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# Murder of Lee Rigby

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On the afternoon of 22 May 2013, a British Army soldier, Fusilier Drummer Lee Rigby of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, was attacked and killed by Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale near the Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich, southeast London. [2][3][4][5][6][7] Rigby was off duty and walking along Wellington Street when he was attacked. [8] Two men ran him down with a car, then used knives and a cleaver to stab and hack him to death. [9] The men dragged Rigby's body into the road and remained at the scene until police arrived. They told passersby that they had killed a soldier to avenge the killing of Muslims by the British armed forces.<sup>[10]</sup> Unarmed police arrived at the scene nine minutes after an emergency call was received and set up a cordon. Armed police officers arrived five minutes later. The assailants, armed with a gun and cleaver, charged at the police, who fired shots that wounded them both. They were apprehended and taken to separate hospitals. [10] Both are British of Nigerian descent, raised as Christians, who converted to Islam.[11]

On 19 December 2013, both of the attackers were found guilty of Rigby's murder. [12] On 26 February 2014, they were sentenced to life imprisonment, with Adebolajo given a whole life order and Adebowale ordered to serve at least 45 years. [13] The attack was condemned by political and Muslim leaders in the United Kingdom and in the international press. [14][15]

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## Coordinates: \_\_\_\_ 51.4885°N 0.06255°E



Location of the attack, outside the Royal Artillery Barracks (indicated by the arrow)

**Location** Woolwich, Royal Borough of

Greenwich, London, England

**Coordinates** 51.4885°N 0.06255°E

**Date** 22 May 2013 14:20 BST (UTC+01:00)

Weapons Car, cleaver, knife, revolver

Non-fatal 2 (Michael Adebolajo, Michael injuries Adebowale)

Victim Lee James Rigby<sup>[1]</sup>
Perpetrators Michael Adebolajo

Michael Adebowale 8 further arrests

## Victim [edit]

The soldier killed in the attack was 25-year-old Lee Rigby, a drummer and machine-gunner in the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. Rigby, from Middleton, Greater Manchester, had served in Cyprus, Germany, and Afghanistan before becoming a recruiter and assisting with duties in the Tower of London. [2][16][17] He was attacked when he was returning to barracks from working at the Tower. [18] Rigby married in 2007 and had a two-year-old son, but had separated from his wife. [19] He was engaged to a new fiancée at the time of his death. [20] A post-mortem examination showed that Rigby died from "multiple incised wounds". [21]

Rigby supported British Armed Forces charity, Help for Heroes<sup>[22]</sup> and was wearing a hoodie supporting the charity when he was attacked.<sup>[23]</sup> In the five days after his death the charity received more than £600,000 in donations.<sup>[24]</sup>

Rigby was given a military funeral at Bury Parish Church on 12 July 2013. The service



Drummer Lee Rigby, the victim of the attack

was attended by several thousand people, including present and former soldiers,

Prime Minister David Cameron and Mayor of London Boris Johnson. A private burial service was then held at nearby Middleton Cemetery. [25] Prior to the funeral it was announced that a memorial to Rigby would be installed in Middleton. [26] The first permanent memorial to him was installed in February 2014 at The Valley, a football stadium less than a mile from the site of his murder. [27]

On 1 September 2014, Rigby was honoured at a ceremony in Staffordshire, with his name added to the Armed Forces Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum. [28][29] Plans for a memorial to Rigby in Woolwich initially ran into opposition from local MP Nick Raynsford, who expressed concerns that it would generate "undesirable interest" or become a target for vandals. [30] Greenwich Council said that it had not received a request from the Army to erect a memorial at the site. [31] Following a campaign for a memorial supported by London mayor Boris Johnson and a petition with 25,000 signatures, plans for a memorial near the site of the attack were announced on 11 June 2014. [32]

## Attack [edit]

The attack took place shortly before 14:20 in Wellington Street, and near its junction with John Wilson Street, part of the South Circular Road (A205) in Woolwich, near the perimeter of the Royal Artillery Barracks where Rigby was stationed. Rigby had arrived at Woolwich Arsenal station at 14:10 and was walking down Wellington Street towards the Barracks. [33][34]

