

THE AFTERMATH

Carter Responds by Returning to the Political Fray

By Robert G. Kaiser
and Michael Getler

Washington Post Staff Writers

The boil was not lanced in Tehran. But the failure of the rescue mission has opened up a new phase in the presidency of Jimmy Carter and perhaps in U.S. foreign policy, almost as certainly as it would have if the raid had succeeded.

The president, faced with the raid's failure and operating from an already weakened political position, has chosen to break his promise not to campaign as long as the hostages are held prisoner.

Now he will take his case to the country, hoping to make political capital of the boldness, if not the results, of his rescue efforts.

It is clear many influential figures in Washington are deeply worried by the rescue effort and its aftermath.

Yet some fears are mitigated by a hope that the president can get back on a course that is not dominated by the hostage issue.

Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), for example, says the president has done the "sensible" thing in dropping his Rose Garden strategy and that it should have been dropped a lot sooner.

But Jackson also coupled this with a sharp warning to the president to break his and the national obsession with the hostages. Carter, he said, must shift his focus from that narrow and emotional issue, and from military solutions, to the broader and more crucial matters of overall U.S. foreign and economic policy.

Furthermore, the conservative Democrat who carries a lot of weight at the Pentagon, also sharply warned the president against taking additional military action to try and solve the hostage crisis.

"I violently oppose" any such plans, he told reporters. "Born-again hawks scare me," a possible reference to a president who—in the aftermath of Iran and Afghanistan—has shifted from the attitude of always forgoing the use of force.

In recent months, Jackson has repeatedly said he was afraid of "the hawks" and hardliners who may be too anxious to fight a war in a region near the Soviet Union which the United States is in no position to win at this time. Indeed, many senior military leaders say the same thing privately.

"Clearly we should turn to quiet diplomacy and not let ourselves be diverted on the central issue, which is the survival of Iran as an independent state, regardless of our feelings and emotions," the senator argues.

Middle East stability must be the number one U.S. foreign policy objective for the rest of this year, he says. Letting the "radicals and mad dogs" in Tehran whiplash the U.S. morning, noon and night does irreparable harm to U.S. foreign policy and plays into the hands of the Soviets, he argues, who are quietly working to take over Iran and thus eventually neutralize the oil-producing countries of the Persian Gulf.

America's allies are also nervous that there may be more military action in the offing from a still-narrowly focused White House. Though part of the rescue cover meant deceiving them, the allies are swallowing their chagrin and are rallying around the president's call for sanctions as another way hopefully to avoid military action.

As the man who takes responsibility for the aborted raid, its aftermath is most important for the president. His presidency is at risk, his statesmanship and helmsmanship in question. He has chosen to respond by returning to the active political fray.

There is no indication that Carter will defend the rescue operation on the grounds which actually prompted him to launch it — a desire to "lance the boil," as one aide put it, or end the crisis once and for all, whether or not all the hostages could be saved. Instead Carter argues that the United States had a duty to do something after all diplomatic efforts had failed.

The decision to campaign again was prompted by more than calculations about the repercussions of the raid.

"There's going to be a lot coming out in the weeks ahead," a senior White House official said last week, "a lot of bad news about the recession and unemployment and things that the president has to be able to address. If we want to take what's going to come out head-on, the president is the only one who can do it."

This same official acknowledged that Carter's initial decision not to campaign while the hostages were held was partly political. He said, "We probably could have campaigned through a couple or three weeks of January, perhaps into February," he said, referring to the period in the hostage crisis before intense bargaining with the Iranian authorities began.

This meant, a questioner noted, that Carter could have joined the debate in Iowa Jan. 7 with Edmund G. (Jerry) Brown Jr. and Edward M. Kennedy, which the president dropped out of on Dec. 28, saying he needed to "preserve national unity on a non-partisan basis" in the hostages crisis.

The senior White House official did not dispute that assertion.

On the record, Carter explained his situation differently. On Feb. 13, for example, he said: "I want the world to know that I am not going to resume business as usual as a partisan campaigner out on the campaign trail until our hostages are back here, free and at home."

Now Carter is encumbered with another awkward explanation — his version of why he can resume campaigning. On Wednesday Carter told civic leaders in the White House that the problems he faces as president "are manageable enough now for me to leave the White House for a limited travel schedule," as though somehow the failure of the rescue mission had already lessened his and the country's problems.

