



The 14th of July



One of the revolutionary days in Paris, now a national holiday. Nowadays, July 14 (or "Bastille Day" as it is also known) is celebrated with a mixture of solemn military parades and easygoing dancing and fireworks. The storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789 has been commemorated in France for more than a century.

The storming of the Bastille

Paris was in a state of high agitation in the early months of the French revolution. In Spring 1789, the Estates-General refused to dissolve, transforming itself instead into a constituent National Assembly. In July, King Louis XVI called in fresh troops and dismissed his popular Minister, Necker. On the morning of July 14, the people of Paris seized weapons from the armoury at the Invalides and then marched in the direction of an ancient Royal fortress, the Bastille. After a bloody round of firing, the crowd broke into the Bastille and released the handful of prisoners held there.

The storming of the Bastille signalled the first victory of the people of Paris against a symbol of the Ancien RØgime (old regime). Indeed, the edifice was razed to the ground in the months that followed.



The FØte de la FØdØration ("Feast of the Federations") held on July 14, 1790, celebrated with great pomp the first Anniversary of the insurrection. In Paris, Talleyrand said Mass at the Altar of the Fatherland, on the Champ de Mars.

The national holiday

The commemoration of July 14 was abandoned in subsequent years. Under the Third Republic, however, leaders (Gambetta especially) cast about for ways to celebrate the foundations of the regime. A Deputy for the Seine Department, Benjamin Raspail, moved that July 14 be named the national holiday of the Republic, and Parliament passed an act to that effect on July 6, 1880.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

From the outset, the emphasis was on the patriotic and military character of the event, expressing France's recovery from the defeat of 1870. Every commune or locality in France holds its own celebration, starting with a torchlight parade on the evening of the 13th. The next morning, church bells or gun salutes announce the military parade, which is followed by a luncheon, spectacles and games, with dancing and fireworks to end the day.

Coming after the austerity of the 1914-18 war, the 14th of July 1919 was the occasion of a great victory celebration. Similarly, July 14, 1945 was preceded by three days of civic rejoicing.

The 14th of July today

Today, the festivities of July 14 are as popular as ever. In Paris, the traditional military parade on the Champs-Élysées is a meticulously planned spectacle, and dancing and fireworks displays or special illuminations are organized all over the country.

Successive Presidents of the Fifth Republic have modified the day's events slightly. Restoring the tradition of revolutionary Paris, President Giscard d'Estaing re-routed the military parade, marching the troops from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de la République.

Under President François Mitterrand, the "La Marseillaise" night-time parade organized by Jean-Paul Goude on July 14, 1989, watched by numerous foreign heads of State, was a high point in the celebrations of the bicentenary of the French revolution.

In 1994, German soldiers serving in the Eurocorps took part in the parade on the Champs-Élysées, symbolizing the reconciliation between the two Nations.

Since the election of President Chirac, young people from all over France, as well as members of the armed forces, have been invited to attend the reception given after the parade in the grounds of the Élysée Palace.

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