



In memory of
John-Mark Theunissen
1970-04-09 – 2018-04-06

PART 1

Our Part In The Rwandan Genocide War

By Rodney Underwood

Forgiveness is not the suppression of anger.
Forgiveness is more painful than the wound that we suffer.
It is more painful than the wound that was inflicted.
[Kinyarwandan post genocide proverb]

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~ Chapter 1 ~

Never!... Those people are crazy!

The Nyiragongo volcano belching a large plume of smoke in the distance ahead of us. A large typical African village sprawled out below to the left of our descending plane, with people running across the runway carrying piles of firewood on their heads. The United Nations headquarters to our right, with gigantic, waiting, Antonov planes at the ready, and to top it all, a tented French Foreign Legion camp! This is the scene that greeted us, as our small Beechcraft King Air 100 came into land at Goma airport in Zaire, dodging the wood carriers in front of us. I half expected movie credits to start rolling up in front of my eyes.

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The conflict in Rwanda between the Hutu and Tutsi people had been escalating since the late 1950's.<sup>1</sup> It finally exploded in April 1994, into the slaughter of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis by Hutu extremists. Impartial Hutus and those who opposed this genocide were also massacred.

Three months later, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1994, the genocide was finally halted with a military victory by the Tutsi-dominated Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF).

Over two million Hutus then fled Rwanda, fearing Tutsi revenge. One million of these refugees crossed the border at Gisenyi into the city of Goma in the country Zaire (which is

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail of the Rwandan genocide war see the Appendix at the end.

now The Democratic Republic of Congo or the DRC).

This massive influx of people into Goma created a severe humanitarian crisis due to a critical shortage of food, water and shelter. Huge sprawling refugee camps were set up by The United Nations in and around Goma. Several thousand more lives were lost in these camps through disease and revenge cross-border attacks. This inundation of refugees into Goma also had a devastating impact on the lives and resources of the local Zairian people living in the Goma area. The situation was critical.



My first memories of the Rwandan war started in July 1994, as images of the UN personnel, NGO's and other relief workers among war-torn villages flashed across news channels on TV. I clearly remember myself thinking “Never!... Those people are crazy! I would never do that. You will never get me to such a dangerous place. I will never set foot in countries such as Rwanda, Angola or Mozambique”. Yet all three of those countries' stamps, among many others, can now be found in my passport.

Later that year, in August, Barry Mc Namara from Jesus Alive Ministries (JAM) came to our church, looking for three volunteers with military experience, to establish a “quick reactionary” relief team to work among Rwandan refugees in and around the city of Goma. JAM had received a donation from the European Union of two and a half thousand tons of food made up of maize meal, beans, oil, sugar and milk

powder for distribution among these refugees.

I've never really been one to seek adventure. I am not one of those adrenaline junkies who always look for the next fix. (Hence my reluctance when seeing the Rwandan genocide war on TV.) Adventure, however, has always seemed to seek me out, whether it be skateboarding, surfing, skydiving, scuba-diving, rock climbing, abseiling or any other crazy, audacious endeavour. This is because whenever I faced a situation that involved an adventure or something scary, I have always feared the regret of not taking the jump, more than I feared the jump itself. If we were standing at the edge of a cliff with water below, wondering if it is safe to jump, the next thing “splash!” I would be in the water below, shouting that it is safe. This isn't because I am particularly brave. Maybe a little stupid, but not brave. It's fear that would make me jump. I am simply terrified that someone else would jump first and I would then have the regret that it wasn't me.

I remember one early morning, driving down to the beach to go surfing. From the top of the cliff, I could see that the waves were particularly large and imposing that day. I was petrified, because even though I was alone, I knew that I would not be able to stop myself joining the more experienced guys already out there, again for fear of regret.

Throughout high school I had a picture of a skydiver on my home study desk. This was there as a visual goal, because I knew it was something that I would do one day... No... would HAVE TO do one day. I just could not consider the

regret if I didn't.

It was the same with my decision to go to Rwanda. At first, I was not among the three to be chosen. But that night, I could not escape the haunting thought that I had to be on the team. The next morning, I told my pastor that I had to go to Rwanda. He agreed and switched my friend John-Mark Theunissen with me. I was first concerned that John-Mark may resent this. It turned out though, that he was okay with it, as he had already been selected to lead a mission trip to Zambia. (John-Mark did, however, end up joining us later in Rwanda and Zaire, after his Zambia trip.)

