

Express
Reporter

TEN DAYS OF TERROR

sends the year's
most exciting story

Abbottabad (N.-W. Frontier), Monday

THERE is not a whole statue or crucifix left in the convent, hospital, and college of St. Joseph's, Baramula. The little red, ivy-covered chapel is no more than a shell filled with holy rubble.

Every room, from the nuns' quarters to the operation theatre, is a shambles, and the piles of straw on the floors of many are dark with dried blood.

In the hospital orchard only yellow autumn leaves garland the 10ft.-square mound of earth where Colonel Douglas Dykes, his wife Madeleine, and four others are buried. Past the mass grave runs a 100ft.-long trench with a rough parapet of stones and logs—an air raid shelter.

The only living things in the convent now are the tame white rabbits making themselves a warren among the vines, and inquisitive, screeching mina birds investigating the ruins of a bombed hospital ward.

The Indian Dominion troops who have recaptured Baramula from the ravaging hordes of Pathan tribesmen in the battle for Maharajah Sir Hari Singh's Kashmir can easily guess at the tragedy of St. Joseph's.

They will not guess at the honour, courage and faith that welled there. And it was those things which carried 75 people through a life-long ten days under the protection of two Yorkshire priests, Fathers George Shanks and Gerard Mallett.

I was lucky enough to be there. This is some of the ten days' diary of St. Joseph's, Baramula.

The tribesmen—Mahsouds—came in crazed with fighting, shooting and screaming as they charged down from the hillsides after the broken Kashmir forces in that first day, a Monday.



by
**SYDNEY
SMITH**

From the North West Frontier Province, Smith today explains in detail the story of his captivity at Baramula, about 25 miles from Srinagar, in Kashmir. Sydney Smith, D.F.C., has been captured before—when his plane was shot down in 1941.

There were 75 of us trapped in that lonely convent The bombers attacked . . . The tribesmen shot their way in

adults of four different religions and nine nationalities.

There were seven Hindu and Sikh families, two Englishwomen—a missionary and a patient—a mixed group of Indian Christians, and 13 Franciscan nuns. One of these was British, Mother Conwal of Paisley, and the rest came from France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, and Germany.

The characters of Father Shanks's flock ranged from the cheerful sweetness and endless energy of the nuns to the pathetic reserve and loneliness of 19-year-old Kaushalya, a pretty and sullen Hindu dancing girl rescued from the dock streets of Bombay.

Kaushalya, her ears brilliant with great turquoise rings and her fingers still shining with silver, spent most of each day and night smoking cigarettes in a corner with a blanket clutched before her face.

The brood

Then there was the little sweeper woman, Shivu, and her flock of impish children. Shivu had 10, and her eldest son beat her every time a new one came. He disapproved of his mother continuing to bear him brothers and sisters five years after his father's death.

She and her flock of chattering sparrows crawled under a single bedcover on the floor each night,

and their smothered laughter was the last sound before the ward began its restless sleep.

That was the mixed company which for ten days shared their daily plates of rice, a little space on the floor, and changing hopes and despair.

For the first six nights wandering Pathans broke into the ward and the half-sleeping mass on the floor would huddle against the walls in a quivering heap of screaming children and petrified women.

In disguise

Sometimes the Pathans brought lamps and searched for our Hindu and Sikh women. But Father Shanks had cut their hair and put them in European clothes on the morning of the second day. They passed as Christians.

On the evening of the second day, while more reinforcements arrived and carried on the smashing, looting, and shooting, the first Pathan wounded returned from the front. The nuns and the Anglo-Indian Dr. Greta Barretto, whose shot husband had died in her arms the day before, were called to treat them.

They were incredible patients. There were no anaesthetics and hardly any equipment left, but no Pathan ever winced or cried. One as Greta Barretto probed for a bullet, was asked: "Doesn't it hurt?"

The patient shook his head and replied: "No, I eat raw meat." When the wound was sewn up he slung his rifle, slipped the doctor's surgical scissors in his belt with his dagger, and limped off back to the front.

Endurance

Nor shall we forget the man who walked back from the front

curiosity, and then the party was over.

We laughed for two days over the friendly half-educated Afridi who, as he commiserated with us in broken English over our trials with the Mahsouds, said solemnly: "The Mahsouds are beasts. They haven't learned etiquette."

Then there was the 12-year-old Pathan, Pur Dil Khan, who had run away from home armed with a rifle cleaning rod to take part in his first war.

