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THE ENGLISH SOLDIER IN THE CAMPAIGN OF AGINCOURT

BY WILFRED BRENTON KERR

III. *The Battle of Agincourt*¹

TOWARD morning the rain ceased, and the English, awaking and looking about, found before them a triangle of land among three villages, Maisonnelles to the south, Tramecourt to the northeast, Agincourt to the northwest, each set in a small thick wood.² Through the middle of this triangle ran the road to Calais, and between Agincourt and Tramecourt, a distance of three-quarters of a mile, lay the French army blocking the passage. The field between English and French was open, devoid of hedges, thickets, valleys, ravines, or other obstacles, and had been chosen by the French themselves. For our purpose the country was like a table; rarely is a battlefield so simple and easy to describe.³

At the same time on this morning of October 25, 1415, the French were astir. They had foregone any notion of surrounding the English as contrary to fair play and had made their plans for a stand-up fight.⁴ They were soon taking their places in order of battle in the usual three sections. Foremost was a vanguard of five thousand men of arms, all or almost all knights, nobles and gentlemen who expected only a bit of military exercise and wanted for themselves whatever little glory was to be had. They formed a line three deep and packed themselves closely, each man having about two feet of room. The length was the three-quarters of a mile mentioned above, less sufficient room for cavalry and crossbowmen on each end.⁵ With the van were the principal commanders, the constable Charles d'Albret and the Dukes of Orleans

¹ This article is the third part of a study of the life and work of the English soldier in the campaign of 1415. The first two parts, dealing with the siege of Harfleur and the march to Agincourt, were published in this JOURNAL, IV (Spring 1940), 8-29.

² Thomae de Elmham, *Vita & Gesta Henrici Quinti, Anglorum Regis*, ed. by T. Hearne (Oxford, 1727), p. 59, says that Henry sent some noble knights to view the prospective battleground at dawn. This may be, but he is more likely to have gone himself.

³ *Croniques par Waurin*, ed. by W. Hardy (Rolls series, London, 1868), II, 210; J. H. Wylie, *The Reign of Henry the Fifth* (Cambridge, 1914-29), II, 131-32.

⁴ Wylie, *op. cit.*, II, 140-41.

⁵ *Chronique du Religieux de Saint Denys*, ed. by M. L. Bellaguet (Paris, 1844), V, 561, makes the French van 5,000 and says that those in the third rank could hardly use their swords for the press. This indicates three ranks of less than 1,700 men to a rank. Two feet each to these makes less than 3,400 feet or about 1,100 yards. 200 yards for the cavalry (100 on each side) makes 1,300 yards or about the necessary three-quarters of a mile. The calculations are, of course, only rough. The crossbowmen were mostly behind the cavalry. "Elmhami Liber Metricus de Henrico Quinto," *Memorials of Henry V, King of England*, ed. by C. A. Cole (Rolls series, London, 1858), p. 120, makes the French van three times the "Anglica rura," but the former source is a better

and Bourbon. Behind it at an unstated interval came the main and rear, so close together that the English chronicler speaks of them as one.⁶ About eighteen or twenty thousand in number, they were all on horses to the surprise of the English; behind them were the servants, the whole appearing an "innumerable multitude" to their opponents. The commanders of the main were the Dukes of Bar and Alençon, but it appears that they left their posts to join the fray in front. On each flank of the van the French placed bodies of mounted men, two or three hundred strong. They found room behind these horsemen and the van for detachments of crossbowmen and worked in a few stone-throwers and a field-gun or two between the van and the main. The high command intended to send the flank squadrons of cavalry against the English archers and override them. The crossbowmen and stone-throwers might get a little practise on the English men of arms while the French lances, with their great superiority of numbers, made short work of the combat. The plan was sound and could not have failed of success had it been executed as it was conceived.⁷ By the English accounts and one good French story, many of the French treated the coming encounter as a joke; but certainly others took it seriously, forgave injuries, and embraced each other. The confidence of the French has drawn the unanimous scorn of historians, but the circumstances actually appeared to justify their assurance—no one laying a bet at the time would have placed his money on the English.⁸

