

Hundred years war essay sample



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The Hundred Years War was the longest war in the medieval era, which began in the first half of 14th century, and over the middle of 15th century. The war was between the two most powerful countries in Europe - England and France. It was not the first war between them; it was rather the final stage of the protracted long-standing conflict. The Hundred Years War had a huge impact in medieval Europe, instigating the deterioration of feudalism, increased usage of longbows in fights, and important changes in people's everyday life. The conflict between England and France lasted more than three centuries. The war can be divided into several stages: first - 1337-1360, the second - 1362-1399, the third - 1402-1428, the fourth - 1429-1453. It all started with the formation of the Duchy of Normandy. It happened on the historical French territories (north-west) in the 10th century.

Norman dukes conquered England and became kings of England. In the 12th century they also conquered Aquitaine, the South-Western historical region of France. The English king, Henry II, received his rich dowry with his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine - the owner of these lands. Approximately half of all French territories now fell under the sway of the English kings, who was originally from the French territory, Normandy. Sea access through the Seine and the Loire were closed now for French monarchs. Between the two countries was a continuous fight for all the territories. By the middle of the thirteenth century the English owned only Aquitaine and even there they were only vassals of the French kings. This fact increased the enmity between the countries even more.

Both England and France were looking for Flanders. Flanders was independent from the middle of the eleventh century and it had grown to be the industrial center of northern Europe and had become extremely wealthy through its cloth manufacture. However, it was acknowledged as a vassal of the French kings and the French tried to regain control of the region in order to control its wealth. England depended upon this trade for its foreign exchange. Lynn Nelson, professor of Medieval History, explains that the difficulty was that England could not grow grapes to produce the wine that many of the English now favored and had to import it.

A triangular trade arose in which English fleece was exchanged for Flemish cloth, which was then taken to southern France and exchanged for wine, which was then shipped into England and Ireland, primarily through the ports of Dublin, Bristol, and London (1). Consequently, each of the countries wanted to have it as a part of their territories; however, France was able to do this more than England. By the beginning of the 14th century England and France interest in Aquitaine and Flanders became deeper. Each country had to carry out their own tasks. Britain wanted to create a large and rich country in Europe, which would have a strong position on the continent. Even though traditionally English kings were still vassals of the French king. English King Edward III (1327-1377) was the nephew of the last king of Capetian dynasty, which was a ruling house of France from 987 to 1328.

He made plans for the invasion of France and he was looking for allies, with other neighbors of France. The immediate reason for the invasion was the announcement made by the King of France in the spring of 1337 about their confiscation of the western part of Aquitaine. The English King Edward III

immediately put forward a claim to the French throne and declared war on France. King Philip VI (1328-1350) led the French army against King Edward III. In his army fought the King of Bohemia, the Duke of Lorraine, Duke of Flanders, the Duke of Alençon, and other nobles. They brought large detachments of his vassals with them. As a result, at the beginning of the war, according to British historian, Anne Curry, the total number of soldiers reached the record figure of the Middle Ages – about 100 thousand people. The English army numbered less, but at the same time was better organized. (87) War in the Middle Ages was unlike modern warfare.

Army moved slowly, battles were not as bloody, big battles were rare and often it happened in fortified places – castles and towns. Of course, the main goal was to weaken the enemy, inflict as much damage as possible, to devastate their land, burn the crop on the vine, to burn houses of the peasants with the possibility to kill them as well. As a result, peasants could no longer pay taxes, and this damaged the trade system. The first stage was from the declaration of war in 1337 till 1360. Best-organized England army won battle of Crecy. The often forgotten Battle of Sluys of 24 June 1340 was a major turning point in the Hundred Years' War — a war that practically defined the direction that both England and France would follow for centuries. English King Edward III was interested in trading city of Bruges, Sluys, because this city was a major center of European trade.

