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Hi Michael

This lays out the basic story as I see it - the conflict seen from the English side through the eyes of Henry Vth and from the French side through the eyes of a fictional knight, Longueville.

Just bare bones here but we can discuss character arcs, them and key relationships. I'm half way through Wolf hall and greatly enjoying it, would be great to give this story the same level of attention to period and character.

Will be in LA week of the 1st Nov so look forward to meeting up if you're available.

Talk soon,

John

AGINCOURT

Screen Story by John Collee
October 2010

1. The Wound

The Battle of Shrewsbury. 1403

The King (Henry IV) wins a bloody battle against insurgents, but at the moment of victory he learns that his beloved eldest son Henry Vth (age 16) has been struck in the face with an arrow.

He finds his son lying unconscious in the surgeons tent, the arrow deeply imbedded in his face. It's a terrible injury which the prince is not expected to survive.

2. The Miracle Cure

The Court Physician John Broadmore crafts a special tool with which to extract the arrowhead, then cleans the wound with alcohol and uses honey as an antiseptic.

Henry recovers from 3 days of agony and feverish delirium to find his mother and two priests keeping watch by his bedside. He thanks the surgeon for saving his life. Broadmore says that God saved his life. It's a sign that Henry is destined for some higher purpose.

This statement makes a huge impression on the young prince. The deep scar on his face remains a lifelong reminder that he has been touched by God.

3. Education of a Prince

As a teenager, Henry V studies at Queens college Oxford. Henry's father usurped the throne and there are many who question the legitimacy of his claim to the monarchy.

Henry, a notorious brawler, is prepared to settle the argument in combat. His priestly tutors constantly reinforce the notion that he is the rightful heir not just to Britain, but also to large areas of France

4. Death of the King.

Three years later we find Henry apparently fighting for his life. It's a kind of tournament called a melee in which half a dozen armoured knights go at each other with real weapons.

Its incredibly arduous and risky but prince Henry now aged 21 is a master at this kind of fighting – fit, quick, adept and possessed of an almost insane self confidence, which stems from the belief that God is preserving him for something.

The melee is interrupted by a messenger.

Henry is angry that the fight has been interrupted. He's a man for whom violent action is a kind of therapy.

The messenger explains that his father, The King, has died

5. The Coronation

The coronation of Henry V takes place at Westminster Abbey.

Its mid-April but there's a strange, useasonal snow-storm which everyone takes as a sign. Thick snow carpeting the cobbles and the rows of shivering citizens.

Among the assembled knights and courtiers many think the new king will not live up to expectations. His detractors say he's too young, too violent, insufficiently statesmanlike.

They're all wrong.

6. The New Regime

Henry begins his reign with a number of sweeping and wise reforms. Old enemies are pardoned, corrupt friends are banished, English rather than French or latin, is adopted as the language of official correspondence, splinter groups and plots are nipped in the bud.

The French ownership of "English" lands in Normandy and elsewhere has long been a cause of strife. Henry proposes to end the "100 years war" by marrying Catherine de Valois - the daughter of the French king.

7. The Mad King of France

Cut to France. The French king, Charles VIth, is aged 37 and suffering from Schizophrenia.

The notorious “Bal des Ardents” gives some idea of the decadent mayhem in his court

....at the behest of the king, a grand party was organized to celebrate the wedding of one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting. The King and four other lords, dressed up as wild men and danced about chained to one another. They were "in costumes of linen cloth sewn onto their bodies and soaked in resinous wax or pitch to hold a covering of frazzled hemp, so that they appeared shaggy & hairy from head to foot".[6] The King's brother approached with a lighted torch in order to discover the identity of the masqueraders, and he accidentally set one of them on fire. The Duchess of Berry, to save a dancer who had come near her, threw the train of her gown over him, and it was soon revealed to her that the life she had saved was the king's. Several Knights who tried to put out the flames were severely burned on their hands. The four lords dressed as wild men all perished:

8. The French Princess and the perfect Knight

Princess Catherine is 16 years old and already a beauty. She knows of Henry Vth of England by reputation but has never met him.

