

The Revolution Begins: Lambesc's Charge, 12 July 1789

Paul G. Spagnoli

During the winter of 1794–95 a citizen of the Mont Blanc section published a history of the French Revolution for students, written in catechism style. “At what date did the revolution begin?” he asked. “The forever memorable day when the criminal Lambesc, entering into the Tuileries, saber in hand, with a detachment of his *Royal-Almand* [*sic*] regiment, massacred with his own hand a respectable old man, who had committed no crime except to appear in Lambesc's path.”¹ The citizen was neither the first nor the last to emphasize the importance of the invasion of the Tuileries garden by the prince de Lambesc and his Royal Allemand cavalry. In June 1790 a journalist disparaged Lambesc's attempts to defend himself from the legal consequences of his action, adding that the public was “awaiting with impatience and suspicion the judgment [of] the Châtelet . . . on this affair which is the key to the revolution.”² Modern historians have generally concurred on the importance of the incident. A contemporary engraving of the charge was used as the cover illustration for the paperback edition of a well known recent volume on the origins of the Revolution.³

According to Jacques Godechot, who wrote the most comprehensive modern account of the events of July 1789 in Paris, the news of Necker's dismissal produced a sizable demonstration on the twelfth. As the crowd moved about the city, it eventually collided with royal troops in the place Louis XV (now the place de la Concorde), it then

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¹ *Journées mémorables de la Révolution française* (Paris, Year III), 24–25.

² *Chronique de Paris*, no. 158, 7 juin 1790, 630.

³ Moreau le Jeune's “An Incident in the Tuileries on 12 July 1789,” appeared on the cover of William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1980).

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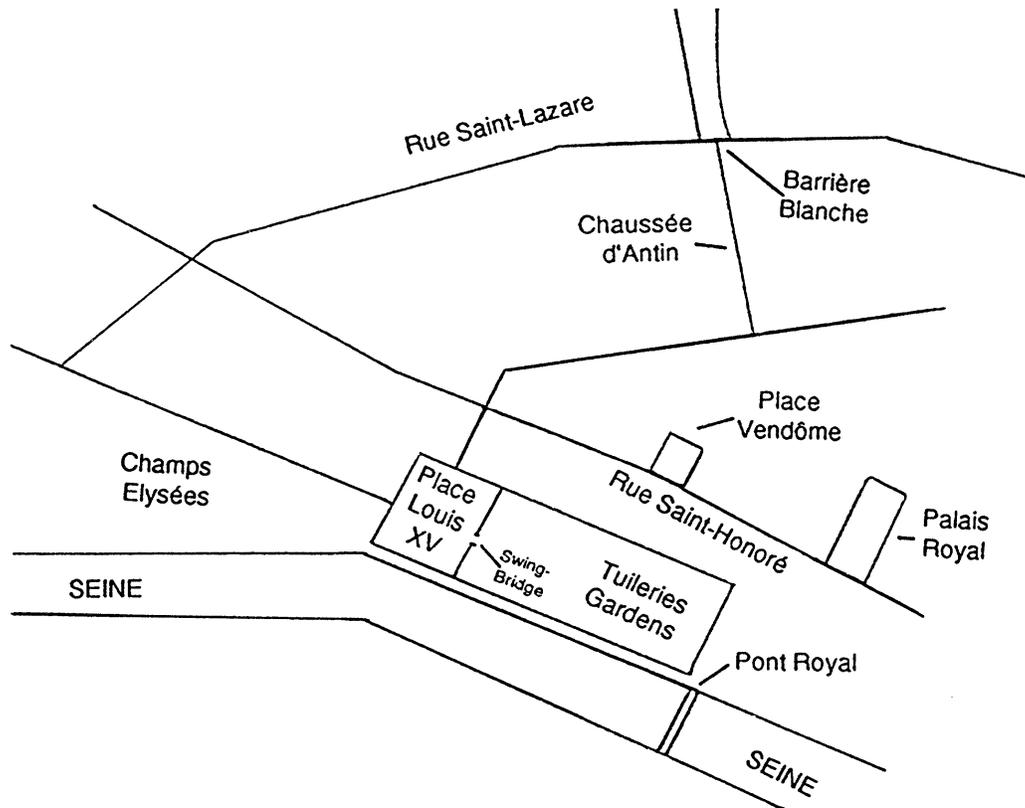


FIG. 1: NORTHWESTERN PARIS IN 1789

moved into the adjacent Tuileries garden from which it hurled down taunts and stones at the assembled troops. Baron de Besenval, the commander of the troops, ordered Lambesc to clear the Tuileries. “It is this order which [transformed] into an insurrection what until then had been only a demonstration.” As rumors spread that the royal army was attacking civilians, the Gardes françaises, an army regiment which had long been stationed in the capital and which by the late eighteenth century had become its principal police force, went over to the side of the people. Believing that the long-feared attack by royal troops had begun, the people of Paris began a search for arms which two days later culminated in the invasion of the Invalides and the capture of the Bastille.⁴

Despite its ostensible importance, Lambesc’s charge has received scant attention from historians. Perhaps out of disdain from mere

⁴ Jacques Godechot, *La Prise de la Bastille* (Paris, 1965), 237; a translation by Jean Stewart has been published as *The Taking of the Bastille* (New York, 1970). For the Gardes françaises, see Jean Chagniot, *Paris et l’armée au XVIIIe siècle: Etude politique et sociale* (Paris, 1985).

événements, modern historians have for the most part been content to repeat formulaic accounts of this and other events of 12 July without critically examining sources or even without explicitly referring to any sources at all. The result is that a comparison of standard accounts of the day turns up some striking discrepancies of detail and interpretation. A review of recent works by Sutherland and Schama serves to illustrate this point.

Sutherland generally follows Godechot. Opposition to Necker's dismissal began in Paris with speeches in the Palais Royal urging resistance, though the fine story told by Camille Desmoulins about his own role "cannot be believed." One group then left the Palais Royal to close the theaters as a sign of mourning, while another crowd collected busts of Necker and the duc d'Orléans and paraded through the streets. At the place Louis XV it clashed with the Royal Allemand and was driven into the Tuileries garden. According to Dr. Rigby, an English traveller who was in Paris in July, "this incident was decisive." Palais Royal orators who had earlier "urged the crowds not to give the military a pretext to intervene" now called on them to take up arms in self-defense. Moreover the Gardes françaises responded to the news of the "massacre" by attacking the Royal Allemand at the place Louis XV. During the night that followed, the attacks on the barrières began, with the Gardes françaises participating in the pillage instead of defending the posts.⁵

Schama stresses the role of Desmoulins, who began the call to arms at the Palais Royal around three in the afternoon. The demonstrators' call for arms forced the authorities to intervene; this is not the angry but nonviolent crowd of Godechot and Sutherland. Lambesc was ordered to clear the marchers out of the place Vendôme. Outnumbered and unable to do so, he had to retreat to the place Louis XV. The crowd moved on into the Tuileries garden, where they collided with the troops. How the troops came to be in the garden is not specified, but the clash drew blood: the man who had been carrying the bust of Orléans "was dragged behind a horse back to the place Louis XV." Cavalry struggling to enter the garden were bombarded with a hail of objects thrown by the crowd on the terraces. The skirmish lasted long enough for word to spread of the massacre of the people by foreign troops, bringing Gardes françaises who drove Lambesc's cavalry out of the garden. Outside in the square, the outnum-

⁵ D. M. G. Sutherland, *France 1789–1815: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (New York, 1986), 65–66.

bered Royal Allemand tried to hold on alone against the huge crowds. Though they were slowly reinforced by the Salis Samade regiment during the evening, by 1:00 A.M. it was clear that their position was untenable, and Besenval, commander of all the troops in Paris, ordered them to withdraw from the city. Left to its own devices, the populace turned to "haphazard violence," seeking arms, beginning the attack on the barrières, and sacking the Maison Saint-Lazare. The failure of the troops to move against these disorders during the night meant that Paris was "lost to the monarchy," and the events of the twelfth, combined with reports from his officers that their troops were unreliable, shook Besenval's confidence to the point that he was unwilling to launch the full-scale military offensive necessary to regain control of the city on the thirteenth.⁶ Schama, then, emphasizes the role of Desmoulins, whose call to arms forced the authorities to act, and of Besenval, who ineptly sent a hopelessly outnumbered Royal Allemand company into action, then failed to provide it with timely reinforcements. Lambesc's charge itself is not even mentioned, but the scuffle between crowd and cavalry is shown as important, though unimpressive.⁷

The differences between these accounts are as striking as the points of similarity. There is flat contradiction on the role of Desmoulins. More important, there is a good deal of confusion about the movement of troops and crowds. When and where did their clash take place, and what did it involve? How decisive was it? Did it cause the Gardes françaises to switch to the people's side? Did it begin a search for arms, or had that already begun before the conflict? Was Besenval guilty of a major strategic error in dealing with the unrest? It is difficult to resolve such questions on the basis of these accounts.

To the extent that something important happened at the Tuileries, all accounts agree that it involved a massacre of civilians by the Royal Allemand. Yet it is interesting that an examination of the records of the Châtelet's investigation into the incident indicates that no one was killed by the infamous charge, but that cavaliers from Lambesc's Royal Allemand regiment did shoot and kill an apparently innocent bystander at the barrière Blanche on the same evening. This shooting, amply documented during the investigation, was widely ignored, whereas the imaginary massacre at the Tuileries produced

⁶ Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York, 1989), 378–87.

⁷ It "was not much of a battle." *Ibid.*, 384.

quantities of resounding rhetoric during the Revolution and has not ceased to figure in the historical literature to this day. It seems worthwhile to ask why, and to add this to the list of questions which this article will attempt to answer.⁸

The bulk of what follows represents an effort to reconstruct, insofar as possible, the events of 12 July 1789 and to resolve the discrepancies in existing accounts of the day, operating on the assumptions that *something* “really happened” in the past and that it is a significant part of the historian’s task to sift through the welter of sometimes contradictory, often misleading, and always incomplete evidence in an attempt to determine what that was. The article then continues with a brief examination of the origins of the patriotic myth of 12 July, asking in particular why Lambesc’s charge produced such an uproar at the time, whereas the real damage caused elsewhere by his troops was ignored. It concludes with an assessment of the importance of the affair at the Tuileries. Although no one would argue today that it was “the key to the revolution,” was it nevertheless “decisive” in the unfolding of the Paris rebellion of July 1789?

