



ME AGAINST MY BROTHER

AT WAR IN SOMALIA,
SUDAN, AND RWANDA

"HIS REPORTING IS FRESH WITH COLORFUL OBSERVATION . . .
IT MAKES FOR POWERFUL READING."

—Mark Bowden, author of *Black Hawk Down*

SCOTT PETERSON

the rescue of the francophone—and therefore brotherly—Hutu regime even during the genocide. The French secretly rushed to supply the failing army with munitions, delivering five cargo flights of weapons to Goma, Zaire, in May and June 1994, when the scale of killing was perfectly clear. The French consul in Goma said these were legitimate shipments that had been ordered and paid for long before. But subsequent shipments were facilitated by the French with Zairean soldiers assisting cross-border deliveries.²⁹ Still, the official line was that France was blameless: “We cannot be reproached for having armed the killers,” said the French chief of staff, Admiral Lanxade. “In any case, all those massacres were committed with sticks and machetes.”³⁰

Mastermind of the RPF push was Maj. Gen. Paul Kagame, nemesis of the francophiles and a soft-spoken, spare man whose family fled Rwanda when he was just two years old. His ascendancy—and reputation for strict discipline and a formidable intellect—sparked the Hutu radio to demand the death of every Tutsi child, so that the “next” Paul Kagame would not survive. His long, fine features were set with a pair of eyeglasses more befitting of an academic than an unforgiving disciplinarian. With a disarmingly quiet demeanor, he was stern and rarely smiled.

Like many Tutsi exiles, Kagame fought alongside Museveni during Uganda’s civil war. Kagame became Uganda’s head of military intelligence, and his tenure saw a record number of treason cases. For this ruthless pursuit, he was nicknamed “Commander Pilate,” after Pontius Pilate, who sentenced Jesus Christ to death.³¹ Brought to bear during the RPF advance, such hard-nosed discipline and ability to focus on the primary goal proved devastating to Hutu forces, which were distracted by their own involvement in mass killing.

The rebel leader had an even simpler explanation for the RPF sweep: the Tutsis had to end the slaughter of their fellow Tutsis. “Basically, every one of us was motivated. That was the main weapon of our success.”³²

French intervention to save the disintegrating Hutu army was a natural instinct for the “African Cell” in Paris and certain French commanders, especially by mid-June when defeat of the army and the extremist rump “government” was inevitable. Throughout the genocide, France had not uttered a word of condemnation. On the contrary, Paris acted sympathetically toward the genocidal interim “government” which was created by hardline *Akazu* militants whose known sole mission was annihilation of all Tutsis. Two senior extremist leaders—“foreign minister” Jérôme Bicamumpaka and CDR head Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza—were in fact welcomed to the Quai d’Orsay at the end of April and met officially with the French president.³³ Barayagwiza would later be indicted by the Arusha Tribunal for war crimes and at the time of writing was awaiting trial.

The long-standing Franco-Rwanda training deal meant that—“possibly without realizing it,” Prunier notes—French troops had trained cadres of the *interahamwe* and *impuzamugambi* militias, which were the spearhead of the genocide. For this reason, in Rwanda President Mitterrand was nicknamed “Mitterahamwe.” And on the back page of the 1990 issue of *Kangura* that published the Hutu Ten Commandments was a portrait of the French leader with the caption: “It is during hard times that one comes to know one’s true friends.”³⁴

So when France’s chosen allies were about to be routed—an embarrassing outcome, if nothing else, after such a deep French commitment to the regime—French forces stepped in. The genocide had been under way for two months; the bulk of the killing had already been done. But now, overnight, Rwanda’s tragedy became all-important in Paris. Declarations of France’s vital “humanitarian” interest took on a strident tone, in sharp contrast to the previous silence.