Catherine's favourite cousin Longueville is a French knight in the mould of Sir Lancelot. An exemplar of the chivalric ideal who finds himself in the service of a madman. It's an indication of his character that he nevertheless remains true to his sworn duty to protect the king and his daughter.

The mad king accepts the English marriage proposal on Catherine's behalf. She's outraged and tearful.

At the same time the king refuses to part with the territory Henry demands. Instead, resentful of Longueville's close relationship with Catherine he sends Longueville to deliver a “gift”, as a measure of his esteem for the English monarch.

9. Longueville travels to meet the enemy

Longueville lands in England with a treasure chest and proceeds to the enemy court. When they open the impressive lead-lined chest it contains tennis balls

Henry, enraged, says he will take back English lands by force.

Longueville knows the English king is serious. These two have jostled against each other in the past and have enormous mutual respect for each other as warriors. Longueville returns home and tells Charles that the English are preparing for war.

Charles chooses not to believe the English threats. He says its a lot of macho posturing over an innocent joke. He says the English wouldn't dare invade France, and if they did the French knights would defeat them.

Longueville respectfully reminds his monarch that he cannot rely on the support of his own nobles. There's a civil war brewing between the Dukes of Orleans (faithful to the king) and Burgundy (who thinks Charles is unfit to rule and should be overthrown).

Charles doesn't want to hear this. Unpleasant news throws him into a state of violent denial, fleeing through the echoing corridors of the palace, screaming. At times he believes he is made of glass and will break if touched

10. The English Preparations for War

True to his word, Henry throws the entire English nation into preparation for war. Messengers are sent to every knight and lord owing allegiance to the king, commanding a certain number of men at arms and bowmen. Hundreds of ships are requisitioned. Donations and subscriptions are raised from churches and merchants.

For years the English have been waiting for a king to lead them decisively against France. Now the whole nation is behind their popular new king - Henry. Through the harsh winter and spring foreign mercenaries (condottieri) and English archers enlist in droves. Arrows and weaponry are manufactured and stockpiled

11. French Intelligence

In France Longueville and others are desperately gathering intelligence. They know a huge force is being assembled over the channel. They can guess the timing of the attack. Summer is the traditional campaigning season.

What the French don't know is exactly where the English force will land. Longueville has people keeping watch at Bourgoigne Dieppe or Harfleur. When the English fleet set sail he guesses Dieppe and rides there to reinforce the garrison.

The English land at Harfleur

12. Skirmish.

Approaching Harfleur, Longueville and his followers accidentally encounter Henry's advance guard of veteran fighter Sir John Corwallis and others. After a brief skirmish Longueville and his men break through the English cordon, rescue a French family whom the English have taken hostage and enter the city of Harfleur.

13. The Siege begins.

As Longueville and his men help bolster the city's defences, Henry begins the siege.

His Footsoldiers and bowmen surround the city. Siege engines and cannon are dragged into position. There is a formal request for surrender which Longueville and the garrison commander d'Estouteville formally refuse.

Longueville is lodging with the family who his men rescued from outside the city walls. There's a deep unspoken attraction between Longueville and the eldest daughter Janine who is delegated to take him on a tour of town's defences.

Harfleur is surrounded by a moat with an earth filled wooden towers called "barbicans" defending the town's main entrances.

A river flows through the town via a tunnel under the walls. It's secured by chains across the opening and sharpened stakes in the river bed

Longueville is satisfied the town can withstand a few weeks fighting – ample time for reinforcements to arrive – he reassures Janine that the French king's army will be here in a fortnight to break the siege

14. The Bombardment.

Henry knows he has to take the town quickly. Once established in a defensible position he can import more supplies from England and push up the Seine to Paris. But first, it is vital to get inside the walls of Harfleur

As Henry's cannon and siege engines pound the town walls, Welsh miners start digging a tunnel, six feet wide and high enough for a man to stand upright – to undermine a part of the French fortifications.

Sheltering behind the town's high walls, Longueville sees the digging and commands a counter tunnel to be dug in the opposite direction in order to intercept the English miners.

