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The Attack

‘I can remember waking up, and there was gunfire all around the place. The whole neighbourhood, there was shooting going on. I got up and went into the gardens of the hospital and there was some nuns standing, talking together, obviously very worried and concerned. And they beckoned me over to them. And suddenly, the whole place erupted with shooting, shouting, screaming, yelling. And the nuns grabbed me and we went into a room next to the garden—I think that was the medicine room for the hospital, I remember—and locked ourselves in.’

It was mid-morning on Monday, 27 October. The raiders had scaled the walls of the convent grounds and started shooting. Amid the confusion, Tom Dykes was separated from his parents and his younger brothers. ‘Then these fellows that had raided the hospital started to batter down the door of this room we were in. The splinters started to fly across the room, and I could see the wild faces through the cracks in the door, and I noticed that at the back of the room there was another door, and I tried it and it wasn’t locked and I ran for it. I left the nuns. They were all huddled, huddled in a corner, obviously petrified, holding each other in a group. I don’t know what happened to them. I do remember seeing some of them later, and they were staggering around the place with their habits torn. In retrospect maybe they were raped, but I certainly don’t know if that did happen.’

Tom Dykes was five years old when the tribesmen killed his parents. The three Dykes boys—the youngest then just two weeks old—were brought up by an aunt. They were not encouraged to ask questions about their mother and father and how they died. They never returned to Kashmir. All three men spent much of their adult lives in southern Africa, another unhappy appendage of Empire. Tom made his home near Johannesburg. I met him when he came to London to visit his brother. Tom had adjusted well to the changes in South Africa. He would not be part of the white flight out of the country, or even out of the orbit of its



principal city, he insisted. He enjoyed Johannesburg, for all its problems. He spoke softly but confidently, a man with a gentle face, stocky, with fair hair and an accent with only the slightest South African cadence. Tom's modesty and reserve invited trust, and his words bore authority. Tom's brother told me he couldn't remember ever talking about his parents' deaths to his siblings. But Tom's memories, if rarely rehearsed, were clear and compelling. His recall of his parents was distinct, and strengthened by an array of family photos and memorabilia. 'Looking at photographs of my parents is rather strange actually, because they both died when they were in their early thirties. It's always a bit funny looking at your parents as young people, considerably younger than oneself is now. And that's the only way I can think of them or imagine them. As youngsters. It's a bit odd really.'

Baramulla wasn't simply the place where his parents were killed. It was also the place where Tom was born. In the same mission hospital. St Joseph's had a good reputation, especially as a maternity hospital, and its location along the Rawalpindi-Srinagar road made it—in those pre-Partition days—easily accessible. Tom had memories of holidays in Kashmir, spending time on a houseboat, and watching his father cast a line to catch trout. 'I often wonder what my father would have done when he left the army,' he commented—adding ruefully that he didn't even know whether his father, born and bred in Edinburgh, had a Scottish accent. 'I accepted what happened years ago. But one thing I felt a little bad about was that as a child, I'd try to talk about the incident, which I do remember vividly. And generally speaking people didn't like talking about it to me. And that included my own family. I can't really remember discussing it with anybody in my family. They probably thought the best thing to do was forget it, which I think probably is not the best thing on these occasions.'

From Tom and his brothers, from surviving fellow officers, and from Colonel Dykes's service record and other documents in the official archives, it's possible to assemble a tolerably complete account of Tom and Bidy's lives.¹ Tom was born in 1914 and educated in Edinburgh. He attended the Royal Military College at Sandhurst where he was a sound but unspectacular cadet, and headed out as an officer in the Indian army when twenty-one years old. Tom Dykes spent his first year in India as a second lieutenant with the Royal Scots based in Lahore, now the capital of the Pakistan's Punjab province. Sam Manekshaw, who later rose to be a field marshal in the Indian army, was his contemporary and friend. He remembered Tom as 'very tall, six-foot-two or something like that. I





can picture him, light hair . . . nice, good-looking officer.' Life in Lahore for young, carefree officers in the mid-1930s was none too onerous. 'We enjoyed ourselves,' Manekshaw recalled. 'No dearth of girlfriends. There were restaurants. There were dancing halls. One of the others would say: Sam, can I take your car? And I'd say: take the damn thing, but look after it.'

