

TERROR IN SANTIAGO

Columban Priest Tells Of Police Raid, Slaying

When Bishop Joseph L. Hogan and his diocesan party visited Santiago, Chile, on a tour of the missions recently they stayed at the Columban Center House, where the Columban Fathers who work in the area live.

On Nov. 1, 1975, the center was a scene of mayhem as police, apparently suspecting that Marxist extremists were being hidden inside, opened fire on the center, killing its housekeeper, then entered it and carried off a British woman doctor.

Father William Hallidan who was in the house at the time told the story of that fateful night to the Courier-Journal's Anthony J. Costello. It is a tale of terror, reflecting what it's like to live in a police state, without freedom of the press.

"An American Sister had entered the infirmary at the center a couple of days before the attack," Father Hallidan related. Dr. Sheila Cassidy, a Briton who had treated some of the priests and practiced at the public health service, was attending the Sister.

"Dr. Cassidy often stopped to pray in the chapel, as did the housekeeper (Senora Ares Enriqueta, a mother of four). The Sister and Dr. Cassidy wanted to arrange a prayer meeting but I had to prepare a sermon. I went off to my office ... the two women said they would pray together ... I sat down and heard machinegun fire. So I ran downstairs and into the living room and lying there was the housekeeper, shot through the heart, as we now know.

"I assume she had gone to answer the doorbell ... we had always told her not to go to the door ... she went to the french window, turned around, probably to ask my permission to let the people in, I suspect, and they shot her dead — four bullets in her body, one through the heart.

"Immediately the doctor arrived down the backstairs and I said to myself, 'Thank God, there's a doctor in the house' and I went to call the police. There was more shooting — I think that was the time they put bullets through the front door ... As I went for the telephone I found Sheila dragging the woman ... so I helped her and put her at the foot of the backstairs near the telephone.

"Then it really opened up — I thought there were police upstairs shooting with abandon. It was so loud and I could smell the gunpowder. And they put two bullets right where I lay down ... Sheila went into the kitchen on the floor there ... I got up when they stopped and went out to the kitchen to see how the doctor was. I saw through the kitchen window three fellows coming over the back wall — three men dressed in civilian clothing, each carrying a sub-machinegun ... a Russian AKA ...

"I thought they were extremists being chased by the police or the army. I wasn't about to be involved. I said, 'Come this way, there's a gate door out in the back!' I went out and it was locked, as it should be. This is important because a later government statement said there an extremist and he escaped through the back door...

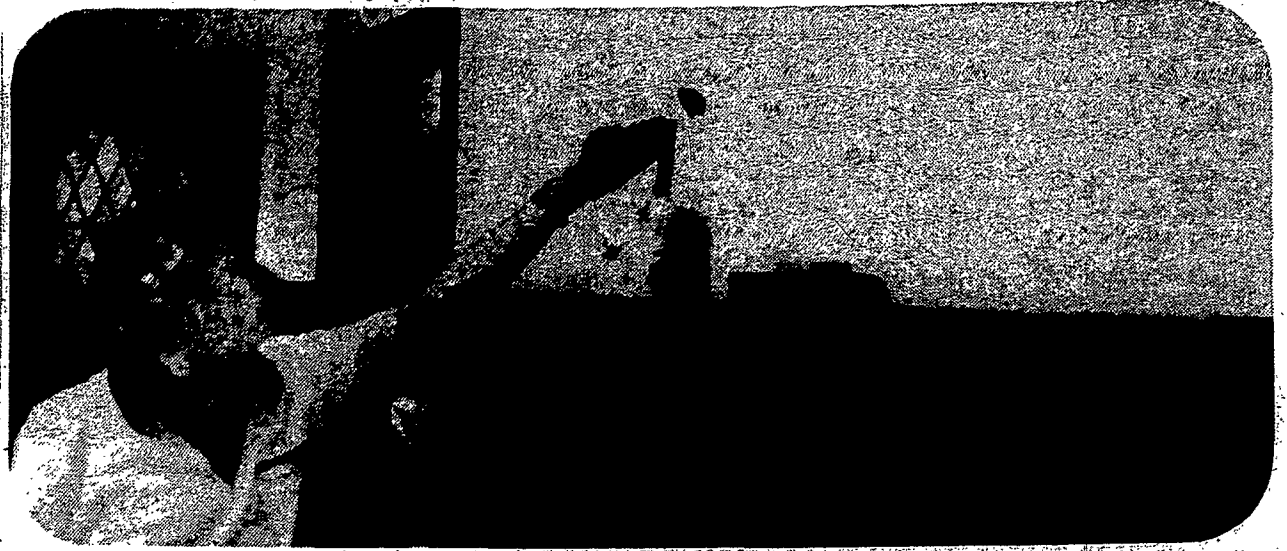
"A fellow took me by the shoulder and threw me across the kitchen yelling, 'Where are they?' ... They went out to where the woman was lying and the doctor was with her. And they obviously opened the front door and eight other fellows came in, all dressed in civilian clothes and all carrying machineguns ... they went upstairs and the fellow who spoke to me first, a tall, fair-haired fellow who seemed to be the leader, went upstairs and next thing he came down the backstairs with the nun dressed in a red dressing gown ... they found her kneeling on the floor praying, gave her a kick ... they brought her downstairs with the machinegun stuck in her ribs.

