# In the footsteps of
# The Crécy Campaign
## 1346 — 1347

by Ian R Gumm MSTJ TD VR

## Before the battle — Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue to Crécy-en-Ponthieu

Edward of Windsor, who became Edward III King of England, was born on 13 November 1312 to King Edward II and Queen Isabelle, the daughter of Philippe IV King of France.


King Edward III.

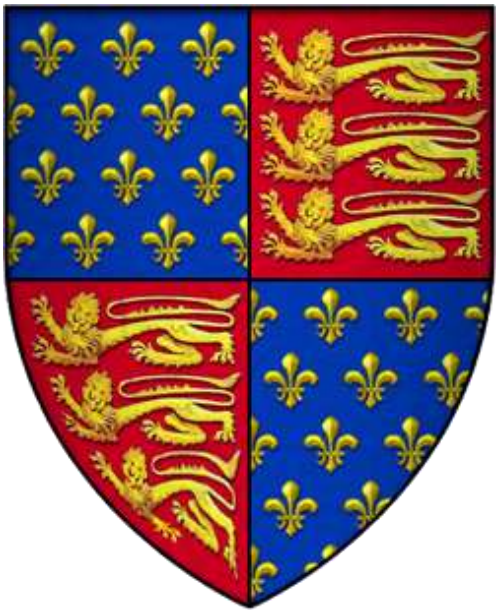
On 1 February 1328 Charles IV King of France, Queen Isabella's brother, died at the Château de Vincennes leaving behind his pregnant wife, Jeanne d'Évreux, and their 1-year-old daughter Marie. If Queen Jeanne's unborn child was a boy, then he would inherit the French throne, if not the throne would be vacant. Two months after her husband's death Queen Jeanne gave birth to a baby girl, Blanche. The French throne was vacant.

Charles IV's closest living male relative was the fifteen-year-old Edward of Windsor, by now King Edward III of England. His claim was through his mother Queen Isabella, and she claimed the vacant French throne on her son's behalf. The French nobility, however, were not about to accept an English King on the throne of France and passed a law excluding any claim through the female line. Edward's cousin, Philippe Count of Valois was Charles IV's closest living relative in the male line and Instead of crowning Edward, the French nobility chose Edward's cousin, Philippe Count of Valois and he was crowned Philippe VI King of France on 29 May 1328.

King Philip VI.

Following his assumption of the throne the new King Philippe VI insisted that Edward did homage for his lands in Aquitaine and Ponthieu. The young King Edward did not see himself as subordinate to Philippe VI and consequently reluctantly carried out this act of fealty. This led to an increase in tension between the two kingdoms, a tension that was further heightened by the French sending aid to the Scots in their war with Edward.

For nine years it appeared as if Edward had been willing to accept Philippe VI's ascendancy to the French throne and an uneasy peace existed between the two kingdoms. Then on 24 May 1337 King Philippe's Great Council at Paris confiscating Edward's lands in Aquitaine and Ponthieu on the grounds that he was in breach of his obligations as vassal and sheltering the French King's mortal enemy Robert d'Artois. In reply King Edward began to reassert his claim to the French throne and on 25 January 1340 proclaim himself King of France.



The coat of arms adopted by King Edward III, as King of England and of France.

The first clashes of the Hundred Years War were a series of naval battles fought in the Zwin Estuary on the coast of Flanders and the nearby Scheldt Estuary in which the French fleet was virtually destroyed and the English gained control of the English Channel.

The Battle of Sluys, 24 June 1340. [Jean Froissart's Chronicles]

This was followed up by a Campaign in 1345 when King Edward intended to mount a simultaneous three-pronged attack against France from Brittany, Flanders, and Aquitaine. Henry of Grosmont, the Earl of Derby and the son and heir of Henry of Lancaster, led the campaign in Aquitaine and whilst the actions in Brittany and Flanders did not amount to much, the actions of Henry of Grosmont's army did. The principal actions in Aquitaine were the Battle of Bergerac on 26 August 1345 and the Battle of Auberoche on 21 October 1345; both of which were resounding English victories.

On 1 January 1346 Edward III ordered an invasion fleet to be assembled at Portsmouth. His intention was to undertake a chevauchée through Normandy and across northern France plundering its wealth to severely weaken the prestige of King Philippe.

Edward III embarking for France. [Geoffrey le Baker of Swinbrook Chronicle]

On Monday, 11 July 1346 Edward III and his sixteen-year-old son, Edward Prince of Wales, later to become known as the Black Prince, set sail with a fleet of 750 ships from Portsmouth. The English army consisted of over 15,000 men: knights, men-at-arms, mounted archers, archers, foot soldiers and mercenaries from the Holy Roman Empire. The following day this army came ashore on the beaches near Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue. Among the first ashore were Godefroy d'Harcourt the Viscount of Saint-Sauveur, one of the most powerful lords in Normandy who had been banished from France by King Philippe two years before, and Thomas Beauchamp 11th Earl of Warwick.

There was no initial significant French response to the English landing as the main French force was some distance away. The company of Genoese crossbowmen based at Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue deserted a few days before and eight ships that had been assembled to defence the port and had been abandoned on the beach and were burnt. The villagers in the area fled as the English approached and Robert Bertrand de Bricquebec, the former Marshal of France, was the senior Frenchman in the area and he had summoned all local men of military age to muster. The force mustered numbered just a few hundred men and with these he made a half-hearted effort to drive the English back but was easily beaten off.

King Edward came ashore around midday, tripped and fell, and hit his head which caused a nosebleed. Edward characteristically picked himself up and shrugged it off saying that *"the land was ready to receive him"*, some however saw it as an ill-omen. Thereafter the King and his entourage climbed the nearby hill to the Église Saint-Vigor de Quettehou where Edward III knighted his son Edward Prince of Wales, William Montagu, Roger Mortimer, William

de Ros, Roger de la Warre, Richard de la Vere and a number of other young noblemen. Godefroy d'Harcourt also paid homage to King Edward for his lands in Normandy formally recognising him as he liege lord.


The plaque at Saint-Vigor de Quettehou. [© Ian R Gumm, 2018]

On 18 July 1346 the English army broke camp and moved southeast from Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue towards Valognes. At Valognes Godefroy d'Harcourt split off from the main army and headed for his ancestral home the Château de Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte; this he found in ruins having been destroyed three years before by his arch enemy Robert de Bricquebec. The main body of the English army turned southwards down the Cotentin Peninsula passing through Montebourg and Sainte-Mère-Église to Saint-Côme-du-Mont where they spent the night; an area known today for the American Paratrooper drops and seaborne landings at UTAH Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944.

On 19 July 1346 the English army approached Carentan along the causeway leading from Saint-Côme-du-Mont across the marshlands of the Marais, in three divisions. The French had burnt or destroyed the bridge over the River Douve on the approaches to the town, but this had been repaired by the English carpenters overnight. They entered Carentan that morning and the bourgeoisie capitulated without a fight. There was a brief struggle at the castle, but this too surrendered after a brief show of defiance. The English army subsequently looted the town and by midday it was a burning.

From Carentan, the English army continued its advance southwards following the causeway through the Marais towards Saint Lô. They were harried by a small French force all the way and when they reached Pont-Hébert they found that the bridge over the River Vire had been destroyed. The English carpenters set to work repairing the bridge and King Edward and his army crossed the River Vire on 22 July 1346.

Robert de Bricquebec hoped to make a stand against the English in the medieval walled town of Saint Lô. On reaching the town he put his men and the town's people to work repairing the defences that had long been neglected. When the English army approached from the north, however, he decided that Saint Lô was not strong enough to hold the English off and withdrew his force. On entering Saint Lô the English discovered the severed heads of Jean de la Roche-Tesson, Guillaume Bacon and Richard de Percy, the three Norman knights who had been

executed for supporting King Edward three years earlier, impaled on spikes over the gate. These were taken down and given a proper burial, probably by their friend and former ally Godefroy d'Harcourt.

In Saint Lô were over 1,000 barrels of wine and the English army, probably under the influence of some of this, went on the rampage. The town was sacked, and the inhabitants were either killed, or if wealthy enough shipped back to England for ransom. The town was looted and when the English army left to continue its advance, Saint Lô was left in flames.