After an initial year in Lahore, the young officers had to select an enduring regimental loyalty. Sam Manekshaw opted for the Frontier Force. Tom Dykes joined the Sikh Regiment, and was obliged to study both Urdu and Punjabi. The Second World War brought with it accelerated promotion and active service, particularly on the arduous Burmese front repelling Japan's advance towards India's eastern frontier. Tom undertook chemical warfare and jungle warfare courses, and ended the war with a clutch of medals. He also emerged from the war married and with children. Bidy Clarke was from a family with a tradition of service in the Indian army. She made the passage out as a military nurse. According to family folklore, she captured Tom's attention by staging a fall from her bike to show off her shapely legs. They married in September 1940 in Agra, the city of the Taj Mahal. The venue was the East India Company's imposing St George's church. It was a grand ceremony, by all accounts, with fellow officers providing a sword of honour, holding up their ceremonial swords to form an arch for the newly married couple. As newly-weds, they got to know Kashmir, a popular rest and recreation spot for British soldiers and officials during the war years. A friend of Bidy's took holiday snaps of three wives sitting on the steps of a houseboat in Srinagar in June 1942.² Bidy had a spaniel on her lap, disguising her pregnancy. Her first child, Tom junior, was born in Baramulla three months later.

As the British pulled out of India, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Dykes was charged with rebasing the Sikh Regiment from Nowshera in what had become Pakistan to Ambala, north of Delhi, on the Indian side of the Partition line. He became acting commandant of the new regimental centre. While a few British officers chose to stay on with the Indian army after independence, Tom Dykes was probably intending to remain in India just for a few more months, helping to settle his old regiment in their new setting. Major Ben Suter, who served with Tom when the First Sikhs were based at Nowshera, described him to me as tall, silent and a touch severe. Marguerite Suter got to know Bidy Dykes well—a very motherly woman with 'a round, happy face, darkish hair and a lovely smile'—and had intended to accompany Bidy up to Baramulla in the autumn of 1947 for the birth of the Dykes's third child. But the Suters' passage



home came up more quickly than expected, and they headed to Mumbai to board a boat.

It is remarkable, with hindsight, that the Dykes's persisted with their plan for Bidy to go to Baramulla for the birth in spite of the storm clouds gathering over Kashmir. And it's even more remarkable that with the invasion under way, the family didn't make a more determined attempt to get out to Srinagar. The lack of preparedness at the mission as the lashkar struck appears to have been based on a false confidence that a foreign-run religious establishment would be spared depredation. There had been no full evacuation, no bunkering down, and no assembling in the most secure building.

When the attackers struck, there was mayhem. Tom never saw his parents again, alive or dead. He knew that his father had not died immediately, but wasn't taken to see him on his deathbed. In the immediate aftermath of the assault, having slipped out of the medicine room through a back door, Tom found himself in one of the wards of the mission hospital:

The tribesmen were looting the place, they were pulling everything apart, and putting their booty into sheets which lay on the floor and were made up into bundles. They were very nice—well, when I say nice, I don't remember them being unkind to me. They took me with them, and, as I say, bundled this stuff into their sheets, and made their way to the front of the hospital where they put all their booty in a pile.

Rather fortuitously, our servant—I do remember his name, his name was Feroze—saw me with them. He was obviously milling about out in the road there, and he came up, and he persuaded them to let me go off with him. And he said well, we must go and find your family. Which we duly did, and went back to the central part of the hospital, a garden area with a path round it. And we came across these bodies, covered with blood. And sitting on top, howling his eyes out, was my little brother Douglas. Not very nice.

I do remember the body of a girl. I don't know if she was related to one of the medical staff, but I think she was a teenager. But that's the only one which I actually remember recognising. I was only a little boy, so my memory is obviously not that clear, although it's fairly vivid nevertheless.

At that point, a young girl came up to me—I think I'm right in saying that, it was a young girl—and she said to me, well, your mother and father are dead. And, funnily enough, I don't remember





feeling too much. I just felt a bit numb and I can't remember feeling too many emotions really. I have an idea it was the daughter of the lady doctor. That was my memory. That's what I seem to remember.

The young girl was Angela Barretto, whose mother, Greta, had recently started working as the doctor and surgeon at the mission hospital. Biddy Dykes had written, in a letter to her sister, how Tom and Douglas had 'got a friend in the Dr[']s little girl . . . and all rush madly round the place'. Angela Aranha, as she had become, recalled how the story of her parents' bravery at Baramulla had been a source of pride. She had been born into a devoutly Catholic family of Goan origin. One of her half-sisters had served as a nun in Australia. At her flat in the heart of Bangalore, close to the cathedral, she showed me her precious collection of family photographs—her parents just after their marriage; with friends at a picnic; snapshots of her mother in the years after the tragedy.

