The Battle of Crécy, 1346

ANDREW AYTON and PHILIP PRESTON

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THE BATTLE OF CRÉCY, 1346

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Preface and Acknowledgements

In October 1998 the Battlefields Trust held their first overseas residential conference at Crécy-en-Ponthieu, with the battles of Crécy and Agincourt as its twin foci and with invited speakers from the United Kingdom and France. This book owes its inspiration to that occasion, and in particular to the conference dinner, during which, as strangers, we struck up a conversation on some of the perennial questions that surround the campaign and battle of Crécy. It quickly became apparent that we shared the belief that a substantial, multi-faceted study devoted to the battle of Crécy was long overdue; and in the light of the new evidence and fresh interpretations that had emerged during the conference, it was clear to us that the time was ripe for such a project. That it has taken flight has been owing to the enthusiastic – and patient – support of Boydell & Brewer, who have been everything that authors could wish for in a publisher.

Several of those who spoke at the Crécy conference in 1998 have been kind enough to submit their papers as chapters for this book. For their contributions, we are most grateful to Professor Bertrand Schnerb, of the Université de Lille; to Professor Michael Prestwich, of the University of Durham; and to Dr Christophe Piel, of the Paris Sorbonne. Although inspired by the Crécy conference, this book is by no means a straightforward collection of the papers that were given on that occasion. The original lecture on the English army has been greatly expanded to form Chapter 5. (This represents the first major output from a project on Edward III's armies supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Board: RLS: APN 13143 / AN 8490.) There were some important gaps to fill, and we have taken it upon ourselves to supply the greater part of this new material (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 9 and 10). However, for Chapter 8, on the political repercussions in France following the battle, we are particularly grateful to Madame Françoise Autrand of the École Normale Supérieure. We should also like to thank Dan Smith for his assistance in the translation of this paper.

We are pleased to acknowledge the expert assistance of Professor Jean Sommé, of the Laboratoire de Géomorphologie et d'Étude du Quaternaire at the Université de Lille, who provided an opinion on a significant element of the topography of the battlefield; and Robert Hardy, who offered technical guidance concerning the longbow. Similarly, we are grateful to Dr Paul Adamthwaite of the Archives and Collections Society, who compiled a report on the tides in the Somme estuary on 24 August 1346 (see http://www.aandc.org/research/tides.html). We would like to thank Monsieur Eric Balandra, of the History Society of Crécy, whose formidable academic and local knowledge has frequently been of assistance to us. For advice and encouraging words at various stages of our research, thanks are also due to Professor John Palmer, Professor David Crouch, Dr Julian Haseldine and Dr Richard Gorski – all of the History Department at the University of Hull. Richard Gorski is also responsible for the

Battle of Crécy Trust website, where a range of source materials relating to the battle may be consulted (http://www.hull.ac.uk/history/dept/crecytrust.htm). The staff of the Bibliothèque municipale d'Abbeville kindly assisted in the interpretation of nineteenth-century maps of the battlefield of Crécy. For the conference that inspired us, we would like to acknowledge the co-operation of the Battlefields Trust, and in particular their Secretary, Chris Scott; the logistical help of Jean-Claude Brasseur and Roger Brechet of L'Association Crécy la Bataille; and the support of the Mayor of Crécy, who allowed the use of both the cinema and the Salle des Fêtes. Our gratitude goes also to Miss Monica Harper, British Consul General in Lille, whose presence brought the occasion official recognition.

We should like to take this opportunity to remember the late General Sir Martin Farndale KCB, who was present at the 1998 conference in his capacity as President of the Battle of Crécy Trust, and to whom this book is dedicated. As a past Master Gunner at St James's Park, General Farndale's interest in Crécy was not only in his unceasing efforts to help in the creation of a Battle Centre, but also for the fact that it was at Crécy that the forerunners of his regiment, The Royal Artillery, first used guns.

This book has been some years in the making and, like Michelangelo, we have been asked many times when we would be finished. We leave it to others to decide whether it satisfies 'in its artistic details'. That it has been brought to completion is due in no small part to our wives, Agnes and Kirsi, who have been faithful and patient supporters, and sources of much good sense, throughout the years that we have spent talking about the battle of Crécy.

Andrew Ayton
Shugborough
Staffordshire

Sir Philip Preston Bart.
Crécy-en-Ponthieu

Abbreviations

Acta Bellicosa, ed. Moisant	'Acta Bellicosa Edwardi Tertii', in J. Moisant, *Le Prince Noir en Aquitaine, 1355–6, 1362–70* (Paris, 1894)
Acts of War, ed. Barber	'The acts of war of Edward III (1346)', *The Life and Campaigns of the Black Prince*, ed. and trans. R. Barber (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 26–40
Anonimalle	*The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1333–1381*, ed. V.H. Galbraith (Manchester, 1927)
Avesbury	Adam Murimuth, *Continuatio chronicarum* and Robert de Avesbury, *De gestis mirabilibus regis Edwardi Tertii*, ed. E.M. Thompson, Rolls Ser. (London, 1889)
Baker	*Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Swynebroke (1303–56)*, ed. E.M. Thompson (Oxford, 1889)
BIHR	*Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*
BL	British Library
Black Prince Register	*Register of Edward the Black Prince*, ed. M.C.B. Dawes, 4 vols (London, 1930–3)
Brut, ed. Brie	*The Brut*, ed. F.W.D. Brie, 2 parts, Early English Text Society, cxxxi and cxxxvi (1906–8)
Canterbury	*Chronica Johannis de Reading et anonymi Cantuariensis 1346–1367*, ed. J. Tait (Manchester, 1914)
CCR	*Calendar of Close Rolls*
CFR	*Calendar of Fine Rolls*
Chandos Herald, ed. Tyson	*La vie du Prince Noir by Chandos Herald*, ed. D.B. Tyson (Tübingen, 1975)
Chronique de Flandre	*Istore et croniques de Flandres d'après les textes de divers manuscrits*, 2 vols (Brussels, 1879–80), ii, pp. 27–45, 56–71 [short continuation of the *Chronique de Flandre*]
Chronique des quatre premiers Valois	*Chronique des quatre premiers Valois (1327–1393)*, ed. S. Luce (Paris, 1862)
Chronique Normande	*Chronique Normande du xiv^e^ siècle*, ed. A. and E. Molinier (Paris, 1882)
Chronographia	*Chronographia regum Francorum*, ed. H. Moranville, 2 vols (Paris, 1891–7)
CIPM	*Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*
Complete Peerage	*The Complete Peerage*, ed. G.E. Cokayne, revised edn, 12 vols in 13 (London, 1910–57)
CPR	*Calendar of Patent Rolls*
EHR	*English Historical Review*
Eulogium	*Eulogium historiarum sive temporis*, ed. F.S. Haydon, Rolls Ser., 3 vols (London, 1858–63)
Foedera	*Foedera, conventiones, litterae etc.*, ed. T. Rymer, revised edn by A. Clarke, F. Holbrooke and J. Coley, 4 vols in 7 parts (Record Comm., 1816–69)

Fowler, 'News from the front'	K. Fowler, 'News from the front: letters and despatches of the fourteenth century', in P. Contamine, C. Giry-Deloison, M. Keen, eds, *Guerre et société en France, en Angleterre et en Bourgogne, xiv^{e}–xv^{e} siècle* (Lille, 1991), pp. 63–92
Froissart: Amiens	Froissart, *Chroniques, Livre 1. Le manuscrit d'Amiens*, ed. G.T. Diller, 3 vols (Geneva, 1991–2)
Froissart: Rome	Froissart, *Chroniques. Début du premier livre. Edition du manuscrit de Rome Reg. lat. 869*, ed. G.T. Diller (Geneva, 1972)
Froissart, ed. Lettenhove	*Oeuvres de Froissart*, ed. K. de Lettenhove, 28 vols (Brussels, 1867–77)
Froissart, ed. Luce	Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. S. Luce et al. (Paris, 1869–1957)
Gilles le Muisit	*Chronique et annales de Gilles le Muisit, abbé de Saint-Martin de Tournai (1272–1353)*, ed. H. Lemaître (Paris, 1906)
Grandes chroniques	*Grandes chroniques de France*, ed. J. Viard (Paris, 1920–53)
Historia Roffensis	BL, Cotton MSS, Faustina, B. V [*Historia Roffensis* or Rochester chronicle]
Jean de Venette, ed. Newhall	*The Chronicle of Jean de Venette*, trans. J. Birdsall, ed. R.A. Newhall (New York, 1953)
Jean le Bel	*Chronique de Jean le Bel*, ed. J. Viard and E. Déprez, 2 vols (Paris, 1904–5)
John of Reading	*Chronica Johannis de Reading et anonymi Cantuariensis 1346–1367*, ed. J. Tait (Manchester, 1914)
Knighton, ed. Martin	*Knighton's Chronicle, 1337–1396*, ed. G.H. Martin (Oxford, 1995)
Lanercost, ed. Stevenson	*Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. J. Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1839)
Le Prince Noir, ed. Michel	*Le Prince Noir. Poème du heraut d'armes Chandos*, ed. F. Michel (London and Paris, 1883)
Melsa	*Chronicon monasterii de Melsa*, ed. E.A. Bond, 3 vols, Rolls Ser. (London, 1866–68)
Murimuth	Murimuth, Adam, *Continuatio chronicarum* and Robert de Avesbury, *De gestis mirabilibus regis Edwardi Tertii*, ed. E.M. Thompson, Rolls Ser. (London, 1889)
Norwell	*The Wardrobe Book of William de Norwell, 12 July 1338 to 27 May 1340*, ed. M. Lyon, B. Lyon, H.S. Lucas and J. de Sturler (Brussells, 1983)
PRO	Public Record Office
RDP	*Reports . . . Touching the Dignity of a Peer*, 5 vols (London, 1820–9)
Récits	*Récits d'un bourgeois de Valenciennes*, ed. K. de Lettenhove (Louvain, 1877)
Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*	C.J. Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp: English Strategy under Edward III, 1327–1360* (Woodbridge, 2000)
Rot. Parl.	*Rotuli Parliamentorum*, ed. J. Strachey et al., 6 vols (London, 1767–83)
Rotuli Scotiae	*Rotuli Scotiae*, ed. D. Macpherson et al., 2 vols (Record Comm., 1814)
Scrope and Grosvenor	*The Scrope and Grosvenor Controversy*, ed. N.H. Nicolas, 2 vols (London, 1832)

St Omer chronicle	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Fr. 693, fos 248r–279v
Sumption, *Trial by Battle*	J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Trial by Battle* (London, 1990)
Tout, *Chapters*	T.F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England. The Wardrobe, the Chamber and the Small Seals*, 6 vols (Manchester, 1920–33)
Treaty Rolls, 1337–39	*Treaty Rolls, ii, 1337–1339*, ed. J. Ferguson (London, 1972)
TRHS	*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*
Villani	*Chronica di Giovanni Villani*, ed. M.L. Ridotta (Florence, 1823)
Wrottesley, *Crecy and Calais*	G. Wrottesley, ed., *Crecy and Calais from the Original Records in the Public Record Office* (London, 1898)

Documents cited in the notes by class number alone are to be found in the National Archives (formerly known as the Public Record Office), Kew.

