Why did William win the Battle of Hastings? Exemplar 2

The Battle of Hastings took place in 1066 when Edward the Confessor died, leaving no heir. Harold Godwinsson took his place, but he has two rivals, Harald Hardraada, the king of Norway, and William, Duke of Normandy. William eventually won, and this piece of writing explores the reasons why.

William was a very determined and ambitious leader. He claimed that Harold had promised to help him to become king, and so, when Harold claimed the throne, he did all that he could to conquer England. He left Normandy undefended, and took 3000 ships with horses and soldiers across the English Channel. He must have been very determined to do this, as the Channel was very dangerous. His bravery is shown again during the battle, when he took off his helmet and said to his soldiers, “Look at me well. I am still alive and, by the grace of God, I shall yet prove victor”.

William also had a strong army, and a good strategy. For example, he put the archers in the front, then infantry, and behind them the men on horseback. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says “All the English were on foot. The Normans had foot-soldiers, archers and cavalry with horses”. This would have been a great advantage. He also pretended to retreat, and then the English broke the shield wall, so when the Normans turned back, the English were not very well protected. William chose a good time to invade, before Harold had established his position as king.

Harold’s bad luck also helped William to win. Harold Godwinsson was fighting Harald Hardrada at Stamford Bridge when William invaded in the south. Harold had to march 300km, having lost many of his best men in the previous battle. If the wind had not changed just then, Harold would have had more men, and he would have had more time to set his army up. There is a picture in the Bayeux Tapestry of Harold being killed with an arrow through his eye. When he died, the English were frightened, and deserted.

William won the battle for many reasons. It was a mixture of good leadership, planning and luck. If the wind hadn’t changed, or if Harald Hardrada hadn’t invaded, I think that Harold could have won, and England would be a different place.

*One of the strengths of this Zack is that you have kept the focus clearly upon the causes and organised them sensibly into different types. The work is concise and clear – exactly what I wanted. Focussed and thoughtful.*