He brought together a large force in June 1340. Edward was going to take the harbor, as suddenly he got the news that the French captured the bay and a foothold there. Edward decided to attack the French fleet. Great sea-battle ended with a terrible defeat of France. Mary Macgregor describes the <https://assignbuster.com/hundred-years-war-essay-sample/>

battle, " The sun was shining directly upon the English fleet as it approached Sluys. Edward, seeing this, ordered the sails to be lowered and the ships to be turned so that the sun would be behind them. The French watched the great ships as they changed their position, and soon they cried, ' They are turning tail, they are not men enough to fight us.' But in that they were mistaken. For the English bore down upon them, and, grappling their ships together with hooks and chains, fought on deck with their battle-axes and swords as though they were on land. " (116)

To a nation whose history is full of significant naval victories, the English triumph at Sluys is one of the first and tremendously important naval success. the English won the battle of Poitiers (1356) as well. Here are extracts describing battle of Poitiers, from the Chronicle of Jean Froissart, "[The Black Prince sent two lords to search for the French king.] These two lords took their horses and departed from the prince rode up a hill to look about them: then they perceived a flock of men of arms coming together right wearily: there was the French king afoot in great peril, for Englishmen and Gascons were his masters; they had taken him from sir Denis Morbeke perforce, and such as were most of force said, " I have taken him"; " Nay," quoth another, " I have taken him"; so they strave which should have him.

Then the French king, to eschew that peril, said: " Sirs, strive not: lead men courteously, and my son, to my cousin the prince, and strive not for my taking, for I am so great a lord to make you all rich." The king's words somewhat appeased them; howbeit ever as they went they made riot and brawled for the taking of the king. When the two foresaid lords saw and heard that noise and strife among them they came to them and said: " Sirs,

what is the matter that ye strive for?" "Sirs," said one of them, "it is for the French king, who is here taken prisoner, and there be more than ten knights and squires that challengeth the taking of him and of his son.

"Then the two lords entered into the press and caused every man to draw aback, and commanded them in the prince's name on pain of their heads to make no more noise nor to approach the king no nearer, without they were commanded. Then every man gave room to the lords, and they alighted and did their reverence to the king, and so brought him and his son in peace and rest to the prince of Wales. "

Accordingly, battle of Poitiers ended with a terrible defeat of France and the lost of John II, the French king, who after the Poitiers was in English captivity. This allowed the British to ruthlessly plunder the country. After that the people of France, the townspeople and peasants, decided to defend themselves. Chaos ruled, as many French nobles and armed force rampaged. Richard Newhall translated the Chronicles of Jean de Venetteof which said: "... all went ill with the kingdom and the State was undone. Thieves and robbers rose up everywhere in the land. The Nobles despised and hated all others and took no thought for usefulness and profit of lord and men. They subjected and despoiled the peasants and the men of the villages. In no wise did they defend their country from its enemies; rather did they trample it underfoot, robbing and pillaging the peasants' goods..." (48)

Edward III invaded France. He wanted to take advantage of the chaos that ruled in France and seize the throne. He chose the city of Reims for the coronation. However, residents of Reims had time to prepare for his arrival,

and were able to defend the city. Coronation didn't happen. French forced English King to negotiate with them. This forced Edward make peace in Brittany. England lost its vast possessions in the South-West of France because Edward had to abandon the Normandy, Touraine, Anjou and Maine; He also agreed reduce the French king, John II, for a million crowns.

The second stage of the war (1369-1396) was generally good for France. Even though French king Charles V oust the British with the help of masses, as it was said earlier, from the South-West of France (Normandy, Touraine, Anjou and Maine), England still owned some large and strategically important ports on the French coast - Bordeaux, Bayonne, Brest, Cherbourg, Calais. An armistice was signed in 1396 because of the extreme exhaustion on both sides. It did not solve any of the disputed issue of lands owning, making the continuation of the war. The third stage of the Hundred Years War is the shortest and most dramatic for France. After landing in the North of France the new British Army defeated the French at Agincourt (1415), the independent existence of the kingdom of France was threatened. After this battle English King Henry V subdued about half of France and signed the agreement in Troyes (1420), which resulted the unification of the English and French crowns under his authority.

The Treaty of Troyes dated 1420 says: " After our death [Charles VI], and from that time forward, the crown and kingdom of France, with all their rights and appurtenances, shall be vested permanently in our son [son-in-law], King Henry [of England], and his heirs. The power and authority to govern and to control the public affairs of the said kingdom shall, during our lifetime, be vested in our son, King Henry, with the advice of the nobles and

wise men who are obedient to us, and who have consideration for the advancement and honor of the said kingdom...

