

# Kwibohora27 : How RPA rescued over 2,000 civilians at Saint-Paul

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Saint-Paul rescue mission is among the best operations mounted by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) in the wake to put an end to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Survivors still don't understand how the army was able to rescue more than 2,000 Tutsi civilians right in the middle of claws of death.

St Paul training centre in Muhima sector was located in the middle of different positions of Ex-FAR and Interahamwe militia.

It was slightly above the Ex-FAR roadblock at Kinamba junction, opposite to Gendarmerie station at Kacyiru and behind a military Mechanised unit in Camp Kigali and the presidential guards as well.

St Paul was home to over 2,000 Tutsi civilians hiding from Interahamwe militia.

They were protected by Bishop Celestin Hakizimana for over two months whereas Father Wenceslas

Munyeshyaka was next door at Sainte Famille involved in the killings.

Bishop Hakizimana is among the protectors of the friendship pact.

"Hakizimana was really a merciful person who was trying to bribe Interahamwe so as to keep us safe, but other opinion leaders like Tharcisse Renzaho and Angelina Mukandutiye were very harsh on him," recalls Rurangwa Anselme, the former Mayor of Gatsibo district and St Paul survivor.

Most people had flocked to churches believing that killings won't take place in holy sanctuaries. But little did they know that humanity was lost in people.

Days after days, people started getting selectively killed in the parish and its training centre. Interahamwe militia could come and select people at different times and kill them.

As killings escalated, one of the civilians escaped from the site and fell

in an ambush of RPA soldiers, where he narrated what was happening inside St Paul.

They then planned operation to save thousands of people hiding in the parish and the centre.

“This rescue mission stands out among the RPA’s operations because they were surrounded by enemies in all corners but broke in and escorted back thousands of civilians to their safe havens,” comments Medard Bashana, a historian.

Colonel (Rtd) Jacob Tumwine who was the commanding officer of Bravo battalion and the leader of the operation says that more military tactics had to be applied so as to make sure people are rescued safely.

“First we had to send one force to clear our way by eliminating the Kinamba roadblock. The second force was charged with the responsibility to block the Kacyiru gendarmerie so that they don’t intervene,” he recalls.

“The two others had to cross immediately and one had the responsibility to occupy the roundabout in town so as to prevent the presidential guard division and other forces at Camp Kigali and Kabuga stations to intervene,” he adds, citing that the last force had the responsibility to approach the parish and the centre to rescue people being killed.

The commanding officer of the battalion also explains that they had to use a deceptive communication

strategy to confuse the enemy.

“We knew our communication was being monitored, so another technique that we used was to employ a deceptive communication that we are attacking the prison so that the army can occupy the place and leave our potential targets,” he said.

“So we started shooting there so as to deceive them and most of their troops shifted there, which allowed us to penetrate and rescue people easily”.

However, when the soldiers reached St Famille parish, people refused to open in fear of being killed by Interahamwe, according to Beatrice Uwera who is one of the survivors.

“People in Ste Famille were suspecting it might be Interahamwe militia coming to kill them, and refused to open,” she recounts.

According to Tumwine, after those at Ste Famille refused to open, the troops moved on to St Paul and started rescuing people.

“So, we heard people coming and calling some of us in our real names,” Mukabyagaju recalls.

“I immediately carried my baby at the back and went downstairs to see who was calling us by name. It was a young boy saying he is Inkotanyi and after realizing we knew some of them, we followed them,” she adds.

According to Rurangwa, RPA troops were organised military personnel : “They were all coming in

lines and also telling us to walk in lines, with an amazing order unlike the militia and that is how we followed them,” he recalls.

In that dawn, RPA managed to escort more than 2,000 Tutsi civilians to Kabuye and Byumba which were controlled by RPA.

The next morning, more than 100 Tutsi civilians at Ste Famille parish were killed in retaliation for the St Paul operation.

Twenty-two years after the operation, the memories are still fresh in the minds of the survivors.