



‘Ten Days of Terror’

For a week and a half, the survivors of the attack on St Joseph’s mission, holed up in the hospital’s baby ward, had little hard information about the ebb and flow of the fighting for the Kashmir Valley. They knew that battle had been joined. They would have picked up snippets of information. They could hear the trucks full of tribesmen heading up the Valley road towards Srinagar. And they had even more pressing evidence of the Indian counter-attack: the tribesmen used the mission as a transport depot and command post, prompting the Indian air force to stage repeated bombing raids. Their main concern, though, was not the fate of Kashmir, but the narrower battle for survival as captives amid the crowded confines of a single room.

On my most recent visit to Baramulla, the ward bore a more tranquil aspect. A brass cross inlaid into the stone-flagged floor paid tribute to Mother Teresalina, who died in this room, and the other victims of the attack. Of the thirteen sturdy hospital beds, two were occupied. Even that was something of a renaissance for the hospital. The mission has always found it difficult to recruit a doctor-cum-surgeon. Dr Melanie, herself a Franciscan nun, was the doctor in service when I first visited St Joseph’s. But cancer forced her to stop work, and then to move to the mission house in New Delhi where she died. The religious order had no one to offer in her place. And Baramulla wasn’t an attractive posting for a lay medical specialist—Kashmir was too turbulent, and at the convent, the erratic electricity supply made for a spartan lifestyle with hurricane lamps the main form of lighting and water always in short supply. On top of that, St Joseph’s made a demand that many Indian gynaecologists would find difficult—they didn’t insist on a Catholic or indeed a Christian, but any doctor they hired would have to abide by the church’s teachings: no abortion, and no contraception.

The catastrophic earthquake in Kashmir in October 2005 was the occasion of a solution of sorts. It occurred just as the centenary celebrations





of St Joseph's School were being staged, with the bishop in attendance. 'Everything went at seventy degrees, and everything fell out of all the cupboards,' recalled Sister Elaine, the sister superior. But the mission suffered nothing more than superficial damage. The epicentre was across the ceasefire line in the area controlled by Pakistan, and that's where almost all the tens of thousands of deaths occurred. But there were also hundreds killed, and tens of thousands without homes, on the Indian side. The nuns were furiously busy—'we climbed mountains which we'd never climbed before,' said Sister Elaine—and the mission hospital provided a base for medical practitioners who came to Kashmir to respond to the emergency. One of these doctors, a nun from another religious order, decided to stay on at St Joseph's, and slowly hospital wards which had seen no in-patients for years came back into service. When I visited almost a year after the earthquake, three of the wards were open, and the operating theatre was in use for obstetrics. And there were thirty-three nursing students in residence.

The convent doctor at the time of the tribesmen's attack, Greta Barretto, was a devout Catholic, though she was not in holy orders. She had been recruited to take the place of a medically qualified nun who had taken extended home leave. On 27 October 1947, Dr Barretto had seen her husband shot dead. She had witnessed two others, Tom Dykes and Mother Teresalina, die a lingering death because she had no way of stemming their blood loss. She had two more patients with gunshot wounds, little medicine, no power, and was hemmed in to a small hospital ward every inch of which was taken up by a frightened, cowering mass of nuns, refugees, and seekers of sanctuary. In addition, the Pathan tribesmen expected her to tend their injuries. Dr Barretto's daughter, Angela Aranha, recalled her mother telling one particular story of that ordeal. 'My mother, she had to stitch up the nose of one fellow whose nose had got torn. It was the very same day that my father had been killed. And she said to him: you shot my husband this morning. So he said: yes, we had to do it because in time of war, everything is fair.'

On the first night, the memories of the viciousness of the attack and of the deaths of friends and colleagues still numbingly fresh, the multitude in the baby ward had a restless few hours of repose. 'I found myself an empty space on the floor, a corner of somebody's blanket, + tried to sleep,' wrote Father Shanks. 'The guards settled themselves one by one + dropped off':

The floor was hard, the air in the room cold + fetid . . . I tried all kinds of positions without avail . . . The events of the day kept



'Ten Days of Terror' 163

crowding in upon me: the looting and destruction I had myself witnessed A stifled scream from one of the women startled us into wakefulness . . . we followed her shaking finger as it pointed to the opposite window. Outlined against the red glow from the burning village, looking incredibly evil in the dim light from the lamp, several of those faces were pressed against the windows The sight completely unnerved the women on that side, + there was a wild scramble for sanctuary on the other side. Someone shook the guards into activity + they ran outside. There was much shouting + arguing, ending at last in the departure of the intruders.¹

Father Shanks remembered a night 'torn to shreds by a succession of alarms', and eventually being awakened by the rattle of the bucket at the well as the Pathans started drawing water, and by the smell of boiling coffee, brewed by the nuns on a paraffin stove.