The initial discrepancy in our two accounts concerned the role of Camille Desmoulins. It is easily resolved with the assistance of the work of René Farge, who seventy-five years ago showed that Desmoulins progressively embellished his own role in events in successive recountings. Comparing the different versions, and fitting Desmoulins’ activity at the Palais Royal into what he could establish of the chronology of events on the twelfth, Farge showed that Desmoulins’s excited and disjointed harangues were of no more importance than

⁸ The Châtelet was the principal royal court at Paris other than the Parlement. In October 1789 the National Assembly voted to refer to it for investigation all accusations of treason resulting from the events of July. The Châtelet also conducted the inquiry into the October 1789 march to Versailles. Historians seem to have ignored the court’s probe of Lambesc. Though Godechot, *Prise de la Bastille*, 236–37, has a single, unattributed quotation from it, it does not appear in his notes, his indispensable bibliography, or his discussion of available sources. The Châtelet heard testimony from eighty-five witnesses. The original dossier containing transcripts of the depositions along with other evidence was long considered lost, but I recently was able to locate it in AN, BB³ 221. A copy of some of these depositions is contained along with other relevant information in BB³⁰ 82. Eighty-three of the eighty-five depositions have been published in M. J. Mavidal, E. Laurent, et al. (eds.), *Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860* (Paris, 1875–), 10:296–320 (hereafter *AP*). The printed versions of the depositions are generally incomplete, often omitting the age and sometimes the address of the witness, sometimes changing the spelling of names, and in certain instances omitting words or phrases in such a way as to alter the meaning of the testimony. Medical reports and other supporting data in the dossier remain unpublished.

those of countless other speakers and had no direct connection with events at the Tuileries four to five hours later.⁹

By his own accounts, Desmoulins said nothing about closing theaters, but shortly after he spoke, crowds left the Palais to shut them down as they began to open in various corners of Paris. Those who closed the theaters in the northeastern part of the city stopped along the boulevard du Temple at the home of Curtius, a well-known painter, sculptor, and wax museum proprietor. There (rather than at his Palais Royal shop) they collected busts of Necker and the duc d'Orléans.¹⁰ They then began a march back in the direction of the Palais Royal. On the rue Saint-Martin the crowd picked up a detachment of the Garde de Paris to keep order as they marched. Some five or six thousand strong, and growing by conscripting those they passed, the crowd paraded through the city like a tumultuous funeral cortège, carrying the busts wrapped in mourning crêpe, as well as clubs, hatchets, and pistols.¹¹ To the marquise de Lostange, looking out her window at these "beggars and wretches, poorly clothed and armed with clubs," it looked like the return of the Réveillon rioters of April. Other sources claim that two or more men ran ahead of the demonstrators, shouting warnings that residents should close their windows, because "they were pillaging, burning, and slaughtering all over Paris."¹² Perhaps the warnings referred to the royal troops; the marchers themselves seem to have attacked neither persons nor property.

Aside from the obvious intention to protest the sudden turn of political events, the precise purpose of the march remains elusive. In part, the demonstrators meant to pay homage to their heroes. As they marched, the crowd shouted, "Vive Monsieur Necker, vive Monsieur le duc d'Orléans!" and made those they passed doff their hats to salute the busts.¹³ According to several reports, once back in the Palais Royal,

⁹ René Farge, "Camille Desmoulins au jardin du Palais Royal," *Annales révolutionnaires* 7 (1914): 660–61. Despite Farge's thorough debunking, the role of Desmoulins has continued to be celebrated to this day. Sutherland's account is one of the few exceptions to this pattern.

¹⁰ *Procédure criminelle instruite au Châtelet de Paris sur la dénonciation des faits arrivés à Versailles dans la journée du 6 octobre 1789* (Paris, 1790), 1:151 and 185–86, depositions of Curtius and Pepin.

¹¹ *Récit de ce qui s'est passé à Paris le 12 juillet* (n.p., n.d.), 1–2; Jean-Sylvain Bailly, *Mémoires d'un témoin de la Révolution* (Paris, 1804), 2:80–81; Christophe F.-L. Montjoye, *L'Ami du roi* (Paris, 1791), 3:54; *Réimpression de l'Ancien Moniteur* (Paris, 1850), 1: 170; Louis Abel Beffroy de Reigny, *Histoire de France pendant trois mois* (Paris, 1789), 24.

¹² Pierre Caron, "Un Témoignage sur les événements de juillet 1789," *Revue historique* 116 (1914): 308–9; Montjoye, *L'Ami du roi*; François Louis, comte d'Escherny, *Correspondance d'un habitant de Paris avec ses amis de Suisse et d'Angleterre* (Paris, 1791), 33–34.

¹³ *Procédure criminelle instruite au Châtelet*, 1: 185–86, deposition of Pepin; *Révolutions*

the crowd decided to march to Versailles to demand the restoration of Necker to office.¹⁴ In fact, there was a major scare at Versailles on the evening of the twelfth as news spread that Parisians were arming themselves. Troops were stationed along the routes from Paris, and the bridge at Sèvres was guarded by artillery who were ordered to cut it if Parisians threatened to cross en masse. At 11:00 P.M. an alert about a potential attack on the bridge made it necessary for the troops to maintain battle formation all night.¹⁵ Next day the entire Royal Allemand regiment was ordered to station itself on the Billancourt plain to intercept “the Parisians who wanted to go to Versailles to find the king.”¹⁶

Whether or not there was a clear plan to march to Versailles, it is certain that the demonstrators, after their brief return to the Palais Royal, set off again in a westerly direction. What followed is one of the mysteries of 12 July. Schama follows a long line of historians who describe a clash between the marchers and royal troops in the place Vendôme. Buchez and Roux, Michelet, and Flammermont all describe a successful effort by troops to disperse the demonstrators, while Godechot has dragoons overrun by the demonstrators and requiring rescue by Lambesc and the Royal Allemand.¹⁷ The original

de Paris, no. 1 (12–17 juillet 1789, “8e édition, augmentée, 26 juillet 1789”), 1–2. For the use of effigies as a characteristic feature of eighteenth-century crowd action, see Colin Lucas, “The Crowd and Politics between *Ancien Régime* and Revolution in France,” *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988): 421–57.

¹⁴ “Paris en 1789: Du 25 juin au 1er août 1789: Lettres et journal de Gudin de la Ferrière,” *Revue rétrospective* 11 (1889): 7. The letter cited dates from 27 July. AN, BB³ 221, depositions of Lefèvre, la Gennetière, and Paré; William Eden, Lord Auckland, *The Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland* (London, 1861), 2:328–29; M. de Courtive, *Révolutions de Paris* (n.p., 1789), 6–7.

¹⁵ *Journal général de l'Europe*, 4, no. 87, 21 juillet 1789, 133. For two other press reports of a threatened march of Parisians to Versailles, see *Assemblée nationale*, 2, no. 2 (13 juillet), 24–62, and *Le Courier de Provence (XIXe lettre du comte de Mirabeau à ses commettans*, 9–24 juillet 1789), 20. See also *Histoire authentique[sic] et suivie de la Révolution de France* (London, 1792), 1: 156–57, and the sources cited by Pierre Caron, “La Tentative de contre-révolution de juin-juillet 1789,” *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 8 (1906–7): 669, on the terror that reigned in reactionary circles at Versailles once the news of the events of 12 July arrived from Paris. In June, before he was superseded by the duc de Broglie as commander of royal troops in the Paris-Versailles region, Besenval had made detailed plans for dealing with a Parisian march on Versailles. See Pierre Victor, baron de Besenval, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1821), 2:356.

¹⁶ AN, 1 AS 3, section I, “Fragment sur la conduite honorable et invariable du Régiment de royal allemand cavalerie étrangère,” 10. This document was written by the chevalier de Planta de Wildenberg, first lieutenant of the regiment, and has been published in part by Marc Bouloiseau, “Une Source ignorée de l'histoire de la Contre-Révolution,” *Actes du quatre-vingt-douzième congrès national des sociétés savantes, Strasbourg et Colmar 1967: Section d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (Paris, 1970), 3: 395–410.

¹⁷ Jules Michelet, *History of the French Revolution*, trans. Charles Cocks (Chicago, 1967), 150–51; Philippe J. B. Buchez and Prosper C. Roux, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1834–38), 2:82; Flammermont, *Journée du 14 juillet*, clxxvii; Godechot, *Prise*

source for this incident appears to be an anonymous and not always reliable pamphlet written the next day, which states that a detachment of dragoons pounced on the crowd in the place Vendôme, that the crowd replied with stones, that their bust of Necker was broken while that of Orléans narrowly escaped, and that the “traitorous” soldiers fired on the crowd, killing an unarmed Garde française. Prudhomme’s account is similar, though it attributes the attack to the Royal Allemand, who “hurled themselves into the crowd” after stones were thrown. The troops fired, the Garde was killed, and several were wounded.¹⁸ Bailly, who was not a witness, records in his memoirs that the crowd was dispersed and the bust of Necker broken, and adds that “it is said” that a Garde française among the crowd was killed, and that a soldier of the Paris Garde killed the dragoon who was responsible.¹⁹

There are certain problems about the Vendôme incident, quite apart from the disagreements on whether dragoons or demonstrators emerged victorious from the skirmish. In spite of the general agreement about the smashed bust of Necker, two witnesses later testified that they saw the crowd with both busts in the place Louis XV before Lambesc’s charge, and their owner, Curtius, testified that his two busts were returned to him intact within a week.²⁰ Army sources make no mention of any clash at the place Vendôme.²¹ In itself this is not conclusive evidence that nothing happened; it could also mean that something happened that they do not want to talk about.²² The only

de la Bastille, 236. There are numerous references to dragoons in the primary and secondary literature on 12 July. It is invariably unclear whether the term is being used generically to refer to cavalry or specifically to refer to members of the Royal dragons or Dauphin dragons regiments that were present in the area. For military units called into the Paris region in spring and summer 1789, see Caron, “Tentative de contre-révolution,” 12–13 and notes.

¹⁸ *Récit de ce qui s’est passé, 2; Révolutions de Paris*, no. 1, 2–3. Prudhomme adds that “at the same instant” the Royal Allemand charged into the Tuileries; this does not increase the credibility of the account.

¹⁹ Bailly, *Mémoires*, 2: 80–81.

²⁰ AN, BB³³ 221, depositions of Poussin and Saugnier; *Procédure criminelle instruite au Châtelet*, 1:150–51, deposition of Curtius.