This book is dedicated to the memory of
General Sir Martin Farndale KCB
late President of the Battle of Crécy Trust

1

The Battle of Crécy: Context and Significance

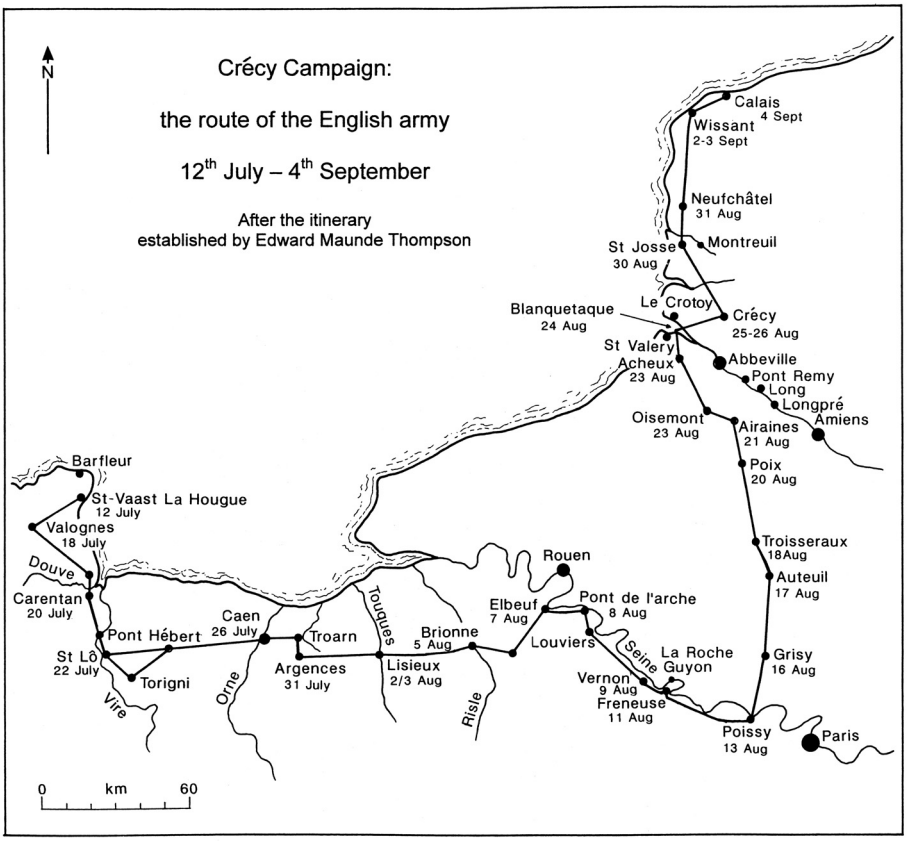
ANDREW AYTON

At dawn on 12 July 1346, a vast armada of ships appeared off the coast of Normandy. Their destination was St Vaast-la-Hougue, a small port on the north-eastern corner of the Cotentin peninsula. The size of the fleet and the presence of ships bearing the quartered leopards and lilies of the royal arms of England indicated that this was no mere raid. In fact, it was to be the largest amphibious operation of the Hundred Years War, and it had achieved complete surprise. The consternation of the local population can easily be appreciated. Robert Bertran, Marshal of France and commander on the spot, was able to muster a few hundred men. But since, according to an English narrative, a force of five hundred Genoese crossbowmen, their pay in arrears, had withdrawn from the area a few days previously, it is small wonder that the English met only light resistance as they landed and moved inland.[1] It took several days to disembark the horses and supplies, during which time flying columns ranged across the Cotentin peninsula. Barfleur, a town 'as good and large as Sandwich', was burnt.[2] 'The men-at-arms of the region have withdrawn into the castles and fortified towns,' noted Bartholomew Burgherssh in his report of 17 July. 'There is no one left in the surrounding countryside for twenty miles around who is offering resistance,' added Thomas Bradwardine in his letter of the same day. It had been an auspicious opening for the English, and on Tuesday, 18 July Edward III and his army set out from La Hougue and began the campaign proper. The king's intention, reported Burgherssh, was 'to secure his rights by conquest'.[3]

1 *Acts of War*, ed. Barber, p. 28; St Omer chronicle, fo. 259r; *Chronique de Flandre*, ii, p. 39. Cf. *Récits*, pp. 215–16; *Canterbury*, p. 187.

2 Michael Northburgh's newsletter of 27 July: *Murimuth*, pp. 212–14; *Avesbury*, pp. 358–60. This is one of eight newsletters to survive from the Crécy campaign. The others are: Bartholomew Burgherssh, 17 July and 29 July (*Murimuth*, pp. 200; 202–3); Thomas Bradwardine, the chancellor of St Paul's (*Murimuth*, pp. 201–2); Michael Northburgh, 4 September (*Avesbury*, pp. 367–9); Richard Wynkeley, 2 September (*Murimuth*, pp. 215–17; *Avesbury*, pp. 362–3); Edward III, 29 July (C81/314, no 17803, printed in Fowler, 'News from the front', pp. 83–4) and 3 September (Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 789, fos 148r–148v; printed in *Le Prince Noir*, ed. Michel, pp. 308–11). All except the king's letter of 29 July are reproduced in English translation in R. Barber, *Life and Campaigns of the Black Prince* (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 13–25. On the newsletters arising from the Crécy campaign, see G. Martin, 'John the Blind: the English narrative sources', *Johann der Blinde, Graf von Luxemburg, König von Böhmen 1296–1346*, ed. M. Pauly (Luxembourg, 1997), pp. 83–92 (at pp. 86–9); and Fowler, 'News from the front', pp. 76–80, 83–4.

3 'le roy ou soun hoste chivache avant en la terre pur conqerer soun dreit'. *Murimuth*, p. 200.



Map 1

A good deal is known about the six-week campaign that followed. An itinerary for Edward III's march across Normandy can be established from a combination of administrative records and fourteenth-century narratives.[4] (See Map 1.) Eyewitness accounts and contemporary secondary sources provide much

4 Sources: (1) William Retford's financial account for the king's kitchen (E101/390/11): arranged as a journal, it records the names of the places where this department of the royal household lodged on each day of the campaign. See *Baker*, pp. 252–3; Tout, *Chapters*, iv, p. 115 and n. 5. (2) A contemporary itinerary, surviving in a fifteenth-century copy: BL, Cotton MS, Cleopatra D. VII, fo. 179, printed in *Baker*, pp. 253–5. (3) The *Acta Bellicosa*, a campaign diary apparently written by a member of Edward III's army. It survives in a single, incomplete, late fourteenth-century copy, which narrates events up to 28 July, resuming on 11 August to continue the story to 20 August. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 370; imperfectly printed in J. Moisant, *Le Prince Noir en Aquitaine, 1355–6, 1362–70* (Paris, 1894); translated in Barber, *Life and Campaigns of the Black Prince*, pp. 26–40. (4) Geoffrey Baker's account of the campaign, which is clearly based on another contemporary itinerary (*Baker*, pp. 79–86). (5) The English newsletters: see n. 2 above. E.M. Thompson reconstructed Edward III's itinerary based upon (1), (2) and (4): see *Baker*, pp. 255–7. As he noted, the 'discrepancies' in detail that are evident when these texts are compared are no doubt the consequence of the texts having been 'written independently by persons marching with different divisions of the army'. For amendments to Thompson's interpretation of the place-names in Retford's kitchen journal, see H. Belloc, 'Crécy', *Six British Battles* (Bristol, 1931), pp. 15ff.

detail, from a variety of perspectives, on many of the engagements that took place along the English line of march – from the skirmishes in the Cotentin, through the storming of a series of towns, most notably Caen on 26 July, to the climactic encounter at Crécy-en-Ponthieu on 26 August. With the exception of the week or so leading up to Crécy, reconstructing the sequence of major events presents few problems. For the most part, we seem to know what happened, where and when. However, difficulties arise when attention is turned to the *interpretation* of these events, for in this respect the documentary sources are both less revealing and less consistent in their testimony. In these circumstances, it is easy to see how historians seeking to discover what was really happening during this campaign, and why, have come to very different conclusions. Did the English march from La Hougue to Crécy proceed according to a strategic plan, which had anticipated the necessity of crossing the Seine and the Somme, and which had a battlefield confrontation with Philip VI as its principal aim? Or was this, in the main, an improvised operation, responsive rather than purposeful: a great chevauchée, which by the second week of August had become 'a very dangerous adventure',[5] and which culminated in a battle that Edward, having been closely pursued by his adversary, had been compelled to fight?

At first glance, the Crécy campaign does indeed have the appearance of a great 'chivalrous adventure'.[6] It was punctuated by dramatic *coups de main*: the assault on Caen, the seizure of a bridgehead over the Seine at Poissy and the crossing of the Somme at Blanquetaque. The campaign is also notable for smaller-scale feats of arms, which contributed much to the chivalric reputations of those involved but little to Edward's purpose. Take, for example, Sir Thomas Holland's reckless ride onto the bridge at Rouen – 'une emprise oultrageuse' as one chronicler characterised it; or Sir Robert Ferrers's audacious amphibious raid across the Seine to attack the castle of La Roche Guyon.[7] The chroniclers delighted in reporting such displays of knightly prowess, but for all the bravado, there was a darker side to this campaign. A central feature of the English march from La Hougue to Crécy that is not readily conveyed by a line drawn on a map is the ravaging of the countryside and the plundering of towns that accompanied the progress of the army. The extent of the devastation wreaked is emphasised by contemporary writers, whether of continental or English provenance. Eyewitnesses recorded that ravaging was undertaken on a broad front – about fifteen to twenty miles around the line of march.[8] If anything, the sacking and burning of towns along the route was still more damaging, since 'the greatest concentrations of wealth in the medieval world were to be found' in such places.[9] As Jean

5 As characterised by Charles Oman: *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London, 1924), ii, p. 132.

6 Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, ii, p. 131.

7 *Récits*, p. 220; *Acts of War*, ed. Barber, p. 35.

8 *Murimuth*, p. 215; *Avesbury*, p. 358. See also C.J. Rogers, 'By fire and sword: *bellum hostile* and "civilians" in the Hundred Years War', *Civilians in the Path of War*, ed. M. Grimsley and C.J. Rogers (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2002), pp. 33–78: map 2.1 (p. 38) provides some indication of the extent of devastation along chevauchée routes.

9 Rogers, 'By fire and sword', pp. 45–7 and n. 62.

le Bel observed, 'no man alive could imagine or believe . . . the riches that were gained and robbed' in the great mercantile town of St Lô.[10] Few historians would now doubt that such extensive devastation of town and country was, in the main, calculated and purposeful, the very essence of the 'practice of war', intended (in addition to the gathering of supplies) to destroy economic resources and challenge the authority and honour of the Valois king and his nobility.[11] Taking the argument a stage further, Clifford Rogers has recently found a 'definite strategic rationale' in this destruction. This was to 'to put [Philip VI] in a lose–lose situation', in which he either accepted battle, in all likelihood in unfavourable circumstances, or failed 'visibly and unequivocally . . . in the foremost duty of kingship: to protect (or at least to avenge) the subjects of the realm'.[12]

Edward III's chivalric mentality, centred as it was on the enhancement of his martial reputation and on the vindication of his honour, especially with regard to his claim to the French throne, was the driving force in his 'just quarrel' with Philip VI. The chivalric code to which he subscribed was flexible enough to accommodate the practical requirements of the English way of war. Thus, for Edward, the two faces of the Crécy campaign, the chivalric and pragmatic, coexisted comfortably and without contradiction. In the first place, we may be sure that neither he nor indeed his peers in the aristocratic elite of Christendom would have been troubled by the hardship caused by the systematic ravaging of town and country. Such activities were legitimate in a just war, and the guiding principles of chivalry were, in any case, little concerned with the welfare of the peasantry.[13]

Secondly, from the outset of the campaign, political calculation was tightly woven into the chivalric ceremonial that was an essential part of the martial ritual of the king's army. Immediately upon landing at La Hougue, 'the king and his army . . . in a group made their way to a high hill near the shore', where the Prince of Wales and other noblemen were knighted by the king.[14] The dubbing ceremony formed part of a spectacle that was charged with political symbolism. Much emphasis was given to Edward's claim to the French throne, as demonstrated by Godfrey de Harcourt's homage for his lands in Normandy and symbolised by the prominently displayed Garter, bearing the uncompromising motto 'Hony soit q' mal y pense'.[15] And the whole event was witnessed by a sizeable proportion of England's political elite, headed by six of the eight earls who were militarily active at the time. The ritual was repeated before the climactic battle began at Crécy. According to Froissart (here, as usual,

10 *Jean le Bel*, ii, pp. 77–8.

11 The classic study of this subject is H.J. Hewitt, *The Organisation of War under Edward III* (Manchester, 1966), ch. 5: 'War'.

12 Rogers, 'By fire and sword', pp. 56–7; C.J. Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp: English Strategy under Edward III* (Woodbridge, 2000), *passim*. Hewitt noticed the 'battle provocation' argument, but was unconvinced by it: *Organisation of War*, pp. 99–100, 116–17.

13 See Rogers, 'By fire and sword', pp. 54–5, and references cited there.

14 *Acts of War*, ed. Barber, pp. 27–8.

