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Shake Hands with the Devil

Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire
with Major Brent Beardsley

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About the Book

When Lt. General Roméo Dallaire received the call to serve as force commander of the UN mission to Rwanda, he thought he was heading off to Africa to help two warring parties achieve a peace both sides wanted. Instead, he and members of his small international force were caught up in a vortex of civil war and genocide. Dallaire left Rwanda a broken man, disillusioned, suicidal, and determined to tell his story.

An award-winning international sensation, *Shake Hands with the Devil* is a landmark contribution to the literature of war: a remarkable tale of a soldier's courage and an unforgettable parable of good and evil. It is also a stinging indictment of the petty bureaucrats who refused to give Dallaire the men and the operational freedom he needed to stop the killing. 'I know there is a God,' Dallaire writes, 'because in Rwanda I shook hands with the devil. I have seen him, I have smelled him and I have touched him. I know the devil exists and therefore I know there is a God.'

About the Author

Lt. General Roméo Dallaire served as force commander of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda from July 1993 to September 1994. *Shake Hands with the Devil,* his eyewitness account of the Rwandan genocide, won the Shaughnessy Cohen Award and the Governor General Award.

Shake Hands with the Devil

The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda

Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire
with Major Brent Beardsley

arrow books

To my family and the families of all those who served with me in Rwanda, with deepest gratitude

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Matthew 5:9

To the Rwandans, abandoned to their fate, who were slaughtered in the hundreds of thousands

To the fifteen UN soldiers under my command who died bravely in the service of peace and humanity

Lt. Lotin	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
1st Sgt. Leroy	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
Cpl. Bassine	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
Cpl. Lhoir	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
Cpl. Meaux	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
Cpl. Plescia	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
Cpl. Dupont	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
Cpl. Uyttebroeck	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
Pte. Debatty	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
Pte. Renwa	Belgium	Killed in Action	7 April 94
L/Cpl. Ahedor	Ghana	Killed in Action	17 April 94
Pte. Mensah-Baidoo	Ghana	Killed in Action	9 May 94
Capt. Mbaye	Senegal	Killed in Action	31 May 94
Major Sosa	Uruguay	Killed in Action	17 June 94
Capt. Ankah	Ghana	Killed in Action	8 July 94

To Sian Cansfield, researcher, journalist and dear friend, who died on June 1, 2002, while working so hard to tell this story

PREFACE

This book is long overdue, and I sincerely regret that I did not write it earlier. When I returned from Rwanda in September 1994, friends, colleagues and family members encouraged me to write about the mission while it was still fresh in my mind. Books were beginning to hit the shelves, claiming to tell the whole story of what happened in Rwanda. They did not. While well-researched and fairly accurate, none of them seemed to get the story right. I was able to assist many of the authors, but there always seemed to be something lacking in the final product. The sounds, smells, depredations, the scenes of inhuman acts were largely absent. Yet I could not step into the void and write the missing account; for years I was too sick, disgusted, horrified and fearful, and I made excuses for not taking up the task.

Camouflage was the order of the day and I became an expert. Week upon week, I accepted every invitation to speak on the subject; procrastination didn't help me escape but pulled me deeper into the maze of feelings and memories of the genocide. Then the formal processes began. The Belgian army decided to court-martial Colonel Luc Marchal, one of my closest colleagues in Rwanda. His country was looking for someone to blame for the loss of ten Belgian soldiers, killed on duty within the first hours of the war. Luc's superiors were willing to sacrifice one of their own, a courageous soldier, in order to get to me. The Belgian government had decided I was either the real culprit or at least an accomplice in the deaths of its peacekeepers. A report from the Belgian senate reinforced the idea that I

never should have permitted its soldiers to be put in a position where they had to defend themselves—despite our moral responsibility to the Rwandans and the mission. For a time, I became the convenient scapegoat for all that had gone wrong in Rwanda.

I used work as an anodyne for the blame that was coming my way and to assuage my own guilt about the failures of the mission. Whether I was restructuring the army, commanding 1 Canadian Division or Land Force Quebec Area, developing the quality of life program for the Canadian Forces or working to reform the officer corps, I accepted all tasks and worked hard and foolishly. So hard and so foolishly that in September 1998, four years after I had gotten home, my mind and my body decided to give up. The final straw was my trip back to Africa earlier that year to testify at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The memories, the smells and the sense of evil returned with a vengeance. Within a year and a half, I was given a medical discharge from the army. I was suffering, like so many of the soldiers who had served with me in Rwanda, from an injury called post-traumatic stress disorder. With retirement came the time and the opportunity to think, speak and possibly even write. I warmed to the idea of a book, but I still procrastinated.