²¹ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Reinach. See also Reinach’s “Mémoire” on the events of 12 July, in AN, D XXIXbis, 2, dossier 25. The “Mémoire” was addressed to the Paris Comité de recherches after Reinach learned of its accusation against Lambesc. It has been printed in Pierre de Vaissière, *Lettres d’aristocrates: La Révolution racontée par des correspondances privées* (Paris, 1907), 52–54n.8. AN, 1 AS 3, section I, “Mémoire pour servir d’instruction à L’Affaire des Thuilleries arrivée le 12 Juillet 1789,” 6–7 (a section of Planta de Wildenberg’s previously cited “Fragment”). Charles Eugène de Lorraine, prince de Lambesc, *Précis historique et justificatif* (Trier, 1790), ii.

²² Compare the account of events at the barrière Blanche on the evening of 12 July, signed by twenty-one officers and men of the Royal Allemand, which makes no mention of any shooting or any deaths. The account was published in *Relevé d’erreurs et d’impostures consignés dans les journaux, comme faits réels*, no. 3 (10 mai 1790), 104.

civilian eye-witness who testified concerning these events at the later investigation was an employee of the Administration royale des eaux de Paris who happened to be in his office at the square when from his window he saw the crowd arrive carrying the two busts. Curious, he joined them and followed them to the place Louis XV, where they encountered a detachment of dragoons. By his account, nothing happened at the place Vendôme.²³

On the other hand, a good deal happened at the place Louis XV. According to the same witness, the crowd asked the dragoons to salute the two busts. The dragoons responded with a volley of pistol fire and charged at a gallop across the square, injuring an unarmed Garde française. François Pepin, who was carrying the bust of Orléans, testified that as the marchers became embroiled with the troops in the square he received a slight chest wound from a sword, a bayonet, or a saber; in the crush, he failed to notice it until he felt the blood. Then as he moved with the crowd, approaching the entry to the Tuileries over the swing-bridge (a movable bridge which crossed the moat between the gardens and the place Louis XV), he was shot in the left ankle. He had to give up the bust, and a crowd helped him back to the Palais Royal where his wounds were treated. He was there when he heard news of Lambesc's charge.²⁴

In the Châtelet's investigation of Lambesc's charge there is abundant documentation, direct and indirect, of this prior conflict between troops and the crowd in the place Louis XV. François Drouin testified that while strolling in the Champs-Élysées with his wife and daughter in the late afternoon or early evening he heard shots from the direction of the place. Soon after, a squadron of dragoons galloped up, and some bystanders said that the troops had just been defeated in the square. Dominique Ancelin was just getting off the boat which had ferried him across the Seine between the Champ de Mars and the Champs-Élysées when he heard two shots. A dragoon told him that it was only a quarrel between a Garde française and another dragoon. Jean-Baptiste Franquelin heard at the Palais Royal around 7:00 P.M. that there was trouble at the place Louis XV, that shots had been fired, and that a Garde française, among others, had been gravely wounded. Jules Paré testified that he heard in the Palais Royal some

²³ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Saugnier.

²⁴ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of François Pepin. See also Pepin's November 1789 testimony before the Comité de police of Paris in the same dossier and his testimony to the Châtelet's investigation of the October march to Versailles, *Procès criminelle instruite au Châtelet*, 1: 185–86.

time after 6:00 P.M. that the crowd marching to Versailles had been stopped at the place Louis XV. He went to investigate, and when he reached the Tuileries he saw many people fleeing; they told him that there was shooting at the swing-bridge at the opposite end of the gardens. The marquis de Chateauneuf went to visit some officer friends at the army camp on the Champ de Mars. Around 6:30 their party was interrupted by a hussar who galloped up with news of a "horrible uproar" at the place Louis XV. The marquis took the boat across the river and then walked on to the place to investigate, arriving shortly before the Royal Allemand.²⁵

Though most of this testimony rests on hearsay or surmise, we also have eyewitness accounts of the *mêlée*. Pierre Lefèvre was with a group who left the Palais Royal with the intention of going on to Versailles. At the place Louis XV they encountered dragoons in battle formation and suggested that the dragoons join them. The crowd responded to the troops' rejection of their invitation by throwing stones, and the dragoons in turn fired several shots in the air.²⁶ Adrienne Tricot and Pierre Auvès told the Paris Comité de police that they saw dragoons kill a Garde française who had been swept up in the crowd.²⁷ André du Tronquay provided the most vivid description of events. Some time after 6:00 P.M. he was strolling in the Tuileries gardens when he heard a loud noise. Curious, he climbed the terrace near the place Louis XV, from which he saw a large crowd carrying the two busts in the square. A hussar rode across the square, from the river to the rue Royale, saber in hand. Several stones were thrown at him, and he commenced to gallop. Just then a detachment of some three hundred dragoons galloped into the square, and a shot was fired by someone concealed in the building stones collected alongside the square for use in the construction of the new Louis XVI bridge (now the pont de la Concorde). Although he saw no one hit, there was a riderless horse whose cavalier was said to have been killed. Jean du Barcide, commander of the *invalides* who guarded the Tuileries, saw from the opposite end of the gardens a crowd fleeing toward him across the swing-bridge. Moving down to check on the situation, he

²⁵ AN, BB³ 221 depositions of Drouin, Ancelin, Franquelin (testimony omitted from *AP*), Paré, and Chateauneuf (most of the cited testimony was omitted from *AP*, 318).

²⁶ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Lefèvre. The words "in the air" are omitted from the *AP* text (307).

²⁷ AN, BB³ 221, report of Jean-Baptiste Tricot's testimony to the Paris Comité de police, a report that includes the comments of his niece and her friend who were present.

heard shots from the place. He saw a wounded Garde française run over by the cavalry; the Garde soon died.²⁸

Other contemporary sources report the events in the place Louis XV, including the death of a Garde française.²⁹ The photograph on page 477 shows an attempt by the Revolutionary artist, Jean-Louis Prieur, to depict this "battle." A patriot who served on the Revolutionary Committee of the Poissonnière section and on the Revolutionary Tribunal (for the trial of Danton, among others), and who was ultimately executed in 1795 with Fouquier-Tinville, Prieur drew vividly, though not necessarily accurately; we have already seen that the busts of Necker and Orléans survived the events of the twelfth. For our present purposes, what is most important to note is that the affray took place *before* Lambesc's charge into the Tuileries.³⁰ The charge did not begin the violence on 12 July.

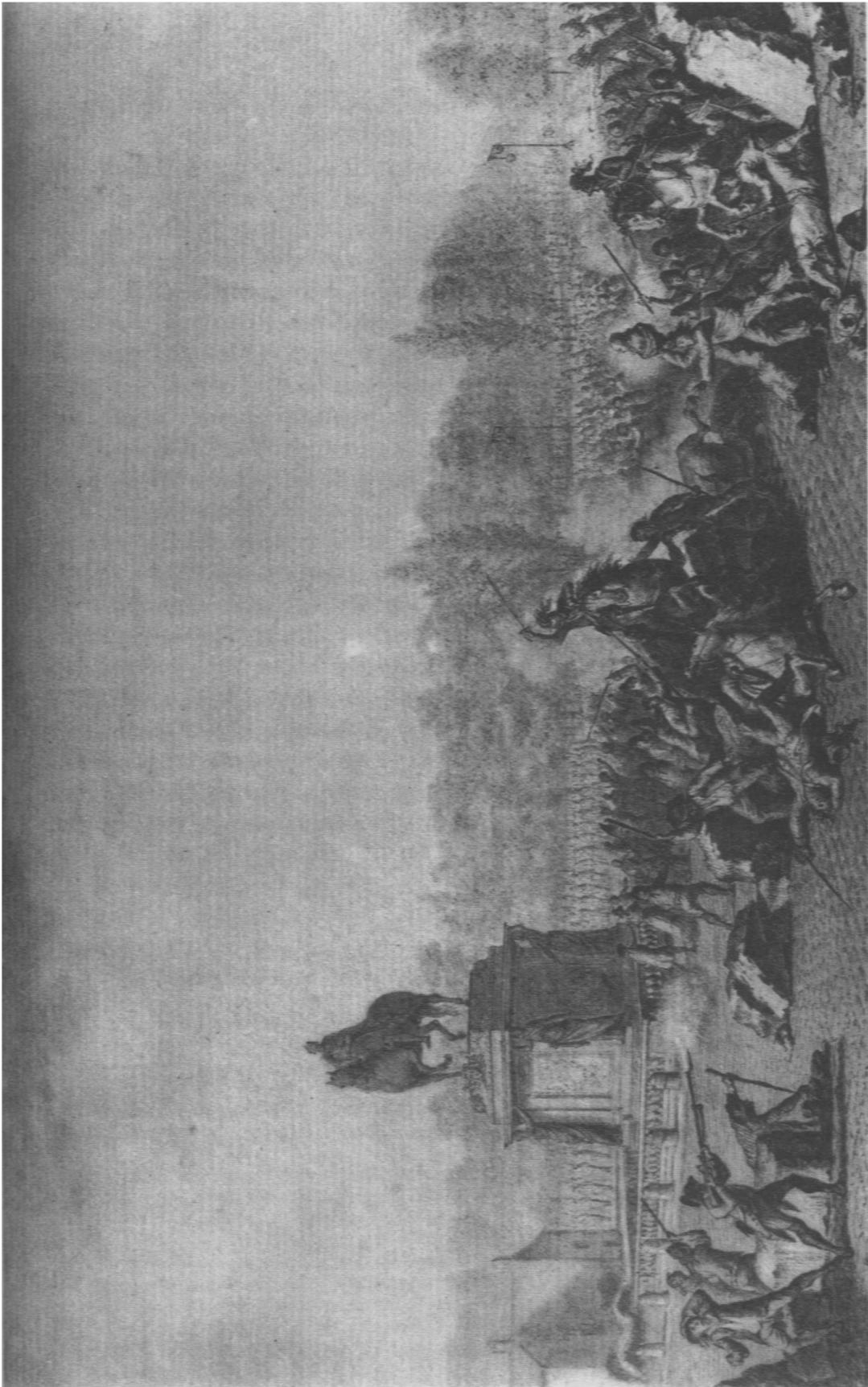
By early evening the baron de Besenval, commander of all the troops in Paris, was personally present in the place Louis XV. Besenval believed that something had to be done to prevent worse trouble from developing. A week earlier his immediate superior, the maréchal de Broglie, had sent him a moderately worded letter asking that he do his best to avoid bloodshed.³¹ Later, during the investigation of his conduct in July, Besenval explained that he had ordered the various cavalry units scattered around the city to collect in the square around 4:00 in the afternoon because he feared that small, isolated detachments dispersed around the city would be too weak to overcome opposition and might be provoked to violence. Because of the crowds, he had difficulty in reaching the square himself, and when he finally did so, he learned that the first dragoons to arrive there had been badly treated. Several, he claimed, had been fatally wounded by gunshots or stones. Although order had been restored by the time he arrived, he was concerned about the huge number of people alongside the Tuileries' moat, near the swing-bridge which crossed the moat and amid the stones collected for the construction of the new pont Louis XVI. But he also feared that any order to move troops already

²⁸ AN, BB³ 221, depositions of du Tronquay and du Barcide. Three regiments of hussars (light cavalry) were present in the area in July. Caron, "Tentative de contre-révolution," 13n.

