

WILLIAM THE BASTARD AT WAR

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As Allen Brown observed at the end of his paper on his battle at his conference, almost the only thing about the Norman Conquest that isn't controversial is the fact that the Normans won the Battle of Hastings. How and why they won remain matters of opinion. In Allen's view – and, characteristically, he described himself as being 'at least as unbiassed as William of Poitiers' – they owed their victory to their 'superior military techniques' and to William's 'superior generalship'.¹ Now much has been written about military techniques and organisation, both Norman and Anglo-Saxon, but almost nothing has been written about William's generalship. Although what he did – and what Harold did – in 1066 itself has been endlessly discussed, no real attempt has been made to put that decisive campaign into the context of William's whole career as a war leader. Even William's military experience in the years prior to 1066 – the experience on which he presumably drew as he contemplated the greatest enterprise of his life – has been often mentioned but hardly analysed.² This omission is all the more curious in view of the fact that the materials for such a study are ready to hand. One of the conqueror's own chaplains wrote an account of his master's life in which he consciously chose to portray him as a model of generalship. Time and again William of Poitiers compares William with the great generals of antiquity, and time and again he concludes that William was the greater soldier. His account of the campaign of 1066 culminates in a sustained comparison between the Norman invasion of England and the Roman invasion of Britain, demonstrating – at least to the author's own satisfaction – that William had faced greater difficulties than Julius Caesar and yet had achieved a much more impressive degree of success.³ Since the chaplain was writing in the 1070s, and writing a work clearly destined for his master's ears, this was presumably a demonstration very much to William's taste. Throughout his work indeed it is evident that WP was saying what he felt his lord would like to hear. He was producing a justification of William the Conqueror and, at times, a nauseatingly sycophantic one. One of his earliest known readers, Orderic Vitalis, son of an English mother and a Norman father, was clearly shocked by WP's account of the harrying of the North and was moved to comment: 'When I think of the helpless children, the young people in the prime of life, and those whose hair was

¹ R. Allen Brown, 'The Battle of Hastings', *Battle* iii, 21.

² Except in the excellent but brief chapter entitled 'Military Society and the Art of War' in F. Barlow, *William I and the Norman Conquest*, 1965.

³ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 68, 156, 162, 168, 232–4, 246–54; probably also Orderic ii, 234.

now grey with age, all alike condemned to die of hunger, then I am so stirred to pity that I would simply lament what was done, rather than vainly attempt, with empty adulation, to flatter the perpetrator of such infamy'.⁴ It is also evident that WP was, as R. H. C. Davis has put it, 'intent on producing a work of great literature', a self-conscious stylist, insistently parading his easy mastery of a wide range of classical Latin literature, 'flattering himself' as well as the Conqueror.⁵ Reading him indeed I am irresistibly reminded of the opening words of Geoffrey Parker's chapter on warfare in the thematic companion volume to the *New Cambridge Modern History*: 'Part of the charm of Renaissance writers is their firm conviction that . . . the heroes of antiquity would have been miserable failures as Renaissance men, even as Renaissance soldiers'.⁶ By these criteria William of Poitiers was a Renaissance writer and William the Bastard a Renaissance soldier. And so indeed they were.

But there is no need to dismiss the work on this account.⁷ On the contrary. These features are so obvious that they are relatively easy to make allowances for. Moreover from the point of view of the student of war, the history of WP has two great advantages. First, it was written by someone close to the court, a member, as it were, of the duke's headquarters staff. Second, it was written by an author who had himself been a soldier. In Orderic's words, 'before he entered the church he had himself been keenly involved in the business of war. He had borne arms in the service of his prince and, having himself lived through the dire perils of war, was all the better placed to give an accurate description of the conflicts he had seen'.⁸ His account of William's career may be a biased one, but it is the bias of a man who, on the subject of war at least, knew exactly what he was talking about. Since I have had the good fortune never to have been more than an armchair soldier, I shall follow very closely in the footsteps of William of Poitiers.

My intention then is twofold. Firstly to take Duke William's military career as a model of eleventh-century generalship.⁹ Secondly to put the 1066 campaign into the context of mid-eleventh century warfare. This means that in this paper I shall have relatively little to say about the last period of William's career, the years after 1075 when he no longer enjoyed the fortunate constellation of political circumstances which had characterised the 1060s and early 1070s and

⁴ Orderic ii, 232.

⁵ R. H. C. Davis, 'William of Poitiers and his History of William the Conqueror' in R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, eds., *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages. Essays presented to R. W. Southern*, Oxford 1981, 71–100, esp. 72.

⁶ G. Parker, 'Warfare' in *The New Cambridge Modern History* xiii, Companion Volume, ed. P. Burke, Cambridge 1979, 201.

⁷ Any more than it would be right, on similar grounds, to dismiss Richer of Rheims as a source for late tenth-century warfare. See the comments, valuable on this and on all aspects of war in this period, of John France, 'La Guerre dans la France féodale à la fin du IX^e et au Xe siècle', *Revue Belge d'Histoire Militaire* xxiii, 1979, 177–198, esp. 179, 192–3.

⁸ Orderic ii, 258.

⁹ In this respect an exercise very similar to J. Gillingham, 'Richard I and the science of war in the Middle Ages', J. Gillingham and J. C. Holt, eds., *War and Government in the Middle Ages. Essays in honour of J. O. Prestwich*, Woodbridge 1984, 78–91.

when, in consequence, his generalship faltered.¹⁰ In Orderic's words, 'In the last thirteen years of his life he never once succeeded in putting an army to flight or capturing by military skill any fortress to which he laid siege.'¹¹ WP's task as panegyrist was made distinctly easier by the fact that he happened to be writing at a time when William's military reputation was at its peak.¹² Bearing in mind the defeats and setbacks of William's later career it is doubtless easier for me to be a little more detached.

I begin with an example of the panegyrist at work: WP's treatment of the battle of Val-ès-Dunes (1047), the first military incident to be reported in the surviving portion of his text. Here WP gives the impression that Duke William was in overall command of the 'loyalist' troops, with King Henry I of France merely lending useful assistance.¹³ But since in 1047 the king was the greater man in rank, in age and in experience of war, common sense alone suggests that WP was being misleading, probably deliberately so.¹⁴ And in this case common sense is confirmed by the language of William of Jumièges' account of the battle, written half a dozen years earlier than WP's.¹⁵

If, in fact, it was King Henry who was the army commander at Val-ès-Dunes, then it becomes possible to draw a rather striking conclusion. In 1066, as Frank Barlow pointed out, William had no previous experience of command in a set battle.¹⁶ Whether or not it is quite right to go on to say, as Barlow does, that until he faced Harold, William had never deployed his own army in the face of a large

¹⁰ The high drama of 1066 rather obscures the fact William's military career falls quite naturally into three parts: the period up to 1060 when he was generally on the defensive against both internal and external enemies; the years of expansion between 1060 and 1075; and finally the period between 1076 and 1087 when he was once again on the defensive.

