

FRENCH FORTITUDE AT GERBEROY – 9 MAY 1435

# FITZALAN'S FOLLY

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In the early 1430s, the English were still in a powerful position in France despite several setbacks. The English crown controlled most of northern France including Normandy and Paris, as well as Aquitaine. Their losses at Orleans and Patay had been partly offset by the capture and execution of Joan of Arc in 1431, which in turn had led to a few years of relative peace as both sides reequipped.

By Guy Bowers

**H**owever, the peace did not last long. In 1434, the forces of the French king Charles VII had captured Soissons, Compiègne, and Beauvais – all north of Paris – thereby threatening to cut off the capital from resupply. Near Beauvais was the town of Gerberoy – the French had recaptured in 1432 but abandoned it again, slighting the defences. In the spring of 1435, some 1800 men under the command of La Hire and Jean Poton de Xaintrailles arrived to refortify the town. In doing so, Gerberoy would protect the recently reconquered Beauvais and be a useful outpost for raiding English Normandy.

Barely eight kilometres away in Gournay-en-Bray, the Earl of Arundel, John FitzAlan, had marched from Rouen to recapture the town of Rue, near Calais. His force consisted of approximately 3000 men, probably mixed

men-at-arms and archers. When he learnt that Gerberoy was being refortified, he decided to divert his force and assault the defences before the French had time to rebuild them. His force outnumbered the French, but he did not consider the ingenuity of the French commanders La Hire and Xaintrailles.

When the French learnt of the advance, they realized that the defences of Gerberoy were in no fit state to suffer a siege. They would have to meet the English in open battle, but on their terms. La Hire immediately set off with a force of heavy cavalry to outflank the English advance, while Xaintrailles marched out with the infantry to meet the English vanguard.

La Hire's cavalry left Gerberoy and bypassed the English vanguard. The French approached the advancing



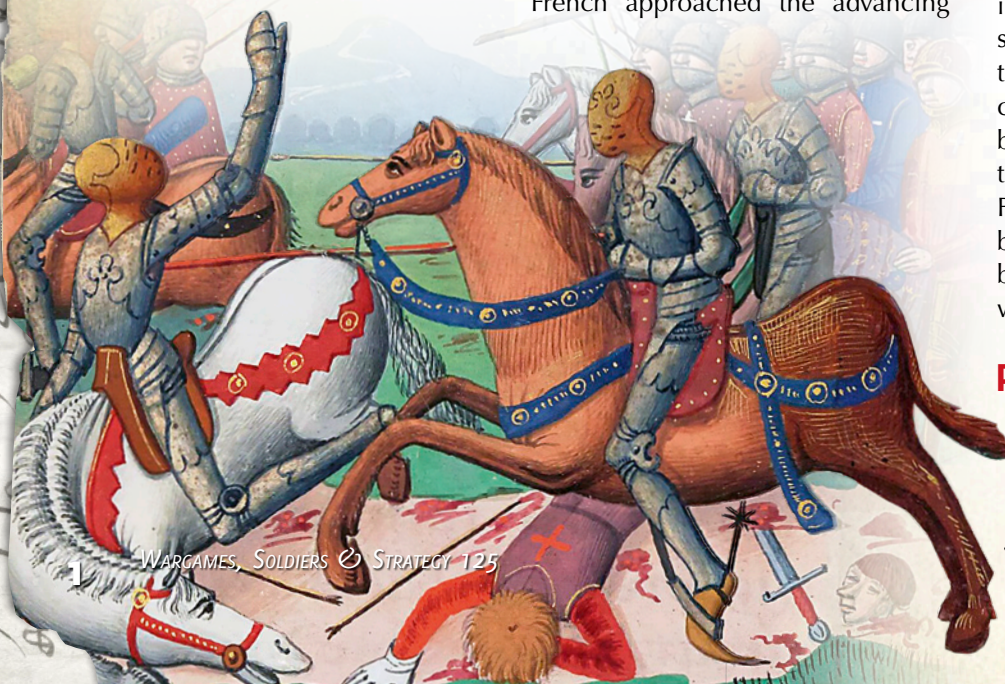
English columns near Laudencourt, just outside Gournay. Their arrival was completely undetected and they then attacked into the side of the English ranks, panicking them. As the English fled back to Gournay, the French pursued, and fighting broke out in the streets of the town.

Meanwhile, Xaintrailles met the English vanguard led by FitzAlan. The vanguard consisted of 800 men, so they were outnumbered by the French, but they proved to be a stubborn opposition. The English did not know of La Hire's attack and believed their reinforcements were imminent, so they fortified their position and held against the French attack. It took the arrival of La Hire's cavalry from Gournay to finally break the English position and force them to surrender. During the fight, FitzAlan was wounded in the foot by a hand cannon. He was captured by the French and succumbed to his wounds a month later.

