

The Daily Telegraph

July 12, 1994, Tuesday

SECTION: INTERNATIONAL; Pg. 12

LENGTH: 858 words

HEADLINE:

10,000 died in one day of massacre French soldiers find mass graves where the Tutsis had taken refuge

BYLINE: By John Kampfner in Kibuye

FRENCH troops in Rwanda have discovered the mass grave of about 7,000 massacred Tutsis in a football stadium. A nearby pit is thought to hold 3,000 bodies. Military sources say the victims were slaughtered in the stadium and a nearby church before local people were ordered to bury them with their bare hands. Even for members of France's special forces, who have made Kibuye one of their three forward posts since intervening in the civil war three weeks ago, the discoveries were harrowing. They chose the stadium as a base because it was easy to defend. They came across the largest grave last Saturday when their vehicles disturbed the turf. Perched on top of rolling hills overlooking Lake Kivu, Kibuye is a picturesque place, but on one day in April, it became a slaughterhouse. About 7,000 Tutsis, Rwanda's minority tribe, were herded into the stadium, kept there for three days and mown down with unspeakable brutality. A mile away, in the church of St Jean, another 3,000 Tutsis took refuge. Now only the stench of rotting flesh and the odd bone protruding from the ground testifies to their existence. According to the few Hutus who have risked their lives to speak of the events of April 17, the Rwandan government's Interahamwe militia locked the Tutsis in a stadium stand and fired rocket-propelled grenades at them from a nearby hill. Those who survived the bombardment were finished off with machetes. Local people were then told to dig a pit, throw the corpses in and cover them with soil. The massacre was carefully planned. Children were taken from the Gatwaro primary school a few yards away. Their textbooks are still there, still open. The murderers never expected the graves to be opened, and the discovery leaves the French in a terrible dilemma. Their 800 men in Kibuye have found themselves defending the majority Hutu population, whose forces carried out the slaughter, and many others across the country in which at least half of Rwanda's one million Tutsis have been killed. Now the Hutus are on the run everywhere. Their militia could gun or chop down innocent civilians, but on the battlefield they have been beaten by the small but well-trained Rwandan Patriotic Front. It is now a matter of days before the Tutsi-dominated RPF, which holds two thirds of Rwanda's territory, completes its victory. Still, it will be difficult to bring any of the butchers to justice. Almost everyone in Kibuye tries to deny anything happened there. Frora Hawandime, 17, was walking across the mass grave, stepping on human bones gnawed by dogs and covered with flies. The smell was overpowering. What was under the ground, I asked him, pointing to the bones and the burnt clothes. "Nothing," he said, before adding: "There are only Hutus in there. The Tutsis killed them and ran away." He then rushed off. The scene at the Roman Catholic church was more gruesome. The altar had been replaced but all around it were bloodstains the Hutus could not conceal with a lick of paint. The corrugated iron roof was still speckled with bullet holes. The circular stained-glass windows had been blown out. A seminarist, the only Hutu I found who showed a hint of remorse, explained what had happened. The Tutsi men stood guard outside the church that day, he said. When the Hutu militia arrived, the men begged that they be used as sacrifices. The militia men opened fire on them with sub-machine guns. With the women and children cowering and screaming in the small chapels, they lobbed grenades through the windows. They completed the job with machetes before dumping the bodies in land dug up by the church steps. As we waited for the French barge that was to take us out of the town, we were invited to share a bottle of beer at the hotel by the harbour. The idea of a drink with these people, some of whom probably took part in

the killings, was too much. But I took the opportunity to ask two of the Hutus, educated men, one an agronomist, the other a doctor, what had happened at the stadium and church. They started by saying they were refugees; that they had not been there during the massacres. Not that anything had happened anyway. When I described what I had seen, one replied: "How can you tell who is Hutu and who is Tutsi?" He might as well have said it was the Jews who killed the Germans in the concentration camps. A French commando held an emaciated seven-year-old girl in his arms. He had been asked to look for her by doctors in a refugee camp in Zaire, where the girl's sister was being looked after. The soldier found her sheltering with a Hutu woman. The girl was a Tutsi, the only one they believed was still alive in the town. One of her arms had been broken by an Interahamwe with a club. By the standards of Rwanda's war, she had been lucky. As the barge pulled away, a militia man put his machete close to his throat. His gesture was easy to understand. If it had not been for the French, the girl would never have got away, and we would not have got close to the stadium. Yet the Hutus depend on the French, and when Operation Turquoise is over, yesterday's butchers are likely to be tomorrow's victims.