

# Elizabeth I (1558-1603) the Spanish Armada (1588)

1

## The Causes of The Spanish Armada.

Philip had long been considering an invasion of England. However, the expense of mounting such an operation has made him hesitate.

## What factors influenced his decision?

- Philip of Spain wanted to gain **revenge for the execution** of the Roman Catholic, Mary Queen of Scots in 1587.
- Philip had been married to Mary Tudor and like her still wished to see England returned to the Roman Catholic faith and the Pope as the head of the Church in England. Spain was the strongest Catholic nation in Europe. The idea of a Roman **Catholic Crusade** against a protestant country appealed to Philip and in fact gained support from the Pope Sixtus V to depose the "Heretic Elizabeth".
- All attempts to **assassinate Elizabeth had failed**. An invasion and forceful removal were the only remaining options.
- The activities of the English '**sea dogs**' Drake, Raleigh and Hawkins who were continually attacking Spanish ports and Spanish galleons, stealing their treasure had greatly angered the Spanish. Even, when they complained to Elizabeth, she did nothing, except knight Francis Drake!
- In 1585, Elizabeth helped the **Protestants in the Netherlands** when they revolted against their Spanish overlords led by the Duke of Parma. Firstly, she had supplied money and supplies and later 12,000 men under the command of the Earl of Leicester. With Elizabeth out of the way, Philip could crush the Dutch Protestants.
- The final straw was the incident in 1587, when Sir Francis Drake is said to have '**Singed the King of Spain's beard**'. Four English vessels calmly entered the harbour of Cadiz and fired on the Spanish fleet, sinking thirty ships and damaging many of the ships that were there awaiting the invasion of England. Considerable amounts of stores were also damaged.

## The Plan

- On 20th May, 1588, Philip's Armada of 132 ships carrying 8,000 sailors and 20,000 marines eventually sailed from Spain under the command of the Duke of Medina Sidonia. Santa Cruz, the original leader of the planned Armada, had died earlier in 1588
- The plan was to sail to Calais. There they would meet with the Duke of Parma

and his 30,000 soldiers.

- Parma had ordered the construction of flat-bottomed barges that were to be used to transport his troops across the channel in order to invade England. The Armada was to provide protection using their crescent formation with the barges in the centre.
- The Spanish soldiers would then land in Kent and march on London where they would be met by an army of 25,000 English Catholics. London would be captured.
- Elizabeth was to be removed from the throne and replaced with a Catholic monarch, originally, Mary Queen of Scots.
- It must be remembered that this was Philip's plan. Both Parma and Sidonia were unhappy with it, but their proposed plans had been turned down.

### **The Events of the Armada**

- On 20th May 1588, The Armada set sail but immediately ran into bad weather. Ropes broke, food went rotten or was lost. Water went bad. The ships had to return to port for repair and re-supply. They eventually left Corunna Harbour on the 12th July.
- On the 19th July, the Armada sailed past Plymouth and from there was pursued up the Channel by the English fleet under the command of Lord Howard of Effingham and Drake.
- The Armada covering an area of 11km, formed themselves into a crescent shape which made it difficult for the English to attack successfully.
- Fighting took place all week with additional English ships sailing out from harbours along the south coast and attacking the Spanish.
- On 27th July, the Armada put into Calais Harbour to await Parma's troops. On arrival they found that the troops had been delayed by the Dutch Navy who were blockading the coast and stopping Parma sailing his barges along to Calais. They had to find an alternative route overland and were not expected to arrive for another two weeks. Once the Spanish ships were inside the harbour, Drake sent in eight fire ships loaded with barrels of tar and gunpowder.
- This caused panic and confusion amongst the Spanish and many tried to leave the harbour, breaking their crescent shape and sailing straight into a volley of fire from the awaiting English fleet. The Battle of Gravelines then took place.
- With the Armada scattered, the Spanish were badly defeated and attempted to escape. 4 Spanish ships sunk and many damaged. Fortunately for the Spanish, the English ran out of shot.
- Escape up the Channel was thought to be too risky as they would be picked off by English ships. They began to sail up the east coast of England intending to sail

round the North of Scotland, down the west coast of Ireland and back to Spain.

- Bad weather hit then in the north of Scotland.
- The bad weather continued for many days and 23 ships were wrecked off the coast of Scotland and Ireland. It is believed that only 53 ships managed to return to Spain and only half the men.
- Many Spanish seaman who swum ashore were killed by the inhabitants.
- The English ships took shelter in English ports. They had lost less than 100 men and not one ship!

## **Why Did The Armada Fail?**

### **Leadership**

- The death of the Spanish Admiral Santa Cruz had left the Armada under the command of a seasick prone and very inexperienced seaman called Duke of Medina Sidonia. He was a good soldier, but terrible sailor. He didn't even want the job.
- Compared to this the English leaders were men of great skill and experience in naval matters. Other Spanish officers were nobles and soldiers and not trained for sea.

### **Delays**

- Drake's attack on Cadiz in 1587, had caused damage to the Armada. Philip had ordered repairs of ships and equipment to be done very quickly. However, this meant that barrels used to keep water and food in were not properly finished and the food and water went off. This was to cause a shortage later on. Disease followed.

### **Unsuitability of Port**

- Calais was not an ideal port to embark troops, but there was no alternative.
- The storms had prevented the Spanish from returning to Calais to pick up Parma's soldiers. These soldiers were vital if the invasion was going to succeed.

### **Philip's indecision**

- Philip had known about Parma's problems and delay, yet did nothing.

### **Design and Weapons**

- The Spanish fleet was built mainly for transporting and not fighting.
- The English ships were much smaller, more manoeuvrable and faster than the vast Spanish galleons.
- The size of the Spanish ships made them easy targets
- The English battery guns could fire longer distances.
- The English gunners could fire quicker and more accurately. Loaded easier
- The Spanish Ships had many of their guns on the lower decks. They could not use them in the Channel as water entered the ship as the ship rolled.

## **Tactics**

- The tactics used by the Spanish were outdated. They relied on damaging an enemy ship with close quarter firing then sailing up to the ship, throwing on grappling hooks, pulling the ship towards them and then boarding the ship with large numbers of soldiers.
- The Spanish were not used to the rough seas they experienced. They were used to fighting in calmer waters.
- The English had altered and fine-tuned their tactics. They now relied on the use of long-range guns. Therefore, they never allowed the Spanish to get close enough to board them. The English sailors were better trained.

**Bad Luck - Weather**

**Other Factors** - Elizabeth inspirational leader. English Catholics did not rebel.

## **What Were The Consequences of The Defeat of The Armada?**

- The threat of a Spanish invasion had now completely disappeared. Philip would never be able to contemplate another invasion after this disaster.
- England would remain a Protestant country, with the monarch the Head of the Church. Papal control was denied. The Counter-Reformation was now in decline in Europe.
- England was starting to become the greatest naval power in Europe. The expertise of her sailors and the tactics used were to revolutionise naval warfare.
- The Netherlands were encouraged by the failure of the Armada and felt more inclined to keep up their fight against their Spanish overlords.
- This was a heavy blow to Spain's pride. Spain had lost its status of "Super Power".