



BATTLE OF AGINCOURT

During the summer of 1415, King Henry V was laying siege to France. He had set sail across the English channel with more than 11,000 men and had high hopes of defeating one of their oldest enemies - the French. Matters weren't helped by the fact that King Henry felt he was the rightful King of France —something that the French disputed. The only way to settle it seemed to be war.

When the English arrived in France, they immediately laid siege to Harfleur in Normandy. The town was well defended, but they were eventually forced to surrender after five weeks of bombardment from the English. Unfortunately, it came at a great cost to King Henry. Overall, he lost half of his men to disease and the small battles that the townsfolk engaged in.

With only 5,000 men left, the king decided to flee for Calais: he would meet the English fleet of ships and sail back to England. Along the way, they had to pass through a place called Agincourt. There, a French army of 20,000 men waited for them. No leader would want to lead their men into battle against such great odds, and King Henry was no different. The French weren't being led by their own king, who was considered too insane to leave his castle.

The battlefield lay between two dense forests that were impenetrable by anybody except for single foot soldiers. The whole battlefield was roughly a kilometre long, close enough for the two opposing armies to see exactly what the other was doing. Henry was afraid. He held mass three times during the night before the battle, praying for salvation.

At 11am on the 25th of October, battle commenced. The narrow stretch of land and the fact that the woods blocked any attack from the side, meant that the French army had to advance in plain sight. They were also unable to spread out very far. This worked to King Henry's advantage. He knew that his army was exhausted and weak after the stand-off in Harfleur, so he told them to stand firm and wait for the French to attack them. The French did as he expected and slowly moved forward through the thick mud.

Nearly 80% of the English army was made up of stout, fearsome archers armed with a longbow,



and King Henry used them to devastating effect. The French army was known for their heavy armour, but this just slowed them down in the mud, and the English archers bombarded them with a rain of arrows. The French soldiers who made it through tried to attack the archers, but they were protected by a line of pointed stakes. As more and more French soldiers fell on the battlefield, it made it even harder for those behind them to move forward. Some of them weren't even able to raise their swords to strike a blow.

At this point, the French were stuck. They were too tired and bogged down to retreat, and the English soldiers raced onto the field and won the battle. Victory against such great odds boosted English moral and swung the direction of the Hundred Years' War in their favour.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find and copy a word that tells you France didn't agree with Henry being the king of France.
2. What does the word "bombardment" tell you about the English attack on Harfleur?
3. Which word tells you that the forests were thickly filled with trees?
4. Which word tells you that the forests were impossible to get through?
5. Write a synonym for "stout".

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

How many men did King Henry V take to Agincourt?

S

Why did the French soldiers find it difficult to cross the battlefield?

R

How long was the battlefield?

R

What protected the archers?

S

What effect did the battle have on the English?

Answers:

1. Disputed
2. It was a continuous attack/it didn't stop
3. Dense
4. Impenetrable
5. Strong/broad accept any alternative synonym

R: 5,000

S: The thick mud and their heavy armour slowed them down, and then the dead soldiers made it even harder to get across the field.

R: A kilometre

R: A line of pointed stakes in the ground

S: It boosted their moral and helped them in the Hundred Years' War