

# Eyewitness - Terror Brigade Keeps Refugees In The Camps

Chris McGreal

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**By Chris McGreal in Kibumba, Zaire**

Few stumbling among the corpses in Kibumba take notice anymore. Perhaps the woman who died giving birth, the expired child only half emerged, drew more than a glance. And the man who lay amid the scattered bits of his own body. He drew attention.

Among the victims of cholera, dysentery and loss of hope, his death was in some ways more ominous and terrifying.

An aggressive young man pushed his way forward and demanded to know who was showing an interest in the corpse. He gave his name as Leonard. The small crowd turned its attention, uncertain if there might not be another unusual carcass before long.

Leonard denied knowledge of the body in front of him. A few minutes later the corpse would have been wrapped in a reed mat and dumped with the others destined for the mass graves.

If anyone had asked, and they rarely do, someone would have said it was another victim of disease or dehydration.

Instead, there it lay in a pool of fresh blood. Machete blows had split its skull, left an arm hanging loose and sliced away part of its hand and fingers.

The small crowd deferred to Leonard, 23-years-old. He confidently admitted to being a member of the Interahamwe militia, the men who led the genocide of Rwanda's Tutsis and who help to keep the old power structures alive in the refugee camps.

"The Interahamwe defend the people. We defended the people in Rwanda and we defend the people here because they have no one else to defend them. Who can we turn to? The Zaireans steal from us. They are ignorant."

"You say we are murderers, but who did we kill? There was a war. We have the support of the people," Leonard said, gesturing to the crowd for support. It mumbled its assent.

The defeated Rwandan army is partially visible in uniform, although most soldiers have been herded off in a different direction to keep the threat of another war alive. Much of the real control over the 300,000 packed into Kibumba camp falls to Leonard and his ilk.

The Interahamwe have wormed their way into the camp food distribution, causing near riots at the afternoon deliveries as they beat people back with sticks and carry off precious sacks of grain.

But the militiamen, unlike many of Rwanda's leaders who brought about this calamity, at least usually share the suffering and risks of others in the disease-infested camp.

Before fleeing to Zaire, Leonard manned barricades on the road south from Gisenyi. Some militiamen bore a blind hatred of Tutsis. Others claim to have been dragged in through fear or intimidation. Leonard has a different reasoning.

"We knew the RPF [the mainly Tutsi Rwanda Patriotic Front] wanted to take all the good jobs. The Tutsis have a lot of land, but with their foreign money the RPF were going to buy up the rest. But if we defended ourselves then there would be more land for us and more jobs. I don't have a job and I want a job," he said.

Kibumba camp has the highest death rate. Hundreds die each day and although cholera is easing off, dysentery is expected to claim another batch of lives before long.

Across the camp US soldiers are digging deep burial pits. One of their officers, a woman, said they receive counselling to cope with the sight of so many bodies. A French lieutenant, who has overseen burial parties for more than a week, is so shocked he shakes.

At first French troops merely organised the gruesome task of entombing the dead, leaving the actual burial to Africans. Now, soldiers shove piles of bodies into pits with bulldozers.

Leonard is not ashamed of the misery he has helped to bring on his people. The children thrown into the mass graves do not move him. He said he grieves, but his manner and the speed with which he returns to his anti-RPF rhetoric suggest otherwise.

The defunct Rwandan government

and its cohorts drove the refugees to this landscape of suffering and death, but the sermon is the same tract heard from all of the apologists for genocide. The Tutsis brought it on themselves, Leonard said.

He insists that all his victims were RPF, even though the former rebels only made it to his area toward the end of the war. He said he cannot remember how many people he killed. Maybe six or seven, all men. He swore he was not among those who sliced children to death or cut off their limbs to leave them with an appalling struggle for the rest of their lives.

The RPF had guns, Leonard said, while he only had a machete. How did he manage to kill them? A blade appears from nowhere to demonstrate his expertise at chopping people up. Standing close to the body, the crowd stared as Leonard went through his paces.

First the machete tore a glancing blow at the air that would have caught a man in his midriff. Then it swung back to hit the victim, any victim, across the neck. Finally a blow came down like an executioner's axe on to the skull.

It looked remarkably like what might have happened to the corpse at Leonard's feet, although there was no sign of blood on the machete's blade. Was he sure he did not know anything about it? Leonard was annoyed at the subject coming up again.

"He was RPF, or a thief. Maybe he was stealing food. How should I know? Perhaps the RPF sent him to steal our food so we would starve. Why do you care about this man? You are British. The British support the RPF. The British and the Americans," he said.

Or perhaps the man simply wanted to go home. The Interahamwe are

still at the forefront of terror, persuading the refugee population of terrible crimes by the RPF against those who return to Rwanda.

Representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on Tuesday met the Kibumba camp leadership - the mayors and political elders once powerful inside Rwanda - to try and persuade them it was safe to return.

The old Rwandan leadership does not want its people to go back. In the camps they retain influence that would be lost under an RPF administration. So the self-styled representatives of the people produced a list of more than 100 refugees said to have been murdered on their return home.

The UNCHR offered to take the

elders to Rwanda to investigate. No, they said, they will only return home if the RPF gives up its weapons, leaves the country and hands power back to the former regime. A UNHCR official described dealing with the elders as like walking into a brick wall.

Leonard's job is to ensure no one dissents from his leaders' opinions. He and his cohorts are good at it. The trickle home from Goma has almost dried up.

It does not mean some refugees are not reflecting on why they are trapped in the horror of Kibumba. The man cut to pieces may have been a reminder of the dangers of trying to leave. But all around him lay other warnings of the risks in staying.