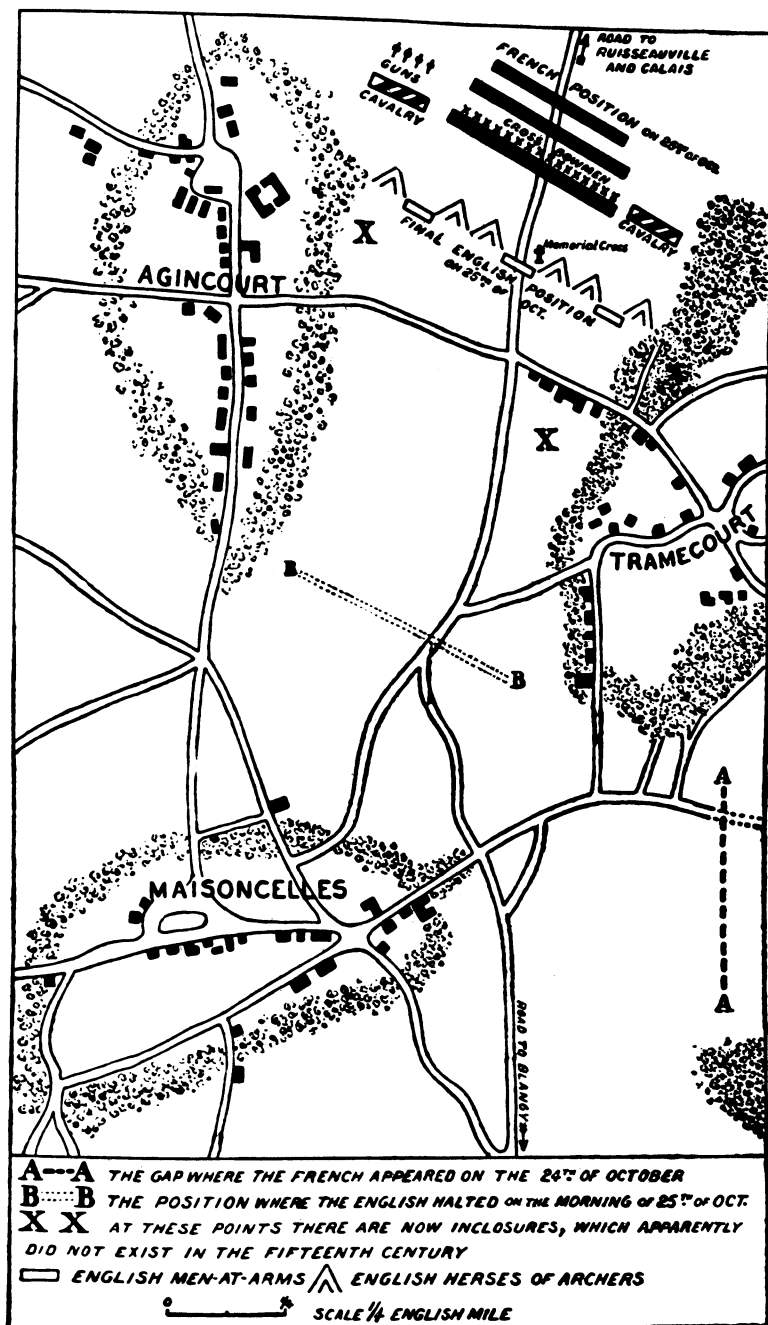
Meanwhile the English, a mile away, watched the French ordering themselves, the cavalry forming on each side of the front line and the line itself

authority for the French. *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre, Seigneur de Saint Rémy*, ed. by F. Morand (Société de l'Histoire de France, Paris, 1876), I, 255, says that some of the front rank had cut the shafts of their lances short to get a better push.

⁶ *Henrici Quinti, Angliae Regis Gesta*, ed. by Benjamin Williams (London, 1850), pp. 49, 55, mentions only "anterior acies" and "bellum posterius," and again "bellum equestre posterius," not "postremum." But in "Elmhams Liber Metricus," p. 120, the same author acknowledges "hinc equitum turmis acies sunt posteriores."

⁷ The dispositions of the French from *Henrici Quinti*, p. 49; *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 246-49; and "Elmhams Liber Metricus," p. 120. That the French had some stone-throwers appears from Titus Livius, *Vita Henrici Quinti Regis Angliae*, ed. by T. Hearne (Oxford, 1716), p. 17, and from *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 247. That they had at least one gun from Joseph Hunter, *Agincourt, A Contribution towards an Authentic List of the Commanders of the English Host in King Henry the Fifth's Expedition to France in the Third Year of His Reign* (London, 1850), p. 36, which records the death of an archer from it. As *Henrici Quinti* and "Elmhams Liber Metricus" are silent, however, the amount and effect of this artillery must have been negligible. The number of cavalry is much in dispute: *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 255, has 80 on each side; "Chronique de Ruisseauville," *Archives Historiques et Littéraires du Nord de la France et du Midi de la Belgique*, IV (Valenciennes, 1834), 140, says there were only a few; a mean between *Henrici Quinti*, p. 49, and "Elmhams Liber Metricus," p. 120, indicates between 200 and 300.

⁸ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 49; "Elmhams Liber Metricus," p. 119; "Chronique de Ruisseauville," p. 144; *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 249. Most of the crossbowmen were left with the main division; there was no room for them in front and no use for them until the English archers were out of the way.



THE BATTLE OF AGINCOURT
 From C. L. Kingsford, *Henry V* (New York, 1901).

like a forest of lances with masses of shining helmets. The chaplain chronicler thought the French thirty to one of the English but was in no good mood for statistics.⁹ Certainly Henry's men knew that they were greatly outnumbered. They were soaked by the rain and little refreshed by their sleep or the breakfast which cannot have been ample after a week of short rations, and many of the archers were hatless and barefoot for the march had wrought havoc with clothing and boots.¹⁰ They can have been in no gay mood, but, spared by national habit from lively forebodings, they were ready to do their best. Henry, fresh from three masses, appeared in harness and surcoat emblazoned with the arms of England and France, a fine bassinet and a golden crown on his head. He was riding a little gray horse without spurs to be the readier for action.¹¹ He asked what time of day it was. "Prime," was the response. "Now is good time," he said, "for all of England prayeth for us. Therefore be of good cheer and let us go to our day's work."¹² He ordered the men out of the village, omitting the usual trumpet calls in the interest of better hearing, and presently drew them up in front of the wood of Maisoncelles in a field of young green wheat, remarking, "Keep all together and be of good cheer."¹³ The sick, the baggage, and the chaplains remained for the time in Maisoncelles with the pages, most of whom were Henry's, and the horses. Henry told off ten lances and twenty archers, who might have thought this a bit of luck but apparently did not, to guard the assortment in the village and asked the Duke of York to take command of them. The Duke refused the sinecure for the honor of leading the van, and Henry was compelled to choose a gentleman whose name is not given.¹⁴

