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## Why did the spanish armada failed

The defeat of a Spanish invasion force in 1588 was a moment of great patriotic pride for Elizabethan England. The nation's sailors had driven off the vast menace of their Catholic enemy. In reality, the Armada was doomed for a whole host of reasons, only some of them the work of the English. Unrealistic Expectations King Philip II of Spain had a poor understanding of the limitations his scheme faced. Believing that God was on his side, he originally planned to send his fleet out in winter without worrying about the weather. A previous incident when English ships fled a fight led him to consider the English sailors spineless when in fact these had been English supply vessels whose contract with the French was to transport goods, not make war. Drake's Raid on Cadiz As the Armada was being prepared, the English admiral Sir Francis Drake launched a daring raid on the Spanish port of Cadiz. Blockading traffic up and down the coast, he disrupted the preparations so severely that the invasion had to be postponed. Originally due to set sail in the winter of 1587, it was put off until 1588. When it did, a shortage of seasoned wood for barrel staves – again caused by Drakes' raiding – meant that supplies of food and water went off. The Death of Santa Cruz The Marquis of Santa Cruz was Spain's greatest admiral and one of the key figures in planning the Armada. His death in the winter of 1587-8 left the Armada without one of its most skilled leaders. Some even said that he died because of the Armada, his heart breaking from the certainty that it would fail. Medina Sidonia Santa Cruz was replaced by the Duke of Medina Sidonia. While not the worst of commanders, Medina Sidonia had not been selected for his skills as an admiral, but because his noble birth gave him the authority to command the Spaniards serving under him. Recruitment Problems The Prince of Parma, assembling the army of invasion in the Low Countries, struggled to gather the soldiers he needed. Lack of funds limited the troops he could recruit locally. Many among the forces coming from Spain died on the long march to Holland. Bad weather and poor nutrition took more men out of the equation. On top of this, the rush to recruit in time for the Armada meant that many men had not served in the colonies, the method Spain used to harden its fighting men. Even if they had landed in England, they would have been a weakened and weary fighting force. Philip II. Technological Obsolescence The power of the Spanish navy lay with her galleys, which famously defeated the Turks at Lepanto in 1571. These oar-powered vessels each had a ram at the prow. They would smash into enemy ships, and if that did not sink them, then they would launch a boarding action, turning a naval battle into a land fight at sea. The ranks of rowers prevented canons from being mounted along the sides, so instead a limited number were fitted at the front. By the 1580s, these vessels were becoming obsolete. Powerful sailing galleons could have rows of cannons mounted along their sides, giving them more firepower. It was ships such as these that smashed the Spanish at Cadiz, in conditions theoretically favorable to the oared galleys. Drake's map of his attack on Cádiz And so, with less than a year until their invasion, the Spanish found that four out of every five of their ships was obsolete. Though they found alternatives, much of their naval might had been lost. John Hawkins' Ships Under the guidance of John Hawkins, the English spent the decade from 1576 rebuilding their fleet. Hawkins saw ways to build a far superior galleon. Fore and aft castles were lowered for stability. Hulls became longer and narrower, increasing speed, maneuverability, and firepower. By 1588, half the Royal Navy consisted of ships to this new design, and most of the rest had been rebuilt to Hawkins's specifications. Fewer Gunners The Spanish lacked experienced gunners on their ships. In the English fleet, on the other hand, roughly one man in ten was a gunnery specialist, meaning that every gun crew was supervised by someone with the relevant skills and experience. As a result, when the battle came, the English fired two or three times faster. The wrecking of Girona Inferior Ammunition The Spanish carried more ammunition for their cannons than the English, but it was not as good. Spanish iron ore was inferior in quality to that found in England. The situation was made worse by the rush to produce ammunition for the expedition. To speed up production, canon balls had been cooled in water, weakening their structure. For some of the large bore guns, money had been saved by using stone ammunition. This often disintegrated when fired, making it deadly at short range but nearly useless for long-range inter-ship shooting. Inferior Guns Better metallurgy also allowed the English to produce shorter cannons while retaining their range and power. Combined with specially designed naval gun carriages, this allowed the guns to be pulled in and reloaded more quickly. English fireship The Weather Even before they reached their destination, the ships of the Armada were twice scattered by storms. Some were damaged, others lost, and there were long delays while they regrouped. It was an omen of what was to come, with storms smashing the fleet as it fled the English and limped home around the British Isles. Howard Used the Wind The obvious move for the English fleet would have been to block the Spanish by standing in their way across the Channel. But with the wind coming out of the west, this would have allowed the Spanish to