CHAPTER FOUR

## The Ghost of Frank Olson

### OPERATION ANTLER

One day in the late 1990s, the story goes, a 56-year-old British army veteran named Michael Roche chained himself to the fence at Porton Down and refused to leave. He wanted answers. Maybe also reparations. At the very least, an apology. Roche believed himself to be one among hundreds of British servicemen and women subjected to harmful, even lethal, experiments in the name of their country—an estimated 20,000 “human guinea pigs” used at the army’s chemical and biological weapons research base, Porton Down.

This super-secret facility, located in southeast England not far from Stonehenge and the cathedral town of Salisbury, was set up in 1916 as the “experimental ground” for the War Department, which at the time was fighting the Kaiser’s Germany—an army with chlorine, phosgene and

mustard gas at its disposal. The fate of Great Britain's soldiers, it was asserted, rested on the findings of the two small laboratory huts at the compound. That's when human testing—the gravest bogeyman of biological and chemical warfare—became a reality just as entrenched as Porton Down's top-secret shroud. In the aftermath of World War II, it was incumbent upon the Allies to demonstrate a moral, as well as military, victory over Hitler's Third Reich. They were offered up easy fodder for this argument in the unspeakable doings of Dr. Mengele and his diabolical pack of Nazi doctors. In occupied Berlin, Allied armies discovered stockpiles of unknown, highly toxic agents and documents detailing experiments. Liberating the death camps, they saw raw, brutal evidence of some of the most unspeakable human testing operations in modern history. The Allies were compelled to put the Nazi physicians on trial at Nuremberg and pledged to abide by the subsequent "Nuremberg Code" outlining the parameters, responsibilities and ethical guidelines for human scientific experiments. Adherence to this code, it seems, became a very delicate dance during the coming Cold War exigencies both at Porton Down and at the biological and chemical weapons base of England's triumphant American "cousins" at Fort Detrick.

After V-E Day, the Western victors forged a new alliance against the Communists behind the Iron Curtain. A tripartite agreement between Canada, the United States and Britain was signed to govern Western military research and development throughout the Cold War.

By 1945, Porton Down had expanded significantly from its origins as a few cottages and outbuildings on the Salisbury Plain. Even as it maintained its mission statement to ensure that "the British armed forces were provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them," Porton Down was allow-

ing masked doctors in top-secret labs to usher enlisted men into mustard gas showers. Such were the unsavory methodologies and irresponsible recruitment strategies that finally emerged for public discussion in the late 1990s. For a period following Mr. Roche's initial charge, the papers were full of stories of atrocities allegedly committed by British authorities over the years: Reports of Indian soldiers serving under the British Raj used as guinea pigs to test the effects of mustard gas during World War II; tales of elderly patients euthanized; and charges that terminally sick individuals with leukemia were injected with a "Monkey Disease" virus around 1968. The Indians and the geriatrics, whether gassed or not, never got a chance to protest. The servicemen, too, were forced to sign a vow of secrecy before taking part in the experiments, many of which were described as a search for the common cold. But in 1999, decades of silence were broken when a former guinea pig, Airman Gordon Bell, filed a criminal complaint prompting local detectives of the Wiltshire Constabulary to launch an inquiry into the management and methods of the human testing program at Porton Down from 1939 to 1989. Notices in local newspapers and veterans boards encouraged all participants to come forward, resulting in the largest investigation ever undertaken by the county force. The Home Office, prodded by Parliament, even provided £870,000 (the cost was to eventually rise to more than £2 million) to foot the bill for additional investigators from special branches of the Armed Forces. This relatively large probe—an unusual public x-ray of national security state secrets—was codenamed "Operation Antler." Police investigated charges of alleged criminal activity at Porton Down that included murder and manslaughter.

Three years of legwork by Antler's twenty-five-man investigatory team revealed not just the extensiveness of the testing (some 700 servicemen came forward to bear witness), but also the

government's recklessness in allowing trials of substances known to be highly toxic to proceed without the informed consent of the subjects. In some instances, this complicity came in the guise of willful neglect; the defense minister from 1964 to 1970, Lord Healey, acknowledged to the *Telegraph* newspaper that he did not merely turn a blind eye—he had asked for blinders: “I was aware that testing on soldiers was ongoing at Porton Down, but I did not know the details. Even I, as minister, did not want to know all secrets at the MoD and only wished to be told on a ‘need to know’ basis. The great problem with this is that I was only given information that civil servants wanted to tell me.”

