

TEHRAN DIARY

An Air Force Wife's Account of The Last Days Of the Shah's Regime

By Jerrienne R. Hayslett

Color photos by Jerrienne R. Hayslett
Black and white photos by UPI

In December, most U.S. military dependents were evacuated from Iran. Here they settle in for the long trip home.



A tour in Tehran, Iran. The opportunity to travel, buy carpets and copper and learn about another culture.

My husband's assignment as personnel officer for the Air Force Section of the Military Assistance Advisory Group took us to that faraway land in July 1978. I already had laid the groundwork for a job at Tehran American School, which our two older children would attend. A chance meeting with another newly arrived military family took care of babysitting arrangements for our two-year-old son.

Our expectations were high. But who could have predicted the grim turn our lives would take? For we had stumbled upon what was to be the Shah of Iran's stormy swan song.

The following are excerpts taken from my journal kept during the six turbulent months of our Iranian experience.

JULY 23, 1978

We have been flung to a corner of the world few Americans know exists. The contrasts caused by 20th century progress elbowing its way into this ancient civilization are startling. Women draped in black cloaks called *chadores* so that only their eyes are visible seem so incongruous in this city of shiny new Mercedes and towering skyscrapers.

Freelance writer Jerrienne R. Hayslett is an AF wife.

JULY 28

We have been bombarded by security precautions. The sight of military men wandering the hotel halls wearing sports-shirts over their uniforms piqued my curiosity.

"Bulletproof shirts," joked our sponsors. "The men wear them in public to cover not only the uniform, but also their rank." It seems the higher the man's rank, the bigger the target he is for terrorist guns. He also is advised not to carry a briefcase, as that is a symbol of an important person.

The U.S. military member's vulnerability here is so high that the government provides unmarked buses to transport him to and from work. His wife or children should answer the door and accompany him on errands. In our daily comings and goings we must avoid setting a routine or regular route and remain alert for strangers lurking near our house.

AUGUST 2

The lease is signed, furniture delivered and boxes unpacked. Our spacious apartment (consisting of 3000 square feet of living area) is on a quiet, tree-lined street in a northern section of the city. Most of our neighbors are Iranian.

AUGUST 7

Settling in Tehran takes a bit of doing — and a lot of patience. After we spent two days installing a 50-cycle timer and new pulley assembly, the washing machine still doesn't work right — and it leaks. The new gas stove has defective threads in some vital connection. And we don't have the right conversion kit for the dryer to operate on butane.

Transformers needed to use our 110-volt appliances with Iran's 220-volt current are the most complicated problem. Everything with a motor needs one. So as I try to vacuum, I feel like an ambulatory patient dependent on intravenous fluids, dragging my bottle behind me.

AUGUST 15

A ride on the military bus to the Iranian base where the men work provided a couple of uncomfortable sights. The Iranian guard lounging in a front seat of the bus leaned casually on his submachine gun. Also, several banks along the way sported broken windows, reportedly the work of marauding mobs. We don't hear about such things on the news. Probably due to the censorship we do hear about.

AUGUST 20

Many facets of Americana exist here — from ball diamonds to wives clubs. But one missing ingredient, always so much a part of our military life before, is an active social life.

The absence of parties is a drastic change, I understand, from just a few weeks ago. Part of the "low profile" posture the embassy has advised military and civilian Americans to assume. The rationale appears to be that if we aren't so visible, our presence won't be such an irritant to the Iranians who are openly displeased about something.

AUGUST 25

We are now well into Ramadan, a month-long observance of the death of one of Islam's important ancient prophets. During this time Moslems fast and are visited regularly by their local *mullah* (priest).

