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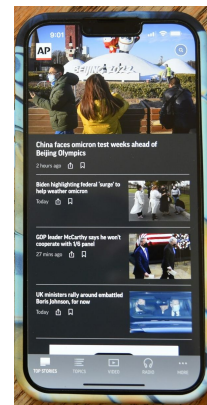
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# Connecting

Sept. 21, 2023

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Colleagues,

Good Thursday morning on this Sept. 21, 2023,

Today's headlines on the release of five Americans from "Tehran's notorious Evin prison" sparked memories for our colleague **Charlie Hanley**.

He takes us back four decades to an experience with four other journalists – including fellow Connecting colleague **Ron Edmonds** – who were invited by the three-year-old revolutionary government to a newsgathering junket in an Iran still semi-closed to Western journalists.

Here's to a great day – be safe, stay healthy, live it to your fullest.

Paul

## 'A Night in Evin Prison,' starring Johnny Apple and The Hangman



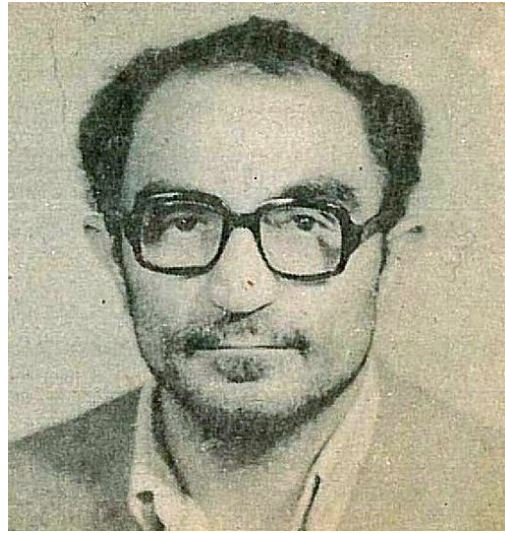
Family embrace freed American Emad Shargi after he and four fellow detainees were released in a prisoner swap deal between U.S and Iran, Sept. 19, 2023, at Fort Belvoir, Va. Jonathan Ernst/Pool via AP

**Charlie Hanley** – The news about the U.S.-won release of five prisoners from Tehran’s Evin Prison recalls for me a wild night in the infamous lockup that could have ended even more wildly and badly but for the cool head of a fellow reporter. I wrote about it at the time, but not the full story, for reasons that will be obvious.

AP photographer Ron Edmonds and I, with three other U.S. reporters – the NY Times’ Johnny Apple (R.W. Apple Jr.), Youssef Ibrahim of the WSJ, and Tom Fenton, CBS – were invited by the three-year-old revolutionary government to a newsgathering junket in an Iran still semi-closed to Western journalists. It was November 1982, deep in the Iran-Iraq War. The Iranians wanted to show off battlefield gains, and so we first spent a hairy time at the warfront. Back in Tehran, we interviewed President (now Supreme Leader) Khamenei and other top dogs. (Meanwhile, in the evenings, away from our 9-to-5 government minders, I was able to develop “unofficial” stories as well.) Then, late in the trip, came the visit to Evin Prison, notorious as the alleged site of nonstop torture and executions of political prisoners. Presumably the Iranians wanted to counter those reports. Our host was chief prosecutor and prison warden Asadollah Lajevardi, known to the exiled opposition as “The Hangman.” (Photo below right)

First problem as our bus pulled up outside: “No photos.” Ron had to stay behind (with NYT photog Fred Conrad) as we headed inside, and as one of his minders commented, Ron later told me, “I worry about the reporters. Lajevardi doesn’t like journalists.” Indeed.

Once through the gate, we were led into the main building and a small room where The Hangman awaited. A squat, bearded man, an ex-carpenter, he sat cross-legged on the floor, as then did we. Taking our questions, fingering his worry beads, he dismissed all mention of torture and insisted the number of executions was minimal. Asked about the recent execution of former Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, accused of sedition and CIA links, Lajevardi grinned. "He was killed here, by firing squad." He laughed. "I would have preferred to hang him right in Washington."



