

# Local Couple Survive Burundi War

Burundi may be a pivotal point in the East-West axis, with the balance between the two major world powers poised on the cutting edge of the machetes being wielded by both sides in the struggle.

Burundi is a tiny country, four degrees below the equator, wedged between Zaire (the former Belgian Congo) to the west and Tanzania to the east. Ten thousand square miles in area, it supports a population of 3½ million. It is a mountainous country, listed in last year's United Nations report as the most rural country in the world. It has only two cities.

Like its twin neighboring republic of Rwanda, it once belonged to Germany and was handed over to Belgium after the first world war and administered as part of The Congo.

Centuries ago Burundi's inhabitants, the Hutu, were conquered by a northern tribe, the Tutsi. The Tutsi now make up 15 per cent of the population and are firmly in control of the government. Before the Belgians abolished the practice, the Tutsi held the Hutu as forced labor.

"The Tutsi say that before the missionaries came, the Hutu knew their place," says Mrs. Lohnes. But, with the liberating influence of Belgian legislation and missionary education, the younger generation of Hutus developed a bitter resentment of the Tutsi elite.

The seeds of tribal conflict were already sown when the country was granted independence in 1962, and a kingdom was set up under a young Tutsi ruler. In 1966 the prime minister, Col. Michel Micombero overthrew the king, and declared himself president of a Tutsi dictatorship.

Four attempted coups followed in the next six years.

This spring the exiled king appealed to the government of Uganda, and Uganda obtained written assurance from Burundi that the king would be unmolested if he returned to live as a private citizen in his country.

"But as soon as he landed in the capital, Bunjumbura, he was arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the government," relates Mr. Lohnes.

That was the spark that fanned the smoldering hatred between the tribes. On April 29, fighting broke out in four centres, including the capital city, and under its cover Col. Micombero had the king executed. The president dismissed his cabinet and called out the army to control fighting in the southern province of the country.

"It is now apparent that a Hutus' people's army of about 2,000 had been organized in southern Burundi to overthrow the Tutsi rulers," says Mr. Lohnes.

Many of its members were Hutu defectors from the Burundi army, who went over to their tribesmen's side as an alternative to execution.

The Hutu force was well-trained, and equipped with automatic weapons and grenades.

And this is one place where Mr. Lohnes' first-hand account gibes with fragmentary news reports reaching here from central Africa.

Although he was loathe to comment on the source of the weapons and the country where the training took place, the missionary said one of the few American reporters on the scene in Burundi named Tanzania as the source.

Tanzania, a "socialist republic" has long accepted Chinese technical aide, ostensibly for the building of its railway. But Westerners living in Tanzania have reported that large numbers of Chinese military personnel are present in the country, carefully sequestered in remote camps. Yesterday, it was reported that 90,000 Chinese are living in Tanzania, and officers now appear openly in the streets in military uniform.

After the first two weeks of fighting, in which 50,000 Burundians were killed, the fighting flickered out into sporadic guerrilla action that still continues.

But the Tutsi government and army began a massive retaliation that amounts to genocide for the Hutu tribe.

First to be rounded up and killed were teachers, medical workers, church workers and businessmen.

"The idea is to eliminate the potential of the educated Hutu people to set up a government," said Mr. Lohnes.

In a secondary school 15 miles from the Lohnes home, 40 Hutu students were rounded up and killed. He estimates that more Hutus have been killed in the reprisal action than the 50,000 slain in the first fighting. Another 500,000 have fled the country.

The bodies of the dead are quickly concealed in mass graves, one located a mile from the Lohnes' mission. In some places missionaries have reported the number of bodies so numerous that bulldozers had to be brought in to dig the graves.

Total chaos now grips Burundi. With the Tutsi army in control, all postal service has been eliminated, a total news blackout is in force, schools are closed and no supply trucks are allowed to carry food and fuel into the interior.

Of Burundi's 4,000 primary school teachers, 2,000 been killed in the reprisals.

"The country faces an economic crisis," says Mr. Lohnes. "This is the season for harvesting cotton and coffee, but the plantations have been abandoned and there will be no cash crops taken off."

What of the future?

"The communists have a strong foothold in Tanzania," says Mr. Lohnes. "If they can create confusion . . ."

The Chinese government promised publicly 10 years ago that if it could take The Congo, it would control all Africa.

The wholesale killings of the Tutsi reprisal actions have left the young Hutu "bitter and enraged", says the missionary. And since they make up 85 per cent of the population, Mr. Lohnes expects an uprising that will result in a blood bath worse than those of this spring and summer.

Although reluctant to indulge in political commentary, the returned missionary was spurred into telling his story by a Hutu doctor, educated in Belgium and ready to return to practice in his country. Now, he is an exile.

"Eight or 10 people die in Ireland and it makes headlines," the doctor told him. "Yet thousands of my people are dying every day, and the world is oblivious to it."

Not quite.

The significance of Burundi's agony may come into focus with the realization that one of the few Westerners concerned with the situation and making personal investigations is Senator Edward Kennedy.