By 2003, Operation Antler had amassed enough evidence of untoward activity at Porton Down for police authorities to recommend that criminal charges—including assault and “administering of noxious substances”—be brought against at least three former scientists. Veterans and their supporters in Parliament hoped the criminal proceedings would shine a light on high-ranking Ministry of Defense officials who had knowledge of the dark experiments. They were especially heartened by official Wiltshire police “update letters” and leaks indicating there were documents proving this. It appeared that there would not be a large enough rug to sweep this one under. It seemed certain dark secrets and black marks on Great Britain’s Cold War record were finally going to come to light.

This was not to be. In July 2003, Operation Antler was suddenly, quietly dropped by Crown Prosecutor Kate Leonard. Leonard had previously given the veterans’ kin hope when she called Antler an “extensive” probe, entailing “a wide range of enquiries.” But in the end, she advised against prosecution, citing “insufficient evidence.” Appalled, a lawyer representing many of the servicemen’s families declared that “an embarrassment of monumental proportions is being buried.”

And buried it was. Even the press, which had been closely covering Operation Antler since its launch, shuffled the anticlimactic denouement beyond the front page. But there was a reason for the demotion. The cases were dropped on July 7, 2003, the day before the Ministry of the Defense—to big fanfare—hung out to dry their most prestigious scientist, the former superintendent of microbiology research at Porton Down, Dr. David Kelly.

In all these details, Dresch, Nadler and Coen smelled a rat. They suspected that the same forces at work trying to keep the Kelly case cold had had a hand in the deep-sixing of Operation Antler. Kelly, after all, had been a top official for the last five years of the probe's period of investigation. Had Kelly been a witness to Michael Roche's one-man protest? If so—was he concerned? Was he ashamed? Was he supportive? Would Kelly have been a target? A witness? If he were a direct target for criminal charges, could he have been a bigger threat to other parties? Might he have been ready to tell more than even the investigators had known? Particularly if, as some of his acquaintances had suggested, he was growing “resentful” of his employers?

To answer this, Coen went to see Alan Care, the personal injury lawyer who represented the Porton Down veterans of Operation Antler in a civil suit. On his way to Care's office, Coen had a last-minute sense that they should talk out in the open somewhere. A park maybe. When the attorney, a man with a gaunt face and a world-weary smile, met him at his office door and immediately donned a pair of sunglasses, Coen, looking for MI5 wires molded smoothly into the door frame, realized he had the same idea.

“Let's take a walk and talk somewhere else,” said Care. “There's a nice park around the corner.”

Care, though involved in many of the chemical war cases detailed in Operation Antler, didn't have access to the brief on

biological experiments that would have taken place in the division that David Kelly inherited.

"I think he must've had some idea," he said. "What I don't understand is why the Hutton Inquiry did not reach out to the Antler case when the two were going on side by side. You basically have thirty detectives who are investigating the goings on at Porton Down in terms of criminal behavior; you have Kelly's death; and the two were never put together. It seems very odd. It seems as though it just dropped behind the filing cabinet."

There were other aspects of Operation Antler that Care could not legally discuss. The Official Secrets Act—a uniquely British restriction and the scourge of truth seekers probing the Empire for years—had insinuated its censoring head into the investigation. A number of the documents Care had unearthed on the veteran guinea pigs fell under this sweeping arc of protection, which covered anyone "working" for any branch of Her Majesty's Government—including these, the most lowly of subjects.

What Care could speak about plainly were the Strangelovian excesses endured by many of his clients: the man who was put in a gas chamber with dozens of rabbits, all of which died; the eye drops causing chronic conjunctivitis; the mustard gas, lewisite and CS gas used for riot control; the biological agent pyrexial; "basically any substance you think would be useful in chemical warfare," each clearly pushing the boundaries defined at Nuremberg. He described the compensations offered to volunteers: two shillings and forty-eight-hour leave. And he disputed the term "volunteer."