15 Harcourt: *Acts of War*, ed. Barber, p. 29. The argument that the Garter was 'an integral part' of Edward's Norman campaign from the outset draws upon Juliet Vale's convincing interpretation in *Edward III and Chivalry* (Woodbridge, 1982), pp. 77–82.

elaborating upon Jean le Bel, but perhaps based upon independent eyewitness testimony), Edward toured the ranks of his army mounted on a white palfrey and carrying a white baton.[16] The Monk of Malmesbury notes that 50 men were elevated to knighthood, some of whom can be identified in the Chancery records.[17] Edward was fully aware that 'ritual preparation . . . was vital for a medieval army'. As Michael K. Jones has observed: 'The effectiveness of ritual could determine the way men fought and how battle might unfold. A force inspired by a shared cause that all could understand and believe in would have greater cohesion and unity.'[18]

Political calculation might also lead to the partial suspension of the chivalric code that regulated the behaviour and treatment of knightly combatants during and after battle. This can be seen in Edward's attitude towards French prisoners of war. During the aftermath of the English assault on Caen, a group of French noblemen, including the count of Eu and the lord of Tancarville, expecting no quarter from the common soldiery, were greatly relieved to see Sir Thomas Holland, with whom they had served 'in Prussia, Grenada and elsewhere' and to whom they could now surrender. Needless to say, Holland was delighted to oblige. Jean le Bel's story reminds us that the aristocratic protagonists in 1346 were members of a wider, international knightly community and that, at another time and place, they had been comrades in arms.[19] The count of Eu may have hoped for parole and early release in return for a ransom, in accordance with the norms of chivalric convention, but Edward III had other ideas. As Burghershh notes in his newsletter, the king ordered the prisoners' immediate despatch to England, 'without being released for ransom or by any other means, until he shall have accomplished more by his war'.[20] The count of Eu was constable of France, and removing such a figure from the political and military equation would weaken the French war effort. Indeed, such 'great' prisoners could bring other benefits. Froissart states that in order to obtain his release, the count agreed to sell to the English king his county and castle of Guines – a strategic location close to Calais, which if true would explain the count's execution for treason on his eventual return to France in 1350.[21]

16 Jean le Bel mentions the king's tour of the ranks; Froissart adds the description of his appearance. *Jean le Bel*, ii, p. 106; *Froissart*, ed. Luce, iii, p. 170; *Froissart: Rome*, p. 719. It was usual practice for Edward to engage with his men in this fashion on the eve of battle: see M. Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience* (New Haven and London, 1996), p. 313.

17 *Eulogium*, iii, p. 211; *CPR, 1345–8*, p. 474.

18 M.K. Jones, *Bosworth, 1485. Psychology of a Battle* (Stroud, 2002), pp. 157–8; see also, M.K. Jones, 'The battle of Verneuil (17 August 1424): towards a history of courage', *War in History*, ix (2002), pp. 375–411 (at pp. 400–3), for the duke of Bedford's ceremonial review of his army outside Ivry in August 1324.

19 *Jean le Bel*, ii, pp. 81–3; see notes to these pages for Raoul de Brienne, count of Eu and Jean de Melun, lord of Tancarville and chamberlain of Normandy.

20 *Murimuth*, p. 203. Sir Thomas Holland did, however, become a rich man through the release of his prisoner to the king. The sum agreed was 20,000 marks, payable over a three-year period from the customs duties on wool. *CPR, 1345–8*, pp. 337, 538–9, 550–1.

21 C. Given-Wilson and F. Bériac, 'Edward III's prisoners of war: the battle of Poitiers and its context', *EHR*, cxvi (2001), pp. 802–33 (for the count of Eu, see pp. 821–2).

At Crécy, all regard for the bonds of an international chivalric brotherhood were set aside in the single-minded pursuit of a crushing victory. At the end of the fight the field was littered with the corpses of French (and allied) noblemen. There were few prisoners and certainly none of note.[22] The 'Vallée des Clercs' (as it became known) had become a killing ground through the employment of devastating archery, the enforcement of a severe disciplinary regime, and the effective exploitation of terrain. Whether or not it had been known about in advance (perhaps even regarded as a potential battle site from the outset of the campaign), the ground at Crécy had been well selected and the English army's tactical deployment carefully prepared. A moment's contemplation upon the events that unfolded in the Vallée des Clercs, a veritable valley of death, appears to dispel any notion that this had been a 'chivalric' encounter. We seem very far away from the world of the knightly feat of arms, as epitomised by Sir Thomas Colville's amicable joust with a French knight on the banks of the Somme just two days earlier. [23] And yet chivalry was as relevant to what happened at Crécy as to any battle during the later middle ages. For Edward III, the overwhelming need to vindicate his honour had brought him to this climactic encounter. It has been well observed that the concept of honour in the chivalric context is inherently aggressive: 'the honourable man must demonstrate his honour continually before his peers, and this in turn often involves challenging the honour of others'.[24] Yet Edward's aggression was controlled, and it was founded upon recognition that the prevailing mentality of the European aristocratic military elite could be turned to his advantage. On the one hand, an appeal to the martial mentality of his own nobility ensured that they became participants in his 'just quarrel'; on the other, an appreciation that, quite as much as himself, his adversary was susceptible to the demands of honour was to have a considerable influence on the shaping of his campaign strategy. Whereas for Edward the focused aggression that was fuelled by his chivalric ideals was a source of strength, for Philip VI the need to defend his honour was potentially his Achilles heel. For if the Valois king was to be provoked into making a tactical mistake that could lead to military disaster it would in all likelihood involve a situation in which he, in the midst of his assembled nobility, had been driven, in unfavourable circumstances, to defend his honour as anointed king of France. Thus the significance of Edward's choice of battleground at Crécy was not simply that it was a site that maximised his army's strengths, while neutralising those of his opponents: it was ground upon which his opponent felt compelled to fight. As we shall see, the fact that the site lay in Ponthieu may well provide the key to understanding the battle of Crécy.

In the sense that it was a point of honour for both (in fact, all five participant) kings to fight at Crécy, Edward's campaign could indeed be described as a

22 Given-Wilson and Bériac, 'Edward III's prisoners of war', pp. 804–5.

23 *Anonimalle chronicle*, pp. 22, 160; *Eulogium*, iii, p. 210.

24 J. Barnie, *War in Medieval English Society. Social Values and the Hundred Years War, 1337–99* (New York, 1974), p. 75, which draws on J. Pitt-Rivers, 'Honour and social status', in J.G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London, 1965).

'chivalric adventure'. But for Edward it was an adventure that had been founded upon careful preparation, rather than improvisation: Crécy was a battle that he had planned to fight, not one that he had been forced to accept while seeking to escape the clutches of his adversary. This is surely the most important of the implications of the killing fields at Crécy, and it is a conclusion that is reinforced by re-examination of other aspects of the campaign. Thus, while some historians have regarded the landing in Normandy as the result of a last-minute change of plan, a fresh look at the evidence suggests that a descent upon the Cotentin coast, at La Hougue, was planned well in advance of embarkation, and that this was intended as the principal thrust of a multi-front strategy. Similarly, while the dramatic river crossings at Poissy and Blanquetaque may have the appearance of lucky escapes from 'a very dangerous adventure', there is reason to believe that each had been anticipated before the campaign began and that each was as much a triumph of planning as of prowess. These ideas will be developed in detail in Chapter 2. For the moment, it is sufficient to conclude that there was a good deal more to the English march from La Hougue to Crécy than first meets the eye, that this has indeed been a 'much studied, but much misunderstood' campaign.[25]

Edward III's six-week campaign in northern France in July–August 1346 was much more than the audacious adventure that has been portrayed by many historians. It certainly left an extensive zone of destruction in its wake. Yet what made this campaign memorable, what gave it lasting significance, was the great battle that was fought at its climax. Edward had led three previous expeditions into France and on each occasion the field operations ended in an anti-climactic withdrawal after a tense stand-off. As a consequence, apart from the maritime engagement at Sluys (the prelude to the second of these expeditions), Edward III's early French campaigns are today little remembered outside specialised historical works. The campaign of July–August 1346 was concluded very differently from its predecessors. Indeed, the battle of Crécy can be viewed as a turning point in Edward III's struggle with his Valois adversary, and in many ways a momentous event for the continent of Europe as a whole. It witnessed the defeat of the greatest power in Christendom, of a major army led by the French king in person, by an expeditionary force raised by a kingdom that at that time was not renowned for its military prowess. It was not the first occasion that a king of England had triumphed over a king of France in the field;[26] but the scale of the victory in 1346 was unprecedented. By the standards of the period, the armies that fought the battle were large and the casualties suffered by the French nobility crippling. Philip VI's military reputation was irredeemably damaged, while Edward III's, and that of the English as a whole, soared. Without Crécy and its consequences, it would be difficult to conceive of a 'Hundred Years War': Edward III's war effort would probably have fizzled out. Yet despite its importance, the battle of Crécy has not attracted the academic attention that it

25 Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, p. 219.
26 At Brémule in 1119, Henry I had defeated Louis VI.

deserves,[27] and thanks largely to Shakespeare it is Agincourt that has engaged the popular imagination.[28] The present collaborative volume, a response to this neglect, has been planned on a scale appropriate to its subject, with the hope of filling a notable lacuna in the historiography of the Hundred Years War. It would probably be naïve to imagine that the deeds of Edward III and his lieutenants may yet be raised to a level of popular awareness comparable to that occupied by Henry V's 'band of brothers'. But if this book succeeds in casting new light on the events of 26 August 1346 and in demonstrating the wider significance of those events, it will have fulfilled its primary purpose.

In seeking to understand the battle of Crécy we are confronted by a fundamental problem. How are we to reconstruct what happened on that late summer's evening in Ponthieu? On the one hand, we are constrained by the limitations of our narrative sources. The eyewitness accounts are few in number and brief in their comments on the battle. The second-hand narratives are more numerous and some are more substantial, but they are selective in their coverage, raise as many questions as they answer, and often contradict each other. No doubt some of these weaknesses arose from the fact that the battle began in the evening twilight and continued into the night. As a consequence, the testimony of eyewitnesses, when passed on to chroniclers, may have been more than usually fragmentary and imprecise. For the latter, the temptation to 'fill the gaps' would have been hard to resist, as can be seen to have happened with Geoffrey Baker, author of one of the most famous contemporary accounts of the battle.[29] Yet, it seems that few fourteenth-century chroniclers of the battle attempted to construct a detailed narrative that takes the reader from the beginning of the battle to the end. (An exception is Giovanni Villani, but his version of events, distinctive as it is in a number of respects, has been largely ignored in the English-language historiography of the battle.) Most accounts are brief and insubstantial, but even the longer ones, such as those composed by Jean Froissart, lack a clear, continuous narrative line. Froissart relied heavily on Jean

27 The most carefully researched modern studies of the campaign and battle of Crécy appear as sections in more general works: R. Barber, *Edward Prince of Wales and Aquitaine* (Woodbridge, 1978), chapter 3; J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Trial by Battle* (London, 1990), chapter 14; K. DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 1996), chapter 13; Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, chapters 10 and 11. There have been only two volumes devoted to Crécy in modern times: Henri de Wailly, *Crécy 1346: Anatomy of a Battle* (Poole, 1987) and D. Nicolle, *Crécy 1346* (Oxford, 2000). De Wailly offers some intriguing material on the archaeology of the campaign, but is dependent on a very limited range of sources. Nicolle's book is intended for a popular audience, but displays the author's breadth of knowledge concerning medieval warfare. The recent reprinting of A.H. Burne, *The Crecy War* (London, 1954) will no doubt find a fresh crop of readers for this entertaining if rather dated volume. Prior to de Wailly, the most substantial study by a French scholar was written in the 1920s: J. Viard, 'La campagne de juillet–août 1346 et la bataille de Crécy', *Le moyen âge*, 2nd ser., xxvii (1926), pp. 1–84. The historiography of Crécy is discussed in greater depth in Chapters 3 and 9 of this book; see also, Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, pp. 230–7.

28 Shakespeare's Edward III is little known outside academic circles: E. Sams, ed., *Shakespeare's Edward III* (New Haven and London, 1996).

29 Geoffrey Baker and the other chroniclers discussed here are examined in detail in Chapter 9.

le Bel's version of events, but the latter's tale takes an unusual approach, recounting the story first from the French point of view, then (more selectively) from the English perspective. His battle narrative stops abruptly after the defeat of the first French cavalry onslaught, and all Froissart could do by way of continuation was to append a series of chivalric episodes, assembled it seems from a variety of eyewitness sources.