"I screamed at them, 'For God's sake, that's a nun, she's sick. And this is my housekeeper. She's a mother of four. And this is a doctor.' I didn't know what they were up to. And I thought they were going to shoot us all. I thought they were extremists.

"... they went upstairs again and I sent the doctor to the kitchen to get some cooking oil ... and I anointed the



Father Hallidan and another bullet hole in front door.



Father Michael Conboy, visiting the Columban center, points out bullet hole in the dining room.

Photos by Anthony J. Costello

housekeeper using the old Latin form and I gave them absolution.

"I got up eventually and went into the living room and standing in the middle of the room were two police officers, a lieutenant and a sub lieutenant and at the door was a policeman with a machinegun.

"I said, 'Thank God, the police are here.' At the time there was no one else in the room, the rest were upstairs searching. I talked to the fellow. He was very glum. I said, 'What is going on in my house?' He said in Spanish, 'You'll find out later.'

"The other fellow came back downstairs and said to me, he was sort of a nice fellow, 'Is this a religious house?' I said, 'Yes.' 'Are you a priest?' ... And I said, 'Yes.' He took me into the front waiting room by the front door ... I saw Sheila Cassidy's housekeeper sitting on the front steps and I said, 'Come in ... Next thing, the ambulance came ... and they took away the woman. I suppose she was dead then ... in a blanket which they had sent Sheila upstairs to get.'

(After bringing the blanket downstairs) "she went back up and told the Sister who was there, 'They are extremists. They have come to get me.' And she didn't want to go with them.

"She hid in the bathroom at the top of the stairs ... and they said to me in Spanish, 'Where is Sheila?'

"I didn't know whether they were police or extremists ... two fellows went upstairs with machineguns to find her and they found her in the bathroom ... She knew they were looking for her so came out. And they took her away.

"I went upstairs to see the Sister and told her to go to bed. I came downstairs to the phone and to my consternation I found that the phone had been ripped out of the wall. It can't be the police ... the police don't go around ripping people's phones out."

Father Hallidan then described going out to get to a telephone. "On the way I saw all the empty shells and I picked up a few and went next door and I called some of my colleagues."

He had trouble reaching them but finally reached one and told him to come over. He also called the Sisters and left a message "for Sister Janet Caulfield, a Rochester Mercy ... eventually Janet came with a young lady who was staying with them, a Canadian girl ... cause there were no women in the house to take care of the Sister ...

"I also tried to call the British consulate but couldn't find the number ...

"A radio patrol I called came, a lieutenant and a policeman and asked what happened and I told them ... I handed him the six empty shells, three big ones and three small ones. I didn't tell them where I got them ... He looked at them and said, 'They're not ours, we don't use that stuff.' He said the assailants must have been extremists. He took away three of each. As I now know the three bigger ones are for the AKA Russian machinegun and the three smaller ones for a 7.65 automatic pistol ...

"I called the hospital to inquire about the housekeeper and she was dead. A policeman answered the phone.

"... I got up at 6 (the next day) and went out in the street and collected quite a lot of empty shells — 24 in all, less than half were for the 7.65, rest were AKA... I called Bishop Valech, the auxiliary. He came at 9 then went to tell the cardinal. I said Mass, came back to look after the sister upstairs. I called the British consulate and they came down. Nothing at all in the papers."