Angela was a little younger than Tom. She remembered a party to celebrate her fourth birthday held in Baramulla just a couple of weeks before the attack. She found it difficult to distinguish between her own memories of the incident, and what she recalled hearing from her mother and others. She couldn't remember telling her friend Tom about the death of his parents. But she had a faint recollection of playing with young boys in the mission grounds, and came up unprompted with Douglas (Tom's younger brother, then two years old) as the name of one of her playmates.

Angela's distant memories of the initial attack on the convent and hospital offer a powerful confirmation of Tom's account. 'All of a sudden,' she recalled, there was 'a lot of noise, and screaming and shouting':

These men came from all directions, climbing over the compound wall. And these wild men, I am told, they went [with] choppers and axes, and breaking down all the doors around, especially in the convent. They smashed everything in sight. And they actually attacked people in their beds. Any adult person they just stabbed or shot, and there were screams and cries and—I don't know, I remember being pushed into a room, and some frightened nurses were there. These nurses had pushed a cupboard, I remember that, and people were thudding and banging, and they were trying to push this door open. And I was in that room. The voices went away and they went to the next ward. And what they were doing I don't know, but we could hear the cries and shouts and the hammering



and screaming all around us. And these nurses were there with me, comforting me, and they were scared themselves.

The memories I have of these fellows with beards—this is what I remember. Because these nightmares used to come to me later on. I would get up in the night and I would be terrified. And they came over the wall, that I remember. You know, big beards and guns—maybe some had turbans and things like that, but they were all shouting and they were very unruly. They were not like anybody from an organised army.

Tom's and Angela's interlocking accounts, at times tentative, but also raw and immediate, are the most poignant memories of the attack.

Sister Emilia's recollections echoed the main themes of the children's testimony—the sense of shock, the brutality, the violence with which the raiders searched for loot. 'They were all over at first, especially the tribes,' she told me. 'They were up with Pakistan, fighting, and they were sending these tribes to kill anyone they find in a house.' Her memories of the tribesmen stalking round the hospital veranda, ransacking, robbing and assaulting, had been rubbed smooth by constant repetition. And that, compounded by her advanced years, made it difficult to reach beyond her customary recitation and probe further. 'Some of us are youngsters,' said Sister Rosy Joseph, the bespectacled, soft-voiced south Indian serving as the convent's sister superior when I visited in the summer of 2003. It turned out to be Emilia's last summer at Baramulla. 'She does have good memories of what happened in 1947 and she keeps telling us this is what had taken place, and this is what happened to Teresalina, how she went along with her the previous day and how she enjoyed life to the utmost. Then the next day she is no more. In front of her, her life was taken away.' Emilia's story has become almost a legend, from which the convent has gained a strengthened sense of mission. 'It is a tragedy,' lamented Sister Rosy, talking of the raiders' attack. 'At the same time, it is a heroic act on the part of our sisters. So we have cherished these moments. Although there was a chance for them to move out, sort of submit to the needs and demands of the attackers, instead we stood to our principles. As a result, we lost one of our precious sisters. In that way, we insist it is a heroic event which has taken place.'

This sense of heroism and sacrifice has infused the survivors' accounts of the attack on the mission. All attest to the speed with which the assault occurred and the disempowering sense of shock. No one was





quite sure of the exact sequence of events. Confusion prevailed amid the clamour and tumult of the raid. There's no unanimity about who exactly the attackers were. Most of the survivors pointed the finger at Mahsuds, but some insisted that Wazirs were also among those responsible for the violence. The attackers came in discrete groups. One of the recurring themes of the survivors' memories was that no sooner had one group of ransackers rummaged through personal possessions and demanded money than another group would arrive to repeat the operation. The looters had several targets—medical supplies, sheets, clothes and any personal valuables they could find.

It seems that some of the tribesmen started looting and robbing the few remaining patients in the hospital. One of the patients either resisted or otherwise roused the ire of the attackers. She was killed—most accounts say she was stabbed to death. To judge by the gravestone in the convent grounds, she was a Hindu, Mrs Motia Devi Kapoor, from Almora in the north Indian hills. Another patient was seriously wounded. Philomena, a south Indian nurse in training to enter holy orders, tried to come to their aid and was shot dead. Colonel Dykes sought to remonstrate with the attackers and was shot and fatally wounded. His wife appears to have run to help her husband and she too was killed.