Added to the difficulties presented by the narrative sources – indeed, partly responsible for those difficulties – is the distinctive nature of the events that they describe. It is the complexity of a battle that is so difficult to recapture: the swirl of simultaneous movements by thousands of participants, and beyond the physical level, the psychological dimension of combat, the frame of mind and emotional responses of those engaged. It is small wonder, as John Keegan memorably demonstrated in his classic study *The Face of Battle*, that the writing of convincing 'battle pieces', for whatever period of history, is exceedingly difficult.[30] Peter Paret's suggestion, while reviewing a book on the Napoleonic Wars, that 'all passages dealing with combat be printed in a different colour so that readers would know at once that they were entering treacherous territory' might well be applied to studies of medieval warfare.[31] It is clear, therefore, that 'reconstructing' Crécy must present a major challenge to the historian. Indeed, such is the challenge that it is impossible to piece together a detailed and convincing sequence of events, a narrative line, from the chronicle accounts alone, still less a series of parallel or concurrent sequences that would stand as a more accurate representation of what actually happened. Six and a half centuries after the events of 1346, we are no better placed than Froissart to construct a composite narrative of Crécy from documentary sources of diverse provenance and reliability.

An alternative approach is required, which combines the testimony of as wide a range of sources as possible with a measure of historical imagination. The narrative sources require particularly careful handling. Contrary to the 'cherry-picking' approach that is all too often encountered, these texts must be used in a way that is consistent with their purpose and sensitive to the circumstances that gave them life. We must also make the most of their strengths, including the rich vein of eyewitness testimony that runs through many of them. Some historians would stress the limitations of such testimony. After all, owing to a restricted field of vision and an overriding preoccupation with self-preservation, no single participant in a battle could have been able to take in more than a fraction of the action. But while eyewitness testimony may contribute little to the construction of a battle narrative or to the elucidation of a commander's tactics (the usual preoccupations of the military historian), it can convey a powerful impression of what mattered to those involved and what was passing through their minds, as well as offering vivid snapshots of what was really happening in the battle. For it is from eyewitnesses, mediated through the pens of chroniclers, that we see the crucial role played by chivalric ritual and

30 J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (Harmondsworth, 1978).

31 P. Paret, *Understanding War. Essays on Clausewitz and the History of Military Power* (Princeton, 1992), p. 85.

inspirational leadership, of 'prowese'.[32] We learn too of small-group collaborative combat techniques, of 'micro-tactics'. We see standards functioning as rallying points; we hear war cries; and we witness the crippling effect of missile weapons on horseflesh. We also gain an impression of 'the mental outlook of the participants' and how that shaped their actions. Thus, something of the essence of the battle of Crécy, together with some of its landmark events, can be found in the chronicles.

That is as far as some scholars are prepared to go, but there is really no necessity to break off the chase once the chronicles have been scoured for evidence. The historian should have other strings to his bow. Admittedly, even with the benefit of additional sources and methodologies, it is impossible to construct an evenly paced narrative of the battle. But if we can recapture something of its general character, including some of its critical moments, we may yet fashion an account that is as satisfying for our time as Froissart's was for his. There are a number of methodological possibilities. For example, the evidence of the narrative sources can be combined with an understanding of combat psychology and a grasp of the practical limitations of fourteenth-century weapons technology. The topography of the battlefield is also of particular importance. Here it should be noted that while most historians have accepted that the battle took place on the 'traditional' site, centred on the Vallée des Clercs, few have subjected that piece of ground to close inspection. As a consequence, the true significance of the topography of the site has gone unrecognised in all modern accounts of the battle. Time and again historians have proposed a narrative that, in some of its essential features, could not have been permitted by the lie of the ground. This book looks at the ground afresh and considers how the topography of the field may have shaped not only the course of the battle, but also the strategy of the campaign.

There is a further category of source material that has been underutilised in modern accounts of the battle of Crécy: the administrative records that illuminate the structure and composition of the armies. The potential offered by these records should require no emphasis, and yet how the personnel (their past military experience and their relationships) and the organisation of the armies may have contributed to the outcome of the battle has never before been investigated beyond a superficial level. What is needed is a systematic prosopographical investigation of the combatants, combined with a reconstruction of the social networks that underpinned the recruitment and functioning of the armies. That would be a challenging research project. In this book, we offer a methodological template and some preliminary findings, which not only cast new light on the battle of Crécy but may also serve as an example for the investigation of other Edwardian battles.

32 This paragraph owes much to the work of Michael K. Jones who has argued that historians would do well to take greater note of 'the role of chivalric ritual' that occurred within medieval armies before and during battle; and to recognise the importance of individual courage and inspirational leadership rather than tactics. See his article 'The battle of Verneuil (17 August 1424): towards a history of courage', and his book *Bosworth, 1485. Psychology of a Battle*.

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The six contributors to this book have approached the battle of Crécy from a variety of directions. Yet underlying these contributions can be identified three fundamental questions: Firstly, why did the battle of Crécy take place? Secondly, how was it that the English won? Thirdly, how significant an event was it? To take the second of these questions first: one of the few undisputed facts about the battle of Crécy is that the English emerged victorious, but how is this outcome to be explained? In Chapter 4, Michael Prestwich reviews the available evidence for the course of the battle, including an important new interpretation of the topography of the traditional site, which Sir Philip Preston presents in Chapter 3. Views on why the English won are also to be found in the chapters dedicated to the two armies (Chapters 5 and 7). Following, in Chapter 9, an examination of the narrative sources for the battle and the problems of interpretation that they present, the concluding chapter of the book offers further thoughts on how the English achieved such an astounding victory.

Formulating answers to the first and third of the questions posed above – 'why did the battle take place?' and 'how significant an event was it?' – is the primary concern of the opening part of this book. We turn to the problem of why a major battle took place at Crécy in August 1346 in Chapter 2; but first we must consider the significance of the battle. To examine the aftermath and consequences of the battle before we have tackled what happened on the field – and why – may appear to be putting the cart before the horse. But as we shall see, the 'significance' of Crécy, as of all major battles, involves not only the consequences that flowed from it, but also the event itself – the battle. Thus, in assessing the significance of Crécy, we begin by examining the part played by battles in medieval warfare, and in particular their role in commanders' strategic thinking. Then, we consider the magnitude of the military and political encounter that occurred in northern France during the summer of 1346. Lastly, and most substantially, we look beyond the strictly military issues, such as the scale of the mobilisation and casualties, to examine what may be termed the 'chivalric politics' of the armies and the social networks that underpinned them. An understanding of these phenomena helps us to reconstruct what took place on the battlefield, while serving to emphasise the impact that the battle must have had in England and France. It also contributes to a more satisfying explanation of why the battle took place.

* * *

There was a time when studies of medieval warfare focused predominantly on battles. For an example of this approach one need only think of the work of Charles Oman.[33] More recently it has been argued that the amount of attention given to battles in the past was 'disproportionate',[34] since such engagements were actually not all that common. John Gillingham has summed up this view

[33] Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*. Similar, in this respect, are the books of A.H. Burne: *The Crecy War* (London, 1955); *The Agincourt War* (London, 1956).
[34] R.C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare (1097–1193)* (Cambridge, repr., 1976), p. 165. Smail's pioneering work was first published in 1956.

succinctly (and provocatively): 'In European medieval history as a whole battles are rare and making war did not normally involve seeking battle.'[35] Medieval commanders were reluctant to give battle because the risks usually far outweighed the likelihood of achieving a decisive outcome. This was the advice of Vegetius's *De Re Militari*, a 'late Roman handbook on war', which (it has been supposed) was widely consulted.[36] Taking the spotlight off such exceptional events as battles would allow us to see more clearly that medieval warfare was typically concerned with destructive raids and sieges. This, it has been emphasised, is not an 'attempt to deny the significance of battle itself, but rather to contextualise it'.[37] Nevertheless, perhaps inevitably, there has been a tendency to play down battles 'for fear of falling into a "decisive battle" approach which can obscure the realities of warfare'.[38]

It is tempting to place J.F. Verbruggen at the head of a very different school of thought, since his major work on *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages*, first issued in 1954 and recently republished in English, is primarily concerned with what happened on the battlefield, and as he notes (surely indisputably) 'a great deal can be learnt about medieval warfare from the study of battles'.[39] Yet when we read his next sentence we realise that Verbruggen's view of warfare is not so very different: 'We can enquire why battle was so often avoided, why the pursuit could not be carried very far, why wars were so seldom decisive.' Another influential commentator on this subject, Philippe Contamine, has offered a further 'contextualisation' of battle. He notes the infrequency of pitched battles, and the tendency among medieval commanders to avoid them, yet adds: 'for all that, it remains the case that the pitched battle was conceived as the culminating point of a war, the major event which made sense of a campaign, the chief episode which, although limited in area and concentrated in time, was the object of all fears, expectations and hopes'.[40]

35 J. Gillingham, 'Richard I and the science of war in the Middle Ages', *Anglo-Norman Warfare*, ed. M. Strickland (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 194–207 (at p. 207). He added the important qualification that 'victory in battle normally offered rewards sufficient to offset the risks involved only in those societies where the science of fortification was relatively poorly developed' (p. 206).

36 Gillingham, 'Richard I and the science of war in the Middle Ages', p. 198. Vegetius had advised that a commander should avoid battle unless the odds were heavily – overwhelmingly – stacked in his favour. Many medieval manuscripts of *De Re Militari* (including in the vernacular) survive, but just how influential Vegetius was has been disputed. See, for example, S. Morillo, *Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings, 1066–1135* (Woodbridge, 1994), p. 118 n. 89; Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 186–7.

37 M. Strickland, 'Introduction', *Anglo-Norman Warfare*, ed. Strickland, p. xx. As demonstrated by J. Bradbury, 'Battles in England and Normandy, 1066–1154', *Anglo-Norman Warfare*, ed. Strickland, pp. 182–93.

38 M. Bennett, 'General Preface' to J.F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. x.

39 Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages*, p. 9. Verbruggen is also the author of *The Battle of the Golden Spurs: Courtrai, 11 July 1302*, ed. K. DeVries, trans. D.R. Ferguson (Woodbridge, 2002). First published in Dutch in 1952, this penetrating examination of the sources, the battleground and the armies is a model of its kind.

40 P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. M. Jones (London, 1985), pp. 219–37 (at pp. 228–9).

Battles are not to be consigned to the margins of later medieval military history, even if we are inclined to believe that the 'realities of warfare' were rooted in less dramatic events. On a number of levels, battles 'bore an importance out of all proportion with their frequency'.[41] But were they really such rare phenomena in the fourteenth century? Did commanders usually display Vegetian caution in their strategy? Conditions no doubt varied throughout Europe, and an investigation of these variations has yet to be undertaken. However, two recent contributions have offered some useful thoughts on this subject. Clifford Rogers has explored the 'many sound reasons why a medieval commander might want to fight a battle',[42] while Stephen Morillo has devised a theoretical framework for the study of medieval strategy, within which battle occupies a prominent place.[43] As far as the English experience of warfare is concerned, doubt has recently been cast (as Michael Prestwich has noted) on the universal application of the 'new orthodoxy . . . that medieval commanders sought to avoid battle wherever possible'.[44] Michael K. Jones's brilliant re-examination of the battle of Verneuil (17 August 1424) provides a case in point, for here we see both army commanders, for different reasons, actively seeking a battlefield contest.[45] What is clear is that command decisions prior to that battle involved not just tactical calculation, but also the 'chivalric element', honour and courage.

These issues are directly relevant to our present task, for understanding why the kings of England and France finally came to blows at Crécy, after a sequence of inconclusive 'stand-offs' in earlier campaigns, is one of the central problems of the opening part of this book. Of the protagonists of 1346, Philip VI does indeed display all the characteristics of a commander of Vegetian caution. We shall examine his frame of mind later in this chapter. What of Edward III? It is

41 C.J. Rogers, 'The Vegetian "science of warfare" in the middle ages', *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, i (2002), pp. 1–19 (at p. 19).

42 Rogers concludes that 'the commander of the side pursuing aggressive war aims typically wanted a battle'. Those 'fighting on the strategic defensive . . . did often prefer to avoid pitched battle, but even that generalisation has many exceptions'. Rogers, 'The Vegetian "science of warfare" in the middle ages', p. 19.