The men of arms now took their places in line in their three sections separated by spaces: the van under the Duke on the right, the rear under Lord Camoys on the left, and the main body in the center with Henry. About his station floated five banners, his own and those of the Trinity, the Virgin, St. George, and St. Edward in token of his claim for divine aid. At intervals

⁹ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 49.

¹⁰ *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 254, a celebrated description echoed by *Croniques par Waurin*, II, 212, and *La Chronique d'Enguerran de Monstrelet*, ed. by L. Douët-d'Arcq (Paris, 1859), III, 106. "Chronique de Ruisseauville," p. 139, notes that most of the archers had no armor and had rolled their hose down.

¹¹ *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 244, for Henry's appearance. Titus Livius, *op. cit.*, p. 16, and Elmham, *op. cit.*, p. 61, agree but give him a white horse and others on lead.

¹² *The Brut*; or, *The Chronicles of England*, ed. by F. W. D. Brie (London, 1906-08), pp. 378-79; "The Siege of Harflet and Battle of Agincourt" (two versions: one in Elmham, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-75; the second, attributed to Lydgate, in N. H. Nicolas, *The History of the Battle of Agincourt and of the Expedition of King Henry the Fifth into France* [London, 1827], pp. 249-62). I have inserted "day's work" in place of the original "journey" to give the modern meaning of this old French term.

¹³ *The Brut*, pp. 378-79.

¹⁴ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 50; *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 245; Titus Livius, *op. cit.*, p. 16; "Elmhami Liber Metricus," p. 120.

in the line appeared the banners of the captains, conspicuous among whom were the Dukes of Gloucester and York and the Earls of March, Oxford, and Kent. Like Henry, the captains had on their surcoats in spite of the slight handicap for fighting. He could not afford to form his men in depth as did the French; he was obliged to put them in one formation as long as that of his opponents. He arranged the men of arms three deep like the French and in places four, but he gave each more room, three feet at the least. For the archers he had a slightly unusual plan. He expected the French to begin the battle with a grand cavalry charge against his bowmen. Accordingly, while leaving most of them in their normal position on the flanks, he placed detachments in the spaces between the sections of lances in order to bring an inside flank fire on the charging horsemen. It would not do to let these archers stay in the line for the clash with the French men of arms, but Henry must have hoped for time enough after the cavalry charge to send them back to the flanks and to close the ranks of his lances. In accord with this plan, the archers, marshaled by Thomas Erpingham, took their places at the sides and in the line, four and five deep, and planted their stakes in front of them. Some of them had pieces of armor, purchased or picked up, but most had not. They had rolled their hose beneath their knees for freer action, and they stood with bows and arrows ready and their striking weapons at their belts.¹⁵ A few French scouts rode up, took a look, and went away;¹⁶ but the French line did not move.

The delay of the battle was actually of Henry's own contrivance. In the previous evening he had sent heralds to the French to ask for a parley; now the French deputies arrived and the parley took place between the lines. By one account the French offered him a passage to Calais and the *status quo* in Guienne and Picardy if he would surrender Harfleur and his claim to the throne of France. The English made a counter-offer of Harfleur and the claim in exchange for certain small increases of territory, the hand of Princess Katharine for Henry, and a cash dowry. By another account, which accords better with the market conditions for such a transaction, Henry offered Harfleur, all the forts in Picardy except Calais, and an indemnity of one hundred thousand crowns for a passage. In neither case does the story-teller profess

¹⁵ Titus Livius, *op. cit.*, p. 17, says that at most there were four ranks of lances. There would have been not less than three to match the French; the four would have been about the standards. 900 men of arms, three to four deep, a yard to each, would occupy about 260 yards; the less than 5000 archers, allowing for casualties on the march, four or five deep, would occupy about 1100 yards. The total of 1360 yards is about the three-quarters of a mile necessary. The calculations cannot be exact, but they yield a rough equality with the French line. It is usually said that the archers were in wedges. This comes from the word "cuneus" in *Henrici Quinti*, p. 50, but "cuneus" means only "detachment" as in *ibid.*, pp. 44, 46, 129.