"Some of them were told they were going in for research on the common cold," said Care. Private Ronald Maddison, a twenty-year-old Royal Air Force engineer, checked in at Porton Down on May 6, 1953, to do his part in "curing the common cold." A Porton technical officer dripped 200 mg of GB sarin—the deadly nerve agent invented by German sci-

entists in the 1930s and used by the Nazis for their ugly war aims—onto a patch of uniform taped to his bare arm. About twenty minutes later, sweating profusely, Maddison reported that he couldn't hear anything and "felt queer." He experienced seizures and spewed from the mouth. "Frog spawn or tapioca," recalled one traumatized witness. "I saw his skin turning blue. It started from the ankle and started spreading up his leg." Three hours and several injections, respirations and resuscitations later, Maddison was dead. An official inquest, held behind closed doors, in 1953 ruled it a death by "misadventure."

Care's legal efforts on behalf of Maddison and other Porton Down volunteers paid off. In the wake of Operation Antler, Maddison became the first Porton Down volunteer to be vindicated, when, fifty years after his agonizing death, a new inquest jury ruled that the volunteer was "unlawfully killed." His survivors were eventually awarded a £100,000 settlement in 2006. Two years later, 350 other veterans were paid £3 million in compensation and an apology was given in the UK parliament by the Minister for Defense.

As Coen and Care walked away from their bench, the lawyer gave the journalist a tip. He told him to remember that Porton Down was just one leg of a tortured triangle. There was a tripartite agreement during the Cold War arms race, a liaison between Great Britain, Canada and the United States providing for a division of labor as well as a steady share of research and development. "The process of cross-information went on between the three countries during the entire time the experiments took place," he said.

That is why, Care explained, the coroner in the Antler investigation traveled to Washington to retrieve Pentagon documents on the Porton Down experiments, which were eventually released to UK authorities on the condition they be kept secret from the public.

“I’ve heard reports that there was a US Army scientist present at Porton Down during Maddison’s ill-fated experiment, a man who threatened to compromise the very premise of the Allies’ post-war security. His name was Frank Olson. Did he see what happened that day?” said Care.

With that, he shook Coen’s hand and excused himself.

## OFF THE RESERVATION

Frank Olson, it turned out, was connected to much more than just human experiments at Porton Down. At their office on the East River, Coen and Nadler trolled the Internet and learned that the case of Frank Olson was an underground legend linked with one of the CIA's most notorious covert Cold War programs—MK-ULTRA.

In the official narrative, Olson was an Army scientist who leaped to his death from the thirteenth floor window of a Manhattan hotel in 1953. Years later, in 1976, a variation on the legend was manufactured in response to post-Watergate hearings into “intelligence abuses” by the agency. In the new version, Olson’s death was precipitated by a dose of LSD slipped to him at a party in a CIA mind-control experiment gone wrong. President Gerald Ford even offered an unprecedented public apology to the Olson family at a White House ceremony, and promised “appropriate compensation.” Then-CIA chief William Colby voiced contrition on behalf of the spy agency. And Congress eventually paid the family \$750,000. The cash came with an agreement that the settlement would absolve the government from any further legal claims by the Olsons.

Eric Olson was nine when his father died. He was sixty-three when Nadler and Coen came across his elaborate website entitled “The Frank Olson Legacy Project.” In between, he had crossed the country by bicycle at the tender age of 16, finished a doctorate in psychology at Harvard mentored by the Yale Professor Robert Jay Lifton, and for decades was haunted by the questions of why and how his father died.

When the journalists contacted Eric Olson and explained their ongoing interest in germ programs and dead scientists, a common bond was found. Olson took the train to New York and walked across the Brooklyn Bridge to meet with them. He

was intrigued by the information they had uncovered about his father's connection with Operation Antler. The moment he laid eyes on the elaborate and chaotic flow chart that dominated one of the office walls detailing the inter-connections of their germ war investigations, Olson sat down on the couch and revealed a new rabbit hole. This one deep in Fort Detrick's most hidden corners. "My father worked in the far north corner of Fort Detrick," he explained. "The Special Operations Division."

