

**26 September
1980**

The Oktoberfest Bomb Attack



City of Munich



Tatjana Neef

**26 September
1980**

**The Oktoberfest
Bomb Attack**

**Department of Arts and Culture,
City of Munich (ed.)**

Contents

Foreword	
Dieter Reiter, Mayor of Munich	6
1980 – The 146th Oktoberfest	11
The Bomb Attack – 26 September 1980	11
After the Bomb Attack	14
Police Investigations	19
After Closing Proceedings in 1982: New Questions, New Findings	26
The Oktoberfest Bomb Attack in the Public Conscience	36
“Time heals no wounds” – The Consequences for Victims and their Families	45
The City of Munich’s Commemorative Research Project	48
Sources	52
Picture Credits	54

Foreword

It is certainly not the first thing that comes to most people's minds in conjunction with the 'Wiesn' but it is nevertheless inextricably linked to it – the Oktoberfest bomb attack of 26 September 1980. The devastating bomb explosion near the main entrance to the festival ground killed twelve people at that time, as well as the perpetrator himself, and injured 221 others, some severely. It was the worst bomb attack in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. The bomber was identified as the extreme right-wing student Gundolf Köhler. His links to the extreme right-wing political scene, however, were ignored in the 1980s by the investigating authorities. As a result, the socio-political context surrounding this act of terrorism and the involvement of possible accomplices were disregarded for a long time.

Journalists, lawyers, political alliances and relatives of those killed doubted the results of the investigation – which pointed to a non-politically motivated single bomber – for decades. Their call for proceedings to be resumed was not met until 2014. Despite intensive efforts, the reopened investigation did not result in the background to the attack being fully clarified. The reasons for this are, in particular, certainly to be found in the massive shortcomings and failings of the original investigations immediately after the attack. Investigations were finally suspended in July 2020.

It is disappointing and regrettable that so many questions will remain unanswered as a result. My thoughts are, first and foremost, with the victims, their relatives and the many people who were injured in the bomb attack on 26 September 1980. For these people in particular it would have been important to have finally gained some clarification and precise background information into the attack and possible accomplices. This has only been achieved in part. Nevertheless, at a time in which the lasting danger of right-wing terror has become apparent in an alarming way, it is all the more important that the attack is finally officially referred to by what it is: an extreme right-wing terrorist attack.

The suffering of those affected can, of course, not be put right through this, but it is an important and long-overdue signal that the extreme right-wing motif behind the attack is acknowledged by the investigating authorities and made known as such. Ultimately, apart from grief, commemorative work and a thorough historical analysis, it is also a question today of putting a stop to right-wing extremism and contempt for others and working actively to promote freedom and human dignity.

The City of Munich was similarly late in committing itself to clarifying this extreme right-wing bomb attack and to making others aware of it. A research project was initiated in 2015 aimed at documenting the poignant, personal fate of victims of the Oktoberfest bomb attack and at counteracting the process of suppression and forgetfulness. An event held in the Old City Hall in September 2015 marked

the launch of this research project. One of the couples affected by the attack kindly answered my request to talk publically about the injuries they sustained and the resultant negative impact on their lives today. The insight they provided was deeply moving and shameful at the same time as, all too soon, people are left to cope with their fate alone and disappear from view although they are in real need of our care and support. Bearing this in mind, I am very pleased that, since 2017, the City Council has made € 100,000 available for concrete supportive measures for those affected.

So that everyone can find out about what happened on 26 September 1980, the aftermath and the fates of those who survived, the site of the attack and place of commemoration at the main entrance to the festive ground now includes a documentation of the events. I am especially pleased that, from the very outset, the exhibition was created in conjunction with survivors. I would like to thank everyone most sincerely for their work and, at the same time, give an assurance that the City of Munich will continue to face up to its responsibility in the future as well and carry on its work in the fields of information and commemoration.



Dieter Reiter
Mayor of the City of Munich



The Oktoberfest Bomb Attack

1980 – The 146th Oktoberfest

The Bomb Attack – 26 September 1980

As in previous years **the 146th Oktoberfest** attracted a large number of visitors. More than five million were drawn to the 76-acre festival ground overlooked by the statue of Bavaria. In the evening of 26 September 1980, shortly before the festival tents closed in the late evening, the unthinkable happened. At 22:20, opposite the traffic island on the Bavariaring circuit road on the north side of the Theresienwiese, not far from the main entrance to the festival ground, there was a powerful explosion. An explosive device placed in a metal litter bin mounted on a traffic sign pole exploded with devastating consequences. When the emergency services arrived on the scene they were confronted with the injured and the dead on the road within a radius of 23 metres. The blast accompanying the detonation was immense. Although the injured were taken care of immediately, help came too late for twelve people and the perpetrator himself. They died at the scene or in the hours and days that followed. 221 people were injured, 68 of them badly. Some of the victims suffered severe burns that were caused by the intense heat generated. As the police later reconstructed during their investigations, the bomb was a self-made explosive device. A number of people had injuries from metal splinters that were so bad that limbs had to be amputated and organs removed. Several victims were still being treated in hospital or rehabilitation clinics weeks or even months after the attack. In some cases, the