Once beyond Saint Lô the English army moved into the rolling countryside of Calvados and advanced on a wide front. Here was rich picking – farms, orchards, cattle, and horses – all of which was plundered and burnt as part of Edward III's classic chevauchée tactics. At the same time Edward's navy was harrying the Normandy coast destroying everything within an 8 Kilometre strip of coast between Cherbourg and Ouistreham. In all some 100 or more French ships were burned and a great deal of plunder taken.

By 25 July 1346 the English army was just 18 kilometres from Caen. That evening King Edward sent Geoffrey of Maldon, an English monk, to the officials of Caen calling on them to surrender. He offered to spare the lives of their citizens, their goods, and their homes, but the officials of Caen rejected the offer. Guillaume Bertrand, the Bishop of Bayeux and Robert de Bricquebec's brother, had Geoffrey thrown into prison.

Early the next morning, Wednesday 26 July 1346, the English army left Fontenay-le-Pesnel and crossed the relatively flat plain towards Caen. They advanced on a broad front with Edward III's division to the south and the Prince of Wales' division taking the more northerly route.

The Battle of Caen 1346. [Jean Froissart's Chronicles]

The English army's appearance before Caen was of course no surprise; for days the refugees fleeing in front of the English advance had converged on the city with their carts and animals and now thronged the streets. Although defensible the Abbaye aux Hommes and Abbaye aux Dames were abandoned due to lack of manpower. Inside the city walls Raoul II de Brienne, the Count of Eu and Guînes, and Constable of France, and John de Melun, the Lord of Tancarville and Montreuil-Bellay, had a force of some 1,500 men including some 300 Genoese crossbowmen under the command of Robert de Warignies. They had improved the defences as best they could by using palisades and ditches to the north and west, and thirty ships had been moored along the banks of the River Odon to act as platforms for their archers to the south.

When the English army appear, however, the French were seized by doubt and decided not to defend the old city but to concentrate their forces in the Île St-Jean. A detachment of 200 men-at-arms and 100 Genoese crossbowmen were sent to defend the castle while the remainder withdrew across the Pont-St-Pierre. The defences of the Île St-Jean were weak. The ships along the River Odon and the fortified Porte-St-Pierre to the north offered some protection, but to the south and east only the tributaries of the River Odon provided a barrier. The water level of the river was low due to the dry summer making it possible for men to wade across where normally ships would pass.

The English assault on Caen began in an uncoordinated and haphazard manner with each division seemingly acting upon their own accord. The Prince of Wales' division seized a gate and entered the old city. The Earl of Warwick entered with by a different gate with men-at-arms and archers. Both forces converged on the Porte-St-Pierre. On reaching the barricade a fierce hand-to-hand battle commenced and the houses in the vicinity were soon alight. King Edward seeing what was happening sent William de Bohun and Sir Richard Talbot to order the Earl of Warwick to withdraw his men. For whatever reason, that did not happen, and the assault continued.

The fighting soon spread along the riverbank and two of the ships moored on the river were set alight. Other ships were boarded and men waded the river under fire of the Genoese crossbowmen. The French defenders at the Pont-St-Pierre quickly found themselves cut-off and surrounded, some managed to take refuge in the old city and others joined the defenders in Île St-Jean or the gate's fortified towers.

For the French, however, the writing was on the wall and those of rank began looking for opponents of equal status to take their surrender. Raoul de Brienne the Constable of France surrendered to Sir Thomas Holland and John de Melun, the Lord of Tancarville and Montreuil-Bellay and Chamberlain of France, surrendered to Sir Thomas Daniel a retainer of the Prince of Wales. The former spent the next three years in England waiting for his ransom was paid and the latter was held at Wallingford castle until his release in 1348.

Several hundred prisoners were taken including several rich citizens of the city, but those Frenchmen of lesser rank or of little value died where they stood. By comparison it is said that just one English man-at-arms was killed in the assault. It is more likely however that the number of casualties amongst the archers and infantry of both sides would have been high due to the savage nature of the fighting.

As dusk descended that evening only the 300 men-at-arms and crossbowmen, who were under the command of Robert de Bricquebec and his brother Guillaume, the Bishop of Bayeux, in the castle continued to resist. The English established their camp on the plains of Ardennes to the west and north of the city, in the vicinity of the present-day communes of Saint-Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe, La Folie-Couvrechef and Hérouville-St-Claire.

On Monday, 31 July 1346 the English army left Caen to continue its journey eastwards in the direction of Rouen. On Wednesday, 2 August 1346 they entered Lisieux where Edward III remained for two-days. They left Lisieux on Friday, 4 August 1346 intent on finding a crossing over the River Seine near Rouen. On Monday, 7 August 1346 they reached the river at Elbeuf, only to find that the bridge had been rendered unusable and a large French force commanded by Jean IV d'Harcourt, Godefroy d'Harcourt elder brother and Comte d'Harcourt, guarding the northern bank. On Tuesday, 8 August 1346, having failed to find a crossing over the River Seine at Elbeuf, the English army turned southwards towards Paris seeking another place at which to cross. They headed for Pont-de-l'Arche the next bridge over the River Seine south of Elbeuf. At Pont-de-l'Arche they found the town walls manned and well protected, the castle garrisoned, and the crossing denied to them. Edward III ordered an assault, but this was repulsed, and English army moved on south to halt in the vicinity of Léry and Le Vaudreuil that night.

On 9 August 1346 the English army recommenced their journey towards Paris, burning Léry and La Vaudreuil when they left, and crossed the River Eure near Louviers. It was a similar situation at Vernon, Mantes-la-Jolie and Moeulan-en-Yvelines with each crossing point being denied to King Edward's English, the bridges had been rendered unusable and crossings being held by the French in force.

On Sunday, 13 August 1346 the English arrived in the vicinity of Poissy, just 20 kilometres from Paris. The bridge at Poissy had been broken and the town and neighbouring town of Saint-Germain-en-Laye had both been abandoned.

The old bridge at Poissy. [© Ian R Gumm, 2018]

The arches of the bridge, however, were still standing and the English carpenters began repairing it. A temporary span across the river was put in place using a 20-metre-long tree and later that day the English established a small bridgehead on the far bank. When news of this reached the French, a force led by the Lords of Aufremont and Revel was sent to deny the crossing to the English. The English bridgehead was only lightly held as the French approached, but William de Bohun led several hundred men across the narrow span to reinforce their tenuous hold on the northern bank. The French were too late.

King Edward's army crossed the River Seine on 16 August 1346 and once across turned northwards intent on joining up with reinforcements that were due to arrive at Le Crotoy and the Flemish under Hugh Hastings. After crossing the river, they destroyed the bridge and left Poissy in flames behind them.

By now King Philippe VI's main force was south of Paris intent on meeting the English south of the River Seine outside of the city. The English crossing the river at Poissy, however, changed everything.

By nightfall on 16 August 1346 Edward III's army had reached Grisy-les-Plâtres 26 kilometres north of Poissy. The following day they continued their journey northwards across the undulating countryside to Auteuil, a further 25 kilometres to the north and just 11 kilometres southwest of Beauvais. They tried probing the crossings at Hangest-sur-Somme and Pont-Rémy without success and continued to move northwards. The crossing of the River Somme was proving to be as difficult for Edward III's English as had crossing the River Seine as all the bridges were either heavily guarded or burned.

King Philippe VI had responded quickly to the English army's departure from Poissy. He turned his French army around and retraced his steps to Paris. Once through the city he commenced a series of forced marches covering around 40 kilometres a day. The local French levies, knowing that King Philippe was in hot pursuit, made life as difficult as possible for the English hiding supplies and harrying them whenever possible. This caused the English to have to forage far and wide for supplies and slowed them up even more. By the time the English army left the area of Beauvais the French army was closing fast.

King Edward knew that time was of the essence and that he had to get across the River Somme before King Philippe VI's larger army caught up with him. He ordered that a portion of the English baggage train was abandoned and the foot soldiers to be mounted on captured horses. He also tried to keep his army focused on speed rather than plunder, but that was easier said than done. He managed to stop them from sacking Beauvais, but time was lost while they plundered the village of Vessencourt, now part of the commune of Frocourt, and set light to the Abbaye Saint-Lucien de Beauvais where Edward III had spent the previous night.