Olson explained to Coen and Nadler that day that his father was a Fort Detrick specialist with both Army and CIA mandates. He was working on delivery systems for biological agents—including anthrax—but he had gotten himself mixed up with a particularly unpleasant covert operation. It was a super secret project combining mind-control and experimental drugs for maximal interrogation results. "Crazy?" asked Olson. "Yes. Cold War? Most definitely." But a goof-up it was not. Special Operations was where Frank Olson decided he wanted out . . . but instead it was the end of the road.

If Porton Down's human trials were concentrated on matching the Nazis' gifts for chemistry, Olson's Special Operations Division was taking a page from the Japanese army's dirty book. The Japanese, after all, were giving the Germans a run for their money on the atrocity front throughout the war.

In fact, the Nazi experiments, for all their hideousness, were not germ-related. It was the Japanese, headed by an army doctor named Shiro Ishii, who set the standard for criminal use of bacteria. Ishii interpreted the 1925 Geneva Convention outlawing the use of poisonous gas as an opportunity for Japan to corner an illicit market. He began Japan's bioweapons program in 1931 and cheered heartily the following year when the Japanese army presented him with occupied Manchuria as a massive testing ground. During the interwar period, Ishii recruited hundreds of scientists to work in research camps like the infamous Ping

Fan, where thousands of Chinese men, women and children would live, on average, three weeks before succumbing to their experimental diet. By the outbreak of World War II, Japan was in possession of a true biological arsenal, which it used with little discretion throughout the war. Ishii and his infamous Unit 731 received special commendations for their work in spreading plague, cholera and typhoid throughout the Pacific theater. They were also sending payloads by hot air balloon across the ocean, but there is no evidence that any biological agent made landfall in the US.

After V-J day, the US found itself in possession of a number of Japanese scientists who revealed the extent not only of the Japanese Imperial Army's use of bioweapons, but also its affinity for mind control as a weapon of war. Knowing that the Soviets had seized control not just of Japanese scientists but also of the labs, torture chambers and anatomy theaters they left throughout Manchuria, the Americans were wary of putting the defeated doctors on trial as they had in Nuremberg. Why advertise to the Soviets the capacity of the facilities they had inherited, US intelligence officials asked. Much more prudent, it was thought, was to tap the captured scientists for information that the US could use to counter any future Kremlin-directed malevolence. And Fort Detrick, already the largest purchaser of guinea pigs in the world, got into the human testing spirit just like its counterpart on Salisbury Plain. Between 1954 and 1973, Army authorities recruited 2,200 US soldiers to participate in biological weapons testing for "defensive" purposes only. And then the Army doctors busted out of their labs, embarking on a spate of mad-scientist urban drills to demonstrate the nation's vulnerability and document the weak links of preparedness: They sprayed non-fatal germs, but some which could make people ill: *Bacillus subtilis variant niger* in the New York City subway; they piped *Serratia marcescens* through the Pentagon's air conditioning vents; they aerated the Pacific coast from the deck of a Navy

vessel so that “nearly every one of the 800,000 people in San Francisco exposed to the cloud . . . inhaled 5,000 fluorescent particles.” People went to the hospital in droves. Eleven people were ultimately infected with the *Serratia* germ. One died.

Frank Olson had been part of many of the clandestine tests—including the aresolization of anthrax—that the US conducted in the early 1950s. His son still remembers his father returning from his trips to the vast Dugway Proving Ground with stories of the desert skies over Utah; young Eric would have dreams on those nights of a mythical wilderness where his father had something to prove.

It was in this climate of concern about the need to achieve parity with what the Soviets had possibly already incorporated into their arsenal, that military and intelligence officers embraced ever-more extreme notions of what constituted a “weapon.” In 1953, the year of Ronald Maddison’s death at Porton Down, CIA director Allen Dulles declared it was mind control that would turn the tide of the arms race. The communists, he insisted, were already practicing it on American POWs in Korea. With that, a whole wave of psychics and experts on mind-altering substances were welcomed to Fort Detrick, where the top-secret Special Operations Division was set up to study the effect of various drugs, chemicals, and persuasive techniques on GI Joe and his counterparts abroad. Frank Olson, who had been recruited at then Camp Detrick in 1943, was eventually assigned to the top-secret Special Operations Division in 1950, and there his moral doubts intensified.

