

A Letter from the Publisher

Jimmy Carter used to say that scarcely an hour passed when he did not think about the hostages. The drama in Tehran has had a similar pull on the staff of TIME. Says Associate Editor Frank B. Merrick, who edited this week's cover story: "We started almost every week gearing up for a breakthrough." The roller-coaster crisis surfaced repeatedly in the pages of the magazine and was the subject of eight cover stories, including one on the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who was named TIME's Man of the Year for 1979.

From the day of the embassy takeover, the hostage story posed special challenges for TIME correspondents and writers. Internal power struggles in Iran and the often conflicting claims of its leaders made conventional diplomatic analysis next to impossible. In Washington, normally loquacious sources were strangely silent. Says Gregory H. Wierzynski, State Department correspondent: "Policymakers all along the line have been uncommunicative—in part to preserve the integrity of their interlocutors but mostly because they were as frustrated and perplexed as we were."

The main narrative this week was written by Senior Writer Ed Magnuson, who also wrote last spring's cover story on the aborted rescue mission. Contributor John Skow reviewed



Senior Writer Ed Magnuson

the events leading up to the final breakthrough, with assistance from Reporter-Researcher Richard Bruns. Using sources he developed on four previous trips to Frankfurt and Wiesbaden, Correspondent Lee Griggs kept close tabs on the preparations to receive the hostages in West Germany. In New York, a TIME reporter specializing in Persian Gulf affairs stayed in close telephone contact with sources in Tehran, ran a network of journalists there and monitored Iranian radio broadcasts. Says Magnuson: "It was a fascinating story, full of hard, fast-breaking news."

As the decisive moment neared, there was palpable relief that the hostage story seemed close to ending. "The past 14 months were loaded with events that broke unpredictably," says Washington Correspondent Roberto Suro. "I developed an almost paranoid sense that something major could happen at any moment." More than any story in years, the hostages tugged hard at journalists' hearts and patriotism. As Suro notes: "The old rule of 'No cheering in the press box' was difficult to observe." Indeed, few staffers could conceal a rooting interest. Says Washington Correspondent Johanna McGeary: "What Carter and his people have wanted most of all is the moment of declaring the hostages free. For one, I am glad they may have it."

John C. Meyers

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Cover: Photograph by James L. Pozarik—Gamma/Liaison



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THE HOSTAGES

Breakthrough!

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