

'The main reason for the success of battles in this period was luck.'

How far does a study of the Battle of Hastings support this statement?

Explain your answer. You should refer to the Battle of Hastings and your contextual knowledge.

[16 marks + 4 SPaG]

Although I believe luck was a reason for the success of battles in this period, I firmly believe that many other factors influenced the outcome of Norman battles - the most important of these being tactics. (okay so here I am IMMEDIATELY establishing my opinion which is a really good thing to do, as the examiner now knows what I'll be arguing for) Luck was a reason for the success of battles in the Norman period, as at Hastings it was only by luck that Harold Godwinson was killed first (this is my point). Before Godwinson's death, both the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans had been fighting for hours and throughout the battle, William had had three horses killed under him, yet had somehow survived, arguably by pure luck (my explanation about my point). Furthermore, the Norman invasion of England was delayed until the winds changed on the 27th September 1066, meaning that (here we go!! one of the key phrases to use, using this phrase will force you to come up with a reason why. You need to argue your point!) by the time William and his troops arrived at Pevensey on the 28th September, Harold's men were in the north after fighting at Stamford Bridge and had to march down to Hastings meaning they were exhausted and therefore perhaps did not perform to their full capabilities. However, luck was only really a factor at Hastings and not at other battles during the period, unlike tactics which was a prominent factor at many battles and arguably, it was only due to the exploitation of luck that battles were actually won. (here is that sustained judgement I was talking about! I'm making it really clear to the examiner just what I think.)

I firmly believe that tactics was the main reason why battles were won in Norman England, as I have no doubts that if the Anglo-Saxons had kept their shield wall intact they most likely would have won the Battle of Hastings. (so I'm immediately establishing what factor this paragraph will be about and by now the examiner should definitely know just what my opinion is) At Hastings, William used the tactic of feigned retreat, which had already been proven to be a successful technique at other battles, such as at St Aubin in 1053 and at Messina in 1060 - both battles which William won using the feigned retreat tactic. At Hastings, while Godwinson stuck with his shield wall, William actually changed tactics mid-battle and used feigned retreat which led to (key phrase!!) the shield wall breaking up, as many inexperienced fyrdsmen fell for the false retreat. This opportunity of changing tactics arose due to luck, as some historians have argued that William's soldiers actually began to genuinely retreat after believing William to be dead. Therefore, while luck was a factor here, it was only due to it being exploited by tactics that the battle was actually won. Another example of tactics being arguably the main reason for the success of battles in Norman England was at Fulford Gate on the 20th September 1066 (okay unsure if this is the same for your exam case study but we have to provide examples of other battles, which is exactly what I'm doing here and I also did this when I mentioned St Aubin and Messina earlier too). At Fulford Gate, Harald Hadrada and his experienced soldiers snuck up behind Edwin and Tostig and attacked them from behind, while Tostig Godwinson and the inexperienced soldiers served the purpose of "distracting" Edwin and Morcar's army from in front. This led to (here it is again, I will admit I don't use the key phrases much at all because I didn't particularly like to use them as my answers sort of naturally include what would come after these phrases just without the phrases BUT other people in my class who were working at roughly the same level as you found it very useful to keep using the key phrase and these phrases go for EVERY single question on the history paper) Hadrada's success at the battle. Therefore, tactics is clearly the main reason why Norman battles were won. (here my opinion is again!!!!)

While tactics was the main reason battles were won, it's clear that resources played a role in the

outcome of battles. (would you just look at that my opinion is here yet again!!) At Hastings, William had cavalry and the gonfanon, which allowed him to easily communicate with his men - something which Harold could not do. Harold not having cavalry meant (key phrase here!) that when his soldiers began to fall for the Norman feigned retreat, he had no way of telling them it was a trick, leading to the breakdown of the shield wall and therefore his main chance at victory. As well as this, Harold was unable to get any archers for Hastings, as they were a more popular weapon in the north. This unavailability of archers may have lead to (key phrase!!) Harold being unable to deploy any new useful tactics at Hastings. Likewise, at Stamford Bridge on 25th September 1066 (okay so here's another case study! I don't think you need to put many in, I was just getting a bit excited I think haha), Hadrada was taken by surprise by the appearance of Harold Godwinson's army, who had marched just under 300km in under 5 days. Hadrada and his men, not expecting any problems at this point, had left their armour at their ships 25km away. This lack of protection was a clear factor in them not winning the battle. While resources played a role in the outcome of battles, at Hastings, both sides were evenly matched - although arguably Harold's fyrds men did not compare to William's mercenaries and cavalry - with around 7000 men so I believe resources were not as important as tactics at Hastings, as I believe that if the shield wall hadn't broken, Harold could have won the battle.

In conclusion, I do not agree with the factor in the statement, as I strongly believe tactics was the main reason for the success of battles in this period and not luck. (surely my opinion is abundantly clear by now, remember this sustained judgement throughout will get you into the very top band - which is band 5 I believe!) At Hastings, it's clear to see that William's use of feigned retreat was an extraordinary tactic that led to (key phrase again!) the breakdown of the Anglo-Saxon shield wall and therefore the defeat of the Anglo-Saxons. In my opinion, the moment the Anglo-Saxon shield wall was broken, an Anglo-Saxon defeat was inevitable.