Since my return from Rwanda in 1994, I had kept in close touch with Major Brent Beardsley, who had served as the first member of my mission and had been with me from the summer of 1993 until he was medically evacuated from Kigali on the last day of April 1994. Brent used every opportunity to press me to write the book. He finally persuaded me that if I did not put my story on paper, our children and our grandchildren would never really know about our role in and our passage through the Rwandan catastrophe. How would they know what we did and, especially, why we did it? Who were the others involved and what did they do or not do? He said we also had an

obligation to future soldiers in similar situations, who might find even a tidbit from our experience valuable to the accomplishment of their missions. Brent collaborated at every stage in the writing of this book. I thank him for his prompting and his support. I am also grateful to his wife, Margaret, and his children, Jessica, Joshua and Jackson, for loaning him to me through the initial research and drafting, through the reviews and most recently for his work to help me finish the manuscript. Brent was the catalyst, the disciplinarian and the most prolific scribe; he committed day after day to the work in order that I could complete this project. Even in periods of enormous suffering from the debilitating effects of overwork, lack of sleep and his own affliction with post-traumatic stress disorder, Brent always went well beyond the effort required of him. He has become my soulmate for all things Rwandan; he provides the sober second thought and voice to my efforts surrounding the Rwandan debacle. His willingness to be a witness for the prosecution at the never-ending International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and his support for my own involvement have cemented our lives together in the best tradition of ex-warriors returning from the front. He has saved me from myself, and I owe my life, as well as the guts of this book, in part to him.

I am especially grateful to Random House Canada for taking a chance on a non-author and a sick veteran. I am grateful for their understanding, their encouragement and their support. A very special thanks goes to my editor and friend, Anne Collins. Without her advice, encouragement and discipline, this project might not have been completed. She kept telling me that this book must be written and that it would be written. For many months I did not put in the effort required, but she held firm, showed genuine concern for me and proved to be the most patient person of us all. She is a lady who takes risks, and I admire her courage and determination. I also wish to thank my agent, Bruce

Westwood, for his belief that somewhere in me, we would find the man who could write this story. He kept a friendly eye on me and encouraged me every step of the way. He has become a close colleague, and I respect his skills and experience in the complex world of publishing.

I assembled an ad hoc staff for this project, who worked together magnificently in mutual respect and co-operation. Major James McKay, a long-time researcher for my efforts with the tribunal and on matters of conflict resolution, was my “futures” person. I thank him for his support. Lieutenant Commander Françine Allard, a dogged researcher and “keeper of the documents,” worked for me while I was still serving in the Canadian Forces. Fluent and articulate in six languages, she was committed to this book and a cherished member of the team. A special thanks must also go to Major (Retired) Phil Lancaster, who replaced Brent in Rwanda as my military assistant during my final months in the mission area. He helped me draft the chapters on the war and the genocide. A soldier, doctor of philosophy, and a compassionate humanitarian, Phil has worked with war-affected children in the Great Lakes region of Africa almost full-time since his retirement. He has never really returned from Rwanda, and I admire him and the work he does.

Dr. Serge Bernier, the Director of History and Heritage at the Canadian National Defence Headquarters and a classmate of mine from cadet days, provided very personal encouragement and constant contact throughout the project. He reviewed the French version and also provided resources and support for the official history of the mission as debriefed by me to Dr. Jacques Castonguay. He remains a voice of stability in my life.

In addition, there were many extended family members, friends, colleagues and even strangers who encouraged me throughout the writing of this book. I needed that often very timely encouragement and I will be eternally grateful.

In Rwanda today there are millions of people who still ask why the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), the United Nations (UN) and the international community allowed this disaster to happen. I do not have all the answers or even most of them. What I do have to offer the survivors and Rwanda's future generations is my story as best as I can remember it. I kept daily notes of my activities, meetings, comments and musings, but there were many days, particularly in the early stages of the genocide, when I did not have the time, the will or the heart to record the details. This account is my best recollection of events as I saw them. I have checked my memory against the written record as it survives, in code cables, UN documents and my papers, which were released to me by the Canadian Forces. If there are any errors in the spelling of the names of places or persons, or misremembered dates, I offer my apologies to the reader. I remain fully responsible and accountable for every decision and action I took as the sometime Head of Mission and full-time Force Commander of UNAMIR.