¹⁶ T. Walsingham, *The St. Alban's Chronicle, 1406-20*, ed. by V. H. Galbraith (Oxford, 1937), p. 94.

more than hearsay for his source; certainly no agreement was reached. In a short time the deputies returned to their lines.¹⁷

Henry then called a council of the leading captains, and they all agreed that they must bring on a battle or perish of starvation. At this moment three Frenchmen rode up. Chief of them was the Lord of Helly, who, once a prisoner in England, had broken his parole and escaped. Now he said he wanted a duel to clear his good name. Henry could not waste time on trifles; he charged the visitor with his misdeed and predicted that he would be either a captive again or a corpse by the end of the day. Turning to more serious business, he asked the three when the French would attack. Their answer was, when they saw fit. Henry bade them be gone and declared that his army would be at their heels.¹⁸ First he addressed his men, recalling the famous English victories over the French;¹⁹ he had a special word for the archers whose freedom from armor might tempt them to trust in their legs and the grand principle of safety first.

"Sirs and fellows, yonder army think to block our way and they will not come unto us. Let every man prove himself a good man this day and forward banner in the best time of the year; for as I am true king and knight, for me this day England shall never pay ransom. First many a man shall forfeit his life for here rather I will be done to death." He turned to the lances, "And therefore, gentlemen, for the love of sweet Jesus, help maintain England's right this day"; and to the archers, "Also, archers, to you I pray, no foot that ye flee away, else be we all beaten in this field; and think, be Englishmen that never would flee at no battle, for against one of us though there be ten, think Christ will help us in our right." Last he prayed, "But I would no blood were spilt (Christ help me so now in this case) except of those that are the cause of this sinful deed. When thou sittest in judgment, there hold me excused before thy face, as thou art God omnipotent. But pass we now

¹⁷ *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 251-52; "Chronique de Ruisseauville," p. 139. The latter account, which is entirely credible, vouches for the dispatch of heralds the previous evening. There has been much controversy about this parley. *Chronique du Religieux de Saint Denys*, V, 555, assigns it to the evening of the 24th and gives terms much like those in "Chronique de Ruisseauville," Henry offering to make reparations for the damage done and to restore his conquests. "Chronique de Pierre de Févin," *Collections des Memoires Relatifs à l'Histoire de la France*, ed. by Michaud and Poujoulat, 3rd ser., vol. I (Paris, 1857), p. 588, assigns it to the morning of the 25th. The only allusion to it in the English accounts may be that in "Siege of Harflet," in Elmham, *op. cit.*, p. 368, which says that Helly, "a true knight," came to Henry and besought him to yield and save himself and his army. This misunderstands both Helly's purpose and character but contains a hint of the parley.

¹⁸ Titus Livius, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19. This affair is mentioned in "Elmhami Liber Metricus," p. 188, but is misplaced, and in "Siege of Harflet," in Elmham, *op. cit.*, p. 368, but is misinterpreted. "Chronique de Pierre de Févin," p. 588, also has it.

¹⁹ "Elmhami Liber Metricus," p. 121. There may be some question as to how Henry addressed a line of men three-quarters of a mile long; probably he rode along it and repeated the speech four or five times.

all in fear, duke, earl and bachelor. Of all our sins he make us free, gentle Jesus born of Mary; and as for us thou didst die on Good Friday as thy will was, so bring us to bliss on high and grant us there to have a place. Do and bete on fast."²⁰ The tense phrases, the appeal to national prestige, the prayer in case of the worst, all so pregnant of zero hour, helped to rouse every soldierly instinct.

Henry had told the priests, the heralds, and the officer in charge of the baggage to wait in Maisoncelles for the end of the fight, but bands of local French were gathering about the village and eyeing the baggage greedily. The officer reported their presence to the king, and Henry sent for him, his charges, and associates to come and stand in rear of the line. The priests, pages, heralds, and some of the drivers obeyed; and the first betook themselves to their prayers and service-books on Henry's behalf. A few drivers of the royal baggage were slow, however, and the ten lances and twenty archers, sharing the Duke of York's opinion, had gone off to help their comrades in the battle. Hence it was easy for a group of plunderers to pounce on the baggage and carry off a considerable booty, over two hundred pounds cash and most of the horses.²¹

Henry was too busy to notice the absence of his treasure carts at the time. He sent the old knight Thomas Erpingham to make a final arrangement of the archers for he could now see from the limited number of the French cavalry that he need not fear a grand charge by several thousands of the enemy. He might as well send the interior detachments of archers back to their normal stations on the flanks; it was necessary to do this in any case if the English were to make the attack. Erpingham conducted the detachments to the main bodies of their comrades and drew all the archers a little to the front, and the men of arms closed line. As final steps Erpingham rode along the line with two attendants, delivering final instructions to the archers and putting in another word of exhortation on the king's behalf for a vigorous combat, and threw up a warder from his hand as a sign that all was ready.²² He then returned to his place beside Henry who was by this time on foot behind his banner. Henry made the sign of the cross and called for an advance in the name of Jesus, the Virgin, and St. George.²³ The English knelt, took morsels of earth in their mouths for a sort of communion (as Erpingham had doubtless suggested), and then rose and gave a great cheer to hearten themselves. With this they marched forward, some shouting continually and all

²⁰ This speech, of which I have given a free rendering, is given in *Chronicles of London*, ed. by C. L. Kingsford (Oxford, 1905), pp. 119-20, and in Nicolas, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-35.

²¹ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 50; *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 257; "Chronique de Ruisseauville," pp. 140-41; Wylie, *op. cit.*, II, 170-71. The second of these is the only one to account for the absence of the guard.