lives of victims and their families and of those who assisted the injured and collected the bodies at the scene are still affected by physical and psychological injuries to this day.

The Victims

- Gabriele Deutsch** (*1962)
 - Robert Gmeinwieser** (*1963)
 - Axel Hirsch** (*1957)
 - Markus Hölzl** (*1936)
 - Paul Lux** (*1928)
 - Ignaz Platzer** (*1974)
 - Ilona Platzer** (*1972)
 - Franz Schiele** (*1947)
 - Angela Schütterigkeit** (*1941)
 - Errol Vere-Hodge** (*1955)
 - Ernst Vestner** (*1950)
 - Beate Werner** (*1969)
- and the perpetrator**
Gundolf Köhler (*1959)

The 'Theresienwiese' festival ground showing the scene of the attack and the memorial site

After the Bomb Attack

One day after the bomb attack there was little to show there had been an explosion, apart from the flowers that has been placed on the site. On the one hand, this was due to where the centre of the explosion was, namely at the edge of the festival ground where there was virtually nothing else. Neither fairground rides nor beer tents were damaged. Other than a few twisted traffic signs, broken paving slabs and burst window panes, the material damage was limited. One day after the attack most had already been cleared up. On the other hand, Erich Kiesl, the mayor of Munich in office at that time, decided in the night of 26 to 27 September that the Oktoberfest was not to be closed. This decision, that some considered as lacking a proper sense of reverence, was based on two things. In addition to the already high number of visitors to the Oktoberfest that weekend, football fans were expected in the city for a match between Hamburger SV and FC Bayern München. The police feared that the disappointment of finding the festival tents closed could possibly turn into aggression that would be difficult to bring under control. And because it was assumed that the bomb attack had a terrorist background, the decision also rested on the wish to demonstrate resolve. The mayor phrased it as follows: *“Neither this State, nor this city or its citizens will be held to ransom by criminals. A closure would only support the condemnable intention of the perpetrator. For this reason we must say: life must go on.”*¹ And so the Oktoberfest continued; around one



The Oktoberfest was suspended for one day on 30 September 1980

1 Schmalz, Peter, 'Wir dürfen vor der Gewalt nicht kapitulieren' in *Die Welt*, 1 October 1980



Mourners at the scene of the bomb attack



Memorial service at the scene of the bomb attack, 26 September 1981

million people visited the festival ground that weekend. An official memorial ceremony in the Old City Hall and an ecumenical church service, a wreath-laying ceremony and several other events to mark the attack took place four days later, on 30 September 1980. On that date, the Oktoberfest remained closed for the day to commemorate the victims of the bomb attack.

Police Investigations

The police started investigations immediately after the incident. Considering the severity of the bomb attack and the fact that **Bundestag elections** were to be held nine days later, expectations were very high that it would be cleared up quickly. Initial speculation about the reasons behind the bombing was rife. Nobody doubted that the explosion had been an act of terror. There seemed, however, to be some debate about what was behind the attack. Who was responsible for it? Was there more than one bomber? Was this a politically motivated act? And, if so, were those responsible to be sought in extreme left-wing or right-wing circles?

On 5 October 1980, elections for the 9th German Bundestag were held. The Federal Chancellor in office, Helmut Schmidt (SPD), managed to beat the contender from the Conservatives, the Bavarian Minister President Franz Josef Strauss (CSU). This had been preceded by a highly polarised election campaign dominated by the question of security policies.

Initially overshadowed by competency disputes at State and Federal Government levels, the Oktoberfest Task Force (Sonderkommission Theresienwiese – ‘Soko’) was set up comprising, at times, around 100 officers from the State Office of Criminal Investigation (Landeskriminalamt – LKA) and the Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt – BKA). Based on the belief that it was an act of terror, additional investigation proceedings against ‘persons unknown’ were opened by the Federal Public Prosecutor General at that time, Kurt Rebmann. The investigation, therefore, became the responsibility of the Federal Government.

