

## The Battle of Brossinière 1423

Translated and summarized by Vanessa Williamson

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Towards the end of the summer of 1423, Lord William Pole, brother of the Earl of Suffolk, prepared his military expedition, which every year terrorized and destroyed the French countryside. He trained English captains and garrisons of the towns and castles of Lower Normandy. About two thousand men and 800 hundred archers, went into Maine and plundered. It is necessary to oppose John de la Pole raid of 2,000 soldiers and 800 archers of attach on Segré and the properties of Yolande of Aragon, the countess of Anjou and mother-in-law of King Charles VII . "*Yolande then mobilizes her entire female network, she wants to strike a blow to make the English pay for their looting and Azincourt*". In Angers hearing of their approach on the return journey, Queen Yolande hurried to Mayenne to Ambrose de Loré at Chateau Sainte-Suzanne. She informed him the English were preparing to return to Normandy with a huge booty, including twelve hundred oxen & cows plundered from Anjou. Ambrose de Loré had no doubt this was a good military opportunity. He contacted Count of Aumale, Jean de Harcourt in Tours. The Count of Aumale was already gathering a large company for a summer counterattack in Normandy. Calling his men-at-arms, he departed for Laval. A mighty assembly of 12 Lords of Anjou joined him, along with Anjou's most courageous captains. From Mayenne Jean de la Haye, Baron de Coulonges, valiant knight, arrives in Laval "*with a beautiful company*". Through the Count of Aumale, Queen Yolande sent a messenger to Anne of Laval at Vitré, to send as many people as they can, with one of the sons of the sire of Laval, to fight the English. André de Laval, second son of Madame Anne & Guy de Laval, that his grandmother entrusts their heroic sword to, he was just sixteen years old. This is the first battle for André de Laval, he goes on to become Marshal of France and an outstanding Military leader of his day.

The Count of Aumale knew the English were travelling toward Normandy, leaving Segre and crossing the Craonnais River. To cut them off Count of Aumale , with all his troops, left Laval September 25, for Bourgneuf-la-Forêt. He was joined by André de Laval, and his common people who did great service as foot soldiers and archers. Each parish provided a number, those who pulled the bow came with the bow, or crossbow, the kit filled with scestes (*arrows*) and the coustille (*long knife or short sword*) on the belt. The others were armed with lead or lead malls, vouges, axes, etc. They covered their heads with iron capeline (*archer skull cap*), and body with a Vouge; a kind of thick and sharp spike on one side. Arm of a jaque (*Jack*) or gambeson lined with chain of mesh (*chainmail*) and they carried Pavises; long baskets of light wood covered with skins, used to hide behind when they shot their arrows and tiles.

The Count of Aumale sent from Laval spies to find the English, to watch them from afar, and give hour by hour, news. On Saturday evening, he arrived at **Bourgneuf**, learning the English had arrived beyond the Gravelle, without making the places well defended and most importantly entangled by the immense booty and herd of oxen. The English were lodged for

the night, three leagues from the **Bourgneuf**, and headed the next day were headed towards the heaths of the **Brossinière**. A few distinguished knights and squires meet in council under the Count of Aumale. After various opinions are considered the battle plan is made. The next morning at sun rise the Count of Aumale with the whole army will go to Brossinière. All knights will set foot on the ground and wait in ambush for the enemy. Trémigon, on horseback, with a hundred and fifty spears, will go to the front of the English and snare with them, without taking action, trying to lure them towards the hidden French army.

The next day Sunday, the small French army battled on the moors of the Brossinière, not far from a village that still exists and bears the same name. These moors, now cultivated, covered a vast expanse of land; dotted with heather and thickets, in the middle of which meanders the road coming from the Gravelle and heading north. To the west are the first hills of Brittany covered with wood. To the south the terrain straightens and forms curve in the shallow valley. On sunrise autumn fog covered the countryside, the French cold & impatient waited for the enemy who do not appear. One hour, two hours goes by. Finally, Ambrose, de Loré, ahead with his cavalry, see the English spies sent by the Count of Aumale. At a gallop along with knights Trémigon, Coulonges and his hundred and fifty riders, heading to skirmish the English, successfully forcing them off their horse's half a league (1.4klm) from the village of La Brossinière. Pressing & harassing with the fog, preventing the English scouts from seeing Count of Aumale & forces, the English advance without suspecting the ambush.

