

Death Camps

HOTEL MILLE COLLINES, KIGALI

The Hotel Mille Collines became a different kind of death camp. Some members of UNAMIR were staying in the hotel, which was therefore protected by ten-to-twelve Tunisian UNAMIR soldiers. The U.N. presence attracted many refugees there, including prominent opposition members and dissidents. About six hundred Rwandese were there, plus foreigners. The hotel had telephone and fax links to the outside world for the first days of the crisis, so the plight of the refugees trapped inside became well-known internationally. As in the case of the churches of St. Famille and St. Paul's, the refugees were a mixture of Tutsis and Hutus who were wanted for political reasons or who came from the south. But even with the UNAMIR presence, the refugees were still under constant threat from the killers.

Paul Rusesabagina was manager of the Hotel Diplomate before the genocide. The interim government requisitioned this hotel immediately after unleashing the genocide. When the expatriate manager of the hotel was evacuated, Paul was told by the new government to take over the management, which he did for a few days until the government evacuated to Gitarama on 12 April. The Belgian company that owns the Diplomate also owns the Mille Collines; at this point Paul was transferred to the Mille Collines.

During his spell as manager of the Mille Collines, Paul Rusesabagina, who is a Hutu, earned the respect and gratitude of the many people who took refuge there. Many of the refugees evacuated from Mille Collines paid warm tribute to his efforts to protect and help them. Speaking the day after he himself was evacuated from his hotel, he described how running the hotel was somewhat different from his normal professional activities.

I had hard times at the Mille Collines. Very hard times. One morning, at 6:00 a.m. around 18 April, an officer from the ministry of defence telephoned my room from the reception. I was still in bed. He told me to get everybody out of the hotel in thirty minutes. He said only UNAMIR would be allowed to remain. He said I must kick out all those who had sought refuge at the hotel. The compound of the hotel was already surrounded by soldiers and interahamwe. I asked him where he thought these refugees could go. I pointed out that the homes of many of these people had been destroyed and their families killed. Others had fled to the hotel because of the fighting which was still continuing. I asked him 'What

security have you provided for these people? Where are the guarantees for their security?' He replied 'You tell them to leave however they can leave. If they came by foot, they go back by foot. It's not your problem.' I remained on the telephone for two minutes without saying anything. Then I said 'Give me thirty minutes. I'm still in bed.' Fortunately, I had access to a private line at the hotel which had not been cut off because they did not know of its existence. I started using my connections in the army. I asked all the prominent refugees to call every senior person in the army they knew. Thirty minutes later, some officers came to pick up the officer.

Another time, another officer from the ministry of defence, in intelligence, came. It was on 15 May. He said he came to tell me that they were planning to kill everybody that night. I sent urgent appeals by fax everywhere—to Belgium, France etc... I rushed around like a madman asking people to put pressure on the government. Fortunately our efforts paid off. We got a good and encouraging response from abroad. But those who had planned the attack were obviously frustrated. A bullet hit the hotel around 10:35 p.m., just to let us know their power and that the plan had been in place.

But the hardest time I ever had in my life was the day before yesterday [17 June]. After killing people in St. Paul's church [sixty two men were massacred on 14 June], the interahamwe came to kill people at Mille Collines. They came screaming: 'We want the manager.' My wife and children were hiding in the toilet. Fortunately, at that moment, I was at the Diplomate. I came back. The Mille Collines was surrounded by about thirty armed interahamwe. UNAMIR called their headquarters and the chief of staff. The chief of staff came to the hotel personally with a lot of soldiers. He got them out of the hotel without any injuries and gave assurances of protection.

But I could not feel secure. The militias took to coming in and asking for the manager. They told people they were looking for 'that protector of the *Inyenzi*.' I started wearing clothes that did not make me look like a manager. At times they would even ask me where the manager was. I decided to leave after that. [By mid-June, a large number of the refugees had been evacuated]. I felt personally threatened and I worried about my family's safety.

