

# Boston Medical Examiner Challenges Helper's

By HOMER BIGART

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NAPLES, Fla., April 25 — Boston's Medical Examiner testified today that he could never have concluded, as had the Chief Medical Examiner of New York, that the wife of Dr. Carl A. Coppolino was murdered by an injection of a paralyzing drug.

Dr. Richard Ford, a tall, thin man with a stern and somber visage, sharply challenged the autopsy report of Dr. Milton Helpern, the pathologist of New York City.

Asked by the defense counsel, F. Lee Bailey, if he could find any basis for concluding the cause of death of Carmela Coppolino, Dr. Ford answered in a loud, authoritative voice:

"I couldn't."

In previous testimony, Dr. Helpern, and his chief toxicologist, Dr. Charles Joseph Umberger, said they had found, by a new method, traces of elements of succinylcholine, a muscle relaxing drug, in the brain and liver of Mrs. Coppolino.

## Doctor Against Doctor

Mr. Bailey tried today to provide doubt on that score by placing the expertise of Dr. Ford against that of Dr. Helpern. Dr. Ford said he had conducted, supervised or assisted in 7,000 to 8,000 autopsies; the score claimed for Dr. Helpern is over 48,000. The two medical experts were opposing witnesses last December in the first Coppolino was acquitted in the murder of a former neighbor, Lieut. Col. William E. Farber in 1963.

Dr. Ford gave these reasons for his distrust of Dr. Helpern's conclusion:

Death by suffocation — the end result of a fatal injection of succinylcholine, which paralyzes the muscles of the lungs — rarely produces a cadaver that shows any blood clotting, he said. "In pure asphyxial death, blood after death does not clot," he explained. Dr. Hel-



Associated Press Wirephoto

F. Lee Bailey, right, the defense attorney, leaving his plane at Naples, Fla., with Dr. Richard Ford, Boston's medical examiner, whom he picked up at airport in Miami.

pern's autopsy on Mrs. Coppolino, according to Mr. Bailey, reported some post-mortem clotting.

And in death by injection of a toxic drug, the main place to look for any residue of the drug would be along the needle track, Dr. Ford said. Neither Dr. Helpern nor Dr. Umberger had looked for traces of the drug at the injection site — the upper left buttock of Mrs. Coppolino. They had left this task to another investigator, Dr. Bert La Du Jr., of New York University Medical School, and Dr. La Du found material "with the same properties as succinylmonocholine" near the injection site.

The state rested its case after testimony by the 32d witness against Dr. Coppolino. The wit-

ness was Mrs. Patricia Edwards Adomat, who lived next door to Mary Gibson in Sarasota before and after Mrs. Gibson had become the second Mrs. Coppolino. Speaking in a soft Southern accent, Mrs. Adomat testified that Carl Coppolino and his two children "moved in" on Mrs. Gibson several days before their marriage on Oct. 7, 1965.

Mrs. Adomat said Dr. Cop-

polino started visiting Mary Gibson in mid-June, 1965, and that he was "usually" at the Gibson house "almost" every day thereafter that Mrs. Gibson was home.

On cross-examination, Mr. Bailey had her draw a sketch of the location of the two houses and "to imply that she was 'spying,'" asked her to note every door and window that would give her "surveillance on the comings and goings Dr. Coppolino.

Mrs. Adomat volunteered some of her observations made from her patio and garbage bin.

"So," cried Mr. Bailey, "of your surveillance was while you had a handf garbage!"

Mrs. Adomat smiled and said, "Why, sure."

When the state rested

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