That could, of course, eventually be true, providing an ironic smell of success to the failed mission.

The abort has contributed to the president's decision to come out of the White House, a fact that will probably force greater presidential focus on such things as domestic economic woes.

Similarly, it may diminish the political pressure the president felt to "do something" about the hostages.



Associated Press

Iranian officials view the burned-out U.S. equipment left behind in the eastern desert after abortive rescue attempt.

CARTER'S JUDGMENT

Delaying Raid Lessened Its Chances

By George C. Wilson
and Michael Getler

Washington Post Staff Writers

Vainly waiting for a diplomatic solution, President Carter missed the most opportune time for launching the hostage rescue mission to Iran, and thereby increased the risk of failure, according to government sources.

About last December, military planners from the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned the president that, if he was going to launch a secret raid, he should do so within about 90 days — before the end of March.

By April or before they warned, desert sandstorms would howl across the Iranian back-country, greatly complicating the long-dis-

tance logistics of the raid and lengthening odds against success.

When the mission was aborted 10 days ago, a raging late-April sandstorm in the southern desert of Iran was a principal component of the failure. It forced one helicopter to retreat to the Nimitz aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Oman, grounded another one temporarily in the desert and may have contributed to the technical breakdowns. The mission was scrubbed for want of enough helicopters.

This question of high-risk timing is one of many elements, disclosed by those with inside knowledge, which suggest an understanding of the mission plan that is quite different from that suggested by President Carter and his top mili-

tary advisers, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and Gen. David C. Jones, chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

The president and his officials have portrayed the mission as "snake bit" by bad luck and random technological failures, but they insist that the original plan had "good" to "excellent" prospects for success.

To some planners, however, it always looked like a high-risk operation. Indeed, in corroborating details now filtering out, the picture is clear: preparations were made anticipating the possibility of extensive casualties, including perhaps of the hostages who were to be rescued.

See RAID, A30, Col. 1

RAID, From A1

This, in turn, underscores a fundamental change in President Carter's thinking about the long-running crisis. For six months, Carter said again and again that his main purpose was to save the 53 American captives in Tehran. But in launching the desert mission, he concluded that another objective had taken precedence—ending the crisis, once and for all.

Carter, said one administration official, wanted "to lance the boil," even if the outcome fell short of his original goal of rescuing all the hostages in good condition.

"A cancer that has to be removed," according to one adviser.

In fact, at one point the going estimate inside Pentagon and administration councils for a successful mission was as low as one in four, or 25 percent, sources said.

Gen. Jones came close to acknowledging this last week when he said at a Pentagon press conference that "in the initial stages we did not see an option that had a reasonable chance of success.

"After improvements, some in use of technology, exercises, concepts—we came to the conclusion that it was militarily feasible, and all of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—we collectively addressed this—concluded that we had a good chance of success. There were some risks, yes . . ."

Jones and others have steadfastly declined to specify the degree of risk but one part of the operation that

has not been disclosed before suggests heavy casualties were considered a definite possibility.

Besides the C130 transports waiting for rescue helicopters in a secret escape base west of Tehran, sources revealed, the plan called for having giant C141 transports on call in case there were too many dead and wounded to fit inside the two C130s. The casualties would have been flown to a hospital in Egypt, presumably in Cairo.

Although this fits under prudent worst-case planning, the inclusion of the C141s throws new light on Secretary Brown's April 25 assertion that, once the Blue Light commando unit reached the embassy itself, this "was the part of the mission of which they were most confident." Brown said he and the Joint Chiefs had focused on the embassy takeover part of the plan before recommending the mission to Carter.

The apparent reason Carter, Brown and Jones put so much confidence in a plan considered risky by some other insiders was their conviction that the assault force could be called back quickly at almost any "fail-safe" point along the way and that the embassy could be taken by surprise, according to sources.

Brown suggested as much last week when he said "the plan provided for the possibility of terminating the operation because of any difficulties, such as mechanical failure or detection by the Iranians of the mission."

Yesterday sources disclose that an

THE RAID

Prospects for High-Risk Mission Were Diminished by Long Delay

elaborate recall network had been established in Iran, with superb communications linking it all together.

