

PRISON ESCAPES 7

Canadian prisoner escapes



Prisoners have escaped from institutions across Canada, including Kingston Penitentiary, where bank robber Ty Conn got over a 10-metre perimeter fence at night in 1999 by using a hand-made ladder and grappling hook he constructed in the prison shop. (Canadian Press)

When two Quebec prisoners [climbed a rope lowered from a helicopter](#) and flew to short-lived freedom this past weekend, their spectacular custody break was only the latest in a long list of escapes.

While the reasons for being imprisoned can vary widely, the efforts individuals in that situation make to break free can reflect great daring and ingenuity.

Here's a look at some flights to freedom in Canada, or ones elsewhere that involved Canadian prisoners.

Franz von Werra, 1941

German pilot [Franz von Werra](#) is known as "the one that got away." On his way to a prisoner of war camp in January 1941, he leaped from a train near Prescott, Ont.

Helicopter escapes

Helicopter prison breaks may be rare, but the Quebec fugitives who used one for their escape are hardly the first to turn to the flying machines in their quest for freedom. Here are other notable helicopter prison breaks:

A New York businessman convicted of murder, **Joel David Kaplan**, used a chopper to escape from a Mexican jail in 1971, and went on to write a book about it. The caper also inspired the 1975 movie *Breakout*, starring Charles Bronson.

What is believed to be Canada's first prison escape by helicopter took place in 1990 when **Robert Ford** and **David Thomas** were whisked away from a maximum security facility in British Columbia. RCMP captured them two days later on nearby Echo Island.

Pascal Payet, a French prisoner, used a helicopter to escape on three occasions, the latest on July 15, 2007. He was caught by authorities every time.

Source: Canadian Press

Von Werra made it across the border into the U.S. and then on to Germany. He was awarded an Iron Cross for his escape, but died in battle later that year. His story is told in the 1957 British film *The One That Got Away*.

Escape from Camp X, 1941

Not long after von Werra's escape, 28 German POWs [escaped from Camp X](#), near Angler, Ont. They had spent three months digging a 46-metre tunnel.

After a week, two escapees had been killed and the rest captured. Two got as far as Medicine Hat, Alta.

The story of the Camp X escape was first told by a 23-year-old reporter, Scott Young -- musician Neil Young's father.

Escapes from Stalag Luft III, 1943 and 1944

The first escape from this POW camp near the German-Polish border involved a wooden horse the prisoners built and used for gymnastic vaulting but designed for concealing men, tools and dirt containers.

They would move the wooden horse every day to the same spot near the perimeter fence, for vaulting over it and digging under it. Canadian flight lieutenant Gordon (Moose) Miller was one of the men who carried the horse.

Three POWs escaped on Oct. 29, 1943, eventually making it to Britain. The escape was celebrated in the 1950 film *The Wooden Horse*.

A second escape, in 1944, was the single biggest escape of the war and was featured in the 1963 film *The Great Escape*. The man in charge of building the escape tunnels was

Canadian pilot Wally Floody, who was a miner in northern Ontario when he enlisted. Floody was transferred from the camp 10 days before the escape.

Nine of the 76 escapees were Canadian. All nine were recaptured. Six of them were then executed by the Germans. Only three of the 76 escapees reach Allied territory.

The Boyd Gang, 1951 and 1952

The Boyd Gang, whose name was given to them by Toronto newspapers, twice escaped from Toronto's Don Jail.

After six bank robberies, Edwin Alonzo Boyd was jailed. There he met two other bank robbers, and together they escaped on Nov. 4, 1951, by using hacksaw blades, which one of them had hidden in his wooden foot to cut the bars and bedsheets and go down the walls. More robberies followed, including the largest haul in Canadian history.



The Boyd Gang's second escape, in 1952, led to the biggest manhunt in Canadian history. It was also the subject of the first news report on CBC-TV. (CBC)

On March 6, 1952, gang members Steve Suchan and Lennie Jackson shot police detective Edmund Tong, for which they would later hang. They were soon captured. Boyd was later tracked down and arrested in his bed.

The Boyd Gang escaped from the Don Jail for a second time on Sept. 8, 1952, again using a hacksaw blade and a cell key they had fashioned from a palm imprint of the original.

That escape led to the biggest manhunt in Canadian history, which lasted until their arrest 10 days later. The escape and manhunt became the subject of the first news report on CBC-TV.

Lucien Rivard, 1965

Lucien Rivard was arrested in Montreal in 1964 on narcotics smuggling charges filed in the U.S. He was held at Bordeaux jail until March 2, 1965, when he escaped with another prisoner. They scaled the jail wall with a garden hose they had obtained on the pretext of flooding the skating rink.

Alcatraz and the Maze

Some high-profile prisons have had high-profile escapes, in some instances with prisoners using their own ingenuity and supplies they found within the walls, and in other cases getting help smuggled in from outside.

One of the more famous prison escapes became the subject of a 1979 movie starring Clint Eastwood. *Escape from Alcatraz* told the 1962 story of Frank Morris and brothers John and Clarence Anglin who apparently used a metal spoon and a drill cobbled together from a vacuum cleaner to free themselves from the prison that sits on an island in San Francisco Bay.

They have never been seen again — and no bodies were ever found.

In Northern Ireland, some of the worst offenders arrested during the Troubles were put behind bars in the Maze, a now-closed prison just west of Belfast. In 1983, IRA prisoners with smuggled guns took over a prison block before using a food delivery van to flee. Most of the 38 prisoners were recaptured within days.

Rivard was on the run for four months before being captured in Montreal. He was quickly extradited to the U.S., tried and convicted, but a bribery and corruption scandal over the Rivard affair had already engulfed the federal government of Prime Minister Lester Pearson.

Two high-ranking officials resigned. A royal commission criticized how the federal justice minister, Guy Favreau, handled the investigation and he, too, resigned.

Rivard was the Canadian Press Canadian Newsmaker of the Year for 1965. The 2008 film *Le piège Américain* (*The American Trap*) tells Rivard's story.

Donald Kelly, 1975

Murderer Donald Kelly overpowered a guard at the North Bay, Ont., jail, seizing a rifle as he fled on Aug. 2, 1975. Kelly gained folk hero status as the massive police manhunt went nowhere. Then the famous police tracking dog, Cloud II, joined the search.

Four weeks after the escape, Cloud II tracked Kelly to a cabin deep in the woods near Skead, Ont. Kelly shot and fatally wounded Cloud II, and the dog's handler shot and wounded Kelly.

Kelly was tried and convicted for two 1969 murders and sentenced to life in prison. He died behind bars.

Ty Conn, 1999

Bank robber Tyrone William Conn had already escaped from three other prisons when he was transferred to Kingston Penitentiary in 1998. In 1999, he escaped from there, too.

He got over the 10-metre perimeter fence at night by using a hand-made ladder and grappling hook he constructed in the prison shop. Thanks to a dummy he made by stuffing clothing with paper, his escape was not discovered until the morning.

Conn had robbed his first bank when he was 16 years old. Two weeks after his 1999 escape, police tracked him to a basement apartment in Toronto. He shot himself during the standoff.

Omid Tahvili

Omid Tahvili is still on the run following his Nov. 15, 2007, escape from a maximum security jail in B.C.



Video released by B.C. Corrections shows Edwin Ticne, right, escorting Omid Tahvili through a secured door inside the North Fraser Pretrial Centre during his escape in 2007. (B.C. Corrections)

Prison guard Edwin Ticne helped him escape in exchange for a promised \$50,000. Ticne was sentenced to three years, three months in prison in 2008. It was the first time in the history of B.C. Corrections that a guard has been charged with helping an inmate escape, according to B.C. Corrections.

Video cameras caught Ticne leading Tahvili through a series of locked doors. Tahvili, wearing a janitor's uniform, then escapes through the front door.

Tahvili was said to be the kingpin of an Iranian-Canadian organized crime family. He was convicted in absentia of kidnapping and sexually assaulting a man. He is also wanted in the U.S. for telemarketing fraud, allegedly stealing \$3 million from mostly elderly Americans.

Tahvili remains on the FBI's Most Wanted list.

Feds: 2nd inmate who escaped Chicago jail captured

Friday, January 04, 2013



Left: Joseph "Jose" Banks; Right: Kenneth Conley

CHICAGO (AP) - January 4, 2013 (WPVI) -- The second of two bank robbers who escaped last month from a high-rise federal jail in downtown Chicago was captured Friday afternoon, at an apartment complex across the street from a suburban police department, authorities said.

Kenneth Conley was arrested in Palos Hills, according to U.S. Marshals Service spokeswoman Belkis Cantor. She said someone called local police Friday morning thinking they recognized Conley. FBI spokeswoman Joan Hyde said the Palos Hills Police Department took him into custody.

Conley fled the Metropolitan Correctional Center last month with Joseph "Jose" Banks, apparently by smashing a hole in a wall at the bottom of a narrow cell window and squeezing through before scaling down about 20 stories using a knotted rope made out of bed sheets. Banks was arrested without incident two days later at a home on the city's North Side.

A man who answered the phone at a number listed for Conley's brother, Nicholas Conley, in Orland Hills refused to answer questions and asked that the family be left alone. A message left for Conley's mother was not immediately returned.

Jail officials did not notice for hours on the morning of the escape that Banks and Conley were gone. Surveillance video from a nearby street showed the two hopping into a cab shortly before 3 a.m. on Dec. 18. They had changed out of their orange jail-issued jumpsuits.

When the facility did discover the two men were gone around 7 a.m., what was found revealed a meticulously planned escape, including clothing and sheets shaped to resemble a body under blankets on beds, bars inside a mattress and even fake bars in the cells.

A massive manhunt involving state, federal and local law enforcement agencies was launched, as SWAT teams stormed into the home of a relative of Conley only to learn the two escapees had been there and left. The authorities searched other area homes and businesses - even a strip club where Conley once worked.

Law enforcement officials left a host of questions unanswered, including how the men could collect about 200 feet of bed sheets and what they might have used to break through the wall of the federal facility.

Conley, 38, pleaded guilty last October to robbing a Homewood Bank last year of nearly \$4,000. He wore a coat and tie during the robbery and had a gun stuffed in his waistband.

Banks, 37, known as the Second-Hand Bandit because he wore used clothes during his heists, had been convicted of robbing two banks and attempting to rob two others. Authorities say he stole almost \$600,000, and most of that still is missing.

Chesco women helped accused killers in jailbreak plot

WEST CHESTER, Pa. - December 4, 2012 (WPVI) -- Two Chester County women have been charged with plotting to help two accused murderers break out of prison.

Sara Lombardo and Jameela Rozier were arrested Monday in Pocopson Township, Chester County.

Only Action News was there as they were arraigned Tuesday in Kennett Square.

Prosecutors say the women were plotting with prisoners Saleem Williams and Shamek Hynson to help Williams and Hyson break out of Chester County Prison.

The alleged prison break called for the women to smuggle in various tools and a gun.

Hynson is already serving life in prison for a murder during his days as leader of a notorious Lancaster County drug gang.

He was in Chester County now to be tried for a revenge murder that took place several years ago in Coatesville. It is a death penalty case.

Williams was scheduled to stand trial this week for a murder in Phoenixville last year.

Police say the alleged escape attempt was to start at the isolated room where approved visitors come to talk via telephone to the maximum security inmates who are behind bulletproof glass.

The D.A. says the women experimented with several varieties of pressure tools to try to shatter the glass including center punches and hammers.

Before they could try anything, searches of packages helped prison guards uncover the plot.

"If they actually would have got into the prison and started implementing this escape, this would have been a bloodbath," Hogan said.

All four are facing multiple charges in connection to the alleged scheme.

PHOENIX - August 9, 2010 -- Federal agents on Monday captured one of two inmates who escaped from an Arizona prison as he walked, armed with a handgun and a hitchhiking sign, in Wyoming, and were still hunting for the other fugitive and a suspected accomplice.

Convicted killer Tracy Province told authorities he was relieved that the manhunt was over for him when he was arrested around 6:20 a.m. in Meeteetse, Wyo., about 60 miles outside of Yellowstone National Park, said David Gonzales, the U.S. Marshal for Arizona.

The other inmate, John McCluskey, as well as suspected accomplice Casslyn Welch, were still on the lam.

"They consider themselves as Bonnie and Clyde," Gonzales said. "This is very, very serious business."

Gonzales said agents were working on leads in Wyoming. He said they believed that McCluskey and Welch were no longer in tourist-packed Yellowstone, where more than 100 armed park rangers were patrolling amid an estimated 30,000 campers and tourists.

At the park's northern entrance at Gardiner, Mont., rangers were given posters of the fugitives so they could check the passing cars. But they weren't handing out the posters, nor were they advising entering motorists about the search.

Authorities tracked Province to the town with a resident's help. On Sunday, the woman chatted briefly with Province on the steps of the church, Gonzales said. She called police after recognizing him on television.

When marshals and other law enforcement officers arrested him, he initially denied being Province, Gonzales said. He was carrying a 9 mm handgun and the sign that said "Casper," authorities said.

Province was at the Meeteetse Community Church at least an hour before the 10:30 a.m. service Sunday, said Jay Curtis, who plays drums for the nondenominational Christian church and welcomed Province.

Province sang along with the music, especially a song titled "You're Grace is Enough," Curtis said.

Efforts to find the trio intensified after they were linked to a double homicide in New Mexico.

Province, McCluskey and Daniel Renwick escaped from a private, medium-security Arizona State Prison near Kingman on July 30 after authorities say the 44-year-old Welch threw wire cutters over the perimeter fence. Welch is McCluskey's fiancée and cousin.

