

0. TONY MENDEZ and HIS ARGO PLAN - Story Preface
1. WHEN the US and IRAN were FRIENDS
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3. WHEN FRIENDS became ENEMIES
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52 American hostages, taken captive by Iranian students on 4 November 1979, pose at Wiesbaden Air Force Base (in Germany) after they were released from captivity on 20 January 1981. Photo online, courtesy U.S. Department of Defense.

As the world focused on the hostage crisis, only a few people knew that six Americans had escaped:

Bob Anders  
Lee Schatz  
Joe and Kathy Stafford  
Mark and Cora Lijek

Thanks to the help of Canadians in Tehran - especially Ken and Pat Taylor, together with John and Zana Sheardown - the American diplomats had a place to stay hidden until the crisis ended. Within days, however, the purpose of the hostage-taking had changed. Ayatollah Khomeini had decided to use the situation to further a different objective.

The crisis would not be quickly over. The Americans-in-hiding needed to leave Iran, but how could that happen?

As weeks became months, both Ken (the Canadian ambassador) and John (the Canadian immigration officer) knew the situation was becoming increasingly unsafe. The Staffords and Schatz lived with the Sheardowns. Anders and the Lijeks lived with the Taylors.

Everyone worried that if Iranian government officials discovered the living arrangements, public executions

could take the lives of helpers and hidiers.

When surprised CIA officials learned that six diplomats were not among the rest of the hostages, they asked one of the agency's employees - Tony Mendez - to propose an "exfiltration" plan. With the help of John Chambers (a longtime collaborator and highly respected Hollywood makeup artist), Mendez (known as a "master of disguise") concocted an audacious plan.

The six diplomats, aided by two "exfil" specialists, would pose as Canadians searching for a movie location in Iran.

The film Mendez decided "to make" was called *ARGO*, based on the novel *Lord of Light* by Roger Zelazny. Pulling together all aspects of a real movie-making venture, Mendez and Chambers:

- Leased office space
- Selected a script (written by Barry Geller) which, according to Mendez, they actually "stole"
- Obtained set designs (drawn by Jack Kirby whose characters have grossed billions of dollars in films like *The Avengers*), and
- Began to develop their cover story.

They even held a launch party at the Brown Derby.

With the help of the Canadian government, Mendez assembled passports for the U.S. diplomats, then made plans to enter Tehran. With President Carter approving his plan, Mendez hoped to get the six diplomats out of the country on Iran's national election day - the 28th of January, 1980. He arrived in town - with no back-up plan - shortly before the departure date.

As Mendez explained his idea to the American diplomats, Joe Stafford was skeptical. How could such an audacious idea actually work?

Among other reasons, Mendez assured the six that the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance - which had to clear any film-making in Iran and whose office opened at 9 AM - would still be closed as the "movie crew" made their way through the Mehrabad-airport checkpoints.

Of course ... that assumed the flight was on time.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/TONY-MENDEZ-and-HIS-ARGO-PLAN-ARGO>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/TONY-MENDEZ-and-HIS-ARGO-PLAN-ARGO>

## Media Stream



Patricia and Ken Taylor - October 10, 2007

### ARGO - Ken and Pat Taylor

Image online, courtesy Canadian Encyclopedia.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/ARGO-Ken-and-Pat-Taylor>



### John and Zana Sheardown

Photo of John and Zana Sheardown by Christopher Pike. Copyright, Christopher Pike and the Toronto Star, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-and-Zana-Sheardown>



### Tony Mendez - Creator of the ARGO Escape Plan

Photo of President Jimmy Carter and Antonio Mendez, by a White House photographer, online courtesy the CIA.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Tony-Mendez-Creator-of-the-ARGO-Escape-Plan>

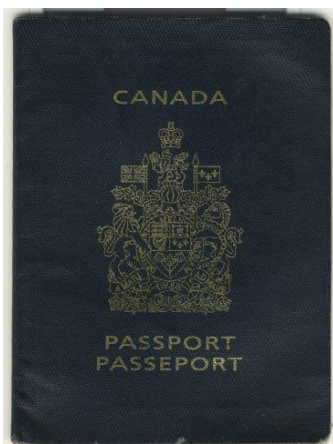


### John Chambers - "Jerome Calloway" - ARGO Collaborator

Image of John Chambers online, courtesy *Make-Up Artist Magazine*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-Chambers-Jerome-Calloway-ARGO-Collaborator>

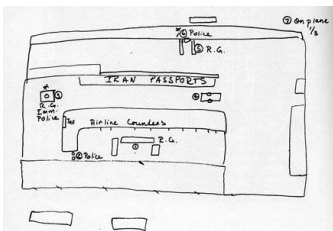


### ARGO - Canadian Passport Used to Leave Iran

Image of Canadian passport, used by Mark Lijek, online courtesy Mark Lijek. For more on his perspective of the events, see Lijek's book, entitled *The Houseguests: A Memoir of Canadian Courage and CIA Sorcery*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/ARGO-Canadian-Passport-Used-to-Leave-Iran>



### ARGO - Escape - Airport Drawing

Image of airport-security-location map, drawn by Ken Taylor, online courtesy Mark Lijek. For more on his perspective of the events, see Lijek's book, entitled *The Houseguests: A Memoir of Canadian Courage and CIA Sorcery*.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/ARGO-Escape-Airport-Drawing>



### Argo - Actual Six Escapees Tell Their Story

"Escape from Iran," online courtesy CBC via YouTube. Copyright, Les Harris, all rights reserved. Provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the program.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Argo-Actual-Six-Escapees-Tell-Their-Story>



### Tony Mendez and John Chambers - "Stole" the ARGO Script

Clip from "The Little Gray Man," part of the First-Person series by Errol Morris. (The series is available from Amazon.) Copyright, Errol Morris, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the program.

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