While Rigby was crossing the road to get to a shop, two men, who were later identified as Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, drove a Vauxhall Tigra car at him at 30 - 40 mph, knocking him to the pavement. [35][36] They attacked Rigby with knives and a cleaver, and attempted to behead him. [8][10][37]



The site of the attack in Wellington Street, with floral tributes

Immediately after the attack, several passers-by stood over Rigby's body to protect him from further injury. [36] Ingrid Loyau-Kennett, a cub scout leader from Cornwall, [38] disembarked from a passing bus with the intention of rendering first aid, after she saw what she thought was a road accident. On discovering that the victim was dead she engaged one of the assailants in conversation. The man said he was responsible for killing the man on the ground – a British soldier who the attacker claimed had "killed Muslims in Iraq and in Afghanistan". [39][40] She asked one of the men to hand over his weapons, but he refused. [41]

One of the assailants, filmed by a bystander said:

"The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers. And this British soldier is one ... By Allah, we swear by the almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you until you leave us alone. So what if we want to live by the Sharia in Muslim lands? Why does that mean you must follow us and chase us and call us extremists and kill us? ... when you drop a bomb do you think it hits one person? Or rather your bomb wipes out a whole family? ... Through [many passages in the] Koran we must fight them as they fight us ... I apologise that women had to witness this today but in our lands women have to see the same. You people will never be safe. Remove your governments, they don't care about you. You think David Cameron is gonna get caught in the street when we start busting our guns? Do you think politicians are going to die? No, it's going to be the average guy, like you and your children. So get rid of them. Tell them to bring our troops back ... leave our lands and you will live in peace."

—Michael Adebolajo, excerpted from a *Daily Telegraph* transcript<sup>[42]</sup>

Adebolajo also gave a bystander at the scene a handwritten two page note which set out his justification for his actions. [43][44] The assailants remained at the scene and asked bystanders to call the police. [45] The Metropolitan Police received the first 999 call about an assault at 14:20 and regular unarmed police were deployed. Subsequent 999 calls said the attackers had a firearm, and armed police were ordered to the scene at 14:24. Unarmed police arrived at 14:29, set up a cordon, and remained behind it. [46] Authorised Firearms Officers arrived at 14:34. Two men, one brandishing a cleaver and the other a revolver, charged at the police. Armed police fired eight times and both men were wounded. [36][47] They were arrested and taken to separate hospitals. A revolver, knives, and a cleaver were seized at the scene. The victim, Rigby, was pronounced dead and formally identified. [47]

#### Attackers and other suspects [edit]

The two men who carried out the attack, Michael Olumide Adebolajo, 28, and Michael Oluwatobi Adebowale, 22, [48] are British of Nigerian descent. [49] Both men were known to British security services. [50]

On 23 May, a man aged 29 and two women aged 31 and 29 were arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to murder.<sup>[51]</sup> The Metropolitan Police arrested three people aged between 21 and 28 in south-east London, at two separate locations on the evening of 25 May. <sup>[52]</sup> On 26 May, a 22-year-old male was arrested in Highbury. <sup>[51]</sup> On 27 May, a 50-year-old male was arrested in Welling. <sup>[53]</sup> Of the eight people arrested, six were freed on bail, and two released

without charge.[54]

## Michael Adebolajo [edit]

Adebolajo, born in Lambeth to a Christian family, [38][55] went to Marshalls Park School and studied sociology at the University of Greenwich. He has a history of involvement in radical Islamist activities and had been arrested at a violent protest and later released. [56] According to Anjem Choudary, a radical Muslim cleric, Adebolajo converted to Islam in 2003 and was linked to the outlawed Islamist group al-Muhajiroun. [48][57] In 2006, Adebolajo was arrested outside the Old Bailey during a protest about the trial of Mizanur Rahman. [58]