When the English reached Poix-de-Picardie it was spared the torch on payment of a ransom. After the bulk of King Edward's army had marched on, however, the townsfolk attacked the small party that had remained to collect the money and they had to be rescued by the rearguard. Poix-en-Picardie was consequently put to the torch and its two castles raised to the ground.

Despite these diversions, which were beginning to eat up valuable time, the English army's progress remained good, and they reached Camps-en-Amiénois, about 20 kilometres from the River Somme, on 20 August 1346. As he drew close to Abbeville, Edward knew he was running out of options. He had to find a crossing or get caught between the River Seine and River Somme.

On 21 August 1346 as the English army approached Airaines a French force threatened the English rear guard and Hugh Despencer and Robert d'Ufford were sent to drive them off. The French chose to fight and sixty of them were taken prisoner and more than 200 were killed.

The following day scouting parties were sent out to look for crossing places over the River Somme. These found that the French had destroyed many of the bridges and those crossing places that remained were well defended. The Earl of Warwick and Godefroy d'Harcourt tried to force a crossing at Pont-Rémy where they were opposed by forces under the command of John, King of Bohemia. They then tried the causeway about 3 kilometres upriver from Fontaine-sur-Somme, but they found that this too was heavily defended. They made no attempt to cross and pushed onwards to the next potential crossing at Longpré, but this too was well defended and once again no attempt to cross was made. The Earl of Warwick and Godefroy d'Harcourt continued upriver to Hangest-sur-Somme, but once again found the bridge had rendered unusable and a French force was present in numbers to deny them passage. This left just Picquigny a further 8 kilometres upstream, but again that town was too well defended. Unsuccessful, the Earl of Warwick and Godefroy d'Harcourt turned their men around and made their way back to Airaines to report the situation to King Edward.

By Wednesday, 23 August 1346 Edward III was aware that King Philippe's French army was closing fast and that he would either need find a place to cross the River Somme or turn and give battle. English reinforcements were due to arrive at Le Crotoy and the Flemish army under Sir Hugh Hasting was supposedly on route to join him once he was across the river. He was not yet ready to give battle to the French and when he did King Edward wanted it to be on ground of his own choosing and at a time to suit him. The English army consequently left Airaines with some haste that morning. They initially moved west towards the coast, but at Oisemont they turned northwards to bivouac at Acheux-en-Vimeu that night. They met with some resistance at Oisemont as the inhabitants had mustered to resist them, but these were easily dispersed by a cavalry charge by Edward's men-at-arms. More time was lost, however, while the English army pillaged and burnt Oisemont.

During 23 August 1346 King Edward rode to Monts de Caubert, approximately 3 kilometres from Abbeville, to get a clear view of the town. The French rode out from the town to threaten King Edward's small party, but the swift action of the Earl of Warwick drove the French back and allowed the King's party to ride away. From this reconnaissance King Edward realised that taking the bridge at Abbeville was not a practicable option and that he would have to find somewhere else to cross the River Somme.

The last remaining known crossing point was at Blanchetaque where there was a narrow ford stretching across the widening expanse of the river as it neared the sea. There are several varying accounts that related to how King Edward learnt of the existence of a ford at Blachetaque, including one that a Frenchman from the nearby village of

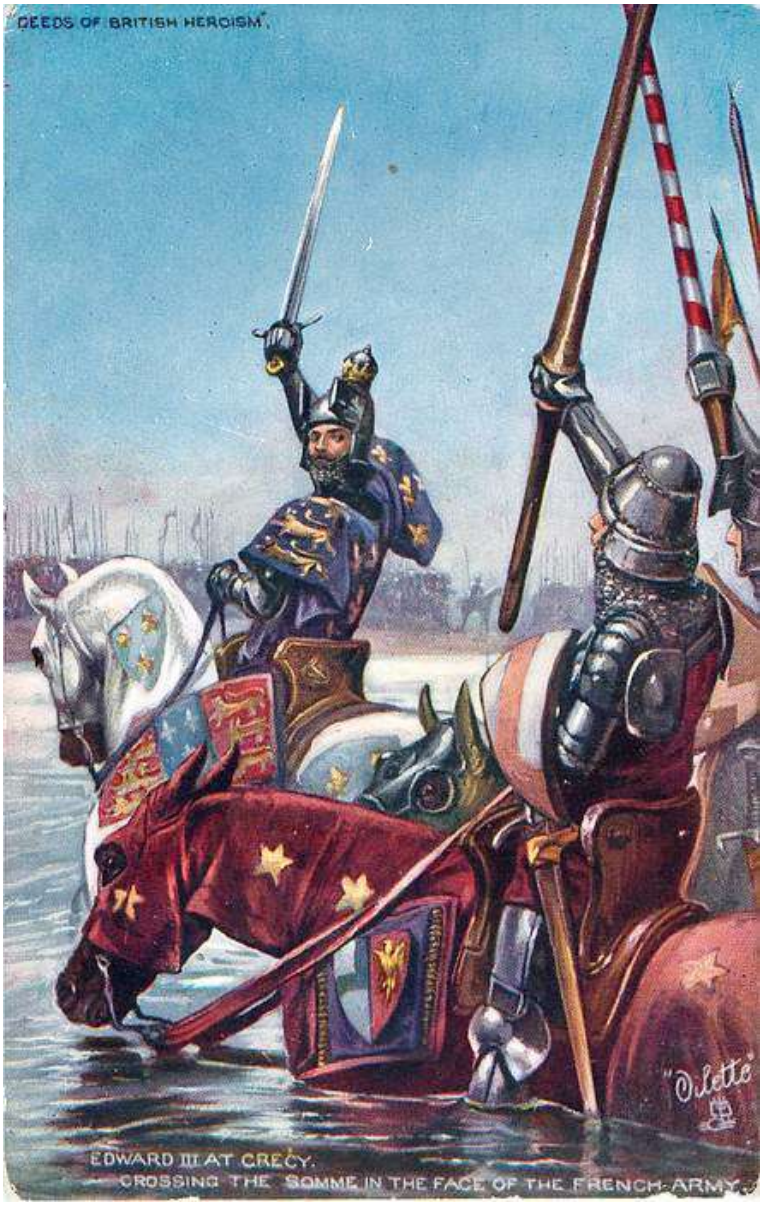
Mons-Boubert, Gobin Agrae, revealed its location to the King in return for 100 pieces of gold. Whatever the case, it was to Blanchetaque that the English army made its way next.

In the early hours of Thursday, 24 August 1346 the English army set off from Acheux-en-Vimeu towards the ford at Blanchetaque. When they arrived at the river just before sunrise the tide was just beginning to turn and the water level still too high to cross. 500 French men-at-arms, Genoese crossbowmen and around 3,000 French infantry under the command of Godemar du Fay were present on the far back ready to defend the crossing and it was apparent that the English were going to have to fight if they were going to cross the River Somme at this point.

The possible site of the ford at Blanchetaque. [© Ian R Gumm, 2018]

After a four-hour wait and with Frenchmen approaching the rear of their column, the Earl of Northampton and Reginald de Cobham, 1st Baron Cobham, led a small vanguard of 100 men-at-arms and 100 archers forward into the waist-deep river of the ford at around 08:00 hrs. Their intent was to cross the fourteen feet wide ford and establish a bridgehead on the far bank into which King Edward could push his army and force the French back. They waded through the waist high water in a tightly packed formation with the main body of mounted knights and men-at arms under the Earl of Warwick following close behind.

As they neared the far bank the Genoese crossbowmen fired their bolts and the English column seemed to shiver as some of the missiles struck home. The English archers returned fire and let loose their arrows sending five or six clothyard barbed shafts into the Genoese for every bolt fired. As the Genoese fire began to slacken the Earl of Northampton and Reginald de Cobham led their small force of men-arms forward. As the vanguard began its advance King Edward suddenly spurred his horse into the press crying *"Let those who love me follow me!"* and the knights and men-at-arms under the Earl of Warwick plunged forward forcing the archers to the very edges of the causeway.




