

The Langley Files: CIA's Podcast
FILE 013 – PART II
The Side of the Argo Mission You've Never Heard - Exfiltration

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Walter: At CIA, we work around the clock and across the globe to help keep Americans and others around the world safe. Secrecy is often vital to our work.

Dee: But we're committed to sharing what we can when we can. So let us be your guides around the halls of Langley as we open our files and speak with those who have dedicated themselves to this mission.

Walter: These are their stories.

Walter and Dee: This is The Langley Files.

Walter: Welcome back, everyone, to Part Two of our mission report on the Argo operation—CIA's long-classified mission to rescue six Americans stranded in Iran after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and sneak them out of the country disguised as—of all things—a film crew.

Dee: We're bringing you a moment-by-moment account of this operation, courtesy of Brent, a member of CIA's cadre of in-house historians, and Rob, the Director of our CIA Museum.

Walter: We're also bringing you a side of the operation that's never before been publicly revealed. In the Academic Award-winning film Argo, Ben Affleck plays the real-life CIA disguise expert, Tony Mendez, who plans the operation and sneaks into Iran solo to carry it out. But in real life, a second CIA officer went with him - also putting himself on the line in this effort to bring the six Americans home.

Dee: The second officer was Ed Johnson, a fellow CIA exfiltration specialist—someone with years of experience in quietly getting people out of dangerous places. Ed participated in a recorded debriefing on these events some years ago here at CIA, and—for the first time ever—we're bringing you parts of that audio, to hear about the operation in Ed's own words.

Walter: Now, there are several very diverse angles to this story. One is Hollywood. Working with legendary makeup and special effects expert John Chambers, who is in on the ruse, Tony creates a fake motion picture production studio and chooses a film that he and Ed will pretend to be scouting for in Iran: Argo.

Dee: Another angle is Canada. The six Americans are US State Department employees who managed to escape being taken hostage when the US Embassy is overrun by armed protestors. Now, they're being sheltered by Canadian diplomats—the Canadian Ambassador, Ken Taylor and his wife, and other members of their staff—and all of whom are themselves assuming immense risk on behalf of their neighbors to the south. It is with their country's extraordinary cooperation that CIA undertakes this mission.

Walter: In fact, Tony and Ed have procured authentic Canadian passports courtesy of Canada's Parliament. They've filled those passports out with information consistent with their cover stories, and

they've carried those passports into Iran, to rendezvous with the Americans in hiding, teach them how to impersonate a film crew, and sneak the entire group out of the country.

Dee: When we last left Tony and Ed, they used a local map to navigate to what they thought was the Canadian Embassy—because an official US government map would be too alerting if they were to be detained. However, upon arrival, it became clear it was the wrong location—and they instead find themselves at the Swedish Embassy, right across the street from none other than the US Embassy.

Walter: Where at that moment, armed Iranian revolutionaries are holding the other Americans hostage in a standoff that the whole world is watching.

Dee: So, let's hear what happens next.

(music ends)

Dee: Here's Brent, the in-house CIA historian that we've been speaking with.

(music begins)

Brent: And so they go to the security guard, working the outer layer of defense there at the Swedish Embassy, and they try to speak to him in English, and they try to speak to him in French, and they try to speak to him in German, and he doesn't speak any of these languages. They're trying to ask for directions where to go. While they're talking to this guy, one of these young revolutionary types with a with a full beard—and in Iran at the time, that was a symbol that you're a revolutionary, is to grow your beard out—so one of these young revolutionary types comes with his his full beard and his army jacket looking very stereotypical hostage taker, and he comes across the street and he intervenes in their little interaction, which Tony talked about in his book as being quite a tense moment.

Walter: Let's turn back to Ed for a moment.

Ed: And this kid came over from the Embassy, and all the demonstrators were there, and they were quiet because the camera trucks weren't there and the red light wasn't on, they were they were just chilling in there. He came over and he said you know, what's what's wrong, what's wrong, what's wrong?

Brent: And he starts to berate the guard. The Iranian guard at the Swedish Embassy. And they're not sure what he's saying. And so then he turns to them and asked them, you know, who are they and what are they doing there? And I think he does so in German and, well, Ed speaks German.

Ed: As it turned out, he was he had spent a year in Germany, was a student, so I spoke in German to him. And we chatted a bit.

