

The Agincourt Executions:  
Verdicts in the Courts of Chivalry and History

Matric. Number: 0309222  
GCMRS MPhil  
Course Convenor: Dr. Katie Lowe  
1 July, 2005

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“Agincourt, Agincourt!  
Know ye not Agincourt?  
Where English slue and hurt  
All their French foemen?  
With our pikes and bills brown,  
How the French were beat downe,  
Shot by our bowman.”<sup>1</sup>

The Laws of Chivalry are just as complex as any set of laws today. There were books of law, debates on fine points, and even higher “courts” which would decide on finer matters or dictate the full suspension of such laws.<sup>2</sup> This complexity, while fascinating, causes troubles when attempts are made to fully understand both motivations and ramifications of actions during the later Medieval period.

This inability to fully understand the “chivalrous mind” is not a recent occurrence however. As shall be evidenced in the following paper, historians and chroniclers before them have questioned the suitability of the actions of armies and individuals since the actual events occurred, much less several centuries later. Events which were recorded in one way have become over the years re-interpreted, perhaps reflecting the changing values of the time or more likely the changing collective image of the Medieval period at large. This is to speak nothing of the cultural perspective of the historian or chronicler which must be taken into account. This paper deals with a perfect example of this change over time and perspective.

During the series of battles, skirmishes, and uneasy peaces that have become known as the Hundred Years War, there was one battle which has been recognized as one of the most significant English victories in history. On October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1415, King Henry V of England led his vastly outnumbered army consisting predominantly of archers against the superior forces of France on a field between the small French towns of Tramcourt and Agincourt. The story of the English victory at Agincourt is one which is so famous as to have become popular

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, “Agincourt or The English Bowman’s Glory,” First stanza, 17<sup>th</sup> century ballad.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffroi de Chagny’s *Le Livre de Chivalry*, Honore Bonet’s *L’Arbre des Batailles*, and Christine de Pisan’s *The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye* are all excellent contemporary sources on the codes of chivalry. As will be discussed later in this paper, it appears that the Codes of Chivalry could and occasionally were suspended or modified as necessary by figures such as the King or the Pope.

knowledge. There are key pieces of information however which must be mentioned, so a small recitation of the relevant facts is in order.

### THE BATTLE OF AGINCOURT

In the early autumn of 1415, the English had recently taken the town of Harfleur in a month-long siege. While few casualties occurred, the English forces had still been heavily reduced due to the ravages of dysentery, and a garrison force still had to be left to hold Harfleur, reducing the English numbers even further. According to the *Chronicle of London*,<sup>3</sup> on October 8<sup>th</sup>, King Henry departed Harfleur on his way to Calais with 6,000 troops, only 1/6<sup>th</sup> of which were men-at-arms, the rest being archers. After fifteen days marching with only a single day of rest, the army arrived at the “River of Swords” (River Ternoise) when they received word that the French army was just on the other side of the river. After crossing, Henry joined his scouts on the top of a nearby hill and for the first time witnessed the massive army they would be facing, estimated at between 20,000 and 24,000 men, all pulled up in battle formation (recent evidence suggests that this was not a chance meeting as previously thought, but instead the French were intimately aware of Henry’s position since he left Harfleur<sup>4</sup>). Henry ordered his own troops to form ranks, whereupon a knight remarked to Henry that he wished he had 10,000 more archers to which Henry was famously alleged to have replied:

That is a foolish way to talk . . . because, by the God in Heaven upon Whose grace I have relied and in Whom is my firm hope of victory, I would not, even if I could, have a single man more than I do. For these I have here with me are God’s people, whom He deigns to let me have at this time. Do you not believe . . . that the Almighty, with these His humble few, is able to overcome the opposing arrogance of the French who boast of their great number and their own strength?<sup>5</sup>

Before Henry could prove his point however, the host of French broke ranks and bivouacked nearby. Henry withdrew himself to a nearby hamlet where he proceeded to send “representatives to [the French commanders] . . . to offer them reparation for all the damage which they had caused and the restitution of all that they had taken on condition that they

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred H. Burne, *The Agincourt War* (Herfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999), 69.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Phillpotts, “The French Plan of Battle During the Agincourt Campaign,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No., 390 (Jan., 1984), 60.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, *Gesta Henrici Quinti* c. 1417 in Anne Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 33.