## PLAYING GERBEROY

Like Patay, Gerberoy is a difficult battle to recreate, as any English commanders would use their

The Battle of Gerberoy, as depicted in an 1484 edition of *Les vigiles de la mort de Charles VII*.  
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La Hire's mounted knights are able to catch the marching English column of troops in the flank and drive them back.

foreknowledge of the battle to avoid making the same mistakes FitzAlan did. The battle divides into two scenarios: La Hire's cavalry battle and Xaintrailles' infantry battle.

The games have been designed with *Lion Rampant 2* in mind. The scenario should be adaptable to most rulesets by simply using the army lists and ratios as a guide. For example, army lists for *Swordpoint* or *Hail Caesar* could use the *Lion Rampant* lists as a start by assuming one *Rampant* unit represents one or two units in either *Swordpoint* or *Hail Caesar* and using the stats from *WS&S 125's* Verneuil scenario.

### The table and terrain

Both scenarios should be played on a 6'x4' table, with a road running from the middle of one short edge to the other. The board should have several copses and woods on either side of the road. With La Hire's scenario, the village of Laudencourt may be included. The woods should count as difficult terrain.

### Special rules

**No time to prepare:** The English do not

have time to prepare defences, so they cannot use any special rules for stakes in these scenarios.

**Dismounting:** Any mounted knights (elite cavalry) can dismount and fight on foot (as elite infantry), replacing their cavalry models with infantry models.

**The element of surprise:** In both scenarios, the French get the first activation.

### SCENARIO 1: La Hire's battle

The French cavalry have successfully outflanked the English and have surprised them in column.

#### Set up

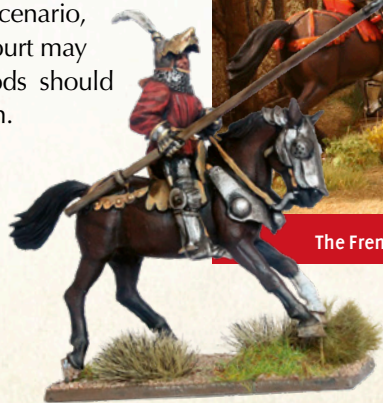
The English are set up in column marching down the road towards Gerberoy. La Hire's forces may enter by any long table edge. If forced to retreat, the English forces will head back



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The French knights follow the retreating English into the town of Gournay where street fighting ensues.





News of the French attack spreads. English archers mount up, ready to retreat back to the safety of Rouen.

towards Gournay; French forces retreat back to the table edge they entered by. A \* indicates that the leader of a retinue is with that unit.

#### French flanking force

- Motivated elite cavalry\* (La Hire)
- 2x motivated elite cavalry
- 2x heavy cavalry

*La Hire is a skilled fighter and his units may reroll one failed attack roll per turn.*

#### English main column

- 1x elite infantry\*
- 2x expert archers
- 2x heavy infantry

*The English retinue leader has no special leadership skills.*

#### Special rules

**Unprepared for the fight:** All the English units are marching in column. Any English unit must first pass a move order to ready their weapons – their Attack and Defence values are assumed to be 5+ until they do, and they cannot shoot.

#### Victory

The French win if they can drive off the English retinue, forcing them to retreat to Gournay. The English win if they can fend off the French attack.

#### SCENARIO 2:

#### Xaintrailles' battle

The English are set up in battle formation up to 24" from

their short board edge, and then the French do the same. The walls of Gerberoy can be represented at the French table edge, but this is optional. If forced to retreat, both sides will do so to their respective short board edges.

#### French infantry

- 1x elite infantry (Xaintrailles)
- 1x crossbows with pavise
- 1x handguns with pavise
- 1x expert heavy infantry (voulgiers)
- 1x heavy infantry with pavise (armour 4 from shooting)
- 2x skirmishing infantry (bidowers)

*Xaintrailles is a skilled fighter. His unit may reroll one failed attack per turn.*

#### English vanguard

- 1x elite infantry\* (John FitzAlan)
- 3x expert archers
- 1x expert heavy infantry

*FitzAlan is a skilled fighter. His unit may reroll one failed attack per turn.*



#### French reinforcements

The two battles can be played simultaneously. If La Hire wins his battle, allow any surviving French unit to arrive on the English small board edge in the following turn. Otherwise, allow the French player a unit of motivated elite cavalry to arrive on turn 12, if the game is still playing.

#### Victory

The French win if they can drive off the English retinue. The English win if they can fend off the French attack.

#### CONCLUSION

Despite winning the battle, the French were unable to exploit their victory locally, as their main efforts were focused on retaking Paris, which they did in 1436. Gerberoy was besieged in 1437 and captured by the English, but it was then recaptured by the French in 1449. As the Hundred Years' War ended and all of northern France (except for Calais) came under the control of Charles VII, the town of Gerberoy lost its strategic importance. **WS&S**



Believing reinforcements are coming, FitzAlan's archers prepare a final volley as the French infantry close.