
Chapter 2

Iranian Navy

In 1972, I had just graduated from Vesal High School in Tehran, Iran in a community called “Tehran-Noe”. My major course of study was in Mathematics. In Iran, you must study and do well in all the courses you signed up for that year. Failing one course would result in having to take all the courses over again the following year. Education and achieving good grades was very important to me since I intended to advance my education by going to college after graduating from high school. I would study long hours at home and with friends in a library while researching extra materials needed to pass the entrance exam to one of the universities when the time came. However, due to the shortage of universities in Iran and because of the very difficult entrance exams, I was not successful in achieving entrance to any of the universities there.

I took advantage of my summer sessions and acquired some courses in English and Typing, while at the same time I worked alongside my older brother, Parviz, in a photo shop. He worked as a lab-technician in a photo shop called “Photo Rima”. His boss was an outstanding Armenian individual that I met. Though we did not get into any type of

religious discussion, he treated us like his own sons! This was my first encounter with a Christian.

After finishing my high school, I somehow ended up joining the Iranian Navy. When I say somehow, it is because, I never asked nor applied for it. It fell in my lap as part of God's plan in my life!

While searching for other universities, I saw and responded to an advertisement in one of Tehran's local newspapers about working on a commercial cruise liner, which they were accepting applications.

The Iranian Navy had provided the facilities and the space needed for 300 students to take their exam. Two groups were chosen based on the results of the exams. The first group consisted of twenty people, which later I learned were chosen for the commercial cruise liner. The second group consisted of only twelve students, whom the Navy chose to train internally. I was included in the latter group.

Though it was flattering to be chosen as part of the Iranian Navy, they never gave us the option of whether we wanted to serve in the Iranian Navy or not. I never applied or asked for that job. They just took us, proceeded to give us haircuts, and measured us for a military uniform!

I had never had any dealings with the government and was very inexperienced, not knowing what questions to ask.

As a result I went home very confused that day and discussed the matter with my Dad. Luckily, the following day my Dad met a Commander from the Navy in one of the social gatherings and told him briefly about me and what had taken place at the Navy base. He told my Dad that if I had any questions to please come by his office and that he would be glad to answer any questions that I might have.

So, the following day I went to the Commander's office in order to consult with him and ask him some questions concerning how we were handled. The Commander was not in his office at the time, but there was a young officer sitting there on one of the chairs in his office, also waiting to speak with the Commander. He inquired about my business and I told him about the questions I had regarding the Navy. He then proceeded to tell me that he recently came back from overseas after finishing his four years of schooling there.

(I thought to myself that maybe he is the one that I should listen to since he just finished going through what I was about to.)

He continued by telling me that after a few years of education they would bring you back and treat you like a “football” by kicking you from the North (Caspian Sea) to the South (Persian Gulf) and vice versa. He then told me that he had been back in Iran and on active duty for several



months, yet to this day he had not received a station or job assignment. He then advised me to choose the civilian life instead, where I could be my own boss and be in charge of my own destiny.

(That day, I left the Commander's office feeling more confused than ever. I knew though, that the military might draft me someday anyway for a two-year service. But, if I chose this route, I at least would have the opportunity to go overseas with the Navy and further my education. The thought of becoming an officer made me feel proud as well, not to mention that the uniform was very appealing to me. So I decided to stay.)

Anyhow, the Navy sent us to an area north of Tehran where the rest of the cadets were already going through their basic training. It appeared that they were twelve cadets short of completing their quota in this previous group of recruits and that is why only a small group of us were being selected at this time. To make matters more confusing, when we got there, the four months of training had just finished, and as a result, we were all sent home the following day!

The next step was for us to report to an English class where we studied English for approximately three months. Then the Navy would choose specific schools in the United States for specific courses of study for all of us. Later in chapter four, I will talk more about the challenges I faced in my designated school. In the mean time while we were taking our English training, we participated in some military ceremonial events.

One of the things that caught my eye was this: During speeches or military ceremonials, the commanders would

salute to just a picture of the Shah (the former King of Iran) and expressed to us that we all should be committing our loyalty to him, rather than to the country!

At any rate, during my first year in the Navy, I had numerous good experiences. We made several field trips to the south, including “Khark Island” and other locations in the Persian Gulf region. We visited many Naval Bases as well as the famous Abadan oil refinery, one of the largest in the world. Their goal was to teach us to protect the country and the places of importance from the aggressors, as the whole world was after what we had in abundance—“**the oil!**” But it was already too late, because most of the oil profits were going outside of the country! I began taking notes mentally since I was not familiar with those military implementations.

Eventually on January 16, 1979, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his wife, Empress Farah, left Tehran and flew to Aswan in Egypt to go into exile. Many of his high-ranking officers either left with him or were killed by this new Islamic regime. A good example of that, (according to the people of Iran), was what happened to the Prime Minister, Amir Abbas Hoveyda. He was being charged for wrong doings done by the Shah and his government against the people of Iran.

He was supposed to go before the courts to answer questions as to why he or the Shah held, killed, or tortured so many political prisoners. While they were transporting him, one of the religious hardliners who acted as the judge, jury, and the executioner pulled his gun and killed the Prime

Minister in cold blood before he could have a chance to defend himself in a court of law.

That Judge, (according to some Iranians that I have spoken with), was one of the ruthless religious hardliners of that time and brought much fear among the people of Iran, making them subservient to this new regime.

Under Islamic regime many things changed. Women lost their freedom and were forced to cover their whole body including their hair. Men were not allowed to wear shorts. The Iranian education curriculum, though it used to have some religious study, became more Islamic at all levels, including universities. Many faced harsh punishments and imprisonment by questioning the motives of this new regime or opposing the Islamic government by suggesting that religion should not be involved in the politics of Iran.

