

Kent Richardson

Title: “Agincourt: England’s Unpredictable Triumph Over France”

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Paper written for: History B352: Middle Ages (Fall 2012)

My name is Kent Richardson and I am a History major here at IPFW. I will be graduating in May and I would like to get into museum work. I am definitely considering graduate school as well. I am most interested in Colonial American history, but Dr. LaVere’s HIST B352 Middle Ages class attracted me to medieval Europe and especially to the bitter rivalry between England and France. I did not know very much about the Battle of Agincourt before writing the paper, but almost immediately I found the battle and its main protagonist, Henry V, fascinating. There were many elements of the battle and of the circumstances that led up to the battle that seemed distinctively medieval to me, and Henry V quickly proved to be one of the most dynamic and controversial historical figures that I have come across in my research. After my presentation I hope that members of the audience will find Henry and the Battle of Agincourt equally captivating.

Abstract

Before the English and French armies faced off on the battlefield of Agincourt on October 25, 1415, the Hundred Years War had been raging between the two countries for almost eighty years. The English had dominated the early phase of the war, but the outbreak of the Bubonic Plague postponed the war and a virtual stalemate had occurred between the two sides since then. After Agincourt, though, the stalemate was over and England and its king, Henry V, reigned supreme over France. The battle of Agincourt was the culmination of an English campaign led by Henry V to re-confiscate lands that his grandfather, Edward III, had won in the early stages of the war. Henry was also going after the French throne, which he believed was unjustly denied to his grandfather. Henry became king in 1413 and immediately began planning an invasion of France. On August 11, 1415, Henry and his troops sailed for France in one of the largest invasion fleets the world had ever known. The first stop was the strategically important port city of Harfleur in upper Normandy. After laying siege to the town, coupled with heavy bombardment, the French at Harfleur surrendered in three weeks. Henry’s forces, though, had become decimated by dysentery. While many in the English camp believed (and hoped) that Henry would now return home to recuperate, Henry ordered his men to march north and claim “his” territories along the way. This march was finally interrupted at Agincourt by the massive French army that had been gathering for weeks. Cold, hungry, and tired, the English troops appeared to be no match for the rested and healthy French force, which also outnumbered the English six to one. Henry’s leadership and confidence, though, along with a sound military strategy and the most superior weapon of the day, the longbow, made these factors obsolete. The English routed the French army at Agincourt, and Henry V proved that his cause was just.

Selected Bibliography

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