
Debate

The Efficacy of the English Longbow: A Reply to Kelly DeVries

Clifford J. Rogers

Every profession needs its gadflies: men and women who shake our complacency and force us to re-examine assumptions we have rarely if ever questioned before. Sometimes revisionists lead us, as the word itself suggests, to see things in a new way, and convince us that our former understanding of an event, a process, a person or a thing was fundamentally flawed. At other times the process of reappraisal leads us back to the same conclusions which we held when we began, but enables us to maintain with new confidence – now that they have been tried – that they are true.¹

One topic which has recently been subject to a dose of historical revisionism is the efficacy of the medieval longbow. Until recently, there has been general agreement that the ability of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English archers to strike down charging Scotsmen or French men-at-arms, whether mounted or on foot, was of decisive importance in the battlefield triumphs of Edward III, the Black Prince, Henry V and the Duke of Bedford, from Halidon Hill (1333) through to Verneuil (1424). Over the past few years, however, this view has been challenged by Professor Kelly DeVries. His argument, which he makes in his books *Medieval Military Technology* and *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century*, as well as in an article recently published in this journal, ‘Catapults Are Not Atom Bombs: Towards a Redefinition of “Effectiveness” in Premodern Military Technology’, is most fully expressed in the first of those works:

the tactical use of the English archers at [Agincourt], and, for that matter, in all of the battles since the beginning of the fourteenth century, with the longbowmen either skirmishing in a “shoot-out” with their opponents’ archers or flanking their infantry troops, could not have caused the losses of life attributed to them by his-

¹ My thanks to my colleague E.C. Kiesling, who suggested this paragraph to me.

torians. *In fact, there is little evidence that the longbowmen, needing to fire with an extremely steep arc to cover the distance between themselves and the enemy and thus unable to penetrate their opponents' armor, did any more damage than the killing of a few horses and the wounding of even fewer men. While the archers did not kill many men, however, they did harass their enemy to such an extent that they broke into a disordered charge, a charge narrowed by continual flanking fire until it reached and stopped at the solid infantry line.*²

According to DeVries, historians (myself specifically included) who argue for the lethal efficacy of the longbow are committing the sin of technological determinism, and indeed 'have done military history and the history of technology a disservice':

Not only has this inhibited progress in understanding premodern military history in general, and premodern military technology in particular, but it has also too often and too easily removed the individual soldiers and their leaders from the military historical equation, replacing them with a technological, deterministic explanation.³

Anyone who has read my article on Edward III's strategy⁴ should realize how absurd it is to accuse me of removing the English leadership from the military historical equation, and in general I think DeVries seriously overstates the extent to which the historians he cites believe the longbow was an example of an "invincible" technology', 'so much so that England was to gain many victories *solely* because of its use in warfare'⁵ (emphasis added). DeVries does not give specific citations to the places where I or the other historians he names make such claims, and in fact I don't think that I or Jim Bradbury or Robert Hardy has ever written either that the longbow was 'invincible' or that it was the 'sole' cause of the English battlefield victories of the late middle ages.

So far as I know, no one has yet published a defence of the traditional view of the efficacy of medieval archery against DeVries's revisionist stance. In this short article I propose to do just that: to demonstrate that English arrow-fire in the battles of the fourteenth and

² K. DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology* (Peterborough, Ontario, 1994), p. 38; emphasis added. Cf. *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1996), pp. 5–6, 127–28 ('if the archers did not kill many, which seems to be what happened at [Dupplin Moor and Halidon Hill] as in most others fought during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries'), p. 194. The paragraph quoted above is reproduced nearly verbatim in DeVries's 'Catapults Are Not Atom Bombs', *War in History* iv (1997), pp. 454–70, except that in this case the author wrongly attributes his own opinions to John Keegan. Cf. n. 44 below.

³ DeVries, 'Catapults', p. 455. Cf. DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, p. 6.

⁴ C.J. Rogers, 'Edward III and the Dialectics of Strategy, 1327–1360', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., IV (1994), pp. 83–102.

