

Back With a Vengeance

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Refugee Rebels Battle to Conquer Hell

RUGENDE, Rwanda (AP) — Francois Rwagansana once took well-off Westerners on exotic but safe safaris throughout Africa. But he came home for the ultimate adventure tour : guerrilla warfare.

"It was exciting," said Rwagansana, 33, who plies his new trade at a rebel base here, five miles north of the divided capital. He has learned how to survive sickness, carry weeks of food on his back - and break the proper bones of rigid dead enemies to better remove their coveted clothing.

And he has learned how to kill.

"Sometimes I ask myself : What am I doing here ?" said the tall, lanky Rwagansana, a university graduate in sociology smartly dressed in jungle fatigues and Adidas high-top sneakers.

What Rwagansana and others like him are doing is fighting a war against a government they believe has carefully orchestrated the slaughter of what the United Nations estimates is

100,000 to 200,000 people in the past five weeks.

The mind-boggling killing spree broke out after the Hutu president died in a mysterious plane crash. Government soldiers and civilian militias began massacring Tutsis and Hutus perceived as their allies.

At the time, the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front had brokered a truce with the government. When the killings began, however, it mobilized its troops and launched a new offensive. It now controls most of this blood-drenched nation of 8 million people.

The complex ethnic and social tensions date to colonial days and the 1959 rebellion by the majority Hutus against the repressive minority Tutsi government.

Thousands of Tutsis fled to Uganda, Zaire, Kenya and Burundi to escape the reprisals that followed, and they raised a lost generation of Rwandan children who formed the core of the rebel army that launched the

RPF invasion from Uganda in 1990.

"These young men hardly know their country, hardly know the difference between a Hutu and a Tutsi," said Tito Rutaremara, 49, a RPF political leader.

"Yet there they are, in the bush, fighting the war," he said, gesturing to the lovely green hills filled with thousands of corpses.

To their supporters, the rebels are seen as the cavalry coming to the rescue of a country hemorrhaging rivers of blood.

Human rights organizations and aid workers have uniformly held the Hutu-led militias responsible for most of the carnage in Rwanda. The vast majority of victims have been Tutsis, most of them hacked to death with clubs and machetes.

The Tutsi-dominated rebel movement, which includes many Hutus and professes a platform of national unity, has ordered troops to refrain from seeking retribution against Hutu soldiers and civilian militias.

Revenge is officially prohibited, and there have been only scattered, isolated and unconfirmed reports of reprisals.

But Rwagansana, 33, admits the anti-vengeance edict is a hard code to live by.

"You see all those people dead because they were Tutsi, and you make them want to pay," said Rwagansana, who left Rwanda as a child and

came home from Kenya three years ago. "Why don't they fight us instead of innocent peasants?"

Guerrilla Eric Ruhumuriza - a 16-year-old, baby-faced kid who looks closer to 12 - struggles with the same emotion. His parents were killed during a massacre in early April. The orphan was quickly adopted by the rebels, who gave him a small uniform and a big AK-47.

"I have a feeling of revenge, but the code prevents it," he said as he sat at the rebel base here on Sunday.

Mortar shells boomed in the background as the rebels fired on a government base on the outskirts of Kigali, the capital where large units of government soldiers are based.

The smell of rotting massacre victims in the surrounding fields wafted through the base as the soldiers drank tea and ate rice and beans.

Suddenly a new song came on the radio, its lyrics urging people to kill RPF sympathizers.

"They're still killing innocent people," said Capt. Mark Sebanjira, a rebel commander.

Rwagansana says the worst problems he faced with his old job as a tour guide with the U.S.-based Overseas Adventure Travel, were quarreling tourists and broken-down safari vehicles.

"Imagine coming from a city like Nairobi (Kenya) and you find yourself in the bush," he said. "Sudden-

ly, you're just there, and you're attacking people and they're attacking you.

"You sleep outside, there's mosquitoes - I've had malaria twice," he said. "You got a gun, people are shooting and bombs are falling."

Shortly after he joined the rebels in 1991, Rwagansana said he realized he was in a grim new world when he

and a more seasoned rebel approached the body of a dead government soldier.

He found out it was time to resupply.

"He broke the bones at the elbow and took the shirt, then he took the pants and the boots," he said. "I asked myself : Could I do that?"

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