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Happy Birthday, Mr President: Congratulations sent to Jimmy Carter on 100th birthday

The UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities has added its congratulations to the multitude of international greetings sent to former US President Jimmy Carter on achieving an incredible milestone – his 100th birthday.

Carter was the 39th President of the United States holding office from 1977 to 1981. His term of office is probably best known for the Camp David Accords; the Three Mile Island nuclear disaster in Pennsylvania; and the American Embassy hostage crisis in Tehran.

Following his tenure in office, Carter and his wife Rosalynn continued their public service, both at home and abroad, for four more decades until being obliged by old age and ill-health to finally take a well-earned rest.

Sadly First Lady Rosalynn Carter died last year. Aged 98, President Carter entered a hospice and in recent months his health has continued to decline.

The Carters, being deeply religious, made a significant contribution as Sunday School teachers in their local church. They also worked tirelessly to end disease in Africa, travelled the world as election observers to defend democracy and oversee free and fair ballots, and built houses for the needy as volunteer construction workers with Habitat for Humanity. President Carter also contributed to the pursuit of peace as a member of The Elders, a non-aligned international organisation of respected former stateswomen and men first established by late President Nelson Mandela.

In 2002, Jimmy Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize for his lifetime of work advancing human rights and world peace, but author Douglas Brinkley claims in his book *'The Unfinished Presidency'* that he had been nominated five times beforehand. He nearly won it in 1978 for his instrumental role in the Camp David Accords. Many expected him to win in 1994 for his diplomatic efforts in Haiti. US Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan said he deserved "five Nobel Prizes" for this work alone¹.

A part of Carter's history that most people will be unaware of relates to his military service working with nuclear power – and this includes being the only President to have helped first hand to prevent a nuclear disaster prior to taking office.

Carter graduated from the US Naval Academy at Annapolis with an engineering degree in 1947. He was subsequently promoted Lieutenant and selected to join a new branch of the service – to develop nuclear-powered submarines. In 1952, Carter was responsible for training the crew of the USS Seawolf whilst the construction of the submarine was completed, and also began working with the US Atomic Energy Commission. The young Lieutenant was amongst only a very few naval personnel authorised to enter a nuclear reactor.

On December 12, 1952, an explosion occurred at the NRX research reactor at Chalk River in Canada. The reactor suffered a partial meltdown after multiple fuel rods ruptured. Radioactive material had escaped into the atmosphere, and the basement of the reactor was flooded by millions of gallons of radioactive water. The 28-year old Lieutenant Carter was sent with 22 of his men to join a team of Americans and Canadians to prevent a complete disaster and repair the damage at the plant.

The intense radiation in the reactor meant that any human, even shielded by protective equipment, could only spend a maximum of 90 seconds near the damaged core. Carter wrote in his auto-biography *'Why Not the Best?: The First 50 Years'* that they had a duplicate of the reactor nearby to practice on:

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"We all went out on the tennis court, and they had an exact duplicate of the reactor on the tennis court. We would run out there with our wrenches and we'd check off so many bolts and nuts and they'd put them back on. And finally when we went down into the reactor itself, which was extremely radioactive, then we would dash in there as quickly as we could and take off as many bolts as we could, the same bolts we had just been practicing on. Each time our men managed to remove a bolt or fitting from the core, the equivalent piece was removed on the mock-up."ⁱ

This approach enabled them to work as efficiently as possible in the damaged reactor and to plan every next step. Eventually, it was Carter's turn. He joined a team of three. *"Outfitted with white protective clothes, we descended into the reactor and worked frantically for our allotted time,"* he wrote. His 90 second slot meant that he absorbed all the radiation permitted for a full year, but the mission was successful. The damaged core was removed; within two years, it had been rebuilt and restartedⁱⁱⁱ.

For several years afterward, Carter and his crew were tested for radioactivity; he told journalist Arthur Milnes: *"We were fairly well instructed then on what nuclear power was, but for about six months after that I had radioactivity in my urine. They let us get probably a thousand times more radiation than they would now. It was in the early stages, and they didn't know."* In his book, Carter wrote that *"there were no apparent aftereffects from this exposure, just a lot of doubtful jokes among ourselves about death versus sterility."*

In October 1953, Carter was honourably discharged from the US Navy to allow him to take over his family's peanut business.

The UK/Ireland Nuclear Free Local Authorities have sent their congratulations in a note via The Carter Centre. NFLA Chair, Councillor Lawrence O'Neill, said: *"President Carter holds a number of records. He is the longest surviving former US President. He is the longest lived former President. He is one of only four Presidents to have received the Nobel Peace Prize. And he is certainly the only President with first hand experience of stopping a nuclear disaster!"*

"The spirit of this incredible man was best illustrated when, in 2019, Jimmy Carter took a fall whilst working on the roof of a house he had been building for the needy. Despite being injured, it says alot for the man that the day afterwards he returned to work, complete with a prominent black eye, to get the job done. He was at the time 95 years old.^{iv} I cannot imagine former President Trump with his perchant for golf ever choosing to selflessly swing a hammer, instead of self-indulgently swinging a club.

"The NFLAs say Happy Birthday Mr President on your first century and thank you for your service for peace. We send you all of our best wishes and sincerely hope that you are able to attend the inauguration of your Democrat colleague, Kamala Harris, next January."

Ends://For more information, contact NFLA Secretary Richard Outram by email to richard.outram@manchester.gov.uk

This media release can also be found on the NFLA website at:

<https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/news/happy-birthday-mr-president-congratulations-sent-to-jimmy-carter-on-100th-birthday/>

ⁱ <https://www.biography.com/political-figures/a43031160/presidents-who-won-the-nobel-peace-prize>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/jimmy-carter-nuclear-meltdown-clean-up-canada-navy-history>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2023/02/20/jimmy-carter-nuclear-reactor-navy/>

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<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=President+Carter+falls+off+a+roof&mid=6549540C41F137ED73AF6549540C41F137ED73AF&FORM=VIRE>