

Rwandan Generals Accused of War Crimes in UN Employ

by Judi Rever

*Why did the United Nations choose men alleged to have supervised death squads to head peacekeeping forces in Darfur and Mali? The activities of Lieutenant General **Patrick Nyamvumba** and Major General **Jean Bosco Kazura** in eastern Rwanda shed light on what their victorious army did during the 1994 genocide and for years to come.*

- ***Nyamvumba's** battalion hunted down massive numbers of Hutu civilians, killing and burning them in Akagera Park, according to a dozen former RPA soldiers and other witnesses*
- *His deputy commander during the genocide, **Jean Bosco Kazura**, helped comb the countryside, eliminating thousands of men, women and children, soldiers allege*
- *A UN court had sufficient evidence to indict **Nyamvumba** but declined to do so, a UN official says*
- *Highly secretive and organized killings were ordered by RPF leader **Paul Kagame**, a lengthy investigation has found*
- *The UN says it is now taking the information seriously and assessing it*

BRUSSELS - Joseph Matata, a Rwandan farmer who became a human rights activist, was in Belgium in April 1994 when the genocide began. But his children and ethnic Tutsi wife were at home in Murambi, a village on Rwanda's eastern border. At dawn on April 12, a militia of Hutu extremists known as the Interahamwe arrived at their house looking for blood. The attackers quickly forced the family outdoors and sliced his wife's back with a machete. They then went after Matata's 12-year-old daughter, cutting her neck and face. The girl fell to the ground and lapsed into a coma. A Hutu neighbor named John intervened as the militia started beating three other children with clubs. When the attackers thought they'd killed two Tutsis, they decided to move on.

With the help of a local gendarme who knew the family, John managed to get Matata's wife and daughter to the nearest hospital, while his remaining children found refuge with another neighbor who kept them safe by paying off marauding bands of killers.

A week later, the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA)—a Tutsi rebel army that routed Hutu extremists and seized power—swept into Murambi and brought Matata's wife and daughter to a more equipped hospital in neighboring Gahini, a village in the commune of Rukara, on the shores of Lake Muhazi.

"For that, I have to thank the RPF," Matata said dryly at a restaurant in central Brussels, referring to the Rwandan Patriotic Front, (RPF) the political wing of the RPA and current ruling party of Rwanda.

When the RPF formed an emergency coalition government in late July at the end of the genocide, flights resumed to the country and Matata was finally able to get home. He headed straight to Gahini to pick up his wife and daughter, who had temporarily moved into a house near the hospital that had nursed them back to health.

It was then that Matata heard a litany of other horrors that had occurred in Gahini and in villages throughout the prefectures of Kibungo and Byumba. Civilians began to tell him stories about systematic killings of Hutus perpetrated by the RPA, the victorious army that had supposedly halted the genocide.

“I was grateful to the RPF for helping my family but I couldn’t ignore what I was hearing,” Matata said, unable to finish the same glass of *Leffe* beer over our three-hour encounter. “As someone who believed in human rights I felt obliged to investigate the allegations.”

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Matata—a voluble yet linguistically precise man—worked at the National Bank of Rwanda in Kigali and became critical of the former Hutu regime and one-party rule of President Juvenal Habyarimana. He later moved to Murambi and opened an agricultural business. In November 1990, when the RPA first invaded northern Rwanda from Uganda, he was accused of aiding the RPF, a charge he denied, and was briefly thrown in jail. By 1991, he became a founding member of ARDHO, the Rwandan Association for the Defense of Human Rights, and would later head CLIIR, the Brussels-based Centre to Fight Impunity and Injustice in Rwanda, where he’s become a tireless chronicler of the complex, unrepentantly violent history of Rwanda.

The 58-year-old Rwandan of mixed ethnicity stages weekly protests outside the Rwandan embassy in Brussels and issues missives condemning disappearances and arrests in his homeland, incidents largely ignored by organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. He has become, among Belgium’s curious sanctum of Rwandan exiles, a lawful Zorro-like figure and a one-man support network for Hutus and Tutsis behind bars or in flight.