¹¹ Orderic ii, 350. In view of the defeats and setbacks which William suffered at Dol in 1076, Gerberoi in 1079, La Flèche in 1081 and St Suzanne in 1084–5, Orderic's judgement seems better grounded than Barlow's 'once he had caught the wind he never got becalmed', Barlow, xvi.

¹² Some idea of his reputation in the mid-1070s can be gathered from the rumour that he was planning to attack Aachen and seize the empire reported by Lampert of Hersfeld under the year 1074. Lampert of Hersfeld, *Annales* ed. O. Holder-Egger, *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, Hanover 1894, 195.

¹³ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 16–18.

¹⁴ The king, in WP's words, was *vir strenuus et nominatus in rebus bellicis*, a competent and cautious advisor to the young soldier, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 24, 82.

¹⁵ 'rex cum duce', Jumièges, 123. Despite this most historians, e.g. Michel de Bouïard, *Guillaume le Conquérant*, Paris 1984, 205, or R. Allen Brown, *The Normans*, Woodbridge 1984, 44–5, or David Bates, *Normandy before 1066*, 1982, 73, continue to follow WP in implying that William was in charge at Val-ès-Dunes. More in line with WJ's emphasis is D. C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, London 1964, 49. I would like to emphasise that impressed as I am by WP's qualities as a historian of war, I am almost equally impressed by WJ, monk though he may have been. Perhaps indeed in a society where no monastery was immune from the consequences of war – usually destructive, but sometimes in the more acceptable form of gifts from the contrite warrior – it was natural for observant monks to be well informed about war. On WJ see E. M. C. Van Houts, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, Groningen 1983, and on the relationship between WJ and WP, Davis, 'William of Poitiers' 76–80.

¹⁶ Barlow, 33. One implication of this is that the engagement in 1057 which is conventionally referred to as the 'battle of Varaville' was in fact not a battle. Here I entirely agree with Barlow, 33 and de Bouïard, 205, that it was not. See below p. 153. Of course if we eliminate Val-ès-Dunes and Varaville from the roll of William's battle honours then it becomes a little harder to see him as the general who, when he rode into the field of Hastings 'had never fought a battle which he had not won', Brown, *The Normans*, 45. Cf. R. Allen Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, 1969, 49.

enemy force, probably depends on what is meant by 'in the face of', but it is undoubtedly true that although there were earlier occasions when William offered battle, and may have done so seriously, in fact no battle actually took place.¹⁷ In passing it should also be noted that, so far as we can tell, in the summer of 1066 Harold too was without experience of command in a set battle.¹⁸ What makes this point all the more striking is the observation that at Hastings 'the core of the army was a force of fighting men seasoned in the many wars Duke William had fought'.¹⁹ It follows that there were many wars but very few battles.²⁰ In that case three questions at once arise. The first, why were battles so rare? The second, just what was William's normal style of warfare? The third, why in 1066 did he depart from his familiar methods and try something of which he had no experience?

To start with the first question. Hastings, as every schoolgirl knows, was a decisive victory. And this is how it was understood in the eleventh century.²¹ Moreover the battle of Val-ès-Dunes also seems to have been regarded as being decisive. It is true that the defeated Guy of Brionne was able to remain in revolt for a long time afterwards – for three years according to Orderic – nonetheless it does look as though as a result of the battle the military initiative passed into William's hands.²² But if one of the more dramatic events in William's early career had indeed been his participation in a decisive victory in battle, then this only sharpens the question.²³ Why, if he had learned that battles could bring important advantages to the victor, did he subsequently and for so long avoid

¹⁷ On William offering battle see below pp. 150–1.

¹⁸ Though it should be noted that we know a great deal less about Harold's military career than we do about William's. It might, however, be argued that it generally was the case that when battles occurred it was between commanders who had little or no experience of battle. On the battle of Lewes, for example, David Carpenter has observed that 'not a single person on either side in 1264 had ever been in one', D. Carpenter, *The Battles of Lewes and Evesham 1264/5*, Keele 1987, 17.

¹⁹ M. Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England 1066–1166*, Oxford 1986, 9–10.

²⁰ Exactly how many wars it is hard to know, but a likely minimum is that he went to war in at least thirteen of the years between 1047 and 1065. Very probably he went to war more often than this but given the gaps in the sources, – none of them by authors who were setting out to compile detailed annals – and given the well-known chronological problems which they present, (see Davis, 'William of Poitiers' 75–77 and Bates, Appendix A) we are unlikely to get much further than this minimum estimate. But we must always bear Chibnall's warning in mind. 'In dealing with a period where the evidence is so exiguous and warfare was almost continuous, it is important not to imagine that the few engagements of which we have some knowledge, even if accurately reported, were the only things that happened', Orderic ii, 365.

²¹ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 208, 248.

²² Jumièges, 123; *Gesta Guillelmi*, 18–20; Orderic vi, 210.

²³ Since the first section of WP's History is missing, we have to rely upon WJ for William's earliest military experiences. Whether or not the undated recapture of Falaise (Jumièges, 118) actually was his first experience of war – WJ could well have discreetly passed over less happy experiences, particularly in the previous months when King Henry had invaded Normandy, burned down the ducal town of Argentan, and returned home laden with plunder (Jumièges, 117–8) – the episode nicely illustrates the generalisation, important as it is well-known, that 'the military strategy of the period was based almost entirely on the castle or town', Barlow, 30. See also the chapter on 'The castle in war' in R. A. Brown, *English Castles*, 2nd edn., 1976.

battle?²⁴ For there can, I think, be no doubt that he did avoid battle, i.e. the absence of battles in the years 1048 to 1065 is not simply because other generals were afraid of William and ran away whenever he approached. This is undeniably one of the impressions which WP tries to create.²⁵ Unfortunately he significantly weakens his case in a passage in which he comments generally on William's defence of Normandy from the time of his youth up until his forty-fifth year. He remarks that whenever King Henry attacked, William went out of his way to avoid battle.²⁶

Why then did William avoid battle when it could be decisive? The answer surely is, precisely because it could be decisive. Decisive for the loser as well as for the victor and no general could ever be absolutely certain of victory. So far as we can see Hastings was a very close run thing, and Val-ès-Dunes may have been as well.²⁷ Indeed it is unlikely that any given battle would take place unless both commanders felt they had a reasonable chance of victory. In a fairly evenly balanced situation a few minutes of confusion or panic and the patient work of months or even years might be undone. Moreover although battle might tip the strategic balance one way or the other, it does not follow that all battles did. The advantage won by William's victory over the northern rebels at York in 1069 was to be very short-lived. Later that same year the North was up in arms again, the Danes landed, Edgar Atheling returned to the fray and an army 'marching in high spirits' re-captured York.²⁸ More directly relevant to the subject of William's generalship prior to 1066 is the battle of Mortemer in 1054. Here Count Robert of Eu won the victory which effectively put an end to King Henry's invasion in that year, but it neither altered the balance of power in northern France nor led to the break-up of the Capetian-Angevin alliance against William. Thus in 1057 the allies were to invade Normandy again, and it is just possible that they did so

²⁴ In De Bouïard's view William disliked battle so intensely that he fought only two (Val-ès-Dunes and Hastings) in his whole career, and even these two were forced upon him by his adversaries, De Bouïard, 205. By my reckoning William the general fought two or three battles, Hastings, probably York 1069 (in both of these it was William who took the initiative) and Gerberoi 1079; and William the soldier fought in a fourth (Val-ès-Dunes).