King Edward III at Blanchetaque. [R Caton Woodville]

The French drawn up across the narrow path leading from the ford dashed forward to engage the knights instead of standing firm and holding their ground. Perhaps they were eager to take the knights prisoner and hold them for ransom, but whatever the case they sacrificed their advantage and the fighting at the head of the ford soon descended into a mêlée at the water's edge.

The English archers' arrows continued to rain down on the French unable to join the mêlée and the Frenchmen began to give ground. This rearward movement gradually took on a life of its own as the French were forced back until they finally broke and fled in the ensuing confusion. The English army was across the ford, but at the other end the vanguard of the pursuing French army commanded by John I, King of Bohemia and Jean IV d'Harcourt caught up with the English rearguard and wagon train as it entered the water. The killed or captured the few that still remained on the riverbank, but the rising water prevented pursuit and they watched on in frustration as the English army crossed the River Somme to safety.

Edward III crossing the River Somme at Blanchetaque. [Benjamin West circa 1788]

Once across the River Seine King Edward, knowing that the French were hot on his heels, gave thanks to God before dispatching Hugh Despenser with a force to Le Crotoy to meet up with the reinforcements and supplies that were due to land there. The Earl of Warwick's men-at-arms pursued Godemar du Fay's fleeing Frenchmen the bulk of whom made their way to Abbeville while some made for Sailly-Bray 5 kilometres to the north. The Earl of Warwick's men-at-arms cut many of them down as they fled and the French loses at Blanchetaque were said to amount to 2,000, but whatever the figure they were certainly heavy.

Hugh Despenser's force arrived at Le Crotoy to find that the expected English reinforcements and supplies had not arrived. The supplies had in fact not yet been loaded into the ships and the men were yet to assemble let alone set sail for France. Hugh Despenser's men sacked the town that evening before beginning to forage for supplies. Noyelles-sur-Mer was sacked, and Rue 10 kilometres further north was put to the torch. Cattle, provisions, and wine from ships moored in Le Crotoy harbour were taken before they made their way to re-join King Edward's main force.

At Blanchetaque, the two armies faced each other across the river; King Edward's English on the eastern bank and King Philippe's French on the western bank. They continued to watch each other for the remainder of the day and into the next. On 25th August 1346 King Philippe, knowing that he had little chance of securing a crossing at Blacnhetaque, gave the order for the French army to disengage and return to Abbeville, where they could cross the River Seine to continue the pursuit. King Edward now free to leave Blanchetaque led his army through the Forêt de Crécy towards the small town of Crécy-en-Ponthieu.

# The Battle of Crécy, 26th August 1346

The Battle of Crécy. [Froissart Chronicles]

The English army spent the night of 25 August 1346 on the eastern edge of the forest before moving the 4 kilometres to take up a defensive position at the eastern end of Crécy-en-Ponthieu where King Edward III of England had decided to make a stand. He was by now aware that Sir Hugh Hastings and the Flemish army and the expected reinforcements due to land at Le Crotoy would not be joining his army and that he would only have the survivors of his original army at his disposal. This was somewhat depleted since it had left Caen and, whilst no accurate recorded figures exist, it is thought to have been between 14,000 and 15,000 strong. It consisted of some 3,000 knights and men-at-arms; 3,000 hobelars, many of whom were mounted archers; 5,000 archers; 3,500 spearmen and 5 Ribauldequins.

On returning to Abbeville King Philippe found that the bridge had been damaged and need to be repaired before his army could cross and it was not until Saturday, 26 August 1346 that he could continue his pursuit of King Edward's English army. From Abbeville he set off on the Hesdin road and followed a route east of the Forêt de Crécy passing Saint Riquier and Noyelles-en-Chaussée. Just after passing Saint Riquier King Philippe leant that the English army had passed through the forest and were now in the vicinity of Crécy-en-Ponthieu, which was about 15 kilometres to his northwest. The French king sent out scouts to determine what King Edward's forces were doing and turned his own army towards Crécy-en-Ponthieu. Henri le Moine de Bâle, a Swiss knight in King Philippe's army, returned to report that the English were drawn up in battle order between the villages of Crécy-en-Ponthieu and Wadicourt. By this time

the French army was advancing along the Chemin de l'Armée and their leading elements were about 5 kilometres from King Edward's men.

The historical sources and accounts of the Battle of Crécy while fairly numerous are somewhat scant on detail about the dispositions and tactics employed by both sides. It is, therefore, impossible to say exactly where the battle was fought, though it is generally accepted that this was along the ridge in the vicinity of the Moulin de Crécy between the villages of Crécy-en-Ponthieu and Wadicourt, and precisely how the battle was played out.

It is thought that King Edward's English approached the town from the south through the Forêt de Crécy along the line of the modern day D111 and moved through the town to the ridge where he deployed his forces on advantageous ground to await the arrival of the French.

The French had crossed the River Somme at Abbeville and headed towards Noyelles-sur-Mer when King Philippe received word that the English were drawn up in battle order between the villages of Crécy-en-Ponthieu and Wadicourt. He ordered his army to change direction and skirt around the southern edge of the Forêt de Crécy to approach the English along the axis of the track that we now call the Chemin de l'Armée.

The ground over which the French approached was in the main across the gentle slopes of open undulating down land. As they closed with the English, however, they had to cross the Vallée aux Clercs. On the eastern side of this valley is a bank, which was probably the result of terracing for farming. The slope of the bank is steep, more than 45 degrees, and it rises in places by up to six metres above the cultivated valley floor. At best it is over two metres high, and it presented the French cavalry with an obstacle similar to that used in today's equestrian sporting events to test the abilities of a modern rider and their horse. It would have been a significant challenge to an individual rider and horse, but to a formed body of heavily armoured medieval horsemen crossing the ground at speed this bank was a major obstacle.

The precise alignment of English army is unknown and open to debate. It is generally accepted that that they were arrayed in three divisions and that King Edward set up his headquarters at Crécy windmill, which stood on the spot where the current viewing platform stands. This gave him an excellent view of the battlefield from which to direct his forces.

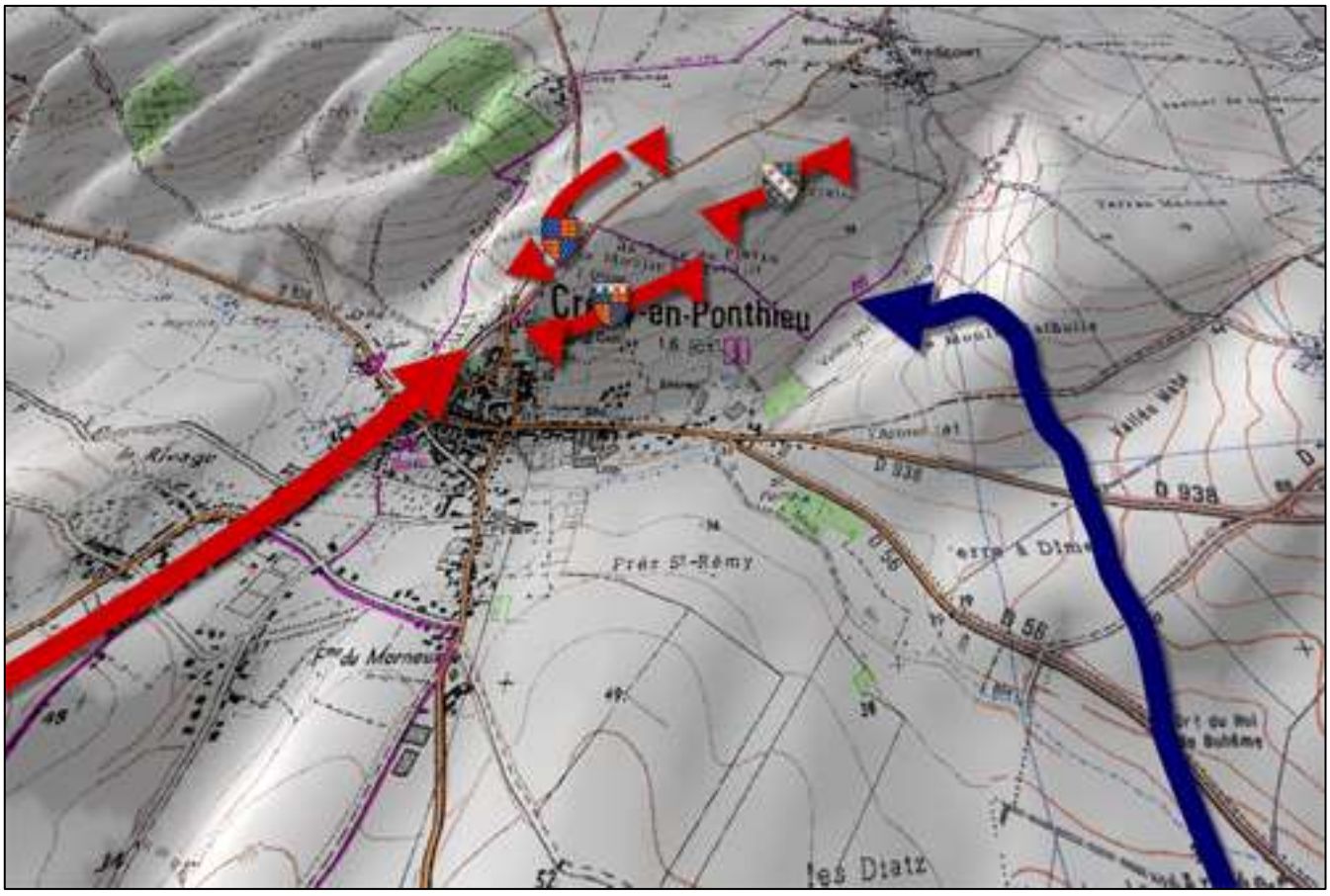
My research leads me to believe that:

- The Prince of Wales’s division was forward right and closest to Crécy and was positioned approximately 300 yards in front of King Edward's vantage point about halfway down the forward slope of the ridge. This division consisted of 800 men-at-arms and was flanked on either side by 2,000 archers and 1,000 Welsh bowmen. To support the 16-year-old Prince, the Earl of Warwick and John de Vere, the 7th Earl of Oxford, were appointed to be his chief officers. Godefroy d'Harcourt was tasked with protecting the Prince in the event of anything untoward happening.

- The Earl of Northampton's division was forward left and closest to Wadicourt. This was placed about 300 to 400 yards to the left of the Prince of Wales' division and slightly further back towards the crest of the ridge. The Earl of Northampton's division consisted of 500 men-at-arms with 1,200 archers deployed on either flank.

- The King's division was held in reserve in the vicinity of the Crécy to Wadicourt road. This consisted of 700 men-at-arms, 2,000 archers and 1,000 Welsh spearmen was positioned to the rear of the ridge on the plateau in front of Crécy Grange.

- The wagon train was located at Crécy Grange and protected by the pages and servants.




3D-map showing the dispositions of the English army and the French line of approach. [© Ian R Gumm, 2017]

The French approached the waiting English Army along the Chemin de l'Armée, across the modern D56 and passing close to the site of the Croix du Roi de Bohême. It continued north to cross the D938 before turning west to advance directly towards the English line.

King Philippe had despatched four knights to reconnoitre the English dispositions as soon as he had learnt that they had deployed at Crécy-en-Ponthieu. During the approach march he had consulted many of his senior knights and it was agreed that, as it was getting late in the day, they would halt overnight short of the English line to organise the French army ready for an attack early the next day. However, events seemed to take on their own momentum and by the time the decision was reached, and messengers sent forward it was too late.

On receiving news that the French Army was not to attack until the following day the vanguard halted. Those immediately following the vanguard also halted but would not retire until the vanguard did. Others further behind continued to press forward and in the chaos that ensued the vanguard met the waiting English. By now it was late in the afternoon and may possibly have been as late as 6.00 p.m.

The actual organisation of the French Army when it encountered the English is unknown. Reports vary that it consisted of between three and nine divisions, though it is likely to be the former as that was the standard for the day. It appears that the Genoese crossbowmen under the command of Carlo Grimaldi and Anton Doria were the closest to the English when the battle began. The Count D'Alencon led the following division of knights and men-at-arms; among them Jean de Luxembourg, the blind King of Bohemia. In D'Alencon's division rode two more monarchs; the King of the Romans and the displaced King of Majorca. The Duke of Lorraine and the Court of Blois commanded the next division, while King Philippe led the rearguard.

Carlo Grimaldi and Anton Doria ordered their men to advance. This they did in three movements each of which were accompanied by loud whopping and shouting intended to goad their enemy. They would normally have advanced behind the cover of their pavises; large oblong shield that covered their entire body and behind which they would shelter while loading their weapons. These and their resupply of crossbow bolts were back in the wagon train and had as yet not been brought forward and unloaded. The crossbow was an effective weapon but had a significantly slower rate of fire than the English longbow. In addition, it had been raining and the sodden conditions made the crossbow difficult to reload as the crossbowmen sought to gain sufficient purchase on the slippery ground to place a foot in the stirrup and draw back the string.

The initial bolts fired by the French crossbowmen fell short. The English stood their ground and the English longbowmen held their fire. The crossbowmen advanced forward to shorten the range and fired again, but still their bolts fell short. Again, no reply came from the waiting English and the Genoese crossbowmen advanced a third time. The Froissart chronicles describe the response: *"The English archers each stepped forth one pace, drew the bowstring to his ear, and let their arrows fly; so wholly and so thick that it seemed as snow."*

The rate of fire of the longbow was about 10 to 12 arrows per minute, while that of the crossbow was between 3 and 4 bolts per minute. Without their pavises to hid behind when reloading the crossbowmen were soon taking casualties. The impact of the first flights of arrows on the Genoese crossbowmen and waiting French heavy cavalry was quite dramatic. The unprotected Genoese crossbowmen turned and began to flee. The sting of the English arrows as they bit into the mounts of the French cavalry maddened the horses causing them to buck and crash into the men on foot. Some of the French cavalry, seeing the Genoese crossbowmen retreat, perceived this to be cowardice and spurred their mounts forward to them ride down.

To add to this confusion, the English ribauldequin, their volley guns, opened fire into the packed French and Genoese ranks. These probably did little damage, but the noise they added to the cacophony of the battle would have added to the chaos in the French line. Soon not only were the Genoese fleeing, but many of the French were quitting the field in disarray before they had even formed up.

There are varying accounts of what happened next, the most popular of which is that the French made as many as fifteen successive assaults against the English lines. These attacks were in the main mounted and had to cross the Vallée aux Clercs with its steep bank. The bank would have broken the charges of the French horsemen up and significantly reduced their speed, and it was speed that they relied upon to break into the dismounted Englishmen's line.

Some Frenchmen dismounted to attack on foot, but struggling up the incline of the hill towards the waiting Englishmen would have taken its toll on a Frenchman wearing his heavy armour. One to do this was the Count of Blois who strode forward into the English line to meet his end.

At one point it appears that the battle in the vicinity of the Prince of Wales's division became particularly fierce and Sir Thomas Norwich, a knight of the Prince's division was sent to the King to request assistance. King Edward is said to have replied *"I am confident he will repel the enemy without my help. Let the boy earn his spurs."* No help was forthcoming. Whether or not this is true, it was certainly the Prince of Wales's division that bore the brunt of the battle.


Charge of the French Knights at Crécy. [Harry Payne]

There were many acts of gallantry during the battle. It was reported that the Prince was twice brought to his knees, but that he rose again to continue the fight. There is little doubt that the sixteen-year-old Edward, Prince of Wales earned his spurs on that day.

King Philippe fought bravely that day and had two horses killed under him. He suffered several wounds during the hand-to-hand combat and was eventually led from the field by the Count of Hainault. Miles de Noyers, who carried the French war banner the Oriflamme that signified no quarter was to be given, wrapped the banner about his person to prevent it being captured. He went down in the fighting and the Oriflamme taken, ripped to shreds and destroyed.