Matata did not last long in Rwanda under the Rwandan Patriotic Front, whose power was just beginning to flourish amid the ruins of war in July 1994. Within days of his return from Belgium to Rwanda, he interviewed dozens of villagers in Gahini and other sectors, many who would later disappear. He also visited 10 mass graves in the towns of Muhazi, Kayonza and Kabarondo. Some of the bodies of Hutus in those graves were later burned or brought to mass graves containing Tutsis killed by the Interahamwe before the RPA arrived.

A witness that assisted him with the probe was one of Matata’s former employees on a farm he owned in Murambi. This man, a Tutsi, had the ghastly job of transporting corpses for the RPA in a *fougonnette*—a kind of African taxi minibus—to mass graves.

“This man worked for the RPA. He had to carry corpses in a vehicle the RPA had seized. The work was done quickly,” Matata said.

“He was traumatized. Sometimes the victims loaded into the taxi weren’t even dead. They would still be moaning and crying.”

The employee in question—whom Matata described as a sensitive person—eventually had problems with the RPF and was forced to flee the country.

In Matata's initial investigation, witnesses described how the RPA combed the hillside. "The RPA hunted people down like they would rabbit or other prey. The soldiers did clean-up operations in the hills. They went from house to house, shooting people." Sometimes they used grenades, he said.

Some people hid in banana groves or escaped to the adjacent forest, the Akagera National Park.

"Quite a few victims would see the soldiers coming and throw themselves into the lake and drown."

The RPA also used another method—one of entrapment—to kill larger groups of people.

"They asked people to gather in certain areas, in schools and markets. Those who showed up at these meetings were given cooking equipment, clothes and food. These people were told to spread the word about other meetings. When larger groups of people showed up the RPA used grenades or guns to kill them."

Matata contends the RPA called Hutus to meetings and slaughtered them in other areas of the country as well. "The massacres were intensive and massive."

Matata was unable to complete a full investigation in Kibungo—with names and numbers of victims—because his life was threatened on several occasions. Within weeks he returned to Kigali and was forced in early 1995 to leave Rwanda for good. Nevertheless, his truncated work was eventually bolstered by the findings of a man named Robert Gersony.

Gersony, a consultant with extensive experience in African war zones, was hired by the United Nations to conduct a survey on the feasibility of Rwandan refugees returning to their homes after the genocide. Like many who descended on Rwanda in the aftermath of genocide, Gersony and his team were initially sympathetic to the RPF, and were granted access to 91 sites in more than 40 communes around the country. They conducted interviews with 200 individuals and held another 100 small group discussions.

But what they found was disturbing enough to throw the United Nations into complete disarray, findings that necessitated nothing sort of a paradigm shift in international agency thought.

In September 1994, Gersony's team discovered RPA soldiers appeared to have carried out genocide against Hutu civilians.

A US State Department cable dealing with Gersony's findings was sent to then US Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, and US embassies in the region. The cable, dated September 1994, read: "(Hutu) refugees were called for meetings on peace and security. Once gathered, the RPA would move in and carry out the killing. In addition to group killings, house-to-house searches were conducted; individuals hiding out in the swamps were hunted; returnees as well as the sick, the elderly, the young and males between 18-40 years old were victims. So many civilians were killed that burial of bodies is a problem. In some villages, the team estimated that 10,000 or more a month have killed since April."

Another cable sent by the UN peace monitoring mission, UNAMIR, quoted Gersony using stronger language to describe the crimes committed by the RPA against Hutus.

“Gersony put forward evidence of what he described as calculated, pre-planned, systematic atrocities and genocide against Hutus by the RPA whose methodology and scale, he concluded, (30,000 massacres) could only have been part of a plan implemented as a policy from the highest echelons of the government. In his view, these were not individual cases of revenge and summary trials but a pre-planned, systematic genocide against the Hutus. Gersony staked his 25-year reputation on his conclusions which he recognized were diametrically opposite to the assumptions made, so far, by the UN and the international community.”

The authenticity of the UNAMIR cable has been confirmed by two individuals: an ICTR lawyer and a person who took part in discussions of Gersony’s findings.

The cable, indexed and used as evidence at the UN International Criminal Court for Rwanda (ICTR), was written by UNAMIR official Shaharyar Khan and was sent to UN peacekeeping chief at the time, Kofi Annan. Khan went on to say that he did not believe the killings were part of a “pre-ordained, systematic massacre ordered from the top” but admitted that the UN was now “engaged in a damage limitation exercise.”

