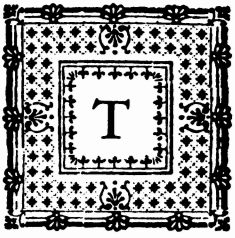
# The King's Longest Night

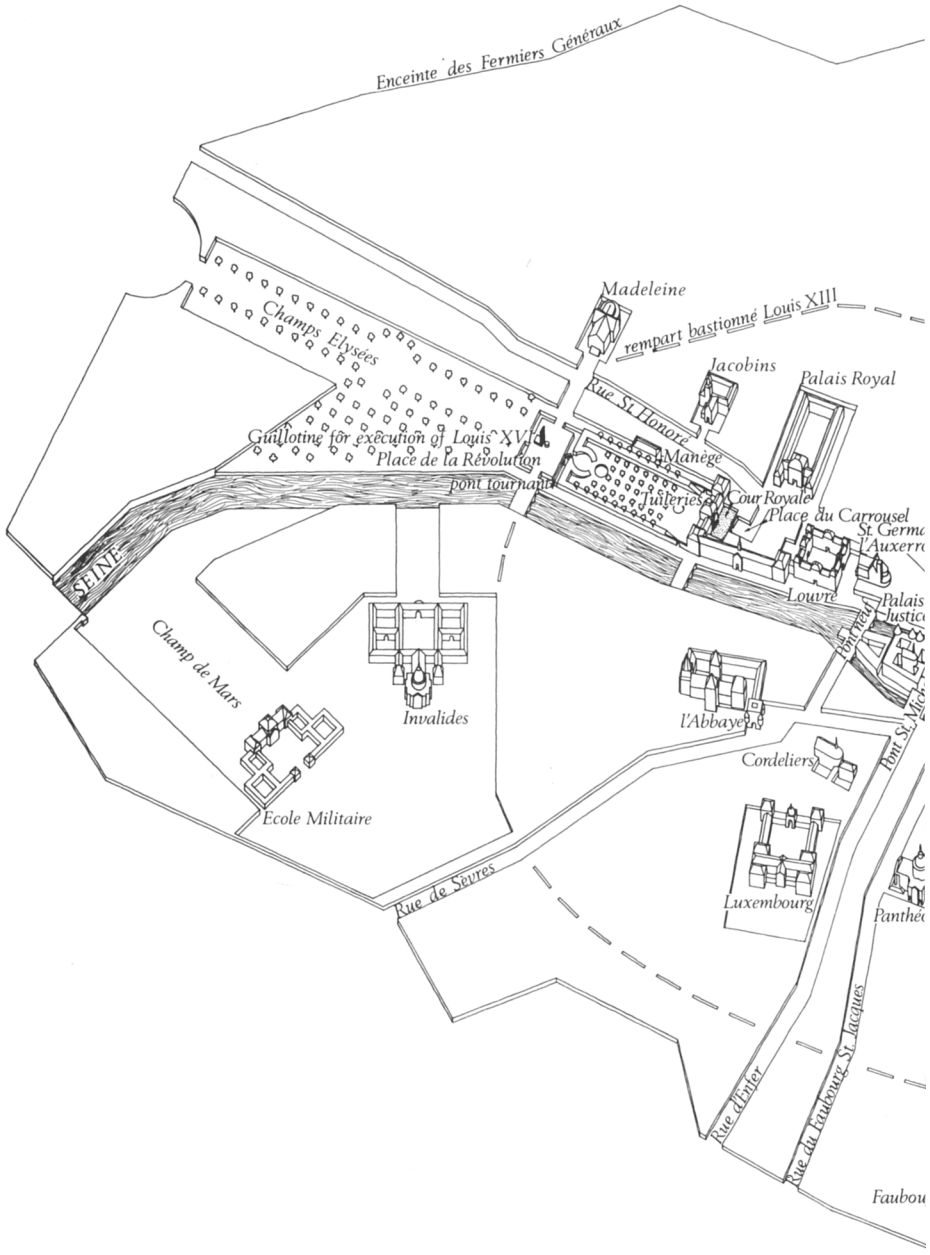
## THE TUILERIES, AUGUST 9–10, 1792

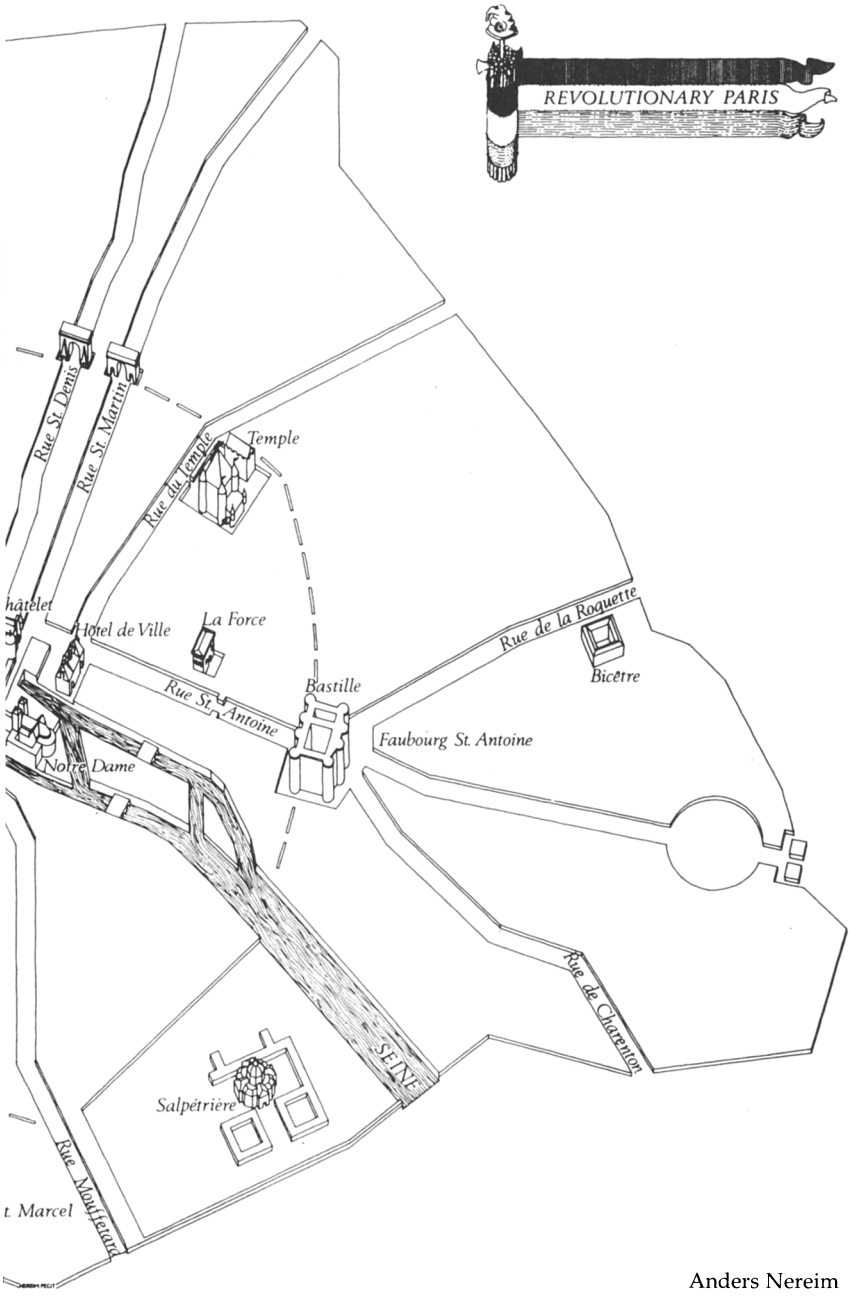


TALLOW WAS in short supply in Paris but the Tuileries, the king's château since 1789, was ablaze with candles on this hot, clear night. All the windows were open to let in what little air was stirring. The public rooms were crowded with troops and armed men nervously awaiting an attack from the people of Paris.

In the royal apartments on the second floor the king and his family also waited. Only the royal children, the dauphin, age seven, and his sister, Madame Royale, age fourteen, were oblivious to the excitement: they were sleeping, watched over by their governess, Madame de Tourzel. The king, Louis, the sixteenth of his name, was passive, even lethargic. He was dressed in violet, the traditional color of mourning for French kings, but he showed no signs of distress, no awareness of danger. Marie-Antoinette, whose selfishness and stiff public manners had long ago alienated the affections of her subjects, was more agitated than her husband. Two years of revolution had affected her profoundly. The once beautiful queen, her faced lined, her hair graying, looked older than her thirty-seven years. The king's sister, the pious Madame Elisabeth, and the queen's friend and companion, Madame de Lamballe, completed the royal entourage.

