

University of California, Santa Barbara

Sir Francis Drake: The Pirate Leading the Counter Armada

Senior Honors Thesis submitted to the faculty  
of the History Department

By  
Daniel Razzari



## Contents

Acknowledgments .....	i
Introduction .....	1
The Spanish Intelligence System .....	5
Difficulties at Plymouth and the Attack on La Corunna .....	11
Aftermath of La Corunna and on to Peniche .....	27
Division at Peniche and the Long Road to Lisbon .....	33
Problems at the Mouth of the Tagus River .....	48
Conclusion .....	62



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Dutra for his time and commitment in making this project possible. I appreciate his patience and guidance throughout the entirety of the project. His knowledge of the subject and willingness to help improve my abilities as a historical writer has not gone unnoticed. I would also like to thank Professor Miescher for his guidance and eagerness to help improve my project. Although his job as the instructor for the thesis course was time consuming, Professor Miescher was readily available to answer questions and other issues concerning the project. I appreciate Professor Dutra and Professor Miescher's help in improving my writing skills. Without the aid of both professors this project would have been much more difficult. I would also like to thank Professor Tutino for taking the time to answer specific questions. My colleagues gave several important and interesting suggestions. I would like to thank all of them for taking the time to read my project, especially Jim Towers, John Stark, and Jackson Warkentin. Although their schedules were busy, their time given to my project was valuable and greatly appreciated. Finally, I must thank God for keeping me focused in times of difficulty and clearing my mind allowing me to successfully complete this project. Along with Professor Dutra and Professor Miescher, my faith helped dramatically reduce the burden and stress which accompanied the project; making it much more enjoyable and fulfilling once completed. Once again I would like to thank all who had given their support and aid in making this project possible.

## Introduction

Drake, conquering Drake, whose fortunes are not such,  
Whose valure more, and kindnesse thrise so much,  
A friend to friends, a scourge vnto the foe,  
A plague for those that wish sweete Englands woe.  
What Pylot may compare with him for skill,  
What man more foreward, his enemies blood to spill?<sup>1</sup>

In 1588 the Spanish Armada launched an attack against the English navy, ending in defeat.

Several English elites<sup>2</sup> felt that it would be in England's best interest to launch a counter-attack against the Spanish. Queen Elizabeth I eventually agreed, and granted a commission to Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Norris to lead a campaign against the Spanish.<sup>3</sup> The expedition embarked on 18 April 1589 to destroy the remnants of the Spanish Armada, as well as ships returning or heading for the West Indies. The main purpose was the destruction of Spanish shipping, but there were also instructions for Drake and Norris to aid Dom António in reclaiming the Portuguese throne.<sup>4</sup> These instructions, however, were subordinate to the primary objective—distressing Spain's shipping. The expedition quickly diverted from its original purpose. In defiance of the queen, Drake ignored her orders and embarked on his own journey leading the English to Lisbon and its environs. The expedition accomplished little, and hundreds of English soldiers were overcome with disease. The loss of financial resources and lives outweighed the

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry Roberts, *The Triumph of Fame, or Sir Fraunces Drakes and Sir Iohn Hawkins Farewell, with an encouragement to all Sailors and Souldiers, that are minded to go in this worthie enterprise: with the names of many famous ships*, [from *The trumpet of Fame* (1595)]. Excerpt from poem, lines 29-34.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Walsingham, Sir John Norris, Sir Francis Drake, the Earl of Essex, several Privy Council members, and various other lords throughout England supported a counter strike. Others, such as Lord Willoughby, were concerned more with the struggle in the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> Admiral Howard would have been Elizabeth's choice. Unfortunately, her treasury was empty and private parties donated most of the funds allowing Drake to take control of the navy. In reference to Howard, Nolan stated, "As Admiral of the Royal Navy he should have taken the lead, but given the Queen's sparse resources, he had little to offer" John S. Nolan, *Sir John Norreys and the Elizabethan Military World* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1967), p. 126; R.B. Wernham, "Queen Elizabeth and the Portugal Expedition of 1589" Vol. 66, *The English Historical Review* (1951) 1-26. Wernham discusses Elizabeth's financial situation in 1589.

<sup>4</sup> Dom António was the pretender to the Portuguese throne. The Spanish controlled Portugal at the time, and Dom António looked to England for military aid.

limited success of the expedition, or what Drake and Norris claimed to be a success.



Sir John Norris.

**Figure 1. A portrait of Sir John Norris, c. 1630**  
(Nolan, *Sir John Norreys and the Elizabethan Military World*).

Plans for a counter-attack seemed to have developed around August of 1588. Prior to embarking on the expedition, Queen Elizabeth gave Drake and Norris specific instructions on how to destroy Spanish shipping.<sup>5</sup> There is evidence, early on, that Elizabeth was interested in an attack by land and sea, providing that an alliance could be formed with surrounding “princes” (the Sultan of Morocco being one of the princes Elizabeth referred to) against the King of Spain.<sup>6</sup> This plan of attack never transpired, and she decided on a plan to destroy Spanish shipping at key ports. In October of 1588 the expedition, in theory, remained a small scale raiding party, but things would quickly spin out of control by early 1589. A commission from the queen to Drake

---

<sup>5</sup> Instructions for Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, 23 February 1589, in R.B. Wernham, ed., *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal, 1589* (London: Temple Smith 1988), pp. 82-88.

<sup>6</sup> Walsingham to Henry Roberts, 5 August 1588, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 6-7; The Queen to Mulay Ahmed of Morocco, 10 September 1588, *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.

and Norris instructed them to levy troops not exceeding 4,000 men.<sup>7</sup> A smaller-scale force, as was ordered by the queen, would not attract as much attention, and concealing the treasury was easy. It would have been affordable for the crown. Drake and Norris, however, wanted to have their plans as the queen in utter disgust watched the army, as well as the expedition, grow increasingly as time for departure neared. This would hurt the crown financially and as a result, because the primary source of revenue, the queen began losing interest in the course of the expedition.<sup>8</sup>

England, at the time, did not have a large reserve of veteran troops. Many of their veteran soldiers were stationed in the Dutch Provinces in honor of a treaty in 1575 between the Netherlands and England.<sup>9</sup> Norris had been given authority to recruit from the English auxiliary forces in the Low Countries; however, much of the expeditionary force had been drawn from the "dregs of society."<sup>10</sup> In London, the mayor was informed that the "idle and loose persons lurking" should be delivered to the captains appointed by Norris, who were then pressed into service.<sup>11</sup> These men pressed into service would create several problems throughout the expedition. It also proved to be difficult, if not an unfortunate waste of time, to pull men from the Low Countries.

Although Elizabeth wanted to conceal her plans, it was quite impossible because the Spanish had an intricate system of intelligence led by Bernardino de Mendoza. Mendoza

<sup>7</sup> Commission for Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, knights, 11 October 1584, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, 12-14. By the time the expedition departed Plymouth, the numbers of both volunteers and sailors was between 16,000 and 23,000 men, well over the intended size of the force.

<sup>8</sup> Nolan, *Sir John Norreys*, p. 139-141.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. The treaty, once signed, created an alliance between England and the Dutch Provinces for the purpose of repelling Spanish forces under the Duke of Parma.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Bucholtz, *Early Modern Britain, 1485-1714* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 146. Also see B.R. Burg, *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the seventeenth century Caribbean* (New York: New York University Press, 1984). Burg's book discusses how young men were cast out of their homes, and into society where they ended up in large cities. These young men, or vagabonds, were pressed into service on navy or merchant ships.

<sup>11</sup> Troop Levy in London, 29 September 1584, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 35. England did not have a standing army, and many of her veteran troops were in the Netherlands assisting against the Duke of Parma.

operated out of France as an ambassador and had several informants under him. Many were English Catholics, who monitored England closely.<sup>12</sup> The impact intelligence had on the expedition was not solely responsible for the English disaster, but combined with several English mistakes, it created a task, especially for raw recruits, which was almost impossible.

The expedition, scheduled to depart on February 1, did not leave until 18 April 1589.<sup>13</sup> The expedition initially landed at La Corunna and aimed for Lisbon thereafter.<sup>14</sup> A combination of delays at home, Spanish intelligence, and ignoring Elizabeth's instructions equally contributed to the failure of the voyage. It is possible to argue that the voyage was doomed before it had left Plymouth; however, Drake and Norris could have changed the fate of the expedition. But whether by greed, ambition, or lack of responsibility, they failed to return to Plymouth riding a wave of success. Throughout the course of this work I will continue to draw on the events in England, prior to embarkation, in order to express how critical it was for Drake and Norris to progress mistake free, which they did not. Also it will be important to analyze the mistakes during the expedition, and show how each hindered and eventually deteriorated the English force.

In order to investigate the reasons for the failure of the expedition, rather than another narration of events, several key documents have been helpful: *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal, 1589* (edited by R.B. Wernham), the *Calendar of Letters and State Papers, Spanish* (edited by Martin A.S. Hume), and the *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Venice* (edited by Horatio F. Brown). The *Calendar of Letters and*

---

<sup>12</sup> De Lamar Jensen, *Diplomacy and Dogmatism: Bernardino de Mendoza and the French Catholic League* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Harry Kelsey, *Sir Francis Drake: The Queen's Pirate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 349.

<sup>14</sup> Groyne is the name of the city La Corunna in Elizabethan English, and is the common name seen in English documents. For practical purposes, La Corunna will be used when discussing the city, rather than Groyne, the English name. However, since several quotes may have the name Groyne in it, it is important to note the difference. La Corunna is a city in Northern Spain, more precisely, in the area of Galicia.

*State Papers, Spanish* provides us with valuable information concerning the Spanish intelligence system. These letters, however, were written about the events leading to the departure of the expedition, and few concerning anything thereafter. The R.B. Wernham compilation is a key source of information, primarily because those who took part on the expedition wrote the documents. They reveal different English viewpoints of the expedition's course. A careful analysis of these sources is crucial to understanding what went wrong on the expedition. Spanish intelligence certainly hurt the expedition. But the largest problems that contributed to the failure of the military venture came from within rather than externally. Our goal, after a thorough investigation, is to discuss in detail the reasons of why the expedition failed. To accomplish this task, we need to examine closely these English accounts. By the end of the project it will become quite clear that Sir Francis Drake, although granted the title of general, remained a pirate in actions and thought.

### *The Spanish Intelligence System*

On April 18, 1589 the expedition sailed away from Plymouth. Estimates of the numbers of ships that sailed that day and men on board vary considerably.<sup>15</sup> While Harry Kelsey believes there were over one hundred ships and roughly around 19,000 men, Robert Bucholtz places the numbers at 23,000 men in roughly 140 ships of all sizes.<sup>16</sup> Numbers range as low as 15,000 men along with 130 ships. For our purpose, the important thing to notice is that regardless whether the

---

<sup>15</sup> There is some debate about when the expedition left Plymouth. Harry Kelsey and Kenneth Andrews state the expedition left on 18 April 1589, but John Nolan states 17 April 1589. John Eversham's account of the voyage, transcribed in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, 226-236, states that the voyage left on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, which is consistent with other accounts as well. John Nolan however states the 17<sup>th</sup>, basing this date on Emmanuel van Meteren, *A Brief Discoverse of the Memorable Voyage to Portugal, Anno 1589* (London: Imprinted [by Felix Kingston] for Matthew Lownes, and sold at his shop vnder S. Dunstons Church in the west, 1602). The Problem with Emmanuel's account is that it is quite inconsistent as a whole, and his account is the only account that puts the departure date on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April, whereas other accounts all agree on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Kelsey, *Sir Francis Drake*, 348; Bucholtz, *Early Modern Britain*, p. 139.



numbers were 15,000 or 23,000 men, they were much higher than the projected 4,000 men Elizabeth had allowed.

Before discussing key issues and events that occurred from Plymouth to the attack on La Corunna, we should look at the Spanish intelligence system. This is important because in order to understand the magnitude of Drake's and Norris' mistakes we must understand what the fleet was up against, and why their mistakes would prove to be costly in both time and men. Historians have generally been concerned with the events of the expedition, and have not shown much interest in Mendoza's operation in relation to the expedition.

The Spanish had several English spies. Two of them, David (Manuel Andrada) and Sampson (António de Escobar) were Dom António's most trusted men. Dom António was oblivious to the fact that both worked for the Spanish and continued to hand his letters over to Mendoza.<sup>17</sup> Both were able to send reliable information about the English affairs to Mendoza. The system, however, was not perfect. Although the Spanish knew what the English leaders planned, it took a great deal of time to deliver messages. "The fastest delivery recorded in the Mendoza correspondence was eight days, but the average time from Paris to Madrid was more like twelve days"<sup>18</sup> The expedition sailed on April 18, 1589, but a letter from Mendoza dated around the 26<sup>th</sup> expressed a great deal of confusion as to whether the English fleet had left Plymouth yet.<sup>19</sup> Mendoza, in a letter to Philip, expressed his frustration about receiving information, "but now the English ports are rigorously closed it is difficult to get advices at

---

<sup>17</sup> *Calendar of Letters and State Papers, Spanish*, ed. Martin A.S. Hume (London, 1889), Vol. 4, Document 555, pp. 552-553; Jensen, *Diplomacy and Dogmatism*, p. 106. Although Jensen uses "Sanson" it is Sampson according to the Cal. S.P. *Spanish*. The names Sampson and David were used to hide their real names. In 1586, Mendoza had several English on his payroll. Thomas Morgan, the Earl of Westmorland, Charles Pager, Thomas Throckmorton, Charles Arundel, and others all aided Mendoza one way or another—primarily by delivering information.

<sup>18</sup> Jensen, *Diplomacy and Dogmatism*, p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol. 4, Document 526, pp. 533-534.

all.”<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth had closed access to the ports, and naturally this delayed messages leaving England. It should have provided enough of a delay to give the English fleet a chance for a surprise attack.

The time it took to deliver a message was compensated with unusual accuracy. Preparations for a counter-attack began soon after the defeat of the Armada. However, the Spanish acquired a few hints of the English operation as early as September 1588. A letter from Mendoza to Philip II of Spain had mentioned that Dom António was attempting to land in Portugal along with English aid.<sup>21</sup> By November England’s intentions had become clear to Spain; therefore, Spain would have over six months to prepare for an attack.

The clarity and preciseness of the intelligence was unusual for the period. Mendoza provided a vast amount of information to Philip about the English preparations and departure dates. An anonymous document, written in April of 1589, is a superb example of the kind of intelligence the Spanish received:

On the 19<sup>th</sup> March Drake and Norris were in Dover, ready to embark for Plymouth. On the 25<sup>th</sup> they sailed with 80 ships, Flemish and English, the rest being at Plymouth. It is asserted that they will have over 130 sail victualled for six months, and taking 15,000 soldiers. The intention is said to be to make for Portugal, and to land near Lisbon the larger part of the force, the rest remaining on the fleet of which Drake is to have command, whilst Norris is to direct the land operations. If it is found convenient the greater part of the fleet will go out to await the Indian flotillas. It is believed in Plymouth that the fleet will sail some time in April at least.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the claims in the letter above, such as the amount of victuals, are not precise, but changed as the time for departure arrived. It is important to examine, not what was expressed in the document, but the detail and certainty the author related about the English motives and preparation. It should also be pointed out that the informant was quite accurate in his assessment

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, Document 526, p. 534.

<sup>21</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol. 4, Document 420, pp. 416-417.

