

In 1994 one of the most horrific holocausts took place, in a small country in the heart of Africa; Rwanda. As part of the United Nations, Australia sent peacekeepers in under the blue beret. However none of the 300 personnel who went representing Australia's contribution to the peace keeping effort were fighters. Australia sent 300 medical personnel, all with excessive rules of engagement, which prevented them from using deadly force, unless their own bodies were threatened, these rules may have contributed to the deaths of thousands.

The Rwandan riots began when the president, a Hutu, was assassinated in April 1994, after agreeing to a peace treaty with Tutsis. The Hutus blamed the Tutsis and used the death of their leader as



President Habyarimana Juvena.

justification for the following 100 days of bloodshed, in which 100,000 Tutsi men, women and children died. Later 2 million Hutu refugees fled the Rwandan Patriotic Army (R.P.A.), many of whom were involved in the earlier slaughter. The bloodshed continued at a rampant rate over the next 6 years, with people from both ethnic backgrounds killing thousands the racial

tensions in Rwanda will probably never go away, and after that level of bloodshed no country could recover. All that remains is for the rest of the world to learn from this dreadful occurrence.

“All human beings are born free and equal, in dignity and rights” states Article One of the universal declaration of human rights. “Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person” states Article Three of the universal declaration of human rights. As part of the U.N. it is Australia's job to promote and protect the universal declaration of human rights. In the Rwandan genocide the rights of almost all the people involved were violated. Nevertheless Australia didn't send artillery, riot police, or any military style support, we sent 300 medics, all virtually useless to the thousands of people who were shot dead in cold blood. At its strongest the U.N. military support in Rwanda was 4770 peace keepers, none with any real authority to assert the principles of the declaration of Human rights over the R.P.A.

“Any Contracting Party may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide” states Article Eight of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Thus, had Australia or any other nation in the U.N. invoked the word ‘genocide’ in relation to the atrocities in Rwanda the entire force of the U.N. would have been knocking very hard at Rwanda's door step. Part of being a good global citizen is honouring all treaties and agreements that we sanction. In Rwanda it's obvious that the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was broken, but Australia didn't react in the way that it had agreed to, showing bad global citizenship, the values shown



by us not reacting strongly enough, should be changed so as to prevent further mistakes like those made in regard to Rwanda.

The conflict in Rwanda was not the first in that region. To the North East of Rwanda is another small country that in the years prior to the Rwandan genocide experienced a similar outbreak of violence. America's experience in Somalia was particularly fractious. In this conflict the line between peacekeeping and peace making was disastrously blurred. After America's time in Somalia its standing in the world eye fell dramatically, which was the reason for its hesitation in getting involved in a similar conflict. America was the greatest barrier between Rwanda and the necessary support that the U.N. should have provided. The world didn't learn from the mistakes made in Somalia, but if we learn from Rwanda perhaps the world can slowly heal.



From horrific events like the Rwandan genocide, come stories of outrageous atrocities and unequalled heroism. Many of the stories are about Australians and the courage they demonstrated throughout the years spent in Rwanda.

One of the most pernicious events was the 1995 Kibeho massacre, which has since become infamous. Many of the returned servicemen still suffer post-traumatic stress disorder from the scenes of that unforgettable week.

The 32 members of the Australian Medical force arrived at the Kibeho refugee camp to provide upwards of 100,000 I.D.P.'s with medical assistance. At the time, the refugees were being forced to leave. "The camp resembled a ghost town. We had arrived too late" (1) The Australians quickly realised that something was very wrong. They left the camp on the first day dogged by the frustration of not being needed. The AMF (Australian Medical Force) spent their second day searching fruitlessly for bodies. They left the camp that day feeling uneasy. Half way back to their base they received notification that another 10 refugees had died of fresh gunshot wounds in their absence.

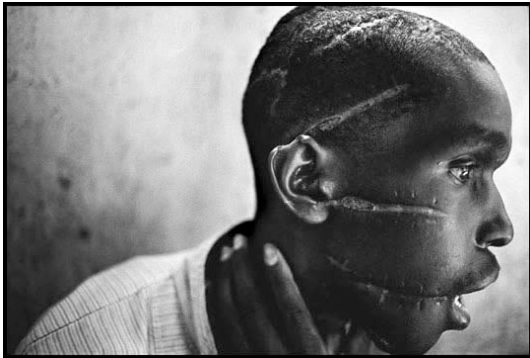


Trooper Jon Church carrying an injured Rwandan child.