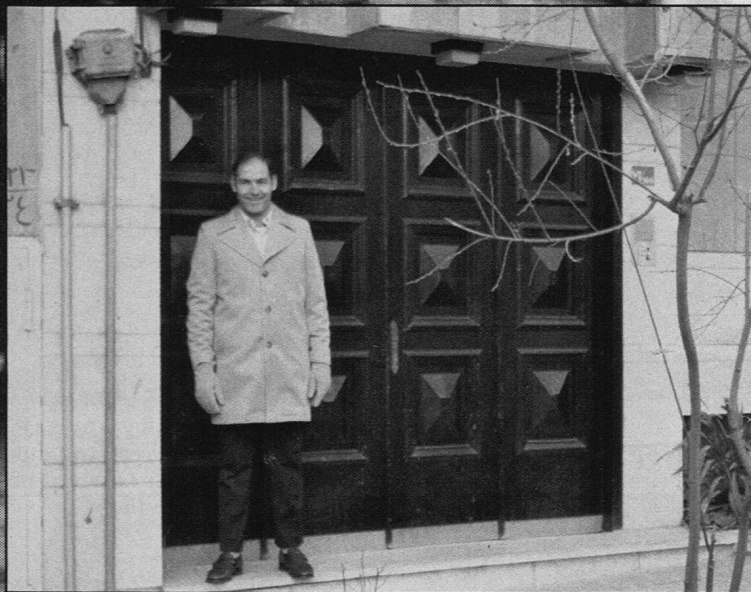
The people of the city seem to be rather testy and tense these days.

AUGUST 27

My first day of work at Tehran American School held all the trauma and chaos that typifies the first day of any Stateside school. Hurrying, scurrying little bodies anticipating — they know not what. Harried teachers shouting commands, giving directions and calling names above the din.

SEPTEMBER 6

It's been a week of mechanical breakdown laced with apprehension due to the internal unrest of this country. After



The author's husband, AF Lt. Col. Hilbert H. Hayslett, stands in front of their apartment.



Parts of Iran, like this desolate mountainous region, are very scenic.

burning out two motors, rupturing its drain hose and herniating its water pump, the washing machine is no longer operational.

Meanwhile, Tehran American School has some new tenants. Iranian Army guards with fixed bayonets patrol the playgrounds and parking lot. At night they bivouac in the gym. After the first start of surprise, life at the school resumed its normal pace.

SEPTEMBER 7

There are new faces on our street, too. Pairs of policemen on patrol — a result, no doubt, of the growing unrest in the city. The demonstrations and riots previously so far to the south are rolling northward like an incoming tide. Never before, say long-time Tehran residents, has there been this much trouble. Hope it's not an ill omen.

SEPTEMBER 8

Martial law is in effect with a 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew. However, demonstrators insisted on marching anyway. Ten of them marched to their deaths. Fires were rampant in the city, according to the evening news. Our landlord insists we are safe, as our immediate neighbor to the west is SAVAK, Iran's answer to the Soviet KGB.

SEPTEMBER 10

Like retracted cat claws, the bayonets have disappeared. Our guards at school now patrol with the barrels of their guns benignly bare.

Conditions must be improving. Even the curfew has been rolled back to 10 o'clock. Yet the running-scared are preparing to flee. Four children checked out of school today. Parents are sending them to the safety of the U.S. One neighbor has packed up her silver for mailing back home and another phoned her parents, alerting them of her imminent return.

SEPTEMBER 12

I feel like a Pollyanna in a world of Henny Pennys. Parents are pulling their children out of school, airline reservations are booked to capacity and packages of precious treasures and mementos are being shipped back to the States.

Tanks rumble through downtown streets; large-scale firefighting puts a strain on the city's water supply.

OCTOBER 14

All the world seems to have gone on strike. Taxi drivers, newspaper and TV employees, university students and professors, postal workers, customs officials and oil workers. Every day brings another walkout.

Also, riots are erupting anew. In Isfahan, a pipebomb was thrown at a busload of Americans. Three injured, according to the rumor. The incident was not reported in the news.

Except for going to work and school, we are inseparable. When it's time to take Chris to football practice, we all pile in the car to go. Laundry chores have become "clothes-folding parties." Instead of "It's your turn to do the dishes," everyone pitches in until they're done. And when we need Coke, all five of us — Hib and me and the three kids — troop down to the corner store together to get more.