Olson traveled a lot on assignment. He made frequent trips to Porton Down, where his colleagues were also experimenting with psychoactive drugs. In July 1953, Olson took a business trip through Europe. He made several stops in Germany, the UK and Morocco. According to Eric Olson, it was on this trip that something happened that shook him profoundly. He believes

that it may have been seeing an innovative torture method practiced on an ex-Nazi, or the administration of an untried truth serum on a captured Soviet agent. It may have been a successful operation, technically, or a botch of disturbing proportions such as was the case with Private Maddison. What was certain, his son believed with all his heart, was that Frank Olson had witnessed something to make him question the work he was involved in.

"I mean at nine years old you don't discuss your father's attitude toward biological warfare or anything else, but I remember, I remember he was very upset." That's how Eric Olson remembered his father's state of mind when he returned home from that trip in July 1953. Shortly thereafter, Olson attended a two-day work-related retreat, with fellow members of Special Operations. He returned even more withdrawn. It was at the retreat, Olson's family was later told, that Olson and four other colleagues had been slipped LSD in their brandy.

That weekend, after the retreat, Olson told his wife Alice he had made a "terrible mistake" and promised to explain later what he meant by this. He never did. He did tell her that he was quitting his Army job to become a dentist. But the next morning at the office when he tendered his resignation his colleagues persuaded him to see a psychiatrist in New York. They insisted that they all leave "immediately," even though it was the day before the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Three days later, Frank Olson was dead, a smashed man on the sidewalk below his thirteenth floor room in the Hotel Statler in the heart of midtown Manhattan.

Eric Olson drank tea as he laid out his story for Coen and Nadler. He had told it many times before.

He recalled the closed casket draped with the American flag that his father was buried in. His family was told that his face was too badly injured to see. The funeral register contained the signatures of Fort Detrick colleagues in attendance, including the head of MK-ULTRA, the notorious Dr. Sidney Gottlieb.

For more than twenty years, despite great anxiety and lurking suspicions that something didn't add up, no family member nor anyone else publicly questioned Frank Olson's death until a front-page *Washington Post* article appeared on June 11, 1975, detailing the CIA wrongdoings revealed during the Rockefeller Commission Hearings. The Watergate scandal and Nixon's impeachment had opened a brief but important window on the agency's dirtiest secrets. One of the headlines read "Suicide Revealed" and alleged that an unnamed Army scientist had been given LSD without his knowledge before jumping out a window to his death. The Olsons suspected immediately that this was their "suicide." This was then confirmed to them by Col. Vincent Ruwet, who had been Frank Olson's superior in Special Operations based at Fort Detrick. The story was publicly revealed by a *New York Times* journalist who had several scoops related to the CIA's role in the Watergate scandal and had prompted Congress to investigate. The reporter was Seymour Hersh, who had already written the book that blew the lid off of secret US military programs. His *Chemical and Biological Warfare: America's Hidden Arsenal*, published in 1968, was an instant classic.

Hersh's front page story appeared the day the Olson family held a well-attended press conference in the garden of their Frederick, Maryland home, in which they claimed that the US government was responsible for Frank Olson's death. By then, the family's lawyers were in the midst of preparing a lawsuit against the government. Just ten days after this press conference, the Olsons were in the White House for the historic apology from President Ford. Three days later, the family was invited back to Washington, this time to CIA headquarters for a lunch with Director William Colby, who turned over a dossier to the Olson family. Eric remembers Colby as being extremely nervous. With good reason—Colby was under fire from agency veterans for taking seriously the post-Watergate

directive to expose excesses by compiling a file on the activities of his predecessors as CIA chief. Written documentation of twenty-five years of agency misdeeds may have been what an invigorated Congress wanted—but none of the senior spooks did. Two decades later, Colby died in a mysterious canoeing accident.

