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Audio Link 1.1

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Audio 1.1

Fergus Anckorn tells about how his hand was saved and about his narrow escape during the Japanese massacre of patients in Alexandria Hospital.

0:09 I got bombed in action. I was, I had been hit. And I was driving back to-- I had to go and get another gun. And I went down and got one, and I was driving back with it, and these Japanese bombers must have seen me-- 27 of them, and they unloaded everything and I got blown up.

And I got hit all over the place. The shrapnel came in, I got hit in the face and the back, and you don't know where you've been hit, you just know everything is like this-- you have to test to see what's moving.

0:49 And the lorry was on fire and I couldn't get out of it, so I went to open the door, and I saw my hand was hanging off-- my right hand, just from, that's why I wear this splint. So I couldn't open it. And in the end, I kicked the door open, I lay on the seats because in the gun lorry the guns sit beside you, five of them, and I lay on it and kicked the door open and I jumped. And when I was in midair, I was shot. That brought me down. I got a-- a bullet went to the back of my leg into my knee cap. And down I went. And meanwhile my arm was bleeding so profusely that I'd only got seconds to live really.

1:35 But someone found me and put a tourniquet on it. And then I had to be taken to hospital. And I couldn't bend or-- nothing worked from here downwards, so they lay me on the mudguard of the lorry, and I hung on with this hand, and this was all broken it was so painful, and we went flying down the street in Singapore under fire, and eventually a bullet came and it hit-- creased my nerves, went into the engine, and stopped it, in the street. So we were sitting targets then, and these two fellows dragged me-- my legs weren't working-- so just dragged, across the road, into a post office.

2:27 And there, was a surgeon, operating on casualties from the street you see, and he put me on the table, which was the post office desk, and he said I'm sorry, I can't save your hand son, it'll have to come off. So I said right, you save me, get rid of the hand, your priorities change, one time as a magician if anyone said you'd lose a hand-- I said to hell with the hand, get me out. And he told the orderly to put me out, and he put a square of muslin on my nose, and poured ether on it, which was terrible, terrible! Couldn't breathe or anything, I was gasping for air. And I saw this bloke look at me and then he said, "You're not the magician in the concert party, are you?" I said yes. He said "You can't take his hand off, this is a magician". And the last words I heard were, "I'll see what I can do".

3:25 And I woke up, several hours later, in the British military hospital. I don't know how I got there, but that's where I was. And there was 76 in our ward, and I kept going in and out of consciousness for hours at a time, you know the direction, and I remember waking up at one point there was a fellow on a stretcher next to me and I said, "Have I still got a right hand?" And he picked my hand up, and he said "This little piggy went to market, this little piggy--" he went right through. You know, you can't believe it can you, but the man knew I still got it. And then I went unconscious again, and I woke a bit up later, an hour or so I suppose and I saw what I thought were Japanese soldiers in the ward walking along, there was no shouting or anything these soldiers were walking along, and the walking wounded were following them up with their hands tied together.

4:21 And I said to this fellow next to me, "Aren't they Japanese soldiers?" Because I hadn't seen any after that date, being in the artillery you know, long way away when you're firing at them, and he said "Yes they are", and I said "Well what are they doing here? This is the British hospital". And he said "Oh they're killing all the walking wounded on the front lawn". And that's what they did, they went out, did that, then they came in and kill everyone in the beds. Nurses, doctors, everyone, they were killing.

4:50 And they came up bayoneting everyone in the beds, of course I couldn't move anything. And once there's no hope, it doesn't matter, you're not worried. If there's hope that you can get out of a window, your adrenaline going, "Once he left me, I'm dead." You have no worries. and I remember saying two things, out loud, to myself, I don't know why, the first thing I said is "I'll be dead in 30 seconds," and the second thing I said was, "I'll never be 25." Which seemed to me, an important thing, you know, I'll never be an old man, 25.

5:27 And then I just sat there and I saw these fellows getting bayoneted one by one, and I knew it was my turn, and then I suddenly got this abhorrence. I didn't mind being killed, I was nearly dead anyway at that time, but I just did not want to see that bayonet go in my stomach. Some of the fellows were moving when they got bayoneted they were doing this when I knew I was just lying there I would see it go in. So I put my head under the pillow, so as not to see it happen.

6:01 All I can think of is they must have thought the bed was empty. When I came up for air, there were only four people alive and I was one of them, and I hadn't been touched. And the Japs were upstairs doing the same up there, killed about 400 people. So that was my-- then I went unconscious again. And I remember when I said to that fellow "What are they doing?" and he said "They're killing them on the front lawn", and I said "Oh I see" and then I went to sleep again, it didn't bother me, it seemed I wanted to know what it was all about and now you've told me, I didn't get frightened.

6:36 When you're dying, it's a wonderful feeling, you don't give a damn anymore about anything, you just say, well, it's all over, and you-- and as you keep going unconscious, that's-- you know you just feel tired, and so I didn't give a damn one way or the other, I just kept going to sleep.

6:55 And I woke up again, on the floor of a Chinese girls high school with fifteen survivors of that massacre. How I got there, or who took me there I have no idea, I was lying on the floor with 15 other survivors, and then the fellow I asked him "What's going on?" He said "We're in the bag". And I didn't know what that meant, I said "What do you mean?", he said "We're in the bag, all of us". I said, "What bag?" He said, "We're prisoners."

7:27 And I'd never-- I thought when you were in prison, someone-- you were having a fight with someone and they said right you're my prisoner. I couldn't visualize it that I was lying on the floor with someone and we were prisoners. I didn't know that the whole division had handed in the white flag, you know, and that's how I started prisoner of war days, without a stitch of clarity or a possession. And from there, I had a lot cut off when they were looking at my leg, but the rest might have been stolen, I don't know, but I had nothing, not even a water bottle, which is the most important thing. I had no possession, except a ring my mother had given me. And so I was in a pitiful state, really, this arm was broken, this-- I can take this off now, I'm not using it, the wrist bone was blown out, so I haven't got a wrist bone at all, and this is where it should be, this thing, you know, so this bone was blown off about there, so there's no bone from there downwards, and it was broken at the time, so moving was painful, and the Japanese then decided I was fit enough to be sent to Changi. All the others had to march 20 miles.