

0. THE ARGO ESCAPE from TEHRAN - Story Preface

1. WHEN the US and IRAN were FRIENDS

2. WHEN the FRIENDSHIP was DAMAGED

3. WHEN FRIENDS became ENEMIES

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6. TONY MENDEZ and HIS ARGO PLAN

7. THE ARGO ESCAPE from TEHRAN

8. ARGO and ITS AFTERMATH

The night before their departure, Lee Schatz (pronounced "shots") and Joe Stafford stayed-up for hours. Would this plan, to get them out of Iran, really work?



View of Tehran with the Alborz (Elburz) Mountains in the background. Photo by Hansueli Krapf, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons. Image License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#) Mehrabad Airport is located within the city limits.

Despite their apprehension, the escapees were surprised by the drive to the airport. It was actually peaceful. The hopeful passengers arrived while it was still dark - about 5 AM - on the morning of January 28th, 1980.

Even though Mendez had urged the group to stay together, there were two different process lines - one for smokers, the other for non-smokers. Schatz, a non-smoker who joined the shorter line, was alone when the airport's immigration officer questioned the American's photo in his fake Canadian passport.

Although his moustache was longer in the picture than it was on the day of check-in, Schatz (who now works for the USDA and still wears a moustache) was ultimately allowed to proceed to the departure lounge. No one else was questioned as the group made their way through the airport's various checkpoints.

Everything was going smoothly for the "Canadians" until Swissair announced a flight delay. Something was wrong - apparently with the plane's air-speed indicator - and the plane would be grounded until the mechanical

issue was resolved.

Waiting for the delay to be lifted was mentally exhausting for the six. Without thinking, Joe - who understands Farsi - picked-up a newspaper and started reading. Mendez was shocked. Who would believe that a Canadian movie-maker could understand Farsi?

At about the same time, Joe realized what he was doing and put the paper down. He'd avoided what could have been a disastrous unraveling of the escape plan.

The mechanical delay lasted less than an hour. Once the flight was ready to go, the escaping Americans had to clear security checkpoints again. To their great relief, no one was questioned about anything. No Iranian suspected that "Joseph Earl Harris," for example, was really Mark Lijek.

Crossing the tarmac, in the airport bus, the "ARGO" crew members were stunned to see "Aargau" written on the side of their airplane. Perhaps the name of the Swiss canton, where the DC-8 had originated, was a good omen for their escape?

Boarding the plane without issues, the Canadian imposters breathed more easily as the plane left Tehran, en route to Zurich. They would need two more hours before the flight cleared Iranian airspace. No one came after them; no one questioned who they really were.

The joy of escape was slightly diminished, however, when the diplomats arrived in Switzerland. They learned they were not going home. No one could know about their escape, for fear of what would happen to the hostages still being held in Iran.

Instead, the six would be sent to an Air Force base, in Florida, where they would live - in hiding - until all the hostages were freed. Ken Taylor, the Canadian ambassador, could call his colleagues in Ottawa to give them the good news, but the six diplomats could not even tell their families they were out of Tehran.

At least ... that was the plan.

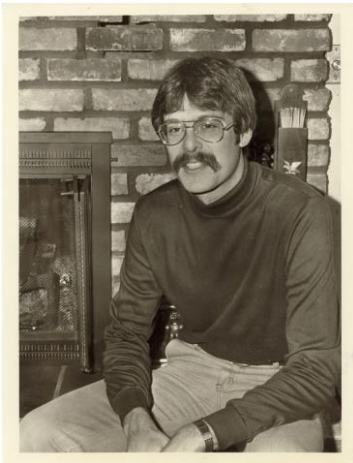
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-ARGO-ESCAPE-from-TEHRAN-ARGO>

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-ARGO-ESCAPE-from-TEHRAN-ARGO>

Media Stream



ARGO - Lee Schatz

Image online, courtesy Lee Schatz and Boise State Public Radio.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/ARGO-Lee-Schatz>



ARGO - Joe Stafford

Image of Schatz, Stafford and Lijek online courtesy Lee Schatz and Boise State Public Radio.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/ARGO-Joe-Stafford>

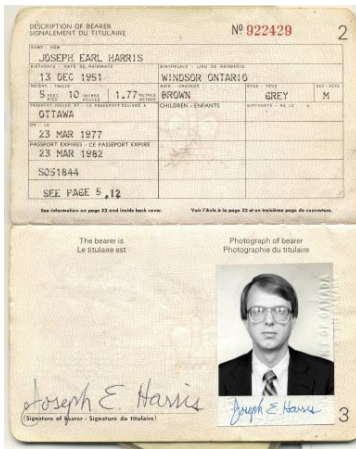


ARGO - Mehrabad Airport

Photo of Mehrabad Airport by Navid22, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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ARGO - Joe Harris a/k/a Mark Lijek

Photo of Mark Lijek's fake Canadian passport, online courtesy Mark Lijek.

For more information about the story from the escapees' points of view, see Lijek's book, entitled [*The Houseguests: A Memoir of Canadian Courage and CIA Sorcery*](#).

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ARGO - The Six Escaping Diplomats

Photo of the six "houseguests," online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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ARGO - Aargau Map Locator

Map locator by Tschubby, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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ARGO - Actual Plane Flying Diplomats from Tehran

Image of the plane which transported the six diplomats from Tehran to Zurich by Edvard Marmet. Copyright, Edvard Marmet, all rights reserved. Photo provided here as fair use for education purposes. Online via [airliners.net](http://www.airliners.net).

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