My wife, Elizabeth, has given more than I can ever repay. Beth, thank you for the days, weeks, months and years when I was absent and you held the home front and the family together, whether I was off serving around the world, at home in my workaholic bubble, or just out in the back forty on exercise, waking you and everyone else in the married quarters with the sound of our guns. Thank you for your support during this last duty, which has been one of the hardest and most complex efforts of my life. I thank my children, Willem, Catherine and Guy, who grew up without a full-time dad but who have always been the pride of my life, the true test of my mettle, and who continue to make their own place in the world. Be yourselves and thank your mother. One of the reasons I wrote this book was for you, my very close family, so that in these pages you may find some solace for the toll my experience in Rwanda has

exacted, and continues to exact, from you—far beyond the call of duty or “for better or for worse.” I am not the man who left for Africa ten years ago, but you all stayed devoted to this old soldier, even when you were abandoned by the military and the military community in the darkest hours of the genocide. You saw first-hand what happens to the spouses and families of peacekeepers. I remain forever thankful that you so clearly opened my eyes to the plight of the families of a new generation of veterans. You are the ones who really started the Canadian Forces Quality of Life Initiative.

I have dedicated this book to four different groups of people. First and foremost, I have dedicated it to the 800,000 Rwandans who died and the millions of others who were injured, displaced or made refugees in the genocide. I pray that this book will add to the growing wealth of information that will expose and help eradicate genocide in the twenty-first century. May this book help inspire people around the globe to rise above national interest and self-interest to recognize humanity for what it really is: a panoply of human beings who, in their essence, are the same.

This book is also dedicated to the fourteen soldiers who died under my command in the service of peace in Rwanda. The hardest demand on a commander is to send men on tasks that may take their lives, and then the next day to send others to face possibly similar fates. Losing a soldier is also the hardest memory to live with. Such decisions and actions are the ultimate responsibility of command. To the families of those courageous, gallant and devoted soldiers I offer this book to explain. When the rest of the world failed to even offer hope, your loved ones served with honour, dignity and loyalty, and paid for their service with their lives.

This book is also dedicated to Sian Cansfield. Sian was this book’s shadow author, but she did not live to see it finished.

For almost two years, she immersed herself in everything Rwandan. Her uncanny memory was a researcher's gift. I enjoyed her sparkle, her enthusiasm, her love of Rwanda and its people, whom she came to know in the field a few years after the war. Her journalistic aggressiveness to get at the truth combined with her energy and her zeal to evoke the heart of the story earned her the title of "regimental sergeant major" of our team. We worked well together and enjoyed many laughs and too many tears as I recounted hundreds of incidents and experiences, tragic, revolting, sickening and painful. In the last stages of the drafting of the book, I noticed she was tiring as the content and the workload ate away at her sense of humour and objectivity. I sent her on leave for a long weekend to rest, sleep, eat and recharge her batteries, as I have done so often with officers or soldiers who showed the same symptoms. The morning after she left for the weekend, a phone call broke the news to me that she had committed suicide. Sian's death hit me with a pain I had not felt since Rwanda. It seemed to me that the UNAMIR mission was still killing innocent people. The following week, I joined her family in attending her funeral and mourned her passing. The sense of finality and the shock that came from her death brought to life the spirits that have been haunting me since 1994. I wanted to cancel the project and let my tale die with me. Encouraged by her family and my own, especially Beth, by the rest of the team and many friends, I came to realize that the best tribute I could pay to Sian was to finish the book and tell the story of how the world abandoned millions of Rwandans and its small peacekeeping force. Sian, so much of this book is dedicated to you; your spirit lives with me as if you were another veteran of Rwanda. May you now find the peace in death that so eluded you in life.

