The Development of Battle Tactics in the Hundred Years War

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It is a common aphorism that the history of war is too important to be left to military historians. They tend to be seen as obsessed with battle with no further interest or wider understanding of the warring societies.1 In truth, they have done themselves no favours in the past by emphasising 'decisive' victories. This overvalues the long-term impact of even the most significant battle and distorts by undervaluing the other, far more common, activities of raid, attrition, fortification and siege in the warfare of any period.

By their very nature battles are ephemeral events, and historians have to rely upon largely subjective accounts in reconstructing them. Some consider this an uncongenial or even inappropriate task for their profession. `Real' history is to be found in the study of `real' information, such as can be found in the administrative records of governments: musters lists, tax records, accounts, diplomatic correspondence, building records and so on. Biased and `journalistic' reportage of chroniclers and government propagandists or the partial and often confused recollection of participants scarcely qualifies as history. Furthermore, the study of battles has tended to be conducted by soldiers.

There may seem nothing wrong with this, but it has led to them drawing upon their own military experience of modern warfare without making due allowance for the differences of another place and time. Just as the historians might benefit from some practical experience of, for example, `living in the field', the soldier historians' often impressionistic accounts need more historical rigour. They tend to be critical of medieval commanders and their forces on grounds that are simply not valid for their times. This is true of Lt-Col. A.H. Bume, still the most well-known military historian of the Hundred Years' War.2

He deserves credit for the work he did in exploring battlefields and his observations may be perceptive. But he was guilty of missing the point about how medieval warfare was conducted, by concentrating on battles alone. He was even capable of saying of the period 1369-1396 (when the bulk of the English king's continental possessions fell into the hands of his French rival) that: `The war (was) lacking in military interest, for there was remarkably little actual fighting'.3 When the fortresses which guarded Aquitaine were being lost this is nonsense! As a result historians have tended to see the study of battles as a field for cranks and `enthusiasts'. Since understanding a battle requires study of the tactics employed by the protagonists, tactics have been tarred with the same brush. Surely they cannot be important in comparison to the great moving forces of history exemplified by economic, demographic, medical, governmental and ideological factors?

Yet if it is valid to study the impact of religious reform movements in the later middle ages, then it should be acceptable to look at tactics, since both were important areas of intellectual concern. The former has a higher status, because intellectual religiosity has a long literary tradition and so it can be studied. In contrast, military theorising was part of an oral, vernacular and secular culture, which rarely survives in writing. In fact, from the early fifteenth century there is written evidence that military commanders were capable of innovating, experimenting and setting down how warfare should be conducted and how battles should be fought.4 Above all they were capable of learning

from experience, a talent which is almost never ascribed to the medieval military mind.

So tactics were important. They were important because failure to employ correct tactics could have a profound political impact, in a period when national leaders fought in the front rank of battle. In this context, clearly, time and intellectual energy were spent in discussing and attempting to put into effect, tactical variation. Attempting, for the medieval host was an unwieldly instrument for innovation. This not because it was made up solely of part-time soldiers; the hunting classes and their retainers at war, although there was always an element of that, In England, especially, many men made war their trade, and by the mid-fourteenth century there were substantial groups of men-at-arms and archers who might be considered professionals: they fought for pay and made their careers in the military service of the state. The indenture system promoted this situation. (That is to say a system of raising troops by contracts with individuals and their followings, from simple squires to men of high noble rank.) Fighting together over a season or over years such men learnt how to deploy tactically, both quickly and efficiently, and how to combine horse, foot and missile weapons to best effect. This is what made the English and their (chiefly) Gascon allies such good soldiers during the Hundred Years War. The French and their allies rarely achieved the same level of battlefield efficiency, even after Charles V1I's reforms of the 1440s.5

It is important to identify what tactics are. A recent, most widely read and otherwise excellent textbook on the Hundred Years' War confuses tactics with strategy. The chevauchee is explained in terms of 'Fabian tactics', which is to say: a policy of defeating an opponent without the risks of battle.6 But the chevauchee (literally a `ride') was a raiding strategy, inflicting economic damage and so weakening an enemy's political and moral authority in the ravaged region. The misuse of the word tactics in the strict sense means that they are not discussed as an important factor. As a result, the French reaction to English tactics which was a continuing development from the 1340s to the 1450s – the duration of the war – is not considered

A further definition of the various levels of military activity should help to make the role of tactics clearer.

1. The level of diplomacy, of political manoeuvering.
2. The organisation of forces, how they were raised and paid for.
3. Logistics, that is the movement and supply of these forces.
4. Strategy, both overall and specific to theatre.
5. Operational or campaign strategy involving chevauchee, sieges and battle-seeking or avoiding courses of action.
6. Tactics, or close-range manoeuvre and use of troops and their weapons.
7. Individual acts of bravery (the aspect usually celebrated by a chronicler like Froissart).