Around 12:45 A.M. the sounds of the tocsin, the alarm bells


Enceinte des Fermiers Généraux
Madeleine
rempart bastionné Louis XIII
Champs Elysées
Jacobins
Palais Royal
Rue St. Honoré
Guillotine for execution of Louis XVI
Manège
Place de la Révolution
pont tournant
Tuileries
Cour Royale
Place du Carrousel
St. Germa
l'Auxerro
SEINE
Louvre
Palais
Justic
Champ de Mars
Invalides
l'Abbaye
Cordeliers
Pont St. Mic
Ecole Militaire
Rue de Sevres
Luxembourg
Panthéo
Rue d'Enfer
Rue du Faubourg St. Jacques
Faubou




Anders Nereim

housed in every parish church, shattered the apparent calm of the night. Everyone in the château rushed to the windows and strained to identify the sound of specific bells. Which churches were ringing the call to arms, which neighborhoods would be marching on the Tuileries? Some shouted out the names of Paris churches, insisting they recognized the unmistakable tones of the bells of Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marcel, the two most feared neighborhoods in the city. The hours of nervous, almost hysterical waiting were over. The tocsin was ringing and soon Paris would answer the call to march against her king.

The attack was not unexpected. Almost two months earlier, on June 20, an angry and armed Paris crowd had easily entered the royal apartments and intimidated the king and his family. June 20 had been a dress rehearsal for August 10. Both attackers and attacked had learned important lessons from June 20. Louis and his commander, the Marquis de Mandat, concluded that the Tuileries was poorly defended and could probably not withstand a siege. Louis himself had little interest in tactics, and Mandat, an unimaginative if loyal officer, had made the necessary preparations. The château itself, built as a residence rather than a fortress, would be the second line of defense. The insurrectionists must be checked before they entered the grounds of the Tuileries. By holding the bridges across the Seine, Mandat hoped to make the attackers pay a heavy price in blood before they reached the château. If, he reasoned, they managed to cross the river from the left bank and attempted to join up with the troops on the right bank, they would then face seasoned troops strategically placed in and around the château. At the east end of the Tuileries gardens stood the old château of the Louvre, which was heavily defended. All the other entrances to the château had been sealed off. The stone-walled terraces surrounding the grounds could be held against attack by a handful of men, and the Pont Tournant, a mechanical bridge at the west end of the grounds, was locked. The insurrectionists, Mandat thought, would have to fight on his terms. He had strengthened the garrison, nearly doubling its size. The château and its grounds were bristling with soldiers and the Cour Royale, the largest of the three courtyards in front of the Tuileries itself, was defended by artillery.

Mandat's preparations were thorough and competent. Now it was up to the king; only he could set the defensive machinery in motion. Louis had to decide to fight or surrender, defend the monarchy or abdicate. But Louis hated decisions. The fate of the martial Bourbon house rested with a vacillating and pacific king. In the midst of the excitement the king remained inert, seemingly indifferent to what was about to happen.

Madame Elisabeth, who had been leaning out a window to hear the sounds of Paris in insurrection, left her post and walked over to Pierre-Louis Rœderer, the representative of the Department of Paris. The mayor of Paris, Jérôme Pétion, had refused to defend the château, as had the Legislative Assembly. By default of municipal and national authorities, Rœderer was left with the responsibility of defending the king and the monarchy. It was not an obligation he sought. Rœderer was a bland and timid man who preferred bureaucratic obscurity; but events had thrust him into prominence. Almost as much as the king Rœderer hated decisions.

When Madame Elisabeth approached he was sitting at a table reading the law of August 3, 1791, which dealt with the declaration of martial law. "What is that you have in your hand?" the king's sister asked. "Madame, it is the law dealing with the use of public force." "And what are you looking for?" "I was trying to find out if it was true that the Department had the authority to proclaim martial law." "And is it true?" "Madame, I don't believe so." It was not an answer to inspire confidence.