OCTOBER 23

Rumors of more terrorist activities, demonstrations and possible evacuation of Americans hum along the grapevine.

The gasoline strike is affecting everyone. I've never seen such long lines at gas stations. Perhaps the most serious sign yet was the cancellation of football games for the weekend. Do wish things would settle down!

OCTOBER 28

Several military work buses were stoned yesterday. The men say young kids are the culprits. Today the buses began taking long, circuitous routes around the troubled areas. But that adds nearly an hour to the men's travel time and a few more gray hairs to their wives' heads.

OCTOBER 31

With so many people talking about evacuation, we felt compelled to discuss how such a possibility would affect our family. Although the children and I probably would have to leave first, Hib feels he would be only a week or two behind us and we might want to wait for him in Europe. But the commanders here say it's just not bad enough even to think about evacuation.

Our greatest fear is that we *will* have to leave. Although coping has become a definite challenge, we like it here very much. But it's difficult to remain optimistic with demonstrations and bloodshed continuing and student withdrawals from the American school on the increase.

The truckloads of armed troops that have entered our neighborhood to guard the road leading to SAVAK headquarters, just two blocks away, have deepened the little furrows of worry that crease our foreheads.

I try to stifle the feeling that we are witnessing the options running out for a terminally ill patient.

NOVEMBER 4

The clouds of rioting and violence grow darker. English-language Iranian newspapers and the U.S. *Stars and Stripes* carry daily stories of fierce and deadly clashes between university students and government troops. There was no school today because of riots. Where will it all lead?

NOVEMBER 5

Tehran burns. The men riding home this afternoon saw marauding bands of youths roaming the downtown area setting fire to buildings, cars and buses. But the rumors spread faster than the flames.

This afternoon, a friend reported that she had heard about a huge riot this morning on a main street near our house. But I was shopping in that very area from 10 o'clock in the morning until 2 and the only disturbance I saw was when one of a flock of sheep crammed into the back of a Datsun pickup was bough by a man who wrestled it over to his car.

But *riots*? I saw none. And the shopkeepers couldn't have been more congenial.

But tonight the sky to the south was blackened with smoke from burning buildings. With no news of what is happening, we wonder just how desperate our situation is.

NOVEMBER 11

Our isolation is complete. No newspapers or mail delivery, the telephone out of order and a lengthy power outage that has knocked out radio and TV. We feed on a junk food diet of rumors, which quell the hunger pangs, but provide none of the nourishment necessary for an informed existence.

School has been closed for a week. Kids are bored. Frenetic mothers' fingernail scratchings scar their villa walls. The adventure sought by many Americans in coming to Iran has taken a grotesque twist.

We are philosophical. We don't want to leave, but realize the decision is out of our hands. Although the climate is dangerous for Americans, we are not afraid. Worrying about the future will not affect its outcome.

NOVEMBER 13

School reopened, but so many children are checking out I feel

September 10:

"The running scared are preparing to flee. Four children checked out of school today. Parents are sending them to the safety of the U.S."

like I'm being abandoned on a sinking ship.

A second extensive power outage in as many days leads to speculation that a saboteur may be flipping a switch. But who's to know? We'll surely never read about it in the papers. They've been abolished by the new military government.

NOVEMBER 21

Threatening notes left on Americans' car windows and shoved in doorways warn, "Go home Domed Yonkeys or you all die." The poor spelling and bad grammar are humorous despite the seriousness of the message.

NOVEMBER 23

Thanksgiving Day. Despite all we have to be thankful for, little sprouts of nervousness poke through our resolve to be calm and optimistic. It's difficult with two DoD employees' cars firebombed four blocks away. And they've put bullet-proof plexiglass on the windows of the work buses.

NOVEMBER 25

In an effort to provide the American community with more accurate information, the embassy and U.S. military headquarters are publishing "Info-grams," which attempt to confirm those rumors that are true and discount the erroneous ones.