For example, sources said, the 50 to 100 "friendlies" infiltrated into Iran in advance of the rescue attempt were ordered to spread themselves out all along the advance route from the Blue Light teams mountain hideaway east of Tehran to the embassy compound itself. The friendlies included U.S. military specialists and intelligence operatives.

As the commandos approached the city in innocent-looking trucks and buses mixed in with the night traffic, the friendlies were supposed to keep track of them and Iranian security forces every step of the way.

At the first sign that the cover of the mission had been blown, the Blue Light commanders would learn about it from friendlies plugged into the elaborate warning system. Then the calling everything off.

If the 90 Blue Light commandos reached Tehran undetected, they would have been assembled in a warehouse in the city staked out as a last-

minute check point before racing into the embassy.

The troopers, commanded by Col. Charlie Beckwith, were going to thrust into the embassy like a stilleto, not a broad sword. The plan depended on speed, stealth and deadly marksmanship, not on some super-duper secret weapon like knock out gas.

The Blue Light commandos were going to kill or subdue the guards and herd the hostages to a predesignated rescue point, where the helicopters from the mountaintop hideaway would swoop down and fly them away to the C130s, which were waiting west of the city.

Blue Light's hand-picked sharpshooters were armed with .45 pistols with silencers and M16 rifles. These sharpshooters were so accurate, one source said, that during training Beck with and a visiting commander of a West German anti-terrorist outfit once confidently sat between target silhouettes while the commandos blasted away with their weapons.

If Beckwith needed outside help during the embassy takeover, he could have called in C130 transports armed

with machine guns and 10-millimeter cannon.

The planes' crews were trained to orbit in the night sky over the embassy, "hosing down the streets," as one source put it, to stop any Iranian forces that might have tried to stop the rescue.

Another C130 crew was ready to orbit over the Tehran airport, blasting the runways to stop any Iranian fighter planes which tried to take off from there.

Far to the south, in the Arabian sea and Gulf of Oman, the aircraft carriers Nimitz and Coral Sea had tricky assignments, too. Some of their war planes were prepared to make a feint at bombing Iranian oil fields at the head of the Persian Gulf, while others would protect the C130s and C141s flying out of Iran to Egypt with their load of hostages, commandos and perhaps a few of the friendlies.

Under that option, which might not have been exercised at all if the embassy takeover went smoothly, Navy A7 fighter-bombers would have feinted a bombing raid on the oil fields while F4 and F14 fighters would have provided the protective "cap" for the departing transports. Presumably any Iranian planes which got aloft would have raced south to defend the oilfields.

Officials stressed that the warplane option was defensive in nature and not part of any offensive strike against Iran. Indeed, sources say the plan did not include any punitive raids against Iran even in the event of

a serious failure of the rescue operation. The idea was to stick to a rescue mission and not to undertake actions that could have inflamed the whole region and possibly driven Iran into Soviet hands.

Officials said it would have been too difficult to try to launch any sizable force of fighter-bombers over Tehran from the carriers. This would have required mid-air refueling at night since, when loaded, these warplanes have a combat radius of only about 300 miles.

The Joint Chiefs opted for going fast and light, counting on speed and surprise for success. This decision, sources said, resulted in paring down elements of one of the many preliminary drafts of the rescue plan finally implemented by Carter.

Planners anticipated that several Navy RH53 helicopters would fail in the two long hops from the Nimitz in the Gulf of Oman to the mountaintop hideaway east of Tehran, totalling 700 miles. Some planners early on recommended up to 12 to 14 helicopters instead of the eight decided upon.

Although they are not saying so publicly, many military officers now fault the final plan as "too thin," resting on too many unrealistic assumptions. Some contend the obstacles most likely would have gotten worse, not better, as the Blue Light team proceeded beyond Desert One, the refueling site 500 miles inside Iran, toward the embassy. They complain of too few "worst case" protective features in the planning.

THE DECISION

How Switch Was Made From Diplomacy to Force

By Martin Schram
Washington Post Staff Writer

By the time President Carter convened his National Security Council on the morning of April 11, he had already made the most crucial and personally agonizing decision of all.

The crisis that had so paralyzed the country and his presidency had to be ended, he had concluded, even though he knew that it was quite possible that some of the 53 Americans held hostage in Tehran would be killed in the effort to free them.

