

# Ivory Coast Refugees Describe Piles of Corpses

Ivory Coast Dead Include Mental Patients

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ZEALE, Ivory Coast, Dec. 5 -- Terrified people fleeing Ivory Coast's western town of Man today told of bodies piled in the streets after heavy fighting between rebels and government troops.

Hundreds of people walked down heat-seared roads leading from the key cocoa-producing center, which has experienced some of the heaviest fighting in a two-month uprising that has exploded into a war between the government and two independent rebel groups.

Rebels seized Man last week, and government soldiers ousted them Sunday in a fierce assault with helicopter gunships and tanks. Fleeing residents said the streets were strewn with corpses.

"There were hundreds of dead. . . . Everywhere we went was piled with corpses," said Julien Adeko Achi, a philosophy teacher, who added that the bodies had fallen "like dead chickens ahead of a New Year feast."

The refugees said many of the dead appeared to have worn bandannas and magic charms to ward off bullets, suggesting they were rebels. But they also reported heavy casualties among inmates at a mental hospital next door to the police station that the rebels had turned into their headquarters.

Rebels of the Movement for Justice and Peace accused the army of indiscriminate killing after retaking Man. A rebel sergeant who gave his name as Bamba said by satellite phone: "There was a real manhunt. The massacre was terrible."

Army officers have said all those who were killed died in combat or subsequent "mopping-up" operations.

The rebel uprising began on Sept. 19 in Ivory Coast, the world's leading cocoa producer. The government holds the south, including Abidjan, the country's key port and economic hub. The main rebel group, the Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast, holds the largely Muslim north and wants President Laurent Gbagbo -- a Christian from the southwest -- to resign and call new elections.

Two new rebel factions are made up of ethnic Yacoubas from the west, out to avenge the death of Ivory Coast's former junta leader, Gen. Robert Guei. Guei, who was killed in the first hours of the coup attempt, had a large following in the west.

Residents of Man and Danane have said they saw fighters from neighboring Liberia with the rebels, but the insurgents deny the claim. Government officials say Liberian and Sierra Leonean mercenaries are in the region.

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