President Mitterrand took the offensive on 18 June: “Whatever happens, we will act. Every hour counts and it is now only a question of hours and days,” he said. “Increasingly savage fighting [*sic*] is taking place and one can no longer wait . . . this is a matter of great urgency.”³⁵

But the belated call for “urgent” military intervention—which was backed by MSF and approved quickly by the UN Security Council—could not disguise its self-serving nature. France’s history of manipulations in Rwanda and unabashed military support for so many other discredited African regimes made French troops the least welcome to all but the overjoyed Hutus. Days before the landing, RTLM was delighted, and in broadcasts told “you Hutu girls to wash yourselves and put on a good dress to welcome our French allies. The Tutsi girls are all dead so you have your chance.”³⁶

UN commanders in Kigali had begged for months for intervention, but they worried that the French offer to send 2,000 soldiers was ill-advised. Unamir needed neutrality even more than it needed troops. In private, Unamir commander Roméo Dallaire—a francophone Canadian himself, who was aware of the secret arms deals—was more forthright about the French mission: “If they land here to deliver their weapons to the government, I’ll have their planes shot down,”³⁷ he said.

For the RPF, the French were forcing an end to the RPF advance, and the rebels reacted with fury. “We have never got a French body, but we hope to show you one very shortly,” vowed one Tutsi officer.³⁸ But rebel rage did not matter to the French.

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any damage was done—a very fine 4WD. In the dark we left and arrived very late in Bukavu, Zaire. The French were meant to deploy early the next morning, but it seemed we were in the wrong place. The French media had descended upon Goma to the north, but we were too exhausted to drive on. We slunk off to find rooms, then heard that there had been French soldiers, a “very small” advance team, at the local airport.

We arrived where the French had landed—the word “airport” seems too grandiose—let ourselves past the unmanned barrier, and drove toward a bright security light near a shack. The French unit was as surprised to see us as we were to see them. Their intention had been low profile, and instead here were journalists—English-speakers no less—here even before the French press had got wind of the change from the Goma plan. We arranged to deploy with them in a few hours.

The French crossed the border on 23 June 1994, and were met as liberators. They were heroes to the Hutus. The welcome party was outrageous, because it was clear that these European soldiers were saving the killers from all the demons that their violence and murder against the Tutsis had stored within their psyches. Freshly made *tricolores* waved from every hand; men chanted and danced with their machetes and bottles of beer. The crime had been committed, and now it was being absolved: they would be safe. Banners proclaimed “*Vive la France!*” and praised President Mitterrand for his mercy and care. Militia checkpoints evaporated when the convoy of troops passed. Confetti was thrown. I was jostled around by the crowd, as they tried to humor me and ply me with beer.

These Hutus had already forgotten the “lawns of flesh” they left behind, the communal evil, and skulls and machetes slick with blood. Remorseless, they could even ignore the bodies that, at that moment, were still piling up in their backyards as death squads kept up their work. For them, Rwanda was beautiful once again. But not for me.

Opération Turquoise in effect carved a Hutu “safe haven” out of southwest Rwanda. French commandos vowed to prevent the rebels from taking the area, thereby blocking complete RPF victory. The French commander declared that “no quarter” would be given if Tutsi rebels took him on, and troops did engage Tutsis on the borders of the self-declared security zone. These moves, of course, also saved the remnants of the disintegrating army and the collapsed hard-line rump “government” from total defeat. The interim “prime minister,” John Kambanda, would later become the first man in history to be convicted of genocide. He pleaded guilty before the Arusha tribunal in May 1998.

Still, the French on 11 July 1994 offered any member of this quasi-government asylum in the zone. There the French kept the killers from facing

justice, ensured that the vanquished forces could receive clandestine arms shipments, and that French influence with the Hutu majority would remain pervasive.

