

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RFG - 4

Kikuyu Villagization

c/o Barclays Bank  
Queensway  
Nairobi, Kenya  
January 11, 1955

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The most encouraging events to happen in Kiambu District of Kenya in the last few weeks have been a series of confessions by repentant Mau Mau terrorists. Mr. Loyd, the District Commissioner, is quite optimistic about these confessions, which have taken place mostly in the bad Githunguri Division, and takes great pains to "organize" them so that they will be heard by the greatest possible number of Kikuyu. The most important confessions so far have been voluntary. Members of the gang which perpetrated the Lari Massacre got up before a "baraza" (a public meeting) in Githunguri and told in grisly detail of their parts in the affair; how, when the Lari chief could not at first be found, the order was given to indiscriminately murder everyone in the settlement; and later, when the chief had been found and killed, how the terrorists were required to drink his hot blood. Although voluntary confessions are strongly encouraged, the D.C. also attempts to persuade persons who are known or suspected to be Mau Mau adherents, through police investigation, to confess. There is some general cynicism about these rehearsed confessions which are alleged to be sometimes extorted through third-degree methods. But Mr. Loyd explains that every possible precaution is taken to prevent police brutality and also to discount false information offered because of fitina, i.e. quarrels and grudges between Kikuyu. He hopes that the present trend of confessions will take on epidemic proportions and by gathering momentum like a rolling snowball will be an important factor in bringing the Mau Mau emergency to an end.

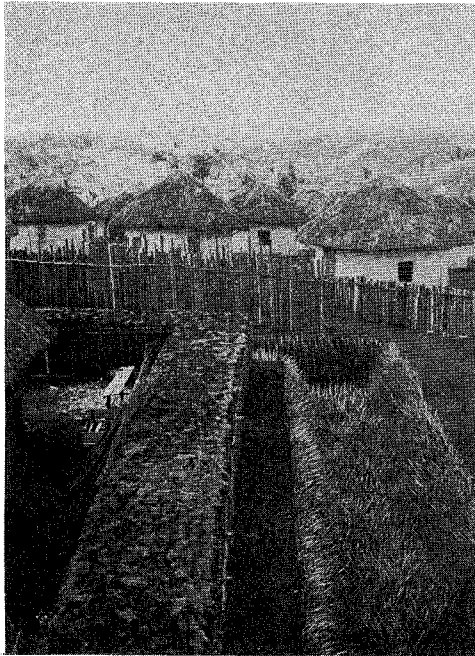
In many confessions there is mention of the names of other Kikuyu who have been active in Mau Mau--in giving oaths, taking part in terrorism, or providing gangs with food and supplies. These people are then investigated by the police and are frequently induced to confess themselves. At one baraza attended by 2,000 Kikuyu, a woman confessed and then described the offences of six other people whom she could see in the crowd. She gave them two weeks to confess voluntarily before she informed the authorities of their names. In general it is more advantageous for a Mau Mau to confess voluntarily than to be discovered through inquiries of the police. The D.C. hopes that the fear of almost certain betrayal will produce an increasing number of voluntary confessions. The present policy is to deal firmly but leniently with persons who confess. A heavy fine is usually imposed. Then if possible the offender is turned free to begin life over with no fear of further punishment. Imprisonment is avoided as serving no good purpose unless the crimes are very serious. Sometimes it is inadvisable to allow a confessed Mau Mau to remain in the local community because of the danger of reprisals by loyalists whose relatives have been killed or injured by terrorists.



