



OTTAWA (AFP) — A retired Canadian diplomat who protected US envoys as they fled the Iranian revolution, part of an operation that inspired the recent hit movie "Argo," has died, public television reported Monday.

Former consular official John Sheardown died in hospital in Ottawa aged 88, the CBC report said. The precise cause of his death was not given, but he was elderly and known to be suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

In November 1979, Sheardown and then Canadian ambassador Ken Taylor decided to shelter six American diplomats in their Tehran homes after Iranian student radicals stormed the US embassy and took 52 more Americans hostage.

While the hostages ended up spending 444 days in captivity, the six that got away were housed in secret by their Canadian hosts and just under three months later were able to escape the country under false Canadian passports.

The so-called "Canadian caper" inspired the 2012 Hollywood movie "Argo," by actor-director Ben Affleck, though some in Canada felt it underplayed the role of their diplomats while making CIA agent Tony Mendez the star.

"It completely ignored all the Canadian involvement," Sheardown's son Robin complained, in a CBC interview.

The embassy hostage-taking triggered a breakdown in relations between Washington and revolutionary Iran which continues to this day.

The student Islamists who stormed the embassy were demanding that the United States send the ousted Iranian monarch, Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi, home to face trial and restore his fortune to the Iranian people.

In April 1980, then US president Jimmy Carter ordered an ill-fated military rescue mission, Operation Eagle's Claw, which was aborted even before a plane crash at a makeshift desert refueling base killed eight US servicemen.

The 52 hostages were eventually freed in on January 20, 1981, after Algeria mediated a deal between Washington and Tehran's Islamist regime.