The three later kidnapped two semi-truck drivers at gunpoint and used the big rig to get away, authorities said. The group left the drivers unharmed in the truck at a stop just off Interstate 40 in Flagstaff and then fled. Renwick was arrested Aug. 1 in Colorado.

The manhunt intensified Saturday after forensic evidence linked the two inmates and Welch to the killings of an Oklahoma couple. New Mexico State Police spokesman Peter Olson declined to elaborate.

The badly burned skeletal remains of Linda and Gary Haas - both 61 and from Tecumseh, Okla. - were found in a charred camper Wednesday morning on a remote ranch in eastern New Mexico. Their pickup truck was found later 100 miles west in Albuquerque.

Province was serving a life sentence for murder and robbery out of Pima County, Ariz. McCluskey was serving a 15-year prison term for attempted second-degree murder, aggravated assault and discharge of a firearm out of Maricopa County, Ariz.

Renwick had been serving two consecutive 22-year sentences for second-degree murder.

Publicizing their photographs in newspapers and on television, including a segment Saturday night on "America's Most Wanted," has helped generate tips, investigators said. Gonzales said a \$40,000 reward was set for McCluskey and Welch's capture.

"Rest assured, we are going to be on McCluskey like a cheap suit," Gonzales said. "We are not going to pull this thing down."

Some Yellowstone campers weren't concerned about the search, including four men from Pittsburgh who were taking a vacation. Their families called them with the news that the inmates could be in the area.

"We're just driving around, stopping and getting out of the car," Kevin Tonini said. "The odds of them being there aren't too good. It's a big park."

Prisoner escapes from Chester hospital via helipad

Tuesday, May 24, 2011

CHESTER, Pa. - May 24, 2011 (WPVI) -- Police are searching for a man who escaped from a Pennsylvania hospital by jumping from a helicopter landing pad after freeing himself from handcuffs.

The Delaware County Daily Times reports 20-year-old Drakkar Green had been taken into custody by Chester police following a vehicle crash. Officials say he complained of head pain and was taken to Crozer-Chester Medical Center where he was handcuffed to a hospital bed.

Investigators say Green slipped out of his cuffs and was spotted on security footage taking an elevator to the landing pad, which is located beside a road outside the building.

Authorities issued a warrant Monday for Green's arrest on escape charges

Iranian prisoners sentenced to death attempt to escape



Prisoners, who were sentenced to death for drug trafficking and other serious crimes, attempted to escape, the Iranian Mehr news agency reported.

Prisoners serving in the Gizilhasar prison in the Kerej city first set a fire at the prison in an attempt to escape. Then they tried to escape taking advantage of confusion, but the police managed to prevent their attempt.

Earlier, the Iran Human Rights (IHR) has published the annual report on the death penalty in Iran in 2010. Based on the report, at least 546 people were executed in the country during the report period. According to official Iranian sources 85 people have been executed in January 2011.

The Gizilhasar prison is one the biggest prisoners in the Middle East. Some 15,000 prisoners serve sentence here.

Three Iranian inmates escape from Salemba prison

Three Iranian inmates convicted on drug charges have escaped from the Salemba Penitentiary in Central Jakarta, on Tuesday, local police say.

“The iron bars were cut through, and then they escaped out the window,” Central Jakarta Police chief Sr. Comr. Angesta Romano Yoyol said Wednesday, as quoted by tempo.co.

He disclosed the identity of the three convicts as Mohammad Razmi Ramazah, Ali Reza Rastegar Mozafar and Rasoul Sarlakian.

He said that although their sentences were all for drug-related cases, the three were arrested separately.

“One has only served one month [in prison], another has served two months and the other one has served 11 months,” he said.

The police said they would question a number of witnesses in connection with the escape of the three Iranian prisoners to find out whether or not their getaway was due to prison guards’ negligence.

2 inmates escape during Iran prison blast

Ilam police chief says rocket-propelled grenade damaged prison's wall, allowing two inmates who had been sentenced to death to flee

Dudi Cohen and AFP

A bomb explosion outside a prison in [Iran](#) on 9/19 people and allowed two prisoners to escape, cited a local police official as saying.

The blast was in front of the facility in Ilam in western Iran, the city's deputy police chief Colonel Aziz Abdi told the agency.

"Nineteen people have been wounded,

including three prison guards," he said, adding that three prisoners tried to escape "but one of them has been recaptured and two are still at large."

The official IRNA news agency quoted Ilam governor Nurullah Arjomandi as saying a rocket-propelled grenade had been fired at the prison, damaging a wall and shattering windows. He did not mention casualties or give further details.

According to another local news outlet, the prisoners who had escaped were sentenced to death.

A senior medical official in Ilam told the Fars news agency that the blast did not result in any deaths and that the wounded were evacuated.

Two inmates escape after attack on Iran jail: reports

Two murder convicts escaped after a rocket-propelled grenade was fired at a jail in southwest [Iran](#) on Saturday, wounding up to 19 people, media reported.

A third inmate who managed to break out after the blast at the central prison in the city of Ilam was quickly recaptured, police colonel Aziz Abdi was quoted as saying by the semi-official Mehr News Agency.

Three prison guards were among the wounded in the incident in a region bordering [Iraq](#), Mehr added.

"The culprits, who used getaway cars to escape from the scene of the incident, are at large now and the police are after them," the official IRNA news agency quoted provincial [Governor](#) Nourollah Arjomandi as saying.

Arjomandi said the blast was caused by a rocket-propelled grenade aimed at one of the prison's walls, but that there were no deaths, IRNA said.

"The explosion caused damage to the residential units around and broke window panes within a radius of 500 meters and a number of cars were damaged," Arjomandi said.

State television said the suspected motive of the blast was to free a number of prisoners and that at least five people were wounded. They received medical care but were later allowed to leave hospital. Mehr put the number of wounded at 19.

English-language Press TV said on its website: "Security officials later reported that two of the prison inmates, who were serving time for murder, managed to escape in the turmoil."

Murder is a crime punishable by death in the Islamic Republic.

Ilam, which is also the name of the province, is a mountainous region bordering [Iraq](#), and home to tribal people as well as ethnic Kurds.

(Reporting by Hashem Kalantari and Ramin Mostafavi; Writing by Fredrik Dahl; Editing by Jon Hemming)

Escape from Iran: One Man's Journey From Riches to the Torture Chamber to Freedom

The story of how an Iranian businessman helped his country develop the world's largest natural gas field, got involved with the president's depraved son, and ended up fighting for his life.



A guard stands watch in Tehran's Evin Prison / Reuters

Older Iranian homes usually have traditional squat toilets, porcelain holes in the ground with overhead flush tanks. So do the torture chambers in Tehran's Evin prison, as Houshang Bouzari discovered on a sweltering summer night in 1993. His interrogator pulled Bouzari out of his six-by-four-foot cell and forced him to crawl down the bloodstained stairs that lead to the basement of Section 209 -- the cell block reserved for

political detainees. When they reached the basement, the interrogator lifted Bouzari up from the ground and pushed him into a tiny bathroom stall. The squat toilet was clogged.

Bouzari was forced onto his chest and the officer's boot pressed against the back of his neck, plunging his head into the porcelain hole. Bouzari immediately decided that if only he could stop breathing, he might actually withstand this. Sealing his mouth shut, he held out for what he believes was a full, excruciating minute. Then, instinct took over, and he breathed in gulps and gulps of excrement-ridden water. His choking and muffled screams gave way to a newfound peace; he was on the verge of passing out. The moment before relief, he felt his body being lifted. A sharp blow cracked against his back and Bouzari's mouth emptied onto his chest. He was pushed against a wall, facing his tormentor. "Look what you've done, you sonofabitch," the officer howled. "You've shat all over yourself. How are you going to pray in this filthy state?"

Ablutions and daily prayers were the last things on Bouzari's mind as he passed out. When he finally came to, the stench was so overpowering that he no longer sensed it. The officer was still hurling verbal abuse. A powerful notion flashed across his mind. "If this is torture, I can take it," he told himself. *If this is torture, you can take it.* But Evin's practiced torturers would soon prove him wrong. This was just the beginning of an eight-month ordeal in the nightmare-lands of the Iranian security system. By the time his interrogators were through with him, he would confess to having spied for five separate foreign intelligence agencies and much more.

Bouzari's plight was all the more remarkable because he was a chosen son of the ayatollahs, Iran's spiritual and political leaders. Had he played his cards right, he may well have wound up a minister or ambassador of the Islamic Republic. The story of Bouzari's rise and fall bears the hallmarks of classical tragedy: ambition and greed, friendship and betrayal, and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unspeakable cruelty. But it also contains many of the same elements that dominate headlines about Iran today: from the fissures at the very top of the regime to the unscrupulous Western businesses that still invest in a regime that is brutal, isolated, and heavily sanctioned. It is a story whose chief villains are well-known in Iran: then-President Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and his son and political heir, Mehdi.

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Houshang Bouzari was born in 1952 to a respected clerical family. Both of his grandfathers were jurists, interpreters of Iran's Shi'a Islam. Bouzari's father was a civil servant in the shah's secularist regime, but a pious man who passed that belief on to his children. As a student, Bouzari straddled the secular and clerical realms, earning a journalism degree in 1971 and a physics degree in 1974, all while also undertaking seminary studies. Like many youth from Iran's emerging middle class, Bouzari studied abroad. In 1978, he earned a physics doctorate from Turin University in Italy, where he

flirted with some of the same leftist ideas that were just then boiling over in Iran. The next year, a popular revolution ousted the shah and established the Islamic Republic.



Houshang Bouzari

Bouzari rose meteorically on his return to post-revolutionary Iran, fueled by strong credentials: academic brilliance, clerical pedigree, and anti-shah militancy. In 1981, he started work at the Majlis, Iran's parliament, as an international affairs advisor to then-parliamentary speaker Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Bouzari, still in his late-twenties, wrote two or three speeches per month for Rafsanjani and accompanied the pistachio mogul-cum-mullah on his trips abroad. "The travel opportunities were amazing," Bouzari told me in one of our many interviews about his life. "I went on about 50 trips abroad during this period. Vienna became a second home for me." He got close enough with Rafsanjani to learn his boss's real last name: Bahremani.

He was soon recruited to advise the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), one of Iran's wealthiest and most powerful bodies. By 1988, he had dozens of friends inside the government. But as the war that had broken out with Iraq in 1980 drew down, Bouzari soured on power. "I was privy to information others didn't have," he told me. "I saw these guys torturing and killing people. Summary trials and summary executions. I couldn't look at myself in the mirror." He took a yearlong leave of absence. He told colleagues he was seeking medical care abroad for his wife, but the real purpose was to extricate himself from the Iranian regime and build a new life as a private businessman.

I interviewed Bouzari, who now lives in exile in Canada with his wife, for about 15 hours over the course of several weeks. Revisiting his experiences in Tehran's torture chambers was extremely difficult for Bouzari, who, after recounting particularly harrowing episodes, would sometimes request that we stop the interview and pick up the next day. He agreed to speak with me in part to show how Iran has changed over the

last 30 years, how much more corrupt and cruel its government has become. Several documents and records, produced as part of an ongoing civil proceeding in the Canadian justice system, corroborate what he told and help tell his story. Some of these documents are already in the public record; others were made available to me on condition that I not reproduce them. Still, even with these files, it's impossible to independently verify all of Bouzari's claims.

When Bouzari decided to go on leave from his government work in 1988, he was no doubt disturbed from seeing the regime's inner workings. But as Nikahang Kowsar, a prominent Iranian-Canadian editorial cartoonist and blogger familiar with his case, told me, a guilty conscience probably wasn't Bouzari's only motive. "It's plausible that he was sick of how the regime works," Kowsar said. "But he was also really smart and realized that, after the war, there was a chance to make a lot of money."

The eight-year war had devastated Iran's oil industry. Production had shrunk from a shah-era peak of over six million barrels of crude per day to under two million barrels, almost half of which were marked for domestic consumption. The country desperately needed to repair its damaged oil infrastructure, and Western oil and gas contractors were eager to help. Armed with technical knowledge, political savvy, and powerful connections, Bouzari was the perfect middleman. "I understood the oil industry: pipelines, compressing stations, refineries," he told me. "So I thought I could create a link between the Iranian end user and the international oil companies."

Along with an Italian partner, Bouzari set up a consulting company in Rome. By 1989, his civil servant status at state-run NIOC had lapsed and he had transformed himself into an international businessman with few official ties to the regime. He was jet-setting between Rome, Geneva, and London and underwriting a lavish life for his wife and two young children. Within months, his company was getting involved in hydroelectric dam building, airport construction, and other heavy-duty industrial projects.

Business was already booming when, late one night in 1990 while rummaging through old NIOC documents stored at his house in Tehran, Bouzari came across an appraisal memorandum addressed to the pre-revolutionary shah's oil ministry. Back in 1976, engineers with the offshore drilling giant Reading & Bates (now Transocean) had explored a natural gas condensate field shared by Iran and Qatar. The field, the engineers had concluded, was one of the richest light gas reserves in the Persian Gulf. The memo referred to the project as the "Qatar North Dome." The name stung Bouzari's sense of Persian pride. During a late night brainstorming session over pizza and non-alcoholic beer, he and a close Tehran-based associate coined a new name for the project: South Pars. The name would become one of the global energy industry's most famous; South Pars is the largest gas field in the world.

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Ayatollah Rafsanjani, Bouzari's old boss, had just been elected president of Iran. Though today's Iran is dominated by Supreme Leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Rafsanjani was then by any measure the most powerful man in the country. Khamenei had only recently replaced Ruhollah Khomeini as the religious Supreme Leader and was widely viewed as lacking sufficient theological or jurisprudential training for the job.