In 2009, Adebolajo spoke at a demonstration against the English Defence League and Stop Islamisation of Europe organised by Unite Against Fascism at Harrow Central Mosque. He was recorded saying: "Don't be scared of them, do not be scared of the police or the cameras. You are here only to please Allah. You're not here for any other reason, if you are here just for a fight, please leave our ranks. We only want those who are sincere to Allah. Purify your intention." [59]

In 2010, Adebolajo was arrested in Kenya with five others. He travelled using a British passport in the name Michael Olemendis Ndemolajo. [60] Boniface Mwaniki, head of Kenya's anti-terrorism unit, said he believed Adebolajo was planning to train with Al-Shabaab, a militant group linked to al-Qaeda. He was released to British authorities in Kenya and deported. [60] The British Foreign Office confirmed "a British national was arrested in Kenya in 2010" was given consular assistance. No charges were filed against Adebolajo. [60][61]

Abu Nusaybah, a friend of Adebolajo, said on BBC's *Newsnight* on 25 May that Adebolajo had complained of persistent questioning by the British Security Service (MI5) specifically concerning his knowledge of "certain individuals". He said Adebolajo alleged that MI5 had asked him to work with them and he had refused. [62][63] He also said Adebolajo claimed he had been tortured and sexually assaulted by Kenyan troops after his arrest. [64]

Adebolajo was released from hospital on 31 May and taken into police custody. [65] The following day he was charged with Rigby's murder, two charges of attempting to murder police officers, and possession of a firearm. [66] At a court appearance on 3 June, he asked to be known as Mujahid Abu Hamza. [67] On 17 July, Adebolajo reportedly lost two front teeth in an incident at Belmarsh prison. [68]

## Michael Adebowale [edit]

Following media reports that Michael Adebowale had attended the University of Greenwich with Michael Adebolajo, the university issued a statement, in which it said that there were "no records relating to [Adebowale] in connection with the Woolwich incident", and that the university had launched an investigation into the matter. [69][70] Adebolawe's mother is a probation officer and his father a member of staff at the Nigerian High Commission. [71]

On 28 May, Adebowale was released from hospital and taken to a police station in south London. [72] Police charged him with the murder of Rigby and possession of a firearm. [54]

## Investigation [edit]

Investigators searched four houses in Greenwich, south London; one in Romford, east London; another in north London; and a property in Saxilby, Lincolnshire. [73][74]

Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, said the committee would use new powers to retrieve documents from intelligence agencies. A written report is to be provided by Andrew Parker, the Director General of MI5.<sup>[75]</sup>

An Independent Police Complaints Commission investigation<sup>[76]</sup> into the use of firearms by Metropolitan Police Officers, which was published on 19 December 2013 once a verdict had been reached in the defendants' trial, concluded that the officers who had used force on 22 May 2013 had "acted entirely appropriately" and had shown "skill and professionalism".<sup>[12][77]</sup>

Home Secretary Theresa May chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Office Briefing Room committee (COBRA)<sup>[78]</sup> attended by Defence Secretary Philip Hammond, the Mayor of London Boris Johnson, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, the Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Cressida Dick and other unnamed members of the intelligence agencies.<sup>[79]</sup> The Prime Minister David Cameron cut short a visit to Paris to chair a second COBRA meeting.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Legal proceedings [edit]

On 31 May, the inquest into Rigby's death was opened and adjourned at Southwark Coroner's Court. The inquest heard that Rigby had been identified by his dental records. [6][18]

On 27 September 2013, the two accused men appeared via videolink in court at the Old Bailey, where they both pleaded not guilty to the murder of Lee Rigby, and to other charges relating to the incident.<sup>[80]</sup> The trial began at the Old Bailey on 29 November 2013. Adebolajo asked to be known as Mujaahid Abu Hamza in court with Adebowale

wishing to be known as Ismail Ibn Abdullah. [81]

On 19 December 2013, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale were found guilty of the murder of Lee Rigby. The judge, Mr Justice Sweeney, said that he would pass sentence after a key appeal court ruling on the use of whole life terms. [12] On 26 February 2014, both men were sentenced to life imprisonment. Adebolajo was given a whole life order excluding the possibility of parole, and Adebowale, the younger of the two, was given a minimum term of 45 years in prison. [13]