<sup>22</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol. 4, Document 518, p. 526.



of the English. Notice the mention of landing in Lisbon and the fact the document was written prior to April 18<sup>th</sup>; it suggests that the English, although not Elizabeth's desire, had determined to sail for Lisbon prior to embarkation, rather than destroy Spanish shipping as their orders instructed. Wernham argues, based on the doubling in size of the army and a document from Dom António written to both Norris and Drake, that there is strong evidence that Drake and Norris had diverted from the original intent of the voyage.<sup>23</sup> Dom António's letter stated:

Nevertheless, we promise, on our word as a Prince, to make every effort to make the said reimbursements of the charges of the said army, the pay of the men of war, victuals, and other things necessary, as soon as possible, with honorable recompense to the said Generals and other chiefs of the said army.<sup>24</sup>

Dom António's letter, dated February 1589, addressed the way in which Drake and Norris should behave themselves in Portugal, and rules regarding the ransom of hostages. Dom António's promise to pay for the expedition once everything was accomplished suggests that Wernham is correct, and the expedition was diverted long before it left Plymouth. Although the Spanish had not seen Dom António's letter, it certainly justifies their concerns regarding his influence over the expedition. Mendoza's suspicions were confirmed when he received information that Dom António among other Portuguese had prepared to leave with Drake on the expedition. For Mendoza, it was not a coincidence that Dom António happened to follow the expedition, and his informants noticed this as well. One of them, Marco Antonio Micea noted that "it is publicly stated that the destination is to be Portugal" and, interestingly, he pointed out that this was contrary to the queen's plans.<sup>25</sup> A lengthy letter written in March, by the informant David,

---

<sup>23</sup> R.B. Wernham, *After the Armada* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 100. The document that Wernham refers to is located in *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal, 1589*, Document 72, p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> Dom António's answers to articles of Norris and Drake, February 1589, transcribed in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 91-98.

<sup>25</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol. 4, Document 507, pp. 512-514. From the document we know that Marco Micea had spoken with Dom António, and in document 510 we know he was working for Mendoza.

suggested several preparations that should be made along the coast of Portugal, "It is clear that their intention is to land near Lisbon, as they are confident that they will be helped by the Portuguese."<sup>26</sup> Other hints of an invasion of Portugal were discovered when Spanish informants exposed negotiations between England, Dom António, and the Sultan of Morocco; however, Morocco did not aid the English or take any course of action.<sup>27</sup>

The presence of Dom António in England obviously made the Spanish apprehensive, justifiably so, and the spy, David, insisted that proper precautions should be taken for defense in Portugal. He urged Philip to issue a proclamation that would punish by death any Portuguese aiding Dom António. This would become an issue for the English when they decided to land the army at Peniche, because they were depending on the Portuguese to rally to Dom António. Over the course of the expedition less than 300 men came to Dom António's aid, and most of them were commoners or priests.<sup>28</sup> Philip also had several Portuguese nobles summoned to Spain in order to reduce any attempt of an uprising in Portugal.<sup>29</sup> Any hope of an uprising in Portugal had been diminished in late 1588. Emanuel Gomes Gielvez, a Portuguese noble, tried to move his countrymen towards an uprising of sorts, but he was arrested.<sup>30</sup> In an anonymous letter sent to England, there is further evidence that the Portuguese were ready to rise against the Spanish. According to the letter a small religious house outside of Lisbon had prepared arms for "some

---

<sup>26</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol. 4, Document 516, pp. 523.

<sup>27</sup> Several letters were exchanged between Elizabeth and the Sultan, and Dom António had sent his son as hostage as a sign of loyalty. After negotiations nothing transpired and Morocco remained neutral.

<sup>28</sup> Sir Roger Williams to [Walsingham?], 1 June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, 177. Sir Roger Williams was discouraged, "...having not 200 Portugals to friends and those the greatest cowards I ever saw".

<sup>29</sup> *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Venetian*, ed. Horatio F Brown (London, 1894), Vol. 8, Document 811, p. 427; Victor von Klarwill ed., *The Fugger News-Letters*, trans. L.S.R. Byrne (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1926), p. 189. With the Portuguese nobles removed, the people in Portugal had no real source of power to rally around.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, Document 739, pp. 391-392.

service.”<sup>31</sup> The religious house was dissolved and the people were executed. The same letter reported that a goldsmith in Lisbon had shipped a large amount of treasure to Dom António. Unfortunately for the artisan, he was caught and executed.<sup>32</sup> This is yet another example of the Spanish government crushing any attempt at an uprising or aid to Dom António. It is not clear whether this religious house was preparing the arms for a rebellion once the expeditionary force neared Lisbon, but it certainly shows how nervous the Spanish were of similar possibilities. The Portuguese were not particularly happy with living under Spanish rule, and any hint of a rebellion would cause the Spanish to react quickly. Gielvez confessed to writing to Dom António and was executed; or as Hieronimo Lippomano (Venetian Ambassador in Spain) suggested, he had been drowned.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately for the English, this is one example of how the Spanish intelligence system had hurt the expedition. It appears Philip had taken David’s advice. However, there were occasions on the expedition where Portuguese aid seemed promising to the English.

The Spanish had been receiving information that the fleet struggled with provisions, and some doubted the English had a sufficient supply of victuals or provisions to continue with the expedition. The Spanish received news on the condition of the fleet in a letter dated May 15, 1589.<sup>34</sup> It described the fleet’s strength in men and ships, but more importantly it noted its weakness. The fleet lacked victuals and the author (anonymous) emphasized that if the English were unable to obtain provisions in Spain or Portugal, they would have to return home. Seven days later, by April 22<sup>nd</sup>, the English had landed at La Corunna and on May 16<sup>th</sup> troops landed at

---

<sup>31</sup> Intelligences from a Scot, 22 January 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 81. There were 3,000 muskets and calivers stored.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 744, pp. 393-394. A merchant collaborating with Dom António would also be executed, by hanging.

<sup>34</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol.4, Document 535, pp. 538-539.

Peniche.<sup>35</sup> A couple things can be understood; first, it clearly shows how long letters took to arrive and were sometimes too late to be of any importance. Second, and most importantly, it seems that the Spanish understood their enemy's predicament. When the English were forced to retreat from Lisbon, little was done to impede them. The Spanish probably understood that the English could not remain in Portugal much longer. Rather than losing soldiers in a skirmish, the Spanish allowed the English to retreat somewhat peacefully.<sup>36</sup>

The Spanish intelligence system was elaborate, and had numerous informants throughout Europe. The information received was clear, accurate, and detailed. This, however, was not enough to prevent the English from completing their objectives. Still the Spanish intelligence network played a role in the failure of the English expedition. The Spanish had time to react and create a difficult environment for the English upon their arrival to the Iberian Peninsula. Nevertheless, the ultimate reason for defeat lies not within the structure of Mendoza's system of intelligence, but on the shoulders of Sir Francis Drake. Each mistake or diversion from the expedition's original course would prove to be disastrous.<sup>37</sup>

### *Difficulties at Plymouth and the Attack on La Corunna*

Before the fleet left Plymouth on April 18<sup>th</sup> several difficulties placed the English in an awkward position. The expedition was set to embark on February 1, 1589, but they were delayed while awaiting English auxiliaries from the Netherlands; furthermore unfavorable winds kept

---

<sup>35</sup> Kelsey, *Sir Francis Drake*, pp. 349 and 353.

<sup>36</sup> Spanish galleons fired on the English as they retreated from Lisbon to Cascais (a port north of Lisbon). The incident will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>37</sup> Aside from the Spanish intelligence, the men under Drake's command were ignorant of Elizabeth's orders. Drake felt it was better for their plans to remain secret until they were at sea; however, a storm scattered the fleet and Drake decided against the announcement.

them in the harbor until the middle of April.<sup>38</sup> Problems rapidly emerged when the expedition failed to leave in February. The obvious issue the English force would have to contend with was the fact that the Spanish had been collecting intelligence on their plans since late 1588, so they needed to move quickly. Departing on April 18<sup>th</sup>, instead of February 1<sup>st</sup>, inadvertently gave Philip II a little over a month and a half longer to prepare for the attack.

Mistakes began early, and as they begin to compound it will become clear as to why the expedition would fail. Elizabeth desired a small force of around 4,000 men, yet Norris and Drake continued building an army much larger than the queen desired. If they had followed Elizabeth's instructions of levying 4,000 men at most, the expedition might not have been delayed waiting for additional troops from the Netherlands. Also the rapid growth of the army should have concerned Elizabeth, which of course had been the case as she became quite nervous as the army grew. If we look at Elizabeth's instructions for the voyage we will see that the large force levied by Norris and Drake was unnecessary. "A small landing force would be needed to force the harbors, but there was no real reason for an army over 12,000 men."<sup>39</sup> Nolan's argument is certainly viable because Elizabeth's objectives, for the most part, could have been accomplished by a sea attack. According to Elizabeth's instructions: the expedition was to destroy Philip's ships (particularly those that had been part of the Armada of 1588, and to focus on the ports in Galicia, Biscay, and Guipuzcoa), take control of the Azores, and her last order was to help Dom António.<sup>40</sup> The last portion that suggested the expedition might help Dom António had strict

---

<sup>38</sup> Wernham, "Queen Elizabeth and the Portugal Expedition of 1589," p. 1-25. Wernham discusses the difficulty in obtaining a few companies of auxiliary troops from the Netherlands. He discusses in detail the conflict between Elizabeth and the States General in the Netherlands. Wernham argues that this contributed to the delays at Plymouth, and it was not Elizabeth's ineptitude that hurt the expedition as previous historians suggested.

<sup>39</sup> Nolan, *Sir John Norreys and the Elizabethan Military World*, p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> Instructions for Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, 23 February 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 82-88. Santander was one of the ports of primary concern. Elizabeth probably hesitantly gave the order to aid Dom António.

conditions as to how such an operation should be performed. A statement from the queen suggests that the English, if they landed, were little more than a supporting element:

But in case you shall find upon good ground that the party that Don Antonio hath there is great and that they stand so well affected towards him as he pretendeth [and that there will be a party of the Portugals nation that will be ready to aid the King and join with his forces against the Spaniards *inserted above by Burghley*], as also that the King of Spain hath not drawn down into that realm any such [great *added above by Burghley*] forces, but that you may proceed to make a descent there without any great hazard<sup>41</sup> and place him in his kingdom, then we think it a thing most honorable to be preformed and that we may also greatly annoy the King of Spain.<sup>42</sup>

It is clear that the queen wanted Spanish shipping destroyed. A small fleet of 4,000 soldiers seemed sufficient for the operation. Elizabeth wanted to control the Atlantic trade route, and felt England could do this by taking a few islands in the Azores, in which a small landing force would be necessary. However, notice in the above extract from Drake and Norris' instructions where Elizabeth stated "without any great hazard." This is a common idea stressed throughout her instructions, and clearly expressed the notion that she was hoping to keep her soldiers aboard their ships, rather than landing in Portugal or anywhere else (aside from the Azores). It is a safe assumption that Elizabeth wanted a raiding party that would avoid major conflicts or battles. Norris and Drake, however, had their own ideas, and the number of soldiers and sailors had risen somewhere between 15,000 and 23,000 men. This army clearly was not built for raiding purposes, or destroying shipping, but for invading the Iberian Peninsula and defeating the Spanish. According to William Monson, "The project of this Voyage was to restore a distressed

---

<sup>41</sup> By hazard the queen is referring to the danger English troops would endure. She was explicit throughout her orders not to place any of the men in great danger.

<sup>42</sup> Instructions for Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, 23 February 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 82-88. See page 84 for the quotation.



King to his Kingdom, usurped as he pretended.”<sup>43</sup> Nolan argued that the expedition suddenly diverted because the army was not prepared to attack Santander effectively.<sup>44</sup> However, it seems the evidence supports an idea that Drake had plans to head for Lisbon as his primary objective regardless of where Spanish shipping was located. Sometime in March of 1589 a plan was designed for sacking Lisbon.<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth did state that she wished for Drake and Norris to destroy the shipping in Lisbon, but there was not an order to sack the city. The following extract states Elizabeth’s orders concerning Lisbon:

And for that we understand that the said King hath great store of shipping within the port of Lisbon, we think meet also that you should do your best to endeavour to intercept and distress the same, in the execution whereof, as well there as in the rest of the ports of that kingdom, we doubt not but you will have a principal care that the same may be performed with as little hazard of our subjects and ships as may be.<sup>46</sup>

It is clear that Elizabeth was not calling for an attack on the city itself, but the ships in its harbor. The plans for attacking the city were in defiance of her instructions. There is a possibility that the plan was suggested in case the Portuguese were willing to support Dom António. However, the line “the army now prepared to sail directly” further suggests the fleet was set on course for Lisbon.<sup>47</sup> The evidence appears overwhelmingly in support of the argument that the expedition was headed directly for Lisbon, not as Nolan suggests that it was only because the original plan became faulty.

---

<sup>43</sup> Sir William Monson, *A true and exact account of the wars with Spain, in the reign of Q. Elizabeth (of famous memory) being the particulars of what happened between the English and Spanish fleets, from the years 1585 to 1602...* (London: Printed for W. Crooke, and sold by W. Davis, 1682), p. 55.

<sup>44</sup> Santander is a city in Northern Spain, and the expedition was supposed to destroy the ships harbored there. Norris and several sailors believed the fleet could not safely enter the harbor, and Norris felt the army was not prepared to attack the city. Nolan argued that since Norris understood the fleet could not enter here successfully he had one of two choices. He could either call off the expedition, or continue as they had done. Nolan, *Sir John Norreys and the Elizabethan Military World*, p. 132.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Lemon ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1581-1590* (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), Vol. 2, Document 50, p. 587.

<sup>46</sup> Instructions for Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, 23 February 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 83. The complete instructions are found on pp. 82-88.

<sup>47</sup> Cal.S.P. *Domestic*, Vol. 2, Document 50, p. 587.

The size of the army reinforced the Spanish belief that the English were not solely going to destroy their shipping, but head directly for Portugal. It is also clear from Monson's perspective that he felt their primary target was Portugal and restoring Dom António. However, although Drake and Norris seemed to have planned an expedition contrary to the queen's instructions, their biggest mistake occurred when providing provisions for the fleet. The majority of the force waited for additional troops and ships from the Netherlands in Plymouth. Contrary winds stranded the fleet after the entire force had been assembled, and a good proportion of the provisions had to be used to sustain the men amidst unfortunate delays. Drake, at first, complained about using their "sea stores" but in order to feed his men he was forced to use what was available.<sup>48</sup> Morale began to drop amongst the men, and the expedition began looking as if it would not embark because the fleet was stranded as a result of contrary winds. Furthermore, Drake complained that the remaining victuals would only last them for another month, and no longer than five weeks.<sup>49</sup> A note in February points out that around 3,000 men were lacking victuals and arms for the expedition.<sup>50</sup> Drake and Norris, understanding the position the fleet was in, made one of the worst decisions of the voyage. Instead of reducing the force, Drake and Norris embarked from Plymouth with more men than victuals to sustain them throughout the expedition. Placing trust and hope in finding provisions in Spain, Drake carelessly ignored the issue at hand and set sail for the Iberian Peninsula. Although there were attempts to re-stock the fleet, the countryside had been depleted of its resources, and it was, according to Humphrey Founes, impossible to re-stock the fleet for the amount given as prices had begun to rise.<sup>51</sup> Drake requested a supply ship to be sent, but the supplies would not reach the fleet until late in the

---

<sup>48</sup> Norris and Drake to the Privy Council, 3 April 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 118-120.

<sup>49</sup> Drake to Walsingham, [23 April 1589], in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 120.

<sup>50</sup> A Note of Shortages, 16 February 1589, *Ibid.*, 77; Cal.S.P. *Domestic*, Vol. 2, Document 79, p. 579.

<sup>51</sup> Humphrey Founes and William Hawkins to Burghley, 25 April 1589, *Ibid.*, 128. Hawkins and Founes probably meant the countryside around Plymouth, not the whole country.



expedition when it was preparing to return home.<sup>52</sup> It was an irresponsible move on the part of Drake and Norris to continue on with the expedition without reducing the force. When the fleet finally sailed away from Plymouth on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, they lacked a sufficient supply of victuals for the entirety of the expedition. The situation became much more difficult, as the Spanish were well aware of the situation. By the middle of May, Philip began receiving reports regarding the situation of the English. This allowed the Spanish to take a defensive position rather than an offensive around Lisbon, because it was clear that the English could not sustain themselves for any length of time.

