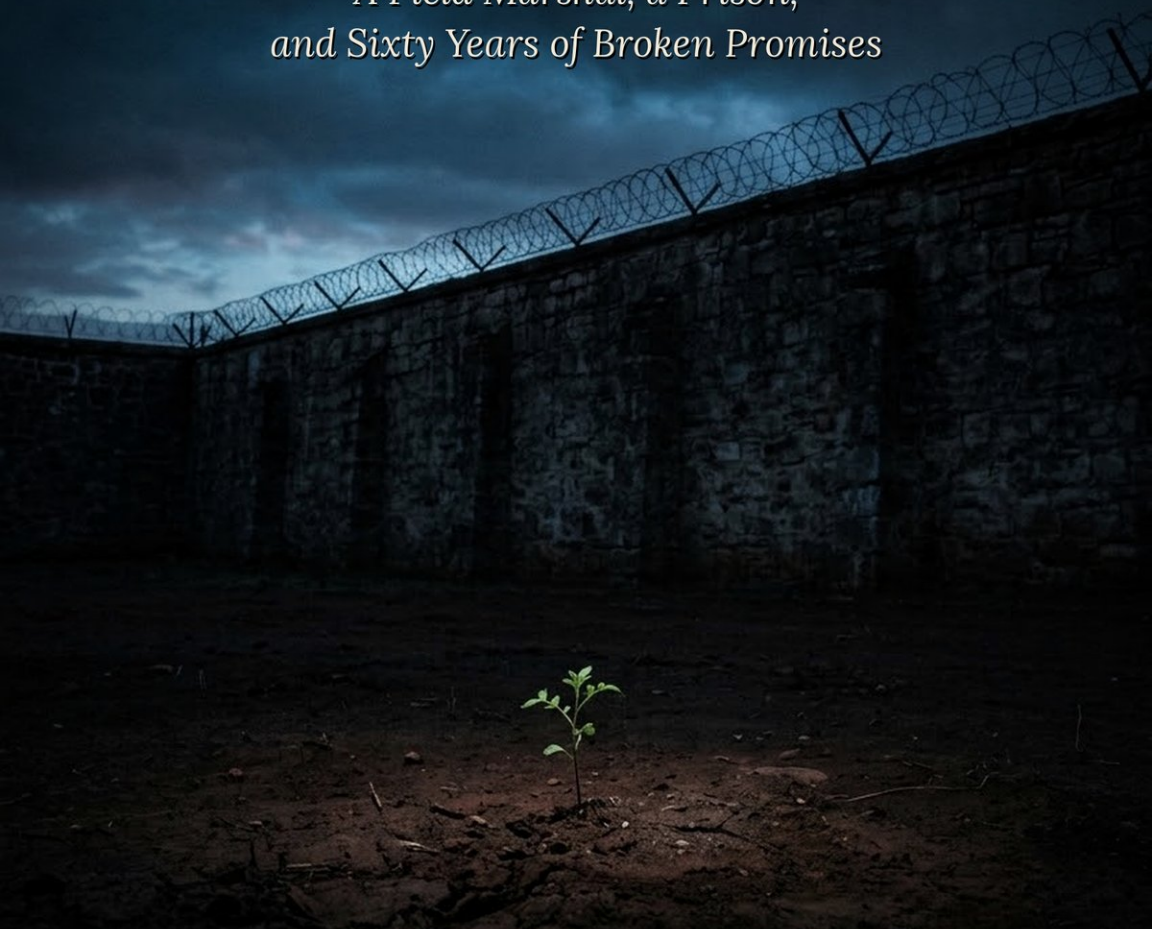


KAMITI, KENYA · 1957 – 2024

THE LOST GRAVE OF KIMATHI

*A Field Marshal, a Prison,
and Sixty Years of Broken Promises*



HANGED IN 1957. BURIED IN SECRET. NEVER FOUND.

GRAHAM KASINDO

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Cover design by Graham Kasindo

First edition, 2026

“My blood will water the tree of Independence.”

— Dedan Kimathi to his wife, Mukami, on the morning of his execution,
18 February 1957 (as she remembered it)

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Prologue

KAMITI PRISON. 18 FEBRUARY 1957. EARLY MORNING.

They hanged him before the sun was high.

A prison officer would later say that Dedan Kimathi went to his death “composed and quiet.” He was thirty-six. For four years, he had been the most wanted man in the colony of Kenya.

Then they buried him.

There was no ceremony. No family. No marker. The Field Marshal of the Mau Mau was put into the ground somewhere inside the walls of Kamiti.

Somebody knew exactly where.

Kenya became independent six years later. Governments came and went. Ministers stood up in Parliament and made promises. Prisoners who said they had carried the body came forward. Families dug. Scientists brought geophysics. His widow waited sixty-six years.

The country that Dedan Kimathi died for still cannot find him.