The fourth group to whom this book is dedicated comprises the families of those who serve the nation at

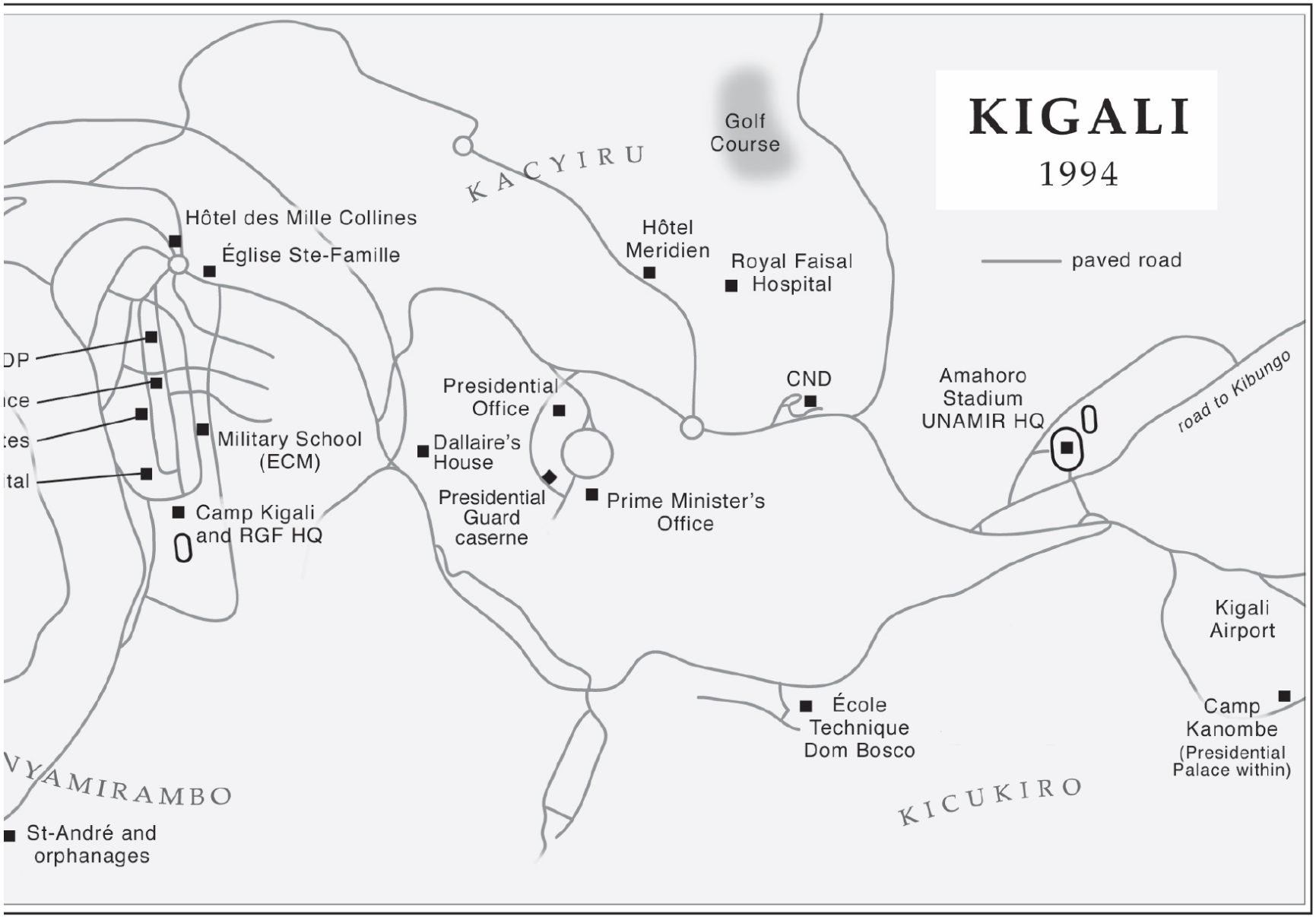
home and in far-off lands. There is nothing normal about being the spouse or child of a soldier, sailor or airperson in the Canadian Forces. There are very good and exciting times and there are also hard and demanding times. In the past, this way of life was very rich and worthwhile. But since the end of the Cold War, the nature, tempo and complexity of the missions on which our government has sent members of the Canadian Forces have caused a significant toll in marriage casualties. The demands of single parenthood, loneliness and fatigue, and the visual and audio impact of twenty-four-hour news reporting from the zones of conflict where loved ones have been sent create stress levels in the families of our peacekeepers that simply go off the chart. Our families live the missions with us, and they suffer similar traumas, before, during and after. Our families are inextricably linked to our missions, and they must be supported accordingly. Until the last few years, the quality of life of our members and their families was woefully inadequate. It took nearly nine years of hurt all round before the government began to accept its responsibilities in this regard. Witnessing the deep emotion and genuine empathy of Canadians for our soldiers who were wounded or killed in Afghanistan, I am optimistic that the nation as a whole will finally and fully accept its responsibility for these young and loyal veterans and their families. I pray that this book will assist Canadians in understanding the duty they and the nation owe to the soldiers who serve us, and to their families.

