

# One small step closer to peace

As I write this column, the hostages who spent 444 days in Iran are airborne, all 52 of them, and on their way to Germany and home. Like Americans across the nation, I'm thankful those 50 men and two women are back in friendly skies, surrounded by friendly people, hearing kind and understanding words, seeing warm smiles, and feeling the touch of loving hands.

And I'm glad that while he was still President of the United States, Jimmy Carter was able to effect their release. Mr. Carter leaves his position as leader of the country for four long and troubled years in one last moment of glory. That's good for Mr. Carter; more important, it's good for the citizens of America. It's good for our morale, and we need reasons to feel good about ourselves again, to be proud, and satisfied with our accomplishments.

Negotiating the release of the hostages, because of the extreme feelings harbored by the Iranians, was no easy task. The price we paid and probably will pay in the future, has been high. Most people don't yet know, may never know, all the contingencies and compromises included in the agreement that brought about the hostages' release. We know only that some billions of dollars in Iranian funds were a part of the ransom paid.

The story could have had far more tragic endings; the consequences could have been serious enough to affect the lives of most people living in the northern hemisphere of our planet, even the population of the entire world. The crisis might easily have been the spark that touched off another world war. That it did not is to the credit of the administration in Washington at the time the hostages were taken and the cooler wiser heads that prevailed in the long months of the captivity.

This incident, it seems to me, is a "first" in international diplomacy; we can hope it will stand as an example that negotiating rather than fighting is possible, even when both parties to a dispute feel justified in their actions and grievances. That such a possibility exists, that such negotiations are demonstrably workable, that we, and all the world, know it can be done because we've done it, is a step forward, a small step, but nonetheless, a vital step, in the civilization of humanity.

Americans and Iranians together have proven to the world that resolution of differences and solution of problems is achievable through negotiation. That's something worthy of note in this world's history.

There are two reasons for being glad it came during the Carter Administration's term. First, the newly inaugurated President will not have to deal with new negotiations, will not have to start from square one and retrace the steps of his predecessor. And I think he will have enough problems to face without the hostages and the Iranians.

Secondly, Mr. Carter is leaving his office in a position of strength. We cannot help but feel that in this instance, if in no other, his achievement is an important contribution to our welfare as a nation. We cannot but respect him.

It's important that we have respect for the office of

President of the United States; it's one of the cornerstones of democracy, the system of government under which we are united. When we lose respect for the President, for the head of our government, we lose, in turn, an important part of our own self-respect and self-confidence.

During the past twenty years we've had our self-respect and self-confidence shattered repeatedly. With the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, we were faced with the reality of our incapability to protect the health and safety of our leader, and our faith in the civilization of mankind was shredded.

With our involvement in the Vietnamese War in Southeast Asia, we suffered further loss of self-respect and self-confidence. We faced the reality of our own fallibility. We learned wealth is not enough, and we learned wars cannot be won when fought by men who are not dedicated to a cause.

