

Cluchette Denies Role in Slaying

By Harold V. Streeter

Defendant John Cluchette said today he did wipe murdered Soledad Prison guard John V. Mills' blood off of his cell but denied he was present when Mills was beaten and thrown from the third tier of Soledad's maximum security wing.

He repeated his earlier claim that he was in the first floor television room when Mills was slain Jan. 16, 1970.

Under cross-examination by Monterey County District Attorney William Curtis, Cluchette, 28, said he used toilet paper to wipe blood off the bars of his cell, Cell 302, which was right next to the murder scene.

Flashlight

It was the only part of the prosecution testimony he admitted and he insisted the incident happened well after Mills was dead.

He denied testimony by earlier prosecution witnesses that he threw a flashlight or anything else out of his cell window.

The first time he saw the flashlight, which the prosecution contends was used in beating Mills, was when it was presented in court, he said.

Curtis brought out in his

questioning that Cluchette told prison officials that he had left the television room about 6:15 p.m., some 15 minutes before the murder.

'Never Asked'

When Curtis asked why Cluchette didn't also say then that he went back to the room after getting a fresh towel, and without going to the third tier, he replied:

"I was never asked."

Asked by his own attorney if he killed or helped kill Mills, Cluchette said:

"No, I didn't."

As for his co-defendant, Fleeta Drumgo, 26, Cluchette said:

"I don't believe I saw him at all that day."

Curtis also asked him if he considered George Jackson, the third defendant who was slain at San Quentin last August, his leader. The burly convict replied:

"No, I take pride in keeping my own mind."

The trial, now in its 11th week before Superior Judge S. Lee Vavuris, is being heard by a jury of nine women and three men. The defenst, in its third week, is expected to conclude this week.