This is the story of how a nation lost its most famous grave, and of the people who have spent their lives looking for it.

CHAPTER ONE

Kimathi wa Waciuri

He was born **Kimathi wa Waciuri** on **31 October 1920**, in Nyeri District, in the highlands below Mount Kenya.

His father valued education, and the boy was good at it. He wrote well and spoke better. He was also, by the accounts that survive, fiercely competitive, a bully, and often in trouble with his teachers.

His early working life didn't hold together. In **1940**, he joined the British army and was discharged after a month, reportedly for drunkenness and violence. He herded pigs. He taught primary school, and lost that job too, after accusations of violence.

It was not the start of a man anyone expected to become a legend.

CHAPTER TWO

The Forest

In the late 1940s, working at **Ol Kalou**, Kimathi found politics.

He became branch secretary of the **Kenya African Union** at Ol Kalou in **1950**, in a branch run by militants. In **1951**, he took the Mau Mau oath and joined the group known as the Forty Group. He administered oaths himself, and he used beatings to force solidarity.

That same year he was arrested. He escaped, with the help of local police.

When the colonial government declared a State of Emergency and the war moved into the forests of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares, Kimathi went with it. In **1953**, he formed the **Kenya Defence Council** to coordinate the forest fighters. He became one of the Mau Mau's six **Field Marshals**.

To the colonial government, he was a terrorist and a murderer. To the fighters and to many Kikuyu villagers, he was the general who could not be caught.

For three more years, he wasn't.

CHAPTER THREE

The Hunt

The man who finally caught him was a colonial police officer named **Ian Henderson**.

Henderson didn't catch him with soldiers. He did it with information. His teams worked from intelligence gathered from disgruntled former Mau Mau fighters, men who knew the forest, the tracks and the habits of the Field Marshal.

Henderson would later write a book about the operation, *Man Hunt in Kenya*. He was awarded the George Medal.

By October 1956, the net was closing.

CHAPTER FOUR

The River Bank

TETU, NYERI. 21 OCTOBER 1956.

Near the village of **Kahigaini**, Kimathi was trying to climb a river bank when a bullet hit him in the thigh.

The men who shot him were a **Corporal Wanjohi** and a Tribal Policeman named **Ndirangu Mau**. The most wanted man in Kenya was taken alive.

He was wounded, and he was carrying a revolver.

That gun would cost him his life.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Hospital Bed

GENERAL HOSPITAL, NYERI. NOVEMBER 1956.

Kimathi was tried while he was still recovering from the wound. The court sat at his hospital bed.

He faced two charges: the murder of a Kikuyu home guard, and unlawful possession of a firearm: a **.38 Webley Scott revolver** and **six rounds** of ammunition. Under the Emergency Regulations, the firearm charge alone carried the death penalty.

The Crown tried him on the firearm charge. The murder charge was never pursued. It didn't need to be.

The case was heard by **Chief Justice O'Connor** of the Supreme Court, sitting with three African assessors. Kimathi was found guilty and sentenced to death.

27 December 1956. The Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa dismissed his appeal.

14 February 1957. In London, the Privy Council refused his petition.

He had four days left.

CHAPTER SIX

The Last Morning

KAMITI PRISON. 17 FEBRUARY 1957.

The day before his execution, Kimathi wrote a letter to a Catholic priest, **Father Marino**. He asked the priest to see that his son was educated, and to look after his wife, **Mukami**, who was herself in detention.

“I have committed no crime,” he wrote. “My only crime is that I am a Kenyan revolutionary.”

18 FEBRUARY 1957.

That morning, Mukami was brought to see him. They were together for close to two hours.

She would remember what he told her: “My blood will water the tree of Independence.”

Then she was taken away, and he was hanged.

No death notice gave a place of burial. No stone was raised. The grave was never marked.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Promise

Kenya. 12 December 1963. Independence.

The fighters who had gone to the forest came home to a country run by Africans. Many of them expected the new government to honour the Mau Mau dead. It was more complicated than that. The movement remained banned under colonial-era law.

PARLIAMENT. 1968.

An MP named **G.G. Kariuki** raised the question in the House: where was Kimathi, and when would he be brought out?

The Minister, **Mbiyu Koinange**, gave an answer that would haunt every government after him. The grave, he said, was “fenced and looked after” at Kamiti. The government would proceed as Kariuki proposed, relying on Mau Mau elders to locate it, and there were plans to move the remains to a better place.

It was the first time the government admitted it knew where the grave was.

It was also the last.

1969. The government changed its mind. An Assistant Minister, **Kamwithi Munyi**, told Parliament that singling out one freedom fighter for a ceremonial reburial would undermine national unity.

Nothing was done.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Mass Grave

NAIROBI. JULY 1990.

