



REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

National Commission for the Fight against Genocide

Commission Nationale de Lutte contre le Génocide

Komisiyo y'Igihugu yo Kurwanya Jenoside

-CNLG-



BISESERO: THE FRENCH MILITARIES OF THE OPERATION TURQUOISE ABANDONED THE TUTSI IN THE HANDS OF THE GENOCIDARIES

The abandonment of Bisesero is one of the most serious situations that marked Operation Turquoise. The presence of French soldiers in Bisesero on June 27, 1994 exposed the survivors of whom more than 2,000 were massacred. The events took place in the presence of foreign journalists, and numerous Rwandan witnesses confirmed the criminal attitude of certain French officers of Operation Turquoise. The abandonment of Tutsi survivors is a confirmation that Operation Turquoise was a military operation, which was distrustful on the genocide.

1. FRENCH MILITARIES ABANDONED TUTSI REFUGEES IN THE HANDS OF KILLERS

On June 27, 1994, three journalists, including *Patrick de Saint-Exupéry*, Sam Kiley, the French soldiers of the air parachute commando controlled by Lieutenant-Colonel Diego, whose real name is Jean-Remy Duval, went to Bisesero.

Arrived in the hills of Bisesero, they saw some survivors who very quickly disappeared. A refugee, Eric Nzabahimana, spoke to the French and explained to them that they were exhausted, that it had been two months since they had been fighting and fleeing from groups of killers who hunted them down every day. Little by little, other survivors joined the group. Journalist Patrick de Saint-Exupéry found out that they were very thin, with unkempt clothes, and many of them had injuries caused by machete blows; "*a child with a cut left buttock, a half-cut right arm man*".

Survivors indicated a mass grave dug a few meters away, as well as a still fresh body of a man killed two hours earlier. Then, the survivors recognized the French guide Jean Baptiste Twagirayezu, one of the militia leaders who hunted them down. This militia wanted to divert the French so that they could not see the survivors, and rather brought them to a camp of displaced Hutu installed close to Gisovu. He was chased by the French. Diego assured the refugees that he would return in two or three days and that meanwhile they had to hide.

Back in Kibuye, Diego revealed to Patrick De Saint-Exupéry: "*The lieutenant-colonel is still in shock: "I have experience, but that ... "There is no illusion:" Before we can intervene in Bisesero, at least 2,000 other refugees will be murdered.*"



Looking exhausted and full of remorse, the officer sent his information to the headquarters: " He said it is up to them to make a decision. If we go there to protect these thousands of people who are hunted down like animals, we commit on one side and we risk having all the militias and the local authorities against us. We will obey orders. We are ready. But are they ready in Paris ? "

In his book reconstructing the encounter and abandonment, Patrick de Saint-Exupéry wrote that upon returning to Kibuye "Diego remained hanging on his encrypted phone, sending report after report to Paris. The refusal to intervene in Bisesero came directly from Paris, the 2,000 Tutsi were abandoned and killed despite the reassuring words of Lieutenant-Colonel Diego.

2) MORE THAN 2000 SURVIVORS WERE MASSACRED AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THE FRENCH

The survivors of Bisesero were in agreement in saying that following the meeting with the French soldiers, the attacks intensified during the three days preceding their return. According to the survivors of Bisesero, at the time of their meeting with Diego and his group, they were about 2000 survivors, after three days of intensive massacres, 800 were finally rescued.

Diego's pessimism when he declares "that before we can intervene in Bisesero, at least 2,000 other refugees will be murdered" was not surprising, as was the fact that he considered bringing assistance at the Basesero would be like taking sides in the conflict. This seems to indicate, perhaps beyond his personal compassion, a vision of the mission in which he was engaged far removed from the stated goal of saving lives at risk.

3) THE CAPTAIN GILLIER'S REFUSAL TO STOP THE MASSACRE OF BISESERO SURVIVORS

Between the dates of June 28 and June 29, 1994, hundreds of people arrived from all sides to meet in the center of Gishyita. This mobilization took place under the eyes of French soldiers installed in Gishyita for about two days. About seventy elements of French elite troops, marine commandos and members of GIGN settled in Gishyita on June 25 or 26.

The presence of the French in Bisesero made it possible for the killers to realize that contrary to what they believed, there were still many survivors in Bisesero. This information was the reason for a general mobilization of the local killers, and reinforcements from Cyangugu and Kibuye. The general mobilization of several hundred killers in the small center of Gishyita took place under the eyes of the French soldiers and their leader Marin Gillier.



