

Doctor Reaffirms Drowning Verdict In Kopechne Case

By The Associated Press

WILKES-BARRE, Pa., Oct. 20

—A medical examiner supported today a contention that blood was present in the nose of Mary Jo Kopechne when her body was recovered from Senator Edward M. Kennedy's car last July 19.

Dr. Donald R. Mills, associate medical examiner of Dukes County, Mass., who originally ruled that Miss Kopechne's death was caused by drowning, said he saw "at least one little cobweb of blood which clearly came from the edge of the nostril." He added, however, that this was common of drowning victims.

"It was obviously a clear case of drowning," Dr. Mills testified as a hearing opened on a petition by District Attorney Edmund S. Dinis of New Bedford, Mass., to have Miss Kopechne's body exhumed.

Mr. Dinis maintains that he needs an autopsy for an inquest he has scheduled into the death.

Evidence of Blood

Mr. Dinis had based his petition largely on a claim that he had evidence showing that blood was present in Miss Kopechne's nose and mouth and on her clothing when the body was recovered.

Dr. Mills did not perform an autopsy before making his ruling.

Police Chief Dominick J. Arena of Edgarton, Mass., testified earlier in the hearing that he saw no blood or signs of injuries on the body.

In support of his verdict of

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death by drowning, Dr. Mills said:

"Inside the chest one could hear a swishing as water came out when she was turned her side, which is characteristic of drowning." He added that foam and more water came out of the side of her mouth.

Dr. Mills said his examination took 10 minutes.

"She had no evidence of injuries on her body, such as bruises, cuts, broken bones," he said.

"Do you say your external examination excluded the possibilities of other causes of death?" asked Mr. Dinis' assistant, Armand Fernandes Jr.

"Yes," Dr. Mills replied.

The medical examiner said he arrived at the scene of the accident on Chappaquiddick Island off Martha's Vineyard at 9:30 A.M. on July 19, about half an hour after Miss Kopechne's body had been recovered by a skin diver. He added that he fixed the time of her death at about six hours or more before his examination.

"The body was almost solid, like stone from head to toe," Dr. Mills continued. "I could see that she was obviously



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Dr. Donald R. Mills, left, associate medical examiner, and Dominick J. Arena, police chief, at court in Wilkes-Barre.

deceased but just for a sort of routine I put the stethoscope on her heart."

Asked about the lack of an autopsy, Dr. Mills said that when he turned the body over to the undertaker, he directed that it not be embalmed until

he gave further instructions.

"I wanted to talk to the district attorney to determine whether an autopsy should be done," Dr. Mills said.

The medical examiner testified that he called Mr. Dinis' office and was told to obtain

a blood sample for alcohol, less than 5 per cent carbon dioxide and a negative showing for barbiturates.

Asked under cross-examination what significance he placed on the test, Dr. Mills replied:

"That this girl had had a small amount to drink. The carbon monoxide showed that she may have smoked a cigarette or inhaled some car fumes."

Joseph F. Flagan, attorney for Mr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Kopechne of Berkeley Heights, N. J., who object to an autopsy, questioned Dr. Mills on what inquiries he had made about an autopsy.

"Did you make any direct contact with Dinis?" Mr. Flagan asked.

"I don't recall, there were so many calls," Dr. Mills replied.

Mr. Flagan produced what he said was a memorandum Dr. Mills had prepared for himself about a week after the accident.

In response to a question by Mr. Fernandes, Dr. Mills said that he "requested that an autopsy be considered because of the circumstances of the case and the indication that a prominent person was involved, and I was carrying a lot on my shoulders. I wanted help."