Hearing the commotion, the convent's Belgian mother superior, Mother Aldetrude, rushed to the scene. Alongside was her twenty-nine-year-old Spanish assistant Mother Teresalina, who had been in Baramulla only for a few weeks.³ A raider took aim at the Mother Superior. Both nuns were hit by bullets. The assistant's wounds proved to be fatal. In the grounds of the convent, Angela's father Jose Barretto was helping some elderly nuns to safety. 'We were moving towards the church when we saw Mr Barretto arguing with a party of Pathans who had caught Sister Belen from Spain and were dragging her,' according to the recollection of an eyewitness. 'We were still about ten yards away shouting at the Pathans to leave the sister when one of them shot Mr Barretto at point blank range, left Sister Belen and ran into the church . . . On reaching Mr Barretto we found him motionless and dead, his blood flowing on the road next to the only chestnut tree a few yards away.'⁴ Within a matter of minutes, six people had been killed or fatally wounded and several others injured.

Sister Priscilla, an Italian nun then in her mid-forties, was in the middle of the maelstrom and left an impassioned account of the attack:

We were in the dispensary, Sister Belen and myself, when we heard gunshots. So we closed the dispensary and while I made my way to

the hospital to try to calm the patients, Sister Belen went to the convent. All of a sudden, the Mahsuds arrived in a fury, shouting out in their language and firing gunshots. On the veranda, I'd just missed a bullet by ducking into a corner. Mr Dykes had also missed an initial shot by getting behind a pillar. Then he said to me: 'If you go inside, go to the children's room[.]' Through the window, I later saw him with a Mahsud, to whom he was saying: 'This is a hospital. What are you doing?'

In the children's room we were reciting the rosary when one of the raiders got in by smashing the door with an axe. All the children screamed in terror. The man, who was armed with a gun, a knife and a revolver, seized me by the throat, and said: 'Where's the money?' He touched me everywhere, and put his hand in my pocket . . .

After a while, I went on to the veranda and I saw the bodies of our poor casualties on the ground: Mother Aldetrude, Mother Teresalina and then Philomena, the tertiary, who was already dead. She was in a pool of blood. Turning my head, I saw the body of Mrs Dykes on the ground, in front of her room. Summoning up courage, I wanted to go and see if there were other injured, or patients who needed to be put in the babies' room. Passing by, I saw Col Dykes on his bed, half dead. He had managed to drag himself there, having been mortally wounded . . .⁵

As Sister Priscilla hurried to help the injured, she spotted a man she described as a Pathan officer, Major Saurab Hyat Khan. His intervention put a stop to the worst of the violence.

Father Shanks later pieced together the story of Saurab Hyat Khan's providential arrival at the mission. In the account he set down later in his desk diary, Shanks recounted how, as the tribesmen descended on Baramulla, a man on a motorbike (who turned out to be Major Hyat Khan) stopped at the home of a local Muslim teacher at St Joseph's College:

'Don't worry old man; I haven't come to rob you. All I want is a cup of tea—I've had nothing today yet; too busy trying to get these damned men of mine moving.' . . .

The visitor was a formidable enough figure. Well over six feet in height, built on massive lines which were spoilt somewhat by a pronounced paunch and an over-fleshy face, he seemed to fill the small room. A huge + well curled black mustache gave added fierceness to a typical Pathan countenance—sharp-eyed, hawk-



nosed, heavy-browed . . . He wore the typical Muslim salwars, or baggy white trousers; his shirt + jacket, though soiled, was of obviously good cut; his unturbaned hair was short; and he had an air of authority which owed nothing to the Sten-gun wh. hung from his shoulder or the revolver holstered at his thigh.

‘They moved quickly enough when they came over that hill half an hour ago,’ said Yunus.

‘Oh, that lot!’ The tribesman spoke contemptuously: ‘a rabble from South Waziristan sent in to mop up a few miserable Kashmiris. One of my Afridis is worth three of that mob.’

‘You are an Afridi, sir?’