English Lord W. Pole realizes he is going to be dealing with a strong party, all his people-in-arms now (dismounted) on the ground. Behind each other they walk tightly, the heavy carts carrying the luggage and rich booty taken from Segre. In the center the horses are protected and held by their squires, along with the prisoners and hostages, on the wings are placed the archers. Advancing, in rows, slowly, pessimistically, slanting the sharp iron paulx (iron shod stake) obliquely into the ground like the Roman soldiers, carrying with them those of the last row, removing the stakes placed by those of the first, moving bristling with spikes and iron. The army is delayed defending the booty convoy and oxen trailing behind them for over 4 kilometers. The animals becoming irritated and panicked by the spears of de Loré's horsemen and arrows of the archers. Local tradition adds the common people walked heavy and were impenetrable, with the riders withdrawing before it, and tiring from the harsh intensity of skirmish. Suddenly, the French reveal the army of the Count of Aumale. English and French are face to face, at the distance of a stroke of arc (archer range).

The sun began to dissolve the curtain of fog lying on the moor. The scene is described of fluttering banners, steels of the armor, golds and bright colours of armored coats, pennants and shredded lambrequins (helm mantles) floating in the crests of helmets. The minstrels began singing the old popular tunes, the lords, like wild animals, made their battle cries. De Loré, de Coulonges, de Trémigon, straddling the two battles, they come to clash against the stakes securely tied in the ground and against the cold tenacity of Lord William Pole and his knights. The horses are crammed, overturning with their riders. De Coulonges had brought with him many beehives, releasing the bees, the oxen are stung and tormented becoming furious throwing confusion in the ranks of the English.

De Loré quickly reformed their attack; the squires saddle their disarmed lords; the spurs sink into the flanks of the horses; they appear to be leaving! Instead of attacking head-

on, making a detour, turn the battle, attacking a weakly defended point by the stakes and carts. Knights fearless, spears forward, leaning over the necks of their mounts, they enter like a storm, breaking the English line putting the English into disorder. D'Aumale with his footmen, attack the English battle head-on and everywhere men are engaged in hand to hand fighting. The rattling of iron mallets bristling with spikes, of plumbs, English axes striking over and over on the basins and armor, leading so loud noise that it was said "*all the blacksmiths of Lower Maine were besoging (hammering) at once on their anvils*". The common people do not spare themselves; in the midst of the bloody push; they finish off the English with upturned arms, powerless to rise under their heavy armor; their blows directed into the defects of the armor, sink in and come out with long jets of blood. The old sword of Du Guesclin worked wonders in the young hands of André de Lohéac. The broken English no longer have a order, they are cornered and defeated, some historians attribute to Coulonges, alone, the merit of the decisive charge and the gain of the battle. The fight was not long, but it was bloody.

Thirteen to fourteen hundred Englishmen lay dead on the battlefield. The next day, the lady of Laval instructed the herald of Alençon to count the dead and bury them. They were buried on the land where the battle had been fought. Others perished in the rout, on the moor, in the low paths, in the middle of the fields, killed, knocked out. Or after the battle by the people of arms who went back on horseback in pursuit of them, and also by the common people, having a desire for revenge gave no quarter and had no pity of the English. The result of the victory was unexpected. The English army was destroyed, with only hundred and twenty survivors, the rest dead or taken prisoner, among them Lord William Pole, Thomas Aubourg, Thomas Cliffeon, and thirty nobles of England. The huge booty, the whole convoy of cows and oxen were recovered. The French had many wounded, but few dead: a single knight, Jehan Lerou.