²⁹ See the *Moniteur*, 1, 170; Courtive, *Révolutions de Paris*, 6-7; Antoine-Prosper Soulès, *Événemens de Paris ou procès-verbal de ce qui s'est passé en ma présence depuis le 12 juillet 1789* (Paris, n.d. [July 1789]), 1-2; *Procès-verbal des séances et délibérations de l'Assemblée générale des électeurs de Paris* (Paris, 1790), 1: 178.

³⁰ In addition to the previously cited testimony, see in AN, BB³ 221 the depositions of Boulenger and Binet, who went to investigate reports of fighting and arrived just in time to witness Lambesc's charge.

³¹ Letter of 5 July printed in Caron, "Tentative de contre-révolution," 25.



LES BUSTES DU DUC D'ORLÉANS ET DE M. NECKER SONT PORTÉS EN TRIOMPHE ET BRISÉS SUR LA PLACE LOUIS XV 12 JUILLET 1789, BY J.-L. PRIEUR.
From *Tableaux de Paris pendant la Révolution française: Soixante-quatre dessins originaux de J.-L. Prieur* (Paris: Le Livre et l'estampe, 1902).

in the square out of formation in order to push back the crowd would only aggravate the situation.³²

By now it was approximately 8:00 P.M.; Lambesc and his Royal Allemand detachment were about to arrive in the square.³³ According to one version of Besenval's testimony, the fortuitous appearance of the Royal Allemand provided him with a way out of his dilemma: the newly arriving detachment could be used to clear the crowd out of the square without any provocative movement by troops already drawn up in formation.³⁴ According to a second version, which corresponds with Lambesc's own recollections, the prince sent word from the place Vendôme that he was there with his detachment, asking for orders. Besenval took advantage of this to order him to the place Louis XV.³⁵ As soon as Lambesc arrived, Besenval ordered him to "move gently" or to "charge"—depending on which source we accept—the crowd collected in the square near the swing-bridge which crossed the moat and provided entry into the Tuileries gardens.³⁶ The object was to clear the square, not (as in Godechot's account) the gardens. Lambesc asked Besenval whether the cavalry should themselves cross the bridge into the garden, and according to Lambesc, repeated the question twice to make sure that he had understood him correctly.³⁷ Besenval's version is that he first replied in the negative and then changed his mind after realizing that it would be necessary for them to cross into the gardens and establish a position a short distance ("six pas") inside in order to accomplish the objective of pushing the crowd back far enough to separate it from the main body of troops in

³² AN, BB³⁰ 82, interrogation of Besenval. See also BB³ 221, deposition of Besenval (from the Lambesc investigation), and Besenval, *Mémoires* 2: 362. In 1789 there was a moat, about thirteen feet deep and almost eighty feet wide, between the place Louis XV and the Tuileries gardens. The moat was crossed by the *pont tournant*, a thirty-foot wide bridge in two sections which met in the middle when open and which were swung back against opposite sides of the moat at night. See Figure 1, and Jacques Hillairet, *Le Palais des Tuileries* (Paris, 1965), 123 and figure 6.

³³ Godechot, *Prise de la Bastille*, 339, gives 5:00 P.M. as the hour of Lambesc's charge, but the evidence collected in the Châtelet investigation indicates that it occurred between 8:00 and 8:30.

³⁴ AN, BB³⁰ 82, interrogation of Besenval from the Châtelet investigation of his conduct in July.

³⁵ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Besenval in the investigation of Lambesc; Lambesc, *Précis historique*, ii.

³⁶ Besenval has both versions: "se porter légèrement" in his interrogation in BB³⁰ 82, and "charger" in his deposition in BB³ 221. Three of the four Royal Allemand sources state that Besenval ordered them to "charge," though Reinach in his deposition in BB³ 221 simply says he was ordered (by Lambesc) to "enter" the Tuileries. The other three sources are: Lambesc, *Précis historique*; Reinach's "Mémoire" in D XXIXbis, 2; and Planta's "Mémoire" in 1 AS 3.

³⁷ Lambesc, *Précis historique*, ii.

the square.³⁸ All Royal Allemand sources insist that they then moved slowly to carry out these orders.³⁹ However, almost all of the thirty-two civilian witnesses who mentioned the pace of their advance emphasized its rapidity, not its moderate speed.

According to Lambesc, once inside the gardens his men encountered a sort of barricade, made up of several rows of chairs, stretching between the terraces on either side of the entrance. He led his troops slowly around it, careful to avoid injuring any of the crowd, whose numbers were inflated by curious bystanders. Although the crowd had not yet dispersed, Lambesc had pushed it back out of the square and into the gardens, and he was satisfied that he had at least accomplished the first task set by Besenval. He drew his men up in formation between the terraces. Unfortunately, they were immediately subjected to a barrage of stones, chairs, and broken bottles from the crowd which had moved up the ramps onto the terraces. There were even a few gunshots, which fortunately did not hit anyone. Worried about the increasing impatience of his detachment and fearing the likely consequences for the crowd if the barrage continued, the prince decided to order a retreat. But as soon as he gave the order he heard shouts to close the bridge and saw several men apparently moving to do so. He immediately recognized how disastrous it would be if his detachment had to fight its way through the crowd to the other exits, almost half a mile away at the opposite end of the park, and he therefore ordered several reliable cavaliers to fire their pistols in the air, in an effort to intimidate the crowd. Meanwhile he hastened to the bridge, using his saber to strike one of those who seemed to be trying most energetically to close it, without wounding him seriously. Back in the place Louis XV, he drew his men up in formation and reported to Besenval.⁴⁰

Lambesc's story is confirmed by two other Royal Allemand officers who were present and whose testimony is available to us. The chevalier de Planta de Wildenberg commented on the need to hurdle the chairs piled up to try to block their incursion, on the shots fired at them by the crowd, on the effort to disperse the crowd by firing in the air, and on the absence of any injuries to the crowd, which demonstrated the detachment's carefulness. He added that as they began to retreat out of the Tuileries an old man tried to block their passage by

³⁸ Besenval deposition in AN, BB³ 221; Besenval interrogation in AN, BB³⁰ 82 (where he says "cinq ou six pas").

³⁹ Lambesc, *Précis historique*, ii. AN, BB³¹ 221, deposition of Reinach; D XXIXbis, 2, "Mémoire" of Reinach; 1 AS 3, "Mémoire" of Planta de Wildenberg.

⁴⁰ Lambesc, *Précis historique*, ii-iii.

closing the bridge, so that Lambesc had to strike him on the shoulder with the flat of his saber.⁴¹ The comte de Reinach, too, mentioned the barrier formed out of chairs and added that once past it he rode over to a shed or tent to the left of the entrance. There he found a large crowd and ordered it to disperse, promising that no harm was intended. The throng responded with a rain of stones, bottles, chairs, and anything else at hand, giving him contusions on his side and back. At the same time the crowd on the terraces shouted down insults and fired on the cavalry. Reinach, who was captain and thus second in command to the prince, ordered the men to split up into small groups and carefully to fire a few shots in the air.⁴²

There is, however, an interesting discrepancy in Reinach's two accounts of the purported effort to close the swing-bridge and the resulting sabering. In his "Mémoire," which represents the first version of his testimony, he reported that at the moment when the detachment began to leave the gardens he saw a citizen at the left-hand corner of the bridge, trying to leave. Lambesc struck the man on the head with his saber, without wounding him. "Seeing that the prince was compromising himself with this man, I interposed myself between the two." Only later did Reinach's troops tell him that the man had been trying to close the bridge. In his 2 June 1790, testimony before the Châtelet, Reinach seems to have tried to portray the prince in a more favorable light. He then stated that at the moment of departure from the Tuileries he heard shouts from all sides to close the bridge, which in his ignorance of Paris he had not known could be closed. At the bridge he saw Lambesc near several persons, one of whom had his arms up in the air; but here he said nothing about any saber-blows.⁴³

Reinach's two accounts of the Royal Allemand's visit to the Tuileries gardens also touch on a new point. Six witnesses who testified in the second round of Châtelet hearings in November 1789 reported that an officer whom they took to be Lambesc broke off from the other cavaliers to chase a young man through the gardens. The officer, they reported, struck the young man with his saber, which only cut his hat, and then fired several pistol shots at him as he fled into the trees. Judging from his fight, the young man did not appear to be

⁴¹ AN, 1 AS 3.

⁴² AN, BB³ 221, deposition of the comte de Reinach, where the crowd's size is estimated at two hundred; and Reinach's "Mémoire" in D XXIXbis, 2, where the crowd is estimated at eighty.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, AN, B³ 221, deposition of Reinach.

wounded. The officer who had chased him galloped around the basin and then returned to the other members of the detachment. In his "Mémoire," Reinach reported that he briefly chased a young man who cursed at him. In his June testimony Reinach expanded on this, explaining that a young man aged about eighteen had thrown a large piece of a chair at him, giving him a painful blow on the arm, so that he thought it was broken. He chased him away, firing a blank to frighten him.⁴⁴

Besenal's own testimony supports the accounts of Lambesc and the other Royal Allemand officers. He saw the prince lead his men over the bridge and into the garden, but then was surprised, soon after, to see them fire in the air and abruptly gallop back into the place Louis XV. He immediately confronted Lambesc to ask what had happened and why he had failed to hold his position in the Tuileries. The prince replied that when his men entered the garden the fleeing crowd did not move to the other end, as anticipated, but instead climbed up onto the terraces on either side, from which they began to bombard the cavalry with chairs, stones, and anything else they could find. Meanwhile behind them some men were beginning to close the bridge, so he decided to get his men out as quickly as possible.⁴⁵

Much, but not all, of the Royal Allemand's version of events in the Tuileries is confirmed by independent witnesses who testified in the course of the investigation. Seventy-three of the eighty-five witnesses had evidence related directly to events at the Tuileries or the place Louis XV.⁴⁶ Fourteen confirmed that stones were thrown, with or without other objects. Once Lambesc's cavaliers had entered the garden, two witnesses saw the crowd on the terraces throw down chairs and stools between the troops and the bridge, in an apparent effort to impede their movements.⁴⁷ Interestingly, these are the only references to the use of chairs to block the cavalry's movements, and in each case the chairs are said to have been thrown behind the cavaliers after they had entered the garden. No civilian witness mentioned the chairs which, according to all Royal Allemand sources, the cavaliers

⁴⁴ AN, BB³ 221, depositions of the *marchand tapissier* Le Belle, of five persons who accompanied him—his wife, her sister, and three of his *garçons* (one of whose depositions is omitted from the *AP* version)—and of Reinach; D XXIXbis, 2.

