

DREW PEARSON

Ted's Associates Tell New Details

Editor's Note: Today's column is written by Jack Anderson, Drew Pearson's associate.

WASHINGTON—Sen. Ted Kennedy has denied my account of what happened on the night he drove off Dyke Bridge and left Mary Jo Kopechne at the bottom of Poucha Pond. The details were drawn painfully from Kennedy intimates who would have no reason to falsify the facts.

They have now provided a few more details, which help to explain Kennedy's strange conduct after the awful accident.

No doubt he did his best, risking his own life, to save Mary Jo. However, those who know him say he would risk his life ahead



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of his political career. He has a compulsion, which only Kennedy intimates fully understand, to finish the work of his slain brothers.

Every day that he remains in the public spotlight, he risks his life. He is convinced, say intimates, that some demented soul will try to finish off the last Kennedy brother. He fully expects another Lee Oswald or Sirhan Sirhan to take a shot at him some day.

Yet he has stayed doggedly in his brothers' footsteps, speaking out boldly on emotional and controversial issues that might excite a psychopath. Kennedy isn't foolhardy, and doesn't relish the idea that a mad sniper might be

lying for him in ambush. He has even sounded out Republican friends about getting a bullet-proof government limousine.

Nevertheless, he has always put public duty ahead of his personal safety.

On the night of the tragedy, apparently, he was willing to risk his life but not his career for Mary Jo. After it was too late to save Mary Jo, he felt it might still be possible to save his presidential dream.

This was his state of mind, apparently, as he avoided lighted homes and a fire station in the tormented midnight walk back to the vacation cottage. He told his cousin, Joe Gargan, his friend, Paul Markham, what had happened. Gargan agreed to say he had driven the death car.

He had arranged for the cottage and had helped chauffeur the guests. It wouldn't

have been difficult for him to convince the authorities that he had borrowed the Senator's car to drive Mary Jo to the ferry.

For Gargan, the penalty would have been minor, probably a suspended sentence. For Kennedy, it could mean the ruin of his career and the end of the Kennedy dream.

Without saying a word to the other guests, Kennedy, Gargan and Markham quietly returned to Dyke Bridge. This gave Gargan a chance to familiarize himself with the accident scene.

Then Gargan and Markham rustled up a boat and delivered Kennedy on the other side. The senator did not suddenly jump into the water and impulsively swim the treacherous 15-yard channel as he later claimed.

The idea was to remove the Senator from the site of the accident. Then Gargan, who was prepared to take the

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blame returned with Markham to the cottage. Kennedy managed to slip unnoticed into the Shiretown Inn, where he was registered. To establish his alibi, he left his room, dressed and dry, to talk to the room clerk. Kennedy complained about the noise next door, then asked for the time, explaining he had misplaced his watch.

In other words, he supposedly had put the whole nightmare out of his mind and was concerned about having his sleep disturbed.

The next morning, Gargan and Markham returned to Edgartown, where they had dropped off Kennedy in the dark of the night to pick him up. They assumed that they were still the only three persons who knew about the accident, and they wanted another look at the scene in the daylight.

As they were crossing the channel, however, someone mentioned that a car had been found bottom up in poucha pond. Kennedy was shaken and walked off alone to get a hold of his emotions. Standing behind a car, he decided what he must do. It was his moment of truth.

As soon as the ferry docked, he stepped over to a pay phone near the landing and telephoned his attorney, Burke Marshall. Then the senator returned on the ferry to Edgartown and headed purposely for the police station. Markham made the lonely crossing with him. Gargan hurried to the cottage to get the other members of the Kennedy party off the island before the press descended upon them.

Edgartown Police Chief Dominick Arena, who hurried in his swimming shorts from Poucha Pond to the police station, obligingly held up the senator's statement until Gargan had time to clear out the cottage. It should be emphasized that Kennedy's hope to avoid the blame and establish an alibi occurred during a nightmare of emotional trauma. But in the end, he abandoned this scheme and manfully owned to what he had done.

Note: Sen. Kennedy also

denied my report that he invited Mary Jo for a midnight swim. His original statement claimed he had turned onto Dyke Road, which led to a secluded beach, because "I was unfamiliar with the road and I turned right onto Dyke Road instead of bearing hard left on Main Street."

My sources say he was quite familiar with Dyke Road and the beach. He and his late brother, President Kennedy, often had used this particular beach to escape prying eyes.

Kennedy and Miss Kopechne left the cottage, according to my sources, about 11:30 p.m. In view of Dr. Donald Mill's report on the time of her death, and Deputy Sheriff Christopher Look's statement that he happened upon a black car like Kennedy's which suddenly headed down Dyke Road at 12:40 a.m., it is possible the senator and Mary Jo had already taken their dip and headed back toward the beach to escape detection.