The president decided that this human risk was now preferable to letting the crisis continue indefinitely, according to one of the president's most senior advisers.

A military rescue plan had been studied and refined for months. It offered no guarantees. Indeed, Carter had been informed that it was quite possible that some of the hostages might die in the course of the rescue operation.

Carter's willingness to risk the lives of some of the hostages to finally end the crisis marked a dramatic and personally wrenching shift in his thinking. For months, ever since the U.S. Embassy was seized on Nov. 4, 1979, the president had publicly defined America's primary objective in terms of protecting the lives of every hostage.

"I cannot and will not rest until every single American is home, safe and free," Carter said in February. That was the heart of his policy. He kept his Christmas tree unlighted and tied it with yellow ribbons. He told Americans he was praying several times a day for the safe return of each hostage.

But four months later, after the rescue failed, the president would refer obliquely to his changed viewpoint in an answer during his news conference last Tuesday.

The president said:

"Had the operation been successful or even if it had been concluded without complete success, it would have ended a continuing crisis that is destabilizing for the people of Iran . . ."

That single phrase — "... without complete success" — was Carter's way of talking about the deaths of some of those he was trying to save.

A senior White House official ex-

plained:

"He meant that even if there were casualties, it was preferable to letting the situation continue indefinitely. Presidents have to make decisions that will cost lives. Everybody here knew that it was possible that there would be a loss of life of some of the hostages."

For months the president had pursued a policy of trying to win the safe return of all the hostages with patient diplomatic negotiation. In the beginning, this restraint had won him the highest marks from the American people, as his low standing in the public opinion polls soared and his campaign to win reelection was rolling impressively over the challenge of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D.-Mass.).

But by March, the nation's frustration was mounting, its confidence in



President Carter at news conference after the aborted raid in Iran.

Carter's handling of the crisis was falling, and the Kennedy campaign was finding new life, in the form of landslide wins in the Democratic primaries of New York and Connecticut.

The president based his hopes for the negotiated return of the hostages on a secret, jerrybuilt diplomatic effort founded upon contacts between his chief of staff, Hamilton Jordan, a specialist in domestic politics but not diplomacy, and three French lawyers, who were also novices in international policy but who could serve as intermediaries to the unstructured and uncertain leadership of the Iranian government.

As the month of March ended, the president's hopes soared. He thought he had assurances that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini would approve the transfer of the hostages from the militants to the Iranian government, the crucial first step to securing their safe return to the United States.

The president was anxious to get the good news out on April 1, the day of the Wisconsin primary he hoped would restore his sagging political fortunes. He called an extraordinary 7 a.m. news conference, timed to make the television network morning news shows, and hailed a "positive step" in Iran.

But Khomeini and his followers promptly pulled the rug out from under Carter. The negotiations collapsed and the president, who had gotten himself so far out front with his own peace-is-at-hand proclamation, now turned toward the military option.

Even as the final diplomatic effort was in progress, the president had met with his top national security advisers at Camp David to review the various military recourses available. These included the mining of Iran's harbors or the imposition of a naval blockade. And there was the rescue operation that had been conceived in November and had been refined steadily since.

In the days ahead, the president

would know well that his Secretary of State, Cyrus R. Vance, opposed all military options for Iran, favoring instead further pursuit of the paths of negotiation and consultation.

By this time, a number of those closest to the president had come to blame Vance, with some bitterness, for the president's landslide defeat in the New York primary, by mishandling the controversial vote on the anti-Israeli resolution at the United Nations.

Carter concluded, according to top advisers, that the crisis in Iran had dangerously heightened world tensions. It had inflamed the already explosive Persian Gulf region. It had diverted world attention from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

A naval blockade or mining of the harbors would not solve the crisis, but inflame it further, he felt. It would only broaden and intensify the crisis and perhaps cause the Islamic world to turn against the United States.

"Ending the crisis—once and for all—became the major factor in the president's decision-making," one of his senior advisers said.

Just before his diplomatic effort collapsed, Carter had derided former president Ford's decision to undertake the Mayaguez rescue as more tempting than wise. "I've decided to use political and economic options and forgo the military options altogether," Carter told Meg Greenfield, editor of the editorial page of *The Washington Post*.

"We've not had any loss of life during this administration because of people being sent into combat. It happens to be the first time in 53 years that that has happened," he said.

