

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1960)
Heft: 1370

Artikel: True till death
Autor: J.J.F.S.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691382>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 16.05.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

TRUE TILL DEATH

The French Revolution, like a volcanic eruption, shook the very foundations of European Society and reverberated throughout the world. In its course, dark and inhuman deeds were perpetrated, and well might Madame Roland bitterly exclaim, as she did at the foot of the scaffold, "Oh liberté, que de crimes sont commis en ton nom". By contrast, many acts of heroism and devotion are recorded among which the defence of the Tuileries by the Swiss stands out as a shining example.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a Swiss bodyguard formed part of the French Royal establishments, the first regiment having been recruited in 1616. At the time of the revolution, the Swiss Royal Guard was stationed partly in Versailles, partly in Courbevoie, a suburb of Paris. When, after the unsuccessful flight to Varennes, the King was brought back to Paris, and took residence in the Tuileries, the Swiss garrisoned the palace and were responsible for the safety of the Royal family.

Louis XVI was a slow-witted, phlegmatic sort of man, good-hearted enough but lacking strength of character. He seemed to know or understand little of what was happening outside the court. When, late at night on 14th July 1789, the news of the storming of the Bastille was brought to Versailles by the Duke of Liancourt, the King exclaimed, "Mais, c'est une révolte." "Sire", replied Liancourt, "it is not a revolt, c'est une révolution!"

During the next three years, the King remained in the uneasy occupation of a tottering throne. His weak and precarious reign came to an end when, on 10th August 1792, he left the Tuileries and abandoned the Swiss to their fate. His days were numbered, anyway: imprisonment and the guillotine awaited him.

All through the night of 9th August, Paris was in ferment. The Legislative Assembly and the Municipality were in permanent session, a state of insurrection had been proclaimed, Mandat, the commandant of the National Guard, who was suspected of loyalty to the King, was murdered as he stepped out of the Town Hall, and at midnight the tocsin was rung calling the people to arms. On Friday, 10th August, a beautifully sunny morning, an armed mob from the Faubourg St. Antoine and from every other sections began to march on the Tuileries, at their head the 600 men from Marseilles who, under the command of Barbaroux, and with three cannon, had arrived in Paris a few days earlier. By eight o'clock they came in sight of the Royal Palace, an excited and uncon-

trolled body of men and women, armed with pikes, sabres and muskets, vociferating and threatening. The National Troops posted round the palace made no attempt to stop them; no one in authority dared give the order. Before, however, the crowd had reached the palace, a delegation from the Legislative Assembly persuaded the King to take refuge in the Salle de Manège. The Royal family left the Tuileries under escort, through the silent ranks of the Swiss, never to return.

The Swiss, calm and steady, stood at their posts in orderly ranks. They occupied the outer staircase, the corridors and the windows, tense, alert and with their muskets loaded. They had received no orders, but they knew it was their duty to protect the King's residence. Summoned to make way, they refused to stir from their posts. The Marseillais pleaded with them, Westerman, the Alsatian, addressed them in his dialect, the crowd yelled and clamoured, all to no avail, the Swiss stood firm. Realizing that entrance could not be gained peaceably, the Marseillais brought their three cannon into action. Badly aimed, the first shots rattled harmlessly over the roofs.

The moment had come for a decision. Should the Swiss fight or withdraw? They resolved to fight, taking it to be their duty to do so, and before the cannon could be reloaded, they fired a volley across the square of the Carrousel. The human tide receded, in a minute the Carrousel was deserted and the cannon left unattended. A party of Swiss rushed out and succeeded in seizing the pieces. They brought them in and tried to fire them when the attack was resumed, but as the linstocks and other parts were missing the guns were of no use to them.

Soon the crowd returned to the attack, joined by the National Troops with their artillery, who now openly sided with the attackers. The Swiss kept up a steady fire, volley after volley thundered from their muskets, the dead and dying lay around, the wounded were carried away, bleeding, through the streets; the mob roared with fury, and pandemonium reigned. So deadly was the Swiss fire that at least 1,200 of the attackers were killed and many more wounded.

Towards midday a messenger from the Legislative Assembly was seen making his way through the bullet-swept approaches to the palace. He carried a written order from His Majesty the King to cease firing. This order, which can still be seen in the Musée Carnavalet reads: "Cessez le feu et rendez vous".

What were the poor Swiss to do now? Why was there no order not to begin? Their position, if they

Telegrams and Cables: TRANCOSMOS LONDON.

Telephone: HOP 4433 (8 Lines)

COSMOS FREIGHTWAYS

AGENCY
LIMITED.

INTERNATIONAL FREIGHT FORWARDERS

By Road, Rail Sea and Air

1, CATHEDRAL STREET,
LONDON BRIDGE, LONDON, S.E.1.

REGULAR GROUPAGE SERVICES WITH

SWITZERLAND

ANGLO-SWISS CUSTOMS EXPERTS.