close with the English, taking advantage of Spain's tightly packed formations and experience in boarding actions. Instead, Admiral Lord Howard led the English around the Spanish so that they were sailing behind them. From this position, they could fire at the Spanish ships, making use of their superior gunnery, with little risk of close quarters action. Fire Ships The English use of fire ships against the Spanish fleet moored at Calais did not sink any enemy ships. However, it forced the Spanish to scatter, ships becoming damaged as they collided with each other, giving the English an advantage in the days that followed. Source: John Tincey (1968), The Armada Campaign 1588. The commander of the Armada was the Duke of Medina Sidonia. The Duke had set out on the enterprise with some reluctance, as he was wary of the abilities of the English ships. However, he hoped he would be able to join with the forces of the Duke of Parma in the Netherlands, and find safe, deep anchorage for his fleet before the invasion of England. To his dismay this did not happen. The Spaniards maintained a strict crescent formation up the Channel, which the English realised would be very difficult to break. Despite this, two great Spanish ships were accidentally put out of action during the initial battles. The Rosario collided with another ship, was disabled and captured by Drake, while the San Salvador blew up with tremendous loss of life. The two fleets skirted round each other up the Channel with neither gaining advantage. How did English fireships help break the Spanish Armada? On 27 July 1588, after the Armada had anchored off Calais, the English decided to send in eight 'fireships'. These were vessels packed with flammable material, deliberately set alight and left to drift towards enemy ships. At midnight, the fireships approached the Spanish Armada. The Spanish cut their anchor cables ready for flight, but in the darkness many ships collided with each other. While none of the Spanish ships were set on fire, the Armada was left scattered and disorganised. Launch of fireships against the Spanish Armada, 7 August 1588 (BHC0263, © NMM). Next morning, there was the fiercest fighting of the whole Armada campaign during the Battle of Gravelines. By evening, the wind was strong and the Spanish expected a further attack at dawn, but as both sides were out of ammunition none came. That afternoon the wind changed and the Spanish ships were blown off the sandbanks towards the North Sea. With no support from the Duke of Parma and their sandbanks lost, Medina Sidonia's main aim was to bring the remains of the Armada back to Spain. Why did the Spanish Armada fail? Many ships were wrecked off the rocky coasts of Scotland and Ireland. Of the 150 ships that set out, only 65 returned to Lisbon. The following year, Philip sent another smaller fleet of about 100 ships. This too ran into stormy weather off Cornwall and was blown back to Spain. Map of the track of the Armada around Britain and Ireland (PBD8529(2), © NMM). It was not until the reign of James I (ruler of Scotland and England 1603-1625) that peace was finally made between the two countries. Spanish Armada timeline: 1588 12 July: The Spanish Armada sets sail 18 July: The English fleet leaves Plymouth but the south-west wind prevents them from reaching Spain 19 July: The Spanish Armada is sighted off the Lizard in Cornwall, where they stop to get supplies 21 July: The outnumbered English navy begins bombarding the seven-mile-long line of Spanish ships from a safe distance, using the advantage of their superior long-range guns 22 July: The English fleet is forced back to port due to the wind 22 - 23 July: The Armada is pursued up the Channel by Lord Howard of Effingham's fleet. Howard was the commander of the English forces, with Francis Drake second in command. The Spaniards reach Portland Bill, where they gain the weather advantage, meaning they are able to turn and attack the pursuing English ships 27 July: The Armada anchors off Calais to wait for their troops to arrive. The English send in fireships that night 28 July: The English attack the Spanish fleet near Gravelines 29 July: The Armada is re-joined by the rest of the missing ships 30 July: The Armada is put into battle order 31 July: The Spanish fleet tries to turn around to join up with the Spanish land forces again. However, the prevailing south-west winds prevent them from doing so 1 August: The Armada finds itself off Berry Head with the English fleet far behind. Howard is forced to wait for his ships to re-join him 2 August: The Armada is located to the north of the English, near Portland Bill. Both fleets turn east 6 August: Both fleets are once again close but avoid any conflict 9 August: After the main danger is over, Elizabeth travels to speak to the English troops at Tilbury 12 August: The fleets come close again, with the Armada in good shape. However, still no fighting takes place, and the Spanish ships are ordered to sail north. Stormy weather plagues them for the rest of the voyage 1 September: the ship Barca de Amburgo sinks in a storm near Fair Isle, Scotland 3 September: the Duke Of Medina Sidonia, commander of the Armada, sends a message Philip II that there have been four nights of storms, and 17 ships have disappeared 12 September: The ship Trinidad Valencera is caught in a bad storm, and is eventually forced to land near Kinnagoe Bay in Ireland October: The remaining Armada ships manage to return home. safety in the north and many lives were spared. Main image: English ships and the Spanish Armada, August 1588 (BHC0262, © NMM)



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