²⁵ E.g. *Gesta Guillelmi*, 40, 78, 110.

²⁶ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 28. True he ascribes this to William's laudable concern for the royal dignity and to his memory of their former friendship, but royal dignity may have meant more to William after 1066 (when WP was writing) than it had before. Moreover, as WP himself notes, other Normans were less troubled by such scruples.

²⁷ WP emphasises the strength of the opposition at Val-ès-Dunes – 'the greater part of Normandy' (*Gesta Guillelmi*, 16) and this, together with WJ's statement that 'the king and the duke were undaunted by their enemies' fierce attacks' (Jumièges, 123), might be thought to imply that they had been dangerous attacks. The stories told by Wace in the *Roman de Rou*, composed in the 1160s and 1170s, might be taken to reinforce the impression that the issue hung long in the balance, but it is surely rash to attempt to reconstruct the course of the battle – as do De Bouïard, 127–31 and Douglas, 50–1, – from tales told and songs sung for a hundred years before they reached the ears of the man who wrote them down. We only have to listen to a modern guide at a historical monument to realise that topographical precision is not the slightest guarantee of historical accuracy. See also Matthew Bennett, 'Poetry as history? The "Roman de Rou" of Wace as a source for the Norman Conquest', *Battle v.*, 21–39. All we really know about Val-ès-Dunes is that Henry and William won it.

²⁸ ASC 'D' ad annum 1069.

in 1058 as well.²⁹ What was really decisive was neither Mortemer nor William's own victory in the engagement at Varaville in 1057, but the fact that both Henry I and Geoffrey Martel happened to die in 1060.³⁰ Even victory in battle might, in other words, bring only limited rewards, whereas there was always the possibility that defeat might be disastrous. Seeking battle was a high-risk strategy.

Moreover if the imminent prospect of battle brought to all men the terrible fear of injury, or death, or shame, then to none more so than the commander himself.³¹ This is because it was always clear that the surest way to win a battle was to kill or capture the opposing commander. Thus the critical importance of the moment at Hastings when William calmed the fears of his men by showing them that he was still alive and well.³² It was not only that Harold – and his brothers – died at Hastings. Harold Hardrada and Tostig were killed at Stamford Bridge. Conan of Brittany had been killed at the Battle of Conquereuil in 992. William fitzOsbern was to be killed at Cassel in 1070.³³ Since we know that, as things turned out, William managed to survive his battles, it is easy to forget the very great risks he was taking. At Gerberoi his horse was killed under him, and 'he who brought up another for him, Toki of Wallingford, was immediately killed by a bolt from a crossbow'.³⁴ William escaped with an injury to his hand. It sounds minor but just such an injury was to cost William Clito his life in 1128.³⁵ Hastings was clearly no exception. If WP is right in saying that William had three horses killed under him then it may have been merely a matter of luck as to whether it was he or Harold who was killed first.³⁶ Even if he escaped death or injury a prince had reason to worry about the political

²⁹ O. Guillot, *Le comte d'Anjou et son entourage au XIe siècle*, Paris 1972, 81, citing the *Cart. de Notre Dame du Ronceray*, no. 80, 'Anno . . . MLVIII quando profectus est comes in Normanniam cum exercitu cum rege Francie Henrico super comitem Guillelmum'.

³⁰ As WP implicitly recognised when, immediately after reporting their deaths, he announced his intention of turning to the subject of William's conquests, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 84–6.

³¹ See, e.g., Orderic's account of a confrontation between William and Fulk le Réchin, probably in 1081: 'Dum utraque acies ad ambiguum certamen pararentur, horribilesque pro morte et miseriis quae mortem reproborum sequuntur, timores mentibus multorum ingererentur' (Orderic ii, 308–10).

³² *Gesta Guillelmi*, 190; *BT* ed. D. M. Wilson, pl. 68. By the early twelfth century it was believed that King Henry had had a close shave at Val-ès-Dunes, *De gestis regum* ii, 287.

³³ Orderic ii, 282.

³⁴ *ASC* 'D' ad annum 1079.

³⁵ Symeon ii, 282–3. This Durham author was exceptionally well-informed, perhaps reflecting the diplomatic interests of Bishop Flambard.

³⁶ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 198. I am not convinced that WJ ever really said that Harold was killed at the beginning of the battle, in *primo militum congressu* (Jumièges, 135). The train of thought indicated by the sentences before and after the sentence containing this phrase, in particular the words at the beginning of the next sentence, 'Comperientes itaque Angli regem suum mortem oppetiisse . . . iam nocte imminente' suggests to me that what WJ actually wrote was in *postremo militum congressu*; *postremo* then being misread by a copyist who overlooked the *post* abbreviation. WJ's autograph does not survive, so all extant MSS may derive from an early copy already containing this scribal error. See the stemma in Van Houts, 67.

consequences of being taken prisoner.³⁷ To judge from WP's account of the capture of William of Aquitaine in 1033 and of Theobald of Blois in 1058, it looks as though William's advisers were well aware of this danger.³⁸

In the light of all these considerations it would be reasonable to imagine that an eleventh-century prince might be a little nervous about battle. Thanks to the remarkable *Fragmentum Historiae Andegavensis* written by Count Fulk le Réchin, we can show that at least one such prince certainly was. The climax of Fulk's brief history of the counts of Anjou (written in 1096) comes when he describes the war of succession between him and his brother Geoffrey (1060–68):

'Time and again we made war (*guerram*) one upon the other. With interludes for truces this tribulation went on for eight years altogether. Then, on the instructions of Pope Alexander, I released my brother from the chains in which I held him, but still he attacked me yet again, laying siege to my fortress (*castrum*) of Brissac. There I rode against him with those princes whom God, in his clemency, permitted to join me, and I fought with him a pitched battle in which, by God's grace, I overcame him; and he was captured and handed over to me, and a thousand of his men with him.'³⁹

Only on one other occasion does Fulk refer to God's grace, and that is in his reference to Fulk Nerra's victory, *Dei gratia*, over Count Odo of Blois in the battle of Pontlevoy.⁴⁰ Battle was a desperate business; the risks terrible; the outcome uncertain. As Fulk Rechin's language shows, it was at this perilous moment that events were felt to move out of human control and into the hands of God. Since then the rewards might be limited while the risks were always terrible, it is not surprising that prudent commanders should prefer to look for other methods, methods which 'did relatively little harm if things turned out badly, and yet brought great gains when they turned out well'.⁴¹ This, after all, would be the professional approach to war and, as Allen Brown has so often emphasised, these were men whose approach was professional through and through.⁴² This, moreover, was the advice they received from Vegetius, author of that late Roman handbook on war which, throughout the middle ages and beyond, was to

³⁷ William of Malmesbury was to have some sympathetic words for the plight of politically valuable prisoners, *De gestis regum* ii, 288.