⁵ DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, pp. 6, 5; cf. 'Catapults', pp. 454–55, 462–63, 460 ('In fact, it has been thought that this weapon alone determined many victories for England').

fifteenth century did indeed do much more than 'the killing of a few horses and the wounding of even fewer men'. This is not to say that the longbow was an 'invincible' weapon, or even that its effectiveness lay solely in the deaths and wounds it inflicted, any more than the same is true of the bombs dropped by B-52s. *All* weapons are as important for their effects on those whom they do not hit as for their effects on the people they do hit. Battles are won more by the psychological effects of weapons than by their physical impacts: this is demonstrated simply by the fact that a defeated army very rarely suffers even 50 per cent of its number in killed or wounded, and indeed can rarely endure losses of over 25 per cent before acknowledging defeat.⁶ But those psychological effects *are* the direct results of the physical ones, for it is primarily the sight of comrades being wounded and killed that demoralizes an attack and causes it to fail.

Even on a priori grounds, therefore, DeVries's argument does not make much sense to me. For arrow-fire to have had as significant an effect in disordering attackers as he acknowledges it did, it would have to have the power to do substantial harm: if the arrows could not do more than wound just a few men, then the attackers would simply ignore the archers' fire, and would also have no difficulty dispersing the bowmen and ending the disruption they were somehow causing.⁷ Certainly, if the longbowmen could not at the very least inflict large numbers of fairly serious wounds, then we would not hear of skirmishes and full battles being won primarily by their fire, which – despite DeVries's scepticism⁸ – is often precisely what the contemporary sources say.

For example, the *Chronicon de Lanercost* says that at Dupplin Moor, 'the Scots were defeated primarily by the English archers';⁹ and Higden's *Polychronicon* says nearly the same thing.¹⁰ At Kinghorn during the same campaign, 'the archers entirely alone vanquished the count of Fife' and his force, because the English men-at-arms had not yet

⁶ Even during the infamous charge of Pickett's and Pettigrew's divisions on the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg, for example, the attacking Confederates had only suffered about 25% casualties when their assault broke (another 25% of the original force was lost during the retreat down the slope). Note that this calculation supports Napoleon's famous dictum that 'in war, the moral is to the physical as three to one'.

⁷ Cf. DeVries, 'Catapults', p. 464: 'Any deaths of men and horses which occurred would obviously have added to the disruption of the charge, but they need not have been numerous or to have occurred at all to gain the desired result.'

⁸ DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, p. 127: 'it may be too much to say, as Jonathan Sumption does, that these battles [Dupplin and Halidon] "were [both] won by archers".'

⁹ *Chronicon de Lanercost, MCCI-MCCCXLVI*, ed. J. Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1839), p. 268: 'victi sunt Scotti maxime per sagittarios Anglicorum.'

¹⁰ Ranulph Higden, *Polychronicon*, ed. J.R. Lumby and C. Babington (London, 1865–86), III, p. 328: '[Scotis] qui oppressi sunt a sagittariis Anglorum et insecuti ab equitibus Angliae usque ad noctem.'

disembarked from their ships.¹¹ The author of an anonymous bulletin from the siege of Tournai describes a major sally by the defenders which was 'defeated and cast back' by the English archers.¹² Froissart, Henry Knighton and the *Chronographia Regum Francorum* all agree with the *Chronique du Pays-Bas* that the French vanguard division at Poitiers 'was defeated by arrow-fire'.¹³ There are also a number of statements in chronicles and campaign letters that the English archers 'put the enemy to flight' on various occasions; presumably they did so with their bows rather than with harsh language.¹⁴

I think, however, that DeVries's *main* point is not that arrows did

¹¹ Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS CCC78 (unpublished *Brut* continuation), fo. 171v: 'entra Escoco a Kynkorne et sodeignement lez archers tant soulement venquerent le count de Fiff . . .' Cf. *Historia Aurea* (Oxford, Bodleian MS 240), p. 560; Thomas Burton, *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa*, ed. A.E. Bond (London, 1868) II, p. 363; Adam Murimuth, *Adae Murimuth: Continuatio Chronicarum*, ed. E.M. Thompson (London, 1889), p. 66; Galfridi le Baker de Swynebroke [Geoffrey le Baker], *Chronicon*, ed. E.M. Thompson (Oxford, 1889), p. 49; Henrici Knighton, *Chronicon*, ed. J.R. Lumby (London, 1895) I, p. 462; cf. *Pipewell Chronicle* (BL, Cottonian MS Caligula A XIII), fo. 13: 'Anglici ad terram exilentes de navibus sine equis istos [Scotos] animose invadabant'; *Historia Roffensis* (BL, Cottonian MS Faustina B V), fo. 62: 'ad terram applicantes. Statim sine quiete contra Scotos congregientes, plures de Scochis occidentes . . .'