Akbari Rad: "What's your shoe size?"

Bouzari: "Forty-four."

Akbari Rad: "I'll turn that into a comfy 48 for you."

Bouzari believed that his former colleagues at NIOC would be unlikely to support his South Pars idea. Too many of them were focused on surviving the leadership transition and wary of risky new ventures. So he reached out to his non-Iranian clients instead. "I went after a whole bunch of foreign companies," Bouzari recalled. "I described the project and said, 'if you go forward and suggest something to Iran, I will help you win the bidding process.'" Several European and Japanese companies formed a consortium to do just that. The major players included Technip (France), TPL and Saipem (Italy), Machinoimport (Russia), and JGC and Chiyoda (Japan); Halliburton, from the U.S., was a subcontractor. (A letter from TPL executives, introducing Bouzari to the U.S. Embassy in Rome as a consultant, [can be found here](#).)

After weeks of intensive negotiations with the Iranian government, they reached an agreement that valued the project at \$1.78 billion and required the consortium to put up 90% of the initial costs. Bouzari had been so central to the deal that, when the consortium decided to accept the deal, the group's head called him directly from his private jet. "Dr. Bouzari, you got it," he said, according to Bouzari. "You got it!"

Bouzari, who was set to collect a \$35 million commission, popped a champagne bottle.

Not long after both parties executed the letter of intent, Bouzari, now back in Rome, received an unexpected phone call urging him back to Tehran. President Rafsanjani had taken note of Bouzari's role in the lucrative new project, the caller said, and sought an audience with his former aid. Having successfully rebranded himself as a private entrepreneur, Bouzari was reluctant to re-enter Iranian government circles. But this was an invitation he could not decline. Three or so weeks later, he was in Tehran, seated across from Rafsanjani and his son Mehdi. "Thank you for your patriotic initiatives related to South Pars," the president began. "We are proud of you. But we have called you here to discuss our son, *agha*-Mehdi here, who has just graduated from college. He is very interested in maritime industries, and you must help him learn the business."

From his days at parliament, Bouzari vaguely recalled watching Mehdi as a child play soccer with Revolutionary Guard officers at the Majlis compound. Mehdi Hashemi Rafsanjani, born in 1969, was now 21. "I will be Father's eyes and ears in South Pars," he told Bouzari during their first of many mentorship sessions.

Rafsanjani's fourth and youngest son, Mehdi, is by all accounts the apple of the former president's eye. In memoirs published online, Rafsanjani recalls his son's development with obvious admiration:

Mehdi was always interested in industrial affairs. He understood that our position in the maritime economy was weak. He sought to enhance our capacity to build underwater pipelines, and he helped develop South Pars. Mehdi and my other children avoided confrontation. They are not into secrecy and mendacity--whoever they are, they show it. They don't intrude on matters that do not concern them. They do not enter politics but they are always in the arena.

(Rafsanjani's site has since been blocked, but copies of the memoir can still be found, and the relevant section can be [downloaded here](#).) All parents exaggerate their children's virtues. But the gap between the paternal illusion and reality here may be especially wide. Former friends and associates have described Mehdi as erratic, cruel, and even sexually depraved -- in other words, the stereotypical son of a Mideast autocrat.

"You can fuck off and rot there for all I care. The children deserve better than you."

The Iranian dissident cartoonist Nikahang Kowsar, before he defected to Canada under a death threat from a hardline group, served as media advisor to Mehdi during the early 2000s. "He's smart and he's rude," Kowsar told me. "If he knows you, he shares a lot of dirty jokes." Not unusual for the power-high offspring of dictators, Mehdi is said to be a fan of psychological games. The Tehran neighborhood where Mehdi lived at the time, for example, was home to a number of clerics. "Mehdi would climb the walls of [other ayatollahs'] homes and use a big camera to take pictures of, say, a group of them smoking opium," Kowsar recalled. "It was a score for him. He loved messing with other people." Mehdi is rumored to have an insatiable appetite for women. "I learned of his taste for women because of the secretaries he used to hire," Kowsar told me. "You could tell there was something in the air. You wouldn't see any of those secretaries working for other governmental offices. So you could have a secretary wearing perfume -- that's crazy in the Islamic Republic!"

Bouzari was eager to appease the young Mehdi, aware he could scuttle the lucrative South Pars project with a snap of his finger. "The kid was sexually starved," Bouzari remembered. "I decided that the best thing to do is to entertain him. We'd send him from one industrial exhibition and five-star hotel to another just so he was out of my hair." For the next few months, Mehdi and his personal aid traveled the world at Bouzari's expense. One 1992 Hilton Genève bill ran tens of thousands of Swiss Francs. Billed to Houshang Bouzari, the receipt identifies the guest as one "M. Bahreman Yazdanpanahtazdi," an amalgam of Mehdi's real last name and that of his aid. (Bouzari also claims he bankrolled Mehdi's expensive escort habit in Iran and Europe during this period.)

Appeasement would only go so far. In winter 1992, Bouzari received a message from Mehdi's assistant: "Mehdi says you must gift him fifty million dollars or he'll scrap the project." The exorbitant bribe demanded by the president's son stunned him -- and far exceeded the \$35 million he was set to make from the deal. Bouzari did not make much of the threat until he got another call, this time from Mehdi himself, announcing the formation of a new company, the Iranian Offshore Engineering and Construction Co. (IOEC), which was to take over all South Pars contracts from the oil ministry. "Doctor-jan," Mehdi addressed Bouzari lovingly. "I will lead the board of directors and you will be the chief executive. Father says this is the best path. I'm waiting for you to prep me for future meetings." Bouzari received a memo announcing the formation of IOEC and listing Mehdi as managing director, as well as six other Rafsanjani apparatchiks as board members.

He should have cut his losses and moved on, Bouzari now says. Instead, he made what he sees as the biggest mistake of his life. In May 1993, he flew to Tehran, hoping to change the Rafsanjanis' minds.

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Bouzari started noticing suspicious signs as soon as his plane touched down in Tehran. He was not greeted with the usual VIP welcome. Mehdi was nowhere to be found, and Bouzari's attempts to reach him found nothing. Then, late one night, a member of Mehdi's inner circle -- a bodyguard who also owed Bouzari a favor -- rang his doorbell. When Bouzari opened the door to let the man in, he lunged himself inside, pushed Bouzari into a nearby bathroom, and turned on all of the faucets. Holding his right hand over Bouzari's mouth, he spoke breathlessly: "Mehdi is on pilgrimage to Mecca. Doctor, you must get out of Iran. Turn off the water after I leave." He was gone in less than a minute.

Bouzari was shaken, but he did not heed this or other warnings. "I had friends everywhere in the security system," he told me. "Nothing will happen to me, I thought." And then there was the matter of his hefty consulting commission. "When you're going for a big job, you have to take big risks."

Still, the warnings rattled Bouzari enough that he booked a flight back to Rome, scheduled for the day after the next. In the meantime, he went real-estate hunting with his closest Tehran confidant, a man named Said Yazdani-Sabouni who at the time imported heavy equipment for the Revolutionary Guards. After the day's business was over, they stopped by a bookstore, where Bouzari picked up something to read on his upcoming flight. When Yazdani-Sabouni saw the book's cover, he burst into laughter. It was the autobiography of Ehsan Naraghi, an adviser to the shah's wife who, after the revolution, suffered a long prison sentence in the ayatollahs' jails.

"That is so funny, brother," Yazdani-Sabouni told Bouzari several times in between chuckles during dinner. "That is hilarious." The book was titled *From the Shah's Palace to Evin Prison*.

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The irony of that title was lost on Bouzari -- but not on Yazdani-Sabouni, who had been bought off by Rafsanjani's allies weeks before his friend's arrival in Tehran. Entrusted with keys to Bouzari's apartment, Yazdani-Sabouni had helped intelligence officers bug its rooms and tap all three of his phone lines. Three intelligence officers used the information to track Bouzari's every move for many days. They moved to capture him the day before he was to fly out of Iran. That morning, the agents arrived at Bouzari's front door and unceremoniously arrested him. Bouzari drove himself to Evin prison, accompanied by the senior-most of the officers, where he was blindfolded and thrown into a cell that he says crawled with "hundreds" of cockroaches.

During his first two weeks in Evin, Bouzari's interrogators assaulted him constantly, part of a process of psychological breakdown that torturers have used for centuries, but for which Evin is especially infamous. They would slap his face with heavy rubber slippers -- 10, 20, sometimes 30 strikes in one sitting. Each strike would leave his head ringing for several seconds; he could often feel his ear canals bleeding. "Why are you beating me, my good man?" Bouzari would plead with Siadati, the agent who arrested him. "Ask me anything, and I'll tell you." But his begging was only answered with more intense violence. Bouzari's head was twice plunged into a clogged toilet. This is when he first developed the mantra, if this is torture, you can take it. But then Siadati stopped showing up. Bouzari was mostly left alone for another two weeks.

One day in early July 1993, guards took him out of his cell and moved him to the Towhid detention center in downtown Tehran. There, a particularly cruel interrogator took charge of his case. It was this officer, who went by the name Akbari Rad in Towhid, who introduced Bouzari to cable number three.

To flog detainees, Iranian interrogators use cables of varying diameters: cable number one is the widest, number two a bit thinner, and cable number three is the thinnest, about a quarter of an inch in diameter. By concentrating the impact over a small surface area, it inflicts a massive dose of pain with each blow.

"What's your shoe size?" Akbari Rad asked Bouzari early on. "Forty-four," he responded sheepishly. "That's okay," Akbari Rad said calmly. "I'll turn that into a comfy 48 for you." To this day, both of Bouzari's feet are abnormally large, and he walks with some difficulty. Typically, Bouzari would be stretched out on his back between two steel bars while his torturers worked his thighs and feet. After about a dozen sessions, Akbari Rad and others had beaten his feet into unrecognizable bags of purple flesh; all ten of his toenails eventually fell off. He lost 50 pounds and consistently urinated blood.

After a few more weeks in Towhid, Akbari Rad informed Bouzari that his wife had wired the intelligence ministry three million U.S. dollars.

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Shortly after Bouzari's arrest, President Rafsanjani had unilaterally terminated the South Pars contract. The government drew up a new contract with the IOEC -- the quasi-public outfit founded by Rafsanjani's son Mehdi-- as the consortium's major Iranian counterparty. Bouzari was cut out of the development of the world's largest gas field. Now, to complete his excision, the state appeared to be preparing Bouzari for a speedy trial in a revolutionary court, probably on espionage charges carrying the death sentence, the usual tool against high-level regime opponents.

This is most likely why Bouzari's torture sessions took such an interrogatory character, and why they became so much more brutal. His torturers started applying electric prods to his kneecaps, he says, his throat, and his genitals. Bouzari readily confessed to having worked for the CIA, MI6, the Mossad, Shin Bet, and the Italian intelligence service.

That was when his wife's wire transfer came through, and it likely saved his life. (Faxed memoranda detailing the liquidation of three million dollars of the Bouzaris' assets and the transfer of the resulting funds to the Iranian ministry of intelligence can be read [here](#) and [here](#).) Even before he embarked on the South Pars consultancy, Bouzari was a very wealthy man. When Yazdani-Sabouni called Bouzari's wife, Fereshteh, on the ministry's behalf to ask for five million dollars to cover her husband's "hospital bills," she understood right away. It took her less than 72 hours to sell off enough assets to send the three million, not quite the sum demanded but still enough to satisfy the ministry.

Initially, Bouzari was terrified to learn his wife had paid out. "Once these guys smell money," he knew, "they will always want more." Ever the businessman, Bouzari formulated a plan: he would convince his captors that there was much more money for the taking, but that only he could liquidate and deliver the assets.

As fall turned to winter and Bouzari's case meandered its way to the courts, a new, turbaned torturer had appeared his cell. Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i is one of Iran's most prominent intelligence officers. At the time, he officially represented the revolutionary court at the ministry of intelligence. He would later head the ministry, including during the brutal crackdown after Iran's disputed 2009 election. Mohseni-Eje'i was most likely present to collect Bouzari's confessions, which would also explain why the physical torment was gradually abated.

This shift in treatment worried Bouzari; he sensed the trial, and thus a probable death sentence, looming. He requested and was granted a personal audience with Mohseni-Eje'i.

"If you send any codes or signals, I will blow your brains out right here."

"*Haji*, I have more to confess," Bouzari told the intelligence officer, who is also a cleric. "There are many more assets still on the other side [in Europe] and they belong to the brothers here. But I fear my wife may have found a new lover and is wasting the money away. You must let me travel to Rome to retrieve what rightly belongs to the sacred regime." By this point, news of the three million-dollar transfer had surely made its way around the intelligence ministry. Credit for that score, Bouzari realized, belonged to Rafsanjani and his allies. By offering this "confession," he hoped to play Mohseni-Eje'i against the Rafsanjani faction. "Alright, alright, we will study the matter," the cleric soothed Bouzari.

At Mohseni-Eje'i's behest, Bouzari was finally allowed to call his wife. Two intelligence officers were listening on the call. Before Bouzari dialed Fereshteh's number in Rome, one of the agents pointed a silenced pistol to his head: "If you send any codes or signals, I will blow your brains out right here." Bouzari's heart was racing. He would ask Fereshteh to send more money but, for the plan to work, she would have to refuse. This would allow Bourazi to argue that he must travel to Rome himself to sell his assets and bring the money back. If it worked, he would fly out and never return. But if she did as he asked and sent the money, then not only would Bourazi still be in jail and facing execution, but his family would be poorer for nothing.