To demonstrate their “neutral” and humanitarian intentions, however, the French drove immediately to Nyarushishi Camp, one of the last havens for surviving Tutsis in the entire region. Some 8,000 people had been hiding here, their number cut down each night by militia raids. Colonel Didier Thibaut—the name the French commander gave to us—tried to calm the camp leaders, and declared “*Amahoro! Peace!*” The Tutsis responded, faces nervous and unwilling to accept that they would now be protected. Unknown to us or the Tutsi, the real name of “Thibaut” was Thauzin, a former French secret service officer and a former military adviser to President Habyarimana—an unlikely choice for a “humanitarian” mission. Thauzin was “itching to ‘get at’ the RPF,” and so was later recalled, according to Prunier.³⁹

But Thauzin knew his mission and put on a good display of appearing balanced. The Hutu prefect, Emmanuel Bagambiki—the man in charge of the camp and of the Hutu militiamen, who three days earlier had tried to organize the slaughter of every male refugee—lied to the colonel: “There are no militias here, and there never have been.” Thauzin expected this lie, and I was surprised to see him pointing to his eye so that everyone could see his disbelief. One refugee explained: “Because [the prefect] knew that French soldiers would come, he wanted to kill us before. He read out the names of those to die from lists. He wanted to kill the able men at least, so that the French would take over a camp of old men and children.”

Anglophobes were thick among French ranks that entered Rwanda from the Zairean town of Bukavu on 23 June. The French special forces did not sport blue berets, and in fact had stripped all insignia from their uniforms. The paratroopers were Somalia veterans of UN operations, too, who recognized my bald companion, Sam. He had helped them navigate a mined road in southern Somalia. We also had satellite telex machines with us and, apparently, by finding them in Bukavu in the middle of the night, good intelligence. So French officers came to believe that Sam was a British spy working for MI6. His name appeared on a “Wanted” list at checkpoints, and he was to be arrested if found. The situation became so tense—based solely on the imagined, yet common, fear among some senior military chiefs in Paris—that *The Times* complained to the French defense ministry.

Buoyed by the protective French presence, the *interahamwe* militia and army pressed on with their genocidal work. Far away from the main road, even farther away from the first French reconnaissance teams, we came across a group walking up a hill on a mission of killing. Most of the 50 men and boys strung out along the road carried machetes, hardened clubs, and

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grenades. They had already decimated many Tutsi houses and carried away stacks of roof tiles and corrugated iron on their heads. Thinking we were French, they waved and smiled as we drove by, shamelessly oblivious of their daily destruction. Among them were government soldiers, “working” side by side with them to conclude the genocide.

At sunset, the warm air was thick with smoke, for nearly every one of the 200 houses in that Tutsi area was burning. Flames licked at the sky as though nothing had changed since the “Apocalypse of 1959.”

Sam and I wanted to get ahead of the French deployment. But beyond the area of French *tricolores* and smiling Hutus, the land was still cursed. We traveled north toward Kibuye and the dirt road—this remote region had always been neglected by Kigali—was a treacherous gauntlet of hateful Hutu checkpoints. Some were just a couple of dusty men with machetes who had put a few stones across the track. Others were more deliberate, with gates and armed guards. It seemed that there was a new one around every corner. I counted 25 on the way to Kibuye alone. This was a final dragnet for any remaining Tutsis who might be naive enough to try to escape by road.

But even for us, passage was not easy. Luckily, a French journalist had joined us, Vincent Hugué of *L'Express* (Paris), and at each stop Vincent would speak French and hand over our Anglo passports with his politically correct French one on top. The ruse worked, though after every checkpoint—practically in earshot of the Hutu guards—Sam would unnervingly shout: “You bestial killers! You *carnivores!*”

I didn't care much for playing Russian roulette behind the line of a genocidal government whose defeat was assured. Defeated armed men in Africa are always a bad bet for safety. And I was beginning to feel bad physically. Of course we were exhausted. The endless driving, little sleep, and then a night in the Nyarushishi camps conspired to knock us out. But the problem was something more. As we ticked off the Hutu checkpoints, I was slipping out of my senses. It was over 100 degrees, but I had the chills and wore a thick hat and all my clothes. Sam seemed to be driving fast and more and more erratically—that much wasn't a dream, until finally we whipped around a corner and side-swiped a battered army land cruiser coming the other way. We swallowed hard, for this could be disaster in such hostile territory.

