

## SEE MAGAZINE

### **Return to Rwanda**

**When Roméo Dallaire was finally ready to visit the places that haunted him, Peter Raymont was waiting**

- Jeremy Shragge

### **Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Roméo Dallaire**

**Directed by Peter Raymont**

**Mon, Jan 31, 9 pm**

**CBC TV**

**Wed, Feb 2, 8 pm**

**CBC Newsworld**

### **Who remembers Rwanda?**

Which of us knows where or what Rwanda is? Which of us could describe, with even a modicum of detail, the bloody events that occurred in that forlorn corner of sub-Saharan nearly eleven years ago or could bear witness to the slaughter?

The Canadian who could best answer "me" to the above questions is Lt. General (ret.) Roméo Dallaire.

With the UN's African peacekeeping operations all but crippled in the wake of the Somalia debacle, Dallaire, the commander of the United Nations' peacekeeping mission in Rwanda was forbidden from raiding the weapons stores that the Hutu militias subsequently used to facilitate their murderous campaign.

"The world stood by as 800,000 people were killed in 100 days," says Peter Raymont, the filmmaker behind *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Roméo Dallaire*.

Once the ethnic cleansing of Tutsi's and moderate Hutus began apace, Dallaire, hamstrung by the political impotence and depraved indifference to human life displayed by his superiors in New York, could do little but protect his command whilst silently beholding the atrocities. The horrors that he saw nearly drove him mad.

### **Waiting for the General**

Shot less than nine months ago, *Shake Hands with the Devil* documents Dallaire's return to Africa for the 10th anniversary of the genocide. This story, Raymont says, is one that he has wanted to tell for a number of years. It took until April, 2004, however, for the requisite pieces—and Dallaire's mental health—to fall into place.

"When I first came back from Rwanda, when I made a film over there five years ago [*Rwanda: In Search of Hope*], I was determined to try to make a film with Roméo Dallaire, and spent a lot of time trying to track him down," Raymont explains from his office in Toronto.

"At the time he was going through serious psychological problems; therapy for post traumatic stress [syndrome]. He was trying to write his book; he wasn't ready to talk to a filmmaker."

Then in the summer of 2003, Raymont says, he was given a pre-publication copy of Dallaire's manuscript, *Shake Hands with the Devil*. In short order he secured the documentary rights to the book, through Michael Donovan of Halifax's Salter Street Films, and convinced the CBC to finance the film. Then, Raymont explains, events began to happen quick succession as "Dallaire decided to go in April [2004], which was the 10th anniversary of the genocide.

"He was ready to go then," Raymont adds. "He had done his testifying at Arusha [Tanzania] at the war crimes tribunal, he'd pulled himself together better psychologically, he'd written the book, he wanted to take his wife, and he was invited by the Government of Rwanda for the 10th anniversary events. So it all worked; the timing was good."

Although originally commissioned (and budgeted) as a 45-minute television documentary, Raymont, who has been writing, producing and directing documentaries for nearly 35 years, found three-quarters of an hour was simply inadequate for the story that he felt needed to be told.

## **The long and the short**

So in the great tradition of starving artists, he pushed ahead on credit and hoped for the best.

"People still haven't been properly paid; I feel kind of guilty telling you that," he confesses. "They will be eventually," he adds.

When the editing process was complete, Raymont found himself with two versions of the documentary: a full length-feature, which is currently screening in the 2005 Sundance Film Festival World Cinema Documentary Competition, and a shorter—perhaps gentler—cut which will be shown on CBC at the end of January.

Much of the archival footage that Raymont had to sift through when putting together the film is "material that has never been shown on television and shouldn't ever be shown to anybody."

"I think that one has to use discretion and sensitivity in deciding what to put on television," Raymont proffers. "There's some pretty horrendous stuff in our film as it is: people being chopped up with machetes. I think we went far enough."

The decision to create the 91-minute version, Raymont explains, was heavily influenced by encouraging feedback that he received from the organisers of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), where the feature first screened in September, 2004.

"What happened was we showed a rough cut just of the first forty minutes I think—about half the final length—to the people at the Toronto film festival. And they were really impressed, and they said, 'We want it and we'll show it at whatever length you end up finishing it at.'" So we just decided to go for it," he says.

Raymont, whose film *The World is Watching* won the Best Short Documentary Film award at the 1989 Genie Awards, reckons that this year's Sundance festival represents a new level of success.

## **Lone Canadian**

For one, he is attending the 2005 edition as a director; the first film that brought him to Sundance (*Starting Fire with Gunpowder* in 1994) was one that he had co-produced.

It also helps that *Shake Hands with the Devil* is the only feature-length Canadian production (documentary or fiction) being shown at Park City. It's "very prestigious to be kind of the Canadian representative," Raymont says.

And although the potential for critical success is alluring, Raymont does not deny that, for a film that is well over budget and still without a distribution deal south of the border, the most influential movie festival in America is very much about the bling. After all, it was at last year's Sundance that *Super Size Me* and *Napoleon Dynamite* (\$27 million and \$44 million (US) at the box office, respectively) were sold.

"This is the event to find that distributor," he explains flatly.

At the end of the day, he insists, Sundance 2005 will be a valuable experience for several reasons.

"It's big, because you get the American distributors, you get the American broadcasters; you get the American critics, you get these panel discussions and things like that. There's good focus on documentary at Sundance, I think greater than at TIFF. So it's a big deal in many ways. This is the American premiere screening of the film"