Agents: WELTIFURRER INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT CO. Ltd., Zurich, Basle, Buchs, Schaffhausen, Geneva, St. Gall.

ALSO AT
LIVERPOOL, MANCHESTER,
NEW CASTLE-ON-TYNE,
HULL, BRISTOL, CARDIFF,
SWANSEA, NEWPORT, Mon.
GLASGOW.

CONNECTED
THROUGHOUT
THE WORLD

OFFICIAL FREIGHT AND
PASSENGER AGENTS FOR
SWISSAIR AND ALL AIR LINES
TO SWITZERLAND AND ALL
PARTS OF THE WORLD

obeyed, was desperate. They ceased firing, but not to be fired at. Could they find shelter anywhere? One party broke out by the rue de l'Echelle; it was immediately set upon by the infuriated mob and all were murdered. Another rushed the gardens through a keen fusillade and some of them found sanctuary in the National Assembly. A third, several hundred strong, made towards the Champs Elysées, hoping to join up with the Swiss in Courbevoie, but none of them escaped; they were all murdered, singly and in groups fighting from street to street. In justice to the Marseillais, it must be said that they took no part in the killings, and even tried to save. A few of the Swiss found refuge in private houses, and one Clémence, a wine merchant, led a rescued Swiss to the bar of the Assembly and there offered to adopt him. But most were slaughtered and their bodies mangled. Fifty were marched as prisoners to the Hotel-de-Ville; the people burst through the escort and killed them to the last man. The scarlet uniform worn by the Swiss made them a conspicuous target and whenever a red-coat showed, he was fired at and hunted down. A pile of dead, stripped of their uniforms, lay in the streets two days before being carted away. Thus perished these gallant and unfortunate men, victims of their devotion to duty.

Some doubt exists as to their burial place. According to Desclozeaux (quoted by G. Lenotre), whose house adjoined the Madeleine cemetery, most of the Swiss were buried there; it is possible that some of them were taken to Monceau and other cemeteries. But wherever they may rest, the memory of these brave men is kept alive by Thorwaldsen's beautiful monument in Lucerne. Carved in the rockface, it represents a dying lion still protecting, in its last agony the drooping lilies of France.

The tragic events of 19th August, outcome of terror and mass-hysteria, form a confused and violent pattern difficult of adequate description. They have been reconstructed mainly from the accounts of eye-witnesses. Among the latter was no less a person than young Bonaparte, who, according to La Cases, expressed the opinion that the Swiss, had they had a commander, would have won the day.

Thomas Carlyle, in his masterly history of the French Revolution, devoted to the Swiss of 10th August a special chapter from which the following lines are well worth quoting:

"Honour to you", he writes, "brave men; honour and pity, through long times! Not martyrs were ye, and yet almost more. He was no King of yours, this Louis, and he forsook you like a King of shreds and patches. Ye were but sold to him for some porr six-pence a-day, yet would ye work for your wages, keep your plighted word. The work now was to die; and ye did it. Honour to you, o kinsmen, and may the old Biederkeit and Tapferkeit, and Valour wick is Work and Truth, be they Swiss, be they Saxon, fail in no age."

J.J.F.S.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

Our next issue will be published on Friday, 30th September 1960. We take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: Mrs. R. Hill, P. Lehrian, A. De Quervain, H. Pfirter, C. Berti, J. A. Steiner, T. Siegfried, W. B. Sigerist, A. Gallusser.



THE LION OF LUCERNE

Close by Lucerne's enchanting shore,
The lakeside where four cantons meet,
A garden lies, a still retreat,
Redolent of heroic lore.

Here, in the living rock, is wrought
Thorwaldsen's lion, dying, prone,
Majestic symbol, carved in stone,
Of men who but of duty thought.

They knew not glory, nor romance,
Their task was plain, they'd pledged their oath
To fight and die — and they did both —
In service of a King of France.

J.J.F.S.

GRAPE HARVEST FESTIVITIES

When autumn comes to the many wine-growing areas of Switzerland, from the Rhine in the north to the most southern point of the Ticino, each region stages its own grape-harvest festivities, which are always among the jolliest and most spontaneous events of the whole year. Let us give pride of place to the light-hearted Ticino, where in Lugano they are preparing for the great pageant on October 2. In Neuchâtel and Morges, festive processions will wind through the streets on October 1 and October 2, while on the banks of the Lake of Bièvre, where every Sunday from September 25 to the end of October is an occasion for making merry, the vineyard villages hold their festivities in unbroken succession. The grape harvest at Spiez, on the Lake of Thun, begins on September 26 and in the Geneva suburb of Saint-Gervais the winegrowers' celebration lasts from September 30 to October 2.

E.A.B.

"CITY INFORMATION"

In co-operation with the Swiss Touring Club, the Lausanne Tourist Office has organized a new service for tourists and travellers in the Lausanne area. At the beginning of the outskirts of the city, on each of the main roads, information booths have been set up, marked "City Information". These booths, which are linked by telephone, are manned by students speaking several languages and especially trained to help the traveller.