The Count D'Alencon's standard bearer refused to put on his helmet until he was ready, saying that once he had done so he would not take it off again. This proved to be correct as he was one of those who fell during the ensuing battle.

The Prince of Wales's own banner was in the thick of the fighting and at one point was in danger of capture. Richard Fitzsimon, the Prince's standard bearer laid it down and stood over it as he fought to protect the Prince. He and Thomas Daniel raised it up again to be rewarded for their valour by the Prince after the battle.

Jean de Luxembourg, the blind King of Bohemia, riding to his death in the Battle of Crécy. [The Story of France by Mary Macgregor]

Jean de Luxembourg, the blind King of Bohemia, was one who passed into legend on that day. On hearing of the flight of the first waves of the French it is said that he asked two of his knights to lead him into the mêlée and the three of them road to their deaths with their horses tied together. On his helmet Jean de Luxembourg wore three ostrich feathers, which were presented to the Prince after the battle. The Prince subsequently adopted these as his symbol on his jousting armour and and his motto *"Ich Dien"* (I serve). This is said to be the origins of the modern Prince of Wales's heraldic feathers and motto.

The fighting was ferocious, and the French loses were heavy. The struggle continued far into the night and at around midnight King Philippe abandoned the carnage, riding away from the battlefield to the castle of La Boyes. Challenged as to his identity by the sentry on the wall above the closed gate the King Philippe is said to have replied bitterly: *"Voici la fortune de la France"* (Here is the fortune of France) and was admitted.

The battle ended soon after King Philippe's departure, the surviving French knights and men-at-arms fleeing the battlefield. The English army remained in its position for the rest of the night.

Many of the French nobility were among the dead, including King Philippe's younger brother the Count D'Alencon; Jean de Luxembourg, King of Bohemia and James II, King of Majorca; the Duke of Loraine; the Archbishop of Sens; the Bishop of Noyon; and the Counts of Blois, Flanders and Hancourt. Both commanders of the Genoese crossbowmen were also among the dead as were Godefroy d'Harcourt's brother and nephew, and another 1,500 knights and esquires.

In all the French losses were said to be in the region of 14,000 while the English are reported to have lost just 200. What seems to be extraordinary, however, was that Edward III's force of just 16,000 had defeated a French force of 35,000.

## After the Battle of Crécy — Crécyen-Ponthieu to Calais

Following the battle there was no immediate pursuit and the English Army remained in their battle positions until after midnight when they were allowed to stand down, but not disarm. It was late in the day and King Edward dined with his senior commanders.

The following morning the French that were still present on the battlefield were driven off by Thomas Beauchamp the Earl of Warwick and William de Bohun the Earl of Northampton. It appears that many of the common French soldiers thought that the approaching English were men of their own side, they paid dearly for their mistake and many of them were killed.

Fearing that the French might regroup and return to the battlefield King Edward kept his army in the field and alert throughout the day.

It was later on Sunday, 27 August 1346 that Sir Reginald de Cobham and a herald were sent out by King Edward to assess the scale of his victory and draw up a list identifying the French casualties. The king also ordered that the

armour and equipment strewn across the battlefield was gather in and burnt to prevent its future use. King Edward may have won a great victory, but King Philippe VI of France was not among the dead and was still at large and had a considerable number of his army still at his disposal despite their loses.

On Monday, 28 August 1346 French heralds arrived requesting a three-day truce. This was granted and the dead were collected from the battlefield and buried in a communal grave.

King Edward beside the mass grave of the dead. [Geoffrey le Baker of Swinbrook Chronicle]

King Edward order that the English army marched towards Calais and despatched two of his Royal Councillors, Bartholomew Burghersh and John Darcy, to report the victory and intention to take Calais to the council of Bishops at Westminster. Just a week later, on 6 September 1346, writs were sent across England to the principal towns of the realm proclaiming the great victory and calling upon the merchants to bring supplied to the Siege of Calais. That evening the King and his retinue arrived at the nearby Cistercian Abbaye de Valloires where they stayed the following two nights. The approach to the Abbaye took the English Army down the valley of the River Authie.

On Wednesday, 30 August 1346 the English Army crossed the floodplains of the River Authie, probably near Maintenay, and climbed out of the valley to the higher ground. They crossed the undulating terrain to Saint-Josse, 15 kilometres to the northwest, on a broad front burning and pillaging as they went.

On Thursday, 31 August 1346 they moved on to Neufchâtel-Hardelot by a route that probably took them across the River Canche southeast of Étaples before moving up onto the higher ground. They stayed in the vicinity of Neufchâtel-Hardelot the next day before continuing their journey on 2nd September, setting light to the town before leaving and raiding in the vicinity of Boulogne as they went. Once at Wimille the English Army was now just 30 kilometres from Calais. They halted here for two-days while King Edward consulted his advisors and decided on his next move.

On Monday, 4 September 1346 the English Army continued the journey towards Calais crossing the undulating countryside to Wissant which they also razed putting it to the torch. From Wissant they continued along the coast to the low-lying marshland at Sangatte, just a few kilometres from the City port of Calais.

On Monday, 4 September 1346 King Edward III's army began their siege of Calais which was to last for eleven months, until 3 August 1347.

King Edward knew that if he was going to continue his campaigning, he needed a base from which to operate. He also knew that he needed a port through which he could resupply and reinforce his army. Calais, with its double moat, substantial city walls and citadel in the north-west, was readily defensible. Its port was an ideal landing point for supplies and reinforcements. It was therefore ideal as both a forward operating base for future operations and a resupply base for troops and supplies from England.

Calais had long been seen as a potential target for King Edward's English and his Fleming allies. Since the beginning of 1346 it had been defended by a strong well-equipped garrison, that included stone-throwing and gunpowder artillery, and its stores had been well provisioned. In July and August 1346 reports from spies in Flanders suggested that the Flemish were attempting to persuade King Edward III to attack the town and were making their own preparations for a siege. These reports were not taken seriously by King Philippe, but Duke Odo, the Duke of Burgundy and ruler of Artois, did. He assigned two of his most able and loyal men to command the town's defences. One was Jean de Vienne, a Burgundian knight, and the other a local knight called Enguerrand de Beaulo. On 14 August 1346 Jean du Fosseux, one of the two lieutenant-governors of Artois, arrived in Calais to take command of the citadel in person. Thus, when King Edward and his English army arrived outside of the town's walls it was ready and well prepared to withstand a siege.

On Tuesday, 5 September 1346, the day after the English army's arrival, the first of their resupply ships appeared off the harbour. They had been gathering off Winchelsea and Sandwich, as King Edward's army marched through Picardy, and they brought with them a large portion of the supplies and reinforcements that the King's Council had been able

to collect in England. The additional men and supplies were brought ashore across the beaches in full view of the town and brought the strength of the English army to somewhere in the region of 10,000 to 12,000 strong.

Siege of Calais. [Jean de Wavrin Chronicles]

Even the most cursory inspection of Calais' defences showed clearly that a direct assault was out of the question and the English army set about establishing their main encampment on the island of firm ground that surrounded the Église Saint-Pierre about a kilometre from the town on the Boulogne to Gravelines road. King Edward deployed his army outside the three landward sides of the town, and they began digging trenches across the causeways and paths and constructing improvised fortifications around the bridges to guard themselves against attack from the rear. In the following weeks their encampment, which they called Villeneuve-la-Hardie, grew along the line of the causeway. It included mansions of timber for the King, his principal officials and noblemen, market halls, public buildings, stables, and thousands of small ‘houses’ of brushwood and thatch.

For King Philippe the weeks immediately following the Battle of Crécy marked a low point of his reign and he was still reeling from the defeat that had sent shockwaves across France. The successions of funerals, as the bodies of one French nobleman after another were recovered from the battlefield or Abbaye de Valloires and brought home to be given a proper burial, added to the disbelief and enormity of what had happened.

When news of the English presence at Calais reached him, King Philippe refused to believe that King Edward would embark upon a long siege. The Siege of Tournai that had taken place just six years before had not gone too well for the English and King Philippe thought that King Edward would not want to risk repeating that experience. Despite the advice of his senior commanders in Artois King Philippe dispersed the greater part of his army on 5th September, the day after the siege began.

