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Did Mrs. Onassis Apply Judo? A Witness and a Friend Say No

The story that Mrs. Aristotle Onassis threw a newspaper photographer to the ground with a judo flip here Sunday was denied yesterday by a witness and by a friend of the former First Lady.

Peter Tufo, an assistant to Mayor Lindsay and head of the city's office in Washington, said he was walking with his wife on 57th Street at the time of the incident involving three photographers and Mrs. Onassis, the widow of President John F. Kennedy.

Mr. Tufo said that Mel Finkelstein of The Daily News fell to the ground apparently after being jostled by one of the other photographers or because he slipped.

"Mrs. Onassis didn't touch him with her hands," he added. "She didn't make a move toward him."

"I saw the whole thing, there were three men with cameras and Mrs. Onassis walking very briskly down the street. She was trying to get away. Two of them were jostling, trying to get in front of her. One appeared to push the other, and he fell in front of her. He was laughing and brushed himself off."

Forceful Flip Charged

The incident took place near the Cinema 57 Rendezvous, on 57th Street between the Avenue of the Americas and Seventh Avenue, after Mrs. Onassis emerged from the movie "I Am Curious (Yellow)."

Mr. Finkelstein said that he had been at a "discreet distance," taking pictures of her,

but that she came over to him, "grabbed" his right wrist with her hand, his elbow with the other hand, "put her leg out and flipped me over her thigh."

Mr. Tufo summed up his version of the scene: "As a former Marine [1963]; I know a judo toss when I see one. She didn't use any judo."

Last night Mr. Finkelstein asserted: "I stick exactly with what I said."

Earlier in the day Mrs. Onassis' former secretary, Nancy Tuckerman denied that the former first lady had knocked down Mr. Finkelstein. "I congratulated her this morning," Miss Tuckerman said, "told her I thought it was a neat trick, but she said she hadn't done it."

"The story, as told by Mr. Finkelstein is completely untrue," Miss Tuckerman said.

The theater doorman, Bernardo Rojas, also said that the photographer had slipped and fallen, that Mrs. Onassis had not pushed him.

A picture of the aftermath of the incident, showing Mr. Finkelstein on the pavement, was taken by some of the other photographers there, including John Lent of The Associated Press.

Mr. Lent said that he had seen no evidence of a scuffle between Mrs. Onassis and Mr. Finkelstein. "I can't say I saw her touch him," he said, adding that he was busy at the moment trying to take a picture. Mr. Tufo and his wife, could be seen in the background of Mr. Lent's picture.