

# LA BELLE DISCOTHEQUE

**Situation:** US troops at a Berlin discotheque did not know they were targets of international terrorists.

On April 5, 1986, a Libyan terrorist bomb killed two US Sergeants and a Turkish woman and injured 230 others in a crowded West Berlin nightclub. No one noticed a suitcase packed with explosives in the bathroom and US troops were an easy target at 2:00 AM on a Saturday morning.



Libyan leader Colonel Qadhafi praised the attack as a revolutionary act. This was one in a series of Libyan terrorist attacks and US counterattacks in an on-going dispute in the Mediterranean in the 1980s. Local threat conditions in Berlin gave little warning of the attack. A 15-year German investigation and trial resulted in the conviction of four individuals in November 2001.

Public places with large groups of US troops are appealing targets. Your best defense is to stick to places with good security. Try to avoid large crowds of US troops in public locations.

Be alert even when local conditions are not threatening. An alert observer might have noticed the suspicious suitcase in the bathroom.

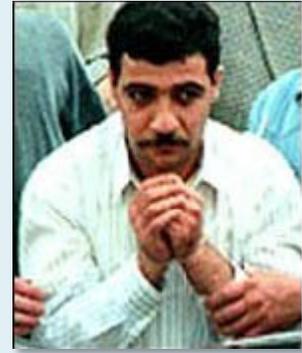


US forces in Europe were on a high state of alert because of warnings of anti-US terrorism. Three days earlier, on April 2, the Abu Nidal Palestinian terrorist group bombed TWA Flight 840 flying from Rome to Athens. An explosion shook the aircraft as it approached Athens, taking four lives. US intelligence concluded that Abu Nidal acted on orders of Colonel Qadhafi to avenge US missile attacks on Libyan PT boats the previous month.

Earlier on the night of April 5th, British intelligence intercepted a message to Tripoli from the Libyan embassy in East Berlin predicting a joyous event. The intercepted message was routed to the US Army brigade stationed in West Berlin.

Remote events might provide hints of a growing threat. The Libyan Government chose to strike US troops with a terrorist bomb since it could not succeed in a direct confrontation with conventional weapons.

The Brigade Commander, BG Thomas Griffin, mobilized US military police patrols to check bars in Berlin, looking for suspicious individuals or activities. American soldiers in West Berlin frequented many local bars, but there were not enough MPs to clear them all out quickly. A team of MPs was only 300 yards from the La Belle discotheque when the bomb went off.



The suitcase bomb consisted of three kilograms of plastic explosives mixed with nails and was left in a bathroom. Evidently, no one in the nightclub noticed the abandoned suitcase. The explosion killed two American Sergeants and a young Turkish woman. 230 others were wounded, including several dozen American troops.

Efforts to alert US troops during off-duty hours in West Berlin were made, but no means existed to get the word to all off-duty troops. It is best to avoid off-duty locations with large numbers of US troops.

[A Palestinian employee of the Libyan Embassy in East Berlin, Yasir Shraydi \(at left\), planned the attack. He recruited a German woman to carry the bomb into the discotheque in a travel bag.](#)



US analysis proved Libyan, Syrian, and Palestinian roles. An intercepted message from Libya to its Embassy in East Berlin called for an attack with maximum victims. Also, Libyan leader Qadhafi praised the attack as a revolutionary act, so on April 15, President Ronald Reagan ordered air strikes against Tripoli.

A 15-year German investigation resulted in convictions on 13 November 2001. A German woman, Verena Chanaa, was given 14 years for murder; she carried the bomb into the disco in a travel bag. A Palestinian employee of the Libyan Embassy, Yasir Shraydi, organized the attack and received 14 years for attempted murder. A Libyan diplomat, Musbah Eter, was given 12 years as an accomplice. A Lebanese-born German, Ali Chanaa, 42, former husband of Ms. Chanaa, was given 12 years.

Investigation and prosecution of terrorists is often a long and difficult process, requiring cooperation between governments. The United States is committed to pursuing justice even through long delays as Libyan diplomat and intelligence operative, Musbah Eter (pictured at left), learned.

[You may avoid becoming a statistic by recognizing and avoiding situations in which Americans might be susceptible targets.](#)