²² *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 253.

²³ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 50; "Elmhami Liber Metricus," p. 121; *The Brut*, pp. 378-79.

repeating the cheer twice. They halted at least once to dress the line and to rest, a mile being a long distance for a man of arms and the earth sticky. The archers naturally outpaced their heavier comrades and began shooting at the French as soon as they were within any sort of range.²⁴

The French of course observed this advance which must have taken fifteen to twenty minutes. The constable Charles d'Albret ordered the flank squadrons of cavalry to charge the archers when these seemed near enough, perhaps two hundred yards or more away. Here for the first time things went wrong; only half or fewer of the men assigned to the job had made their appearance. Those present obeyed the order but could make no great speed over the softish ground. The archers had time to plant their stakes and to deliver rapid fire on the assailants while the men of arms must have halted. Some of the French horses went down before the arrows; most of them, as the story goes, took fright, turned about, and ran off with their riders. In this way the charge on the side of Tramecourt came to grief; but on that of Agincourt, three Frenchmen, including Guillaume de Saveuses, actually reached the stakes and forced a way through them as the wet soil afforded little hold. Their horses floundered with the effort, however, and the archers soon pulled the men off and killed them. A few horsemen at each end of the line got between the archers and the woods of Tramecourt and Agincourt, but the archers sniped at them and brought down one or two, the rest disappearing from our accounts and presumably from the field. Thus the charge of the cavalry had failed.²⁵

It is hard to believe that horses and riders alike were as untrained as the story suggests. Since it was possible to reach the stakes with an effort like Guillaume's, one suspects that the horses were less at fault than the riders. These may have thought that they need not trouble themselves much in view of the great superiority of their side. In the flight or retirement they suffered more loss from the arrows. Some of the horses now really went out of control and ran along in front of the French van. The men of arms opened their ranks to let their luckless cavalry through, but they managed to reform line pretty well and spread out over the vacant flank space, filling it entirely after the disappearance of the crossbowmen. The mud had played its part in the battle in slowing the cavalry but was the same for the men on foot of both sides.²⁶

²⁴ "Chronique de Ruisseauville," p. 139; *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 253-54. The former says that the battle began at 10 a. m. Titus Livius, *op. cit.*, p. 19, says that the English advanced in the usual order of sections, van first, main next, and rear last; this is quite incredible, and no other source assumes anything but an advance in line; Titus Livius may have misunderstood Gloucester.

²⁵ *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 255; *Henrici Quinti*, p. 52; "Chronique de Ruisseauville," p. 140; *Chronique de Religieux de Saint Denys*, V, 561.

²⁶ *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 256, and all the French accounts lay much of the French defeat to the gaps in the van caused by the fleeing cavalry, but *Henrici Quinti*,



ARCHERS PROTECTED BY STAKES

From a contemporary monogram reproduced in Georg Liebe, Der Soldat in der deutschen Vergangenheit (Leipzig, 1899).

The English line moved forward again until its flanks, like those of the French, touched the woods of Agincourt and Tramecourt and the space between the lines was about one hundred yards. The archers halted, and the men of arms began to advance by themselves. This, if any, was the time for the French crossbowmen. They discharged a volley but were too quick about it. Most of the bolts fell between the lines, and the others injured only a very few of the English. The stone-throwers and field-guns also fired and killed one English archer.²⁷ But the archers concentrated on the crossbowmen and quickly put them out of action, the survivors retiring. Then they delivered their warmest barrage on the French line while the men of arms continued forward shouting to each other to do their best.²⁸

p. 53, has the same van moving forward shortly "plena fronte" which indicates that the gaps, if any, were of little importance. So also "Histoire d'Artus III, Duc de Bretagne et Comte de Richemont," *Collections des Memoires Relatifs à l'Histoire de la France*, ed. by Michaud and Poujoulat, 3rd ser., vol. I (Paris, 1857), p. 188.

²⁷ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 52; Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 36. The archer slain by the gun was Roger Hunt in the retinue of James Harington.

²⁸ The movements of the English line are not described in any of our sources and must be inferred from stray phrases. The line must have halted when the cavalry commenced to charge; and a cavalry charge needs 200 yards or more. *Henrici Quinti*, p. 53, says that at the clash both flanks merged into the woods on either side of the armies. The English line must have come forward from its position in receipt of the cavalry charge when there had been room for a few horsemen to run about between the archers and the woods. For the last position of the line we must rely on (1) the reports of the barrage as hot and heavy, which means having a range of 100 yards or more, and (2) the short shooting of the crossbowmen, whose effective range was from 40 to 60 yards. The archers would not have ventured closer in the interest of their personal safety and of the effective use of their weapons. That the men of arms

