

CHAPTER ONE

**De Wolfe Motto: *Fortis in arduis*
Strength in times of trouble**



Year of our Lord 1066 A.D.

Late September

Pevensey, England

Through the mists of time, they came.

Thousands of men disembarked vessels that had brought them across the dark and rolling sea. These titans of war emerged from the surf astride war horses that breathed fire, with eyes that bespoke of their thirst for blood.

The Apocalypse, for the Anglo-Saxons, had arrived.

It was a cloudy day towards the end of the month of September when the transports of the Duke of Normandy's fleet moored off the coast of Pevensey, England in shallow water with hardly a ripple from the waves that came in from the south. The sea spray was

minimal, as was the swell, allowing both men and materials to be offloaded without trouble. Horses, who had suffered the uncertainty of a trip across the channel, were led off the ships by their masters, kicking up the water and jumping about, smelling the salt and the sea grass, eager to be on land where they belonged.

As the army came upon the shore in waves of flesh and bone and armor, setting foot in this land for the taking, a beachhead was set up so men could recover from the journey and prepare for what was to come. But they made no secret about their arrival; they had no intention of being covert about their presence. Thousands of men raided the countryside for food and anything else they could carry while their commanders, including the Duke of Normandy, huddled in tents and planned the coming incursion.

A military action unlike anything the world had ever seen before.

With their tactics, manpower, and superior weapons, the Normans had the advantage. Harold Godwinson, the King of the Anglo-Saxons, had been far to the north dealing with another attempted invasion by the Norwegians when the Normans appeared on his southern shore. The Normans knew this, of course, through their network of spies and mercenaries, so their appearance on the shores of Southern England had been no accident. This is what they'd planned for, making sure they were able to make it ashore without any resistance from Harold and his army. Now, they were here – and it was essential that they defeat the Anglo-Saxon army in a mighty display of their power.

A battle to end all battles.

Harold had an excellent army, however, which concerned the Normans, but they were also betting on the fact that many of Harold's ranks were full of farmers and farm workers who needed to tend to their fall crops at this time of year. At least, that's what William's

advance scouts were telling him and that was what the duke was counting on. While Harold would lose men to the harvest, William was bringing a massive contingent that was fresh and ready to fight.

And that would be Harold's downfall.

After the first night on the rocky shores of Pevensey, William and his men moved on to Hastings and captured the town, where William began to build the first of many castles he would build in England. From that castle, the Normans continued to raid the surrounding area heavily, gathering supplies for their foray north into England. But that particular move came sooner than expected near the middle of October, only three weeks after the landing at Pevensey.

Word had reached the duke that Harold had marched his army at a crushing pace south and were nearing Hastings, prompting William to move his army out of the safety of Hastings Castle and head north to intercept the Anglo-Saxon army. About six miles northeast of Hastings, they came within striking range and on the night of October 13, William and his army formed lines because Harold's army had been sighted by the duke's scouts about ten miles to the north. It was time to take a stand and the Normans did, doing what they did best as they dug in and awaited Harold.

And that's when Warwolfe was called forth.

Gaetan de Wolfe was the tactical mastermind that the Duke of Normandy relied on. An enormous man with black hair and eyes the color of polished bronze, de Wolfe set up the lines of men and weapons that would face Harold's army in the morning. With his generals, men who had each earned great and crushing reputations on the field of battle, the front

lines of the Norman army were positioned so as not to allow any room for mistakes or problems.

The lines were to hold, regardless of the situation, because de Wolfe had given that command and all further battle commands would come down through him and his generals, trickling down to men known as the Companions of the Conqueror. These companions were unimpeachable nobles from the finest families supporting the duke's conquest. Although they were men of battle, they weren't necessarily on the lines like Warwolfe and his men were. Even as there were two factions advising and fighting for the Duke of Normandy – the Companions of the duke versus his Angels of War – even the Companions, these great and noble men of battle, knew well enough to defer to the *Anges de Guerre*, led by Warwolfe himself.

Where Warwolfe went, destruction followed.

The morning of the 14th day of October dawned cold with a hint of rain blowing in from the south. Before sunrise and amidst the snicker of horses and the heavy smell of cooking fires, the cavalry mounted, including Warwolfe and his generals, and these ten great men were separated with the three distinct lines that de Wolfe had formed. Each man had specific orders to ensure the success of the day.

Men that would lead the charge against the Anglo-Saxons.

