

Train Bombing in Madrid

By Sharon Fabian

Caption: Candles left in memory of the deaths at Atocha Station, Madrid, March 11, 2004

In 2004, about two and one-half years after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, an attack occurred in Spain. Bombs destroyed commuter trains in Madrid, killing and injuring hundreds of people.

The attacks worried people in the United States and other parts of the world because they feared that the attacks were the work of the same terrorists who had attacked in New York. Many people in Spain had different ideas. Since the attacks had occurred only three days before their election day, many believed that the attacks were the work of political rivals.

The explosions occurred early in the morning of March 11, 2004, as busy commuters were going to work. Bombs exploded in Atocha Station, a busy central station in Madrid. More bombs exploded in El Pozo Station, Santa Eugenia Station, and Calle Tellez Station, all on lines leading into the city.

One hundred ninety-one people were killed. The victims were from Spain and sixteen other countries. About eighteen hundred people were injured. By eight o'clock in the morning, ambulances and rescue workers were arriving. To treat the many victims, they set up a field hospital in a nearby sports facility. They also set up a temporary morgue.

There had been no advance warning of the attacks. After the attacks, no group came forward to claim responsibility.

Because of the ongoing election controversy, suspicions were leveled against the group called ETA, which opposed the political party in power. In the Basque language spoken in the northern part of Spain, ETA stands for "Basque Homeland and Freedom." If the ETA was found responsible, it could help the current ruling party to get reelected.

The ETA announced that they were not responsible. Since they had announced warnings in advance of previous attacks, this one did not seem to be their work.

Meanwhile, suspicions were also falling on Islamic groups related in some way to al-Qaida.

The police were beginning to locate clues and suspects. They found out that all of the explosives had been hidden inside backpacks. They found a van containing bomb-making materials including cell phones.

Several suspects were located in an apartment in a town south of Madrid. Police closed in on the apartment, and then the militants still in the apartment set off an explosion, committing suicide and killing one police officer. Other suspects had already escaped.

After more investigating, police arrested additional suspects. Some were from Morocco; some were from Syria and other countries. They did not find evidence that al-Qaida was directly involved.

There were signs that the Madrid event was related to other terrorist events in some way; maybe new terrorist groups were imitating a previous bombing. Maybe the terrorists of the Madrid bombing had been trained in Afghanistan's terrorist training camps.

In Spain, the controversy was not settled easily. People on both sides of the election continued to suspect the other. Even if they weren't the bombers, maybe they were involved in some way. Opposition to Spain's involvement in



Name _____



Date _____

Iraq grew, too.

A few days after the bombing, the national election was held. The old government was voted out. Soon after that, the new government withdrew all Spanish troops from Iraq. They spoke out for a diplomatic solution, rather than a military one, in Iraq.

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Questions

- _____ 1. The Madrid train bombings occurred on _____.
 - A. March 11, 2004
 - B. September 11, 2001
 - C. March 11, 2001
 - D. September 11, 2004

- _____ 2. The train bombings occurred in the country of _____.
 - A. Madrid
 - B. Spain
 - C. Syria
 - D. United States

- _____ 3. The ETA was found guilty of the train bombings.
 - A. true
 - B. false

- _____ 4. Al-Qaida was found guilty of the train bombings.
 - A. true
 - B. false

- _____ 5. _____ people were killed in the bombings.
 - A. Two
 - B. Eighteen hundred
 - C. One hundred ninety-one
 - D. Eleven

- _____ 6. After the bombings, Spain elected new government officials.
 - A. false
 - B. true

- _____ 7. The new leaders of Spain _____.
 - A. supported the Iraq War for the first time
 - B. continued to fight in the Iraq War
 - C. withdrew from the Iraq War
 - D. increased troop strength in the Iraq War

