

Paris Tells Troops to Woo Rebels in Rwanda.

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From Sam Kiley in Nyarushishi, western Rwanda.

French troops, sent to protect civilians from massacres in Rwanda, were yesterday told to change the focus of their mission. Their new orders are to win over the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which has threatened to kill French soldiers.

Operation Turquoise, the French mission to Rwanda, began on Thursday when 50 commandos entered the country from neighbouring Zaire. More special forces had been expected to cross at Goma, further north, closer to the front line between the mainly Tutsi rebels and Hutu government troops, who have been accused of orchestrating the genocide campaign.

Yesterday, however, the French troops, part of a contingent of 2,500 men backed by light tanks and helicopters, were instructed to expand their operations into southern Rwanda to win the confidence of the rebels. A senior French military source said that the entry of their troops through Goma and Gisenyi, in the north of Rwanda, would be delayed for several days. There are thought to be several pockets of Tutsis, hiding from government militias and soldiers, at the nearby town of Ruhengeri. The town, once the rebel base for staging operations into the Virunga mountains, has

been surrounded by the RPF.

French troops will now deploy to the north, east, and south from the border town of Cyangugu in search of more refugees fleeing the massacres. In Paris yesterday, a French military officer said that the troops had discovered mass graves near Cyangugu, held by government forces. He could not say how many bodies were buried.

The toughest task for the French will be to find the thousands of people believed to be hiding in the dense tropical rain forest of Nyunga, which covers a huge area of the south of this tiny central African country. During the weekend, they will also head south to Bugarama, in search of 15,000 Tutsis, the main victims of the massacres, and north to Kabuye, where there are at least 45 Tutsi nuns being held captive.

Yesterday, a small team of commandos drove into the interior of Rwanda to the small village of Gatete, where 2,000 people were slaughtered on April 29, two days after their safety had been assured by a senior local official. Now only nine teenage Tutsi girls remain alive in the care of Catholic sisters, seven of whom are also Tutsi.

The French officers, who visited Gatete, vowed to send a patrol to the village every few days. They have warned the local police that they

would be held responsible for the safety of the refugees. However, after they left, one of the nuns said that neither she nor the Tutsi girls were able to leave the school. "We would be killed instantly," she said.

She said the massacre of the Tutsis in the village had been carried out mainly by their Hutu neighbours, who went on the rampage after the army perpetrated the killings by throwing grenades into rooms where the Tutsis had been sheltering. "The killers were enjoying themselves. Most of the people in the town joined in, or were killed. The innocent ones came here to hide from the screams of their friends," she said.

The tough approach adopted by the French forces is clearly aimed at winning over the rebels. They are also determined to show that France has

no ulterior motive in its intervention in Rwanda, and that its only objective is to save people from the militias who have killed hundreds of thousands since April. Finding those still left alive in a land where the French have been threatened with death, will, however, be a tough task.

Yesterday, the Rwandan rebels bombarded the centre of Kigali, the government-held capital, inflicting dozens of casualties. The Red Cross hospital and the public market came under mortar attack. At least seven patients were reported to have been killed.

"A bomb just fell on the emergency block," said Philippe Gaillard, the chief delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Kigali. He said dozens of wounded had been brought to the hospital since Thursday.