‘Of course. I am . . . third in command of this expedition. We’re going to get rid of that Maharajah for you, old man, and bring you in to Pakistan—if we don’t waste too much time on the way.’⁶

Saurab Hyat Khan was an officer in the Pakistan army or in the process of transferring to Pakistan’s armed forces. He behaved as—and was regarded by the tribesmen as—a commanding officer. Whether he was there under military orders, or had been gently encouraged to accompany the Pathan tribesmen into Kashmir, or in the disturbed post-Partition weeks had simply taken it on himself to join the lashkar, is not clear. His presence in Baramulla, clearly not directing operations but with a measure of authority over the tribesmen, is a telling indication of the key role of officers in Pakistan’s new army in assisting the tribal forces’ advance into the Kashmir Valley.

On entering Baramulla, and discovering that there was a convent and mission hospital nearby, the major—according to Father Shanks’s account—hurried over on his motorcycle to make sure the tribesmen did not abuse the sisters or their patients. By the time he reached there, it was too late to stop the initial burst of shooting and killing, but he was able to prevent further bloodshed. Several of the nuns, who had witnessed the shooting down of Jose Baretto, had been rounded up in the grounds of the hospital and were convinced they were about to be shot. The expected volley of gunfire was, several testimonies aver, delayed because a tribesman was trying to extract a gold tooth from the mouth of one of the nuns:

‘Un moment . . . permettez-moi monsieur . . .’ and Sister C. fumbled at the tooth . . . Seigneur, des secours? . . . Nobody knew better

than Sister C. that the tooth was immovable: still, anything to gain a little time . . . Marie, misericorde! . . . The raiders were growling impatiently . . . Rifles were raised again . . .

‘Courage, mes soeurs . . .’

A stentorian voice bellowed an order from the gateway: all heads turned in that direction. A giant of a tribesman was covering the ground towards the group in huge strides: his face was suffused with rage, the Sten gun under his arm was ready for action. At his heels . . . he flung aside the bunch of raiders + confronted the little band of sisters, panting:

‘I’m sorry, sisters’ he jerked out, ‘have these devils been troubling you?’

‘Well, sir’ Sister Patricia replied for the group, ‘I . . . I think they were going to shoot us . . . you can see they ’ave already killed this poor man . . .’

[The major] turned on the discomfited-looking Pathans, + poured out a flood of abuse; his men stood alert behind them, rifles ready, eyes watchful. One of the fiercest-looking of the raiders began to bluster, gesticulating towards the Sisters . . . The Sten gun moved threateningly towards his stomach . . . he subsided sullenly: The Major bashed out another order, fortified with another flood of abuse . . . the group shuffled a little . . . the Sten gun moved again . . . the ruffians decided to make the best of it, + went off the way they had come, with many a backward murderous glance.⁷

This was the incident the nuns remembered most vividly. A Scottish nun, Mother Conwall, gave a formal evidence statement in which she recounted how Mrs Barretto, the doctor, ‘and four of our SISTERS were lined up to be shot but before they could shoot a Pathan officer came and stopped them. The delay in shooting took place as the tribesmen tried to deprive a Sister of her false gold teeth.’⁸ Sister Emilia was one of the nuns in line for execution, and remembered vividly the arrival of the major.

One of them, not dressed in ordinary way, he stopped just at the beginning of Baramulla to take some tea. He asked what is in Baramulla. They said there is a school and a hospital. Then he took a motorcycle and ran to us, because they said they were going to kill everybody. As he reached the gate, he said something to them and they put down their arms. Otherwise, they were just about to shoot



up all [of] us. I think [he was] from Pakistan. Not military dress, no. Civilian. He saved us because he said to these people something to them in their own language, and they put down their arms.

Saurab Hyat Khan managed to instil a certain order amid the mayhem. Everyone in the mission was shepherded into the baby ward of the hospital. Some Hindus, Sikhs and Christians from the town also congregated there for safety. The ward is still there, with a plaque in its flagstone floor in memory of those killed in the attack. It now has room for thirteen very basic hospital beds. On 27 October 1947, it was a sanctuary for more than eighty people—some of them injured, others dying. Major Hyat provided tribesmen to act as guards and dissuade their fellow fighters from further looting. The bodies of Jose Barretto, Philomena and Mrs Kapoor were placed in another ward. The body of Bidy Dykes was carried away by a group of Mahsuds. It was found a couple of days later down a well in the convent grounds. Mrs Dykes's tweed outer clothes had been removed, but she was still wearing underclothes.

