

British Aid Woman Tells of Hell and Carnage in Rwanda.

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A British woman aid worker spoke last night of her “astonishment” at being alive after becoming trapped at the heart of the fighting in Kigali, the Rwandan capital, where law and order seems almost completely to have broken down.

Susanne Niedrum, 28, a civil engineer working for Care, the American agency, in the central African state, told *The Times* from Nairobi : “It was carnage, a hell, shootings, rapes, killing of anyone by the presidential guard to try to eliminate those in opposition parties, their families and their children.”

Last night her mother, Barbel Cheesewright of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, said after hearing that her daughter was safe : “I’m overjoyed. She takes care of everyone and I am sure she would have wanted to help all those trapped.”

Miss Niedrum said fighting began on the streets of Kigali on Wednesday night after President Habyarimana died when his plane was shot down. She had been out with a girl friend.

“At first it seemed like the usual night of shooting with grenades going off in the distance. We went home at about 9.30 pm, but then came the grenades, guns, and lots of shooting.

“At 5.15 am all hell broke loose. It was the presidential guard coming to take revenge for the President’s plane and they were shooting everyone. It was carnage. They were killing anyone to try to eliminate those in opposition parties, their families and their children.

“I live alone with my maid and her children and we tried to hide in my house. The safest place was in the corner in the hall. We tried to leave the house, but there were bullets flying. I don’t know what they were firing, but when they hit they made so much noise

they must have been big guns. It was very frightening.

“My house is opposite the American Ambassador’s, right in the firing line. I judged we had to get help to join others, so we ran for it. At this point the phone went dead. There were hundreds of people fleeing from the countryside and coming into the ambassador’s residence.

“Bullets started coming through the windows and over the roof tops. One child was hit and died. Others were hit too. It was right between the government forces and the rebels the front line. The ambassador’s staff were trying to coordinate the evacuation. The Rwandans had to help themselves. But there was little there. I tried to bandage (the wounded) the best we could. But I was the only expat there.

“When the convoy was ready I couldn’t wait to go. I didn’t want to leave my maid and her family there, they were like my daughters. But we were told all those on the convoy would be killed if there were any Rwandans with us. I had to leave them ; I know they must be dead. I so wanted to bring them with me to take them to the country out of Kigali. They were close friends and her daughters were my daughters. If I stop to think what must have happened to them and other friends ... it’s too horrible to think.

“We left at 3 pm on Saturday and we travelled for 12 hours to get to Bujumbura (the capital of Burundi). I was in the last car, carrying an American flag. A Rwandan soldier was in my car for protection in case we were ambushed, which we thought might come at any moment.

“We managed to get over the bridge out of Kigali. After we had passed across it, once the last car had got to safety, they blew it up.”

In Kigali yesterday, gangs of men wielding knives,

machetes and clubs lined roads in the suburbs. Civilians carrying AK47 assault rifles guarded vehicles crowded with people trying to flee. Dead bodies lay abandoned everywhere in the streets.

Eric Bertin, co-ordinator for Medecins sans Frontieres in the city, said that about 50 wounded people treated by the agency were yesterday reported to have been killed. The International Red Cross told the agency that the wounded patients had been killed inside tents being used as hospital wards that were clearly marked with its emblem. "There have been around 1,000 deaths at the main hospital in the city. You can see people dying everywhere outside it, too," M Bertin said.

One evacuee, the chef at the luxury Meridien Hotel, said there had been shelling near the building on Saturday and yesterday by rebels entering the city. He said this was because soldiers loyal to the former President had taken up position inside. That position had been overrun, however, and the hotel reception was now occupied by about 15 Rwandan rebel soldiers. He also said that about 35 children had gathered in the hotel and that he had tried to leave behind enough food for them for the next three days.

Driving through the suburbs from the airport to the school in a convoy of French troops to collect the evacuees, groups of desperate people could be seen clustered outside looted houses, many of which appeared to be abandoned, indicating an enormous displacement of people from the city to the countryside. The people waved and cheered at the French paratroops, who also appeared to have a good rapport with government soldiers. Elsewhere in the city, soldiers carried suitcases, seemingly containing stolen goods, on their heads.

The atmosphere in Kigali is sinister and menacing. Along the dirt track that forms the street in the outer suburbs of the city, most houses are closed behind fences and locked gates. It is also becoming clear that atrocities have been committed on a grand scale close to the city as well.

An order of nuns running an orphanage at Masaka, about seven miles east of the capital, was last night evacuated on a French military aircraft to the Central African Republic with large numbers of Tutsi and Hutu women and children, and more than 90 or-

phans who were in their care. Sister Palleotrinias, a Polish nun who has lived in Rwanda for the past 18 years, said that anywhere between 30 and 50 people had been massacred at her orphanage at about mid-day yesterday. She said they included a nun whose appearance was that of a Tutsi, but whose identity card when she showed it to the attackers made it clear she was Hutu.

The orphanage was attacked by a group of Hutu men carrying guns and machetes. After they killed their victim, Sister Palleotrinias said, they threw their bodies into an open-pit latrine that contained the corpses of as many as 200 people massacred in the previous two days.

At night, Belgian soldiers helped carry the orphans across the tarmac of the international airport to the plane. Many of the Rwandan women boarding the aircraft had babies strapped to their backs.

More expatriates being evacuated by night said a number of foreigners had been killed, including two French people who had been hit by mortar fire.