

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“TO MAKE AN END TO THE WAR BY BATTLE”:¹ THE CRÉCY CHEVAUCHÉE, 1346

Generally, he who occupies the field of battle first and awaits his enemy is at ease; he who comes later to the scene and rushes into the fight is weary. And therefore those skilled in war bring the enemy to the field of battle and are not brought there by him.
Sun Tzu, VI.1–2²

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1346 which climaxed with the famous battle of Crécy has, as the last chapter suggested, often been misinterpreted. As this chapter will demonstrate more fully, Edward’s goal for the campaign was to make an end to the war by meeting his enemy in decisive battle, as he had tried to do in 1339 and 1340. This view of the English king’s motivation in the campaign will inform the entire narrative, greatly altering the familiar story of this remarkable expedition.

After his landing at St.-Vaast-la-Hougue on 12 July, the English king spent six days there to disembark the horses, to rest himself and his men, and to bake bread.³ To mark the start of what was intended to be the decisive campaign of the war, the king knighted a number of the young nobles who had accompanied him, including his own eldest son, the Black Prince.⁴

As part of the same ceremony, Godfrey d’Harcourt solemnly did homage to Edward III for his Norman fiefs, acknowledging the Plantagenet as King of France.⁵ This was the first of several steps Edward took in an effort to bring the Cotentin, if not the whole Duchy of Normandy, into his obedience. On the 13th the king proclaimed that the persons and goods of clergy, women, old people

¹ PRO C66/219/m. 21d (CPR [1345–48], 516–17). See p. 260, below, for the text. Cf. also the writ in Wrottesley, *Crecey and Calais*, 58.

² Griffith (ed.), 96–7.

³ Although this seems rather a long time, a comparison with other expeditions suggests that the delay was inevitable. In 1355, for example, the Earl of Lancaster landed at la Hougue with a much smaller army, and took four days before marching to Carentan. Burne, *Crecey War*, 265.

⁴ He was not known by that name until after his death; but to avoid an unnecessary proliferation of “Edwards” I shall often refer to him so.

⁵ *Acta Bellicosa*, 29.

