**Battle of Agincourt: Fact & Film**

**Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453)**

**Battle of Crécy** (August 26, 1346)

English [Edward III] French [Philip VI]

* 10-15,000 total 20-25,000 total
* 7,000-7,500 archers 6,000 crossbowmen
* 2,000 spearman
* **100-300** (dead) **2,000 men-at-arms** (dead)

**Battle of Poitiers** (September 19, 1356)

English [Black Prince] French [John II]

* 6,000 total 8,000 men-at-arms
* 3,000 men-at-arms 3,000 infantry
* 2,000 archers **2,500** (dead)

4,000 (wounded)

* 1,000 infantry 2,000 (captured)
* **few hundred** (dead)

**Battle of Agincourt** (October 25, 1415)

English [Henry V] French [French nobles]

* 6,000 total 12-36,000 total
* 5,000 archers 10,000 men-at-arms
* 900 men-at-arms **7-10,000** (dead)
* **100-150** (dead)

**Each battle was different, but in each the English archers played a key role and in each battle the English were outnumbered significantly by their French opponents.**

**SOURCE EXCERPTS: *Gesta Henrici Quinti* (ca. 1417, Latin) anonymous chaplain with English army, sat on horse with baggage train during battle.**

1. But because the **dysentery**, which had carried off far more of our men, both nobles and others, than had the sword, so direly afflicted and disabled many of the remainder that they could not journey on with him [Henry V] any further, he caused them to be separated from those who were fit and well and gave them leave to return to England… so that of what was left of the army there remained no more than **900 lances** and **5,000 archers** able to draw sword or fit to fight.
2. And on the morrow, that is Friday, on the feast of **Sts Crispin and Crispinian** the 25th of October, the French, in the early dawn, arrayed themselves in battle-lines, columns, and platoons and took up position in front of us in that field, called the **field of Agincourt**, across which lay our road to Calais, and the **number of them was really terrifying**.
3. And then, when the enemy were nearly ready to attack, the **French cavalry** posted on the flanks made charges against those of **our archers** who were on both sides of our army. But soon, by God’s will, they were forced to fall back under **showers of arrows** and to flee to their rearguard, save for a very few who, although not without losses in dead and wounded, rode through between **the archers and the woodlands**, and save, too, of course, for the many who were stopped by **the stakes driven into the ground**…
4. And then the battle raged at its fiercest, and **our archers** notched their **sharp-pointed arrows** and loosed them into the enemy’s flanks, keeping up the fight without pause. And when **their arrows** were all used up, **seizing axes, stakes and swords and spear-heads** that were lying about, they struck down, hacked, and stabbed the enemy.
5. God, indeed, had also smitten them with another great blow from which there could be no recovery. For when some of them, killed when battle was first joined, fall at the front, so great was the **undisciplined violence** and **pressure of the mass of men** behind that the living fell on top of the dead, and others falling on top of the living were killed as well… such a **great heap grew of the slain and of those lying crushed** in between that our men climbed up those heaps, which had risen above a man’s height, and butchered their enemies down below with swords, axes, and other weapons.
6. Our England, therefore, has **reason to rejoice and reason to grieve**. Reason to rejoice at the victory gained and the deliverance of her men, and reason to grieve for the suffering and destruction wrought in the **deaths of Christians**. But far be it from our people to ascribe the triumph to their own glory or strength; rather let it be **ascribed to God alone**…
7. And when, the battle over, our king, out of consideration for his men, had spent that night in the same place where he had lodged the previous night, on the morrow he resumed his march towards Calais, **past that mound of pity and blood where had fallen the might of the French**.

