

# WORLD HISTORY

King of Spain – Philip II

Queen of England - Elizabeth I

## Spanish Armada

### Dates

The Spanish Armada was first sighted off The Lizard on July 19, 1588. Sporadic fighting occurred over the next two weeks with the largest English attack coming on August 8, off Gravelines, Flanders. After the battle, the English pursued the Armada until August 12, when both fleets were off the Firth of Forth.

### Commanders & Armies

**England** - 35 warships, 163 armed merchant vessels

Sir Francis Drake

**Spain** - 22 galleons, 108 armed merchant vessels (130 total ships)

Duke of Medina Sedonia

### Reasons for the Attack

Built on the orders of King Philip II of Spain, the Armada was meant to sweep the seas around the British Isles and permit the Duke of Parma to cross the Channel with an army to invade England. This endeavor was intended to increase control over England by, ending English support for the Dutch resistance to Spanish rule, and to reverse the Protestant Reformation in England.

A third reason was competition for supremacy in trade and sea power. Spain's discovery of the New World opened up a huge source of trade, of which the English wanted a share. The growing strength of English naval power was a threat to Spain's domination of the seas and England was located in a very strategic geographic location. If Philip could gain control of England, he could command the Channel, encircle Spain's old enemy, France, and have easy passage to the Spanish Netherlands.

A fourth reason was the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, by order of Elizabeth, in 1587. This shocked all Catholic nations. Seeking to fight for Catholicism, Philip was ready now to establish himself as the rightful King of England. He had been King of England thirty years prior, as husband to Mary I (Tudor).

### Spanish Armada - Early Encounters

Sailing from Lisbon on May 28, 1588, the Armada was commanded by the Duke of Medina Sedonia. A naval novice, Medina Sedonia was assigned to the fleet following the death of veteran commander Alvaro de Bazan a few months earlier. Due to the size of the fleet, the last ship did not clear port until May 30. Plans for the attack by the Spanish Armada were advertised throughout Europe and England.

As the Armada put to sea, the English fleet was gathered in Plymouth awaiting news of the Spanish. On July 19, the Spanish fleet was sighted off The Lizard at western entrance to the English Channel. Putting to sea, the English fleet shadowed the Spanish fleet, while remaining upwind to retain the weather gage. Proceeding up the Channel, Medina Sedonia had the Armada form a tightly packed, crescent-shaped formation that would allow for the ships to mutually defend one another. Over the next week, the two fleets fought two skirmishes off Eddystone and Portland, in which the English explored the Armada's strengths and weaknesses, but were unable to break its formation.

### Spanish Armada - Fireships

Off the Isle of Wight, the English launched an all-out assault on the Armada, with Sir Francis Drake leading the largest contingent of attacking ships. While the English enjoyed initial success, Medina Sedonia was able to reinforce those parts of the fleet that were in danger and the Armada was able to maintain formation. Though the attack had failed to scatter the Armada, it prevented Medina Sedonia from using the Isle of Wight as an anchorage and forced the Spanish to continue up the Channel without any news of Parma's readiness. On July 27, the Armada anchored at Calais, and attempted to contact Parma's forces at nearby Dunkirk. At midnight on July 28, the English filled eight ships with as many flammable substances as they could find. These ships were called fireships ("Hell Burners"), they were "floating bombs" and they were floating towards the Armada. Afraid the fireships would set the ships of the Armada on fire, the Spanish captains cut their anchor cables and scattered. Though only one Spanish ship was burned, the English had achieved their goal of breaking up Medina Sedonia's fleet.

## **Spanish Armada - The Battle of Gravelines**

In the wake of the fireship attack, Medina Sedonia attempted to reform the Armada off Gravelines as the rising south-westerly wind prevented a return to Calais. As the Armada concentrated, Medina Sedonia received word from Parma that another six days were required to bring his troops to the coast for the crossing to England. On August 8, as the Spanish rode at anchor off Gravelines, the English returned in force. Sailing smaller, faster, and more maneuverable ships, the English utilized the weather gauge and long-range gunnery to pummel the Spanish. This approach worked to the English advantage as the preferred Spanish tactic called for one broadside and then an attempt to board. The Spanish were further hampered by a lack of gunnery training and correct ammunition for their guns. During the fighting at Gravelines, eleven Spanish ships were sunk or badly damaged, while the English escaped largely unscathed.

## **Spanish Armada - Spanish Retreat**

On August 9, with his fleet damaged and the wind backing to the south and the mouth of the Channel blocked by the English, Medina Sedonia abandoned the invasion plan and charted a course for Spain. Leading the Armada north, he intended to circle around the British Isles and return home through the Atlantic. The English pursued the Armada as far north as the Firth of Forth before returning home. As the Armada reached the latitude of Ireland, it encountered a large hurricane. Hammered by the wind and sea, at least 24 ships were driven ashore on the Irish coast where many of the survivors were killed by Elizabeth's troops. The storm, referred to as the **Protestant Wind** was seen as a sign that God supported the Reformation and many commemorative medals were struck with the inscription *God Blew the Winds, and They Were Scattered*.

## **Spanish Armada - Aftermath & Impact**

Over the following weeks, 67 of Medina Sedonia's ships straggled into port, many badly damaged with starving crews. In the course of the campaign, the Spanish lost approximately 50 ships and over 5,000 men, though most of the ships sunk were converted merchantmen and not ships from the Spanish Navy. The English suffered around 50-100 killed and around 400 wounded. Long considered one of England's greatest victories, the defeat of the Armada temporarily ended the threat of invasion as well as aided in securing the English Reformation and allowed Elizabeth to continue supporting the Dutch in their struggle against the Spanish. The Anglo-Spanish War would continue until 1603, with the Spanish generally getting the better of the English, but never again attempting to mount an invasion of England.

## **Spanish Armada - Elizabeth at Tilbury**

The campaign of the Spanish Armada provided Elizabeth with the opportunity to deliver what is considered one of the finest speeches of her long reign. On August 8, as her fleet was sailing into battle at Gravelines, Elizabeth addressed Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester's troops at their camp on the Thames estuary at West Tilbury:

*I have come amongst you as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved in the midst and heat of battle to live and die amongst you all, to lay down for my God and for my kingdom, and for my people, my honor and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England too. And think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any Prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm!*

## **Assignment**

- 1) Make a "timeline" of the Spanish Armada's attack on England
- 2) Make an "outline" using the **BOLD** titles – YOU WANT TO BE ABLE TO ANSWER WHO, WHY, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and RESULTS of the attack
- 3) Select 1 of the following using **75-100 words** to summarize the Spanish Armada: **SONG, JOURNAL ENTRY** (told from viewpoint of Sir Francis Drake OR the Duke of Medina) or **NEWSPAPER ARTICLE**