People gather to read them outside the *Stars and Stripes* bookstore. They remind me of wall posters in China.

NOVEMBER 28

Life in Tehran has become a concerted effort to obtain bottled gas. Everyone seems to be out of it. After standing in line for more than eight hours, we finally got a small canister filled. Now — with our freezer full, lots of games to play with the kids and gas to cook on — we should be set for anything.

DECEMBER 2

Our nightly Ping-Pong games have been replaced by vigils on the roof. We can't see much, but the undulating waves of chanting that roll across the city from one section to another are unnerving. Even more disturbing are the bursts of gunfire that split the night air.

DECEMBER 4

The volume of the chanting has risen to a fever pitch and there's so much gunfire it sounds like the world is coming apart. The shouting voices of people trying to storm the gates of SAVAK held us mesmerized. We knew we could get caught in a crossfire between troops and demonstrators, yet we couldn't unglue our eyes from the inky blackness of night.

We vacillate between the siege mentality of digging in for the duration with hoarded food and the panic of "evacuation fever."

DECEMBER 5

The only crossfire we've been caught in is that of psychological warfare. The *mullahs* play tape recordings of gunfire on loudspeakers atop their mosques. The custodian at church says red dye and sheep's blood is being spilled on the streets to greet people coming out after the morning curfew.

DECEMBER 6

We are taking precautions that would be mistaken for acute paranoia anywhere else. We leave the car unwashed so it won't look so obviously American, have taped over the portion of the license plates that identify us as U.S. military and peek out the drawn drapes every time we hear a noise.

We returned to school after a three-day vacation due to the nocturnal unrest. We expected to be off a couple days next week for the deep mourning period of Ashura, which commemorates the martyred death of one of the Prophet Mohammed's grandsons. But at 9 this morning the administration announced that school would close today and not reopen until Jan. 6.



From the school bus, armed guards could be spotted in the parking lot of Tehran American School.



An Iranian man and his son use the most common means of transportation in the remote countryside.





On the day of their airlift from Iran, dependents line up at dawn in the commissary parking lot.



The confusion of leaving Iran apparently didn't bother this dependent.

DECEMBER 7

Temporary relocation to a safe haven has been offered to dependents. Separating our tightly containerized family would be excruciating; we have grown too close. We have fought too hard to stay together to give up now. We will stay.

DECEMBER 8

We re-create scenes from World War II, huddling around our shortwave radio trying to tune in news from the outside world on Voice of America. More often than not we get Radio Moscow instead. It's ludicrous! Americans in Iran dependent on Russian broadcasts for what's happening in the world!

DECEMBER 9

The day dawned wrapped in a white blanket of heavy fog. Eerily symbolic. An Iranian friend told us last week that not one meter of white fabric could be found in all of Tehran. It all has been bought by Iranians who plan to march to their deaths tomorrow swathed in white martyrs' shrouds. According to our friend, more than 17,000 people have registered at the city's death houses in anticipation of the bloodbath.

Most of my American friends are gone. All military families desiring to leave were whisked out aboard military planes yesterday before the closure of the airport. More than 80 percent of the dependents left.

DECEMBER 11

The second day of crisis for Iran, and the third day of total confinement for us, has come to a close. We have passed the time addressing Christmas cards, baking goodies and wrapping presents. Although we went to the roof several times to watch and listen, we neither saw nor heard the million demonstrators the Voice of America said were marching in the streets downtown, nor the army troops who had been pulled back to protect the northern section of the city where the Shah resides.

DECEMBER 17

Mysteriously, pro-Shah demonstrations have erupted all over the country — a result, I understand, of a vision of a high-ranking religious man who said the Shah was good. Whatever the reason, we will enjoy the peace while it lasts.

DECEMBER 23

The Shah's public support was short-lived. An explosion at Western Electric, a bare mile from our house, and the ambush of an American in the southern part of the country are tragic events at this yuletide season. Makes our frustration over the past two weeks of power outages seem rather petty.