The United Nations and the United States chose political subterfuge. Gersony’s field notes were ultimately buried in a concerted effort to protect the post genocide government led by Paul Kagame. No further investigations were ever pursued, and those suspected of being behind the slaughter of innocents were never questioned.

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Before he left Rwanda, Matata tried to ascertain who was responsible for the slaughter, at least on a local level. In due course, he discovered that authority emanated from a lieutenant colonel that would later go on to lead the world’s biggest UN peacekeeping operation.

“That commander was Patrick Nyamvumba,” Matata said ruefully. “The soldiers who massacred civilians were under his responsibility.”

Today, Lt General Nyamvumba is a highly respected figure on the international military stage, and currently Rwanda’s chief of defense staff. In 2009, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon appointed him commander of the UN/African Union hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), a post he held until June this year, when Ban praised the general for his “dedication and invaluable service” provided over four years.

Rwanda has four battalions deployed in UNAMID, the world’s largest and arguably most important peacekeeping mission at an estimated 22,000 international troops. The country’s crucial contribution to peacekeeping in an unstable but politically important region such as Sudan has provided Kigali with prestige in the hallowed halls of the United Nations, according to analysts. Indeed, in October 2012, Rwanda secured a rotating seat on the UN Security Council—and is generally accustomed to receiving cover against allegations of serious breaches in humanitarian law at home and in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo.

So how did Lt General Nyamvumba rise to the highest echelons of Rwanda's prodigious military? And more importantly how was he chosen as a chief peacekeeper by the United Nations, a global body whose enshrining principles are based on international law and security? And how did Nyamvumba's comrade-in-arms, General Jean Bosco Kazura, come to secure his role in June as force commander of the UN's newly created peacekeeping force in Mali, MINUSMA? Just who is Kazura, and how did this Tutsi officer originally from Burundi rise to prominence within the RPA?

Over the last several months, a dozen former RPA soldiers and officers in Africa, Europe, and North America have quietly agreed to share their knowledge of what these men did two decades ago along a swathe of Rwandan territory that stretched from the border of Uganda to that of Tanzania. And another young man—a Tutsi genocide survivor who was a teenager at the time—has related chilling memories of Nyamvumba and some of his men operating in an area on the western rim of the Lake Victoria basin, a seemingly primeval paradise of red rutted paths, papyrus reeds, and bourbon coffee trees that belies its history as a killing ground.

Kamanzi, the witness in question, has a luminous face and a reluctantly determined demeanor. In late April 1994, because he knew some of the young Tutsi soldiers based in Gahini, he was entrusted with collecting livestock on abandoned properties seized by the RPA. He remembers Nyamvumba as a pleasant man who walked with a limp. "He presented well. He was calm and often smiling. He was the ground commander. But soldiers were definitely comfortable around him."

Nyamvumba, whom Kamanzi called "the Colonel", often stayed in the most beautiful house in Gahini overlooking Lake Muhazi—the first dwelling on the left on a road leading to the top of the hill. The witness went to Nyamvumba's residence several times when he was there. It was customary for young women to be milling around; one well-known girl became Nyamvumba's girlfriend.

Kamanzi regularly accompanied soldiers when they ransacked buildings, grabbing merchandise, food and money. "It was wartime. We were trying to get by," he explained.

But it was during operations, going house-to-house and into the fields—the teenager saw firsthand what the soldiers' actual objectives were. Over a period of two months, from late April onward, Kamanzi accompanied soldiers on their missions at least two or three times a week. The soldiers referred to the work as "screening" or "cleaning out the enemy."

"I saw soldiers kill people. Sometimes I stayed back in the vehicle because I really did not want to see what was happening," he said. "I was frightened to see someone killed in front of me."

The soldiers, many of them barely out of their teens, called the unarmed Hutus *Interahamwe*.

"But what is sad is that these were villagers," he explained. "They weren't Interahamwe. Many of them were working in the fields. Sometimes the parents had fled and children were left at home alone. Unfortunately the soldiers killed the children."

Kamanzi remembers one traumatic incident early on, in a village near the Akagera park.

“We went into a house. No one was there except a little girl about five years old. The soldiers asked her where her parents were. She told them they had gone into the fields. A few of us headed back to our vehicle but one soldier stayed behind. After a few seconds I heard a gunshot.”