Days later, with his diplomatic effort reduced to rubble, Carter changed his mind. He reviewed the military rescue plans again with his National Security Council. He knew the plan could result in the deaths of some of the hostages, and he knew approving it would result in the certain loss of his secretary of state.

Knowing all this, Carter ordered the military rescue.

"It was," said one of his most senior advisers, "a classic presidential decision."

Instrument Failure on Chopper Five Doomed Hostage Rescue Attempt

to react. This is no big deal in a clear sky thousands of feet above the earth but delay can be fatal if the chopper is flying blind a few hundred feet off the earth at 150 miles an hour or more. The gyro compass and attitude indicator are, thus, vital for blind flying at low altitude.

What the pilot and crew of Chopped Five did not realize as they were flying along that starry night of April 24, flying toward a rendezvous with seven other helicopters and six C130 transport planes in a stretch of desert near Tabas, was that someone on board had left his jacket jammed against an air

vent. That particular vent fed cool air onto the black box sending electricity to the gyro compass and attitude indicator.

Over southern Iran, Chopper Five ran into the edge of what was to be a violent sandstorm—a bath of sand the texture of talcum powder “Like flying in a milk bowl,” as the pilot would say later and the black box feeding electricity into those vital navigational instruments was getting hot—for want of cool air from the blocked vent.

The pilot and copilot strained to keep their chopper straight and level, resisting the temptation to trust their sensory judgment of which way was up and which way was down. The sandstorm buffeted the ungainly craft, caught at that moment in a valley ringed by sharply rising hills. An accident waiting to happen. The crew had been trained to trust their instruments, not themselves, as they worked the controls with deft touches of both their hands and feet.

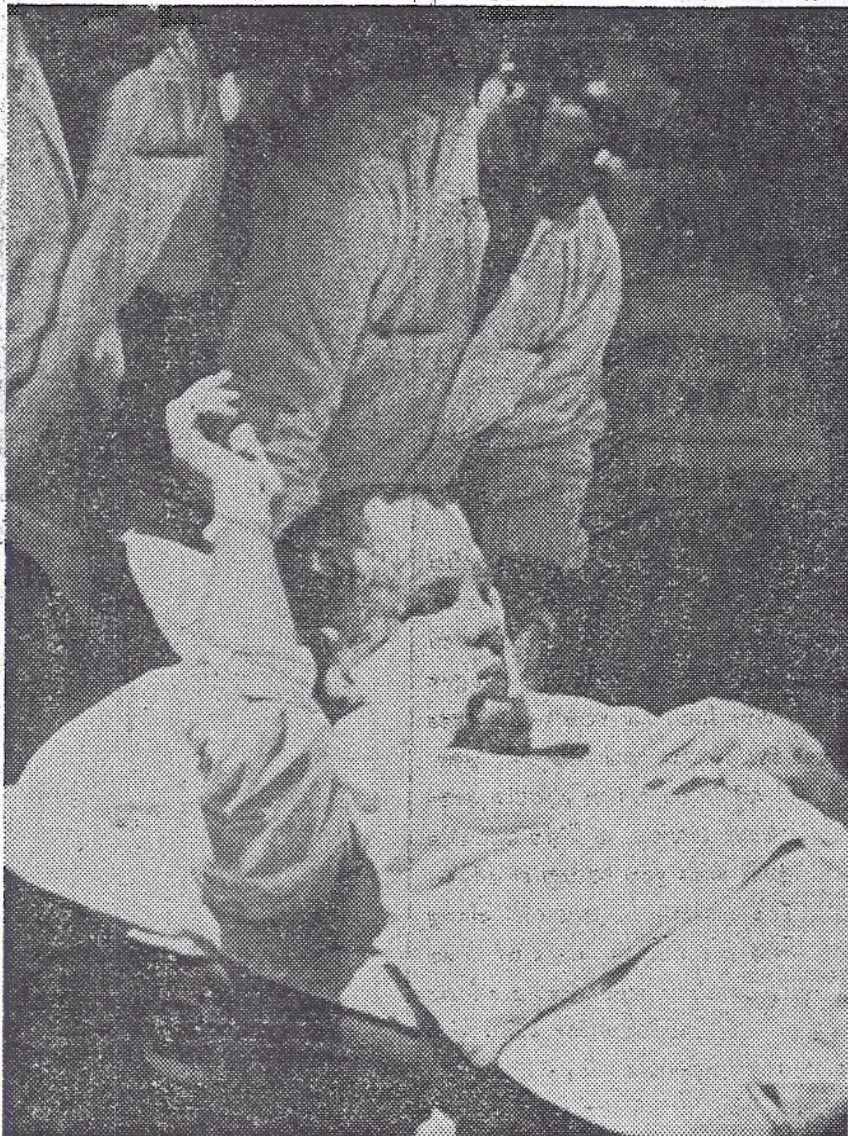
Behind the pilots, the air crewmen were being tossed around. They were getting air sick. The pilots were becoming disoriented from the buffeting, at the edge of the condition called vertigo.