On Thursday, 7 September 1346 King Philippe left Amiens for Pont-Sainte-Maxence, his favourite residence by the River Oise. On the way to Pont-Sainte-Maxence he was met by his son, John of Normandy, who had learnt of the disaster that had befallen his father at Crécy while he was marching across the Limousin. Prince John brought with him news that only added to King Philippe's woes, the complete failure of his own campaign on the Garonne and the disbanding of his army just a few days before.

News of the elaborate arrangements being made by the English at Calais continued to reach the French King and he consulted his advisors. For King Philippe it must have been a gloomy conference, the outcome of which was a complete volte-face. It was decided that a new French army was to muster at Compiègne on 1 October 1346 and from there march north to the relief of Calais before winter set in. The orders for it to assemble were issued on 9 September 1346, just three weeks before the day on which it was to muster.

On 13 September 1346 the English Parliament met, and the King Edward's commissioners delivered their report on the campaign. The document found at Caen, revealing the French King's plans to conquer England, was read out once more and the piratical deeds of the seamen of Calais were recounted. Letters from the leading men of the army calling for special effort and generosity from those at home were used to add weight to the proceedings. The Commons, whilst they may have grumbled about past abuses, voted in a subsidy for the coming year and another for the year after that.

There was one bright note for the French. At the beginning of September 1346 King Philippe had re-commissioned the French galley fleet that had been laid up in the Seine. On 17 September 1346 these French galleys caught the first English supply convoy since the beginning of the siege just as it was approaching Calais. All twenty-five English vessels were destroyed, and their crews killed. This first blow by the French in the defence of Calais significantly added to the cost of future English supplied as it became necessary to provide large escorts for convoys and to post strong guards of archers and men-at-arms on every ship.

On land, however, King Philippe's orders and counter-orders in early September had proved to be catastrophic and for most of September and October the English before Calais had the field to themselves. In Gascony there was no organized French defence what-so-ever as every Frenchman available was used for garrisons around the marsh of Calais and along the frontier of Flanders. Even then there were still great gaps in the defences of the north.

In Flanders the Flemish raised many men that joining forces with the remnant of the army that had just returned from Béthune. These crossed into France and blazed a trail across the countryside of Artois all the way to the great garrison town of Saint-Omer. Here they joined forces with the Earl of Warwick, who come from Calais with several

hundred English soldiers. On 19 September 1346, as King Philippe and his advisors looked on helplessly, this combined force moved south to ancient ecclesiastical city of Thérouanne. They left behind enough men to keep the garrison of Saint-Omer as they marched the 13 kilometres to Thérouanne where the famous commercial fair was in progress. Bishop Raymond Saquet was in the town with a large military retinue, but having passed his life in official and diplomatic service about the court the Bishop was no soldier. With no confidence in the ability of the crumbling Roman walls of Thérouanne to keep the Anglo-Flemish out, Bishop Raymond marched his men and the citizens out of the city out into the open countryside to face the approaching enemy. The result for the French was a disaster; their makeshift army was massacred, and Bishop Raymond was severely wounded. The spoils taken from them by the Anglo-Flemish filled a large wagon-train and the buildings of the city were so thoroughly ransacked that it was several months before the survivors plucked up the courage to return and rebuild their homes.

Encouraged by lucrative booty and the almost complete absence of resistance, the Anglo-Flemish forces spread across north-western Artois from Boulogne to the River Aa. Within a month they had destroyed everything there that would readily burn outside the walled towns and principal castles. By the end of September, the Flemings had taken so much booty that they had enough; they stopped their raids, abandoned the siege of Saint-Omer and returned home.

The months of the siege of Calais were to a large degree stagnant. The English sat before the walls of Calais but were unable to blockade the town from the sea resulting in supplies and fresh drafts of troops continued to reach the town. In the second week of November, just before the foul weather set in, the French got a convoy of requisitioned merchant ships into the harbour with enough food to preserve the garrison until the spring. After that the English navy tightened their blockade.

On land the French were largely inactive, and the English continued to receive supplies from Flanders via Gravelines. The army ordered to muster at Compiègne was slow to assemble and by the end of October it was still only a little over 3,000 strong. Realising that his chances of resuming the fight against the English in 1346 were dwindling, Philippe resorted to diplomatic means. He offered a truce to King Edward who rejected it out of hand. An approach through the cardinals was made, but by then it was too late. On 27 October 1346 King Philippe ordered all French naval and military operations in northern France to cease except for the defence of the principal garrison towns. The troops at Compiègne were dispersed without ever leaving the town and new arrivals were turned away. The Genoese galleys of the French fleet were laid up on the banks of the River Somme at Abbeville on 31 October and the French fleet a week later. The French court was in crisis as King Philippe blamed one official after another for the failings that had beset France in 1346.

By mid-November King Edward had amassed enough of the paraphernalia of war necessary to mount assaults against the town's walls. An elaborate plan was devised for storming Calais by introducing a fleet of small boats into the moat and scaling the walls from ladders placed on their decks. This enterprise required a great deal of energy and ingenuity. Fifty fishing vessels were ordered from England; 25-foot and 40-foot ladders were obtained; wooden catapults and at least ten cannons with powder and ammunition were shipped across the English Channel. Reinforcements that had been held back in England when the French army had dispersed were ordered across the

English Channel and more men were called to arms from their homes. Most of these men reached Calais during the second half of December, but the repeated assaults on the town's walls all failed. The last attempt was made on 27 February 1347, after which the English settled in for a long siege designed to starve the citizens into submission.

King Philippe raised the Oriflamme once again at Saint-Denis on Sunday, 18 March 1347. He intended to move his army north at the end of April, however, was once again slow to assemble. When Philippe reached Amiens, his army was by no means ready to march to relieve Calais. Undaunted, however, king Philippe left Amiens in the second week of May 1347 and began his progress north in short stages to give his troops time to gather. It was not until he arrived at Arras that his were finally eyes were opened and he realised his predicament. Insistent calls for reinforcement were made, but the strength of the French army was only slightly greater by the end of June. There could be no serious military operations undertaken until July at the earliest, more than two months late, and even then, these had to be conducted on a much smaller scale than King Philippe's first plans had envisaged.

Within the walls of Calais, the defenders suffered from terrible privations. The English blockade was doing its job and their stores, which had not been replenished since early April, were approaching exhaustion. There was hardly any grain, wine or meat left. They were eating cats, dogs, and horses and some of the men were reduced to gnawing on their leather saddles. As the summer lengthened the wells of the town began to dry up; fresh water became scarce, and disease began to take hold. On 25 June 1347 a French supply convoy was attacked by the English fleet as it passed the mouth of the River Somme. That same evening Jean de Vienne sat down and compose a very sombre report to King Philippe. *"We can now find no more food in the town unless we eat men's flesh,"* he wrote. None of the garrison's officers, he said, had forgotten King Philippe's orders to hold out until they could fight no more. They had agreed that rather than surrender they would burst out of the gates and fight their way through the English siege lines until every one of them was killed. *"Unless some other solution can be found, this is the last letter that you will receive from me, for the town will be lost and all of us that are within it."* The message was entrusted to a Genoese officer who tried to slip out of the harbour mouth with a few companions in two small boats at first light on the morning of the 26th. They were seen by the English who gave chase. When his own boat grounded south of the town, within the siege lines, the Genoese officer attached the letter to an axe and flung it as far as he could into the sea. The English, however, managed to retrieve the letter at low tide and it was taken to King Edward who read it and then attached his own personal seal to the letter and forwarded it to King Philippe.

With remarkable courage and persistence another supply convoy was formed, this time at Dieppe. Eight barges full of armed men and loaded with supplies set out in the middle of July. They had hoped to creep into Calais unnoticed, but they were seen and the whole convoy was captured.

Realising that supplies were not going to get to them, the town's defenders rounded up everyone in the town whom they judged to be useless to the defence, women, children, the old, the wounded and infirm. In all there were about 500 people, and these they ejected from the town's gates. For months these poor wretches had defied King Edward's summons to surrender and now the English would not let them pass. Instead, they driven them back towards the town's walls where they remained in the town ditch starving to death within sight of both sides.