On subsequent nights, again tribesmen were ordered to stand guard against any of their number who wished to loot or assault. On occasion, truck drivers who had been cajoled or threatened into transporting the tribesmen were co-opted into the task. Given the prevalence of sexual assault during the invasion, the women in the ward were at grave risk. And as Father Shanks later recounted, there was a constant danger of abduction, particularly at night:

All went well until the night when our two guards, after a lengthy talk outside, demanded that I should send out one of the Indian Catholic Nurses for 'questioning'. Playing the village idiot . . . I went out and spent five hectic minutes in argument with them. (T)he argument broke down when I was presented with the brutal alternative of either delivering up the girl or being responsible for the guards going away and returning with the whole band to abduct our womanfolk; easy enough to decide that the answer must be no, but it was ever so difficult to pronounce. Feeling as if the bottom had dropped out of everything, Father Mallett and I waited in the darkness for the two to return with their companions and only our Guardian Angels could help us now. (T)hey did, a sudden shout from the dispensary, and the whole band were ordered into their lorries to depart for the fighting lines.²

From that night on, the men of the mission kept guard themselves. 'A nightmarish business it was, listening and watching those four panes of glass in the door, outlined sharply against the bright moonlight outside,'





recalled Father Shanks, ‘and waiting for the inevitable moment when they would be back peering in curiously’ at the sleeping women and children.

The local Hindu and Sikh women who had taken refuge at the mission—there were apparently seven such families, with a total of twenty children—were most at risk of abduction. They were dressed up as local Christians, wearing European clothes and with their hair cut short, much in the fashion of Anglo-Indians. The Sikh men also cut their hair and shaved their beards. Several of the families seeking sanctuary, the Pasrichas and the Raths among them, were among the most prosperous in the town. The two priests used the crisis to seek converts. Mother Teresalina had died with the words—according to clerical accounts—‘*J’offre ma vie pour la conversion du Cachemire*’ (I offer my life for the conversion of Kashmir).³ As she was on her deathbed, the Mill Hill fathers were lining up souls to save. Father Shanks recounted how his clerical companion, Father Mallett, had whispered to him that he had received a prominent local Hindu and all his family into the church. ‘I instructed them in the essentials, and they have promised that, if they ever get out alive, they will complete the instruction + live as Catholics,’ he confided. “‘Good work, Gerry,’” the older priest replied. The *Daily Express*’s Sydney Smith also recounted how this same Hindu family ‘embraced the Catholic church’. It seems to have been a fleeting embrace, as the family concerned, the Pasrichas, nowadays insist they are and have always been Hindus.

There was quite a range of caste and social background among those crowded into the hospital ward. Not all were easily reconciled to the indignities of life in captivity. Father Shanks was irritated by one Hindu woman ‘who sat in a corner nursing her baby ordering anyone within range to clear away the dirty napkins (myself included) refusing to arrange her veil in the [Christian] fashion and remained sour faced to the end’. Another, Shivu, a woman sweeper, came with her ten children—‘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’. No local Muslim families sought sanctuary at the convent because, it must be assumed, they did not initially consider themselves a likely target of their co-religionist raiders.

Among the throng was a young sex worker. She captured Father Shanks’s attention, and he set down a vivid description of her:

A young woman passed by the open doorway; her flame-red bodice, bright yellow saree, the cheap jewel in her left nostril, long ear-rings and above all the cigarette which drooped from the corner of her



mouth, struck a note of incongruity in the Convent surroundings. That she was ill was only too evident. The flaunting dress could not conceal the painful dragging of her footsteps. The dirty grey of her face was too much for the rouge wh[ich] she had too sketchily applied. The cynical twist of the lips belied the bold star of her lustreless eyes; the one invited, the other showed her opinion of those who accepted. She might have been anything between 18 + 28.

'Who is that, Father?'

'The lady's name, I understand, is Sushila, and she is a dancer from Bombay. And that is all nice girls are supposed to know about her'; Fr. X. recognised the type. They had strayed into the College often enough on their way up to Srinagar, and it had been his embarrassing duty to show them the gate, under the sniggers of the senior boys.

'But how did she get here?'

'With the rest of the crowd that comes up to Kashmir in the season; fell sick + got stranded without her fare home, + the Sisters picked her up + brought her in. She's pretty far gone in T.B., poor soul. Smokes like a chimney, too, which doesn't help.'

'Poor child! God keep her out of the hands of the Pathans.'⁴

She also caught the attention of Sydney Smith, who wrote of 'the pathetic reserve and loneliness of 19-year-old Kaushalya, a pretty and sullen Hindu dancing girl'. She achieved a modest degree of literary immortality when the novelist H.E. Bates, borrowing liberally from Smith's description, worked her into the cast list of *The Scarlet Sword*—and indeed she features in some of the more lurid jacket designs of what is not at all a lurid novel. Sir George Cunningham, the governor of Pakistan's Frontier Province, was sufficiently intrigued to note in his diary that he had received a list of those successfully evacuated from the mission 'ending with "1 prostitute Khushalia"!'⁵ From there, her story fades from the historical record.

On the day after the initial attack, John Thompson, the British businessman based in Baramulla, joined the throng in the hospital's baby ward. He made the final leg of the journey to the convent, having been separated from Sydney Smith, by motorbike, apparently with a tribesman riding pillion. He would have brought with him a fairly grim assessment of the balance of forces around Baramulla, and of the prospects for an early end to the captives' ordeal. Once confined to the hospital ward, Thompson's most pressing concern was to arrange the evacuation of the two women with gunshot wounds, the Belgian mother superior,



Mother Aldetrude, and the British-born Celia Pasricha, who was later to become his mother-in-law. Father Shanks also badgered the tribesmen and those in authority over them to arrange a medical evacuation, but with little immediate success.

It was four days after the attack that 'one of our party discovered a friendly lorry driver detailed to take two badly wounded Pathans to Abbottabad,' Shanks recorded. 'I wrote a note to the Camp Commandant, begging permission for him to take our wounded also. With surprising promptness he consented, at 4 in the evening an antique lorry bumped off down the main road with two wounded women, a Sister to look after them, and one of our men charged with the task of explaining our plight to the world.' The nun who made the journey was a Scottish nurse, Barbara McPhilimy. John Thompson had the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the women and getting word out about the attack.

