

Last U.S. hostage free after 6 years

Terry Anderson's release ends Lebanese saga



DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Journalist Terry Anderson, the last American hostage in Lebanon, was set free Wednesday by pro-Iranian Islamic radicals and said faith and stubbornness helped him survive the nearly seven-year ordeal.

His release ended a brutal saga in which Shiite Muslims kept 13 Americans in chains, killed three and bedeviled two U.S. presidencies.

A joyous Anderson grinned broadly, raised his arms and warmly greeted friends as he entered a conference room at the Syrian Foreign Ministry. He later left to meet his 6-year-old daughter, Sulome, for the first time.

Anderson said sheer determination got him through his captivity.

"You just do what you have to do. You wake up every day, summon up the energy from somewhere ... and you get through the day, day after day after day," said Anderson, The Associated Press' chief Middle East correspondent.

"I was lucky enough to have other people with me most of the time. ... My faith. Stubbornness, I guess," he said.

His appearance was delayed for hours. U.N. officials, who have skillfully negotiated for the release of nine hostages since August, said they believed he had been caught in a snowstorm in Lebanon and was forced to take a lengthy detour.

Anderson's kidnappers turned him over to Syrian security officials who delivered him to U.S. Ambassador Christopher Ross in Damascus.

Anderson, wearing a white shirt and a dark cardigan he received only Wednesday morning from his captors, joked about tight-fitting shoes. He said they were the first he had worn since he was kidnapped.

"You can't imagine how glad I am to see you," an emotional Anderson told reporters. "I've thought about this moment for a long time and now it's here, and I'm scared to death. I don't know what to say." He hugged and kissed Alex Efty, an AP correspondent.

Ending the news conference, he explained: "I have a date with a couple of beautiful ladies and I'm already very late." He was referring to

Sulome and her mother, Madeleine.

Asked what his last words to his kidnappers were, he rolled his eyes and said simply: "Good-bye."

Anderson was to leave later in the evening for Wiesbaden, Germany, where recently released hostages Joseph Cicippio and Alann Steen are resting and undergoing medical examinations.

A U.S. military doctor said Steen suffered brain damage and was subject to periodic seizures because of being kicked in the head during his captivity.

The release of the three Americans ended the agonizing hostage drama for the United States. Two Germans still are held in Lebanon, however, and U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar said his work would not be over until they are released.

Perez de Cuellar has led delicate negotiations involving a complex swap of Western hostages, hundreds of Arabs held by Israel and information about missing Israeli servicemen.

Anderson was the best known of the captives and came to personify the agonizing hostage ordeal.

Frank Reed, who spent two years in captivity with Anderson, said from Malden Mass., that Anderson's release truly freed all hostages once held in Lebanon.

"For me, today is the first day you can officially call me an ex-hostage, now that Terry's free," Reed said. "Thank God almighty we're all free at last."


A flurry of contradictory reports early in the day about Anderson's whereabouts mirrored the agonizing cycle of raised and dashed hopes for release from his 2,455-day ordeal.

Until Anderson arrived in Damascus, it was a painful day for his relatives and friends.

"It's been like a big roller coaster ride," Anderson's 36-year-old brother John said from his home in Ocala, Fla. "But that's the way it's been for almost seven years."

The confusion arose after a five-page Arabic-language statement from the Islamic Jihad group, which held Anderson, announced that he would

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