Our initial team was; my brother Gordon Underwood, Gary Thompson and myself. The three of us were to be led by another South African from JAM, ex-paratrooper John Delaney.

The following week was a whirlwind of preparation. Inoculation shots, passports, visas, packing, wrapping up business, saying goodbyes and so much more. Then finally, the moment arrived where we found ourselves, one morning, in the dark before sunrise, driving around the back of Lanseria airport to the JAM hangar. The mood was a melancholy mixture of nervous excitement and uncertainty. We packed the plane and taxied to take off.

It was all this that led up to our small plane, piloted by JAM founder Peter Pretorius, landing that clear September morning, into the surreal backdrop of the Rwandan conflict. Our task: To distribute the two and a half thousand tons of food that JAM had acquired as it arrived by the truck load,

and to assist a group of Norwegian NGO missionaries who were giving medical care, such as polio vaccines, to the Rwandan refugees.

Later on, we would end up crossing the border at Gisenyi into Rwanda itself. This would be to assist a war orphanage in the town of Gitarama (renamed The City of Muhanga in 2006) with supplies that were flown into Goma airport by JAM. This meant driving 140 kilometres, across the border, through breathtakingly beautiful countryside and a number of intimidating roadblocks to get to the orphanage. The first time I would cross this border from Zaire into Rwanda would be on foot.

## ~ Chapter 2 ~

*Gary Thompson*

My first night in Goma was spent with Gary Thompson, on the tarmac of the Goma International Airport. Gary and I were the first pair selected to stay with the aeroplane overnight to guard it. (We did this in 24-hour shifts.) The rest of our team went to join the Norwegians, who were already housed on the campus of Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs<sup>2</sup>, on the edge of Lake Kivu, where we were to live during our stay in Zaire.

I think the first time that I really got to know Gary, was sitting with him that evening on the edge of the tarmac, under the wing of our aeroplane, eating our supper out of metal dixies warmed up over feeble fuel tablets. This was a meal that we will never forget. The smoke cloud coming out of the volcano in front of us began to glow red as the twilight got darker. We could hear the French mumblings of the Foreign Legion camp just behind us, when suddenly a Legion soldier materialised out of nowhere on his way back to camp. “Bon Appétit” he greeted us as he passed.



In these unfamiliar circumstances I got to see a side of Gary that was not always apparent. I always knew him as quiet,

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<sup>2</sup>

Translation: Free University of the Great Lakes Countries

humorous, non-intrusive and reliable. But as I got to know him that night and over the rest of our time in Zaire and Rwanda, I got to see him for his depth of thought and character. For his courage, his calming, encouraging and trustworthy nature and his razor-sharp wit.

An example of this was on one occasion, while driving from our base in Zaire to the orphanage in Rwanda. We approached a particularly daunting roadblock. I stopped our vehicle about 50 metres away to build up courage and to pray. As I asked God for courage, Gary abruptly added, “Ja, bang vir niks!” (Afrikaans for “Yes, not scared of anything!”) which was particularly humorous due to the tension and the fact that his home language was English and not Afrikaans. This random remark instantly cut the tension and brought a relief that gave me the pluck to drive on.

Many months after Rwanda. while going through an oppressively lonely time in Angola. I particularly missed Gary’s company.

### *Gordon Underwood*

Whether it was a flat tyre, engine trouble, a tree fallen across the road or just the beautiful changing scenery and friendly people on route, travelling from Goma to Gitarama was always eventful. And there were the roadblocks... always the roadblocks. These ranged from annoying to terrifying. There were times when we were held at gunpoint on our knees, sometimes for what felt like hours, with the constant prodding of AK47 rifle muzzles. Some of these roadblocks were manned by children no older than fourteen.

My brother Gordon recently reminded me of a time that we were being arrested at the border for something that I had done. It was rather stupid of me actually. At the orphanage in Gitarama, one of the workers asked me to take a letter to a family member across the border in one of the refugee camps in Goma. In my naivety, I agreed, without thinking that the authorities in Rwanda would consider many of these people in the refugee camps as enemies. I also think that I was being set up, because as soon as we arrived at the Rwandan side of the border a guard came directly up to me, immediately looked exactly where I had kept the letter and accused me of carrying information to the enemy. They told us we were in big trouble and would be going to a Rwandan jail. After a lot of verbal abuse and manhandling, out of fear, I had the sudden impulse to shout out “JESUS”. Instantly the hostile situation changed. The guard seemed confused. He immediately released us, gave us a warning and said we could go. He did however keep the letter.