The French had been preparing themselves for the shock. The constable Charles d'Albret, the marshal Boucicault, and the princes exhorted them also to do their best; trumpets and clarions seconded the effort. Before the storm of arrows the men who had shields raised them; the others bent their heads to avoid being struck on the face. Some were injured, especially on the flanks, but the majority were unhurt. They made the sign of the cross, bade farewell to each other, and, when the English line was only twenty paces away, slowly moved forward shouting "Montjoie."²⁹ For the first half-minute they kept a good line;³⁰ had they maintained it, attacking English archers and men of arms simultaneously, they would have won the battle. Instead they became excited and began a pell-mell rush toward the three principal standards of the English. They struck the English line in three wedges;³¹ lances mingled and at first the French had the advantage, pushing back the line a spear's length while Henry's dismayed clerics redoubled their prayers. But the English gathered against the wedges, pushed in their turn, and recovered the lost ground. The set-to became furious as the other French of the van pressed up to their comrades, but the fighting remained pretty well confined to the area of the three principal banners and especially the King's. Eighteen French gentlemen had sworn to knock Henry's crown off his head or die in the attempt. One got near enough to strike a fleuron off the crown with his sword, but all were soon slain and the crown remained.³² At one time Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, received a sword wound and was thrown prostrate. He was in imminent peril, but Henry himself bestrode his brother and saved him.³³ The outermost and hindmost Frenchmen began to fear that they would miss their share of the fray and pushed toward the points of combat. Here a little discretion was needed. They could easily have poured around the ends or through the gaps which must have appeared in the English line by this time and come at their enemies from the rear. Or they could have taken over the fighting in relays and soon have tired the English out. But neither of these did they do; instead they jammed themselves together. The live, pushing forward, fell over the dead in front; others were killed over them so that presently there grew three heaps of dead and prostrate to the height of a man. Some of the English jumped on the heaps and wielded

moved to the shock alone is indicated by "cum accessum prope mutuam utrimque fecissent armati" (*Henrici Quinti*, p. 53). The English shouts to each other are mentioned in *Chronique de Religieux de Saint Denys*, V, 561.

²⁹ *Chronique de Religieux de Saint Denys*, V, 561; *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*. I. 254-55; *Henrici Quinti*, p. 53.

³⁰ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 53.

³¹ "Elmhami Liber Metricus," p. 121.

³² *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 250; "Elmhami Liber Metricus," p. 121.

³³ Titus Livius, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20; *Henrici Quinti*, p. 59; "Elmhami Liber Metricus," p. 121. Titus Livius speaks of only two French "horns" attacking the English line, but Gloucester's memory doubtless led to a slip here.

swords and axes on whatever heads and throats they could see. Thus far the English were holding their own, but nothing decisive had yet been done. The heaps need not have contained more than forty or fifty men each, and the French could well spare that many. It was now the turn of the archers.³⁴

They had stopped while the men of arms went forward to the clash. They now poured volleys into the sides of the French van until their arrows were exhausted. Then, no doubt acting on order although no authority says so, they threw down their bows, took axes and swords or picked up staves and ends of lances lying around, and rushed to the aid of their men of arms. By this time the French van was in disorder, most of it about the three points of combat, the rest in groups. The archers got into the gaps and assailed their armed opponents. Some even wrested away the axes with which they proceeded to fell the owners. The French, their attention concentrated in front, were taken aback by this onslaught and did not defend themselves properly.³⁵ "Slothful, amateurish, timid, unmanly" were the adjectives of the chaplain chronicler; they "defended themselves poorly," said the experienced Le Fèvre; and the informants of Walsingham had the same tale to tell.³⁶ The procedure was not without its risk, however, and most of the English casualties seem to have occurred among the archers in this struggle. But in the main it was successful, and the French men of arms fell by the hundred. Some escaped from the *mêlée*; others tried to surrender and offered themselves to Englishman after Englishman in vain.³⁷ The English were in frenzy, thinking only of destroying active opponents and deaf to others. Their men of arms took advantage of the pressure exerted by the archers, worked forward into the French van, and put it out of action. With success, the English grew calmer; they took prisoners by the hundred and were so busy at it that some of the French got away with the help of their valets. Presently Henry gathered his men for an attack on the main French body.

The French van had shown courage if little discretion; with but two ex-

³⁴ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 55.

³⁵ The charge of the archers appears in most of the documents: *Henrici Quinti*, pp. 53-54; *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 256; *Chronique de Religieux de Saint Denys*, V, 563; "Chronique de Pierre de Fémin," p. 588. It is omitted from "Chronique de Ruisseauville" and slurred over in Titus Livius, *op. cit.*, and Elmham, *op. cit.*, perhaps because Gloucester did not see much of the battle.

³⁶ *Henrici Quinti*, pp. 53-54; *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 256. Walsingham, *op. cit.*, p. 96, says, "When the French saw so many prostrate whom they had thought insuperable, they were struck with fear, stood immobile and senseless while our men took the axes from their hands and cut them down like cattle with them." Walsingham had not much idea of the battle, into which he imports descriptions and quotations from the classics, but he has a few genuine details. When Le Fèvre condemned the defense, he was speaking about the main division of the French army but was really thinking of the van, as the main was not engaged.

³⁷ The phrase "je me rende" in "Siege of Harflet," in Elmham, *op. cit.*, p. 373, may, of course, well report what the soldiers heard.

ceptions the main and rear were to show neither. It seems incredible that during the two or three hours ascribed to the battle, twenty thousand Frenchmen should stand and watch their comrades of the van being slaughtered or captured.³⁸ An attack on the rear of the English archers would have drawn them off at any time and enabled the van to recover. Even the few hundred horsemen who had run away in the first few minutes could now have redeemed their reputation and saved the day by such an obvious effort. Strange as it seems, the great body of the French had no notion of doing anything except, indeed, of removing their artillery. Instead, when the van had met its fate and the English approached the others, most of them simply turned and fled.

