

WESTERN TROOPS ARRIVE IN RWANDA TO AID FOREIGNERS

By Robert D. McFadden

April 10, 1994



See the article in its original context from April 10, 1994, Section 1, Page 1 Buy Reprints

New York Times subscribers* enjoy full access to TimesMachine—view over 150 years of New York Times journalism, as it originally appeared.

SUBSCRIBE

*Does not include Crossword-only or Cooking-only subscribers.

About the Archive

This is a digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive, before the start of online publication in 1996. To preserve these articles as they originally appeared, The Times does not alter,

edit or update them.

Occasionally the digitization process introduces transcription errors or other problems; we are continuing to work to improve these archived versions.

Convoys of Americans and Europeans and a planeload of French citizens fled the strife-torn capital of Rwanda yesterday as the United States, France and Belgium began a military effort to protect and evacuate 2,850 foreign nationals caught in tribal fighting that has killed thousands in three days of terror.

As the first foreigners were evacuated and the international rescue operation got under way, the fiercest fighting yet was reported in Kigali, the Rwandan capital. New battles broke out to the north, and a force of 4,000 rebels of the minority Tutsi tribe was reported moving on Kigali from two directions. Its leaders said the rebels could arrive as early as today, escalating the fighting between the Tutsi and the majority Hutu tribe even further.

Amid spreading anarchy, some reports said tens of thousands of people, most of them Rwandans, had been killed. There were no reports of casualties among the foreign nationals -- about 250 Americans, 1,500 Belgians, 600 French, 300 Germans, 100 Dutch and 100 Britons -- but dangers abounded on all sides.

One convoy of foreigners organized by American officials and another by the Red Cross left Kigali yesterday with escorts of lightly armed Rwandan troops and were believed headed for neighboring Burundi, a 6-hour drive south. They faced roadblocks manned by gunmen vowing to kill Belgians. But no Belgians were believed aboard and there were no reports of any vehicles being halted or of passengers being molested.

Two other convoys were being organized in Kigali by the American Embassy, and United Nations officials said their staff members also were being evacuated overland.

About 300 Americans and Europeans arrived safely in Bujumbura, Burundi's capital, yesterday and early today, a United States Embassy source told The Associated Press. The group, mostly Americans, Belgians and Germans, reported no trouble during the journey.

Earlier yesterday, after a force of 400 French paratroops had seized the Kigali airport, a military transport plane bearing 43 French citizens flew to the Central African Republic. The French Foreign Ministry in Paris said that more flights were planned and that the operation was proceeding as expected.

The United States sent 360 marines and seven aircraft into Burundi and moved them toward the Rwanda border to assist the evacuations. Belgium, a former colonial ruler, dispatched 800 troops and planeloads of equipment from Europe, and the United Nations was considering sending up to 1,500 reinforcements for its 2,500-member peacekeeping force in Rwanda.

Even as the relief contingents moved in, more heavy fighting was reported in Kigali, where the violence between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority has been concentrated. Relief workers said corpses littered the streets.

The Tutsi rebels, known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front, said they had moved large forces within 10 miles of Kigali. It was feared that their advance into the capital would greatly increase the fighting between the rebels and Hutu-supported Government forces, tipping the country into all-out civil war. Attacks at Other Sites

Rebel forces were also reported to have attacked Government troops in the northern town of Ruhengeri, and were firing mortars from ridges overlooking the Government-held town of Biumba, 30 miles north of Kigali. Gen. Paul Kagame, a leader of the rebel forces, vowed to take Kagali and topple the interim government.

The Tutsis -- the tall Nilotic people also known as the Watusi -- make up 14 percent of Rwanda's population, while Hutus -- a short, stocky Bantu people -- make up 85 percent. They have struggled for political and economic dominance since the nation of 8 million won independence from Belgium in 1962.

The Hutus, which control the central Government, regard Belgium as an enemy not only because it was the former colonial ruler of Rwanda but also because they believe Brussels covertly supports the Tutsi-led rebel group, which has its main office in Belgium. The Tutsis filled many bureaucratic posts under Belgian and German colonial administrations.