43 Morillo concludes that 'the Vegetian paradigm, modified to recognize a regular place for battle, does describe much medieval European warfare'; and that where 'Vegetian strategy had no role to play' (campaigns waged by steppe nomads; warfare 'within a closed cultural or political world that in one way or another established rules that governed the meaning and practice of conflict'), battle-seeking strategies were dominant. S. Morillo, 'Battle seeking: the contexts and limits of Vegetian strategy', *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, i (2002), pp. 21–41.

44 'There is no doubt that battle was sought on many occasions, and its part in the structure of warfare should not be dismissed, as some recent commentators have tended to do.' Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, p. 11.

45 The French, planning to unleash their secret weapon, a powerful contingent of heavily armoured horsemen from Lombardy, had selected a suitable, open site and awaited the English. Angered by the last-minute withdrawal of the French from a pre-arranged battle (or 'journée') outside Ivry on 15 August (on a site that suited the English), John, duke of Bedford felt honour bound to confront the French at Verneuil, despite having to accept an engagement on unfavourable ground and against a numerically superior opponent. Jones, 'The battle of Verneuil', pp. 377–88.

undeniable that he had managed only two set-piece battles before the Crécy campaign (Halidon Hill, 1333; Sluys, 1340),[46] but this was not for want of trying. Examination of Edward's Scottish campaigns suggests that he and his lieutenants had actively sought to bring their elusive adversaries to battle. In July 1336 he narrowly missed catching Andrew Murray, the guardian of Scotland, as he was besieging Lochindorb castle.[47] In a revealing aside, a northern captain, probably Sir William Felton, writing to the king in 1340, noted than 'a certain secret matter' could have 'as great an effect on the war as a battle'.[48] Given the heavy casualties that were inflicted on the Scottish nobility at Dupplin Muir and Halidon Hill, and the immediate political consequences of those encounters, that the English should be seeking battle in the north is altogether understandable. What is perhaps more surprising is that Edward maintained this strategic aim in his early French campaigns as well.

The idea that Edward III, far from setting out to avoid battle in France, pursued a consistent policy of seeking battle has recently been presented in a vigorously argued investigation by Clifford Rogers.[49] Edward's battle-seeking strategy was based upon confidence in his army's tactical superiority when fighting on the defensive, combined with the realisation that great political gains could be made on the battlefield. Battles could be decisive and the risks could be minimised. His opponents' reluctance to engage with him on his terms had to be overcome, and he sought to do this by provoking them beyond endurance, principally by extensive devastation of the French countryside, which while destroying wealth challenged the authority and honour of the Valois king and his nobility. That Edward had failed to bring Philip VI's army to battle in 1339 and 1340 (and perhaps early in 1343, though the English king's intentions during the siege of Vannes are less clear) makes an investigation of his success in doing so in 1346 all the more fascinating. What was different about Edward III's methods during July–August 1346, and why did Philip VI respond differently? We shall seek answers to these questions in Chapter 2.

The magnitude of the military and political event that occurred at Crécy can be demonstrated in various ways. The Liègeois chronicler, Jean le Bel, character-

46 Of course, there were captains in Edward's army in 1346 who had rather more experience of 'real' battles, as opposed to assaults on fortified positions. Sir Thomas Ughtred, the sub-marshal of the army, had fought at Bannockburn, Byland, Dupplin Muir, Halidon Hill and St Omer. A. Ayton, 'Sir Thomas Ughtred and the Edwardian military revolution', *The Age of Edward III*, ed. J.S. Bothwell (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 107–32.

47 As reported in a campaign newsletter: H. Ellis, ed., *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, 3rd ser., 4 vols (London, 1846), i, pp. 33–9. See Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, pp. 117–18.

48 G.G. Simpson and J.D. Galbraith, eds, *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland*, vol. 5 (Edinburgh, 1986), no. 809 (p. 269).

49 Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*. Rogers's ideas had been given an initial outing in 'Edward III and the dialectics of strategy, 1327–1360', *TRHS*, 6th ser., iv (1994), pp. 83–102. Other historians have proposed that Edward was seeking battle with his Valois adversary during the early campaigns of the French war (see, for example: Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, pp. 281 [siege of Cambrai], 351 [siege of Tournai]), but Rogers was the first to argue that this was the *consistent* strategy of the English king. See also, Morillo, 'Battle seeking: the contexts and limits of Vegetian strategy', p. 40.

ised the battle of Crécy as the triumph of a 'little company' over 'all the power of France'.[50] In truth, although certainly numerically inferior to the French army, the host that Edward III had at his disposal was substantial and potent. Indeed, numbering as many as 14,000 or 15,000 combatants, the army that disembarked at La Hougue in Normandy in July 1346 was the largest English force to be transported to France at one time during the entire middle ages.[51] The king had raised an army of similar overall size at least once before – for the Scottish campaign of 1335.[52] But during the summer of 1346 he faced an altogether more complex and demanding range of military commitments. While the main thrust of his continental war effort was directed towards Normandy, other expeditionary forces were simultaneously operating in Aquitaine, Brittany, Flanders and Ireland.[53] In a letter to David II of Scotland, Philip VI claimed, perhaps not unreasonably, that Edward III's multi-front assault on France must have left his kingdom defenceless, but this was actually far from true.[54] The military community north of the Trent had been excused continental service in order to ensure the security of northern England, a responsibility that they were called upon to perform at Neville's Cross on 17 October.[55] Moreover, garrisons were maintained in the Channel Islands, at Dover and Carisbrooke castles, at Berwick and elsewhere;[56] and close attention was given to the defence of the 'maritime land' in southern and eastern England.[57] In these circumstances,

50 *Jean le Bel*, ii, p. 107.

51 For a discussion of the size and composition of the English army, tentatively suggesting 14,000 men, not including non-combatants, see below, Chapter 5. For a slightly higher estimate, see Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, pp. 216, 423–6.

52 R. Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 198–200.

53 For Aquitaine (Henry, earl of Derby), see K. Fowler, *The King's Lieutenant* (London, 1969), pp. 222–4 and references cited there. Brittany (Thomas Dagworth): A. Prince, 'The strength of English armies in the reign of Edward III', *EHR*, xlvi (1931), pp. 364–5; M. Jones, 'Sir Thomas Dagworth et la guerre civile en Bretagne au XIVe siècle: quelques documents inédits', *Annales de Bretagne*, lxxxvii (1980), pp. 621–39 (E101/25/17, 18 and 19). Ireland (Ralph Ufford): R. Frame, 'The justiciarship of Ralph Ufford: warfare and politics in fourteenth-century Ireland', *Studia Hibernica*, xiii (1973), pp. 7–47. According to a pay account, Sir Hugh Hastings's force in Flanders included a company of 237 foot archers (to whom 6 chaplains were assigned), and a personal retinue of 8 men-at-arms and 11 archers (E372/191, m. 49). However, the latter contingent seems small for a captain of his standing and no mention is made of Hastings's colleagues, Sir John Montgomery and Sir John Moleyns (see Wrottesley, *Crecy and Calais*, p. 173; *Knighton*, ed. Martin, pp. 58–9), so we must suspect that we are seeing only part of this army.

54 Philip VI's letter of 22 July, printed in *Chronicon domini Walter de Hemingburgh*, ed. H.C. Hamilton (London, 1849), pp. 422–3. The idea, mutated in various ways, found its way into a number of chronicles: see D. Rollason and M. Prestwich, eds, *The Battle of Neville's Cross* (Stamford, 1998), pp. 138, 144, 152 (Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon*); *Knighton*, ed. Martin, pp. 68–9.

55 *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, pp. 668–75; M. Prestwich, 'The English at the battle of Neville's Cross', *The Battle of Neville's Cross*, ed. Rollason and Prestwich, pp. 1–14.

56 Channel Islands: E101/25/6; E403/336, m. 43 (Castle Cornet, Guernsey, garrison). Dover castle: E101/531/21; E372/191, mm. 49. Carisbrooke castle: E372/191, m. 54. Berwick: *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, pp. 669, 671, 674–5.

57 E.g., the appointments of keepers in March 1346 (Wrottesley, *Crecy and Calais*, pp. 73–7) and a stream of orders issued to them in July–August (C76/23, mm. 25, 24d, 22, 21d, 20, 19d).

raising an army consisting of as many as 14,000 fighting men for the Normandy campaign was indeed an impressive recruiting achievement.

In some ways still more impressive was the logistical feat required to transport an army of this size across the channel.[58] The shipping of armies to continental Europe was to become so commonplace a feature of the English war effort during the Hundred Years War that we are apt to take for granted the capacity of royal officials to requisition and retain the services of hundreds of merchant ships from ports around the coast of England, and to organise the refitting of many of these vessels to carry horses or to serve as warships. It is also easy to overlook the fact that waging this kind of war represented a new departure in the late 1330s. There was no established tradition of campaigns in France involving armies shipped from England: they had been infrequent events during the preceding hundred years. Few in 1338 could have recalled the expeditions to Gascony and Flanders in the 1290s, and the last army to be transported to France, in 1325, had been carried in only 80 vessels.[59] The naval dimension of the Scottish wars, and in particular the essential task of supplying armies by sea, could involve dozens of vessels, but an all-out concentration on continental warfare, such as we see from the late 1330s, would make altogether greater demands on England's maritime resources. Thus, on three occasions during the early years of his French adventure – in 1338, 1340 and 1342 – Edward III crossed the channel with an army of 4,000 to 5,000 combatants; and a similar number of troops, divided into three separate expeditionary forces, was conveyed to France during the summer of 1345.[60] These armies may not appear large, but they presented a major logistical challenge because a significant proportion of the combatants were accompanied by horses.[61] In 1297 an army of 895 men-at-arms and 7,800 infantry, together with their supplies, had been conveyed to Flanders in 305 ships.[62] In July 1338, only half as many combatants,

58 The preparations required for a cross-channel expedition during this period are discussed in Hewitt, *The Organisation of War under Edward III*: see pp. 55–9 for the supply of foodstuffs to the army, essential during its lengthy wait for a favourable wind at the ports and on board ship, and during the early days of the campaign in Normandy. For an analysis of the difficulties encountered in raising a sufficiently large fleet, see R. Kaner, 'The Management of the Mobilization of English Armies: Edward I to Edward III', D.Phil. thesis, University of York, 1999, chap. 7 (at pp. 142–8, 150–1).

59 M. Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1988), pp. 381–6; 392–5; Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, p. 73.

60 A. Ayton, 'Edward III and the English aristocracy at the beginning of the Hundred Years War', *Armies, Chivalry and Warfare in Medieval Britain and France,* ed. M. Strickland (Stamford, 1998), pp. 173–206 (at pp. 179–82); Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, pp. 453–5, 457–61. In both 1338–9 and 1340, Edward's Anglo-Welsh force was substantially supplemented by contingents supplied by his continental allies. In July 1345, the king's small army did not actually disembark, but the forces led by Northampton and Derby conducted operations in Brittany and Aquitaine respectively.

61 Evidence for the horse-carrying capacity of individual ships is not plentiful, but an average of twenty per ship may be about right. See M. Prestwich, *War, Politics and Finance under Edward I* (London, 1972), p. 147 (1303); E101/695/20 (1355).

62 N.B. Lewis, 'The English forces in Flanders, August–November 1297', *Studies in Medieval History Presented to F.M. Powicke*, ed. R.W. Hunt et al. (Oxford, 1948), pp. 310–18; Prestwich, *War, Politics and Finance under Edward I*, p. 142.

but including about 1,400 men-at-arms and 1,200 mounted archers, required a transport fleet of 361 vessels crewed by over 12,500 mariners (twice as many as were needed in 1297).[63] The emergence of armies in which mounted archers served alongside men-at-arms ensured that even secondary expeditions would make heavy demands on the English merchant marine.