³⁸ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 32–4. Slightly later examples that come readily to mind are Robert Curthose at Tinchebrai and King Stephen at Lincoln.

³⁹ L. Halphen and R. Poupardin, ed., *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et des seigneurs d'Amboise*, Paris 1913, 237. This time Geoffrey stayed in prison. Fulk Rechin was one of the enemies who were to give William such a hard time in the later years of his life. I entirely agree with Jim Bradbury's re-assessment of this prince elsewhere in this volume.

⁴⁰ Halphen and Poupardin, 234.

⁴¹ 'Quae si male cesserint, minus noceant, si bene, plurimum prosint', Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris*, ed. C. Lang, Leipzig 1885, 91–2.

⁴² Here the appropriate footnote is surely Brown, *passim*.

remain 'the soldier's Bible'.⁴³ For Vegetius was emphatic. Battle should be the last resort. Everything else should be tried first.⁴⁴

What then were these other methods? What was William's normal style of warfare in the years between 1047 and 1066? I begin with an analysis of William on the attack.⁴⁵ By far his greatest success before 1066 was his conquest of Maine and WP is very clear as to how this was achieved. His principal target was Le Mans itself, *validissima urbs, caput atque munimentum terrae*. But rather than an immediate and direct assault on the city itself, William preferred a different way. 'This then was his chosen method of conquest. He sowed terror in the land by his frequent and lengthy invasions; he devastated vineyards, fields and estates; he seized neighbouring strongpoints and where advisable put garrisons in them; in short he incessantly inflicted innumerable calamities upon the land.'⁴⁶ In these succinct phrases we have an excellent outline of the basic strategy of attack: the intention is to seize fortresses and the standard preliminary is to ravage the surrounding countryside.⁴⁷ In 1073, when William had to recover Maine, he adopted the same methods. In the words of the ASC, 'In this year king William led an English and French host oversea and conquered the province of Maine, and the English laid it completely waste; they destroyed the vineyards, burnt down the towns, and completely devastated the countryside, and brought it all into subjection to William.'⁴⁸ Similarly William's enemies were expected to operate in the same way. When Henry I invaded Normandy in 1054, he came, according to William of Poitiers, with the intention of 'destroying *oppida*, burning villages, here putting to the sword, there seizing plunder, and so in the end reducing the whole land to a miserable desert'.⁴⁹ Since no system of magazines and supply lines was capable of sustaining an army embarked on operations in enemy territory it followed that armies were forced to forage to stay alive.⁵⁰ Of course foraging and ravaging are not quite identical activities, but the fact

⁴³ On Vegetius see W. Goffart, 'The date and purpose of Vegetius' *De Re Militari*', *Traditio* xxxiii, 1977. I have not seen B. S. Bachrach, 'The practical use of Vegetius' *De Re Militari* during the early middle ages', *The Historian* xlvii, 1985. But wide of the mark is D. J. A. Ross's notion (in 'The Prince Answers Back: "Les Enseignemens de Theodore Paliologue"', C. Harper-Bill and R. Harvey eds., *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood*, Woodbridge 1986, 165) that even when he wrote Vegetius was 'hopelessly out of date'. Eternal common-sense principles – R. C. Smail's apt description of Vegetius' strategic maxims – do not date.

⁴⁴ 'Ideo omnia ante cogitanda sunt, ante temptanda, ante facienda sunt, quam ad ultimum veniatur abruptum.' Vegetius, 86.

⁴⁵ A narrative of William's wars would take up more space than I have here and would, in any case, be superfluous. For a recent excellent chronological summary of his campaigns in their political and military context see Bates, 73–83.

⁴⁶ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 90. Characteristically WP explains that this was because William wished to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.

⁴⁷ As, in the next century, Jordan Fantosme was to put it: 'Let him . . . lay waste their country . . . then besiege their castles' (R. C. Johnston, ed., *Jordan Fantosme's Chronicle*, Oxford 1981, 11.439–50). See Gillingham, 83–4.

⁴⁸ ASC 'E' ad annum 1073.

⁴⁹ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 70; cf. 'ad Calcivum subvertendum territorium . . . ad demoliendum comitatum Embroicensem' (Jumièges, 129).

⁵⁰ M. Van Creveld, *Supplying War. Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*. Cambridge 1977, 7–10. Van Creveld's analysis, based on seventeenth century conditions, applies *a fortiori* to the eleventh.

remains that in most circumstances one man's foraging is another man's ravaging. Thus 'the usual method, indeed the very aim of warfare was to live at the enemy's expense' and by doing so compel him to give in to your demands.⁵¹ Ravaging, and foraging while ravaging, was the principal strategy of attack. All this was strictly the Gospel according to Vegetius. 'The main and principal point in war is to secure plenty of provisions for oneself and to destroy the enemy by famine.'⁵² The point about ravaging, and foraging while ravaging, was that it was directed simultaneously to both these ends. At one and the same time moreover it suited both the overall campaign strategy of the commander and the individual interest of the ordinary soldier who was fighting for private profit, for plunder. A method which worked on all these levels at once was clearly a supremely efficient one.

WP's account of the 1063 conquest of Maine is, of course, phrased in very general terms. None the less it is precisely these strategic generalisations which enable us to make sense of his much more detailed account of the earliest episodes in the history of Norman military pressure on the county of Maine, pressure which dated back to the early 1050s. It all began with a counter-attack, William's reaction to a threatening advance made by the most formidable warrior of the day, Count Geoffrey Martel of Anjou.⁵³ At an unknown date, but probably *c.* 1051 when he acquired a firm grip on Maine, Geoffrey Martel took control of Alençon and Domfront, 'the former within, the latter adjoining the borders of Normandy'.⁵⁴ According to WJ, having placed troops in the fortress of Domfront, Geoffrey began to ravage Normandy. Indeed according to WP, it was precisely the licence to plunder which Geoffrey gave them which made his lordship so attractive to the men of Domfront and Alençon.⁵⁵ William responded by launching an attack on Domfront. The strength of this fortress's site meant that it could not be taken by assault so, after an initial attempt to take it by surprise had failed owing to treachery within his own ranks, William settled down to build four siege castles in an attempt to starve it into submission.⁵⁶ He adopted, in other words, a strategy of blockade and attrition. But a phrase like 'settling down' to besiege should not be taken to mean that William had adopted an inactive 'wait and see' style of warfare. On the contrary. In WP's words, 'he went out riding by day and night, or lay hidden under cover, to see whether attacks could be launched against those who were attempting to bring in

⁵¹ Van Creveld, 23, 27, 32.

⁵² 'In omni expeditione unum est et maximum telum, ut tibi sufficiat victus, hostes frangat inopia' (Vegetius, 69). Thus, as Matthew Bennett has pointed out in 'The Status of the Squire: the Northern Evidence', *Ideals and Practice* (as n. 43), 4, even in the *chansons de geste* ravaging is portrayed as an entirely commonplace activity.