Paul and his family were evacuated on 18 June by UNAMIR. When he left, in addition to the staff of UNAMIR, there were about three hundred Zairians and two hundred Rwandese who were still living there.¹⁶

One of the guests—or prisoners—in the hotel was François Xavier Nsanzuwera, the deputy attorney-general. A Hutu, he was told he was on an

¹⁶ Interviewed in Kabuga, Greater Kigali, 19 June 1994.

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assassination list. He and his wife fled to a neighbour who was too frightened to drive them to the Mille Collines Hotel. After he learned that the gendarmes would not give him protection precisely because he was in danger, he started contacting people to arrange an escape.

I did not know where I could go. The Belgian contingent of UNAMIR were too afraid to collect me themselves. I telephoned contacts at several Western embassies, but no one felt they could help. They urged me to find my way to the Mille Collines Hotel, on the basis that with so many Europeans at the hotel, the Presidential Guards might hesitate to shoot people inside the hotel. Still, I was left to struggle with the problem of how to get to the hotel. My host said he could not take me.

I telephoned a friend in the army. He was astonished to learn that I was still alive. He sent me a heavily-armed military escort which accompanied us to the Mille Collines Hotel. When we arrived, we were told to be very careful because there were Presidential Guards in the hotel carrying grenades and looking for the children of the Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyamana. Fortunately, the telephone was still working and I called my contacts in Belgium. They arranged for me to be evacuated by UNAMIR. They came to collect me and my wife but they could not find us. By the time they came, the only person who knew my room number, the Belgian manager, had been evacuated.

For safety reasons, we stayed locked in our room. But after a while, hunger became a problem. My wife ventured out to make contact with the other refugees and to make arrangements about food. I also got in touch with some of the people because you cannot stay cooped up all day long. There were constant worries about security.

One time, the Rwandese manager of the hotel told me that a certain Lt. Apollinaire Hakizimana, charged with intelligence at the ministry of defence, had visited him and ordered him to chuck everybody out of the hotel. From my work, I knew that Hakizimana was a real assassin and had been implicated in many of the political murders that I had been called upon to investigate. He said the refugees could return to their houses knowing the hotel was surrounded by soldiers.

The frantic manager called everywhere and asked some of us to call up our contacts in the military. The military met to discuss the situation and the army headquarters called the manager to say that they had never given any such order. Many military officers who were married to Tutsis had evacuated their in-laws to the hotel and therefore had personal reasons to be concerned.

As a senior civil servant in close collaboration with the U.N., François had good connections with France and Belgium. Confirming the

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story given by the manager, Paul Rusesabagina, his testimony contains an account of the sole occasion on which the French government intervened to protect Rwandese civilians at the height of the killings—an ironic demonstration of the power for good that the French could have used had they desired to exert their influence with the Rwandese army and interim government.

Another time the manager received a tip that some extremist soldiers planned to attack the hotel that night in order to kill the people who had taken refuge there. We spent a lot of time sending SOS faxes to Europe. We knew that only France had influence with the killers. This was also the only time that there was a reaction from France. That morning, the chief of staff came to the Mille Collines together with General Dallaire of UNAMIR and apologized. The soldiers realized that they could not kill us because of the reaction of the chief of staff. In frustration, they shot a bullet at the hotel. Fortunately, it did not cause much harm.

The threats were daily. Interahamwe were coming and going all the time. There was even a big interahamwe from Gitarama living at the hotel, a businessman called Kamana who had to leave Gitarama after people there made it clear that they did not want him. The security provided by UNAMIR was wholly inadequate, a dozen Tunisian soldiers with two armoured carriers.

Anxious to be evacuated, we continued to keep in touch by fax with people abroad who could help us, as well as with UNAMIR.¹⁷ After a while, UNAMIR decided to evacuate sixty-two of us who had letters confirming that the Belgian government had accepted responsibility for us. At the time, the airport was still in the hands of the army. I cannot give the exact dates of events; I never wrote anything down for fear that our rooms would be searched. But I think the evacuation was organized on 25 May.

The evacuation was far from straightforward, and ultimately did not succeed. François was extremely lucky to survive, as the killers were determined to murder him and the other evacuees. He was saved because his would-be executioner was a poor shot.