On arrival of their third day the AMF personnel discovered 30 I.D.P.'s had been shot during the night. Day 3 too seemed pointless as they treated little more than colds and broken bones. Before leaving again for the night they received notice of a priority one evacuation of 6 critical patients. These were airlifted to a hospital in Butare. While travelling home they came across 2 men with gunshot wounds that could have proven fatal. The Australians

assisted them but spent most of the journey home trying to negotiate their way through the RPA road blocks.

The situation escalated on the fourth day, the Australians arrived at the camp and were confronted with over one hundred people with combinations of gun shot and machete wounds and the M.S.F. worker who were supposed to remain at the base to maintain order were no where in sight; they immediately began to treat the wounded but just as they began treating one patient “another would appear with more serious injuries” (1). Many of the medics were forced to make split second decisions, which would haunt them forever, about who would live and who would die. They spent the entire day sorting the injured from the deceased, treating those who would survive and organising aerial removal of the most



Young boy with machete wounds

critically injured. On occasions, to ensure uninjured children’s safety, the Australians were forced to fake injuries and sedate them while the ambulances were being searched.

By the fifth day the flow of casualties had slowed and the A.M.F organised a body count. The team split up and began to count the numerous dead bodies that lay scattered all over the street; they waded through the rubbish, gathering live children who still clung to their dead mothers. the total body count at the end of the day was over four thousand; it’s believed however that the count was inaccurate because many of the dead children that were found were under piles of rubbish and there were probably many more undiscovered corpses; it’s also suspected that the R.P.A spent the night before burring their dead victims in an attempt to lower the body count. At the end of the day the A.M.F had organised for a helicopter to evacuate the most seriously injured, however any time the A.M.F. planed to move people from the base, the R.P.A. would check who was leaving. Their searches undermined the Australian medic’s authority and often lead to ‘suspects’ (people who they believed had been involved in the earlier massacres) who needed better medical attention being denied the necessary care.



Skulls lined up to make counting the dead easier for peacekeepers.

Monday the twenty fourth of April was described by Paul Jordan “at two p.m. that day we were rotated out of the camp. We felt sick with resentment at leaving the job incomplete... I believe that if the Australians’ had not been there to witness the massacre the R.P.A. soldiers would have killed every single person in the camp”.

Seen in the context of the humiliating inadequacies of the UN response to Rwanda, Australia’s contribution to peace keeping in the 1994 genocide was embarrassing.

Australia's role may have been somewhat limited by the agreed upon response of UN participants but the failure to prevent the needless deaths of so many innocent people made a mockery of the term 'peace keeping'. This is because the concept of 'peace' is far more than the mere absence of conflict and the peace keepers did not even achieve this! The devaluing of human life that occurred as a result must surely be marked as one of the profoundest international failures to uphold the dignity of the person – and this is the fundamental underpinning of all peace keeping missions.

Nevertheless the men and women who went as representatives were awe inspiring and their actions should be recognised. However their return home was not the reception of heroes which they might have expected. They were given minimal debriefing and a small ceremony. The courageous actions of the A.M.F. were equal to those of men in the heat of a battle and often far more difficult, so they should be recognised equally. None of the peacekeepers who served in Rwanda have been acknowledged by the Australian community for their brave actions, they should be recognised for the restraint they showed in the face of pure contempt, and the compassion they showed for the suffering Rwandans. The seriously flawed terms of reference for their response and the obvious limitations on their ability to properly respond to the violent and irrational threats of death and torture which confronted them daily does not relegate the bravery and fortitude of the individuals who served.

Being a good global citizen is all about having good ethics and consistently acting on them. Australia's reaction to the Rwandan genocide was inadequate and demonstrated poor global citizenship. The aim of peacekeeping should always be, first and foremost the protection of human life. Australia's feeble force of three hundred medics was insufficient in the circumstances. However the actions of the Nation as a whole cannot be compared to the efforts of those who served in the A.M.F. These outstanding men and women demonstrated excellent global citizenship and personal virtue. Australia's peacekeepers are world renowned for their professionalism and compassion. Generally the way our peacekeepers carry themselves, through wars and times of peace show the values necessary to be good peace keepers and good global citizens.

The decision to send so few personnel to such a massive crisis was one of the biggest mistakes in world history and sadly it can never be rectified. The decisions of the people who went to Rwanda were nothing short of heroic and demonstrated the values that should be applied to all military tours. Australia's involvement in Rwanda was nothing to be proud of; but if we learn, and exert the knowledge and wisdom sadly gained from this horror we can at least be proud that we are moving forward and can say "we grew"

By Siobhan McCarthy

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