

NICK THIMMESCH

Ted's Lodestone of Tragedy



WASHINGTON—The latest Kennedy tragedy makes it seem as though that family is a lodestone attracting forces that both generate and destroy.

Sen. Teddy Kennedy is the least ambitious and most likable of the clan, but like his brothers before him, possesses fantastic power to draw full attention.

The story of his accident nearly overwhelmed that of the moon astronauts last week. But this time, the American people might have had enough.

There is an Agamemnon-like tragic quality in the Kennedys. Relentless disorder pervades their lives and the lives of those who come into the fold through marriage or dedication.

The very way Teddy conducted himself after the accident which took the life of a true believer seemed to be self-destructive.

His account of the tragedy remains sketchy, and true Kennedy believers — the loyal constituents of a name — wonder about a senator's stumbling walk through the night, a vague sleep in the back of a car, disappearing secretive guests at a

party, a call for help nine hours late, a girl's body extracted by a scuba diver, and the lack of proper autopsy.

"I was shocked and disappointed," said Mrs. Robert Dieterich of Park Ridge, Ill. "I felt a lot for John and hoped Teddy would carry on. My shock isn't over a girl in a car. It is over him not answering the questions. I wonder how they will patch this up. I don't think there is a future for him as our great president."

"I always liked Kennedys," said a Negro cab driver in Washington, "because I thought they liked us. But if I got into a mess like that, my butt would be in jail. I don't like this."

"I think he's had it," said Mrs. Tom Donahue of Detroit. "Too many conflicting stories. You don't just leave someone upside down in a car in a pond. That's unforgivable. I don't believe him either when he wears a neck brace to the funeral. I don't want somebody like that running the country. He thought of himself first."

It is clear that the senator could have demonstrated his character if he would have stood up and told the whole story at once. No matter what the circumstances or his own condition, he should have done that.

The late Harlow Curtice, a controversial president of General Motors, did so on Nov. 19, 1959, the day after he acciden-

tally killed a close friend, Harry Anderson, a former GM vice president.

The two men were duck hunting on St. Anne's Island in Ontario when Anderson's head was blown off by a shot from Curtice's gun.

Although several GM elder statesmen disapproved, Curtice released a statement to the press the same day, and on the next morning, stood in his office in Flint, Mich., and not only answered newsmen's questions, but dramatically re-enacted the tragedy by kneeling down, as though he was firing again. There were no doubts about facts when the ordeal was over.

Big men get big applause but must also take big consequences.

No matter how the tragic episode of Chapequiddick Island in Massachusetts comes out, the ordinary folk who loved Kennedys might now unconsciously avoid them.

The lodestone has drawn too much death — by airplane crash, by assassination, even by strangulation from a piece of meat in the throat.

Death spawned death — Jack Ruby killing Oswald, a man and a woman crushed by a passing train as they rushed to the funeral train bearing Robert Kennedy's body to Washington.

At the 1964 Democratic convention in Atlantic City, a woman became so hysterical at the sight of President Kennedy's widow that she ran through a glass door, cutting her head severely.

Too much turbulence, too much jet set, too much Onassis and too many nasty stories in the wake of the fading heroes of Camelot. Teddy himself has told friends that he expects to be killed.

"I just feel terrible things will keep happening," says Mrs. Dieterich, a disillusioned true believer.