Two of the French leaders had a better idea for the occasion. Anthoine, Duke of Brabant, a younger brother of the Duke of Burgundy, reached the field late, rushed into the fight, and met his fate. The Admiral of France, Clignet de Brabant, rallied a considerable number of men in the rear and prepared to attack the English. The latter observed the movement and raised a clamor of alarm.³⁹ Henry let his nerves get the better of him and proclaimed orders to the sound of a trumpet that each man must kill his prisoner or prisoners except the dukes and a few other notables lest they join with Clignet's force and reverse the fortune of the day. Both French and English protested loudly against the order, and the English refused it. They naturally did not want to lose the ransoms, but we need not deny them a repugnance on humanitarian grounds. Henry then told an officer and a band of archers to do the job. They led out some of the first captives before the French and made a start at it but were not at all zealous; the other soldiers may have put on a little show of killing to please Henry as William Wolf, mentioned below, seems to have done. They had a good precedent for slackness; Henry and his staff, with a fine eye to profit, were carefully saving their own prisoners from the consequences of the order.⁴⁰

In the meantime Henry sent other archers against Clignet's force and shortly led a detachment of men of arms to their support. At the first arrows the French abandoned the field in panic, only a few on foot remaining to be dealt with by the English men of arms. Henry cancelled his order about the

³⁸ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 55; *Chronique de Religieux de Saint Denys*, V, 561; and Titus Livius, *op. cit.*, p. 19, all agree on two or three hours. "Chronique de Ruisseauville," p. 140, has half an hour which is rather tempting, the suddenness explaining the dismay of the French main and rear, but it must be rejected in view of the other figures.

³⁹ "Elmhami Liber Metricus," p. 122.

⁴⁰ For a description of this massacre and the controversy about it, see *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 258; *The Chronicle of John Hardyng*, ed. by H. Ellis (London, 1812); "Elmhami Liber Metricus," pp. 122-23; "Siege of Harflet," in Elmham, *op. cit.*, p. 375, and in Nicolas, *op. cit.*, p. 262; and *Chronique de Religieux de Saint Denys*, V, 569. The recall of the order is implied in the last named source, V, 565; the saving of the royal prisoners, in *Henrici Quinti*, p. 56.



ENGLISH ARCHERS AT AGINCOURT

From a drawing by Henry Ford in C. R. L. Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling, A History of England (Garden City, 1934).

prisoners. The English captured the French baggage and found carts and wagons filled with arrows, bows, lances, and, most important, food; they promptly enjoyed their first real meal of a week.⁴¹ Now it was safe to resurrect the prisoners. Many soldiers and the few tradesmen and servants sold their men to Henry and the nobles. One of the actors in the stage-massacre,

⁴¹ *Henrici Quinti*, p. 56. Titus Livius, *op. cit.*, p. 20, has another story, that Henry sent heralds to Clignet and threatened to kill the noble prisoners unless he withdrew. Henry may have sent the herald and dispatched the van of archers after him to make the strongest impression on the French.

William Wolf, esquire of the Earl of Arundel, was in a difficulty about his important prisoner, the Seneschal of France, and waited until the arrival at Calais before he confessed and delivered his charge to the king. After their meal the English went back over the field and resumed the sorting out of the heaps of men with some pity for the slain. Henry detailed five hundred men to do the work systematically. They and the others took surcoats and armor from the prostrate figures and separated the dead from the living. Of the living, those likely to survive were taken up and given some care. The Count of Richemont was drawn out from under two or three corpses, recognized and brought to Henry. Gilbert de Lannoy, with ten or twelve others, was removed to a house for shelter; the house was later set on fire and he barely managed to escape. He attributed the fire to a deliberate intention to burn the captives but no doubt mistook the motive, some soldier probably thinking that all inside were corpses which ought to be disposed of.⁴² We may suppose that the other seriously wounded were removed to the villages and left.

The living whose cases seemed hopeless, French and English alike, were put to death. The armor and other property were gathered into heaps and taken to Maisoncelles. While the English were thus occupied, the country people assisted them unasked. They searched the hedges for fugitives, and, when they came on servants or pages unprotected by men of arms, they killed them mercilessly for the plunder. Next came the question of burial. The English gathered the bodies of their own men into a barn, placed in it the booty that could not be carried off, and burned everything.⁴³ The French corpses that could not be identified were put into three great trenches by direction of the ecclesiastical authorities of the locality, and there they remain near the wood of Tramecourt to this day. The French had lost twenty-four hundred killed, knights and upwards in rank, and perhaps a few commoners. The English had lost only a handful, including the Dukes of York and Oxford and the young Earl of Suffolk; they accepted it generally that the total was about twenty killed. The truth is impossible to ascertain, but the figure is likely to be less than one hundred.⁴⁴

That evening Henry entertained his noble captives at dinner and discussed with them the fortune of the day. He described it as a visitation on the part of God, the Virgin, and St. George for the sins of the French, their pride and riotous lives, their violation of women, and their robbery of the country people and the churches. The English on the other hand had deserved success; they had violated no women, robbed no men or churches, even burnt no cot-

⁴² Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 25; "Chronique de Ruisseauville," p. 142; "Histoire d'Artus III," p. 188; Wylie, *op. cit.*, II, 172, quotes Lannoy's *Oeuvres*, pp. 50, 187, for the latter's experiences.

