The battles of Ferrybridge and Dintingdale 27-28 March 1461

Introduction

The battles of Ferrybridge and Dintingdale have traditionally been treated by historians as simply a prologue to the main event at Towton. Little has been written about the sequence of events at Ferrybridge & Dintingdale and their military and political importance; the various contemporary chronicles (e.g. those of the Pastons, Jean de Waurin, Croyland Abbey, and Edward Hall), while giving a broad outline, are tantalisingly vague about the detail of what happened on those cold days in late March 1461, as indeed they were about the Towton conflict. Modern writers, such as Phillip Haigh, Andrew Boardman and John Sadler to name but a few, mostly look briefly at the actions of Ferrybridge and Dintingdale before concentrating on the decisive events at Towton. Not all agree however; Tim Sutherland, in his "Killing Time" (please refer to this in the Research tab of our website) moves away from the view of Ferrybridge, Dintingdale and Towton as primarily infantry engagements fought over 48 hours, proposing that all 3 occurred within 24 hours as cavalry actions. This paper takes the view that the actions at Ferrybridge, Dintingdale and Towton took place over at least 3 days (4 if one counts the 26th as a precursor to Ferrybridge), that it was a joint infantry/cavalry action, and covered a much wider area than the narrow strip of terrain along the Great North road between Ferrybridge and Towton. It is based on a re-examination of the facts as they are outlined in various sources, and the identification of the gaps in these. The events held within these gaps are then filled by reference to past and current military logic and procedures and inherent military probability, and is based on the authors own military experience as an infantry NCO, with the advice on officer-level staff work being provided by Captain Andrew Powell of the Light Infantry.

This paper has then 3 principal aims:

- To reconstruct the battle of Ferrybridge – its tactics and detailed sequence of events - from its opening moves to the Lancastrian withdrawal, by reference to military logic and "Inherent Military Probability"
- To reconstruct the action at Dintingdale
- To draw conclusions, both military & political

In doing so it will consist of 5 main sections:

- Section 1 – Background
- Section 2 – Opening moves
- Section 3 – The battle of Ferrybridge
- Section 4 – Aftermath
- Section 5 – Importance of the battle & conclusions

Background

The Wars of the Roses, as we call them now, were a number of brawling engagements, fought with increasing savagery, ostensibly between the Houses of York and Lancaster and their followers. Political ambition quickly merged with desire for revenge, a red mist which led to death and social, political and commercial disruption on a large scale. The irony lies not so much in the victories chalked up by York & Lancaster, but that in the end, with the 2 main protagonists having exhausted their resources and supply of claimants, a relatively unknown outsider – Henry Tudor – stepped in to take advantage of this and took the throne from Richard III at Bosworth in 1485.

Opening moves

Opening moves - revenge, ambition and survival

In order to understand the three battles of Ferrybridge, Dintingdale and Towton, it is necessary to look back to previous battles of the Wars of the Roses in order to trace the development of the three main motives – revenge, ambition and survival, that so characterised these actions.

The 1st **battle of St Albans** was the first major military encounter of the Wars of the Roses, taking place some 22 miles north of London on 22 May 1455; the result was a Yorkist victory, with the forces of Richard Duke of York & Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick defeating the Lancastrian forces under Edmund, Duke of Somerset. It had three consequences which set the scene for later conflicts:

- Henry VI was captured and effectively deposed, removing him from the seat of authority
- Richard of York took power, becoming Constable of England
- Three of the main Lancastrian nobles present at the battle were killed: Thomas, 8th Lord Clifford, Edmund, Duke of Somerset, and Henry Percy, 2nd earl of Northumberland. Their sons took their places both in terms of the succession and a leadership role within the Lancastrian cause; they also developed a deep and abiding hatred of the Yorkist party, swearing revenge for the deaths of their fathers.

