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Nice terror attack: 'soldier of Islam' Bouhlel 'took drugs and used dating sites to pick up men and women'



By **David Chazan** ; **Lydia Willgress** ; **Jannat Jalil** ; **Tom Morgan** ; **Camilla Turner**, IN NICE ; **Peter Allen**, IN PARIS ; **James Rothwell** ; **Martin Evans** and **Saphora Smith**, IN LONDON

17 JULY 2016 • 9:00PM

- **Terrorist drove through crowds celebrating Bastille Day in Nice, killing 84 people**
- **Police vans blocking off promenade withdrawn just before attack**
- **Driver, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, was a career criminal**
- **Bouhlel was radicalised within months and sent £84,000 to his family days before attack**
- **Everything we know so far about the Nice attack**

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25 Jul 2016, 5:01am



Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel CREDIT: MATRIXPICTURES.CO.UK

Suspects range from two Albanians suspected of supplying a pistol to Bouhlel, and others whose phone numbers appeared on the phone.

Another man, 37, arrested in Nice on Sunday is suspected of supplying arms to

the killer after reportedly receiving messages saying: "Bring more weapons, bring five of them to C."

The message is said to have been sent 18 minutes before he ploughed a 19-tonne lorry into holiday crowds, killing 84 people.

More than 200 investigators were urgently working to determine the significance of 'C' and whether the killer had accomplices or links with a terrorist network.



Seven people including a woman were in custody on Sunday night after the arrests earlier in the day of an Albanian couple suspected of aiding Bouhlel, described by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil) as one its "soldiers".

He sent a flurry of texts shortly before the attack. Another one, saying "I've got the material", was sent to one of the men in custody, whose identities have not been made public.

Bouhlel fired a 7.65mm automatic handgun at police before they shot him dead on Thursday night. Other weapons found in the lorry turned out to be fakes or replicas.

CCTV cameras on the Promenade des Anglais, the scene of the massacre, captured Bouhlel twice in the two days before the attack driving the lorry as he scrutinised his surroundings, apparently preparing how best to execute the attack.



'Loner' Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel was killed by police after unleashing carnage on the 30,000-strong crowd in Nice CREDIT: MATRIX

Bouhlel's phone is said to be full of messages, videos and photographs, including ones of men and women he had recently slept with.

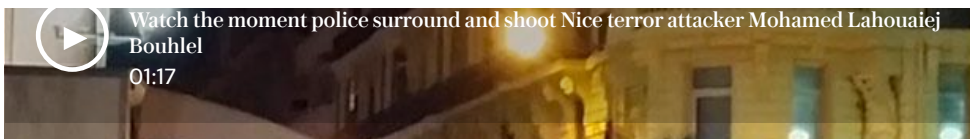
"The testimony which investigators are relying on most is that of the mobile phone," reported the BFM TV news channel, basing their report on evidence leaked to them.

Two hundred officers are now working exclusively on inquiries related to data found on the phone. Bouhlel loved sending selfie photos to people, and would record all of his relationships with other people, however brief.

He visited gyms and salsa bars regularly, and would also visit websites "showing pictures of executions", said BFM TV.

"The busy sex life of a man who had recently discovered a religious faith is shown by the data on the device," BFM added.

The divorced father-of-three also used his phone to prepare his attack on civilians, including hundreds of children enjoying a Bastille Day fireworks display.