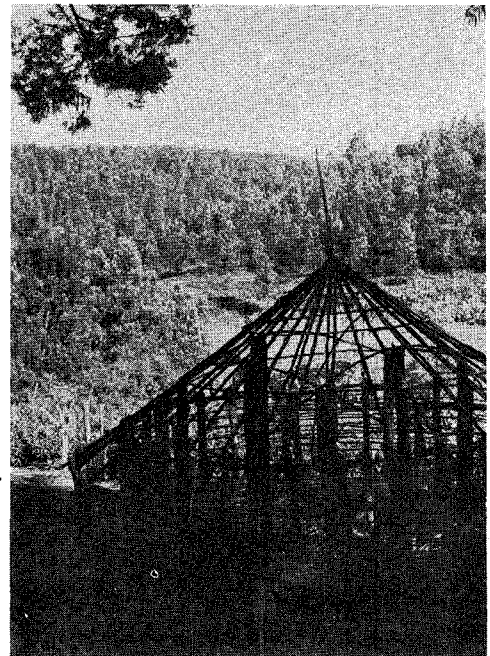
Family Plot in a "Permanent Village"

Although the present wave of confessions is encouraging, there have been many previous disappointments in the campaign against Mau Mau, and the authorities are rigorously maintaining all the security measures now in force and pushing forward with new schemes, the most important of which bears the awkward label of "villagization." It was realized early in the emergency that the Kikuyu were specially vulnerable to intimidation by underground terrorists because of their way of living in family homesteads scattered diffusely over the ridges that make up the Kikuyu Reserve. It was reasoned that the Kikuyu could much better defend themselves or be defended from Mau Mau gangs if they were concentrated in villages. Accordingly, a project of villagization was started. Further support for this policy came from the psychiatrist Dr. J.C. Carothers who stated his opinion in a special report ("The Psychology of Mau Mau," Govt. Printer, Nairobi, 1954) that certain unfavorable traits of individual and social psychology among the Kikuyu could be traced to the excessive individualism of their way of living, and that these might be corrected through villagization. The building of villages was first started in Nyeri and Fort Hall Districts along the forest edge. The individual homesteads in those areas had been virtually defenseless against the raids of gangs who descended from their forest hideouts at night to administer oaths and demand food and supplies. But when the people were moved into stockaded villages defended by Kikuyu Guard Posts there was a high degree of security against such raids. It is estimated that about 75% of the population in those areas are now living in villages. Because of the urgent nature of the danger, the villages were hastily built and proved to be not entirely satisfactory from either a sanitary or social viewpoint. At first they were unpopular with the natives, but as the advantages of security were appreciated they came to be accepted, at least grudgingly.

During the early days Kiambu District was comparatively unaffected by Mau Mau and villagization was not undertaken. In the last year, however, as the center of terrorist activity shifted from the outlying regions to Kiambu (see RFG - 3) it was found necessary to plan villages there also, as well as to greatly increase the number of Kikuyu Guard Posts. Profiting from the mistakes that had been made in Nyeri and Fort Hall Districts,



(Left) Ritho  
Village from  
Guard Post



(Right) Abandon-  
ed Homestead in  
Dangerous Ritho  
Valley



Ritho: a Family of Doubtful Loyalty

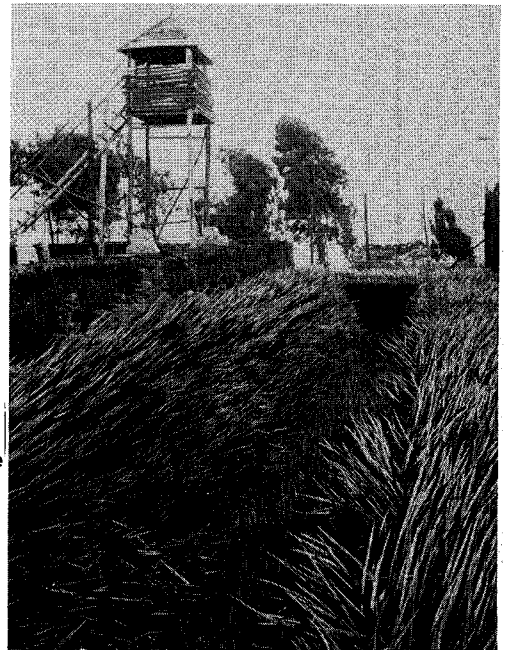
the Kiambu authorities planned their villages on an improved design which they hope will, if necessary, be permanently satisfactory. The final modification of the plan was made by the District Health Officer Mr. Waddicar. But before these improved plans could be put into operation, a number of villages were urgently required to protect the exposed population living on the margin of the Abedare and Kikuyu Escarpment Forests. These were quickly built from the resources which were locally available at that time. Thus the villages of Kiambu are divided into two categories, "temporary" and