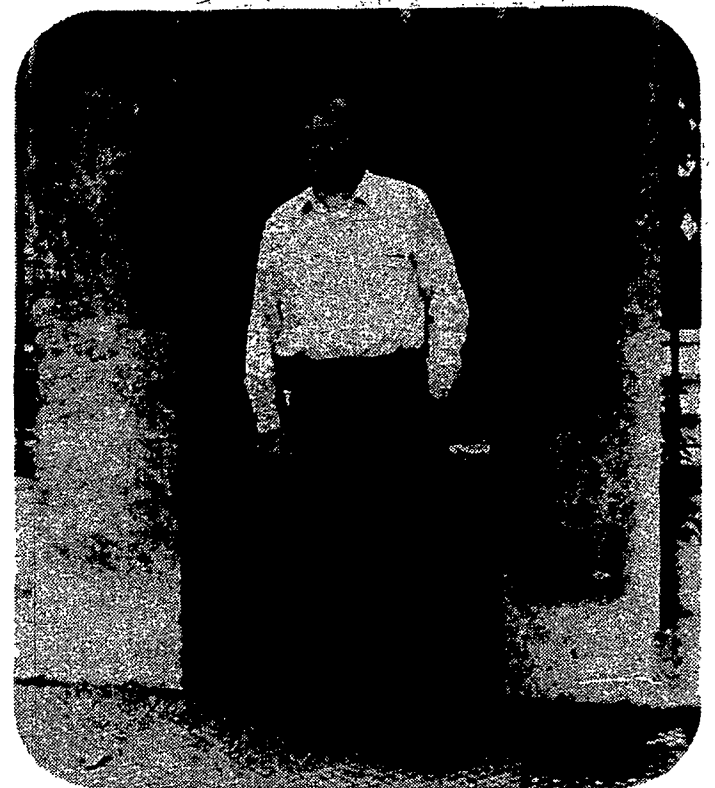
Here, Father Hallidan supplies the background for the attack — which he didn't know at the time. The army had had a shootout with a band of extremists and the leaders got away. The extremists are known as the MIR, an armed Marxist group. One leader was Pascal Allende, nephew of the late President Allende. The other was Nelson Gutierrez.

They came to Santiago and showed up at the peace committee offices where a Jesuit priest persuaded them to give up their guns. Gutierrez had gunshot wounds and the priest called a doctor — Sheila Cassidy. This was about a week before the shooting at the center. She treated them and they escaped to embassies — Gutierrez to the papal nunciature and Allende to the Costa Rican embassy.

"But anyway," Father Hallidan continued, "they took her away and she was tortured and she eventually told what happened... they tortured her quite a lot so she had to talk. And we knew nothing at all about Sheila Cassidy being involved in this business."

The cardinal had a meeting with the minister of the interior and both agreed to maintain silence on the subject until an investigation.

"However," Father Hallidan related, "a German priest



Father Hallidan at gate to home.

who acts as a news correspondent sent out a cable and gave the facts which were substantially correct and this flew in the world press. At which point the government decided they were no longer bound by the bargain with the cardinal and published a long statement ... and as regards the house published a version of the facts which did not correspond with what I knew to be the truth. They said that when they arrived here at the house looking for the doctor, they were met with a hail of machinegun bullets from Russian guns and that one of them was wounded.... He was but not from any guns in this house. They were firing at random. They did believe, I think, that Nelson Gutierrez and the other fellow were in this house. They were very nervous naturally ... these were very dangerous men.

"They had gone to Sheila Cassidy's house, looking for them and her and her housekeeper said that she was at the priests' house looking after a sick person. They must have thought that's where they are. So they came and shot first, that's how the housekeeper got murdered.

"The government also stated that they found bullets in this house — three AKAs and three 7.65s and they published photographs of bullets ... this (supposedly) proved that we were hiding an extremist in the house ... and when police eventually came in, this fellow had disappeared. And that Sheila Cassidy was armed with a pistol and between the two they had murdered the housekeeper — turned the whole thing around.

"There was no one in the house (the government statement continued) except the sick nun and a priest of advanced age, that's me, who didn't come downstairs. I think it was probably their way of letting me off the hook — otherwise they would have to arrest me and charge me with harboring the criminal. Now I was 59 which isn't all that advanced ... I think it was a kindness or else it was letting the back door open to explain why I wasn't arrested ...

"The statement was published in all the papers — they went to town on it. Eventually the Mercurio surpassed itself. It published a photograph of this house and said in this house of the Columban Fathers Nelson Gutierrez and Pascal Allende were hidden and treated by Dr. Cassidy and were accomplices of Communist terrorists and that they were Marxists — very bad boys.

"And we had nothing to do with it."

Finally an investigation took place and a military investigator appointed. Father Hallidan gave some nine hours of testimony in two courts. — "they were very nice, very correct." He told of two ballistics experts, retired colonels, who came to the house. He overheard one say to the other, "Nobody shot from this house.

"The upshot of the whole thing — the investigator sent up his report ... which states quite categorically that no bullets were fired from inside toward the outside. All the impacts were in the opposite direction. However, members of the DINA, the secret police, refused to give any evidence. When they were called to appear ... they wouldn't come ... The case is closed until further evidence."

Sheila Cassidy was kept in jail for 59 days and they let her go for lack of evidence but she was picked up again by DINA. Eventually she was expelled from the country and the British government withdrew its ambassador and he hasn't been replaced.