

HEARING ON KOPECHNE AUTOPSY REQUEST IS SET AFTER DINIS REPORTS FINDING BLOOD

Hearing on Kopechne Autopsy Request

WILKES-BARRE, Pa., Sept. 18 (AP)—A hearing on a request for an autopsy on Mary Jo Kopechne was ordered today after District Attorney Edmund Dinis of Massachusetts said blood was in her mouth and nose when she was found dead in Senator Edward M. Kennedy's car.

Mr. Dinis, in a four-page amendment to his original autopsy petition, said the presence of blood "may or may not have been consistent with death by drowning."

He also said that possible bloodstains were found on the white shirt Miss Kopechne was wearing at the time of the accident the night of July 18.

However, Police Chief Dominick J. Arena of Edgartown, Mass., said he had "no knowledge of any blood at all" when the girl's body was recovered. He had been on hand when the car was pulled out.

"When she was in my arms, waiting to put her on the boat, I saw no indication of blood," Mr. Arena said.

Common Pleas Judge Bernard C. Brominski, who had de-

manded more solid evidence from Mr. Dinis to show that an autopsy might help resolve any "doubt and suspicion surrounding the death," set the hearing for Sept. 29 at 10 A.M.

Mr. Dinis, District Attorney for the Southern District of Massachusetts, said an autopsy should "be performed as soon as is practicable, time being of the essence."

Miss Kopechne was found dead after Senator Kennedy's car plunged off a narrow wooden bridge into a pond on Chappaquiddick Island off the Massachusetts coast.

The 28-year-old secretary was buried in a small Roman Catholic cemetery in Larksville in the coal region of northeastern Pennsylvania.

Examiner's Ruling

Dr. Donald R. Mills, associate medical examiner of Dukes County, Mass., ruled death was caused by asphyxiation from immersion (drowning). He had examined the body only externally, about eight hours after death.

Mr. Dinis has ordered an inquest into the death. The



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Massachusetts Supreme Court has postponed the start of the inquest in order to review the procedural rules for it. Attorneys for Senator Kennedy argue that constitutional issues are involved regarding to the right to cross-examine witnesses.

Senator Kennedy has admitted driving the car at the time of the accident, and not reporting the accident to the police until some 10 hours later. He pleaded guilty to violating a motor vehicle law.

Miss Kopechne's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Kopechne of Berkeley Heights, N. J., who are vigorously opposed to exhumation, declined comment on Mr. Dinis's latest petition.

One of their Wilkes-Barre attorneys, Joseph Flanagan, said he would consult with them before deciding whether to try once more to have Judge Brominski dismiss the autopsy request because of insufficient evidence, or pursue the fight at the Sept. 29 hearing.

Mr. Dinis in his amended petition said that:

"There appear on the white shirt worn by Mary Jo Kopechne 'washed out' reddish brown and brown stains on the backs of both sleeves, the back and collar; that these stains give positive benzidine reaction, an indi-

cation of the presence of residual traces of blood; that said residue is of insufficient amount to make further test as to specific origin or type.

"That investigation has revealed there was present a certain amount of blood in both Mary Jo Kopechne's mouth and nose, which may or may not have been consistent with death by drowning.

"That this information . . . was not available to petitioners until after interment."

Medical Comment

Medical sources queried about the Dinis petition said yesterday that in a simple drowning there is no blood, per se, present in the oral or nasal cavities. There often is, however, a "pinkish froth" that is sometimes mistaken for blood by laymen, they said.

If blood was indeed present, they continued, other factors should be considered, one of which is possible injury sustained in the accident itself.

Studies of accidents involving submerged automobiles have shown that the impact of a car hitting the water from 5 feet is strong enough to break out all its windows. The Kennedy car fell from a height of 10 feet. Senator Kennedy reportedly sustained a head injury in the accident.

Tests have also shown that a car submerged in an upside-down position, as the car was, would not contain an air pocket large enough to sustain life.

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