How could he make his beloved wife -- who had not seen him for many months -- understand that she must spurn and spite him? He spoke rapidly and in an emotionless voice: "Fereshteh-*jan*, I need you to do follow my instructions very closely. I need you to sell our apartment in Geneva, our property in England, my share in the consultancy -- *and our yacht.*"

The Bouzaris lived a luxurious life but they never owned a yacht; Fereshteh was hydrophobic. Would she get the message?

The next time Bouzari called, Fereshteh unleashed a torrent of insults: "What do you want from me, you piece of shit? I never should've married you. My father always said you were nothing but trouble, and he was right! You can fuck off and rot there for all I care. The children deserve better than you."

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Iran's intelligence officers and torturers are not fooled easily, and it would take many more months of work before Bouzari convinced them to move forward. Finally, in winter 1994, Mohseni-Eje'i had him released-- still blindfolded -- in the middle of a busy Tehran street. He got in touch with his wife, who, realizing that Bouzari was still not free and likely under surveillance, continued to perform the role of the spiteful ex-lover. Mohseni-Eje'i, after demanding a \$250,000 cash advanced, returned Bouzari's passport so he might recover "the brothers' millions" abroad. The plan had worked.

"If you don't come back, we'll kill you," Mohseni-Eje'i told him during their last meeting. "If you write a book about this, we'll kill you. Maybe your children will have accidents." Then the cleric whispered the Koranic traveler's prayer in Bouzari's ears, entrusting him to the care of the Almighty.

In 1998, the Bouzaris made their way to Canada, where they currently reside. There, Bouzari co-founded the International Committee against Torture. In November 2000, he sued the Islamic Republic in a Canadian court claiming damages for his torture. When the case was dismissed on sovereign immunity grounds, his lawyers filed a new lawsuit in 2005. This time, he named now-former President Rafsanjani, his son Mehdi, Akbari Rad, Mohseni-Eje'i (who that year became head of the intelligence ministry), and other high-ranking Iranian officials. Last August, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice endorsed the suit, concluding, "The plaintiff, Houshang Bouzari has endured unspeakably outrageous torture by [Mehdi Rafsanjani] or at his instigation." In effect, the court rendered a default judgment, ordering Mehdi to pay Bouzari \$13 million in damages. (A copy of the judgment, which Mehdi now seeks to set aside with the help of the prestigious Canadian law firm Davis, LLP, [can be found here](#).)

Mehdi Rafsanjani continued to play a leading role in developing South Pars. But the work has been slowed by tightening international sanctions. In 2004, the energy giant Statoil was [fined by the Norwegian Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic and Environmental Crime](#) after a business daily revealed that the company had wired \$15 million to a foreign investment firm that served as a front for Mehdi.

He was also closely involved in his father's failed 2005 presidential bid. "He felt that [Supreme Leader] Khamenei had somehow politically raped his father," Kowsar, who declined Mehdi's offer to work on his father's campaign, told me. "He wanted to get back at Khamenei." Today, Mehdi is pursuing an Oxford doctorate in, of all subjects, constitutional law.

In 2009, the Rafsanjanis' threw their weight behind the Green Movement. Many Western supporters of the Obama administration's engagement policy embraced the family, resurrecting the idea that the "pragmatic" Rafsanjanis could be a viable alternative to the crazed hard-liners. Bouzari doesn't see it this way.

Shahram Jazayeri Escapes The Prison

By: [Mir M.Hosseini](#)

[Shahram Jazayeri](#), a high profile prisoner whose name was associated with financial corruption and bribing of top officials escaped while being taken for investigation about a property. Accompanied by two guards, he suddenly vanished near his apartment in

Ecbatan district of [Tehran](#). The escape sent a shock wave among [Iranians](#) debating healthiness of the judicial system. The authorities gave contradicting statements adding further to public suspicion. Several officials were forced to resign including the head of the notorious Evin prison. During [Norooz](#) holidays, the news of his arrest in [Oman](#) was announced. He had reportedly escaped to [Dubai](#) on a fake passport. After receiving a tip, two [Iranian](#) police officers showed up at the hotel where Jazayeri was residing but he evaded the arrest. Being chased by the Interpol, he finally got arrested in Oman and brought back to Iran on a private jet plane. Many of vital questions regarding how's and why's of his escape still remain a mystery. Some rumors indicate that his term is just a formality and that his strong relations have guaranteed him a luxurious life in prison just like the former Tehran mayor, Gholamhossein Karbaschi.

On the other hand, reports of human rights violations, and abuse of political prisoners and rights activists continue to fill pages of the regime's workbook. As a matter of fact, the last word in the [Islamic Republic of Iran](#) is Connections which stands well above laws, rules and regulations

Dissident's Tale of Epic Escape From Iran's Vice



Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times

Ahmad Batebi, a dissident who escaped from Iran, crossed into Iraq and made it to the United States, in Virginia last week with his lawyer, Lily Mazahery.

Published: July 13, 2008

WASHINGTON — After three days on the run, Ahmad Batebi picked his way down a rocky slope to the stream that marked Iran's border with Iraq. His Kurdish guides, who had led Mr. Batebi, an Iranian dissident, through minefields and dodged nighttime gunfire from border guards, passed him to a new team of shadowy human smugglers.



A photograph of Mr. Batebi in 1999 holding a protester's bloody shirt altered the course of his life.



The New York Times

With the aid of Kurdish guides, Mr. Batebi was able to cross into Iraq.

At the age of 31, after nearly eight years in Iranian prisons, subjected to torture and twice taken to the gallows and fitted with a noose, Mr. Batebi had fled.

But in Iraq, his former captors had one more chilling message for him. Not long after his arrival in Erbil in March, the new cellphone provided by [United Nations](#) officials rang. Mr. Batebi was shocked to hear the familiar voice of the chief interrogator at one of Iran's notorious prisons.

“We know where you are,” the interrogator said. “You must turn yourself in.”

Instead, Mr. Batebi, one of Iran's best-known dissidents, received permission to enter the United States. He arrived on June 24.

In several lengthy interviews, Mr. Batebi provided an unusual window on Iran under its ruling clerics. His alienation began at age 9, when he witnessed a deadly stoning. He rose to fame in 1999, appearing on the cover of *The Economist* magazine holding the bloody T-shirt of a fellow student demonstrator — an image he first saw when a judge slapped it before him and declared, “You have signed your own death sentence.” Finally, after a decade of political combat, he reluctantly decided to abandon Iran for an uncertain exile.

His escape has prompted a paroxysm of denunciation in Iran's controlled news media, which have accused him of defrauding creditors and suggested that he has long been in league with the United States and Israel, claims that human rights groups dismiss as crude propaganda.

From his Yahoo blog, Mr. Batebi has replied, posting the taunt, “Your hands will never reach me” and the instruction “Click here.” The photograph that pops up shows the dissident, an Iranian [Johnny Depp](#) with a ponytail and a satisfied expression, posing in front of the United States Capitol.

While some details of Mr. Batebi's biography, his treatment in Iran and his escape could not be independently confirmed, he provided a video he took during his journey, and independent advocates vouched for much of his account.

He knows he has arrived during a time of tension between Iran and the United States, and he said he did not want his story to heighten the conflict.

Wary of being viewed as a pawn of American policy, he said that the United States played no role in his departure from Iran, a fact American officials confirmed. The United States did give him permission to enter this country “out of concern for his safety,” said Gordon D. Johndroe, the spokesman for the [National Security Council](#). He said Mr. Batebi attended a courtesy meeting with N.S.C. staff members on Friday.

Despite Mr. Batebi’s soft-spoken Persian, translated by Lily Mazahery, an Iranian-American lawyer who is helping him resettle, his contempt for Iran’s rulers is palpable. But he does not want a violent revolution. “No one with a healthy brain wants a revolution without a plan for what comes after,” he said. “That’s what happened in 1979.”

An Awakening

Mr. Batebi may have inherited his jaundiced view of his country’s leaders. After the Islamic revolution of 1979, his father, a customs bureaucrat who had fallen out of favor with the shah’s regime, declined to join the [Revolutionary Guards](#). His mother, a first-grade teacher, taught him and his younger brother and sister a mild, Golden Rule Islam that had little in common with the ayatollahs’ harsh theology.

His own awakening began in fourth grade, when his teacher, fed up with the distortions of an official history textbook, burst out: “Go out and read other things to try to get the truth.”

“The teacher probably doesn’t even remember,” Mr. Batebi said. “But he changed the course of my life.”

A few weeks later came the stoning. Though forbidden by his mother, he slipped out of the house to see the commotion near his school. He saw a man, accused of adultery, buried to the waist, his head covered with a sack that turned red as Revolutionary Guards hurled chunks of concrete. A mullah standing atop a wall gave the orders, and an ambivalent crowd of neighbors looked on.

“I was utterly shocked,” he recalled. “My hands and legs were shaking.” Afterward, he suffered from nightmares.

Years later, he would witness public hangings and dismemberments. “But nothing had the impact of that stoning,” he said. “I thought, This can’t be Islam.”

At the University of Tehran in the mid-1990s, Mr. Batebi embraced his photojournalism studies and made two dozen short films with existentialist themes, often with his own electric guitar for a soundtrack. He also joined in student protests, getting arrested three times. In fervent late-night discussions, he recalled, one admired model was the Rev. [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

The demonstrations exploded in 1999 in what would become known as 18 Tir, the date according to the Iranian calendar. In a wave of protests that threatened the 20-year-old regime, hundreds of students demonstrated against the closing of a newspaper, Salam. Mr. Batebi, busy making his senior thesis film about drug addiction, stumbled upon the demonstrators and joined in.

When the police fired into a crowd, a bullet hit a young man next to Mr. Batebi, who pulled off the student’s shirt to try to stanch the bleeding. After carrying the wounded man to a makeshift clinic, he held up the shirt to warn other students against marching outside.

A photographer caught the moment. Mr. Batebi was already in jail when The Economist published his picture, putting him in far greater peril. When the judge hearing his case showed him the magazine, Mr. Batebi reacted with both fear and perverse pride.

“At first I was shocked and scared,” he said. “But then I thought that even though they’re going to kill me, I’ve caused a major blow to the regime.”

Confined and Tortured

Mr. Batebi described 17 months in solitary confinement, including repeated torture by interrogators trying to force him to say on television that the famous T-shirt was stained with paint or animal blood.

His jailers thrashed him with a metal cable, beat his testicles and kicked in his teeth, he said. They held his face down in a pool of excrement. They tied his arms behind his back and hung him from the ceiling. At other times, strapping him to a chair, they kept him awake night after night, cutting him and rubbing salt into the wounds.

To stave off madness, he said, he fought back. “If the interrogator cursed me, I would curse him back,” he said. “If the interrogator hit me, I’d try to hit him back.”

Twice he was led blindfolded to the gallows. Once the noose was left around his neck for 45 minutes, and he passed out from fear, he recalled. The second time, he sat, waiting, as a prisoner on each side of him was hanged.

The photo that so infuriated the authorities may have saved him, as advocates around the world took up his cause. His death sentence, for “agitating people to create unrest,” was commuted, first to 15 years and then to 10.

In 2005, allowed a day pass to take exams for a sociology degree, he decided to flee. He remained free for five months, working in the political underground and marrying a young dentist. But after she was jailed because of his activities, they agreed to end their union, he said.

After Mr. Batebi was rearrested in 2006, the harshest treatment stopped. But he was sometimes forced to watch his friends being tormented. Last year, after Mr. Batebi suffered what was probably a stroke and several seizures, he was released for medical treatment.

In March, he was ordered to return to prison. He knew that supporters wanted him to keep up the fight from behind bars, but he was worn out. “I couldn’t do more than I had,” he said. “Everyone needs a life.”

An Underground Railroad

On a Yahoo chat site, on March 13, Mr. Batebi contacted Ms. Mazahery, the lawyer, who he knew had helped other Iranians get into the United States. At the same time, through a connection made in prison, Mr. Batebi sought help from the underground Kurdish [Democratic Party](#) of Iran, which soon directed him to Argentine Square in Tehran.

To his surprise, his Kurdish helpers — volunteers whose real names he never learned — said he had to leave immediately, taking advantage of the authorities’ lax attention during the Iranian New Year holidays. Carrying only a backpack containing his Dell laptop computer, a camera and a pocket-size video recorder, he retrieved some money from an A.T.M. and climbed into the strangers’ car.

The next two days were a blur, he said, as he was driven in a series of cars on a circuitous route to the northwestern border with Iraq, a straight-line distance of about 300 miles. Once, his ride was with a family. Another time, it was with a mother and her baby. A third time, he was directed to board a bus.

With many precautions, the Kurdish underground railroad moved him to the border — he will not say exactly where. Then a new five-man team took over.

For a day and a half, with burros carrying supplies, they moved along the border, which was patrolled by guards and protected by land mines. One of the escorts walked ahead to ensure that the way was clear, Mr. Batebi said.

They heard sniper fire and occasional artillery bombardments, but never came under direct fire. Mr. Batebi's tiny camera captured shaky images of the burros traversing the dry, rocky hills and gullies. Peering over bluffs, the group could see the flags of two nations facing one another at lonely border posts.

On March 20, when Mr. Batebi's guides handed him over to new Kurdish guides in Iraq, he said, he felt no elation.

“Suddenly I was very scared,” he said. “I was like a baby who's been separated from his mother and has stepped into a world of which he knows nothing.”

A Tense Stop in Iraq

His protectors brought him to the Erbil offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which began the laborious process necessary to move an Iranian with no passport and little identification to a new land.