Nelson Mandela, free after twenty-seven years in prison, came to Kenya. He spoke of the Mau Mau as an inspiration for his own struggle. He asked to meet the Kimathi family.

The visit never happened. MPs who went looking found Mukami living in poverty in a leaking colonial-era house, in a place that was hard to reach. The embarrassment pushed the government to help the family. It did not bring them any closer to the grave.

PARLIAMENT. 1993.

Opposition MP **Kiraitu Murungi** raised the question again.

This time the answer was different. The Home Affairs Minister, **Francis Lotodo**, said the grave could not be identified: the colonialists had buried Kimathi “in a mass grave along with others.”

Murungi didn’t accept it. He said Kimathi had been buried under one of the prison walls, not in a mass grave. **Raila Odinga** challenged the minister’s claim too. The exchange turned heated. Murungi offered that his own party would pay for the exhumation.

In twenty-five years, the government's story had gone from a fenced, cared-for grave to a mass grave nobody could find.

CHAPTER NINE

The Diggers

11 NOVEMBER 2003.

Forty years after independence, the government of Mwai Kibaki formally registered the Mau Mau movement, setting aside the colonial law that had banned it. “It has taken 40 years for the group to be officially registered,” said Vice President **Moody Awori**.

Awori also revealed something new. Four prisoners, he said, had carried Kimathi’s body to the grave, and they could identify the spot. One of them had come forward.

KAMITI PRISON. 15 JANUARY 2004.

Kimathi’s family went into Kamiti with eight people who said they knew where he was buried.

They found nothing.

A government taskforce reported that it, too, could not locate the grave.

18 February 2007. On the fiftieth anniversary of his execution, President Kibaki unveiled a bronze statue of Kimathi in central Nairobi, at the corner of Kimathi Street and Mama Ngina Street.

He stands in combat dress, holding a rifle. It's the most visible monument in the country to a man whose body is still missing.

25 October 2019. The **Dedan Kimathi Foundation**, led by his daughter **Evelyn Wanjugu Kimathi**, announced that the grave site had been identified in the grounds of Kamiti. The family said they were waiting for court orders on exhumation.

The Ministry of Interior disagreed. The grave, it said, had not been found.

There was no exhumation.

CHAPTER TEN

The Widow

Mukami Kimathi had been in detention when her husband was hanged. She spent the rest of her life asking the same question.

In **2010**, she asked the government for a new search. The state built her a house and later gave her a vehicle. It never gave her an answer.

“I want to be shown my husband’s grave,” she said. “I want to know where he was buried... I do not want to die before being showed the exact place where my husband was buried.”

May 2023. Mukami Kimathi died in a Nairobi hospital, still not knowing.

“Our mother, the wife of a national hero, was not helped to find the remains of our father,” said her daughter, **Nyawira**.

At her funeral, President **William Ruto** and his deputy, **Rigathi Gachagua**, promised that the state would find Kimathi’s remains and give him a proper burial.

The same month, an old Mau Mau veteran, **Brigadier John Kiboko**, told *The Standard*: “We know where Dedan Kimathi was buried, we dug his grave.”

Epilogue

LOUISE LEAKEY AUDITORIUM, NAIROBI. 29 FEBRUARY 2024.

Scientists gathered for a workshop with a very specific title: *Unmarked Grave Search of Dedan Kimathi Utilizing Archaeological Geophysical Techniques*.

The family had been working with volunteers from Argentina, Brazil and the United States. A Kenyan archaeologist, **Charles Osango**, had joined them. Evelyn Wanjugu Kimathi had even raised the search with King Charles III when he visited Kenya in November 2023.

She said the family was optimistic that this time the grave would be found.

For nearly seventy years, the grave has been looked for with promises, with memories and with shovels. Now people are looking with science.

Somewhere inside the walls of Kamiti, under the ground, lies the man whose statue stands on Kimathi Street.

My blood will water the tree of Independence.

The tree grew. The grave is still lost.

THE RECORD

BORN	Kimathi wa Waciuri, 31 October 1920, Nyeri
CAPTURED	21 October 1956, Kahigaini, Tetu, shot in the thigh
TRIED	Supreme Court at Nyeri, from his hospital bed; possession of a revolver and six rounds
APPEALS	Dismissed 27 December 1956; Privy Council refused 14 February 1957
EXECUTED	18 February 1957, Kamiti Prison
BURIED	Unmarked grave, Kamiti; location never confirmed
SEARCHES	1968 promise; 1993 “mass grave” claim; 2004 dig; 2019 claimed find disputed; 2023 presidential pledge; 2024 geophysical survey
WIDOW	Mukami Kimathi, died May 2023, still waiting

The tree grew. The grave is still lost.

A Note from the Author

If this story stayed with you, you can buy me a coffee. It keeps the research going and helps bring the next one to you.

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CLICK MTAA TECHNOLOGIES	

Asante sana.

— *Graham Kasindo*