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THURSDAY

**JACK ANDERSON**

# Did Ted Go Back To Get Mary Jo?

WASHINGTON—After a painstaking review of the Kennedy-Kopechne tragedy, this column has concluded that Sen. Ted Kennedy dived back into the inky black waters to rescue Mary Jo Kopechne, failed to locate her in the front seat of his sunken Oldsmobile and persuaded himself that she had somehow escaped.

Not until the following morning, when an old man approached the Senator at the Chappaquiddick Ferry landing with the news that a body had been found in his car, did Kennedy abandon hope that Mary Jo might still be alive. Up to that moment, Kennedy apparently, he had clung desperately to the thought that she was merely lost somewhere on the island.



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This conclusion is based upon talks with Kennedy intimates, interviews with other witnesses, and a study of the confidential transcripts taken by District Attorney Edmund Dinis.

Kennedy himself still hasn't given intimates a clear account of what happened after he and Mary Jo plunged off Dyke Bridge in his black Oldsmobile. For a week after the accident, he stayed in seclusion at his Squaw Island home. He was deeply despondent, refusing to be drawn out about the tragedy. Twice he broke down in front of his friends. He tried to take his mind off the accident by flying kites with his son Ted Jr. and by spending time on the water aboard the family cruiser Marlin. But while others swam and fished, Kennedy brooded.

His advisers had to depend largely upon Joe Gargan and Paul Markham for information about the incredible events of that black night. From the tidbits that have leaked out, here is what apparently happened:

Kennedy isn't the kind who would abandon a girl trapped in a car at the bottom of Poucha Pond. Intimates fully believe his story that he tried to rescue Mary Jo. They are now convinced, however, that he searched in vain for her in the front of the submerged car and decided she must have struggled free.

Actually, Mary Jo had either lunged or drifted into the rear compartment. Scuba Diver John Farrar, who found her body the following morning, is convinced from the position of the body that she reached an air pocket and remained alive for several minutes in the back of the upside-down car.

In the murky waters at night, Kennedy easily could have missed her. Even in daylight, Farrar didn't immediately locate the body.

"I looked through the open window (on the driver's side) and found nothing," he told Dinis' investigators. "I swam around the back of the car and saw two feet together in the top right side of the rear window."

Apparently, two ideas formed in Kennedy's mind as he made his way back to the vacation cottage, by-passing four lighted homes along the route. First, he would get his two trusted cronies, Joe Gargan and Paul Markham, to help him find Mary Jo whom the senator desperately told himself had made it to some unknown point along the shore. Second, he would let the always-willing Gargan take the bad publicity for running the Oldsmobile off the bridge.

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THE TRIO returned to

Dyke Bridge after midnight, not to dive for Mary Jo's body as the senator later stated on television, but to search the area for her. The next morning, Gargan seemed sincere when he told the other girls: "There's been an accident. We can't find Mary Jo."

Some of the girls later spread the story that Gargan had been driving the car. As this column has previously reported, the original plan had been to let Gargan take the lumps for the accident.

It had been a standing joke with the Kennedy, as a loyalty test, to remand playfully of friends: "If I committed (this offense or that outrage), you'd take the rap for me, wouldn't you?"

For a few hours on the night of the accident, the joke became a reality. The Senator's two loyal friends hustled him by boat off the island so he could establish an alibi at the Shiretown Inn, away from the scene of the accident. It now appears that Markham remained at the inn with the senator and Gargan returned to the Chappaquiddick cottage.

The next morning, Kennedy and Markham, accompanied by another man still unidentified, returned to Chappaquiddick presumably to continue the search for Mary Jo. They hoped fiercely that she was alive. But dead or alive, they apparently believed she had made good her escape from the sunken car.

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WITNESSES say that Kennedy, on the ferry trip across the narrow channel, didn't appear particularly distraught. When he learned that the accident had been discovered, he headed for the public phone at the ferry landing.

Then the old man, about 70, trim, with thin strands of white hair, appeared. He ambled up to Kennedy and asked: "Senator, did you know they found a body in your car?"

Kennedy was severely jolted by the question. He struggled visibly to get a hold on his emotions. Once he fully realized the gravity of the situation, there were no more thoughts of letting Gargan take the rap. As one intimate put it, the senator "bit the bullet."

He caught the next ferry back to the mainland where he almost ran to the police station. He was in such a hurry, witnesses say, that he nearly knocked over a man who had to jump out of his way.

Edgartown Police Chief Dominick Arena, without taking time to change out of wet bathing trunks, rushed from the accident scene to the station. Under interrogation later by Dinis's investigators, the chief described Kennedy's appearance.

"He looked neat, and he looked physically okay," said Arena, "but he was very depressed and acted very depressed, acted very duntrod-den."