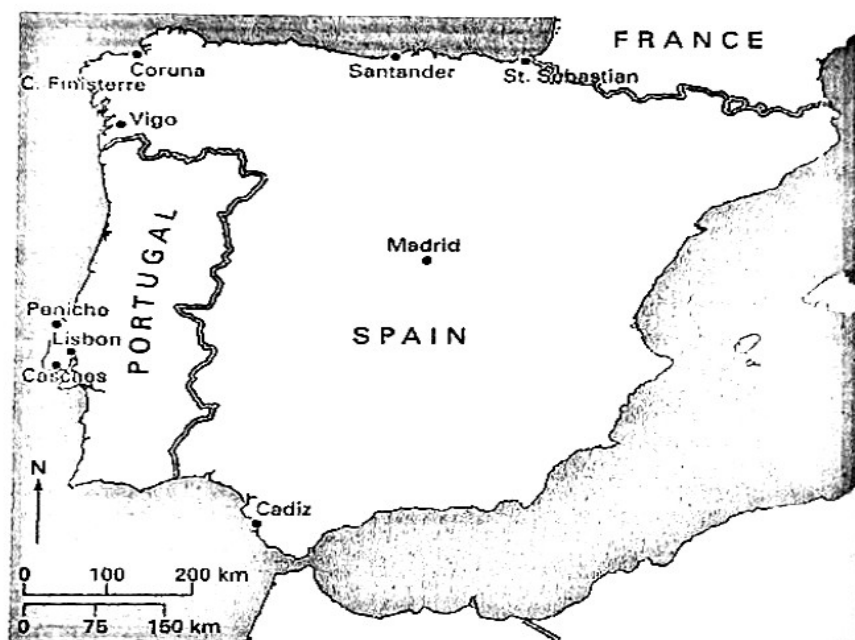
A curious issue emerges, because prior to embarkation of the expedition, Drake and Norris agreed to certain terms with Dom António. Dom António urged, if not ordered, Norris and Drake not to harm the people, ransack villages, or steal from the people in Portugal.<sup>53</sup> There are several stipulations that Dom António stressed, but the important point to notice is that Portugal became essentially untouchable for the English soldiers. The English were not allowed to pillage, and those who did faced punishment. This creates an interesting situation considering the English were already sailing with few provisions as it was. This may in fact be the reason why Drake led the fleet towards La Corunna initially, and not directly towards Lisbon. Furthermore, Drake's actions at La Corunna suggest that the purpose of landing was not to honor the queen's orders but to replenish the fleet. While Drake's letters to the Privy Council and Elizabeth appear genuine, his actions do not reflect those of his words. If the English were to advance into Portugal, they would certainly need a sufficient supply of provisions. Since obtaining them in Portugal seemed highly unlikely, an alternative was needed.

---

<sup>52</sup> The supply ship took a great deal of time to depart, and it was not until the Fleet was preparing to leave Cascais that a rendezvous with the supply ships happened.

<sup>53</sup> Dom António's answers to the articles of Norris and Drake, February 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 91-98. Drake would punish those who offended the Portuguese people in any way while the expedition took them through Portuguese territory.

As mentioned, Drake requested a supply ship to rendezvous around Cape Finisterre or the Isles of Bayona.<sup>54</sup> This in itself is a curious request. It is peculiar that Drake would have the supply ships sail towards the western parts of the Iberian Peninsula, when in fact the fleet was supposed to sail towards Santander, a city east of La Corunna. It makes little sense to think Drake would sail around the cape to collect provisions, and after the exchange head up and around the cape towards Santander.



**Figure 2. A map of the Iberian Peninsula showing several key ports during the expedition (Nolan, *Sir John Norreys and the Elizabethan Military World*).**

This is a peculiar request for several reasons. First, the fleet lacked provisions and needed to take them on quickly. An attack on Santander, or any place, could last much longer than expected; therefore it would make more sense militarily to take on the provisions before engaging. Secondly, if Drake were to head for Santander it would seem careless to allow two supply ships to float around aimlessly in enemy territory until the fleet arrived to take on the provisions. Lastly, weather was unpredictable and the fleet had suffered several setbacks already because of

<sup>54</sup> Cape Finisterre is located on the northwestern portion of the Iberian Peninsula.

it; therefore it would be unwise for the fleet to pick up the provisions and then move towards Santander. The English could not expect that the weather would hold favorably to their objectives. This appears to be another hint that Drake was not preparing to head east to Santander, but along the western coast towards Lisbon.<sup>55</sup>

Problems continued for the fleet after leaving Plymouth. Prior to landing at La Corunna the fleet was broken up by a storm, and thirty or so ships were lost or abandoned the fleet during the storm.<sup>56</sup> Just before the expedition left Plymouth Drake and Norris wrote a letter to the Privy Council about receiving intelligence, which stated that there were around “200 sail of ships of divers nations at the Groyne and other ports of Galicia and Portugal.”<sup>57</sup> It is interesting that Drake and Norris listed La Corunna, and subtly stated that other ports are included, somewhat as if they were justifying their course before it happened. The fleet arrived outside La Corunna on 24 April 1589, two miles outside of the city. In La Corunna’s harbor there were between four to six ships, and only two of which were galleons. It is astonishing that Drake did not order a ship to sail ahead and scout the harbor well before the fleet arrived off the coast. This alerted the Spanish of their arrival, and they landed unnecessarily in La Corunna. The fleet should have scouted the area, and when they realized only a meager four to six ships were anchored in the harbor, they could have passed on unnoticed to Santander, as was expected of them. Although the Spanish were well aware of England’s intentions, all incoming intelligence took several weeks to arrive. The Spanish were astonished and unprepared when the English landed in La Corunna; it was expected that the delays in Plymouth might have hampered the English enough

---

<sup>55</sup> Julian Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy with a history of the rise of England as a maritime power* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1899), p. 309. Corbett believed Drake wanted to quickly take Lisbon, and “seize the heart of the Spanish maritime strength.”

<sup>56</sup> John Evesham’s account of the voyage, July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 226-241.

<sup>57</sup> Norris and Drake to the Privy Council, 6 April 1589, *Ibid.*, pp. 141.

to prevent them from landing on the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>58</sup> Philip became considerably worried and urged Mendoza to send several messages on different routes. The English continued to have an advantage, yet Drake failed to recognize their opportunity. Landing in La Corunna to destroy a handful of ships certainly was not a wise choice because not only was it a waste of time, but the fleet also revealed its position. Couriers were sent immediately from La Corunna to all ports alerting them of Drake's arrival, and to prepare for any possible attack.<sup>59</sup> "There we lost many a day, in which the time the enemy armed and placed his forces where he thought most necessariest, chiefly in Lisbon."<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, there was no real attempt to destroy the ships in the harbor, the primary cause for organizing this expedition. Instead, Norris landed around 7,000 men two miles from the town on 24 April 1589.<sup>61</sup>

The choices made by Norris and Drake to land the army is baffling, and it is quite clear why Elizabeth became upset once the news had arrived what they had done.<sup>62</sup> They did not head directly to Santander. The army landed at La Corunna which proved to be a waste of men, time, and munitions, and any control Elizabeth may have had was lost. Drake and Norris' revealed their motives when they landed 7,000 troops. Ignoring Elizabeth's orders to destroy Spanish shipping, Norris led the army into the base town.<sup>63</sup> For whatever reason Drake failed to bring the fleet around to destroy the ships in the harbor.<sup>64</sup> This would turn out to be costly as a couple of

---

<sup>58</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 830, pp. 434-435.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* Couriers were sent from Galicia to Cadiz.

<sup>60</sup> Sir Roger Williams to the Lord High Admiral, Lord High Treasurer, and Mr. Secretary Walsingham, July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 222.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Fenner to Burghley, 6 May 1589, *Ibid.*, pp. 142-144; Advertisements from the Groyne, 7 May 1589, *Ibid.*, pp. 150-152; Drake to Burghley, 8 May 1589, *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>62</sup> Cal.S.P. *Domestic*, Vol. 2, Document 50, p. 600. The queen was clearly disturbed after she received a letter on the whole event that had happened at La Corunna, and claimed, "they went to places more for profit than for service".

<sup>63</sup> The base town is what is known as the lower town, or the portion of the city that is weakly fortified, if any fortifications exist at all.

<sup>64</sup> The Spanish destroyed their own ships during and after the English took the base town. Drake did not make an attempt to destroy them himself. The ships were shot at from land, but there was no naval attack on the ships.

ships escaped to Ferrol and continued to bring supplies to La Corunna. Ralph Lane, somewhat dejected, expressed his view of the situation:

We [~~over it crossed out~~] planted a battery against the same upon the land side and to the sea side [~~to crossed out~~] left it open, every day in despite of us to be refreshed with new men, munition, and victuals at their pleasure by means of two galleys, which we could not cut off from the first to last.<sup>65</sup>

It is beyond any understanding why Drake failed to lead a handful of his fleet towards the ships supplying La Corunna in order to destroy them.<sup>66</sup> Why would Drake and Norris attack La Corunna if not to raid its store houses for provisions? There certainly is no other purpose, unless they had planned to leave a garrison in La Corunna. There is no evidence that Drake or Norris had any intentions of leaving a garrison if they had taken the city. So, what could have been accomplished? Did they expect to hold the city? Tomaso Contarini noted, "If Drake becomes master of that position he will have a port suitable for his fleet, where it can be reinforced and re-victualled from England."<sup>67</sup> Yet the prospect of using La Corunna as a refitting station was not likely, since it would have required Drake to leave a sizable portion of his army behind to defend the city, and establish a constant supply line of both provisions and troops from England to La Corunna. Furthermore, England's treasury was not overflowing with gold and could not afford to sustain a constant line between England and La Corunna, nor did Elizabeth wish to occupy any portion of the Iberian Peninsula. The real purpose that drove the attack probably was to take the provisions that were held in the high town. The landing outside La Corunna and the eventual raid

---

<sup>65</sup> Ralph Lane to Walsingham, 27 July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition to Norris and Drake*, pp. 218-221. Although Lane states that they could not cut the two ships off, it was a task that needed to be accomplished and could have been. The port is wide open, Drake could have strategically placed some of his ships in order to detour the two ships from entering La Corunna with supplies. However, nothing was done to stop the two ships, nor was there an explanation given as to why Drake would ignore the two ships.

<sup>66</sup> Wernham, *After the Armada*, 110.

<sup>67</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 830, pp. 434-435. Tomaso Contarini was the Venetian ambassador in Spain.

was absolutely disastrous in terms of time, men, and supplies. For several reasons, La Corunna became the beginning of the end of the expedition:

But the Landing at the Groyne [La Corunna] was an unnecessary lingering and hinderance of the other great and main design a consuming of Victuals, a weakning of the Army by the immoderate drinking of the souldiers, which brought a lamentable Sickness amongst them, a warning to the Spaniards to strengthen Portugal, and (as great as all this) a discouragement to proceed further being repulsed in the first Attempt.<sup>68</sup>

After failing to destroy the shipping in the harbor, Norris marched with 7,000 men on the base town, which lies along the coast of Galicia facing the Atlantic. Fortifications were light around the base town, and it would have been relatively easy for the English troops to advance through.

The English swept through the base town with little resistance, and pushed its inhabitants into the high town in less than an hour. If anything positive came out of the attack it certainly was the fact that very few English were killed. An estimate of around eighty men or so had been captured, including Captain Don Juan de Luna.<sup>69</sup> The English collected any useful supplies such as weapons, victuals, powder, and anything else that could be used.<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, the English stumbled upon a large store of wine which Captain Anthony Wingfield expressed in displeasure, "Our men by inordinate drinking both grew themselves for the present senseless of the danger of the shot of the town, which hurt many of them being drunk, and took the first ground of their sickness."<sup>71</sup> The English had successfully ransacked the lower town and raided the ships left in the harbor, which were destroyed by the Spanish not the English.

---

<sup>68</sup> Sir William Monson, *A True and Exact Account of the Wars with Spain*, p. 55.

<sup>69</sup> Advertisement from the Groyne, 7 May 1589, transcribed in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 150-152. Captain Luna was in charge of the musters, and later would, probably from interrogation, give the English several tips.

<sup>70</sup> Wine, oil, beef, beans, peas, wheat, and fish were found. However, wine was the largest commodity found in the base town. 150 pieces of brass cannon were found, among pikes, calivers, and muskets.

<sup>71</sup> Anthony Wingfield's discourse, 30 August 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 259.



After the base town had been taken and destroyed the English should have embarked again. Several accounts suggest that “the wind came contrary and so it continueth.”<sup>72</sup> For Nolan, this claim was quite ironic. When the fleet eventually departed, they did so against the wind. Furthermore, Nolan is convinced that General Norris wished to postpone their departure because the men were simply too drunk to continue at sea.<sup>73</sup> Nolan’s assessment of the situation is fairly accurate, but not solely the reason; it appears to be only a part of a larger scheme. It makes little sense that two supply ships were capable of sailing to and from La Corunna, yet Drake’s fleet lay helplessly in the harbor. Several documents provide evidence suggesting that the wind was somewhat of a problem, but that does not explain why the English were able to depart when the wind was against them later on—but not in this particular situation. The men were drunk and it would have been in the soldiers’ best interest to postpone embarkation until the men had recuperated—causing further delays.<sup>74</sup> Anthony Wingfield blamed the crisis partially on the unseasoned troops in the army:

Even our newest men, our youngest men, and our idlest men, and for the most part our slovenly pressed men whom the Justices (who have always thought unworthily of any war) have sent out as the scum and dregs of their country. And those were they who distempering themselves with these hot wines, have brought in that sickness which hath infected honest men than themselves. But I hope, as in other places, the recovery of their diseases doth acquaint their bodies with the air of the countries where they be, so the remained of these which have either recovered or passed without sickness will prove most fit for martial service.<sup>75</sup>

Professional troops, however, were just as likely to make similar mistakes as the “green” troops. Norris, Drake, and other officers should have been accountable for the lack of order after the attack ended—not just the men Wingfield described. The men could have been controlled and

---

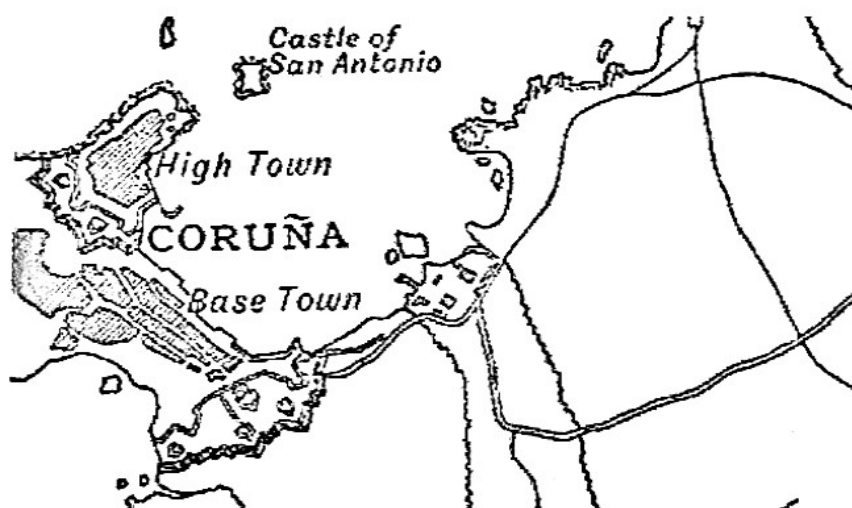
<sup>72</sup> Norris and Drake to the Privy Council, 7 May 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 144-148; Thomas Fenner to Burghley, 6 May 1589, *Ibid.*, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 144-146.

<sup>73</sup> Nolan, *Sir John Norreys*, p. 143.

<sup>74</sup> Although Nolan makes a great point, there are some interesting contradictions that will be addressed shortly.

