Laura Lane – Bell of Awareness

“Never again”. The words are a bell in our minds, ringing unassailably for a short while, only to fade into an indistinct whisper as time passes. Make no mistake that the bell will ring again, but of course, only to grow faint again. I question why this bell cannot ring perpetually for everyone, especially after an atrocity such as the Holocaust. The answer comes in that a country strives to do what is in its best interest, politically and economically. This is valid, and what a country is supposed to do. However, in the midst of a country doing what is “best for itself”, often times it falls prone to neglect the social necessities of the most helpless, thus disregarding the ever-important chime. Ultimately, if the signs of genocide are apparent, no matter to what extent, it is critical that the core countries, and any others capable, recognize the situation and act. This should seem rational. However, even for the most powerful countries, supranational, and intergovernmental organizations, acting is one of the most difficult things to do. Prime evidence of this comes from eighteen years ago, from the scattered lakes and the sharply beautiful mountains of Rwanda.

In the short span of one hundred days, an estimated five hundred thousand to one million Rwandans lost their lives. The genocide marked the climax of pressure between the ethnic groups of the minority Tutsis and the majority Hutus. Ruled for centuries, the Hutus seized power in the early 1960s, and maintained the upper edge for nearly thirty years. In 1990, a rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), composed primarily of Tutsi refugees, invaded Northern Rwanda in an attempt to overthrow the Hutu-driven government of Rwanda. And in the middle of all the flaring missiles, the stream of bullets in the nights, the tragic corpses accumulating on the ground in the days, and the bred hatred between the Hutus and Tutsis, there was an incredible strength – an aware, objective kind of strength – in the blessed, valiant heart of a woman named Laura Lane. Lane entered Rwanda as a second-tour junior officer in the Foreign Service. From a small
town near Chicago, Illinois, Lane wanted to see the world. She loved other cultures, other countries, and wanted to make a difference. Rwanda, she knew, was going through a wave of political difficulties. To her, an opportunity in Africa would be a something neat to undertake. In Rwanda, Lane worked in what she described as a “very, very small embassy”. She was an “everything officer”. She did the all, from economic reporting to military security assistance work. However with the increasing tensions, assassinations in the nights, and bodies piling into unimaginably high stacks, Lane’s role was immediately elevated to one where she not only served as liaison between the U.S. ambassador, the Hutu-led government forces, and the RPF, but also turned the embassy into a safe haven for innocent Rwandan refugees.

With the RPF advancing South, and as it saw its people spread across the ground, lifeless, it vowed to seek revenge for the blatant acts of genocide. The Hutu government forces were out to exterminate every last Tutsi. And at the same time, the RPF Tutsis sought to eradicate every last Hutu. Opposing Hutu and Tutsi radio broadcasts pepped both forces against each other, which only exacerbated the issues setting them apart. The ethnic groups were not just enemies; they were oil-water enemies, and had absolutely no regard for each other. The fighting was imminently going to get worse, and during all of this overt aggression, both the United Nations and several other individual countries declined to send in more troops to halt any more conflict. Many of the countries that did have the power to send in a moderate amount of troops only sent in enough to rescue their own citizens, leaving the innocent Rwandans to watch somberly in dangerous conditions, as the people with white skin were embraced in the hands of safety and returned home. Laura Lane was ordered to gather all the 258 Americans and guide them to protection. With utmost poise, Lane made sure that every American that she was responsible for had made it out of Rwanda alive. The USA deemed Lane’s work complete, and ordered her to organize a convoy with her team to safely lead the embassy officials into safe territory and out of the country. Lane was not satisfied, and saving only the Americans was not enough. She recognized what several countries tied together could not; if one was born in the USA, he or she was granted safety. If one was an innocent Rwandan citizen clinging to life in one of the most socially volatile places on Earth, he or she was not granted safety. It was awareness at its finest. Lane organized the last convoy
with over 600 innocent men, women, and children, no matter if they were Kenyans, Tanzanians, Germans, French, Hutus, or Tutsis. She took a stand to stop genocide in the magnificent country of Rwanda. She was the long awaited rainfall in the seemingly endless drought of war.

For me, Laura Lane serves as an inspiration to be aware – aware of the struggles of not only the core country that I live in, but also the periphery countries, where human life is just as important. Her actions have taught me to approach any conflicts without a fear of my own reputation, and to act based on what is morally correct, whether it be applied to a trivial situation at school, or something much larger at a global scale. Her actions exemplify that a job is not complete unless it is wholeheartedly evaluated from multiple points of view. Her actions teach us to collectively take a stand to ensure that “never again” holds true to what it means. She is that bell in my mind – a bell that will never stop ringing.

Bibliography


