The Wimpy Operation 1982: Khaled Alwan and "Don't Shoot, We Are Withdrawing"

Less than two weeks after the Israeli occupation army stormed West Beirut in September 1982, and days after the Sabra and Shatila massacre, an officer and soldiers of the occupation army sat on the pavement of the Wimpy café on Hamra Street, in the heart of the capital, drinking coffee and getting ready to pay in shekels. A nineteen-year-old Lebanese in civilian clothes, Khaled Alwan, walked up to them, drew his weapon from under his shirt and opened fire, then vanished into the alleys of Hamra. [1][2]

The Wimpy operation of 24 September 1982 was one of the first resistance operations in occupied Beirut and a turning point in the attacks on the occupation's soldiers, who soon toured the streets with loudspeakers calling out: "People of Beirut, don't shoot… we are withdrawing," and pulled out of West Beirut by the end of September. This article is part of a series on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the 1982 siege of Beirut. [3][1]

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The operation at a glance

Item	Details
Date	24 September 1982
Place	The Wimpy café, Hamra Street, Beirut
Carried out by	Khaled Alwan (1962–1984)
Framework	The Lebanese National Resistance Front, declared on 16 September 1982
Target	An officer and soldiers of the occupation army on the café pavement
Occupation losses	Accounts range from one soldier to four killed
Aftermath	The occupation army withdrew from West Beirut by the end of September 1982

Sources: [1][4][2][5][3]

Occupied Beirut

The multinational force was to stay in Beirut until 26 September but left on 10 September, days after the last Palestinian fighters departed. On 14 September President-elect Bashir Gemayel was assassinated and the occupation army stormed West Beirut; by 17 September UN observers recorded that the area north of a line from the Hotel Mediterranée through the public garden was “under full control” of the occupation army, with its armour deployed at the Sports City, Bir Hassan, Ouzai and the airport. [6][7][8]

Under the cover of this occupation, after its army had sealed off the camps of Sabra and Shatila and lit them with flares, Lebanese militias allied with it carried out the massacre between 16 and 18 September. The occupation’s soldiers now strolled through Beirut’s streets and sat in its cafés. [9]

“The first shot”

On 16 September 1982, the day the massacre began, the launch of the Lebanese National Resistance Front (Jammoul) was announced. Led by leftist and national forces, it was described as a front that cut across sects, with the aim of “expelling the occupation army from the capital.” [5]

The spark of organised action was an operation at the Bistros pharmacy on Hamra Street, later known as “the first shot,” carried out by a cell of three young men after careful surveillance and preparation; it was followed by an operation against a gathering of occupation troops at the Ayoub petrol station in the Zarif district. Homes in the surrounding neighbourhoods became secret meeting points for the fighters and for moving weapons. [5]

24 September: on the pavement of the Wimpy

On 24 September 1982 an occupation army officer and two soldiers sat on the pavement of the Wimpy café on Hamra Street. One of the soldiers was mocking the café boy and pulling out shekels to pay the bill, when Khaled Alwan stepped up, told him in his Lebanese dialect to leave it to him, then drew his weapon from under his shirt and emptied it into them. [1]

His comrades’ account says he first scouted the café, then came back with two companions; they had one pistol at first and then obtained two more, and when one man’s pistol jammed he struck an officer on the head with its grip. After the shooting Alwan threw the weapon down and ran towards the slope of Abdel Aziz Street, disappearing among the alleys and buildings. [4][1]

The researcher Wassim Marwa saw the operation as a turning point in the attacks on the occupation’s soldiers, and local media at the time said it encouraged people to take up arms. [3]

Khaled Alwan

Khaled Alwan was born in 1962 and joined the Syrian Social Nationalist Party in 1978, one of the pillars of the National Resistance Front in the days after its launch. During the invasion he commanded a position and then took part in the defence of the Ramlet al-Baida area. [4][2]

He was killed on 5 September 1984 in an ambush laid by agents linked to the occupation, together with his comrades Kamal Abu Rashid and Mahmoud al-Taqi. His name remained in Beirut’s memory as the emblem of a city that refused to let its occupiers drink coffee on its pavements. [4]

“Don’t shoot… we are withdrawing”

The attacks on the occupation’s soldiers grew in the days that followed, and its tanks drove through the streets of West Beirut with loudspeakers calling: “People of Beirut, don’t shoot at the Israel Defence Forces, we are withdrawing.” Wassim Marwa saw in this appeal proof that the mounting armed resistance was the main reason for the withdrawal. [3][5]

By the end of September 1982 the occupation army had withdrawn completely from West Beirut, having failed to storm it through a siege of some three months and then been unable to stay in it more than two weeks after entering it.[3][1]

Differences between the accounts

Accounts of the occupation’s losses in the Wimpy operation vary widely: Arabi Post speaks of one soldier killed; An-Nahar relays accounts of an officer and two soldiers, and others of an officer and three soldiers; a headline on Al-Hadaf gives four officers; while Alwan’s comrades infer that a captain was killed because another captain was appointed in his place months later. We found no toll announced by the occupation in the available sources. The sources also differ on the weapon, a pistol or a submachine gun. [3][2][1][4]

Timeline

Date	Event
10 September 1982	The multinational force leaves Beirut ahead of schedule [6]
14 September	Bashir Gemayel assassinated, followed by the occupation army’s storming of West Beirut [7]
16 September	The Lebanese National Resistance Front declared; the Sabra and Shatila massacre begins [5]
17 September	UN observers: the occupation controls most of West Beirut [8]
September	“The first shot” at the Bistros pharmacy; the Ayoub station operation [5]
24 September	The Wimpy café operation [1]
Late September	“Don’t shoot… we are withdrawing”; the occupation withdraws from West Beirut [3]
5 September 1984	Khaled Alwan killed in an ambush [4]

Frequently asked questions about the Wimpy operation and the resistance to the occupation of Beirut

What was the Wimpy operation?

An operation carried out by the resistance fighter Khaled Alwan on 24 September 1982 against an officer and soldiers of the occupation army at the Wimpy café on Hamra Street in Beirut. [1]

Who was Khaled Alwan?

A Lebanese resistance fighter born in 1962, a member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, killed in an ambush in 1984. [4]

How many occupation soldiers were killed?

Accounts range from one soldier to four killed; we found no official toll. [3][2][1]

What was the Lebanese National Resistance Front?

A front declared by Lebanese leftist and national forces on 16 September 1982 to drive the occupation army out of Beirut. [5]

When did the occupation withdraw from West Beirut?

By the end of September 1982, about two weeks after storming it, under the blows of the resistance. [3]

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Sources and references

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