So, in relation to the campaign of 1346, Edward III: claims the French Crown (diplomacy); raises forces by indenture (organisation); moves them across the Channel to Normandy (logistics); sacks Caen and advances to Paris (raiding strategy); then falls back to Crecy (operational decision); deploys his host defensively to ambush the pursuing French (tactics); and Edward, Prince of Wales, `wins his spurs' in the ensuing encounter (heroics).

This is intended to be no more than a crude outline, but it does put tactics into perspective. If the study of tactics is now despised, it is because A. H. Bume and Sir Charles Oman raised them above these other aspects of warfare as the decisive factor – which it sometimes was and more often was not.7 Their views are coloured more than a little by an anachronistic nationalism and affected by their belief in the superiority of

English firepower `throughout the ages'. So Burne the Gunner sees English archery as a sort of battlefield artillery (which to an extent it was, but the parallel should not be over-stressed). Sir Charles Oman is clearly influenced in his interpretation by his reading of the Peninsular War. This is the now generally accepted (though recently criticised) view that British musketry in line was inevitably superior to French column attacks, because of the number of weapons that could be brought to bear. The English archer formations flanking their men-at-arms in Burne's reconstruction perform the same role. This serves to confirm the eternal British-French stereotypes as well. The `Brits' phlegmatic and well–disciplined; the `Frogs' excitable and uncontrolled; as it seemed to Victorian English gentlemen at least!8

A brief survey of archery tactics in the `English' tradition may help to set the subject in context. The archers' role at Hastings in 1066, is well known, although the description of plunging `fire' late in the day is only found two generations later in Henry of Huntingdon's chronicle.9 A detailed account of the Battle of the Standard, fought between a northern English host and invading Scots near Northallerton in 1138, places alternating bow and spearmen in the English line. This was enough to shoot down and hurl back the impetuous Scottish charges; the day being won by a counter-charge of the English cavalry reserve.10 At Falkirk, in 1298, faced with stationary Scottish schiltrons of massed pikemen, Edward I's archers 'shot-in' their heavy cavalry. Perhaps this was also the plan on the second day of Bannockburn, sixteen years later. But the `Hammer of the Scots' had been succeeded by his ineffectual son, who mishandled his archers. Moving into a flanking position on the main Scottish, they fell into disorder crossing a stream and were then counter–charged and scattered by Robert the Bruce's well-used cavalry reserve.11 As J.E. Morris has shown, Edward I built up his missile arm by recruiting large numbers of Welsh and English archers.12 Under his grandson they were to make English arms the most feared in Europe. How did this come about?

The most important short-term influences were probably the battle of Boroughbridge in 1322 and Dupplin Moor in 1332. On the first occasion, Thomas, Duke of Lancaster was in rebellion against Edward II and retreating northwards. Sir Andrew Harclay led the Royalist forces and defended the line of the river Ure with a combination of dismounted men-at-arms and archers. Lancaster needed to break through. He attacked the bridge with dismounted men and the ford with cavalry, but both attacks were routed by the archery of the defenders. T.F. Tout, who `discovered' this battle, believed that the archers were interspersed amongst the men-at-arms.13

Ten years later, an opportunist expeditionary force led by Edward Baliol, claimant to the throne of Scotland, similarly thrashed a much larger host of Scots by defending a defile with archers on the flanks (fig. 1.1).14 In the following year, Edward III repeated the medicine at Halidon Hill. His three `battles' were apparently each flanked by archers. The Scots under Sir Archibald Douglas had unwisely committed themselves to raising the siege of Berwick by a certain day. Their attack, uphill, in the now traditional, close-packed `schiltroms' of spearmen, was bogged down in heavy ground (the area is still called Heavyside today), shot to pieces by the English archery and then massacred by a counter-attack of English cavalry (fig. 1.2). This was the model for English tactics throughout the Hundred Years' War. 1 4

Its first application in France was at Morlaix in Brittany in 1342 (fig. 1.3). The earl of Northampton was supporting the Montfort candidate to the duchy. After initial successes in Montfortian areas he bit off more than he could chew by besieging Morlaix. Charles of Blois, the French candidate, led a much larger force (perhaps 3,000 men-at-arms and 1,500 Genoese mercenaries) against him. Northampton fell back to a defensive

position a few miles north. He had a wood at his back, into which he put his baggage and horses, and a stream on one flank, adding a concealed ditch to his front. Charles attacked in three `battles', one after the other. First came native Bretons, on foot and probably quite lightly armoured. They were shot down and hurled back onto the men-at-arms. The second battle charged on horseback, but fell into the ditch. The few who managed to get through were captured. After a delay a third French attack was launched but Northampton had already drawn back his forces – by now running out of arrows – into the wood. Hampered by the desertion of their Genoese crossbowmen the French were unable to break into the thickets and drew off. Northampton's men were short of food (and endured a siege of uncertain duration, perhaps for several days) before they charged out and broke through the encircling French lines.15

This was no great victory, although the English were greatly outnumbered, but it prefigured in several ways their successes at Crecy and Poitiers, respectively four and fourteen years later. As Burne points out, Northampton commanded the left wing at Crecy, and his presence may have influenced the tactics on that day. Personal experience and the passing on of information between contemporaries and even down the generations was crucial in the development of tactics.