Brent: So Ed starts to converse with him in German and explains to him that they're Canadians and trying to find the Canadian Embassy, at which point the guy becomes very friendly.

Ed: And oh, you want to go to the Embassy of Canada. He writes, writes an address out on a piece paper and then calls a cab over. And he hands the papers to the cabbie.

Brent: Um, he shows them on their map, where the Canadian Embassy is. He writes the address on a piece of paper. He hails a taxi. The taxi comes. He gives the slip of paper to the cab driver explains to the cab driver to please take these people to the Canadian Embassy. Ed and Tony tried to tip him for his help, and he refuses.

Ed: He wouldn't even take, I offered him a tip.

Brent: And, you know, it's it's all it's all very polite and very cordial. And and and Tony even mentions in his book that, you know, he he wound up being a nice guy that had helped him, and the irony was that he was he was very likely involved in the hostage taking.

Ed: I have to thank the Iranians for being the beacon who got us to the right place...

(music ends)

Dee: Crazy. So good Samaritan slash bad guy assistance getting to the Canadian Embassy. What happens at that point?

Brent: So when they get to the Canadian Embassy, they meet with the Ambassador. He knows that they're coming. He's been he's been told that they're coming in, and so he meets with the they meet with the Ambassador and his head of security. And, they start to, discuss next steps. The Ambassador then takes them to his residence where the houseguests are holed up.

Walter: Wow. How have the six Americans, the so-called house guests, been holding up this whole time? Has there been concern that their location is under surveillance—or that the Iranian forces have noticed the very fact that they're missing from the larger group of Americans being held hostage elsewhere in the city?

Brent: So yea, there was a military helicopter that flew over the neighborhood where the Canadian Ambassador lived while the houseguests were there and that that made people pretty nervous, but, you know, for the most part, I think that the greatest struggle that they had, it wasn't that there were people going door to door. It wasn't that intense. But the greatest struggle that they had was just keeping their sanity, not being able to go outside, and not knowing, you know, how close are people? Are they looking for us? They didn't even know if it was known that they had escaped. In the film, there's a whole depiction of the famously shredded documents at the Embassy of people piecing them back together, and and that was real. That really happened. But there's no, there's no sort of historical evidence that they piece together those documents in the amount of time it took to figure out there are six diplomats missing. I don't think that's actually the case, so we don't really know that there was an active search going on for them. There may have been, but I think that it was the not knowing that was the hardest part on the houseguests, you know, having to stay indoors. And, they talked about playing playing so much Scrabble that they were wearing the board out. Uh, you know, this kind of thing.

Dee: Okay, so the Americans are safe but maybe a little stir crazy when Tony and Ed meet them. So how does that conversation go?

Brent: They start to brief them, and inform them about what the what the plan is, probably to the shock and dismay, it was to the shock and dismay of some of them, according to Tony, but very quickly, all but one came around to the idea that this was this was feasible. This was doable. It was just weird enough to work.

Dee: So they're they're really taking a chance that these six Americans are going to be able to pull off, you know, not only the change of look but also the persona of what a film crew would be.

Brent: That's right, that's right. But you know, it's funny. Um, Tony in one of his books, he actually talked about this. That that if you think about trying to come up with a cover story for people that haven't

had any chance to really prepare it, you want to do that with something that people can imagine easily how those people look and act and so forth. And everybody knows Hollywood. And so that was kind of the idea was um, you know, just, you know, ham it up and and act like you're from Hollywood. It's not that hard, if you know, if you think about it.

Dee: No offense to Hollywood.

Brent: Yeah, no offense, no offense to anybody in Hollywood. And so that's why that's that's one of the reasons why they thought it would be a perfect cover.

Walter: So how do they go about transforming these six State Department officers into a film crew? Do they give them... I don't know, props—pun intended, I guess?

(music begins)

Brent: Yeah, it's funny, some of the things that they brought with them or that they had pouched out to them, there's a little viewfinder that a cameraman, you know, cinematographers like to wear around their necks and they hold it up to their eye, you know, and sort of get a sense for what it'll look like on camera. They actually brought one of those with them. And they gave that to the guy who was supposed to be, you know, sort of the the cameraman. So that was part of his disguise. And he got a kick out of that and and sort of started to really get into character. They had, obviously the Argo scripts, um you know, the name of the film they came up with, Argo. They have the script and they have note pads, you know, for the writers and and for the people that you are supposed to be, you know, making notes to themselves. And they have clothes and so on that they're going to give them to to sort of embody their, their characters.