Throughout this incident, Gordon was steadfast. He could have denied involvement, but instead, he stuck by me to the end. This is not surprising though, because he has always proven to be tenaciously loyal and resolute. He has never feared hardship in any circumstance. His determined toughness and “never give up” attitude is how he previously managed to pass the stringent selection and recruitment of the South African Parachute Battalion, and how he persisted through some of the toughest military training in the world to become a “parabat” soldier. This was despite problems with his knees that caused excruciating pain during his

training. His experience, later, in the Philippines, as a missionary teacher, was also a difficult testing time for him. Very few people would have stuck it out as he did.

*John-Mark Theunissen*

John-Mark joined us about a month after we first arrived in Zaire. As I mentioned previously, he had been leading a trip to Zambia. He arrived on the JAM aeroplane in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. I travelled by vehicle with a group from Goma in Zaire, across the border, to meet the flight in Kigali. It was good to connect with him again and exchange stories.

The rest of the JAM delegation that came with the flight, including Peter Pretorius and Barry Mc Namara went on to the town of Gitarama to visit the orphanage there. John-Mark and I were left behind to stay and guard the aeroplane.

The next morning, we were woken up by knocking on the aeroplane door. As I opened the door, I was greeted by about eight soldiers with their AK47 rifles pointing at me. A young army officer informed us that the airport tarmac was international airspace, that we were not allowed to be there and that we must leave immediately. The problem with that though, was that we were chosen by JAM to be in Rwanda because of our military training, and our military training had ingrained in us that if we have been given an order, we should obey that order, no matter what.

We had been given an order to stay and guard the plane and therefore we felt that we had no choice but to stay. I explained this to the officer, and surprisingly he seemed to

understand. However, he also had his orders; to get us out of there. I then asked him if he would allow one of us to leave to somehow contact our people and inform them of the situation. He gave us until his shift ended that afternoon to sort it out or to leave. John-Mark and I then decided that he would stay with the plane, and I would go and try to contact Peter Pretorius at Gitarama.

I have to admit that I had my doubts about being able to do this, for two reasons. Firstly, we hadn't gone through proper immigration procedures to get to our plane which was parked in "international airspace". We had simply driven our vehicle in via a back gate. This meant that I didn't have a Rwandan exit stamp in my passport, which would be a problem when I would need to leave international airspace through immigration to get to the airport building from the tarmac, as this was effectively re-entering Rwanda.

Secondly, I had no clue on how to get a message to the orphanage, which was all the way in Gitarama, as this was before the time of cell phones. The only phone they had with them was a satellite phone to call the base back in South Africa. I decided to only worry about that once I had managed to get out of the airport. My plan to get through immigration was to simply explain my situation and hope that they would understand. As I arrived at the immigration checkpoint, I had a compelling urge to just keep walking through. Then the strangest thing happened. The guards stopped everyone else except me. It was really as if they couldn't see me and looked right through me. I'm still trying to understand what happened there that day. I believe that it

was God who had a hand in this. Later on, when I needed to get back to the plane, I knew that they would not simply let me back through without a valid reason. But the same thing happened on my way in. It was incredible.

Once I was out of the airport and onto the streets of Kigali, I still had the next problem to solve: How was I going to contact the orphanage in Gitarama, which was 62 km (about an hour and a half by car) away? Then I remembered that just up the street from the orphanage was a small United Nations base. So I thought that if I could get to the United Nations headquarters here in Kigali, I could then ask them to radio a message to their Gitarama base asking them to contact the orphanage. It was a long shot, but I was going to try.

Firstly, I needed to find the United Nations headquarters. I had no clue where anything was, as this was my first time in Kigali. After asking directions, it turned out that they were quite close to the airport, and that I could easily walk there. The next trick was to get inside. I walked up to the UN soldier on duty at the gate and explained my situation, but he was having none of it and refused to let me in. I whispered a short prayer for help, when a captain arrived and asked what was going on. I explained the situation to him and he was very helpful. He took me to the radio room and instructed the soldier there to send my message to the UN base in Gitarama.

A little while later, an answer came back that the people from JAM would return to Kigali and meet us at the plane. I then returned to John-Mark, once again walking through immigration unseen and uninhibited. When the JAM leaders

arrived, they were unable to convince the airport authorities that we should stay with the plane. However, the airport authorities did offer their own soldiers to guard the plane.