During the sentencing, Mr Justice Sweeney said that the extremist views of the attackers were a "betrayal of Islam", prompting Adebowale to shout "That's a lie," while Adebolajo shouted "Allahu Akbar". [13][82] Following a scuffle with security guards in the dock, both men were removed from the court and the sentencing continued in their absence. [13]

On 8 April 2014, Adebolajo launched an appeal against his whole life term. [83] On 29 July, he was refused permission to appeal, and the case will be heard by a panel of Court of Appeal judges. [84]

In July 2014, a freedom of information request filed by *The Sun* showed that Adebolajo and Adebowale had received a combined £212,613.32 in legal aid. [84]

## Subsequent events [edit]

The Ministry of Defence investigated the incident. Immediately after the death, British service members were advised not to wear military uniforms in public, [85] although the advice was later relaxed. [86]

In the immediate aftermath, Julie Siddiqi of the Islamic Society of Britain expressed concern that the killing would be used to create ethnic and community divisions. [87] Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe condemned the attack and called for calm and a "measured response", adding "we have met with community representatives, and extra officers remain on duty there tonight. Across London our officers are in contact with their communities too." Commander Simon Letchford later noted community concerns following the incident and assured that an investigation was under way. He also appealed for calm and avoidance of speculation. [79] An additional 1,200 police officers were deployed across London to prevent revenge attacks on Muslim communities. [73]

The British National Party (BNP) leader, Nick Griffin, posted a series of Twitter messages blaming "mass immigration" for the attack and called for a protest rally in Woolwich. [88] After the English Defence League called on its supporters to mobilise, [78] some members staged a protest at Woolwich Arsenal station in which bottles were thrown at police. [87] The BNP scheduled their protest for 1 June, but Scotland Yard refused to permit them to march from Woolwich Barracks; the demonstration instead took place at Whitehall in central London. [89] Unite Against Fascism mounted a counter-protest. Police arrested 58 people, all anti-fascist protesters, for breaches of the Public Order Act. [90]

On 7 June 2013, a 21-year-old woman from Harrow was ordered to complete 250 hours of unpaid work after tweeting that people in Help for Heroes T-shirts "deserve to be beheaded". [91] On 14 March 2014, a married couple from London - who pleaded guilty to disseminating a terrorist publication - were jailed for posting videos on YouTube which condoned the death of Lee Rigby, with one video describing it as a "brilliant day". [92][93]

#### Anti-Muslim backlash [edit]

In the aftermath of the attack, an anti-Muslim backlash occurred across the United Kingdom. [94] A representative of Hope not Hate said the number of phone calls to its helpline concerning anti-Muslim incidents greatly increased after the murder. [95] Hope not Hate reported 193 Islamophobic incidents, including attacks on 10 mosques, as of 27 May. [96] On 1 June, Tell MAMA, a government-funded project, reported 212 anti-Muslim incidents, including 125 online incidents, 17 incidents involving physical attack, and 11 attacks on mosques. [97] It was reported on 9 June that government funding for Tell MAMA would not be renewed, due to concern over the reliability of data reported by the organisation, although the decision had been made before Rigby's death. [98]

Incidents ranged from verbal abuse to physical assaults in which women's headscarves were pulled off. [95] Graffiti was scrawled over mosques and Muslim-owned businesses. [99] Hope not Hate claimed that online activity suggested some of the attacks on Muslims were co-ordinated. [95] At least seven people have been arrested for a range of social media-related issues. [95]

During the night after Rigby's death, two mosques were attacked. In Braintree, Essex, a man entered a mosque with two knives, threatened the congregation, and threw an explosive device. Witnesses say the explosive device was a grenade or gas canister. In Gillingham, Kent, a man ran into a mosque and smashed windows and bookcases, specifically targeting those containing copies of the Quran. Two men were arrested in connection with the attacks.<sup>[100]</sup> On 26 May, several petrol bombs were thrown into a mosque in Grimsby. No one was injured and the fires were rapidly extinguished.<sup>[101]</sup> Two former soldiers were arrested in connection with the attack.<sup>[102]</sup>