"permanent." The former are meant to be used only as long as the emergency lasts or until they can be replaced by permanent villages. Some ten of the temporary villages have now been built. These again are subdivided into two categories: three "punitive villages" have been constructed in areas which were notorious for harboring Mau Mau gangsters and providing them with supplies; the other seven, called "protective villages," were built to protect people who are essentially loyal but exposed to gangster raids. The temporary villages are all constructed in the same way regardless of their purpose.



KIKUYU GUARD  
POST

(Left) Entrance  
with Drawbridge

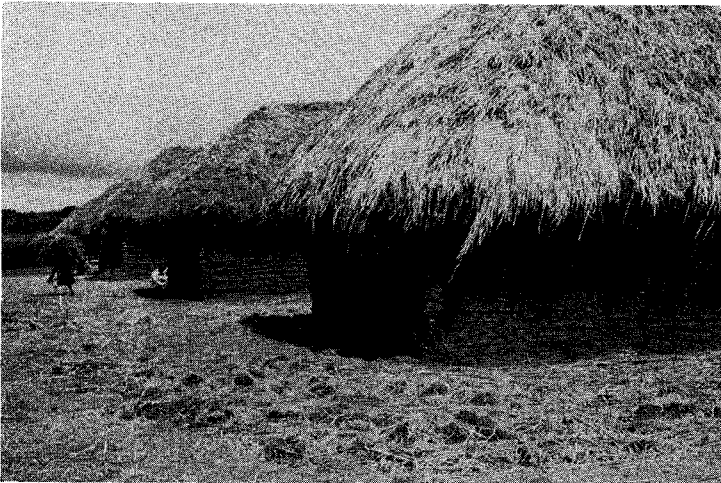


(Right) Moat  
Lined with Needle  
Sharp Franji

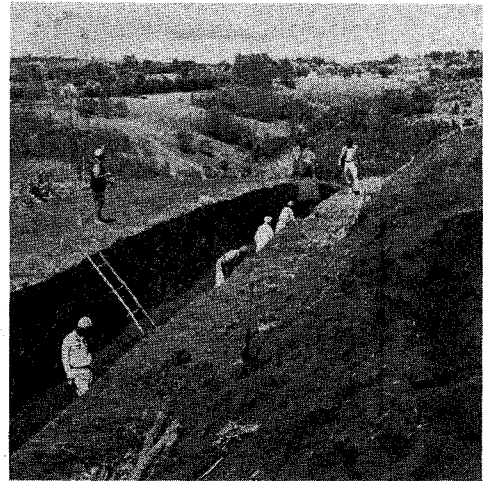
The permanent villages are carefully laid out with a view to their being used after the emergency if needed.

During several tours of Kiambu District with Mr. Waddicar I had opportunity to observe some of the temporary villages which are already built and some of the permanent villages under construction. About ten miles north of the D.O.'s Boma of Gatundu Division at the head of a wooded valley which was notorious as a Mau Mau hideout there was an exposed population. Gangsters frequently came out of the forest at night and demanded shelter and food from the isolated homesteads which were too dispersed to offer organized resistance. It was also known that many of the inhabitants of the area were sympathetic to Mau Mau. Therefore a temporary village was built on a narrow ridge at the top of Ritho Valley. To indicate its dual purpose, Ritho Village is classed as both a punitive and protective village. Before visiting Ritho we stopped at Gatundu Boma where Mr. Holmes, the D.O., provided us with an escort of a European policeman and several armed askaris. The narrow road as it approaches the village winds through the wooded valley and could easily be ambushed by the gangsters who are known to infest the region. The village, which has only recently been finished, is well situated for defensive purposes, but conforming to the crest of the ridge it is too elongated to fit the design of a permanent village. The 150 houses are aligned in more-or-less straight rows; the only strict rule is that they must be spaced with fifty feet between center poles. The whole village is surrounded with a double stockade with a fifteen-foot space between them which no one is allowed to cross. This space is smoothed and sprinkled with dust, and every morning it is examined to see whether anyone has entered or left the village during the night.

