

= Monbar Hotel attack =

The Monbar Hotel attack was carried out by the GAL , a state @-@ sponsored death squad , on 25 September 1985 in Bayonne , France . The targets were four members of ETA military , whom the Spanish government believed to be senior figures in the organisation , itself proscribed as a terrorist group in Spain and France . All four people were killed , with a fifth person , apparently unconnected to ETA , injured in the shooting . This represented the deadliest attack carried out by the GAL . Although two of the participants were apprehended shortly after the shooting , controversy surrounded the possible involvement of senior figures in the Spanish police .

This attack , and similar attacks carried out by the GAL , became a major issue during the 1996 Spanish general election after a Supreme court trial established that the Spanish Interior Ministry had provided clandestine funding for the GAL . Spanish Interior Minister José Barrionuevo and his security chief , Rafael Vera , were jailed for ten years for sanctioning a kidnapping and misappropriation of public funds to finance the group , and the GAL scandal is seen as a key factor in the Spanish Socialist Workers ' Party (PSOE) losing the election , though more senior figures in the PSOE , such as Felipe Gonzalez , denied knowledge and involvement .

= = Background = =

The French Basque Country had been a favourite haven of ETA . Since mid @-@ 1968 most of ETA 's leadership had lived there and used it as a base for training , infrastructure and planning attacks . ETA commandos also operated from there , crossing the border into Spain to carry out attacks before fleeing back to France . This led to complaints in Spain that French authorities were not doing enough to tackle ETA activity , preferring to leave the Basque conflict to the Spanish to deal with .

As one of the larger towns in the French Basque Country , Bayonne had been one of the main bases of ETA organisation there . From 1975 onwards this had prompted a reaction from anti @-@ ETA groups . In April 1975 , Mugalde , a Basque bookshop in the town , was bombed , though no one was injured . On 25 June 1979 , Enrique Gómez Álvarez , an alleged ETA member , was killed by the Batallón Vasco Español (BVE) , a right @-@ wing paramilitary group active since 1975 .

The BVE vanished after 1981 but , from 1983 onwards , the GAL began carrying out similar attacks and abductions . The first in Bayonne occurred on 17 October 1983 , when alleged ETA members Joxe Lasa Arostegi and José Ignacio Zabala disappeared . Their mutilated bodies were found in Alicante in 1985 . An unsuccessful kidnapping attempt occurred the following day and , in December , Ramón Oñaederra , an alleged ETA member and Mikel Goikoetxea , an alleged ETA leader , were assassinated by the GAL in separate incidents . Prior to the Monbar attack , two people had been killed and six injured in three separate attacks in the town in 1985 .

= = The targets = =

The targets of the attack were four members of ETA . According to the Spanish authorities , they had a long history within the organisation .

Ignacio Asteazunzarra (Beltza) had been arrested in 1973 in Loyola , but had been freed by other ETA militants at gunpoint . He was believed to have been part of a cell which had been particularly active in 1979 in attacks in the province of Álava .

José María Etxaniz (Potros) had begun activity in 1973 . He had been arrested by Spanish police in 1975 , along with 21 others in connection with a large haul of guns and explosives discovered . He had been arrested again by French police in 1984 . He was the leader of ETA military in the Vitoria area , according to Spanish police sources .

Agustin Irazustabarrena (Legra) belonged to the Segia cell of ETA military , according to Spanish police . He fled to France in 1982 and in 1984 he had been arrested by French police charged with possession of illegal weapons . His trial had still been pending at the time of his death . He was believed to be in charge of cross @-@ border operations for ETA .

José Sabino Etxaide had belonged to an information gathering cell of ETA . He had fled to France in 1982 .

= = The attack = =

The attack occurred at 21 : 15 on a Wednesday evening , as a football game featuring Spain and Iceland was being shown . The four participants exited their car carrying shotguns and machine guns and opened fire on the bar . The bullets shattered the skull of three of the victims and hit the fourth in the heart . Three of the targets were killed instantly , with the fourth dying shortly afterwards in hospital . A fifth person was injured after being hit in the foot , but survived the attack .

Three of the four attackers fled on foot through the streets of Bayonne . Pursued by a group of Basque refugees who had witnessed the attack , two of them were caught and handed over to the French police , after having thrown their weapons into the river near the Monbar Hotel . Those apprehended were Pierre Frugoli and Lucien Mattei , both believed to be members of the Marseilles underworld by French police . Police later retrieved two 9mm calibre pistols from the river . Their two accomplices in the attack managed to escape by car . Their vehicle was later found abandoned in San Sebastián .

The GAL claimed responsibility in a telephone call the day after the attack . For their part , ETA military released a statement confirming that the four killed had belonged to their organisation .