At this critical moment, when the pilots were barely winning their fight against the desert storm, the gyro compass went out completely. One of the two attitude indicators, one for each pilot, went out, too. The black box burned itself out.

The pilot decided to keep plunging ahead into the thicker part of the dust storm to make his rendezvous and risked ramming into a mountain he knew to be near. Then he decided to reverse course to reach the clear air where he could read the ground, where his old fashioned instruments could guide him back toward the Nimitz.

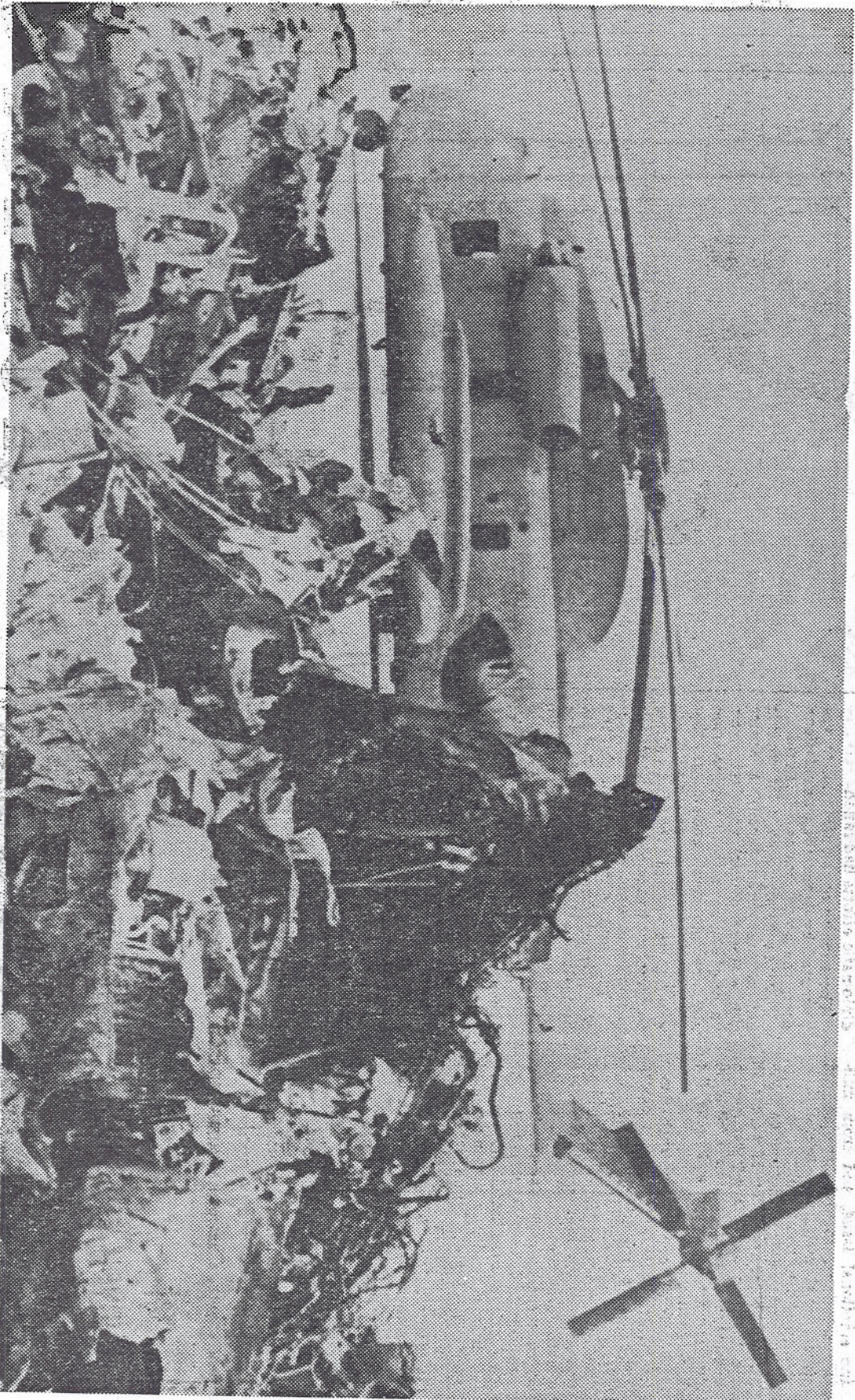
The pilot could not know at the time that another helicopter had already been abandoned on the way to Desert One. A second would not be able to take off because of hydraulic failure. As Chopper Five swung back, the Nimitz was steaming toward it, trying for a rendezvous in the Gulf of Oman before the helicopter's fuel ran out.