The following is my story of what happened in Rwanda in 1994. It’s a story of betrayal, failure, naïveté, indifference, hatred, genocide, war, inhumanity and evil. Although strong relationships were built and moral, ethical and courageous behaviour was often displayed, they were overshadowed by one of the fastest, most efficient, most evident genocides in recent history. In just one hundred days over 800,000

innocent Rwandan men, women and children were brutally murdered while the developed world, impassive and apparently unperturbed, sat back and watched the unfolding apocalypse or simply changed channels. Almost fifty years to the day that my father and father-in-law helped to liberate Europe—when the extermination camps were uncovered and when, in one voice, humanity said, “Never again”—we once again sat back and permitted this unspeakable horror to occur. We could not find the political will nor the resources to stop it. Since then, much has been written, discussed, debated, argued and filmed on the subject of Rwanda, yet it is my feeling that this recent catastrophe is being forgotten and its lessons submerged in ignorance and apathy. The genocide in Rwanda was a failure of humanity that could easily happen again.

After one of my many presentations following my return from Rwanda, a Canadian Forces padre asked me how, after all I had seen and experienced, I could still believe in God. I answered that I know there is a God because in Rwanda I shook hands with the devil. I have seen him, I have smelled him and I have touched him. I know the devil exists, and therefore I know there is a God. *Peux ce que veux. Allons-y*.

LGen Roméo Dallaire
July 2003


KIGALI
1994
paved road
Golf Course
KACYIRU
Hôtel des Mille Collines
Église Ste-Famille
Hôtel Meridien
Royal Faisal Hospital
CND
Amahoro Stadium UNAMIR HQ
road to Kibungo
Presidential Office
Dallaire's House
Presidential Guard caserne
Prime Minister's Office
Military School (ECM)
Camp Kigali and RGF HQ
Kigali Airport
École Technique Dom Bosco
Camp Kanombe (Presidential Palace within)
VYAMIRAMBO
KICUKIRO
St-André and orphanages


road to Mulindi
Kadafi
Crossroads
road to
Gitarama
Gendarmerie
Camp
UNI
Ministry of Defen
Hôtel des Diplomat
Central Hospi
N


RWANDA
OCTOBER 1993
DEMILITARIZED ZONE
UGANDA
ZAIRE
(NOW DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO)
BURUNDI
Kagitumba
Nyagatare
Kabale
Lake Bunyonyi
Kagitumba
Kagera
KAGERA NATIONAL PARK
Lac Rwanyakizinga
Lac Mikindi
Lac Hago
Lake Mujunju
Lac Kivumba
Lac Ihema
BIRUNGA NAT'L PARK
Kirambo
Ruhengeri
Byumba
Ngarama
Gabiro
RUHENGERI
Busengo
BYUMBA
Goma
Gisenyi
Rushashi
Murambi
Kabaya
GISENYI
Ngororero
Nyabarongo
Kiyumba
Kigali
Rwamagana
KIGALI
Lac Nasho
Lac Cyambwe
Lac Mpanga
Lake Bisongou
Lac Mugesera
Kibungo
KIBUNGO
Kirehe
Lac Kivu
Ile Bugarura
Ile Wahu
Ile Idjwi
Ile Gombo
KIBUYE
Kibuye
Gitarama
GITARAMA
Birambo
Bugesera
Ruhango
Kaduha
Rwesero
GIKONGORO
Karaba
Gikongoro
Nyabisindu
CYANGUGU
Cyangugu
Bugumya
BUTARE
Butare
Gisagara
Busoro
Munini
Akanyaru
Lac Cyohoha Sud
Lac Rweru
Lowa
0 10 20 30 40 km
0 10 20 mi
International boundary
Prefecture boundary
Road
Track
National capital
Prefecture capital
Town
Airport
The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
1° 00'
1° 30'
2° 00'
2° 30'
29° 00'
29° 30'
30° 00'
30° 30'
31° 00'