Each morning for three days these killers went up to assemble in Gishyita, they had to pass the three barricades erected by French soldiers at the main entry and exit points of the village.

3) COLONEL ROSIER WANTED TO SACRIFICE THE SURVIVORS OF BISESERO

The abandonment of the survivors of Bisesero by Diego and the refusal to rescue them by Gillier lead to Colonel Rosier. Diego informed Colonel Rosier of his discovery. In addition, Gillier said that he had requested twice the authorization to go to Bisesero, on June 27 and 28, 1994. However, Diego and Gillier were the direct subordinates of Rosier who, followed closely developments on the ground. It is almost certain that Rosier had received information from his two subordinates regarding the trouble of the survivors of Bisesero and the request to intervene. It is therefore evident that the abandonment of the Bisesero survivors was the result of a decision by Colonel Rosier.

Colonel Rosier's statement to the Liberation newspaper of June 27, 1994 allows us to understand the logic of his action: "*The militiamen wage war. For the sake of neutrality, we do not have to intervene. Otherwise, tomorrow, if there are rebel infiltrations, we will be answerable.*" But, beyond Colonel Rosier's action, the Bisesero affair shows the adoption by the French military hierarchy of a position that could no longer be described as ambiguous. In this regard, the reversal of roles between victims and killers in the briefing preparing the troops for their mission in Rwanda is particularly revealing.

As a reminder, it was Thierry Prungnaud who was in Bisesero during the Operation Turquoise assigned to the COS detachment led by Marin Gillier, revealed it when he explains, in his interview, that at his base in France, he had been told that it was the Tutsi who massacred the Hutu. This reversal of roles in the context of the genocide revealed hostility towards the still surviving Tutsi civilian populations, whom the French army was supposed to come to save, as well as an involvement with the killers. The army command sought to manipulate its men so that their possible compassion for the true victims of the genocide would not show up.

4) UNBEARABLE ATTITUDES OF FRENCH MILITARIES IN THE HUMANITARIAN CARE OF BISESERO SURVIVORS

- **The French soldiers exposed the survivors to the bad conditions which caused their death and practiced abusive amputations in Goma.**

Once again, the attitude of the French soldiers was ambivalent towards those they were in charge of. First, the French soldiers hastened to disarm the survivors, while they left their weapons with the Interahamwe and the FAR soldiers who passed near the survivors' camp. Then, when the refugees indicated to their protectors that they preferred to join the territory under the control of the RPF, rather than remaining under French protection, the French soldiers would stop feeding them, thus pushing certain refugees to risk their lives outside the camp to look for food.



Some would not return; they would be massacred by groups of killers who continued to stalk around the Basesero camp. Finally, the French soldiers will make this transfer to the RPF zone in a brutal way, endangering the lives of the survivors.

- Survivors suffered improper amputations in Goma

The survivors of Bisesero, seriously injured who were rushed to Goma by the French army, have a very bitter memory of the treatment received from French military doctors. On one hand, they accuse them of having treated them in a deeply humiliating manner, but more serious, manner of having carried out amputations of abusive members. The unit in charge of the military medical cell in Goma was the Airborne Medical and Surgical Group made up of 12 members including 2 surgeons, an anesthesiologist as well as nurses.

Pascal Nkusi, a survivor of Bisesero transported to Goma on July 1, begins by telling the conditions of their stay in Goma, the way in which the French soldiers gathered all the wounded and brought the most serious cases to Goma for treatment. The injured were transported on rubber tents spread out over the bottom of the helicopters. They were installed in the garden of the French military field hospital near Goma airport and started to receive treatment the day after their arrival.

CONCLUSION

On the hill of Bisesero, there were many Tutsi survivors. There had been many attacks since April 15. In fact, they were often attacked, but they had managed to defend themselves as best as they could. Only, when the French arrived, they exposed the Tutsi who were hidden by promising them protection. This concerns Bisesero, but also the surroundings of Kibuye. After their withdrawal, several thousand Tutsi were killed.

The Bisesero situation confirms once again that the objective of Operation Turquoise was to support the genocidal regime and its army. Saving Tutsi was, for the French hierarchy, constituting a violation of "neutrality", so as not to oppose to the killers. The Tutsi who were saved were saved by the presence of journalists.

Done at Kigali on July 3, 2020

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