The next encounter where English tactics proved superior, was, of course, at Crecy in 1346. Perhaps the story is well known. Edward III was in Normandy attempting to bring the French king to battle. He had twice failed to draw Philip into a fight in Flanders half-a-dozen years earlier, and the cost of that expedition, involving as it did an ambitious political alliance against France, had beggared the English government. The stand-off at Buironfosse (1339), as it was called, should not be forgotten because Philip chose to create a sort of fortified camp, which Edward dare not attack.16 So French commanders did not always opt for all out attack.

The situation was different in 1346. Edward had landed in western Normandy and chevaucheed to Caen, which he took and sacked. He then advanced toward Paris. It is not clear if he intended to bring the French on to him. He may have misjudged the vigour of Philip's response. Faced by much larger forces Edward began to withdraw north east to the Somme. The English fought their way across the ford at Blanchetacque, near the mouth of the river, and withdrew to a strong hilltop position at Crecy in Ponthieu. This was in territory well known to Edward. A recent paper suggests that the site had been carefully `prepared beforehand, as regards supplies and ammunition. In addition, the field was apparently sown with pits, on the flanks at least, where the archers stood.17

This is perhaps the time to take a look at the old chestnut of how the English archers were deployed. Almost a century ago the pages of the English Historical Review were filled with debate on this subject. Froissart's description of the English at Crecy laid out 'i maniere d'une fierce' has caused much controversy as to what he actually meant. It could be interpreted as referring to the branches of a candlestick, a harrow (the most popular choice) or possibly, by reference to 'herrisson' a spiky fence (like a hedgehog). The one which has found most favour is that the archers were deployed on the flanks of each battle of men-at-arms and sloping slightly forward in order to provide a crossfire in front of the main battle line.18 This has been elaborated by Burne into a formation with projecting `teeth' of hollow wedges where two battles joined ([fig. 1.4](#)). There is a problem with this idea as it actually produces weak points in the English line, where, if contacted by heavily equipped men-at-arms, the archers would have been hard-pressed to defend themselves. In answer to this criticism proponents of Bume's idea suggest that the impact of the English archery would be to drive off attackers and funnel them into positions opposite their own men-at-arms, against whom, for reasons of social status

opposing the men-at-arms preferred to fight.19 I am not convinced by this argument.
It seems that on most occasions the English took care to protect their front with ditches or potholes, suggesting that they did not trust to hold off an enemy by `firepower' alone. This at least until they learned to use portable stakes as an obstacle. My theory is further reinforced by the advice of Jean de Bueil, in his treatise on warfare known as 'Le Jouvencel' (The Youth). This was written following personal experience in warfare, around 1466, and draws together the military lessons of the Hundred Years War. De Bueil advises deploying archers on the flanks of the main body, but protecting them by placing men-at-arms at either end of these wings ('aux deux bouts'). In fact, this description, and my interpretation of previous deployments, is close to a sixteenth-century layout of a core of close–order fighting men flanked with `sleeves' of shot (although studying the 1890s debate 1 found that I was not the first to see the parallel).20

So, to return to Crecy. Edward seems to have formed his three 'battles' in the formation shown in [fig. 1.5](), although this is open to dispute. A recently published monumental work on the Hundred Years War to 1347, has the archers on the flanks surrounded by wagons for protection. I think that this is a misreading of Edward's use of wagons to protect his flanks and rear from encirclement, an ancient device used successfully against French cavalry as recently as 1304, at Mons-en-Pevele by Flemish forces.21 The English archers had to be more mobile than this if they were to perform effectively. For as J.E. Morris pointed out, they were not 'animated dummies'. Viollet-le-Duc's comparison with Napoleonic 'tirailleurs' is a telling one.22 These musketry skirmishers formed a screen across the battalions' front, disrupting an enemy's formation and chain of command with their sniping fire. Similarly the archers could have started in front of the men-at-arms before falling back to the flanks as an enemy approached. They could even have skipped between any potholes which had been dug while cavalry were brought down by them.23