Thompson later told British diplomats how he and the nurse were smuggled into a tribesmen's lorry, and reached Abbottabad at midnight on Friday. On the way they passed between 100 and 200 trucks 'full of fully armed tribesmen' heading into the Kashmir Valley. 'All the villages en route had been burnt and looted.' Thompson brought confirmation as to the effectiveness of the invasion force. 'From my observations the Tribesmen appeared to be well supplied with lorries, petrol and ammunition. They have also got both 2" and 3" Mortars.' He emphasised the need for help for those trapped at the convent, not omitting to urge that 'it is imperative that full compensation be given to each and every person'.⁶ John Thompson also carried a powerfully expressed plea for help from Father Shanks in the form of a letter to one of his clerical superiors, Father Meyer in Rawalpindi:

About 60 of us are couped up in one ward in the Hospital. It is impossible to get any transport from the Military here, and we have no communication with anywhere else. Meanwhile we have no clothes, no bedding, no food, and are in danger of all kinds, from bands of Tribesmen marauding round. Everything is ruined, College, Hospital, Church and Convent and the bungalow has been burnt down. Probably the other buildings will not last much longer. We are in danger of bombing and machine gunning from the air, as there are Military Camps in both compounds and they have already machine-gunned us twice. *We must be got out* immediately, preferably by British Convoy, and evacuated either to Abbotabad or Pindi. If the British cannot do it, the Pakistan Government must be forced to do it.



‘Ten Days of Terror’ 167

Six of us were killed on Monday and two others are lying seriously wounded, Rev. Mother and Mrs Pasricha. The others are unhurt, but in a constant state of nerves bordering on panic and cannot hang on much longer.

Please lose no time in getting the necessary assistance. We shall need at least three lorries, well guarded, as there are still Tribesmen coming up the road.

Hurry.⁷

It was signed, simply, ‘George’. In spite of the best efforts of the church and key British and Pakistani officials, it was another week before ‘the necessary assistance’ reached the Baramulla mission.

During the long ordeal, those trapped in the hospital ward had an adequate supply of food, largely provided by the local community. ‘Most of our stores had been taken away by the Pathans, and we had visions of slow starvation,’ Father Shanks wrote, ‘but the local Kashmiri villagers rallied round, robbed themselves of most of their winter stores of rice and grain. [I]ll treated, many of their friends and relations killed by their brethren from the Frontier, their wives and daughters abducted, yet they thought of us in the midst of their troubles. Many faced further ill treatment to bring us their offerings of rice, flour, milk and eggs.’ But there was a sting in the tail of these clerical reminiscences. ‘The Kashmiris had always been considered to be the most ungrateful people under the sun, but our opinion of them in those days underwent a radical change for the better.’ Jamal Sheikh, the mission night watchman and the only Kashmiri Christian on the staff, ran a field kitchen which provided two meals a day, making good use of some preserved peaches which the looters had overlooked.

The survivors, to preserve their own well-being, needed to develop a rapport with their attackers and jailers. The good fortune of Major Saurab Hyat Khan’s presence was compounded by that of the operation’s second-in-command, Aslam Khan, an Afridi who had apparently grown up in Kashmir—‘his four brothers were educated in our school and his father B.R.U.K. of the Kashmiri Army was an old friend,’ reminisced Father Shanks.⁸ Aslam Khan was apparently either one of the small number of Pakistan army officers informally deputed to assist the tribesmen, or had opted for Pakistan at Partition but had not formally enrolled in his new unit. As with Major Hyat Khan, Aslam Khan apparently described himself as an army deserter, though this is unlikely to be the full story.



Building up some basis of trust with the tribesmen was essential to surviving the crisis. The medical care provided by Dr Barretto and the nuns helped to bring down barriers. George Shanks related how ‘a constant stream of wounded men had been pouring in to the Hospital for First Aid. The Sisters set up a temporary emergency dispensary on the verandah near our ward, and for hours each day and night two of them stood surrounded by battered and bloodstained Pathans, sewing up wounds, probing for bullets, while two of us men stood by in turns in case of trouble . . . It certainly added to our knowledge of the Pathan character to watch them under treatment. Not a muscle would move as a gaping wound was cleansed and sewn up with a blunt needle and no anaesthetic. Truculent at first, they became more friendly and human under the gentle hands of the Sisters, even grateful sometimes.’ There were regular gifts of cigarettes, and of apples for the children, and on one occasion a joint of beef was provided. A young Pathan, not yet a teenager, took a particular liking to Father Shanks, and one day presented the priest with a packet of cigarettes and a small amount of money he had chanced upon. To set against that was the tale of a tribesman who, once stitched up, insisted on pocketing the surgical scissors which had been used to help him. The sisters also sought to tend to the spiritual needs of the attackers—Sister Priscilla recounted how two badly injured Pathan fighters were baptised and instructed to seek God’s forgiveness for their sins.

