

Beaten Hutu Troops Lose Weapons and Taste for War.

Inigo Gilmore

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By Inigo Gilmore in Goma.

THE baby-faced Rwandan soldier dressed in a scruffy camouflage uniform slumped into a crouching position by the road and sighed heavily. "We are tired, sick and hungry and the Zaireans have taken our weapons," he said, staring vacantly into the distance. "It will be some time before we can go back and fight."

John Sibomana, 22, is one of an estimated 25,000 soldiers from the former Rwandan army in Goma and his defeatist mood is echoed by comrades in and around the city. There has been widespread concern about fresh fighting in Rwanda, but the belligerent talk of army leaders and former ministers is belied by evidence in the field.

Troops of the former government are demoralised. Defeated by the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front, a force numerically and technically inferior, they languish in disease-racked, makeshift camps, struggling to feed themselves and their families. The vast majority, it seems, have been disarmed by Zairean troops. Many turn to drink for solace.

Mr Sibomana said the troops have hidden weapons, but he conceded that they lack the firepower to launch a serious counter-offensive. Soldiers had rec-

onciled themselves to months, possibly years, in exile until they were fully prepared.

Major-General Romeo Dallaire, the UN commander in Rwanda, believes that the former government army would need to find a donor to sponsor rearmament if they were to take on the Rwandan Patriotic Front again. But he did not rule out the possibility of minor incursions into Rwanda, particularly in the northwest.

However, the notorious and well-organised interahamwe, who were behind most of the mass killings in Rwanda, appear to be growing increasingly active and are thought to be responsible for recent killings in refugee camps. Interahamwe members from refugee camps in Tanzania have already started making forays into Rwanda to kill Tutsis. The fear is that such attacks could provoke the RPF to retaliate.

"The militias are definitely more of a threat than the government soldiers," a UN official said.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has meanwhile asked that the Zairean government cease to assign its troops to refugee camps around Goma after a soldier was hacked to death in Kitale camp

on Thursday. There have been numerous incidents in recent days of harassment and attacks on refugees by Zairean troops, and this may have been a revenge killing. It is now feared that Zaireans may carry out retaliatory attacks against refugees.

A Unicef spokesman said he was

near Kitale camp at lunchtime on Thursday when he came across a group of terrified refugees fleeing down the road. They said a soldier was shooting a Rwandan refugee for his motorcycle. When the Unicef spokesman investigated, he found the man dead with several bullet wounds.