At Crecy then, the archers seem to have been deployed forward and on the flanks. Their crossfire may have only covered the front of their own battle, although they may have been able to shoot over the heads of their men-at-arms owing to the terraced nature of the hillside.24 Whatever was the case, the French attack failed through lack of coordination. Philip VI is rarely given any credit for generalship. But it is worth pointing out that he had successfully defeated a Flemish force at Cassel in 1328 with a well judged cavalry flank attack. Further, his avoidance of battle at Buironfosse in 1339, and the following year at Bouvines, had proved masterstrokes in that Edward's campaigns collapsed as a result. Such a policy took some nerve to carry through, though, as it meant accepting the ravaging of his lands without reply, and enduring the taunts of chivalrous young nobles that this was the behaviour of the fox and not the lion. When Philip came upon Edward's army on 26 August, 1346, he may have thought that he finally had the English at a disadvantage (or that the humiliation outside Paris was too much to bear). I doubt also that he was the same man as at Cassel eighteen years earlier.25

His dispositions, if he had any, involved deploying the Genoese crossbowman in front, while mounted men-at-arms formed the traditional three battles in the centre, with any infantry on the flanks.26 But this may be all too neat a description of a force hastily deploying from line of march. Certainly the Genoese crossbowmen suffered from the lack of their `pavises' (tall shields which protected them whilst they reloaded), as these were on carts in the baggage train. They have been much reviled and hence misunderstood. My reading of Froissart suggests that they formed up under command and advanced with three great shouts to keep them in formation. That they were outshot

was a function of their smaller numbers and more rapid shooting of the archers, both of which might have been remedied by the pavises. But it was the impatience of the French chivalry to be at the English which was the real disaster. Many and uncoordinated charges, delivered frontally, were no solution to the tactical problem, although apparently there was some breakthrough of the English archers of the Prince of Wales' battle. Philip had no control over the action and was only involved in the fighting when the English mounted for the pursuit.

Crecy proved the superiority of the English tactical system. What attempts did the French make to counter it? Already outside St Omer in 1340, a flank attack had been used to turn the position of forces commanded by Robert of Artois. But the troops who ran away that day were his inexperienced Flemish allies, and Robert won the day (on that field at least) with a determined counter-attack to his front, combining archers and dismounted men-at-arms.27 In Tout's collected papers, he draws attention to `Some neglected fights between Crecy and Poitiers'.28 At Lunalonge, somewhere in Poitou' in 1349, an English force led by the Captal de Buch, was attacked by Jean de Lisle, seneschal of Poitou and Jean de Boucicault (fig. 1.6). The French sent part of their mounted force against the dismounted English, while another body galloped around the English rear to capture their horses. Unfortunately for the French their forces were defeated in detail, but they did drive off the English horses, forcing the victors to retire on foot during the night to a nearby fortress.

In 1351, on 6 April, near Taillebourg in the Saintonge, Guy de Nesle, marshal of France, chose to dismount most of his men-at-arms, except for two groups which he kept mounted on either flank of his main battle (fig. 1.7). It should be said that he still lost, and was captured, Tout surmising that the mounted flanks were still no counter to flanks of archers. In the same year, just two months later, in the northern theatre near Ardres, the lord of Beaujeu dismounted all his force to attack John of Beauchamp, captain of Calais, who was conducting a chevauchee (fig. 1.8). Beaujeu died, but the French triumphed taking Beauchamp with estimated English losses of 700 killed and captured. (We are not told who advanced to the attack although this might have been crucial, according to Jean de Bueil, below).

The following year, at Mauron in Brittany, there was a much larger battle between Guy de Nesle's forces and those under the command of Sir Walter Bentley. The standard English formation was countered by retaining one `battle' of 700 men-at-arms on horseback. These were successful in driving off the archers who opposed them. But in the centre and on the other flank the dismounted attack, although pushing Bentley's line back as far as the cover to its rear, was defeated and de Nesle was killed. So the English had the victory, although the mounted French division was able to draw off unmolested. Bentley was so enraged by the failure of his right flank archers that he had thirty of them beheaded for cowardice (`pour encourager les autres' presumably; Burne believes this indicates that only thirty fled!).

The lesson of these encounters is that the French were thinking tactically, that they were experimenting, and that these experiments were carried out all over France. Guy de Nesle was a royal official as was de Lisle,so this looks like an official policy to seek a battle-winning tactic, not just inspired improvisation at local level. That it was not universally successful may be because, to paraphrase Jean de Bueil: `A dismounted force which attacks another dismounted force is beaten.'29 So much for the benefits of hindsight; but the difficulty in maintaining formation was a real one, and disorder the main factor in defeat.

If King John had devised a plan to disrupt the English formation, he was unable to put it

into effect at Poitiers, in 1356. His much larger force had caught up with Edward, Prince of Wales' chevauchee a few miles south of the city, where the English were trying to get their heavily-laden wagons of booty over the River Moisson. All accounts of the battle are very confusing. It seems to have been what would later be called 'a scrambling fight'. Edward certainly intended that this should be the case. For he brought his forces into an area of broken ground so unlike most of the plains surrounding Poitiers (fig. 1.9). The map is only one guess as to the dispositions, which were probably fluid during the battle anyway. The Prince's three `battles' (one of which may have been south of the river when the action began) were defending a position protected by hedges, trees and marshy land. The French, in much greater numbers, seem to have had only two avenues of approach.