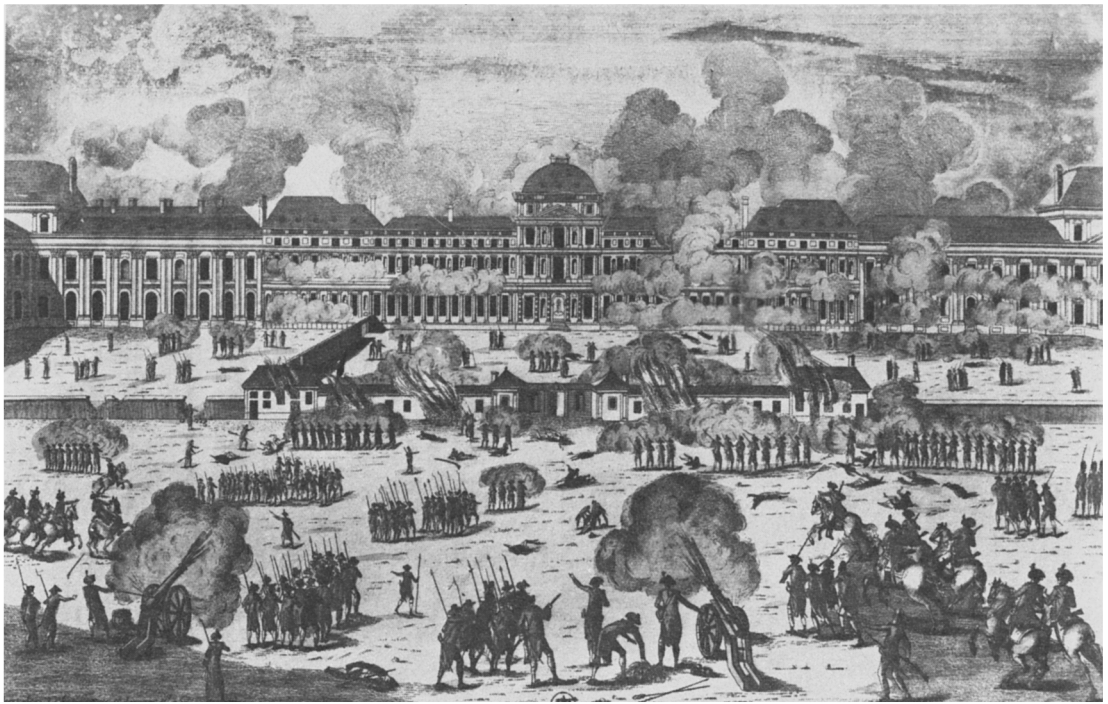
Rœderer had earlier told one of the king's ministers that martial law could only be proclaimed when the public tranquillity was habitually threatened, and he was unsure whether the Department, whose jurisdiction overlapped that of the municipal government of Paris, had the authority to run up the red flag of martial law. Besides, this, he had explained, gesturing vaguely toward the Carrousel where a crowd was gathering, "is a completely different thing than a simple disturbance of public tranquillity. It is a revolt stronger than martial law." Rather than exceed his authority, rather than compromise his political future, Rœderer wanted Louis to leave the Tuileries and seek refuge in the Legislative Assembly, which was in session just across the garden from the château. Rœderer stubbornly insisted he could not and would not proclaim

martial law: Louis, just as stubbornly, refused to leave the Tuileries. The king retired to his bedroom, Rœderer went on reading the laws.

Around 2:30 A.M. a messenger arrived to report to the king that there were no signs of the sections of Paris marching. They were having trouble collecting their contingents. Perhaps the tocsin would go unanswered. The news, as it spread through the château, dissolved the sense of danger. There would be no attack; the revolutionaries would skulk back to their mean homes and submit to their rightful leaders; the monarchy would endure and triumph.

This optimistic interlude disappeared with the dawn. Paris was not marching but the sections remained agitated. The streets of Saint-Antoine and Saint-Marcel were lit with torches, armed men were assembling. At around 4:00 A.M. the sound of a coach, probably carrying Mayor Pétion to the city hall, the Hôtel de Ville, rattling over the cobblestones of the Cour Royale roused the château. In the royal apartments Madame Elisabeth was the first up. She went to the window. The dawn was dark red, as if nature had conspired to prefigure the events about to unfold. She shook Marie-Antoinette awake to see the beautiful sunrise. But politics interested the queen more than panoramas. She went over to Rœderer, who had spent the last couple of hours dozing in a chair, and asked him what was to be done. The king and his family, he answered, must seek safety in the National Assembly.