¹² 'Et aultre foitz issirent de la dite ville bien a C hommes darmes et nos archiers engleys les descomfrent, [et] rebotirent.' To be printed in C.J. Rogers, 'An Unknown News Bulletin from the Siege of Tournai in 1340', forthcoming in *War in History*.

¹³ *Chronique des Pays-Bas, de France, d'Angleterre et de Tournai*, in *Corpus Chronicorum Flandrensium* III, ed. J.J. de Smet (Brussels, 1856), p. 187, re Poitiers: 'La prunière bastaille de Franche fu desconfite par le trait des saiettes.' [The same is found in *Chronique Normande du XIVe siècle*, ed. A. and E. Molinier (Paris, 1882), p. 116n.; each is derived from the *Chronographia Regum Francorum*, ed. H. Moranville (Paris, 1897) II, p. 262: 'ex sagittarum emissione, Francorum equos occidere, ita ut eorum assensores inpressuram cadentes ibidem suffocarentur. Tunc rex et ceteri de sua acie descenderunt de equis suis. . . Prima autem acies Francorum devicta est ex tractu Anglicorum.' Knighton, *Chronicon* II, p. 89: 'Jam prima acies Francia congregituru cum comite Warwyck, sed cito per sagittarios subpeditati sunt.' Froissart, *Œuvres*, ed., Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels, 1867–77) v, pp. 425, 439: 'la bataille des mareschauls fu tantos toute dérouté et desconfite par le trait des archiers.' Similarly, Thomas of Burton sums up the battle of Sluys with the simple statement: 'Franci et Normanii acriter sagittati per Anglos sunt devicti': *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa* III, p. 44. Cf. DeVries, 'Catapults', n. 30: 'In actuality there was not much use of longbows at Sluys, and the weapons certainly cannot be seen as the cause of victory.' See also the *Chronique des règnes de Jean II et Charles V*, ed. R. Delachenal (Paris, 1910), p. 72, re Poitiers: "autres dient que la cause de la desconfiture fu pour ce que l'on ne pouvoit entrer es diz Angloiz; car ilz s'estoient mis en trop forte place, et leurs archiers traioient si dru que les gens du dit roy de France ne pouvoient demourer en leur trait.' See also the *Chronique Normande*, p. 115, concerning the defeat of King John's division at Poitiers: 'y ot plusieurs Englois qui tournerent pour fuir, mais François s'entassèrent si pour le grant trait des archiers, qui sur leurs tests leur venoit, que grant foison ne pouvoient combattre et chairent les uns sur les autres. Lors se prindrent François à desconfire' (emphasis added). *Op. cit.*, p. 81, re Crécy.

¹⁴ *Chronicon de Lanercost*, p. 295, re Cadsant (misidentified as Sluys): 'statim invenerunt homines paratos qui pugnaverunt cum eis, sed cito per sagittarios Angliae fugabantur.' At Poitiers, the duke of Normandy's battle advanced, and 'les archiers des Anglois prindrent si espesement à traire, que la bataille du duc commença à ressortir', *Chronique Normande*, p. 115 (this phrase is not related to the *Chronographia Regum Francorum* or *Chronique des Pays-Bas*).

not win battles; it is rather that they 'did not kill many'.¹⁵ Now, if arrows did not often kill, then we must assume either that they were not even able to inflict many serious wounds (as DeVries suggests) or that they did often inflict serious wounds, but that these serious wounds were rarely lethal.

As I said earlier, I find it hard to understand how one can doubt that the English archers' clothyard shafts could and did inflict large numbers of serious wounds, for it is hard to see them having the disruptive and herding effect which even DeVries acknowledges unless they could do so. But we do not need to rely on such deductive reasoning to show that longbow arrows were capable of doing a great deal of damage of this type, since the chronicle sources are quite clear on this point. Let me start with the battles of Dupplin Moor and Halidon Hill.¹⁶

At Dupplin, says the *Pipewell Chronicle*, the Scots 'were gravely wounded by the [English] archers';¹⁷ the *Chronicon de Lanercost* agrees that 'the English archers, by a continuous fire of arrows, so blinded and wounded in the face the first division of the Scots that they were helpless',¹⁸ and that the same thing happened at Halidon.¹⁹ The short version of the *Brut* in the *Anonimalle Chronicle* says of Halidon Hill that 'the archers of England wounded [the Scots] and took them out of the fight'; this is supported by Thomas of Burton, who describes the Scots as 'very severely cut up by the archers'.²⁰

Similarly, Froissart speaks of archers 'impaling' the Scots at Neville's Cross.²¹ The chronicle of Tournai lists a whole series of named individuals 'shot in an arm', 'shot in a leg', 'shot through the chin', 'shot in the arm', 'shot in the thigh', 'shot in the eye', and so on, during the

¹⁵ DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, p. 127; cf. pp. 5–6, 194, and DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology*, p. 38 (quoted above).