After the next couple of days at the orphanage, John-Mark and I dropped the JAM people off at Kigali airport and had a fairly uneventful drive back across the border to Goma. It was good to be with John-Mark guarding the aeroplane, spending time with him at the orphanage and driving back to Goma together.

I can honestly say that John-Mark was my truest friend. I say 'was', because he passed away from a heart attack on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2018. Even though I was not always the best friend to him, he never stopped being there for me. John-Mark was always ready to drop everything for anybody if they needed him. He was one of my two biggest supporters in Rwanda and later Angola, the other being Nick Vieira. Whenever I flew back home to South Africa from Angola, I always knew that John-Mark and Nick would be there to meet me.

There was a time, a few years before, when I was called up for an army camp. On one of the weekends that I was there, John-Mark drove the four hours to Bloemfontein, pitched a tent in one of the local caravan parks on the off-chance that I would be free sometime that weekend. It turned out to be a very pleasant and memorable weekend.

The three of us, John-Mark, Nick and myself, were inseparable. We went on holidays together. We ran a church youth group together. We were part of a group of young

adults that went to live in a squatter camp while helping to build a temporary school. We were involved in running a coffee shop outreach in a seedy part of town together. John-Mark and I were even sharing a flat together when I met my wife Jasmina, who herself had lived through a ten year genocide war in Yugoslavia. John-Mark saw that she was good for me and was the first to encourage me to marry her. I miss him very much.

### *John Delaney*

At the time of us going to Rwanda, John Delaney worked full time with JAM. He was to be our team leader in Goma and Rwanda, but after about a month, he needed to return to South Africa for personal reasons. However, in the short time that we were with him, he became a role-model and a mentor, whose influence changed me (and I'm sure the others) tremendously. It is amazing how much I grew as a young man under his mentorship. Despite his rugged manner as an ex-paratrooper and his rough-tough appearance, he had a way of gently correcting, affirming and encouraging, such that the gentleness of it was not easily apparent. He was the life of the party which could sometimes be a little too much for some, but he was definitely unforgettable. At one point I was not coping emotionally with the devastation to which we were daily exposed. I will always remember what he said to me that day, "Rodney, your sensitivity is one of your greatest strengths. Don't let it become your weakness."

After John needed to go back to South Africa, I was asked by JAM to take over the leadership of the team. Despite feeling overwhelmed and out of my depth, I agreed to this.

As the team leader I got to interact with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), The World Food Program (WFP/PAM), UNICEF, the French Foreign Legion and many NGO organisations such as Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). Meeting with these people was surreal. The places where we had these meetings were like movie sets. These were hotels that had been converted into operation control centres with huge maps plastered all over the walls, large camouflaged army tents set up as temporary HQs with Foreign Legion officers deliberating over maps sprawled out on conference tables and makeshift emergency hospitals in appalling conditions.

Dealing with people like this was an extraordinary experience. I soon picked up that they were of a calibre that I had never encountered before. These were people dealing with large scale, urgent world issues on a daily basis. Working with such people and being treated as an equal on such important matters, was profoundly maturing for me.

## ~ Chapter 3 ~

### *The Refugee Camps*

It is very difficult to describe the refugee camps in Goma, to describe what it looks like when one million people are forced to live so close together with nothing but a few sheets of plastic for shelter. They were sprawled out to the northwest of Goma and in the area between Goma and the volcano to the north. Any natural resources such as water or firewood were very quickly depleted. The stench and squalor that these poor displaced people had to live in, is indescribable. They were permanently harassed by flies everywhere. It wasn't possible to place your hand on any surface without squashing a few. The ground everywhere was carpeted with sharp, loose volcanic rock on which the children walked and ran barefoot. There were trucks that would drive through the camps daily to collect and mass-bury dead bodies. Even the images of these camps that can still be found on the internet are beyond belief and very hard to comprehend.<sup>3</sup>

We would regularly accompany the Norwegian team into these camps to assist them giving medical care to the refugees. In turn they would assist us in the distribution of the food donated by the EU.

At times, we were invited to visit church services in these camps. These services were attended by hundreds of refugees and were held in the open air under a baking sun

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<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.google.co.za/search?q=goma+refugees+1994&tbm=isch>

and never lasted less than four hours. As I already mentioned, there was a constant buzzing of flies. All the children would be seated in the front of the congregation. Anyone who had a choir was given an opportunity for their choir to sing a song (or several songs). Each song was repeated many times. It seemed like every person there had a choir. It was a very memorable experience.