= = Reactions = =

Basque president José Antonio Ardanza Garro condemned the attack : " attacks like this do not help us to consolidate democracy or overcome the problems of violence in our society . This attack could provoke a response and a further spiral of violence . " The Basque Nationalist Party voiced suspicion that the attacks were part of a dirty war being carried out by the Spanish state . Herri Batasuna , the political wing of ETA , also accused the Spanish secret services of complicity in such attacks and delivered a letter of protest to the French consulate in Bilbao , criticising the French for perceived inaction against the killers . The PSOE , at that time the governing party of Spain , condemned the incident as an attack on " the freedom of the Basque people " . Their chairman in the Basque Country , Juan Manuel Eguigaray , stated that he did not believe that the solution to ETA violence was to have similar terrorists trying to even the score .

Euskadiko Ezkerra , the Communist Party of Spain and the People 's Alliance also issued statements condemning the attack . Herri Batasuna organised numerous protests against the incident , which at times resulted in street violence and arrests . They also organised a general strike in the Basque Country , though observance of this was limited to San Sebastián and the home towns of those killed .

= = Trials = =

The trial of Pierre Frugoli and Lucien Mattei opened on 30 November 1987 in Pau , France . Mattei , who had been previously been released after serving one year of a 20 @-@ year sentence for armed assault , retracted his previous confession . Frugoli , however , acknowledged that he had set out to kill ETA members . He stated that he had been recruited by members of the Spanish secret services , codenamed Francis and Miguel , in La Samaritaine bar in Marseilles port . With Mattei , he made several trips to San Sebastián to receive instructions for the attack , the last in the city 's Orly Hotel three days before the attack . He claimed that Francis had offered him 100 @,@ 000 francs for carrying out the attack and 50 @,@ 000 more for each person killed . Francis then met them in Bayonne , supplying them with the weapons used in the attack and the identities of the desired targets .

Both Frugoli and Mattei identified Francis as José Amedo Fouce , a police sub @-@ commissioner in Bilbao . Hotel records showed that Amedo had stayed in the Orly hotel at the same time as Frugoli and Mattei . The French judges issued an international arrest warrant for Amedo , whose

spokesman denied the charges .

On 2 December 1987 , both defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment , with a recommendation that Mattei should serve no less than 18 years in prison . Frugoli 's sentence was subsequently reduced to 20 years in prison . Their accomplices in the attack were never identified .

Lawyers for the prosecution suspected that the Miguel who had recruited the mercenaries was Michel Dominguez , a Spanish police officer of French origin who worked with Amedo . In April 1990 a waiter at Londres Hotel and a security employee at the Kursaal casino in San Sebastián both stated that they had seen Amedo and Dominguez on various occasions in the company of Mattei and other GAL mercenaries .

In March 1991 , the case against Amedo and Dominguez in relation to the Monbar attack was dropped due to lack of evidence . However , in September 1991 , both Amedo and Dominguez were sentenced to 108 years in prison for organising other GAL attacks . In November 1994 , Spanish High Court judge Baltasar Garzón reopened the case against them for the Monbar attack .

Subsequently , three others , Julián Sancristóbal , Juan Alberto Perote and Francisco Álvarez , were implicated in the case . Sancristóbal had been the former director of state security , Perote the former head of the Spanish secret service , while Álvarez had been head of the anti @-@ terrorist squad . They all denied the accusations . The Monbar case was closed in October 2001 , with Garzón declaring that , although suspicions remained about involvement of some of those accused , there was insufficient evidence to prosecute .

= = Consequences = =

Author Paddy Woodworth argued that " the GAL campaign caused many French Basques to see the (Spanish Basque) refugees as causing a rapid decline in the local economy , especially the tourism business , as the news spread that the bars and boulevards of the region 's coastal resorts were now the targets of a terrorist group . " Consequently , the French authorities began to change their stance on the refugees , increasing cross @-@ border cooperation with their Spanish counterparts . This involved deporting ETA members to various other countries and putting greater restrictions on those who remained .

As the Monbar case and similar cases came to light , the GAL issue became increasingly controversial in the 1990s , with questions over whether members of the Spanish government and state security service had known about the group 's operations in places like Bayonne and , if so , to what extent they had supported and funded the attacks . This became a major issue during the 1996 Spanish general election with Spanish Interior Minister , José Barrionuevo , and his security chief , Rafael Vera , implicated in the GAL case . In 1998 , both were jailed for ten years for sanctioning a kidnapping and misappropriation of public funds to finance the GAL . Along with various corruption scandals and the poor state of the Spanish economy in the mid @-@ 1990s , the GAL scandal is seen as a key factor in the PSOE defeat .