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(Medieval Sourcebook: Hundred Years War: Treaty of Troyes)

However, contract had not been so successful as it was expected, since Henry V suddenly died in 1422 at the age of 36 years, and Charles VI died two months later. Henry V, thus, could not accept the inheritance and be crowned the crown of France. This fact gave an excuse to Philip the Good to withdraw from the treaty of Troyes agreement and go to Charles VII. The result of the Treaty of Troyes agreement was an existence of “ Three Frances ”: Lancastrian, which included Normandy, a number of central areas of France and Guyenne; France of Bourguignon, which included Burgundy, Nivernais, Picardy; and some nearby areas, which consisted mainly of south lands of the Loire. France began a new phase of the war – the struggle for independence. Later Karl VII managed to win a number of military victories over the British and their French supporters and regain power. The British, however, continued to assert that they had rights to the French crown.

Furthermore, the masses of France even more strongly than before fate intervened in the war. It has defined its character on the final fourth stage. By the end of fourth stage of the Hundred Years War France had expelled England from their territories. For France it was a struggle to preserve the

possibility of self-development and laying the foundations of the future of the nation-state. In 1429 a simple peasant girl, Joan of Arc (ca. 1412 – 1431) led the fight for the lifting of the siege of Orleans. This victory inspired the people of France to believe in victory over the English.

Joan left her house and went to Charles VII to become the head of the army and expel the English from France. She reached Chinon, where the Charles VII was. She was the head of the army because everyone believed that this extraordinary girl is going to save their homeland. Native intellect and sharp observation helped her to find the right way in the situation and quickly learn a simple military tactics of the time. (Anne Curry, *The Hundred Years War*.) She wrote the letter to the King of England, who was laying siege to the town of Orleans. Note how she speaks of government in religious terms and how she switches back and forth between the first person “ I” and the third person “ she” when she refers to herself:

” To you, archers, noble companions in arms, and all people who are before Orleans, I say to you in God’s name, go home to your own country; if you do not do so, beware of the Maid (Joan of Arc), and of the damages you will suffer. Do not attempt to remain, for you have no rights in France from God, the King of Heaven, and the Son of the Virgin Mary. It is Charles, the rightful heir, to whom God has given France, who will shortly enter Paris in a grand company. If you do not believe the news written of God and the Maid, then in whatever place we may find you, we will soon see who has the better right, God or you.” (Joan of Arc, “ Letter to the King of England.”)

Joan with a small army enters Orleans. On the 4th of May her army won a first victory, taking the bastion of Saint-Loup. Victory followed one after another and in the night of 7th to 8th of May the British were forced to lift the siege of the city. Thus, the task that other French generals thought was impossible, Joan of Arc has decided in four days. After the victory at Orleans and the coronation of Charles VII, glory of Joan of Arc has increased extraordinarily. Charles VII and his entourage began to show Joan more confidence, but they betrayed her. During one sortie Joan was trapped and was taken prisoner. King Charles, who owed her so much, did not do anything to save Joan. Burgundians sold her to the English for 10, 000 gold francs.

The British accused her of heresy and witchcraft and executed her. She was burned by the sentence of the ecclesiastical court on 30th of May in 1431. This action didn't change the actual state of affairs. The French army was reorganized under Charles VII and won the support of the townspeople and peasants several important victories. In 1453 the English garrison surrendered in Bordeaux, which is conventionally considered, by historians, as the end of the Hundred Years' War. For more than a century the British held the French port of Calais in the north of the country. English crown lost vast territories in southwestern France, which they owned from the XII century. Madness of the English king plunged the country into anarchy and internecine wars. Due to the civil war, Britain did not have the strength and means to recover the lost territories in France. Furthermore, treasury was devastated by military expenditures.

During the war its character had been changed. It all started with the classic feudal conflict between the two pretenders for the land. Later it turned into a war with a national character between two monarchs with the involvement of various strata of society. The war had a profound influence on the development of military affairs: the increased role of infantry on the battlefield, which required less money to create large armies; new weapons like longbows were invented and favorable conditions were created for the development of firearms.

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