

Sample Essay - Hastings

Choose a battle from a war or campaign between an English king and another country such as Edward I and Wales, Edward II and Scotland or Edward III and France, Henry V and France or another you have studied.

Describe the events that took place during the battle

(20 marks)

SYK Paragraph

The battle that I have chosen to write about is the Battle of Hastings. This battle was fought on the 14th October 1066, between the English king Harold II and William, Duke of Normandy. This battle took place as a direct result of a disagreement as to who was the rightful king of England after the death of Edward the Confessor and signalled the beginning of the Norman Conquest.

Paragraph 1

Harold arrived with his army late on the 13th October immediately blocking William's route to London. *Harold's arrival surprised William who like Harald Hardrada at Stamford Bridge had underestimated the speed with which the Saxon army could travel.* By 8am Harold had positioned his army across 1000m wide Senlac Hill. The ever reliable and feared Housecarls took up a central position flanked by the fyrd. *Harold's tactics were simple and his earlier experience in Normandy had shown him the dangers posed by William's army and in particular the knights. Harold instructed his soldiers to stay put on the hill and not to move on any account. They were to absorb the attacks of the Normans. Eventually, Harold believed the Normans would become demoralised and exhausted and at that point the Saxons would launch a charge at William's army*

Paragraph 2 Optional

William's tactics appeared to play into Harold's hand. William planned to launch consecutive attacks of archers followed by infantry followed by knights. These attacks would continue gradually chip away at the Saxon shield wall. In time a gap would appear and the Saxon army would be defeated.

Paragraph 3

The battle began at 9am with William's archers firing at the Saxon shield wall. This attack was ineffective. The subsequent attack by the infantry met with a similar lack success. The knights then made their first charge but were repulsed by the Harold's men. These attacks continued with the Normans taking the most casualties. On one of the knights charges the Breton cavalry appear to have reached the Saxon shield wall ahead of its supporting cavalry. Met by fierce Saxon resistance they panicked and turned back down the hill. A group of fyrdmen sensing final victory broke ranks and charged down the hill after the fleeing Bretons. William seeing this happened ordered his cavalry to surround the chasing fyrdmen who were then cut to pieces. *News spread that William had been killed, a rumour that was squashed when William removed his helmet to reveal himself to be alive and well.*

Paragraph 4

A short pause in the fighting took place. William then ordered his French knights to attack the Saxon left flank but then retreat apparently in fear. William was hoping to replicate earlier events. Again the fyrdmen showing a lack of discipline broke ranks, charged down hill to face certain death. Harold's army was now seriously depleted.

Paragraph 5

William realising that dusk was approaching and that he needed to act quickly once again changed tactics. This time he ordered his archers to fire high over the Saxon shield wall providing cover for a combined simultaneous attack of both infantry and cavalry. Eventually, a group of William's knights broke through the Saxon defences, and found Harold lying injured apparently from an arrow in an eye. Harold was killed, hacked to pieces, despite the brave attempts of his housecarls to protect him. Both of Harold's brothers, Gyrth and Leofwine died at this time.

Conclusion/summary

With their leaders dead the Saxon army vanished into the dark. So ended the battle. William victorious, was eventually crowned king on Christmas Day 1066. His victory at Hastings would change the course of English history.

Lines in italics are optional dependent on your speed of writing! Essay trial runs are vital!