If in terms of intensity of maritime involvement, the early campaigns of the French war had marked the beginning of a new chapter in Edwardian warfare, these expeditions were in fact but a modest prelude to the operation that was to be launched in July 1346. Having turned his back on his former strategy, which had involved the recruitment of expensive and unreliable foreign allies (who in 1337 contracted to supply nearly 7,000 men-at-arms), Edward III was now faced with the problem of shipping his entire army from England. That force would need to be large if a battlefield confrontation could seriously be contemplated. Indeed, the army that landed with the king at La Hougue was about three times larger than that which had accompanied him to Brittany in October 1342. And there must have been a great many horses: single mounts for each of the 3,000 or so mounted archers and hobelars, and (on average) several for each of the 2,500–3,000 men-at-arms, not to mention the animals required for the baggage train. Without the original mariners' pay-rolls we cannot be sure of the size of the transport fleet, but it is clear from the chroniclers' comments that it was very large, and it may well have consisted of as many as 1,000 vessels – a veritable 'city on the inconstant billows dancing'.[64] Naturally, gathering a fleet of such proportions had caused considerable problems. There is an air of desperation about the order of 18 March, which directed officials responsible for arresting vessels to include those of as little as 10 or 12 tons burden, excepting only fishing boats.[65] But although, as the king noted in a letter written on board ship off Yarmouth (Isle of Wight) on 7 July, his passage had been much delayed 'pur defaute des niefs',[66] a remarkable maritime mobilisation had indeed been achieved. The armada of vessels assembling in the Solent must have been an awesome sight, stretching (as a contemporary noted) from Yarmouth to the Needles.[67]

A fleet of this size was needed to ship an army that was exceptionally large by

63 *Norwell*, p. ciii.

64 For a survey of the chroniclers' estimates, which range from 600 to 1,600 vessels, see J. Viard, 'La campagne de juillet–août 1346 et la bataille de Crécy', *Le moyen âge*, 2nd ser., xxvii (1926), p. 8 n1. In 1345, 443 ships had been assembled to carry the three expeditions. Fowler, *The King's Lieutenant*, p. 49.

65 Wrottesley, *Crecy and Calais*, p. 70.

66 Printed in *Jean le Bel*, ii, pp. 337–8. The king was to be held up a few days more by adverse winds. The fleet finally set out across the channel on 11 July, arriving off St Vaast-la-Hougue before dawn on the 12th.

67 *Acts of War*, ed. R. Barber, p. 27. The author of this account gives some impression of the difficulties involved in bringing together so large a number of vessels in the open water of the Solent. Although the principal initial assembly point for the fleet had been the large natural harbour at Portsmouth (the king's headquarters being at Portchester castle: *CCR, 1346–9*, p. 31), it is clear that other inlets convenient for the Solent were used. For example, the earl of Northampton was based at Beaulieu abbey, his ships presumably anchored in the Beaulieu River: C81/1734, nos 54, 60, 63.

English standards. Despite the attrition of a six-week campaign, Edward III's host was still a formidable force on the day of the battle of Crécy; perhaps all the more formidable for the experience gained during the six weeks since the landing at La Hougue. Yet there can be no doubt that it was heavily outnumbered by Philip VI's army. Admittedly, the French king's troops were not as numerous as they had been in the 'host of Bouvines' in the summer of 1340, when he had well over 20,000 men-at-arms at his disposal.[68] In July 1346 a sizeable French army, plausibly estimated at 15,000 to 20,000 combatants of all kinds, was preoccupied with besieging Aiguillon in Aquitaine. The siege was not abandoned until 20 August – too late for these troops to take part in the battle of Crécy.[69] Nevertheless, King Philip had managed to assemble a imposing array of chivalry in northern France: 'toute la fleur de Crestienneté . . . montée en armes si richement que merveilles',[70] credibly estimated by Edward III at 8,000 knights and esquires among a total of 12,000 mounted men-at-arms.[71] This force of heavy cavalry outnumbered Edward III's men-at-arms by four to one; indeed, it approached the size of the entire English army. And it was supported by several thousand Genoese crossbowmen and a large, though indeterminate number of common infantry, who were so numerous that 'tous les champs en estoient couvers'.[72] It is true that sheer numbers of common soldiery, or indeed heavy cavalry, might not in itself count for much against a well-deployed opponent with effective missile weapons. But it can hardly be denied that disparity of numbers on the field, reflecting the manpower resources available to the protagonist kings, was a powerful indicator of the magnitude of military upset that had occurred at Crécy.

The scale of the French defeat, and its wider significance, is further underlined by another aspect of the composition of the two armies. Substantial contingents had been contributed to Philip VI's host by princes whose lands lay beyond the borders of France but still within the French sphere of influence. The most notable of Philip's foreign allies were John of Luxembourg, king of Bohemia and his son, Charles, who had been elected king of the Romans on

68 The financial accounts indicate that there were 22,500 men-at-arms in the army of Bouvines and in the frontier garrisons in this part of France; but several important contingents, including those of the King of Bohemia and the duke of Brittany, are not included in these records. P. Contamine, *Guerre, état et société à la fin du moyen âge* (Paris, 1972), pp. 68–70; P. Contamine, ed., *Histoire militaire de la France. 1: des origines à 1715* (Paris, 1997), pp. 137–8.

69 Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, pp. 484–8, 496–7, 512–13, 519–20. Note, however, that part of the army had been transferred to defence duties in Normandy in late June: *ibid.*, p. 499.

70 *Chronique de Flandre*, ii, p. 43.

71 'plus de xii. mille dez hommes-d'armes, desquelx viii. mille furent de gentil gentz, chevaliers et esquiers': *Le Prince Noir*, ed. Michel, p. 310. Philip Contamine argues that there were fewer than 10,000 men-at-arms, not all of the contingents having arrived in time for the battle: Contamine, ed., *Histoire militaire de la France. 1*, p. 138. The available evidence suggests that Edward III had in the region of 2,800 men-at-arms at the start of the campaign.

72 For the Genoese, see Bertrand Schnerb's comments, below, p. 269. Foot soldiers: St Omer chronicle, fo. 261v. Writing on 2 September, Richard Wynkeley reported that there were 12,000 men-at-arms and 60,000 others in the French army. *Murimuth*, p. 216.

11 July 1346, and was due to be crowned on 27 August.[73] According to the contemporary Florentine chronicler, Giovanni Villani, they arrived at the head of 500 men-at-arms.[74] They were joined by Raoul, duke of Lorraine, the counts of Namur, Salm and Saarbrücken, and a Savoyard contingent, led by Louis de Vaud, regent to the young Amadeus VI of Savoy.[75] Adding still further to the cosmopolitan flavour of the French army was the political exile, Jaime II, king of Majorca. By contrast, Edward III's army was almost entirely Anglo-Welsh in composition. Those 'few Strangers' (as Joshua Barnes termed them)[76] who landed at La Hougue with the English were either disaffected Norman noblemen, like Godfrey de Harcourt, or 'German' soldiers of fortune, like the knights Rasse Maskerel, Adam von Ederein and Gerhard von Wendendorp.[77] But all told there cannot have been more than 150 foreign troops on the English side at Crécy (and that is probably a high estimate), and we should not be surprised to learn that they found English fighting methods difficult to comprehend.[78] It was the chivalry of mainland western Europe – 'toute la fleur de Crestienneté – that was defeated at Crécy.

The scale of the defeat is also indicated by the extraordinarily heavy casualties suffered by the French and allied nobility and their retinues. Most, it seems, fell to archery rather than to the sword, lance or battle-axe. English newsletters, written within days of the battle, noted that over 1,500 noblemen, knights and esquires had been killed during the evening battle on 26 August. The overall total seems to have been at least 2,000, with a disproportionate number of magnates among the slain.[79] In addition to his close ally, King John of Bohemia,

73 John's relationship by marriage to Philip VI (his daughter, Bonne, was married to Philip's son, John, duke of Normandy) and his staunchly francophile outlook put him firmly in the Valois camp in the Anglo-French war. See P. Contamine, 'Politique, culture et sentiment dans l'Occident de la fin du Moyen Âge: Jean l'Aveugle et la royauté française', *Johann der Blinde. Graf von Luxemburg, König von Böhmen, 1296–1346*, ed. M. Pauly (Luxembourg, 1997), pp. 343–61. For Charles's coronation, see F. Seibt, *Karl IV: ein Kaiser in Europa, 1346–1378* (Munich, 1978), p. 144.

74 *Villani*, vii, p. 158.

75 Villani (*ibid.*, vii, pp. 168–9) notes that the duke of Lorraine reached the battlefield late and was killed in the rout on the morning of 27 August. The Savoyard contingent also arrived after the battle but shrewdly marched on to Montreuil and held it for Philip VI. E.L. Cox, *The Green Count of Savoy: Amadeus VI and Transalpine Savoy in the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, 1967), pp. 59–60.

76 Joshua Barnes, *The History of that Most Victorious Monarch Edward III* (Cambridge, 1688), p. 340.

77 At the Tower, on 2 May 1346, they had agreed to serve with a company of twenty men: E101/68/3, no. 64. See Chapter 5, Appendix 2, Table 2, n. 35. Cf. *Jean le Bel*, ii, p. 106; *Froissart: Amiens*, iii, p. 13.

78 *Chronique de Flandre*, ii, p. 44.

79 Edward III noted that more than 1,500 'chivalers et esquiers' were killed in the area of the first onslaught (*Le Prince Noir*, ed. Michel, p. 310), while Michael Northburgh stated that 1,542 'bones gentz darmes' fell on the evening of 26 August, and more the following morning (*Avesbury*, p. 369). Northburgh's figure is probably based upon the official enumeration of the dead, which we know took place after the battle. The chronicles of Adam Murimuth (the Nero D. X text) and Henry Knighton both give an overall figure of 2,000 and more knights and esquires killed: *Murimuth*, p. 248; *Knighton*, ed. Martin, pp. 62–3. The Bourgeois of Valenciennes states that, in addition to magnates, 500 bannerets and 1,600 knights fell,

who was arguably the most famous chivalric figure in Europe, Philip VI of France lost his brother, Charles, count of Alençon, and his nephew, Louis de Châtillon, count of Blois. The other leading noblemen cut down in the evening battle included Louis de Nevers, count of Flanders; Jean, count of Harcourt;[80] Louis, count of Sancerre; Simon, count of Salm; and Jean de Chalon, count of Auxerre. The duke of Lorraine fell during the renewed fighting on the morning of 27 August. 'It was said for a long time', wrote Jean le Bel, 'that no one had heard of so many princes killed on a single day, not at Courtrai, nor at Benevento, nor anywhere else.'[81] Such breathtaking losses made Crécy not only a devastating military humiliation but also 'a political catastrophe for the French Crown'.[82] Only the death or capture of Philip VI could have made matters worse.

That is how it must have seemed on the morrow of the battle, but within a year Edward III had indeed made matters worse. He had capitalised on his victory by capturing Calais, thereby securing a base on the continental mainland that proved to be of lasting strategic and economic importance.[83] It is sometimes suggested that the military consequences of Crécy were 'small',[84] but it is clear that the battle created the conditions that allowed the English to prosecute the siege of Calais for nearly a year. The political community in England backed the enterprise with money and manpower, while Philip VI's government, paralysed by a political and financial crisis, was unable to raise an adequate relief army until the summer of 1347. When, towards the end of July, that army did arrive on the heights of Sangatte, it was confronted by an English host so effectively entrenched that Philip VI shied away from risking another battlefield disaster outside the besieged town. Calais fell to the English on 3 August 1347 and, coming so soon after Crécy, and the successes in Aquitaine and at Neville's Cross, it further cemented Edward III's relationship with his Flemish allies and prompted the Wittelsbach group among the Electors of the Holy Roman Empire to offer him the Imperial Crown.[85]

In the aftermath of Crécy, newsletters listing the prominent noblemen who had fallen fighting for Philip VI circulated around Europe.[86] The merits of Vegetian

figures that are consistent with his anecdote that over 2,200 heraldic surcoats were collected from the corpse-strewn field. *Récits*, pp. 233, 235. Lists of the principal casualties are to be found in the newsletters and chronicles, though many contain inaccuracies. See, for example, *Baker*, pp. 85, 262.

80 The elder brother of Godfrey de Harcourt, who fought with Edward III. The count of Harcourt's son, Jean, count of Aumale, was wounded in the battle.

81 *Jean le Bel*, ii, p. 109. Repeated by *Froissart: Amiens*, iii, p. 26.

82 Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, p. 532.

83 For the importance of Calais to the war effort, see C. Richmond, 'The War at Sea', *The Hundred Years War*, ed. K. Fowler (London, 1971), p. 100.

84 Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, p. 532. For a very different view, see Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, pp. 283–4.

85 H.S. Offler, 'England and Germany at the beginning of the Hundred Years War', *EHR*, liv (1939), pp. 627–31; Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, p. 284 and n. 61.