Walter: Here's the director of the CIA Museum with us again, Rob Byer.

Rob: And they needed this. It's what we call pocket litter, right? The idea of who you are and why you're in a place has to be consistent with what you have on your body and and they're carrying with you. So when they're going through that airport, yes, they want the script. They want Studio Six Production logo everywhere. They want, you know, the satchel with Studio Six on it that carried the script. All those are part of the back story that makes this exfiltration legitimate as they're doing it.

Brent: But they also talked to them about, you know, this is information that's provided by John Chambers. They talk to them about what each person's role would be on a location scout. And so, they they've got that actually written. They have written materials for them and sort of the whole cover of where they're from? When did they move to Hollywood? And they learn their whole backstory that way. And so, they're given that, their personas, they're given their false biographies to study over the, you know, 24 or 48 hours that they have to work with before it's time to fly out.

Dee: So let's actually listen to Ed reflect on this particular aspect of the operation.

Ed: Um, it was an example of how tech officers have to be sent to prep rookies to do to do things. Oftentimes we worked with professional professional espionage intelligence people, who were more or less accustomed to doing this, doing that, doing that. Working with the with the six. These are rookies. They were people who were not trained to to lie to authorities. They weren't trained to be clandestine, elusive. They were trained to be Department of State. So, uh, the requirement was to give them a package, both of a document package and disguise package with which they were familiar, in which they had

confidence, and allowed them to go. Uh, the the biggest thing I think we did was to was to convince them that you can, you can do it. As simple as that.

Walter: So are all six of the Americans onboard with the idea at this point?

Brent: One was very skeptical. Tony Mendez talked about in his book how it took some time to convince that last that last person that this was going to work. And not until the morning of when they when they all go to the airport does he finally really come around to the idea that, okay, this is uh, this this is worth giving a go, and they did.

(music ends)

Dee: So what's the time frame of this at this point?

Brent: So they arrive on a Friday, and then they fly out Monday morning.

Dee: So a very quick turnaround to try to convince everybody and get them all ready.

Brent: Yea. They have a full, they have a nice big dinner the night before. Drinks are served, and then they actually quiz them. They have one person who's there whose job is to sort of be the bad cop who asked them difficult questions like it's a person at the airport, like it's an immigration officer at the airport. You know, they really uh they really put them through the wringer a little bit the night before to get them ready to go.

Dee: So you have the houseguests here prepping for their Hollywood roles. What are Tony and Ed doing at this point?

(music begins)

Brent: So after they meet with the houseguests, the next day they go back to the Canadian Embassy. And Ed and Tony actually worked in the Ambassador's office. Tony describe the Ambassador's office and kind of funny. He said that he was a very unconventional guy, and he doesn't have a conventional desk. He has this big, round glass top table that he sits at. And so he says, here, you guys can have the table. So they sit down and they start their work. Well, what their work consists of is taking those little yellow slips of paper that they got at the airport, and they start putting in the false stamps and the caches and so forth to make it look as though the house guests had arrived, um at a different time as part of this film crew and that kind of thing. They do final touch ups on their passports that had arrived in the diplomatic pouch from Ottawa. All that kind of work that these guys were pros at, and so that's what they did. Tony told a great story about how one of the things that was sent out to them was an ink pad that they would use for stamps and that the ink pad had gone dry. And so he looks around the room and he sees the Ambassador's liquor cabinet, and he grabs the highest alcohol content liquor that he can find, which was a Scotch whiskey, of probably a decent age. And he splashes a little in the ink pad and doesn't miss a beat. What it does is it activates the ink. And so he's able to use the stamp.

Dee: So, let's listen to Ed discuss some of those last-minute challenges they faced as they worked to get every last detail of those false documents correct.

Ed: When we got, arrived in country I picked up a couple of those yellow sheets because we had to have them for each passport, and it was a long sheet like yea. So when I fill those, I fill those sheets out. It was a difficult job, and I think I messed up for four or five of them. So I said, hey, would you mind going back to the airport getting some more? And the Canadians just whoosh. Off they went.