By Saturday, just one day after the bomb attack, the Soko had already identified the geology student **Gundolf Köhler** as the bomber. He also died during the attack. Witnesses had seen him at the scene just before the explosion. The distinguishing features of the injuries on Köhler’s body backed up witnesses’ statements and left no doubt that he was the perpetrator – the first result of the investigation. The fact that Köhler himself could no longer be interrogated about the attack and the reasons behind it impeded further proceedings and left questions unanswered.

Gundolf Köhler was born on 27 August 1959. He grew up in Donaueschingen where he attended the ‘Gymnasium’ and took his school leaving exams in 1978. Even as a youth he had experimented with explosives in the cellar of his parents’ house. During basic military service he set his sights on a training programme to become an explosives expert. Due to a hearing disorder, however, he was prematurely dismissed from military service. Köhler, who had right-wing leanings, already had contact in the mid-1970s to the ‘Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann’ (WSG), founded by the right-wing extremist Karl-Heinz Hoffmann, and took part in field exercises. In 1978 Köhler approached Karl-Heinz Hoffmann and asked him for his support in establishing a WSG group in Donaueschingen. Hoffmann, however, referred him to a WSG group that was already being set up in Tübingen. After his military service Köhler started studying geology in Tübingen. On 26 September 1980 he carried out the bomb attack in Munich in which he was also killed.

Cf. Heymann, Tobias von, Die Oktoberfest-Bombe. München, 26. September 1980 – Die Tat eines Einzelnen oder ein Terror-Anschlag mit politischem Hintergrund? Berlin 2008, p. 51ff.

Through establishing his personal data, the first details about Köhler as a person and his political leaning in particular became known. Köhler had already been registered by the intelligence service in the past due to his contact to the extreme right-wing group, the **'Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann' (WSG)**. In the light of this, it was assumed that the WSG would be held responsible for the attack. The investigation in the first few days, therefore, concentrated on the paramilitary 'sports group' around Karl Heinz Hoffmann that had already been banned in spring 1980. Parallel to the arrest of former members of the WSG, several house searches were carried out in the Federal Republic, including in Ermreuth Castle, the organisation's former headquarters and Hoffmann's home. Neo-Nazi material, grenades and explosives for military use were seized. Shortly afterwards, Georg Tandler (CSU) – the Bavarian Minister for Home Affairs in which the LKA is a subordinate division – made it publically known that the WSG was responsible for the bomb attack.² One day later, however, the members of the WSG were released from custody as no evidence of any connection to the attack could be found. Tandler moved away from the theory of the WSG's involvement propagated at the outset and, from then on, only spoke of the attack being carried out by one individual. A speaker for Kurt Rebmann, the Public Prosecutor, on the other hand, was more reserved. Although he did not dismiss the single bomber theory, he considered the participation of several people more probable, without mak-

The 'Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann' (WSG) was a pronounced neo-Nazi terrorist group that trained neo-Nazis in the martial arts as well as in the use of weapons and munition. It was founded in 1973 by the most prominent right-wing extremist in Germany in the 1970s, Karl Heinz Hoffmann. Due to its anticonstitutional orientation, the WSG was banned in January 1980 by the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

Cf. Fromm, Rainer, Die 'Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann': Darstellung, Analyse und Einordnung: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen und europäischen Rechts-extremismus, Frankfurt/Main et al. 1998, p. 439ff.

² Anon., 'Rebmann: Schwerster Anschlag' in *Bild*, 29 September 1980.

ing a direct reference to the WSG.³ A dispute between the Bavarian ministry and the Public Prosecutor ensued as to the possible involvement of a third party in the attack.

In the meantime, the police had been able to reconstruct the composition of the explosives. Thanks to fragments of the bomb that had been recovered they came to the conclusion that the core of the bomb was self-made and consisted of a CO₂ propellant cylinder with a British mortar shell inside. A search of the cellar at the house of Gundolf Köhler's parents revealed notes on how to make explosives and detonating devices, as well as particles of paint that were of the same material as traces of paint found on the bomb fragments. They were seen as evidence that Köhler had not just detonated the bomb but had also built it himself. In the course of the weeks and months to follow, more than 1,800 witness were questioned⁴ in an attempt to reconstruct events surrounding the attack. Some eye-witnesses testified that they had seen Gundolf Köhler near the scene of the crime accompanied by several other people. These people, of whom only vague descriptions could be made, were however not tracked down. Similarly, a case that Köhler allegedly had with him at the time of the attack was neither among the pieces of evidence recovered nor ever found anywhere else.

3 Anon., 'Generalbundesanwalt hält Bombenleger nicht für Einzeltäter' in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 1 October 1980.