On 5 June, the Al-Rahma Islamic Centre in Muswell Hill – which was used by children after school – was destroyed by a fire. [103] The building had been sprayed with graffiti making reference to the English Defence League. [104] The fire investigation is being conducted by Scotland Yard's counter-terrorism command, because of a possible link to domestic extremism. [105] On 8 June, a fire at Darul Uloom School, an Islamic boarding school in southeast London, forced the evacuation of 128 students and teachers. Police said they feared the incident may have been a revenge

attack.[106]

On 10 June, a senior Metropolitan Police officer confirmed there had been an eight-fold increase in the number of Islamophobic incidents since Rigby's death, and that the real figure may be higher due to under-reporting.<sup>[107]</sup>

In the London Borough of Hackney the Stamford Hill Shomrim, a Jewish volunteer Neighbourhood Patrol Group, made an offer of help to the local Muslim Community<sup>[108]</sup> which was gratefully welcomed<sup>[109]</sup> and commended by Hackney Police Borough Commander Chief Superintendent Matthew Horne<sup>[110]</sup>

#### Video footage controversy [edit]

Video footage of one of the perpetrators justifying the killing of Lee Rigby was obtained by *The Sun* and ITN.<sup>[111]</sup> ITN's video, which was edited before it was broadcast,<sup>[112]</sup> aired during the 18:30 *ITV News* bulletin before the 21:00 watershed, and again in its 22:00 bulletin.<sup>[111]</sup> After being posted on the ITN website in the afternoon, the high level of visits caused the site to crash and go offline for around half an hour.<sup>[111]</sup> Total traffic on the site, which averages 860,000 unique users per week, reached 1.2 million for the day of the attack.<sup>[112]</sup>

Managing editor of *The Sun*, Richard Caseby, said the newspaper had faced a "a very difficult decision". Both media outlets argued they had released the video "in the public interest". BBC News showed some parts of the video. Sky News decided not to follow suit, as senior editors were of the opinion that the graphic images were "unnecessarily distressing". Both ITV and the BBC ran warnings before showing the footage. Most of Britain's national daily newspapers grabbed still images from the video footage for their front pages the next morning. [111] A BBC executive said that the news organisation edited the footage before broadcasting, and "dealt with the material as carefully as we could." The spokesman said they "thought very carefully about the pictures... and gave great consideration to how we used the footage". They argued that the footage was an important element of the story and shed light on the perpetrators and the possible motives for the attack."[113]

The Guardian reported there were "around 800 complaints from distressed viewers". [112] Most complaints were targeted at the television coverage, with ITV receiving 400 complaints in the 24 hours following the broadcast. [113] Sky News, which showed a still image of one of the suspected attackers with bloodied hands, received "a handful of complaints". [113]

On 17 June, the broadcasting standards watchdog Ofcom launched an investigation into broadcast of footage from the attack after receiving about 700 complaints.<sup>[114]</sup> Ofcom published its findings on 6 January 2014, ruling that the news footage had not breached broadcasting regulations. Ofcom issued new guidelines to news outlets on giving appropriate warnings before airing distressing content.<sup>[115]</sup>

## Anti-terrorism task force [edit]

The UK government established a task force to look at ways of stemming the growth of Islamic extremism in Britain, focusing on the radicalisation of worshippers in mosques, university students and prisoners. The task force – chaired by David Cameron – had its inaugural meeting at 10 Downing Street on 3 June 2013, and includes Cabinet Ministers, and representatives from the police and intelligence services. Later that day Cameron made a House of Commons statement on the Woolwich attack, saying that lessons must be learned. "When young men born and bred in this country are radicalised and turned into killers, we have to ask some tough questions about what is happening in our country. It is as if that for some young people there is a conveyor belt to radicalisation that has poisoned their minds with sick and perverted ideas. We need to dismantle this process at every stage – in schools, colleges, universities, on the internet, in our prisons, wherever it is taking place."[116]

#### Reactions [edit]

Queen Elizabeth II, political leaders and religious leaders variously expressed concern and distress over the incident, and called for calm. [79] Prime Minister David Cameron made the following statement:

This country will be absolutely resolute in its stand against extremism and terror. This action was a betrayal of Islam and the Muslim communities that give so much to our country. We will defeat violent extremism by standing together. We will not rest until we know every detail. [The attackers told Ingrid Loyau-Kennett that] they wanted to start a war in London and she replied, "You are going to lose, it is you against many." She speaks for all of us.