15. The siege drags on

In the summer heat, both sides swelter in their armour. The English stage raids against breaks in the walls and are replied by the French with crossbow fire, lumps of masonry and boiling oil

Fever and dysentery spreads through the English camp

Inside the town Longueville sends desperate messages to the king, requesting a relief force. Supplies are running low and the citizens are desperate.

At the French court in Paris, Charles Vth seems unable to defend his own country. His daughter Catherine begs him to relieve Harfleur but somehow delay piles on

delay. The truth is that the Burgundians want to reveal the king's weakness. If Harfleur falls the king's weakness will be obvious to all and his eventual overthrow will be easier. If the English venture inland they will be squashed. An army who is struggling to invest Harfleur will never succeed in taking Paris

Outside Harfleur, Henry prays for victory and keeps pressuring. Cannon balls destroy the Church steeple raining huge blocks of masonry into the cobbled streets.

The French remain resolute in defence. Under cover of darkness the citizens rebuild any walls damaged by the day's bombardment.

At times Longueville and his knights ride out to counter-attack, burning the English siege engines, then racing back inside the city walls

16. The fight in the tunnel

Three weeks into the siege, the French tunnellers report that they are close to the English tunnel.

Longueville, who suffers from claustrophobia, goes to inspect the earthworks and as he does so.....

The floor of the French tunnel gives way, breaking through the ceiling of the English tunnel.

A desperate fight in the lamplit tunnel. A number of men are buried alive but the English tunnellers are stopped.

Longueville, wounded, half suffocated, is dragged out of the collapsed tunnel.

He's carried back to his lodgings where Janine nurses him back to health

17. The storming of the Barbican

Infuriated by the failure of the tunnel Henry orders an all out attack on the northern barbican.

Flaming arrows set the huge timbers alight and Henry's men-at-arms led by Sir John Cornwallis, climb through the flaming timbers to take the tower.

18. Capitulation of Harfleur

With the Outer defences taken and Henry's bowmen now firing arrows directly into the town, the fall of Harfleur is only a matter of time

Henry demands the towns surrender, threatening that, should they refuse, he will allow his men to rape and pillage at will.

Garrison commander D'Estouteville wants to fight to the last but the town elders, including Janine's father, over-rule him – their families have suffered enough.

19. Escape

Under the terms of the capitulation the French lay down their arms. The town elders, dressed in linen shifts with nooses round their necks, throw themselves on Henry's mercy.

It has been announced that any fighting men trying to flee the town will be drawn and quartered. Janine, meanwhile, smuggles Longueville out through the water-gate at the South side of the town. He promises to find her once the English invaders have been defeated, but Janine disappears back inside the ruined town. Longueville commandeers a horse and rides back to the French court.

20. Henry Takes Stock.

In Paris Longueville goes before the king's council to tell of the fall of Harfleur and to try to understand why no relief was sent.

In Harfleur, now under English occupation, summer is coming to an end. Henry's invading force of 12,000 has been reduced to 9,000 men through injury and disease. Many are still ill from dysentery. He doesn't have the ships to return direct to England and doesn't have the strength of numbers to push on into France.

He decides instead to march the army up the coast to British-held Calais.

21. Longueville reports to the king.

Learning from Princess Catherine that the Burgundians have been dragging their heels – hence the lack of relief at Harfleur – Longueville rides to the court of the Duke of Burgundy and persuades him that it is in the interests of France as a whole to put aside old differences and join the king's forces.

Time is short. If Henry is to be stopped the best place to face him is at the ford of Blanche-Taque where an army can easily cross the Somme.

As the Burgundians and the Orleanists finally thrash out a truce, Longueville takes a small force and rides for the river Somme.

22. The blockade at the Somme

He's anticipated Henry's moves exactly.

Leaving the heavy guns and most of the carts behind, Henry has marched his army northwards, heading for the ford at Blanche-taque

When they reach the ford it has been blockaded. Longueville and his men have placed sharpened stakes in the river bed, making the force impassable.

In anger Henry orders his archers to unleash a volley across the river at the French. At a range of 300 yards the English longbowmen are still deadly. Longueville knows he'll have to deal with these guys in a pitched battle and starts putting together a force of fast, armoured cavalry who will be able to ride down the English bowmen and scatter them before they are able to do serious damage.