86 See, for example, Johann von Schönfeld's letter to the bishop of Passau: J.F. Böhmer, ed., *Acta Imperii selecta* (Innsbruck, 1870), no. 1055.

caution could hardly have been more forcefully demonstrated. The personal military involvement of the aristocracy, particularly when headed by the king, gave battle such political immediacy that, in any given war, it was likely that *at least one* of the protagonists would seek to avoid coming to blows on the battlefield because the stakes were too high. Military objectives might be achieved by other, less risky means. This had certainly been Philip VI's viewpoint. He had fought only one major battle before the summer of 1346 (Cassel in 1328), and had been unwilling to take the plunge against Edward III at Buironfosse (1339) and Bouvines (1340). King John of Bohemia was among the most experienced of the senior commanders at Crécy, but most of his battles had been fought in his early adulthood – notably Esslingen (1316) and Mühldorf (1322).[87] Since then he had been involved in more than his fair share of 'stand-offs', as in 1331 against Charles I of Hungary, and in 1336, when he and Louis of Bavaria observed each other from adjacent armed camps.[88] And, of particular relevance to Crécy, he had also witnessed the 'batailles manquées' at Buironfosse and Bouvines. King John was one of the foremost chivalric figures in Christendom, yet in a world in which the political elite took up arms in person, he was as aware as anyone that caution was usually the better part of valour. Indeed, on the eve of Crécy, he had received a forceful reminder of the hazards inherent in precipitate action. On 19 July 1346, a few days after Edward III's landing at La Hougue, King John and his son, Charles, had been dismayed spectators of the battle of Vottem, when perhaps 4,000 heavy cavalry had been defeated by an array of Liègeois fighting on foot.[89] This was indeed a 'sauvage aventure',[90] and an ominous prelude to King John's fateful involvement in the Crécy campaign.

'Batailles manquées' occurred so frequently in medieval warfare that it could be argued that they deserve as much attention as the battles that actually took place. Indeed, when viewed as political and chivalric events a case can be made for bracketing the two phenomena together. A royal army was a remarkable political and social organism. A king would rarely, if ever, assemble as large a proportion of the aristocracy of his realm for any other purpose, while the raising of contingents of infantry from among the rural peasantry was itself not without political significance.[91] It would also be a breathtaking spectacle, bewildering to the untutored eye: a sea of armorial bearings, displayed on banners, surcoats and warhorse caparisons, proclaiming the distinctiveness of noble

87 R. Cazelles, *Jean l'Aveugle, comte de Luxembourg, roi de Bohême* (Paris, 1947), pp. 63–4, 111–14. Cazelles argues that King John cannot personally have taken part in the battle of Cassel; but he was involved in the attack on the Lithuanian stronghold of Medvegalis in early 1329: *ibid.*, pp. 157, 170–1; S.C. Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending: A Pagan Empire within East-Central Europe, 1295–1345* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 239–40.

88 Cazelles, *Jean l'Aveugle*, pp. 197, 237–8.

89 C. Gaier, 'La bataille de Vottem, 19 juillet 1346', in C. Gaier, *Armes et combats dans l'univers médiéval* (Brussels, 1995), pp. 27–37; DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century*, pp. 150–4.

90 *Jean le Bel*, ii, p. 141.

91 See J.R. Maddicott, 'The English peasantry and the demands of the Crown, 1294–1341', *Past and Present, Supplement 1* (1975), p. 45, who concludes that 'The more frequent assembling of large armies [during the Edwardian period] may also have served to widen the political consciousness of the peasantry'.

lineages.[92] Yet this was not simply a crowd of individuals; nor, if we visualise an army as a form of social network, was it a network of random associations. In addition to family and retaining ties, there would be a regional or tenurial basis to much of the recruitment in the banneret-led retinues and even in some of the large 'battles' or divisions that formed the main organisational units of the army.[93] If the bannerets were foci for relatively small clusters of knights and esquires, perhaps a few dozen men, the king's principal lieutenants, at the head of the 'battles' under whose organisational umbrella the bannerets were grouped, were the principal 'hubs' in the network.[94] Moreover, the lieutenants were linked by ties of shared status, and particularly by their shared access to the king. In this way, the social and institutional network of the army, resting upon that of the political elite itself, offered clear channels of communication whereby the opinions of the nobility, including their views concerning immediate military matters as well as broader political issues, could be distributed among themselves and transmitted directly to the king. Viewed in this way, an army was a forum for debate, particularly between individuals and groups who would otherwise have little opportunity for communication and the exchange of ideas. This characteristic of medieval armies, notable in the case of those raised by the king of England, was especially significant in France, for this was a kingdom of huge territorial extent and distinctive provincial character, whose armies customarily included contingents supplied by foreign princes. When Philip VI mustered a royal host he was gathering what would have been regarded by contemporaries as the most powerful fighting force in Christendom, but he must also have been aware that, in some senses, he was opening Pandora's box. His actions, the strategy he adopted for the campaign, and the tone of his leadership would be closely watched and discussed.

It can be seen that when two major royal armies met in the field, whether or not they actually came to blows, it was an event that could have far-reaching political consequences, of which those that resulted from defeat in battle were merely the most obvious. Here was the dilemma facing Philip VI in 1346. Having mustered the political elite of his realm, he ran the risk of alienating them if he opted for the militarily prudent course of action and avoided battle when close to his adversary. Caution in the face of the enemy, however sound the reasons underlying it, could carry a political price. A prolonged stand-off would

92 The heraldry on such occasions could be 'read' by the heralds attached to each army: indeed, recognising the noblemen in both armies, before and during the battle, was one of their prime functions. For the instructions given in a fifteenth-century heralds' manual, see P. Contamine, 'Batailles, bannières, compagnies: aspects de l'organisation militaire française pendant la première partie de la Guerre de Cent ans', *Les Cahiers Vernonnais,* iv (1964), p. 19.

93 See, for example, Contamine, *Guerre, état et société à la fin du moyen âge*, pp. 74–85; and Contamine, 'The French Nobility and the War', *The Hundred Years War*, ed. Fowler, pp. 147–9, for an analysis of the composition of the 'bataille' of Raoul de Brienne in the host of Bouvines (1340).

94 This kind of network has been aptly labelled 'aristocratic'. It is otherwise known as 'scale-free'. See A.-L. Barabasi, *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); M. Buchanan, *Nexus: Small Worlds and the Groundbreaking Science of Networks* (New York and London, 2002).

test the strength of the bonds that held together the army. Tensions and rivalries could arise among the nobility, assembled in all their finery and fired-up for action, but frustrated by inactivity.[95] Esquires would be elevated to knighthood yet denied the consummation of battle. On the other hand, the social network that linked an army's personnel provided conduits for the distribution of rumour and dissension. Waiting uneasily in anticipation of a battle that failed to materialise, men would talk, and while we cannot be sure what they said, an understanding of the 'aristocratic' network within the army does offer some indication of how ideas could have spread. An anti-climactic end to the stand-off could be interpreted as dishonourable and would reflect badly on the army leadership. Edward III was only too aware of this: as a boy of fourteen, he had been reduced to tears of frustration by the humiliating conclusion of the Weardale campaign in 1327.[96] Philip VI's prestige had been seriously dented by the 'batailles manquées' of 1339 and 1340. As Jonathan Sumption has observed, '[t]o the knights and noblemen who marched with the army the King's inactivity was a betrayal of instincts which made the pitched battle the highest form of warfare and its avoidance tantamount to defeat. Each of these men took back to his home his own kind of camp-fire dissidence and gossip.'[97] We should not underestimate the effect of these earlier inconclusive encounters on the mentality and actions of the French king and his lieutenants in August 1346.

If the social network within an army's political elite could be a source of instability in the circumstances of an anti-climactic stand-off, that same network provided the essential underpinning for effective combat in battle. It was not unusual for fourteenth-century European wars to reach a climax in a trial of arms between two rival political elites fought at close quarters in a small area. Indeed, there was a certain inevitability about this: medieval kings did not always find it easy to follow Vegetius's advice. Although offering opportunities for individual prowess, the 'knightly' combat that would occur in such an encounter, whether mounted or on foot, was essentially a team activity. Where possible, men-at-arms fought co-operatively in groups, and what counted most were the bonds of mutual trust based perhaps upon a shared locality of origin or, better still, upon longstanding comradeship in arms. The clusters of individual relationships within the social network of the military class were, therefore, the foundation upon which successful battlefield performance could be built. But significant battles rarely involved two evenly matched teams of men-at-arms fighting on a level playing field. Commanders were not seeking a fair fight; they were in pursuit of victory. The network of relationships that gave tactical formations their strength in some combat situations was especially vulnerable to attack by missile weapons. At Crécy, each army attempted to use such weapons to break the cohesion of the other; but in the initial exchange of missiles, Philip VI's crossbowmen were outclassed by Edward III's archers, who were then given a free hand to wreak havoc on the massed formations of French cavalry.

95 For the bitter arguments among the French commanders at Buironfosse, see Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, pp. 171–2.
96 Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots*, p. 36.
97 Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, p. 368. See also Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, p. 173.

As was noted earlier, the losses sustained by the French nobility were extraordinarily heavy: more were killed in this battle than at Courtrai in 1302,[98] with a particularly large proportion of magnates among the dead. It seems that whole groups of knights and esquires, fighting together in retinues, or 'conrois', were destroyed or severely weakened by archery, the survivors left vulnerable and at a grave disadvantage in any close combat that occurred. But what was more damaging to the French army's fortunes was the neutralising of its captains, from bannerets to the commanders of 'battles'. There may have been a couple of hundred leaders of this rank in the army at Crécy.[99] The killing or disabling of so many of them tore the 'hubs' out of the 'aristocratic' network that held the army together, and without its centres of command and control, Philip VI's host fell apart.

'On the morrow of Crécy', the death of King John of Bohemia 'was seen by kings, lords, clerks, knights, and chroniclers as the distinguishing mark of that sanguinary and astonishing day.'[100] Driven by the demands of upholding his dispersed territorial interests, as well as by his enthusiasm for crusading, King John's thirty-year military career had made him a household name throughout Christendom. To contemporaries, he was 'le bon roi', a paladin of chivalry. That he should fall fighting for Philip VI in his war against England ensured that the shock waves from the battle reached the furthest corners of Europe.[101] As was fitting for such a celebrated martial figure, the manner of his death became the stuff of chivalric legend. A variety of chroniclers relate how, although blind, he had himself led into the fray by his loyal knights.[102] Froissart's justly famous version conveys to the reader the vivid image of the fallen king surrounded by

98 The proportion who died at Courtrai was higher: 40 to 50 per cent of the 2,500 noblemen who fought in the battle. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages*, pp. 190–4. Cf. Agincourt, where the losses appear to have been 'proportionately larger' than at Crécy, although this was partly the consequence of the killing of many of the prisoners: A. Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 472–3.

99 An extrapolation from Philippe Contamine's calculations for the well-documented host of Bouvines in 1340: Contamine, 'The French Nobility and the War', *The Hundred Years War*, ed. Fowler, p. 144.

100 Martin, 'John the Blind: the English narrative sources', *Johann der Blinde, Graf von Luxemburg, König von Böhmen, 1296–1346,* ed. Pauly, p. 92.

101 King John heads the schedule of casualties attached to contemporary newsletters. See Johann von Schönfeld's letter to the bishop of Passau: Böhmer, ed., *Acta Imperii selecta*, no. 1055. For an example of the wide interest in King John's death, see the fifteenth-century Polish chronicle, *The Annals of Jan Długosz*, ed. M. Michael (Chichester, 1997), pp. 296–7.

102 *Jean le Bel*, ii, 108; *Chronique de Flandre*, ii, p. 43; St Omer chronicle, fo. 262v; *Jean de Venette*, ed. Newhall, p. 44. J. Viard, 'Henri le Moine de Bale à la bataille de Crécy', *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, lxvii (1906), pp. 489–96. *The Annals of Jan Długosz*, ed. Michael, p. 296. Of the English chroniclers, only Thomas Walsingham offers an account of King John's heroism: *Historia Anglicana, 1272–1422*, ed. H.T. Riley, Rolls Ser., 2 vols (London, 1863–4), i, pp. 268–9; *Chronicon Angliae, 1328–1388*, ed. E.M. Thompson, Rolls Ser. (London, 1874), pp. 22–3. Many of the French chronicles merely note his death, without describing the circumstances.

the bodies of his companions, their horses tied together.[103] This was surely the tightest of the clusters of men-at-arms to be wiped out en masse at Crécy.