4 Cf. Heymann, Tobias von, *Die Oktoberfest-Bombe. München, 26. September 1980 – Die Tat eines Einzelnen oder ein Terror-Anschlag mit politischem Hintergrund?* Berlin 2008, p. 89.

Although it was never possible to retrace the sequence of events surrounding the attack in its entirety, the Bavarian LKA discontinued its investigations in May 1981. One-and-a-half years later, in November 1982, the Federal Public Prosecutor General terminated his investigations as well. The conclusions made in the final reports hardly differed from one another. In both, Gundolf Köhler is named as the sole perpetrator who built the bomb, took it to the scene of the attack and detonated it himself. The involvement of third parties is considered a possibility in the report by the Public Prosecutor but classified as impossible to prove. Despite initial belief, a participation by the WSG is dismissed in both reports. Based on statements from people who knew Köhler, he is described as a young man with extreme right-wing leanings and an exaggerated interest in explosives. Personal frustration and an uncontrollable hatred of his immediate surroundings were given as motives for the bomb attack.

After Closing Proceedings in 1982: New Questions, New Findings

Since official investigations were terminated in 1982, doubts about the results brought to light have been raised time and again. These led to a number of initiatives to resolve unanswered questions. The lawyer Werner Dietrich, who still legally represents several people injured in the attack, filed a petition three times for proceedings to be reopened. His first two applications (in 1983 and 2008) were officially rejected by the Public Prosecutor “due to the lack of new evidence”. It was only at the third attempt in 2014 that Dietrich – and, as a consequence, all those who questioned the single bomber theory – was successful.

It was not only family members and victims of the attack who entertained doubt about the results of the investigation. Initiatives were also repeatedly launched from within the ranks of politics to have information surrounding the attack scrutinised once again. In 1981, the SPD member of parliament and Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Herta Däubler-Gmelin, made an ‘interpellation’ for the re-evaluation of the Oktoberfest bomb attack after evidence had emerged that the explosives had possibly come from extreme right-wing circles. In 2005, on the 25th anniversary of the attack, an alliance of several organisations (also comprising trade unions and anti-fascist associations) as well as individuals – including several city councillors and regional and federal SPD politicians – once again attempted to have the LKA

and BKA re-open investigations. Four years later, members of parliament from the BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN fraction submitted a ‘minor interpellation’ on the Oktoberfest bomb attack to the Bundestag.⁵ The reply issued by the Federal Government stated that “no sufficient or actual new leads or evidence” existed that could give occasion to investigations being resumed.⁶ All initiatives up until 2014 to have the case re-opened or a new investigation started were turned down by the Public Prosecutor and the BKA, always referring to insufficient leads and the lack of new evidence.

- 5 Minor interpellation by the MPs Hans-Christian Ströbele, Jerzy Montag, Volker Beck (Cologne), Monika Lazar, Silke Stokar von Neuforn, Wolfgang Wieland, Josef Philip Winkler and the BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN fraction, in Parliamentary Reports 16/13305, German Bundestag, 4 June 2009, ‘Oktoberfest-Attentat – Stasi-Notizen und Indizien betreffend Beteiligung der ‘Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann’ sowie Verbindungen zu ‘Gladio’.
- 6 Reply from the German Government to the minor interpellation by the MPs Hans-Christian Ströbele, Jerzy Montag, Volker Beck (Cologne), further MPs and the BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN fraction, in Parliamentary Reports 16/13527, German Bundestag, 22 June 2009, ‘Oktoberfest-Attentat – Stasi-Notizen und Indizien betreffend Beteiligung der ‘Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann’ sowie Verbindungen zu ‘Gladio’.

All efforts were essentially driven by the same motivating force – the wish to clarify controversial findings from investigations (such as the analysis of statements from witnesses, where the explosives came from and the involvement of the ‘Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann’). The scepticism is supported – among other things – by the publication of *Oktoberfest. Ein Attentat* by the journalist Ulrich Chaussy, in which he juxtaposes his research with the investigations carried out by the police and the law and highlights unanswered questions and irregularities.⁷ One of the main points of criticism is the speed in which it was established that the attack was the work of a single individual despite several statements by witnesses to the contrary, non-attributable evidence and the self-incrimination of two former WSG members of their participation in the attack. In this respect, it is presumed that the Bundestag elections on 5 October 1980 had a decisive influence on how the Bavarian police investigators proceeded and their findings. It can also be assumed that a successfully swift investigation not only suggested stability and security to the general public but that it was also aimed at relativising an error of judgement made earlier by the Bavarian Minister President and Federal Chancellor candidate, Franz Josef Strauss. Strauss had not only classified the danger from left-wing extremists as being considerably higher than from right-wing extremists but had also described the ban on the WSG in spring 1980 as an over-reaction.⁸ The

7 Chaussy, Ulrich, *Oktoberfest. Ein Attentat*, Darmstadt/Neuwied 1985.

8 Heymann, Tobias von, op. cit., p. 215ff.

involvement of organised right-wing extremists in the findings could well have had a negative influence on his candidature to become Federal Chancellor.