<sup>75</sup> Anthony Wingfield’s discourse, 30 August 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 246-290.

this clearly is the case as the army marched through Lisbon later on. The generals issued a proclamation that condemned various acts of theft, destruction, and hostility against the Portuguese people and communities; which was followed dutifully.<sup>76</sup> The generals could have issued a similar proclamation of conduct while in Spanish territories. Since no proclamation had been authorized, I would argue that the generals had little concern towards the reckless display exhibited by the men in Spain. It was irresponsible on the part of Drake and Norris not to recognize these issues before the expedition had landed at La Corunna. Consequently, the men became drunk and soon very ill. Wind had been an issue and the men were growing ill, but is this the reason that the English remained in La Corunna? Unwilling to depart La Corunna the English quickly prepared for an attack on the high town.



**Figure 3. A map of the harbor of La Corunna and the town (Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor navy*).**

The high town, however, was situated with three sides of the fortification surrounded by the Atlantic, with one side accessible from land.<sup>77</sup> A fortified wall surrounded the high town, and

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267. After one man was hung for disobeying the proclamation, order within the army was maintained easily.

<sup>77</sup> Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy*, p. 311. See map on p. 311, and notice the sketch of a fortified wall around the high town, which is lacking around the base town.



if the English were to storm the city several pieces of siege artillery would have been required; however, whether Elizabeth's fault or Norris', a siege train was not taken on the expedition.<sup>78</sup> However, Don Ernando believed that the walls were old and indefensible.<sup>79</sup> Fortunately for the Spanish, the English army did not bring a siege train along. Harry Kelsey argues that Elizabeth decided against a siege train in order to dissuade the generals against attempting to take Lisbon.<sup>80</sup> The walls might have been weak, but if the English were to take the high town they needed to breach its walls. Drake and Norris' next move was rather suspicious—an attack on the high town. Both generals understood that a siege train was necessary, yet they commenced an attack regardless. In order to compensate, Norris and Drake had a few guns removed from the ships to create a battery.<sup>81</sup> The English artillery consisted of four pieces of ordnance, two demi-cannons and two culverins.<sup>82</sup> It was generally a pathetic attempt on the high town.

Norris' plan of attack was sound, but he lacked the necessary pieces of artillery to successfully storm the high town. The plan consisted of a continuous battery from the few pieces of ordnance brought ashore. Meanwhile, a team was sent to dig a mine underneath the walls in order to blow the wall out by igniting casks of gunpowder. There were two main aspects to the battle—the second mining attack and artillery breach.<sup>83</sup> After the first mining attack failed, the English needed a diversion to attempt another. Drake, in pinnaces, led 300 men towards the

---

<sup>78</sup> I would place the blame more so on Norris than Drake or Elizabeth, because Norris was in charge of the army and it should have been his responsibility to acquire the siege train.

<sup>79</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 832, pp. 435-436; *Ibid.*, Document 830, pp. 434-435. The garrison in La Corunna is stated as being weak in numbers.

<sup>80</sup> Kelsey, *Sir Francis Drake: The Queen's Pirate*, p. 353.

<sup>81</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, July 1589, transcribed in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 226-236.

<sup>82</sup> Henry J. Webb, *Elizabethan Military Science* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp. 217-222. Webb's book has definitions of several weapons used in Elizabethan militaries. A demi-cannon was a piece of ordnance with a caliber of 6.5 inches. A culverin is described as having a caliber of 5.5 inches. It should be apparent that the power against a fortified city would be limited.

<sup>83</sup> The first mine explosion did not harm the wall; the charges were not placed underneath the wall. The mines were dug underneath the high towns towers.

island castle of San Antonio; which enabled Norris' men to dig another mine.<sup>84</sup> A second attempt to destroy a portion of the wall from a mine bomb was partially successful, in the sense that the wall had been damaged. Immediately after the explosion English troops hastily charged over the rubble. Unfortunately their attempt was fruitless and ended in disaster as a portion of the tower collapsed onto the men. Many were killed or trapped underneath the rubble, and those who were not killed quickly retreated. The breach caused by the cannon was not successful either. As the English attempted to cross the breach the rubble beneath their feet gave way, and they were forced to retreat once again. The English were forced to raise the siege; it was an impossible feat that could not be accomplished without proper siege artillery.

Why would Norris and Drake commence an impossible attack that would jeopardize their soldiers' lives? Tomaso Contarini provides us with a rather simplistic answer:

Drake occupied the part known as the Pexaderia (the Fish market); he knocked down houses, seized cattle, killed soldiers, released officers on ransom; and by the pillage of the suburbs and the burning of a monastery, he seemed to show that he cared more for plunder than for glory.<sup>85</sup>

While the above quote does not explain why the attack ensued, Contarini offers an answer—plunder. In fact, this seems to be the real reason the English did not embark after sacking the base town. John Evesham's account provides evidence that there was some amount of wealth in the uppertown.<sup>86</sup> Nolan's claim that Norris did not want to embark immediately because the soldiers were intoxicated and ill certainly is a viable conclusion. However, if Nolan's argument is correct, it makes little sense to attack if the soldiers were suffering physically. Furthermore, preparations for an attack came soon after the generals decided not to embark, which raises

---

<sup>84</sup> The fortified island is just north east of La Corunna. Drake lost thirty men in the maneuver.

<sup>85</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venerian*, Vol. 8, Document 836, pp. 440-441. There is some exaggeration as English sources state the men had taken beef, but not live cattle.

<sup>86</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, July 1589, transcribed in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 228.

suspicion of the generals' intentions. It is somewhat ironic that the soldiers supposedly were physically incapable of sailing, yet had enough strength to breach the fortification, mine tunnels underneath the walls, and eventually march several miles away to confront a Spanish force that consisted of several thousand men.<sup>87</sup> It is increasingly suspicious that, upon departing, the expedition sailed against the wind.<sup>88</sup> "After we had put from thence, we had the wind so contrary as we could not under nine days recover the Burlings."<sup>89</sup> What purpose could sacking the high town present to the expedition other than accumulating plunder? It was not necessarily planned, but it was an opportunity to obtain plunder that someone such as Drake would find difficult to resist. The wind was less than favorable, and many of the men continuously became ill—this justified the decision of Drake and Norris to remain in La Corunna. The high town did not have a strong garrison and the risk would have been low—that is, until the generals discovered that the Spanish were gathering a few miles away at Puente de Burgos. It is possible the generals sought to capture and garrison La Corunna, but to what purpose?<sup>90</sup>

Whatever the reason for remaining in La Corunna, it had severe repercussions on the expedition. Ultimately, the attack on the high town was unsuccessful. Several men were either killed or injured. Provisions, munitions, and, most importantly, time was diminished substantially. The Spanish were now aware of Drake's present location, and could mobilize throughout the Iberian Peninsula accordingly. Furthermore, delaying at La Corunna allowed the

---

<sup>87</sup> Norris and Drake learn that the Spanish are gathering their forces at Puente de Burgos. Norris proceeds to march 7,000 men to confront the Spanish before they reach La Corunna. Estimates of the Spanish forces range anywhere from 8,000 to 15,000 men.

<sup>88</sup> Anthony Wingfield's discourse, 30 August 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 265. Wingfield stated that they suffered contrary winds for up to nine days after leaving La Corunna.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>90</sup> There was a certain provision in Elizabeth's instructions to fortify and garrison certain border forts if Dom António had been placed on the throne. However, Elizabeth probably meant forts within Portuguese territories, and it was to be done after Dom António was placed on the throne. There is presently no evidence that suggests this was a reason for trying to take the high town. Also La Corunna is in Galicia—a Spanish territory.

Spanish to gather men and encamp at Puente de Burgos. This quickly became a concern as

Anthony Wingfield related:

The next day, the General [Sir John Norris] hearing by a prisoner that was brought in, that the Conde de Andrada had assembled an Armie of 8000 at Puente de Burgos, five [six] miles from thence in the way to Petance, which was but the beginning of an Armie: in that there was a greater leauie readie to come thether under the Conde de Altamira, either in purpose to relieue the Groyne [La Corunna], or to encamp themselues neere the place of our embarking, there to hinder the same.<sup>91</sup>

Norris quickly marched 7,000 men towards Puente de Burgos. The Spanish were entrenched on the opposite side of the river and numbered between 8,000 to 15,000 men.<sup>92</sup> Norris and his men easily pushed the Spanish back. During the retreat the English pursued the Spanish and butchered those who were not quick enough.<sup>93</sup> After the battle Norris' troops burnt and plundered the countryside before they marched back to La Corunna. When Norris returned, plans to embark began shortly thereafter, and on May 8<sup>th</sup> the expedition departed La Corunna.<sup>94</sup>

### *Aftermath of La Corunna and on to Peniche*

The expedition remained in La Corunna for fifteen days, accomplishing little. Although, Elizabeth's instructions specifically stated to destroy Spanish shipping, only three or four ships were destroyed. Even then, the Spanish were responsible for the destruction of those ships that were in the harbor.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, Drake failed to destroy the two ships that continuously delivered supplies to La Corunna. In a letter, Drake attempted to justify the failure:

If there had been good reckoning made of the necessity of this service, we should not then have needed these particular wants of victual, cannon, and powder. The want

---

<sup>91</sup> Wingfield, *A true Coppie of a Discourse*, p. 22-23.

<sup>92</sup> Norris and Drake to the Privy Council, 7 May 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 144-148; Norris to Burgley, 8 May 1589, in *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>93</sup> Anthony Wingfield's discourse, 30 August 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 264. Estimates of 2,000 Spanish were cut down from behind.

<sup>94</sup> Norris to Burgley, 8 May 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>95</sup> The Spanish overloaded the guns, after firing they would explode; therefore destroying the ship.

of the one maketh us to leave some service half done, and the other to seek meat to live, whereof if there be no speedy supply made, it may be the cause to hinder such an action as I shall not live to see the like to perform great matters at so convenient a time.<sup>96</sup>

The arrogance expressed in the above quote had to have shocked Elizabeth, who was outraged when news of Drake and Norris' actions arrived in London.<sup>97</sup> Drake clearly ignored her orders, yet he attempted to justify failure in La Corunna by asserting that lacking a plentiful store of supplies resulted in the raid's failure. Drake's threatening tone towards Elizabeth seems to illustrate his lack of respect for her authority. He appears to blame Elizabeth for their lack of victuals. This is interesting considering it was Drake and Norris who inflated their ranks to an unmanageable level. Drake seems to have forgotten that it was he and Norris who wasted fifteen days in La Corunna, along with supplies of all sorts. His arrogance, selfishness, and lack of responsibility would only continue as the expedition moved along. Drake was hardly a general, but remained piratical in all his actions.

The attack on La Corunna had strained the fleet's provisions. After departing La Corunna, several shipmasters decided to head home, or were forced due to mutiny. Lieutenant Devereux reported the conditions of their provisions:

We having nothing, 1 biscuit to 6 men and once a day; no bread; our drink being all sour, that little we had left, and our water being past drinking; a little salt flesh left, which we did eat up.<sup>98</sup>

Devereux reported that the men on his ship reverted to mutiny, and forced them to sail to England. This is hardly surprising due to the poor state of the provisions left in the ship's stores. Thus, after La Corunna, Drake's fleet dwindled. Perhaps many of the deserters were, as

---

<sup>96</sup> Drake to Burghley, 8 May 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 154.

<sup>97</sup> The Queen to Norris and Drake, 20 May 1589, *Ibid.*, pp. 164-168. Elizabeth was displeased with the direction Drake and Norris took. Furthermore, the continuous bickering of both Norris and Drake for the acquisition of additional supplies irritated her.

<sup>98</sup> Confession of Lieutenant Devereux, 2 June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 172.

Wingfield suggested, dispirited by the events at La Corunna. One can hardly fault them as they struggled to maintain their provisions, and the expedition had only begun.

After departing from La Corunna the fleet headed west around Cape Finisterre—not for Santander. When Drake was questioned about not sailing to Santander he explained that his shipmasters considered the harbor too dangerous to sail into.<sup>99</sup> Tomaso Contarini expressed a similar view of the harbor, “the channel by which the port is reached is so uncertain and so shifting that it is impossible to enter it without a pilot and plenty of time.”<sup>100</sup> In all fairness to Drake, the queen emphasized that her subjects were not to be placed in dangerous situations. However, it is doubtful that Drake’s conscience and loyalty were the reasons for not going to Santander. Furthermore, Drake’s claim that Santander’s harbor was too dangerous is ironic considering that when the fleet entered Peniche’s harbor—it also was very dangerous. Regardless of the danger, it is known that several of Philip’s galleons were in the port of Santander. Somewhere between forty and fifty ships from the Spanish Armada lay anchored at port.<sup>101</sup> The ships were in the process of being repaired, which progressed quite slowly due to the lack of workers. The galleons in Santander were vulnerable to an attack. Nevertheless, the English fleet failed to organize an attack on the ships.

A close examination of Elizabeth’s instructions reveals an interesting outlook on the situation. She stated, “Forasmuch as the chief and principal end of the setting forth of our army under your charge tendeth chiefly to two purposes, the one to distress the King of Spain’s ships,

---

<sup>99</sup> The charges against Norris and Drake, and their answers, 23 October 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 291-294.

<sup>100</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 834, pp. 437-438. The view that the harbor was dangerous was generally accepted. John Hawkins had warned earlier of sailing into Santander.

<sup>101</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 830, pp. 434-435.



the other to get the possession of some of the Islands of Azores.”<sup>102</sup> Drake and his masters had determined that Santander would have been too risky an attempt, and as we will see much later he felt similarly about entering the Tagus River. This is important because if Drake could not destroy shipping in ports throughout Galicia and in Lisbon safely, he was ordered to sail for the Azores. Therefore, Drake should have set course for the Azores after La Corunna. By disregarding his orders Drake failed to capitalize on a great opportunity. According to Tomaso Contarini, “They [Spanish] also fear that he may seize some of the fifty or sixty richly laden ships which are about just now.”<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, in the same letter, Contarini stated that the Spanish were incapable of preventing the English from taking those ships because their navy was essentially dismantled after the Armada attack in 1588. The English fleet had nothing between them and several treasure ships. Instead, Drake sailed around Cape Finisterre and along the Portuguese coast towards Peniche. As the evidence suggested prior to embarkation from Plymouth, Drake was determined to sail on to Lisbon.

While the fleet sailed around Cape Finisterre and down the coast of Portugal, England was essentially left defenseless. Although Drake and his shipmasters argued the risks of entering Santander were too great, fifty ships now lay anchored in Santander with nothing between them and England. Historians have neglected to examine this issue, probably because England was not attacked and they felt it did not need to be investigated. In order to understand the problem it is essential to examine England’s military position.

It should have been clear by now that the English who served on the expedition were primarily pressed into service—few were veteran soldiers. England’s best troops were in the

---

<sup>102</sup> Instructions for Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, 23 February 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 83.

<sup>103</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 836, pp. 440-441. The letter was sent on 27 May 1589, Drake had plenty of time to scout the coast and eventually sail to the Azores. Instead he wasted several days in La Corunna, and failed to intercept these ships.

Dutch Provinces aiding the Dutch against the Duke of Parma. England had been depleted of her best troops at home. Furthermore, Norris and Drake levied somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 troops for the expedition. England's coffers were empty and Elizabeth's finances were heavily strained. Between the defense against the Armada in 1588 and the expedition in 1589, the government was simply broke. Also, many of England's ships had been pressed into service for the expedition, including six of Elizabeth's galleons.<sup>104</sup> Over 120 ships had been commissioned for service in the expedition.

Many of England's best naval and military leaders left on the expedition. Although Drake had several negative attributes, it is without question that he was a great mariner. Sir John Norris was considered by many to be one of England's best generals of the period. Norris was a veteran from the war in the Dutch Provinces among other military ventures England had participated in. Edward Norris, Anthony Wingfield, Sir Roger Williams, along with several other experienced officers accompanied the expedition.<sup>105</sup> England's military talent was concentrated in the Dutch Provinces and on the expedition—leaving England depleted at home. To make matters worse, the Earl of Essex smuggled himself onboard the Swiftsure prior to embarkation from Plymouth.<sup>106</sup> Essex had great abilities as a leader, and acted as a father figure to the men he led.<sup>107</sup> Before the English reached Peniche, Drake and the rest of the fleet met up with Sir Roger Williams somewhere around Bayona on 13 May 1589.<sup>108</sup> Drake welcomed Essex and Williams with open arms. The fleet added another large ship to its arsenal and more men. However,

---

<sup>104</sup> The Revenge, Nonpareil, Dreadnought, Swiftsure, Foresight, and the Aid were the six ships given to Drake for use during the expedition. The Queen had other ships, but it is important to point out that six of her ships were sent on the expedition.