The next military event of importance took place at Wakefield on 30 December 1460. Richard, Duke of York had brought an army with him to Sandal Castle, probably in order to force the issue with Lancastrian troops holding Pontefract castle, 12 miles away. Short on supplies and confronted by his enemy he led a sally out of the castle, only to be quickly surrounded and destroyed. Both Richard and his younger son Edmund, Earl of Rutland, were killed; Richard in the press of his enemies, and Edmund by John, 9th Lord Clifford on Chantry Bridge. Their severed heads were spiked on Micklegate bar, York, Richards with a paper crown to mock his aspirations to the throne. The consequences of this battle were:

- Richards claim to the throne passed to his eldest son, Edward, Earl of March, as per the Act of Accord; a transfer of leadership to a potentially more able leader.
- Edward swore revenge for the killings and mutilation of his father and younger brother

The battle of Mortimer's Cross took place on 2nd February 1461 near Wigmore, Herefordshire, and was fought under Edward's direct leadership to prevent Lancastrian forces from Wales, led by Owen & Jasper Tudor, from joining up with Lancastrian forces. The Yorkists were victorious; Jasper Tudor fled, while Owen Tudor was captured and executed and possibly up to 4,000 Welshmen slain. This battle was remembered for the appearance of a complete sun dog (also known as a 'parhelion') in the sky before the battle, which the Yorkists then took for their emblem.

The importance of Mortimer's cross is threefold:

- Edward becoming a successful leader in his own right
- Owen Tudor (a capable Welsh leader) was captured & killed, with heavy Welsh casualties reducing the forces available to the Lancastrians.
- The victory paved the way for Edward's crowning later in the year

At the 2nd battle of St Albans in 17 February 1461, a Yorkist army under the Earl of Warwick attempted to bar the road to London north of the town. The opposing Lancastrian army used a wide outflanking manoeuvre to take Warwick by surprise, cut him off from London, and drive his army from the field. This Lancastrian victory released King Henry, Warwick's prisoner, from his captivity and reunited him with his Queen and his army. One of the leading Lancastrian commanders, John Clifford, was given a deal of credit for this victory by Margaret of Anjou, Henry VI's queen.

This victory opened the way for a Lancastrian advance on London, an opportunity which their High Council declined, opting instead for a withdrawal to their northern heartlands. This was therefore a tactical victory for Lancastrians but strategic failure in that it opened the way for Edward to enter London, where he was subsequently proclaimed as Edward VI by his supporters.

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The subsequent Lancastrian withdrawal from London was marked by a 30 mile broad swathe of plundering by Lancastrian forces, with the slighting of bridges en-route to slow any Yorkist advance; as such many Southern & Midland towns turned against Henry & Margaret and opened opportunities for Edward to raise forces and advance north in pursuit. The chase is on, with both hunters and hunted spurred on by 3 principal motives;

Revenge

Somerset, Percy & Clifford – for their fathers

Edward – for his father & brother

Ambition

Edward for the crown

Survival

For Henry, to remain as king

Yorkists as rebels & traitors to Henry – attainder, drumhead trial & execution

Lancastrians as traitors to Edward – attainder, drumhead trial & execution

The Battle of Ferrybridge

The small town of Ferrybridge is situated at a major crossing point where the Great North Road crosses over the River Aire; as such it formed in medieval times a communications hub for road (north-south) & river (west-east) traffic. Given its bridge of stone, built in the late 1300's, and its stone-built causeway up to Brotherton, it was the only crossing for miles not subject to flood disruption (the next nearest crossing at Castleford, to the west, had a ford, but this had declined in importance since its heyday in Roman times). As such it was a popular stopping-off point for travellers, merchants and those engaged on government business heading both north and south, being well provided with facilities – inns, stables and the like - for travellers to break their journey. As a major communications intersection it was commercially, militarily, and politically important; instrumental in the movement of goods to & from local markets. It linked Pontefract castle (in those days a major royal castle) with more northerly garrisons for reinforcement and resupply in the event of Scottish incursions over the border, and swift links for communications heading to all points of the compass.