A Kikuyu Guard Post with a watchtower is located at the end of the village overlooking the valley. The only entrance to the village is dominated by the Guard Post which is fortified with a moat whose sides bristle with the pointed sticks called franji. The village accommodates 350 people. No unauthorized strangers are allowed into the village. The Kikuyu Guardsmen,



Prisoners Dwellings



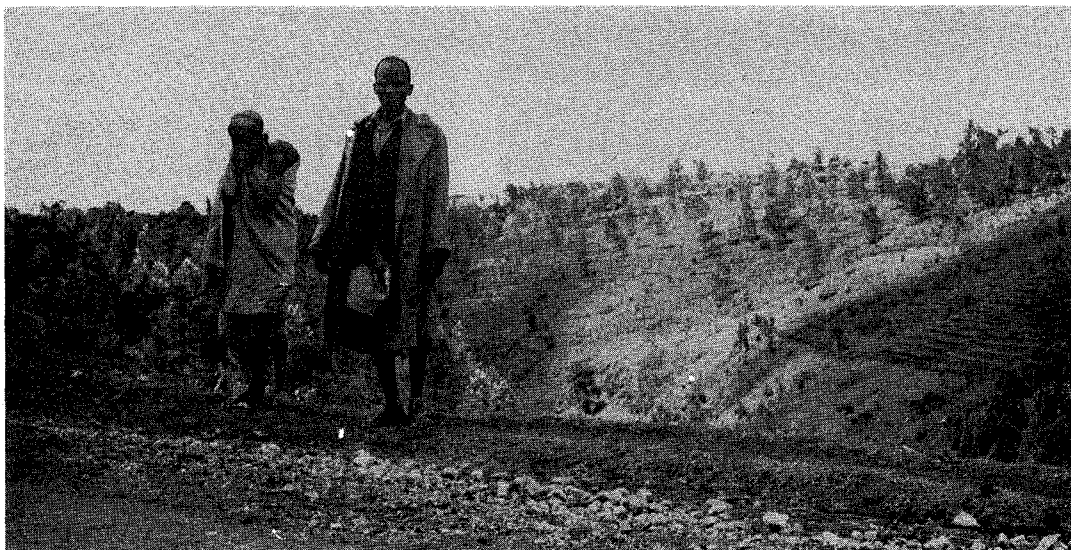
A Moat

### GITHIGA WORK CAMP UNDER CONSTRUCTION

as elsewhere in the Kikuyu Reserve, are identified by large brass emblems strapped to their arms. They are armed with spears, bows-and-arrows, and pangas. Because of the doubtful loyalty of the village, there are no firearms at this post. The duties of the guardsmen are to guard the village and patrol the surrounding region. Driving through the Reserve, one often sees Kikuyu patrols wearing colored headdresses which are meant to distinguish loyalists from the gangsters who sometimes falsely represent themselves as Kikuyu Guardsmen. The color to be worn for any one night is kept strictly secret till the moment that the patrol leaves the post, so that the Mau Mau have no time to prepare similar headdresses for the purpose of impersonating bona fide patrolmen.

Ritho is one of a chain of temporary villages in Gatunda Division which must be carefully supervised by the D.O. and his assistants. Githunguri Division does not have the same long exposed frontier and so the village problem is less urgent. But it has a labor camp located not far from the boma and police station. There the more reliable prisoners from detention camps are kept and put to useful labor on public works. With the help of this prison labor, the program for terracing hillsides has been greatly accelerated until some of the particularly hilly areas of the Reserve are taking on the appearance of a Japanese landscape. The aim of the agriculture authorities is to require the terracing of all cultivated slopes with a gradient of 20% or more. They have also ruled that terraces must be used for cultivating cash rather than food crops. The most important cash crop in this part of the District is pineapples, and throughout Githunguri and Gatundu the newly built terraces can be seen bristling with the spiny tops of pineapple plants. The abundant communal labor provided by Mau Mau prisoners has made possible the hillside terracing which stops erosion of the land and stimulates the growing of cash crops. Thus the economic welfare of the Kikuyu is being indirectly advanced by the Mau Mau movement, though in quite a different way from what was intended. Other measures for the prevention of erosion and improvement of the soil are the "paddock" rule—fencing off of pasture areas so that they can be allowed fallow periods of rest—and the building of compost enclosures for the purpose of returning waste vegetation to the soil as manure.





