

Excerpt from Oral History of Sister Margaret Michael, SNDdeN

On July 16, 1942, around 11 p.m. there was a terrible explosion. I jumped out of bed, got dressed, but I couldn't get my stockings on; I tried and tried, but I couldn't get them on, so I just wore my shoes. Sr. Mary Cletus, who had been named the warden, and who was supposed to be calm, cool, and collected, came dashing over in her nightgown, shouting, "Douse the lights. The Japs have dropped the bomb in St. Xavier's schoolyard." Sr. Mary St. Rita came out of her room and started to have an asthma attack. I told her, "This is no time to have an asthma attack." Sr. Agnes Rita was shouting that someone had stolen her black stockings: she had one black stocking, but she couldn't find the other black stocking. Somebody had stolen it. She was ranting and a raving about her stolen black stocking. I remember shouting at her, "What's that around your throat?" The night before, she had remarked that she was getting a sore throat. One of the Sisters told her to take one of the stockings she had worn that day and wrap around her throat. It would prevent her from having a sore throat, and it really did. The explosion was not a bomb. It was caused by a leaking gasoline tank at a gas station that was across the street from St. Xavier grade school. One policeman was killed. His body was blown across St. Xavier grade school, hit the roof and fell into the alley. A piece of glass brick was blown into a dormitory window and just fell near a Sister's bed. The window had been open wide and had no screen in it. Some of the Sisters saw the body of the policeman in the alley. Later, we found that he had gone to St. John's school when young. We also were told that he was supposed to have started his vacation the next day. The police checked to see if we were ok, and we were. One old Sister yelled out of the window, "There's a dead man in our yard." This was not true, but the police had to come in and check. Sr. Rita Louise, clad only in her nightgown and cap, no teeth, etc. insisted on taking the police around into the various buildings. I remember one old Sister, when she saw Sister and the police said, "Tell the vision to no man." I have never forgotten that statement. It helped ease the tension that some of us felt. Since it was summer, the Chapel windows were all left open about an inch. The firemen said had they been closed, all of the glass would have been shattered. There was no physical damage to the buildings, foundations, etc. The roofs of the buildings were all peppered with small holes. We had fire insurance, storm insurance, but not chemical insurance. So, the roof damage was not covered by any insurance. There was an elder pastor who did not know our Sisters and yet each month, he took up a collection for our benefit. His parish was a small one near a river, that is all the information he would give. During all the commotion of that night, quite a number of Sisters heard nothing and slept through the entire ordeal. God love them.