

FRENCH ESTABLISH A BASE IN RWANDA TO BLOCK REBELS

INSURGENTS ADVANCING

Paris Alters Its Rationale for Its Military Intervention in Central African Nation

By **RAYMOND BONNER**

Special to The New York Times

GIKONGORO, Rwanda, July 4 — France inserted itself more directly into Rwanda's civil war today, establishing a major base here six miles from the advancing Tutsi-led rebel army and manning it with Foreign Legionnaires and paratroopers supported by heavy artillery.

The purpose is to prevent the rebels' westward advance into the safe zone declared by the French intervention force.

"It is a line in the sand," a French Army captain said.

The French move came on the same day that the rebel forces, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, gained control of major Government installations in Kigali, the capital.

After nearly three months of almost daily bombardment, the capital was quiet today, United Nations officials there said. The rebels allowed the Hutu to leave and Tutsi emerged from hiding. Kigali is 80 miles north of the new French base.

The country's second-largest city, Butare, has also fallen to the rebel army, according to a Rwandan Army general traveling today on the road west of Butare. A football field two miles west of this base was crowded today with wounded Government soldiers who had been forced to flee from Butare.

The French move to set up the safe zone and stop the rebel army, which was approved by President François Mitterrand, represents a substantial change in its mission. Until now, the French have said they are neutral. But in protecting a region that contains Government forces but no rebel troops, France has effectively come to the rescue of the beleaguered Hutu-dominated Government.

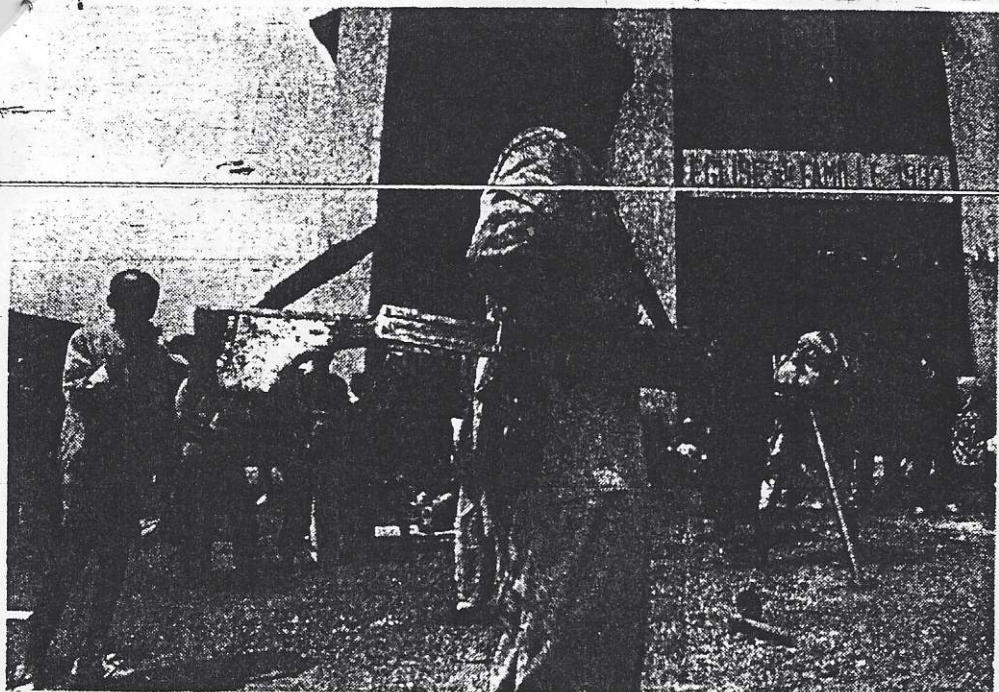
Hundreds of Rwandan soldiers, on foot and in passenger cars, were fleeing farther west. Late in the afternoon, they passed a long convoy of French jeeps with machine guns and six small tanks that was on the way to the hilltop base here, 18 miles west of Butare. French Foreign Legionnaires dug in on a strategic hillside along the route a few miles from the base. Throughout the day, helicopters brought in supplies.

"My mission is not to fight the R.P.F.," Col. Didier Thibaut, commander of the French paratroopers at the base, said on Sunday.

Today, he was still characterizing his mission as protective. "If the R.P.F. comes here and threatens the population, we will open fire against them without any hesitation," the colonel said, "and we have the means."

