

10,1989

## A Day to Remember

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Beijing, China

On June 4, 1989 Alex Jackson of Toronto, Canada witnessed the Tianamen square massacre of Beijing, China. He had been there with his father Ted Jackson to film Gorbachev the premier of Russia's visit to China, with Eddie Nowlan.

But while Eddie and Ted were filming Tianamen square, to capture the site of thousands of university students doing peaceful demonstrations for fairer treatment. It began October 1, 1949 when Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China was formally established. When this happened the people were put into four social classes: the workers, the peasants, the petite bourgeoisie and the national capitalists. Years later on April 21, 1989 more than 100 thousand people, mostly

university students, gathered to mourn the death of reform leader Hu Yaobang. Soon after they began peaceful demonstrations for fair treatment and freedom of expression.



**The Goddess of Democracy. The students made her.**

On May 13, 1989, more than two thousand students began a hunger strike in the square to make the government listen. Also on May 27, 1989 student leader Wang Den called for a city wide march. A week earlier protesters went against martial law by lying down in front of tanks, forming a wall.

They knew that the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) and other military groups were coming to clear

the square of the students along with a few citizens.

Alex stayed at The Beijing Hotel holding up the base. And taking notes from what his father and Eddie told him from their two way radios. His father and Eddie split up to get more information. Another danger other than the on coming military, with tanks, was that video taping was made illegal by the government of China.

"I was given orders to stay at the hotel to hold up base with Xu Bing-Long." Recalls Alex, Lao Xu was their translator and guide while they were in China.

"But when the troops coming closer to were my dad was and he wouldn't get out of the square I just had to go get him out of there, Lao Xu came with me. So we made our way out of the Beijing Hotel and towards the statue of the Goddess of Democracy.

And then on the two way I heard my dad say that troops were coming towards him and that they had seen the camera and they were after him. Then I heard a smashing sound and my dad's blood-chilling scream. I was afraid about what they would do to him."

Soon after Alex and Lao Xu heard gunfire coming from the south, the crowd started screaming with rage. Alex didn't need to know chinese to understand what angered them: chinese using guns against chinese. The troops near Alex and Lao Xu started to advance, the crowd began throwing things at the troops to stop them, than the soldiers raised their AK 47's to their shoulders and all other sound was muffled by the earsplitting roll of bullets piercing the night sky. "People fell to the ground, the others stared moving back, but didn't turn and run. The shooting

lasted about 10 seconds then stopped. Suddenly Lao Xu's voice separated from the rest of the crowds' he pushed his way through while I tried to stop him. He started running towards the soldiers (I had let go of him then) the PLA soldiers shot him and the shooting began again." Alex recalls the horrible incident.



**A dead protester.**

Lao Xu's dad had been a survivor of the Long March, Lao Xu had believed in the PLA all his life and then they killed innocent people in Tianamen square, which hurt him emotionally. He had worked for the government. "After Lao Xu was killed people stared falling around me and then against me, I fell on the ground by the impact and I was being buried by bodies I pushed them out of the way and ran with the crowd. I fell and hit my head on the hard street." Alex looked around and saw buses lined up, so he went up

there to get a better view to film the terrible scene, he knew people needed to see. "The students were on the roves waving flags and banners. I learn from a student that they had all vowed to stay there as long as they most." The soldiers began shooting again. And then Alex realized the whole square was surrounded, leaving no way out.



**A protester stands in front of tanks.**

"The soldiers and the tanks were preparing to shoot at us again, so I got down from the bus I as on and ran to the Bank of China and hid behind a car with three other students. The young woman beside me asked me if I was a reporter, I said yes. She told me that their story had to get out of the country.

Then PLA troops rounded the corner of the bank, I was paralyzed, but the

students weren't, they pulled me to my feet then I started running with them. Suddenly I felt something hit my leg hard like a baseball bat. I fell down face first, hitting my head on the pavement."

Alex was knocked out and brought to the house of Wang Xin - Hua's house were Alex recovered his strength after being shot in the leg and hitting his head hard on the pavement twice. Xin - Hua's friend, Xiao - Nie, was studying to be a doctor, so he helped Alex recover.

They helped Alex get out of China with the film. But sadly Xin - Hua was shot by a soldier at the airport because they found out she was a student. Alex found his father and they went back home to Canada. They sent Alex's film to the CBC station were it was televised.

Eddie was safe in side the Beijing Hotel were he had gone to when the gunfire had started and after Alex had left.

"I don't think I will ever be the same again. I feel so alone.

And I don't fit in anymore." Says Alex back home in Canada with his father.

The number of the people who died on June 4, 1989 was never known. Because the PLA soldiers burned the bodies. But it is clear thousands died. In China, the massacre is always known as June 4. Just like we call the terrorist events of September 11, 2001 "September 11th" or "nine eleven". Thousands were killed on both days making them both a day to remember.