"Monsieur, there are troops here. It is time to know who will triumph, the king and the constitution, or factionalism." Rœderer responded dryly that if the queen was determined to fight, the king would have to concern himself with preparations for resistance. During this exchange Louis emerged from his bedroom. He was still drowsy with sleep. His carefully curled and powdered hair was flattened on one side where he had slept on it. His violet suit, rumpled from being slept in, complemented his lopsided coiffure. The disheveled king repeated what he had said some hours earlier: he had no intention of leaving the Tuileries. He had no faith in the Legislative Assembly. He seemed determined to fight for his crown. Rœderer managed to persuade the king to send a representative to the Assembly to see if they were willing to defend



*THE TUILERIES UNDER ATTACK, AUGUST 10, 1792.* An anonymous engraving, in color. The conception is static and even hieratic, but the engraving, contemporary to the event, conveys some of the excitement of the fall of the monarchy. The puffs of smoke coming from the château are from the Swiss defenders firing muskets. The Cour Royale is the center of the three courtyards; and the royal apartments were on the second floor. The open area in front of the three courtyards where the attackers are standing is the Carrousel. The attack, as depicted here, is much too orderly; but it makes clear the important role of artillery, and the château itself is accurately presented. *Bibliothèque nationale*

*LOUIS AS REVOLUTIONARY.* A popular engraving (artist unknown) commemorating the invasion of the Tuileries on June 20, 1792. Louis was forced to put on the "Bonnet de la liberté" by the crowd (the caption insists, euphemistically, that the cap was presented to the king by the nation). This is one of the few portraits of the king where revolutionary and monarchical symbols are juxtaposed. *Bibliothèque nationale*


*LOUIS IN HIS GLORY.* Lithograph by Delpech, after a semiformal portrait of the king. The signature is a facsimile of the king's. He is bedecked with the ribbons and medals of the *ancien régime*, but appears here without his robes of monarchy. *Bibliothèque nationale*

the monarchy. Etienne-Louis-Hector DeJoly, the minister of justice, volunteered and set off across the garden.

Louis had momentarily thrown off his lethargy. He buckled on a ceremonial sword, put his hat under his arm, gathered his family together, along with several ladies of the court, and went to inspect his troops. It was around 6:00 A.M. The troops in the château itself, mostly professionals with a leaven of devoted courtiers, were passionately loyal to the king and greeted their commander-in-chief with enthusiasm. Louis then ordered his family to remain behind while he descended to the courtyard. The Swiss mercenaries he met on the way acclaimed him with shouts of "Down with the factions!" "Down with the Jacobins!" But once in the courtyard, where the guns were manned by members of the Paris National Guard, the artillerymen shouted "Long live the nation!" "Down with the veto!" "Down with the traitor!"—taunts he had not heard since June 20. Louis kept his composure but reviewed the troops perfunctorily, then returned to the château, unable or unwilling to rally his defenders.

At about the same time Louis reentered the château and mounted to the royal apartments, DeJoly returned from his mission to the Assembly. He had found the deputies—or at least those who remained since the supporters of the king and of General Lafayette's constitutional monarchists had abandoned their seats—frightened, confused, and unwilling to act. The only decision the Legislative had been able to take was to sit tight and remain in session so that the sovereignty of the nation, embodied in the Assembly, would not be compromised. The national authorities were of the same mind as the municipal and departmental authorities: to oppose revolutionary Paris was unthinkable if not impossible. Let events run their course.

Rœderer, who had left the château to find out what had happened to DeJoly, intercepted the excited minister as he was about to enter the Cour Royale. "The Assembly hardly listened to us. There are not enough members to make a decree; at the most there are 60 or 80." In addition DeJoly reported having seen armed men pushing into the château gardens by way of a gate near the Manège, the former riding academy of Louis XV where the Legislative met. Some

of the artillerymen had unloaded their guns; others had turned their guns on the château itself, defying orders. And in the Carrousel, just in front of the château, DeJoly reported seeing an enormous crowd armed with pikes, swords, even sticks.

