

## HUNDRED YEARS' WAR (1337–1453)

Stretching 116 years, the Hundred Years' War was actually a series of conflicts fought ostensibly over English claims to the French throne. After William the Conqueror, duke of Normandy, defeated the Anglo-Saxons at the 1066 Battle of Hastings, he implemented an Anglo-Norman ruling class in England. However, Norman leaders remained landholders in France and were thus answerable to the French crown. Subsequent land grabs and power struggles sparked competing claims to the throne that broke out into full-scale war in 1337. England and France fought to a stalemate until Edward III invaded France in 1346, beginning a decades-long English occupation of Calais and Ponthieu. In the wake of a French civil war, England's Henry V landed at Harfleur in 1415 and, with the help of Burgundian allies, soon controlled two-thirds of France. In 1428 the English laid siege to Orléans. The following spring, Joan of Arc met them in battle.



**CITY OF ORLÉANS**  
At the time of the 1428–29 English siege, Orléans remained loyal to the French crown. Its central position made it a critical hub for English incursions into southeast France, the only region under French control.

## SIEGE OF ORLÉANS

Under the 1420 Treaty of Troyes, the increasingly mad Charles VI gave his daughter Catherine to Henry V in marriage, thus ceding the French throne to the English king's future heirs. Accordingly, after Henry died at Meaux in 1422, his infant son, Henry VI, was declared king of England and France. However, French loyalists refused to recognize his legitimacy and continued fighting to return the throne to Charles'

heir—Catherine's brother, Charles, the disinherited Dauphin of France.

English forces pressed the issue in 1428, laying siege to the central city of Orléans. Joan of Arc, a 17-year-old peasant girl, approached the Dauphin in early 1429, insisting that God had commanded her to drive away the English occupiers, starting with the forces at Orléans. Persuaded by Joan's convictions, the Dauphin sent her to relieve the besieged city. She had to

act quickly, as English reinforcements under Sir John Fastolf were en route.

The girl general mounted direct assaults on the English strongholds at St. Loup, east of the city, and Les Tourelles, on the south bank of the Loire River, rallying French troops "in the name of God." Despite incurring heavy casualties, Joan's men persisted and drove the English from the city within 10 days of her arrival. The Maid of Orléans had prevailed.