“The soldier shot her dead. He later told me she was the daughter of an Interahamwe. He didn’t even think that she was just a little girl.”

“At that point I wondered: did these people come to save us?”

Colonel Nyamvumba rarely accompanied soldiers during operations. But there was one incident, Kamanzi recalled, where they’d received word that Hutus in a particular village might be armed. On that day, the ground commander, his escorts and a team of soldiers went in separate vehicles to the location, eventually surrounding a property there. Kamanzi went along too. Nyamvumba gave orders in Swahili, a language the teenager did not understand, and he and Nyamvumba stayed behind a few meters while soldiers fired shots for an extended period of time. Like in every mission he was privy to, there was no combat; soldiers just proceeded to kill.

Former soldiers and officers explained that before April 1994, Nyamvumba had been a middle ranking officer with very little if any command experience; he was above all the chief instructor of the RPA’s training wing, which shifted from the Gatunda township near the Ugandan border to Gabiro at the edge of the Akagera Park after the genocide was unleashed. The battalion that was created under his direction to euphemistically “screen”, “mop up”, or “comb” the hillsides of Hutu civilians was considered highly clandestine. Oscar operated in areas already cleared of insurgents, in the rear of the RPA’s 157th mobile force led by the notorious Fred Ibingira, now a Lt. General, and the 7th brigade under William Bagire.

Sources interviewed for this story said Nyamvumba supervised this battalion, which consisted of several companies of young soldiers drawn principally from RPA’s High Command—consisting of Kagame’s escorts—and soldiers from the training wing. Nyamvumba received direct instructions from Kagame, according to senior officers familiar with the operations.

The operations were conceived, planned and coordinated by Kagame and the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), along with intelligence staff from High Command and the training wing, officers alleged.

The intelligence officer that worked directly for Kagame was Silas Udahemuka, who helped coordinate operations. Udahehumka was assisted by three other Kagame escorts: Innocent Gasana, Jackson Mugisha, and Charles Matungo.

At the time, DMI was headed by Kayumba Nyamwasa, long considered second to Kagame in Rwanda’s military hierarchy. General Nyamwasa fell out with his boss in 2010, fled to South Africa and survived an assassination attempt by suspected Rwandan agents. He declined to be interviewed for this article.

Another central figure from DMI that helped execute was Jackson Rwahama. He advised, inspected, and attended secret meetings, officers explained. “Rwahama was a senior killer from the Ugandan army, had worked in intelligence for Idi Amin,” one officer said, referring to Uganda’s ruthless

dictator during the 1970s whose regime was marked by egregious human rights abuses and political repression.

“Rwahama helped coordinate the killings. Remember Nyamvumba was young at the time and had little experience. They asked themselves ‘how are we going to kill a lot of people in a short period of time before anyone knows about it?’ Rwahama was the best person to plan this,” the officer confided.

Officers and soldiers confirmed that in addition to working alongside DMI in a scheme to clear Hutus from these prefectures, Nyamvumba had at least three deputy commanders overseeing death squads. They were John Birasa, Emmanuel Butera, and Jean Bosco Kazura.

By all accounts, Kazura was an intellectual with a passion for soccer and little battle experience apart from briefly serving in a battalion known as Delta Mobile. Originally from Burundi, he spoke fluent French, English and Kinyarwanda, was commissioned in 1992 and joined RPA High Command, where he became a translator for Kagame, regularly listening to Radio France Internationale and greeting important visitors that came to see Kagame and RPF chairman Alex Kanyarengwe at Arusha House at the RPF’s military base, Mulindi, before the genocide.

But as soon as former Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana’s plane was shot down by a surface-to-air missile on April 6th 1994, Kazura was catapulted into new, deadlier terrain.

Immediately after the assassination—which would ignite the genocide and spark a killing frenzy predominantly against Tutsi civilians—Nyamvumba left the Karama training wing near the Ugandan border, along with intelligence staff and several nominees of the main rank and file there. The intelligence staff that went with Nyamvumba were Dan Munyuza, Rwakabi Kakira and Kalemara alias Kiboko. Leaving his official job as chief instructor, Nyamvumba and his men ‘started to sweep’ from Gatunda and on to Ngarama, where they would make a temporary base.