The action at Ferrybridge can be divided into 5 main phases:

- Advance to contact
- The action at Ferrybridge
- Moves on a broader canvas
- Withdrawal from Ferrybridge
- Disaster at Dintingdale

Advance to contact

After the weeks since the Battle of Wakefield, various Yorkist nobles had left London with their retinues in order to gather troops, equipment and provisions from their estates: Warwick to the Midlands (who then joined Edward at the Trent, sometime around the 18th of March); Robert Horne and John Fogge to Kent; the Duke of Norfolk to Norfolk and East Anglia. Ill health slowed The Duke of Norfolk, so his rearguard headed north later than the rest of the army; his timely arrival at Towton was however decisive.

The Yorkist vanguard (forward division) under Lord Fauconberg had set out from London to the north on the 11th March; Edward himself set out from London on the 13th and the two elements – vanguard and mainguard – proceeded along the Great North Road, gathering additional numbers, via St Albans (reached on the 16th), Cambridge (reached on the 17th), Nottingham (reached on the 22nd), and Pontefract (reached on the 27th), where they set up camp at Bubwith Heath, a triangular piece of land on what is now the Knottingley road.

Once at Pontefract, we believe the Yorkist high command swung into action, sending light cavalry to reconnoitre the areas north of Ferrybridge, probably via Castleford; one of these

parties may have encountered a Lancastrian reconnaissance party from the Earl of Northumberland's force, and destroyed it, thereby securing the ford at Castleford for Edwards use. The only way for the Yorkists to advance north was across the river systems towards the east of the county; to the west, the Pennine mountain chain would prove impassable to the large baggage train needed to support such a large army on the move. Edward had doubtless received intelligence from travellers etc but he needed accurate information in order to make his plans, no doubt guided by experienced commanders such as Lord Fauconberg, a veteran of the 100 years war against France. These reconnaissance parties would be under orders to reconnoitre the land, spot obstacles, and report back any intelligence gleaned about the Lancastrian army – but to avoid any contact with enemy forces unless absolutely necessary. The role of one of these parties, who based themselves at Dintingdale, was of major importance, as we will see later. On the evening of the 27th Edward sent his uncle the Earl of Warwick and John Radcliffe, Lord Fitzwater, with a mixed force of engineers and light cavalry, to secure and repair the bridge over the River Aire at Ferrybridge, slighted to delay the Yorkist advance, in order to safeguard the crossing for the main Yorkist advance. Meanwhile, the Lancastrian high command had been busy also. Gathered in York, they had doubtless been gathering information and may have tracked the Yorkist advance. Like Edward though, the Duke of Somerset needed up-to-date and accurate intelligence on the Yorkist army, its composition and numbers, rate of advance, and their route. The two main routes that Edward could use with minimal deviation from his route of advance were the Great North Road via Ferrybridge to Tadcaster, the most direct and least at risk from floods with its stone bridge at Ferrybridge, and stone causeway over the floodplains on the north bank of the Aire. The ford on the old Roman road heading north from Castleford was at risk from heavy waters when the river Aire was in spate, but if fordable, this would not have escaped notice of the Yorkist command. Light cavalry from Cumberland and Northumberland under the Clifford brother and the Percies respectively were the ideal choice for these reconnaissance duties. Trained and equipped as light cavalry and experienced in policing the notoriously unstable Anglo-Scottish border, they were light, fast and versatile troops who were expected to act on their own initiative. Lightly equipped however they were only able to engage the enemy, if at an advantage.

The action at Ferrybridge

Fresh from his vengeful triumph at Wakefield in the previous December, John Clifford, 9th Lord of Skipton and his "Flower of Craven", 500 hard riding, hard fighting men, would be the ideal choice to act as Somerset's eyes and ears. Setting out from York on the 26th with orders to gather intelligence, and harass the Yorkists, if feasible, Clifford proceeded south along the Great North Road through Tadcaster, Dintingdale, Barkston Ash, Sherburn-in-Elmet and Milford, to reach the limestone ridge upon which Brotherton stands. From here Clifford would have been able to see the Yorkist work parties toiling to at least make the bridge passable, doubtless under the voluble encouragement of Fitzwater. They probably settled in for a night of observation. Was Fitzwater aware that he was under observation by hostile forces? It seems not, for he erected his tents and turned in for the night with only a light guard for protection.