First into battle was Kristoph de Lohr, a Breton from Lohréac, who was the great motivator of men. He was joined by Aramis de Russe, of Flemish blood, who killed with his fearsome double-blades. Lancelot “Lance” de Reyne, a Breton from Morlaix, was a man that all men would follow, and Marc de Moray, former Sheriff from Rouen, was the master of the spear. Fearsome men who struck terror into the hearts of the enemy.

But there were more - Denis de Winter, whose bloodlines descended from the Visigoths, wielded the sword of his forefathers, *l'Espada*, with the power of the archangels. His friend and comrade, Luc de Lara, who, with his noble Spanish blood, was a titled lord among them as the Count of Boucau. He was an impenetrable wall of destruction. Kye St. Hèver came next. He was a nephew to the Count of Anjou and man they called "The Hammer".

Finally, Téo du Reims, bastard son of the Duke of Reims, wielded his fearsome morning star, and Bartholomew *Eni yn dda*, or of Wellesbourne, was a Welsh mercenary from the ancient town of Wellesbourne and the man all men feared.

These were the *Anges de Guerre*, men who had served with de Wolfe for as long as anyone could remember. Each man was a cog in a bigger wheel, men who fought together as seamlessly as the rain blended with the clouds. All of the men were leaders but there were those that took more easily to command and those who simply wanted to fight - de Lohr, de Winter, and du Reims were those who commanded with grace and ease. De Reyne, de Lara, and de Russe also had the ability, but they tended to lead by actions rather than words. And the rest - Wellesbourne, St. Hèver, and de Moray - were pure beasts of battle. Nothing - and no men - stood in their way and lived to tell the tale.

It was a collection of knights the world had never seen before, all of them led by the greatest knight of all, the knight known as Gaetan de Wolfe. Norse and Breton on his father's side, Gascon and Saxon on his mother's, de Wolfe bore all of the fighting traits of those bloodlines as a man with no weakness and no faults, only glory. Descended from the kings of Breton, he had more nobility in him than even the Duke of Normandy, a man with whom he was particularly close. They thought alike, which was why William placed so

much faith in his Warwolfe. He and Gaetan had fought many battles together, but none so important as the one they were about to face on this day.

Therefore, the Duke of Normandy and his Companion nobles were towards the rear of the lines as the *Anges de Guerre* set up the shield wall. Given that there were three distinct lines – one in the middle and then the right and left flanks, de Wolfe himself took command of the center line while de Lohr and du Reims took the left and the right, respectively. These were cavalry lines with the infantry in the front and the archers to the rear. De Winter, de Reyne, and de Lara had command of the three groups of archers while the rest of them – de Russe, Wellesbourne, St. Hèver, and de Moray positioned themselves up with the infantry. Those men would be the first to see action.

And with the final positions achieved, all they could do at that point was wait.

But the wait wasn't long.

Harold and his army appeared an hour after sunrise, coming over the rise from the north and seeing the Normans dug in on an elevated position to the south. Seeing the thousands of men waiting for him, Harold deployed his army on a similar rise. The armies faced each other as the sun rose and the clouds, which had gathered at dawn, began to flitter away on the sea breeze.

Now, there was a blue sky and bright light illuminating both armies. De Wolfe realized as he watched Harold position his men that somehow, somewhere, the king had picked up fresh men. He could tell because they didn't move like men who had just marched hundreds of miles from the north. There was some energy to their step. But he also noticed that, from what he could see, Harold had very few archers. Mostly infantry, some cavalry, and limited archers.

That would be his fatal mistake.

News of the lack of archers made its way back to Normandy at the rear of the lines along with another message that the Norman archers, as a result, were going to be used sparingly. The reason was obvious – when two armies face one another and rained arrows down upon each other, archers from each side would pick up those arrows from the opposing army from the ground and reuse them. With so few Anglo-Saxon archers, the Normans could use up their supply of arrows quickly. De Wolfe wanted to conserve ammunition.

The duke understood that but he was also impatient. He had a throne to claim and another property to add to his Normandy holdings, and he didn't have much patience. He sent orders to the front of the lines for de Wolfe to begin the bombardment before the Anglo-Saxon lines were set and de Wolfe obliged.

Under fair skies and light winds, the Norman's didn't wait for Harold's army to completely set their lines. The first strike was from the Norman archers, raining spears of death upon the unprepared Anglo-Saxon army and creating a good deal of casualties at the onset. Men panicked, ranks wavered, as the Normans charged with all of their might.

After that, it was bedlam.