His Kurdish allies believed that an Iranian hit team was hunting for him, so he was moved from one safe house to another for three months.

He was shaken one day by the unexpected phone call from the Iranian interrogator, a man known by the prison pseudonym Javad Javadi. Mr. Batebi sought to turn the tables on the interrogator, firing questions back at him and capturing a digital recording of one of the calls, but he knew he had to get out.

The United Nations was arranging a placement in Sweden when Ms. Mazahery called to say that the United States had granted Mr. Batebi's request for "humanitarian parole," a relatively rare measure used in cases of danger or political importance.

An Opposition Icon

When his flight from Vienna landed at Dulles Airport in Virginia in late June, Mr. Batebi was astonished to see that the airport worker waving the jet into the gate was a Muslim woman wearing a tight head scarf.

Mr. Batebi was enthralled, sensing a casual tolerance that was exactly what he had longed for in his own country. "It seems to me that people here are free to live their lives, as long as they do no harm to anyone else," he said.

There are more distinguished figures in the Iranian opposition, people who have spent decades in the struggle, as Mr. Batebi is quick to acknowledge. But he is discovering that few are so recognizable. For the Iranian diaspora, The Economist's 1999 photo remains an iconic image.

Mr. Batebi was a little nonplussed, Ms. Mazahery said, when an Iranian-American woman outside a Washington grocery store walked past him a few days ago, did a double take and called out his name. When he said that, yes, he was Mr. Batebi, the long-imprisoned dissident, she burst into tears.

Zahir Janmohamed of [Amnesty International](#) USA called Mr. Batebi "grounded and humble" about his role.

"As a human rights activist, Batebi's credentials are unquestionable," Mr. Janmohamed said.

But he warned that now, as Mr. Batebi joins an exile community whose rivalries are legendary, many factions would seek to recruit him.

Mr. Batebi speaks of working from afar for peaceful change in Iran. He recoils when asked about the possibility of American military action against Iran, saying that if the United States attacked, "I might go back and fight for my country myself."

He has some ordinary goals, the dreams of a man who spent most of his 20s in a prison cell. He wants to study politics and sociology, he said, and work as a photojournalist. He wants to play guitar. He thought for a moment, then he remembered one more modest ambition.

“I want to fish!” Mr. Batebi said, his face relaxing into a smile. “I’m going to go fishing!”



photo by ANDREW MACPHERSON

Dr. Hossein G. Vahedi is a 77-year-old Los Angeles dentist. For decades, he has led a very private life. Until November 28, when WikiLeaks publicized its first batch of 250,000 classified State Department documents. Among them were U.S. Embassy cables from Ankara, Turkey, to Washington, D.C., written in February 2009 on Vahedi’s behalf. They essentially said this: “Refused permission to return home to the U.S. after visiting relatives in Iran, Hossein Ghanbarzadeh Vahedi, 75, undertook a daring secret trek over the mountains to Turkey and turned up in Ankara asking for help.”

In a follow-up, it was said that Vahedi’s getaway was made on horseback over snow-covered mountains patrolled by armed border guards. In the wake of the WikiLeaks release, news organizations around the world have been clamoring for details, but Vahedi himself has not spoken. “I can tell the story only once,” he says today from his

son and daughter-in-law's home in a hillside section of Brentwood. "It is too difficult to relive. The memory makes me feel sick."

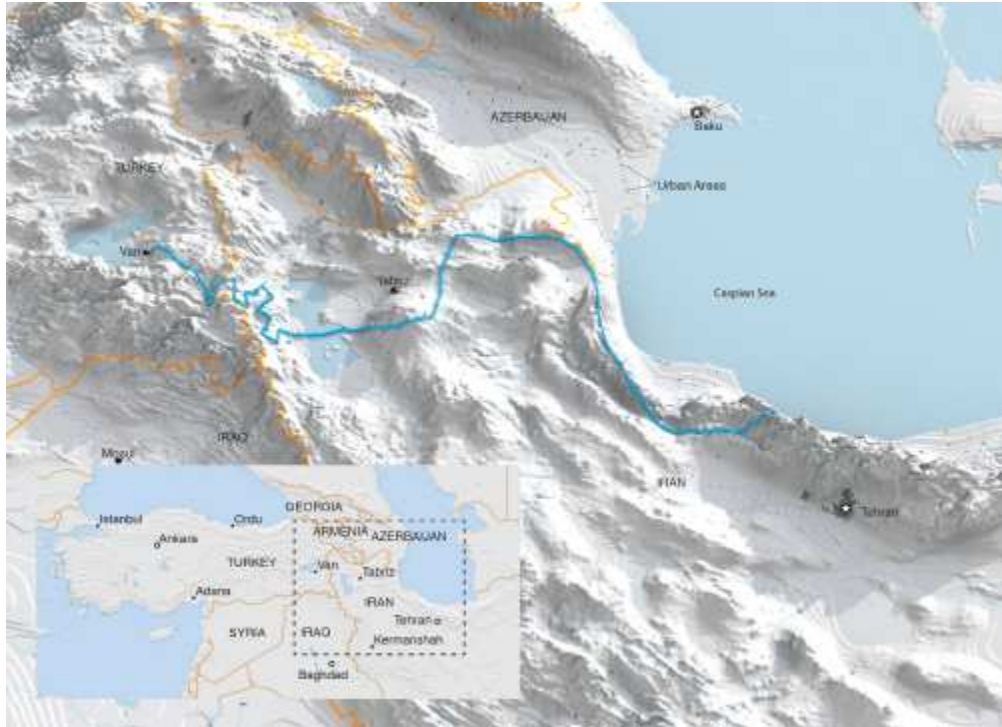
Before I meet with Vahedi, my mental picture of him is a cross between John Wayne and James Bond. Instead, he looks more like a violinist—soft-spoken, with white hair, bifocals and graceful hands, which makes it all the more difficult to imagine him atop a horse, switchbacking along icy cliffs.

Prior to his escape, Vahedi had not ridden a horse since he was a boy in Iran. He moved to America in 1984, and his previous visit to Iran was 10 years ago. Then in May 2008, he planned a trip to visit his parents' graves.

Seated at a dining table, Vahedi opens a thin folder of papers that chronicle his ordeal. He had just arrived at the airport in Tehran when his troubles began. "A man—unshaven, in pajamas and a dark olive coat—called out to me by name," he relates. "He said, 'Could you give me your passport?'" Like many Iranian Americans, Vahedi carries one from the U.S. and one from Iran. He complied and presented the Iranian one. When he asked for his passport back, he was told to report to a building in Tehran run by the Islamic Revolution Court.

Once there, he says, "I was invited to talk with officials about the *matter*. 'What matter,' I asked?" One IRC official was polite, even offering some tea. But another demanded personal information about the American businesses of Vahedi's sons (two of his three sons promote concerts featuring, among others, Persian pop singers Kamran & Hooman). When he protested, he was told to shut up. "When I left, I had the feeling this was a serious problem," Vahedi says.

He traveled to his parents' graves but soon received a call summoning him back to court in Tehran. This time, Vahedi says, "there were verbal threats...then [veiled] discussions about having my sons bring some 'goods' to Iranian officials in Dubai. It was extortion. Over my dead body would I leverage my sons." With no American Embassy in Tehran, he turned to the Swiss Embassy.



BRYAN

CHRISTIE

When officials at the Swiss Embassy learned Vahedi still had his American passport, they told him to leave Iran immediately. “They said, ‘Just go, now!’ ” So he paid a fee to change his ticket and started to head home immediately. Passing through customs, he breathed a sigh of relief. “Then I heard my name over the loudspeaker,” he says. Iranian officials held him overnight and told him he was not allowed to leave Iran. They did not say why.

While solving the “matter” had been challenging up to this point, it had now turned Kafkaesque. He sought counsel and was told, “Lawyers can’t help you in Iran.” What he needed, he realized, was to find an official who would “help” (as in, take a bribe).

First, he was introduced to a man who claimed to be a bodyguard of President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad. Next came a man claiming to be “connected to [Ayatollah Al] Khamenei,” the Supreme Leader of Iran. “He kept saying, ‘I’m gonna fix it for you,’ ” Vahedi recalls. After several weeks that included meetings in a hospital room, a taxi and a park, those trails ran dry.

Another round of meetings began, this time involving cash payments and odd gifts. “One guy’s mother needed something. Another [person] needed a tin can of fruit,” Vahedi says. All the efforts reached dead ends.

He showed up at the IRC each time he received a summons, but his prospects for freedom from Iran’s theocratic maze seemed to worsen. “I see men being led away in chains...Young girls from the university taken in for questioning. There was a basement in the court. Once you go there, you are on your way to Evin prison,” he says. Known

worldwide for its political prisoners, Evin is where two American hikers, Shane Bauer and Joshua Fattal, have been held on espionage charges since July 2009.

By then, months had passed. From Los Angeles, Vahedi's daughter-in-law, Alisa Freundlich, a lawyer, had been communicating with the Swiss Embassy. "There was nothing they could do," she says. Meanwhile, both Freundlich and her husband, Kevin Vahedi, were working to get heart medication to his father: "We sent it to Switzerland, and they brought it to Iran inside a diplomatic pouch."

In November, after some six months of limbo, things worsened. Officials at the IRC told Vahedi he had to post an amount equivalent to \$50,000 or go to jail. As he was weighing his options, the bail was raised to \$150,000. "I realized I had to escape," Vahedi says. "I thought, *Either I'll die in an Iranian prison, or I'll die on the run.*"

He began to study exit routes and gather information about smugglers' fees. He learned there were three viable options: over the water, in a shipping container across the Persian Gulf into Dubai; over land into Iraq and then to Karbala; or over the mountains into Turkey.

Escape was not a subject for casual conversation in Tehran; even broaching this kind of subversive talk could land you in jail. "I had to be careful about who I was talking to because it could be a setup. I began switching phones, making calls in the park. I thought I was being followed. Spies are everywhere—even street cleaners report to the government in Iran."

Vahedi says he didn't want to travel over water. He ruled out Iraq because soldiers are generally known to be loyal to Iran. Once he decided on a mountain escape into Turkey, he began walking the Tehran hills to get in shape. He told no family members of his plan, but in December, while collecting his heart medicine at the Swiss Embassy, Vahedi confided in a diplomat that he would try to escape. "They told me, 'I don't recommend it—it's very dangerous.'"

Even so, the Swiss notified his family in Los Angeles. Freundlich recalls, "The [diplomat] said, 'Your father-in-law was here. He looks very bad. I'm very worried about him. I think he's going to try to escape.'"

And he did. Vahedi paid \$5,000 to a smuggler and hid another \$2,500 on his body, to be paid on the other end. He was taken north by car, on a covert route along the Caspian Sea, then inland, then across a bridge over the Urmia River in northwestern Iran. "The first part of the journey was a little girl on a horse leading the way, then me on a horse, then a man walking behind us. 'Don't talk to anyone,' they said. I had only a coat, no gloves, Ferragamo shoes."

At one point, the group paused inside a small clay hut. At another, the smuggler in charge of Vahedi's escape met up with the group. "He was a huge man," Vahedi recalls, "big and strong. He could tell I was scared. He put his arms on [my shoulders] and gave

me courage. He said, 'You are going to make it. You are going to be okay.' He lent me his phone to call my wife."

It was after a short respite at another safe house that the death-defying journey began in earnest. "I was not told of the plan," Vahedi says. "I had no sense of time or how long it would take." If not for the kindness of an elderly Kurdish woman in the safe house, he believes he would have died from exposure. "She gave me a pair of gloves and tied a scarf around my head. She said, 'Shoes no good,' and gave me a warm pair."

Up into the mountains they rode in deep snow and bitter cold, through a maze of smugglers' trails. "Around and around we went," Vahedi says, apparently in an attempt to avoid the border guards. "There were wolves walking around us just 10 yards away. One [smuggler] had a stick, and he said, 'Don't be scared.'" Along the path, Vahedi spotted a dead horse, seemingly recently killed by a bullet in its side. He learned that horses know the route by rote, so smugglers will sometimes load contraband on their backs and send them down the mountainside on their own.

"The day my father chose to escape was a holy holiday," Kevin Vahedi says, noting that his is not the typical Persian-American family, at least in a religious sense. "My mother is a devout Muslim, and my wife is a Jew. The day was the Day of Ashura, which had its advantage. The guards were distracted."

The group passed over the top of the mountain and came to a secret meeting point. "We hid behind this single large stone," Vahedi says. "Somebody whistled. I was freezing—shivering. We were in Turkey now." There was a switch of horses, two new guides. "One man came up and hugged me to warm up." They began riding again, when "suddenly I just rolled off. I rolled and rolled, and when I came to a stop, I was crying in pain. I had injured my shoulder. I didn't care. I lay in the snow and thought, *Here I will die.*"

Instead, the smugglers took turns helping him, alternating between laying him over the horse's back and carrying him over their shoulders. Guards were still within earshot, so Vahedi bit his fingers to keep from screaming. After some time, he saw a little house. "They took me inside—it was warm!" Unable to move his fingers, a little girl fed him tea, then bread. He fell asleep. In the morning would be the final leg of his journey home.

The road from the Turkish border town to the bus station in the city of Van was rife with guard posts, Vahedi says. He sat quietly in the backseat of a car that had been loaded up with loaves of bread. Whether this was part of the smugglers' disguise or an amazing coincidence he never learned, but Vahedi believes the appearance that he was part of a bread-selling concern aided in his escape.