There was sufficient bonhomie between attackers and captives to produce two deeply atmospheric photographs, probably taken within minutes of each other, both of which were clearly treasured by their respective keepers. Among the photos and mementos George Shanks’s sister Maureen Corboy parcelled up and posted to me was a picture apparently taken in Baramulla of George, thoughtful, in a black clerical cape, alongside a self-conscious Pathan (to judge by the headgear), with an ammunition belt draped over his shoulder. On the back of the photograph, in the hand of another of Shanks’s sisters, is the inscription: ‘G. making friends with the man who intended shooting him’.⁹ Thousands of miles away in Bangalore, Angela Aranha—whose father was killed in the attack—showed me an almost identical photograph. The same Pathan, with the same ammunition belt, is on this occasion sandwiched between the two priests, with Father Mallett resplendent in white clerical robes. Both the Pathan and Father Shanks are smoking. Were these photographs taken at the time of the raid? Who was this Pathan? He does not look sufficiently young or confident to be either of the Afridi army officers who were at times based at the mission, Saurab



Hyat Khan and Aslam Khan. One possibility is Syed Sarwar Shah, the man who proclaimed himself 'Pope of the Mahsuds' and came to the aid of the survivors in burying their dead and ensuring their safety. 'His language sounded most unpontifical, but one word from him and the largest Pathan crawled under the nearest blade of grass,' Shanks recorded, while making clear that he developed a measure of camaraderie with the Mahsud leader. 'I shall always have a warm spot in my heart for Sarwar Shah, in spite of his casually mentioning afterwards that he had been all in favour of shooting us all at first.'¹⁰

The two British priests used to curry favour among the tribesmen by the transparent method of declaring 'Pakistan Zindabad' or 'Long Live Pakistan' amid much backslapping and handshaking. It didn't always work. Once Father Shanks came up against 'one nasty looking individual' who was 'part of a particularly unfriendly looking mob' who responded, not entirely inaccurately, 'you people are no friends of Pakistan'. Another occasional tactic was to complain to one tribal contingent about the excesses and incivility of another. 'We laughed for two days,' wrote the *Daily Express's* Sydney Smith, '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."'

The remarkable means by which Sydney Smith managed to join the crowd in the baby ward, and so gain a great front-page exclusive, is itself an astonishing story. Smith was certainly the scoop-wallah of the Kashmir crisis in 1947—the first (as far as can be made out) to report from the front line, the first into lashkar-held Baramulla, and the only journalist inside the convent during the invasion, he went on to track down and interview the adventurer Russell Haight, a US army veteran serving with the pro-Pakistan forces. Sydney Smith—'Bill' to his friends—was one of the most daredevil reporters from the golden age of London's Fleet Street.¹¹ His first big assignment was for the mass readership *Daily Express*, reporting the bitterly fought Spanish civil war of the late 1930s, where he was reputed to have been sentenced to death by both sides. During the Second World War, he flew Royal Air Force bombers and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. In July 1941, he crash-landed his badly damaged Blenheim bomber on a street in Rotterdam, saving the lives of his crew and avoiding casualties on the ground, and spent the next few years in German prisoner-of-war camps. He tunnelled his way out on one occasion, but was recaptured after half an hour. After his release he rejoined the *Daily Express*, and spent the next fifteen years as a foreign



correspondent based in Singapore, Delhi, Korea, Jerusalem, Paris and Algiers. His style appears to have been to operate on his own, rather than with the 'press pack', taking enormous risks to get to the heart of the action. He was 'hardbitten Fleet Street', in the judgement of his Delhi press corps contemporary Jim Michaels. Certainly, his fellow foreign correspondents in Delhi were always anxious that with Sydney Smith on a story, they needed to be on their toes. In October, the *Daily Express* sent a second correspondent to share the burden of reporting India's turmoil, a reporter who became one of the most renowned of his generation: James Cameron. Smith's copy still got more of the limelight.

Sydney Smith had an eye for a story, and knew the art of telling it well. The *Daily Express* was reduced to a trim four pages in austerity, post-war Britain. The only real space for foreign news was on the front page. Smith got more than his share of front-page splashes, whether on communal carnage in Punjab, rioting in the Indian capital ('Half a million people are fighting organised battles in the burning streets of Old Delhi tonight . . .'), or tales of British bravado ('Only one man, a British officer, tried to defend a train packed with Moslem refugees when Sikh raiders ambushed it . . .'). He was in Lahore in early October 1947 when he turned an unpromising story about the proclamation of a Republican provisional government by a small group of insurgents based just inside Kashmir into yet another front-page splash lead. It bore the banner headline: 'Sir Hari Singh warned: you're deposed'. Smith explained to *Daily Express* readers that 'Sir Hari Singh is the hereditary ruler of a State nearly as big as the British Isles. He has an income of more than £2,000,000 a year, a collection of jewels too rare to be priced, a string of racehorses, a fleet of cars.'

Smith's next byline appeared almost three weeks later, from the Kashmir capital, Srinagar. He was there on holiday with his wife relaxing on a houseboat, but finding himself where the action was, made the most of it. Although he was roughed up by his tribal captors, Smith told British diplomats that he had no real complaints:

Mr Smith was well treated and hospitably entertained by the tribesmen . . . and they were at pains to stress that they had no hostility towards the British, with whom they had long had, on the whole, satisfactory relations. The trouble came from the wilder elements amongst the Mahsuds, who were complete savages. Many of them had never seen a white face . . . These people were completely out of control and it was one such party which was responsible for the killing at the Baramulla convent and hospital.¹²



The survivors in the mission had suffered several days of cramped and fearful captivity by the time Sydney Smith joined them.¹³ Francis Rath, one of those in the baby ward, witnessed him being ushered into the room by the back door one evening. 'He was caught by the kabailis near the front. They handled him very badly. I saw him coming in, in a bad shape. He was a nice man, but he was a terribly frightened man when he came there. We were all sitting there in the evening when there was a knock—this man brought bread for us. We opened up and we saw a strange man with him, a European.'

