



A Day To Remember

Story and Photos by Tom Bartlett

Sgt Kenneth L. Kraus will long remember Valentine's Day, 1979. That was the day he was wounded in the forehead and eyes by a shotgun blast.

But that's not the end to Kraus' "Valentine" story. It was strictly by chance that the 22-year-old Marine from Lansdale, Pa., was serving at the American Embassy, Tehran, Iran. Originally (after graduating from the Marine Security Guard School, Washington, D. C.), he was assigned to Nicosia, Cyprus. He was sent to Iran on temporary additional duty after serving less than three months at the embassy in Nicosia.

On February 14, heavily armed Iranian guerrillas attacked the American Embassy in the capital city (Tehran) in Iran. American Marines defended the embassy by firing tear gas, and then shotguns loaded with number nine skeet shot.

According to an embassy official, the skeet shot is not meant to kill. It is used to wound or "to discourage" embassy intruders when necessary.

(The Tehran embassy had a complement of 19 Marines; an estimated force of 200 guerrillas massed through the embassy gates.) The guerrillas fired automatic rifles, sub-machine guns and heavy machine guns into the embassy.

The Marines used tear gas as they moved from the ground floor to an upper deck, locking a metal door behind them. But the guerrilla force heavily outnumbered the Americans and the Marines were ordered to discard their weapons and ammunition.

The ambassador arranged a surrender. Kraus later recalled: "I was at my bunk, about to get undressed and have a shower. I had just had breakfast after doing the early morning watch.

"Suddenly I heard a flow of shots—pop-pop-pop. My buddy and I looked at each other. Then we grabbed our gear and chased down the back stairs, putting on our stuff as we ran. (Helmets, flak jackets, walkie talkies.) We also had .38 caliber pistols, shotguns and tear gas.

"My duty assignment was at the gate to the commissary. There were three of us Marines there and about 20 civilians. There were at least 100 armed men coming over the wall.

"Others were shooting from the roofs of buildings outside the compound. Rounds were coming in every-

where. We told the civilians to stay low.

"We were in touch with the ambassador (William H. Sullivan) by walkie-talkie. He gave orders not to fire unless our lives were in danger. He said we should surrender to them. So I stowed our two walkie-talkies and two shotguns in the ice cooler.

"I threw two tear gas canisters over the wall, but that probably just made them angrier. They were shooting the windows out. Then they started pounding on the door. When they burst in, one of the Iranian employees stepped in front of me.

"He took a submachine gun burst in the chest. We threw up our hands and said '*pasheman*' (surrender). They made us take off our helmets, flak jackets, wristwatches and money. They just left us our boots and trousers.

"One guy in a nice suit came up to me and said, 'Don't worry. Just tell us where your guns are.' I gave him our .38's. He said, 'Where are the guns?' So I showed him the two shotguns in the ice cooler. He asked where the heavier weapons were.

"I said, 'Look, we are security troops. All we've got is this stuff.' He said something in Persian to the guy standing next to him, who decked me with a rifle butt to the ribs.

"As I was lying there, I saw another guy with one of our shotguns about 20 feet away, drawing a bead on my face. I said to myself, 'Jesus, I hope it's over quick,' and closed my eyes. Then I heard this terrible roar."

Kraus woke up in a hospital.

From the hospital, the revolutionaries arrested Kraus and held him for a week. Preparations were being made to take legal actions against the Marine for unspecified "crimes" committed during the attack. He was blindfolded, handcuffed and taken away while still wearing hospital pajamas.

Ambassador William Sullivan negotiated continuously with the Khomeini Committee to secure Kraus' release. When he was freed, President Jimmy Carter called the Marine's mother to tell her that her son was once again at the American embassy.

"I'm glad to be going home," Kraus said as armed guerrillas escorted him to the plane which would carry him to Frankfurt, Germany. He said he had been held in a



Sgt Kenneth L. Kraus will long remember the day he was wounded and captured while helping to defend the American Embassy in Tehran, Iran. He'll also remember the day he returned home and was greeted by his family, the Secretary of the Navy and the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Tehran prison but not mistreated.

Following a medical examination at an Army hospital in Frankfurt, he was flown to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. There he was greeted by the Honorable W. Graham Claytor, Jr., Secretary of the Navy; General Louis H. Wilson, Commandant of the Marine Corps; Senators John Heinz III and Richard Schweiker; and Representatives Lawrence Coughlin and Richard Schulze.

Kraus' mother, three sisters and his fiancée were also present, as were many newspeople representing television, radio and newspapers. The Marine Band and units of the Marine Barracks at Eighth and Eye (Washington, D.C.) were also on hand.



Secretary of the Navy Claytor awarded the Navy Commendation Medal to Kraus and General Wilson presented him with the Purple Heart.

And as The Marine's Hymn," tears streamed down the sergeant's face.

Valentine's Day, 1979. It will be a day that Sgt Ken Kraus will long remember....

