

Rwandan Army in Disarray at a Camp on Border

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In this border town, once a gracious spa favored by Rwanda's rich and powerful, hundreds of weary and dirty families were camped today, waiting until they could cross the border, hoping to flee the country before the arrival of rebel troops, who were only 10 miles away. If the rebels come, the refugees can be certain they will get no protection from what is left of the Rwandan Army. The Government soldiers here today guzzled beer, wantonly fired their weapons and looted expensive lake-front villas.

They did just about everything but prepare to defend the town from the troops of the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front.

The front, led by members of the Tutsi ethnic minority, controls the capital, Kigali, and has become the de facto government but refuses to agree to a cease-fire, in spite of pleas from the international community.

As the rebels advance westward, refugees, nearly all of whom are Hutu, continue to pour across the border into the town of Goma in Zaire, a mile west of here. Many soldiers of the mainly Hutu Rwandan Army have joined the exodus.

At the border this morning, several Government soldiers in camouflage uniforms laughed and enjoyed themselves while they drank beer, obli-

ous to five men who filed by – between them, they had balanced on their heads two couches, two bed frames and a mattress.

Many refugees who make it across find their loads lightened by Zairian soldiers on the other side. "It is the national sport here to steal from people," said a French officer at the border. In Goma, the refugee population continues to swell. Strips of grass next to stone walls surrounding lakefront houses, crowded on Friday, are jammed today. The smoke from evening fires is dense and stinging.

Today, the roar of cargo jets signaled the arrival of the first relief supplies – some blankets, jerrycans and plastic sheeting, and 60 tons of food.

"A drop in the ocean," said Panos Moutzis, a spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. He said 600 tons of food a day was needed. As if to stretch the capacity of man to comprehend – much less cope with – death, despair and the destruction of a country, the situation in the southern part of this Vermont-size country is just as bad if not worse.

"Yesterday we said it was catastrophic, and it worsens," a French military spokesman, Col. Didier Bolleli, said today.

"It is total panic," he said, explaining that thousands of Rwandans

were pouring into the safe haven that French troops have created. There are nearly a million displaced people in the south, and there is not enough food or medicine, Colonel Bolleli said. "Many people are dying," he said.

'No Commander Anymore'

The Rwandan soldiers here are in complete disarray. "There is no commander anymore," said Clement Wihangani, a young soldier. "There are no more orders."

As he talked on a boulevard lined with palm trees, a Mazda van drove by, with "Coca-Cola" emblazoned on it. The windshield was missing, making it easy to see three soldiers with rifles. The back was loaded with possessions – owner unknown.

Most soldiers encountered here today made it clear they were in no mood to answer questions from foreign journalists. Many questions were met with glares, from soldiers whom a French officer described as "drugged up to their eyeballs."

Hundreds of Rwandan soldiers were on the road, making for Goma. A soldier on a bicycle wearing a black helmet blew a silver whistle to maneuver past a man who was fleeing with a television set balanced on his head. A red Toyota pickup was piled with soldiers, who sat on red cases of Mutzig beer.

Before crossing the border, the soldiers get rid of their weapons, stashing them to fight another day.

Other weapons are also being stockpiled. On the Rwandan side of the border today, Rwandan men in

civilian clothes and brandishing automatic rifles – which means they are probably part of one of the Hutu militias believed to be responsible for the killings of tens of thousands of Tutsi in the last few months – confiscated machetes from peasants before they were allowed to continue the last 100 yards into Zaire.

Once on the Zairian side of the border, the Rwandan soldiers were not harassed by the Zairian soldiers. They were allowed to keep their uniforms and boots, and they were taken to a sports club in the center of Goma. Many Rwandan soldiers in the camp were wounded. One man leaning against a tree had had his right hand amputated; another man had his head wrapped in bandages; several soldiers had arms in casts.

Rwandan civilians who have reached Goma over the last two days are not finding life as easy as the Rwandan soldiers. The civilians have become prey for Zairian soldiers, many of whom are now seen driving motorcycles with Rwandan license plates.

Continuing the international efforts to achieve a cease-fire, the commander of the United Nations forces in Rwanda, Maj. Gen. Romeo Dallaire, met today with the Chief of Staff of the Rwandan Army, Maj. Gen. Augustin Bizimungu, who crossed over from Gisyeni to Goma for the meeting and then returned here.

General Bizimungu has agreed to a cease-fire, but the Rwandan Patriotic Front wants certain conditions met before it agrees to stop fighting. Among them is that those responsible for the massacres of Tutsi be handed over to the front.