would agree to let them return freely to their own country,”<sup>6</sup> all of which were rejected out of hand by the French nobility. Henry, having made an effort to prevent the inevitable slaughter of his troops at the hands of the French, rose the next morning and put on what was reported to be an extremely confident façade, haranguing his troops with declarations of confidence in God’s favour being with the English.<sup>7</sup>

Accounts vary, but it seems that Henry gathered his troops in the southern end of the field and arranged them into three groups, with archers and men-at-arms interspersed in each. There were little or no troops left to guard the baggage and none left in reserve. On the northern end, the French has arranged themselves in three main ranks, filling the width of the field entirely. It had rained the night before, and the centre of the field was extremely muddy. After a game of waiting, Henry ordered his troops forward until they came into bowshot range of the French troops. At this point, wooden stakes, either sharpened or capped in iron spikes at both ends were placed, and the archers began strafing the French. “Our archers shot no arrows off target; all caused death and brought to the ground both men and horses . . . Our stakes made them fall over, each on top of the other so that they lay in heaps two spear’s length in height.”<sup>8</sup> Even allowing for the inevitable over-exaggerations, this comment seems relatively likely. 5,000 archers firing into a mass of 24,000 men and horses are quite likely to find targets easier to hit than miss. The stakes were equally successful in keeping the French army from making any sort of effective charge via horseback or on foot. Additionally, the cavalry was rendered completely impotent by the sucking mud which had been churned up by both armies, the result being that the French had no recourse to an effective offence whatsoever.

Over the space of three hours, the inevitable defeat of the English had turned into a complete rout of the French forces. Thousands of French were killed in the first, and the rest either retreated or surrendered to the English. These men were then taken as prisoners of war, surrendering a gauntlet and their helmet as surety of payment of ransom. Thus is the moral and chivalric question of the Battle of Agincourt. After these men had surrendered, there came a rallying of those French troops which had retreated while at the same time the baggage train, which had been left undefended, was attacked. Unable to both guard prisoners

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<sup>6</sup> Le Religieux de Saint-Denis, *Histoire de Charles VI* in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*, 104.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Elmham, *Liber Metricus de Henrico Quinto*, in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*,

<sup>8</sup> Anonymous, *The Brut* in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*, 92.

and defend against fresh attacks from two directions, King Henry gave the shocking order via battle horn to execute those taken as prisoner. A great cry of dismay was taken up by both the English soldiers and their French prisoners. Some sources report that the English men-at-arms refused to follow the order and that an esquire had to be detailed a group of archers to carry out the executions personally. Eventually however the order was carried out, and the English began executing the surrendered French prisoners. It is believed that such executions were likely easily accomplished, as the French had already been disarmed and part of their armour had been removed. Before long, the approaching French withdrew again (if they had ever attacked in the first place) and the executions ceased, but not before several hundred men had been “murdered.”

### **A CASE OF CHIVALRIC LAW**

In *L'Arbre des Batailles* (“The Tree of Battles”), Honore Bonet’s study of chivalry which takes the form of a series of questions and answers on difficult intricacies on the subject of chivalry, Chapter XLVI deals with the treatment of prisoners and is quite simple. To paraphrase: Should a man kill another man on the field of battle; that is simply the way of war. However, once the other man has been taken into custody (“led . . . to his house”<sup>9</sup>), it becomes murder if he is killed in anything but self-defence. It is that attitude which a number of chroniclers and historians adopted when dealing with the actions of the English, dismissing entirely in the process the second half of the chapter wherein Bonet goes on to say that it is within the jurisdiction of the “sovereign prince who is carrying on the war” to choose to execute the prisoner should there be “a risk of his escaping, with the result of prolonged war, damage, or mischief.”<sup>10</sup> It is therefore obvious that the contemporary voice on the subject of correct chivalric behaviour supported the actions of King Henry. That is not to say that the annals of history were so accepting, however. Indeed, the popular opinion of Henry’s actions varied greatly depending on who was writing about him and when.