23. Shadowing the English

Longueville's force can stop Henry crossing the river, but its not big enough to defeat him.

The best he can do is delay, shadowing Henry's forces down the opposite bank of the Somme and blockading each bridge or ford before the English army reaches it.

In this way he hopes to slow down Henry and drive him inland, hoping that the king's forces (the Orleanists) plus the Burgundians will come together to form an army large enough to defeat Henry in pitched battle.

24. The raid on the column

Henry's forced march continues deeper and deeper into enemy territory. A couple of French towns are persuaded to offer him food but the army are hungry and the weather foul.

Longueville and his knights harry the rear of Henry's column, wreaking havoc among the close-packed archers.

Henry instructs his archers to sharpen heavy stakes and carry them with them to plant in the ground as defence against a cavalry charge.

Henry rallies his commanders and proposes a rapid night march across a 30 mile long loop in the river, aiming to reach the bridge at Bethancourt before the French know whats happening.

They march in full armour expecting an attack at any time but their tactic works and the English secure the bridge..

Next morning, In torrential rain, Henry gets his forces across the Somme, surprised to encounter zero resistance from the French.

The reason is that Longueville has achieved his objective. The Burgundians and the Orleanists have finally joined forces. A United French army has formed in numbers are greater than even Longueville dreamed possible

25. Henry faces defeat.

In torrential rain the exhausted English cross the tracks of a huge body of men and horses, the French army.

Near the Village of Agincourt Henry's army crest a rise and see, camped across their path, a vast multitude of – horsemen, crossbowmen and men-at-arms, outnumbering the English Five to one

The English troops are already on their knees. They have marched 260 miles in two and a half weeks, subsisting on hazelnuts and whatever farm produce they can steal or scavenge.

Henry sends a messenger to the French. With typical chutxpah he says they are blocking his route. If they move aside, or surrender he will grant them their lives. If they stay in their current position he will be obliged to fight them.

The french – warm, well-fed and confidemnt - send back their response – they'd prefer to fight.

ACT 3

26. Henry rallies his troops

Henry addresses his disheartened troops, all of whom expect to die now

This is a version of the St Crispins day speech, in which Henry tells the men that he will be fighting with them in the very centre of the front line and that he fully expects to win the battle.

Their small numbers are not a disadvantage, because the smaller the number of troops on their side, the greater the individual glory

*And gentlemen in England now-a-bed
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.*

27. Dissention in the French ranks

Meanwhile Longueville is trying to get his fellow knights to agree on a plan of battle.

Broadly, it is agreed there will be a cavalry charge to take out the English bowmen followed by a series of volleys from the French crossbowmen and then a charge by men at arms on foot in successive waves, to break the English line.

The problem is that in the absence of the king, the huge French force has no overall leader. The chivalric code emphasizes personal courage rather than nationalism. As overall victory seems certain the French knights are primarily interested in personal glory. Everyone wants to be in the front line of attack, no-one will agree to be in the wings or the rearguard.

And because of the general mistrust between Orleanists and Burgundians, No one will agree to cede control of their cavalry or their crossbowmen to an overall commander

Longueville sleeps uneasily. The French knights carouse and drink, and bitch about each other.

Meanwhile in the English camp.....

28. The night before battle.

In the cold rain, Henry the soldier's soldier, the democrat, walks from campfire to flickering campfire talking to his men-at arms, his longbowmen, heralds and pages, cooks and servants.

Before dawn, he and knights begin the laborious process of kitting up in armour

Everyone, the king included, receives mass and begs forgiveness for past sins. Despite the king's confidence, most English fighters do not expect to survive.

29. The stand-off.

A cold dawn reveals the assembled army – the thin line of English, positioned between two areas of forest, archers on the flanks, dismounted knights and men at arms in the centre, the king dead centre on a stocky white charger.

Facing them, across a muddy ploughed field the vast host of French soldiers with their banners and chargers and shining armour.

A few hours pass. Neither side makes its move.

