

Further Reports on The Kennedy Story



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Today's column is by Drew Pearson's associate Jack Anderson

Washington

SENATOR TED KENNEDY has denied my account of what happened on the night he drove off Dyke bridge and left Mary Jo Kopechne at the bottom of Poucha Pond. The details were drawn painfully from Kennedy intimates who would have no reason to falsify the facts. They have now provided a few more details, which help to explain Kennedy's strange conduct after the awful accident.

No doubt he did his best, risking his own life, to save Mary Jo. However, those who know him say he would risk his life ahead of his political career. He has a compulsion, which only Kennedy intimates fully understand, to finish the work of his slain brothers. Intimates say he has always put public duty ahead of his personal safety.

On the night of the tragedy, apparently, he was willing to risk his life but not his career for Mary Jo. After it was too late to save Mary Jo, he felt it might still be possible to save his presidential dream.

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THIS WAS HIS state of mind, apparently, as he avoided lighted homes and a fire station in the tormented midnight walk back to the vacation cottage. He told his cousin, Joe Gargan, his friend, Paul Markham, what had happened. Gargan agreed to say he had driven the death car.

For Gargan, the penalty would have been minor, probably a suspended sentence. For Kennedy, it could mean the ruin of his career and the end of the Kennedy dream.

Without saying a word to the other guests, Kennedy, Gargan and Markham quietly returned to Dyke bridge. This gave Gargan a chance to familiarize himself with the accident scene. Then Gargan and Markham rustled up a boat and delivered Kennedy on the other side. The senator did not suddenly jump into the water

and impulsively swim the treacherous 150-yard channel as he later claimed.

Then Gargan and Markham returned to the cottage. Kennedy managed to slip unnoticed into the Shiretown Inn, where he was registered. To establish his alibi, he left his room, dressed and dry, to talk to the room clerk. Kennedy complained about the noise next door, then asked for the time, explaining he had misplaced his watch. In other words, he supposedly had put the whole nightmare out of his mind and was concerned about having his sleep disturbed.

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THE NEXT MORNING, Gargan and Markham returned to Edgartown to pick Kennedy up. They assumed that they were still the only three persons who knew about the accident, and they wanted another look at the scene in the daylight.

As they were crossing the channel, however, someone mentioned that a car had been found bottom up in Poucha Pond. Kennedy was shaken and walked off alone to get a hold on his emotions. He decided what he must do. It was his moment of truth.

As soon as the ferry docked, he telephoned his attorney, Burke Marshall. Then he returned to Edgartown and headed for the police station. Markham made the crossing with him. Gargan hurried to the cottage to get the other members of the Kennedy party off the island before the press descended upon them.

Edgartown Police Chief Dominick Arena, who hurried in his swimming shorts from Poucha Pond to the police station, obligingly held up the senator's statement until Gargan had time to clear out the cottage. It should be emphasized that Kennedy's hope to avoid the blame and establish an alibi occurred during a nightmare of emotional trauma. But in the end, he abandoned this scheme and manfully owned to what he had done.

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