

The army that Henry V raised for the French campaign of 1415, although not the largest raised by the English crown during the period, was certainly a substantial force, consisting of about 12,000 fighting men. By the early fifteenth century the English crown had effectively privatised the responsibility for recruiting armies by entering into formal, written, agreements with leading noblemen who acted as its captains. These agreements – known as indentures because the contract was written out twice with a jagged cut between the two resembling teeth (after the Latin word for teeth *dentes*) – specified the number of men the captain was to recruit within his personal military following known as his retinue, and the terms of service under which they were to serve such as the length of their service and rates of pay.

These retinues then came together at muster to form the army. There were two types of men within these retinues – men-at-arms and archers, both of whom were mounted – recruited by this period at a ratio of roughly 1:3. Though it is a gross simplification, the vast majority of ‘rank-and file’ men-at-arms (although it should be noted that men from the upper stratum of the army like dukes paid 13s 4d per day were also classed as men-at-arms) by and large came from amongst the upper and middle sections of medieval society; what we might term the gentry. Their weaponry included swords, lances, staff weapons, shorter handled axes, war hammers, and maces, and by this period nearly all wore full plate armour. The archers originated from amongst the yeomanry, the elite of village society just below the gentry. As with the men-at-arms, the mounted archers of this period had no standardised equipment but generally possessed a jak or some other, lesser body protection, swords and daggers, along with their bows and arrows. The men-at-arms received 12d. per day in wages, the archers half that. Though a captain’s most important men might receive some equipment from their lord it seems the vast majority of men provided their own equipment. In battlefield situations both types of troop within these ‘mixed’ retinues dismounted and fought on foot, as at Agincourt.

Generally speaking the more important the captain, the larger the number of men he was expected to recruit. For the Agincourt campaign John Mowbray, earl of Nottingham and marshal of the army, as a reflection of his social standing, agreed to recruit 200 men for

Henry V: 50 men-at-arms (including himself and four knights); and 150 mounted archers. This was not even the biggest retinue in the army. Henry V's brothers, the dukes of Clarence and Gloucester, indentured with the king to provide 960 and 800 men respectively. These were large retinues even for wealthy and socially prestigious men. To recruit these huge retinues captains often entered into sub-indentures with other, lesser captains to provide the men they needed, such as that made between Thomas, earl of Dorset and the esquire John le Boteler, the latter agreeing to provide the earl with two men-at-arms, himself included, and six mounted archers. Most of the independent retinues at Agincourt, however, were much smaller than those of the great earls. Sir Thomas Tunstall, for example, brought five men-at-arms (six including himself), and 18 mounted archers.

It is difficult to know exactly how large the English, and indeed the French armies were which fought at Agincourt on 25 October 1415, Saint Crispin's day. On the English side a large number of men either died or were invalided home with dysentery during and just after the siege of Harfleur, an important port town in Normandy which fell to the English in late September. To replace at least some of these men it is likely that reinforcements were sent from England. The most recent estimate by Professor Anne Curry based upon the administrative records puts the size of the English army as probably around 6,000 strong at the time of the battle. There is much more debate about the size of the French army, largely because French records are far from complete and there has been no systematic attempt to analyse what does exist, scattered over a large number of archival repositories. Estimates by some contemporary chronicles of hundreds of thousands, even the high tens of thousands, are wildly inaccurate. Professor Curry argues that the French army numbered c.12, 000 but other estimates by modern historians range to as much as 20,000-30,000.

What is certain is that there were far more casualties on the French side than the English. The majority of French casualties were inflicted by English arrows and suffocation as Frenchmen pressed together in the advance trying to avoid the English arrows. The English casualties at the battle largely came from when the French advance met the English lines. The Duke of York's company in particular suffered high casualties – about a quarter of the

400 men on his payroll – suggesting that they took the brunt of the French assault. York himself was killed in the melee. The other notable English casualty was the earl of Suffolk. In all the English dead numbered perhaps a few hundred men, whilst the French numbered in the thousands. This does not include the French prisoners who were captured by the English, though some of these were massacred on the battlefield on Henry V's orders after rumours of renewed French attack towards the end of the battle circulated; a controversial decision which has clouded Henry's triumph.

But a triumph it was. The victory, immortalised both at the time in England in the famous *Agincourt Carol*, and more significantly in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, was a victory on a scale not seen since the great victories over the French in the reign of Edward III over half a century earlier. Agincourt increased the conviction in Henry V's mind that it was his God-given right to be king of France and both he, and his successors after his death in 1422, fought to realise this ambition. In short, Agincourt paved the way for at least another four decades of Anglo-French warfare.

Suggested Further Reading

Curry, A. *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations*, (Woodbridge, 2000).

Curry, A. *Agincourt: A New History*, (Stroud, 2010).

Bennett, M. 'The Development of Battle Tactics in the Hundred Years War', in *Arms, Armies, and Fortifications in the Hundred Years War*, (Woodbridge, 1994), 7-20.

Gesta Henrici Quinti. The Deeds of Henry the Fifth, ed. & trans., Taylor, F., Roskell, J.S. (Oxford, 1975).

Mortimer, I. *1415: Henry V's Year of Glory*, (London, 2009)

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'The evolution of English Shipping Capacity and Shipboard Communities from the early 15th Century to Drake's circumnavigation (1577)', with Dr Craig Lambert at Southampton. His major research interests lie in the field of late medieval and early modern social and military history. He has an article on the Duke of York's retinue at Agincourt coming out soon and recently presented a paper at the 2015 conference at the University of Southampton commemorating the English victory at Agincourt 600 years on.