<sup>105</sup> Several important naval or military figures were away from England—although some did remain.

<sup>106</sup> Essex was forced to hide on the Swiftsure because Elizabeth forbade him to join the expedition. Elizabeth was outraged, but for now it is important to understand that Essex was one of many superb officers who left with the expedition. The issue of Essex on the expedition will be discussed later on.

<sup>107</sup> Webb, *Elizabethan Military Science*, p. 62.

<sup>108</sup> Wingfield, *A true Coppie of a Discourse*, p. 26. Sir Roger Williams was in command of the Swiftsure.



Elizabeth was furious when it became known that Essex had fled the court in order to take part in the expedition. In several letters to Drake and Norris, Elizabeth ordered them to return Essex as soon as they found him, and to punish Sir Roger Williams for allowing him aboard the Swiftsure. Drake understood the implications Essex would have on the expedition and the spirit of the men and did not send him back to England. Furthermore, Drake ignored Elizabeth's order to arrest and punish Williams; he was left untouched for what remained of the expedition. Drake's utter disregard for Elizabeth's orders should come as no surprise. But it is astonishing how blatant his actions against her were. It was almost as if Drake felt he was untouchable, and above the English government. At any rate, the expedition sailed towards Peniche.

England appeared to be in a dangerous situation. However, Admiral Howard remained in England leaving the country with at least one major naval officer at home.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, even if Privy Council members, Elizabeth, and Admiral Howard were able to muster some sort of defense, how would they have paid for those troops to levied?

Fortunately for England, Drake's neglect of the ships in Santander did not prove to be harmful. The Spanish may not have had any intentions of launching a small raiding party out of Santander. But the opportunity for an attack was viable. According to Tomaso Contarini, the ships in Santander were not prepared to sail, as each ship was being refitted.<sup>110</sup> In all likelihood, the Spanish were probably not prepared to launch such an attack against the English coastline. The question really is not directed to what the Spanish were capable of accomplishing; but why would Drake leave several enemy ships in a port within striking distance of England that could cause a large amount of damage upon the English coast? Similar to La Corunna, the opportunity

---

<sup>109</sup> Admiral Howard, along with Drake, led the English fleet against the Spanish Armada in 1588. If the Spanish had taken advantage of Drake's mistake, Howard would have been capable of leading some sort of naval defense.

<sup>110</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 830, pp. 434-435.

to acquire wealth appeared to be too great for Drake to resist, and his orders from Elizabeth became expendable. Prior to leaving Plymouth, Dom António stated:

And as it is necessary and reasonable that at the departure of so great an army, the costs and expenses of the levy of the men of war and all other equipment of the said army for our service should be known, so as to be able at due time and place reimburse the said knights and in addition recompense them according to their deserts and the royal liberality always displayed by our predecessors, and wishing that the memory of so great a benefit may never be lost in our time or the time of our successors.<sup>111</sup>

Notice that Dom António stated that he would repay Norris and Drake for their services, but “in addition recompense them according to their deserts.” Drake certainly would have been encouraged to aid Dom António after having been promised reimbursement and an additional reward on top of that. His reason not to sail to Santander was justifiable and it was exactly the excuse he needed to proceed with his own plans. His personal gain obviously took precedence over his duty to the realm. Drake, determined to reach Lisbon, sailed around Cape Finisterre and South to Peniche.

### *Division at Peniche and the long road to Lisbon*

The expedition arrived just outside the port of Peniche, on May 16, 1589; forty-five miles north of Lisbon and a six day march to the Portuguese capital. Drake decided to sail to Peniche because both Norris and himself thought it was the best place to land the army.<sup>112</sup> The landing was very difficult and dangerous. Ralph Lane expressed the danger as:

We landed at Peniche in Portugal where the army was enforced to fight for out landing and that in a most dangerous place. The Earl of Essex and the colonel-general there took their first landing with some 2,000 with them and made a fight with the enemy almost two hours before the General [Norris] could take land by reason of the huge billows and

<sup>111</sup> Dom António's answers to articles of Norris and Drake, February 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 92.

<sup>112</sup> Norris and Drake to the Privy Council, 2 June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 179.

most dangerous rocks that splitted divers of our boats and many of our men cast away in landing.<sup>113</sup>

Other accounts related similar features of the landing. It is ironic though because the primary reason for not sailing to Santander was due to the danger of its port. The port in Peniche may not have been quite as dangerous as Santander. It is interesting, however, to notice that Drake did not consider the danger of landing the men in Peniche. The weather was rough, ragged rocks lined the port, and although only a handful of artillery pieces lined the castle walls, the fleet had to endure constant bombardment. Essex landed alone while the remainder of the army struggled to reach land. On the beach, Essex supported by Sir Roger Williams quickly prepared to fend off Spanish resistance. Conde de Fuentes led his Spanish troops against the English, but they were pushed back after two days and were forced to retreat. The English were in control of Peniche, and a staging point for an attack against Lisbon had been established.

Initially, the Portuguese were not overjoyed at the English arrival. They remained friendly but were not eager to allow the English to enter the castle without speaking to Dom António.<sup>114</sup> The Portuguese had good reasons not to openly welcome the English into their country. Messages were sent from La Corunna throughout the peninsula immediately after the English had landed. The people in Peniche would have been aware that Drake was leading the expedition. Drake's previous ventures against the Spanish Main, Cadiz, his attacks in Spanish America, and other raiding missions certainly would have created some concern amongst the Portuguese in Peniche. Furthermore, David (the Spanish Spy) suggested to Mendoza that preachers throughout Portugal should proclaim that the English are using the idea of restoring Dom António to screen their ulterior motives—raiding and robbing as they have done

---

<sup>113</sup> Copy of a letter from Ralph Lane, 2 June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 185.

<sup>114</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 231. Peniche was the town and Montacruz was the name of the castle according to Evesham.

elsewhere.<sup>115</sup> António de Aurid was the leading Portuguese in Peniche and it appears the Spanish had done as David suggested. Aurid would not turn the castle over until he had spoken to Dom António. After Dom António was brought ashore the issue was quickly resolved, and the castle had been turned over to the English.<sup>116</sup> The Portuguese also had to consider another issue about their situation. Although the Portuguese were restless under Spanish control, it had to have been a concern of whether or not Spain could be defeated and pushed out. Could the English mount a strong aggressive front and help Portugal defend its borders? If the English had pushed Spanish authorities out of Portugal would they have given further assistance to help Portugal remain autonomous? These are questions that must have entered the peoples' minds.

David had warned the Spanish that the English were likely to land in Peniche. In a letter to Mendoza, David suggested, "I again remind you to advise his Majesty to have a strong garrison at Peniche, as it is whispered that the landing of the force will take place there."<sup>117</sup> Peniche had a fairly sizeable garrison numbering around 5,000 men with about 500 Portuguese.<sup>118</sup> Nonetheless the English were able to force the Spanish to retreat and abandon their post in Peniche. It is important to notice that the Spanish were able to delay the English in Peniche—giving Spain more time to prepare defenses in Lisbon. Harry Kelsey suggests that the delays in Peniche ended any hope of a surprise attack on Lisbon by the English.<sup>119</sup> However, I think the delays in La Corunna hurt any chance of a surprise even more so than landing in Peniche. Several accounts suggest the English were headed towards Lisbon prior to embarkation from Plymouth. Once Mendoza learned that Dom António would join the expedition, it appeared

---

<sup>115</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol. 4, Document 516, pp. 522-526.

<sup>116</sup> Although the Portuguese turned the castle over to Norris and Drake, it remained in Portuguese hands. Drake and Norris were not occupying the castle, but using it as a strategic outpost, which they would garrison before departing.

<sup>117</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol. 4, Document 516, p. 524. The letter is dated sometime in March; it does appear that Philip took David's advice.

<sup>118</sup> Norris and Drake to the Privy Council, 2 June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 179.

<sup>119</sup> Kelsey, *Sir Francis Drake: The Queen's Pirate*, p. 353.

all too obvious to the Spanish where the English were headed. Therefore, Peniche acted as more of a speed bump in Drake's plans, and gave the Spanish more time for preparations.

Although, the Spanish garrison was unable to defeat the English, it is important to see how the Spanish government reacted to the intelligence they received. Before the English had left Plymouth David discovered that they only had around 400 horse, yet took about 1,200 saddles. According to David the English planned to steal horses when they landed to increase the size of their cavalry.<sup>120</sup> Another Spanish spy in Dom António's retinue, Diogo Botelho, made an interesting suggestion to Philip:

It will be desirable in his Majesty's interests that orders should be given all over Portugal that there should be no horses, waggons, or mules near the coast of, as the thing they [English] most.<sup>121</sup>

After the English took control of Peniche Drake mentioned that 200 horse were left behind, though this may in fact be due to a hasty retreat by the Spanish. We do know that the English would march away from Peniche largely lacking mules and wagons, except those that Essex had brought. However, we should notice that the Spanish system of intelligence allowed Spain to create certain obstacles for the English. Soldiers were massed in areas where the English were expected to land, the Portuguese were essentially demobilized, and the Spanish were able to keep certain supplies out of English hands. This is important because it provided the Spanish with an ample amount of time to prepare in Lisbon and along the Tagus River.

Before progressing further, let us quickly look at the Spanish military in Portugal. Spain's best soldiers were occupied in the Dutch Provinces. Several veteran soldiers had been killed the previous year during the attack against the English Navy. Many more died of a sickness that

---

<sup>120</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol. 4, Document 516, p. 522.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 523.

spread quickly throughout the ranks of the army. Mendoza reported on a squadron of missing armada ships:

An Italian named Aurelio Sopra, in the queen of England's service in Ireland, had come from there, and says that counting the ships that foundered at sea, and those wrecked on the coast, 27 sail of the Armada and 9,000 men had perished there. He says the men found the English even more cruel than the winds and waters, as they had murdered nearly all of them.<sup>122</sup>

The Spanish were forced to garrison Portugal with raw recruits, and as Tomaso Contarini expressed, "more valuable for their quantity than for their quality."<sup>123</sup> This is important because it will explain the Spanish lack of action as the English moved towards Lisbon. Philip knew the English were lacking victuals, a less than adequate amount of artillery, and the men had fallen ill. Instead of working offensively against the English, the Spanish could afford a defensive stance. Although Drake's mistakes gave the Spanish time, it was the Spanish intelligence that allowed Philip access to key information. This is where the work of Mendoza and his associates played a key role in defending against the expedition. The information the Spanish government received gave them critical insight to the English army's weaknesses. Therefore, Philip did not have to pursue his enemy with an army of raw recruits, but could defend and allow time to take its toll on the English.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, garrisons throughout Portugal consisted of quite a few Portuguese

---

<sup>122</sup> Cal.S.P. *Spanish*, Vol. 4, Document 509, p. 515.

<sup>123</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 829, pp. 433-434.

<sup>124</sup> Philip's army of Portugal was "green" and it certainly played into his hands when it became clear that he would not have to attack in order to defeat the English. The English at La Corunna and Peniche successfully pushed back any opposition. The Spanish garrisons built on raw recruits appeared weak, or unwilling to fight. It may have been disastrous if the Spanish would have had to meet the English in battle. Drake's mistakes allowed the Spanish to fight defensively. Whereas the English once held the upper hand, they quickly lost it due to a lack of organization and planning.



soldiers, which were not all that trustworthy.<sup>125</sup> This is precisely why it was crucial for the English to act quickly, but as we have seen Drake's decisions cost the expedition dearly in time.

After the English were cleared to enter the castle several soldiers began to ransack various houses throughout the city. The Portuguese who had occupied them left prior to the English entrance into their city. According to John Evesham a proclamation was issued and all that was taken was to be replaced immediately.<sup>126</sup> Dom António stressed that the English were not to harm or steal from the Portuguese people. This is important because the men for the remainder of the expedition followed the proclamation issued by their generals.<sup>127</sup> However, it should be also noticed that order within the ranks of the English army was attainable, yet earlier in La Corunna it appeared impossible. Consequently, allowing the men to drink large amounts of wine led to the ever-growing sickness throughout their ranks.

Peniche became a rallying point for Dom António, or at least it was supposed to be.

Anthony Wingfield related, in his discourse, certain promises of aid:

Wherein some friers and other poore men came unto their newe King, promising in the name of their Countie next adjoining, that within two daies he should have a good supplie of horse and foote for his assistance. That day we remained there, the Generalls companie of horses were unshipped.<sup>128</sup>

However, aid came in minute amounts of not more than 300 to 400 by the end of the expedition.

Drake and Norris ordered a small garrison to stay behind at Peniche.<sup>129</sup> The English garrisoned Peniche primarily to set up a post in case the army needed to retreat at some point. The sick (primarily from the wine) and wounded were placed in the castle along with enough provisions

---

<sup>125</sup> Victor von Klarwill ed., *The Fugger News-Letters*, trans. L.S.R. Byrne (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1926), p. 192. Check document 360, Drake at Lisbon.

<sup>126</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 231.

<sup>127</sup> There was one man hung later on, but for the most part everyone was held orderly by the generals.

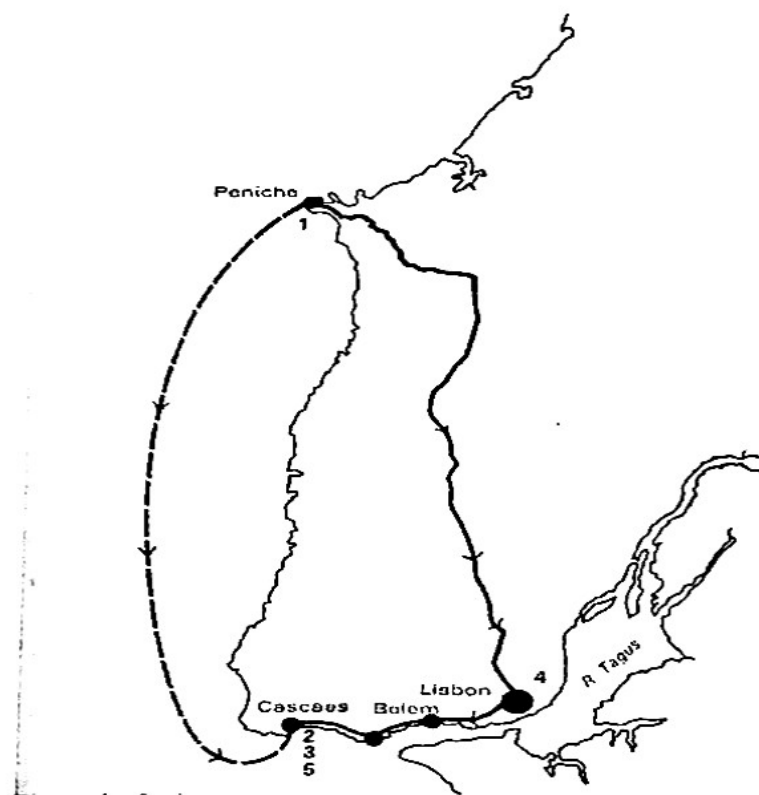
<sup>128</sup> Wingfield, *A Trve Coppie of a Difcoursfe*, p. 28.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28. According to Wingfield one company of foot was left behind to guard the castle.



to enable them to regain their health. The generals now had to decide which course to take next.

Before the expedition had left Plymouth a two-pronged attack was discussed.<sup>130</sup> The fleet would sail to Cascais where two ships were prepared to be deployed as fire ships. Those two ships would be set afire and pushed by the wind in front of Saint Julian's, in order to create a smoke screen for the fleet to pass by unharmed. A portion of the fleet would sail past Saint Julian's and the remainder near the outer channel. The fleet would land somewhere near the Bay of Oeiras, where the army would land and prepare to march on Lisbon. Drake would then sail towards Lisbon and bombard the city from the sea. It appeared to be a sound plan, but one that would not be followed through—at least not closely.