Just before we left the hotel, the chief of staff came to the Mille Collines and told UNAMIR that they could not evacuate us. UNAMIR told him that the government had already given its approval. As we were getting into the vehicles, many army officers arrived at the hotel, including Lt.

¹⁷ Paul Rusesabagina's testimony shows how this was possible—he had a personal line that the military had failed to cut.

Apollinaire Hakizimana and Captain Gaspard Hategekimana, mentioned in the report of the International Commission as a member of the death squad. He greeted me and asked if I was planning to leave. When I said yes, he smiled.

We left in four trucks after the chief of staff gave his permission. My wife and I were in the first truck. Given the menacing behaviour of so many senior army officers, I was afraid that we would be killed *en route*. We arrived at a roadblock manned by Presidential Guards, outside a nightclub called Kigali Night which belongs to the President's oldest son. They told the passengers in the first and second vehicles to get out of their cars and to sit down on the road. They asked us for money and took some dollars my wife had. They searched us thoroughly, even looking through children's clothes. They confiscated my identity card, my driving license and my passport, as well as my wife's passport. They beat everyone up very badly despite the calls for restraint from a certain lieutenant who asked them to await further orders. Some young women suffered very serious injuries. They slapped children who cried. I was hit on the forehead with the butt of a rifle and near the left ear. [His scars were still evident at the time of the interview].

The situation became very tense after the arrival of some interahamwe. One of the interahamwe who recognized me commented 'The procurer has written a book insulting the President. He does not like the interahamwe because he imprisons them. He must be killed on the spot.' The interahamwe requested permission to take me, saying that the others could be returned to the hotel. The lieutenant refused, saying he had to await orders.

While this conversation was taking place, I was stretched out on the tarmac road, very hurt and bleeding. An interahamwe on the other side of the road fired at me but missed me. The second bullet wounded a Presidential Guard who was standing behind me. There was chaos as soldiers and the interahamwe argued and jostled. The tension was made worse by the fact that the RPF was known not to be very far from the area. The lieutenant told us to get back in our cars. The interahamwe were also threatening the passengers in the third and fourth vehicles who had not descended. The préfet of Kigali intervened and ordered that we should be taken back to the hotel. My intuition is that Gaspard had told the Presidential Guards to attack us.

We returned to Mille Collines. There was no further possibility of an evacuation. UNAMIR then told us that we had two options only; either we chose to go to a government-controlled area or to an RPF-controlled

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zone. I chose to go to an RPF-controlled zone and arrived here in Kabuga this morning.¹⁸

As well as the dangers of trying to get out of the hotel, any visitors were also at risk. Soldiers and interahamwe were permanently camped outside the Mille Collines Hotel. They made a note of visitors. Many refugees said they had Hutu friends who wanted to help them, including some senior army officers, but who were too afraid of coming to the hotel for fear of their lives.

AMAHORO STADIUM, KIGALI

Amahoro Stadium differs from the other camps detailed in this chapter because the interahamwe, soldiers and Presidential Guard were unable to enter the camp themselves to kill the people they wanted. This was because there was a contingent of UNAMIR troops stationed at the stadium throughout. However, the killers soon found a way around their problem: they shelled the stadium. Philomène Cyulinyana, a nurse, was one of those who took refuge there:

After they took control of our neighbourhood, the RPF told us to go to Amahoro Stadium. We stayed there for two weeks before coming to Byumba. But Presidential Guards and the interahamwe came regularly to the stadium intending to kill the refugees. There was constant artillery bombardment and many people were killed. In one single day, twenty-seven people were killed and sixty-seven wounded by shells. I know the numbers well because I was working as a nurse that day.¹⁹

Shortly afterwards, the RPF took control of the area. This removed the harassment by the soldiers, but increased the dangers from the shelling. Now the government forces claimed that they were shelling rebel positions. Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol of MSF-France was in Kigali at the end of April:

In the Amahoro Stadium where a lot of people are camped, there is a barbed wire that separates the refugees from the U.N., and then the RPF is all around the stadium. Because of their presence, government soldiers

¹⁸ Interviewed in Kabuga, Greater Kigali, 28 May 1994.

¹⁹ Interviewed in Byumba, 22 May 1994.