

Mark Doyle, BBC correspondent who reported from Rwanda during much of the genocide

Jocelyn Coulon: Thank you very much, Anne. Thank you very much for having respected your 10-minute briefing time. You know I've been in journalism for 20 years, very often in war zones, and in international affairs. I agree with what you've just said. So I would now call upon Mark Doyle to give us his talk. You'll do it from there?

Mark Doyle: I'm feel more comfortable sitting talking to this microphone at the tables. In late April, 1994, when I was in Kigali, I was doing a question and answer session with a BBC presenter in London, and the presenter asked me to clarify what all this shooting and killing was about. I found myself saying, "look you have to understand that there are two wars going on here. There's a shooting war and a genocide war. The two are connected, but also distinct. In the shooting war, there are two conventional armies at each other, and in the genocide war, one of those armies, the government side with help from civilians, is involved in mass killings." Now I know that's very simplistic, but I think it's a useful way of understanding what happened.

My first insight into what was going on in Rwanda came in February, 1994, when I had an off the record briefly from an African ambassador in Kigali. I can't tell you which one it was, of course, because it was off the record. The ambassador astonished me with his frankness. He explained in detail how the various extremist Hutus parties were blocking the installation of the power sharing government. And he also astonished me by keeping me there in his private office for four hours. I didn't even have an appointment with him. I was a bit embarrassed, and I kept looking at my watch, but he kept on saying, "sit down Mark. You have to understand. I want the BBC to understand what's happening. Do you understand now how dangerous this situation is?" When I left his office, the ambassador said, "don't forget Rwanda Mark. A big story could happen here."

I was in Nairobi when I get a call from the BBC late in the evening of April 6. A plane had come down, and I remember with crystal clarity what I said. "Oh my God," I told the editor on the other end of the phone line, remembering clearly the ambassador's warning. "Oh my God this is going to be a huge story!" The next day, the machinery got into motion. Colleagues from Reuters news agency chartered a plane from Nairobi to Mbarara in southern Uganda, and I bought a seat. Kigali Airport was shut, of course, and this was the best way, I thought, of getting some angle on the story. It took most of the day to get to Mbarara, and most of the next day to get to Kabale on the Uganda/Rwanda border, and awhile to negotiate entry into the RPF-held zone to meet with Paul Kigame at the old tea estate in Melindi. I stayed for a couple of days near Melindi, and saw the starting of the shooting war. The RPF lines just north of Byumba, and the government lines on the outskirts of that town. And when it became clear from what I saw around Byumba, that the shooting war had restarted, I decided I had to try and get to Kigali. There was no way I could get through those front lines. So I drove back north. I took a risk I drove through the night, which is against my normal rule in Africa. I never drive at night, and I drove to Entebbe Airport. By an extraordinary fluke, a few journalists and myself met an aid worker at the airport, who had a plane, which was going to fly to

Kigali. It was half empty except for some food supplies, and he agreed to give us a lift.

The scene at Kigali Airport was quite extraordinary when we arrived there. The shooting war was clearly in full flight. We could hear constant small arms and mortar fire. At night we could see tracers, and hear explosions. On the apron of the airfield, there were numerous French, Italian and Belgian military planes disgorging European paratroopers, who had come to save European lives.

I spent a few nights sleeping in the airport, eating French military rations, which are by the way infinitely superior to any other military rations, and by day I went with the French as they drove into town to rescue the French citizens, not because I thought that rescuing Europeans was the main story, but because it was the only way that I could get into town with any sort of security. I hadn't made contact with the UN people at that point. The shooting was going on everywhere. I distinctly remember one time when normally the sound of small arms is the occasional crack and whip, so you crack whip, crack whip like that, but there so were so many small arms going off there, that there was a deafening wall of sound that went on for hours and hours just from the small arms fire, which was then sometimes supplemented by mortars, and other things, rockets.

The other war, the genocide war, was also getting underway. When I was with the French military, going to rescue some white people, I saw a Rwandan man, sitting in the back of a truck attacking another with a screwdriver. Colleagues at the other end of the convoy of military lorries saw people being attacked with machetes. The French soldiers just drove straight past heading for the house of the European they wanted to rescue.