⁵³ For his great reputation as a soldier see *Gesta Guillelmi*, 32, 42; Orderic ii, 104; Halphen and Poupardin, 235.

⁵⁴ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 42. On the date see Bates, 255–7.

⁵⁵ Jumièges, 124; *Gesta Guillelmi*, 38.

⁵⁶ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 36. That William initially hoped to take Domfront by surprise seems a very plausible interpretation of WP's words. See De Boïard, 199.

supplies, or carrying messages, or trying to ambush his foragers'.⁵⁷ The struggle for Domfront very quickly resolved into a struggle for supplies, a typical example of Vegetian warfare. Precisely this, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was still the cardinal problem in war: how to capture a town before the resources of the surrounding country gave out.⁵⁸

When he heard that Geoffrey was bringing an army to the relief of Domfront, William, leaving troops behind to maintain the siege, rapidly advanced to meet him. But no battle occurred. Geoffrey, according to WP, was suddenly overcome by fear and fled before he even caught sight of the Norman army.⁵⁹ To historians who assumed that most medieval generals were keen to fight battles, this apparently timid behaviour on the part of so formidable a warrior cried out for explanation. Thus Halphen believed that it must have taken a diversionary attack on Anjou to make him turn back, and so he dated these events to 1049 when there is evidence for a campaign waged by Henry I in the Loire valley.⁶⁰ It is likely, however, that Geoffrey's withdrawal was both sensible and normal, calling for no special explanation. According to WP, after his adversary's ignominious retreat, William was free to lay waste his rich lands, but, understanding the wisdom of restraint in victory, he decided not to do so.⁶¹ What this most probably means is that Geoffrey's army, though it presumably retreated, had none the less remained close enough to inhibit William's ravaging.⁶² In that case William was now in a fix. With his army stationary before Domfront he faced very great logistical problems.⁶³ It may be that at this stage of the campaign Geoffrey Martel had reason to believe that he had obtained the upper hand. But William, acting with startling speed and ferocity, turned the tables. He turned suddenly against Alençon and took it with scarcely a blow being struck.⁶⁴ The additional information provided by WJ allows us to glimpse the reality behind WP's vague and bland words. A fort across the river from Alençon was seized, fired and some of the defenders brutally punished. William's ferocity persuaded the citizens of Alençon that, if they wished to retain their feet and hands, they had better surrender at once. Equally impressed the garrison of Domfront also decided to yield.⁶⁵ The notoriety of the atrocity at Alençon – as Barlow pointed out, WP's silence is good evidence that it was regarded as barbarous – has, quite naturally, tended to overshadow the other details in WJ's

⁵⁷ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 38.

⁵⁸ Van Creveld, 28.

⁵⁹ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 38–40.

⁶⁰ L. Halphen, *Le comté d'Anjou au XI^e siècle*, Paris 1906, 72–4; followed by Guillot, 72 n.320. De Bouïard (200–1), while dating the Domfront campaign to 1051, none the less retained Halphen's explanation; so also Barlow, 19. At least Douglas (59–60) inserted the word 'perhaps' when writing that Geoffrey left Maine 'owing to a threat to Anjou by King Henry'.

⁶¹ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 40–2.

⁶² This, it may be, is the manoeuvre that Harold had failed to carry out when he was taken by surprise by William's rapid advance.

⁶³ Van Creveld, 25. And for William's insistence on keeping moving in 1066 see below, p. 157.

⁶⁴ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 42.

⁶⁵ Jumièges, 126–7.

account.⁶⁶ But these too are very valuable. We are told that William turned on Alençon because his scouts had informed him that the town was in a poor state of readiness; that he then rode through the night and attacked at dawn; finally, having taken and garrisoned Alençon, he returned to Domfront 'in great haste'.⁶⁷ Unquestionably the Domfront campaign is an extremely illuminating one. It illustrates some very characteristic features of William the Bastard at war. Within a closely-supervised strategy of attrition he succeeded because he ensured that he was kept well-informed – frequently riding out on patrol himself – because he moved rapidly and because he was prepared to be brutal.

The next stage in the Norman Conquest of Maine came in 1055. William ordered the construction of a *castrum* at Ambrières (in the lordship of Geoffrey of Mayenne, a vassal of Martel), and, reports William of Poitiers, the lord of Mayenne knew only too well what this portended: once they had completed Ambrières the Normans would have a free hand to raid, ravage and lay waste his lands.⁶⁸ Geoffrey Martel swore to protect his vassal and approached Ambrières, where William, with his army, eagerly awaited his arrival. Geoffrey, however, proved a disappointment, preferring to keep his distance. Despite this apparent timidity on Geoffrey's part, it is evident that his strategy did in fact achieve a degree of success. William withdrew from Ambrières. According to WP he did so because both princes and ordinary soldiers were complaining about food shortages.⁶⁹ In other words Geoffrey had successfully undermined William's capacity to supply his troops, presumably by making it unsafe for them to go out foraging. Geoffrey was now in a position to launch an assault on the Norman garrison of Ambrières unimpeded by the presence of William's army. As it turned out, however, his assault failed and William was sufficiently determined to muster fresh troops and return to the scene of the action. Now it would have been Geoffrey's turn, as commander of the army laying siege to Ambrières, to suffer the logistical consequences of immobility and so it is hardly surprising to find him retreating in the face of the Norman advance. Thus William was able to consolidate his hold on Ambrières. Soon afterwards Geoffrey de Mayenne drew the appropriate conclusion and submitted.⁷⁰

Two years earlier the revolt of William of Arques had precipitated a series of

⁶⁶ Barlow, 20. For the nature of the insult see E. M. C. Van Houts, 'The origins of Herleva, mother of William the Conqueror' *EHR* ci, 1986, 399–404. For additional evidence that William came to have the reputation of being an unusually ruthless soldier see J. F. Benton, ed., *Self and Society in Medieval France. The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent*, New York 1970, 69.

⁶⁷ In WJ's account of William's earliest known campaign we find a similar emphasis on the speed of the young duke's movements (Jumièges, 118, 126–7). Once again one of Vegetius' maxims is to the point: 'courage is worth more than numbers, and speed is worth more than courage', cited by P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, (trans. M. Jones), 1984, 252.

⁶⁸ Thus if ravaging was a preliminary to seizing fortresses, so also seizing fortresses was a preliminary to ravaging. In 1074, for example, 'Philip the king of France sent a letter to him (Edgar Atheling), . . . he would give him the castle of Montreuil so that thereafter he could daily work mischief upon his enemies' (ASC D).

⁶⁹ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 76. If William's decision to offer battle before Ambrières meant that his army remained immobile for a while then this would have materially added to his logistical problems.

