

The Kennedy Probe Hinges On Drinking

EDGARTOWN (Mass)—(AP)—A special Dukes County prosecutor says he is considering whether charges of driving to endanger and driving under the influence of alcohol might be placed against Sen. Edward Kennedy.

Walter Steele said yesterday the additional charges were under consideration as an investigation continued into the accident early Saturday in which a young secretary riding in Kennedy's car died.

Kennedy already is charged with leaving the scene of the accident.

"These have all been considered and have not been ruled out," Steele said of the possible additional charges.

'No Evidence'

He said there is no material evidence to indicate the car in which Miss Mary Jo Kopechne died was operated in a manner to endanger.

Steele said he hoped to determine whether there had been drinking — or heavy drinking — at a party attended by Miss Kopechne the night she died.

A medical examiner has reported that a sample of Miss Kopechne's blood showed a small amount of alcohol. Dr. Donald Mills said it was insignificant, "such as might show in a person who has had a few cocktails."

The Commonwealth also hopes to learn who attended the party Friday night at the rented cottage on Chappaquiddick Island, Steele said.

Miss Kopechne, 28, of Washington, D.C., drowned when a car Kennedy was driving went off a bridge and landed bottom up in a tidal pond.

Minor Injuries

The Massachusetts Democrat, 37, escaped with a mild concussion and strained neck muscles.

He did not report the accident until nine hours after it happened. Kennedy said he was in shock.

Edgartown Police Chief Dominic Arena said:

"I am concerned only with the charge of leaving the

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scene of an accident. I know nothing of any party. It is only a rumor. All I know about that is what I read in the papers. I know nothing of who was there, only that Mr. Joseph Gargan rented the house."

"I've got to repeat again," Arena told a news conference, "and say emphatically that there is no negligence involved in this accident."

Arena, who recovered Miss Kopechne's body from the wreckage with the aid of skin divers, said the pretty blonde secretary "was fully clothed and everything was buttoned right up."

He also disclosed that a pocketbook belonging to a Miss Keough, who he said attended the party, was found in the Kennedy car.

Asked if he believed Kennedy had been in shock after the accident as he said, Arena replied:

"Yes, but for how long?"

Crank Calls

Arena said he had been receiving phone calls and telegrams from all parts of the

country. He said many praised the Edgartown police for deciding to take court action in the case but others were abusive. He said he had to take his home phone off the hook Monday night because of crank calls.

Kennedy, looking drawn and haggard and wearing a neck brace, made his first public appearance since the wreck when he attended Miss Kopechne's funeral yesterday in the coal mining town

of Plymouth, Pa.

He returned to Cape Cod almost immediately and was met at the airport in neighboring Hyannis by a crowd of newsmen.

"I've just come from the funeral of a lovely girl and this is not an appropriate time to comment," he said.

Kennedy, in reporting the accident to police, gave this account:

The accident occurred, he said, as he was driving Miss Kopechne to catch a midnight ferry from Chappaquiddick to Martha's Vineyard.

They had attended a dinner party for a small group of Kennedy friends and campaign workers for his late brother Robert.

'Wrong Turn'

Kennedy said he became confused and took a wrong turn, heading away from the ferry dock. The car plunged off a bridge.

The accident left him in a state of shock. He attempted several times to get Miss Kopechne out of the submerged car, but was unable to do so.

He then walked the mile or so back to the small house where the party was held and climbed into the rear seat of a car parked there.

Questions Raised

Later, not specifying the time elapsed, someone drove him to his hotel at Edgartown. He remembered walking around Edgartown, indicating he was still in a daze.

He said he reported the accident to police as soon as he

realized fully what had happened.

His account left questions unanswered — including these:

- Why did the senator wait so long before going to the police?

- Who took him back to his hotel?

- Wasn't some effort made to question Kennedy when he was being taken to his hotel, to determine what had happened to his car and Miss Kopechne?

- If he gave information to the person taking him to his hotel, why weren't the police notified right away so search could have been started for Miss Kopechne?

- What happened to Kennedy after his arrival in Edgartown?

- Wouldn't someone in Edgartown — perhaps a police officer or a tourist — have seen him and offered assistance?

- Why would he be confused — he had been in the area numerous times — and take a wrong turn before reaching the bridge?

These questions may be answered during court proceedings in coming weeks.

The next step is Monday's show-cause hearing. Its purpose is to determine whether a summons is to be issued, bringing the case to trial.

Under Massachusetts law, persons convicted of leaving the scene of an accident may receive from two months to two years in jail, but such sentences frequently are suspended.