Before examining the records of the Battle of Agincourt, it would be appropriate to note that Bonet’s very next chapter deals with another subject of interest to the incident at Agincourt. The payment of ransom seems an unchivalric course for a knight to the modern mind and there were questions as to its legitimacy in the Medieval period as well. Entitled

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<sup>9</sup> Honore Bonet. *L'Arbre des Batailles*. trans. Coopland, GW. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 152.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

“Whether ransom of Silver or Gold may Justly be Demanded of a Prisoner,” Chapter XLVII of *The Tree of Battles* details the logical reasoning behind the allowing of ransom demands (in short, the captor has the right to all the prisoner’s possessions, thus as long as he is not bankrupted -- an unchivalrous act itself -- the prisoner may be legitimately exhorted for money).<sup>11</sup> Legal reasoning aside, the ransoming of prisoners was an inescapable facet of warfare. The captains of the Great Companies earned much of their famed wealth through the ransoming of prisoners, and it was commonly thought that it was only through battle and its accompanying looting that a man could advance himself in the world beyond his born station. Thus when Henry’s command for the execution of the prisoners was announced, it meant that the main source of profit for the men-at-arms and archers was being destroyed as well.

The varying opinions and portrayals of the execution of prisoners that occurred at Agincourt are a fascinating subject and one deserving of closer study. Luckily there are any number of sources which are readily available which, when viewed as a body, give significant insight into the changing attitudes over time.<sup>12</sup> The discoveries which are made when such a comparison is carried out might perhaps be startling. An examination which covers both chronological progression and cultural origin seems the most appropriate; and in such an examination, it will be illustrated that the logical progression assumptions -- that the farther from the event the less outrage would be shown, and further that the English would be more inclined towards forgiveness than their French counterparts -- are in fact diametrically false.

## **ENGLISH CHRONICLERS AND HISTORIANS**

Written only two years after the Battle of Agincourt, the *Gesti Henrici Quinti* was a blatant piece of propaganda designed to make Henry V look “as a devoutly Christian prince who, with his people, enjoyed God’s constant approval and the support of Him and His Saints, notably the Blessed Virgin and St. George.”<sup>13</sup> Despite the obvious bias on the part of the nameless author, the *Gesti* still contains one of the most accurate descriptions of the Battle known, and is the source most often copied from in later texts. In discussing the execution of

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-153, and in Christine de Pisan, *The Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye*, in Christopher Allmand, ed., *Society at War: The Experience of England and France During the Hundred Years War*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998) 83-84. Both Bonet and Pisan share an opinion that ransoms may be requested, but never at the cost to the livelihood of the prisoner or his family, though Pisan paints a rather more serious image of the evils of overcharging for ransoms.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Curry’s recent book *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations* is excellent for this sort of study and figured heavily in the research for this paper as it gives the relevant excerpts from well over sixty different sources, both English and French, spanning from the fifteenth century up to modern day.

<sup>13</sup> *Gesta Henrici Quinti* in Curry, *The Book of Chivalry*, 23.

prisoners, mention of Henry's part in the action is suspiciously absent. Instead, it says only that "the prisoners, save for the dukes of Orleans and Bourbon, . . . and a very few others, were killed by the swords either of their captors or of others following after, lest they should involve us in utter disaster in the fighting that would ensue."<sup>14</sup> Thus, by omission, Henry is completely free of explicit blame for the action. Indeed, the author was even successful in making the executions sound completely necessary for the preservation of victory (handily fulfilling one of the requirements for a just execution of a prisoner, according to Bonet).

This may be sharply contrasted with a recent twentieth century account of the execution wherein the author, John Keegan, describes Henry's decision to order the executions as "notorious." In Keegan's portrayal, the attack on the English baggage was only a few looters from nearby Agincourt, and the order to execute the surrendered French was not only wrong but immoral and even illegal. According to Keegan, Henry's troops refused to execute their prisoners, not for the financial reasons mentioned above, but instead because they held themselves to a higher moral code. Henry eventually had to order low-born *archers* to do the bloody deed under the command of an esquire.