***La Chronique* (ca. mid 1440s, French), Enguerran Monstrelet**

1. At that point, between nine and ten in the morning, the **French were completely confident**, given their **great number**, that the English could not escape them. Even so, **there were some wiser ones amongst them who were worried about fighting** them in open battle.
2. [Henry] had his battle drawn up by a knight grey with age called **Thomas Erpingham**, putting **the archers in the front and then the men-at-arms**. He made **two wings of men-at-arms and archers**, and the horses and baggage were placed behind the army. **The archers each fixed in front of them a stake sharpened** at both ends…. At the throwing of the baton, all the English suddenly made a great cry which was a cause of great amazement to the French.
3. Then the archers who were in the meadow raised a great shout and fired with great vigour on the French. Straightway the English approached the French; **first the archers, of whom there were a good 13,000 began with all their might to shoot volleys of arrows** against the French for as long as they could pull the bow. **Most of these archers were without armour**, dressed in their doublets, their hose loose round their knees, having axes or swords hanging from their belts. Many had bare heads and were without headgear.
4. Then the English sounded their trumpets loudly and **the French began to bow their heads so that the arrow fire would not penetrate the visors of their helmets**. So they advanced a little against them, but then made a little retreat. **But before they could engage together, many French were hampered and wounded**. When they came together **they were so closely packed one against the other that they could scarcely lift their arms to strike their enemy**…
5. Because of **the strength of the arrow fire and their fear of it, most of the others doubled back into the French vanguard, causing great disarray** and breaking the line in many places, making them fall back onto the ground which had been newly sown. **Their horses had been so troubled by the arrow shot of the English archers that they could not hold or control them**. As a result the vanguard fell into disorder and countless numbers of men-at-arms began to fall.
6. Soon afterwards the English fell upon them body on body. **Dropping their bows and arrows to the ground, they took up their swords, axes, hammers, falchions and other weapons of war**. With great blows they killed the French who fell dead to the ground.
7. As a result of this setback the English king was very concerned, for everywhere he looked in front of him the field was full of French who had taken flight but were regrouping in companies. Fearing lest **they might attempt to form a new battle he had proclaimed in a loud voice…that each Englishman, on pain of penalty, should kill his prisoners** so that they would not be able to assist their compatriots. There **was immediately a great slaughter of French prisoners**…. Here and there in a few places the French tried to regroup in small units but they were killed or taken by the English without putting up much of a fight.

***Chronique*** (ca. early 1460s, French), Jean Le Fèvre, 19 years old at time of battle with the English army, part of French diplomatic corps.

***Chronique*** (ca. early 1460s, French), Jean Waurin, 15 years old at time of battle, served as page or squire during the fighting.

**Both rely heavily upon on Monstrelet, but bot include details not in Monstrelet (including some conflicting with his account).**

1. **On the two flanks of the men-at-arms were the archers**. There were about 900-1,000 men-at-arms and **10,000 archers**… When the king had drawn up his battle and made arrangements for the baggage he went along the line on his little grey horse [Waurin omits the horse] and made very fine speeches, encouraging them to do well, saying that he had come to France to recover what was rightful inheritance, telling them that they could fight freely… In addition, **he told them that the French had boasted that if any English archers were captured they could cut off the three fingers of their right hand** so that neither man nor horse would ever again be killed by their arrow fire.
2. **The site was narrow and very advantageous for the English and the very opposite for the French**. For the French had been all night on horse and it had rained. Pages, servants and several others in **exercising the horses had completely churned up the ground making it so soft that the horses could scarcely lift their hooves out of it**. In addition, the **French were so weighed down by armour that they could hardly move forward**…. So heavy were their arms that as the ground was so soft they **could scarcely lift their weapons**…. **They had plenty of archers and crossbowmen but nobody wanted to let them fire**. The reason for this was that the **site was so narrow that there was only enough room for the men-at-arms**.
3. When the English saw them together in this fashion, it was **ordered by the king of England that each man should kill his prisoner**. But those who had taken them **did not want to kill them for they were all hoping to collect a large ransom from their prisoners**. When the King was told that no-one was willing to kill his prisoner **he appointed a gentleman with 200 archers to the task, commanding that all the prisoners be killed**… For, in cold blood, **all those noble Frenchmen were killed and their heads and faces cut**, which was an amazing sight to see...
4. He then called to him the other princes in the area where the battle had been. When the king saw the site, he asked what the castle was called that he could see nearby. They told him that it was called Agincourt. Then the king of England said, ‘As all battles’, the king said, ‘ought to take their name from the nearest fortress, village or town where they happened, **this battle from henceforward and for ever more will be called the battle of Agincourt**’.