Smith's fellow captives, he later reported, were 'living in one ward in conditions of great hardship', while the tribesmen were encamped in the mission compound. Smith's friend, John Thompson had already headed out to Abbottabad with the two injured women. The British authorities had more or less given up on Smith—*The Times* correspondent had told them that he was probably dead. It had all the ingredients of a dramatic 'end of Empire' news story. Brave Britons in a faraway place keeping wild bands of Muslim insurgents at bay. What's more, Smith had the story to himself. But he had no means of filing to his news desk until he, and the others in the mission, was rescued.

The first attempts to evacuate the survivors came the day after the two wounded women reached Abbottabad. Sir George Cunningham, the governor of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, noted in his diary news of the attack on the Baramulla convent and the ensuing casualties. 'I rang up GHULAM SARWAR [the deputy commissioner, Hazara] at ABBOTTABAD and told him to send up a few lorries with responsible people and tribesmen to try and get out the Europeans who are left there.' Two days later, he got a call to say that the trucks had returned empty, the convent was gutted and there was nobody to be seen there. It was the best part of a week before a more thorough evacuation mission could be arranged. But word began to reach the outside world of the deaths at Baramulla, and the ordeal faced by the survivors and refuge-seekers. The Reuters news agency filed the story with a New Delhi, 3 November dateline. The following day, the *Hindustan Times* bore the front page banner headline: 'Raiders Attack Convent at Baramula'. The same day, the Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru acceded to a request from his opposite number in Pakistan for safe conduct for two Red Cross ambulances to evacuate those at the mission.¹⁴

In the meantime, the mission had to endure constant bombardment by the Indian air force. Their planes used cannon and mounted guns to limit the daytime movement of the raiders along the main road, and to harass their encampments. The tribesmen kept many of their trucks



parked in the compound adjoining the hospital and pharmacy, and on the playing field of the college next door. Some of these were used as mobile ammunition stores. As the Indian operation gathered pace, the mission also faced dive-bombing raids by Tempests. 'We had grown quite used to two daily visits by the Indian Air Force at 11 in the morning and five in the evening, and the rattle of machine guns and cannon overhead,' Father Shanks wrote. 'But bombing was quite a different matter. I knew it would come as soon as the tribes started to camp in the hospital precincts and took their positions all around our ward to shoot at diving aircraft, and told them so in the most fluent Urdu I remember using these ten years; pointing that they were using the Red Cross on our roof as a cloak for themselves, and begging them to consider the danger to women and children.' Sydney Smith recounted how those trapped in the mission had done their best to ward off the bombing raids:

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, unfrightened 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.¹⁵

The trench was only used twice during air raids, being then commandeered by the tribesmen for use as a firing position against attacking aircraft. The hauling of mattresses onto the roof of the ward to form a red cross—they were taken down every evening to be slept upon—appeared to have some benefit, for their part of the mission was never hit. The aerial attacks didn't cause any casualties among those trapped in the baby ward, but they came to be almost as feared as the night-time silhouettes at the windows.

As the stalemate dragged on, the inmates of the mission developed a routine to help maintain morale and pass time. Every morning, Father Shanks would lead his flock in community singing, at least for those who knew the words of such wartime British favourites as 'It's a Long



Way to Tipperary’ and ‘Lily of Laguna’. One of the older nuns tended to her pet rabbits, which had been fortunate to escape the cooking pot. Father Shanks sought to maintain the semblance of devotional activity, even though his clerical robes and sacred vessels had been looted. A daily rosary was recited, and in the evening a blessing was delivered. In the second week of captivity, ‘someone made a terrific discovery, some of the sacred particles had been overlooked by the Pathans. A feverish search was made in the convent—the compounds were fortunately quiet that day—for anything that would serve as vestments. A sizeable piece of white silk was found, some braid. Vestment for a service were found, [a] few scraps of cloth would suffice, hosts were hurriedly made. On the 11th morning I had the happiness of saying mass for our safe evacuation, at the main door of the ward, on the kitchen table, as the first grey crept into the eastern sky. It seemed that God had waited for the psychological moment; as we were saying the last of the prayers after mass, a knock came at the door, the convoy had arrived.’¹⁶

Indeed, two convoys arrived intent on evacuating the mission. One was led by Mumtaz ‘Tazi’ Shahnawaz, a writer and social activist from one of the most politically influential families in Pakistan whose mother was prominent in the ruling Muslim League. Tazi’s sister Nasim was married to Brigadier Akbar Khan, the Pakistan army officer who had played a prominent part in devising a military strategy to secure Kashmir. The two sisters based themselves in Murree, a hill town in Pakistan close to its border with Kashmir, to help with relief work among refugees.¹⁷ Tazi Shahnawaz’s mission of mercy to Baramulla, presented to the world as a resounding success, did not commend itself to Father Shanks. ‘Announcing in clear tones that Ali Jinnah had sent them in the name of the women of Pakistan with one car, one station wagon, one three tonner to evacuate our 72 women and children, she carefully dictated all the dangers through which they had come unscathed, and triumphantly produced emergency supplies for the road back in one tin of baby food, one packet of cream crackers and half a bottle of bad Brandy,’ the priest wrote. ‘She then proceeded to lecture us for the best part of an hour on the glories of Pakistan and the shocking qualities of the tribal liberation. I saw the lips of several of my companions move in silent prayer: the answer came, an opportune aerial attack, and our brave rescuer disappeared into the last shelter available, under Mrs O’Sullivan’s bed.’ She eventually tagged along with the larger Pakistan army convoy, which had arrived better equipped for the task.