Adapted from Map No. 3717 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
December 1997 (Colour)

Introduction

IT WAS AN absolutely magnificent day in May 1994. The blue sky was cloudless, and there was a whiff of breeze stirring the trees. It was hard to believe that in the past weeks an unimaginable evil had turned Rwanda's gentle green valleys and mist-capped hills into a stinking nightmare of rotting corpses. A nightmare we all had to negotiate every day. A nightmare that, as commander of the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda, I could not help but feel deeply responsible for.

In relative terms, that day had been a good one. Under the protection of a limited and fragile ceasefire, my troops had successfully escorted about two hundred civilians—a few of the thousands who had sought refuge with us in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda—through many government- and militia-manned checkpoints to reach safety behind the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) lines. We were seven weeks into the genocide, and the RPF, the disciplined rebel army (composed largely of the sons of Rwandan refugees who had lived over the border in camps in Uganda since being forced out of their homeland at independence), was making a curved sweep toward Kigali from the north, adding civil war to the chaos and butchery in the country.

Having delivered our precious cargo of innocent souls, we were headed back to Kigali in a white UN Land Cruiser with my force commander pennant on the front hood and the blue UN flag on a staff attached to the right rear. My Ghanaian sharpshooter, armed with a new Canadian C-7 rifle, rode behind me, and my new Senegalese aide-de-camp, Captain Ndiaye, sat to my right. We were driving a particularly dangerous stretch of road, open to sniper fire.

Most of the people in the surrounding villages had been slaughtered, the few survivors escaping with little more than the clothes on their backs. In a few short weeks, it had become a lonely and forlorn place.

Suddenly up ahead we saw a child wandering across the road. I stopped the vehicle close to the little boy, worried about scaring him off, but he was quite unfazed. He was about three years old, dressed in a filthy, torn T-shirt, the ragged remnants of underwear, little more than a loincloth, drooping from under his distended belly. He was caked in dirt, his hair white and matted with dust, and he was enveloped in a cloud of flies, which were greedily attacking the open sores that covered him. He stared at us silently, sucking on what I realized was a high-protein biscuit. Where had the boy found food in this wasteland?

I got out of the vehicle and walked toward him. Maybe it was the condition I was in, but to me this child had the face of an angel and eyes of pure innocence. I had seen so many children hacked to pieces that this small, whole, bewildered boy was a vision of hope. Surely he could not have survived all on his own? I motioned for my aide-de-camp to honk the horn, hoping to summon up his parents, but the sound echoed over the empty landscape, startling a few birds and little else. The boy remained transfixed. He did not speak or cry, just stood sucking on his biscuit and staring up at us with his huge, solemn eyes. Still hoping that he wasn’t all alone, I sent my aide-de-camp and the sharpshooter to look for signs of life.

We were in a ravine lush with banana trees and bamboo shoots, which created a dense canopy of foliage. A long straggle of deserted huts stood on either side of the road. As I stood alone with the boy, I felt an anxious knot in my stomach: this would be a perfect place to stage an ambush. My colleagues returned, having found no one. Then a rustling in the undergrowth made us jump. I grabbed the boy and held him firmly to my side as we instinctively took

up defensive positions around the vehicle and in the ditch. The bushes parted to reveal a well-armed RPF soldier about fifteen years old. He recognized my uniform and gave me a smart salute and introduced himself. He was part of an advance observation post in the nearby hills. I asked him who the boy was and whether there was anyone left alive in the village who could take care of him. The soldier answered that the boy had no name and no family but that he and his buddies were looking after him. That explained the biscuit but did nothing to allay my concerns over the security and health of the boy. I protested that the child needed proper care and that I could give it to him: we were protecting and supporting orphanages in Kigali where he would be much better off. The soldier quietly insisted that the boy stay where he was, among his own people.

I continued to argue, but this child soldier was in no mood to discuss the situation and with haughty finality stated that his unit would care and provide for the child. I could feel my face flush with anger and frustration, but then noticed that the boy himself had slipped away while we had been arguing over him, and God only knew where he had gone. My aide-de-camp spotted him at the entrance to a hut a short distance away, clambering over a log that had fallen across the doorway. I ran after him, closely followed by my aide-de-camp and the RPF child soldier. By the time I had caught up to the boy, he had disappeared inside. The log in the doorway turned out to be the body of a man, obviously dead for some weeks, his flesh rotten with maggots and beginning to fall away from the bones.