Still, even though he was out of Iran, he was not out of danger. It is alleged that Turkish police turn escapees back in to Iranian border guards in exchange for payoffs. Finally, Vahedi arrived at the bus station, where he began a 27-hour overnight trip to the capital of Ankara. When he made it to the U.S. Embassy, he was so exhausted and overwhelmed he just laid on the floor.

“A tall man—a Turkish national—comes over, looks at me and laughs. ‘Are you Mr. Vahedi?’ he says. ‘I was looking for you yesterday.’” The State Department in Washington had sent word. Embassy staff took him to a hotel, and he enjoyed a long, hot shower. Then came the shocking news: Although Turkey is an ally of the United States, it was Turkish policy to send back anyone caught entering illegally from Iran. And because Vahedi’s American passport did not have an entry stamp for Turkey, the local magistrate could deny him an exit visa. “If it wasn’t for Hillary Clinton’s staff at the State Department,” Freundlich says, her father-in-law might have been deported back to Iran.

Vahedi also credits the Embassy in Ankara. “The woman at the consulate said to me, ‘Over my dead body will I let them send you back.’ She took me to her own house. She said, ‘We’re not going to leave your side until [the airplane] is wheels up.’”

Eight months and one week to the day after leaving L.A. for what was supposed to be a short visit to his parents’ graves in Iran, Vahedi was escorted by two U.S. diplomats onto an airplane in Ankara to make his way home.

Vahedi’s story is one of courage, but it is also a cautionary tale. As Kevin Vahedi realizes all too well, when Americans go to Iran, they are playing dangerous games, and the stakes are their lives. “I doubt many Americans—certainly Persian Americans—realize this when they travel there,” he says.

“Iran is the country I was born in,” Vahedi himself sighs. “I served in the army. I was a dentist on the frontlines...in the first Iran-Iraq conflict.” It is where he, his wife and their children were born. Discussing this, the gentle yet stoic Vahedi chokes up, and it’s readily apparent why he does not want to retell his narrative to news organizations around the world.

The real story of what happened to him is much more than “the daring secret trek over the mountain,” as the classified State Department cable reads. Indeed, his physical escape meant a 1,000-mile odyssey across the Middle East. But on a personal level, the journey was much shorter—from his head to his heart. “America is my country now,” Vahedi says. “America saved my life. I feel proud to be an American. I did not know this, in this way, until now.”

Ahmad Batebi: "My heart is not Free"



Ahmad Batebi interview on how he was tortured for 9 years

CBS) Much of the attention on Iran over the last few years has focused on its mysterious nuclear program. Another mystery that has received far less attention is torture in Iran's prisons. It's a story the Iranian government doesn't want you to hear; a story a man risked his life to tell. His name is Ahmad Batebi, and quite by accident he became one of the most famous dissidents in Iran. He says he endured years of torture in an Iranian prison, after his picture appeared on the cover of The Economist magazine. He escaped from Iran last year, and told CNN's Anderson Cooper how he did it.

To escape from Iran, Batebi was smuggled by car, and then by donkey, through mountains and minefields. He documented the dangerous journey on his cell phone camera. The men who helped him were from an underground Kurdish group and they were taking him into Iraq. Batebi never intended to be a famous dissident. He wanted to be a photo journalist, but it was a picture of him that changed his life and almost got him killed. In July 1999, demonstrations rocked Tehran. Outraged by a government crackdown on dissent, students took to the streets. Batebi, a film major at Tehran University joined in. When police fired into the crowd, a student standing next to Batebi was hit. "The bullet hit the wall and ricocheted back into my friend's shoulder. I heard the bullet go by my face," Batebi remembered. "It sounded like a bumblebee going by my ear." Trying to help, Batebi took his friend's shirt off. "To put pressure on the wound. It was bleeding. And so I tried to use his shirt to keep the blood in. Then we took him to the medical facility," he recalled.

(CORBIS)After helping his friend, Batebi returned to the protest, and waved the bloody

shirt to show what police had done. That's when a photographer took a picture of Batebi that would appear on the cover of The Economist and was seen around the world. Just days after the picture appeared, the government arrested him. "They took me to a special prison for intelligence. And I was in solitary confinement for several months. After seven or eight months we went to court, but they didn't tell me where we were going. I was blindfolded, and I thought this was just part of my questioning. They sat me in a room and opened my blindfold," Batebi told Cooper. That's when a judge showed him The Economist. Batebi told Cooper it was the first time he had seen the magazine. He says the judge told him, "With this picture, you have signed your own death sentence." "He said, 'You have defaced the face of the Islamic Republic that is a representative of God on earth. You have defaced it around the world. And therefore you have to be sentenced to death.' It took less than three minutes," Batebi recalled. He was held in the notorious Evin Prison, on the outskirts of Tehran, which 60 Minutes could only photograph secretly from our hotel window. Batebi says he spent 17 months in solitary confinement, trapped in a tiny cell not much bigger than a bathtub. "They kept the light on 24 hours a day. You have no information about the outside. You have no contact with the outside, and after a while you become mentally disoriented. This kind of torture doesn't affect you physically, but it does affect you mentally and emotionally." "It can drive you crazy," Cooper remarked. "Yes," Batebi agreed. Psychological torture is one thing, physical torture another. And Batebi says there was plenty of that too. "They kicked me in the teeth and broke them. There was a toilet that was stopped up with feces. They put my head into the toilet," he said. Batebi told Cooper the bottom of his feet and his back were beaten with a cable, and that his testicles were beaten as well. Asked how long this went on for, Batebi said, "This happened the whole time I was in solitary confinement. It also happened at other times."

Read his story of Great Escape [Here!](#)

ESCAPE FROM EVIN

I had a piece out in Saturday's Times about an Iranian dissident journalist, Shahabaddin Sheikhi, who had an extraordinarily lucky escape from Tehran's notorious Evin Prison.

Sheikhi had been writing about women's rights and Kurdish issues and had also been active in the Green Movement following the regime's disgraceful stitch up of the last elections.

For doing this he was facing charges which would have resulted in lengthy imprisonment or even execution. Sheikhi was rounded up along with thousands of others on the anniversary of the Iranian revolution in February.

As the prison was overloaded with an intake of new prisoners, he was able to surreptitiously join a group of those being released.

Those with a subscription can read the story [here](#).

Dissident's Tale of Epic Escape From Iran's Vise



Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times

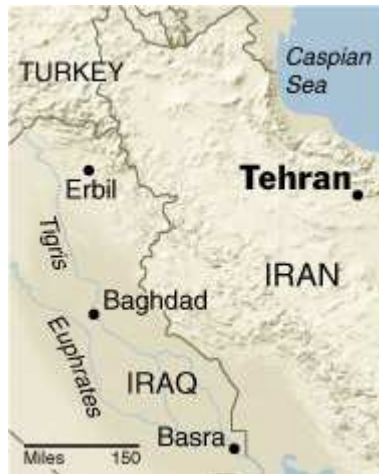
Ahmad Batebi, a dissident who escaped from Iran, crossed into Iraq and made it to the United States, in Virginia last week with his lawyer, Lily Mazahery.

[WASHINGTON](#) — After three days on the run, Ahmad Batebi picked his way down a rocky slope to the stream that marked [Iran](#)'s border with [Iraq](#). His Kurdish guides, who had led Mr. Batebi, an Iranian dissident, through minefields and dodged nighttime gunfire from border guards, passed him to a new team of shadowy human smugglers.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



A photograph of Mr. Batebi in 1999 holding a protester's bloody shirt altered the course of his life.



With the aid of Kurdish guides, Mr. Batebi was able to cross into Iraq.

At the age of 31, after nearly eight years in Iranian prisons, subjected to torture and twice taken to the gallows and fitted with a noose, Mr. Batebi had fled.

But in Iraq, his former captors had one more chilling message for him. Not long after his arrival in Erbil in March, the new cellphone provided by [United Nations](#) officials rang. Mr. Batebi was shocked to hear the familiar voice of the chief interrogator at one of Iran's notorious prisons.

"We know where you are," the interrogator said. "You must turn yourself in."

Instead, Mr. Batebi, one of Iran's best-known dissidents, received permission to enter the United States. He arrived on June 24.

In several lengthy interviews, Mr. Batebi provided an unusual window on Iran under its ruling clerics. His alienation began at age 9, when he witnessed a deadly stoning. He rose to fame in 1999, appearing on the cover of *The Economist* magazine holding the bloody T-shirt of a fellow student demonstrator — an image he first saw when a judge slapped it before him and declared, “You have signed your own death sentence.” Finally, after a decade of political combat, he reluctantly decided to abandon Iran for an uncertain exile.

His escape has prompted a paroxysm of denunciation in Iran's controlled news media, which have accused him of defrauding creditors and suggested that he has long been in league with the United States and Israel, claims that human rights groups dismiss as crude propaganda.

From his Yahoo blog, Mr. Batebi has replied, posting the taunt, “Your hands will never reach me” and the instruction “Click here.” The photograph that pops up shows the dissident, an Iranian [Johnny Depp](#) with a ponytail and a satisfied expression, posing in front of the United States Capitol.

While some details of Mr. Batebi's biography, his treatment in Iran and his escape could not be independently confirmed, he provided a video he took during his journey, and independent advocates vouched for much of his account.

He knows he has arrived during a time of tension between Iran and the United States, and he said he did not want his story to heighten the conflict.

Wary of being viewed as a pawn of American policy, he said that the United States played no role in his departure from Iran, a fact American officials confirmed. The United States did give him permission to enter this country “out of concern for his safety,” said Gordon D. Johndroe, the spokesman for the [National Security Council](#). He said Mr. Batebi attended a courtesy meeting with N.S.C. staff members on Friday.

Despite Mr. Batebi's soft-spoken Persian, translated by Lily Mazahery, an Iranian-American lawyer who is helping him resettle, his contempt for Iran's rulers is palpable. But he does not want a violent revolution. “No one with a healthy brain wants a

revolution without a plan for what comes after,” he said. “That’s what happened in 1979.”

An Awakening

Mr. Batebi may have inherited his jaundiced view of his country’s leaders. After the Islamic revolution of 1979, his father, a customs bureaucrat who had fallen out of favor with the shah’s regime, declined to join the [Revolutionary Guards](#). His mother, a first-grade teacher, taught him and his younger brother and sister a mild, Golden Rule Islam that had little in common with the ayatollahs’ harsh theology.

His own awakening began in fourth grade, when his teacher, fed up with the distortions of an official history textbook, burst out: “Go out and read other things to try to get the truth.”

“The teacher probably doesn’t even remember,” Mr. Batebi said. “But he changed the course of my life.”

A few weeks later came the stoning. Though forbidden by his mother, he slipped out of the house to see the commotion near his school. He saw a man, accused of adultery, buried to the waist, his head covered with a sack that turned red as Revolutionary Guards hurled chunks of concrete. A mullah standing atop a wall gave the orders, and an ambivalent crowd of neighbors looked on.

“I was utterly shocked,” he recalled. “My hands and legs were shaking.” Afterward, he suffered from nightmares.

Years later, he would witness public hangings and dismemberments. “But nothing had the impact of that stoning,” he said. “I thought, This can’t be Islam.”

At the University of Tehran in the mid-1990s, Mr. Batebi embraced his photojournalism studies and made two dozen short films with existentialist themes, often with his own electric guitar for a soundtrack. He also joined in student protests, getting arrested three times. In fervent late-night discussions, he recalled, one admired model was the Rev. [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

The demonstrations exploded in 1999 in what would become known as 18 Tir, the date according to the Iranian calendar. In a wave of protests that threatened the 20-year-old

regime, hundreds of students demonstrated against the closing of a newspaper, Salam. Mr. Batebi, busy making his senior thesis film about drug addiction, stumbled upon the demonstrators and joined in.

When the police fired into a crowd, a bullet hit a young man next to Mr. Batebi, who pulled off the student's shirt to try to stanch the bleeding. After carrying the wounded man to a makeshift clinic, he held up the shirt to warn other students against marching outside.

A photographer caught the moment. Mr. Batebi was already in jail when *The Economist* published his picture, putting him in far greater peril. When the judge hearing his case showed him the magazine, Mr. Batebi reacted with both fear and perverse pride.

"At first I was shocked and scared," he said. "But then I thought that even though they're going to kill me, I've caused a major blow to the regime."

Confined and Tortured

Mr. Batebi described 17 months in solitary confinement, including repeated torture by interrogators trying to force him to say on television that the famous T-shirt was stained with paint or animal blood.

His jailers thrashed him with a metal cable, beat his testicles and kicked in his teeth, he said. They held his face down in a pool of excrement. They tied his arms behind his back and hung him from the ceiling. At other times, strapping him to a chair, they kept him awake night after night, cutting him and rubbing salt into the wounds.

To stave off madness, he said, he fought back. "If the interrogator cursed me, I would curse him back," he said. "If the interrogator hit me, I'd try to hit him back."

Twice he was led blindfolded to the gallows. Once the noose was left around his neck for 45 minutes, and he passed out from fear, he recalled. The second time, he sat, waiting, as a prisoner on each side of him was hanged.

The photo that so infuriated the authorities may have saved him, as advocates around the world took up his cause. His death sentence, for "agitating people to create unrest," was commuted, first to 15 years and then to 10.

In 2005, allowed a day pass to take exams for a sociology degree, he decided to flee. He remained free for five months, working in the political underground and marrying a young dentist. But after she was jailed because of his activities, they agreed to end their union, he said.

After Mr. Batebi was rearrested in 2006, the harshest treatment stopped. But he was sometimes forced to watch his friends being tormented. Last year, after Mr. Batebi suffered what was probably a stroke and several seizures, he was released for medical treatment.