Thousands of Tutsi who lived in this mountainous region have been killed or forced to flee, and the population left to protect is virtually all Hutu, including some 250,000 refugees from parts of the country now controlled

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Agence France-Press

A Tutsi soldier with the rebel forces stood guard yesterday at Holy Family Church in Kigali, the capital, after the city fell and the Hutu-led Government fled. The church had been packed with refugees, mostly Tutsi.

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by the rebels.

As the French troops took up their positions, Rwandan officials drove along the dirt roads, using loudspeakers to urge the people not to flee, because the French had come to protect them.

Shortly after the outbreak of the civil war, which began in October 1990 when the rebels invaded from bases in Uganda, the French sent paratroopers to stop the rebels, who were approaching Kigali. France continued to support the Hutu-dominated Government with arms and training, and as recently as six months ago French soldiers were here in open support of the Government. They withdrew in December and did not return until their present intervention, which began on June 23.

Last week a French official here said the rebels could not be allowed to achieve a military victory. Even though Government-backed troops are guilty of massacres, he said, the Tutsi will have to negotiate with them. Tutsi are a minority, he added, and can not expect to run the country, he said. (The Tutsi make up about 15 percent of Rwanda's population.)

By confronting the rebels with military muscle, the French may be hoping to bring them to the negotiating table.

From the beginning of the French intervention, the rebels have accused the French of favoring the Government, and today they charged that the French were exceeding the United Nations mandate that approved intervention to protect refugees.

The French sought to renew their mandate on Saturday, when they



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The French-proposed safe zone is in southwest Rwanda.

asked the United Nations Security Council to specifically support establishment of a safe haven in southwestern Rwanda from which all military forces would be excluded.

By moving troops into the area, the French have effectively acted without waiting for United Nations approval, though there was no visible effort to create an entirely military-free zone. Rwandan Government troops moved freely throughout the area today, and a checkpoint less than a mile from the French base was manned by militiamen with machetes, rifles and grenades.

The militia have been responsible for much of the slaughter of Tutsi, according to human-rights organizations. "The militia have killed far more people than have uniformed members of the armed forces," Human Rights Watch/Africa said in a report in May.

Several French commanders have said since their arrival that they do not have the authority to disarm the militias.

Rebels' Rights Record

While the rebels have been accused of rights violations, rights organizations have said they are not guilty of mass killings of civilians, which has characterized the Government's war against the Tutsi.

"The R.P.F. does not have a good human-rights record," African Rights, a rights organization in London said in May. "There are docu-

mented cases of killing of suspected militia members and indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets. However the R.P.F. is not implicated in the genocide," the organization said, and "the major reason for the abatement of the killings has been the advance of the R.P.F."

When the rebels moved into Butare on Sunday, they passed through large numbers of fleeing Hutu without incident. And there have been no reports that the rebels attacked the thousands of refugees camped a few miles south of Butare.

But the refugees have been bombarded for months by Government broadcasts saying the rebels will kill all Hutu, and many refugees are certain the rebels will seek revenge. There was real fear among the fleeing civilians today, aggravated by their concern about being trapped between the French and rebel forces.

French Talk With Rebels

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PARIS, July 4 — French officials said today that senior military commanders in Central Africa had met with rebel leaders along the Rwanda-Uganda border over the weekend to discuss setting up havens for civilians.

"These contacts took place at the highest level and they went well," one official said, adding that there was a general understanding of the need to stop the flow of refugees into neighboring countries because of the danger of aggravating ethnic and political tensions.

But rebel representatives in Paris and Brussels denounced the French move to set up a base in Rwanda. One representative called it a "last entrenchment" for the benefit of Rwandan Government troops. Fighting between the rebels and French troops may be inevitable, the rebels said.

French officials in Paris insist that their aim is not to prevent a victory by the Rwandan Patriotic Front but to establish a safe haven to prevent further killing.

And though French officers in Rwanda have said they have no plans to try to disarm either Government or rebel forces, television news broadcasts here showed French troops grabbing young men, taking away their guns and machetes and removing them by helicopter.

Officials in Panama Say They'll Accept 10,000 From Haiti

PANAMA CITY, Panama, July 4 (AP) — The Government agreed today to accept as many as 10,000 refugees fleeing the political crisis in Haiti.

The decision comes in response to a request by the United Nations, said Tomás Altamirano Duque, the Vice President-elect. The United States government has also asked Panama