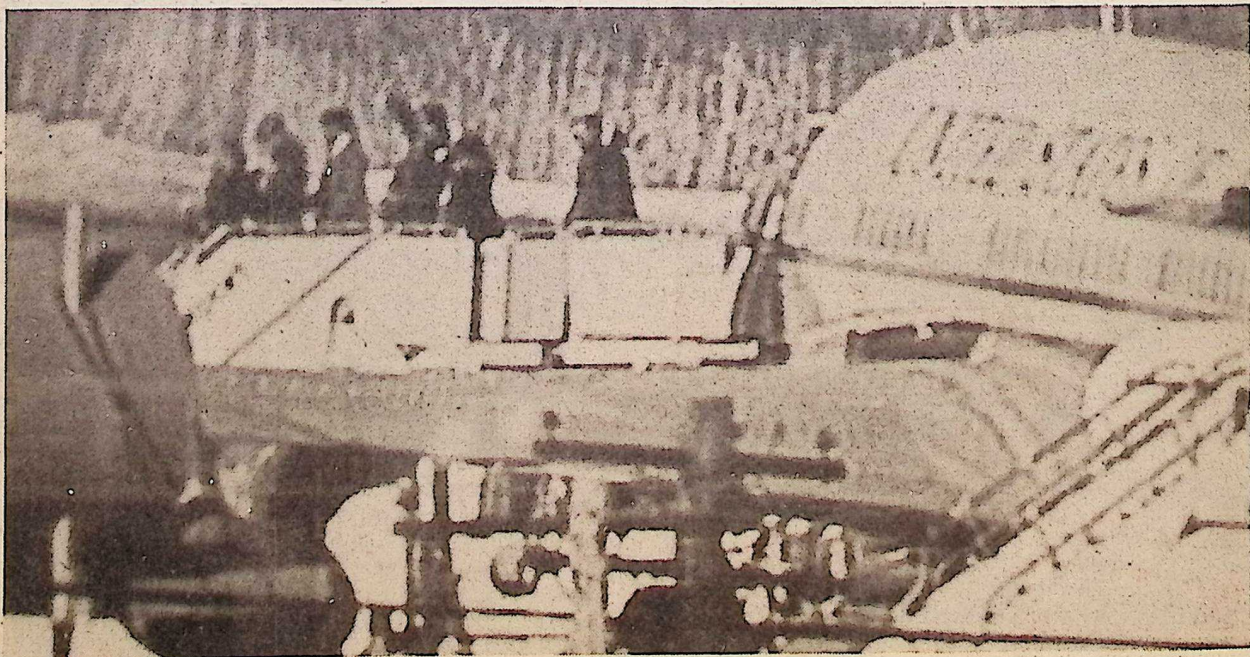
Through Watergate, we learned to distrust our government and the people in charge. We are still raking the live coals of that destructive fire; we may continue to do so for some years to come. Smoking and glowing embers continue to throw off sparks as we paw through the wreckage, and attempts to extinguish them seem only to fan them into new fires. It will be with us a long time.

Americans today, January 21st, 1981, however, are feeling a pride that's long overdue. It's good for us. We need this uplifting emotion to help heal our battered egos. And because Mr. Carter's final days as President were spent in achieving an important victory, he has performed a vital service to his country. He has helped to restore, in some small part, our sense of solidarity, self-respect and self-confidence. And he's done it without plunging us into another war that couldn't be limited to battles between one small Mid-eastern country and ourselves. All the Middle East would have exploded. It may, in any event, but the chances that it will in the immediate future have been greatly reduced in the last week.

And had the Middle East (that's been called a tinder box for decades) become embroiled in major conflict, all Europe and most of Asia, as well as our own country, would soon have been at one another's throats. Modern weaponry would have made such a conflict a short and devastating one.

Four-hundred-forty-four days of captivity is a cruel burden to place on 52 Americans to preserve the limited peace the world is experiencing today. (Keep in mind Afghanistan; heed the people of Poland; remember the millions of struggling humans in Africa; and don't overlook the restlessness in the countries of Central and South America, and even of those in the Caribbean.) The world is in no way at peace...

It is, however, one small step closer to peace than it was last week, or even yesterday at this time. There is a long, long voyage ahead, and there are gales and storms to weather before we drop anchor in the quiet waters of our final port-of-call, World Peace. A course to follow, on the other hand, has been charted; dangerous shoals and rocky shores are marked and, while the seas may be rough and the voyage seems endless, the longest journey begins with but a single step.



After 444 days of captivity in Iran, American men and women are pictured Sunday afternoon disembarking from Presidential jet "Freedom One" at Stewart Airport, near the West Point Military Academy in New York. Patience and seemingly endless negotiations

finally brought to a peaceful conclusion one of America's darkest years. In the aftermath, a time for rejoicing and compassion. (Photo by Mark Cote, via television screen in Marstons Mills)