Rœderer escorted DeJoly to the king, who received the report along with a rumor that the municipality of Paris had ordered 5,000 musket balls distributed and another that the Commune (the city government) was disorganized—a euphemism for the coup d'état at the Hôtel de Ville—the mayor under house arrest, and Mandat, who had earlier been summoned to report to the Hôtel de Ville, either arrested or dead. The insurrectionists were on the march. Still Louis would not hear of leaving the château. The king was seated at a table next to the entry to his reception room. His hands rested inert on his knees; he was oblivious to his surroundings. His earlier decision to fight had evaporated. He listened to the reports and rumors listlessly, almost in a daze. Gathered around him were the queen, Madame Elisabeth, the remaining ministers, and the ladies of the court. "Sire," Rœderer pleaded, "Your Majesty has not five minutes to lose. You will be safe only in the National Assembly. The opinion of the Department is that you go there without delay. You do not have enough men to defend the château. They are no longer well disposed toward you. The artillerymen have unloaded their guns."

The king looked up blankly at Rœderer: "But I haven't seen a large crowd at the Carrousel." "Sire, there are twelve pieces of artillery and a huge crowd is arriving from the *faubourgs*." Louis stared at the floor. Gerdret, one of Rœderer's colleagues, loudly supported his superior's plan. "Don't raise your voice here with us," snapped Marie-Antoinette. "Let Monsieur the *procureur-général-syndic* speak." She turned to Rœderer, reminding him that the château was full of armed and determined men. "Madame, all Paris is marching."

The king looked up and glanced with disinterest around the room. Then he slowly got up and turned to his wife: "Let us go." He stood rooted, waiting for someone to tell him what to do next.

Madame Elisabeth asked Rœderer if he would be responsible for her brother's safety: "Yes, Madame, on my life, I will march immediately in front of him." DeJoly asked if the ministers could join

the royal family; the queen asked on behalf of Madame de Tourzel and her daughter. Rœderer agreed to both requests. Then he explained to the king that representatives of the Department would surround the royal entourage and, escorted by some National Guardsmen, they would all walk to the Manège. "Yes, it will be just as you say," Louis muttered. Rœderer opened the door to the reception room and announced that the king and his family were going to the National Assembly. He sent for the officer in charge and gave instructions.

As soon as the escort arrived the royal party marched through the reception room. The crowd watched mutely. The king said, to no one in particular, "I am going to the National Assembly." As they passed through the *œil-de-bœuf,* the foyer leading to the royal apartments, Louis took the cap of one of his escorts and exchanged it for his own plumed hat. The astonished guard stuck the royal hat, with its large white feather, under his arm and continued marching. The royal entourage descended the Great Stairway, passed through the Central Pavilion and out into the Cour Royale. Louis noted once again that there were not so many people gathered in the Carrousel. Rœderer reiterated that all Paris was marching. When they reached the terrace, which was crowded with National Guardsmen, they were greeted with revolutionary slogans: "Long live the nation!" "No more veto!" "No women, no women, we want only the king, the king alone." The royal fugitives kept marching.

They crossed the gardens without incident. Louis, about to lay down his crown, a crown that Bourbon apologists traced back almost a thousand years to Hugh Capet, was heard to remark: "The leaves are falling early this year." In front of the Manège they were met by a delegation from the Legislative Assembly, who surrounded them and marched them into the hall. Louis had not stood in the midst of the nation's elected representatives since the autumn of 1791 when he accepted the constitution under which he still governed.

Once inside the Manège he was confronted by a constitutional difficulty: by law the king could not be present in the hall when the Assembly was in session. Louis seldom concerned himself with such questions of etiquette. He was usually surrounded by lackeys

who looked after these details. But now he was without his courtiers and in the midst of men sensitive to the issue of separation of powers. He could sit neither on the benches reserved for ministers of the crown nor in the places reserved for the deputies. While Louis stood there the deputies debated the issue. They decided that the king and his family could take refuge in the Logographie, a tiny room behind the rostrum reserved for the reporters of the Assembly's debates. An iron grill separated the Logographie from the floor of the Assembly. The fugitives could see and hear all that was going on, but the constitution had not been violated. The room was stuffy and cramped. The children were cranky, Marie-Antoinette anxious and nervous. She fidgeted, clasping and unclasping her hands in her lap. Only the king appeared composed. He said little to his family.

Earlier that morning, when Louis was determined to fight, he had issued his only order: force was to be met with force. The order had not been rescinded when he abandoned the château. The king's loyal defenders, without their commander-in-chief, were left with a situation in which the king's order had little meaning, since Louis was no longer in need of defense. But the order stood. Two hours after Louis XVI reached the Manège fighting broke out across the gardens. The dreaded attack on the Tuileries had begun.