

A not-so-funny experience.

Many of you will now be tired of reading different versions of 'The War'... the events leading up to the over-throw of Idi Amin. During our two-months of 'incarceration' in the Diocesan Administration we kept a small diary of daily events. It survived and recently I read what Eileen Maher had written of the incident of 6th March 1979- a year to the day since the raid of the Convent on Nyamitanga Hill. I quote from Eileen's writing:

Monday March 5th 1979

Normal daily routine i.e. we three (Sarah, Helen, Eileen) left the Admin building at approx. 8am, cooked breakfast in the convent. Helen cooked lunch, Sarah went to 11.30 Mass at Poor Clare's celebrated by Peter Kelly; Eileen patrolled the school compound about every hour. Swarms of young boys trying to loot from the school especially from the office block. One woman had packed a sack full of PE uniforms when we caught her. She left it and went. Among the looters an old, old lady walking with a stick. Sheeba and Tintin (dogs) were hopeless to chase the looters. Doreen with her big stick patrolled from 10-12 noon approx. Afternoon was relatively quiet. Word must have got around that Maryhill was not deserted. Peter came for tea around 4.30. Eileen and Helen went to Mass in the Admin chapel. Peter and Sarah stayed in the house until 6.30 approx. and then came to Admin. Peaceful night-relatively.

Tuesday March 6th.

Memories of the same date the previous year were recalled. (Anatolia and I have jointly written about that in a small article called 'An Unexpected Raid'.) A year later to the day the three of us set out as usual. On arrival at our convent we saw a man in our bedroom end. He locked himself in immediately he saw he was discovered. We debated what to do. We were afraid to confront him ourselves. Sarah went for help. Helen and I ate breakfast in the kitchen with frequent glances towards the community side of the house. Sarah returned with Brother Francis and two soldiers, unlocked the door and discovered the 'thief' had taken our key and let himself out the school door, taking a carton of washing soap. Had our first good game of Scrabble on the verandah after lunch. No looters around the house or school. Peter and Francis collected ground nuts and beans from the school dining room for the Poor Clare's and Admin. In the afternoon I went with a hammer and nails and tried to repair the sick bay, dorms, needlework room doors- I did a poor job.

About 5.30 three soldiers came. One took the lead in questioning us and Peter about 'who was in the house the night before making so much noise?' Obviously a cooked - up story. At the bedroom end tried to separate Sarah and me. We were aware of their intent and so we stuck together. They continued to search the house with the four of us standing near the dining room door, would not let us move, continued to torment us with irrelevant and nonsensical questions. The leader called Peter to interrogate him at the double door by the chapel and one of the other soldiers told us to go. We picked up our baskets and had got as far as the annex when Peter appeared on the verandah and I thought he indicated to us not

to go. The bully shouted at us to come back, lined us up on the verandah and called Sarah for interrogation- outside the double door at the front of the house. Next called Helen and quizzed and quizzed her. We three prayed and prayed. As long as I could hear Helen's voice I felt she was alright. Then I was called. Helen was not dismissed, TG. I was questioned a little and then he turned to Helen again, while the smaller soldier began to maul me. Helen pleaded that we be let go and began to retreat. He took out his pistol and told Helen three times to come nearer and nearer. We were terrified, said we wanted to go up the hill to join the others for prayer and supper. He told us he prays with his gun and had not had supper for three days. For some reason they laid off and walked towards the quadrangle and we took to the heels along the front of the house, out to the road, took off the shoes in order to run faster. When I looked across towards the annex there was the leader with his rifle pointed towards us and shouting. I did not hear what he said but just kept running. Their land-rover was parked outside Doreen Drake's. I felt they might jump into it and follow us up the hill. Helen was as white as a sheet; we were both panting and out of breath. No soldiers in front of St Lawrence's. We ran to the kitchen entrance of Admin- panting and crying. Gaspd our story to Oswald, then we got Kobusheshe and Francis to go rescue Sarah and Peter Kelly. Helen and I collapsed on our beds. Very shortly Sarah and Peter arrived. When the three soldiers ran towards Doreen's- seemingly after Helen and me- Sarah and Peter ran out the double door to the classrooms, on to the dining room of the school to staff houses- to the Poor Clare's and home to the Administration. They zigzagged in and out of buildings and food stores. A second group of rescuers went down to inform the first group that we were all here and they locked our house. Decision taken immediately that we would not stay down there during the day. The whole intimidation lasted just over an hour.

Eileen Maher