

# Blindfold Worn by Iran Hostage Robert "Bob" Blucker, 1979-1981

*Gift of Roy J. Apel*



*"Blood, sweat and tears" takes on a new meaning when we consider the blindfold of Robert Blucker, held hostage at the U.S. Embassy Tehran from 1979-1981. This cloth, deceptive in its simplicity, represents the extreme hardships that diplomats may undergo serving their country.*



This seemingly ordinary white cloth was used to blindfold Robert Blucker, an Economic Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Militant Iranians held him and 51 other American diplomats hostage 444 days from 1979-1981. The blindfold separated captive from captor, so that they no longer could see each other's eyes. When face to face communication ceased, bridging the "the last three feet," so important to diplomats communicating the world over, became impossible. Humiliation replaced humanity.

For many Iran hostages alive today, blindfolds are a reminder of months of isolation and fear. Those who remember the hostage crisis can conjure up images of diplomats on the cover of *Time* or on the nightly news, always blindfolded. During this crisis, Americans began to use the yellow ribbon for the first time as a symbol of hope that flowered on trees, mailboxes and homes around the United States.

Roy Apel, who donated the blindfold, was not himself a hostage, but he remembers his colleague, Bob Blucker, who died in 2003, as a "very independent, principled, and individualistic Foreign Service Officer." Once, when Iranian students attempted to take photos of Blucker in his room, he lay face down on his bed and refused to speak to them, forcing them to photograph the back of his head.



Blindfolded U.S.  
Hostage, 1979  
*AP Photo*

After the hostage ordeal, Mr. Blucker gave the blindfold to a good friend to thank her for her hospitality and asked her to wash it. After he died, she wrote "I would not do it [wash it], all his tears are still in it, this is like a relic."

Though soft to the touch, this cloth "relic" is a powerful reminder of the unexpected and sudden dangers that diplomats may encounter.



Anti-American protestors at  
gates of U.S. Embassy,  
Tehran 1979  
*AP Photo*



U.S. Diplomats held hostage  
444 days return home  
*Cynthia Johnson, The White House*