As a humanitarian aid worker, Wilkens moved his young family to Rwanda in the spring of 1990. When the genocide was launched in April 1994, Wilkens was the only American to remain in the country, though thousands of expatriates evacuated and the United Nations pulled out most of their troops. Venturing out each day into streets crackling with mortars and gunfire, Wilkens worked his way through roadblocks of angry, bloodstained soldiers and civilians armed with machetes and assault rifles in order to bring food, water, and medicines to groups of orphans trapped around the city. His actions saved the lives of hundreds.