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CIA Project Eyed Lobotomy, Electric Shock Techniques

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The Central Intelligence Agency proposed spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to develop the use of electric shock and surgical lobotomy techniques to aid in its nearby intelligence-gathering operations, according to recently released agency documents.

Although some critics objected that the use of such techniques would be "morally wrong," one CIA memo dated Feb. 15, 1952, proposes setting aside \$100,000 to develop "neuro-surgical techniques" and another \$100,000 for work on electric shock and hypnosis in intelligence gathering. Both programs were part of a \$650,000 proposal code-named by the CIA as project "Artichoke."

While 739 pages of Artichoke documents which have been released by the CIA so far show that the agency did try hypnotic and drug combinations on foreign agents, there is no indication in the agency's papers that would lead to the conclusion that electric shock or lobotomies were performed.

Artichoke was one of several CIA mind-control programs which were grouped together under code names such as MK-ULTRA and MK-SEARCH and which stretched from 1949 through 1972. They were terminated, according to a July, 1972, CIA memo, because agency officials felt they had lost their usefulness and because some agents found them morally distasteful.

A 1953 internal CIA memo describes the purpose of the Artichoke program as attempting to gain control of the will of those being experimented upon while at the same time studying "every conceivable technique that can be brought to bear to prevent others from extracting information from our people or gaining control of the will of our people."

Thus far the intelligence agency has released only the most sketchy financial records, which do not give any more than a hint at the actual operations conducted under the mind-control programs. But the latest series of documents shows by far the most detailed view of the programs. Among the items contained in the latest documents:

- The Artichoke program examined everything from aspirin to snake toxin to see if they could be used in some combination to gather intelligence.

As far back as 1943 the Office of Strategic Services, predecessor to the CIA, fed a marijuana-type substance to an unknowing New York City gangster to gauge its effect as a possible mechanism for interrogation. The gangster proceeded to tell an OSS agent of criminal activities he knew about for two hours. The OSS and the British apparently both used drugs during prisoner interrogations during World War II.

Two Russian agents were drugged and then hypnotized in 1952 by Artichoke operatives. One of the agents was led to believe while under drugs and hypnosis that he was talking with an old friend from the Soviet republic of Georgia and "relived" in detail events spanning 15 years of his life. The experiment left Artichoke officials elated at the results and the information the agents divulged. The Artichoke team was most pleased that they apparently were able to erase the memory of the interrogation from the minds of the Russians with the drugs and hypnosis.

- Another CIA document described a visit by an Artichoke "A Team" to an unnamed overseas military area—possibly Korea—in May, 1952. The team conducted interrogations of foreign defectors and double agents using "Artichoke techniques" but found the results disappointing, according to the CIA records.

A major concern of the Artichoke project officials was "disposal" of those who were unwillingly questioned and presumably knew what their interrogators were after.

The electric shock and lobotomy suggestions were made, according to the CIA documents, to "dispose" of these interrogation subjects. One report notes that "A Team" members rejected the lobotomy solution as inhumane and "against all concepts of 'fair play' and the American way of life." Such a technique would also invite "horrible reprisals," the team warned.

A CIA official, commenting in another memo on the \$100,000 proposal to implement the lobotomy suggestion for disposing of interrogation subjects, noted it would be morally wrong "unless the situation is highly critical to the national interest or involves the lives of agency personnel."

Agency officials also rejected as "too surgical for our use" the idea of injecting forms of cocaine into a subject's brain through small drilled holes.

The CIA did seriously investigate the use of isolation and sensory deprivation techniques to break down unwilling subjects of interrogation. One memo on the subject said short periods of such isolation had produced LSD-type hallucinations, while longer periods could cause irreversible brain damage and render the subject "a vegetable."

One isolation experiment noted in the CIA papers was conducted in 1954 by researchers at Canada's McGill University. The experiment, which was run for the Canadian army, paid graduate students \$20 a day to remain in an isolation chamber for up to seven days. Several students complained weeks later of being unable to concentrate, the CIA document said.