Doubts about the single bomber theory and Köhler’s motives were also fuelled by articles published by the journalist Tobias von Heymann. Following the collapse of the Communist Eastern Bloc in the late 1980s researchers once again began analysing the Oktoberfest bomb attack in a variety of different ways. This was largely due to being able to draw on documents that had been inaccessible up until that time. In this way, von Heymann was able to examine files from the East German Ministry for State Security (Stasi) specifically for records related to the Munich bomb attack.⁹ He combed through more than 6,000 documents that alone makes it clear that the Stasi not only followed the investigations into the bombing very attentively but also considered the attack to be a politically motivated act by right-wing extremists. Heymann draws attention to one document in particular in which the Stasi refers to surveillance of the WSG by the intelligence services in the states of Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg. This had in fact been ordered 22 hours before the explosion in Munich under the code name ‘Aktion Wandervogel’, leading to the Stasi assuming that West Germany state security possibly had knowledge of an impending attack.¹⁰

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 131ff.

Apart from Stasi files von Heymann analysed press reports published around the time of the attack. Here, he also found indications that Köhler well may have had accomplices as, one day after the Oktoberfest bomb attack, several daily newspapers in Munich had received an anonymous call from a woman. The wording was always the same: "We're from Bologna's right wing. We're against the Reds. We carried out a prank yesterday. We're going to carry on."¹¹ Just under two months before the Oktoberfest bombing a similar attack was perpetrated in Bologna on 2 August 1980 in which 85 people were killed and more than 200 injured. This bomb attack was clearly attributed to an extreme right-wing network. The anonymous caller was never identified. The reference to the Bologna bombing and the short time between the two attacks made many people question the single bomber theory once again.

There is no mistaking that the results of Tobias von Heymann's research contributed to Dietrich's second petition to reopen the case in 2008. Apart from his demand to take the Stasi files into consideration, he also suggested comparing splinters from the Oktoberfest bomb with bombs used by extreme right-wing organisations in the 1970s and '80s. For Dietrich one other motive for reopening proceedings was to be found in the new possibilities in forensic research, such as DNA analyses, that were not available in the 1980s. In answer to his request to have the evidence found at that time examined once again, the Federal Prosecutor's Office informed him that this had already been destroyed in 1997. Why this was done remains unexplained. Generally speaking, evidence is only eliminated in cases that have resulted in binding rulings – criminal procedures leading to an acquittal or a conviction.

More than thirty years after the bomb attack, Dietrich's third petition was finally accepted in 2014. One decisive factor for this delayed success was the film *Der blinde Fleck* (*Blind Spot*; 2013) – a political thriller based on the bomb attack and investigations carried out by the journalist Chaussy. The resonance in the media was unexpected. The award-winning film struck a note among its audience that had not been reached before through any other means.

11 Ibid., p. 79.

New witness contacted **Chaussy** and **Dietrich** and their statements substantiated misgivings about the single bomber theory, confirming that they had seen Köhler just before the explosion in the company of others. However, it was not just these statements that forced the Public Prosecutor to take action. Findings that emerged from the **NSU trial** also contributed to this. The mistakes made during earlier investigations and the involvement of confidential informants in the NSU murder series sensibilised the securities service to review the controversial investigative results. In addition, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN and DIE LINKE fractions in the German Bundestag jointly filed a suit against the Federal Constitutional Court. It was aimed at shedding light on how much information the confidential informants in the intelligence service had about the planned Oktoberfest bomb attack. The case for a general right to information was partly granted. Referring to the need to protect confidential informants, their personal rights and the good of the state, inquiries into the role of informants continue, however, to be turned down.

In December 2014 the Federal Prosecutor's Office finally resumed its investigations. Together with the 'Soko 26. September', set up especially for this purpose by the Bavarian State Office of Criminal Investigations, files comprising more than 300,000 pages were reviewed, including those from the secret service that had previously been held under lock and key.