According to testimony, some of the first operations began along the eastern border of the demilitarized zone, where the RPA had an upper hand in the pre-genocide war of invasion. The RPF had lured Hutu peasants in this area, with promises of salt, sugar, medicine and other basic necessities. These were some of the first people to be caught and killed in the RPA’s snare.

By the end of April, the training wing – ostensibly run by Nyamvumba—was relocated to Gabiro, at the edge of Akagera, a park originally spanning 2,500 square kilometers comprised of swamp, savannah and mountains.

His Oscar battalion—as it eventually would be called—grew in small numbers to an estimated 800 soldiers as the genocide wore on, with new waves of Tutsi passouts from within Rwanda and surrounding countries. The force would eventually be sent across the prefectures of Byumba and Kibungo; localities targeted included Muvumba, Ngarama, Gituza, Bwisige, Muhura, Murambi then on to Kibungo.

Kazura, at the time in High Command and known to be close to Kagame, became deputy commander of these operations, initially in Byumba. Then, sources say, Kazura’s and Nyamvumba’s men advanced toward Kibungo town, to Kanyonza, Kabarondo and Rukira.

“The soldiers did this job deliberately,” said David, a former RPA officer.

David is a loquacious, middle-aged Rwandan Tutsi living in exile. When he’s not talking about Rwanda, his manner shifts easily between jovial and ironic. Surprisingly, like so many Rwandans who’ve endured the horror of genocide, his face betrays little of the emotional scars that lie underneath. But his expressions change quickly. When he speaks of the crimes that unfolded around him in eastern Rwanda, his mouth contorts and his brow twists in trenches.

“The soldiers were digging mass graves. They had the manpower to dig, to burn,” David said. “There were some serial killers, people who were trained just to kill, to exterminate. Others were there to see and get rid of the dead.”

The RPA would kill small groups of Hutus on the spot, he explained. But with larger groups, attempts to separate them were made. Many were brought by trucks to killing grounds in Akagera and were later shot or stabbed. Some were starved for days then killed with hammers and hoes.

One of the main killing centers was Nasho next to a lake of the same name, on the park’s southern flank. The commanders moved around, depending on the magnitude of operations.

“Kazura was at times in Nasho overseeing those killings. Sometimes John Birasa was there with Nyamvumba, who was working under Kagame’s orders,” David pointed out. “This was something they were trying to do in secret, not to alert other troops in the main fighting battalions.”

One of the first killing spots was at Gabiro at the House of Habyarimana—a guest lodge of more than 200 rooms that had once been the home of Rwanda’s king—used by the RPF for screening, identifying and eliminating Hutus, as soon as the genocide started.

Other known killing grounds were located between 5 and 10 kilometers from Gabiro deeper in the park, and at Rwata, some 30 kilometers from Gabiro toward the Akagera River.

“From Gabiro, Hutus could not escape; they were surrounded by soldiers. They were thrown into mass graves dug with bulldozers. Then soldiers started shooting at them,” an intelligence officer that received daily reports of the operations said.

“Lt Colonel Nyamvumba was from Gabiro and was the commander of that operation,” he confirmed.

This officer estimates that thousands of people died in this manner. He said anywhere between 100 to 200 people were put onto lorries, and between 5 and 10 trucks went through Gabiro deeper into the park daily—at night—for months.

Gabiro had the logistics: bulldozers for digging, stocks of diesel and petrol to burn corpses, and acid to dissolve the victims’ remains. The ashes were then mixed with soil or placed into lakes in the park, according to sources.

By June, at the height of the genocide, Kazura was in Rwamagana in Kibungo, east of the capital. A soldier in High Command said Kazura was an operational commander of about 100 soldiers that hunted down civilians, killed them and dumped them in a pit in neighboring Rutonde.

“Kazura was personally involved in carrying out and commanding and overseeing those operations of hunting down and rounding up civilians, bringing them to a detention house and taking them to the killing site,” said the soldier, who was present during the murders.

In one incident, Hutu women and children that had taken refuge in a Catholic church in Rwamagana were taken to Rutonde, where they massacred and thrown into a pit with Tutsi victims that had been killed by Interahamwe earlier in the genocide, he noted.

Other people, including men, were captured in neighboring areas and eventually detained at a petrol station, before being killed and buried in the pit.