Could we visit the cellblocks? No. Could we meet with Zia Nassry (an Afghan American whose imprisonment was of concern in Washington)? No.

We were soon led out into the corridor to learn the real purpose of our visit. Dozens of young inmates descended on us, shouting, "Margh bar Amrika!" - "Death to America!" They grew increasingly frenzied, pressing in on us, as we headed toward what we were told was our main event, a religious service in an auditorium. It was all a demonstration of Lajevardi's "re-education" therapy, of anti-regime prisoners supposedly brought to see the wisdom of the Islamic revolution. "Now it is my duty to go to the front and die," one enthusiastic-sounding teenager told us in English. Of course, it was also wise of any inmate to go along with the "conversion."

The auditorium was packed with more than 1,000 prisoners, both male and female, who joined in praying and chanting revolutionary slogans. We'd had enough. Let's go, we told our minders. But in the hallway we found a mob of angry-looking, shouting youths blocking the exit. Clearly the louder one was, the more devoted to the revolution.

As we retreated, they pursued us. By now, excited inmates were simply thundering up and down hallways, chanting. Our minders were as unnerved as we were. We fled into a small office, bolted the door and blocked it with furniture, as prisoners pounded on it. It was all an act, but a scary one. We knew some of these young men had been violent militants.

After 10 minutes and many apologies from our embarrassed escorts, things quieted down. We ventured out into a courtyard off the main gate, only to find yet another raucous prisoner mob welcoming us, along with a smug-looking Lajevardi, the showrunner himself.

Johnny Apple had had more than enough. The veteran Timesman, notoriously short-tempered, began himself shouting, at our smiling host, demanding an explanation for our treatment, spewing expletives. The minders dared not translate. His face reddening, he loomed over the little Hangman, yelling all the while. Inmates crowded around, louder than ever, now shouting, "Yankee, go home!" (Please, yes.) As Johnny drew closer, right in Lajevardi's face, scaring us all, big Youssef Ibrahim, an old Apple pal, grabbed his hotheaded friend from behind and pulled him away.



We headed out the gate, through a gantlet of screaming prisoners pounding on our backs. “Margh bar Amrika!”

What might have happened, I’ve sometimes wondered, if Youssef hadn’t defused the Apple explosion? The Times’ 2006 obit for Johnny said it all: “Drama, and a lot of dash, followed Mr. Apple as night follows day.”

Two postscripts: Two days after we raised his case to Lajevardi, Zia Nassry was given

word he’d be freed. As for The Hangman himself, he was assassinated in 1998 by anti-regime forces.

## Denne Freeman and golfing legend Byron Nelson



**Charles Richards** - Denne Freeman, a retired longtime Associated Press sports editor for Texas, gave me this picture a year ago at an AP reunion in the mid-cities between Dallas and Fort Worth.

In the middle of this group is legendary golfer Byron Nelson, who played a round of golf that day at a new par-3 golf course in Arlington, not far from Six Flags Over Texas.

The others in the picture were four guys - including Denne and me -- who were then sportswriters/reporters from United Press International (UPI) in Dallas. We were among media types in the Dallas-Fort Worth area who were invited to join Nelson in playing the course that day -- on the first day of its opening.

From left to right, Wilborn Hampton, Charles Richards (me), Byron Nelson, Denne Freeman, and Mike Rabun. There was some prize for anyone who beat Nelson's score that day. None of us did.



This happened 58 years ago, in 1965. which means I was 24 -- a mere pup -- at the time. I now have this photo on a wall. I was pleased to be in the same company as the other four in the photo.

At the time, Denne, Mike, and I were regularly in the press boxes of various Southwest Conference football and basketball games. Denne became UPI's sports editor before moving to the same job with the AP.

Mike succeeded Denne as the UPI sports editor for the Southwest region, and I went to UPI's national sports desk in New York. A dozen years or so later, I joined Denne with the Associated Press (and stayed for 25 years).

The second picture is of Denne and me at that AP gathering. Sadly, Denne passed away earlier this year in his mid-80s.