In March, he was ordered to return to prison. He knew that supporters wanted him to keep up the fight from behind bars, but he was worn out. “I couldn’t do more than I had,” he said. “Everyone needs a life.”

An Underground Railroad

On a Yahoo chat site, on March 13, Mr. Batebi contacted Ms. Mazahery, the lawyer, who he knew had helped other Iranians get into the United States. At the same time, through a connection made in prison, Mr. Batebi sought help from the underground Kurdish [Democratic Party](#) of Iran, which soon directed him to Argentine Square in Tehran.

To his surprise, his Kurdish helpers — volunteers whose real names he never learned — said he had to leave immediately, taking advantage of the authorities’ lax attention during the Iranian New Year holidays. Carrying only a backpack containing his Dell laptop computer, a camera and a pocket-size video recorder, he retrieved some money from an A.T.M. and climbed into the strangers’ car.

The next two days were a blur, he said, as he was driven in a series of cars on a circuitous route to the northwestern border with Iraq, a straight-line distance of about 300 miles. Once, his ride was with a family. Another time, it was with a mother and her baby. A third time, he was directed to board a bus.

With many precautions, the Kurdish underground railroad moved him to the border — he will not say exactly where. Then a new five-man team took over.

For a day and a half, with burros carrying supplies, they moved along the border, which was patrolled by guards and protected by land mines. One of the escorts walked ahead to ensure that the way was clear, Mr. Batebi said.

They heard sniper fire and occasional artillery bombardments, but never came under direct fire. Mr. Batebi's tiny camera captured shaky images of the burros traversing the dry, rocky hills and gullies. Peering over bluffs, the group could see the flags of two nations facing one another at lonely border posts.

On March 20, when Mr. Batebi's guides handed him over to new Kurdish guides in Iraq, he said, he felt no elation.

"Suddenly I was very scared," he said. "I was like a baby who's been separated from his mother and has stepped into a world of which he knows nothing."

A Tense Stop in Iraq

His protectors brought him to the Erbil offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which began the laborious process necessary to move an Iranian with no passport and little identification to a new land.

His Kurdish allies believed that an Iranian hit team was hunting for him, so he was moved from one safe house to another for three months.

He was shaken one day by the unexpected phone call from the Iranian interrogator, a man known by the prison pseudonym Javad Javadi. Mr. Batebi sought to turn the tables on the interrogator, firing questions back at him and capturing a digital recording of one of the calls, but he knew he had to get out.

The United Nations was arranging a placement in Sweden when Ms. Mazahery called to say that the United States had granted Mr. Batebi's request for "humanitarian parole," a relatively rare measure used in cases of danger or political importance.

An Opposition Icon

When his flight from Vienna landed at Dulles Airport in Virginia in late June, Mr. Batebi was astonished to see that the airport worker waving the jet into the gate was a Muslim woman wearing a tight head scarf.

Mr. Batebi was enthralled, sensing a casual tolerance that was exactly what he had longed for in his own country. “It seems to me that people here are free to live their lives, as long as they do no harm to anyone else,” he said.

There are more distinguished figures in the Iranian opposition, people who have spent decades in the struggle, as Mr. Batebi is quick to acknowledge. But he is discovering that few are so recognizable. For the Iranian diaspora, The Economist’s 1999 photo remains an iconic image.

Mr. Batebi was a little nonplussed, Ms. Mazahery said, when an Iranian-American woman outside a Washington grocery store walked past him a few days ago, did a double take and called out his name. When he said that, yes, he was Mr. Batebi, the long-imprisoned dissident, she burst into tears.

Zahir Janmohamed of [Amnesty International](#) USA called Mr. Batebi “grounded and humble” about his role.

“As a human rights activist, Batebi’s credentials are unquestionable,” Mr. Janmohamed said.

But he warned that now, as Mr. Batebi joins an exile community whose rivalries are legendary, many factions would seek to recruit him.

Mr. Batebi speaks of working from afar for peaceful change in Iran. He recoils when asked about the possibility of American military action against Iran, saying that if the United States attacked, “I might go back and fight for my country myself.”

He has some ordinary goals, the dreams of a man who spent most of his 20s in a prison cell. He wants to study politics and sociology, he said, and work as a photojournalist. He wants to play guitar. He thought for a moment, then he remembered one more modest ambition.

“I want to fish!” Mr. Batebi said, his face relaxing into a smile. “I’m going to go fishing!”

ALL ABOUT HOA LO PRISON

** What’s kind of material of the wall, the door, window, loc made it become a unbreakable museum?*

- Bricks and tiles were tailor – made with extra thickness.

-

The surrounded wall was built by with steel rod and stone, 4m high and 0.5m thick. It topped with pieces of broken glass and bare wire connected to high-voltage electricity.

- All locks, doors, and windows were imported from France.

- In addition, all jails were careful collected from other prisons, who were infamous for their cruelty.

** Was there any other prisons built by the French governor in Vietnam? Where were they? How terribly they were?*

-

The first prison was built by the French colonial government in Vietnam was Con Dao prison in 1861. It was built on an isolated island and especially for political prisoners. This prison is well known for its ‘tiger cases’ with hundreds kinds of savage tortures.

- In 1908,

their third prison were built at Son La province. This one is also only for political prisoner but from the North of Vietnam. Its harsh weather, bad conditions and fatal illnesses made this prison become another ‘hell on earth’ which confined more than 1000 prisoners between 1930 and 1945.

4. LIVING IN THE PRISON:

** What kind of prisoner would be kept in the prison? Where did they go next?*

- There were 2 kinds of prisoners would be detained in Hoa Lo:

- those who were waiting for appearing before a court,
- those who were sentenced less than 5 years
- those who were sentenced for death.

-

If they were sentenced to 5 years upward, or above 20 years of servitude or life penalty would be transferred to other prisons in Son La (Northwest of Hanoi) and Con Dao (an island in the South of Vietnam).

** How did prisoner live?*

- In shared room:

- There were about 25-30 of prisoners in one room, they were fettered most of the time and had one shared toilet in this room.
- Everyday, they had 2 meals of rotten rice, stunted vegetables, rotten dried fish and rarely with tough buffalo or old sow meat.
- Had 15' everyday for a walk and a bath. All of them had to stand naked around a round tank built in the centre of the yard and to pour water very quickly onto their body while the guards and jailers watched them.

- In cachot:

- Cachot was special cell to punish political prisoners who were leaders of struggles in this prison.
- The punished prisoners would be moved to a single, dark and tiny room, their legs were fettered and they have to sit all the time on a sloping cements floor. This position is very inconvenience, they couldn't sleep for several days.

5. FIGHTING IN THE PRISON?

During

their time in this prison, Vietnamese patriots' public struggle is for a better condition so as not to be killed little by little. They also had a secret fighting to develop a Communist movement inside the prison life.

** Public struggle: How did the Vietnamese patriots fight against the jailer?*

-

They went on a hunger-strike despite the torture of the enemy which killed some of their comrades and the chief jailer had to accept their request, stopping feeding the prisoners by rotten rice and vegetables.

- The prisoners requested to be treated as political prisoners, to stop insulting the prisoners.

** Secret fighting: How did they exchange the Communist document and express a newspaper in the prison*

-

The revolutionists made the prison a school where they trained themselves to the communist ideology, the iron will in their fighting, and to literacy.

- The first

unit of the Communist Party was formed in this prison in the 1930s. The unit led and organized various combats in the prison.

- They wrote various documents such as “The Human’s Evolution”, “The Communism in Sketch” and exchange to each other.

-

The training courses in politics for 15-20 people were run continuously à different publications namely The Red prison, The Prisoner’s Life came out.

- They used pieces of coal and bricks as pens, and cigarette pack and cement floor as notebooks.
- They invented special kinds of ink to write their secret documents. The ink was 2 types of medicine namely mercurochrome which had red color, and methylene blue: both were taken from the healthcare centre. The diluted mercurochrome used as ink made the writing invisible. To read it, the prisoners would soak it in the liquid of cooked rice. The jailers were surprised and scared when they once discovered kilograms of documents and books and newspapers written with tiny letters and hidden skillfully in the 4 bare walls of the cells.
- The documents were hidden at every unexpected corners, like foot of almond trees, waste bin, stone wall...

** The tropical almond tree – the most useful tree in this prison. The prisoners used up every part of this tree*

- Young leaves and ripen fruit were healthy food for fragile prisoners.
- Applying heated leaves compresses to reduce pain.
- Tree bark was used one kind of tradition medicine, which can cure cholera
- Small branches was for pen holder or chopticks.

6. ESCAPING FROM THE PRISON

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The French believed that they had an unbreakable prison. It was quite true in the first 36 years until the first prison-break happened in 1932 by 7 prisoners. These prisoners pretended to have seriously ill and had been moved to a hospital, where they successfully fled with helps from their friends and relatives.

-

In 1945: in the time of second world war, the French lost and was replaced by Japanese army in Indochina. Taking advantages of this disorder, many prisoners escaped:

- Political prisoners mixed with common criminals, then exchange their uniform with normal clothes from visitors and walked out of the prison decently.
- More than hundred of them escape by sewer way. They removed the manhole cover and follow this dirty sewer system to get out of the prison.

- The most famous jail-break happened in 1951: when 17 prisoners under death sentence organized a escape from sewer tube.

- When they had a out door break (15 minutes everyday), one of them crept into a sewer and used a tiny saw which made of a cylinder to saw its iron bar, whilst others were singing or speaking loudly to drown the noise of this action.
- On the Xmas night 1954, following the broken sewer, the 17 prisoner break out of this prison. Unfortunately, when they open sewer door and stepped on the street, they met a group of patrolman, there were only 5 of them survival and escaped successfully.

7. TORTURE IN THE PRISON

* *Torture:*

-

When conducting the restoration, the staff here met many Vietnamese veteran, who spent part of their lifetime in this prison and asked them to write down what they remember about the prison life. In their stories, they all called this prison as 'hell of earth' by its hundreds kinds of torture.

- Hanging prisoners up or down for beating.
- Electric shock at their head or heart.
- Beating prisoners with boxing
- Stuff prisoners' body with clothes soaked with gasoline and burn
- Putting prisoners into a empty tank and beat from the outside which made their hearing and nerve seriously damaged.
- Many other frightened, shameless and savage with both male and female prisoners

** The guillotine*

- This is one of two original guillotines which were imported from French when the construction project completed.

-

The executions often happened in public in a open yard just in front of the prison to admonish Hanoian. Sometimes, they brought them to other prisons to execute Vietnamese patriots and persecuted local people.

-

Number of Vietnamese revolutionist beheaded by this guillotine is uncountable. Many of them die since they were very young. The youngest one is only 19 year old.

** The death row:*

-

Prisoners who sentenced to be death were detained and waited for the due date. They were fettered on the cement floor all day and night, and did everything at that one place

8. HANOI HILTON

** When did the US aircraft bomb Hanoi ? And why did they bomb Hanoi ? Why did they stop?*

-

During the war time, Hanoi was bombed twice seriously. The main purposes of these bombings is to 'pushed them back into the Stone Age'. By destroying Northern infrastructure, the American hope to break off supporting from the Northern people to the Southern soldiers.

- The first attack – Operation Rolling Thunder – began on March 1965 (?) and ran through October 1968. In that period, twice the tonnage of bombs was dropped on Vietnam and Laos.
- The second attack lasted for only 12 days in December 1972, the American used the B52 to drop bombs from the unreachable heights, for burning civilians with chemicals, for supporting any corrupt. A quarter of all buildings had been destroyed; tens of thousands of people were dead and almost one half of the population evacuated.

-

However, Vietnamese soldiers were successful in innovating aided rockets from Soviet Union and used them to shot down several B52, which was definitely unpredicted by the US strategists. In addition with pressure from many other foreign governments and struggles in their own country, after 12 days, they had to stop bombing Hanoi and later on, signed the Paris agreement, in which they accepted to withdraw US forces out of Vietnam.

** How many US pilots was captured and kept in Hanoi Hilton? Where did Vietnamese government decided to keep US pilots? Why?*

- There were over 300 hundred of US pilots were detained in Hoa Lo from 1965 to 1973.

-

Actually, the number of captured US pilots was much higher but they were kept in several places, not only in this prison. But keeping US pilots right in the city centre is a strategy of Communist government to stop US aircraft bombing Hanoi.

** How did they live?*

-

The photos and exhibition shows that the US prisoners had a quite comfortable situation, they had time for playing, learning and practising their religions.

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However, according to many foreign documents, the exhibited pictures and room may not show exactly happened to the US pilots, we known some opposite opinion about how hard it was with the US pilots. Maybe, we still see every thing in our own side.

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But we believe that it was certainly no worse than what Vietnamese prisoners suffered at the hands of the French. And after all, this is our country. We did not ask to be attacked by foreign powers.

** Famous prisoners?*

-

The most famous US prisoner is Mr. Pete Peterson. He was detained in the prison. 20 years later, he came back as the first USA the ambassador to Vietnam become the first US Ambassador to Vietnam following the re-establishment of diplomatic ties between two countries in 1995.

- Mr. John McCain – an American senator – spent five years in this prison. His plan was shot down in 1967 and he was fished out of Hanoi's Truc Bach lake by a Vietnamese civilian with a broken leg and arms. He was in Hanoi Hilton until 1973.