The death of King John of Bohemia deprived Philip VI of a loyal friend and an invaluable ally, and it also highlighted his own flight from the field. In fairness to Philip, it should be mentioned that various of the chronicles narrate how he tried to rally his army, that he attempted take part in the battle personally and that it was his attendants, principally Jean of Hainault, who led him from the field.[104] There is also the suggestion that he was unhorsed, even that he was wounded, all of which implies that he did get dangerously close to the action.[105] Moreover, it should be emphasised that retreat was not in itself dishonourable. Geoffrey de Charny's *Livre de chevalerie*, written within a few years of Crécy, suggests that it was perfectly acceptable 'to make a safe and honourable withdrawal, when it is the time to do so'.[106] Yet it would seem that many of Philip VI's noblemen made a different choice on that damp August evening in 1346. Of course, we cannot be sure what was passing through their minds, either individually or collectively; and it is certainly true that Crécy was a particularly merciless battle. The French knightly cavalry were obliged to advance into the teeth of English archery, only to find themselves trapped in a confined combat area in which little or no quarter was given and from which escape was difficult.[107] However, it is not easy to disregard the testimony of the chronicles, much of it no doubt based upon the eyewitness accounts of heralds. And their testimony is clear: once committed to battle, whether owing to their own 'pride and envy' or the king's misjudgement, the flower of French chivalry preferred the likelihood of death or capture to a dishonourable flight. It was just such a principle that was incorporated into King John II of France's Company of the Star in 1351–2. The letter of election to the Company stipulated that knights who fled from battle would be suspended. Jean le Bel, the only chronicler to comment independently on this matter, noted that the knights of John II's 'belle compaignie' took an oath never to flee the field further than four arpents,

103 *Froissart*, ed. Luce, iii, pp. 178–9 (A and B MSS) and *Froissart: Rome*, pp. 730–1, which are expanded versions of *Froissart: Amiens*, p. 19. King John's psychology may well have been more complex than Froissart realised. He would have been aware that 26 August was the anniversary of the battle of Dürnkrut, in which King Ottokar of Bohemia had been killed in 1278 (Seibt, *Karl IV*, p. 147). Indeed, this may account for his reported premonition that he would die on the field at Crécy (*Baker*, p. 82). Moreover, coming within weeks of his withdrawal from the field at Vottem, flight at Crécy would have been unthinkable. Consequently, there is little reason to doubt the chroniclers' testimony that, on hearing that the battle was going badly, he determined to intervene personally, to turn the tide of events or die in the attempt.

104 See, for example, *Chronique de Flandre*, ii, p. 44; *Grandes chroniques*, ix, p. 283; *Chronique Normande*, pp. 81–2; *Jean le Bel*, ii, p. 103; *Froissart*, ed. Luce, iii, pp. 179–80.

105 Richard Wynkeley, writing within days of the battle, reported an arrow wound to the face: *Murimuth*, p. 216. See also, Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, p. 269 and n. 176.

106 *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny*, ed. R.W. Kaeuper and E. Kennedy (Philadelphia, 1996), pp. 102–3.

107 To discuss in detail the reasons for the heavy French casualties at this stage would anticipate Michael Prestwich's examination of the battle (Chapter 4), as well as the concluding chapter of this book, which investigates the impact that archery and the topography of the site may have had on the engagement.

preferring death or surrender. As a consequence, notes the chronicler, at the battle of Mauron in August 1352, 89 knights fell who might otherwise have saved themselves.[108]

There is no reason to believe that French knights were any less resolute and courageous at Crécy. For, as Edward III observed in his battlefield despatch, 'les ennemiz se porteront moult noblement, et moult sovent se ralierent'.[109] Cool assessment of the situation from an early stage in the battle would surely have brought them to the conclusion that the struggle was hopeless, yet they returned repeatedly to the fray until nightfall. Once again, the network of relationships within the aristocratic elite may have exerted a strong influence on these events. 'When a soldier is . . . known to the men who are around him,' wrote General S.L.A. Marshall in 1947, 'he has . . . reason to fear losing the one thing that he is likely to value more highly than life – his reputation as a man among other men'.[110] Although concerned with a very different military context, Marshall's view of combat psychology is equally relevant to the medieval battlefield; indeed, perhaps especially relevant, given the code of honour that was so important to the chivalric class of Christendom. The dishonour of flight would have been particularly difficult to accept among knights who knew each other well. We are left with the conclusion that the aristocratic social network and the mentality that underpinned it, which were essential for the raising of Philip VI's army, and which made the avoidance of battle a politically damaging course of action, may also have contributed to the destruction of the French host at Crécy.

A few hours' fighting on the 'mont de Cressy' had left the kingdom of France, as Froissart observed, 'much weakened in honour, power and counsel'.[111] The political risks of battle could have no clearer demonstration. Magnates with whom Philip VI was accustomed to consult and upon whom he depended for raising large contingents of troops had disappeared from the scene overnight. The situation was exacerbated by the duke of Normandy's withdrawal from court throughout the winter of 1346–7 and the king's icy relations with the duke of Burgundy. That neither Edward III outside Calais nor Henry of Lancaster in Aquitaine were opposed in the field during the autumn of 1346 was, to some extent, the result of confused military planning and a collapse of royal finances;[112] but there was also a recruiting crisis. Jonathan Sumption has noted

108 *Jean le Bel*, ii, pp. 204–7; D'A. J. D. Boulton, *The Knights of the Crown: The Monarchical Orders of Knighthood in Later Medieval Europe, 1325–1520* (Woodbridge, 1987), chap. 5 (at p. 196). Even if the creation of the Company of the Star, and the 'no flight' stipulation in particular, were intended as a response to the performance of the French nobility (and Philip VI's ignominious retreat) at Crécy, this tells us more about John II's prejudices than about the actual events of that battle. His own military performance in Aquitaine during the summer of 1346 had hardly been impressive, and it may well have long rankled with him that he had been obliged to raise the siege of Aiguillon but had not reached his father's army before it had suffered its disastrous defeat at Crécy.

109 *Le Prince Noir*, ed. Michel, p. 310.

110 Cited by John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, pp. 71–2. For General Marshall's insightful discussion of 'Why men fight', see *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1978), chapter 10 (modified quotation at p. 153).

111 *Froissart*, ed. Luce, iii, p. 186.

112 On the political crisis in France after Crécy, see Françoise Autrand's discussion in

that 'the response of the French military class [to a call to arms in the autumn of 1346] was late and poor', and that the following spring 'recruitment was even slower and patchier than it had been in the previous October'. One reason for this was the impoverishment of the nobility after ten years of war,[113] but we should also recognise that with so many magnates, bannerets and militarily active knights removed at a stroke at Crécy, raising an army capable of challenging Edward III outside Calais was going to be no easy matter. For, as we have seen, the recruitment of the 'military class' in both England and France depended to a considerable degree upon the exploitation of social networks. It is said that Queen Jeanne suggested a return to compulsory, unpaid military service for the nobility and that Philip VI rejected the idea. It way well be that he realised that without supplementing the remaining well-established 'hubs' in the aristocratic social network, recruiting the nobility at large – including those families whose martial role had fallen into abeyance – would be difficult, if not impossible. In fact, the better part of a year had passed before the French king managed to assemble an army powerful enough to challenge Edward III outside Calais.[114]

The loss of counsel and recruiting potential would have been a serious enough consequence of the deaths of so many noblemen at Crécy. But there must also have been major consequences for landholding society and local administration in France (and perhaps also, beyond the frontiers, in those territories that had supplied contingents to the French army). A moment's reflection on the 2,200 heraldic surcoats ('tournicles') which, having been taken from fallen French noblemen, were displayed like trophies in Edward III's pavilion,[115] brings home forcefully the scale of the social and economic impact of the Crécy casualties. The death of a front-rank nobleman would have had wide-ranging consequences, for a magnate 'was not just a warrior and a politician, he also stood at the head of a vast business empire . . . and exercised powers of management over all aspects of his empire'.[116] By its very nature, combat would claim the lives of a disproportionate number of young adult males – men whose heirs were underage or who themselves were heirs to estates. Even when the lordships concerned were small, the sudden loss of the immediate heir could spell the end of a venerable noble line. It has recently been written of Agincourt that 'the many deaths at the battle caused numerous wrangles over wardship and inheritance, and there is also evidence of dislocation to economies and administration of lordships'.[117] Who can doubt that the same occurred after Crécy, affecting the fortunes of hundreds of noble families?[118]

Chapter 8. For a broader view of the political and military situation in France, see Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, pp. 538–50, 554–780.

113 Sumption*, Trial by Battle*, pp. 554, 560, 561–2.

114 According to Villani, the army included 11,000 mounted men-at-arms: Sumption, *Trial by Battle*, p. 578.

115 *Récits*, p. 235.

116 C. Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: the Fourteenth-Century Political Community* (London and New York, 1987), p. 87.

117 Curry, *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations*, p. 459. Cf. the 'terrible casualties' suffered at Verneuil and their commemoration: Jones, 'The battle of Verneuil', p. 410.

118 This subject has not to my knowledge been researched. In his examination of the numbers

Such wide ranging socio-economic problems were not experienced in England after the battle of Crécy, for none of Edward III's noble captains was killed and, as far as we can tell, losses among his knights and esquires (and, indeed, the archers) were light. A search of the administrative records and narrative sources has yielded the names of only two fatalities: one knight, Aymer Rokesley, and one esquire, Robert Brente.[119] Those memorials to members of the Edwardian military community that date from this period relate to the more numerous casualties from the siege of Calais.[120] But if the English political elite emerged unscathed from the battle of Crécy they were certainly not unaffected by it. The king and his eldest son had been accompanied to Normandy by many of the great men of the realm, including six of the eight militarily active earls. Of the 54 laymen who had received a personal summons to the last parliament to be held prior to Crécy, in June 1344, more than a quarter disembarked with the king in France in July 1346.[121] When it is recalled that a second expeditionary force, under Henry, earl of Derby, was campaigning simultaneously in Aquitaine and that the northern nobility had remained in England to keep an eye on the Scots, it is clear that the majority of the lay peerage were preoccupied with their military responsibilities during the summer of 1346.[122] Looking beyond the select group of men receiving a personal parliamentary summons, we can see that the more broadly based constituency of lesser noble families were well represented among the 50 or so bannerets who fought at Crécy, as were a great many of the county gentry families by the 600 knights bachelor.[123] Edward III's triumph had been shared by the community of the realm.

On one level, what they had shared was a dramatic military event in which the English, on ground of their choosing, had completely outfought the army of the greatest power in Christendom. They had witnessed the beginning of a new chapter of warfare for the English, though not so much in terms of the organisation and composition of the army – or, indeed, in terms of battlefield tactics – since these facets of the Edwardian military machine had been developing

of noblemen in later medieval France, Philippe Contamine notes in passing 'les pertes humaines entraînées par les grandes défaites contre les Anglais, de Crécy à Agincourt et au-delà'. *La noblesse au royaume de France de Philippe le Bel à Louis XII* (Paris, 1997), p. 54.

119 Rokesley: *Eulogium*, iii, p. 211; *CIPM*, viii, no. 627. Brente: SC1/39, no. 178; cf. Wrottesley, *Crecy and Calais*, pp. 125, 146.

120 Such as the east window of St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester, which was probably erected by Sir Thomas Bradeston in memory of his friend, Sir Maurice Berkeley; the brass at Elsing, Norfolk, commemorating Sir Hugh Hastings; and its exquisite if more modest counterpart at Wimbush, Essex, a memorial to Sir John Wautone and his wife. For references, see below nn. 130 and 131.

121 *RDP*, iv, pp. 551–3. It is worthy of note that parliamentary attendance in June 1344 was poor, at which the king 'marvelled greatly'. J.S. Roskell, 'The problem of the attendance of the lords in medieval parliaments', *BIHR*, xxix (1956), pp. 166–7; J.E. Powell and K. Wallis, *The House of Lords in the Middle Ages* (London, 1968), pp. 351–2.

122 The fact that the parliamentary summons of 30 July 1346 could be issued to only 16 lay peers speaks for itself (*RDP*, iv, p. 559). Several of these 16 men had sons or other family members at Crécy.

123 These estimates are based on the figures supplied in Chapter 5, Appendix 2, Table 2.