¹⁶ Cf. DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, pp. 127–238.

¹⁷ *Pipewell*, fo. 13v: 'Scoti autem per sagittarios graviter vulnerati'.

¹⁸ 'sagittarios Anglicorum, qui primam aciem Scottorum ita excaecaverunt et vulneraverunt in facie continuis ictibus sagittarum quod non poterant se juvare': *Chronicon de Lanercost*, p. 268.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 274: 'prima acie venientes ita fuerunt a multitudine sagittariorum Angliae vulnerati in facie et excaecati in hoc bello, sicut in priori apud Gledenmore, quod se ipsos adjuvare non poterant, et ideo cito faciem sagittarum ictibus avertere et cadere inceperunt.' Cf. also the *Historia Roffensis*, fo. 100, on the fight at Calais in 1350, and the *Chronique des quatre premiers Valois (1327–1393)*, ed. S. Luce (Paris, 1862), p. 53, on Poitiers.

²⁰ *The Anonimalle Chronicle 1307–1334*, ed. W.R. Childs and J. Taylor, Yorkshire Archaeological Society: Record Series vol. 147 (1991), p. 166: 'les archers Dengleterre les desbareta et greva'; *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa* II, p. 364: 'per sagittarios nimium lacerate'; this should not be translated merely as 'so cut up by the archers', as DeVries renders it in *Infantry Warfare*, p. 194 (emphasis added).

²¹ Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. S. Luce (Paris, 1869–1975) IV, pp. 234–35: 'les archiers commenchièrent à traire moult fort et moult roit, et à enpaller hommes et cevaus et à mettre à grant meschief.' Similarly, on the battle of Najera: 'Car plus droit traioient archier / qe ne soit pluve en temps d'yver. / Chivalx et hommes lour blesceoient, / Et les Espaignardz bien perceoient': Chandos Herald, *La Vie du Prince Noir*, ed. D.B. Tyson (Tübingen, 1975), II. 3361–64.

siege of 1340.²² The *Chronicon Comitum Flandrensium* says that at Crécy the archers of the Prince of Wales ‘pierced through horses and men with their arrows’,²³ and Froissart speaks of the archers’ shafts ‘piercing the arms and breasts’ of the Genoese from longer range than the cross-bowmen could shoot.²⁴ According to Geoffrey le Baker, the archers of the Captal de Buch’s battalion at Poitiers ‘greatly and horribly pierced’ the miserable French.²⁵

Now, logically, if an arrow can inflict a serious wound, can ‘impale’ or ‘pierce through’ men, then it can also kill them. The difference between an arrow which blinds and one which kills, for example, is only a very small one. At Neville’s Cross, King David had one arrowhead stuck in his face so that two surgeons had to be brought up from York to remove it, drawing it out through the nose; clearly the wound could have been lethal if its penetration had been just a little different. He also had another arrowhead which lodged in his skull, where it stayed until he died; again, this could easily have been a lethal wound.²⁶ Philip VI of France, similarly, fled from the field of Crécy with an arrow stuck in his jaw: he was just lucky that it had struck bone rather than an artery.²⁷ This point is reinforced by the very numerous descriptions of horses wounded or killed by archery – for example the two destriers which were shot dead from under King Philip in that same battle.²⁸ Any arrow which had the power to take down a medieval warhorse surely had the strength to kill a man as well.