Father Shanks had not been an eyewitness to the killings, nor to Major Hyat's dramatic arrival. He was still fending off acquisitive tribesmen in the presbytery. With the immediate threat to the nuns averted, Sister Priscilla led the major to the priests' house, not knowing what fate had befallen the two British missionaries. Reaching the house, with gunshots echoing all around 'like a thunderstorm', she was alarmed to see big pools of blood on the steps. She thought the priests had been killed, but it turned out it was their dog that had been shot. Father Shanks and his colleague Father Mallett were then escorted by Major Hyat to the hospital ward where the survivors of the attack had assembled:

The eye took in nothing at first except a muddled mass of humanity, + a conscious effort was required to sort it into its constituent parts. Gone was that peace + order. Babies' cots were huddled together on the left of the ward; near them, sitting on the floor under the windows, the Malayali [south Indian] nurses were rocking themselves backwards + forwards, moaning helplessly: at the far end of the ward, the women refugees . . . huddled together in little groups—a picture of hopeless dejection. But what brought the full horror of the situation home to us was the sight of those four wounded bodies: near the wall on the right lay Mohan Lal's wife, a gaping wound in her right shoulder, her half-witted daughter staring vacantly at her; a few feet from her lay Rev. Mother, deathlike in her pallor, with



only an occasional groan, a flutter of the eyelids, to show that she lived. On the floor in the middle of the room, a Sister bent over the body of Col. Dykes, syringe in hand; Dr B. + another Sister knelt by the side of Mother Teresalina. Pools of blood glistened on the floor at their sides: the habits of the Sisters were bloodstained to the waist. Some of them had lost their veils, rents in their clothes bore witness to the uncouth handling they had suffered: all of them bore expressions of patient resignation as they moved silently about, bringing warm water, swabs, torn-up bed-linen for bandages, cups of water to moisten parched tongues . . . Somebody was saying the Rosary aloud . . . a chorus of wailing from the cluster of cots signified the babies' disapproval of the disturbance of their peaceful routine . . .

Stupefied by the scene, we could only stare round helplessly . . . The Major's brisk, matter-of-fact voice brought me to my senses.

'Please tell your people that they should not leave the ward on any account,' he announced. 'They should not even show their faces at the windows—particularly the women—but remain seated on the floor. My men will remain on guard at the two entrances—call them if there is any trouble . . .'

He called in the men from outside; for the first time I had an opportunity to examine them. They looked, thank God, a superior type to most of the other tribesmen I had seen—fighters rather than robbers—mostly clean-shaven, + wearing round caps of homespun instead of the hateful black turban. They looked curiously around them: one or two murmured expressions of sympathy—one of them, a smallish man with hair bobbed at the level of his ear-lobes, was openly amused . . . I took a permanent dislike to him . . .

'These are the only men you will allow into the ward', [the Major] was saying, 'This man is in charge of them: he speaks English', indicating a tall, handsome Afridi; 'They are my own men, and they will do their best to protect you . . . I cannot guarantee any more than that.'⁹

It transpired that Saurab Hyat Khan had attended a Catholic school. He told Father Shanks that as a small boy he had been educated by the Presentation Sisters in Peshawar, 'and I'm not likely to forget their kindness'. His protection of the mission was a reward of sorts for decades of educational missionary work in unpromising terrain.

The most pressing task for those trapped in the baby ward was to tend to the injured. Dr Greta Barretto gave Father Shanks an assessment





of their chances of survival. ‘Mother Teresalina + Colonel Dykes are dying . . . Mother Superior may live, if we can only stop the bleeding—there’s nothing I can do to get the pieces of bullet out of her . . . We have no instruments, no dressings, no bandages, no needles—nothing . . . Mrs Pasricha has a flesh wound in the shoulder, + is suffering badly from shock, but she will survive . . .’ Her prognosis proved correct. What impressed Father Shanks most was the manner in which she delivered it. ‘I marvelled at her coolness: This was the woman whose husband, a bare hour before, had been shot before her eyes: dry-eyed, efficient, she was absorbed in her work for others. Only the lines of strain round her eyes told that she was driving herself to activity to shut out the memory of what she had seen.’