Further, after painting a hauntingly evocative picture of the sorry state of the English soldiers who had been involved in the battle, Keegan declares Henry's order to be "comprehensible" but "Comprehensible in harsh tactical logic; in ethical, human and practical terms much more difficult to understand."<sup>15</sup> While this is a bold statement which, according to modern sensibilities, is entirely correct, it still makes use of bad history. First among its faults is an overabundance of detail. Not because it is distracting, but because such a level of detail does not exist in the historical record. The writer of the *Gesti*, for example, was almost certainly at the battlefield but does not give such details as the method by which the looters "reaped the rewards of the fight" while "the main bodies of men-at-arms stood their ground."<sup>16</sup> Further, Keegan descended deep into moral judgement which, as a historian, he should have avoided. To wax judgemental for almost two pages on the nature of Henry's "treachery" and the contrasting nobility of the rest of the army for refusing to follow his command reduces the credibility of the author to almost nothing. While these are mistakes of a historiographical nature, they are still glaring errors which suggest a considerable bias on Keegan's part against

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>15</sup> John Keegan. *The Face of Battle* (London: Pimlico, 2004), 109.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

Henry and add to the growing picture of the spectrum of opinion regarding the Battle and its events.

John Keegan and the anonymous author of the *Gesti* were the two extremes between which laid most of the rest of those English and, later, American historians who addressed the execution of the prisoners during the Battle of Agincourt. Some were just as forgiving of Henry as the *Gesti* was and kept him entirely from the narrative. Another fifteenth century chronicler said: “They killed them, they captured them, and keep them for ransoming but quickly there was a shout that a new battle would begin . . . The English killed the French they had taken prisoner for the sake of protecting their rear.”<sup>17</sup> A few lauded Henry for his brilliance as a leader as in this sixteenth century excerpt: “The prudent king of England seeing the reassemble of his adversaries sent his heralds unto them . . . [to say that] if they delayed to depart . . . those of their company already taken prisoners . . . without mercy or redemption should be put to death”<sup>18</sup> (note the omission of Henry’s actual order that the prisoners be put to death). Some deplored the act and condemned the actions with strong imagery. Another sixteenth century history gloomily described the act: “When this dolorous decree and pitiful proclamation was pronounced, pity it was to see and loathsome it was to behold how some Frenchmen were suddenly sticked with daggers, some were brained with poleaxes, some were slain with mails, other had their throats cut and some their bellies paunched: so that in effect having respect to the great number, few prisoners or none were saved.”<sup>19</sup> In fact the previous entry’s imagery was so compelling that it was copied at least one other time almost verbatim in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*.<sup>20</sup>

It can be seen that as time progressed, relations of the battle more often included Henry’s direct involvement in the choice to execute the prisoners. This could be down to several factors, but two are the most likely and are not mutually exclusive. The more obvious is that the further away from the harsh realities of a long and drawn out war -- seventy-eight of the one-hundred-sixteen years that comprise the Hundred Years War had already passed when the Battle of Agincourt took place -- the harder it became for the chroniclers and historians to fully understand the motivations and mind-sets of the players involved which may have made

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Elmhan, *Liber Metricus de Henrico Quinto* in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*, 47.

<sup>18</sup> John Stow *The Chronicles of England* in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*, 247-248.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*, 241.

<sup>20</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed’s Chronicles* in Henry J. Webb, “Prisoners of War in the Middle Ages,” *Military Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring, 1948), 48.

the perceived necessity of the execution more palatable to the King and common foot soldier alike. Equally as likely is the fact that as time progressed the less historians had to favour the image of Henry V and his actions. It is entirely possible that had the patronage of the King been less important to the author of the *Gesti*, the author might have indicted Henry's actions much more strongly. It should be noted however that Henry continued to be reported as a generally honourable man and a great military leader even while his actions at Agincourt were being lambasted.