²² *Tournai Chronicle* (II) (in Froissart, *Œuvres* XXI), pp. 350–56: ‘vindrent grant plenetet d’Anglois traire à le porte Saint-Martin sur ceulx qui gardoient à le porte . . . Jehan de Hennin fut trait en un brach, et Tassart de Boullenois fu traies en un jambe’ . . . ‘Et fut ledit Guimars trait d’une sayette parmy le genouil’ . . . ‘Jehan Brigades . . . fut traies en une cuisse et revint en Tournay . . . douze hommes d’armes . . . furent scevys des Anglois . . . et là fut Jacques Gargette traies au brach, Unghet de Commines en une cuisse’ . . . ‘là revindrent les Anglois à le porte Saint-Martin traire et faire un grand assault, et fut trait Locemens d’une sayette en l’oeuil, dont il morru . . .’

²³ In *Corpus Chronicorum Flandrensium* I, p. 218, the prince ‘cum suis in Gallicos irruens ex una parte cum gladiis et lanceis, et suis sagittariis cum sagittis equos et homines transverberantibus’. Similarly, Froissart, *Œuvres* V, p. 425 (Poitiers): ‘archier commencièrent à . . . bersser chevaux et à enfiller de ces longhes sayettes barbuës.’

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 52: ‘ces saiettes qui lor perchièrent bras et poitrines et lors céoient sus lors visages et de plus lonc que il ne pooient traire.’

²⁵ Le Baker, *Chronicon*, p. 152: ‘sagitarii grandine diro confodiunt.’

²⁶ Froissart, *Chroniques* IV, pp. 235–36; Walter Bower, *Scottichronicon*, ed. A.B. Scott *et al.* (Aberdeen, 1987–96) VII, p. 260; *Liber Pluscardensis*, ed. F.J.H. Skene (Edinburgh, 1877), p. 294; Murimuth, *Continuatio Chroniarum*, p. 219; *Chronique Normande*, p. 87; BL, Cottonian MS Tiberius A VI (Packington), fo. 197. Surgeons: account in J.E. Morris, ‘Mounted Infantry in Medieval Warfare’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3rd ser., VIII (1914), p. 102.

²⁷ *Eulogium historiarum*, ed. F.S. Haydon (London, 1858–63), II, p. 211: ‘portans in maxilla sua unam saggitam.’

²⁸ Philip: *Chronique des Pays-Bas*, in *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae* [CCF], ed. J. de Smet (Brussels, 1837–65) III, p. 172: ‘mémymes le roy Phelippe fu ij fois desmontés, et ot ij chevaux ochis desous luy, par le trait des saiettes.’ More generally: Jean le Bel, *Chronique*, ed. J. Viard (Paris, 1904) II, p. 232, before Poitiers, ‘Premièrement fut ordonné que tous se combatoeroient à pyé pour la doubtance des archiers qui tousjours tuoient leurs chevaux, comme à la bataille de Cressy.’ Also Giovanni Villani, *Cronica*, in R. Palmarocchi, ed., *Cronisti del Trecento* (Milan, 1935), p. 198: the ground was covered by ‘fediti delle bombarde e saette, che non v’ebbe cavallo de Franceschi che non fosse fedito, e innumberabili morti’. *Tournai Chronicle* (I) (in

'But wait', it might be objected, 'that doesn't follow. Horses could be killed relatively easily because they wore relatively little armour, and the wounds suffered by people like Philip and David were non-lethal not by chance, but because they wore armour protecting their vital points. So that explains why people could be wounded and have their horses killed, but yet not themselves be killed in large numbers by archery.' At first this objection seems reasonable, but in fact it cannot be used to salvage DeVries's assertions. First of all, even if it were true that arrows could not effectively penetrate plate armour, that would not impede the longbow from having acted as 'a killing machine' (to use DeVries's phrase) against lightly or non-armoured soldiers like the Scots at Halidon Hill, or even against a typical French man-at-arms of the early to middle fourteenth century.²⁹ King David and King Philip, after all, doubtless had the best armour available, yet that did not save either of them from suffering multiple serious wounds. Furthermore, we have positive statements that longbow arrows could and did penetrate armour. Adam Murimuth describes arrows (and lances) at Crécy 'seeking out the entrails of men just as much as those of horses, their armour rarely preventing it'.³⁰ Geoffrey le Baker, just as explicitly, says that at Poitiers the archers 'caused their arrows to prevail over the armour of the knights'.³¹

Furthermore, turning again to the sources, we discover that there are a great number of straightforward statements that English archery *did* kill many individuals, whether light-armed Scots or well-equipped men-at-arms.³² Thomas of Burton says that at Halidon Hill the bowmen