**Figure 4. The route taken by the army and navy after departing Peniche in May 1589 (Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*).**

<sup>130</sup> A Project to sack the city of Lisbon, March or April 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 105.

Drake and Norris mutually agreed to split the navy and army at Peniche.<sup>131</sup> The army was prepared to march south to Lisbon and Drake promised to bring the navy up the Tagus River, where he would bombard the city from the sea. The plan generally remained unaltered, except the army now landed between forty-five miles from Lisbon.<sup>132</sup> There is no indication that additional provisions were collected in Peniche. Therefore the army was expected to travel six days with few provisions as it was. Few wagons were taken with the army and those that were belonged to Essex. "The want of carriages the first day was such, as they were enforced to carrie their munition upon mens backes, which was the next day remedied."<sup>133</sup> The army appeared to be heavily burdened. Drake and Norris made a peculiar mistake before each parted ways. The generals did not establish any means of communication. Norris and Drake simply expected to arrive at Lisbon simultaneously, or at least that was Norris' desire. This was a horrendous mistake as the army was expected to march the forty-five miles to Lisbon without any means of communication between the fleet and themselves. A line of communication would have certainly prevented somewhat of a blind attack on Lisbon by the army. It makes little sense not to establish a line of communication. The fleet had already experienced contrary winds and horrible weather. If the fleet suffered similar problems the army would have had no way of knowing. Consequently, creating a situation where the army was unable to alter its movement based on the fleet's progress. Furthermore, if the fleet discovered any problems with its objectives—Drake

---

<sup>131</sup> Wingfield, *A True Copie of a Discourse*, p. 28. Martin A.S. Hume argues that Drake was against splitting the army at Peniche. However, several sources do not give any indication that Drake was against the idea, but it appears to be a mutual decision by both the generals.

<sup>132</sup> Wernham, R.B., *Introduction: The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal, 1589* (London: Temple Smith 1988), p. xlvii; Andrews, *Drake's Voyages*, p. 142.

<sup>133</sup> Wingfield, *A True Copie of a Discourse*, p. 28. Later on Essex gave up some of his carriages to aid the men who fell ill or could not march.

had no way of alerting Norris.<sup>134</sup> This, in fact, was the case later on as Drake refused to sail up the Tagus River. Essentially, the army marched blindly to Lisbon on 18 May 1589.<sup>135</sup> As the army began to march, Drake stood upon a hill and waved to the men as they passed. Standing on that hill, he proclaimed his loyalty and shouted several promises to the men—which he failed to keep—regarding his expected arrival at Lisbon. One has to wonder what flowed through the minds of the men marching towards Lisbon. With little more than promises they watched Drake wave them off as they marched south. Drake's past must have rang loudly in some of the soldiers' minds and if the troops grew nervous it was not clearly evident as Norris, Essex, and Sir Roger Williams led the men south towards Lisbon.<sup>136</sup>

Before discussing Norris' march onto Lisbon, we should examine the options the expedition had before Norris and Drake decided to split their forces. All was not lost, Norris and Drake had another chance to turn the expedition into a successful venture—yet they failed to follow orders. According to Elizabeth's instructions Drake and Norris should have waited at Peniche to see if the Portuguese would rally before the army advanced deeper into Portugal.<sup>137</sup> It would have quickly become clear that aid would not come—at least not in sufficient amounts. Also, Drake and Norris had orders not to invade Portugal if the Spanish force was too great. In

---

<sup>134</sup> Drake decided against entering the Tagus and had no way of alerting Norris' about his decision. This will be discussed later on when the fleets' actions are analyzed.

<sup>135</sup> Norris and Drake to the Privy Council, 2 June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 179.

<sup>136</sup> Drake had an unfortunate history of abandoning his men. He had abandoned John Hawkins during the battle of San Juan de Ulua in 1568, where Hawkins was forced to leave some of the men behind. More recently, Drake ignored orders during the armada attack and left his position as the lead ship during the night. The remainder of the fleet sailed blind. In San Juan de Ulua the situation appeared to be too dangerous for Drake; his choice was to abandon Hawkins in order to save his ship and men. In the armada attack he ignored his position as one aspect of the whole army—he was to sail ahead and leave one lantern lit in order for the remainder of the fleet to follow. Drake extinguished the lantern and abandoned his position in front. Leaving the navy blinded, Drake sailed after his own objectives. Drake's selfishness and carelessness was epitomized in both instances. Robert Bromber discusses Drake's actions at San Juan de Ulua and what had happened to the men Hawkins was forced to leave behind. Robert Frank Bromber, "English Abandonados and Afortunados: Class and Spanish Justice in the Atlantic World, 1568 – 1576" (Phd diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2004). More on Drake's action during the armada attack can be found in Garret Mattingly, *The Armada* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959).

<sup>137</sup> Elizabeth's instructions did not specifically state Peniche but it was a general statement concerning the direction of Drake and Norris' actions in Portugal.

fact, there is no indication that Drake or Norris sent out scouts to determine the size of Philip's force in Portugal. Regardless of the size of Philip's force, the lack of Portuguese support should have been enough to dampen any plans of an invasion. At this point, two options should have been clear according to Elizabeth's orders. The fleet could have sailed towards Lisbon in order to destroy various Spanish ships along the Tagus River; or the fleet could have sailed on to the Azores. The majority of the soldiers remained somewhat healthy, and a decent amount of provisions and powder was left. Although the expedition was, for the most part, a failure at this point, an opportunity for success was within its grasp. The Azores were in a vulnerable position because the Spanish navy was not capable of protecting the islands or the treasure ships returning from the Americas. Thus Norris and Drake had an opportunity to inflict a severe blow on Spain. However, Drake and Norris seemed to lack patience and did not wait to see if a substantial amount of support for Dom António would materialize and rally at Peniche. Instead, Norris decided to march onto Lisbon from Peniche in hope that several Portuguese would swell their ranks along the way. This was a mistake because there was little evidence—other than Dom António's word—that the Portuguese would rally. Furthermore, Norris had little knowledge of the enemy's strength. With so much uncertainty, it is astonishing that Norris would lead his men on a brutal march towards Lisbon. The decision to split the English force at Peniche proved to be devastating to the whole of the expedition, and was the final blow against the English force.

The army, soon after departing Peniche, was forced to endure a strenuous march. The army consisted somewhere around 6,000 men—the rest sailed with Drake.<sup>138</sup> The soldiers were their own pack mules in many ways. All provisions or munitions taken had to be carried by the soldiers. Essex brought a few carriages along and eventually his personal belongings were

---

<sup>138</sup> Sir Edward Norris to Sir Thomas Heneage, early June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 184.

discarded in order to make room for ill and injured soldiers.<sup>139</sup> The weather, according to William Fenner, was hot and caused several men to faint.<sup>140</sup> It is incomprehensible as to why the generals decided to split the army at Peniche and force the army to march in intolerable conditions while lacking carriages. Their provisions were less than plentiful. Furthermore, the army was unable to take along the few pieces of artillery the expedition possessed. However, there is an explanation as to why Norris and Drake decided to march from Peniche. Achieving success in Portugal depended largely on Portuguese assistance. In fact, Elizabeth required a large Portuguese military presence if the English were to advance in Portugal. The primary reason for marching from Peniche was to allow Dom António to rally as many Portuguese as he could along the way. This proved fruitless when few came to Dom António's side. William Fenner, clearly disappointed in the outcome, stated:

In our march towards Lisbon, the King and the Prince of Portugal, being there in person, looked for the nobility and chief of the country to come and submit [them]selves, with offer of such forces as they were able to make to assist the King. But none came, save only a company of poor peasants without hose or shoon, and one gentlewoman which presented the King with a basket of cherries and plums.<sup>141</sup>

It quickly became clear to the English that the Portuguese would not rally.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, the Portuguese did not give the army any provisions during its march towards Lisbon as promised.<sup>143</sup> Drake and Norris had expected aid from the Portuguese both in men and provisions—neither was obtained.

---

<sup>139</sup> William Fenner to Anthony Bacon, 1589, *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>142</sup> The Portuguese were in a difficult position. We know that several important nobles had been removed from Portugal. Furthermore, the Portuguese could not have been guaranteed that the English would succeed against Philip. While many might have wanted to join the English, it was probably much safer to remain neutral than to dive into uncertainty.

<sup>143</sup> Anthony Wingfield, *A True Coppie of a Discourse*, p. 29.

The march towards Lisbon went relatively unopposed. Several skirmishes occurred but nothing resembled a major confrontation.<sup>144</sup> Spanish intelligence probably contributed somewhat to the lack of aggression by the Spanish. Furthermore, Philip knew, through Manuel de Andrada's letters, that the English would be restrained from ransacking villages, churches, and towns in Portugal. In other words, the English had to rely on the Portuguese for supplies—which were not given initially. Also the Spanish forces were, in a sense, diluted of talent due to a large percentage of raw recruits. The English would not have been able to survive long in Portugal without supplies. This certainly was no secret, "It is doubtful whether their provisions will not run out, so that they will be forced to go home."<sup>145</sup> A defensive position was an obvious tactic and was more than adequate for the Spanish—there was no real reason to launch a full attack against the English army. In one particular incident, Norris discovered that a small Spanish force was gathering at Torres Vedras. The English marched quickly to confront the force, but the Spanish fled when they had arrived—leaving the town and castle for Dom António. It is clear that the Spanish were not eager to engage the English. Also keep in mind with several Portuguese having been executed for attempting to aid Dom António, it was probably less likely that the population would willingly aid the English. In fact, the greatest obstacle the English faced as they marched towards Lisbon did not come from the Spanish force, but the lack of food. Anthony Wingfield made an important comment on their situation:

There began the greatest want we had of victualls, especiallie of bread, upon a Commandment given from the Generall, that no man should spoyle the Countrey, or take anie thing from anie Portingal: which was more respectiueley obserued, than I thinke would have been in our owne Countrey, amongst our owne friends and kindred: but the Countrey, (contrarie to promise) hauing neglected the prouision of victualls for us, whereby we were driuen for that time into a great scarcitie.<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

<sup>145</sup> Klarwill ed., *The Fugger News-Letters*, Document 360, p. 192.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



The quote provides two important pieces of information. The English needed to replenish their food stores, and plundering the Portuguese countryside was not an option. Also, looking at the last line we see that the Portuguese in fact appeared somewhat nervous about supplying the English. Perhaps Philip's most decisive attack against the English was done while executing any who wished to aid Dom António—thereafter people appeared afraid to aid Spain's enemy. However, A meeting was organized and Norris convinced Dom António to help re-supply the army.<sup>147</sup> Several English held the Portuguese in contempt at the end of the expedition for not rallying against the Spanish or supplying the English army. "We had not any Portuguese to speak of, but such that were, did us more hurt than good," and "having not 200 Portugals to friends and those the greatest cowards that ever I saw."<sup>148</sup> John Evesham clearly expressed discontent with the Portuguese:

Also in the Portingals there was no truth nor trust for all that the King [Dom António] and our Generals had dealt so well with the Portingals in every place after they landed, for they would not suffer any Englishmen to take anything from them, no, not so much as victuals when our men in marching were ready to starve for want of food.<sup>149</sup>

Several accounts relate similar views towards the Portuguese. Anthony Wingfield accused the Portuguese, especially the friars, of waiting to see which side would prevail before "casting their lot in."<sup>150</sup> Although the Portuguese could hardly be blamed for their idleness, it is clear that several English were disappointed. Regardless of what role the Portuguese played, Norris' army continued to weaken when several men became ill while drinking from a couple of water sources

---

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29. Although Dom António helped supply the army, he did so under protest.

<sup>148</sup> Sir Roger Williams to the Lord High Admiral, Lord High Treasurer, and Mr. Secretary Walsingham, July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 223; Sir Roger Williams to [Walsingham?], 1 June 1589, *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>149</sup> John Evesham's account of the Voyage, July [1589?], *Ibid.*, p. 234. When Drake arrived outside Cascais several Portuguese came to his aid and offered information. The Portuguese were probably willing to help, but Philip held his "iron fist" over the people, easily isolating them. However, it is important to point out that there were occurrences when the Portuguese offered help.

<sup>150</sup> Anthony Wingfield, *A Trve Coppie of a Discourse*, p. 37.

outside Alvelana—adding to the growing list of casualties already sustained. Lacking food, munitions, and little to no Portuguese aid, the army stumbled into the suburbs of Lisbon six days after departing Peniche.<sup>151</sup> The worst was yet to come. To Norris and the army's disappointment, Lisbon's port lay in silence. Drake had not arrived. However, delays were possible and without much concern about Drake's arrival the army began to prepare for an attack on Lisbon.

Norris was in a precarious situation. After a couple nights in Lisbon, he expected a few thousand Portuguese to come to their aid as was promised by Dom António.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, Norris depended on Drake's arrival. The fleet carried the army's artillery and the largest portion of their provisions. It was essential for Drake and the fleet to meet Norris in Lisbon. But Norris did not have any means of sending dispatches to Drake. Drake's whereabouts continued to remain unknown to Norris. A siege was irrelevant because the army did not possess a single piece of artillery, nor did it have an ample store of provisions to commit to a siege. Other munitions ran low as well, leaving the army in a very dangerous position. People did not rally to Dom António, and those who were found in the suburbs were "old folks and beggars crying 'Viva el Rey Don António' and the houses shut up."<sup>153</sup> The Spanish had brought anything of value inside the castle walls, and burnt several storehouses that held corn among other provisions. The Count of Fuentes was the Spanish leader in command in Lisbon. He had several mills destroyed in Lisbon and Sintra.<sup>154</sup> With the storehouses and mills destroyed it was crucial for the fleet to arrive in Lisbon—or the men would suffer through starvation and sickness.

---

<sup>151</sup> The army arrived in Lisbon on the 23 May 1589. Once the army reached Lisbon, several hundred men had died during the march from Peniche. The morale throughout the army was certainly at a low.

<sup>152</sup> Anthony Wingfield, *A True Copie of a Discourse*, p. 36. Dom António promised 3,000 men.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>154</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 856, p. 457. Cintra is the English spelling for Sintra, one that is used in English texts.

Fortunately for Norris and his men, few Spanish were garrisoned in Lisbon. One Spanish report shows that the Count of Fuentes had only 1,500 Spanish, whereas Sir Roger Williams claimed up to 5,000 Spanish were garrisoned in Lisbon.<sup>155</sup> The numbers given by the Spanish report are probably closer to the actual size of the garrison. The Count of Fuentes had a sizeable force of Portuguese under his command, which largely was the reason the Spanish did not commit to an attack. According to a report on the English in Lisbon:

The Count of Fuentes, for the sake of Lisbon, for the sake of the Cardinal's [Arch duke Albert] personal safety, and because he knew that the Portuguese troops were not to be trusted, did not venture to leave the city and to take the field with those few troops on whom he could rely, which did not amount to one thousand five hundred men; and in this he did well.<sup>156</sup>

This indicates that the Spanish force was not large enough to attack the English without the aid of Portuguese soldiers. Furthermore, it certainly was not large enough to leave a contingent inside the castle to watch over the Portuguese as the remainder attacked the English. The lack of a large Spanish presence in Lisbon boded well for an ailing English force. However, the English would not be able to overpower the Spanish in Lisbon. Thomas Fenner sailed along the Spanish and Portuguese coasts in what appeared to be a scouting mission in March of 1589. In his report he stated that Philip had strengthened defenses along the Portuguese coast—more specifically around Lisbon. A bulwark was erected in the market place of Lisbon—an indication that the English were expected to arrive in Lisbon.<sup>157</sup> Without artillery, Norris' presence in Lisbon was essentially harmless to the Spanish. Without siege capabilities Norris, Essex, and Sir Roger Williams had to draw the Spanish out of Lisbon's fortification if they were to have any chance at

---

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, Document 856, p. 457; Sir Roger Williams 'A Brief Discourse of War, 1590, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 224.

