

# Rwandan Refugees Are Stranded at Border

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The New York Times, August 21, 1994

When Zairian troops closed the border with southwestern Rwanda today, 12-year-old Bertin Tatuimana found himself lost astride two worlds, stranded on a creaky bridge over which perhaps 400,000 of his fellow Rwandans have fled in the last few days.

Hours before, while thousands were still crossing the bridge in both directions, Bertin had gone back into Rwanda to play with a friend whose family had yet to make the trek across the frontier.

As they played, a mile-long train of roughly 20,000 refugees made their way down snaking mountain trails toward the Rusizi River crossing, bringing cows and cooking pots, window frames and kitchen sinks.

Suddenly, with barely a moment's notice, Zairian soldiers began to enforce the border closing that they had announced early this morning.

"All my family is in Zaire," said Bertin, the sixth of nine children, as he trembled and wept softly.

For the moment, he stood on the bridge in the company of several other children who had made the return trip to Rwanda to fetch water and an elderly woman who had gone to check on when her friends would cross.

## Wedged Between Two Forces

All of them were wedged between the red-bereted Zairian commandos who had sealed the frontier and green-bereted French Foreign Legionnaires who held the tide of fleeing Rwandans in check at the other end of the bridge.

After about an hour, Bertin and the other stranded Rwandans managed to re-enter Zaire when a sympathetic guard turned away momentarily and allowed them to pass.

Scores of other refugees were able to elude the French and cross the Rusizi River, either in dugout canoes or by risking a 50-yard swim across the shallow but swift waters.

But all but a few were turned back by Zairian soldiers who set upon them as soon as they reached the opposite shore. The troops forced them back across the stream as thousands of people looked on from the bluffs that rise 60 feet above the river.

It was the last full day on the job for the French, who moved into southwestern Rwanda two months ago as a force of 2,500 troops to establish a "safe zone" to feed and protect refugees.

The fleeing Rwandans, mostly Hutu, fear that Rwanda's new, Tutsi-

dominated army will move into the southwest and seek retribution for ethnic killings when the last 400 French troops depart on Sunday.

United Nations officials said 20,000 people crossed the border today, with the number reaching a peak of 50 a minute in the two hours before Zairian troops sealed the frontier just before 2 P.M.

At least that many were still on the road headed for Zaire, including about 5,000 who milled nervously for more than four hours until sunset, when they settled down for the day and began to build cooking fires.

From the moment that the sun rose here today shortly after 6 A.M., until the abrupt closing of the border, refugees were on the move. They carried bundles of clothing and pots and pans on their heads, plastic jugs of water in their hands.

On their shoulders, they carried bamboo stalks of eucalyptus branches and firewood harvested from the lush Nyungwe National Forest, where most fleeing Rwandans have spent their final night before crossing into Zaire.

As the tide of refugees approached the Rwandan end of the Rusizi River bridge today, French troops searched some of them for weapons, confiscating mostly spears and machetes.

## Ethiopians Taking Over

Then they directed them into an orderly single file between thick, 20-foot-long bamboo poles laid along the approach to the bridge and over the span

to produce a traffic corridor.

Within hours of the border closing today, about 100 Ethiopian soldiers turned up, part of the final phase of the handover to a United Nations peace-keeping force. Working in pairs, the French Legionnaires and the Ethiopians formed a cordon to keep anxious refugees from crossing the closed border and to patrol the area through the night.

## The Looters' Booty

The influx of refugees has led to conflict, mostly fistfights, between the Zairians and the recently arrived Rwandans.

Looters, said to be mostly Zairian soldiers and members of the defeated, mainly Hutu Rwandan Army and militia, stripped every unoccupied structure in Cyangugu, the Rwandan border town that is the twin to Bukavu. Along the choked route to Bukavu's city center, dozens of people sell furniture, appliances, clothing, door and window frames, bricks, toilet fixtures and an assortment of sinks, all looted from homes and businesses.

John Tuyshiane, a 29-year-old physician, said he fled from violence in Kigali, the Rwandan capital, in May and settled in Cyangugu only to flee again on July 18.

"I was really afraid of those who wanted to pillage," said Dr. Tuyshiane, who against the grain of most refugees said he planned to leave Zaire and to return to Kigali.