After church, we would be invited to have lunch with the pastor in his makeshift tent. They really went all out for us. They would save their best meat to share with us and would have been very offended had we turned this down. We would normally be presented with the head of a goat or sheep, which they considered a delicacy, and a bucket of glistening orange, oily entrail stew.

They were an extremely hospitable and friendly people who had endured many hardships, and not only hardships caused by the war. I can best illustrate this by talking about Patrick. Patrick was a Hutu refugee, a husband and a father of ten. He offered to be our guide through the refugee camps, which was invaluable help. I once asked him why people in this area had so many children. He answered that many of their children did not survive to see adulthood due to wars and diseases such as malaria. Therefore, they had a lot of children because they did not know how many would survive.

Despite Patrick and his family having endured these hardships, he was a man with a sharp sense of humour. One day, we were driving down the main street of Goma, when he quipped, “On our left, you can see the post office. Out

front, is the red post box pillar. You can put your letters in the post box there... and you can be sure they will not go anywhere.”

### *The Volcano*

Twenty kilometres north of Goma was The Nyiragongo volcano. This very large mountain with smoke and steam constantly rising from its open crater, which stands at a



height of 3470 meters above sea level, was clearly visible from the city of Goma.

We had met a US Navy Seal team that was in Goma to protect the American NGO's and missionaries.

These Navy Seals told us that they had climbed the volcano and looked inside at the lava. They also could not stop saying how tough the climb was. On further enquiry, we found that anyone may climb the volcano, as long as they had a Virunga Park Ranger going up with them. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, so we immediately arranged to meet a Ranger at the base of the volcano early the next morning, where we started one of the most exciting hikes of our lives.

The climb started gradually at first but became steeper as we

got higher. We passed through lush grasslands with a few scattered trees. Most of these trees had their bark stripped by the refugees for fuel. After the grasslands the vegetation got thicker until we were passing through thick jungle undergrowth. At one point we crossed what seemed like a path that had been cut through the jungle by a large vehicle. I asked our guide what had caused that and he said that it was from a charging herd of buffalo.

Eventually we got too high for much vegetation to be growing, and the ground was covered with thousands of little round volcanic rocks, each about the size of a large plum or small apple. It was not easy to walk over these, as they would keep rolling underfoot. We all took a few tumbles now and then. At one point John-Mark slipped and rolled on these loose rocks down the mountain slope for about 30 metres. To say that he was not amused, is an understatement.

By the time we were close to the top we had passed through almost every type of weather that one could imagine, hot sun, rain, sleet, mist so thick that we could hardly see in front of us and even a bit of snow. We were so high that we were looking down on aeroplanes flying by. Due to the thin atmosphere at that height, the last 100 metres felt as if it took forever. We needed to take a rest after every ten or so steps. But wow! When we looked over the edge of the crater down into the lava it was more than worth the climb. The crater was six kilometres in diameter. We were freezing when we got to the top, but as soon as we climbed onto a ledge inside the crater high above the lava, the heat from the lava started

to thaw us out. I cannot describe the awe that this panorama inspired. I had such a deep sense of respect for the power of nature and its Creator there in that volcano. We were aware that according to scientists, this volcano could erupt at any time. It did eventually erupt seven years later in 2002 and then again in 2021. The 2002 eruption sent lava flowing directly into the city of Goma killing 245 people. Many lost their businesses and homes, including the house in which we stayed when we were there. In addition, a large section of the airport runway got destroyed by the lava. The 2021 eruption was similar. But imagine what a much greater disaster it would have been, had it erupted while the one million refugees were still there.

### *The Orphanage in Rwanda*

My memory of the location of the orphanage is vague. As far as I can remember, it was just on the southern outskirts of the town of Gitarama (renamed The City of Muhanga in 2006).

It was in a type of basilica with a Catholic church on the grounds. We had heard that this had been the site of a horrific massacre of thousands of people who had taken refuge in the church and surrounding buildings about three months before. There were still human bones to be seen lying around the grounds. I understand that these bones were eventually gathered up and put on display in one of the many genocide museums found across Rwanda today. This particular museum (if I understand correctly) was opened on the same grounds where we had the orphanage. However, this was after the orphanage was relocated closer to Burundi.

On my first night there, I was shown to my room which was at the other end of the grounds. I then went back to get my sleeping bag and things. The walk back to my room alone by candlelight was extremely eerie. Eventually I got settled and climbed into my sleeping bag on the floor. As I turned around to look out of the low window that almost reached the floor, I saw on the grass outside, a human skull staring at me. To this day I still wonder who that was and what they had to endure.