Adm. Thomas B. Hayward, chief of naval operations was to say afterward, that when the crew of Chopper Five turned back to the Nimitz, the mission was finished: “With them went the prospect of mustering the needed six operational helos. . . . Therein lies the real story of this aborted mission.”



Associated Press

Marine Maj. James H. Shaefer Jr. of Los Angeles, burned in collision of a helicopter and C130, was brought to medical center in San Antonio for treatment.



The wreckage of a destroyed helicopter is seen on a beach. The wreckage is scattered on the sand. A person is standing near the wreckage. Another person is visible in the background.

Remains of destroyed helicopter lie next to an abandoned RH53 Sea Stallion at Desert One, staging base for U.S. raid to rescue hostages in Tehran.

Associated Press

THE MISSION

By George C. Wilson

Washington Post Staff Writer

The pilot of the fifth helicopter scheduled to lift off the deck of the Nimitz aircraft carrier was following the special procedures for a top secret mission.

He revved up his twin-jet engines to full power, studied one instrument after another in the cockpit of the vibrating Navy RH53 Sea Stallion and held his position on the deck longer than usual.

There could be no malfunctions on this one. His chopper was one of eight that were supposed to make history by snatching 53 American hostages out of the grip of Iranian militants in Tehran.

The anonymous pilot of Chopper Five, whose identity the Pentagon has not yet disclosed, played a crucial part in the drama of bad luck which led to the scrubbed mission's failure. If Chopper Five had made it, the history would have been written differently.

The officer in the tower high above the canted deck of the giant Nimitz radioed into the pilot's earphones: Cleared for takeoff. His instruments said: Everything is go.

With silent thanks to the two separate crews that had gone over Chopper Five inch-by-inch to make sure it was ready for this long flight, the pilot used his hands and feet together with the skill of an organist and slipped his bird off the deck of the Nimitz.

After clearing the deck, Chopper Five ran low over the waves, nose pointing down for a bit to gain speed, then swung onto its course for Iran. The pilot had been briefed extensively on this mission. He knew it would be exhausting, difficult and dangerous.

For two hours Chopper Five thud-thudded first over the dark Arabian Sea and then over the hilly terrain of southern Iran. Nothing unusual to report. Darkness obscured the land features so vital to this chopper, which flew low over the desert to duck under the beams of any searching Iranian rada. But the pilot and copilot had instruments for flying blind.

The "wet" compass swings wildly around in the cockpit if the chopper is forced into violent maneuvers. But another compass, steadied by a gyroscope, would show the pilots where they were going without flinching, no matter what the helicopter did.

The gyro, spinning around to proffer from one of those black boxes bolted onto the frame of the big helicopter. Another instrument that made blind-

flying possible was the attitude indicator. It is a little instrument that shows the pilot the position of the helicopter in relation to the horizon—whether he was tipped sideways, right side up or upside down.

Chopper Five also carried those old-fashioned instruments that go all the way back to Eddie Rickenbacker, an altimeter showing how high off the ground the helicopter is, a needle-and-ball to show the pilot how sharp he is turning and backing. There are also instruments showing forward and downward speed.

The trouble with these old-fashioned instruments is they take a while