After a day's delay for negotiation, the French attacked. Edward may have been trying to slip away when this happened, which is why Warwick's left `battle' may have been across the river. But if it was, it soon returned to play an important part in the action. First, the French tried surprise, a rapid cavalry charge led by the marshals Clermont and Audrehem but this foundered due to the terrain and the English archery. Then the Dauphin's vanguard battle attacked on foot, to be driven back after a hard fight. The defeat of this force seems to have caused the second `battle' under Orleans, to flee. This suggests that it was mounted. But the third and largest battle, commanded by the king, arrived after some delay and also walked into the attack. The main problem for the French seems to have been the lack of coordination between their attacks, as well as the terrain which made it difficult for them to bring their greater numbers to bear. As it turned out, it was the exhausted English who took the initiative, Edward mounting some, or all of his men, to counter-attack. The crucial factor was the flanking movement led by Jean de Grailly, Captal de Buch, who led his mounted force into (probably) the left rear of the French force. The shout which his men gave when they launched their attack was crucial in breaking the French morale. Although it is likely that they still out-numbered the Anglo-Gascon force, they crumpled under the two-pronged attack, leaving King John and most of his upper nobility prisoners in Edward's hands.30

Poitiers was decided by one side having and keeping the tactical initiative. Valiant French attempts to wrest this from Edward failed because their forces were not flexible enough to cope with the situation which was presented. Once again French missilemen are notable by their absence, only featuring in the description of the final fight. While the English system could combine missile-power and shock, the product of good discipline, it could not be beaten. The result was that, for a generation, in France at least, the French went back to the successful strategy of avoiding battle. The battle of Auray in Brittany, in 1364, was an exception. Here Bertrand du Guesclin, the Breton mercenary who was to become one of chivalry's greatest heroes, was in command. He tried the tactic of advancing his men-at-arms on foot behind pavises, in order to reduce casualties and disorder from the English arrows. Although it succeeded in this, the French still lost the hand-to-hand fight and Du Guesclin was captured. This fate was to befall him again three years later at Najera, in Spain, where he faced the Prince of Wales's army fighting on the other side of the Castillian succession dispute. Du Guesclin's caution, learned by hard experience, could not be impressed upon his allies, and once more the English tactical system was triumphant.

The battle of Aljubarrota in 1385, provides us with detailed information of how a defensive position was prepared to give a killing ground for the archers. To my knowledge, Crecy has never been excavated, so the field defences are unknown, but in the late 1950s an archaeological dig at Aljubarrota produced remarkable results (fig.

[1.10](#)). This shows the left wing of the position and possibly the centre too. Note the ditch, `not so deep that a dismounted man could not leap it' (Froissart), and the V-shaped field of potholes about a foot square and deep, some 200 yards wide by 100 yards in depth, in rows roughly a yard apart. The Portuguese dispositions placed the English archers in two wings in front of the men-at-arms. They seem also to have been to the flanks, as Froissart describes them as shooting from there. The first attack was made by dismounted knights, who crossed the ditch, but having done so were attacked in the rear by lightly-armed troops, presumably swarming around them, and to the front by the defending men-at-arms. The result was a massacre of the supposedly 4,000 strong vanguard. When the Castillians arrived and delivered a mounted charge they were quickly repelled and the defenders mounted up to counter-attack in pursuit. What can be seen at Aljubarrota must have been reproduced on the many battlefields which are no longer visible.31

The next phase of tactical development concerns the Burgundian experience, in which the battle of Nicopolis was crucial.32 Nicopolis (in modern Bulgaria) was the place where the largely Burgundian and French crusaders of 1396 were totally defeated by the Ottoman sultan Bayezit ([fig. 1.11](#)). The battle map is taken from A. Attiya's book on the subject and the best description comes from the 'Book of the Deeds and Sayings of Marshal Boucicault'. Disdaining to take the advice of their Hungarian allies the crusaders attacked a defensive position. They were unaware that a light cavalry screen masked a field of stakes 'a bowshot deep' filled with Janissary foot archers. Brought to a halt by the obstacle, the crusader men-at-arms either tried to force their horses amongst the stakes, dismounted and tried to remove them, or just dismounted and pushed on up the hill. Eventually most seem to have chosen the last option. Contacting the lightly armoured Turkish foot they routed them. But breasting the rise after this victory they found themselves horseless and exhausted, faced by the cream of the Ottoman heavy cavalry. After some resistance there was a general surrender.33

The importance of this battle relates to the role of the stakes. This is the first reference, as far as I am aware, to such a defence. What is more Froissart describes it as in the form of a 'herce'. There is an alternative explanation for `harrow' interpretation mentioned earlier – that it represents the spacing of men in the same way as the spikes of a harrow, that is to say alternately and not one-behind-the–other. If this is what Froissart meant all along, then it is not formation and not deployment which is important. It implies a loosely-spaced group of archers, all able to pick targets and shoot without obstruction, several ranks deep. The stakes add a further refinement in that the archers have a defensive belt within which they can manoeuvre or retreat to its cover. It is almost impenetrable to mounted men and can only be neutralised by the strenuous efforts of dismounted men whilst in close archery range. It was a mobile version of the woods and hedges which the English archers had previously sought on the battlefield.