Froissart, *Œuvres* XXI, p. 345: 'Celluy jour envers complye issirent encorre des gens du conte . . . et sy y eult de leurs cevaux plentet de navrés du trait.' Froissart, *Œuvres* XI, p. 174, re Aljubarrota: '[les] archiers d'Angleterre ([qi] n'estoit pas en trop grant nombre) traioient si ouynement que leurs [the French vanguard's] chevaux estoient tous encousus et enfillés de saïettes et tellement mehaigniés que ils chéoiënt l'un sur l'autre . . . leurs chevaux qui estoient navrés du trait des archiers, fondonoient et là chéoiënt dessous euls.' Bower, *Scottichronicon* VII, p. 258, n. h, re Neville's Cross: the earl of Menteith attacked the English archers and 'eiusdem nobilis equus a sagitta volante interficitur'. *Chronique des Pays-Bas* [in *CCF*] III, p. 172, re Crécy: 'dont Franchois se prirent à esbahir, pour che que, par le trait des saïettes, véoiënt à pluseurs prinches et chevaliers leur cheval quérir et morir': *op. cit.*, III, p. 186, re Poitiers: '[les] archiers d'Engletière . . . prirent si fort à traire, que il ochirent pluseurs chevaux.' There are many other examples.

²⁹ Cf. DeVries, 'Catapults', p. 463.

³⁰ Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, p. 247: 'lanceis et sagittis densissime intervenientibus, quae non minus hominum quam equorum viscera sunt scrutatae, armatura qualicumque raro prohibente.'

³¹ Le Baker, *Chronicon*, p. 147: 'Nec officia sua sagittarii pretermiserunt, set, insistentes aggeri tuto supra et ultra sepem, coegerunt sagittas armis militaribus prevalere.' On *armis*, note that the standard Latin definition of this word, when it does not mean broadly 'implements of war', is indeed 'armour' not 'weapons', for which *tela* would normally be used. Thus armour, not just weapons, was needed to qualify soldiers as *homines ad arma*. In medieval English usage, however, *armis* often did mean weapons. Still, it makes more sense to read it here as 'armour', in context.

³² The examples in the text below are all of statements that the archers (unmixed with other groups) were the cause of death; there are in addition numerous statements that many soldiers were killed 'by flying arrows and by swords', or 'by arrows and bombards', etc. e.g. at Neville's Cross, according to Robert of Avesbury, *De Gestis Mirabilibus Regis Edwardi Tertii*, ed. E.M. Thompson (London, 1889), p. 377: 'comites

'inflicted a tremendous massacre' on the Scots.³³ The French *Brut d'Engleterre* describes the archers as 'striking the Scots lethally with their arrows'³⁴ and 'striking them down by the thousands', while the *Historia Roffensis* says simply: 'the Scots fell, struck by the English archers'.³⁵ Murimuth says that at Auberoche the French had over 1000 light infantrymen and 700 men-at-arms 'killed by the archers'.³⁶ The *Eulogium Historiarum* speaks of 'a heap of over 1000 destriers and more, killed and wounded by arrows along with their riders' at Crécy, supporting the statement of the *Chronique des Quatre Premiers Valois* that 'the English archers . . . by their fire killed many horses and men'.³⁷ The *Chronographia Regum Francorum* says that 'many of [the Genoese] fell to the arrows of the English', and also that the English 'attacked the French and killed more of them by arrows than in other ways'.³⁸ Jean de Hocsem says the archers 'killed a great number by their arrows'.³⁹ Gilles li Muisit says that the communal soldiers of Amiens encountered by Edward III's army on the day after Crécy 'were all either fled or captured, the English with their bows having surrounded and killed them'.⁴⁰ Matteo Villani describes the archers at the Poitiers 'wounding

de Murif et Stratherne totusque flos militiae ac hominum armorum regni Scotiae in ore gladii et a sagittis volantibus perierunt.' Similarly, Giovanni Villani, *Cronica*, p. 397: Genoese at Crécy 'fediti di saette dagli arceri e dalle bombarde, onde molti ne furono fediti e morti'. Winchelsea: Avesbury, *Gestis Mirabilibus*, p. 412: Spaniards, unwilling to surrender, 'gladiis et sagittis volantibus vita privatis'. Calais, 1350: *op. cit.*, p. 410: 'plures Anglici armati et sagittarii confluebant ad ipsum, et talem Francigenis dederunt insultum quod plus quam CCTi nobiles homines armorum ex eisdem in ore gladii et a sagittis volantibus perierunt ibidem.' John of Fordun, *Chronica Gentis Scottorum*, ed. W.F. Skene (Edinburgh, 1871), p. 376, re Poitiers: 'Nam Marescallus Franciae cum multis de melioribus Franciae putans se fortiter facturum, per sepes ete vineas ad Anglicos ardentem erumpens, cum omnibus, qui secum venerant, per sagittarios et alios artis bellicae diros inflictus ibidem devictus occubuit.'

