

Beirut Bombing: 40 Years Later

VFW remembers the 241 U.S. troops killed in the 1983 terrorist bombing in Beirut, Lebanon

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On Oct. 23, 1983, U.S. troops were awakened at 0622 when a suicide bombing took place at the barracks housing U.S. peacekeeping forces.

The site of the truck bombing was at Lebanon's Beirut International Airport, where 220 Marines, 18 sailors and three soldiers were killed. The U.S. — along with the United Kingdom, France and Italy — were in Lebanon's capital city to be part of the Multinational Peacekeeping Force. U.S. troops were sent to Beirut after the start of the 1982 Lebanon War.

In addition to U.S. troop deaths, 58 French troops and six civilians died in a separate suicide bombing at the Beirut airport just minutes after the U.S. barracks was attacked.

MARINES RECALL BEIRUT

When interviewed in 2003 about his experience, David Madaras, a former Marine of C Battery, 1st Bn., 10th Marines, said he remembers the explosion being “ear shattering” and having his face “seared” from the heat of the blast. Madaras added that after the initial explosion, he started looking for survivors. He recalled seeing two men carrying a stretcher.

“Initially, my sight was drawn by the sun's almost blinding reflection coming from a shiny belt buckle cinched around the waist of the stretcher's cargo,” said Madaras, a member of VFW Post 9862 in Gaithersburg, Maryland. “What makes the image so unforgettable is that there was no body above the belt buckle.”

During rescue efforts, Madaras said he remembered swinging a sledgehammer “in a frantic effort” to save a Marine trapped in slabs of concrete.

“I watched, sickened by a feeling of helplessness, as he received his last rites,” Madaras said. “Our efforts to free him were futile. I can still see his body becoming lifeless and hanging limp as he lost his struggle to survive.”

John Evans, a member of VFW Post 201 in Waterbury, Connecticut, told VFW magazine

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that he was in Beirut as part of 3rd Bn., 8th Marines. Evans said Marines were there to “keep the peace” but said he felt as if peacekeeping forces were not making a difference.

“Marines are trained to be aggressive,” Evans said. “Hell, we couldn’t even lock and load.”

The U.S. withdrew troops from Lebanon in 1984. After 18 months in country, 238 Marines had died and 151 had been wounded, according to the Marine Corps’ official history.

This article is featured in the 2023 October issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.