This more substantial evacuation mission of six trucks had again



been prompted by the Frontier governor, Sir George Cunningham. Pakistan army officers were in charge of the operation. On board to serve as an interpreter was Frank Leeson, a British serviceman who had learnt Pashto while serving as an officer in the locally recruited scouts in the Frontier tribal agency of South Waziristan. He had been involved in trying, with little success, to intercept armed tribesmen who were heading towards Kashmir. Leeson was on leave in Rawalpindi when he met some Pakistani officers in Flashman's hotel, who signed him up for the trip. 'We couldn't get hold of Red Cross flags,' he recalls, 'so the Red Cross was painted on the tarpaulins of the trucks. We went up actually via Abbottabad because the normal road, up through Kohala, was so congested with the tribal lorries that we knew they wouldn't get through easily. We went straight to Baramulla. Oh, it was an absolute state of devastation by this time. Not so much from artillery fire, but from sacking and looting and pillaging. The entire content of shops had been pulled out, all lying in the street. I was very shocked actually because having worked with the Waziri tribesmen, I had quite a high opinion of them. But I knew nothing really of Mahsuds, apart from their bad reputation.' A keen photographer, Frank Leeson had a lasting regret that he didn't take his camera with him to Baramulla, but back in Rawalpindi a few days later he took a powerful portrait of a group of four armed Orakzai tribesmen who had arrived by train and were on their way to the front line in Kashmir, young men looking stern but excited at the prospect of battle.

The evacuation convoy did not set off until after dusk, to minimise the risk of being strafed by the Indian air force. 'Nightfall found us ready & piling into lorries with our bundles,' Father Shanks chronicled:

We moved off. Past the wreck of the dispensary, with its smashed bottles of expensive medicine, the operating theatre with twisted tables and instruments, the nurses quarters with their mutilated crucifixes and holy pictures, past the college with the cross still standing out triumphantly in the red light of cooking fires; down through the main road thronged with Pathans and into deserted Baramulla's main Bazaar, where not a soul was to be seen. There we were stopped and surrounded and heard that the Sikhs were attacking Baramulla in force that night, and our Major had quite a job to explain our bona fida [sic] to them. At last we were permitted to go on . . . We left the glow of Baramulla behind us. Several times during the night we were held up by armed bands but our stalwart Major & Captain saw us through, and 7 o'clock in the morning



found us weary but safe, stretching our legs in the Military Hospital at Abbottabad . . . Eggs by the bucketful, bread in mounds, & oceans of tea took the edge off our ravenous appetites; everyone of us thought it pleasant to sit and have things done for us for a change.

Not everyone got on board the Pakistan army convoy. Francis Rath missed the rescue party because he had gone back to check if his home was still standing and if its contents were intact—the house was fine, but his possessions had been looted both by the lashkar and by local people. While he eventually made his way to Srinagar, the convoy headed to Abbottabad, arriving on the morning of Friday, 7 November. Britain's High Commission in Pakistan telegraphed the news to London, in what reads almost like a hierarchy of survivors:

Signal dated 7th November from Defence Ministry Rawalpindi states that convoy ex Baramulla arrived Abbotabad morning 7th bringing following:—(A) three Dykes' children, of whom baby is not expected to live (B) eleven nuns (C) twelve Indian Christian nurses. (D) one lady (group omitted) (E) two priests (F) Sydney Smith of "Express", and (G) number of Anglo-Indians and Indians.¹⁸

There were eighty-nine evacuees in all. The refugees travelled on to Rawalpindi with a military escort which included two tanks, armoured cars, and two truckloads of soldiers. The Dykes children had been put in the informal care, at the convent, of Lily Boal, a Protestant missionary from Belfast who took refuge at the convent. At Rawalpindi, the baby was admitted to hospital where he quickly gained strength, while the older boys were looked after by Lady Messervy, the wife of Pakistan's commander-in-chief. Arrangements were made to send the boys back to Britain by sea from Karachi, with nurses accompanying, in December.

The day after reaching safety Lily Boal wrote an anguished letter to a missionary colleague in Britain, breaking the news that the head of the Protestant mission at Boniyar in Kashmir, Ron Davies, had been killed—apparently the only European fatality during the lashkar's invasion apart from those at the Baramulla mission. 'There is real war between the Mohammedans and the Hindus,' she wrote. 'The tribesmen came in and killed many people and looted the whole place.'

I went to the R.C. Hospital in Baramula and the Sister at the gate said you must come in because you are in danger! . . . When I was in



the Hospital I cannot tell you how I felt. It was like “Hell”. The wild men arrived on the 27th and killed 6 people in 15 minutes (before our eyes!!) and two very badly wounded. They stole everything from me but they only showed me their gun and said, don’t worry we’ll not kill you! It was a strange experience and God has spared me for some reason, but I’m a bundle of nerves! . . .

We travelled all night and it was *most* difficult to get out. The whole of Kashmir is destroyed; my heart is broken for the missionaries left . . . I want to get home now.¹⁹

No wonder Sydney Smith’s account of the whole ordeal was headlined: ‘Ten Days of Terror’.