⁴⁵ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Besenal; AN, BB³⁰ 82, interrogation of Besenal from his own investigation.

⁴⁶ Seven testified only about events at the *barrière Blanche*, three were out of town on the evening of 12 July, one was elsewhere in the city at the crucial time, and one simply testified that he had no relevant information about any of the matters involved in the investigation.

⁴⁷ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Hion and Drouin.

had to get past in order to enter the garden. As a left-wing journalist pointed out during the late stages of the investigation, why would anyone have built a barricade when no one could imagine troops entering the gardens?⁴⁸ On the other hand, five witnesses saw the crowd on the terraces throw down “chairs, stools, and even stones” directly at the Royal Allemand.⁴⁹

Almost all of the seventy-three who testified about events at the Tuileries and the place Louis XV mentioned shooting; only one said he heard no shots. Most attributed the shooting to the Royal Allemand. Only four witnesses, including Besenval and Reinach, attributed any shooting to members of the crowd. In addition to Besenval and Reinach, a dozen witnesses who reported shooting by the Royal Allemand agreed that the cavaliers shot into the air. Five said that the shots were aimed “sur le haut des deux terrasses” or “sur le haut de la terrasse” or “sur le haut des terrasses où il y avait quantité de monde.”⁵⁰ The magistrates of the Châtelet argued, questionably I think, that these words should be taken to mean that the shots were fired in the air rather than in the direction of the crowd on the terraces. It is interesting that the testimony of a sixth witness, who said the shots were fired “sur une grande quantité de monde qui étoit sur les deux Terrasses”—a statement which could *not* be interpreted in this fashion—was omitted from the published account of the investigation.⁵¹

The investigation makes clear that it was reasonable for Lambesc to conclude that members of the crowd were attempting to close the swing-bridge. Ten witnesses (in addition to Reinach) reported hearing shouts to close the bridge, and two said they made unsuccessful attempts to close the bridge themselves.⁵² Five witnesses said they believed Chauvel, Lambesc’s victim at the bridge, was himself attempting to close the bridge.⁵³ On the other hand, six stated explicitly that they saw no reason for Lambesc to strike Chauvel, and thirteen others who saw the sabering made no comment either way, although they typically described Chauvel as “small,” “old,” or “unarmed.”⁵⁴

Military sources all indicate that the point of the charge was to disengage the troops in the place Louis XV from the angry citizens

⁴⁸ *Révolutions de Paris*, 49 (12–19 June 1790), 4:572.

⁴⁹ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Laplanche.

⁵⁰ AN, BB³ 221, depositions of Le Belle, Prudent, Bourgeois, Antheaume, and du Barcide.

⁵¹ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Bois (omitted from *AP*).

⁵² AN, BB³ 221, depositions of Binet and Lefèvre.

⁵³ AN, BB³ 221, depositions of Dabjac, Carboire, Le François de Rosuel, Laplanche, and Chateauneuf.

⁵⁴ To cite only one example, see AN, BB³ 221, the deposition of Carle.

crowded around them in the square or heckling and stoning them from the adjacent section of the Tuileries. We have already seen that several witnesses confirm that stones were thrown at the troops in the square before the charge. Only a minority of the witnesses (sixteen, in addition to Besenval and Reinach) commented on the target of the advancing Royal Allemand. Nine supported the military version. Most of them described the object of the charge as the crowd collected in the Tuileries near the swing-bridge.⁵⁵ Two said that the charge was aimed at the crowd surrounding the troops in the square, while two others testified that the cavalry charged the crowd which came from the Palais Royal through the Tuileries or the demonstrators marching with the busts.⁵⁶ On the other hand, seven witnesses reported that the victims of the charge were families: men, women, and children strolling peacefully in the Tuileries, returning from a Sunday walk in the Champs-Élysées, or fleeing into the Tuileries to escape the mêlée that was developing in the place Louis XV.⁵⁷ This is the version of events that was generally accepted in July 1789 and has often been repeated since then.

Taken together, the evidence collected in the Châtelet's investigation suggests that Besenval's order to Lambesc and the subsequent behavior of the prince and his detachment were certainly misguided and counterproductive. Whether they were criminal is another question. No one was actually killed during the charge. Contemporary accounts stressed the "assassination" or "murder" of the little old man on the swing-bridge, but the investigation made clear that the individual, Jean-Louis Chauvel, was not seriously hurt and lived to testify about his small, superficial, though bloody, head wound.⁵⁸ One other witness was injured during the charge and died during November after he had testified. This was Jean-Baptiste Tricot, a master

⁵⁵ See AN, BB³ 221, the depositions of Boivin, Baudin, Henrietta Le Bel (as her name is spelled in BB³ 221, unlike her husband's), Le François de Rosuel, and Drouin.

⁵⁶ AN, BB³ 221, depositions of Brayond, du Tronquay, Tricot, and Samny.

⁵⁷ AN, BB³ 221, the depositions, of Boullenger, Carle, Buguet, Franquelin, and Samny.

⁵⁸ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Jean-Louis Chauvel, 4 November 1789, and 4 November report of the *conseillers médecins et chirurgiens du roi en son Châtelet* on their own examination of Chauvel. Nevertheless, Paris officials continued to insist that Lambesc was guilty of Chauvel's murder. See Sigismond Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution*, première série (New York, 1974; originally Paris, 1894–99), 3:78–79; *Moniteur*, 2, no. 110, 10 décembre 1789, 348; and *Rapport fait au Comité des recherches des représentants de la commune, par M. Garan de Coulon*, in Buchez and Roux, *Histoire parlementaire*, 4:69. This report was delivered on 18 November 1789. By early February, however, Garan de Coulon was no longer talking about anyone killed by Lambesc, though he now referred to a man (doubtless Tricot) who died after being knocked down by the prince's horse. See Jean-Philippe Garan de Coulon, *Réponse aux observations pour le baron de Besenval* (Paris, 1790), 51–52.

tailor, who dislocated his thigh when he fell trying to get out of the prince's way after Lambesc sabered Chauvel. The Châtelet doctors who examined Tricot in November reported that he also had a swollen and painful abdomen, and that they were told that he sometimes spit blood and had trouble breathing. Tricot was convinced that these symptoms were related to his fall on 12 July. The doctors attributed them to "a hemorrhagic disposition" which might have been produced by the fright he received.⁵⁹ Obviously we are in no position to make a more accurate diagnosis, but it seems safe to conclude that his death was not attributable to the dislocated thigh which is the only demonstrable injury he received on 12 July. We have seen several reports that a Garde française died in the place Vendôme, the place Louis XV, or the Tuileries early in the evening of 12 July. Although we can probably rule out the place Vendôme, it is possible that a death occurred in one of the other locations. Nevertheless, all the reports indicate that it happened before the charge and even before the Royal Allemand appeared on the scene at all. It is worth reiterating, then, that no one died as a direct result of Lambesc's charge.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, whether the blame should be assigned to the men who charged or to the commander, Besenval, who gave the order, the advance into the Tuileries was certainly rash. Tricot was seriously injured trying to get out of the way. Anyone ordering cavalry charges in crowded urban locations bears responsibility for this type of injury; the miracle is that more people were not hurt. The same conclusion applies even more strongly to the many shots fired. Even if we disregard those witnesses who swore that shots were fired at the crowd, not just into the air, the fact remains that bullets fired in the air are going to come down somewhere.⁶¹ It is remarkable that no one, apparently, was shot. Although the troops in the place Louis XV and later inside

⁵⁹ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Tricot, and doctors' report on their examination of Tricot.

⁶⁰ The statement in Godechot, *Prise de la Bastille*, 237, that "one old man may have been killed, although there is no proof of this," is perplexing. Perhaps it refers to Tricot, who was 56. Garran de Coulon's *Rapport fait au Comité de recherches*, in Buchez and Roux, *Histoire parlementaire*, 4:69, states that Tricot "died of his wound," which he described as a broken (rather than dislocated) thigh. Garran also attributed the death of a Garde française in the place Louis XV to the Royal Allemand, but this (like the charges concerning Chauvel and probably Tricot) fails to fit the evidence. The editor of the newspaper *Assemblée nationale*, 2, no. 5, 55–56, appended his own commentary on recent events to his report on the National Assembly session of 16 July. In it he charged that Lambesc had murdered a young man with a pistol shot at point-blank range on the swing-bridge. There is absolutely no evidence to corroborate this.

⁶¹ Which is why modern police forces typically have regulations against shooting in the air, a fact recently confirmed for me by William F. Quinn, chief of police for the city of Newton, Massachusetts, and Kenneth Watson, chief of the Boston College Campus Police (private communications).

the Tuileries garden itself suffered substantial provocation, many of those threatened by their advance had done nothing. They were innocent bystanders, out for a family stroll on a Sunday evening in a park believed to be a refuge from worldly concerns, when they were suddenly and shockingly swept into the vortex of military action.

Angry reports spread rapidly. Pierre Brillet was out walking with his wife in late afternoon and early evening on the twelfth. He saw the crowd close the Opéra, and not long afterwards he heard that "the prince de Lambesc was responsible for a great deal of bloodshed in the place Louis XV." Denis Lançon, another stroller, found an uproar when he reached the square. The crowd blocked him from entering the Tuileries, so he went off by way of the quai, where he heard "everyone" say that "the prince de Lambesc was massacring everybody in the place Louis XV." Antoine Paillet went to the Palais Royal on the evening of the twelfth. No sooner had he arrived when a disturbance began, as "everyone shouted, 'To arms,' because Monsieur le prince de Lambesc was massacring everybody at the place Louis XV." Jean Davaine testified that he had spent the day of 12 July at Neuilly. Returning home at midnight he heard that Lambesc had killed a man in the Tuileries gardens.⁶²

Lambesc quickly became the target of popular outrage. Parisians tried in vain to locate him during the next several days, and efforts were made to insure that he did not escape the country.⁶³ He and his regiment were the object of an intense campaign of public and private vilification which is visible in a number of contemporary letters and pamphlets and in the illustration on page 487. Once again the work of Jean-Louis Prieur, it purports to depict the event that made Lambesc infamous, but it inaccurately shows the prince striking the citizen on his way into the Tuileries, rather than on the way out. This, and the absence from the drawing of any hint that the bridge could be closed, make Lambesc's action seem all the more inexcusable, though Prieur could not resist depicting well-armed patriots lined up in good order in the square, as well as crowds massed on the terraces inside the

⁶² AN, BB³ 221, depositions of Brillet, Lançon, Paillet, Davaine.