⁷⁰ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 76–80.

events which were more characteristic of the defensive warfare of the first period of the duke's military career and which, at any rate as described by WP, were dominated throughout by the question of supplies. First on the scene were the duke's *principes militiae* based at Rouen. They at once did their best to prevent foodstuffs and other supplies being carried to Arques in preparation for the expected siege. But the waggons were too well guarded. By the time William arrived – so great, we are told, was the haste with which he had ridden from the Cotentin that all his horses but six had fallen exhausted by the wayside – there was nothing for it but to build a siege-castle and lay a blockade. Some time later while William, who could not afford to be immobilised for long by the siege of a single castle, was away on other business, King Henry I marched to the relief of Arques. Not all went as he would have wished. He suffered heavy casualties when a section of his army was ambushed by the blockading force, and he was unable to dislodge them from their siege-castle. None the less before returning to France he managed to get both supplies and reinforcements into Arques. In the end, however, hunger forced the garrison of Arques to surrender, and the image of starving men gave WP the opportunity for a few literary flourishes, including, of course, an allusion to Vegetius: *famis acrimonia saevius et arctius quam armis*.⁷¹

In this period what strategy did William employ when he was confronted by an invading army, as in 1053, 1054 and 1057? As we know already, thanks to WP, he preferred to avoid battle (see above p. 145). But just what did this involve? Did it, for example, mean that he decided to take refuge in his castles and hope for the best?⁷² The clearest statement of the defensive strategy he in fact adopted comes in William of Malmesbury's description of how the duke handled the great invasion of 1054. In this year King Henry launched a two-pronged attack on Normandy, one army under his brother's command, entering northeast Normandy, and the other, which he commanded, invading the Evreçin. Faced by this threat William, according to William of Malmesbury, manoeuvred 'so that he neither came to a close engagement nor yet allowed his land to be devastated'.⁷³ This of course is a twelfth century, not an eleventh-century version, but the point is that WM had read what both WJ and WP wrote about 1054 and, in the light of his understanding of the practice of his own day, he was drawing out and laying bare the strategic principles, principles which are, in any event, implicit in their accounts. Thus WJ wrote that 'with some of his men he shadowed the king and inflicted punishment on any member of the royal army whom he was able to catch'.⁷⁴ As this passage makes plain the point of having a force in the field and bringing it fairly close to – 'shadowing' – the invading army was to deter the invaders from detaching small units from their main force, in other words, as WM realised, to prevent them ravaging and foraging. Obviously any defender who could catch an invader while some of his

⁷¹ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 54–62. cf. Vegetius, 69.

⁷² The method suggested by J. Beeler, *Warfare in Feudal Europe*, 1971, 57.

⁷³ 'ut nec cominus pugnandi copiam faceret, nec provinciam coram se vastari sineret' (*De gestis regum* ii, 290).

⁷⁴ Jumièges, 129–30.

troops were dispersed ravaging was in a strong position. Thus Orderic describes how, in 1069, the Danes landed a great army at Ipswich but were then, *in praedam diffusi*, caught by local levies and defeated, losing thirty men. A little later the same invaders met a similar fate when they landed at Norwich and once again went plundering.⁷⁵

In the great invasion of 1054 it was an incident of this sort which was to prove decisive. In the words of William of Jumièges, the duke 'forthwith picked a force of soldiers and sent them with all speed to check the pillagers of the Pays de Caux . . . they came up with the French at Mortemer, finding them engaged in arson and the shameful sports of women. They attacked immediately at day-break'.⁷⁶ Commenting on this passage, Beeler noted, evidently with some surprise, that Robert of Eu (the victorious commander) 'seems to have been aware of the value of surprise'.⁷⁷ The tone here is very characteristic of some modern historians' approach to medieval warfare – though not, needless to say, of RAB's. The defeat of his brother's army at Mortemer persuaded Henry to call off his invasion. It is clear that William's commanders adopted the same defensive strategy in both 1053 (see below p. 154) and 1057. In 1057 Henry and Geoffrey were defeated at the crossing of the River Dives when the tide came in at Varaville cutting off the rear of their army and exposing it to attack. William came up rapidly and cut it to pieces.⁷⁸ William of Poitiers offers the additional information that William attacked *cum exigua manu virorum* and this reinforces the impression that he was once again shadowing the invader, not looking for a pitched battle but ready to exploit any opportunity that presented itself.⁷⁹

Of course it would be different if the invader chose to seek battle, called in his incendiaries and foraging parties, and advanced with a concentrated force. Assuming the defender wished to avoid battle then there was probably little he could do except retreat – or as WP might say 'flee' – taking care to stay just out of reach of the invading force. On the other hand the invader could not advance far in this fashion. Sooner or later, and probably sooner, he would be forced to send out foraging parties and then the defender's opportunities would come.⁸⁰

In fact, of course, since systematic ravaging was the principal strategy of attack, it followed that a defensive strategy based on shadowing and harrassing was an extremely effective one. From the point of view of the invading troops, once they could no longer go plundering then soldiering lost its appeal and they just wanted to go home. Paid troops could still, of course, expect their wages, but

⁷⁵ Orderic ii, 226.

⁷⁶ Jumièges, 129–30. In this brief passage note the number of words denoting speed and timing: *protinus, celerrime, illico mane*.

⁷⁷ Beeler, 45. But the attempt to surprise one's opponent was, of course, normal in medieval warfare, even indeed in so-called chivalrous warfare. For a discussion of this see J. Gillingham, 'War and Chivalry in the History of William the Marshal' in P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd, eds. *Thirteenth Century England: ii*, Woodbridge, 1988. For the importance of surprise in both the northern and southern campaigns of 1066 see Brown, 'Hastings', 7–9.

⁷⁸ 'alacriter superveniens', Jumièges, 131.

⁷⁹ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 80–82.

⁸⁰ Presumably it was being able to foresee this that made William decide not to advance into Maine in 1051 (above p. 150).

even they would presumably regret the loss of the anticipated bonus of loot; and, as for unpaid troops, their enthusiasm for war presumably sank even lower. According to William of Malmesbury, after Stamford Bridge Harold made the mistake of not sharing out the plunder and as a result he was to have few with him at Hastings except *stipendiarios et mercenarios milites*.⁸¹

A strategy of shadowing and harrassing involved rapid movement, often with fairly small forces; it involved sudden attacks and equally swift retreats. It is hard to conceive of a type of warfare more dependent upon good group discipline.⁸² Equally it is hard to envisage a type of warfare in which tricks like feigned flights would be more natural and more frequently practised. Thus, for example, the feigned flight by which a section of King Henry's army was trapped and ambushed in 1053.⁸³ So there would be nothing in the least remarkable about the employment of such tricks in the Battle of Hastings.⁸⁴

Clearly in this sort of warfare reconnaissance was vital; and being vital, was standard practice.⁸⁵ Significantly William of Poitiers mentions the normal only in order to contrast it with what was not normal. For William, in his biographer's words, was more solicitous of the army's safety than he was of his own life. Therefore, dissatisfied with the customary practice of relying on other men's reconnaissance, he was in the habit of going out on patrol himself. Immediately after landing in England he went on patrol with an escort of just twenty-five men, including one of his key military advisers, William fitz Osbern.⁸⁶ Similarly on his 1068 Exeter campaign he rode ahead of the main army 'to reconnoitre the ground and walls and to discover what preparations the enemy were making'.⁸⁷ And the implication of William of Poitiers' account of the Domfront campaign (see above p. 149) is that this was a habit which William had developed early. Naturally advance information was particularly valuable; it was therefore normal practice to employ spies.⁸⁸ At the same time, of course, spies only become news when they are caught. Thus we hear about one sent across the Channel by Harold because he happened to be detected and was then employed by William as part of his propaganda war against the 'usurper'.⁸⁹

Equally, of course, enemies tried to keep their intentions and movements

⁸¹ *De gestis regum* i, 281-2.