“Women’s arms were tied behind their backs with their pagnes (wraparound garments) and men were tied with their shirts. They were taken to a detention center at the petrol station in Rwamagana. In the evening they were killed at the station or were taken to the pit and killed there,” the soldier described.

The soldier estimated that at least 600 people were killed in this manner in Rwamagana alone, and more than 2000 in total from outlying areas.

Another soldier said by early July, Kazura was moving around, coming to Rwamagana several times a week with his white Land Cruiser. He stayed at the Dereva Hotel, a kind of guesthouse where he had access to girlfriends and alcohol. It was known that Kazura had “special forces” at his disposal.

The soldier, a quiet, self-assured man named Damas, confirmed that Rwamagana had become a microcosm of detention and killing throughout the genocide. Damas was on site in July when soldiers at the gendarmerie killed an estimated 200 Hutu men with guns and small hoes. Many of the Hutus had their arms and hands tied behind their backs. Some of them were already dead from being shot while they were rounded up in their home areas.

Damas has vivid memories of the slaughter, which took place under the cover of night in a tent sent up in the compound of the Rwamagana gendarmerie barracks.

“No one could say no when it was happening or that it had to stop,” he said. “On a personal level, it was shocking, but we were in a killing situation.”

The victims were later loaded onto three Mercedes trucks and brought to the Akagera Park. “After it was over, one soldier said aloud: ‘Not all of these bastards are killers. We didn’t have to kill all of them!’ The soldier was then struck in the head with a hoe and brought to a hospital.”

Damas said Kazura was not present during the slaughter that night, and that forces carrying out the killings were part of the regular army under a major named Gahigana.

Sources said that as the genocide wound down, both Kazura and Nyamvumba were known to have overseen the transport of Hutu refugees back into Rwanda from camps in Tanzania where they had fled. In one instance, an officer witnessed Kazura directing operations in which an estimated 120 women and children were promised food, supplies, and a peaceful return home. They were put on trucks at Benako, a town on the Tanzania border, and brought to Rwanteru, Rwanda, where they were killed, according to the officer.

“I was there when they were collected in trucks. Most of them were ladies and children. The men were very few,” the officer explained. “These people were killed under the command of Kazura. They were killed with hoes in Rwanteru.”

Many refugees that escaped to Tanzania at the time later refused to go back home. Some survivors of those attacks gave testimony for this article. One refugee said RPA soldiers arrived in his village in the commune Gituza on April 9th. “It was early in the morning. The entire population started to run as soon as they saw RPF troops. I saw wounded people trying to get away. I made the decision to flee with my family.”

The refugee, his wife and three sons ran south along the Kayonza-Kagitunda road to Mirambi then onto Rukara, finally settling at a place called the Karambi Trading Centre where many other displaced Hutus had sought refuge. But the location was quickly overtaken by RPA troops. At that point his life would change forever.

“On April 19th, we were surrounded. The RPF told us they’d bring us back home. The next day, two lines of soldiers arrived. They escorted us to a bean garden behind the trading centre and started to fire on us.”

The refugee said the shooting lasted between 5 and 10 minutes before the soldiers began reloading ammunition. As his three young sons and wife lay in a pool of blood, the refugee ran for his life to the park, wounded in the forehead, buttocks, and stomach.

“In the end, I was not able to bury my family,” he lamented.

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In conjunction with sweeping operations aimed at exterminating Hutus in the northern communes of Byumba, death squads run by DMI were pounding neighboring localities such as Giti and Rutare.

A confidential, 55-page document from the ICTR outlines a macabre and highly organized operation in these two areas, where a contingent of 100 DMI troops led by Jackson Rwahama rounded up countless Hutus before slaughtering them with grenades, guns or hoes, between April 17 and 25.

A witness who worked for DMI at the time said the operations conducted in Rutare and Giti were held on the heels of meetings with Kayumba Nyamwasa, then DMI chief.

The witness said soldiers initially undertook patrols throughout Rutare, where they arrested entire Hutu families, stole their belongings before “eliminating them with hoes, known as *agafuni*.”

The killings were directly supervised by Sgt. Tharcisse Idahemuka, according to the witness, who was present at the time.

Hutu intellectuals were particularly targeted. “Eliminating the maximum number of Hutu intellectuals was a priority because these people posed an immediate and future threat of exposing the truth regarding RPF activities. And the death of these intellectuals would weaken the potential for political parties in the short or long term,” the witness said.