Over the course of the afternoon and evening, first Tom Dykes and then Mother Teresalina died. Father Shanks was on hand to record both moments of mortality:

Colonel Dykes died at about 4 o’clock. He had been without morphine for the last two hours, and conscious most of the time. We had taken turns at his side . . . ‘How’s my wife, Padre?’ ‘Don’t worry, Colonel, she’s quite alright —she’ll be coming soon’ . . . answering his agonised appeals for morphine with the lie that ‘someone had gone to look for some’ . . . As I knelt by his side for the last time, a shadow crossed the window nearby . . . four men passed, carrying the body of Mrs Dykes . . .

The end came with merciful quickness soon after: we put the body in the Duty Room next to that of Mr B.

The three Dykes children, Tom, Douglas and James, were put in the care of Lily Boal, a British Protestant missionary from further up the Valley who had taken refuge at the convent. She was later to accompany the two older boys on the sea voyage back to Britain.

The last death came several hours later:

Mother Teresalina died at about 10 that night . . . a death that must live long in the memories of those who assisted at it. The prayers of the dying nun, gradually fading away as she slowly sank into unconsciousness: the tear-stricken faces, the bloodstained, torn habits of the Sisters kneeling around: the wailing of the babies, ready for food again: the floor with its jumble of refugees: the pallid face of the Rev. Mother, just visible in the outer circle of the light of



the hurricane lamp, watching the last moments of her heroic subordinate: the murmur of voices, the frequent ribald chuckle, from the circle of guards: the distant sounds of brawling from the raiders' camps all round: The occasional silhouette of a raider against the moonlit lawn: the red glow of the burning village lighting up the wall behind the dying nun.

With the death in such a manner of a woman in holy orders, Kashmir had its first Catholic martyr. 'We felt privileged to assist at the death of a Saint,' Father Shanks wrote, 'and better prepared for death ourselves in consequence.'

The burying of the bodies took place the next day. The convent cemetery, at the front of the building and close to the road, was deemed too dangerous a location. Father Shanks chose a spot more out of view at the back of the building:

I decided to bury them all in the Sisters orchard. A friendly Mahsud Syed Sarwar Shah who had lost no time in introducing himself as a Doctor and Holyman, and 'Pope' of the Mahsuds, produced a fatigue party of half a dozen scared Kashmiris, a large grave was dug, only deep enough to be out of the reach of Jackals, and on Tuesday evening I held the strangest burial service I have ever done. No Coffins, the bodies covered with what rags of cloth the Sisters could find. No Ritual to read the official prayers of the church from. A sprinkling of holy water on the grave and on each body as Father Mallett brought it from the Hospital. A hurried De Profundis, and back for the next one. Syed Shah acting as MC and genuflecting reverently as each body passed him.

When Bidy Dykes's body was found, she too was buried in the orchard—the delay in her interment explains why she was not buried next to her husband. Mother Teresalina's remains were later moved to be alongside those of other nuns in the convent cemetery. The five graves still lie in the orchard. Colonel Dykes has a Commonwealth war grave, the only one in Kashmir. The other headstones are more simple. And in the centre of the plot is a small wooden cross recalling the raid in which those resting there were killed. It is not as smart and austere as the larger Commonwealth war cemeteries. But neither is it in any sense neglected. The simplicity of the graves, the taut inscriptions, and the beauty of the location, in a small, tranquil orchard which looks out on the looming





hills encircling the Kashmir Valley, invests the spot with a compelling enchantment, as well as an air of melancholy.

There is one matter concerning the initial hours of the tribesmen's raid on the convent to be discussed—not out of prurience, but because it reflects on the nature of the attack on the mission. The accounts of rape during the tribesmen's incursion into Kashmir are so numerous, and from all vantage points, that there can be no doubt about the considerable extent of sexual assault. Sardar Sherbaz Khan Mazari, at that time a teenage tribal leader taking a small group of Baluchi clansmen to participate in the Kashmir jihad, was shocked by the violence against women. 'I discovered that the tribesmen from Waziristan, Mahsuds and Wazirs, were busy looting and plundering. But what really disgusted me was that so-called upholders of religion and Islam were not even sparing Muslim women. And this really sickened me,' said Mazari. 'We came across some Kashmiri women and children on the way back, and they were literally crying and weeping, and saying look what the Muslim brothers have done to us. I didn't ask because I could imagine what they had gone through. But then later on I gathered from other sources that they were raped.'¹⁰

