

Inquest Testimony Absolves Kennedy

By Jack Anderson

The testimony at the Mary Jo Kopechne inquest has satisfied District Attorney Edmund Dinis that no criminal case can be brought against Senator Ted Kennedy.

Dinis has told subordinates that he will advise the Duke's County grand jury to accept the findings of the inquest. Twice last year grand jury foreman Leslie Leland sought to investigate the case but was persuaded each time to hold off.

Leland made it clear, however, that if he wasn't satisfied with the inquest he would again seek a grand jury probe.

At the closed-door inquest, a quietly solemn Senator Kennedy stuck by his guns. Without emotion, he repeated essentially the same story that he had given to police the morning after Mary Jo Kopechne drowned in his black Oldsmobile.

The senator swore under oath, according to those who heard his testimony, that he had been at the wheel when the Oldsmobile plunged from a bridge on Chappaquiddick Island the night of July 18.

He recalled the sensation of hurtling through the night into the dark waters below, but he couldn't say how he got out of the submerged, upside-down car.

"All of a sudden," he testified, "I was in the water."

He told the inquest that he had dived repeatedly to seek

Mary Jo but that his rescue efforts had been hampered by the swift current. As he left the accident scene, he declared, he was "satisfied" that the girl was dead.

Later in his secret testimony, however, he said that he had continued to cling to the hope she was still alive.

This was not the only inconsistency in the 750 to 800 pages of sealed testimony that Judge James A. Boyle is now studying. Those who were admitted into the closed inquest say the record contains some contradictions, ambiguities and generalities.

There were no witnesses, however, who successfully contradicted the Senator's basic story. Significantly, Kennedy and Dinis came out of the inquest calling each other by their first names.

Jack Olsen's Theory

NOTE: Intimates say Dinis was intrigued at first by author Jack Olsen's theory that Kennedy had ducked out of the car before the accident and that Mary Jo had driven on alone.

Dinis has now told friends, however, that he is convinced from the brake marks on the bridge that the senator was at the wheel. The braking, in Dinis's opinion, was too powerful for Mary Jo.

Olsen's book, "The Bridge at Chappaquiddick," traces the minute-by-minute tragedy of Mary Jo Kopechne. Senator

Kennedy's cohorts, of course, were eager to study Olsen's findings before preparing their case at the Edgartown inquest.

To prevent an advance copy from falling into unauthorized hands, the staid old publishing firm of Little Brown and Co. took cloak-and-dagger precautions. Editor Elliot Fremont-Smith limited the tiny circle of men working on the book to three other trusted aides and selected a printing house, Vail-Ballou Press, in out-of-the-way Binghamton, N.Y. The book was given the code name "Regatta" and only one copy of the manuscript was used.

Despite the elaborate precautions, Jack Vail Jr., assistant manager of the printing firm, urgently called Little Brown executive Brad Emmons to report that the project had been discovered. A clandestine approach had been made, Vail disclosed, to a Vail-Ballou supervisor from a Democratic political figure seeking a bootleg copy of the book.

Agnew and the Media

Vice President Spiro Agnew has triumphantly concluded, according to members of his overseas party in touch with this column, that his shoot-from-the-hip attacks on the TV networks and leading newspapers have cowed his press critics.

In an overseas call from the White House, the Vice President received the happy

news that he is now the third most admired American in the popularity polls behind President Nixon and Evangelist Billy Graham.

Agnew criticized the networks and some newspaper for their "unfair comment" of the Nixon administration. His idea of fair comment, it now becomes clear, is favorable comment. He even tried to dictate to some newspaper which reporters they should send to cover his overseas tour. He barred a reporter from the Baltimore Sun because he didn't like what the Sun has been writing about him. He felt that the Sun should be proud that a native son made it to the Vice Presidency and should write only glowing reports about him.

Before his departure for the Far East, Agnew personally placed calls to a few newspaper publishers to suggest which newsmen should travel with him. One publisher who received an Agnew call was the Los Angeles Times' Otis Chandler. The Vice President suggested that Robert Donovan, the Times' Washington bureau chief, should be assigned to accompany him and write about his good will mission.

Chandler felt this was a selection that should be made by the Times, not Agnew.

"Donovan travels only with Presidents," Chandler told the Vice President coldly.

© 1970, Bell-McClure Syndicate, Inc.