We seem obsessed by the political upheaval of this country, perhaps because our own destiny is so intertwined with it. One frustration is the nightly power outages, going on now for more than two weeks and getting earlier every evening. Today Hib decided to stop wearing his obviously American-style glasses in public.

DECEMBER 24

The stockings are hung, the tree trimmed and gifts wrapped. But we worry about yet another crisis in our day-to-day existence. We're out of heating oil and have no prospects of getting more.

Iran once produced more than six million barrels of oil a day. Now, its populace is literally out in the cold.

December 6:

"We leave the car unwashed so it won't look so American. We have taped over the portion of the license plates that identify us as U.S. military."

DECEMBER 29

The chanting and gunfire have begun again. But even more disturbing is the lack of fuel. The only cars on the streets are those in unbelievably long lines, with drivers who seem incapable of understanding that the gas stations are closed.

Entire families of Iranians, clutching every conceivable kind of container, stand in lines that snake up and down streets, waiting to buy kerosene. But there is none. There's no fuel for either food delivery or garbage trucks. Metal gratings are shuttered tightly over all the shops. Closed.

An uneasy quiet has settled over this once bustling city of five million inhabitants — now at a virtual standstill. Our walls are closing in ever tighter. We must calculate every trip, as we have less than half a tank of gas left in the car. Power outages are longer and more frequent and our candle supply is running low. We spend most of our time in the playroom with all the doors closed and our only light source a small gas lantern.

We have decided to move our New Year's Eve party down the street to a neighbor's house that still has heat. So far it has not been unbearably cold, but heating enough water for baths is a problem.

DECEMBER 31

We have never given an all-night party before, but the curfew leaves us little choice. I'm glad we changed the location. The cold has been penetrating and extremely uncomfortable today.

However, with all the people who are coming tonight, it should be a festive occasion where we can forget about the cold and the trouble of Iran and enjoy food, friendship and a good time.

JANUARY 1, 1979

The party's over — the saddest I've ever seen. Word arrived half an hour before the guests that the lack of essential services, the continually erupting riots along bus routes, mounting anti-American feeling and the many unknowns surrounding the newly appointed civilian government have forced the closure of all schools for Americans, including U.S. military dependents, for the rest of the year.

As if to underline the seriousness of the situation, the embassy has issued an advisory strongly urging all nonessential personnel to depart the country.

With children in the fifth and eighth grades and no school, we are forced to leave Iran.

JANUARY 2

Yesterday consisted of a harried afternoon of cramming whatever we could into five suitcases, punctuated by frequent crying jags. In one closet, I found a bag of gifts we had stashed away for Chris' upcoming 14th birthday. We handed him the bag as I tried to apologize for not having them wrapped.

But I couldn't get the words out, and suddenly the three of us were in one others' arms with uncontrollable sobs. Then, with a collective deep breath, we dried our eyes and agreed that the outpouring had done us good. But later in the day Carianne, 11, came hurtling into the room, threw herself at her dad and shouted; "I'd rather be shot than leave you here alone!" And the flood gates opened up again.

This morning's parting tore our hearts out. It seemed just as painful for all the families waiting for transportation out of the country. In this tough, virile world of the military jock, nearly as many of the men had red-rimmed eyes and tear-stained cheeks as did their wives. Strain pulled down the corners of every mouth.

As military families, we all have had separations before. So what made this one so different? In all our talk of evacuation, it never had occurred to us it would be without the men close behind. Having to leave them for what appears to be an indefinite period threw us into shock.

Our expectations have been cruelly and abruptly aborted.

We have fought so long and hard to stay. Our valor earned us only bitter defeat.

The weeks or months of separation we face with just a few pieces of luggage are as uncertain as where we will live. Leaving our husbands with no heat in their houses, no gas in their cars, no lights at night and sporadic mail delivery in such a volatile environment makes it even more difficult to face the uncertainty of our own future.

JANUARY 5

After 72 hours of shuttling, ferrying, hurry-up-and-wait, erratic meals and almost no sleep, we are finally back on U.S. soil and at my folks' house.