Githunguri Market—Selling Pineapples

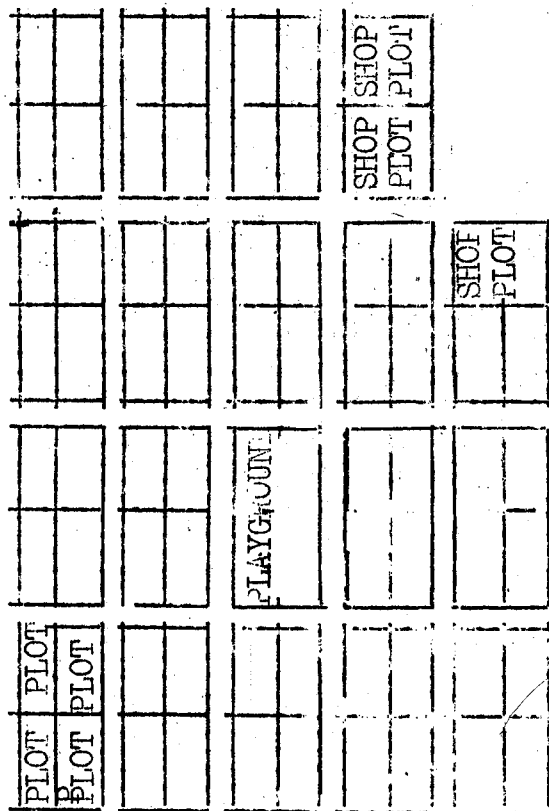
### Terraced Ridges in Githunguri

The labor camp near Githunguri is not well sited for sanitary purposes, and a new camp is being built at Githiga half way between Githunguri and Kiambu Township. This was sited and designed by Mr. Waddicar, and in so far as his plan is being followed, he is satisfied that it will be an ideal camp of its kind. Security against escape or attack is provided by a series of deep straight moats which can be illuminated by spotlights and guarded by sentries at night. Thus the interior of the camp can be left more open and hygienic than in the old camp.

The building of permanent villages is being carried out most intensively in the parts of Limuru and Kikuyu Divisions which border the Escarpment Forest. These villages are being built on the Waddicar plan. A large level area is required for a vil-

lage site--and such places are far from common in the Kikuyu Reserve. The area is then divided into four quarters, each of which is subdivided by streets into blocks containing four family plots. The center of the area is left open for a market space surrounded by shop plots. In the center of each quarter there is a playground space. Each family plot consists of three huts and a

