

REMEMBERING RWANDA

Allan Thompson travelled on assignment with the *Toronto Star* to Arusha, Tanzania, in late January 2004 to report on the testimony by Romeo Dallaire in the landmark trial of Theoneste Bagosora and three other senior military officers accused of orchestrating the 1994 Rwanda genocide. Dallaire, the retired Canadian general who commanded the ill-fated United Nations force in Rwanda, was left traumatized by the horror and by his helplessness in the face of the 100-day killing frenzy, which left some 800,000 minority Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus dead. On the 10th anniversary of the genocide, Thompson, a former Parliament Hill correspondent for the *Star* and now a professor of journalism at Carleton University, reflects on the horrors behind and the way forward for Dallaire, Canada—and the world.

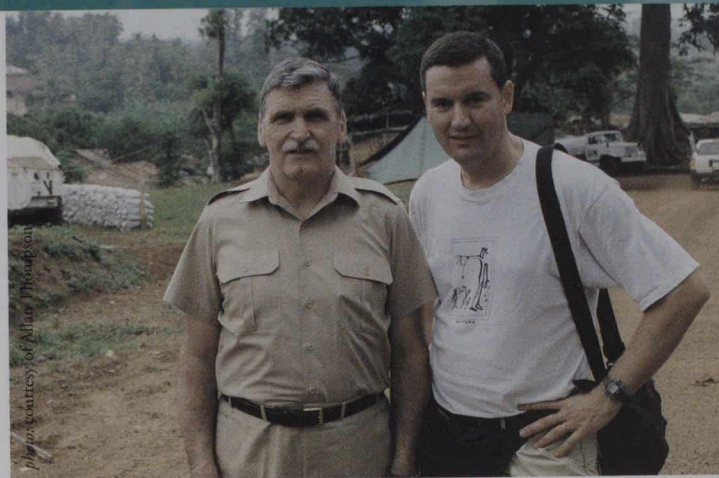


Photo courtesy of Allan Thompson

As the world returns its gaze to Rwanda, however briefly, Romeo Dallaire still stands front and centre. In some ways, it is as if he never left.

For nearly two weeks in late January, Dallaire resumed his role as commander of the UN mission to Rwanda, as the Western world's conscience, the touchstone for the grief and remorse of those who stood by while nearly a million people were slaughtered. This time, Dallaire returned to Africa to testify against one of the alleged masterminds of the genocide, former Rwandan army colonel Theoneste Bagosora.

For years, Dallaire anticipated his chance to testify against Bagosora. But he also dreaded the encounter. The ordeal finally over, he told me he found himself rooted to the spot in the courtroom, unable to move, his eyes fixed on Bagosora. "It was very difficult for me to say that it was over. I just didn't want to let him go," Dallaire said in an interview after he completed seven days of testimony.

While staring at Bagosora, he says, he was once again transported back to Rwanda. "All I saw were bodies and bodies and bodies, so many of the horrific scenes. It was just sort of

like fast forward, when you put a million pictures together and try to watch it."

But maintaining his composure and concentration during seven days on the witness stand was testament to the fact that Dallaire is making progress. In recent years, he has begun to rebuild his life, publishing his Rwanda memoir, *Shake Hands with the Devil*, and gearing up for a research fellowship this fall at Harvard University's prestigious Carr Center for Human Rights Policy.

Dallaire said that he left Africa this time feeling better than when he arrived and that he is ready for a pilgrimage to Rwanda in early April, along with his wife, Elizabeth, for the commemoration ceremony marking the 10th anniversary of the genocide. But he is also ready to move beyond Rwanda and plans to use the fellowship at Harvard to research and write a new book on conflict resolution.

"We can't defuse these conflicts with methodologies that come from pre-1989, Cold-War, nation-state concepts," he said. "I feel that so much of the writing is still fiddling with known methods. We need pure, innovative thought, to get ahead of the nature of conflict."

But there are still moments when his mind travels back to Rwanda. His return there this spring is not to be confused, he said, with the extended, personal pilgrimage he still hopes to make as his final step in coming to terms with the genocide, mourning the dead and "re-establishing contact with the spirits.

"I mean, it's always spring in Rwanda. There is food in the trees. There are always extra beans or some goat's milk. And there are a thousand hills and a thousand valleys.

"The strongest feeling of being in a whole different dimension is usually in the morning. On the high roads, you would have clouds or mist below you... It was like the mist was forming, dissipating, moving down the valleys, like an entity. And then it would disappear.

"It is just an extraordinary place to sit and watch paradise." 🍁

Read the proceedings of a symposium entitled *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, held at Carleton University in March 2004, at www.carleton.ca/mediagenocide.

Allan Thompson (right) first reported from Rwanda in 1996 during the mass exodus of Rwandan refugees from eastern Zaire. He has chronicled Romeo Dallaire's career in a series of reports for the *Star*, including a special section on Dallaire's journey to Sierra Leone in 2001 for CIDA on a fact-finding mission on war-affected children, when this photo was taken.