Red Cross officials in Kigali said the death toll from the fighting -- including the acting prime minister and other political leaders, aid workers, nuns and priests and United Nations peacekeepers, but mostly Rwandan citizens -- has risen steadily and dramatically since Wednesday, when the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, both Hutus, were killed in the crash of a plane that may have been shot down by a rocket. Corpses Are Everywhere

"Yesterday, we were talking about thousands of dead," Herve Le Guillouzic, medical coordinator of the International Committee of the Red Cross, told the Reuters news agency. "Today we can start with tens of thousands."

He said the corpses were everywhere -- "in the houses, in the streets, everywhere."

Mark Billot, of the Belgian branch of Doctors Without Borders, told Belgian BRTN radio that 8,000 people had been killed in Kigali alone, The Associated Press reported. Samantha Bolton, with the same organization in Kenya, quoted relief workers in Kigali as saying the fighting was the heaviest yet.

Relief officials said the Americans and other foreigners trapped in Kigali by the fighting were lying low, waiting for the strife to ease or for a convoy or a flight out.

At the United Nations headquarters in New York, the Security Council held intensive consultations on Rwanda yesterday, but no formal meeting was held and no action was taken.

The current President of the council, Colin Keating of New Zealand, said the future of a force of 2,500 United Nations peacekeepers in Rwanda was unclear. The force -- sent in last year to help carry out an accord ending a three-year civil war between the Government and the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front -- had little chance now to fulfill its mission, Mr. Keating said.

The United Nations force has been confined to barracks since 10 Belgians were killed early in the fighting trying to protect the Prime Minister, who was also slain.

All foreigners in Kigali were being urged by their governments to get out, but it was unclear whether all would heed the warning or even how long such an evacuation might take. Jean-Bernard Merimee, the French ambassador to the United Nations, said the evacuations could be completed in 48 hours. Warning on Evacuation

Claude Dusaidi, the Rwanda Patriotic Front representative at the United Nations, said his organization had no objections to the evacuation of foreigners, so long as the foreign military forces were withdrawn as soon as their humanitarian missions were completed. A continued presence beyond that, he said, would be taken as "a hostile act." He said no time limit had been set by the front for the evacuation.

Mr. Dusaidi's statement was echoed in Brussels, where the Patriotic Front, which has vowed to smash an interim government set up during the turmoil of recent days, issued a statement warning the United States, France and Belgium to limit their troop deployments, especially in the time they spend in Rwanda.

Administration officials said plans to deploy American military forces to protect and possibly evacuate Americans in Rwanda were under way.

Two companies of marines and three transport helicopters were dispatched from ships in the Indian Ocean, and four KC-130 tanker aircraft, capable of carrying 40 to 60 people, were sent from bases in the region. Late yesterday the American forces landed in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi. U.S. Troops Sent North

Officials said the marines were promptly sent north, toward the Rwanda border, to be ready to carry out contingency plans to enter Rwanda if it became necessary to rescue trapped Americans or to come to the aid of American convoys.

But the United States planned to avoid sending the troops into Rwanda if possible, the official said. Instead, the American Ambassador in Kigali, David P. Rawson, was organizing Americans there into convoys that were expected to drive overland, with lightly armed Rwandan escorts.

Details of route and timing were not disclosed for security reasons. But some Americans were said to have been moved out yesterday, while others were expected to follow today.

Belgian radio reports quoting the United States Embassy in Kigali late yesterday said it had organized a convoy of 30 vehicles carrying Americans and Europeans and that it had left the capital. It was not known how many people were in the convoy and there was no word from the Embassy on where it was headed. But a British official said the destination was Burundi, and an official in Washington confirmed late in the day that the convoy had left and that Americans were among the evacuees. It was not clear whether that was the same convoy that the Embassy source in the Burundi capital confirmed as having arrived. Evacuation From Airport

French and Belgian officials said more of their nationals were to be evacuated by plane from Kigali airport last night and today, if possible. A French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said 400 French troops had secured the Kigali airport at dawn yesterday, despite resistance from rebel guerrillas.

The violence that has wracked Rwanda began late Wednesday after an airplane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi, both of the majority Hutu tribe, crashed as it was approaching Kigali airport. They were returning from a peace conference in Tanzania intended to end decades of ethnic strife in their countries.

The Rwandan Government said the plane was shot down by a rocket fired by unknown attackers, and soon afterward the Presidential Guard loyal to Mr. Habyarimana set out to settle scores with Tutsis in Kigali. The fighting quickly turned into wild scenes of anarchy and slaughter.

Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana was reported dragged from a United Nations compound and killed.