

The Kennedys' Kidnaping Scare

By Jack Anderson

The public has yet to learn the full story behind the kidnaping scare that brought more than 60 Secret Service agents racing from all points of the country two weeks ago to protect the late Sen. Robert Kennedy's children. Here are the exclusive details:

The Secret Service's duties are strictly defined by law and do not include guarding the progeny of deceased senators.

Yet for one full week, on orders from the White House, the agents provided emergency, round-the-clock protection for the Kennedy kids. Before the affair was over, the bodyguard service was also extended to a nephew, Christopher Lawford, son of actor Peter Lawford and Patricia Kennedy.

One agent, standing watch outside a Harvard University blowout attended by one of the

Kennedy boys, even suffered the indignity of having to duck a urinary sprinkle. A raucous party raged inside, and one of the partygoers urinated out the window.

The same agent later stood by in astonishment as local police descended upon the scene and barged past him into the building to quiet the reveling students.

The kidnaping threat, based upon a third-hand tip from a police informant in the Boston area, turned out to be bogus. By conservative estimate, the false alarm cost the taxpayers about \$126,000.

The bizarre affair began on unlucky Friday, Sept. 13. Some shady characters, according to the tip, had been talking about kidnaping David and Robert Kennedy, Jr., both of whom attend Harvard.

The information was relayed to the FBI, which immediately

launched an investigation. Meanwhile, Ethel Kennedy, the anxious mother, was alerted. Her first thought, of course, was to protect her children. She knew from experience that the Secret Service has the world's best bodyguards, so she made an urgent request for federal protection.

Secret Service Director Stuart Knight, knowing he had no authority to protect the Kennedy children, agonized with his associates over the request. He personally drove out to the Kennedy estate in McLean, Va., to explain to Ethel how his hands were tied.

But he was overruled by his boss, Treasury Secretary William Simon, who took up the kidnaping threat with the White House. Back came word from presidential counselor Phil Buchen: protect the Kennedy kids.

Simon ordered the Secret

Service into action on Saturday, Sept. 14. Then he phoned Ethel Kennedy to reassure her.

My associate Joe Spear spoke with Simon, who said he had frequently been threatened with physical harm, and therefore, had "empathy for people in public life." Considering the suffering the Kennedy family has been through, he said, "this was one of the easier decisions I have ever made."

Word was received on Wednesday, Sept. 18, that the supposed kidnapers really had their eye on Ethel Kennedy's nephew, Christopher Lawford, who attends Tufts University in Medford, Mass. So a protective detail was dispatched to cover the Lawford boy.

The intensive FBI investigation, meanwhile, turned up no substantial leads. So about 4:30 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 20, the Secret Service protection was lifted.