Kikuyu Village Scale  $\frac{1}{2}$ " to one foot



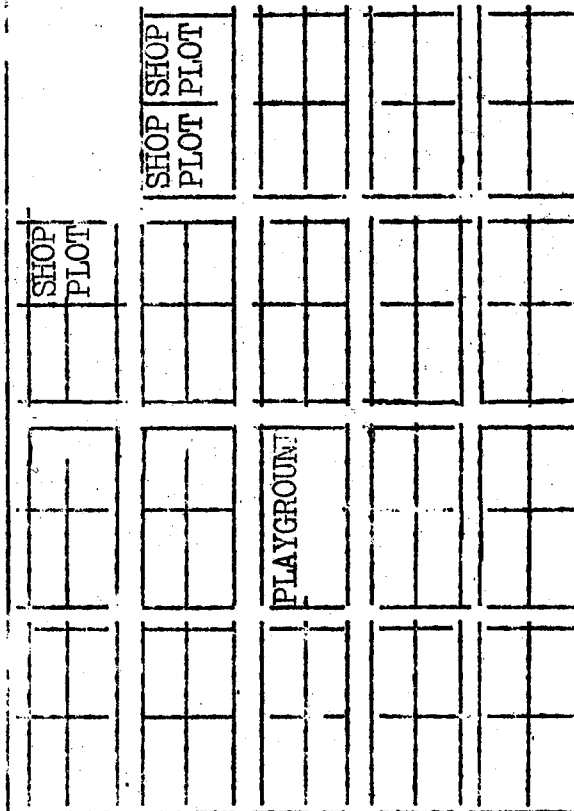
MAIN ROAD

50 feet wide road

MARKET OPEN SPACE

MAIN ROAD

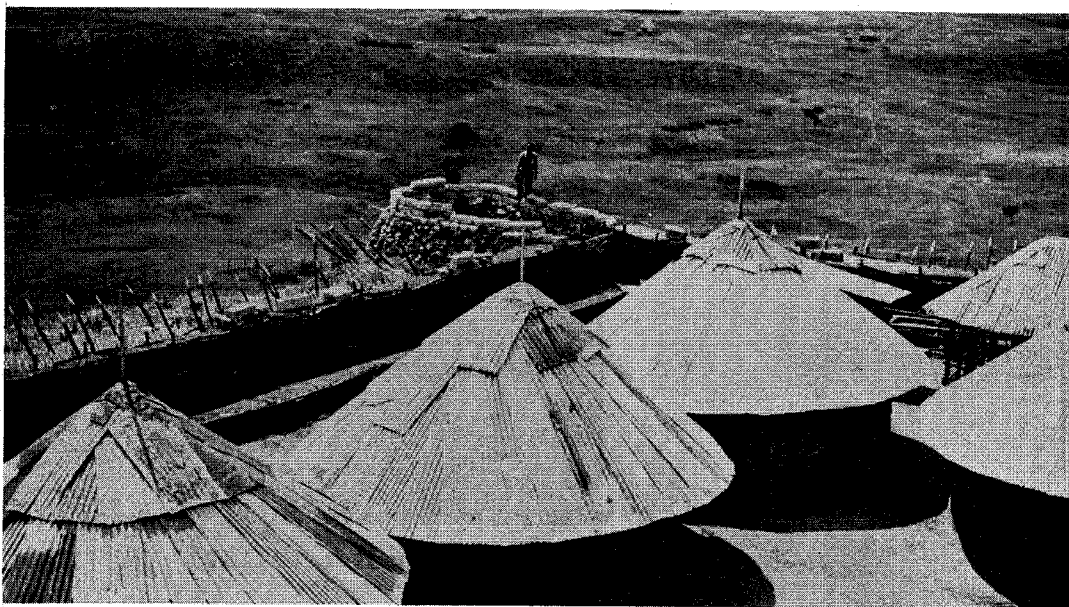
-6A-



H. WADDICAR.

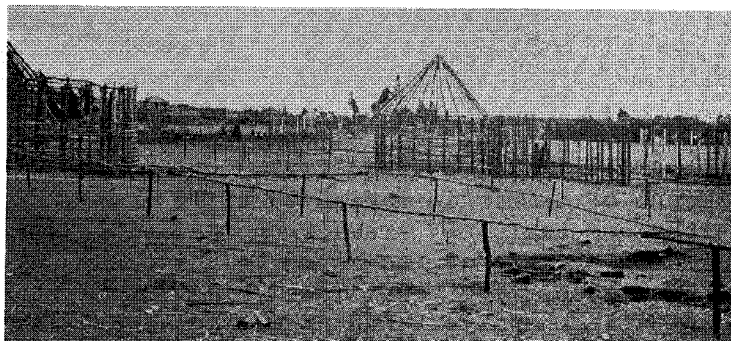




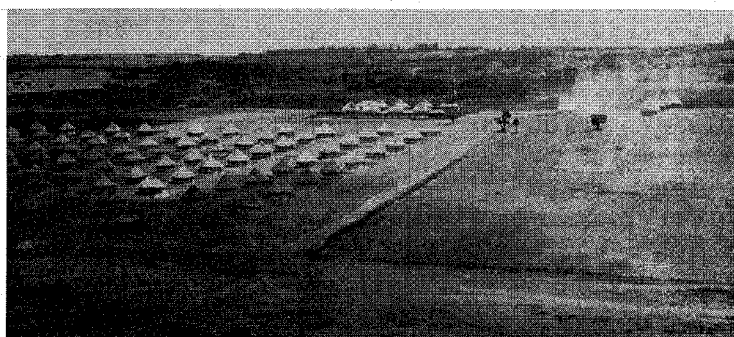


Turret of Losigeti  
Guard Post

Grain store. A latrine is shared by every two plots. In the case of large families, two or more plots may be assigned. It is not easy to determine in advance just how many people will comprise a Kikuyu family living under village conditions. This is one of the many sociological problems which will have to be worked out as the scheme progresses. The general layout of a standard village and family plot is presented in the accompanying sketches drawn by Mr. Waddicar.

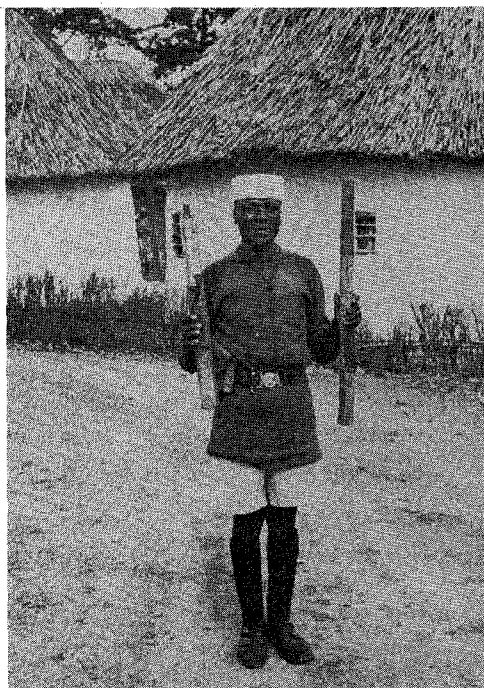


Building Kahingo Village



Tiikuno Being Completed on Approved Plan

A typical permanent village is Kahingo located about four miles from Limuru Railway Station. The village is being built on a plain which slopes gently away from a promontory on which is located the Kikuyu Guard Post. In the case of Kahingo the Guard Post is at the edge of the village facing the forest from which direction the main danger of attack lies. At the time of our visit the plots had all been staked out and the frames of about half of the houses were being built. The total area of the village is quite impressive. Kahingo is meant to accommodate 1,300 people, which is about average in size for a permanent village. As none of



Machine for Building Mud Walls

#### Homemade Mau Mau Guns--Pitted against European Armored Cars and Bombing Planes

the permanent villages are yet completed, one can only visualize in imagination what they will look like when filled with whitewashed thatched huts. An enormous amount of timber is needed to build a village. At Kahingo the poles and sticks are hauled by truck from the nearby forest, but at less favorably situated villages it is necessary to reuse some of the timbers from the abandoned homesteads. The traditional Kikuyu house has a circular wall of mud packed between a double frame of wicker work; it is then plastered and whitewashed inside and out. It is covered with a conical thatched roof. Rules governing the construction and dimensions of houses have been laid down. Because of the large amount of wood required for the wall frames, the authorities are trying to devise a method for building the walls of mud alone. For this purpose a machine has been invented for molding solid blocks of mud tempered with grass. It consists of a central steel pole with a horizontal moveable arm which can be adjusted for height. At the end of the arm is a mold into which mud is packed. The newly formed mud block is left in place on the lower range of blocks and the arm is then swung in position for the adjoining block. In this way the ascending ranges of blocks are laid perfectly level and circular. It is not yet certain how long these pure mud walls will stand up in use, though, and the machine is still in the experimental stage.