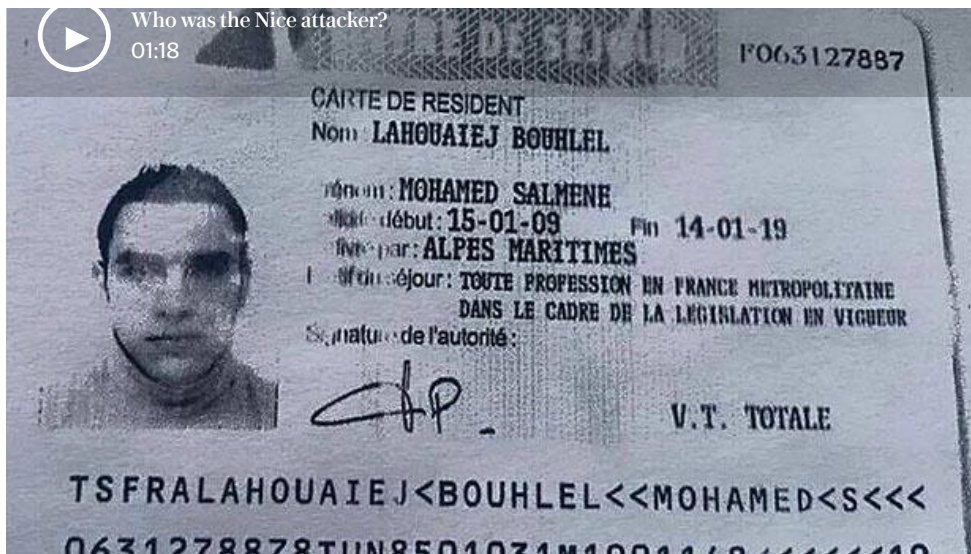


He also took a selfie of himself inside the hired truck just before heading off on his killing and maiming spree, sending it to family members in his native Tunisia.

He was assessed by a psychiatrist in Tunisia in 2004 after his father became concerned about his behaviour.

The psychiatrist, Chamseddine Hamouda, told the BBC: "At the time he exhibited violent behaviour towards his family, but one cannot imagine that a person like that could carry out such a horrific and bloody crime on this scale.

"I'm sure that in the past 12 years something else happened that perhaps influenced how he thought."



Who was Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel?

Tunisian-born Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel - described as a "weird loner" who

"became depressed" when his wife left him - was a French passport holder who lived in the Riviera city and was regularly in trouble with the law.

Bouhlel was reportedly not on a terrorist watch list and investigators are seeking to establish his motives - and are also looking for possible accomplices.

A psychiatrist who saw him in 2004 told L'Express that Bouhlel had come to him because of behavioural problems and that he diagnosed him as suffering from "the beginnings of psychosis."

The French interior minister, Bernard Cazeneuve, said the attacker "appears to have become radicalised very quickly" as one neighbour of his estranged wife added: "Mohamed only started visiting a mosque in April."



Investigators examining Bouhlel's phone records found evidence that he was in contact with known Islamic radicals.

However, an intelligence source cautioned: "That could just be a coincidence, given the neighbourhood where he lived. Everyone knows everyone there. He seems to have known people who knew Omar Diaby (a known local Islamist believed to be linked with the Al Nusra group close to Al Qaeda)."

Relatives have reportedly claimed Bouhlel, in the days before the attack, persuaded friends to smuggle £84,000 in cash back to his family in their hometown of Msaken, Tunisia. His brother Jaber also said he had not seen his brother for several years and the money had come as a complete surprise.

Bouhlel is reported to have contacted his family just hours before the attack to say that everything was normal, even sending a selfie to Jaber.

9:00pm

Attacker's psychiatrist said Bouhlel had exhibited 'violent behaviour' towards his family

Bouhlel was assessed by a psychiatrist in Tunisia in 2004 after his father became concerned about his "troubling behaviour of a psychotic nature".

The psychiatrist, Chamseddine Hamouda, told the BBC: "At the time he exhibited violent behaviour towards his family, but one cannot imagine that a person like that could carry out such a horrific and bloody crime on this scale.

"I'm sure that in the past 12 years something else happened that perhaps influenced how he thought."

Whether or not Lahouaiej-Bouhlel was indoctrinated or mentally ill, "it does not lessen the horror of the operation he carried out," Mr Hamouda said.

6:57pm

Three days on from the attacks the people of Nice continue to visit the scene

As the sun set over the Promenade des Anglais, residents continued to lay flowers in memory of the 84 killed.

White roses, bouquets of lilies and sunflowers now lay scattered the length of the seafront road, with candles, handwritten notes and children's toys - including teddy bears, balloons and angel figures - also left.

On one bouquet, a note indicated it had been placed where a candy store had been set up. The handwritten tribute claimed that 20 children had been gathered in the area when Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel started his rampage.



Floral tributes have been left along the promenade

At another spot, just down from where the 19-tonne lorry finally came to a halt, a local played the piano as mourners gathered around to grieve.

Armed French police maintained a heavy presence throughout the day. One officer estimated that thousands of people were visiting the tributes, which started almost as soon as the massacre ended on Thursday night, every hour.

Tim Robb, who is originally from London but has lived in Nice for 30 years, brought his two children down to see the flowers.

"I think it is really important for the kids, they were very affected by what happened and it was a lot to take in as it was really scary," he said.

Other family groups huddled together as they silently laid flowers. One woman knelt on the ground and sobbed after reading one note that simply read: "For the children."

6:26pm

Bouhlel's wife had thrown him out

A lawyer for Bouhlel's estranged wife said she had not been in touch with her husband for sometime.

