

'Umbrella man' identified?

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Panel plans to question Dallasite during JFK probe

By EARL GOLZ

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A man identified as the so-called "umbrella man," whom the House Assassinations Committee wants to question and the subject of speculation by assassination researchers for 15 years, was located and interviewed by The News this week.

A former co-worker of L. Steven Witt identified him as the person who was photographed opening and closing an umbrella in Dealey Plaza about the time President John Kennedy was assassinated at 12:30 p.m. Nov. 22, 1963.

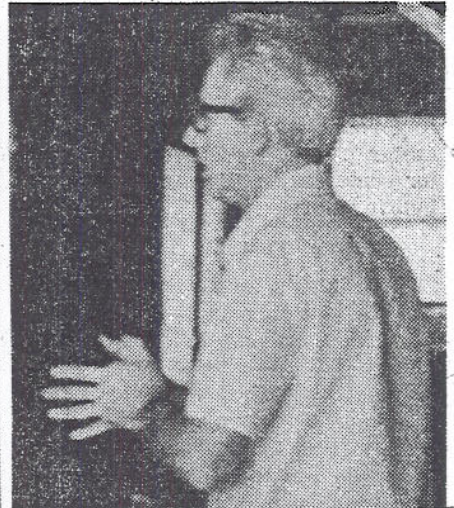
A House Assassinations Committee spokesman said Friday that investigators are planning to question Witt, who told The News earlier this week he had never been interviewed by any governmental agents in connection with the assassination. Witt said he would not object to talking to committee investigators.

A PHOTOGRAPH of the umbrella man, sitting on a curb in Dealey Plaza seconds after the assassination, was distributed by the committee July 30 with four other photographs and drawings of persons wanted for questioning.

Witt, interviewed by The News at his job in the warehouse of a filing equipment company near Stemmons Freeway, neither would confirm nor deny he was the umbrella man. He said he could not remember exactly where he was in downtown Dallas when the president was shot but thought he probably would have been on his lunch hour.

Assassination researchers have speculated the umbrella opening and closing — on the sidewalk adjacent to the president's limousine when the shooting started — could have been a signal.

WITT'S FORMER fellow employee, however, said he is fairly certain that Witt was only protesting the Kennedy family's history in foreign policy matters. The former co-worker, now an insurance executive, agreed to talk about Witt on the condition he remain anonymous.



L. Steven Witt (right) . . . reportedly the "umbrella man" (left).

He said Witt told him the umbrella was a symbol of "protest" and was connected somehow with Joseph Kennedy, the father of the president, and the senior Kennedy's appeasement policies toward Nazi Germany in the late 1930s.

When Witt returned to his office four blocks from Dealey Plaza after witnessing the assassination from only a few feet away, he was "visibly shaken," the former co-worker said.

JOSEPH KENNEDY and British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain were criticized for not taking a tougher line against the Nazis. Kennedy was the U.S. ambassador to England during the same years Chamberlain was prime minister, from 1937 to 1940.

Chamberlain's opposition party in Britain protested his appeasement toward Nazi Germany by using an umbrella as a symbol because Chamberlain constantly was seen with an umbrella during public appearances.

In 1963, President Kennedy was the target of similar criticism in the United States for alleged appeasement of Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro.

At the time of the assassination, Witt was employed in the stock department of the now defunct Rio Grande

National Life Insurance Co., at Elm and Field streets.

ACCUSED ASSASSIN Lee Harvey Oswald walked from the Texas School Book Depository Building after the assassination and boarded a bus at Elm and Field, the Warren Commission has reported. As it headed back toward Dealey Plaza, the bus reportedly became bogged down in heavy traffic, the committee report said, and Oswald got out after two blocks.

In the photograph distributed by the House Assassinations Committee, the umbrella man can be seen sitting on a sidewalk curb next to a dark-skinned man seconds after the assassination. The second man, still unidentified, thrust his right arm straight up and waved it after the first shot hit the president, photographs and film indicate.

THE UMBRELLA MAN was joined on the curb by the second man after closing his umbrella immediately after the shots. Both appear to be conversing calmly as people around them fall to the ground for cover.

After sitting a few seconds together, the umbrella man stood and walked east toward Houston street. The other man goes west toward the triple underpass.