Among those opposing were some of their own clergies like Ayatollah Boroujerdi and Ayatollah Montazari, both with huge followers. They initially were in favor of the change and reformation of Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini, but later disagreed with the harsh treatment of the citizens and pulled away from him. Ayatollah Khomeini issued an order to the Judicial Officials to judge every Iranian political prisoner and kill those who would not repent of anti-regime activities. According to the report by “Telegraph.co.uk”, more than 30,000 political prisoners were executed in the 1988 massacre. Prisoners were loaded onto forklift trucks in groups of six and hanged from cranes in half-hour intervals.

Many have asked me from my perspective whether the Shah was loved or hated. Neither my family nor I were interested in politics. I never knew any other person except

the Shah of Iran as our king. He was a good king based on my limited knowledge. I have always loved and respected him, pleased of his accomplishments. I also was proud of my country as well. I watched one of his early interviews with Barbara Walters of ABC news on American television, where he was expressing that his people loved him and he felt the same toward his people. I could not agree any less with that statement. This pride especially increased when I noticed leaders of many countries around the world were in harmony and agreement with the Shah and his leadership. An example of that was Iran's legendary 2500 years of continuous statehood when the Shah declared his political leadership on the international stage, which Mohammad Reza Shah and his dynasty appeared secure.

This 2500 year celebration of Iran's monarchy consisted of an elaborate set of festivities that took place in October of 1971. It was the occasion of the 2500th anniversary of the founding of the Iranian monarchy by "Cyrus the Great". During this ceremony, the leaders of the whole world were in my country.

What a proud moment that was for us Iranians! Shah Reza Pahlavi, who called himself "the King of kings", stood proudly by the tomb of Cyrus the great, the king of Persia, dressed in full kingship uniform. With a loud voice, which was echoed all over Persepolis, Shiraz (Fars Province, South of Iran) saying: "Cyrus, rest in peace thus we are awake...rest in peace..." as the whole country was glued to the television, including me, listening and watching the whole ceremony. I must say that I was proud of what I was seeing and hearing regarding my country and its accomplishments.



Tomb of Cyrus the great

Frankly, I was in shock when I learned that the Shah of Iran left the country in 1979 after a few shots were fired! Little did I know that his military had already fired many shots into a crowd of demonstrators, and would have killed more if the Shah would have permitted it!

The Shah on the other hand did not want too much bloodshed and chose to leave the country instead with the hope of coming back to rescue his military generals and other high ranking officers. However, the one who called himself “Shah-han-shah” meaning the King of kings never returned back to Iran!

I was young and very naïve, and was not involved in my country’s politics. My first impression was that God was in control and I did not think twice about what would happen next. History had already proven that the Shah of Iran had been a “Good Leader” compared to what we have now in his place (the Islamic Republic), though I did not agree with what “SAVAK” or the Shah’s secret police was doing during his reign. Incidentally when the Shah came to power in 1953

with the aid of the United States, “SAVAK” was also formed and trained by the CIA to control and crackdown the oppositions.

Great Britain had returned the Shah in 1931. The Shah signed a deal selling Iranian oil to the Anglo Persian Oil Company, which today is called British Petroleum (BP). When the first democratically elected parliament and prime minister in Iran took power in 1950 they planned to nationalize Iran’s oil assets, violating the still running oil contract with British Petroleum. The British Government followed that disagreement by a complaint against Iran in Belgium’s International Court but lost the case against Iran’s new government. Great Britain reacted by blockading the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, halting Iran’s trade and economy. The new prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh ordered the British embassy in Iran to be closed. However, British determination and willingness concerning the control of Iran’s oil, with the help of the USA and CIA, arranged a coup in Tehran, overthrew Prime Minister Mossadegh and restored the pro-western Shah to power. After more than twenty years of the Shah’s rule, there was a bloody revolution in 1979 after which Iran became the Islamic Republic it is today. (*Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia*)

Anyhow, our classes ended after three months, and now the time was quickly approaching for our group, which consisted of fifty cadets, to depart for our assigned school in the USA. It was the beginning of the spring and close to our traditional Iranian New Year. Happiness was in the air as the aroma of flower blossoms signified the change in the season from winter to spring. It was an exciting time in my life. It seemed that everyone was buying new clothes, cleaning up

and getting ready for “Norooz”, which means New Year. There were many gatherings and farewell parties, especially in our home.

Shortly after the New Year, we finally headed for the airport. Many of our families and friends were there to see us off. All of my family was there also. They were proud of their son and his accomplishments. I had never flown in an airplane before; as a result I was very excited and nervous at the same time, eager to experience something for the first time in my life. I knew that I was going to a college in the USA for a few years. Going to a college, especially outside of the country, and flying in an airplane for the first time made my head swell up a bit. I wasn’t even thinking of missing my family, or the time of my return. I was “walking on a cloud” within the frame of my mind, not realizing that only God was in control of my destiny and future!

My youngest sister, who was only seven years old, cried for me as we were saying our goodbyes to each other. I gently kissed her face to let her know that I will see her again very soon. Little did I know what lay ahead in my life’s journey!

Though not very aggressive, I somehow managed to move forward. It seemed as though someone was guiding me! But I couldn’t see nor was I able to comprehend who that was. I really did not have a mentor to look up to. Neither my parents nor I were very religious. I loved and respected my Mom and Dad, but they lacked many things I needed as mentors.

We finally said our farewells with kisses and tears and I began my journey for a destiny that only God could know!
