



Ancient & Medieval:

Siege of Orléans

DATE:

Oct. 12, 1428 – May 8, 1429

LOCATION:

Orléans, North-Central France

OPPOSING FORCES

English: Approximately 5,000 soldiers, mostly English, with additional recruits from northern France. 1,500 Burgundian allies joined in the siege. Initially, Thomas Montagu, the Earl of Salisbury, was the field commander for John, Duke of Bedford (regent for young Henry VI). Upon Salisbury's death, William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, took command. His command would soon be shared with Lord John Talbot.

French: The garrison's numbers fluctuated between 6,000 and 9,000 men during the siege, including 3,000 men of the citizen militia. Jean d'Orléans, the "Bastard of Orléans," was in overall command.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

During the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) between England and France, the initiative changed hands many times. But by the early fifteenth century, it had tilted in England's favor. Internal French divisions and England's alliance with the powerful Burgundians had resulted in English control of most of the territory north of the Loire River. As the English resumed campaigning in 1428, they moved against the Armagnac/Dauphin stronghold of Orléans. Initially, the outcome looked promising for the English. Then, after months of siege warfare, a remarkable shift happened with the arrival of a young peasant girl named Joan of Arc. In just over a week, the entire conflict changed. The formerly dispirited French defenders were transformed into victorious warriors of God. Not only would the "Maid of Orléans" save the city, but the French victory would turn the tide of the entire war.

STRATEGY & MANEUVER

Actions by the English – Since William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066 and won the Battle of Hastings (*Battle Digest*, Vol. 4, Issue 1), his Norman lineage – combined with subsequent royal marriages – created substantial English territorial claims on French lands. Despite being formalized in 1259 at the Treaty of Paris, the stipulation that the English king was a vassal of the French king was doomed to fail. Nevertheless, for years, these old feudal ties continued until the tensions of competing sovereigns in 1417, when John Talbot III of England organized the invasion

of the French crown by way of his mother, Isabella (daughter of King Philip IV of France), launched his first invasion in 1339. Later, his impressive victories at Crécy (1346) and Calais (1347) gave England the upper hand. Yet, a limited treasury and the outbreak of the bubonic plague (Black Death, 1347–1351) forced a lull. When the conflict picked up again, Edward's son, later nicknamed "the Black Prince," led an invasion in 1356 that resulted in the capture of French King John II ("the Good") at Poitiers. Afterward, England exacted major land concessions for John's release under the Treaty of Brétigny. While this tilted the balance of power to the English, it wouldn't last.

France was changing. When King John II died in 1364, his son and successor, Charles V, began consolidating the power of the French monarchy, including the recapture of English feudal lands. By this point, England's response had evolved into *chevauchées*, in which soldiers moved through the countryside, burning villages and destroying crops and livestock. And because fighting pitched battles had proven costly, the French mostly avoided direct engagements.

The war changed again in 1413, when Henry V was crowned king of England. Reviving Edward III's claim to the French crown, Henry sent a large *chevauchée* in 1415, producing a dramatic victory at Agincourt (*Battle Digest*, Vol. 2, Issue 4). Emboldened by this success, Henry sought a more methodical conquest. And with the French divided between the Burgundians, who supported the weak and insane French King Charles VI, and the Armagnacs, who supported his son, the Dauphin Charles, Henry decided to settle the old feudal disputes once and for all. Even after his death in 1422, the war continued under his brother John, Duke of Bedford, who was appointed regent for the infant Henry VI.



John, Duke of Bedford

In 1428, as Bedford continued the war from Paris, success looked promising. After English reinforcements under the command of Thomas Montagu, the Earl of Salisbury,

had arrived, the two men planned to capture Orléans as the next objective. Sitting midway between their base in Paris and the Dauphin capital at Chinon, Orléans was a logical choice. Not only was the city strategic – representing a stronghold

to 1429, when John Talbot III of England organized the invasion