## FRENCH CHRONICLERS

Most of the French historians who dealt with the execution did so in the fifteenth century, and with almost a sense of embarrassment and with very little perceived ire towards Henry V. Le Religieux ("The Monk") de Saint-Denis wrote between 1415 and 1422 and said very succinctly "The king of England believed that [the French] were intending to return to the charge and so ordered that all the prisoners should be killed," though according to him, the French never attempted to return to battle but instead were trying to withdraw but had gotten separated from the main body of the army -- an even more ignominious end for the prisoners for their deaths were not only in vain, but were also the fault of their brethren who were retreating *poorly*.<sup>21</sup> This was not the only time in which the French army was blamed for the massacre, in fact. In the 1430s, Pierre de Fenin wrote in his *Memoires* that "[two French nobles] accompanied by some men of low rank launched an attack on the baggage of the English making great affray . . . Thus the English killed many of the prisoners they had. [The nobles] were later much blamed for this and also they were punished by Duke John of Burgundy."<sup>22</sup> The lowborn nature of the nobles' companions here emphasizes the unwise nature of their decision to antagonize the English army. The punishment for the nobles went unexplained previously, but in Monstrelet's chronicle, it is discovered that the two nobles, "Robinet de Bournouville and Isembard d'Azincourt were later arrested and imprisoned for a long duration . . . even though they had given to . . . [the Duke's] son . . . [booty] which had belonged to the king of England and had been found by them along with his other baggage."<sup>23</sup> Though the attack on the baggage was ill-advised, another French chronicler wrote that "After the defeat there came a rumour that the duke of Brittany was coming with a large company. As a result, the French rallied, which was a bad thing, for most of the English killed their

<sup>21</sup> Le Religieux in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*, 108.

<sup>22</sup> Pierre de Fenin, *Memoires de Pierre de Fenin* in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*, 118.

<sup>23</sup> Enguerran Monstrelet, *Chroniques d'Enguerrand de Monstrelet* in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*, 163.

prisoners.”<sup>24</sup> In that case neither King Henry nor the nobles who attacked the baggage train got even the slightest mention. Any blame which could be placed was done so upon those who rallied and attacked from the front.

It may seem odd that later French chronicles and histories for the most part do not mention the execution of prisoners, or if they do only as an irrelevant footnote. Like the ever-increasingly hostile attitude towards King Henry V on the part of the English-speaking historian, the causes can only be surmised upon. It seems most likely that the Battle of Agincourt as a whole rested within the proverbial category of “better left forgotten” in the French mind. After all, the French eventually won the Hundred Years War and had their own heroes and victories to laud. It is easy to imagine that the entire embarrassing defeat and subsequent slaughter was too humiliating to continually contemplate. Perhaps an even more vital and compelling question is why the French took upon themselves the role of scapegoat for the actions of the English? This is a question even more difficult to answer, though a possible supposition is that the chroniclers may have thought that the slaughter was more palatable if it was caused by a mistake of their own, rather than having to admit that they were truly at the mercy of the English. However considering that both of the more famous contemporary books on chivalry were written by the French, it is even possible that the French truly saw it as a matter of chivalric duty to take upon themselves the blame for an incident whose blame can never truly be attributed.

### **THE BATTLE OF VERNEUIL**

Though the Battle of Agincourt has become the single most written-of encounter of the Hundred Years War -- to the point that an alternate name to the entire second half of the war is “The Agincourt War”<sup>25</sup> -- it still was not entirely unique to the English campaign. Similar tactics were used at least one other time by a similar commander, who was similarly outnumbered, with a similar outcome -- right down to a possible case of wholesale slaughter.

The Battle of Verneuil which was fought nine years after Agincourt fifty miles outside of Paris held considerable similarities with the Battle of Agincourt. It was Henry V’s brother, the Duke of Bedford who led an outnumbered army of Englishmen against a Franco-Scottish enemy. The numbers were not nearly as dire as at Agincourt, with the English army

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Juvenal des Ursins *Histoire de Charles IV, roy de France* in Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt*, 131.

<sup>25</sup> Burne, 11.

estimated at 10,000 and the Franco-Scots at a strength of approximately 15,000. A very similar battle ensued, wherein the English advanced upon the French and Scots before placing their stakes and firing upon their enemy. The opposing army managed to affect a charge of cavalry before the stakes were completely buried (the land was hard baked in the heat of summer rather than muddy from rains the night before), creating chaos along one flank of the English army though not enough to significantly change the outcome of the day. The rest of the battle continued more or less as could be expected with Agincourt as the blueprint, though with one prime difference. At no time did the English take a single Scot prisoner. They were instead slaughtered to a man.

