

# Troops Turn Back Stampede Of Refugees - Rwanda.

Sam Kiley

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## **From Sam Kiley on the Rwanda-Zaire border.**

THOUSANDS of terrified Hutu refugees yesterday tried to follow departing French troops out of Rwanda to safety in Zaire. They were forced back by Zairean troops firing into the air at a closed river border crossing.

The main crossing over the Ruzizi river was closed because of fears that the lakeside town of Bukavu would be overwhelmed by refugees. Yesterday thousands of desperate people mainly Hutus in fear of reprisals by the victorious Tutsis pushed aside Ethiopian United Nations peacekeepers at the rickety bridge only to be blocked by Zairean troops beyond.

The refugees rushed back across the bridge, and regrouped to stampede again, only to be repulsed repeatedly by Zaireans firing in the air and training machineguns on the crowd. A few swam across, cheered on by those stranded on the other side.

In Kinshasa, the Zaire capital, the government called for an infusion of foreign aid to prevent Bukavu becoming stripped bare by refugees who are already facing an epidemic of dysentery.

"If the international community pays enough heed to the gravity of the

situation, Zaire may review its position," it said. "It is not because of a surge of xenophobia that we closed the border, but because we have serious logistical problems."

Bukavu is host to about 360,000 Rwandan refugees, 40,000 of whom arrived last week. At the weekend about 2,500 an hour were crossing at Ruzizi. But when the barricade was set up many families became separated. Mothers, parted from their children after a week-long trek through Rwanda's mountains from Gikongoro, where most of the 800,000 refugees in the safe zone were living, wept and screamed as they saw their children disappear in the crowd.

Patrick Fuller, a Red Cross spokesman, said that after lengthy negotiations between the UN and the Zaire administration, the border was opened yesterday afternoon at a second bridge 12 miles away. But the crossing would be sealed at night.

Ethiopian and Ghanaian peacekeepers have failed to win the confidence of the Hutu refugees in the safe zone, who have been terrified by an announcement from Kigali that the Rwandan Patriotic Front would enter the zone after the French leave.

Hutu tribesmen are suspicious of

the slender and thin-nosed Ethiopians, who resemble the Tutsis. Yesterday the new UN mission was off to a disastrous start when Ethiopian troops stood by helplessly as missiles and abuse were hurled at them by fleeing Hutus.

Nina Winqvist, spokeswoman for the International Committee for the Red Cross, said: "If this is the first indication of what will happen with

the French withdrawal, it doesn't bode well."

The Ethiopians, anxious to win the confidence of the Hutus, insisted that they would not try to stop people crossing to Zaire. "Our mandate is to respect the wishes of the people," one said. "We have no mandate to open fire, not even in the air. We are with the people."