



1 Saturday, March 31, 2012. At about 6pm Agnes and her friend Florence Mugo enter Sharlocks Hotel bar in Nanyuki. Agnes starts speaking to a British soldier. Mugo leaves and catches a motorcycle taxi to Lions Court hotel, a popular drinking spot



2 9pm. Agnes arrives at Lions Court to find Mugo and another friend, Susan Nyambura, in the bar. Agnes is out of breath. She says she "picked a soldier's pocket" but got caught



3 The three friends mix with dozens of British soldiers who have booked rooms at the hotel. Eyewitnesses say some of the soldiers are drunk and dancing with local women, many of whom are sex workers



4 Agnes and a British soldier are seen dancing and drinking beer. At midnight, a guard escorts them to the soldier's room. Later, a night porter says he heard a "fierce row" inside the room. Nyambura waits until 3am for Agnes but she never returns



5 Sunday, April 1. Agnes's family and friends begin a search after she fails to return home to her sister's apartment in Majengo. A missing person's report is made to Nanyuki police station. Officers visit the hotel but find nothing of significance



6 Tuesday, June 5. Agnes's body is found in a septic tank at the hotel. She is naked except for a white bra and a necklace. A post-mortem examination finds she has been stabbed in the chest and abdomen, and has been badly beaten



7 Kenyan police begin a murder investigation and identify nine soldiers present the night Agnes died, who are now back in the UK. Police say they asked for them to be questioned and DNA-tested but the Ministry of Defence says no request was received



8 February 2021. The Directorate of Criminal Investigation, Kenya's FBI, visits Agnes's family and informs them that a fresh inquiry has begun. Officers say they want to travel to the UK to interrogate "a number of British soldiers"

I believe British soldiers killed my sister. Now I want the truth

Nine years ago a young mother was found dead in a septic tank in Kenya. She vanished after British troops enjoyed a debauched night out in a hotel. Now detectives want to question the soldiers who were there

DAVID COLLINS AND HANNAH AL-OTHMAN



On a humid Saturday night in March 2012, a slim young woman with long braided hair walked into the air-conditioned bar of the Lions Court Inn hotel in Nanyuki, Kenya. Agnes Wanjiru, 21, sat at a table with two friends. Beside them a dancefloor heaved with dozens of British soldiers, drinking bottles of Tusker beer, dancing with local women and taking them back to their rooms.

At about midnight, Agnes – who had left her five-month-old daughter with a babysitter – left the bar arm-in-arm with a soldier. It would be the last time she was seen alive.

Two months later the sex worker's battered body was found in the fetid sludge of a septic tank yards from the hotel the soldiers had occupied.

The murder shocked the quiet town, and risked serious political ramifications for the British and Kenyan authorities.

By then, the British soldiers had left for home. One of those present that night remembered the night of Agnes's death as a debauched evening of "non-stop" sex with local prostitutes in return for only a few pounds.

It was all night, [soldiers] ferrying women back and forth to the rooms, which were like these huts," the former infantryman said. "You could do whatever you wanted."

But on his return to the UK, rumours had started. "There was a lot of talk among the soldiers that a soldier had killed her [Agnes]."

"I heard there was a soldier boasting about killing a prostitute in Nanyuki."

Kenyan police identified nine soldiers they wanted questioned over Agnes's murder. They asked the British Royal Military Police (RMP) to question the soldiers and take DNA samples. Last week the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said it

received no such request. The inquiry stalled, and the case was never solved.

A new investigation has begun into the murder, however, after an inquest delayed by more than six years found that Agnes was killed unlawfully. The MoD confirmed last week that it was now assisting the Kenyan authorities "to determine what support is needed".

Detectives from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, Kenya's FBI, visited Agnes's family in February. The focus of their inquiries? The same nine suspects, all serving infantrymen at the time, who were at the bar on the night Agnes died. Hotel logs show they had booked rooms, yet they were never questioned.

Agnes's sister, Rose Wanyua Wanjiku, 48, said: "They claimed they had the names of the soldiers and would carry out the interviews, even if it meant flying to the UK."

Confidential documents relating to the original Kenyan police investigation in 2012, seen by this newspaper, raise serious questions for the British armed forces.

The documents show that at least four witnesses saw Agnes leave the hotel bar with a British soldier and go to the soldier's room. One of those witnesses claims to have heard a "fierce row" break out in the room between the pair. They also show that Kenyan detectives specifically asked the British military to question the soldiers and take DNA samples – yet neither happened.