Walter: And this moment is, in fact, the scene depicted in that painting we mentioned in Part One, hanging in a hall here at CIA Headquarters—Tony and the previously unknown second CIA officer, sitting at a table in Tehran, making the final preparations to bring these six Americans home.

Dee: Can you speak a little bit about this particular painting and the history behind it, Rob?

Rob: This painting is a first of its kind because it's the first painted by, uh, an actual CIA officer uh, someone in the Directorate of Science and Technology which is the same place that Tony and Ed worked in. And so that made it really special. It was also the first woman to paint a painting in the Intelligence Art Gallery. And Deborah did such an amazing job. It really shows a great the difference between the darkness and light of their mission. You can see, you know, basically the light is on Ed and Tony, as they're doing what they need to do in order to make this a successful job and surrounding them as sort of this darkness, right? So it's the light into the darkness and and saving people out of that darkness, uh, is one underlying theme. It's also interesting from another perspective is that you only see the back of Ed's head. And so what's also kind of interesting is that a CIA officer was the person who Deborah used as Ed's head. So I I've known this officer for a long, long time and I've always just thought it was very funny that Ed had this connection to the CIA officer he never never knew. So it really made my day when the two of them got to meet a few weeks ago. And the stand-in for Ed's head got to meet the actual Ed.

Dee: Just curious. Did the heads look alike?

Rob: They looked very different.

Dee: Oh ok. Sure.

Rob: It's like in all Hollywood, you know, you get Brad Pitt to play you, and you look like something completely different. But who knows, Ed might have looked that way 50 years ago.

Dee: Fair, fair point.

Rob: Uh, but it just shows definitely the connections here at CIA between past and present. The really neat thing about the painting, it shows Ed and Tony doing something that very few people in the world can do. And that is to take Canadian passports and alter them so that our six State Department officers suddenly became Canadian. And, you know, it shows the different skills we have here at CIA that one day you can be a Studio Six Production, uh, guru, uh producer, and the next day, you're altering a Canadian passport to help exfiltrate people out of Tehran.

Walter: CIA.gov/careers.

(laughter)

Walter: Now Brent, what did Ed's wife make of all this? What is she thinking as the two of them, Tony and Ed, are thousands of miles away in Tehran, up late putting the finishing touches on false documents that they'll use to attempt to sneak past Iranian border security the next day?

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Brent: Ed's wife was aware that he worked for the Agency. And she knew that he traveled all the time from where they were located in Europe, where they were living. But she didn't know where he was at any given time. And when he went to Tehran, she said that he didn't act as though it was anything you

know, more noteworthy than his normal work. And so she was completely in the dark that he was in Tehran. And the only way that she finds out, uh is the phone call that she gets later.

Walter: Phone call from Ed? From?

Brent: No, she gets a phone call from work, from the office, is how she explained it to me. And they simply told her “he's out.”

Dee: Those are terrifying words to hear.

Brent: And she didn't know what that meant because she didn't know where he'd been. And they had never called her before on any of his operations. And so the fact that they had called her and said this cryptic “he's out,” concerned her, as you can imagine. And so she started asking some of the other spouses, if they knew, had any idea where Ed was and somebody did. Somebody knew where he had gone, and told her. And so by the time he got home, she already knew where he'd been. Ed's wife, I actually got to meet her when they were here recently. Great lady. Ed and his whole family came to the Agency and they got a nice tour of the museum, and he was able to, you know, sort of show his family what he had done. And we were able to really tell them a lot of good details, you know, that maybe they didn't know about his career and so on.

(music ends)

Dee: So let's go back to, I guess it's a very short window of time from the time they land, now they have to get out. So morning of, what does that, what does that look like?

(music begins)

Brent: So, the Embassy is, uh there's a good story there. The Embassy is gonna use, they're gonna use Embassy vans, Canadian Embassy vans, to haul everybody because there was concern that if they use taxis or something like that, if, gosh, if if they got separated or, you know, whatever. So they wanted to move them all in one group. So they used Embassy vans and they actually had a good cover for why they were doing that. The cover was the Canadians actually sent a cable back to Canada, in the off chance that the Iranians were listening in or had a way of you know, intercepting their cables, where they said there's this film crew from Hollywood, made up of a bunch of Canadians and we have advised them it's time to get out of the country. It might not be safe right now, and we've offered Embassy vans to take them to the airport. And so that was their cover for why they were doing it. Um, so they took them to the airport. They got to the airport, and the idea was that Tony and Ed would be nearby, as they're going through. Tony would behave as though he's part of the, you know, part of the group. But Ed was sort of, you know, overwatch to sort of keep an eye out to make sure things were going well. He's doing things like tipping the people who carried luggage and so on. But he's also keeping an eye on security, and that kind of thing. But it's early in the morning. There's hardly anybody there. It's actually very sleepy when they arrived and that was by design. They picked a flight to leave early in the morning so that they could avoid as much of the normal ebb and flow at the airport as possible. So Tony described some of the revolutionary guards, you know, soldiers that were there as dozing off and and this kind of thing that we're sitting around you know, with their with their rifles.