While King Philippe had struggled to raise an army the same could not be said of King Edward. Since the end of May reinforcements had been arriving adding to his army's strength and by the end of July King Edward III had around 32,000 men in the field; more than 5,300 men-at-arms, 6,600 infantry and 20,000 archers. In addition to this English army the Flemish had mustered a force of 20,000 under command of Margrave William of Juliers and they were gathered further east along the coast behind the River Aa.

The French army moved north from Hesdin on 17 July 1347. King Edward leant of their movement almost immediately from spies placed around the fringes of the French camp and paroled English knights released to raise their ransoms.

Henry of Grosmont, who had earlier been recalled from Gascony, was out on a foraging party in Picardie with a large body of troops when the news of the French army's moved reached the English King. He was immediately called back to Calais by King Edward and the Flemish crossed over the River Aa and entered the English lines.

King Philippe's army advance northwards at a slow pace covering between 10 and 12 kilometres per day. At Lumbres, a small town near Saint-Omer they paused while the troops guarding the Flemish border and serving in the garrisons of north Artois came in to swell their numbers. At Guînes, some 11 kilometres or so from Calais, they were joined by the Frenchmen who had been stationed along the southern flank of the English army for much of the year. King Philippe's army is reported to have had 11,000 cavalry and the number of infantrymen is not known, but in total his force numbered somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 strong.

On Friday, 27 July 1347 the French army appeared on the heights of Sangatte, the line of escarpments which abruptly marked the southern edge of the marsh of Calais 10 kilometres south of the town, and their banners could be clearly seen from the walls of Calais by the defenders. The only navigable approaches to the town from the south or east were by the beaches and dunes along the shore or by two narrow paths across the marsh. Spread out across the vast expanse of marshland between the French army and Calais was King Edward's much larger Anglo-Flemish force. Between the two armies the River Ham, just in front of the escarpment on which the French were standing, meandered towards the sea and the only one usable bridge over the river was at the hamlet of Nieulay.

King Edward had taken full advantage of these natural obstacles. Palisades had been erected to obstruct the beaches and the coast was lined from Sangatte to Calais with English ships, which were full of archers and augmented with artillery. Behind the bridge at Nieulay were arrayed several thousand men in prepared positions under the command of Henry of Grosmont. South of the bridge, along the main line of approach, was a tower that the English had surrounded with trenches full of soldiers. North of it, behind the Duke of Lancaster's lines were the English and Flemish encampments, which were defended by a series of earthworks and trenches.

The first clashes between the two opposing forces began almost as soon as they came within sight on one-another. The French soon captured the tower guarding the road to the bridge at Nieulay and from there they sent forward scouts to reconnoitre the English positions.

That evening when the French scouts returned, they brought with them dire news. The ground between the French and the English was unsuitable for cavalry, probably as bad as anything they had hitherto seen, and the English were deployed in such a way that there was not a single approach that could be forced without a massacre that would surpass the loses of Crécy. Within hours of his arrival before Calais, King Philippe had decided that relief of Calais was impossible. He kept the French army on the heights of Sangatte for nearly a week while he sought some means by which he could avoid another humiliating defeat.

At first King Philippe tried diplomacy and sent for the two cardinals. That same evening the cardinals passed through the French positions and came to the bridge of Nieulay. There they delivered letters requesting an audience with someone of suitable rank with who they could speak. King Edward on receiving the letters conferred with the Earl of Lancaster and the Earl of Northampton who subsequently went out to meet the two cardinals with a small group of officials. King Philippe, the cardinals told them, was most anxious to discuss peace and he had some proposals that they felt King Edward would find acceptable. The two Dukes were naturally guarded, but a three-day truce was agreed to allow for peace negotiations to take place.

On the morning of 28 July 1347 two large pavilions were erected at the edge of the marsh just within the English lines. Representing the English were the Dukes of Lancaster and Northampton, Margrave William of Juliers, Sir Walter Manny, Sir Reginald Cobham, and King Edward's Chamberlain Bartholomew Burghersh. Representing the French were the Duke of Bourbon, the Duke of Athens, the French Chancellor Guillaume Flote and Geoffrey de Charny. As soon as the negotiations began, it became clear that the French regarded Calais as lost. Their main concern was to try to get reasonable terms for the garrison and townsmen, guarantees that their lives would be spared and that those who wanted to leave the town could do so with all their goods and chattels. It also became clear that the French delegation were authorized to offer a permanent peace. The peace terms that they proposed, however, were not as attractive as the two cardinals had portrayed. King Philippe was willing to restore all of Aquitaine to King Edward III, but only on the basis on which his grandfather, King Edward I, had held it; that is as a fief of the French Crown. These were the same terms that King Philippe had offered three weeks before the Battle of Crécy and thus King Edward's representatives would not even discuss them. They said that Calais was as good as theirs in any case and as for the offer of Aquitaine, that seemed *"too small a reward for all their pains"*.

On Tuesday, 31 July 1347, after four days of fruitless discussions, another French delegation arrived: this time with a challenge. They proposed that the English should come out of the marsh and fight a battle in a 'fitting place' to be chosen by a joint commission of eight knights, four from each side. The proposal was designed to save King Philippe's face and no sensible person in King Edward's strong position would have accepted it, but then again no one with King Edward's reputation could be seen publicly to turn it down. Events conspired, however, to make any such contest unnecessary. The defenders of Calais had seen the French army arrive and had celebrated their deliverance, but that deliverance had not been forthcoming, and they could not hold out any longer. In the evening of 1 August 1347, the defenders signalled to the French army on the heights of Sangatte that they intended to surrender. That same night the French army burned their tents and equipment, spoiled their stores, and before dawn they broke camp and marched away.

The following day Jean de Vienne appeared on the town's battlements asking to speak to Sir Walter Manny. Sir Walter, accompanied by three other councillors of the King, subsequently crossed the area on no-man's-land to parley in front of Calais' gates. The message he carried from King Edward was stark and brief, he would take everything in the town for his own and ransom or kill whom he pleased. *"You have defied him too long, too much money has been spent, too many lives lost."* Jean de Vienne replied that his men were *"but knights and squires who have served their sovereign as loyally as they could and as you yourself would have done in their place"*. The English party returned to their lines where Sir Walter amongst other pleaded with the King saying that his terms were too harsh saying *"By Our Lady I say that we shall not go so willingly on your service if you put these men to death, for then they will put us to death though we shall be doing no more than our duty."* In the fourteenth century the principle common to both sides in the Hundred Years War gentlemen were admitted to ransom, not killed. Like many chivalrous conventions it was founded in the mutual self-interest of the knightly class. King Edward, perhaps sensitive to the potential cost of insisting on his own way, eventually agreed that all but six of defenders of Calais were allowed their lives but not their liberty or their possessions. The six exceptions were to be chosen from the most prominent of the town's citizens and King Edward is reported as saying that *"They shall come before me in their shirtsleeves, with nooses round their necks, carrying the keys of the town and they shall be at my mercy to deal with as I please."*

The Burghers of Calais. [Benjamin West]

On Friday, 3rd August 1347 the six 'Burghers of Calais' emerged from one of the town's gates in their shirtsleeves with nooses around their necks and carrying the keys of the town; exactly as King Edward had commanded. The entire English army was drawn up in front of the town's walls and King Edward, Queen Philippa, the King's principal councillors, allies and commanders were all seated on a raised dias ready to receive them.

The six, who were among the most prominent men of Calais were: Eustache de Saint Pierre, Andrieu d'Andres, Jean de Fiennes, Jean d'Aire, Jaques and Pierre de Wiessant. Arriving in front of the King, they threw themselves on the ground, begging for mercy. King Edward angry that the town had defied him for so long and wanting to show other towns the consequences of defying him called for the executioner. He ordered that the six were beheaded at once. His advisers were shocked, and some protested noisily pointing out the damage it would do to his reputation if he killed them in cold blood. But King Edward would have none of it. It was only when Queen Philippa, who was heavily pregnant with their eleventh child, pleaded with him to spare their lives that the King revoke his instructions and allowed the six to go free.

Calais had surrendered to the English and would remain in their hands for the next two hundred years.

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