As soon as Smith got to Abbottabad, he did what he’d been unable to do since he left Srinagar—he filed a report to his news desk. On Monday, 10 November—almost two weeks after Smith’s last bylined story—the *Daily Express* carried as its front-page banner headline: ‘Captive Reporter Sees Bus Invasion’. The paper made the most of their exclusive:

SYDNEY SMITH, Daily Express Staff Reporter, was captured by invading Moslem tribesmen while out in the battle zone describing the fighting in Kashmir. He was reported missing, believed killed. For ten days, the tribesmen held him prisoner; then a Pakistan Army mission got them to set him free.

Yesterday Smith was back at his job, reporting the Kashmir campaign.

Smith’s reporting had lost none of its edge and urgency during his days in captivity. ‘What is happening today in Kashmir,’ his front-page splash began, ‘is of such importance that I must delay the story of my 10-day captivity to give the news of the moment.’

The first onrush of the invaders has been checked, but I have just watched busloads of howling Pathans, Waziris, Mahsouds, Murmans [sic], and Afghans cross the Kashmir border at Domel to continue the fight from the mountains.

Fifty thousand more Pathans in tribal territory are ready to join them. Pakistan cannot stop them. Sitting with the grey-bearded chieftain, Colonel Shah Pasand Khan, I counted 45 busloads of his burly, glowering warriors—50 to a bus—on their way to do battle with the Indian Dominion troops, mostly Sikhs.



Everyone has a modern rifle, tied with bright strips of holy cloth, the token of each warrior's oath not to return to his mountain home until the massacres of his Moslem brothers in the Punjab are avenged. Many also carry Sten and Bren guns.

Every evening before his staff officers tear at hunks of half-raw sheep for supper, Colonel Shah Pasand Khan, hands raised palm upwards, chants a prayer to Allah for blessings on their holy war for the extermination of the Sikhs.²⁰

Sydney Smith achieved that rare feat for any print reporter of getting his own photo on the front page, along with that of a youthful Father Shanks, his 'teddy boy' quiff looking out of place with the clerical dog collar.

The following day the *Daily Express* gave over almost all its second page to what it trumpeted as 'the year's most exciting story'. Smith's detailed account of the attack on Baramulla, and of the 'humour, courage and faith' with which those trapped in the mission faced their ordeal, was picked up and recycled by newspapers in India and elsewhere. It was a classic story of British bravery in adversity, which also succeeded in giving succinct word portraits of both local refugees and of some of the attackers. It implicitly harked back to what many of its readers would have recognised as the Dunkirk spirit, or the camaraderie of London's wartime 'blitz'. 'As we packed to go,' Smith's article concluded, '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."²¹

By the time Sydney Smith's articles had appeared in the *Daily Express*, the Indian army had taken control of Baramulla. Brigadier L.P. 'Bogey' Sen recorded that his infantry brigade captured Baramulla 'without firing a shot' on 8 November—twenty-four hours after the evacuees from the mission had reached the safety of Abbottabad in Pakistan. 'The sight that greeted us in Baramula is one that no period of time can erase from the memory. It was completely deserted, as silent as a tomb, with not even a whimpering pie dog. Everywhere one looked, whether it was a house or a shop or a shed, there were signs of pillage, arson or wanton destruction. The well equipped Mission Hospital, the most modern in the Valley, looked as if it had been hit by a tornado. Nor had the Mission Church escaped the wrath of the savages.'²²

The authority of Sen's recollections is diminished by the episode he then recounted of the mission's dog, a cocker spaniel, emerging from hiding, and leading troops to where the bodies of 'his mistress and her

companions had been dumped'. Sen wrote of how the Indian lieutenant who followed the spaniel, 'tough soldier that he was, was overcome by the sight and wept unrestrainedly'. There was indeed a spaniel found at the mission, Blackie, which apparently belonged not to the nuns but to the Dykes family. But there was no mound of bodies of nuns, or others from the mission. All the dead had been buried eleven days earlier. A news photographer who accompanied Brigadier Sen into Baramulla, P.N. Sharma, also made reference to scenes of devastation in the hospital and grounds.²³ It is possible that the tribesmen, as they pulled out of Baramulla just a day or so after the evacuation of the survivors from the mission, carried out more killings, but it is also unmistakable that the accounts of both Sen and of Sharma were in part intended to damn the invaders and at times exaggerated their barbarity.

In the wake of the Indian army, a small group of Indian and foreign correspondents were taken into Baramulla. Margaret Parton of the *Herald Tribune* confirmed that Indian forces had taken the town without a fight. She pieced together the story from 'terrorized residents'. On the evening of 7 November, she reported, the raiders began to pour back into Baramulla from the direction of Srinagar. The tribesmen shouted that the Indian army was pursuing them in armoured vehicles 'and threw themselves into buses and horse-drawn carriages and set off in panic for the border of Pakistan'. Parton also heard from the town's residents that 'when the raiders' disciplinary organization, the "special armed constabulary" found itself unable to halt the flight, it also packed up and cleared out'.²⁴ It was the second hurried exodus from the town in as many weeks.