As I stumbled over the body and into the hut, a swarm of flies invaded my nose and mouth. It was so dark inside that at first I smelled rather than saw the horror that lay before me. The hut was a two-room affair, one room serving as a kitchen and living room and the other as a communal bedroom; two rough windows had been cut into the mud-

and-stick wall. Very little light penetrated the gloom, but as my eyes became accustomed to the dark, I saw strewn around the living room in a rough circle the decayed bodies of a man, a woman and two children, stark white bone poking through the desiccated, leather-like covering that had once been skin. The little boy was crouched beside what was left of his mother, still sucking on his biscuit. I made my way over to him as slowly and quietly as I could and, lifting him into my arms, carried him out of the hut.

The warmth of his tiny body snuggled against mine filled me with a peace and serenity that elevated me above the chaos. This child was alive yet terribly hungry, beautiful but covered in dirt, bewildered but not fearful. I made up my mind: this boy would be the fourth child in the Dallaire family. I couldn’t save Rwanda, but I could save this child.

Before I had held this boy, I had agreed with the aid workers and representatives of both the warring armies that I would not permit any exporting of Rwandan orphans to foreign places. When confronted by such requests from humanitarian organizations, I would argue that the money to move a hundred kids by plane to France or Belgium could help build, staff and sustain Rwandan orphanages that could house three thousand children. This one boy eradicated all my arguments. I could see myself arriving at the terminal in Montreal like a latter-day St. Christopher with the boy cradled in my arms, and my wife, Beth, there ready to embrace him.

That dream was abruptly destroyed when the young soldier, fast as a wolf, yanked the child from my arms and carried him directly into the bush. Not knowing how many members of his unit might already have their gunsights on us, we reluctantly climbed back into the Land Cruiser. As I slowly drove away, I had much on my mind.

By withdrawing, I had undoubtedly done the wise thing: I had avoided risking the lives of my two soldiers in what would have been a fruitless struggle over one small boy. But

in that moment, it seemed to me that I had backed away from a fight for what was right, that this failure stood for all our failures in Rwanda.

Whatever happened to that beautiful child? Did he make it to an orphanage deep behind the RPF lines? Did he survive the following battles? Is he dead or is he now a child soldier himself, caught in the seemingly endless conflict that plagues his homeland?

That moment, when the boy, in the arms of a soldier young enough to be his brother, was swallowed whole by the forest, haunts me. It's a memory that never lets me forget how ineffective and irresponsible we were when we promised the Rwandans that we would establish an atmosphere of security that would allow them to achieve a lasting peace. It has been almost nine years since I left Rwanda, but as I write this, the sounds, smells and colours come flooding back in digital clarity. It's as if someone has sliced into my brain and grafted this horror called Rwanda frame by blood-soaked frame directly on my cortex. I could not forget even if I wanted to. For many of these years, I have yearned to return to Rwanda and disappear into the blue-green hills with my ghosts. A simple pilgrim seeking forgiveness and pardon. But as I slowly begin to piece my life back together, I know the time has come for me to make a more difficult pilgrimage: to travel back through all those terrible memories and retrieve my soul.

I did try to write this story soon after I came back from Rwanda in September 1994, hoping to find some respite for myself in sorting out how my own role as Force Commander of UNAMIR interconnected with the international apathy, the complex political manoeuvres, the deep well of hatred and barbarity that resulted in a genocide in which over 800,000 people lost their lives. Instead, I plunged into a disastrous mental health spiral that led me to suicide attempts, a medical release from the Armed Forces, the diagnosis of

post-traumatic stress disorder, and dozens upon dozens of therapy sessions and extensive medication, which still have a place in my daily life.

It took me seven years to finally have the desire, the willpower and the stamina to begin to describe in detail the events of that year in Rwanda. To recount, from my insider's point of view, how a country moved from the promise of a certain peace to intrigue, the fomenting of racial hatred, assassinations, civil war and genocide. And how the international community, through an inept UN mandate and what can only be described as indifference, self-interest and racism, aided and abetted these crimes against humanity—how we all helped create the mess that has murdered and displaced millions and destabilized the whole central African region.