Ed: We finally got enough, and got it all down, and, uh, that was a scary part, uh, of them going to the airport, uh, and walking through and getting in line and having this passport and this yellow sheet hanging out because you can do wonderful things 9/10ths of an operation. And for some reason, uh, someone

loses a piece of paper or someone does something weird, or the inspecting officer, well, in case of in our case, a couple of the people took sheets, the passport to the back office. God knows what what for. But there was mass confusion on their part. The part of the Iranians thank thankfully. There again, that was that was happening up up here with Tony and a couple of them. I was back here with the others and handing out tip money to people who had carried the bags.

Brent: The truth is that their cover story was pretty good that the security and the customs officials and so forth were in some ways still figuring things out. They were not, uh maybe the hardened professionals that might have been at work later in the day. This might have been the B team. But that was all by design to get through there at a time when you have a better chance of just walking right through and essentially, according to Tony and according to Ed, they walked right through.

Dee: So do we have any sense of how those houseguests are feeling and acting in that particular moment?

(music ends)

Brent: So the, when they get to, when they get through and they get to their waiting area for their flight there's uh, little quirks that Tony talked about in his book. One member of the houseguests is trying to look nonchalant, and he's reading a Iranian newspaper that's in Farsi. And apparently it occurs to him, I should probably stop doing this because it's clear I can read Farsi, and so he puts it down. And then there's another, there's another case where one of the gentleman just keeps grinning, and somebody looked at him like knock it off basically, you know. And the tension does rise a little bit, because when it's time to get on their flight, the flight is then delayed just a couple of minutes before they're due to board. It's delayed for mechanical reasons, and there was a plan B in place, and the plan B that was in place was they actually had a contact in Tehran. And so the plan was that they would just get them all on a plane if this flight was delayed too long. But the contact there at the airport asked around and found out and then got word back through his contact who then got it to us saying, no, it's just a small technical thing. It's no big deal. Just wait, better to just wait than trying to then draw more attention to yourself by trying to get on another plane.

(music begins)

Walter: Now the moment's arrived. Tony, Ed, and the six Americans are getting ready for their moment of truth: going through Iranian border security. Ed spoke in his interview on how tense these sorts of moments can be.

Ed: If for some reason, a authority figure or a customs official or what have you, doesn't like your looks or has had a bad day and says, well, sit over there for a while. And after five minutes, average person is going through stew a bit, and, uh, things get very very can get very very dicey.

Dee: But Ed's assessment of the six State Department employees that he and Tony had coached to impersonate these members of a film crew was also unequivocal.

Ed: Incredible, incredible. They were, they were, confident, happy happy go lucky. And even at the airport, it continued. One of them had some doubts about this, this happening, and the others sort of cajoled, cajoled him. And even when there was a delay delaying the flight leaving the possibility of switching to a flight, even then people were happy, happy go lucky that no one, no one's very nervous. Um, I think I might have might have told you, as as we left the the departure lounge, there was one last

security check. Basically, you're pat, pat down, and a couple of a couple of young young Iranians they're patting people down as they went through. And one of the, one of the six, his role was the, he was the basically the director. He was playing the role. He was just up there and he was watching me, watching the people being patted down. And he got up and got on the line and he turned around to us and said, "I'm looking forward to this." Everyone broke up, broke up, and, uh, shoo.

Walter: And they make to that last checkpoint... and...

Dee: And they make it through.

Walter: No last minute snags, no chase down the runway... just...

Dee: Onto the plane, smooth sailing. But about that plane...

Walter: Here's Rob again, Director of the CIA Museum.