Dawn is the classic time for a surprise attack, and Clifford chose well. Probably preceded by a silent cut-throat attack on the Yorkist sentries, the Flower of Craven swept through the camp, making as much noise as possible to confuse and disorientate the sleeping men and slaughtering them in their beds. Just woken, confused and without time to don armour, their resistance would have been brief. Lord Fitzwater, thinking it was a brawl amongst his men, came out of his tent to pacify matters, only to be felled by a blow which later killed him. Clifford and his men then set about reversing the repairs carried out by Fitzwater's engineers

to the damaged bridge, using the materials – planks laid across the gaps – to fortify the northern end against the inevitable counter-attack.
Leaving a force to hold the bridge, Clifford perhaps then employed the tactic, based on sound military logic and his experience with the Border Reivers of dispatching a part of his force to hold the road from Castleford, through the marshes to Fairburn and onto Brotherton; in doing so he secured both his right flank against any Yorkist flanking attack and his escape route. His front, rear and flank now secured, he took up a position, probably around the Brotherton end of the causeway and beyond bowshot from the south bank - where he could observe both his forces; from here he could react to events, reinforcing and resupplying the men at the bridge who he knew would bear the full brunt of the Yorkist attack on the crossing. From here he could also, as he probably knew full well he would have to do at some point, withdraw his men from the bridge.
Clifford knew that, sooner rather than later, Edward and the Yorkists would realise that the bridge had only been taken by a small force, a small force that would have to be swept aside so that the advance could continue. The scene was now set for an action that would, in the terms of a conflict many thousands of miles away in the south Atlantic and 521 years later, “make the bastards’ eyes water”. John Clifford, 9th Lord of Skipton and vengeful son of a dead father, would recognise the sentiment and applaud it.
Meanwhile the gasping arrival the panicked survivors of Clifford’s dawn attack on Ferrybridge caused something approaching a major panic amongst the Yorkists assembled at Pontefract. It would take strenuous efforts on the part of commanders to calm the large number of relatively inexperienced troops who were confronted by the bloodied and terrified survivors. There is a story about Warwick. It is said that he was sent by Edward to engage the Lancastrians at Ferrybridge but was wounded in the leg by an arrow, and turned tail. When he returned to the Yorkist camp and gasped out his message that the bridge was lost, he displayed a typical gift for theatricality which, we are told, helped to settle jangled nerves; he killed his horse and loudly proclaimed that he would retreat no further and fight shoulder to shoulder with any that would fight along with him. No doubt the sceptical amongst the troops would realise that he had other horses. Those with a similar classical education would know that that the gesture was not even original. Spartacus said and did something similar on the eve of his defeat by the roman legions in 71BC.
The next four hours or so were hectic. The Yorkist orders were given to prepare to advance to Ferrybridge, three miles away. Spurred on by the irascible bellows of commanders of all ranks, the camp was struck, tents and camp stores quickly packed, and the men prepared to give battle. Armour was put on, weapons and arrows issued, and the troops shoved and kicked into marching order. As ever, the more experienced men would help the younger green troops to prepare, giving advice common to conflicts down the ages, such as “Keep your guard up”, “thrust, twist and pull your blade out”, “listen and pay attention to your orders”. There would also be banter amongst the seasoned veterans like “If you’re killed, can I have your boots?!”, with, no doubt, suitably pithy replies. While this was going on, Edward and the high command appraised the situation and, coming to the decision to advance on Ferrybridge, issued orders to move out.
Proceeding in their divisions to Ferrybridge and arriving there about midday, the Yorkists moved into the attack by throwing in an infantry assault along the ruined bridge. Clifford had made his dispositions well. Behind cover they could shoot at point-blank range into the massed ranks of troops waiting to get on to the bridge, and at the troops struggling to come to grips along the ruined bridge, at best only 15 feet wide, the width useable to troops now reduced to that of a spandrel wall about 1 or 2 feet wide (a spandrel is the longitudinal stiffening wall of a bridge on top of the arch across which the roadway is laid). At a range of

