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JFK assassination 201

Preyer has heard it all

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If you have a pet theory about the death of President John F. Kennedy, don't bother telling it to U.S. Rep. Richardson Preyer, who heads a special subcommittee re-investigating the assassination.

There are probably several letters on the same theory already in his files.

Daily, from all over the world, the theories, the tips, the advice come pouring into Preyer's Washington office. One staffer devotes almost full time to handling the mail from assassination buffs, who are legion.

Preyer himself gets calls at all hours from persons who are certain they know what REALLY happened in Dallas in 1963.

The callers and writers range from level-headed citizens, with plausible questions and information, to kooks with mysterious conspiracies that link Lady Bird Johnson or George Wallace or the Mafia or the "ole boy network" in the Ivy League to the killing.

Preyer has discovered that an industry of amateur sleuths has grown in the wake of the assassination. The industry even has its own newspaper, the "Grassy Knoll Gazette."

Preyer says, "Some of the individuals and organizations are very responsible and helpful, such as the Assassination Information Bureau, a private organization in Washington that puts out a weekly news letter and submits questions for us to ask witnesses. They also put out a weekly critique of our hearings."

The subcommittee, he says, also has

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Desk flooded
with theories



been aided by a man from Manchester, Mass., a respected architect who has made the Kennedy killing his hobby. He attends most of the hearings.

Preyer says that until the idea was deflated recently, the man had a reasonable theory that the 'umbrella man' may have been involved in Kennedy's death.

"When the Kennedy car came by, there was a man with an umbrella standing on the curb," explains Preyer. "This was somewhat strange as it was a bright, sunny day. As the car passed, the man lowered the umbrella three or four times in a special salute. This led to the theory that he was either signaling the assassin to open fire or that he had poison darts in the umbrella."

For years, the "umbrella man" theory flourished because the man's identity could not be determined. Recently, however, the subcommittee had the photos greatly enlarged by computer, submitted them to the news media and the umbrella man was recognized.

"He came forward and testified," says

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Preyer, "and he turned out to be a witty fellow who explained he didn't like President Kennedy's father (former Ambassador to England Joseph Kennedy) because he associated him with the Munich decision of the 1930s — you know, Chamberlain and Hitler.

"If you'll recall, Chamberlain was symbolized by the umbrella. What the umbrella man was doing was protesting the Munich decision by raising and lowering the umbrella. There was nothing sinister about it at all."

Preyer says the revelation crushed the man from Manchester, Mass., but he told Preyer afterward that he was "down but not out." His interest in the assassination continues.

Theories presented by other individuals and organizations are not as plausible as that of the umbrella man. One group, called the "Committee to Finger the Patsy," contends that Bob Blakey, the Preyer subcommittee's chief counsel, is really working for the Mafia, who ordered Kennedy's murder.

And there are other scenarios just as ludicrous.

"I got a call at 3 a.m. from Korea from a military man who told me knew the real assassin — Lady Bird Johnson," says Preyer, adding that others have offered the same theory.

He says there are also several persons who believe a deaf mute somewhere in Dallas may hold the answer to the assassination. The mute saw Lee Harvey Oswald plotting the Kennedy murder with a girl from the public library — or so the theory goes.

"The deaf mute reportedly was a lip reader and if we could find him we could get the answer," says Preyer.

He says his office also gets letters supporting a "two Oswalds" theory. Its adherents contend the real Oswald is alive in Russia today, and that the one who shot the president in Dallas was a double trained for the task by the Communists.

Another theory has the "ole boy net work" — well-beeled graduates of Ivy League colleges — covering up the assassination in cooperation with the CIA, explains Preyer.

Still another theory has the intended target of the Dallas tragedy not Kennedy, but his wife, Jackie. "Penthouse Magazine had an article on this and we have received several copies in the mail," Preyer says.

A woman writes the subcommittee most weekly, contending that a Communist plot killed not only Kennedy but Martin Luther King as well, according Preyer.

And it goes on. Preyer promises each letter is read and given thoughtful consideration.

Preyer, however, has said repeatedly he has uncovered no strong evidence yet to change his belief that Oswald acted alone.