Reference: 'Kể chuyện nhà tù Hỏa Lò' – Lê Văn Ba – Ethnic Culture Publisher – Hanoi 2006

HOA LO PRISON (THE HANOI HILTON)

Hoa Lo Prison (The Hanoi Hilton). This prison was built by the French at the turn of the 20th century, in classical French prison design. This is where the French imprisoned

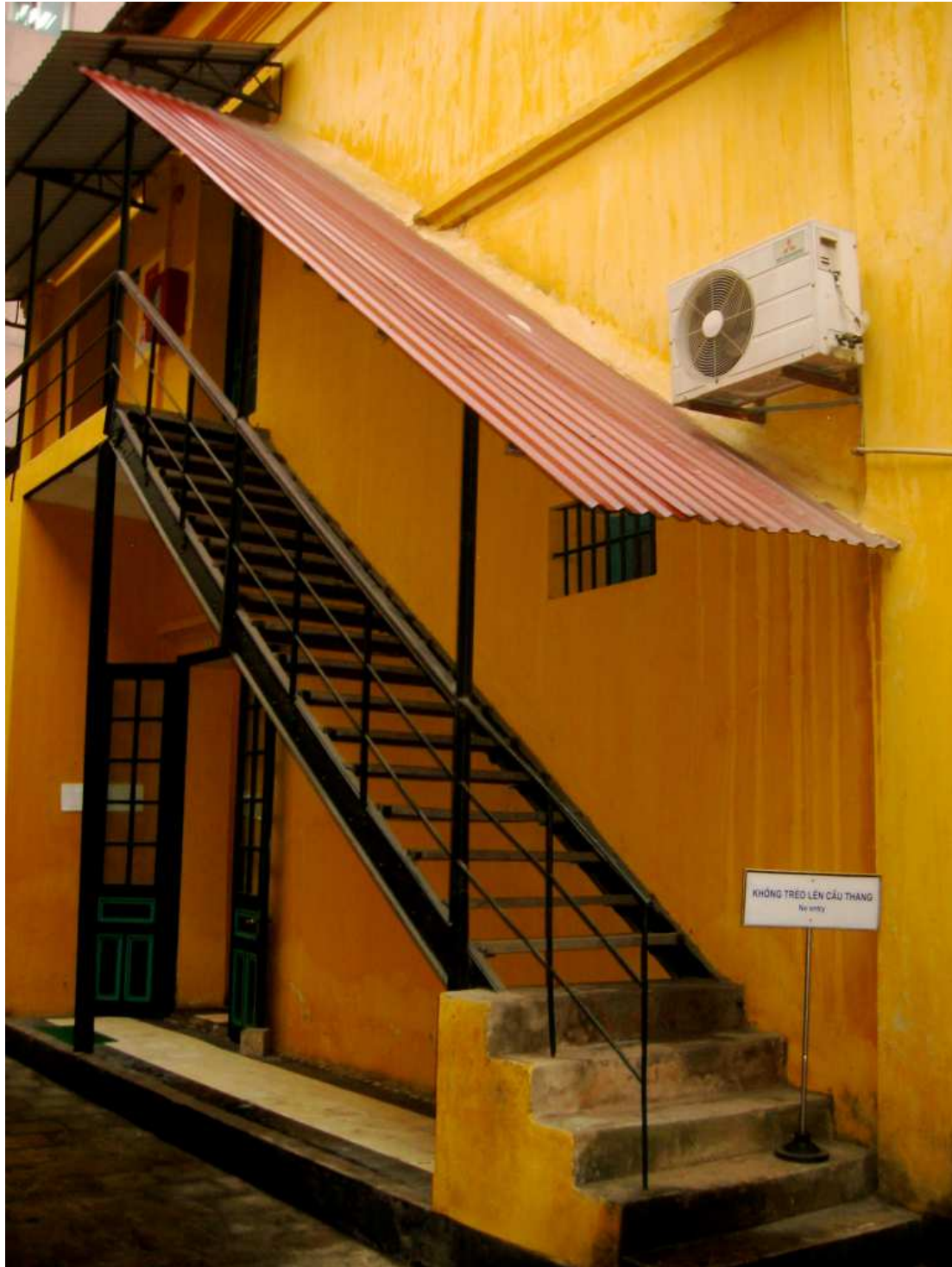
and executed many of the Vietnamese freedom fighters. Now a museum (2/3 of the prison was torn down to make way for the Hanoi Towers), the museum exhibits the brutal French colonial regime and the struggle of the Vietnamese people against imperialism in chilling detail. The prison was also known as the “Hanoi Hilton” during the Vietnam War as it held American POW’s shot down. Little emphasis is given to this period however, and the exhibits shown can be frustratingly skewed in propaganda, choosing to show solely propaganda photos of prisoners being treated well and playing basketball, playing chess, and other staged events. They also claim to have John McCain’s flight suit from when his plane was shot down.

The prison displays focus on the sufferings of Vietnamese revolutionaries who were confined (and sometimes executed) here, when the French were the masters of Vietnam in the early part of the 20th century.

Hoa Lo Prison is worth a visit, if only to experience the colonial experience as the Vietnamese see fit to tell it, and guess at the stories untold by the silent walls and shackles on prominent display.

What you see of the present-day Hoa Lo Prison is actually only the small southern section of the entire prison complex back in the day; most of the prison was demolished in the mid-1990s to make way for the Hanoi Towers, a shiny office and hotel complex so steeped in capitalism it would have horrified Ho Chi Minh.

The present-day complex can be entered through the gate on Hoa Lo Street, known by Vietnamese inmates as “the Monster’s Mouth”. This door is emblazoned with the words *Maison Centrale*, or “central house”, a common French euphemism for city prisons. (The prison in Conakry, Guinea is still known as *Maison Centrale* to this day.)



STAIR CASE TO THE SECOND FLOOR CELLS



ENTRANCE TO THE HANOI HILTON

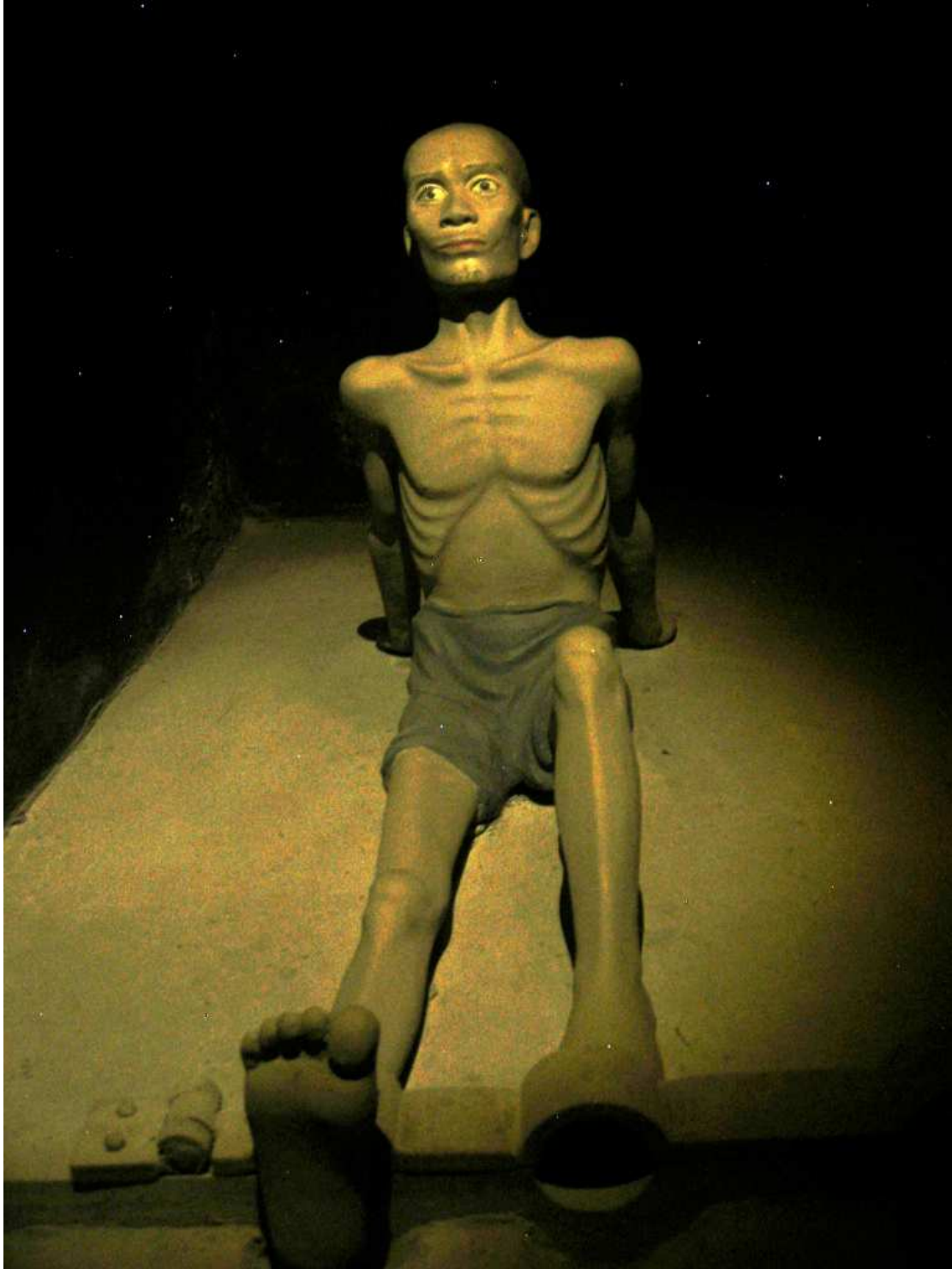


A large iron gate that looms over the room. The gate used to stand at the "mouth of the monster" (the front door through which visitors troop through to enter Hoa Lo Prison);

today, this massive steel hulk is the main attraction in a room that introduces visitors to the cruelty and horror experienced by prisoners in Hoa Lo.



SHACKLED PRISONERS IN STOCKADE "E", HAO LAO PRISON -The "E" stockade is a long room with life-size models of Vietnamese prisoners shackled in two rows, with the latrine on one end of the room. As one can imagine from the picture, life as a political prisoner in Hoa Lo was no picnic. Prisoners were confined in horrifying conditions, fed rotting food twice daily, and were allowed only fifteen minutes' respite from their chains every day. Academic Peter Zinoman, writing in his book *The Colonial Bastille: a History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940*, **SHACKLED PRISONERS IN STOCKADE "E" HAO LAO PRISON**



PRISONER IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT -The cachot, or dungeon, where dangerous or suicidal prisoners were kept in solitary confinement. In each narrow cell, a prisoner was shackled to the concrete floor, and the area was kept under tight guard.



IN THE OUTSIDE AREA IS THE SEWER USED IN AN ESCAPE IN 1951 -Once you exit the solitary area, you will walk down a long outdoor corridor where several memorials to Vietnamese prisoners stand, including a sewer through which five Vietnamese death-row inmates escaped on Christmas Eve in 1951. Hoa Lo was never "escape proof" despite its fearsome reputation - several successful jailbreaks were recorded throughout the prison's long history. Prisoners once managed to walk right out of the prison door; in the confused transition between French and Japanese authority at the close of World War II, some prisoners simply changed out of their prison clothes and casually made their escape.



PORTABLE GUILLOTINE -A guillotine stands against one wall to underscore the gruesome executions that took place here; a vintage photograph of three guillotined heads is posted next to it. This particular guillotine was portable - its personal best was known to have taken place at Yen Bai Prison, where eleven members of a nationalist

group died by its blade. MEMORIAL WALL HOA LO PRISON - the largest outdoor area in Hoa Lo Prison: a memorial monument to the honored dead of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement. To Americans, this monument may present a jarring disconnect - after all, weren't we raised to believe the "Hanoi Hilton" was a symbol of oppression? But Hoa Lo Prison casts a different shadow on Vietnamese history - under the French, the prison was a crucible for revolution, and those who died in its unspeakable conditions are regarded today by the Vietnamese as martyrs. The American POW experience in Hoa Lo, which we will see next, merits but a small footnote in the history of the prison, and the history of Vietnam at large.

Policeman searching jail finds tunnel... and thwarts escape plan of up to 50 inmates

- **Three prisoners overheard digging their hole in early hours of the morning**

A policeman searching a jail discovered a 30ft-long escape tunnel under the wall in Paraguay which up to 50 inmates were plotting to use to breakout.

Three prisoners had been using an old spade they found in the prison to burrow their way under the outer wall apparently without detection.

They managed to connect their tunnel to another hole under the wall which had already been dug, according to local reports.



Breakout: Prison guard Miguel Barrios clammers out of the hole that three inmates had dug under the wall. It took him around 10 minutes to get through the narrow tunnel

But their plan to help as many as 50 prisoners escape from Paraguay's highest-security prison was foiled by prison guard Miguel Barrios who heard what was going on.

As they tried to break through concrete in the early hours of the morning staff went to investigate and the plot was foiled.

The Tacumbu prison guard managed to get out through the hole the inmates had dug onto the street outside. The group's spade was normally used to throw out rubbish.

The men involved in the attempted jailbreak were named as Hilario Villalba Álvarez, who is serving 25 years behind bars as well as Arnaldo Bobadilla Garay and Ramón Cáceres who are in prison for aggravated robbery.



Escape: Paraguayan police watch as the guard emerges from the 30ft-long tunnel out of Tacumbu jail

Artemio Vera, director of the prison, said following the attempted escape all inmates had been counted and no-one was missing.

He told Radio Cardinal: 'As the prisoner tried to break a block of cement, he alerted the guards, because at 4am it was rare to have that kind of activity.'

Mr Vera added that the three men will now all be disciplined.

'They will be put into isolation and then we will try to get them transferred to another jail,' he said.

The tunnel was started from inside a prison cell next to the thick outer wall.



Cracking the case: Prison directors said no one escaped through the tunnel which three prisoners had dug