45 yards or less the clothyard shaft shot from a warbow is murderously effective, achieving deep penetration even through plate armour; for any that succeeded in reaching the Lancastrian line, there were the spearmen ready to thrust their 10-ft long weapons into their flesh. The first assault having failed, archers were brought forward to keep the defenders heads down, and the engineers told to find a solution.

As the afternoon drew on, more assaults were thrown against the bridge's defenders, with the same result. Many of the attacking troops fell into the river, to perish in the icy floodwaters, be it from their wounds, drowning, or the heart-stopping shock of icy water. Attempts were made by the engineers to bridge the gaps, to make a raft to take troops across the river; all failed. More men died.

Exasperated at the singular lack of success, and conscious of the need to restart the stalled advance, the high command ordered Lord Fauconberg to take his mounted troops and, follow the road to Castleford, then the Fairburn road along the north bank of the river to counter-move via Brotherton, to drive off or kill the defenders to take and secure the bridgehead.

Intent on hanging on to the bridge until the last possible moment, Clifford nonetheless was aware that a large body of cavalry was moving upstream; his men had beaten off several attacks and inflicted stinging losses on Edwards's troops – up to 3000 casualties, according to Jean de Waurin, a contemporary chronicler. He would have about an hour to extricate his men and, probably taking advantage of the gathering dusk, the Flower of Craven slipped away to rejoin firstly their comrades at the end of the causeway, then to Clifford at Brotherton. This they achieved just in time. Maybe the lead troops of Fauconberg's flanking attack ran into the previously planned ambush and took casualties, leaving their bodies in the marsh? Taking advantage of this, the Flower of Craven spurred their horses and departed along the Great North Road to, as they thought, the safety of their own lines.

Meanwhile, there were moves on a broader canvas

As the action at Ferrybridge unfolded, both sides were busy. Having successfully crossed at Castleford, the Yorkist reconnaissance along and in the area of the Roman road from Castleford ensured that an alternative route was available for Edward to use, to advance his heavy cavalry and the supply train past the obstacle of the river Aire. A safe passage north for the supply train was especially vital given that even a slimmed down convoy could be anything up to 4 miles long and, travelling at approximately 12 miles per day, a slow and sitting target. An attack on, or loss of these supplies, would badly disrupt the Yorkist advance. Light cavalry moved into the area between the Great North Road and the Roman road to act as forward screen to protect the supply train, to act as a tripwire in the event of a Lancastrian sally south, and to interdict the both the Roman road and the Great North Road.

Meanwhile, Somerset and the Lancastrian army had moved into their previously reconnoitred positions at Towton; last minute adjustments were made to meet the now inevitable clash of arms; Clifford's stubborn defence at Ferrybridge had succeeded and gave him a vital 24 hours to plan and dispose, and for his troops to rest and eat.

Withdrawal to Dintingdale

The success of Fauconberg's pincer move via Castleford and Fairburn was vital to the Yorkist plans. It has been said that his aim was to capture and kill Clifford, but this belies the true purpose of the flanking move; the death of Clifford and his men would be a bonus but it should be borne in mind that the prime focus was not revenge, but to secure the bridgehead. Given this, Fauconberg probably swung south from Brotherton after the skirmish with the Flower of Craven as they withdrew, down the causeway, and finally retook the north end of the bridge. This then enabled Edward to make repairs enough to move his infantry across & form up on the north side; man-packing only vital military stores they started their advance in their divisions.