There is no need to rely only on military memoirs for an account of the welcome townspeople accorded the Indian army. Inayatullah told me that most local people 'were happy' at the advent of Indian forces 'in the sense that they were able to come back to their homes'. *The Times* correspondent—presumably Eric Britter—visited Baramulla on the morning of 9 November, a day after Indian troops entered the town. 'All the Baramulla residents seemed delighted to welcome the Indian troops,' he reported, 'and spoke with great feeling of the tyranny exercised by the raiders during their 10-day occupation of the town.'²⁵ He also reflected on the strategic importance of India's capture of Baramulla—'a major success' and perhaps 'the turning point' of the fighting. 'It means that within a fortnight of the arrival of the first airborne troops here the Indian Army has effectively disposed of the threat to the capital city and has virtually cleared the central Vale of Kashmir of enemy.'



The most influential of the eyewitness accounts of foreign correspondents brought in to inspect the ruins of Baramulla was that of Robert Trumbull, which appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* on 11 November. It was quoted in the *White Paper* published by the Indian government the following spring, and has kept cropping up in accounts of the tribal raid and its aftermath ever since:

This quiet city in the beautiful Kashmir Valley was left smoking, desolate and full of horrible memories by invading frontier tribesmen who held a thirteen-day saturnalia of looting, raping and killing here.

The city had been stripped of its wealth and young women before the tribesmen fled in terror at midnight Friday [7 November] before the advancing Indian Army. . . .

Hardly a single article of value or usefulness was left in Baramulla today. The residents said they counted 280 trucks laden with loot and captive women leaving the town in the direction of the Pakistan frontier.²⁶

The *Times of India* correspondent, who probably visited the town along with Trumbull, described Baramulla lyrically as 'resembling an orchard after a visitation by a swarm of locusts. After the fashion of Mohamed of Ghazni and his hordes, the tribal raiders had sacked the town, looted and burnt property and killed inhabitants who came their way.'²⁷ The report, along with most others, included an eyewitness account of the devastation at the mission. 'The furniture and the pews in the chapel had been smashed up, and the images obscenely desecrated.' He also described how the posse of reporters had entered Baramulla in a convoy headed by India's commander of its forces in Kashmir, Major General Kulwant Singh, and by Sheikh Abdullah's deputy, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad. 'As we marched behind the General and the National Conference leader to the market place of the town, the road was lined with cheering crowds of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, men, women and children cheering and sobbing. Many of them rushed in to embrace us with tears trickling down the cheeks and told us [of] the days of horror they had spent in the town.'

A day or two after Indian troops entered Baramulla, P.N. Jalali and colleagues in the national militia travelled to the town. 'It was desolate, half-burnt,' he told me. They came across women who had been held by the tribesmen in a police station. 'It was stinking. They had raped them.



Then after the rape they would slit their bodies. Pandit women. Some of them were quite young girls. But almost dying. We were able to rescue them, take them to Srinagar.' He also visited the convent hospital, a 'grim, horrifying sight'. A few days later, Major Cranston came to inspect the site.

The Convent buildings and hospital and chapel had been completely wrecked inside. All the furniture was pulled about, books had been pulled out of their racks and largely torn up, including a very good library in the Convent itself. All articles of value had been looted and every single piece of cloth whether clothing, curtains, rugs, dhurries, bed sheet, covers of chairs, mattresses and any other form of cloth, had been removed, as also articles like crockery and silver. The outside of the buildings had not been damaged apart from windows being smashed and only one small building had been set on fire. In the Church the destruction and desecration of the altar, statues, crucifixes, books and furniture, was most deliberate. It was obvious that this had not been done in the first hurried search for loot but was a deliberate policy carried out over a period of time . . . In the hospital the furniture had been wrecked and the extremely fine stock of medicine had been largely destroyed.²⁸

The British high commissioner in Karachi wrote to Pakistan's prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, urging him to ensure that the murderers of Colonel and Mrs Dykes and the others killed at the mission be found and punished. The prime minister replied that 'the incidents took place in non-Pakistan territory and the Pakistan Government cannot assume any responsibility in respect of them'.²⁹

India's leaders came to Baramulla, to reassure its residents and to celebrate the success of their army. On 12 November, four days after its capture, Nehru visited the town, witnessed the devastation at the convent and hospital—'nothing is left in tact except the flowers,' he commented—and walked round some of the looted localities. He also addressed a rapidly assembled gathering at the town's Idgah or prayer ground. 'You have had a unique experience,' the *Hindustan Times* reported him as saying. 'You have had a taste of what Pakistan means. You have known what destruction and slavery means.' Sheikh Abdullah told the same meeting that 'No one had besmirched the name of Islam to such an extent as the raiders from Pakistan.' The Kashmir leader also said—in a pledge that remains unfulfilled—that Indian forces would remain in Kashmir only until the



raiders had been pushed out, and after that the state would organise its own military protection.³⁰

From Baramulla, Indian troops carried on up the Valley road in pursuit of the retreating tribesmen. They advanced quickly, but never got to the other side of the Jhelum gorge. Baramulla, once a staging post on a busy highway, became a dead-end town, the last settlement of any size along a road that no longer led anywhere. The logs could no longer be floated down the Jhelum river. The orchards could no longer serve the old markets in what had become the Pakistan province of Punjab. Many of the men and women in religious orders evacuated from the Baramulla mission eventually returned to Kashmir. St Joseph's College reopened, in a modest fashion, early in 1948—though not at first on its earlier site, which had been taken over by the Indian army. The reopening of the convent and hospital also had to wait until the army had vacated the buildings, but in March 1949 the Franciscan nuns moved back into the mission. Among those who returned to St Joseph's were several survivors of the raid, including the Italians Sister Priscilla and Sister Emilia. The nuns have been there ever since.