We are physically exhausted and emotionally numb. We find our roots are as portable as our suitcases, not planted anywhere, but always waiting to move on.

We have decided to return to the location of our last tour near Oscoda, Mich., which felt more like home than anywhere else we've lived. The Air Force base there will be a great convenience, and without school or medical records it will be easier to provide for the children's needs.

A phone call to a friend in Oscoda this morning really put the wheels in motion. She called back this evening to say she has enough commitments from base and town people to furnish any place we choose to live. What fantastic friends.

JANUARY 6

We have a house! At least for a while. Friends in Oscoda heard of our plight and offered to rent us their house while they winter in the South.

JANUARY 12

Our first letter from Hib arrived today. I feel like a glutton, stuffing myself with activities and renewed friendships while he starves in desolation. He has no gas, no heat, no power; no one to talk to at night, no newspaper, the phone often is out of order, his bus frequently is stoned getting to and from the office where there's no work to do. It's as though he's stranded on a spit of land in a sea of increasingly hostile Iranians with no rescue craft in sight. I wonder how long he can hold out before he begins to wither on the vine. At least he's not seeking refuge in a bottle like some of the others are.

JANUARY 13

Today's highlight, a phone call from Hib, was bittersweet. He sounded so close, but was so far away — and could give us no indication of how soon he would come home. At least he knows where we are and that we're all right.

JANUARY 18

Tonight's news reported the death of a U.S. military officer in Iran. Signs indicate that he died by his own hand. The situation must be desperate.

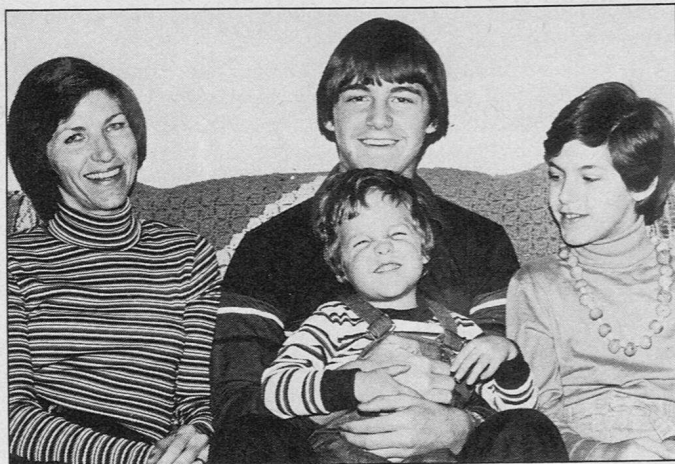
JANUARY 20

Hib says we will be allowed a 1000-pound shipment out of Iran. Not much considering the 12,000 pounds and \$8000 car we shipped over, but perhaps we can salvage a few irreplaceable pieces we've picked up in our travels.

A phone call from Hib this evening buoyed our spirits yet brought depressing news. He got heating oil three days ago, but had to pay eight times the pre-trouble price for it. He also managed to get eight liters of gasoline. That, plus his first

January 2:

"Yesterday consisted of a harried afternoon of cramming whatever we could into five suitcases. This morning's parting tore our hearts out."



Jerrienne R. Hayslett, son Chris holding son Chapen, and daughter Carrienne. (Photo by James Dunn)

mail from us, boosted his morale.

However, plans are in the works to make Iran an unaccompanied tour — which means even if that topsy-turvy world rights itself, we will not be able to return, and the earliest he can leave is next September. Wonder what I will do about furniture when our temporary relocation status expires in July.

JANUARY 30

The national news carried such bad news tonight, including stories of U.S. military people being shot at, that I tried to call Hib. The connection was good, but the situation is bad.

For security reasons they are doubling up in their houses so at least two people will be living together. Personal safety has become a higher priority than protecting household goods from thieves. We'll probably never get our things out.

Mail to Iran is almost nonexistent. Hib has received only two letters from us. The rest of the mail is tied up in New York and he says there's even a four-star general trying to shake it loose.