He followed Father Shanks like a puppy for two days and then announced he was going to the front to get some loot. Two days later he came back with 4s. 6d. He solemnly handed Father Shanks 3s. and a packet of cigarettes.

Target area

Every day we were promised evacuation transport by the tribal officers. On the sixth day the Indian Dominion Air Force finally made up its mind the convent was top priority target in Baramula. It was the tribal headquarters and lorry park.

Twice a day, morning and evening, Spitfires and Tempests cannon-shelled us and Tempests dive-bombed. We made great red crosses with mattresses and dyed surgical gauze. Father Shanks stormed in to the tribal officers and ordered them to get out or move us.

They did neither, and the raids got worse. Each raider was shot at wildly with every weapon in the town and the air sang with bullets.

Through every raid the nuns sat up in the centre ward nursing the children, and their calm, unflinching faces were like a blessing on us.

On the eighth day a dive-bomber shattered the ward next to us, and the day after, as Father Shanks led us in digging the air-raid shelter near the grave under the apple trees, explosive cannon shells hit it again.

On the tenth morning, at 5.30, by lamplight, there was a celebration of Mass and Holy Communion. The altar was a kitchen table and the priests' vestments were made of surgical dressings.

As the last words of the final prayer ended, the door flew open and a major of the Pakistan Army strode in. He had come to fetch us with a rescue convoy of five army trucks.

Just one more day of shelling and bombing, and at dusk we

Within 30 minutes the convent was looted, and six, including Colonel and Mrs. Dykes and the assistant Mother Superior, the Spanish Teresalina, who had given her life for the Mother Superior, had been shot dead.

The intervention of the 23-year-old convent-schooled Afridi tribal officer Saurab Hyat had saved the rest by seconds from a general execution.

As she died . . .

The two Fathers gave final absolution to Mother Teresalina as she died, and around the stretcher of badly wounded Mrs. Celia Pasricha, born British, the Hindu Pasricha family embraced the Catholic Church.

Then, in the little hospital

ward where Saurab Hyat had locked the whole of the convent staff and the patients, Father Shanks gave general absolution. Outside could be heard the sound of Pathans mopping up the last of the Kashmir forces and looting the convent and college.

That afternoon, Fathers Shanks and Mallett dug a grave in the orchard, sprinkled it with holy water and, to a requiem of 20mm. cannons of Indian Tempest fighters spraying the convent, buried five of the dead. Mrs. Dykes's body could not be found.

When, in the glim of oil lamps, Father Shanks looked over his little party at evening prayers he found in his care 20 Indian children, the three Dykes children— one new-born—and 44

stung his ribs, slipped the doctor's surgical scissors in his belt with his dagger, and limped off back to the front.

Endurance

Nor shall we forget the man who walked back from the front 15 miles with both forearms shattered by machine-gun bullets. He rested on a straw bed for two days and then marched on home.

On Wednesday Mrs. Dykes' body was found in a well, and buried with the others in the orchard. Wednesday night was chilly, and the Pathans lit themselves rather more houses than usual. They burned 500 in a week.

In the early hours of Thursday morning a gang of husky thugs came and ordered Father Shanks to send out one of his girl nurses. After 20 minutes' wrangling they decided that Father Shanks meant "No" when he said it.

"All right," they said, "we will go and get the rest of our tribe and take all your women to the bazaar."

Father Shanks said afterwards: "I thought to myself, it's all over now, nothing ahead but rape and murder." One minute after the tribesmen left a whistle blew and the whole tribal convoy was called to its lorries to go to the front.

Father Shanks knelt down in the centre of the ward and prayed his thanksgiving. . . .

Interlude

There were lighter moments each day. At 7 o'clock every morning, after breakfast of boiled millet, George Shanks would thump out some old tunes on the piano in the corridor for the children to dance to and keep themselves warm.

Sometimes the strains of "Tipperary" or "Lily of Laguna" would attract tribal

vestments were made of
dressings.
As the last words of the final prayer ended, the door flew open and a major of the Pakistan Army strode in. He had come to fetch us with a rescue convoy of five army trucks.
Just one more day of shelling and bombing, and at dusk we left.

As we packed to go, Sister Priscilla, smiling and blinking away the first suspicion of tears, turned to Father Shanks and the other nuns and said in her clipped Italian English: "You know, father, I am sorry it is over. We have been very happy in these ten days."