In another incident described by the witness, Colonel Rwahama and Jack Nziza, then a major, intercepted Hutu civilians on their way to a displacement camp. The two men oversaw patrols that led the Hutus to a series of houses on a nearby hill surrounded by a banana plantation and a forest.

With Kalashnikov-wielding soldiers standing guard outside, DMI troops unleashed grenades inside the houses, killing between 300 and 400 people, according to the witness, who expressed remorse for his role in the violence.

“It was horrible to see. Corpses were completely calcified. There were no survivors.”

The witness said the orders to carry out these grisly operations came from Nyamwasa. Individuals with roles in the operation were also named, and included Jean-Jacques Mupenzi, Habass Musonera, and Joseph Zabamwita.

Within days, the DMI contingent would move on to Giti, where soldiers proceeded to round up prisoners—mostly men—and slaughter them in the house of a former mayor. The witness remembered the victims’ skulls being smashed by hoes and ‘brain matter all over the floor.’

DMI would continue to kill waves of displaced Hutus streaming into Giti from other areas, separating them from Tutsi families who were given the grim task of digging graves and were nicknamed Tiger Force. A corporal named Emmnauel Nkuranga was in charge of eliminating Hutu prisoners, according to the witness.

He also stated the RPF held meetings in neighboring communes to persuade people hiding in the bush to go home, where they were eventually murdered, and that young Hutu men whose families had been opposed to the Habyarimana regime joined RPA ranks but were later killed. Truckloads of Hutus rounded up on military trucks also passed through Giti on their way to Gabiro, where they would ‘simply be eliminated.’

At the time, Gabiro was still nominally run by Nyamvumba, who would return to the barracks to check on waves of new recruits. The military barracks was 36-square-kilometres and like other areas in Akagera, was off-limits to UNAMIR and NGOs, ostensibly because Kagame’s army needed to remove anti-personnel mines in the area.

Several officers and soldiers contend that immediately after the genocide and in the years that followed, Nyamvumba and Kazura worked alongside DMI supervising the screening of Hutu men rounded up at night or recruited from all over Rwanda, in particular from Gitarama, Kibuye, Gikongoro, Cyangugu, Gisenyi, and Ruhengeri, to be eliminated at Akagera and in Nyungwe forest in southwestern Rwanda.

“Nyamvumba was chief coordinator of those operations because after all he had already done it. He was critical,” said an officer.

Another officer who worked in intelligence had a slightly nuanced view: “Right after the genocide, Nyamvumba wasn’t the one looking for those recruits,” he said, noting that brigades led by notoriously violent commanders such as Ibingira killed or rounded up Hutu civilians post genocide.

“But these people were eliminated from the training wing, which Nyamvumba was in charge of, so yes he shared responsibility for what was taking place,” the officer added.

A soldier at Camp Garde Presidentielle (GP) in Kigali witnessed Kazura’s participation in these operations in 1995, as well.

“Kazura was involved in taking people in lorries from Kigali to Gabiro. Those people were young Hutu men that were lured into military training from all over the country then taken to Kigali, to Camp GP,” he said, adding: “Kazura was personally involved in transporting the recruits.”

“And then those men were taken to Gabiro where they were killed and burned near the training wing, at a place called New Camp, near the house of the former king of Rwanda.”

Some of these young men died on their way to Gabiro, which by then had earned its reputation as a bona fide death factory, not unlike the Nazi extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau yet much smaller and without the labor.

“Many were taken in containers in trucks and died en route. They died of suffocation,” he explained.

In 1996, the Tutsi soldier in question was in Gabiro for training where Hutus were still being brought to the barracks, and witnessed Kazura, Nyamvumba and key members of DMI on site.

“Kazura, Nyamvumba, Jack Nziza and Nyamwasa were personally involved in killing and supervising the burning of bodies,” the soldier said grimly.

This testimony is strengthened, to some degree, by an ICTR official who requested anonymity but disclosed that Kagame’s and Nyamwasa’s hands have been “covered in blood” for decades.

In an interview, the official said the ICTR Office of the Prosecutor had enough evidence to indict Kagame, Nyamwasa, Nyamvumba and others ‘several times over’ but was unwilling to do so because of political interference within the office itself, and by the United States, a staunch ally of the Rwandan president.