## Rubbing shoulders with a hero



**Greg Halling** - Bob Woodward visited Yakima, Wash., to speak Wednesday at the Yakima Town Hall Series. Tuesday night, series organizers held a reception for Town Hall sponsors. Since the Yakima Herald-Republic is a sponsor, I was there with my managing editor, Joanna Markell. As Woodward walked across the lawn, I caught up with him and introduced myself. When I told him I was editor of the Yakima Herald-Republic, he went, "Oh!" We chatted about newspapers for about 10 minutes, and he told a Ben Bradlee story that I hadn't heard. Since it was a classy event, Woodward cleaned up Bradlee's language for general consumption, but it was still hilarious.

I asked if I could have my picture taken with him, he got out his phone and handed it to someone for a photo of his own, "So I can show my wife."

It's not every day you get to rub shoulders with your heroes. I still can't believe it. The whole time we were talking, I kept looking around for Jason Robards.

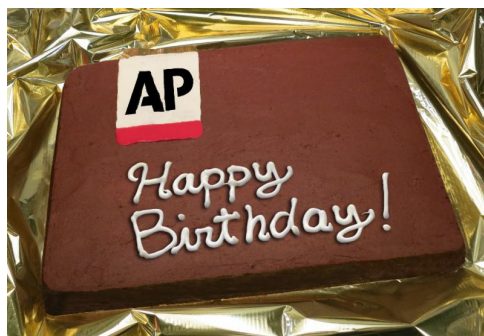
What a gracious, funny and fascinating man.

## AP reunion in Santa Monica



Retired LA news editor Steve Loeper, LA sports writer Beth Harris (center) and retired TV writer Lynn Elber reunited for lunch in Santa Monica on Tuesday. Steve retired in 2017.

## Connecting wishes Happy Birthday



[Karol Stonger](#)

[Grey Montgomery](#)

# Stories of interest

## ***White House Warns Freeing Evan Gershkovich 'Potentially Tough'*** (Wall Street Journal)

By Andrew Restuccia

WASHINGTON—The White House said the U.S. is in “very active” discussions aimed at securing the release of jailed Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, but warned that freeing him could be difficult.

“I can tell you there’s not a single day since Evan has been incarcerated that we haven’t worked on that case,” John Kirby, the National Security Council’s coordinator for strategic communications, said during an interview with MSNBC on Wednesday. He added that the U.S. is also working to free American businessman Paul Whelan, who was sentenced to 16 years in a Russian high-security prison on an espionage charge in 2020.

Gershkovich, a 31-year-old American citizen who was accredited by Russia’s Foreign Ministry to work as a journalist, was detained by agents from the Federal Security Service on March 29 during a reporting trip. He is being held on an allegation of espionage that he, the Journal and the U.S. government vehemently deny. Washington has said Gershkovich isn’t a spy and never worked for the government, and has deemed him to be wrongfully detained.

Whelan denies the charge against him, and the U.S. government has also deemed him to be wrongfully detained. The designation for both men unlocked a broad U.S. government effort to exert pressure on Russia to free them.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Linda Deutsch.

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## ***Evidence suggests Russia has been deliberately targeting journalists in Ukraine — a war crime*** (Nieman Lab)

By KELLY BJORKLUND and SIMON J. SMITH

At least 15 media workers have been killed in Ukraine since Russia began its full-scale war in February 2022. Along with targeting civilians, hospitals, schools, orphanages, residential buildings, communications centers, and places of worship, the Russian state has been accused by the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine of deliberately targeting journalists.



In a conflict such as the war in Ukraine, many journalists risk their lives to report the truth and reveal war crimes committed by both sides. But when journalists themselves are targeted, these war crimes almost always go unpunished.

Research from advocacy group Human Rights Watch has found that a de facto impunity exists for those responsible due to a lack of effort by many governments to bring killers of journalists to justice.

According to Unesco, the perpetrators go unpunished in nine out of ten cases when journalists are murdered, and this impunity "leads to more killings and is often a symptom of worsening conflict and the breakdown of law and judicial systems."