After a year of negotiations, the Olson family agreed to \$1.25 million in government compensation. By the time the settlement was approved by Congress, the amount had been slashed to a \$750,000 award that would prevent the Olsons from making further monetary claims.

For years, Frank Olson's oldest son considered this settlement a “personal, political and moral affront.” “I waited and waited and studied matters further,” Olson told Coen and Nadler, as his tea got cold. Olson admitted that he became relentless—even obsessed—in his efforts to uncover the truth. He tracked down documents, journalists, and former colleagues. He even confronted Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the father of the CIA’s MK-ULTRA’s excesses and a man who once tried to assassinate the Congo’s Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba with the CIA’s secret stash of anthrax. No one gave Olson a satisfactory explanation. Even the documents Colby had given them long ago, he told the journalists, were “a cover story.”

After his mother, who never really recovered from her husband’s death, instead succumbing to alcoholism, died in 1994, Eric Olson decided upon a dramatic maneuver. He recruited the help of one of the country’s leading pathologists, James Starrs, from George Mason University, and had his father’s body exhumed. Olson watched from yards away as an earthmover excavated the grave. The coffin was retrieved and opened to reveal a well-preserved cadaver. Olson remembered marveling at how “clean—perfect, almost” the embalmed face appeared more than forty years later. There was no evidence of the cuts,

lacerations or disfigurement that the government honchos had claimed marred his features. After studying X-rays of the skull, Dr. Starrs determined that Olson's fatal head wound was caused by something other than an asphalt landing. He called it "blunt force trauma to the front of the head before falling to the ground."

The forensic evidence uncovered in the exhumation and Olson's subsequent bird-dogging was enough to convince the Manhattan District Attorney's Office in 1996 to reopen the Frank Olson case as a possible homicide. Working with the DA's investigators, Eric Olson amassed a bewildering amount of additional data, including evidence that the Olson case was cited as an example of a perfectly disguised assassination in a manual used by Israel's intelligence agency Mossad. Another tantalizing piece of evidence was that a British psychiatrist and member of the MK-ULTRA network at Porton Down had overheard Frank Olson talking about how upset he had become by the interrogation experiments he had been witnessing, and that he had warned higher ups that Olson was a potential security risk.

Five years later, in a noteable foreshadowing of the sudden denouement of "Operation Antler" in England, the Manhattan DA's office suddenly dropped the case after informing Olson it didn't have enough evidence to proceed. It offered no further explanation. But still Olson wouldn't stop pressing the New York prosecutors. His next move came soon after he obtained a 1975 memo unearthed by University of California, Davis historian Kathryn Olmstead within the Gerald Ford Presidential Library in 2001. The memo was from a White House aide to President Ford's chief of staff warning that a lawsuit brought by the Olson family risked disclosing "highly classified national security information." The aide was Dick Cheney; the chief of staff, Donald Rumsfeld. "It was a smoking gun that proved they bought us off cheaply,

and we could argue the original settlement with my family was pure fraud,” said Olson, whose attorney said he should sue the government for \$100 million. Olson brought the memo to the Manhattan District Attorney’s office, thinking it would re-energize its investigation, which had languished for a year. But it ultimately didn’t.

Olson was silent for a long time. It was late afternoon. The wind had picked up. The memory of the phone call he received on September 12, 2001, still stung. His lawyer had called to say he did not want to be part of any lawsuit against the US government. He was no longer comfortable serving subpoenas to Cheney and Rumsfeld to grill them about Frank Olson.

Several weeks later, Nadler, Coen and Olson continued the conversation in the same house that Frank Olson left fifty years earlier in the midst of his career crisis. The talk quickly turned spiritual. Eric Olson, a big man whose relaxed eloquence belies the obsessive energy that has fueled his search for the truth, was describing the religious nature of his father’s change of heart. Frank Olson was a Lutheran and Martin Luther’s message, his son explained, was a response to the Catholic assertion that in a battle against the devil, all is forgiven however sinful or evil it may appear.

“Well, that’s the story of the CIA,” he exclaimed, “We can do whatever we want because we’re fighting the Soviet Union.” This is key, said Olson, because two nights before his departure for New York, Frank Olson took his wife to the movies. They saw a new film about the life of Martin Luther. The climactic scene shows the theologian vowing to stand up against the corrupted church.