"There was so many of us about you couldn't do something like that without being seen," the soldier said.

"[But] when you're in the army and you're talking about a foreign prostitute from Kenya, most people wouldn't give a f**k to be honest. Most [soldiers] would help cover it up."

Rose, who has raised Agnes's child, Stacy, says she believes the Kenyan and British authorities have allowed Agnes's killer to escape justice for nine years because they believed the death of a girl from a poor family could be "overlooked". She said: "From the first day we reported the case at the police station, the police did nothing until her body was accidentally recovered."

"She was in the company of some British soldiers. I believe they were responsible. The Kenyan police should have forced the British Army to produce the culprits to face the law."

Last week The Sunday Times tracked down two of the nine soldiers who were in the hotel the night Agnes vanished. They denied involvement in her death. Both confirmed they had not been questioned by either the British or the Kenyan authorities.

"Nobody's been in touch with me," one soldier said. "I've never been questioned by the army or the police about it."

The DISAPPEARANCE The dusty market town of Nanyuki is heavily dependent on the money spent by soldiers from the British Army base up the road in Nyati Barracks. Sex work is rife. Local girls can earn the equivalent of a week's salary by sleeping with a British soldier and charging about £30, although some charge just a few pounds for sex.

Agnes – struggling to support her daughter and living with her sister in a single room in the town's Majengo ghetto – was one such sex worker desperately trying to make ends meet.

"Agnes was a cheerful and friendly girl, just like her daughter, Stacy," Rose said. "On the day she disappeared, she was just as happy as ever."

That Saturday, Rose returned to their home in a maze of shacks with corrugated metal roofs and rickety wooden walls to find that Agnes had gone out, leaving her daughter with a neighbour.

Agnes had headed into town with her friend Florence Nyaguthi Mugo, then aged 21 and working as a hairdresser. Agnes had no pockets, so gave Mugo her national identity card to put in her trousers for safekeeping.

On their way, Agnes and her friend stopped at Sharlocks Hotel bar, where Agnes chatted to a British soldier described by witnesses as very drunk.

Some of the soldiers had been drinking at the local supermarket since the start of the evening, one of them remembered.

"They were buying alcohol for pre-drinks before the hotel," the former infantryman said.

"Some were drinking in taxis with sex workers. The taxis were full of soldiers and prostitutes. Everyone was pre-drinking with them, and obviously everything's dead cheap."

Mugo asked Agnes for money to catch a boda boda (a motorcycle taxi), and went ahead to the Lions Court hotel, a popular night-time drinking spot with a lively dancefloor. Mugo arrived to find another friend, Susan Nyambura, 22, and the two of them sat at a table, drinking water and waiting for Agnes, who turned up at about 9pm.

The bar and dancefloor were heaving by then, according to Simon Minja Gionga, 28, a hotel waiter.

"I can remember the bar had so many customers," he told police in his witness statement. "Normal customers, British Army soldiers and local whites. Some customers were sitting, others were dancing with African women. The bar



was hectic. So many whites were dancing with black women."

The hotel staff were used to British troops looking to let off steam after combat training on the plains of Kenya. A soldier there on the night says he remembers "about 60" soldiers staying in the hotel that night, mingling with up to 40 local sex workers.

"It's the culture," said the soldier. "Even if you go to Germany or Cyprus, you go out on the piss and you go pick up prostitutes. That's just how life is. You're away for weeks and weeks on end. That's the only opportunity you're going to get and so you're going to pay for it. I'd say the majority of soldiers had sex with multiple prostitutes that night. Obviously I had sex with girls. I don't think I saw Agnes but I can't be sure."

Agnes brought water and she and her two friends went to the dancefloor where, according to several witnesses, she met a British soldier who started to chat to her.

"While dancing I saw the deceased [Agnes] dancing with a white man – probably a British Army soldier," Nyambura's witness statement said. "By that time the deceased was holding a bottle of beer. In the hall the whites were so many and all drunk. I saw the deceased moving out of the bar with one of the whites and I assumed they were going into a room."

Nyambura's evidence was corroborated by Mugo, whose statement said that Agnes had ordered a drink, which was then paid for by "a soldier of the British Army whom she found in the bar of Lions Court Hotel".

Her statement continued: "She was dancing with that soldier and after a short time I could not see her. I assumed they had gone into a room."

