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SUBJECT Mind Experiments

JOHN HART: NBC News has new information on mind experiments done 20 years ago without the patients knowledge, experiments funded by the CIA.

This information indicates the CIA was interested in learning how to erase memory. The report by Paul Altmeyer.

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: I would say it cost me my life.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: I was completely -- it was like they had complete control over me.

VAL ORLIKOW: I've heard that it was the most brutal program under that -- under MK-Ultra in the States and in Canada.

ALTMAYER: They're former patients, part of the CIA-funded experiments, MK-Ultra, performed at this Gothic estate known as Ravens Crag in Montreal.

The work was done by the late Dr. Yuin Cameron and involved extensive use of potentially dangerous drugs, excessive electric shock treatment, and endless tape recorded messages to sleeping patients. Some heard the same message a quarter-of-a-million times.

Newly released documents show the CIA's former chief psychologist, John Giddinger, monitored Cameron's project for the Agency. In an exclusive interview with NBC News, Giddinger describes Cameron's methods.

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JOHN GIDDINGER: His idea, then, was to put this bit of the interview that was taped on a round band that played --went around in a circle in a football helmet, I think, and it would say over and over again the actual words that the individual had said. And Dr. Cameron's idea, apparently, was that if somebody listened to this long enough, it would represent some kind of a breakdown -- a breakdown in a -- in a psycho-therapeutic sense.

ALTMAYER: Cameron wrote this was the way to make direct controlled changes in personality. Is that what you were interested in?

GIDDINGER: No, no. I don't even know what he means when he says that.

ALTMAYER: But, the CIA have a great interest in amnesia.

Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the man in the center, was the CIA's chief chemist and in charge of Project MK-Ultra.

In a recent deposition, Gottlieb conceded the CIA was interested in retrograde amnesia, blanking out a period of time in the person's memory, and a follow-up study of some of Cameron's patients show that they suffered amnesia for anywhere from six months to 10 years.

Since his death, Cameron's severe form of treatment -- really experimentation -- has been discredited. And now, nine of his former patients are suing the CIA for one million dollars a piece. They charge they were seeking treatment from Cameron, but were really used as unwilling guinea pigs in a CIA experiment.

This internal CIA document obtained by NBC News seems to give some weight to their argument.

The General Counsel's Office of the CIA wrote, "It is doubtful that any meaningful form of consent is involved in this case."

ORLIKOW: It was an awful feeling to realize, when I found this out, that the man whom I had thought cared about what happened to me didn't give a damn. I was a fly. Just a fly.

JOSEPH RAUH [Former Patients' Lawyer]: These people were treated as guinea pigs, thinking they were getting real psychiatric care.

The United States, the CIA, was doing what the Nuremberg laws say you can't do, take experiments on human beings when in fact they're not told that these are experiments. They thought they were getting treatment. They were paying for treatment.

ALTMAYER: Do you see ethical problem on the part of the Agency or yourself in doing the funding for this, because Cameron was working on winning people, and they were foreigners?

GIDDINGER: That's a Monday morning quarterback type question.

Looking back on it, yes.

ALTMAYER: The CIA says it will have no comment.

Paul Altmeyer, NBC News.