Rob: One of my favorite stories about Argo is as uh, they were getting on the plane to freedom, um, Bob Anders, one of the six State Department officers, said to Tony Mendez, jeez, Tony, you really thought of everything. And Tony said, what are you talking about?

Ed: We entered the plane, you go up the stairs to the plane, open the door. And many of these planes have their names painted on the side. Uh, Spirit of the West. PanAm used to have this. Swiss Air had this right at the level into the plane, written down there was ARGAU, A-A-R-G-A-U. I believe it's pronounced, Argow.

Rob: They were getting on a Swiss Air airplane that had been painted to reflect a city in Switzerland.

Brent: Now it was spelled differently. Um, but it was that was the name.

Ed: But I saw it. ARGAU. What the hell? We went in the plane sat down, and after a bit. I forget when I picked up the Herald Tribune and did the crossword puzzle. And one of the one of the clues was Jason's companions ... Jason and the Argonauts.

Brent: And that was in the crossword puzzle. And so he actually he actually joked. He said that, uh, you know, I didn't know that CIA was that good that we could that we could do that.

Walter: To be clear, this is not CIA officers with excess free time just planting clues.

Brent: Right. Just incredible coincidences.

Dee: I mean, yeah, if you believe in fate that there's nothing more fateful than that.

Brent: Just incredible coincidences.

Walter: So they make it. Each member of the group plays their designated part, from Tony and Ed to the six State Department employees they're sneaking out.

Ed: But, uh, all those things worked. But there are so many possibilities at any point along the way that you can have your cover stories and you're planning, and they can be, they can go up in a ball of wax, and, um, and everyone everyone performed fantastically.

(music ends)

Walter: And Brent, what became of the Canadian Ambassador, his wife, and their staff?

Brent: They left the same day as the houseguests. They actually left on a flight just a few hours after the houseguests, in anticipation of what might happen as the word got out.

Dee: So Canada received a massive—and massively well-deserved outpouring of support across the United States. And as for the CIA's role, well... that still stayed secret for years to come, correct?

Brent: When it was first reported, and it was only like 24 hours after it happened. Because there was a Canadian, uh, believe was a Canadian journalist that got word that this was happening and he agreed not to publish it until afterwards. So when it happened, and it came out in the news, it was a big deal. There were there were, you know people had banners flying across the United States thanking Canada. And it was in all the newspapers, you know, that Canada, you know, acted heroically because because Canada did. But it wasn't the whole story.

Walter: But within the halls here at Langley, Tony and Ed's roles in bringing these six Americans home didn't go unrecognized.

(music begins)

Brent: So the Intelligence Star is the Agency's second highest award for valor and, um, we don't give out very many of them. You have to really accomplish something. And and so Ed and Tony were both recipients of the Intelligence Star for their role in in this operation and deservedly so.

Dee: John Chambers, the Hollywood makeup wizard, also received a CIA medal for his role in making the operation possible.

Walter: That was the one operation from Tony's career that the DCI at the time, George Tenet, chose to declassify to kind of bring his body of work to life. But that suggests then that there are many more operations that Tony and Ed did along these lines.

Brent: Yeah, so I mean, you know, we like to say that, you know, the the operations that everybody finds out about are the failures, you know, those are the ones that make the news. The successes, usually because if something is successful, we want to try to replicate how we pulled that off, and so we don't talk about them, you know? We keep them, we keep them a secret for as long as we can according to statute and so forth. But, in this case, I think part of the thinking was the technology had really come a long way in terms of, its it's a totally different game trying to do the kind of work that Tony and Ed did in this case, you know, crossing through border crossings and that kind of. It's completely different than it used to be, you know? And, you know you think about in terms of just all the technology. So the idea, then, is if you're going to talk about a story, this is one that we could talk about, you know because the technology has changed. You're not that worried about methods anymore, at least not that particular method. And then the other thing, I think is really important in this case, I think that Director Tenet wanted wanted the world to know that CIA had played a really important role in something that had never been known. And enough time had passed that he wanted to make sure that the people that had done it, you know, got got credit for it.

Dee: You talked about the accolades, the parades and the um all of the celebration that was happening towards the Canadian front. You know, Ed and Tony go home, and Ed goes to his family. Do you have any kind of insight into what the reaction was from his, Ed's family or Ed himself?

