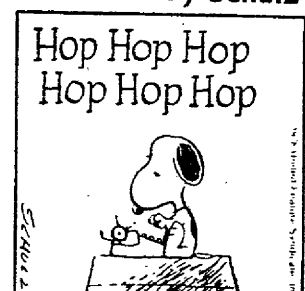
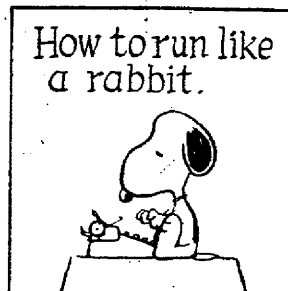
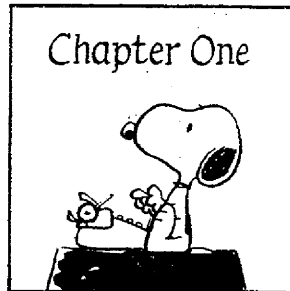
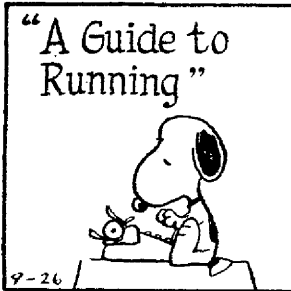


Peanuts

By Schulz



Mystery 'Umbrella Man' in Assassination Photos Says He Meant to Heckle Kennedy

BY ROBERT L. JACKSON
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—The House Assassinations Committee Monday apparently resolved one of the most intriguing minor mysteries of John F. Kennedy's slaying.

Why did a bystander, on that sunny day in Dallas in 1963, suddenly open a black umbrella at the very moment Kennedy's motorcade was fired upon?

Talk of the mysterious "umbrella man" and distant, blurry photos of him have appeared for 14 years in books and articles expounding conspiracy theories about Kennedy's murder.

Conspiracy buffs have suggested that the opening of the umbrella was a signal for one or more gunmen to fire. It has also been theorized that the umbrella itself contained darts or a rocket aimed at the President.

The umbrella man had never been identified. But Dallas insurance man Louie Steven Witt stepped forward Monday—with some embarrassment—as the committee continued its hearings on the Kennedy case.

Witt, responding to a subpoena, said he was the long-sought umbrella man. He even brought along his black bumbershoot.

The 53-year-old Witt, first identified to the committee by friends, testified that he had carried the umbrella from his office to the parade route to heckle Kennedy.

"I'm a conservative," he said, "and I understood that a black umbrella was a sore spot for the Kennedy family. You could use it to heckle them."

He apparently referred to the fact that a black umbrella has sometimes been the symbol of appeasement. It was a hallmark of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, whose futile efforts to avert war with Germany in 1938 originally had been supported by Kennedy's father, U.S. Ambassador Joseph Kennedy Sr.

Witt, who clearly resembled the man in a blown-up photo the committee distributed to newspapers last July, said that he had approached the curb and opened his umbrella by chance as the first shots rang out on Nov. 22, 1963.

"It didn't register on me as being gunfire," Witt said. "There were three or four sharp sounds in very rapid succession. I apparently had the umbrella in front of me for some few steps and I didn't see the President shot."

Witt said suddenly "there was pandemonium all around me. I sat down on the curb because I was stunned," he

said, explaining a chance photo that showed him in that position. "I was aware that something terrible had happened."

When he returned to his office and heard about the shooting on the radio, "I kind of felt like the umbrella was a bad joke that had gone sour," he said.

Witt said he never would have come forward if friends had not identified him from the committee's photo last summer.

"If the Guinness Book had records for people being in the wrong place at the wrong time and doing the wrong thing, I'd be No. 1 in that category without even a runner-up," he said.