While the mass slaughter may seem to be another in a long list of atrocities performed upon the Scottish by the English (or so an Anglophobe might claim), it was in fact the Scots who first declared that it would be a battle wherein no quarter would be sought or given. There were perhaps several reasons for this dramatic declaration. First was that the Scots army had arrived months before but had been forced to wait for four months in Tours, so they were by all accounts exceedingly eager to meet their traditional enemies.<sup>26</sup> A second factor which might explain the English willingness to so thoroughly destroy the Scots may be found again in a collection of ordinances put into effect by Henry V in the summer of 1419. Among provisions for the making of “Rodes” and injunctions against the looting of churches there is an ordinance “For them that taketh Traytours and put them to Raunsom”:

Also if any man take any enemye the whiche hathe ben shorne and had billet, or any man the whiche outhe ligeaunce unto our liege lord the Kinge, that is to witt, Englishe, Welsshe, Irishe, or any other, that as sone as he is comen in to the oste or elswher that he be brought into the warde of Counstable and Marishall upon payne to have the same death that the saide traytour or enemy sholde have . . .<sup>27</sup>

Alexander Douglas had broken an agreement with Henry V to join forces with him upon the restoration of King James to Scotland.<sup>28</sup> As such, Douglas and all of his accompanying Scots were guilty of treason. Had the Scots been captured by the English, they would have been put to death. In fact, had the English tried to capture them for any reason other than to put them

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<sup>26</sup> Martin A. Simpson, “The Campaign of Verneuil,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 49, No. 193 (Jan., 1934), 94.

<sup>27</sup> S. Bentley. *Excepta Historica*. (London, 1831), 38.

<sup>28</sup> Burne, 197.

on trial for treason (ie; for ransom, being the whole reason that prisoners were taken in the first place), then they too would have been put to death.

Whatever the reason, the Scottish resolution to ask for no quarter was upheld, and common belief is that the Scots, who were largely abandoned during a French retreat, were eventually slaughtered to a man. This crushing defeat effectively removed Scotland from the remaining of the Hundred Years War, as no further mention of any sort of considerable Scottish force is made.<sup>29</sup>

While a good deal bloodier in terms of numbers killed (the Scottish forces consisted of up to 6,500 men), the slaughter of the Scots was apparently far more palatable to the chroniclers of the time. The *Brut* makes hardly a mention of, and passes no judgement on, the destruction of the Scottish forces, but instead makes an observation that the execution (by hanging, drawing, and quartering) of a French commander for leading 500 troops off the field was “quite right.”<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION

War between England and France was not a new thing, even when the Hundred Years War started in 1337. Only thirteen years previously, the English had lost the short War of Saint-Sardos to France, losing with it the last of their French lands apart from Bordeaux and a narrow strip of coast. Despite this familiarity with the state of war, it is doubtful that either country was truly prepared for the sustained hostility which would last for over a century. When the Battle of Agincourt came about, 78 years of on-and-off warfare had already occurred. Not only had each of the soldiers present at Agincourt grown up with the Anglo-French Wars a reality, but their fathers, and in some cases their grandfathers had as well. On each side were men who were professional soldiers who had literally never known anything other than warfare.

Looking at the copious accounts of the events which occurred on St. Crispin’s Day in 1415, there is no way to tell for certain what happened between the French and English forces. It is unclear if King Henry himself gave the order for the prisoners of war to be executed. It is a

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

mystery as to whether the men-at-arms and archers killed them voluntarily or had to be made to by their superior officers. It is even unknown how many men were present on the day from each side, much less how many were executed or even were killed in total. The true question which was asked in this case was whether or not King Henry V was guilty of what amounts to war crimes. The titular Courts of Chivalry would have found Henry innocent. As sovereign, he had the right to suspend any law of chivalry especially when the campaign in general was at risk. Unfortunately, the Courts of History have not been so kind. As time has progressed, historians have become more vocal and considerably harsher in their judgement of Henry's actions and in modern times at least would appear to have found him guilty of war crimes. The one thing that is so easily forgotten however is that had Henry spared the lives of the prisoners and had the French continued their renewed attack, there was every chance that Henry's still-outnumbered army would have been destroyed utterly. This makes Henry's actions self-defence in the truest sense and so immune from prosecution, regardless of the condemnations of the more recent historians.

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