Tiikuno village some miles south of Kahingo was started before the standard village plan had been worked out, because of urgent need to protect the population of the region. It is being completed according to the approved plan and will ultimately be of mixed design but able to provide homes for 2,000 people. At Tiikuno the fortress for the Kikuyu Guard is located in the center of the village in order to better repel attacks from any side. The actual work of constructing villages is done by the local Kikuyu who will inhabit the village, under the supervision of the D.O. of the Division and his staff. In most cases there is passive resistance from some of the Kikuyu who are reluctant to give up their old homes. The Mau Mau themselves do everything possible to hinder villagization, so that during the building

of a village the strictest security precautions must be observed. To stimulate effective work on the part of the Kikuyu, in most cases a deadline is set for the completion of the village. After that the huts of the old homesteads will be burnt whether or not the village is finished.

The largest village planned so far is Losigeti in Kikuyu Division. At the last moment it was decided to make it a double village and it will be inhabited by 3,000 people. As yet it has only been staked out with the frames of a few huts being built here and there. From end to end Losigeti extends as far as the eye can reach. The guard post is located at one side of the village on the brink of a cliff which joins the Rift Valley Escarpment further west. It somewhat resembles a medieval fortress with turrets and redoubts overlooking the valley which is frequented by Mau Mau gangs. At Losigeti, as at other important guard posts, a European officer is in command and stays at his post all night. These young men work under a terrific strain which clearly shows in their expressions and manners, and the same is true of the Divisional D.O.s in Kiambu District. The officer in command at Losigeti, acting on information received by the police, takes a patrol on ambush duty about three nights a week. In these operations, the Kikuyu Guardsmen making up the patrol are not informed of the location of the ambush beforehand. The loyalty of the Post as a whole is too doubtful and there would be danger of the information leaking out so that the ambushers might themselves be ambushed.

At Dagoretti Location near Nairobi the same need exists for concentrating the scattered population, but for various reasons the building of villages is considered unfeasible there. As an alternative, a project which is called "ribbon development" is being carried out. Several straight roads have been laid out extending for about three miles and lined with a single row of huts on either side. It is considered that these communities can be adequately defended by patrols marching up and down the roads at night.

The ultimate fate of the Kikuyu villages in Kiambu is still a matter of debate. The Medical Department favors them as permanent institutions because the control of health and hygiene would then be considerably improved. It is also generally believed that the political life of the people would develop in a more orderly manner under conditions of village life. The Agriculture Department, however, looks on villagization with disfavor. The traditional Kikuyu methods of cultivation are intricate and delicate, and it is feared that agriculture might seriously deteriorate under village life, where a man's (or more properly, a woman's) fields may be miles from his home. At present it is necessary to bring all the cattle inside the village at night. This will require new methods of herding which will be different from when the livestock was kept in the scattered homes of the District. It will now be difficult to transport animal manure from the villages to the outlying fields where it is needed to enrich the soil.

Mr. Loyd, who recently spent six months in the United States studying soil erosion problems and farming methods, takes a flexible in-between view. To start with, he is fairly optimistic about the whole Mau Mau problem in Kiambu. He does not think it will be necessary to villagize the whole population. At present about 35 permanent villages are under construction. Possibly 10 more will be needed in the future at most. Altogether, less than 35% of the population of Kiambu District should be living in villages when the emergency ends. Mr. Loyd believes that these villages should remain and possibly others be built. But they should be greatly reduced in size.

Land owners would then be returned to their homesteads to carry on agriculture by traditional methods. The small villages scattered about the District would be inhabited by artisans and traders and would serve the functions of market villages as they exist in agriculture regions of other countries.

Regardless of the final destiny of Kikuyu villages, there remains the more immediate problem of the changes and sociological adjustments which a society like the Kikuyu tribe must make when they rapidly undergo a radical change in their conditions of life and modes of association. The situation existing in Kiambu offers a fascinating laboratory for the study of the processes of rapid culture change. But unfortunately it is virtually impossible to carry on anthropological research among the Kikuyu at present, and the opportunity may be lost before peace is restored.

Sincerely,

*Robert F. Gray*

Robert F. Gray

Received New York 1/18/55.