According to the Gesta *Henrici Quinti* this is how Henry ordered his archers to prepare stakes.

As a result of information divulged by some prisoners, a rumour went round the army that enemy commanders had assigned certain bodies of knights, many hundreds strong and mounted on barded horses, to break the formation and resistance of our archers when they engaged us in battle. The King, therefore, ordered that every archer, throughout the army, was to prepare for himself a stake or staff, either square or round, but six feet long, of sufficient thickness and sharpened at both ends. And he commanded that whenever the French approached to give battle and break their ranks with such bodies of horsemen, all the archers were to drive their stakes in front of them in a line

and some behind them and in between the positions of the front rank, one being driven into the ground pointing towards themselves, the other end pointing towards the enemy at waist-height. So that the cavalry, when their charge had brought them close and in sight of the stakes, would either withdraw in great fear or, reckless of their own safety, run the risk of having both horses and riders impaled.34

It seems likely that Henry had heard of the success of this device at Nicopolis two decades earlier. If this is true then there is a delicate irony here. Marshal Boucicault owed his defeat and capture at Nicopolis to the tactical use of archery. At Agincourt he suffered the same fate. How did Henry learn the trick? Doubtless it circulated orally, but it was also `published' (in the medieval sense of the word) in the book celebrating Boucicault's career in 1411, just four years before Agincourt. What deepens the irony is that Boucicault had refined some tactics to defeat the English and intended to use them for the Agincourt campaign. Dr Christopher Philpotts only recently discovered this battle plan in a damaged Cottonian manuscript in the British Library.35

Bertrand Schnerb points out that at Othee in 1408, John the Fearless defeated the Hainaulters with a tactical plan that mimicked the English system. His main battle, dismounted, was flanked by 2,000 archers who poured arrows upon the surprised Flemings, meanwhile 400 men-at-arms and 1,000 `gros valets' (more lightly equipped) remained mounted to sweep in on the flanks and rear. We have seen that this was a standard counter to English dismounted dispositions since the 1350s. Boucicault was attempting something similar, as [fig. 1.12](#)shows.

Dr Philpotts showed in his article that this was the plan, however ineptly performed, for Agincourt. It proposed cavalry charges upon the flanks and rear of the English with troops of more lightly armoured horse, while the heavy men-at-arms slogged it out in the main battle, on foot. But everything went horribly wrong for the French at Agincourt ([fig. 1.13](#)). The flank charges were undermanned and cramped for room and were effectively neutralised by the defensive stakes; their missilemen were not utilised but were rather pushed behind the vanguard of men-at-arms whom they should have been supporting. The attacks on foot were swept by archery, blunted by the mud (with the resultant exhaustion of the men-at-arms) and repulsed by the relatively fresh English men-at-arms. To cap it all the English archers proved nimble, deadly opponents in the boggy ground, swinging leaden mallets which they used for driving in the stakes. National stereotypes dominate again!

It appears from the foregoing that chivalrous types learnt nothing; but they did. The Burgundian Ordinance for John the Fearless' advance on Paris in 1417 shows how. This was first published by J.E Verbruggen in 1959 (and later translated by Richard Vaughan in his book on the duke). It is well known, but Schnerb does not make the connection between the two plans clear, although he cites them both.36 Duke John lost a brother and numerous other relatives and vassals at Agincourt. He must have pondered on what went wrong. So his plan stresses (Clauses 9 & 10) that there must be sufficient space to deploy the main battle so that it does not crowd the van or neutralise the bowmen, as happened at Agincourt. Furthermore, during his advance on Paris he practised his army in drawing up in this formation, in order that his men should be able to do it in the presence of the enemy. Monstrelet draws attention to the fact that John threatened strict punishments for anyone withdrawing from the battle. Clause 2 `. . . Everyone, of whatever rank, must keep to his standard or banner in battle, with no excuses to leave it. And, on the day of battle no-one, on pain of losing his life and possessions (sur peine de perdre corps et biens), shall flee … And (the duke) wishes anyone who discovers those in flight shall kill them and cut them into pieces and shall gain their pos–sessions. And, if

by chance they should not be captured, the duke calls them traitors, evil men and committers of the crime of "lese majeste" ' ([fig. 1.14](#)).37