Tribute to Lee Rigby, Manchester Day Parade, 2 June 2013<sup>[117]</sup>

Many Muslim leaders denounced the attack. The Prime Minister's statement was echoed by Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, the co-chair of the Christian Muslim Forum, in a joint statement.<sup>[37]</sup> The Muslim Council of Britain said the attack "has no basis in Islam and we condemn this unreservedly".<sup>[10]</sup> The head

of the Ramadhan Foundation, Mohammed Shafiq, also condemned the attack. The director of Faith Matters and coordinator of the government-backed anti-Islamophobic project Tell MAMA stated: "We, as the Muslim community, will work against anyone who promotes such hatred." [79]

Anjem Choudary refused to condemn the attack. He said, "I'm not in the business of condemnation or condoning. I think if anyone needs to be condemned it is the British government and their foreign policy. It's so clear that that is the cause."[118] On BBC's Newsnight, when Choudary was questioned about his role in the radicalisation of Michael Adebolajo, he denied any responsibility, and talked about such radicalisation as a means to an end. He stated that he believed that not many Muslims would disagree with what Adebolajo had said in his videoed statement.[119]

Asghar Bukhari of the UK Muslim Public Affairs Committee said that both the British Government and the Muslim community were at fault in dealing with "extremism". He criticised the British Government for being involved in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan while "completely denying that it has anything to do with the political situation around the Muslim world", and said that Muslim organisations "have failed their own community by not teaching these young, angry men how to get a democratic change to this policy that's ruining so many lives". He described Muslim leaders as unwilling to bring about change, focussing on points of theology, rather than the practical education of young people in ways to achieve political change. [120]

Baroness Neville-Jones, a former security minister and chairman of the British Joint Intelligence Committee, and Colonel Richard Kemp, a former Army commander, suggested blame could be put on internet hate preaching. Neville-Jones told the BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme that "the inspiration that comes from internet hate preaching and jihadist rhetoric... is a very, very serious problem now."[121]

George Galloway, a British MP, said that the attacks were "indefensible". He criticised British support for the Syrian rebels, stating that similar attacks are likely to occur "as long as we are, as a country, involved in spreading murder and mayhem across the Muslim world." [122][123][124]

Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair saw the attack not as an isolated expression of two crazed individuals but part of the broader "problem within Islam". [125]

In foreign press reports there was widespread outrage and condemnation of the killing. Yusif al-Shihab, in Kuwait's *Al-Abas*, stated that the assailants have "deformed the image of Islam" while Batir Mohammad Wardum in the Jordanian daily *Al-Dustur*, and other Middle Eastern newspapers, stressed that their actions have endangered the lives of thousands of Muslims.<sup>[15]</sup>

The killing triggered a public outpouring of grief and hundreds of bunches of flowers, teddy bears, poems and other tributes were left near the scene of the crime.<sup>[126]</sup>

In a statement issued on 28 May, Adebojalo's relatives condemned terrorism and violence in the name of religion, and expressed their horror at Rigby's death. [72]

In October 2013 British anti-terrorist police warned several Muslims who had spoken out against Islamist extremism, some of them explicitly against the murder of Rigby, that they had been targeted in a video created by Al-Shabaab, the group responsible for the attack on the Westgate shopping mall in Kenya.<sup>[127]</sup>

## See also [edit]

- 7 July 2005 London bombings
- 21 July 2005 London bombings
- 2007 plot to behead a British Muslim soldier
- 2008 Exeter attempted bombing
- Beheading in Islamism
- List of terrorist incidents in London
- Terrorism in the United Kingdom
- Udham Singh, a Sikh who shot dead British soldier Michael O'Dwyer in London in March 1940.

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