

Dossier: Yusufu/ the Bisesero resistance

Name: Maurice Sakufe

Cellule: Gitwa

Sector: Bisesero

Commune: Gishyita

Préfecture: Kibuye

Profession: Driver

Marital Status: Widower of the genocide, now remarried

Age: 37 years old

....

That evening, we all withdrew to the higher mountains of Bisesero, no one from the local authority, civil or military was prepared to help us,. We were attacked daily by military soldiers from all sides. We stayed on the hill which was called 'Muyira' where there were many of us. We had to battle against the cold and the attacks on a daily basis.

Around the end of April 1994, I began to see Obed Ruzindana. He used to come in a white van full of genocidal military soldiers who were armed with guns. Obed had one too. Each time they attacked they would surround us and we would have to find a way to escape by breaking out of their circle. Each time we passed next to Obed, he would fire at us.

During this period, we fought against an ex-FAR lieutenant. We were surrounded in the usual way and we tried to get out of the circle. This took place in Bibande in a banana plantation which belonged to a Hutu called Nkiryaho. The battle lasted a long time. There was a lieutenant soldier with a pistol who was shooting a lot. One of our people called Ntagozera, hit him on the head with a hoe. The soldier lost consciousness and immediately lost control of his bladder. His pistol fell to the ground. We thought he was dead. However, this was not the case as he managed to kick Jean Rutabana (Tutsi). We immediately finished him off with machetes. Nzigira, our colleague, was dealing with the other four accomplices and we eventually killed them. We found the lieutenant's identity card. He was from Gisenyi in the commune of Gaseke.

There were bee hives in this banana plantation. The owner was a beekeeper. We used the hives to chase away the attackers by tipping them over so that the bees would sting them.

Afterwards, we had two weeks of respite. We began to bury the bodies. We also started to go back to our activities as survivors, like working on the fields. We thought that the genocide was over.

However there was another terrible attack on 13 May 1994. More than eight buses arrived, along with lorries and vans full of military soldiers, and other soldiers in uniform. They parked in places known by the name of Ku Nama and Ku Kamina. The whole of the Hutu population had come to kill us.

They overwhelmed us by showering us with bullets and grenades etc. We could no longer put up a fight. We didn't even see who was attacking us. That day, practically all the women and children were killed. My mother Mukabaziga was unable to escape.

We could see that the attackers had some weaknesses. We tried to search for a way to get away. We managed to escape by hiding in the bush. There, the bodies were piled up. All the hills were covered in bodies.

That evening, when the criminals had gone, we tried to bury our people, especially the older ones. As we were carrying this out, we came across the bodies of our attackers. We took out their identity cards. One of them was evidently from Bugarama (Cyangugu). I remember how we cried out 'Even militiamen from Cyangugu came to kill us'.

The next day the same persecutors came to attack us. They said that it was better to hit the head around the ear to damage to cerebellum. We scattered around to find a place to hide. That night Birara tried to reorganise us so that we would be able to continue our resistance until the end.

At night we looked for water to drink and went through the fields to look for potatoes or bananas. However, the wives of the militiamen, who came with their husbands at the time of the attacks, had already gathered all the food. The role of these women was to gather crops from the fields and to take off the clothes from the dead bodies.

Around the 20 May 1994, militiamen in Toyota vans launched an attack on us. We were exhausted by this time and we had no energy left to run. The people who were caught were hit with machetes by the militiamen. We decided to run over to where the leaders of the militiamen were want to stay (Ku Nama) so that we would be shot rather than be killed by a machete.

That day all of us ran towards Ku Nama. The militiamen increased their fire because they realised that we wanted to attack their leaders. About eighty people died instantly. I ran with my machete in my hand until I got to Ku Nama. I saw Yusufu in the shooting position. He was wearing a hat that muslims wear and a 'Boubou'. He was standing in front of a yellow truck and beside him were other militiamen including Obed and Mika. Yusufu was carrying a gun.

Just at that point, I heard Birara's voice telling us to retreat. He saw that many of us were being killed. I retreated and hid in the bush. I was very fortunate not to die that day because I had been surrounded by bullets.

Another attack that I can't forget was the one which took place in the middle of June 1994. I could hardly walk at the time and I had been hit. It was around the end of May 1994 that I was wounded. The militiamen had ran after four of us (Tutsis), two of whom died. However after having killed one of the militiamen I was hit with a stone on my foot. This is why I could hardly walk. That day in June, the militiamen searched through practically all the bushes. At the time, my wife and children were still alive. They were hiding a short distance from where I was. A militiaman called Sebikoba from our commune discovered my wife. She was carrying our child on her back.

The militiaman hit my wife with a machete and then he put a wide bamboo stick into her vagina. He pushed it in so far that it went right to her stomach. The child that she was carrying on her back fell to the ground. The child wandered off saying 'mummy, daddy'. He had not yet learned to speak properly. The militiamen saw the child and killed him, saying 'We mustn't let a child of Sakufi's live'.

That evening, when the militiamen had gone home, I went to see my wife's and child's bodies. When I arrived at the place where she lay, I found myself trembling. She was still breathing. I removed the bamboo stick from her body. When I had taken it out, my wife's neck cracked and she died instantly.

I went to fetch a hoe and I buried her there and then. I didn't have anything to remind me of her. She didn't have any clothes left and I had no photos of her. Fortunately, I saw the traditional sling my wife used to use for carrying our child on her back. It was next to their bodies. I picked up the sling and I still have it now.

In June 1994, I saw Yusufu. He had a cap and was wearing trousers and a shirt. He was with Doctor Gérard Ntakirutimana. I knew the doctor because his father was a friend of ours and he had given my father a cow. The doctor was looking after the wounded militiamen. Yusufu had a gun at the time. This was in Kamina and I saw them as I was going to hide in a bush.

We remained where we were, suffering. Our two main people (Nzigira and Birara) had been killed. They were the ones who had organised us.

Now I live in Gikondo in the commune of Kicukiro. I have remarried and I rent a house. I often go back to Bisesero to visit the other survivors and to see the things I lost during the genocide. Although I am still alive, I cannot sleep. When I remember how the people were killed at Bisesero, I lose consciousness.

When I left Kigali in 1986, I went to Bisesero. I had some money so I began breeding modern cows. I bought 35 cows off someone called Dalio Kasiku Wa Ngeyo in Zaire. I could get 21 litres of milk from each cow a day. I then distributed the milk around Mugonero and Mubuga etc. Practically everyone from our commune came to buy milk from me. I was happy and I built a beautiful house in my farm.

Now I even drink the milk which is for my child. (*This child is from his second marriage*). Before the genocide, milk was in abundance.

When I go back to Bisesero, I have nowhere to stay. There is no-one to help me repair my house.

It shocks me to see all the bones lying on the hills when I return to Bisesero. Why doesn't the State help us bury them? We can't do it. Instead of helping us they just talk about reconciliation. I wonder if the people who talk about reconciliation really know what the word means.

One reconciles with someone who comes to ask forgiveness. How is it possible to reconcile with someone who wants to carry on with the genocide. Last Friday, 21 March 1997, four militiamen hit a survivor from the Gitabura sector (Bisesero) with machetes. Now the survivor is in hospital in Ngoma. How can a survivor reconcile with a militiaman after something like that?

Interviewed in Nyarugenge, 28 March 1997.