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## Anglo-French War, 1202-1204

**Date:** 1202–1204

**From:** *Encyclopedia of Wars*, vol. 1.

PRINCIPAL COMBATANTS: England vs. France

PRINCIPAL THEATER(S): Normandy

DECLARATION: No formal declaration

MAJOR ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES: England's possession of Normandy

OUTCOME: England lost its French possessions.

APPROXIMATE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF MEN UNDER ARMS: Unknown

CASUALTIES: Unknown

TREATIES: No formal treaties

Possession of the territory of Normandy was the pretext for almost continuous warfare between France and England in the Middle Ages. Each new monarch inherited the animosity initiated by William the Conqueror (1035–87) in 1066, and with each succession the royal families became increasingly more complex and intertwined. The Anglo-French conflict that began in 1202 perpetuated the cyclic behavior of the two nations and also marked the shift from English to French rule over the disputed region.

The death of the English king Richard the Lionheart (b. 1157) in 1199 ended a six-year war with France's Philip II (1165–1223). The following year the Peace of Le Goulet (May 22) was signed between Richard's successor, John I ("Lackland") (1167–1216), and Philip II. John, immediately challenged by his cousin (or nephew) Arthur of Brittany for the throne, made several key concessions to Philip in order to solidify his ascension. The concessions coupled with John's own blunders, which included renouncing his marriage to Isabella of Gloucester (?–1217) and a new marriage to the fiancée of a French nobleman from Poitou, quickly established him as one of the more unpopular monarchs in English history. John's refusal to answer to Philip II—technically, his feudal overlord—for his matrimonial misconduct provided the French king with a reason to renew hostilities. Philip II declared all English holdings in France void. A rebellion in Poitou followed, and in 1202 a full-scale war erupted between the two monarchs.

During the first months of the war, King John captured his rival, Arthur, and 200 of his conspirators at Poitiers in an

impressive raid that covered 80 miles and lasted 48 hours. Most historians believe John then murdered his cousin in a drunken rage. However, John failed to exploit his advances in Poitiers, thereby allowing Philip II to gain the offensive in the surrounding Angevin territory. Enjoining the sympathy of the local anti-English populace, Philip II felt confident enough to lay siege on an English military fortress built by Richard I of England called Château Gaillard.

Located on the banks of the Seine at Les Andelys, Château Gaillard was key to defending English holdings in Normandy. In September 1203 Philip II's knights surrounded the fort, and by March of the following year this last major English bastion fell. The door lay open for Philip II to invade the Norman city of Rouen.

On June 24, 1204, Philip II's knights executed a surgical strike that captured the city. Once Rouen had capitulated, Philip drove the English out of the whole region north of the Loire River. Philip II conquered the English fiefs of Anjou, Brittany, Maine, Normandy, and Touraine. Although John maintained Gascony and some regions south of the Loire, the overall result of the Anglo-French War from 1202 to 1204 was England's loss of its long-cherished Angevin territory.

The war had been relatively brief, but it was rife with profound consequences for military history. Philip II established for the first time in history a semipermanent royal army through a combination of mercenaries and indentured servants. Philip's use of such an army in his siege of Château Gaillard demonstrated how a wealthy monarch could overcome the drawbacks of the purely mercenary forces typical of the Middle Ages, including the expense involved and the individual soldier's lack of devotion to a cause. In broader historical terms the war created an all-but-permanent rift between France and England that would endure some 500 years.



#### Further Information

Frank Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England, 1042–1216* (London: Longman, 1972); John Le Patourel, *The Norman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); W. J. Warren, *King John* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961).



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