A growing library of books and articles is exploring the tragic events in Rwanda from many angles: eyewitness accounts, media analyses, assaults on the actions of the American administration at the time, condemnations of the UN's apparent ineptitude. But even in the international and national inquiries launched in the wake of the genocide, the blame somehow slides away from the individual member nations of the UN, and in particular those influential countries with permanent representatives on the Security Council, such as the United States, France and the United Kingdom, who sat back and watched it all happen, who pulled their troops or didn't offer any troops in the first place. A few Belgian officers were brought to court to pay for the sins of Rwanda. When my sector commander in Kigali, Colonel Luc Marchal, was courtmartialled in Brussels, the charges against him were clearly designed to deflect any responsibility away from the Belgian government for the deaths of the ten Belgian peacekeepers under my command. The judge eventually threw out all the charges, accepting the fact that Marchal had performed his duties

magnificently in a near-impossible situation. But the spotlight never turned to the reasons why he and the rest of the UNAMIR force were in such a dangerous situation in the first place.

It is time that I tell the story from where I stood—literally in the middle of the slaughter for weeks on end. A public account of my actions, my decisions and my failings during that most terrible year may be a crucial missing link for those attempting to understand the tragedy both intellectually and in their hearts. I know that I will never end my mourning for all those Rwandans who placed their faith in us, who thought the UN peacekeeping force was there to stop extremism, to stop the killings and help them through the perilous journey to a lasting peace. That mission, UNAMIR, failed. I know intimately the cost in human lives of the inflexible UN Security Council mandate, the penny-pinching financial management of the mission, the UN red tape, the political manipulations and my own personal limitations. What I have come to realize as the root of it all, however, is the fundamental indifference of the world community to the plight of seven to eight million black Africans in a tiny country that had no strategic or resource value to any world power. An overpopulated little country that turned in on itself and destroyed its own people, as the world watched and yet could not manage to find the political will to intervene. Engraved still in my brain is the judgment of a small group of bureaucrats who came to “assess” the situation in the first weeks of the genocide: “We will recommend to our government not to intervene as the risks are high and all that is here are humans.”

My story is not a strictly military account nor a clinical, academic study of the breakdown of Rwanda. It is not a simplistic indictment of the many failures of the UN as a force for peace in the world. It is not a story of heroes and villains, although such a work could easily be written. This

book is a *cri de coeur* for the slaughtered thousands, a tribute to the souls hacked apart by machetes because of their supposed difference from those who sought to hang on to power. It is the story of a commander who, faced with a challenge that didn't fit the classic Cold War-era peacekeeper's rule book, failed to find an effective solution and witnessed, as if in punishment, the loss of some of his own troops, the attempted annihilation of an ethnicity, the butchery of children barely out of the womb, the stacking of severed limbs like cordwood, the mounds of decomposing bodies being eaten by the sun.

This book is nothing more nor less than the account of a few humans who were entrusted with the role of helping others taste the fruits of peace. Instead, we watched as the devil took control of paradise on earth and fed on the blood of the people we were supposed to protect.

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MY FATHER TOLD ME THREE THINGS

MY FIRST LOVE has always been the army. It has been my mistress, my muse and my family. Even as a child, I never had any doubt about where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do. My first toy, brought with me from war-ravaged Holland when my mother and I came over to join my father in Quebec after the Second World War, was a very crude replica of a Canadian Army Jeep. As a boy, I would create battlefields on the large living-room rug, happy when my parents left me home alone to hold the fort while they ran errands. At the cottage in the summer, I would build massive sand fortresses and defensive works. Totally absorbed by the manoeuvres of my large Dinky Toys inventory and hundreds of plastic soldiers, I would dream of the battlefields of old, where the guns dominated the flow of combat. I was always an artilleryman, peppering the impressive and gallant oncoming cavalry and massed infantry with large gobs of sand.

I wasn’t playing war, I was living it, alone in a time far gone yet very alive for me. When not conducting my campaigns on the carpet or in the sand, I would pore over military history books and dream I was a captain dressed in a dashing red and blue serge uniform, commanding a battery of guns and light artillery in the Napoleonic Wars. Those scenes were so real to me, I could smell the gunpowder and hear the screams of the horses. The thrill