⁶³ See the letter from Jacques-Emmanuel Faily, négociant, to his brother in Châlons-sur-Marne, 18 July 1789, published in René Gandilhon, "Cinq lettres sur les événements parisiennes (30 août 1788–2 août 1789)," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 28 (1956): 272. Courtive, *Révolutions de Paris*, 10. See also *Courrier de Versailles*, 1, no. 10, 16 juillet 1789, 154–55. AN, 1 AS 3, "Fragment sur la conduite honorable," 13. *Le Sabreur des Tuileries dans l'embarras* (Paris 1789). *La Générosité de M. de Saint-Priest envers le sabreur des Tuileries* (Paris, 1789). See also *AP*, 8:307; *Le Courrier de Versailles à Paris et de Paris à Versailles*, 2, no. 26, 2 août 1789, 83–86; and Edmond Cleray, "Un Précédent de 'Varennes,' l'émigration du prince de Lambesc," *Annales des sciences politiques* 24 (1909): 531–37.

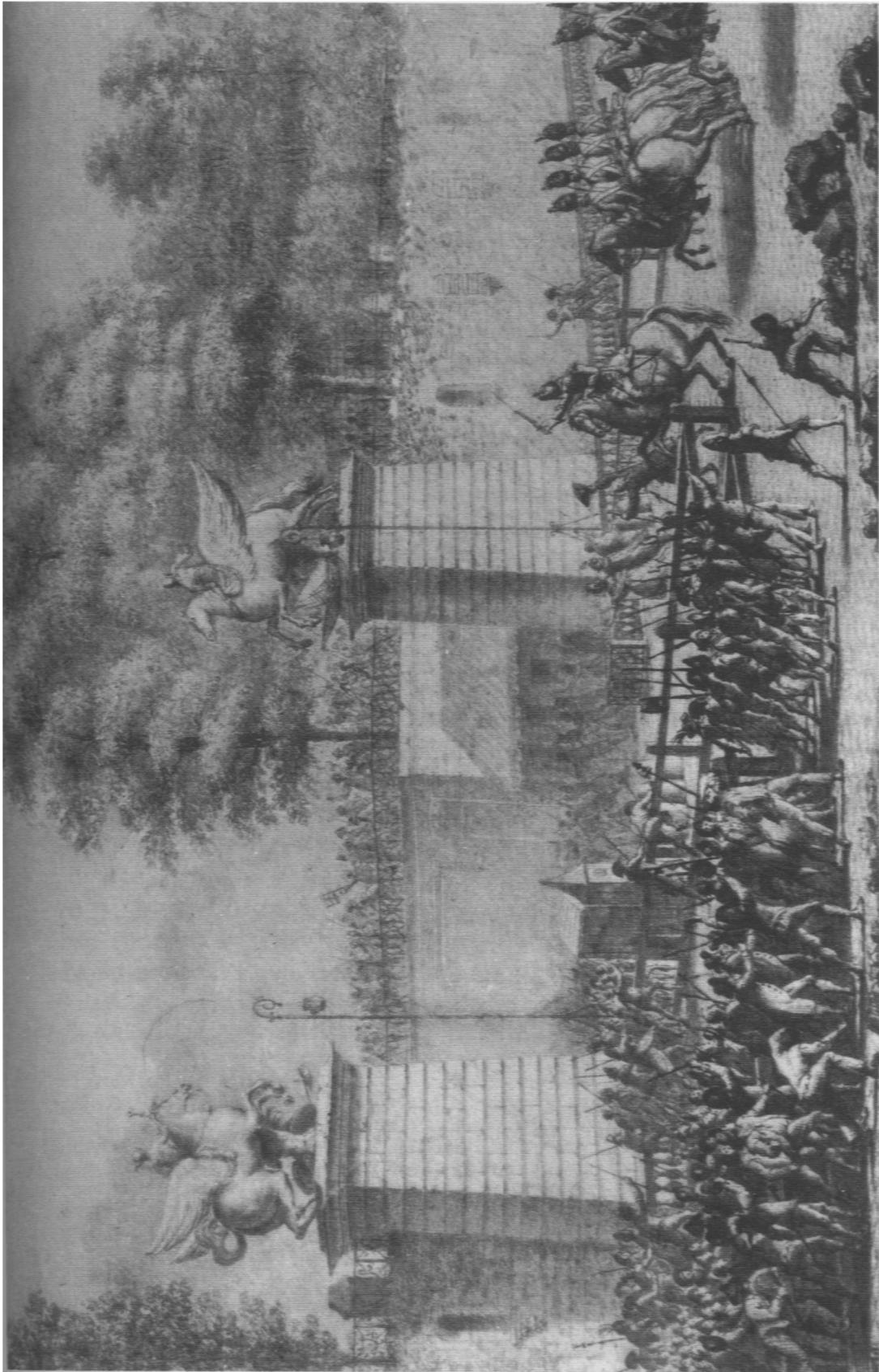
garden. Among the pamphlets attacking Lambesc, several incorporated the kind of sexual slander that Robert Darnton has identified as a characteristic feature of prerevolutionary pamphleteering and which persisted in Revolutionary political invective as well.⁶⁴ The impact of this campaign lingered; at the height of the Terror Barère's report to the Convention on the victory at Fleurus mentioned that the enemy cavalry had been commanded by the *ci-devant* prince Lambesc, "the assassin of old men," and his comment could still arouse a shudder of horror in the Convention. Even after Thermidor the charge into the Tuileries and the "massacre" of "a respectable old man" could still seem the key event that began the Revolution.⁶⁵

One might well ask why this rather trivial event produced such a firestorm of outrage. For all the talk of "assassination" and "murder," Chauvel was not seriously hurt, Tricot's death was only tenuously linked to the Royal Allemand, and the unsubstantiated death of the *Garde française* was, if anything, the work of some other regiment. The amount of opprobrium heaped on Lambesc seems even more disproportionate when one recalls the other, much less celebrated, victims of 12 July. François Pepin, the bust carrier, took a bullet in the ankle which might very well have struck him, or another member of the crowd, in a far more dangerous location. An unidentified *Garde française* was injured and perhaps killed in the same *mêlée* before Lambesc's charge. Each of these incidents was the work of other, unidentified, regiments, which were not singled out for the kind of abuse heaped on the Royal Allemand.

Did something in the background of the prince or his regiment account for these attacks? Lambesc came of ancient noble lineage; his mother was a Rohan-Montauban, and his father was born into a branch of the Lorraine family which descended from a younger son of the first duc de Guise in the mid-sixteenth century. When the dauphin married Marie-Antoinette, Lambesc's mother asserted a distant

⁶⁴ See the letter by Gudin de la Ferrière, an associate of Beaumarchais, published in "Paris en 1789," 7, and the following pamphlets: *Les Nouveaux Projets de la cabale dévoilés* (Caen, 1789); *Descente du prince Lambesc aux enfers* (Paris, n.d.); *Testament préalable à la juste exécution projeté du traître et assassin le prince Lambesc* (Paris, 1789); *La Mort du ci-devant prince Lambesc* (Paris, n.d.); and *Néron Lambesc vit-il toujours?* (Paris, n.d.). The first of these pamphlets reported that, after the fall of the Bastille, Lambesc traveled around Europe, seeking foreign aid for counterrevolution, in the company of "a beautiful castrato" with whom he slept when he couldn't do better; the *Testament préalable* attributed his actions to his captivation with "the royal prostitute," Marie-Antoinette. Compare Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); and Elizabeth Colwill, "Just Another Citizen? Marie-Antoinette on Trial, 1790–1793," *History Workshop* 28 (1989): 63–87.

⁶⁵ *Moniteur*, 30 June 1794, 21, 93–94; and see above, n. 1.



LE PRINCE DE LAMBESC ENTRE AUX TUILERIES PAR LE PONT-TOURNANT AVEC UN DETACHEMENT DU ROYAL-ALLEMAND 12 JUILLET 1789, BY J.-L. PRIEUR.
From *Tableaux de Paris pendant la Révolution française: Soixante-quatre dessins originaux de J.-L. Prieur* (Paris: Le Livre et l'estampe, 1902).

family connection between her late husband and the future queen. Her success in getting this recognized at court earned her son the office of *grand écuyer*, with responsibility for the royal war and race horses as well as a substantial retinue of subaltern officials. As *grand écuyer*, Lambesc played a prominent role at the coronation of Louis XVI and received a substantial stipend, which amounted to a quarter million livres annually even after 1787 cutbacks.⁶⁶ But this information was rarely featured in the denunciations of the prince after 12 July; even the alleged family tie to the queen, although not ignored, did not figure prominently in the criticism.⁶⁷

The Royal Allemand regiment had been ordered to Paris from its post in Valenciennes late in June. It arrived at the château of la Muette just west of the capital on 6 July. It therefore shared in the suspicions which all the newly arriving troops provoked among patriots, all the more because it was an ostensibly foreign regiment which seemed less likely to share the attitude of French citizens toward the political transformation that was underway.⁶⁸ Yet it is unlikely that this explains the uproar over the “massacre” at the Tuileries, because no one criticized the Royal Allemand for the death it verifiably caused on 12 July: at the same hour that Lambesc entered the Tuileries, a different detachment shot and killed a man at the *barrière Blanche*.

The *barrière Blanche* figured prominently in the first wave of attacks on *barrières*, which began (as is occasionally noted but far more often ignored) during the night of 11–12 of July, before the news of Necker’s dismissal reached Paris.⁶⁹ Shortly after noon the next day a detachment of Royal Allemand cavaliers was dispatched to the *barrière* to try to keep order and prevent rioters from restarting the previous evening’s fire. This detachment, commanded by Reinach, spent a difficult afternoon there, surrounded by a crowd that both heckled and attempted to seduce the troops with offers of alcohol and money. Around six o’clock Lambesc came to inspect the situation, and Rei-

⁶⁶ Jacques Vicomte Fleury, *Autour de la grande écurie: Le Prince de Lambesc, grand écuyer de France* (Paris, 1928).