Ulrich Chaussy, a freelance journalist for the Bayerischer Rundfunk broadcasting company, and the lawyer Werner Dietrich challenged the results of investigations on the Oktoberfest bomb attack for more than thirty years. For both, the search for truth became a central issue, in which Dietrich invested considerable time and money, far beyond the terms of his mandate. It is thanks to their perseverance that the case was re-opened. In 2015 both were awarded the Krenkl Prize by the SPD, Munich South, for their commitment. In addition, the Bayerische Verfassungsmedaille (Bavarian Constitution Medal) was presented to Ulrich Chaussy in 2014 and to Werner Dietrich in 2019.

The NSU trial was held in Munich between May 2013 and July 2020. The accused, Beate Zschäpe, was a member of the right-wing terrorist 'National Socialist Underground' (NSU) trio. The two other members, Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt, committed suicide to avoid arrest. With the intent of 'preserving the German Nation', the three members of the terrorist association murdered nine non-Germans between 2000 and 2006. In addition, they are held responsible for a number of bomb attacks and the death of a policewoman. It was only in 2011 that the NSU was unmasked. Up until then, the security services had assumed that the murder series was the work of organised foreign criminals. The racist motive remained unrecognised for years and evidence that extreme right-wing terrorists were involved was ignored. The public uproar about the failure of the investigation process culminated in the accusation that the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution were 'blind in the right eye'. Zschäpe was found guilty of murdering ten people and sentenced to life imprisonment. Four other suspected NSU supporters were also given prison sentences.

More than 1000 people were questioned and 770 old as well as new leads taken up. After five-and-a-half years investigations were halted in July 2020 and the official number of victims raised from 224 to 234. Despite extensive investigative work neither could any possible accomplices be brought to justice nor could the origin of the explosives be clarified. However, unlike investigations in the 1980s, the Public Prosecutor no longer categorised the bomb attack as non-political but as a right-wing extremist motivated act instead.

The Oktoberfest Bomb Attack in the Public Conscience

Four days after the bombing, on 30 September 1980, the city mourned the victims of the attack. At an official memorial service in the Old City Hall, relatives came together with members of the German parliament, representatives of the church and other dignitaries to mourn the dead and the injured. In his address, the mayor of Munich at that time, Erich Kiesl, called the memorial service an act of solidarity with the injured and bereaved while, at the same time, making an appeal to the public. He emphasised that violence – irrespective of whether motivated by left or right-wing sympathies – always targeted society as a whole. He called on people to show greater political vigilance and civil courage: “We must fight any belief that encourages violence, preaches it, condones it, tolerates or plays it down.”¹² The people of the City of Munich heeded this summons on 30 September 1980 by taking part in the most varied of public vigils and memorial events on that day.¹³ Since the bomb attack the



Memorial service at the scene of the bomb attack, 26 September 1981

12 Landeshauptstadt München (ed.), *26. September 1980. Dokumentation zum 5. Jahrestag des Bombenanschlages auf dem Oktoberfest in München*, Munich 1985, p. 18.

13 Among other events, a commemorative torchlight procession took place organised by the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime and the Young Democrats and Young Socialists in Munich, an ecumenical service of worship, a DGB rally with a minute's silence, as well as a wreath-laying ceremony.



Anti-fascist vigil, 26 September 2000

'DGB-JUGEND München' (German Trade Union youth association) has organised a rally with a wreath-laying ceremony every year on the anniversary of the bombing to commemorate the victims and keep critical discourse on the attack alive.

To uphold the memory of the victims of the attack in the public conscience, the City of Munich commissioned a commemorative column to be erected at the main entrance to the Oktoberfest in 1981. However, even after being remodelled several times, such as the creation of a flower-bed in 1985, the column at the place of commemoration was barely obvious. Millions of visitors simply walked past it without even noticing it, due to the sheer dominance of the festival ground and the memorial's inconspicuous design. Rubbish was often dumped around it and it was even used as a urinal. To draw greater attention to the memorial site and lend it more dignity, as well as protect it from being violated, the memorial was remodelled once again in 2008. The bronze stele designed by Friedrich Koller in 1981 was expanded by the same sculptor to include a perforated, semi-circular steel wall, symbolising the force of the detonation. According to the artist, the wall is to be seen as a metaphor for protection and democracy that – as the holes imply – can also be violated. In addition, thirteen steel splinters have been set in the ground, standing for those who were killed in the bomb attack. At the initiative of relatives, the names of these victims were added to the column in 1987.



WILHELMSENEN AN
DER OPFER DES
BOMBENANFALLS
VOM 26.8.1950

1950
1950
1950
1950
1950

In the light of the debate surrounding commemorative work it emerged that the Oktoberfest bomb attack was often confused with the bombing at the Olympic Games in 1972 in Munich.¹⁴ Also when seen in this light, it becomes clear how important initiatives are, such as the re-design of the memorial, the annual commemorative event, as well as publications and artistic work on this theme,¹⁵ to keep the memory of what happened alive in the public conscience.