Brent: He participated in a lot of things in his career, but he said that this was definitely, you know, one of the highlights. That it's, it's one of those things that there's a clear-cut win. There's just a very clear-cut win that that we got those people out. One interesting story, I would tell. It's not necessarily about how the families, you know, reacted, but Tony actually had I think four of the houseguests out to his farm in West Virginia for dinner shortly after everybody got back. And they still knew him by his cover name that he had used when he was there. And so he sort of had to reintroduce himself when they came to his home for dinner. But, uh, but yeah, they kept that secret. And that's I think, another neat part of the story is, none of the six ever talked about this until the CIA declassified it a few years back.

Dee: Eventually, all of the remaining hostages in Iran were released.

Walter: But there's one last chapter in this saga, at least for Dee and myself. We also got the chance to see Ed on his recent return to CIA Headquarters, and his reflection on this operation—more than four decades later—has stayed with both of us.

Dee: “Once in a lifetime,” was how he described it. But at the same time, he said, the next day it was on to that next operation. Because that's how it is for folks here.

Brent: It's funny, you know, as a historian, I interview people all the time for internal histories here at the Agency. And I interview people that have done remarkable things, and that is a refrain I hear again and again and again that, you know well, it's it's been six months or it's been a year. You know, I've done some stuff since then, you know? And some of these folks chuckle, you know, like maybe they've done things even more interesting than the thing I'm interviewing them about you know? And so uh, yeah, I think that that's that's very definitely, that's just part of the culture, you know. We're not a very big organization that does a lot of big things and so people tend to be busy. But, uh, I don't think I've ever done anything as much fun as this.

(music ends)

Walter: As talking to us?

(laughter)

Dee: Well, big thanks to both Brent and Rob for making this possible.

Walter: And to Ed and his family, for being willing to share his side of the story, and for a lifetime of service.

Dee: So that does it for Season Two of The Langley Files.

Walter: For anyone just tuning in now, we spoke on this season with CIA's first ever Chief Technology Officer on what lured him from Silicon Valley to the halls of Langley, and with the Agency's first-ever Chief Wellbeing Officer on how she and a CIA case officer who was injured in a terrorist attack overseas drove a new focus on how CIA takes care of its people...

Dee: We learned from the Agency's chief of analysis about the intense and generally nocturnal lifestyle of an intelligence briefer to the President of the United States... and met with one of CIA's security protective officers who serves the first line of defense for America's first line of defense.

Walter: We also sat down with two of CIA's disguise-making specialists, who let us in on some jaw-dropping stories, even for Dee and myself, and, as summer travel season got under way, we shared some of the tradecraft Agency officers use to stay safe while traveling around the world.

Dee: We'll be back soon with another season of The Langley Files, but first, let's do some trivia. In File 012 of The Langley Files, we asked you all what clothing accessory did Lt. Colonel Popov wear to make sure that his CIA case officer counterpart knew that he was a friend and not a foe?

Walter: Uh, cufflinks. Cufflinks, uh, which, when you think about it is a great way to discreetly signal to, you know, a hypothetical CIA case officer you're meeting with, that you are indeed the real item without drawing more attention to yourself.

Dee: And I think a lot of the times we all assume it's like the feather in the cap or the rose in the lapel or something like that. Do you wear cufflinks?

Walter: Sometime ago I actually tried to find shirts that are cufflink capable, uh, cufflink ready, but they don't, they don't make many French-cuffed shirts these days for men, yea.

Dee: That's a bummer.

Walter: It is a bummer.

Dee: I don't know what else to say about cufflinks, so Walter, um, I think we should probably give them another trivia question. What do you say?

Walter: Yea, sounds great.

(music)

Walter: So on this two-part, season finale, we heard how Tony and John Chambers worked to setup a fake Hollywood film studio to really sell the idea that Tony and Ed were filmmakers going into Iran to scout for locations. We also heard how they came upon this script that seemed ideal for the mission at hand. It would eventually come to be known as Argo. But our question today is ... why?

(music begins)

Dee: That's a good question, and folks will actually have to figure it out and hold on tight to that answer until we return for Season Three of The Langley Files. But until then ...

Walter: From all of us here at Langley...

Dee and Walter: We'll be seeing you.

(music continues)

Walter: When Rob called the script a clunker, do you think anyone's feelings are going to get hurt?

Dee: (laughing) I wondered that too.

Walter: (laughing) He was really harsh. We apologize.

(music ends)