The ICTR official said witnesses brought forward evidence against Nyamvumba for his role in killings in the east, and against Kazura with respect to his role in transporting and eliminating Hutu recruits.

The ICTR, whose mandate has been to try genocide suspects for crimes committed in 1994, is winding down operations. Yet it has not prosecuted a single member of Kagame’s regime.

Despite ICTR evidence of alleged activities of Kazura and Nyamvumba, the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) confirmed unequivocally that it had indeed screened Kazura before choosing him as UN force commander in Mali this year.

“The United Nations applied the human rights screening policy in the appointment of General Kazura to the position of Force Commander for the United Nations Integrated Mission in Mali,” Kieran Dwyer, DPKO chief of public affairs, said in a statement.

Officials refused to discuss how DPKO specifically screened Kazura or Nyamvumba for their jobs as chief peacekeepers. Requests this month to interview Kazura—and Nyamvumba in 2012—were not facilitated by the UN.

Yet Dwyer admitted this new information would be taken seriously.

“The material provided contains new information. The United Nations takes this information seriously, and will thoroughly assess the information in accordance with the human rights screening policy,” the UN official went on to say.

In 2008, the United Nations was drawn into a human rights debacle after deciding to renew the mandate of another Rwandan General, Emmanuel Karake Karenzi, who was deputy commander of UNAMID, despite a Spanish indictment against him for war crimes committed against Hutus in the 1990s.

In February 2008, Spanish magistrate Fernando Andreu Merelles issued an indictment against 40 Rwandan officials, including Karake and Nyamwasa, for crimes committed against Hutus during and after the genocide.

Nyamvumba himself was cited in the 2008 indictment as having played a role in massacres against Hutu civilians in Murambi, Kizimbo and Kigali Rural, although no indictment was actually issued against him, because more evidence was needed.

“A witness said Nyamvumba was heavily involved in the operations of massacres in these three areas,” confirmed Jordi Palou-Loverdos, a lawyer representing victims in Spain’s special court for serious crimes.

Another witness, also a top RPA lieutenant, provided evidence against Nyamvumba to the magistrate, he pointed out, adding that investigations were continuing in the case.

“The Spanish court is continuing to gather complementary evidence of international crimes committed in Rwanda and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The research is ongoing,” Palou-Loverdos said.

Kagame himself—who is lauded for defeating Hutu extremists responsible for killing more than half a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus during the genocide—enjoys immunity from prosecution because the Spanish court does not have jurisdiction to indict a head of state.

But Spain has sufficient evidence implicating the Rwandan president in having a command role in large-scale massacres of Hutu civilians in the Rwandan towns of Byumba and Kibeho, in the murder of Rwandan bishops, Spanish missionaries and Spanish aid workers, and in the slaughter of Rwandan and Congolese Hutu refugees in the DRC in the 1990s, according to Palou-Loverdos.

“In most of these cases, we know very positively from key former RPF soldiers that there was a radio call directly from Mr. Kagame to his subordinate commanders to do the work,” the lawyer said.

“The witnesses have testified that there were strict instructions that these decisions could only be taken by Mr. Kagame,” Palou-Loverdos added.

Despite Matata’s own investigation into RPA killings in Kibungo in 1994, he was not surprised that the UN caved into Kagame’s wishes to appoint Nyamvumba in 2009 as UNAMID chief.

“I barely reacted when the decision was announced,” Matata said. “But I admit that it is disheartening to see the RPF’s army in a peacekeeping force. How do killers ensure peace? These soldiers are implicated in crimes in Rwanda and the Congo, but the UN refuses to listen.”

“We just can’t seem to get the message across.”

For Damas, the issue runs deeper. “We make the Rwandan government powerful because we don’t speak out.”

The Tutsi soldier—who lost most of his family to Hutu extremists during the genocide—said he’s ashamed to call himself Rwandan. And yet he is adamant about one thing: “I want people to know about these hidden crimes. The ball is in our court to tell the truth and say what we know.”

“We need a better future for our country; we have to tell our children what really happened.”

Judi Rever is a Montreal-based freelance journalist, formerly with Agence France-Presse and Radio France Internationale. She has reported from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and the Middle East. She specializes in human rights issues, and is currently doing research for a book that would explore war crimes committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front and its army.