14 Cf. Kienast, Moritz, *Erinnerung an das Oktoberfest-Attentat vom 26. September 1980*, Master's dissertation, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich 2015.

15 These include, among others, the film: *Der blinde Fleck* by Daniel Harrich (2013) and the play directed by Christiane Mudra *Wir waren nie weg – die Blaupause* from 2015.

The inscription reads:

In memory of the victims of the bomb attack of 26.9.1980





“Time heals no wounds” – The Consequences for Victims and their Families

“Time heals no wounds” were the words of a woman whose son was killed in the bomb attack and who, like several others, agreed to be interviewed for this brochure. Her statement is exemplary for the suffering of all those who were injured in the attack or lost friends and relatives.

Forty years after the bombing many people are still suffering from their severe injuries which have proven impossible to heal completely despite long hospital stays, countless operations and extended convalescence periods. In the majority of cases these injuries have led to impaired mobility that affects the daily routine of the victims. Several people interviewed have had to change their lives completely as a result of their physical and psychological injuries. This can be seen in everyday situations in particular. For some, the use of public transport for example requires considerable physical exertion, as getting to a bus stop or station alone, or standing for a long time, are extremely painful.

However, it is not just physical limitations that have affected the quality of people's lives. Whereas today crisis intervention and psychological support for traumatised victims of dramatic events is more or less taken for granted, such methods of treatment had not become established by the beginning of the 1980s. The survivors of the bomb attack and their relatives were largely left to their own devices to come to terms with what they had been through. A large number still suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders to this day. In the course of conversations it became clear that, since the attack, many avoid large crowds and react particularly sensitively to loud bangs. A lot also desist from attending the annual commemorative event as being at the scene of the bombing and the atmosphere of the Oktoberfest bring back horrific and painful memories of the attack

Many of the survivors find the attitude adopted to their medical needs which resulted directly from the bomb attack, as an additional burden to the physical and psychological injuries they suffered. In the course of the first year after the bombing those who were injured received financial support that, as their recovery progressed, was reduced or stopped altogether. Those injured had to meet the cost of further essential rehabilitation measures or psychological treatment themselves or still have to deal with long bureaucratic processes.

Many survivors emphasised the readiness of the people of Munich to help immediately after the bomb attack, as well as the commitment shown by individual organisations, such as the 'Weisser Ring' that provides support for crime victims

and their families. The injured received donations, presents and were visited in hospital and some still draw on this positive experience to the day.

To this day survivors have still not received adequate material compensation that takes their suffering over decades into consideration. Only following the close of investigations in 2020 and the resultant re-evaluation of the bomb attack have the prerequisites been fulfilled for the provision of support from government funds for victims of right-wing violence.

The City of Munich's Commemorative Research Project

In 2015 the City of Munich initiated a research project on the Oktoberfest bomb attack. The original intention to document the biographies of those who survived evolved into a communal project to make the attack and its aftermath more visible in the city. Talks brought many poignant stories to light and, in addition, just how much support the survivors of the attack need today. For this reason an aid fund was established in 2018. By 2020 the city council had made € 100,000 available which is administered by 'BEFORE', a counselling organisation for victims and those affected by right-wing violence. Those affected can register with 'BEFORE' and apply for support.

The scope of the research project increased continuously from 2015 onwards as many of the survivors expressed the wish to communicate more closely with one another and to have the possibility of contributing towards the form the city's commemorative work was to take. For these reasons, the Department of Arts and Culture organised regular meetings at which survivors could exchange views with one another and the research project team about a worthy form of commemoration. The wish formulated during these meetings for a visible memorial in the city centre led first of all to the joint realisation of a commemorative plaque in the New City Hall in 2018.



Unveiling of the memorial plaque at Munich City Hall on 4 September 2018 by the Lord Mayor Dieter Reiter and Dimitrios Lagkadinou who represented the survivors and victims of the attack. "Their unheeded suffering admonishes us to care. The deeds of right-wing extremists call for vigilance. Munich remembers the victims of the Oktoberfest Bomb Attack on 26 September 1980 and all those affected by it"

Fired by the success of this cooperation and the desire to provide a full explanation of the bomb attack, as well as wanting the stories behind the fates of each individual to be an integral part of the public conscience, work on the creation of a documentation site took place from 2018 onwards. Survivors were actively involved in both the decision process for the design as well as its execution.