This had been the case at Agincourt, when the third, mounted division, melted away; it had been the case at Poitiers and it was the medieval general's greatest problem. What John demanded was discipline. Vaughan does not realise the significance of the disciplinary clause, which he omits from his translation; but battlefield discipline is crucial to success, upon it rests the proper execution of a tactical plan. Hence the Burgundian requirements of the creation of units with clearly distinguished standards and the requirement to keep to them. These new instructions gave the Burgundian – potentially at least – an effective battlefield weapon.38

The Burgundian encounter with the Armagnacs at St-Remy-sur-Plain in 1422, saw them deployed with 1,200 dismounted men-at-arms, supported by 500 missilemen flanking them and 2,400 mounted `valet d'armes'. The formation resembled nothing so much as the sixteenth-century disposition of a main body with `sleeves' of shot, mentioned above. The Ordinance dictates small banners for missilemen (in order that they might operate separately in what were later called `commanded' bodies of shot). A wagon-fort protected the rear of this formation; an old tactic and a good one. When the enemy's mounted charge was repelled the Burgundians counter-attacked with a loud shout. Co-ordinated shouting was another aspect of English tactics instanced at Poitiers and elsewhere. So when Burgundians and the English combined at Cravant to force the river crossing they were playing the same game. At Verneuil in 1424, the French flank attacks were neutralised by English stakes (although some fell down in the hard ground). The tactical debate was carried on both on and off the battlefield.

The English had a successful system and stuck to it. When it failed in the last two big battles of the war, at Formigny and Castillon, it was not because artillery blew the archers away, but because Kyriell and Talbot failed to employ the tactics properly. But artillery was beginning to make an impact in the field. When the Burgundians used it against the Barrois in 1430 they combined the shooting with great shout. Many of the enemy, 'went to ground' (in modern parlance) terror-stricken by the impact of the noise and blast.

So, in conclusion, there is a link to be made between the English archery of the Hundred Years' War and British musketry of the Napoleonic Wars. But it is not solely 'firepower' that matters; it is the combination of missile fire and shout – the first to shake the enemy, the second to let him know that you are still confident enough to close with him, which often decided the day. Nor should this be seen as a specific national characteristic, as nineteenth-century English historians saw it – three rousing British cheers to see off the excitable lesser breeds! It was a game to which anyone could learn the rules, if they were prepared to submit to the necessary discipline and to practice. Tactics were a transferable skill and central to the conduct of one aspect of medieval warfare.

End Notes
1. Hence the growth of the 'War and Society' school of history, in which the study of warfare is `legitimised' by reference to its social context. Unfortunately, and all too frequently, war often drops out of what become simply administrative studies.
2. A.H. Burne, *The Crecy War* (London, 1955) and *The Agincourt War* (London, 1956). This two volume work was republished as recently as 1991, but with no cautionary preface taking into account the extensive researches over the last half-century.
3. Bume, *The Agincourt War*, p. 20.

4. See M. Vale, *War and Chivalry* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 30-2.

5. The success of the reforms should not be over-rated, if we can believe the scornful comments of Philippe de Commynes about the battle of Montlhery, 1465, in his *Memoirs: The Reign of Louis XI 1461-83*, trans. Michael Jones (London, 1972), pp. 68-80.

6 C.T. Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War, c.1300-c.1450* (Cambridge, 1988).

7. Sir C. Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols, vol. 2, 1279-1485 (First pub. 1898, revised and enlarged 1924). This work has also been reprinted recently (1991), although it badly needs updating.

8. P Griffiths, *Forwanl into Battle* (Chichester, 1981), esp. ch. 3, The Alleged Firepower of Wellington's Infantry.

9. Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum,* ed. TA. Arnold, Rolls Series 74, VI, 28, pp. 203-4, stresses the role of the archers at Hastings.

10. J. Beeler, *War/are in England 1066-1189* (New York, 1966), pp. 86-92 analyses the sources for the battlein describing the likely English formation.

11. See G.W.S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (London, 1965) pp. 138-46 (Falkirk), 290-332 (Bannockburn); a more recent account of Bannockburn with several detailed maps may be found in R.M. Scott*, Robert the Bruce, King of Scots* (Edinburgh, 1993) esp. pp. 150-1.

12. J.E. Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I* (Oxford, 1901).

13. T. F. Tout, 'The Tactics of the Battles *of* Boroughbridge and Morlaix', *Collected Papers,* 2 (1934), pp. 221-25.

14. See R. Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 132-8.

15. Morlaix, after Burne, *Crecy War*, p. 38 and Tout, 'Tactics'.

16. Comparison with warfare in the same area of Flanders in the eighteenth century is instructive, especially the campaign and battle of Malplaquet, 1709; see D. Chandler, *Marlborough as Military Commander* (London, 1973), esp. p. 253ff for the construction of an abbatis in wooded ground.