⁴³ "Chronique de Ruisseauville" pp. 142, 144; *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 260.

⁴⁴ Wylie, *op. cit.*, II, 183-89, 217-29; Nicolas, *op. cit.*, appendix LXXVII.

tages according to Henry's declaration, though this last is hard to believe.⁴⁵ In this form Henry's theory does not commend itself to modern minds, inclined to stress Henry's wanton aggressions and the natural resistance of the French. But it has a grain of truth in that the English had displayed a better self-restraint and a better heed of their leaders' orders than had the French, virtues which bring solid military advantages. They were in a situation which brought out their best qualities. The imminence and obviousness of the danger had remedied the lack of imagination so normal to Englishmen and given their intelligence full play. They had shown the individual virtues of strength, skill, and discernment of opportunities with the mass virtues of cohesion and cooperation. They had committed no mistake and had acted as veterans. The part of the archers is especially notable; indeed, they had won the battle, but in the capacity of personal combatants rather than of masters of a craft according to the popular impression. The French on the other hand were in a situation which allowed free play to their worst qualities, their pride and confidence in their individual abilities. Having such an overwhelming superiority, they had not taken their enemy seriously and had hardly bothered to make preparations. They had not assigned enough cavalry to ride down the archers and had not brought up anything like the numbers assigned. The men of arms of the van had gotten in each other's way and spoiled their part of the fight. The leaders had exposed themselves to death or capture in the van and had thereby dissolved the organization. But the worst fault lay with the main and rear. Even without leaders they should have made the obvious attack on the English archers assailing the van; but supinely they watched their comrades and leaders go down before the English, then took to flight themselves. Cowardice and lack of wit are no normal attributes of the French, and in this case they sprang from an unpreparedness which in turn derived from overconfidence. This was the root of the French defeat. Had they had a quarter of their actual numbers, they would have made a much better showing. The battle of Agincourt was in fact no true test of the relative merits of English and French soldiery; it rather exhibited the English at their best and the French at their worst.

That night the army lodged in Maisoncelles again in the rain. Next morning they searched the field once more for men yet alive, and those whom they found they made captives or put to death according to the degree of vitality. At last they made ready to march, and in the afternoon they departed, Henry stopping for a final look at the field. The prisoners marched between the van and the main, and progress was made without incident, though the men sorely missed their horses. Three days later, October 29, the army reached the area

⁴⁵ "Chronique de Ruisseauville," p. 142. *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 261, has a speech somewhat like this but assigns it to a conversation between the King and Orleans on the march to Calais.

of Calais. Here they obtained a little food at extortionate rates, and here they disposed of most of their prisoners. Henry, lodging in comfort in the castle of Guines, learned that his men were in difficulties and tried to procure boats to take them across the channel, but it was not possible to reassemble the fleet of August. He allowed two shillings passage money for each man and each horse, letting them make their own arrangements. In this manner the soldiers found their way by groups to Dover, Sandwich, Southampton, Portsmouth, and Hull and dispersed to their homes in an informal demobilization. Their pay went on until the king had landed in England on November 16 so that they had a little bonus.⁴⁶

The bands which returned were in most cases far from identical with those which had gaily set out in August. Richard de Kighley had led from Lancashire one company of five men of arms and eighteen archers and another of fifty archers. Of the first, one man of arms had died of sickness, two had returned sick, Richard and four archers had been killed in the battle, and two men of arms and fourteen archers arrived home in safety. Of the second, six died of illness at the siege, ten returned sick, eight remained in garrison, seven were taken prisoners on October 24, and nineteen came through the battle without a scratch. The first company had had rather hard luck in the battle; the second rather good. It may be presumed that their experiences must have been fairly typical. When the channel was crossed, hardships were forgotten, casualties became a memory, and the men could look back on a wonderful ten weeks. They had taken a city, made a long march, fought a great battle, and had extraordinary success. They had seen something of France and of a civilization different from their own and more luxurious. They had had all the ups and downs of a soldier's life—short rations one minute and plenty the next, rain one day and sun the day after, the fields one night and a house the following, with every hour bringing something fresh, agreeable or not. They had felt the depth of gloom and the joy of deliverance. Glory had been gained and at least something more tangible for everyone while the canny had lined their pockets well. Life for a short space had been full and varied. Wherefore the men were "greatly joyous" on their return, proud of their achievements and acquisitions;⁴⁷ no doubt through their lives they cherished the memory of this adventure into France in the autumn of 1415.

⁴⁶ *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 260-62; "Chronique de Pierre de Fémin," p. 588; Wylie, *op. cit.*, II, 248-52. *Chronique de Religieux de Saint Denys*, V, 569-71, gives Henry a final speech to his troops on leaving the field, but no English document mentions it.

⁴⁷ *Chronique de Jean le Fèvre*, I, 263.