His maintenance manager, John Gichuki, opened a manhole belonging to one of three septic tanks inside the walled compound. He found a woman's body submerged in the filth, naked except for a white bra and a necklace.

On the other side of Nanyuki, Chief Inspector Mohamed Jerumani was on patrol when he received a phone call from Wangari. "He informed me that there was something terrifying at his hotel that he wanted me to see," Jerumani's witness statement said. "We headed straight there."

The body was transported to Nanyuki district hospital mortuary where it was identified as Agnes by her sister.

Eight days later a post-mortem examination found she had died as a result of stab wounds to her lower right abdomen and her chest. There were also signs she had been badly beaten. With the condition of her body, it was not possible to determine whether she had been sexually assaulted.

The next day, she visited Agnes's home in Majengo to check on her, but Rose said she hadn't turned up from the night before. Concerned, Nyambura returned to the Lions Court with a friend in order to retrace Agnes's steps.

At the hotel, she bumped into a guard she knew and asked him if he had seen Agnes. The night guard said he had escorted them to the door of the soldier's room in the hotel and saw them enter.

"He said he had seen her and actually led her to a room with the European," Nyambura told police.

The guard had not been concerned for Agnes's safety; the pair had seemed to be getting on well.

By late Sunday evening, Agnes's sister and friends were becoming worried and decided to report her missing at Nanyuki police station.

"A report was made at the station and efforts to trace her were launched but to no avail," read an official police report. "Several visits were made to the hotel in a bid to uncover the mysterious disappearance of the lady but couldn't yield any fruit."

One of the hotel guards confirmed he had escorted Agnes and a British soldier to one of the rooms – lodges on the grounds of the hotel that have beds with mosquito nets. "From that point the lady was never seen coming out of the room, neither did she return to her home," Jabali wrote in one of his reports.

Mugo told police in her witness statement that at least one soldier in Nanyuki had reason to be angry with Agnes: she had stolen money from him.

"She [Agnes] turned up at Lions Court Hotel out of breath, sweating and panting, like she'd been running," Mugo told detectives. "I asked her what was wrong, and she said, 'I picked a Johnny's pocket and was caught. I did it for my baby. There was enough money for a nice life.'"

Mugo added: "She was desperate. She needed some money to look after her baby."

A night porter at the hotel said he had heard a "fierce fight" in the room being occupied by Agnes and the British soldier. He heard several voices and had suspected there was more than one soldier in the room, according to Kenyan police officers who worked on the investigation.

Most soldiers would help cover up

British soldiers undertake hot climate training in Kenya, where a new deal with the British Army base near Nanyuki is vital for the economy of the town and the wider region

Agnes's disappearance would remain a mystery until two months later, when a disturbing discovery was made by staff at the Lions Court.

Two of the rooms occupied by British soldiers were next to the septic tank where Agnes was found.

However, a lack of forensic evidence hampered the investigation. By the time the murder inquiry was launched two months after Agnes's disappearance, the room she occupied with a British soldier had been repeatedly cleaned.

NO MILITARY INQUIRY On June 16, Jabali met Major Phillips from the RMP, who handed over the names, ranks, regiment and battalion of the soldiers who were staying at Lions Court that night.

"I can confirm that all of the detailed soldiers are no longer undertaking training in Kenya," Major Phillips wrote.

He promised that the UK would continue to assist the Kenyan police. But when Jabali wrote to ask that the soldiers be questioned and DNA-tested, the request appears to have gone missing.

A letter dated June 20, 2012, sent from Detective Jabali to RMP officers in the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK), made specific requests for assistance in the investigation.

It included a photograph of Agnes and a list of 13 questions to put to the nine suspects including: Did any of them have sex with any girl during the night? Did they exchange contacts with any lady during the night? Had they checked into the hotel in a group or separately? Did each of them know which room they slept in or did they share a room?

The letter added: "There is another request if it is possible to get DNA profiles of each of them if your laws allow... I can as well give you the deceased specimen samples to compare with theirs in your laboratories."

"Looking forward to your co-operation and hope to hear from your office the soonest."

Sources at the MoD say they never saw the request. The soldier says never questioned or asked for DNA.

To make matters worse, witnesses from the Lions Court hotel were unable to pick out the soldier who went to the room with Agnes from photographs, saying they could not be certain.

One told police: "They're white British soldiers – they all look the same." The investigation has stalled ever since.

The new inquiry team for the Kenyan authorities is said to be "concerned" about the standard of the original investigation.

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