Jean-Yves Garino told BFM-TV that the mother of his three children had been

physically abused by him and had eventually thrown him out of the house.

Garino said "it was hard, but she did it," adding, "she was no longer in contact with him."

He said Bouhlel also was violent with the rest of the family, including the woman's mother.

5:43pm

Man arrested in Nice on suspicion of supplying weapons to Bouhlel

A seventh man has been arrested in connection with the Nice terror attacks. He was arrested in Nice on suspicion of supplying weapons to Bouhlel.

It is not clear whether he was the recipient of the text sent by the terrorist just moments before the attack on Thursday, which read, "Bring more weapons, bring five of them to C".

3:39pm

Have a go hero tried to stop terror attack armed only with a knife

A 26-year-old man, who was watching the fireworks, attempted to stop Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel armed only with a knife, the local Nice Matin has reported.

Known only as Gwenael, he described how he saw the 19-tonne lorry begin to plough through crowds of spectators and so grabbed a knife and begin to run towards the lorry.

The delivery driver explained: "I knew what was happening was no accident. This guy was carrying out a massacre. He left behind a trail of dead bodies, of flesh and blood. I had to leap over corpses to try to get close to him. He targeted one particular group of people.

"It was carnage. He then accelerated again and got away from me. I saw what was left behind. For a split-second I thought of what I could do for those who had been run over, but it was too late, so I tried again to catch up with him."

Gwenael clung onto the back of the truck, which was eventually halted by police

in a hail of gunfire.

3:32pm

Bouhlel scouted out the location prior to the attack

CCTV footage taken before the Bastille Day slaughter shows Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel scouting the location, BFM TV reports.

It shows Bouhlel at Nice's Promenade des Anglais early last week to prepare for the attack.

In the footage, he can apparently be seen driving slowing around the area, according to the French television station, which claims he did two reconnaissance missions on the two days before his rampage.

3:08pm

Terrorist's wife is released by police

The ex-wife of Nice terrorist Mohamed Bouhlel has now been released by police after questioning and was believed to be in hiding at her mother's apartment,

Hajer Khalfallah was questioned for two days about her ex-husband who reportedly used to be beat her. The mother-of-three left a central Nice police station with her lawyer on Sunday morning.

12:32pm

The Pope says he shares the pain felt by the families of the victims

Addressing a crowd of worshippers in St Peter's Square in Rome, Pope Francis said: "I am close to each family and the entire French nation. The pain lives in our hearts after this massacre on Thursday in Nice which has devastated so many innocent lives."

12:00pm

Celebrity chef Alain Ducasse also caught up in chaos of terror attack

Dining in the same restaurant as U2's Bono in Nice on Thursday night was the celebrity chef Alain Ducasse



French chef Alain Ducasse was dining with Bono in Nice when the terrorist attack occurred

The pair were both dining separately on the terrace of La Petite Maison restaurant near the seafront when the mass murderer Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel drove a lorry into crowds who had just watched a fireworks display,

killing 84 including 10 children.

Bono was reportedly rescued by counter-terrorist police along with other prominent French figures including the former mayor of Nice, Christian Estrosi, who was also at the restaurant, popular with celebrities. Another of the customers was Eric Dupont-Moretti, the lawyer of Real Madrid footballer Karim Benzema.

11:53am

Albanian couple suspected of supplying weapons are among those in custody

An Albanian couple suspected of supplying Bouhlel with the 7.65mm automatic pistol that he fired on police before they shot him, are among the six people still in custody according to French network, BFM TV.

The station has also reported that Bouhlel's estranged wife, who was also questioned, has now been released.

11:03am

Killer may not have been acting alone

Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel sent a text message minutes before the attack asking for more weapons, it has emerged.

The message, which read 'Bring more weapons, bring five of them to C', was sent to an unidentified figure at 10.27pm on Thursday, just minutes before he began his murderous rampage, according to the French television station BFM.

It suggests he may have had accomplices in the terrorist outrage.

9:22am

Rock star Bono was caught up in the Bastille Day massacre

The singer had to be rescued from a Nice restaurant by antiterrorist police, it has emerged.

The 56-year-old U2 lead singer was on the terrace of "La Petite Maison", next to the seafront in the French city when mass murderer Mohamed Lahouaiej

Bouhlel struck.



The Petit Restaurant in Nice where Bono was dining

After Bouhlel drove a hired lorry into crowds enjoying a holiday firework display, killing 84 including 10 children, Bono and other diners were gripped by fear.

