

Kennedy Book 500

BOSTON AP - A book published today contends that Mary Jo Kopechne was alone, driving Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's car when it carried her to her death off a bridge on Chappaquiddick Island last summer.

The book, "The Bridge at Chappaquiddick Island" by Jack Olsen, a senior editor of Time, Inc., is being issued by Little Brown & Co. three days before the opening of an inquest into her death.

Olsen, who made investigations on Chappaquiddick and Martha's Vineyard after Miss Kopechne's death, contended Sen. Kennedy alighted from the car after a deputy sheriff approached.

The writer said Kennedy wanted to avoid embarrassment and misinterpretation of his presence with Miss Kopechne, a Washington secretary who had worked for his brother, the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, D-N.Y.

Sen. Kennedy was on a holiday skiing trip to Vail, Colo., today and was not immediately available for comment on the Olsen book, accounts of which were published in Boston newspapers.

"It would have been a very logical step," Olson wrote, "for Kennedy to stop the car between the high walls of underbrush, jump out and tell Mary Jo to circle back and pick him up in a few minutes if the policeman did not give chase.

"It does not take the imagination of a dime novelist to see Mary Jo Kopechne at the wheel of the car, struggling to control two tons of equipment on a strange road while her own adrenalin flowed at high pressure.

"She might not have taken time to readjust the seat so that her feet could reach the pedals comfortably. At 5 feet 2, she was exactly one foot shorter than Kennedy; her own car was a Volkswagen, about half the size of an Oldsmobile 88; and most of her driving had been done on city streets."

Olsen theorized that the girl, barely able to see over the dashboard, would have been unable to see that the hump-backed bridge veered to the left as she approached and would have continued on a straight line-off into the water.

Miss Kopechne was found dead in the car last July 10, at about the same time Sen. Kennedy was reporting the mishap to Edgartown police and about 10 hours after he said it occurred.

The senator said in a televised statement that he had been taking Miss Kopechne to catch a ferry and had lost his way. He said he struggled free from the auto but was unable to rescue the girl.

The senator pleaded guilty in District Court at Edgartown to a charge of leaving the scene of an accident and was sentenced to a two-month jail term, suspended for a year.

The inquest beginning Monday at Edgartown is to determine the legal cause of Miss Kopechne's death.

Writer Olsen said no driver had ever gone off the bridge in its 20 years of existence, and if Kennedy was going only 20 miles per hour as he claimed, "No amount of driving error seems to explain the accident."

Deputy Sheriff Christopher Look Jr. has reported he saw what he believes was Kennedy's car with at least two people inside about 12:45 a.m., but the car moved down the road toward the bridge as he stepped toward it.

Olsen theorized that Kennedy was not aware the girl had gone off the bridge and walked back to a party at a rented Chappaquiddick cottage that preceded the accident.

The girl was one of six Robert Kennedy campaign workers who had gathered for a cookout at the cottage with Edward Kennedy and several of his colleagues. The senator had come to the islands to compete in the annual Edgartown sailing regatta.

Olsen contended that Kennedy gave his version of the accident in part because his wife was pregnant and after two previous miscarriages would be "upset by public insinuations that would be made if full details came out.

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