

# Hostages

## Texas bells for hostages

### Freedom celebrations take many forms

United Press International  
A huge star that had shone atop Franklin Mountain near El Paso since Christmas 1979 in memory of the hostages finally was extinguished, its mission completed, America's hostages back on free soil.

With trees and street signs across the state draped in yellow ribbons, Texans Tuesday celebrated the release of the 52 hostages after 444 days of captivity.

In Dallas, county commissioners raised the flag in front of the county courthouse from half-mast for the first time in months.

The bells in Dallas' Thanksgiving Square were struck 52 times in honor of the 52 captives shortly after officials there heard President Reagan say the hostages' plane was in the air.

"Everybody's excited down here. There are a lot of people coming down and standing around, watching them (the bells) ring," said spokeswoman Jimmie Lowe.

Saying his prayers had been answered, a disillusioned Iranian national now living in Port Arthur vowed to thank in person one day the American hostage who helped him flee Iran just hours before hostage crisis began.

The Iranian, who asked not to be identified because he still has family in Iran, left his country Nov.

4, 1979, on a visa arranged by American Vice Consul Ernest Cooke. The Iranian did not know until he arrived in the United States that the hostages had been taken that same day.

"I will find him one day and I will thank him," said the young Iranian, whose American wife was in the United States when he was trying to get out of Iran.

Throughout the 14 months Cooke was held, the Iranian prayed for him.

In Fort Worth, downtown Christmas lights were turned on until the hostages returned to America.

In south Abilene, Marguerite Allen set out 20 American flags and tied 400 yards of yellow ribbons on trees, bushes and pillars at Crossroads Shopping Center.

The people in Balch Springs, home of hostage Johnny McKeel, were ahead of the rest of the state, spending a rainy and cold Monday tying yellow ribbons on trees.

The "Welcome Home, Johnny" committee is planning a parade "for when Johnny comes home," said co-chairman Patricia Erickson. The parade is tentatively set for Feb. 7.

"I'm so keyed up I haven't been able to accomplish a thing today," said the other co-chairman, Sandy Wood.

## Balch Springs hostage told mother was dead; she's not

United Press International  
BALCH SPRINGS — Marine Sgt. Johnny McKeel Jr., free of the Iranian militants who held him hostage for 444 days, made a telephone call from Wiesbaden, West Germany, to the woman his captors had said was dead — his mother.

Wynona McKeel said her son did not learn the news of her death was a lie until arriving in Wiesbaden, where American officials sent to welcome the freed hostages told him she was just fine.

"They delivered to him a 'welcome home' box full of letters and pictures, all proving to Johnny his mother was alive.

"They told him I was dead when they interrogated him," Mrs. McKeel said. "They told him they'd let him come home for the funeral if he told them what they wanted to know."

Mrs. McKeel had not been overly critical of the Iranians while her son, 27, and 51 other Americans were held, but Wednesday she called them "stupid, barbaric fanatics."

In their telephone conversation, Mrs. McKeel said Johnny was concerned about the welfare of his family and how Americans had felt about the hostages.

"He seemed to think the government had forgotten them. They didn't know anything that was going on," she said.

Mrs. McKeel said she and her husband, Johnny Sr., reassured their son during the phone call, which came about 2 a.m. Wednesday, that no one in America had ever forgotten the captives during their long ordeal.

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## Hostage Royer from Houston tells family he's taken up jogging and wants an outfit

United Press International  
HOUSTON — Former hostage Bill Royer told his mother by phone Wednesday he had taken up jogging and wanted to buy an outfit because he would soon be running outside.

The phone call Mrs. Dorothy Royer was waiting for came at 3 a.m.

"We told him we didn't wait for him for dinner," Mrs. Royer said as she gleefully answered questions, laughing and smiling as she recalled the 45-minute conversation with her son from a Wiesbaden, West Germany, hospital where he and the 51 other freed hostages had just arrived.

"He was in great spirits," she said. "I knew Bill would come home that way."

Royer, 49, was a teacher with the International Communications Agency when enprisoned in the takeover of the American Embassy in Iran.

The first glimpse Mrs. Royer got of her son was while she was praying for him in church Tuesday night. A local TV station had provided her with a mini-television set so she could monitor the activities, and she saw him as he stepped off a plane in Algiers.

"I almost didn't want to look. Some of the hostages looked so apprehensive, but not my Bill," she said.

She said the phone conversation, which sounded like he was as close as

next door, revolved around questions Royer asked concerning his family. He mentioned he wanted to buy a jogging outfit and shoes, and start running when he got home.

"He's been jogging standing still. He probably would like to get out in some open space," she said.

The symbolic yellow-ribbon pin Mrs. Royer, 79, has been wearing for months is gone from her lapel. She gave it away, but her home is decorated with yellow ribbons, flowers and balloons.

A yellow rose, nestled next to a photograph of Royer, sits on the mantel. Nearby are wrapped Christmas presents.

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