

Troops Will Help Wounded, a Step Likely to  
Anger Government  
As French Aid the Tutsi, Backlash Grows  
(Transcription)

Raymond Bonner

The New York Times, July 2, 1994, page I:5

BISESERO, Rwanda, July 1 –

Taking a risk that will make their presence more precarious, the French military decided today to position 50 troops in these mountains to protect several hundred wounded and hungry members of the Tutsi ethnic group.

The French assistance for the Tutsis will certainly inflame the Government, which is dominated by the Hutu tribe and had expected the French, who have come to their aid in the past, to help them defeat the Tutsi-led rebels.

“We were manipulated,” said Sgt. Maj. Thierry Prungnaud. “We thought the Hutu were the good guys and the victims.”

Already the mood has begun to change in this area, which is now almost exclusively populated by Hutu. Two days ago, the French flag was everywhere along the 70 miles of twisting road from Cyangugu to Bisesero; today, fewer than a dozen were seen. There were almost as many flags of the country’s militant Hutu party, the Coalition for the Defense of the Republic, whose militia are responsible for

much of the killing of Tutsi, according to human rights organizations.

Countless thousands, most of them Tutsi, have been killed since April, the start of the most recent outbreak of violence in the four-year civil war.

### **Anti-French Sentiment**

The increasingly anti-French sentiment was even more palpable around Gisenyi, 70 miles north of here, said French officials, who characterized the attitude as not hostile but certainly cool. A radio station operated by the militant Hutu has reportedly begun accusing the French of collaborating with the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the Tutsi-led political and military organization that has opposed the Government in the civil war. The Front now controls just about all of the country, except for this southwestern corner, where the French have concentrated their intervention.

Realizing how difficult it will be not to antagonize the Rwandan Government, the French landed a unit of

soldiers today 30 miles south of here in Kirambe. The unit will establish a base to provide relief and protection for the displaced Hutu, said Col. Didier Thibaut, the commander of the forces protecting the 8,000 Tutsi living in refugee camps at Nyarushishi.

On Thursday, when the first French troops arrived at Bisesero, some 400 Tutsi came out of hiding. More than 100 of the most seriously wounded, who had been under constant attack from Government forces for nearly two weeks, were evacuated on Thursday night.

Today, French military doctors treated scores of others. Leonica, 10 years old, was shot while running last week and has a hole in her right thigh. She lay on a cot, fed intravenously by a needle in her thin arm from a bag on a stick.

A French paratrooper stroked her cheek tenderly. "They're very brave; they don't show their pain," he said.

Before evacuating her, French soldiers unloaded boxes of high protein biscuits from a helicopter, one of several that landed on the mountain ridge line during the day. The French military also escorted a truck of relief food delivered by CARE International.

Since the French arrived, they have been constantly criticized by international relief organizations for being too partial toward the Hutu Government. On Thursday, the French delivered 250 boxes of high protein biscuits to a Hutu village less than a mile up the mountain from where the Tutsi were being treated today.

Sergeant Major Prungnaud said that local government officials had told the French that rebels had infiltrated the mountains and that the civilians themselves were armed.

Col. Marin Gillier, commander of the French Navy Commando Unit four miles down the mountain from here, declined to say today if any weapons had been found, but French soldiers said that none had been. Nor was there evidence of any infiltration, they said.

## 'People Must See This'

Earlier this week, Colonel Gillier refused to answer any questions about who was doing the killing in the mountains and whether there were Tutsi in need of help. "I do not wish to get involved in a political matter" he said.

But today, he urged a British television cameraman to walk through the mountains and film the corpses. "You must go," he said. "People must see this."

Almost all the 400 Tutsi who came out of hiding on Thursday were men. It was thought that there were more women, but that they were still too afraid to come out.

Today, however, there were still very few women. Villagers said most of them had been killed because they could not run fast enough. One of the women who did survive was Odette Mukamana, 32. On Monday, she lost the last surviving member of her family, her 13-year-old daughter.

Her mother and father, sisters and brothers and other children were killed over the past two months, as was her husband and all of his family, she said. The daughter's throat was cut and her legs had been slashed with a machete, Mrs. Mukamana said.

A few hundred yards away, the body of a small boy lay in a ditch. His clothes were soaked in blood. Judging by the size of his foot, the child was

about 8 years old. Near his left foot was his severed skull. It was not an unusual sight. The cornfields and streams of these mountains are scattered with corpses, many of them women and children, many decapitated.