I slumped over in my hat, ailing badly and fearing the worst. Vincent talked and Sam cursed. The officer was unimpressed. He wore a thin tank top and camouflage trousers, and he had scars on his chest and face attesting to a life of combat. He could easily mess us up. He wanted us to pay, and to go with him to his commanders—an absolutely no-win plan. We refused. But the result was terrifying anyway—a deal was reached, but as we drove on, the

soldier reversed directions, passed us and proceeded through every checkpoint first, spreading bad news about us.

When we finally arrived in Kibuye, I immediately went to bed. My chills had given way to fever, so I lay naked and sweating on top of the bed. Suspecting malaria, I took a dose of something. But it was our physical situation that chilled my mind: there we were, stuck in Hutuland, with 25 hostile checkpoints on either side of us. I couldn't imagine a worse spot to be so incapacitated.

Next morning I pulled on my woolen hat in the heat, and we made a dash for Goma. I was on the verge of collapse, and when I finally got on a Red Cross flight for Nairobi, I did not have the strength to carry my cameras. At home in Nairobi I collapsed in tears, all the pressures of Rwanda that had stealthily built up rushing out in my state of weakness. I had been bitten by a malarial mosquito weeks before while camped at the sacred and abandoned Nyanza seminary in Rwanda. After many days in a Nairobi hospital, the fever of cerebral malaria passed.

Hutus flooded into their “safe haven” zone, and French soldiers winked with appreciation as shipments of fresh weapons for the beleaguered army arrived from Zaire.⁴⁰ Still, the final rout in Kigali on 1 July of the Rwanda gendarme and Presidential Guard troops reportedly sent “shock waves” throughout the French officer corps.⁴¹ These elite Rwandan units were trained by French instructors at President Mitterrand's request in 1990. In Paris this was “defeat by the Anglo-Saxons,” and one senior French officer warned: “The worst is yet to come. Those bastards will go all the way to Kinshasa now.”⁴² Nostadamus himself could not have foretold better.

French forces announced to the UN that they had disarmed the defeated army units in the zone. The weapons, they said, had been handed over to Zairean authorities. The extremist radio was told to stop its broadcasts from within the zone, and so moved across the border to Bukavu, from which it continued to incite Hutus to kill Tutsis.

Though French troops compiled their own lists of people accused of taking part in the killing, they were never given to the UN or the Criminal Tribunal set up to try war crimes. Though France considers itself the “home” of human rights, Paris has refused to allow its soldiers to testify before any court, and accuses the Rwanda tribunal of dispensing “spectacle justice.” French troops withdrew in mid-August 1994, but left behind one weapons cache of 50 assault rifles and some machine guns for militiamen and soldiers “who remained.” UN troops then took control, but the zone was a source of unrest for months.

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Massacres of Tutsis barely slowed in areas where the French deployed. There were no trucks to rescue the handful of surviving Tutsis in the countryside—the French hardware was military only—and so the killing continued when it could find a target, by groups like that large death squad marching up the hill, machetes in hand. By the time French troops arrived, however, most signs of the carnage were gone, buried or washed from floors. But on closer inspection, I could see that sloppy cleaning had left dark trails of blood on walls or dripping down the sides of church rostrums.

And when the slaughter did finally ease, it wasn't because of the French: "It's not out of kindness," one Hutu had told me, "but because there are so few Tutsis left alive."

French officers seemed amazed to find one mass grave after another at churches, stadiums, and behind schools. Inspecting the remains of one orgy, I saw a genuinely shocked Frenchman turn away, exclaiming: "And these [Hutus] are supposed to be the *good savages*."