Read more [here](#). Shared by Linda Deutsch.

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## ***Somalia's first all-women newsroom spotlights female taboos*** (Reuters)

**By Abdi Sheikh**

MOGADISHU, Sept 20 (Reuters) - People often laugh when Fathi Mohamed Ahmed tells them she runs the first and only all-female newsroom in Somalia, one of the most dangerous places on the planet to be a reporter.

But Bilan, the media house where Ahmed works as chief editor, is far from a punchline, producing a daily mix of hard news and in-depth features for local and sometimes international audiences.

In its almost 18 months of operation Bilan, which means "to shine a light", has overcome prejudice and insecurity to illuminate some of the most taboo subjects in Somalia, including a female drug epidemic, albinism, women living with HIV and period shame.

"Sometimes my soul tells me I cannot continue the work because of insecurity and societal pressure. However, it is a career that I loved since my childhood and a dream which still lives in me," Ahmed said.

Although it is supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), success has not come easy or risk-free for Ahmed and her team.

With more than 50 journalists killed since 2010, Somalia is the most dangerous country for journalists in Africa, according to Reporters Without Borders.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Linda Deutsch.

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## ***James Hoge, Who Led Two Big City Tabloids, Dies at 87*** (New York Times)

By Clyde Haberman

James Hoge, who was a blue-blooded editor and publisher of blue-collar newspapers in Chicago and New York for a quarter-century and then long guided a leading journal on international relations, died on Tuesday in Manhattan. He was 87.

His son James Patrick Hoge confirmed the death, at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, but did not specify the cause. Mr. Hoge's death came four weeks after that of his younger brother, Warren, a former foreign correspondent and top editor at The New York Times.

Few editors at major American newspapers have been as young as Mr. Hoge was when he rose to the top at The Chicago Sun-Times, a tabloid aimed at a working-class readership. He became the city editor at age 29, editor in chief at 33 and publisher at 44.

He shook up the staff, strove for sprightlier writing and, like other newspaper editors in the 1970s, introduced new sections on business, food and fashion. "I am always agitating," he said.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Richard Chady.

## **Today in History – Sept. 21, 2023**



By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Sept. 21, the 264th day of 2023. There are 101 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On Sept. 21, 1981, the Senate unanimously confirmed the nomination of Sandra Day O'Connor to become the first female justice on the Supreme Court.

**On this date:**

In 1792, the French National Convention voted to abolish the monarchy.

In 1937, "The Hobbit," by J.R.R. Tolkien, was first published by George Allen & Unwin, Ltd. of London.

In 1938, a hurricane struck parts of New York and New England, causing widespread damage and claiming some 700 lives.

In 1957, the legal mystery-drama "Perry Mason," starring Raymond Burr, premiered on CBS.

In 1961, the first Boeing CH-47 Chinook military helicopter made its first hovering flight.

In 1973, the Senate confirmed Henry Kissinger to be Secretary of State.

In 1982, National Football League players began a 57-day strike, their first regular-season walkout ever.

In 1985, in North Korea and South Korea, relatives who had been separated for decades were allowed to visit each other as both countries opened their borders in an unprecedented family-reunion program.

In 1989, Hurricane Hugo crashed into Charleston, South Carolina; the storm was blamed for 56 deaths in the Caribbean and 29 in the United States.

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act denying federal recognition of same-sex marriages, a day after saying the law should not be used as an excuse for discrimination, violence or intimidation against gays and lesbians.

In 2001, Congress gave \$15 billion to the airline industry, which was suffering mounting economic losses since the Sept. 11 attacks.

In 2011, Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer, two Americans jailed in Iran as spies, left Tehran for the Gulf state of Oman, closing a high-profile drama that brought more than two years of hope and heartbreak for their families.

In 2017, millions of Puerto Ricans faced the prospect of weeks or months without power in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

In 2018, President Donald Trump directly challenged by name the woman accusing his Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh of sexual assault, saying that if the attack on Christine Blasey Ford had been as bad as she claimed, then she would have filed charges.

