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FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: Machine Man Airs 8.30 pm Monday December 11th on ABC TV and iview

He fled Saddam Hussein's brutality to become detainee #982 in an Australian refugee camp. Now Munjed al-Muderis is a world-leading surgeon giving amputees a second chance at life. Sophie McNeill tells his inspiring story.

It happened without warning. At his Baghdad hospital in 1999, a young doctor was presented with dozens of army deserters. Then came the chilling order to mutilate their ears.

Would I obey and live with guilt for the rest of my life? Would I refuse and end up with a bullet in my head? Or would I run away? – Dr Munjed al-Muderis

He ran away, took a smuggler's boat and wound up in Curtin detention centre in Western Australia's far north west.

I was stripped of my identity. Curtin detention centre, in simple words, was hell on earth - Munjed al-Muderis

Fast forward 17 years.

Australian citizen Munjed al-Muderis is a pioneering orthopaedic specialist who transforms lives with a surgical technique called osseo-integration – “merging a human being with a machine”, as he explains it.

I had this chill feeling – what have I done? I’m back to the place I escaped from – Munjed

Now he returns to Baghdad on a whirlwind 10-day mission to attach implants and robotic legs to amputees who thought they would never walk again. Middle East Correspondent Sophie McNeill follows him as he scurries between operating theatres, doing several surgeries at once.

He is a machine. We never catch him – Iraqi surgeon

Wars have left untold numbers of Iraqi soldiers and civilians as amputees. Patients flock to see Munjed... patients like Ghadban, 22, who lost both legs after a mortar strike. Robotic legs might allow him to marry the girl he loves...

She told me that when I walk again her parents will agree – Ghadban

...And Ali, an ex-soldier whose leg was amputated after he was shot in battle with ISIS. His wife then walked out and left him to care for their little boy Hussein.

He used to bring me my shoes and slippers. Now he just brings me one shoe - Ali

Munjed can’t always help everyone, no matter how deserving. Amane was 10 when both her legs were amputated after a fire. Now 19, she is a para-athlete who represents her country. Munjed would operate for free, but the robotic legs cost around \$100,000.

I don’t have the money for this operation. I want to walk – Amane

Munjed returns to Baghdad this week to complete his work on Ali, Ghadban and scores of other patients. At the climax of this medical and emotional journey, his hope is that all of them will walk. A Foreign Correspondent crew will be with him to see how it all goes.

Sophie McNeill’s story *Machine Man* airs 8.30 pm Monday December 11 on ABC TV (repeated 1 pm Tuesday and 11.30 pm Wednesday on ABC TV; 8 pm Saturday and 1 am Sunday on ABC News). Also on iview.

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