

Mehmet Ali Agca Biography

Mehmet Ali Agca

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Biography

Mehmet Ali Agca attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square in 1981. Agca was born in Malatya, Turkey, in 1958. Little is known about his early years, but by mid-1970s, he was firmly established as a member of the right-wing Grey Wolves, a terrorist group dedicated to hunting left-wing opponents. In 1979, he was jailed in Istanbul on charges of murdering the moderate editor of a daily newspaper. He escaped from a maximum-security prison with the help of other members of the Grey Wolves. A Turkish court convicted him in absentia and sentenced him to death, which was later reduced to 10 years in prison.

In 1981, he made his way to Italy, and on May 13, 1981, he fired twice at the Pope as the Pontiff rode in an open car blessing thousands of people. One bullet hit the Pope's hand, and the other his abdomen, barely missing vital organs. Agca was immediately captured.

At first Agca claimed he acted alone and was sentenced to life in prison. Subsequently he retracted those claims and stated the shooting had been organized by the Bulgarian secret police on the orders of the Soviet KGB. Later, Agca also retracted those claims, and began behaving erratically, professing to be Jesus Christ and maintaining the Vatican itself was responsible for the assassination attempt. Agca was forgiven by the Pope shortly after the assassination attempt, and at the Vatican's request was pardoned by the Italian government in June 2000. He was flown to Turkey to serve the remainder of his sentence for murder.