

# Examiner: Boy died of natural causes

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN

A court-ordered autopsy yesterday revealed that a 9-year-old boy who was reportedly beaten July 22 by an attendant at Willowbrook Developmental Center died of natural causes an hour after the alleged incident.

"The boy was suffering from a congenital heart disease," explained Chief Medical Examiner Dominick DiMaio, who performed the exploratory operation yesterday in Manhattan. Dr. DiMaio added that "when you look at his heart, you wonder how the child lived as long as he did."

The medical examiner also said he found "minor bruises" on the scalp of the boy. Kyle Smith. But Dr. DiMaio emphasized that the injuries "could have in no way contributed to the death."

He explained that the bruises were probably caused when the boy's head hit a flat surface. "They are the same kind that occur when a child falls against a wall while playing ball," he said.

A spokesman for Willowbrook said that no action would be taken on the male employe suspended in connection with the alleged beating until the police finish their investigation of the case. She added that Willowbrook would make its own determination on the employment status of the suspended man regardless of what law enforcement officials did.

The spokesman explained that the suspension of an employe at Willowbrook triggers a grievance procedure, involving the taking of statements, and eventually a hearing.

Staten Island District Attorney John M. Braisted, who petitioned to have the boy's body exhumed for the autopsy Monday, said he would make no decision on the case until he has read the full report of the medical examiner.

But Braisted also said that, based on what he had learned about the autopsy so far, the most serious charge that could be brought against the attendant even if a case could be made against him was third degree assault, a misdemeanor.

According to Braisted, the alleged beating was first reported to the police by the neighbor of a Willowbrook attendant who had been told by another employe at the mental institution that the child was murdered.

Subsequent investigation revealed that the attendant took the boy for a shower in Building 26 July 22 about 5:15 p.m. after the child had become incontinent while swimming in a pool in the building. The boy was said to have resisted being bathed and his head apparently hit the wall of the stall as he struggled.

When the incident came to light Saturday—the day of the youngster's burial in Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y., it was reported that a female attendant saw the beating after she was drawn to the shower stall by the boy's screams. But Braisted said yesterday that he knew of no eye witnesses in the case.

In addition, it was reported that the child, who turned blue and went limp in the shower, was already dead by the time he was brought to a medical treatment room at Willowbrook. According to DiMaio, however, the boy lived for at least an hour after the bathing.

Dr. DiMaio said that the boy's heart had three cells instead of the normal four, a condition that required him to receive oxygen two or three times a week. The youngster, who had resided at Willowbrook for eight years, also suffered from Down's Syndrome, commonly known as mongolism.

Shortly after the death, Dr. Ladislau Boros, a doctor working part-time at Willowbrook, listed the cause as "cerebral embolism and congestive heart failure." He later told police he did not see any bruises on the child's body.

Dr. DiMaio said yesterday that the slight injuries were concealed by the boy's hair and would have not been noticeable in an ordinary physical exam.

The youngster's parents refused permission for an autopsy last week because they assumed their son's death was natural. Supreme Court Justice Vito Titone ordered the body exhumed after Braisted informed him of the beating allegation.