***Henry V*** (ca. 1599-1600), St. Crispin’s Day Speech, William Shakespeare

**FRENCH CAMP**

**DAUPHIN**

Mount them, and make incision in their hides,
That their hot blood may spin in English eyes,
And dout them with superfluous courage, ha!

**RAMBURES**

What, will you have them weep our horses' blood?
How shall we, then, behold their natural tears?

*Enter Messenger*

**Messenger**

The English are embattled, you French peers.

**Constable**

To horse, you gallant princes! straight to horse!
Do but behold yon poor and starved band,
And your fair show shall suck away their souls,
Leaving them but the shales and husks of men.
There is not work enough for all our hands;
Scarce blood enough in all their sickly veins
To give each naked curtle-axe a stain,
That our French gallants shall to-day draw out,
And sheathe for lack of sport: let us but blow on them,
The vapour of our valour will o'erturn them.
'Tis positive 'gainst all exceptions, lords,
That our superfluous lackeys and our peasants,
Who in unnecessary action swarm
About our squares of battle, were enow
To purge this field of such a hilding foe,
Though we upon this mountain's basis by
Took stand for idle speculation:
But that our honours must not. What's to say?
A very little little let us do.
And all is done. Then let the trumpets sound
The tucket sonance and the note to mount;
For our approach shall so much dare the field
That England shall couch down in fear and yield.

*Enter GRANDPRE*

**GRANDPRE**

Why do you stay so long, my lords of France?
Yon island carrions, desperate of their bones,
Ill-favouredly become the morning field:
Their ragged curtains poorly are let loose,
And our air shakes them passing scornfully:
Big Mars seems bankrupt in their beggar'd host
And faintly through a rusty beaver peeps:
The horsemen sit like fixed candlesticks,
With torch-staves in their hand; and their poor jades
Lob down their heads, dropping the hides and hips,
The gum down-roping from their pale-dead eyes
And in their pale dull mouths the gimmal bit
Lies foul with chew'd grass, still and motionless;
And their executors, the knavish crows,
Fly o'er them, all impatient for their hour.
Description cannot suit itself in words
To demonstrate the life of such a battle
In life so lifeless as it shows itself.

**Constable**

They have said their prayers, and they stay for death.

**DAUPHIN**

Shall we go send them dinners and fresh suits
And give their fasting horses provender,
And after fight with them?

**Constable**

I stay but for my guidon: to the field!
I will the banner from a trumpet take,
And use it for my haste. Come, come, away!
The sun is high, and we outwear the day…

**ENGLISH CAMP…**

**WESTMORELAND**

O that we now had here
But one ten thousand of those men in England
That do no work to-day!

**KING HENRY V**

What's he that wishes so?
My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin:
If we are mark'd to die, we are enow
To do our country loss; and if to live,
The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.
By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
It yearns me not if men my garments wear;
Such outward things dwell not in my desires:
But if it be a sin to covet honour,
I am the most offending soul alive.
No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England:
God's peace! I would not lose so great an honour
As one man more, methinks, would share from me
For the best hope I have. O, do not wish one more!
Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,
That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart; his passport shall be made
And crowns for convoy put into his purse:
We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.
This day is called the feast of Crispian:
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when the day is named,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say 'To-morrow is Saint Crispian:'
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars.
And say 'These wounds I had on Crispin's day.'
Old men forget: yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember with advantages
What feats he did that day: then shall our names.
Familiar in his mouth as household words
Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

*Re-enter SALISBURY*

**SALISBURY**

My sovereign lord, bestow yourself with speed:
The French are bravely in their battles set,
And will with all expedience charge on us….

**ANOTHER PART OF THE FIELD…**

**Constable**

Why, all our ranks are broke.

**DAUPHIN**

O perdurable shame! let's stab ourselves.
Be these the wretches that we play'd at dice for?

**ORLEANS**

Is this the king we sent to for his ransom?

**BOURBON**

Shame and eternal shame, nothing but shame!
Let us die in honour: once more back again;
And he that will not follow Bourbon now,
Let him go hence, and with his cap in hand,
Like a base pander, hold the chamber-door
Whilst by a slave, no gentler than my dog,
His fairest daughter is contaminated.

**Constable**

Disorder, that hath spoil'd us, friend us now!
Let us on heaps go offer up our lives.

