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English Civil War, 1215-1217

Also known as: First Barons' War

Date: 1215–1217

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

PRINCIPAL COMBATANTS: Forces of the English Crown and the English barons, vs. forces of the French dauphin, Louis

PRINCIPAL THEATER(S): Central, southwestern, and southeastern England

DECLARATION: None

MAJOR ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES: The barons invited Louis to assume the English throne.

OUTCOME: After the death of [King John](#), the barons deserted Louis, who withdrew from England.

APPROXIMATE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF MEN UNDER ARMS: Unknown

CASUALTIES: Unknown

TREATIES: Treaty of Kingston-upon-Thames, September 12, 1217, in which the rebels were granted amnesty, and Louis agreed not to support any future rebellion. The moderate nature of the treaty helped place Henry III's reign on a firmer footing.

In 1215 the ongoing power struggle between [King John](#) (1167–1216) and the English barons culminated in John's grudging agreement to the Magna Carta, which ceded considerable power to the barons. Seeking to void the Magna Carta, John obtained from the pope a decree nullifying it. This enraged the barons, who with the support of many Englishmen invited Louis, dauphin of France (1187–1226; later Louis VIII), to assume the English throne in lieu of John. In the meantime, however, John had hired French mercenaries to fight the barons and made significant progress against them. He avoided major battles but was able to consolidate control of western and central England. During this time John also successfully repulsed an invasion by Scotland's king

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Alexander II (1198–1249).

In 1216 John died, and at this juncture the dauphin invaded England, swiftly overrunning the southeast, where English forces finally contained him. In the meantime, nine-year-old Henry III (1207–72) was crowned to rule under a regent, William Marshal (ca. 1146–1219), who in 1217 led English forces in a naval victory against Louis at Dover, then attacked the French army that was laying siege to Lincoln. But Marshal's most significant victory was political. Unlike John, he voluntarily acceded to many of the barons' demands, prompting them to desert the French cause. Without the backing of the barons, Louis had no choice but to withdraw and conclude a peace with Marshal. The war was ended by the Treaty of Kingston-upon-Thames (September 12, 1217). On behalf of Henry III, Marshal granted the rebels amnesty, and Louis agreed not to support any future rebellion. The wise and moderate nature of the treaty was instrumental in placing the reign of Henry III on a sound footing.



Further Information

Further reading: F. M. Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century, 1216–1307* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); W. L. Warren, *The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, 1086–1272* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987).



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