

0. ARGO and ITS AFTERMATH - Story Preface

1. WHEN the US and IRAN were FRIENDS

2. WHEN the FRIENDSHIP was DAMAGED

3. WHEN FRIENDS became ENEMIES

4. ISLAMIC REVOLUTION in IRAN

5. SURRENDER at the IRANIAN EMBASSY

6. TONY MENDEZ and HIS ARGO PLAN

7. THE ARGO ESCAPE from TEHRAN

8. ARGO and ITS AFTERMATH



Canadian Embassy, Tehran

Canada's Embassy, in Tehran, was closed for a time after its highest-ranking diplomats helped six Americans to escape in January of 1980. Image of the Embassy, online courtesy [Government of Canada](#).

Things changed, drastically, when a Canadian journalist—Jean Pelletier—decided to publish a story he'd been working-up. He had suspected that American diplomats were being protected, and sheltered, by Canadians in Tehran.

When he learned that Canada was closing its embassy in that city—on the 28th of January, 1980—Pelletier determined that the missing Americans had escaped. Asked to refrain from publishing his "scoop," to avoid the potential of harm to the still-held hostages, Pelletier thought it best to [run his story](#).

It was published on the 29th of January, 1980, in Montreal's *LaPresse*. The news quickly spread around the world, including to Tehran.

Once the story of their escape was public knowledge, the six Americans were free to go home. After first spending time in a Swiss mountain lodge, they headed to [Ramstein Air Force Base](#) (in Germany), then to [Dover](#) (where [they worked-on press releases](#)), then to Washington (for a "welcome home!"). (See *Argo*, by Antonio Mendez and Matt Baglio, [pages 276-282](#).)

The hostage crisis dragged on, even after the Shah left America for a [short stay in Panama](#). Very ill, he flew to Egypt where he died on the 27th of July, 1980. His death, however, did nothing to diminish the differences between his country and the U.S.

Not until Iranians grew weary of the American-imposed embargo did the Ayatollah agree to negotiate for the release of the remaining 52 hostages. President Carter hoped that the release—which had been negotiated before the end of his presidency—would happen while he was still America's commander-in-chief. The Ayatollah, however, directed otherwise.

Apparently not forgiving Jimmy Carter for his words and actions involving Reza Shah Pahlavi, Rouhollah Khomeini authorized freeing the hostages on the 20th of January, 1981. [Their release](#)—after 444 days of captivity—took place approximately twenty seconds after Ronald Reagan was sworn-in as America's 40th President.

For decades—while [Iran fought a war with Iraq](#), then began to [develop a nuclear-power program](#)—no one knew that Tony Mendez and his colleagues at the CIA had anything to do with the escape of the six American diplomats. Everyone did know about Canada's involvement, however, and [Ambassador Ken Taylor](#) was gratefully feted throughout the United States.

John Chambers, who had so ably assisted Mendez with "Studio Six Productions" (the fictitious motion-picture company) was recognized by the CIA for his role in "The Canadian Caper" (as the escape was widely known). He received the agency's Medal of Merit, one of only two non-CIA individuals ever to get such an honor.

Mendez was honored, too, but it wasn't until the 50th anniversary of the CIA that President Clinton authorized release of the story. His books—[Master of Disguise](#) and [ARGO](#)—provide all the details of how this now-famous CIA operative worked.

We are left to wonder how so many escape-plan details—as Mendez describes them in [his official CIA report](#)—could have possibly come together:

- How could eight Americans—including Mendez and his colleague, "Julio"—fly out of Tehran, in the presence of Revolutionary Guards, stationed around the airport?

- How could eight people, holding Canadian passports, pose as members of a movie crew when six of them were very-scared Americans who desired nothing more than to flee Iran?
- How could it be that none of the diplomats “blew their cover?”

Perhaps the plan worked because it was so audacious, it had to be true. Perhaps it worked because all six escapees ultimately believed in it.

And ... isn't it interesting that ARGO, the fake film, has an actual audience, after all?

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ARGO-and-ITS-AFTERMATH-ARGO)

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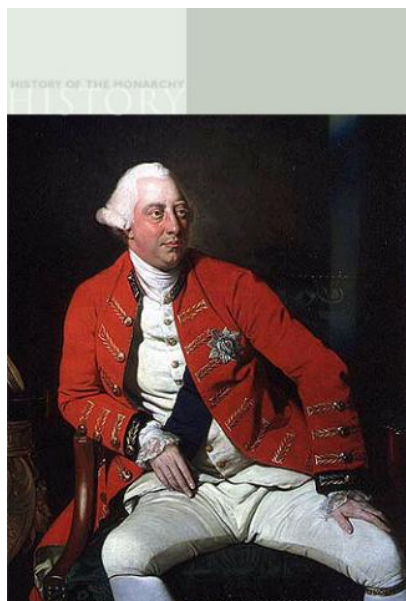


ARGO - Six Escapees at Dover

Photo of the six escapees, at Dover, online courtesy Mark Lijek. For more information about 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 - Making of the Film

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