17. K.A. Fowler, `News from the Front: Letters and Despatches of the Fourteenth Century', in *Guerre et Socidte en France, en Angleterre et en Bourgogne xive xve slecle* (Lille, 1991), ed. P Contamine, C. Giry-Deloison and M.H. Keen, pp. 63-92, esp. Document II, PRO, C 81/314/ 17803.

18. For the *EHR* debate, see E.M. Lloyd, `The "Herse" of Archers at Crecy', July 1895, pp. 538-41; H.B. George, `The Archers at Crecy', October 1895, pp. 733-38. J.E. Morris, 'The Archers at Crecy' July 1897, pp. 427-36 was the most influential. To him the 'fierce' was a wedge-shaped formation. Yet surely he nods when translating 'deux battailes d'archiers i deux costes en la maniere d'un escut' as describing shield-shaped formations and hence wedges?

19. See J. Keegan, *Face of Battle* (London, 1982), ch. 3 (Agincourt), esp. p. 100, for the supposed funnelling of the French men-at-arms.

20. Jean de Bueil, *Le Jouvencel,* ed. C. Favre & L. Lecestre, 2 vols (SHF, Paris, 1887-9) vol. 2, p. 37. See E.M. Lloyd, `The Herse" of Archers', pp. 539-40 for sixteenth-century parallels.

21. J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years' War Trial by Battle* (London, 1990), pp. 526-8; *Annales Gandenses,* ed. and trans. H. Johnson (London, 1951), pp. 66, 68-9.

22. See the *EHR* debate, note 18.

23. Geoffrey le Baker describes potholes one foot square and one deep (R. Barber, *The Life and Campaigns of the Black Prince* (London, 1979), p. 44) but according to H. de Wailly, Crecy 1346: *Anatomy of a Battle*(Poole, 1987), 51, 72-74, there is no indication

from aerial photographs of any such defence.

24. De Wailly, Crecy, pp. 72-3, n. 2 & 3 mentions a terrace upon which Edward's reserve 'battle' was positioned, but doubts that Prince Edward's 'battle' had the same advantage.

25. See J. Sumption, *Trial by Battle, p.* 288, for accusations of `reynarderie' made by young nobles against Philip VI in 1339.

26. Ibid., pp. 528, on Philip VI's dispositions.

27. Ibid., pp. 341-3 on St Omer.

28. TF Tout, *Collected Papers,* 2 (1934), pp. 227-31.

29. Jean de Bueil, *Le Jouvencel,* vol. 1, p. 153. His full remark is: `Everywhere and on all occasions that footsoldiers march against their enemy face to face, those who march lose and those who remain standing still and holding firm win.' (This translation is from P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages,* trans. M. Jones (Oxford, 1984) p. 231.)

30. For the most detailed map and description, see J.J. Hewitt, *The Black Prince's Expedition of 1355-57*(Manchester, 1958), pp. 110-39, map p. 115.

31. A. do Palo, 'The Battle of Aljubarrota', *Antiquity,* 27; 1963, pp. 264-69 and pls. 38 & 39a. The pits are variable in length, depth and distance apart laterally, but might have been drawn up on the rule of thumb of a yard long, half-a-yard wide and a foot deep. Certainly, the rows seem to have been consistently ten feet apart.(I understand that a more recent report on the battlefield was produced, in Portuguese, in 1993, but this had not come to hand at time of publication.)

32. B. Schnerb, 'La bataille range dans la tactique des armees bourguignonnes au debut du 15e siecle: essai de synthese', in *Annales de Bourgogne,* 71, 1989, pp. 5-32.

33. A. Attiya, *The Crusade of Nicopolis* (London, 1934), pp. 82-97; *Le livre des fais du bon messiru Jehan Le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut,* ed. D. Lalande (Geneva, 1985).

34. *Gesta Henrici Quind,* ed. and trans. F Taylor and J.S. Roskell (Oxford, 1975), pp. 68-71, slightly modified.

35. C. Phipotts, `The French plan *of* battle during the Agincourt campaign', *EHR,* 30, 1984, pp. 59-68. For a translation and explanation of this document see M. Bennett, *Agincourt: Triumph against the Odds* (London,*1991) pp. 62-6.*

36. *J.F.* Verbruggen, 'Un plan de bataille du duc de Bourgogne (14 septembre 1417) et le tactique del'epoque', in *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire,* 20, 1959, pp. 443-51. This is translated by *R.* Vaughan,*John the Fearless* (London, 1966), pp. 148-50, although he omits clause *2* and confuses the issue by re-numbering the document's clauses. Schnerb, 'La bataille', p. 32, mentions Nicopolis but does not understand the significance of the battle.

37. J.F. Verbruggen, `Un plan de bataille', pp. 444-5.

38. See M. Vale, *War and Chivalry,* pp. 148-9, on the importance of units and flags. The Burgundian failures against the Swiss are not relevant here!

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