The evidence about the rape of women at St Joseph's convent and hospital is contradictory. Those accounts which are generally sympathetic to India highlight, and arguably exaggerate, the extent of rape, killing and looting, while narratives from the Pakistan perspective suggest whatever outrages took place were isolated incidents and have been blown up by India for the purposes of propaganda. In the statements of evidence of survivors, and the briefings to diplomats provided by those on the spot such as Sydney Smith and John Thompson, there was no reference to rape. Sydney Smith's reports in the *Daily Express* were suffused with a sense of the sexual menace of the Pathans, but did not allege sexual assault. Father Shanks's writing reflected the mood of sexual threat, but did not suggest that this amounted to more than lecherous looks, the pulling off of veils and tearing of habits, and the mauling of women as the tribesmen searched for jewellery and valuables. In a letter written to the order's superior general at Mill Hill just days after the evacuation, Father Shanks insisted there had been no rape:

For the most part, after the initial onslaught of the wilder tribes, we were not molested much. It was not pleasant, of course, to have parties of savages armed to the teeth stalking into our ward at all hours of the day and night, even though they were merely curious.



And there was always the constant fear that they would run true to type and interfere with the womenfolk. That was attempted only on one occasion, thank God, and was interrupted quite providentially . . . I think our continued safety was due more than anything else, to the heroism of the Sisters of the Dispensary, who were on their feet almost all day, and often part of the night, dressing the wounds of great hulking bloodstained brutes from whom they would normally have run at sight.¹¹

Echoing Father Shanks, a Baramulla-based Hindu who was in the convent throughout the crisis, in reply to my question, wrote to assert that ‘to my personal knowledge, there was no case of rape, or sexual assault on any nun, or woman in the Convent, up to the time we were evacuated’. Yet the evidence is uncertain, for another brief—but apparently well-informed—contemporary clerical account of the attack in the Mill Hill archive recorded that the daughter of this same prominent local family ‘was taken into a room with several men and it is feared that she was shamefully outraged’.¹² Sister Emilia’s own testimony was elliptical. On my first meeting with her, Emilia, speaking in broken English, suggested that the attackers had sought to abduct some of the women. ‘We prefer to die than to go in their own hand. I mean to take us away. First they say—go bazaar, take us into the bazaar. Nobody moving to go to the bazaar.’ On a later occasion, she spoke of an incidence of violence against one of the nuns. ‘One man was taking Sister, and I said where she was going . . . I was afraid this man was doing bad thing for her. She was not young also.’ But again, the exact meaning was elusive, and it would have been inappropriate to pry further.

Contemporary accounts in Indian newspapers gave prominence to reports of rape and abduction in Baramulla town, but did not suggest that any of the nuns or their patients had been victims. However, remarks by India’s deputy prime minister Sardar Patel early in November 1947 about the tragedy befalling ‘British’ members of a religious order at Baramulla ‘the details of which are too heart rending to state’, clearly hinted at sexual assault. And this soon became the received wisdom. H.E. Bates made passing reference to rape in the convent in his novel *The Scarlet Sword*. Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, in their high-octane account of the end of the British Raj, recounted how the Pathans in Baramulla ‘were giving vent to their ancient appetites for rape and pillage. They violated the nuns, massacred the patients in their little clinic, looted the convent chapel down to its last brass door-knob.’¹³





Of greater moment is the account by General Stanley Menezes in his history of the Indian army that ‘some nuns were raped’. Menezes, a Delhi-based staff officer in 1947, was involved in a formal court of inquiry into the death of Colonel Dykes, required so that his family could receive a military pension. He was based in Baramulla in 1950 and got to know both Father Shanks and several of the nuns. He recalled being told by one of the older nuns that four women were raped in the convent—two of those killed, Sister Teresalina and nurse Philomena, and two other nuns.¹⁴

Another military historian of the region, Brian Cloughley, became friendly with some of the Baramulla nuns while serving in the United Nations Military Observers’ Group. He recorded a more nuanced conversation with Sister Priscilla. She told him: ‘It is now like a dream, of course. I can’t remember everything in detail. They were young and old; bearded, some of them, but others just boys. They destroyed all of the medicines, that was the worst part. The rape? I can’t remember. I feel sorry for the men. I pray every day for them.’¹⁵ That’s how the issue is best left. Whatever the balance of probabilities, there is no conclusive evidence of the sexual assault of any of the women in the convent or hospital. But by the time the tribesmen climbed over the wall of St Joseph’s, the all-pervading sense of terror which travelled ahead of them, and the very real military threat they posed to the Kashmiri capital, had already made its mark on the map of South Asia.