³³ *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa* II, p. 106: 'In quo Anglici sagittarii maximam stragem perfecerunt.'

³⁴ BL, Add. MS 18462 (a *Brut* manuscript), fo. 101^v: 'chescun dez escheles a lez ditz Roys dengleterre et descoce avoient dencles de bons archiers et ferirent de lour saetes lez Escotz mortielment.'

³⁵ BL, Cottonian MS Cleopatra D III (another *Brut*), fo. 182^v: 'ensi fererent ilz [i.e. les archiers] les escotz qe ils lour mistrent avale par plusours millers'; *Historia Roffensis*, fo. 66: 'cecciderunt Scoti, percussi a sagitariis.'

³⁶ Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, p. 190: 'ubi primo per sagittarios Anglicos plus quam mille pedites, bidowers nuncupati, et postmodum septingenti armati per sagittarios interfecti.'

³⁷ *Chronique des quatre premiers Valois*, p. 16: 'Les Anglois archiers furent du premier embuschiés de les les [sic] haies et par leur trait occistrent moult de chevalux et de gens.'

³⁸ *Chronographia Regum Francorum* II, p. 2232: 'plures autem ex eis [Jannencium] cecciderunt ex sagitis Anglicorum', 'Anglici . . . agressi sunt Francos et plures ex eis occiderunt sagittis quam alio modo.' Cf. *Chronique Normande*, p. 81: 'mout les greverent et plus de trait que d'autre chose', and *CCF* III, p. 172: the archers 'assallirent Francois, et plus de trait que d'autre choses, et moult en ochirent'.

³⁹ Jean de Hocsem [Johannes Hochsemius], *La Chronique de Jean de Hocsem*, ed. G. Kurth (Brussels, 1927), p. 345: 'sagittarios infinitos qui telis suis majorem numerum occiderunt.'

⁴⁰ Gilles le Muisit, *Chronique et Annales* (Paris, 1906), p. 157: 'et Ambianenses omnes aut cesi aut capti fuerunt, qui Anglici cum archis suis eos circundantes occiderunt.'

many men and horses with their arrows, and killing plenty of them'.⁴¹ Froissart says that at Poitiers, at the approach of the first battle of the French, the English archers began to fire so thickly 'that no one either could, or dared to, put himself in their fire; so they wounded and killed in this fight very many men'.⁴² There are other examples as well.⁴³

All the examples I have used so far, however, have been drawn from the fourteenth century, and DeVries's argument about the exaggerated claims of the efficacy of the longbow deals with the fifteenth century as well. Indeed, the first two sources he cites in his book as making the case 'against the decisiveness of the longbow', John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* and an article by Claude Gaier, both deal with periods 70–130 years *after* the battle of Poitiers, and it is well known that the murderous effectiveness of the longbow at Poitiers led to great changes in armour design intended in part to make men-at-arms less vulnerable to archery – a point, which, by the way, offers further evidence for the ability of arrows to penetrate the armour of 1356.⁴⁴ I am willing to concede Gaier's point that in the decades *after* the end of the Hundred Years War in 1453, armour improved (and archery declined) to the point that the English longbowmen were no longer capable of wreaking the kind of havoc I have described above. But I think there is plenty of evidence to show that, at the battle of Agincourt in 1415 and for some decades thereafter, English longbowmen remained fully capable of 'killing many' on the battlefield.

A few quotations from contemporary sources should suffice to make

⁴¹ Matteo Villani, *Cronica*; R. Palmarocchi, ed., *Cronisti del Trecento* (Milan, 1935): 'e sollecitando le loro saette, molti uomini e cavalli fedirono e assai n'uccisono.'

⁴² Froissart, *Œuvres* v, p. 442: 'Là estoient arcier d'Engleterre viste et légier de traire ouniement et se espressement que nul ne se pooit, ne osoit mettre en leur tret: si blecièrent et occirent de ce rencontre tamaint homme qui ne peurent venir à rençon, ne à merci.'