Disaster at Dintingdale

The battles of Ferrybridge and Dintingdale 27-28 March 1461

Following the successful disengagement at Ferrybridge, Clifford and Lord John Neville, a Lancastrian commander, gathered their remaining forces and led them north to rejoin their main army at Towton, proceeding via the Great North Road through Milford and Sherburn-in-Elmet. By this time the horses would have been tired, having probably been pushed by their riders' need to avoid any pursuit by Fauconberg's men; the men would have been tired after being in combat for the best part of 24 hours and doubtless looking forward to a well-earned rest after their efforts. They had, after all, held up the advance of a vastly superior force and inflicted stinging casualties on it and thereby given Somerset a valuable extra 24 hours to make his dispositions at Towton. It is also probable that there would have been a number of men who were wounded, therefore not at their best.

What happened next is stark fact. The Flower of Craven were ambushed at Dintingdale and the majority were killed, with Clifford himself – after receiving a fatal arrow wound to the throat - suffering the double indignity of being decapitated, then "tumbled headless into a pit of promiscuous bodies".

What is open to debate however is:

- The identity, purpose, and point of origin of the Yorkist ambush party
- How Clifford came to be, in what can be expressed in modern parlance, "hung out to dry" with no support apparently forthcoming from the main Lancastrian body almost within reach

Yorkist ambush – who, how?

In order to tackle the first of these, it is necessary to examine exactly how medieval armies tracked each other, met and engaged. This is down to intelligence gathering – of the enemy's location, his intentions, his strengths and weaknesses; it is rather like a jigsaw whose broad outlines is known but lacking detail. Intelligence must be gathered & examined, evaluated, then collated to form a hopefully accurate picture from which a commander can make his own plans and dispositions to meet and defeat the opposing commander. In modern armies this reconnaissance is extensive and swift, conducted by assets in the air, on the ground, by *humint* and *sigint* (assessment of information gathered from human sources and interception of signals), often in real-time i.e. of events as they happen. However, neither Edward nor Henry had access to this embarrassment of intelligence riches; humint probably was gathered from travellers met along the road but in the end it was the light cavalry of both sides which were the prime intelligence-gathering assets. Unfortunately such intelligence could be transmitted no quicker than a fast horse, in which case it could be, at best, several hours or at worst several days old.

It is likely then that the Yorkist ambush party was not Fauconberg's men who had, it is traditionally supposed, pursued Clifford from Ferrybridge, but a different group; they were a reconnaissance in force sent to locate the main Lancastrian army, to observe and report back to Edward, to interdict any Lancastrian reconnaissance parties moving either north or south along the Great North Road, and to act as a tripwire to alert Edward to any Lancastrian moves south to meet him along the road. Doubtless they had orders to remain hidden, and not engage unless directly threatened. In order to achieve this aim, they were probably sent north from Pontefract via Ferrybridge or Castleford, following the successful action by Fitzwater to take the crossing at Ferrybridge on the previous Friday evening.

Slaughter

The second aspect is the controversial issue of how Clifford, a senior and trusted commander, was ambushed and destroyed so close to his own army. It has been suggested that Somerset did not support Clifford due to some personality clash and enmity between the two men; was Clifford "hung out to dry" by a superior officer jealous of a too-popular and effective subordinate who basked in the approval of Queen Margaret, and saw this as an opportunity to

