

Box 9: The Presidential Guard

The Presidential Guard (GP) was, like the "Paracommandos" battalion (Bn"Para") and the Reconnaissance Battalion (Bn"Recce ") an elite unit of the Rwandan army. It was created in the aftermath of the coup d'état on 5 July 1973, which overthrew President Kayibanda and brought into power General Juvenal Habyarimana.

The missions of the Presidential Guard were to ensure the safety of Head of State, his family, his relatives and his distinguished hosts. His command was naturally always entrusted to much trusted officers. Three officers from Gisenyi region Chair thus succeeded at its head: Déogratias Ndirwami, Léonard Nkundiye and Protais Mpiranya. It is the latter, then a major, who was in charge of the GP in April 1994.

Since its inception, the Presidential Guard was entitled to its own quarters in a new barracks built on the hill Kimihurura opposite the center of Kigali. It was the best equipped unit with its own armored vehicles and his staff was carefully selected, mostly among soldiers from the northern prefectures, namely Gisenyi, Ruhengeri and Byumba. Spot about a thousand men, it was the largest unit the Rwandan army.

The commander of the Presidential Guard was running Orders not from the Staff of the army, but from Colonel Elijah Sagatwa, private secretary to the President as well as his security chief. The staff only ensured logistics, in accordance to the instructions of Colonel Sagatwa.

Several witnesses have reported that once news were spread of the presidential plane crash that took in particular the life of Elijah Sagatwa, the Presidential Guard commander now took his orders from the family and in-laws of the President, gathered for the occasion at his residence in Kanombe. This unit should take particular under its protection, its facilities, the dignitaries of the regime, whose lives, unlike that of others, were to be saved.