

Dallaire deals with demons in Rwanda

IT SHOULD BE shockingly obvious that having Robert Redford give his personal stamp of approval to your work at the Sundance Film Festival is a pretty sure way to get attention.

Documentary filmmaker Peter Raymont has just returned with that endorsement from Park City, Utah, after the U.S. premiere of *Shake Hands With the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire*.

The film, which debuted last fall at the Toronto International Film Festival, follows Dallaire back to Rwanda on the 10th anniversary of the genocide in the African country.

"It was a filmmaker's dream, I guess you could say, to have Robert Redford bring his celebrity status to our premiere screening in the United States. He doesn't go to public screenings. He hasn't for years, at his own festival even, because he's snubbed," Raymont said Thursday during a phone interview from Toronto.

"He came to ours and he seemed quite educated about Rwanda. He had been reading Dallaire's book. He knew what he was doing, showing up at our event and bringing all that attention to the film."

An edited version of *Shake Hands With the Devil* airs Monday at 9 p.m. on CBC's *The Passionate Eye*. It will be shown again on Wednesday at 11 p.m. on Newsworld.

The title is taken from Dallaire's best-selling memoir about his experiences in 1994 as the commander of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Rwanda. With little support, Dallaire and his soldiers could do little to stem the tide of evil that swept the di-



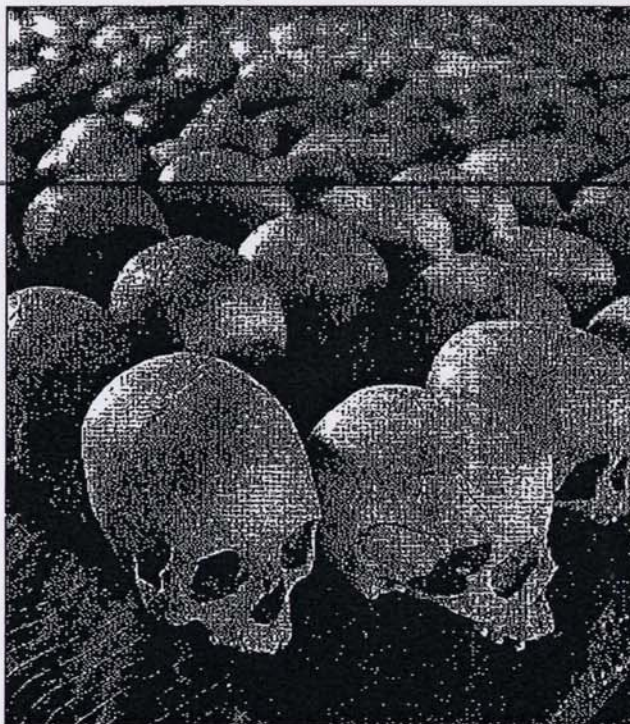
Romeo Dallaire's overwhelming sense of helplessness led to severe depression. (CBC)

vided nation for 100 days.

"I've said this a few times, that I am embarrassed to say that, like most people, I kind of missed the news of the genocide itself," Raymont said. "It didn't make the major headlines. The O.J. Simpson trial was happening at the time and took over the news for that 100 days. You know, the Tonya Harding-Nancy Kerrigan incident, there was more time spent on that on American television news than there was on the Rwandan genocide where 800,000 people were killed."

The Hutu-dominated government in Rwanda instigated the systematic slaughter of the minority Tutsis, creating 500,000 orphans, a topic Raymont covered five years ago in the documentary *Rwanda: In Search of Hope*. He had a feeling that the 10th anniversary of the genocide last April would make a compelling film if Dallaire would co-operate.

"I make sort of experiential, cinema verite-style films. I'm not that into doing the more journalistic style of many, many interviews cut with stock



Shake Hands With the Devil is the title taken from Dallaire's best-selling memoir about his experiences in 1994 as the commander of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Rwanda. It airs Monday at 9 p.m. on CBC's *The Passionate Eye*. (CBC)

footage. I like to see people doing things. So to me, a dramatic film to make was Romeo Dallaire's return trip," Raymont said. "I think he had many options, many ways he could have done the trip and probably many filmmakers who were trying to get through to him when the book came out."

The director had tried to contact the lieutenant-general for about five years with little success. Finally, a contact told him that Michael Donovan of

the Halifax Film Co. had secured film rights to the book that also included the option to make a documentary. Raymont came to Halifax, where Donovan told him he was the man to make the non-fiction film.

Donovan is still working on making a dramatic feature-film version of the general's story.

"(Donovan) had given me the opportunity to start the process and meet with the general and convince the general, I hoped, to trust me and go along with me to give me this access that I

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so needed," Raymont said.

There's a military element to Raymont's family, so he and the general had that common ground to talk about in their initial meetings.

"We got along really well right from the start. He was a bit wary at first, I think, but once he decided to participate in this process, it was all the way," Raymont said.

"We were with him (in Rwanda) from six in the morning till 10 at night every day for 12 days. He wore a radio mike that entire time."

The emotional struggles Dallaire has endured since he first returned from Rwanda have had a high visibility. He was found drunk in a park, and his overwhelming sense of helplessness led to severe depression. What he has seen shows up on his face and in his eyes. Notably, Dallaire's wife makes the return trip to Rwanda with her husband to see the place that affected him so deeply.

"I think that adds a tremendous amount to the film for most viewers. She's kind of an ordinary Canadian person, too, and it's interesting to feel her feelings as much as his," Raymont said. "I think strategically in terms of making a

documentary film and finding characters that people can relate to, and that's the great thing about Dallaire. For all the celebrity status he has now he's a working-class kid from Montreal and he speaks very plainly, honestly and emotionally."

A filmmaker, journalist and writer for 30 years, Raymont is the producer and director of 100 documentary films. His work has taken him to Ethiopia, Nicaragua, India and the Arctic, as well as many places throughout North America and Europe. He has received 35 international awards including a Genie for best documentary for *The World Is Watching*, a film about the role of the media in Nicaragua.

Raymont is hard-pressed to think of what was cut from the feature-length version of *Shake Hands With the Devil* to make the hour-long television edit.

"One can make a much longer film than 90 minutes, for that matter," he said. "The feature-length version is more the atrical in its feel and pacing and style. That was part of it, and part of it was tightening stuff up."

Dallaire was also at Sundance for this week's premiere, which Raymont said was probably a bit of a culture shock.

"He was apprehensive going in because, you know, he's not in that business but he liked it very much. He could see the value of the film bringing attention to the genocide, keeping the (memory of) the genocide alive. That's become his mission in life now.

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