

Jonathon Cote's family fears he was beaten and tortured before he died

By Dan Herbeck and Lou Michel - News Staff Reporters

Updated: 04/25/08 8:53 AM

Horrific details about the deaths of four men who were taken hostage in Iraq with Jonathon M. Cote began to emerge Thursday, as his family called upon the federal government to expand efforts to capture the killers.

Francis L. Cote doesn't know yet how his son died, but he fears that Jonathon was beaten and tortured, based on information he has received from the family members of other hostages who were killed.

"Based on the autopsies of the other victims, it appears that they were beaten to death, while their hands were tied behind them," Cote said. "I don't want our government ever to forget what happened to Jonathon or these other four men."

On a day of grief for the Cotes, family members of the other victims told The Buffalo News horrible details about the other deaths:

- The men may have been killed more than two months ago, based on the decomposition of the remains. Their bodies were found in an undisclosed location in Iraq.
- The victims were savagely beaten to death, probably with their hands tied behind their backs.
- One of the men suffered neck wounds so severe that he was nearly decapitated.
- The men suffered severe internal trauma, according to autopsies.



Derek Gee/Buffalo News
The family of Jonathon Cote, kidnapped in Iraq in 2006, console each other after a news conference on the confirmation that his body had been found. From left, are his father, Francis; stepmother, Nancy; and brother, Christopher.

- No bullet wounds were found in the corpses.

Sharon DeBrabander of Lee's Summit, Mo., mother of hostage John Young, told The News that her son experienced an especially grisly death.

"His head was nearly cut off, but they all had a lot of trauma," DeBrabander said. "From what I'm told, their hands were tied. My son not only had trauma to the head, but his chest. His ribs were broken, and there was internal bleeding."

Mark Munns, the father of Joshua Munns, 25, of Anderson, Wash., said he believes his son was beaten to death with his hands tied behind his back. He said the public has not been told the whole story behind the abductions or the killings.

"This is a coverup, and that's as far as I'm going to go right now," Munns said.

Dirt on the bodies indicated the men had been buried, Francis Cote said.

He also said the abductions may have been set up by disgruntled Iraqi employees of the private security firm where the men worked.



Derek Gee/ Buffalo News
The family of Jonathon Cote appears at a news conference Thursday. From left are his brother, Christopher; his father, Francis; stepmother, Nancy; stepbrother, Max Shroyer; and stepsister, Samantha Shroyer.

Image 2 of 3 [Roll Over Image For Next & Previous](#)

CLOSE X

Terrorists kidnapped Cote and the four co-workers Nov. 16, 2006, while they were escorting an Italian army supply convoy through a perilous section of southern Iraq.

The elder Cote and his son Christopher spoke at an emotional news conference at an Amherst hotel, imploring the United States government to continue efforts to find out who killed and kidnapped the men and why.

Francis Cote said the men were risking their lives to support the war effort in Iraq.

"My father says he can forgive these people," said Christopher Cote, 26. "It's going to take me a long time. Justice has to be served . . . I don't want this [investigation] to be just let go."

The family made its first public comments since learning Wednesday that the body of Jonathon Cote, 25, had been identified. The bodies of the four men taken hostage with him — Young, Munns, Paul Reuben and Bert Nussbaumer — were identified earlier this month.

Jonathon Cote, a graduate of Williamsville North High School, had served with the Army in Iraq and Afghanistan before taking a job with a private security firm based in Kuwait in early 2006.

Francis Cote said government officials have told him that he probably will not receive the results of his son's autopsy for six to eight weeks.

"I just hope that his life was not lost for nothing," Francis Cote said.

Relatives of the other dead hostages had hoped that Cote somehow would be spared.

"The families were all hoping that one could have come back alive to tell what really happened. We were so hoping for it, but it just didn't turn out that way," said DeBrabander, mother of Young, who was 45.

The mother, who has kept a low profile until now, vented anger toward the killers.

"They are nothing but cowards," she said. "Total pigs . . . The cowards couldn't even afford a nickel for a bullet to put the hostages out of their misery."

Government officials have released little public information about the abductions and killings over the past 17 months and had no new information Thursday.

Paul M. Moskal, a Buffalo FBI spokesman, was at the Cote news conference, but he said he was there to support the family and had no comment.

Francis Cote said he, too, is upset by the brutality and baffled about the reasons behind the kidnappings. He said he finds it "absolutely strange" that the abductors made no ransom demands and made no public statements about the reasons behind the crime.

Cote said he believes disgruntled, low-paid Iraqis who worked at the Crescent Security Group with his son may have "set up" the abductions.



"I just hope that his life was not lost for nothing." Francis Cote, talking about his son Jonathon, pictured above.

Image 3 of 3 [Roll Over](#)
[Image For Next &](#)
[Previous](#)

“The Iraqi workers for the company didn’t show up for work that day,” Cote said. “That should have thrown up a big red flag, but apparently nobody saw it.”

Officials at the company’s Kuwait headquarters did not respond to questions e-mailed by The News on Thursday.

Cote’s stepmother, Nancy Cote — resident agent in charge of the Buffalo office of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration — and other family members also attended the news conference.

She thanked the Buffalo media and the national media for not identifying her over the past 17 months.

Christopher Cote issued a tearful plea for government investigators to find out who killed his younger brother.

He said his brother took the private security job partly because of the money — \$7,000 a month — but also because he truly believed in helping the Iraqi people win their freedom.

When asked if he believed the government did everything it could to find the hostages, Christopher Cote answered: “I hope that they did everything they could.”

dherbeck@buffnews.com and lmichel@buffnews.com