⁶⁷ Though twenty-one officers and men of the Royal Allemand argued in May 1790 that the charges against Lambesc were partly motivated by his kinship to the queen. *Relevé d’erreurs*, no. 3 (10 May 1790), 99–101.

⁶⁸ Though the previously cited group of officers and men later protested that the regiment was not in fact foreign. Some members, they argued, were Alsaticans, and although others were German, they had been trained on good French principles. *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁹ The famous wall of the Farmers General was still incomplete in July 1789, and the *barrière Blanche* was an entry point on the old (1674) frontier, located at the end of the *chaussée d’Antin* at the *rue Saint-Lazare*. See AN, Z^{1a} 886, report filed by the staff of the *barrière Blanche*, and the later depositions by three staff members in the *Information concernant l’incendie des barrières* in this carton.

nach requested that his detachment be relieved. He and his men then went back to the Manège to refresh themselves and their horses, before going off to their rendezvous with infamy at the Tuileries.⁷⁰

Another detachment took their place at the *barrière Blanche*, and several witnesses in the *Châtelet* investigation give us an indication of what happened shortly thereafter. Around eight o'clock, just as Lambesc and the first *Royal Allemand* detachment were entering the Tuileries, a skirmish developed at the *barrière*. According to one witness, an old man tried to pass through the cavalry who were in formation in the square in front of the *barrière*. He was mistreated by the troops and fell down. The hostile crowd set up a clamor, and a few stones were thrown. One man was shot in the abdomen. He was taken to a limonadier's shop for assistance and then sent home in a coach, but the witness reported that he was dead on arrival. Another witness stated that the *Royal Allemand* had fired a few shots in the air in an effort to disperse the crowd, but some of the shots broke windowpanes in the neighboring taverns. The occupants responded by hurling mugs and anything else they could find at the troops, who then fired another round, hitting a man who had just stepped out into the square. Although the details differ, in each case the general scenario is clear: the angry crowd felt provoked by some action of the troops and threw things at them; the troops responded with gunfire, killing one member of the crowd, who may have been an uninvolved bystander. The victim's wife verified that her husband, André Riel, an Alsatian shoemaker, had been shot twice in the abdomen and had commented just before expiring that it was his own countrymen (that is, Germans) who had killed him. She added that he had been strolling about the city with a friend (who was not called to testify) when he was shot.⁷¹

Here we have a man who was verifiably shot and killed by the *Royal Allemand* on the twelfth of July, yet no one seems to have cared. No pamphleteers denounced the deed. The Paris authorities mounted no investigation. The *Châtelet* dismissed all of the testimony about the *barrière Blanche* on the grounds that it was irrelevant to the matter at hand, because Lambesc had not been charged with killing anyone there and because he clearly was not in fact there when

⁷⁰ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of the comte de Reinach; D XXIXbis, 2, "Mémoire" by Reinach (which unaccountably contradicts his own deposition and Planta's "Mémoire" by insisting that there were absolutely no problems at the *barrière* during the afternoon); 1 AS 3, "Mémoire," by the chevalier de Planta de Wildenberg; Lambesc, *Précis historique*, ii.

⁷¹ AN, BB³ 221, especially the depositions of Dallemagne, Bourbon, and Lemaire.

the shooting occurred. Historians have not discussed Riel's death, nor have they emphasized the shooting of Pepin or the apparent death of the Garde française during the fracas before the charge.⁷² For two hundred years, everyone has talked about the non-existent "murder" at the Tuileries swing-bridge, while the real victims of 12 July have been forgotten.

It is interesting to speculate why this should be the case. In part, no doubt, the location of these events has determined the amount of attention they have received. The *barrière Blanche* was on the northern fringe of the city, at the edge of the neighborhood unattractively named *Porcherons*, an area just about to be incorporated into the city by the new wall of the Farmers General, which was under construction. The Tuileries, on the other hand, was a once and future royal palace in the heart of the city, and its garden was a favorite spot for well-off Parisians on a summer Sunday. In 1787 one observer had called it "the refuge of virtue," contrasting it with the *Palais Royal*.⁷³ Several witnesses testified that they sought a safe haven in the gardens after they were frightened by the troops and the crowd in the place Louis XV.⁷⁴ Jean-David Boullenger, a *conseiller du Roi* and retired *caissier du Sceau de la grande chancellerie*, felt "the greatest astonishment" when he saw the troops enter the gardens. As the cavalry fired their guns and galloped about, waving their sabers, he held a stool over his head in self-defense and loudly denounced "the atrocity" they were committing in "violating the sovereign's abode and threatening the lives of people who peacefully strolled there." Pierre Bardin, a Garde française, made a similar point: Paris rebelled "because Monsieur le prince Lambesc, at the head of the Royal Allemand regiment, passed through the Tuileries; and, as this is a place where troops ordinarily do not enter, it caused an uproar." Restif de la Bretonne agreed: the Tuileries were "a sacred refuge, destined for games, for laughter, for love, where Mars should never be anything but a statue." As terrible as it was for Lambesc to strike down the old man at the swing-bridge, the real crime, whose guilt Lambesc will never be able to wash away, was "to enter the garden on horseback."⁷⁵

But the special nature of the Tuileries does not by itself fully ex-

⁷² Though Montjoye, *L'Ami du roi*, 3:54, mentions a death at the *barrière Blanche*, and his report is cited by Buchez and Roux, *Histoire parlementaire*, 2:82.

⁷³ Quoted in Albert Babeau, *Paris en 1789* (Paris, 1889), 204–6.

⁷⁴ AN, BB³ 221, depositions of Le Belle, Prudent, Lançon, and Poussin.

⁷⁵ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Boullenger; M. Civrays, "Une Lettre d'un garde française sur la prise de la Bastille," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 1 (1924): 464; Nicolas-Edmé Restif de la Bretonne, *L'Oeuvre*, I, *Les Nuits de Paris* (Paris, 1930), 201–2.

plain the overemphasis on Lambesc's charge and the underemphasis on the shooting of Riel. Many of the witnesses in the investigation testified that on the evening of the twelfth the story that swept through Paris had Lambesc "massacring everyone" at the place Louis XV, rather than in the Tuileries. The identity of this "everyone" is a second factor. The principal victim of the charge was Jean-Louis Chauvel, aged sixty-four, who identified himself as a *maître ès-arts de l'Université de Paris*, indicating that he had received an extensive education and was probably a schoolmaster.⁷⁶ He came from an age group for whom traditional attitudes of derision had recently given way to respect.⁷⁷ And he came from a social group increasingly touchy about aristocratic arrogance.⁷⁸

The people who testified at the Châtelet investigation of Lambesc shared (or surpassed) Chauvel's social standing. They were prosperous shopkeepers, *bourgeois de Paris*, lawyers and robe nobles, the sort of people one would expect to find in the place Louis XV or the Tuileries on a summer Sunday evening.⁷⁹ Any one of them might have been trampled by a cavalry charger or struck by a stray (or well-aimed) shot. Raphael Carle, who by November was the commandant of a National Guard battalion, found himself in the place Louis XV on the evening of the twelfth and later considered it "a miracle" to have escaped in one piece after being in the middle of fifty charging cavalry for fifteen minutes.⁸⁰ His death, for example, or that of André du Tronquay, the président trésorier de France au Bureau de finance de Guienne, would have been a cause for outrage among well-off Parisians who cared little about the shooting of Riel, an Alsatian immigrant shoemaker who lived, appropriately, on the rue du Bout du Monde.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Chauvel is identified as a *maître de pension* in the *Procès-verbal des séances et délibérations de l'Assemblée des Electeurs de Paris*, 1:178n.1.

⁷⁷ David Troyansky, *Old Age in the Old Regime* (Ithaca, 1989).

⁷⁸ See the public outrage generated by the 1782 Moreton-Chabillant trial, stemming from another incident in which a respectable bourgeois was mistreated by an arrogant young aristocratic army officer "in whom the principles or prejudices of his estate have not inculcated a habit of moderation." Bailey Stone, *The Parlement of Paris, 1774-1789* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981), 102-4; and Schama, *Citizens*, 137-38.

⁷⁹ The laboring poor who represented an estimated two-thirds of the Parisian population made up at most a fifth of those who testified about the events at the Tuileries. The intensive efforts of the Paris authorities to locate witnesses makes it unlikely that this simply reflects the greater likelihood that members of the middle and upper classes would come forward to testify. For the composition of the Paris population see Jeffry Kaplow, *The Names of Kings: The Parisian Laboring Poor in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1972), 29.

⁸⁰ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Carle.

⁸¹ Just as the deaths of four white students at Kent State University in May 1970 are remembered with horror, while the two black students shot and killed ten days later by white police during a demonstration at all-black Jackson State College in Mississippi are all but forgotten.

Finally, it is important to emphasize a crucial ambiguity in the attitudes of Parisians toward the July uprising. On the one hand, most Parisians supported the Third Estate's victory at Versailles during preceding weeks. They were horrified at the dismissal of Necker, which seemed to threaten bankruptcy, famine, and civil war. Lambesc's charge into an unarmed crowd of respectable people was precisely the sort of ill-considered action that they associated with the inept royal government that had produced the mess in which France found itself. On the other hand, propertied Parisians were uneasy about popular protests of the dismissal. The comte d'Escherny no doubt spoke for many when he commented that well-off Parisians who had left town for the day returned Sunday night to find the city full of "bandits, cannons, and soldiers, the barrières in flames, the populace running wild, with every appearance of brigandage and massacre." The next day every bourgeois had a story about his adventures the night before. His own first step, once he was able to get home through the turbulent streets, was to clean and load his guns. His next was to hide his valuable papers inside his mattress.⁸²

To many bourgeois (and to Paris municipal authorities who depended partly on revenues from the entry fees), the assault on the barrières appeared as an attack on property and an episode of popular violence in the streets. When the Commune drew up its bill of indictment against Besenval in the fall of 1789, one of its charges was that he had done nothing to control "brigandage" on the night of 12 July; they specifically mentioned the attacks on the Maison Saint-Lazare and La Force as well as the barrières.⁸³ Riel may not have been an active participant in this "brigandage," but his death was a byproduct of it. As such, it was far better to forget Riel than to declare him a martyr.

