

CHIEF ASKS CHECK ON KENNEDY CALLS

Police Head Denies Report
He Knew of Alleged Moves

By JOSEPH LELYVELD

The police chief of Edgartown, Mass., said yesterday that he had asked the office of District Attorney Edmund Dinis to check on a report that Senator Edward M. Kennedy made 17 credit card calls to friends soon after his accident last month.

The report appeared Wednesday in The Manchester Union-Ledger, a strongly conservative New Hampshire newspaper that has been antipathetic to the Kennedy family.

The Union-Ledger quoted the police chief, Dominick J. Arena, as saying that he was "well aware" of the calls alleged to have been made by the Senator. But Chief Arena denied yesterday that he had ever said this.

He said he secured a court order last month to get the phone company's records to determine whether any call were made by Senator Kennedy or his friends from the cottage on Chappaquiddick Island where they were having a party or from his hotel in Edgartown, on nearby Martha's Vineyard.

These records were not introduced as evidence when Senator Kennedy was tried in Edgartown on a charge of leaving the scene of a fatal accident.

No Phone at Cottage

Reliable sources have indicated that they reflected no calls by him or his friends in the early morning hours soon after the accident. In fact, there was no phone at the cottage where the party was being held.

Mary Jo Kopechne, a young Washington secretary, drowned when Senator Kennedy drove his car off a narrow wooden bridge.

The Union-Leader's article specified that Senator Kennedy had used his credit card. Such calls would not have shown up on the accounts of the phones allegedly used by the Senator.

The New England Telephone Company office that handles accounts from Martha's Vineyard is situated in Falmouth.

The office's manager, John

O'Connor, said yesterday that operators were instructed not to ask callers who give credit card numbers for the number of the phone they are using.

He said operators occasionally made the mistake of requesting the numbers and entering them on data processing cards.

But he said it was "very probable, bordering on impossible" that this could happen 17 times in one night.

The Union-Leader article, which purported to be based on phone company records, said that Senator Kennedy had made five calls from the cottage and 12 from the Shiretown Inn in Edgartown.

Mr. O'Connor said that the operators handling Martha's Vineyard calls in the early hours of July 19, when the calls described in The Union-Leader article were allegedly made, were all very experienced.

Asked whether he knew of any instance in which they recorded the phone number of a caller using a credit card that night, he replied, "No I don't."

Law Bans Disclosures

This was the closest the phone company has come to denying the Union-Leader article. Federal law bars it, company officials have explained, from disclosing any information about private phone calls.

Richard Flynn, a company spokesman said that all its employees are constantly reminded that it is a crime to disclose such information.

Senator Kennedy was reported yesterday to have said that he may have made a mistake in not providing further details of the accident in the televised accounting he made to the voters of Massachusetts on July 25th.

A report in The Boston Globe, based on an interview with the Senator, described his friends as saying he knows he would eventually have to answer questions about the accident if he wished to remain in public life.

"I can live with myself," Senator Kennedy told The Globe. "I feel the tragedy of the girl's death. That's on my mind. That's what I will always have to live with."

But he went on:

"What I don't have to live with are the whispers and innuendoes and falsehoods, because these have no basis in fact."

Meantime, Mr. Dinis, the district attorney for southeastern Massachusetts, said yesterday in New Bedford that he would go to Wilkes-Barre today to seek a court order for the exhumation and autopsy of Miss Kopechne's body.

At Mr. Dinis's initiative, an inquest into her death is scheduled to be held in Edgartown on Sept. 3.