<sup>156</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Vol. 8, Document 856, p. 457.

<sup>157</sup> Thomas Fenner, *The Copie of a letter sent from sea by a gentleman who was employed in discoverie on the coast of Spaine by appointment of the generals of our English fleete, to a worshipful friend of his. Aduertising him of such things as he came to knowledge of in the same discoverie* (Imprinted at London: By Richard Field dwelling in the Blacke Friers, 1589).

defeating the Spanish troops in battle. The Spanish ordered several maneuvers similar to raids, but nothing relatively close to a battle occurred. Ironically, this may have been beneficial for Norris and his men. Although they outnumbered the Spanish force, they certainly were not adequately supplied—or physically able—to sustain a large confrontation. Additionally, there was no sign of the fleet, and Peniche was the closest known point of retreat for the army. Where was Drake and why had he not come to Lisbon? Did Drake continue his dreadful past of abandoning his men, or did he have a genuine reason for not sailing up the Tagus? For now, the English in Lisbon were left with uncertainty, and had to rely on little more than promises from both Drake and Dom António.

### *Problems at the Mouth of the Tagus River*

On the 19 May 1589, Drake and the fleet departed Peniche for Cascais, one day after the army marched towards Lisbon.<sup>158</sup> Departing after the army could have been a dangerous mistake. Delays at sea were unpredictable and the possibility of an encounter with a squadron of Spanish galleons was not entirely impossible.<sup>159</sup> Without an established line of communication, any delay would have gone unnoticed by Norris. The fleet needed to reach Lisbon before or around the same time as the army. The largest portion of provisions, munitions, and the few pieces of artillery were on the ships. Therefore, it was imperative that Drake reached Lisbon quickly. As we have seen, without provisions and artillery Norris' army was little more than a nuisance in Lisbon. There was the element of surprise, in which Drake might have hoped to arrive after the army. However, this is doubtful due to the fact the Spanish were well aware of the English presence in Portugal, and expected their arrival in Lisbon. The fleet reached Cascais on 20 May

---

<sup>158</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 231.

<sup>159</sup> Several hindrances to the fleet could have occurred. Contrary winds, the lack of wind, and other unforeseen problems could have stalled the fleet for a long period of time.

1589, a day after departing Peniche, which gave Drake plenty of time to reach Lisbon before or around the time the army would.<sup>160</sup> When Drake reached Cascais on the 20<sup>th</sup>, Norris was still three days away from Lisbon. Everything had gone according to plan, and the weather continued favorably. Why was the fleet not in the harbor of Lisbon when Norris arrived in the suburbs with the army? Did lightening strike twice in Drake's horrendous legacy of abandoning his men? Had Drake's selfishness and eagerness to fulfill his own ambitious desires once again lead him astray—abandoning his position for his own glory?<sup>161</sup> Instead of maneuvering his way towards Lisbon, Drake decided to launch an attack on Cascais ignoring his promise to meet the army in Lisbon. There are certainly grounds to argue that Drake made the right decision in attacking Cascais. Cascais is situated west of the mouth of the Tagus River, and according to Drake about “five leagues” from Lisbon.<sup>162</sup> If Drake had left Cascais alone both the fleet and army could have been in danger of a rear attack. Therefore, his decision to attack Cascais was not necessarily a mistake. However, this is somewhat of a stretch to argue, because several forts lined southern Portugal that could pose a problem to the English—which would also have to be taken if this were true. Furthermore, an account from John Evesham eliminates the possibility of sacking Cascais for plunder:

Also the castle doth stand upon the southern point entering towards the town, which is a strong thing having in in [sic] 7 pieces of ordnance with great store of powder and shot, bread, bacon, tunny fish, oil, wine, vinegar, and water sufficient to have kept those men that were in it for 6 month. And those few men that were in it might have kept it in despite of us, if they would. So Sir Francis gave commandment that upon pain of death

---

<sup>160</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 231.

<sup>161</sup> As mentioned in a footnote above, Drake, during the Armada attack in 1588, abandoned his position at the head of the fleet to chase after the *Rosario*. In committing to this maneuver he left the fleet blind. Drake's orders were to lead the fleet by lantern light (it was night). Drake's move at Cascais was similar. He understood that Norris and the army relied on him, and his arrival in Lisbon was crucial. Instead of making that his primary concern, he attacked Cascais. Whereas the fleet in 1588 depended on him, it was the army in 1589 that depended on him. In both instances Drake abandoned his post.

<sup>162</sup> Drake to Burghley, 2 June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 183.

no man to enter into any man's house to take anything from them; which was duly executed.<sup>163</sup>

Regardless of his reason, Drake became preoccupied with Cascais instead of concentrating on his duty to Norris and the army. If there is no indication that Drake took Cascais for protection, and plunder certainly was not his purpose—then what was? The real reason for attacking Cascais is difficult to determine, but we do know that this was as close to Lisbon as Drake would come.

Making sense of the attack on Cascais is slightly difficult. Those who were under Norris' command in Lisbon at the time wrote the majority of the documents.<sup>164</sup> Drake's letters were short and concise as it were; therefore we need to rely on John Evesham's account for important details in order to understand what had occurred in Cascais. Interestingly after the expedition concluded, while under intense questioning from Elizabeth, Drake defended his actions at Cascais:

Sir Francis Drake answereth that before his going up the river toward Lisbon he thought it meet to understand in what state our army stood, which he attained unto by setting certain Portugals ashore at Cascaes, where himself also thought fit to land, as required thereunto by the inhabitants of the town, thereby to find the inclination of the people and what party might be found for Dom Antonio, according to the instructions.<sup>165</sup>

The first portion of the excerpt is slightly suspicious. The fleet arrived outside Cascais on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and under fire from cannon placed throughout the fort. Neither Drake's nor Evesham's accounts indicate that Drake was preparing to send a group of Portuguese ashore to inquire about the army. In fact, nothing was done that day except when a few of the fleet's pinnaces chased a small bark that had apparently arrived from the Madeiras.<sup>166</sup> The following day Drake decided to

---

<sup>163</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, July 1589, *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>164</sup> Anthony Wingfield, Ralph Lane, Thomas Fenner, Essex, Roger Williams, Edward Norris, Sir John Norris, among others were all at Lisbon. A majority of the documents came from these individuals.

<sup>165</sup> The charges against Norris and Drake, and their answers, 23 October 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 293.

<sup>166</sup> The Madeiras are an island chain in the Atlantic Ocean, west of North Africa.



land about 1,500 men two miles out of town, according to Evesham. There is no indication in Drake or Evesham's letters that any Portuguese were among those 1,500 who landed. However, in Anthony Wingfield's discourse, he had suggested that a Portuguese pilot went ashore in order to speak with the local population.<sup>167</sup> Wingfield went on to say that Drake brought the pilot ashore in hope to gain some support from the local inhabitants, and those in the town. If Drake's purpose were to send certain Portuguese ashore it would have been advantageous to do so at night. The landing boat would have been under cover of darkness—making it near impossible for the Spanish to see the landing. There is no evidence that suggests this had happened. The point is not to determine if Drake lied to Elizabeth, but to show that he had ulterior motives for landing in Cascais that differ from his oral defense upon his return to England. It would seem that if Drake was trying to obtain information about the army he would have sent the pilot ashore with a few of his men—not 1500 men. It would have been time-consuming to land as many men as he did, and only for the purpose of information. Later in the excerpt there is an explanation as to why Drake determined to go ashore. He claimed that he landed in order to see if any Portuguese would rally to him—as he was instructed to do. This is quite ironic because he had ignored every order given up to this point in the expedition—or was it? Once Drake landed, several Portuguese came to him willingly with information, but it is unknown as to what was discussed. However, one cannot forget William Fenner's reconnaissance earlier that year, and the impact it might have had on Drake's decision to land. Perhaps we can argue Drake's purpose for landing was to inquire further about Spanish defenses along the Tagus River. In fact, this argument is consistent with Drake's actions from this point on. After meeting with the Portuguese on land Drake did not appear eager to depart for Lisbon nor did he prior to the landing. Drake knew Norris depended

---

<sup>167</sup> Anthony Wingfield, *A True Copie of a Discourse*, p. 33. It is important to keep in mind that Wingfield was in Lisbon at the time, so his report may not be accurate. Documents from those in Cascais say nothing of Drake landing any Portuguese.

on his arrival in Lisbon, yet something concerned Drake enough to cause him to linger offshore a day. He then proceeded in landing a few troops. Evesham, referring to the Portuguese who came to them, noted that “upon the knowledge we had by them, Sir Francis with his own band alone marched towards the town.”<sup>168</sup> Whatever it was that Drake discovered, sailing on to Lisbon quickly lost precedence as he quickly marched on the town. The town, primarily Portuguese, welcomed the English; with the only attack coming from the castle—causing no harm as cannon shot landed harmlessly outside the ranks of the English. Drake and his men rested in town that night and it became obvious that Drake was not sailing on to Lisbon any time soon. Various documents give little explanation as to why Drake suddenly decided to stop at Cascais. However, in a letter from Drake there is a hint of an explanation as to why he stayed in Cascais:

The long contrary wind at the Groyne and the continuance of the same in all our passage from thence hitherwards, hath been the cause of their intelligence so long before our coming with Dom Antonio. By which means the enemy had gathered their whole strength out of Portugal and Galicia into three several places. The first and greatest they continued at Lisbon. The second in a fort [Saint Julian's Castle] of very great strength in the very entrance and mouth of the haven to Lisbon. And the third in twelve galleys.<sup>169</sup>

It was dreadfully clear to Drake that the Spanish knew what the English intended to accomplish. Consequently, the Spanish strengthened the coastline where Drake would have had to pass in order to reach Lisbon. As one of his better decisions, Drake decided to remain in Cascais and refrain from forcing his way up the Tagus River on to Lisbon. Drake did not intentionally abandon his men, as he had done once before. In fact, it appears Drake had the fleet and army's best interest in mind while attacking Cascais. By taking Cascais, Drake opened another point of retreat for the army, and a courier could alert Norris of his decision quickly. Nevertheless, his decision certainly created a firestorm of criticism later on—particularly from Sir John Norris

---

<sup>168</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 232.

<sup>169</sup> Drake to Burghley, 2 June 1589, *Ibid.*, p. 183.

among others who participated on the expedition. But the decision not to bring the entire fleet up the Tagus, might have saved the expedition from complete annihilation.

It will be important, in part, to analyze the geographic layout of the Tagus River. As we will see, the river is quite difficult to navigate. The river posed many problems for ships sailing in and out of the mouth of the Tagus. Keep in mind these ships underwent great difficulties navigating around several geographic “road blocks”—such as sandbars. “Navigating the sandbars at the mouth of the Tagus was never easy,” asserts Filipe de Castro.<sup>170</sup> Drake had to maneuver his fleet with such precision in order to safely sail up the Tagus. Furthermore, Drake would have had to sail while sustaining enemy cannon fire—making the situation increasingly difficult. The plan of attack discussed in early 1589 looked sound on paper, but there were some important obstacles that created issues. The fleet comprised somewhere around 130 ships, and it would have been a risky attempt to move the fleet past Saint Julian’s, a major fortress guarding the mouth of the river. According to Castro, there were three channels of which a ship may pass through the river’s mouth: the northern, middle, and finally the southern. The plan designed to attack Lisbon called for a portion of the fleet to sail past Saint Julian to the south, and the remainder through the outer channel (northern). The middle channel did not appear as a viable option. Castro discussed that during the early 1600s the middle channel was quite shallow and almost silted over. By 1589, the middle channel may have already been in a similar state, explaining why the middle passage was not part of the plan. By the early seventeenth century the northern channel was considered very narrow and crooked. While it might have been suitable for merchant ships to pass, it would have been difficult to navigate a fairly large fleet of ships

---

<sup>170</sup> Filipe Vieira de Castro, *The Pepper Wreck* (Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), p. 74. Castro’s study focused on a Portuguese Indiaman that suffered a wreck in the early 1600s. His study offers important insight on the Tagus River. Although Drake may not have understood all of what Castro discussed, he certainly knew the task would be dangerous for several reasons.

through the northern channel. Castro continues to point out that, “two large sandbanks narrowed the entrance to the river, making the waters run dangerously fast in both the northern and southern channels.”<sup>171</sup> Castro’s research brings up an important point. If the current was dangerously fast, it could have been disastrous for the English fleet. It would have been difficult for Drake and other commanders to sail through the channel while sustaining cannon fire all at once. Also if the fleet would have continued up the Tagus, the chance that some of the ships could have run aground was quite possible. This would have narrowed the sailing lane further—causing more complications. The situation could have become disastrous very quickly for the fleet. Drake was an expert sailor, and had experience sailing through tight channels.<sup>172</sup> However, it would have been an exceptional feat for Drake to lead 130 ships through the mouth of the Tagus while Saint Julian’s Castle had its guns staring down at the fleet.



**Figure 5. A drawing of the mouth of the Tagus River and the position of Saint Julian’s castle (Castro, *The Pepper Wreck*).**

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>172</sup> In Drake’s circumnavigation he sailed through the Straits of Magellan. It was a difficult pass that was far from straightforward. Drake, with a certain amount of ease, sailed through the straits. However, moving the entire fleet through the mouth of the Tagus was a much more difficult task. Andrews, *Drake’s Voyages*, p. 68. Andrew’s book mentions some of the difficulties Drake faced while sailing through the straits.

Geographical issues aside, Drake still had to contend with the enemy. If Drake successfully overcame the natural barriers associated with the mouth of the Tagus he would still face considerable danger from their enemy. The entrance to the Tagus was narrow, and if the Spanish had intentionally sunk a few ships in the passable channels—exiting the Tagus would have been near impossible. Furthermore, Don Francisco Odonte (Adjutant-General to the army of Lisbon) expected Drake not to enter, but had he done so would have meant his end Odonte believed:

Drake has been half a day in Cascaes, with the fleet. As he has not entered the harbor [Lisbon] to-day, and the enemy came by land, it is held for certain that he will not attempt to enter. But should he enter we will teach him how difficult it is to get out again. I trust to God that, if we look sharp and are active in our operation, not a man will embark.<sup>173</sup>

Drake's failure to destroy the ships in Santander might have played a role in his decision. Drake was aware that forty ships were harbored in Santander, and if they had set sail towards the English fleet—a rear attack in the Tagus would have been horrendous. This was not impossible as a document from Madrid revealed, “especially as in Santander and other places ships are getting ready to resist them.”<sup>174</sup> According to Elizabeth's instructions, Drake was supposed to remain in Lisbon after it fell, where he would aid Dom António in establishing fortifications on the Portuguese border.<sup>175</sup> Thus it appears that Drake's failure to destroy the ships in Santander came back to haunt him. If the fleet remained in Lisbon for any length of time, the ships from Santander could have posed a devastating threat towards the fleet. Although Drake did not mention this concern in his letters, it might have played a role in Drake's decision not to sail up

---

<sup>173</sup> Cal.S.P. *Venetian*, Document 844, p. 449. By the time the army had arrived in Lisbon Drake had already landed at Cascais. Odonte was probably referring to the fleet's arrival at Lisbon.

<sup>174</sup> Klarwill ed., *The Fugger News-Letters*, Document 360, p. 193.