To many of those who marched through the streets of Paris carrying the busts of Necker and Orléans on 12 July, to these "five or six thousand ragged beggars" described by royalist writers, concerns about food shortage and rumors of famine plots must have greatly overshadowed anxieties about a royal bankruptcy.⁸⁴ For them, the attack on the barrières meant an opportunity to relieve economic distress by

⁸² Escherny, *Correspondance*, 36–83.

⁸³ J.P. Garan de Coulon, *Rapport fait au Comité de recherches*, in Buchez and Roux, *Histoire parlementaire*, 4:70. The report added that Besenval had used his troops only against honest citizens. See also Garran de Coulon, *Réponse aux observations pour le baron de Besenval*, 29, 53–54, 61–62, 64–65.

⁸⁴ Quote from Montjoye, *L'Ami du roi*, 3:54.

eliminating entry fees which inflated the prices of wine, fuel, and other goods. For them, Lambesc's charge should have been a side-show that distracted attention from the battle for economic security whose front line was at the *barrières*. Lambesc, rather than Riel, might have lapsed into obscurity if the common people had been setting political agenda in the summer of 1789. Several years had to pass before they would acquire their full political voice; by then Riel had been forgotten amid new, more pressing grievances. In short, the patriotic myth of 12 July was constructed in the days and weeks that immediately followed by the well-off men who dominated the Revolution in its early years.

There remains the question of decisiveness. How important was Lambesc's charge in shaping the events of July 1789? Its subjective importance at the time is evident from the uproar it generated. For the reasons we have explored, the clash between civilians and the Royal *Allemand* struck psychological chords that continued to resonate for several years. It is a little more difficult to detect objective significance in the affair, to find anything important that changed decisively as a result. Did it begin the search for arms? Undoubtedly the search accelerated and intensified in the aftermath of the charge, but we have seen that demonstrators who marched through the streets during the afternoon carried weapons, and some reports indicate that a few shots were fired at troops. Dr. Rigby claimed that the mood at the Palais Royal became markedly more belligerent after a man appeared, aghast, and shouted, "To arms citizens, the Dragoons have fired on the people in the Tuileries gardens, and I myself have received a wound," pointing to his leg. "From this moment nothing could restrain the fury of the people; they burst forth into the streets calling *Aux armes—aux armes*."⁸⁵ We do not know the identity of this individual, but the location of his wound makes him sound more like Pepin, the bust-carrier who was wounded in the scuffle *before* the charge, than Chauvel, whose head was cut by Lambesc.⁸⁶ If this was indeed the turning point, then, it seems to have occurred before the Royal *Allemand* entered the fray.

What of the response of the *Gardes françaises*? Did they answer the charge by attacking the Royal *Allemand* at the Tuileries, as Gode-

⁸⁵ Rigby, *Letters from France*, 45–46.

⁸⁶ Pepin testified that after he was wounded he "was carried to the Palais Royal and exposed to everyone's view; that his wounds were bandaged, and a young man beside him shouted that he [Pepin] had been wounded by the troops and invited everyone to take up arms in self-defense." *Procédure criminelle instruite au Châtelet*, 1:186.

chot has it, by driving them out of the gardens, as Schama indicates, or by attacking them at the place Louis XV, as Sutherland reports? Did this mark a decisive shift in the attitude of the regiment which was the key to the control of Paris? All of these questions must be answered negatively. We have already seen that the cavalry left the gardens on their own; the celebrated sabering of Chauvel occurred as the detachment withdrew from the Tuileries within a few minutes of its arrival, under the hail of objects hurled down at them from the terraces by the crowd. During the course of the evening, the detachment remained drawn up in formation in the place Louis XV, along with troops from several other units, including those of the Salis Samade regiment who slowly arrived. The Royal Allemand detachment eventually withdrew to its quarters outside the city without any further action.⁸⁷

Another Royal Allemand detachment that had been on duty at the barrière Blanche during Lambesc's charge was the one that fought briefly with a group of Gardes françaises. After leaving the barrière, they set up in formation on the boulevard des Italiens near a Gardes françaises base. During the evening Gardes at these barracks heard that a member of their regiment had been killed in a confrontation with troops, and they set out to seek revenge. Encountering the Royal Allemand detachment nearby, they fired on them and put them to flight.⁸⁸ There was no direct connection between this incident and the charge at the Tuileries.

Nor did this signal any decisive turning point in the attitude of the Gardes françaises. The regiment had fought reliably against the Réveillon rioters in April, but sixty-four of its members were among the *vainqueurs de la Bastille*. The transition from repression to revolution was gradual; it did not occur abruptly on the evening of 12 July. There had been enough incidents of insubordination for Besenval to consider the regiment "lost" by early July, and yet reports from the barrières show that some units continued to attempt to keep order. A Garde française even shot and killed a looter at the barrière de la Voirie during the night of 12 July (after Lambesc's charge). As late as

⁸⁷ AN, BB³ 221, deposition of Reinach, and D XXIXbis, 2, "Mémoire" of Reinach; Lambesc, *Précis historique*, iii.

⁸⁸ AN, D XXIXbis, 2, "Mémoire" of Reinach, and I AS 3, "Mémoire" of Planta de Wildenberg; Civrays, "Lettre d'une garde française," 464–65; Antoine C.-M.-A. Tardieu, marquis de Maleissye, *Mémoires d'un officier aux gardes-françaises (1789–1793)*, ed. M. G. Roberti (Paris, 1897), 51–53.

noon on 14 July, members of the Gardes helped prevent the complete burning of the *barrière du Maine*.⁸⁹

The episode may have affected the army general staff more than the rank and file Gardes françaises or the revolutionary crowds. Lambesc's charge showed that Parisians would not easily be intimidated, that many of them would not flee even in the face of charging cavalry, and that if they were attacked, some of them would fight back with any weapons at their disposal. This meant that even reliable troops could only be used successfully if their commanding officers were willing to stomach a bloodbath. Because Broglie had ordered Besenval to limit bloodshed, this in turn signified that troops could not be used.

Finally, there is the question of Besenval's strategy. Earlier we saw that Schama attributed much of the blame for the affair to his strategic deficiencies and specifically to his use of a Royal Allemand company against an enormous crowd and his subsequent failure to provide timely reinforcements. Our detailed review of the events of 12 July suggests that this is simply inaccurate. There were in fact several other units in the place Louis XV during the entire evening of 12 July; the Royal Allemand detachment was selected for use because it was convenient to do so, not because it was the only unit available. It was unable to handle the crowd because its commander had been ordered to avoid a bloodbath—an order which certainly reflected the attitudes of Louis XVI, whether or not he ever knew precisely what was happening in Paris. Under the circumstances Besenval's decision to withdraw from the city seems to have been his only reasonable course of action.

Besenval can more plausibly be faulted for his lack of preparation for the events of 12 July. Several *barrières* had been attacked during the previous night, and Broglie had written on the eleventh to warn him of rumors of possible unrest the next morning.⁹⁰ On awakening on the twelfth, Parisians found notices posted by the government in major streets, appealing to them, on behalf of the king, "to stay home, *not* to form crowds, and to promote the maintenance of order and peace."⁹¹ In spite of this apparent expectation of trouble, Besenval did nothing to prepare for it. An officer of the Gardes fran-

⁸⁹ Besenval, *Mémoires*, 2:351; AN, Z^{1a} 886, reports from the *barrières de la Voirie* and du *Maine*.

⁹⁰ Broglie's letter of 11 July has been published in Caron, "Tentative de contre-révolution," 27.

⁹¹ Montjoye, *L'Ami du roi*, 3:59; Escherny, *Correspondance*, 26.

çaises who reported for duty at noon on 12 July was told to take the day off as things appeared very quiet. Lambesc himself, commander of a key cavalry regiment, spent the afternoon visiting his mother.⁹² Still, it is difficult to see how Besenval could have escaped from his fundamental dilemma: the population was determined to resist, and he had been ordered to avoid bloodshed. Once open conflict developed, his reluctance to trust his army to fight was probably wise. Scott has argued that the army might not have defected if commanders had had the confidence to use it, but his own evidence shows that when officers in the provinces attempted to control rioters with military force in the summer of 1789, the troops refused to fire or even joined the crowds.⁹³

Because it occurred in the heart of well-to-do Paris, because it impinged on the leisure activities of the Paris elite and their middle and lower middle class emulators, and because it seemed to epitomize the arbitrary, even stupid, behavior of the royal government, which threatened to destroy their comfortable way of life as well as the National Assembly's efforts to secure rational reforms, Lambesc's charge from the place Louis XV across the swing-bridge into the Tuileries had tremendous emotional resonance. This helps explain why the *Garde française*, Bardin, could attribute the whole uprising in Paris in July 1789 to anger at the charge, and why Restif de la Bretonne commented, after describing the deaths of Flesselles, de Launay, and three defenders of the Bastille, that Lambesc bore the responsibility for all of them.⁹⁴ It is reasonable to conclude with Godechot that Besenval's order to clear away the crowd and push them back into the Tuileries transformed a demonstration into an insurrection.

This is not to say, however, that without Lambesc's charge the demonstration would never have turned into an insurrection. The attack on the *barrières* actually began the night before. To the extent that Parisians really planned to march to Versailles in July 1789, a collision with royal troops was inevitable, with similar ultimate consequences. Even before the charge, incidents were already leading to the involvement of the *Gardes françaises* in fighting against other

⁹² Maleissye, *Mémoires*, 45; Lambesc, *Précis historique*, ii.

⁹³ Samuel F. Scott, *The Response of the Royal Army to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), 55–59, 70–71. See also Jean-Paul Bertaud, *The Army of the French Revolution*, trans. R. R. Palmer (Princeton, 1988), 24–25.

⁹⁴ Civrays, "Lettre d'une garde française," 464; Restif de la Bretonne, *Les Nuits de Paris*, in *Oeuvre*, 1:210.

army units, which seems likely to have led to an escalation of revolutionary activity. Events were proceeding toward the eventual dénouement, the victory of the patriots, whether or not Lambesc charged. The most crucial development in Paris in July 1789 was the formation of a new municipal government and of a militia under its control, which meant that the royal government had lost control of the capital and could only regain it through a civil war fought with an unreliable army.

Lambesc's charge was a dramatic event which seemed to contemporaries to symbolize what was at stake in July: an educated and socially respectable citizenry which sought to manage its own affairs was under attack by a royal government which was so unreliable and inept that it threatened the whole social order. It is worthwhile to attempt to untangle the reality of 12 July from the mythology in which it is often buried, even though the events of that evening were only small links in the chain that produced the Revolution.