

Battle analysis of hastings (1066)



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The Battle of Hastings

The Battle of Hastings occurred on 14 October 1066 approximately 7 miles northwest of the town of Hastings on Senlac Hill, England. The battle was fought between the Anglo-Saxon King Harold Godwinson against Duke William of Normandy. This battle showed the correct use of planning a defensive position based on terrain. However, it conclusively showed that despite having the advantage of terrain, that lack of discipline in your formation will have very costly effects.

Strategic Setting

During the rule of Edward the Confessor, King of England in 1066, he lacked an heir to the throne. He had offered the throne to his cousin Duke William of Normandy. But, on his death bed King Edward gave the throne to Harold Godwinson, who was at the time the Earl of Wessex and would be crowned King on the 6th of January 1066. Three men had laid claim to the throne, Harold Godwinson, Duke William Of Normandy and King Harald III Sigurdsson of Norway. Duke William and King Harald Sigurdsson both established army's in preparation to take what they believed to be their rightful spot as King. King Harold would identify that his biggest threat was the Duke William. King Harold staged a militia and Navy fleet in the south in May but disbanded them on the 8th of September due to lack of morale and supplies.

King Harald III Sigurdsson would be the first to make movement on the 20th of September 1066. With about 300 ships and approximately 10,000

Vikings taking the town of York before moving back to his ships to celebrate his victory. King Harald would ask for 500 hostages from the defeated northern Earls to ensure that they could not raise an army to counter attack. This was agreed to, and the exchange was set for Stamford Bridge. However, upon arrival King Harald would find King Harold there with an army of his own that would end the Viking's campaign and see King Harald killed in the fight.

Duke William had begun searching for support once King Edward passed. He persuaded Norman barons for support and with the promise of that support began building his army. He would recruit thousands of volunteers from Brittany, Maine, France, Flanders and Italy. After assembling his army and fleet he would begin to move but would be unable to for 8 weeks due to the wind. His army and fleet would wait at Saint-Valery-sur-Somme until the winds changed in his favor.

On the 27th of September 1066, Duke William would move unopposed into Pevensey near Sussex and then onto Hastings with almost 7,000 men where he would fortify his position and maintain the ability to utilize his ships. Duke William chose to move to Hastings due to the fact that the region surrounding Hastings was part of King Harold's personal holdings and he hoped it would draw him to battle faster. Duke William would seek to eliminate King Harold and his army to take his spot as King of England. King Harold marched his army from Stamford Bridge back to London after being told of Duke William's invasion, pausing in London to regroup and recruit new soldiers into his army. King Harold's brother, Gyth, suggested that he wait until he had a large force that could overwhelm Duke William's forces, <https://assignbuster.com/battle-analysis-of-hastings-1066/>

he could then burn the land while he waited in case of a Norman advance. Gyrth even offered to lead the army himself if King Harold did not want to wait, leaving King Harold in position to assemble another army if Gyrth lost. King Harold would not listen to Gyrth's advice though, and instead he marched towards Hastings with a fraction of the force he could have built. His forces would consist primarily of the Fyrd, volunteers with little experience fighting but also Housecarls, or professional soldiers.

The Battle

After arriving moving from London South towards Hastings King Harold would hold his forces approximately 7 miles Northwest of Hastings on Senlac Hill on the 13th of October 1066. Here, King Harold would have his army form a shield wall across an 800-yard opening between two heavily wooded areas off the Roman built road leading from Hastings North to London. The Housecarls would form the center of the formation, while the Fyrd would form his left and right flank. King Harold's men would be armed with swords, spears, double handed axes, and shields. Duke William of Normandy's scouts identified the formation and reported back to William of their arrival. On the 14th of October William of Normandy would lead his army from their fortified position at Hastings to Senlac hill to engage King Harold's Army. Seeing King Harold's army formed at the top of Senlac Hill Duke William identified that the King's army was flanked by dense trees on either side and a small marsh to his front. Duke William formed his forces to attack with his archers in the front line, followed by infantry and his cavalry in the rear. Duke Williams men were armed with bows, swords, lances, and shields.

Duke William began his attack with his archers firing approximately 25,000 arrows at the English formation. Due to the position of the English formation many of the arrows were deflected off the shield wall. Duke William sent his infantry at the shield wall in attempt to break the wall, they were met with a barrage of rocks, spears and throwing axes. As the infantry fought, and it became apparent that the wall would not fall, the cavalry was sent in. Duke William's cavalry would be unable to penetrate the wall meeting the same barrage of thrown weapons as well and as the cavalry on the left flank began to retreat the remaining cavalry from the center and right flank began to follow. The cavalry falling back triggered an unwanted assault from the English right side, causing King Harold's shield wall to break. Duke William on seeing the English break their lines, rallied his cavalry and charged the English cutting down a substantial amount of King Harold's forces. Both sides would pause after this and begin to reorganize their troops. King Harold rebuilt his right flank from his left and center but not wanting to count on the fighting ability of the peasants he tightened his shield wall to continue manning his front line with his most trained infantry. This caused a large number of open targets in the rear of the formation.

Duke William faced with the issue of night approaching and fighting ending had to continue to push to keep King Harold's army from gaining more men. Duke William was resupplied with more arrows for his archers and would put them into good use by killing large amounts of the English infantry. He would then use the effects of his archers to continue to shrink the English numbers while also attacking on each flank and center of King Harold's formation. As the fighting progressed the Normans were inflicting such high casualties on

the English line that the line began breaking. On one of his final cavalry charges King Harold would be killed, and the remains of the English shield line would retreat. Duke William had won the battle but at great cost. He would retreat back to Hastings and wait to receive reinforcements. Duke William then continued on to London and was crowned King of England on Christmas day 1066.

Conclusion

King Harold Of England failed to meet his objective by lack not being able to control his forces. The inability of his infantry to hold their shield line rather than racing to attack the retreating cavalry showed the true weakness of his line. Their lack of discipline ended up being the turning point for the battle giving Duke William the intelligence that he needed to defeat his opponent.

Duke William successfully completed his mission objective by continuously rallying his troops and using a time appropriate combined arms battalion. By generally maintaining control of his units and being able to read the battle field he was able to change the course of the battle and gain ground despite King Harold having the strategic advantage of high ground and dense wooded areas on each side. The defeat of King Harold at Hastings would pave the way for the beginning of the Norman conquest.

References

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