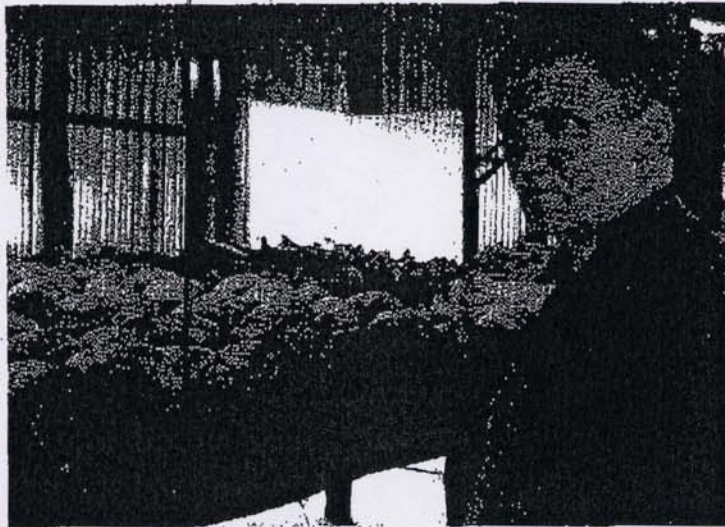


by Lindsay Brown

channel surfing < for you



Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire surveys the aftermath of carnage in Rwanda

Dallaire's nightmare

Ten years ago, Lt. General Roméo Dallaire's revelations about the nightmare in Rwanda – 800,000 citizens massacred over a 100-day period – was the biggest news story of the day.

Ten years later, with the publication of his book *Shake Hands With The Devil*, Dallaire is one of the biggest human stories of the day. And this one human represents the thousands who died, and who survived.

Shake Hands With The Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire (which airs Monday on CBC's *The Passionate Eye* at 9 p.m.), was adapted in part from that ground-breaking book.

And while I'm sure it's a fine volume, it's hard to see how words on a page could give us the same sadness that we experience upon looking into the eyes of this battered man. And would we connect so strongly with horror at a mere description of the sight of bodies piled like so many sacks of potatoes?

The event that brings Dallaire's

story before the cameras is his return to Rwanda – a tiny African country that contains the shame of the entire developed world – on the 10th anniversary of an ethnic cleansing that should have jolted the world's leaders into action, but didn't.

A bit of background: Dallaire was proud of the fact that he was the first Canadian to command a peacekeeping mission in Africa. At the time it must have seemed a huge honour. Dallaire and his puny complement of troops had only pens, pencils and not even enough money to pay for their phone calls to the UN in New York.

As Stephen Lewis, presently the UN envoy to Africa, said: "They were sent in with no briefing, no information, support or background into one of the most incendiary human predicaments in the world.

"Then," Lewis continues, "when [Dallaire] responded intelligently, they refused to take him seriously."

"The whole thing was a bluff," Dallaire tells us. With no resources, he and his soldiers had no chance

of controlling the demilitarized zone (DMZ). In fact, toward the end of the fateful 100 days, his mission and any Tutsis who could get past their foe, the Hutus, were holed up in a compound together waiting for the next direct hit.

Dallaire's re-enactment of this scene was the first hint, to me, that he has a long way to go in his healing. He describes how, to break the tension at that time, he started playing Stompin' Tom Connors on the radio, and begins to clap his hands loudly and rhythmically to illustrate.

But this clapping is too loud and too long. Onlookers begin to clap too, to keep him company. There's something not right, in his eyes.

Dallaire's mental breakdowns, in the throes of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome a year or two after his return to Canada, made the newspapers. This drove him to seek help, without which he would not be alive today, he tells us. Suicide would have been the route out of his obsession with his feelings of guilt.

Outwardly, he seems to have let his rage go. But he passes it on to us, as we learn that one by one the world's leaders turned their backs on his pleas for help for the Tutsis. In a speech to Rwanda University during his return there for the anniversary, he explains why the U.S. and others turned away from Rwanda and toward Yugoslavia.

"They were white," he says simply. "And you are black. And, as I was told, there were too many of you anyways." A moan arises from the packed crowd.

You might moan, too, when in the final few moments of the film, he announces that he and his wife will return to Rwanda to live, within one year, two at the most.

But you'll moan the longest when it becomes clear that the developed world turned their backs on a modern-day Holocaust. 