rid himself of an irritant? This is of course possible. There are however alternative explanations which, when military logic is applied, are perhaps more feasible.
It is generally accepted that Somerset formed the Lancastrian line across where Dacre's Cross now stands. This is on the reverse slope from Dintingdale and as such is out of direct sight of the road and ambush site; equally importantly it is out of earshot. On this basis Somerset would not have been able to see (especially in the gathering gloom of a March evening) or hear neither Clifford's approach nor the fight, so would not have been aware of the need to take action to support him.
Was Clifford's demise due to organisational faults and/or time pressures? At this time Somerset and his officers would have been extremely busy making their plans for what they all knew would be a decisive encounter; did they simply omit to make arrangements for returning scouts? Did they omit to delegate authority to subordinates so that they had the leeway to make decisions as the situation demanded without having to refer the matter upwards through the chain of command? If this was the case, the action at Dintingdale could have been over and done with, with the Flower of Craven wiped out, before a reaction could be made. On this basis, it is a matter of too little, too late.
It is possible that arrangements had been made with this eventuality in mind; as such there may have been a small force based around Dintingdale to act both a forward screen and to meet Clifford and guide him in. What if this group had been attacked and destroyed by the Yorkist reconnaissance party already mentioned above? This would have left Clifford, expecting a friendly force, open to attack when he was least expecting it. He may even have advanced ahead of his men to be recognised and account for them, removing his face armour in order to recognise and be recognised. Struck down in the first volley, he would have been unable to rally his men, who followed him quickly to their deaths.
Aftermath
After Clifford's tactical withdrawal from Ferrybridge and the clash around Brotherton, Fauconberg and his men proceeded to secure the north bridgehead; rough repairs were quickly carried out to enable infantry to cross and possibly enough to enable light cavalry to cross also. It is unlikely that the repairs, carried out quickly, made the bridge strong enough to carry the heavy wagons of the supply train so essential military supplies – armour, weapons and ammunition – would be unloaded and distributed amongst the infantry, who man-packed it up the Great North road. The supply train then proceeded up the old Roman road, branching off to rendezvous at Lead, but this would take the best part of a day. The infantry would be held on the north bridgehead until the divisions were across and assembled into groups large enough to be a serious fighting force in the event of a Lancastrian attack then, guarded to the north by a screen of light cavalry whose purpose was to guard the advancing troops, report on and clear obstacles, and communicate back to Edward and the Yorkist high command any news of the enemy. Progress was slow given two principal reasons. The troops were heavily laden with essential military stores, and the need to maintain a cohesive advance into what in effect was enemy territory, in the dark where an enemy force could be waiting around the next corner or just over the next ridge. It is probable that, given the delay imposed by the need to surmount logistical problems, to assemble the divisions and to advance through darkened and unknown territory, the advance troops would not reach their laager areas between Sherburn-in-Elmet and Saxton until around midnight; without tents, bedding, mess equipment or food in any quantity it would be a cold hungry and sleepless night for all ranks from Edward down to the lowest soldier. It would be a sleepless night for the high commands of both armies, with their enemy in such close proximity.
With the Lancastrians already in position at Towton, and the Yorkists moving into their divisions, dawn would see frantic activity by both sides to prepare for battle; only with

armour donned, weapons checked and ammunition issued would there be time to eat what rations were available, to think on the day ahead.
Then came the opening moves for a day of disaster and victory; snow- and arrow storms preceded the push and shove of men in combat, turned into rout and slaughter following Norfolk's timely arrival to reinvigorate the Yorkists. There were still two kings at the end of that bloody day, but only one of them King Edward IV - held real power, with the other – Henry VI – in panicked flight.

Conclusions - Military & political importance of the battle of Ferrybridge

In tactical terms, Clifford's actions at Ferrybridge were highly successful; he had bought Somerset 24 extra hours, delayed and unsettled the Yorkist advance. He had forced the Yorkists to attack over a narrow front, over a contested river crossing, thereby negating their massive superiority in manpower, and inflicting heavy casualties. To balance this, Fauconberg's tactical flanking attack was a master stroke which successfully cleared the northern bridgehead and saw his rise to prominence as a safe pair of hands and his loyalty to Edward proven in battle
In strategic terms Ferrybridge was a disaster for the Lancastrians. It blooded Edwards troops and settled their nerves but – most important of all - allowed time for Norfolk to advance up the Great North Road to reinforce Edward. The importance of this, probably not seen by Somerset or Clifford at the time, became all too apparent at Towton.
In political terms, the events at Towton were important, but not decisive. It reduced the status and effectiveness of Henry and Margaret, but left them at liberty; it did however reinforce Edward's claim to the crown. It was not however the final solution that Edward had wanted, as the Wars of the Roses sputtered on until 1487.

Alan Stringer BSc(Hons), Dip SLT, PGCE