⁴³ Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, p. 108 (St Omer, 1340): 'Ubi de parte Gallicorum fuerunt occisi xv. barones, lxxx. milites[.] populares, et magni equi, cum saggitis, quasi ad numerum infinitum.' Rogers, 'Tournai Bulletin': 'Et aultre foitz isserent de la dite ville bien a C hommes darmes et nos archiers engleys les descomfrent, rebotierent et tuerent partie de eaux et de leurs chivalx.' Froissart, *Œuvres* v, pp. 49–50, 52: 'ne perdoient nuls de lors trais, car il enferroient et enpalloient parmi les corps ou parmi chevaus, ou testes ou bras ou jambes de gens d'arms, par telle manière que one estoit mehagniet trop durement ou bleciet ou mort, et se ne savoit-on d'où les saïetes venoient.' See also n. 32 above.

⁴⁴ Note that John Keegan in *The Face of Battle* (Harmondsworth, Middx, 1978) does not quite make a case 'against the decisiveness of the longbow', as DeVries states (*Infantry Warfare*, p. 6, n. 16). It is true that Keegan says that the arrows of the English archers 'cannot . . . given their terminal velocity and angle of impact, have done a great deal of harm, at least to the men-at-arms' *when they were fired at 'extreme range'* (the quotation, from p. 93, refers specifically to the arrows fired 'at the opening moment of the battle' (p. 92), when archers had just advanced into 'extreme range' of the French (p. 93)) but he does also say that the French men-at-arms during their advance against the English centre 'were suffering losses from [the archers'] fire' (p. 83) and that 'some of the arrows must have found the weak spots in the visor and at the shoulders and, as the range dropped right down, might even have penetrated armour itself. The "bodkin-point" was designed to do so, and at its terminal velocity . . . could also, at the right angle of impact, make a hole in sheet steel' (p. 98).

the point. Monstrelet observes that, at Agincourt in 1415, even before the general attack began, 'numbers of the French were slain and severely wounded by the English bowmen'.⁴⁵ Waurin, an eyewitness, is equally clear: 'the French began to hold down their heads, especially those who had no shields, because of the violent force of the English arrows, which fell so heavily that no one dared raise his visor [*soy descouvrir*] or look up . . . before they could come to close quarters, many of the French were disabled and wounded by the arrows'.⁴⁶ The same author says of the battle of Verneuil a few years later that the opposing English and Scottish archers 'began to shoot one against the other so murderously that it was a horror to look upon them, for they carried death to those whom they struck with full force'.⁴⁷ Perhaps the most dramatic statement comes from Lydgate's *Battle of Agincourt*: 'Our archers shot full heartily, and quickly made the Frenchmen bleed; their arrows went at great speed, and took down our enemies; through breastplate, haubergeon, and bascinet they went. Eleven thousand were slain there all in a row; you know right well that it was so.'⁴⁸

A better description of the effects of a 'killing machine' we could hardly ask for.

US Military Academy

⁴⁵ *The Chronicles of Enguerrand de Monstrelet*, trans. T. Johnes (2 vols, London, 1840) 1, p. 342.

⁴⁶ Jehan de Waurin, *Anchiennes Croniques*, ed. E.L.C.P. Hardy (London, 1864–91) II, p. 213 'les Francois commencerent a encliner leurs chiefs, especialment ceulz qui navoient nulz pavaiz, pour limpetuosite du trait Anglois, qui cheoit si onniement que nulz nosoit soy descouvrir ne regarder en houl, . . . mais anchois quilz peuissent aborder ensamble y eut moult de Francois empeschies et navres du trait.'

⁴⁷ Jehan de Waurin, *A Collection of the Chronicles and Ancient Histories of Great Britain*, trans. W. Hardy and E.L.C.P. Hardy (6 vols, London, 1887) v, p. 75.

⁴⁸ John Lydgate, *The Bataille of Agyncourt*, quoted in C. Hibbert, *Agincourt* (London, 1964), p. 107: 'Oure archiers shotte full hertyly, / And made Frensshmen faste to blede. / There arwes wente full good sped, / Oure enemyes therwith doun gon falle, / Thorough brestplate, habirion, and bassonet yede. / Slayne there were xj thousande on a rowe alle. / Wot ye right well that thus it was.'