

ANCKORN: But did I tell you about the Korean who got hold of me one day? Walked over to me and said, (he spoke a few words of English — in the whole time I only met two who knew anything of English.) And he came over, and he said to me, "You magic man?" I said, "Yes." And he said to me, "You have beautiful hands." I thought, yeah, you know that. What's this? And I said, "I don't know you." He said, "I see you in Wampo." So he must have seen me doing some of these things and remembered me. And I said, "How do you know me?" He said, "I see you, I magic man, too." I said, "Are you?" He said, "Yes. You teach me magic?" I said, "Yes." (His name was Tomimoto.) So he said, "You, tonight, come to my house." (He called it "my house.") So I said, "Oh, I don't think I can do that." "You come, you're my guest."

So, I went over to his barracks. Now, the whole of the camp area was [riddled with] air raid trenches, 'cause we used to get bombed a lot. You couldn't walk without having to step over one, in any direction.

So I went to him — I asked the Colonel [Toosey] first, "Is it alright that I go? Because he says he's a magician." And he said, "Anything you can do to foster a little bit of feeling, fine." (I wanted to make quite certain that I didn't get a reputation of being "Jap Happy," 'cause that's a terrible thing.)

So I went. And he was in his hut alone . . . barrack hut . . . which would hold about twenty of 'em, I suppose. And he had prepared a little meal for me, with some fish cakes. And he gave me a packet of cigarettes. And I taught him some tricks. He wasn't all that good, but I was able to show him some things, and he could do [them]. And we were just two magicians talking to each other, him in his halting English, and me, which he could [understand] what I was saying.

And then at eleven, about eleven o'clock at night, his mates came back. And instantly there was a blazing row with him and them. And I could see what the tenor of it was, "What the hell are you doing with this bloke in here?" you know. And I said, "I'll go." He said, "No, you're my guest, you sit down." I said, "I ought to go." He said, "No. You're my guest." And he had another furious argument. And one of them stuck a bayonet right through his stomach, there and then.

Now this hut was up on stilts, and I just leapt out of the window . . . why I didn't break my ankle I don't know. And I got this hand like this¹, and I just flew out of that window in the darkness and ran like hell, back to my hut. And I didn't fall down one trench. I couldn't see it — you couldn't see anything — 'cause there were no lights

anywhere. So, [my brain] computer must have got the track worked out. I didn't fall in anywhere.

I got into the hut, and I got Colonel Toosey. I told him what had happened, and he moved me out of the hut and put me in hospital 'cause he thought they would come looking for [me]. But they didn't. 'Cause if you killed someone for being untidy, tough, you were being untidy. So it was just [that] they killed him 'cause he was fraternizing, I suppose.

And I got back to my hut. And one day one of the sentries, who was standing there with his rifle, he came over to me, and he said, "You friend Paradise go." That's the way they used to say, "You die." And he said, "Your friend Paradise go." And that's what happened to Tomimoto, I suppose, for being so kind to me that night.⁸³

Excerpted from an interview by Sears A. Eldredge with Fergus Anckorn.

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