

## *Pure massacre* by Kevin O'Halloran

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Kevin "Irish" O'Halloran, in his debut book "Pure massacre" offers a scathing view of The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR II). O'Halloran was the Infantry Platoon Sergeant that provided protection for the Australian Contingent in 1995. He examines the history of the UN and what Australia's involvement was in Rwanda. The soldiers who had not been on UN Peacekeeping Operations before, had high hopes of the UN being an organization that provided workable and positive outcomes between warring factions or civil wars. O'Halloran describes the UN as an organization racked by internal politics, cultural differences, and in dire need of reform. *"The UN is a kind of polyglot men's club of hypocrisy and bureaucratic blindness in which you do not call a fellow official a murderer even though the world knows he or she is. Countries with the worst human rights abuses sit and give judgment on other countries with much cleaner records"*.

"Pure massacre" can make for uncomfortable reading at times. O'Halloran describes in detail what happened at the Kibeho Displaced Persons' Camp. The strict 'Rules of Engagement' that the UN placed on the Australian soldiers meant that Australian infantrymen's mandate did not allow them to intervene to stop the slaughter. *"Under constant goading and threats to their lives the Australians were forced to watch as a heavily armed Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) force of around 2,000 massacred at least 4,000 refugees in two days of frenzied killing"*. There were only thirty three Australians that faced the insurmountable sea of humanity that cried out for help.

O'Halloran offers the reader an insight to his own thoughts as well as intertwining the stories of his soldiers. Some of them speak for the first time about their experiences in Rwanda. Lance Corporal Glen Snijders *"It was evident leading up to the massacre at Kibeho that the rhetoric was getting stronger and the tension was in the air."* Some of the soldiers recall for the first time the 'unseen wounds' that have haunted them for the past 15 years. Private Matt Jones, *"Prior to the Rwandan deployment, I thought the UN was a vital organization that was there to protect those who couldn't protect themselves. Clearly, I was wrong. I'm very proud of the job the Australian contingents did in Rwanda, however, I don't know if I'll ever be able to forget what happened and wonder if there was anything more we could have done"*.

The stories that O'Halloran and other members of UNAMIR II recall are heartfelt and frank in detail. It is truly amazing how these brave Australians handled themselves in such terrifying and stressful conditions as they faced the RPA blatantly killing women and children in front of their eyes. We will never forget the images that George Gittoes and Robyn Bird took to show the world that genocide did happen in Rwanda.

Reviewed by Gordon Trill

Editor@peacekeepers.asn.au