In 2021, Melvin Van Peebles, a playwright, musician and movie director whose work ushered in the “blaxploitation” films of the 1970s, died at his New York home at age 89.

In 2022, Russia’s Vladimir Putin ordered a mobilization of reservists for the first time in the nation since World War II nearly seven months after invading Ukraine.

Today’s Birthdays: Author-comedian Fannie Flagg is 82. Producer Jerry Bruckheimer is 80. Former Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear is 79. Musician Don Felder is 76. Author Stephen King is 76. Basketball Hall of Famer Artis Gilmore is 74. Actor-comedian Bill Murray is 73. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is 66. Movie producer-writer Ethan Coen is 66. Actor-comedian Dave Coulier is 64. Actor David James Elliott is 63. Actor Serena Scott Thomas is 62. Actor Nancy Travis is 62. Actor Rob Morrow is 61. Actor Angus Macfadyen is 60. Retired MLB All-Star Cecil Fielder is 60. Actor Cheryl Hines is 58. Country singer Faith Hill is 56. Rock musician Tyler Stewart (Barenaked Ladies) is 56. Country singer Ronna Reeves is 55. Actor-talk show host Ricki Lake is 55. Actor Billy Porter is 54. Actor Rob Benedict is 53. Actor James Lesure is 52. Actor Alfonso Ribeiro (rih-BEHR’-oh) is 52. Actor Luke Wilson is 52. Actor Paulo Costanzo is 45. Actor Bradford Anderson is 44. Actor Autumn Reeser is 43. TV personality Nicole Richie is 42. Actor Maggie Grace is 40. Actor Joseph Mazzello is 40. Actor Ahna O’Reilly is 39. Rapper Wale (WAH’-lay) is 39. R&B singer Jason Derulo is 37. Actor Ryan Guzman is 36. Actor Nikolas Brino is 25.

## Got a story or photos to share?

Connecting is a daily newsletter published Monday through Friday that reaches more than 1,800 retired and former Associated Press employees, present-day employees, and news industry and journalism school colleagues. It began in 2013. Past issues can be found by clicking Connecting Archive in the masthead. Its author, Paul Stevens, retired from the AP in 2009 after a 36-year career as a newsman in Albany and St. Louis, correspondent in Wichita, chief of bureau in Albuquerque, Indianapolis and Kansas City, and Central Region vice president based in Kansas City.

Got a story to share? A favorite memory of your AP days? Don't keep them to yourself. Share with your colleagues by sending to Ye Olde Connecting Editor. And don't forget to include photos!

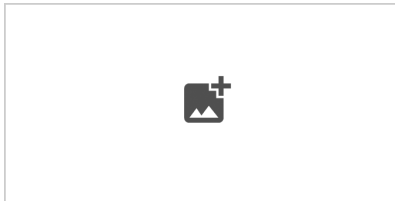
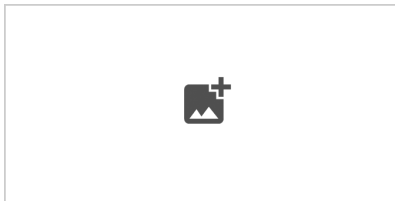
Here are some suggestions:

- **Connecting "selfies"** - a word and photo self-profile of you and your career, and what you are doing today. Both for new members and those who have been with us a while.



- **Second chapters** - You finished a great career. Now tell us about your second (and third and fourth?) chapters of life.
- **Spousal support** - How your spouse helped in supporting your work during your AP career.
- **My most unusual story** - tell us about an unusual, off the wall story that you covered.
- **"A silly mistake that you make"**- a chance to 'fess up with a memorable mistake in your journalistic career.
- **Multigenerational AP families** - profiles of families whose service spanned two or more generations.
- **Volunteering** - benefit your colleagues by sharing volunteer stories - with ideas on such work they can do themselves.
- **First job** - How did you get your first job in journalism?
- **Most unusual** place a story assignment took you.

**Paul Stevens**  
Editor, Connecting newsletter  
paulstevens46@gmail.com



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