⁸² This point is nicely made in Brown, *The Norman Conquest*, 51, though to call this a 'wait and see' method is perhaps to give an unduly passive label to what was an extremely active form of defence.

⁸³ Jumièges, 120.

⁸⁴ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 194. Yet this is a matter on which despite the entirely justified comments of Brown, 'Hastings', 16, doubts continue to be raised. See J. M. Carter, 'The Feigned Flight at Hastings Re-considered', *The Anglo-Norman Anonymous* vi (January 1988).

⁸⁵ The early thirteenth-century History of William the Marshal contains several object lessons on how to organise effective reconnaissance. See Gillingham, 'War and Chivalry'.

⁸⁶ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 168. This, in WP's opinion, was another of the ways in which William was a greater man than the generals of antiquity. For another medieval commander who liked to involve himself in reconnaissance work, see J. Gillingham, *Richard the Lionheart*. 1978, 193-4, 272, 284-6.

⁸⁷ Orderic ii, 212.

⁸⁸ Presumably this is one of the reasons for the common practice of sending envoys into the enemy camp. See, e.g., *Gesta Guillelmi*, 38-40, and, in 1066, 172-9. If the good general went out on patrol himself, then the ideal king acted as his own spy, *De gestis regum* i, 126.

⁸⁹ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 154-6.

secret. There is an interesting contrast between the invasion of 1054 when, says William of Poitiers, the duke knew the disposition of the French forces in advance, and the invasion of 1057 when, says William, for fear of the duke they tried to keep their plans secret.⁹⁰ Since in 1057, unlike 1054, they were able to penetrate deep into Normandy and 'burn and ravage the duchy all the way to the sea', it seems that this is a panegyrist's way of saying that they had actually succeeded in keeping William in the dark.⁹¹

In general, of course, William succeeded and he succeeded because his information was good – as in the capture of Alençon (above p. 151). Above all his information was good in 1066. It is possible that the timing of the Norman fleet's move to St Valéry from the mouth of the Dives just four days after the dispersal of Harold's war-fleet was no coincidence but the result of information supplied by William's 'frigates'.⁹² What is certain is that William owed his chance of victory at Hastings to the fact that he learned of Harold's movements in time. In time, but if we can trust WP's account of the nervous mood in the Norman camp when they learned that Harold was advancing rapidly and that his fleet had cut off their retreat to Normandy, then only just in time. Fearing a surprise attack, possibly at night, William hurriedly called to arms the men left behind in the camp – for the greater part of the army was out foraging. In his anxiety William even put his hauberk on the wrong way round. According to William of Jumièges, the Normans stood to arms throughout the night, fearing an attack.⁹³ In fact, of course, the attack never came. Perhaps, as RAB suggests, Harold halted at or near the ridge at Battle in order to rest his troops, and this respite enabled William to seize the initiative.⁹⁴

If this is so then it is ironic that Harold's fatal miscalculation may, in part, have been the consequence of information he had obtained himself while on his own involuntary 'reconnaissance patrol' in Normandy in 1064. As an eyewitness of the Breton campaign of that year he had enjoyed a rare opportunity to observe William's military style at close quarters, and what he saw, if we may trust WP, was a cautiously conducted war of attrition. The approach of William's relieving army forced Conan of Brittany to abandon his siege of Dol (a strongpoint whose lord, Ruallon, was at the time William's ally). Aware, however, of the problems of taking a large army into unknown and unproductive territory, *per regiones vastas, famelicis, ignotas*, William decided not to pursue Conan. Indeed soon afterwards supply problems compelled him to return to Normandy. Then, learning that Conan had joined forces with Count Geoffrey of Anjou (Fulk Rechin's brother), he re-entered Brittany but ordered his men to refrain from

⁹⁰ 'hostem distributum praevenit' (1054) (*Gesta Guillelmi*, 70); 'Famam tamen sui motus, quantum potuere, occultantes', (1057) (*ibid.* 80).

⁹¹ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 80. Similarly the fact that William had to withdraw in haste from Dol in 1076 makes it plain that on that occasion too his information gathering system had broken down (Orderic ii, 352; ASC D and E *ad annum* 1076).

⁹² As suggested by C. M. Gillmor, 'Naval Logistics of the Cross-Channel Operation, 1066', *Battle* vii, 124.

⁹³ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 180–2; Jumièges, 135.

⁹⁴ Brown, 'Hastings', 9.

ravaging, presumably because the enemy army was in the vicinity – though according to WP the order was given purely out of consideration for the interests of the lord of Dol on whose territory he was encamped. In the event there was no battle and once again both sides withdrew, though it is characteristic of WP that he should say that William returned home while his enemies fled.⁹⁵

Perhaps if Harold had witnessed William's sudden strike against Alençon in 1051 he might have been more on his guard in 1066. As it was, however, what he saw was a very typical example of William at war – a campaign in which the duke seems to have been prudently content with a small gain: the preservation of the allegiance of the lord of Dol, just as in 1055 he had been content with the establishment of an outpost at Ambrières. In 1064 there was no sign of an aggressive, battle-seeking, risk-taking strategy. On the contrary it was a struggle of attrition in which, more than anything else, questions of supply seemed to dominate the course of events, a campaign very much in the style of all the other campaigns of the last fifteen years – a good guide, Harold might have thought in the summer of 1066, to the kind of war he was facing now.

Certainly it is clear that throughout the summer of 1066 the organisation of supplies was crucial. Given the fact that armies normally followed the call of their stomachs and kept on the move in order to stay alive, the month when the Norman troops were based at Dives-sur-Mer obviously caused enormous logistical problems. B. S. Bachrach's calculation of what was involved when an army of 14,000 men, including non-combatants, and 2–3,000 horses, remained immobile for a month makes fascinating reading: the 9,000 cartloads of grain, straw, wine and firewood, the river of 700,000 gallons of urine which the horses would have produced, the mountain of five million pounds of horse-shit which it would have taken 5,000 cartloads to remove (presumably, on sanitary grounds, not the same carts as those that brought in the food and drink).⁹⁶ We do not need to accept a single detail of Bachrach's calculation to know that, on the general point, he must be absolutely right. The logistical problems which William faced must have been massive ones; and, as Allen Brown observed, he 'triumphantly overcame' them. By contrast, Brown argues, Harold did not.⁹⁷ Throughout the summer the English forces were stationed along the south coast but 'when the festival of the Nativity of St Mary (8 September) came, the men's provisions had run out, and no one could keep them there any longer'.⁹⁸ In Allen Brown's words, Harold's failure to solve 'logistical problems which were, if anything on a lesser scale than those which Duke William triumphantly overcame' was 'potentially disastrous' and 'must throw light on the Old English military organization and its efficacy'.⁹⁹ But this implied criticism underestimates the additional problems which Harold, as defender, had to face. He had to wait,

⁹⁵ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 110–12.