“It’s the whole Western notion of conscience,” continued Olson. “That you can’t hide behind an institution, you have to take responsibility for yourself. And my father sees this, Luther

goes in to nail his theses to the door of the church. My father, the very next day goes in and resigns, says, ‘I’m leaving.’”

But instead they took him to New York.

Eric Olson has spent thirty years digging for the truth behind his father’s death. He has determined that Frank Olson was murdered in that hotel room in New York to keep him from talking about what he knew. And some of what he knew dealt with weaponizing anthrax. Coen and Nadler kept in touch with Eric Olson as their investigation continued. When the news of Bruce Ivins’ suicide was still fresh, and the still growing tally of dead scientists in government service at Fort Detrick hung heavy, they reconnected. They even went to Bruce Ivins’ memorial service in Frederick together.

After the short services, Eric Olson let off some steam: “I mean how many murders? How many secret state assassinations? How many National Security homicides?” he asked warily. “What’s striking to me is you were bound to get situations during the Cold War, where certain scientists, certain policy makers, certain administrators, certain military people knew what was going on, and said, ‘You know we’re not doing this. This is not what the United States should be doing.’ The question is, what were you going to do with such people? You couldn’t put them on trial, you couldn’t even put them on military trial. Because in many cases, the stuff they were doing had such a level of secrecy attached to it that you couldn’t even deny it. I mean you couldn’t even speak about it at all. And my father was probably the epitome of that. Of this”—Olson searched for the word—“this boundary between biological warfare and covert operations represented by the CIA. You know people have gotten this sort of cynical general view. They say, ‘Oh we know the CIA kills people.’ And I always say: ‘Yeah, who do you know they killed? Give me the phone numbers of their family so I can send my condolences, you know.’”

Olson shook his head and stretched his long legs. In the distance a siren wailed.

“How many murders?” he repeated. “I know one. And if there was one . . . there certainly was more than one. But one is all I know.”

After their talk, the three men took a drive around Fort Detrick, Ground Zero of so many troubled germ dreams. It was here that both Frank Olson and Bruce Ivins raised their families and went to work with an assumption that their job contributed to the safety of the nation. Olson was developing a perfect delivery system for anthrax as a weapon. Fifty years later, Ivins hoped to design a perfect vaccine for anthrax. Their spirits were palpable on the suburban residential force field around Fort Detrick’s secret labs.

Coen was driving, and he came to a stop outside Bruce Ivins’ house. For a long time the three men sat parked across the street, talking about the dead man’s eccentricities, mental distress and security clearance.

“Well that’s really the question isn’t it,” said Eric Olson. “I mean this has nothing to do with conspiracy. It has to do with what kind of a leash you are going to keep these scientists on.”

Olson was beginning to get antsy as they drove around the fort’s perimeter. He didn’t like being so near Fort Detrick. Though he lived just a few miles away from its fences, he generally avoided this immediate neighborhood. Coen and Nadler were able to convince him to drive by the fortified compound so they could film, and as they did so, they noticed a small group of people gathered with banners outside the gate, including an elderly Japanese couple. It was late on a Saturday afternoon, August 9—the anniversary of the A-bombing of Nagasaki. Here were actual survivors of that original WMD horror, standing in front of Fort Detrick, banners unfurled with the slogans

“Never Again” and “End All Germ War Research!”

One of the demonstrators, an intense local attorney who spied Coen’s camera came straight up to the car. Pointing to the high gates of Fort Detrick’s campus, he yelled, “This place is about destroying and killing!” It was almost too much for Olson, who asked to please go home. After returning him to the Olson family home, Coen and Nadler went alone to the nearby cemetery. Standing at the grave of Frank Olson, Nadler repeated something he had heard his son say: *“That’s the problem you have. There’s a fundamental issue between the military and the scientists who they need to do their research for them.”*

And for about the hundredth time that day, Bob Coen thought of the growing ranks of the dead in this story—Frank Olson, Bruce Ivins and David Kelly: anthrax scientists needed by the powers that be.

Until they didn’t need them anymore.