The next morning, I expected to find a lot of children running around and playing games. But not these children. They just sat there with blank stares. Every one of them had a horrific tale to tell. Most stories were of escaping the massacres of their villages and hiding in the dense bush for days on end. They would slip back into the villages at night to try to forage some food. Often some of them would get caught and murdered. They survived like this until they were rescued. Many of these rescues were done by the French Foreign Legion at great risk to themselves. On one occasion I was asked to assist with rescuing some of these children. Maybe one day I will be able to bring myself to tell that part of the story.

### *Lake Kivu*

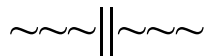
It gets fairly hot in Central Africa, so a swim in the lake, whenever we had a chance, was very welcome. It was a short walk, through the university campus from where we lived, to lake Kivu. Lake Kivu is one of the great lakes of Africa, the biggest we had ever seen. To us it looked like a sea, as we couldn't see the land on the other side. It even

had little waves.

Sometime after we had left Goma and Rwanda, we discovered that it is actually very dangerous to swim in Lake Kivu. Apparently, because of the volcanic activity in the area, large pockets of methane gas bubble up through the water and form a layer on the surface about half a metre to one metre thick, suffocating any human or animal swimming before dissipating. I guess we felt a bit of relief that this didn't happen while we were swimming. We were also a little glad that we only heard of this when we got home, or else we would not have had the amazing experience of swimming in Lake Kivu.

This, along with our other adventures in Zaire and Rwanda, was not only life-altering, but we will always be grateful for the honour, privilege and opportunity to serve the Rwandan people during such a desperate time.

May what happened in Rwanda in 1994, never be forgotten  
or repeated.



## ~ Appendix ~

### *The Rwandan genocide war in more detail*

The conflict in Rwanda between the Hutu and Tutsi people had been escalating since the late 1950's. In 1959 The Rwandan Revolution began with violent conflict between the Hutus and the Tutsis. The Belgian government, who ruled through the chiefs and supported the Hutus, replaced most Tutsi chiefs with Hutus. In 1962, Rwanda gained independence from Belgium to become a Hutu-dominated state.

Many Tutsis were forced into exile in neighbouring countries such as Uganda. From these territories the Tutsis often attacked the Hutus across the border, to which the Hutus responded with large scale slaughter of Tutsis still living in Rwanda. The exiled Tutsis formed a rebel group which they called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), composed of almost 500 000 Tutsi refugees.

In 1990 the RPF launched a civil war by invading northern Rwanda from Uganda.

Then on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1994, Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundian president Cyprien Ntaryamira, both Hutus, were flying to Bujumbura, Burundi. As their plane ascended from Kigali airport in Rwanda, it was shot down with a surface-to-air missile. No one has ever claimed responsibility for this attack and despite many speculations, the perpetrators have never been identified.

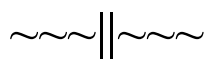
Within hours, the mass slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Tutsi followed. All foreign Embassies in Kigali were closed, and all foreign national aid workers and diplomats were ordered out of the country.

Three months later, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1994, the genocide was finally halted with a military victory by the RPF. But not before an estimated 800 000 Tutsis and impartial Hutus were killed by Hutu extremists.

During this conflict over two million refugees fled Rwanda. More than one million of these crossed the border at Gisenyi into the city of Goma in the country Zaire (which is now The Democratic Republic of Congo). At first, these were Tutsis and impartial Hutus, then later, after the RPF's victory, these were Hutus escaping Tutsi revenge attacks.

This massive influx of people into Goma created a severe humanitarian crisis due to a critical shortage of food, water and shelter. Huge sprawling refugee camps were set up by The United Nations in and around Goma. Several thousand more lives were lost in these camps through disease and revenge cross-border attacks. This inundation of refugees into Goma also had a devastating impact on the lives and resources of the local Zairian people living in the Goma area.

May what happened in Rwanda in 1994, never be forgotten  
or repeated.



## *Further reading & images*

<https://www.stmaryscalne.org/blogs/the-slaughter-the-word-ignored-the-rwandan-genocide-of-1994/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwandan\\_genocide](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwandan_genocide)

<https://www.google.co.za/search?tbm=isch&q=goma+refugees+1994>

<https://www.google.com/search?tbm=isch&q=goma+nyiragongo+volcano>

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