

NEW YORK (AP) — Photographs and X-rays from President Kennedy's autopsy were doctored, probably to conceal the fact that he was shot from the front as well as from behind, three former Navy technicians said.

The three, including the photographer who said he took the autopsy pictures, appeared at a news conference Thursday with Harry Livingstone, an author who contends Kennedy was killed by a vast conspiracy involving government leaders and "powerful interests" backed by Texas oil men.

Livingstone claims the shooting was a "military ambush" by several gunmen who "surrounded" the presidential limousine as it passed in a motorcade. He said the autopsy evidence was faked to "trick Earl Warren" into accepting the single gunman theory that forms the conclusion of the Warren Report.

Livingstone called the news conference to dispute an article in the current issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, in which two pathologists who performed the autopsy, Drs. James J. Humes and J. Thornton Boswell, say their findings support the Warren Report.

He displayed copies of grisly black-and-white photos of Kennedy's body on an examining table, showing an unmarked face with a massive wound on the right side of the head. Others, showing the back of the president's head, were retouched to conceal a large exit hole from the bullet entering from the front, Livingstone and the others said.

Jerrold Custer, a Navy technician who X-rayed Kennedy's body at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland, said the two X-ray photos in the report of the House Assassination Committee are fake. He said they show the upper right front quarter of the skull — including Kennedy's right eye and the surrounding bone — to be missing, whereas the other photos show the entire face intact and unmarked.

"That's how I remember it," Custer said. "To my recollection there was no frontal damage at all."

Paul O'Connor, who said he was a student medical technician at Bethesda in 1963 and assisted Humes and Boswell at the autopsy, said neither pathologist was aware that Kennedy had been hit in the throat as well as from the rear.

The hole in his throat, clearly visible in photos, "just looked like a sloppy tracheotomy to me," O'Connor said.

He said the doctors probed a hole in Kennedy's back to a depth of about 2 inches, but found no exit wound. The bullet from that wound fell out when the body was lifted from a coffin to the examining table at Bethesda, he and Custer said.

Their version conflicts with the JAMA article, which quoted Humes and Boswell as saying the pattern of entry and exit wounds "proved ... Kennedy was struck from above and behind by the fatal shot," with one bullet exiting through the president's throat.

Floyd Riebe, a Navy photographer who took the autopsy pictures, also contended they were doctored because they show Kennedy lying on what appears to be a wooden table, with a dark background and odd shadows.

"We had no such structure, all we had was white tile and stainless steel," Riebe said. And, he said, he used a flash in a room that was already brightly lit.

"The pictures I've seen resemble the pictures that I'd taken. That's all I can say. The quality of (these) prints is very poor. I'd have been in deep trouble if I'd turned in work like this," Riebe said.

Livingstone said the three ex-Navy men also were warned to keep silent about the autopsy, but only Custer, who spent six years in the Navy and now works as an X-ray technician at a Pittsburgh hospital, described such an experience.

He said an admiral called him into his office the next day and told him that "nothing will be said about what happened in that morgue," and "if I opened my mouth I could wind up in prison."

Custer said he signed a "gag order" and has been silent since the assassination, although his account is included in Livingstone's book, "High Treason 2."

Livingstone said Dr. Charles A. Crenshaw, a surgeon who was present at Dallas' Parkland Hospital and the author of another book which claims Kennedy was shot from the front, had agreed to attend the news conference to help counter the JAMA article's claims.

However, he said Crenshaw's publishers, Viking Penguin, had prevented him from making the trip.

Leonida Karpik, a spokeswoman for Viking Penguin, said Crenshaw had just "returned exhausted" to Dallas from a 20-city book promotion tour, and had never consented to go to New York.

"We didn't see any reason why he should," she said. It wasn't his news conference."

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