After the front lines began to stabilize a bit, I left the airport and ventured into town. My first stop was the Mille Collines hotel. The place was full of Tutsis in hiding, with militias trying to get inside to kill them. I managed to get a share of a room at the hotel, and I decided foolishly, in retrospect, to try to go to the Red Cross Hospital. If I knew then what I now know, I wouldn't have done it, because it was a ridiculously dangerous thing to do without a military escort, but I suppose I'm pleased that I did venture out, because I discovered the genocide war on that day, for myself. There were about six roadblocks between the Mille Collines and the Red Cross. There were a relatively small number of bodies, I know that sounds horribly callous, but in the Rwandan context, it's a fair comment, a relatively small number of bodies at each of these roadblocks. With some bluffing, I managed with my friend and colleagues from CNN, Katherine Bond (?), to get to the hospital, and on the way back from the hospital to the hotel about two hours later, the piles of bodies at the roadblocks had grown. For the first time, I had personal, eyewitness evidence that pro-government militias were killing people in large numbers. There's no doubt about it. I remember Katherine turning to me and saying that we should describe that road between the Mille Collines and the Red Cross as "Machete Avenue." "If they can have Sniper Alley in Sarajevo," she said, "we can have Machete Avenue in Kigali." And from then on, I started to use the word "genocide." The transcripts of my radio dispatchers say that I used the word first on April 19, quoting the British aid agency Oxfam. In the early days, I was guilty of misinterpreting the situation. I spoke of chaos and indiscriminate killings, but gradually I learned with my own eyes that it was not

chaotic, and it was far from indiscriminate. I learned to distinguish between the shooting war and the genocide war.

It was after trips like my ride down Machete Avenue that I sometimes found conversations with the news desks in London very difficult. They'd often say, "great stuff Mark, but don't forget to report the other side," or, "let's keep objective about this." I don't blame them, and this was the usual stuff of private chats between editors and correspondents. At no point, however, was I censored or told what to say. I don't think that those editors were seeking some kind of political, moral equivalents. It's just that they, like so many others could not take on board the enormity of what was happening. I sometimes barely believed it myself, even though I'd seen it. I told the news desks in London with my blood boiling internally at the implication that I was biased, that the mass killing was being overwhelmingly done by one side, that it generally did stop when the RPF arrived, and after awhile it was clear that irrespective of what one thought of the RPF, and I didn't and don't hold any grief for them, an RPF military victory was probably necessary if the killing was to stop. These were highly unusual things for a BBC reporter to say.

General Dallaire was quite friendly with the press, but at the same time, he used the press, and as he openly said this, we didn't mind, because if he was going to visit Kigame or Bagosora or one of the other people with a journalist in tow, it helped him, because he could get them to yes we agree to this or that cease fire agreement, but it helped us, because it meant we could interview those people.

However, on one occasion, I deeply regretted traveling with Dallaire. We went across the front line to meet the government side in the Mille Collines Hotel, and after he had had his talk with the government, the press were invited in to film the handshake, or something like that. At this point, a senior gendarmerie officer started berating the press, especially the BBC, for spending too much time with the RPF. Let's be clear. There were very good reasons why we spent time with the RPF, because the RPF were winning the shooting war, and the positions on the other side kept on moving backwards. So it wasn't a great place to be. That's one, and two of course, the genocide was taking place on that side, and it was very, very dangerous. Anyway, when this officer spoke, some misplaced pride told me that I should put my hand up, and say, "I would be very happy to go with you to your side of the front lines," and I regretted it almost as soon as I'd opened my mouth. But anyway, I set off on a tour of government positions, and around the part of Kigali called Nyamirambo. It was very, very dangerous, and I knew that there were RPF positions in the hill above, and at one point a mortar round landed quite near to us. However, on the other hand, I did learn two important things that day; one the killing was continuing. I saw a well full of bodies, and two, that the government military and the militia were working directly hand in hand, because I saw them doing it. I saw them giving orders to each other. It was direct collaboration, and I managed to see it with my own eyes, but it was a dangerous thing to do, but at least I got that information.

My last trip outside Kigali before leaving Rwanda in July, 1994, was a journey I drove myself to the town of Gisenyi. That's on the border of the then Zaire. The RPF had

claimed to have taken the town, and since it would be the last major town to fall to them, meaning they would have won the shooting war, I decided to go and check. There was a petrol tanker on fire at a crossroads in Gisenyi, and I met a tall RPF officer called Bruce Munyango. Someone had told him I was coming, and he greeted me. He had one finger missing on his right hand. "I'm going to take you right up to the border," he said, "to show you that we're in control." He did. The RPF had won the shooting war, but it didn't feel like a triumph, because the other side had almost won the genocide war.