**ORLEANS**

We are enow yet living in the field
To smother up the English in our throngs,
If any order might be thought upon.

**BOURBON**

The devil take order now! I'll to the throng:
Let life be short; else shame will be too long.

**To Learn More about Agincourt, the Longbow, & Medieval Archers:**

**Books/Articles**

* Barker, Juliet (2005).  *Agincourt : Henry V and the Battle That Made England*. London: Little, Brown.
* Curry, Anne (2000). The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations. The Boydell Press.
* Glanz, James (2009). “[Historians Reassess Battle of Agincourt](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/25/world/europe/25agincourt.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)” (*New York Times*, October 24)
* Holmes, Richard (1996). *War Walks*. London: BBC Worldwide Publishing.
* Keegan, John (1976). *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme*. Penguin Classics Reprint. Viking Adult.
* Mortimer, Ian (2009). *1415: Henry V's Year of Glory*. London: Bodley Head.
* Wason, David (2004). *Battlefield Detectives*. London: Carlton Books.

**Documentaries [most are available on YouTube]**

* [Ghosts of the Mary Rose](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCmuMQLBoog)
* Battlefield Detectives: Agincourt’s Dark Secrets
* [The Battle of Agincourt: The Bloodiest Battle of the Medieval Age](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rb9ZTypvWK4)
* [War Walks: Agincourt](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgeyIYa-OMQ)
* [Weapons that Made Britain: Longbow](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lR0wssl9fWo)

***Liber Metricius de Henrico Quinto* (ca. 1418, Latin) Thomas Elmham, a monk at St. Augustine’s Canterbury**

1. The suffering of this dysentery [or bloody flux] weakened many unto death. Five thousand men prepared to leave him. The bishop of Norwich and the earl of Suffolk died there from the disease and some fled. For many deserted the king, secretly returning home. Scarcely more than 900 lances were with him; scarcely 5,000 archers remained, and every day the number with him grew smaller.
2. The king ordered the latter [the archers] to prepare shaped stakes to fix in the ground. Their sloping gave protection against the enemy as the sight of them might frighten the horses.
3. The king, believing that the enemy wished to surround him, ranged his army against them. Black night was almost descending, and did not allow for fighting. The king bivouacked in silence, and ordered his men to keep silent… The enemies, pondering that the English were spending the night in silence, thought therefore that the king was intending to flee. They rode quickly over the fields by several routes. They threw dice to determine which [of the English] they should each have.
4. It was the twenty-fifth day of the month of October ever afterwards giving the English passionate memories of that day… The companies of French infantry were in the front, outnumbering the English by three to one in that field…
5. Both armies came together to battle. The field through the woods was too narrow for them… Our arrows were carried and penetrated, and the enemy was worn out under the weight of their armour… The living were pushed towards death. The living went under the dead. The battle lines piled in… The French fell before the power of the English. Flight from there was not open to them. They killed them, they captured them and keep them for ransoming but quickly there was a shout that a new battle would begin.

***Histoire de Charles VI* (ca. 1415-22, Latin), The Monk of Saint Denis**

1. I have learned from a reliable source that each side fought until mid-day in the most bitter fashion using all kinds of weapons, but that the French were too restricted and weighed down in their movements. Their vanguard, composed of about 5,000 men, found itself so tightly packed that those who were in the third rank could scarcely use their swords. That taught them that if the large number of combatants was sometimes an advantage there were occasions when it became a hindrance.
2. In the opinion of the French, it was precisely what injured the most enemies which assured the English of victory, especially the continuous way in which they had rained down on our men a terrifying hail of arrow shot. As they were lightly armed and their ranks were not too crowded, they had freedom of movement and could deal mortal blows with ease. In addition many of them had adopted a type of weapon until then unknown—great lead-covered mallets from which one single blow on the head could kill a man or knock him senseless to the ground.
3. Then the nobility of France were taken prisoner and put to ransom as a vile troop of slaves or else perished under the blows of a faceless soldiery. O eternal dishonor! O disaster forever to be deplored! If it is usually a consolation for men of heart… to think that they have been beaten by adversaries of noble origin and of recognized valour, it is on the other hand a double shame, a double ignominy to allow oneself to be beaten by unworthy and vile men.