⁹⁶ B. S. Bachrach, 'Some observations on the military administration of the Norman Conquest' *Battle* viii, esp. 11–15, developing the point made by Gillmor. 'Naval Logistics', 124.

⁹⁷ Brown, 'Hastings', 6–7.

⁹⁸ ASC C.

⁹⁹ Brown, 'Hastings', 6–7.

probably not knowing just when and where the attack would come. Yet he had to be prepared. Moreover as defender he suffered a second significant disadvantage, and one of which William of Poitiers was well aware, as he shows in a speech he put into the duke's mouth. 'He (i.e. Harold) does not have the courage to promise his men the least part of that which belongs to me. I, on the other hand, shall promise and give away not only my own possessions but also those which, at the moment, are said to belong to him. Victory will go to the man who is prepared to be generous not only with his own property but also with that of his enemy'.¹⁰⁰ In fact, of course, despite these disadvantages, Harold actually held his forces together from May until early September, i.e. for longer than William did. Moreover the fact that Harold was eventually forced to disband his army made no difference in the end – since William did not attack in early or mid-September. Perhaps indeed at this time the winds were against him.¹⁰¹

Even after the crushing victory at Hastings the question of supplies continued to matter. William's triumphal progress faltered in Kent when, as a result of eating meat and drinking water – presumably the wine had run out – many died of dysentery and even more, according to William of Poitiers, nearly did so. Luckily for William the political disarray of the English after Hastings meant that there was no one to challenge the Normans at this critical juncture. A little later the duke himself fell seriously ill. Nonetheless, in a striking illustration of the problems faced by an immobile army, he permitted no delay for fear they would run out of supplies.¹⁰² If William's speech to the magnates at Dives-sur-Mer accurately reflects the kind of thinking in the Norman HQ, then it may well be that, aware of the attacker's advantage, they deliberately decided to postpone the invasion, to use delay, in other words, as a calculated manoeuvre in a war of attrition, as well, of course, as a means of avoiding battle in unfavourable circumstances, at sea or when disembarking. This suggestion, first made by Marjorie Chibnall, would fit very well with everything we know about William's military career up to that date.¹⁰³

The gospel according to Vegetius said that only in the most exceptional circumstances should a general risk battle.¹⁰⁴ By the night of 13–14 October 1066 we are clearly in such exceptional circumstances. Harold had brought his army close enough to William's to prevent it ravaging; he had also, according to WP, sent a fleet round to cut off William's retreat.¹⁰⁵ In this situation it was obvious that William had no real choice but to risk battle. But it was also so

¹⁰⁰ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 158.

¹⁰¹ Although WP insists that William was waiting for a favourable wind throughout the time he was at Dives, it is only after he had arrived at St Valéry that we hear of prayers for a south wind (*Gesta Guillelmi*, 150, 158–60). It is also worth noting that neither WJ nor the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* mention Dives as a port of embarkation. For them prayers and/or favourable winds relate only to St Valéry, Jumièges, 134; *Carmen*, 4–6.

¹⁰² *Gesta Guillelmi*, 212.

¹⁰³ 'The delay may have been a deliberate tactic of William' (Chibnall, II); cf. Brown, 'Hastings' n. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Vegetius, 86–91.

¹⁰⁵ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 180–4.

obvious that William might find himself in this situation that it must surely have been anticipated. Indeed it is hard to see how William could have derived an advantage in any way commensurate with the scale of preparations for this war unless he brought Harold to battle. In that case it may well be that for the first time in his life he adopted a battle-seeking strategy, and that the ravaging of East Sussex was intended partly as a provocation to draw Harold into striking range.¹⁰⁶ William may have offered battle before, but that is one thing; beginning a campaign with the intention of bringing the enemy to battle quite another.¹⁰⁷ In that case the delay and attrition of the summer of 1066 might have been employed as a tactical device within a battle-seeking strategy.

But 1066 was exceptional. Just how exceptional is shown by the style of warfare in England during the next five years. There was probably a battle at York in 1069, and once again it was one in which William was able to take his opponents by surprise.¹⁰⁸ In essence, however, it was to take another long drawn-out war of attrition before William could feel confident that England was a conquered country. The guerilla warfare waged by the English was the normal medieval defence strategy of shadowing and harassing adapted to local conditions, i.e. in a land of few castles the resistance leaders tended to make their bases not in castles but in the wild country.¹⁰⁹ In this grim struggle the castles built by the Normans played a vital role.¹¹⁰ They enabled the occupying power to control the main towns and to keep at least a watching brief over the main roads. They also functioned as prisons for hostages meant to guarantee the loyalty of local society.¹¹¹ But above all else resistance was overcome by ravaging. Thus the Norman Conquest ended, not with a battle, but with a ravaging, the Harrying of the North, the supreme example of the soldier's brutal art. And this, in Orderic's words, 'I do not dare to praise': *laudare non audeo*.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 180. I.e. whichever strategy you adopted, ravaging remained an important component.

¹⁰⁷ Of course it takes two to make a battle. It may be that, as I have suggested elsewhere (Gillingham, 'Richard I', 85), Harold was adopting the standard defensive strategy. Or it may be that, encouraged by his success in the Battle of Stamford Bridge, Harold himself wanted to repeat this new and intoxicating experience. Cf. Commynes's comment on the effect of the battle of Monthéry on the mind of Charles of Burgundy (Philippe de Commynes, *Memoirs*, trans. M. Jones, Harmondsworth 1972, 79). Either way, during the night and early morning of 13–14 October, Harold was tactically outmanoeuvred.

¹⁰⁸ 'King William came unexpectedly upon them from the south with an overwhelming host, and routed them'. *ASC D*.

¹⁰⁹ S. Reynolds, 'Eadric Silvaticus and the English Resistance' *BIHR* liv, 1981, 102–5.

¹¹⁰ 'For in the lands of the English there were very few of those fortifications which the French call castles; in consequence the English, for all their martial qualities and valour, were at a disadvantage when it came to resisting their enemies' (Orderic ii, 218). This famous judgement is one which Orderic may well have taken over from the old soldier himself; at this point Orderic is still using the lost part of WP's text.

¹¹¹ Turgot, later of Durham and St Andrews, 'unus erat inter alios qui, nuper subjugata Normannis Anglia, obsides pro tota Lindesia in Lindicolino castro custodiebatur' (Symeon ii, 202).

¹¹² Orderic ii, 232 (above pp. 141–2).