

CHAPTER  
**14**

Section 3

**PRIMARY SOURCE** **Attack on the Bonus Army**

*The government planned to pay World War I veterans bonuses in 1945; however, in 1932 tens of thousands of veterans and their families descended on Washington to demand immediate payment. President Hoover eventually ordered the U.S. Army to drive the Bonus Army from the capital. As you read this excerpt from reporter Lee McCardell's eyewitness account, consider whether the veterans were treated fairly.*

WASHINGTON, July 29—The bonus army was retreating today—in all directions. . . .

The fight had begun, as far as the Regular Army was concerned, late yesterday afternoon. The troops had been called out after a veteran of the Bonus Army had been shot and killed by a Washington policeman during a skirmish to drive members of the Bonus Army out of a vacant house on Pennsylvania Avenue, two blocks from the Capitol.

The soldiers numbered between seven hundred and eight hundred men. There was a squadron of the Third Cavalry from Fort Myer, a battalion of the Twelfth Infantry from Fort Washington, and a platoon of tanks (five) from Fort Meade. Most of the police in Washington seemed to be trailing after the soldiers, and traffic was tied up in 115 knots.

The cavalry clattered down Pennsylvania Avenue with drawn sabers.

The infantry came marching along with fixed bayonets.

All Washington smelled a fight, and all Washington turned out to see it.

Streets were jammed with automobiles.

Sidewalks, windows, doorsteps were crowded with people trying to see what was happening.

“Yellow! Yellow!”

From around the ramshackle shelters which they had built on a vacant lot fronting on Pennsylvania Avenue, just above the Capitol, the bedraggled veterans jeered. . . .

The cavalymen stretched out in extended order and rode spectators back on the sidewalks. The infantry started across the lot, bayonets fixed.

Veterans in the rear ranks of a mob that faced the infantry pushed forward. Those in front pushed back. The crowd stuck. An order went down the line of infantrymen. The soldiers stepped back,

pulled tear-gas bombs from their belts, and hurled them into the midst of the mob.

Some of the veterans grabbed the bombs and threw them back at the infantry. The exploding tins whizzed around the smooth asphalt like devil chasers, pfutt-pfutt-pfutt. And a gentle southerly wind wafted the gas in the faces of the soldiers and the spectators across the street.

Cavalrymen and infantrymen jerked gas masks out of their haversacks. The spectators, blinded and choking with the unexpected gas attack, broke and fled. Movie photographers who had parked their sound trucks so as to catch a panorama of the skirmish ground away doggedly, tears streaming down their faces.

The police tied handkerchiefs around their faces.

“Ya-a-a-ah!” jeered the veterans.

But more gas bombs fell behind them. The veterans were caught in the back draft. They began to retreat. But before they quit their shacks they set them on fire. The dry wood and rubbish from which the huts were fashioned burned quickly. The flames shot high. Clouds of dirty brown smoke blanketed the avenue.

*from Lee McCardell, Baltimore Evening Sun, July 29, 1932. Reprinted in Richard B. Morris and James Woodress, eds., Voices from America's Past, vol. 3, The Twentieth Century (New York: Dutton, 1962), 94–97.*

### Discussion Questions

1. According to McCardell, what sparked the fight between Bonus Army veterans and the soldiers?
2. How did the soldiers drive the veterans from the capital?
3. Do you think the veterans were treated fairly? Why or why not? Cite evidence from your textbook to support your opinion.