To mark the 40th anniversary in September 2020 the 'Documentation Oktoberfest Bomb Attack' was opened to the general public. Situated next to the existing work of art by Friedrich Koller at the entrance to the Theresienwiese festival site, the exhibition gives visitors the possibility of informing themselves about what happened on 26 September 1980 and about the impact of this attack from the survivors' perspective.¹⁶

Dealing with the Oktoberfest bomb attack is the concern of society as a whole, something that the City of Munich acknowledges. The Department of Arts and Culture is to continue the commemorative cultural work of this research project. Countless reports by survivors, first responders and eyewitnesses have not yet been made public or documented.

If you have a contribution to make or have questions related to the project please contact the Department of Arts and Culture in Munich (Local History Division), tel.: 089 233-24435.

16 Information on the documentation can be found under: <http://www.dokumentation-oktoberfestattentat.de/>



'Documentation Oktoberfest Bomb Attack' on the Theresienwiese provides information about the attack. It commemorates the victims, gives survivors and relatives as well as eyewitnesses a voice and traces society's response to the attack up to the present day.

Sources:

- **Chaussy, Ulrich:** *Oktoberfest. Ein Attentat.* Darmstadt/Neuwied, 1985.
- **Fromm, Rainer:** *Die 'Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann': Darstellung, Analyse und Einordnung: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen und europäischen Rechts-extremismus,* Frankfurt/Main, et al. 1998.
- **Heymann, Tobias von:** *Die Oktoberfest-Bombe. München, 26. September 1980 – Die Tat eines Einzelnen oder ein Terror-Anschlag mit politischem Hintergrund?* Berlin, 2008.
- **Kienast, Moritz,** 'Erinnerung an das Oktoberfest-Attentat vom 26. September 1980', Master's dissertation, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich 2015.
- **Minor interpellation** by the MPs Hans-Christian Ströbele, Jerzy Montag, Volker Beck (Cologne), Monika Lazar, Silke Stokar von Neuforn, Wolfgang Wieland, Josef Philip Winkler and the BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN fraction, in Parliamentary Reports 16/13305, German Bundestag, 4 June 2009, 'Oktoberfest-Attentat – Stasi-Notizen und Indizien betreffend Beteiligung der 'Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann' sowie Verbindungen zu 'Gladio''.
- **Reply from the German Government** to the minor interpellation by the MPs Hans-Christian Ströbele, Jerzy Montag, Volker Beck (Cologne), further MPs and the BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN fraction, in Parliamentary Reports 16/13527, German Bundestag, 22 June 2009, 'Oktoberfest-Attentat – Stasi-Notizen und Indizien betreffend Beteiligung der 'Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann' sowie Verbindungen zu 'Gladio''.
- **Landeshauptstadt München (ed.):** *26. September 1980. Dokumentation zum 5. Jahrestag des Bombenanschlages auf dem Oktoberfest in München,* Munich 1985.
- **Anon.,** Generalbundesanwalt hält Bombenleger nicht für Einzeltäter' in *Frankfurter Rundschau,* 1 October 1980.
- **Anon.,** 'Rebmann: Schwerster Anschlag' in *Bild,* 29 September 1980.
- **Schmalz, Peter:** Wir dürfen vor der Gewalt nicht kapitulieren. In: *Die Welt,* 1 October 1980.

Picture Credits

- p. 12 Städtisches Vermessungsamt der Landeshauptstadt München
- p. 15 Heinz Gebhardt
- pp. 16, 17 Stadtarchiv München (FS-ERG-B-0025, FS-ERG-B-0027)
- pp. 37, 38, 44 Mark Schütze/Stadtarchiv München (FS-ERG-B-0026, FS-ERG-B-0029, FS-ERG-B-0028)
- pp. 40/41 Denis Schäfer
- p. 43 Tobias Hase/Kulturreferat
- p. 49 Astrid Schmidhuber/Kulturreferat
- p. 51 Büro Müller-Rieger/Kulturreferat



Imprint

Published by:
City of Munich
Department of Arts and Culture
Burgstr. 4, 80331 Munich, Germany

The Mayor of Munich
Specialist Department for Democracy –
Against Right-Wing Extremism, Racism
and Enmity
Marienplatz 8, 80331 Munich, Germany

4th revised edition, 2020

Author:
Tatjana Neef
Translator:
Christopher Wynne
Editor:
Dr. Sabine Schalm
Department of Arts and Culture

Design:
www.leistls.org

Printed and bound by:
Fuchs-Druck GmbH Miesbach

Printed on paper from
100% certified wood
from approved sources