



APPRECIATION

RICHARD I. QUEEN 1951-2002

Richard Ivan Queen, 51, a retired Foreign Service officer, died Aug. 14 at his home in Falls Church, Va., of complications related to multiple sclerosis. He was among the 66 Americans taken hostage by Islamic militants at the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979. He was held captive for 250 days, a third of that in a dark and windowless basement room, and was released only when worsening symptoms of what would later be diagnosed as multiple sclerosis convinced Iranian doctors that he required sophisticated medical care.

Mr. Queen was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Westchester County, N.Y. He graduated from Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y., in 1973 and then studied Eastern European history at the University of Michigan, where he received a master's degree.

Joining the Foreign Service in 1978, Mr. Queen was posted to the consulate in Isfahan, Iran. It was closed as the revolution heated up, and in July 1979 he was reassigned to Tehran as a consular officer, an assignment he had requested. He "wanted to be a witness to history," he said, and "thought it would be extremely exciting to go to a country in revolution."

Just four months after he started work in Tehran, Islamic militants seized the U.S. embassy compound, and took the hostages, demanding that the U.S. return to Iran the deposed Shah Mohammad Reza

Pahlavi, who had been admitted to the U.S. for medical treatment. The U.S. refused and eventually severed diplomatic relations with Iran.

On July 11, 1980, Iran's revolutionary leader, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, ordered Mr. Queen's release. As Mr. Queen later said, "They were afraid of having a dead hostage." A short time later, the deposed shah died. Finally, on Jan. 20, 1981, after protracted negotiations between Iranian representatives and officials of the outgoing Carter administration, the rest of the hostages were freed, after 444 days in captivity.

Later that year, Mr. Queen published a book about his experiences, *Hostage to Iran, Hostage to Myself* (G.P. Putnam, 1981), in which he described the ordeal. In March 1980, he had been moved from the basement to quarters in the embassy's chancery. He organized a library from stored books of the closed Tehran American School, and spent hours reading. But he also began to experience tingling sensations, dizziness, double vision and difficulty coordinating movement — symptoms of the onset of his MS.

Following his release, Mr. Queen met regularly with the families and friends of the remaining hostages. He resumed his Foreign Service career, going to London as a consular officer in 1981. The following year he was posted to Toronto, where he served until 1985. As his

health continued to deteriorate, the range of assignments he could accept was limited, and he retired in 1995 after serving as a consular officer in the Office of American Citizen Services in Washington.

Mr. Queen's marriage to Moire MacDonald ended in divorce. He is survived by his brother, Alexander, and mother, Jeanne Queen, of Stone Ridge, N.Y.

"THE BEST IN THE FOREIGN SERVICE..."

When asked about his experience, Richard Queen is reported to have said that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, but that he also had chosen to go. That well exemplifies what kind of person he was — a classic example of the best in the Foreign Service: a dedicated, competent, outgoing public servant, a proud and patriotic American.

When I knew him in Tehran, however briefly, he was a tall and robust young man, excited about being there, however difficult and often tedious was his assignment at the visa window, day after day. The next time I saw him, he was among those who welcomed the rest of us home in January 1981.

I watched him in the years since, as he gradually succumbed to the ravages of the terrible illness that has now caused his death. He said once that he bore no grudge against those who held him hostage, and I respect



his memory for that — however much I find it difficult to share that judgment.

Richard Queen's life and death are testimony to today's scourge of terrorism, whose roots lie in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Subjected to the isolation and abuse that surely contributed to the illness that in time caused his death, his passing is a reminder of the Tehran regime's culpability in that hostage crisis, which it has never adequately acknowledged, much less offered apology or compensation.

— *Amb. Bruce Laingen, fellow hostage*

“EMPATHY AND A DESIRE FOR PUBLIC SERVICE...”

A warm, open personality, a real interest in people and other cultures, and empathy made it possible for Richard to understand the point of view of others. When coupled with a desire for public service and real ambition to succeed he was able to cope with the bane of many first-tour officers — working on a high-volume, high-refusal visa assignment without losing his perspective.

These same attributes and a quiet pride in his country served him well as a hostage, allowing him to interact with his captors without falling into the Stockholm Syndrome. As a result he was, in large part, responsible for probably the only positive morale factor for the hostages, the organization of the library for their use.

— *Richard Morefield, FSO, fellow hostage*

“TEHRAN TESTED RICHARD TWICE...”

Tehran tested Richard twice: first, for several months on the visa line, and then as a captive for 250 days. Both were tough, but Richard acquitted himself magnificently in both circumstances.

As a vice consul he was always courteous, patient, and professional. When we reopened our consular section in early September, after an eight-month closure, Richard and his colleagues faced over 30,000 applicants.

Richard had a wonderful curiosity about Iran and things Iranian, and I remember some of our discussions about that country and its rich culture and history. Persian was a challenge, however, and a few months at FSI left him still struggling with the language.

In a memorable moment, Richard nearly brought the entire consular operation to a halt. Interviewing a student visa applicant, he wanted to tell the young man that his grade point average (*mo'adel*) was inadequate. Unfortunately he replaced “*mo'adel*” with “*maadar*,” and the sentence came out, “I'm sorry I cannot give you a visa. Your mother is inadequate.” The baffled applicant could never quite figure out why he did not get the visa.

Had tragedy not struck, I think Richard would have had a great tour in Tehran. It is a shame that the double calamities of the hostage crisis and illness changed so much for this wonderful young man.

— *John Limbert, Ambassador to Mauritania, fellow hostage*

“WE HONOR HIM... AND TREASURE HIS MEMORY”

All of us who were his colleagues respected him for many things, but two in particular stand out: first, his willingness to serve his country in a difficult place; and second, his lack of bitterness or rancor about his Tehran experience. He was once quoted as saying, “It happened to me, but I will not let it get to me.” He showed courage, dedication, and devotion to duty and country. We, his colleagues, honor him for this, lament his passing, and will continue to treasure his memory.

— *Amb. Ruth A. Davis, Director General of the Foreign Service, Aug. 20, 2002, from a letter to Alexander Queen on the death of his brother, Richard.*

“WE TRULY REGRET HIS PASSING...”

Not only during the hostage crisis in Iran, but throughout his entire Foreign Service career, Richard represented the best of American diplomacy, and we truly regret his passing from us.

The thoughts and prayers of the State Department are with you and your family.

— *Colin L. Powell, U.S. Secretary of State, from a personal letter to Richard's brother, Alexander. ■*