Morale is extremely low. The saying, "Home by Now Ruz" (Iranian New Year, in March), which has kept them going so far, is taking on a hollow ring.

The anti-American attacks, previously directed at homes and vehicles, are now against the men themselves. In most cases the only provocation is wearing American clothes. Hib never ventures out these days without his gun.

Our conversation ended on a down note. Iranian telecommunications workers have jammed the international lines, making it necessary to use operator assistance on long distance calls. But when the operators hear an American voice, they disconnect. I will have to call him from now on. Another means of communication has been severed.

FEBRUARY 1

The news was so bad tonight. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's return to Iran looks like a preview of the chaotic holocaust that seems destined for that country.

I resisted the urge to call again. I must have faith that my husband is all right.

January 30:

"The anti-American attacks are now against the men themselves. Hib never ventures out these days without his gun."

Tonight's news reported that the remaining 18,000 Americans were leaving Iran. And a friend told me he had heard that five military planes were being flown in to get U.S. troops out. My heart is in my throat, urging me to wait by the phone for a call letting us know Hib's on his way home. But my head must rule. I remember the inaccurate reports of American evacuation as early as Dec. 8.

Every waking moment I am trying to stuff my emotions back into their holding compartments. I must force myself to continue day-to-day activities and not plan on anything that isn't fact. Our future hangs suspended on a slender thread in a country half a world away.

A POSTSCRIPT: FEBRUARY 18

It has been seven weeks of agony. The emotional roller coaster has been exhausting. With no mail since Feb. 4 and telephone communications cut off, we were totally dependent on the news media for information for more than two weeks. It sounded worse every day.

In the last letter I received, Hib said that he had been assigned additional duties making him essential to the mission; these would prevent him from leaving until next fall. That really put us into a tailspin.

But this evening, the phone rang. A voice, husky with fatigue, "I am in Frankfurt. We're out of Iran for good." But his departure was none too smooth.

On Feb. 10 cadets at the Iranian air force training base rebelled. Hib told me he and 50 other U.S. military personnel were under siege for several hours in their Air Force Section offices while Iranians of every persuasion battled with weapons, from handguns to tanks, seized from the base arsenal. The Americans finally were airlifted by helicopters to safer territory in the American Community Center to the north of the city.

Two days later our apartment, previously so secure under the protective shadow of neighboring SAVAK, came under the direct attack of rampaging mobs overrunning that hated secret police compound. From 10 in the morning until 2:30 in the afternoon, Hib lay in the bathtub with the shower curtain drawn and all of the doors in the apartment locked. Hordes of people armed to the teeth stormed the stairway and hall and swarmed over the roof, shooting into the windows and pounding on the door.

It was only through the persuasiveness of our immediate neighbors, who convinced the attackers that no Americans were there, that his life was spared. Three other U.S. Air Force officers two blocks away had similar close calls and also were saved by the courage of their neighbors. We owe those people a lot!

When the shooting was over, Hib found the roof littered with spent shells. Several windows were shot out, including the one directly above the bathtub.

For the next few days the four men in the neighborhood barricaded themselves in one house to wait for the day they could be evacuated. Even though they were allowed only one suitcase when they left, they had to stand in line for more than 10 hours while Khomeini revolutionaries, doubling as customs officials, picked over every article of clothing carried by the evacuees.

Hib is being given a 30-day TDY to try to put our affairs in order. We will attack the mounds of paperwork necessary to file a claim for our household goods. Since private insurance does not cover riot and civil unrest, we must rely on the government, which has a maximum limit of \$15,000 — not much in the face of the loss of nine rooms of furniture, carpets, drapes, clothes, linens, dishes, other assorted stuff and an \$8000 automobile. But the material is immaterial — all that matters is that our family is safe and together.

The adventure of Iran became the challenge to survive a history-making revolution. But now we look forward to a new adventure in our lives, a tour at March AFB, Calif. A warm climate but hopefully not quite such a hot spot. □