In the French rank, Longueville is impatient for action. Other knights tell him: the side who moves is always at a disadvantage. They need to get to Calais, so let them come to us.

As mid-day approaches Henry orders his men to advance. The archers have to pull up their sharpened stakes and trudge three hundred yards across the boggy ground. This is the perfect moment for a French attack but to Longueville's frustration no-one will sound the charge. Even if they did. There's no single commander whom all the French troops will obey

The English advance to within a bowshot of the French troops and replant their stakes. Henry orders his archers to fire a volley.

The hail of arrows has the desired effect and the enraged French finally mount a cavalry charge

30. The cavalry charge

As armoured French cavalry thunder towards the English.

English longbowmen stand firm, protected only by their sharpened stakes.

At a hundred yards range they fire directly into the French advance – four thousand bowmen firing at a rate of six arrows per minutes.

The force of the massive long-bows is extraordinary – At this range the arrows can kill a horse and cut through chain mail. The French who make it through this blizzard of death are impaled on the stakes, or, falling from their horses are clubbed to death by archers.

Wounded panicked horses charge back through the French infantry, decimating their ranks

31. The infantry charge

Now the French footsoldiers come forwards – armoured knights and men-at arms.

English archers cut them down from the flanks, but soon run out of arrows and run to reinforce the centre of the English line.

We're with Longueville – labouring across the sucking mud in heavy armour, his field of vision obscured by his visor, stepping over fallen men and horses

When a fellow knight raises his visor for air he is shot in the face.

The French make it to the English line and lay into the enemy with maces, swords and axes.

The English recoil then stand firm, clubbing down the heavily armoured French as they stagger towards them, beating in their helmets and drowning them in the mud.

The French are fighting for glory, but the English are fighting for survival.

32. Hand to hand.

Through his visor Longueville can see the English king, fighting on foot but protected by his personal body-guard of knights on every side.

Doggedly Longueville hacks his way along the line to reach the English king. The French battle plan has been a disaster but they still have the advantage of numbers. If he can reach the English king and kill him, French honour will be restored, Harfleur will be avenged.

A cry goes up in the English ranks. Frenchmen are attacking the baggage train to the rear.

Henry, fighting desperately to hold the centre of the line shouts back to his men to stop taking prisoners, and kill the ones they have.

Now, no quarter is given. Fallen knights, appealing for mercy are killed where they lie.

Still Longueville works his way along the line. His eyes fixed on Henry's crown as he hacks and parried, through the men at arms, then the Royal bodyguard.

He gets in a blow at Henry's helmet, knocks off a part of his crown then is felled to the ground by an axe-blow.

Falling to his knees, Longueville surrenders himself to the English king.

Henry looks down, recognizes his old adversary, raises offers a hand to lift Longueville to his feet. Just as.....

An English knight kills Longueville with his lance.

33. The Victor.

Henry walks the battlefield.

Already the dead are being stripped of their armour.

He knows the English have won a great victory, that his claim to the throne is secure and the French must now agree to his terms for peace.

Already his archbishops are claiming it a great victory for God. But Henry knows it was also a victory for human ingenuity.

His tactics with massed English bowmen have changed the face of battle and gunnery will change it further.

The age of Chivalry is dead

34. The Proposal.

Five years later, Henry strikes an alliance with the Burgundians and is formally recognized as heir to the French throne.

He once more asks for Catherine's hand in marriage.

It's a political union but, when he finally meets her, Henry falls immediately and madly in love.

The film starts with a battle. It ends with a marriage, attended by all the nobility of Europe.

In post-script we learn that Henry and Catherine have a son Henry VIth of England and of France, but Henry Vth dies two years later which his son is still too young to ascend to the French throne, and France is returned to the French.

The End

Some useful Refs:

Juliet Barker – Agincourt

Bernard Cornwell - Azincourt

R.C. Famiglietti - Royal Intrigue - Crisis at the Court of Charles VIth.

Peter Earle – the Life and Times of Henry 5th

Barbara Tuchman – “A distant Mirror – the Calamitous 14th Century.”

Christopher Hibbert – “Agincourt”

John Keegan – The Face of battle

