

COPY

ETHYL GASOLINE CORPORATION
612 Subway Terminal Bldg.

Los Angeles, California

May 14, 1932

Mr. E. W. Webb,
Ethyl Gasoline Corporation,
135 E. 42nd Street,
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Webb:

Regarding the article which appeared in the Los Angeles Times on May 8, 1932 relative to the death of Lt. [REDACTED] I have the following to report.

To the best of our knowledge this article appeared only in the Sunday editions of the San Diego Union, Los Angeles Times and the Seattle Post Intelligencer.

On my arrival in San Diego I called on Dr. Sumerlin at the Reese Stealy Clinic, 20 001 Fourth Avenue, San Diego. Dr. Sumerlin served ten years in the Navy and resigned two years ago to take up private practice in San Diego. This clinic also renders medical service to the Standard Oil Company of California in San Diego. On Tuesday evening there was a meeting of a few of the doctors of San Diego and the Naval Hospital and fortunately the case of Lieutenant [REDACTED] was discussed. Dr. Sumerlin has promised to send a full report to Dr. Kehoe.

Dr. Sumerlin reported the following facts to me on the case. Lieutenant [REDACTED] had been retired from the Navy two years ago due to poor health, having a blood pressure of 220. On Thursday afternoon he syphoned some Ethyl Gasoline from the tank of his car and which irritated his throat and inducing severe coughing. A local doctor was called and due to the length of time which [REDACTED] had been coughing his stomach muscles were sore. This caused the local physician to jump at the conclusion that Lt. [REDACTED] had lead colic. Mr. [REDACTED] was sent to the Naval Hospital on Friday and died on Saturday, May 7, 1932. The cause of his death was given as hypertension and ruptured aorta by the naval doctors and this information is on the death certificate on file in the Public Health Department, San Diego, California.

When a case is admitted to the Naval Hospital which has been attended by a civilian physician the case record is carried in the Naval Hospital Records as reported by the attending physician until the Navy Hospital doctors have made a diagnosis. Evidently the original case record was never changed to agree with the death certificate.

On Tuesday afternoon I called at the San Diego Union and met Mr. McMullen, reporter for the San Diego Union, and Mr. Warren, Associated Press reporter, who responsible for the story. Mr. McMullen heard of the case and understood that [REDACTED] died of lead poisoning due to syphoning of Ethyl Gasoline from the tank of his [REDACTED]. He called the Naval Hospital Saturday afternoon and the Officer of the Day reported that this was true, probably getting his information from the original case record. Mr. Warren picked up the story from Mr. McMullen and put it on the Associated Press wire and which appeared in the newspapers.

I called at the Naval Hospital Thursday morning and interviewed Dr. Hall who performed the autopsy and who verified, verbally, the facts as reported by Dr. Sumer-

lin. Inasmuch as the Naval Hospital was responsible for the erroneous report I asked Dr. Hall to give me a written statement of the true cause of death. He stated that it was against the regulations of the Naval Medical Department to issue statements of this nature and accompanied me to see Capt. Minter, Executive Officer and Capt. Webb, Commanding Officer of the Naval Hospital. These gentlemen refused to give me a written statement unless they had authority from the Bureau of Medicine & Surgery at Washington, D.C.

I then called upon Mr. McMullen and Mr. Warren again and gave them the true facts of the case and Mr. Warren called the Public Health Bureau of San Diego who confirmed Dr. Sumerlin's report. Mr. McMullen issued a story which appeared in the San Diego Union, retracting the original article. This appeared on May 13, 1932. Mr. Warren sent out a wire and his article appeared in the Los Angeles Times on the same day. I am enclosing copies of both papers. Unfortunately for us the Lindbergh case broke at this time and which, of course, pushed us farther back in the paper.

I called upon the Los Angeles Times on Thursday night trying to get them to give us as much prominence for the retracting article as for the original but all of the newspaper men were busy on the Lindbergh baby case and it was impossible to get an interview. I called upon them again on Friday, but of course received no cooperation.

If we could get permission from the Bureau of Medicine & Surgery at Washington the Naval Authorities would give us a written statement outlining the full facts of the case.

Yours very truly,

S. M. Wagner

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