"Suddenly I see people running, without shouting," said Anne-Laure Rubi, the owner of the upmarket restaurant, which is popular with a number of celebrities. "It was a silent panic - it was extraordinary."

Ms Rubi told La Parisienne magazine that 'by reflex' she grabbed the arm of Christian Estrosi, the former Nice Mayor, who was sitting close to Bono.

"What's going on?" she said. "He was on the phone. He didn't want to say much. I think he was just learning about the attack".

8:43am

Two more arrests in connection with attack

Police arrested a man and a woman in the French city of Nice on Sunday morning in connection with the truck attack that killed at least 84 people celebrating Bastille Day, a judiciary source said.

Authorities have now detained seven people over the killings, claimed by

Islamic State.

4:43am

Nice football referee lost son and sister in law, daughter in a coma

A football referee who lost two members of his family in the carnage is mounting a bedside vigil for his daughter.

Named only as Ibrahim H, he is already mourning the loss of his son Mehdi, 13, and sister in law Fatima. Mehdi's twin sister Chérine is in a coma.

3:33am

French health ministry: 121 still in hospital

The French health ministry has said there are still 121 people being treated in hospital after the terror attack.

They include five children and 21 adults who are still in a critical condition. At least 16 bodies have still to be identified, the health authorities added.



Aftermath of the Nice terror attack CREDIT: GUILHEM BAKER FOR THE TELEGRAPH

Meanwhile the first compensation payouts to victims under a French government scheme will begin next week, minister Juliette Meadel told AFP.

1:54am

French Prime Minister warns terrorism will be part of French daily life for a long time

Manuel Valls, the French Prime Minister, has warned the country that it will have to live with the constant threat of terrorism for a long time.

Interviewed by Journal du dimanche, Mr Valls painted a gloomy picture of the the future.

“The terrorism threat is will be a fundamental and enduring problem and other lives will be wrecked,” he said.

“One could refuse to face facts, we could forget, move on. But I must tell the truth to the French people, terrorism will be part of our daily lives for a long time.”



Manuel Valls CREDIT: ERIC FEFERBERG/AFP

While France was under pressure to ratchet up security measures he was determined that the rule of law should prevail in France.

“To call into question in the rule of law, to call into question our values would be to repudiate what we stand for.”

Rounding on those who have said the Government should have prevented the attack, he added: “Some irresponsible politicians said this was preventable. But there is no such thing as zero risk. To say anything else is to lie to the French people.”

11:29pm

Bouhlel told family "everything is normal" hours before attack

Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel reportedly contacted his family just hours before the Nice attack to say that "everything is normal".

His brother Jaber Bouhlel, 19, who still lives in Tunisia, told the Sunday Mirror that on the day of the atrocity he "sent a selfie and told me he was happy and everything in his life was normal".

His brother-in-law Chokri Amimi told the newspaper that he moved to France in about 2005 and "married his aunt's daughter, who lived in Nice".

Bouhlel's father reportedly said that his son was mentally ill and had suffered a nervous breakdown. "He'd get angry and shout and broke everything in front of him. He was violent and very ill," he told the paper.

8:58pm

Sun sets on a second day of mourning



People lay flowers on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice CREDIT: LUCA BRUNO/AP

Camilla Turner in Nice

As the sun sets on Promenade des Anglais, the city of Nice begins its second night of mourning.

"Vive la France," a man calls out and a few others in the crowd echo him.

As well as candles and flowers, well wishers have left bears and cuddly toys as a tribute to the children who died in the attack.

One banner reads "Pourquoi les enfants?" and others say "Pray for Nice".

Police have cordoned off an area around the vigil to shield the growing crowd of well wishers from passing cars.

Christina Adlers, 68 and her husband Bengt, 65, from Sweden were at the vigil and recalled their horrific ordeal on Thursday night.

"We had come down to the beach with some friends to have a glass of champagne and watch the fireworks," Mrs Adlers said.

"When the fireworks finished we decided to let the families with children go up to the promenade first, as we were not in a rush. That's why we are alive. We wonder what happened to the ones who went first."




As they walked up from the beach they saw the lorry and heard screaming and gun shots so turned round and ran to a restaurant where they hid in the kitchens for two and a half hours.


Mr Adlers said: "We came to the vigil last night too. It's hard trying to deal with all the images in your head. I will never forget that white truck."

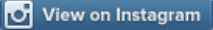
[Read more of the news as it unfolded on Saturday, July 16](#)



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