<sup>175</sup> Instructions for Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, 23 February 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 83-84. Keep in mind the instructions did not give Drake the order to invade Portugal, but only to assist if certain means allowed it to happen as noted above.

the Tagus. However, Drake's primary concern appeared to be Saint Julian. The fort was strong and well armed. It guarded the entrance to the Tagus, making it difficult to pass through. Additionally, there were twelve Spanish galleons near Saint Julian's Castle awaiting Drake's entrance into the Tagus.<sup>176</sup> This small squadron's importance should not be overlooked just because it lacked great numbers to match Drake's fleet of 130 ships. These were twelve warships, not barges or pinaces like those that made up the majority of Drake's fleet. Drake had six galleys, but the remainder of his ships for the most part were smaller vessels. The majority of the ships were under 200 tons and several being less than 100 tons.<sup>177</sup> These ships were armed of course, but the Spanish galleons could have caused serious damage to the fleet. Also Drake would not have been able to sail through the mouth of the Tagus easily. The fleet's progress would have resembled an army crossing a bridge. The narrow channels, as described by Castro, would have forced the fleet to bunch together. Furthermore, they would have had to navigate gingerly through the mouth of the river—creating a vulnerable situation in which the Spanish galleons could attack swiftly causing substantial damage. The situation looked grim, and Drake certainly should not be faulted for failing to advance on to Lisbon. If any blame should be dealt out, it should be given for not destroying the ships in Santander—which potentially could have been a problem. This, in fact, did not prove to be problematic. It may have, if the English fleet reached Lisbon. They did not.

As we look at Drake's decision not to advance on to Lisbon it is important to understand the implications of the outcome of the expedition if the fleet was cornered in the Tagus. The fleet was Norris' only bridge back to England. If Drake and the fleet had been destroyed, Norris and the army would have been trapped in Portugal. Also Drake could not afford to lose many ships

---

<sup>176</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, July 1589, *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>177</sup> Appendix 1, *Ibid.*, p. 332-334.



because those in the army would eventually need to board. If the fleet suffered heavy losses, a scenario similar to the battle of San Juan de Ulua, where some men had to stay behind, could have occurred. Drake was responsible for the atrocities committed during the battle, in which he abandoned John Hawkins. Kelsey made an interesting statement regarding Drake's decision at San Juan de Ulua:

The scandal haunted Drake for the rest of his life, for Hawkins was forced to abandon a hundred of the men on the Mexican coast, and most of them never saw England again.<sup>178</sup>

Perhaps the situation Drake was drawn into clearly reminded him of that dreary day when he abandoned Hawkins. The danger of entering the Tagus might have been clear to Drake, and the army could ill afford a devastating blow to the navy. While Drake committed many mistakes and completely ignored Elizabeth's orders throughout the voyage, he understood that the danger of entering the Tagus was too great.

Drake's decision to secure Cascais and operate an attack from the city was one of his better decisions. For whatever reason, Drake did not send a courier to notify Norris of his position and his decision not to bring the entire fleet up the Tagus. It is unclear as to why he did not send a message to Norris. Nevertheless, Drake did not give up on an attack up the Tagus. In fact, he organized a portion of his fleet to sail up the Tagus once he had received word that the army arrived in Lisbon. John Evesham mentioned Drake's attempt to discuss a surrender of San Julian—only a handful of men held the castle.<sup>179</sup> If the castle surrendered the fleet could have passed the mouth of the river free of cannon fire from the fortification. The attempt failed and

---

<sup>178</sup> Kelsey, *Sir Francis Drake*, p. 39. See also Bromber.

<sup>179</sup> John Evesham's account of the Voyage, July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 233.

soon after Drake received word that Norris had abandoned his position in Lisbon—ending any attempt at sending a portion of the fleet up the Tagus.<sup>180</sup>

Harry Kelsey criticizes Drake's intentions at Cascais, and his failure to sail up the Tagus. He scrutinizes Drake's testimony after the expedition but ignores or perhaps overlooks the dangers presented by the Tagus River. While many contemporary observers and modern scholars criticized Drake for not meeting the army in Lisbon, few were eager to blame Norris for his failure to establish some form of communication between the navy and army. After all, Norris was a veteran soldier and should have known that communication between units was key to any military venture. Similar accusations could be directed towards Essex and Sir Roger Williams. Drake's decisions throughout the expedition are not excusable but the lack of basic military functions is astonishing when England's key military leaders were involved in the expedition. It is also important to remember Drake's statement regarding the Spanish intelligence system. Mendoza and his informants played a major role in preventing the English from penetrating the mouth of the Tagus. Mendoza's operation worked well in Spain's favor. Documents dating back to 1588 alerted the Spanish government about England's plans. Philip reacted and fortified the coast along the Tagus, and more importantly the mouth of the river. Drake certainly was not the hero of the expedition; in fact many of his decisions prior to Cascais resulted in its failure.

Drake did not sail up the Tagus, and for very good reasons. Meanwhile in Lisbon, Norris and the army continued to wait for the fleet and Portuguese aid. Norris waited in vain and was quickly forced to decide on his next maneuver. The army had used the greatest portion of its munitions and provisions. Several men had been killed in a violent clash upon the army's arrival in the suburbs a few days earlier. Several more continued to die from illness and famine.

---

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 233. On 26 May 1589 Drake received word that Norris was on his way to Cascais.

Obeying Dom António, the English did not ransack peoples' homes in the suburbs or anywhere else in Portugal. Consequently, the army quickly fell to starvation. Without the fleet, Norris could hardly inflict any damage in Lisbon. On the 26 May 1589, Norris retreated to Cascais from Lisbon. The retreat to Cascais was brutal:

The horsemen [Spanish cavalry] also followed us a farre of, and cut off as many sicke men as were not able to hold in march, nor we had carriage for.<sup>181</sup>

Several English would perish during the march as the Spanish cavalry killed any stragglers. The twelve galleons that were in the Tagus bombarded the coast where the men marched—making the retreat quite a bit more difficult. However, the cannon fire did not harm anyone. The army finally reached Cascais the next evening. The troops were in horrible condition as one report illustrated:

News came this week by special messenger that the English Armada sailed away from Cascaes on the 18<sup>th</sup> inst. suffering from famine, dysentery, and plague. They are said to have eaten their horses.<sup>182</sup>

There is no indication whether the English devoured their horses or not, but it is clear that they suffered tremendously from the lack of food. The condition of the army hampered any plans of regrouping and finding an alternative way to attack Lisbon. The generals decided it was in their best interest to head for the Azores. It is ironic that Norris and Drake decided to sail on to the Azores—a place they were supposed to go initially. Before departing Cascais several hulks laden with provisions and supplies were captured by the English—they would be “escorted” back to England. Finally, 8 June 1589 the fleet sailed away from Cascais.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> Anthony Wingfield, *A Trve Coppie of a Discourse*, p. 39.

<sup>182</sup> Klarwill ed., *The Fugger News-Letters*, Document 361, p. 193.

<sup>183</sup> John Evesham's account of the voyage, June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 233-234.

Several English who participated on the expedition were furious with the lack of effort from the Portuguese. Philip's "iron fist" over the people had succeeded. This became devastatingly clear after the English departed Cascais. It was clear upon Drake's arrival that those Portuguese in the area welcomed Drake. An anonymous letter reports on their fate after the English retired from Cascais:

Two thousand Portuguese and 150 monks and priests were with them [English], but they refused to take them along and left them ashore. These Portuguese will soon be hanged, and it is to be hoped that half the fleet will die, so that it may not be able to come back here over soon.<sup>184</sup>

Whether this occurred or not it is important to see the pressure put on Portuguese people to stay loyal to Philip II. Once again it is quite clear as to why the Portuguese were not all that eager to aid Drake and Norris.

After departing Cascais the fleet did not sail directly for England. They set their course for the Azores. At this point it appeared Drake and Norris, out of desperation, thought to make some attempt at turning the venture into a successful one. Essex was sent home, something Elizabeth had long desired. Also, a ship had been sent to reclaim the men left behind in Peniche. Unfortunately, those men were lost according to William Fenner:

Captain Barton shipping himself in a Frenchman which we had left there and two Scottishmen went for England, leaving his poor men to the mercy of the Spaniard, which were all put to death by the sword.<sup>185</sup>

The fleet once again suffered from a lack of wind and were becalmed a day after departing Cascais. The following day nine galleons attacked the fleet, as it lay idle and disorganized. The fleet was scattered and several smaller vessels lay in the direct path of the Spanish galleons.

---

<sup>184</sup> Klarwill ed., *The Fugger News-Letters*, Document 361, p. 193.

<sup>185</sup> William Fenner to Anthony Bacon, 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 238.

Numbers vary, but no more than ten ships were destroyed before the English galleons were able to drive the Spanish off.<sup>186</sup> There was a lack of coordination between the ships and its masters. The remainder of the voyage was somewhat straightforward. For our purpose a brief discussion will suffice. The fleet sailed to Vigo where it landed the army and easily took the town—the people had fled prior to their landing. It really shows a lack of concern for the men on the expedition on behalf of Drake. Few of the men who remained were in good health, with the largest portion being horribly ill. After Cascais Drake should have set sail for Plymouth. Instead, whether for greed or his own glory he sailed for Vigo. Considering Drake would not be recompensed for his monetary losses on the expedition—it is hardly surprising. Furthermore, several merchants expected some return on their investment. Above all others, the decision to attack Vigo was singularly the greatest act of selfishness. Both the health of both the soldiers and the sailors had deteriorated, and it would have been in their best interest to return home immediately. After the attack on Vigo Drake decided that Norris would take the sick back to England. From Vigo, Drake would take the healthiest of the remaining men and sail for the Azores. Fortunately for those Drake dragged along, a storm pushed Drake off course, and he decided to sail back to England. Norris arrived in Plymouth on 2 July 1589, and upon their arrival found Drake waiting in the harbor.<sup>187</sup> The expedition ended in complete disaster. The number of casualties suffered is difficult to determine; mostly because numbers vary for the total of participants in the expedition. Those, like William Fenner, who believed the expedition consisted of around 21,000 men, state the losses of men who were slain or died of illness was around 11,000.<sup>188</sup> This estimate seems to be an exaggeration of both the numbers who went, and

---

<sup>186</sup> Anthony Wingfield, *A Trve Coppie of a Discourse*, p. 43; John Evesham's account of the voyage, June 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, pp. 234-235.

<sup>187</sup> Anthony Wingfield, *A Trve Coppie of a Discourse*, p. 46.

<sup>188</sup> William Fenner to Anthony Bacon, 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 241.

those who had died. The documents give some numbers of men killed in battle, but few for those who died of sickness. From the numbers that were given it seems that somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 died from battle and illness. This estimate is based largely on the 2,000 men Norris apparently lost after leaving Peniche and his arrival in Cascais. Furthermore, the men lost in La Corunna, Cascais, shipwrecks, sickness, the men slain who were left behind at Peniche, and the attack from the Spanish galleons adds considerably to that number. Men lost to illness appear to be the greatest loss of lives on the expedition, especially during Norris' march to Lisbon. Also keep in mind a number of men returned quite ill, and it is possible many of them died as well. The numbers of those who had died are not certain, but at any rate casualties were in a large part because of poor decision making by both Norris and Drake.

### *Conclusion*

Several factors played a role in the failure of the expedition. It is clear that fundamental mistakes, Drake and Norris's disregard of their orders, and Mendoza's intelligence network all contributed to the failure of the expedition. After the fleet departed Plymouth mistakes built up similar to the proverbial snowball effect—one after another. Poor decision-making in Plymouth led to several negative blows against the expedition. We also see a military venture where Elizabeth lost nearly all her power and influence to both London and Plymouth merchantmen. A fleet, initially designed to attack Spanish shipping, expanded out of control. Provisions grew scarce before the fleet left Plymouth and neither Norris nor Drake reduced the size of the army to compensate. This proved quite costly as the expedition raged on, and the English crossed into Portugal without any means for obtaining additional provisions. They hoped for provision ships to be sent from Plymouth not long after the fleet had departed. Yet, these ships only arrived after



the fleet had returned home in defeat. Men were pressed into service and little was done to train them properly prior to embarkation. Discipline was non-existent while the English were in Spain; this proved quite costly when a large portion of the soldiers became terribly drunk. Sickness spread amongst the ranks of the English army, causing a number to perish. The expedition failed to visit and attack key ports such as Santander and San Sebastián. Drake and Norris did not destroy the remnants of the Spanish Armada. Instead, they wasted precious time, especially in La Corunna. Finally, the expedition's mistakes and bad decisions only reinforced the effectiveness of Mendoza's system.

While Drake may be considered by some to be one who preferred to strike quickly, this was far from reality in 1589.<sup>189</sup> Drake was a pirate, not a military general. Perhaps the outcome of the expedition taught England a serious lesson. Drake made a living off raiding Spanish ships and coastal towns but he had never led a large fleet of ships until this particular expedition.<sup>190</sup> His skills as an "admiral" were apparently below adequate. He certainly was a good sailor, but that does not necessarily convert into being a good naval leader. It is appalling to see the mistakes committed by both Norris and Drake. Each general made basic mistakes that could have been avoided. While Drake arguably could be praised for his decision not to enter the Tagus River, he certainly could be criticized for diverting from Elizabeth's proposed objectives. Norris should not be excluded from blame so easily either. His plan of attack in La Corunna was less than remarkable. It is incomprehensible that Norris attempted an attack on the high town. Norris had four pieces of artillery removed from the ships in order to establish some sort of battery. This was fruitless and arguably the biggest waste of time and men. His lack of common

---

<sup>189</sup> A few modern historians such as, Harry Kelsey, felt Drake was more comfortable with preemptive strikes. Drake's raid on Cadiz in 1587 is just one of many examples illustrating his decision to attack quickly.

<sup>190</sup> He did help lead the navy in 1588 against the Spanish Armada, but control did not rest solely on his shoulders. Admiral Howard was also in command, if not the leading commander.

sense in Peniche is astonishing. He was a seasoned general and should have known how disastrous his march to Lisbon could become without establishing any form of communication with the navy. Furthermore, his desire to march over forty-five miles from Peniche to Lisbon without a baggage train to carry provisions and munitions was senseless. Norris should have opted to attempt a landing closer to Lisbon. His failure to foresee potential issues does not speak highly of his ability as a general. While Drake equally agreed on the landing, Norris should have known that problems would arise.

It is hardly surprising that both Norris and Drake were criticized after the voyage ended. Several contemporaries criticized the decision to attack La Corunna instead of a direct attack on Lisbon. Others such as Ralph Lane attacked Drake and Norris' character:

But truly, Sir, the inward grief that pierceth even my bowels to have seen with mine eyes so honourable and great opportunities (by God his mercy) offered for Her Majesty's safety and greatness and for the daunting of the forces of so puissant an enemy as the Spanish King, the pique to be continued with great facility, yea, and to Her Majesty's benefit, with due foresight, all to have been omitted and now utterly lost by 2 so overweening spirits, contemning to be advised and disdaining to ask advice.<sup>191</sup>

Lane's criticism of the generals is quite evident. Lane expressed his annoyance concerning the generals' lack of council amongst their captains and other leaders. Lane was right to state that several opportunities were lost. While Santander may have been a well-defended fort, several sources described it as lacking men. The armada ships, around forty or so, in the harbor needed repairs, and few men were available to accomplish this task quickly. Drake and Norris failed to at least scout the area and then determine if an attack would have been too risky. Their decision not to attempt to destroy the ships in Santander left England wide open for an attack while the fleet sailed along the Portuguese coast. England was fortunate that the Spanish failed to

---

<sup>191</sup> Ralph Lane to Walsingham, 27 July 1589, in Wernham, *Expedition of Norris and Drake*, p. 221.

capitalize on this crucial mistake. For some on the expedition, the contradictory decisions had to have been frustrating. It is ironic how Santander quickly became too difficult to attempt, yet the English did attack the high town in La Corunna with only four pieces of artillery. The landing in Peniche was difficult, and several ships along with the men were lost against the rocks. It is clear that some felt this maneuver was too dangerous, yet Drake and Norris insisted. Other opportunities that Norris and Drake failed to capitalize on were the ships returning from Spanish territories in the Americas. Others criticized the extreme secrecy of the expedition. Drake failed to brief any of his captains of the expeditions true objectives. It is evident in several sources that the general belief was that their purpose was taking Lisbon. Many participants in the expedition, however, had no conception of Elizabeth's orders. One interesting complaint noted that Drake did not direct each ship's captain to rendezvous at the desired destination in case a storm scattered the fleet (after leaving Plymouth).<sup>192</sup>

One can easily understand Elizabeth's rage when Drake and Norris returned. Nothing had been accomplished; although Drake, unwilling to waver, arrogantly argued that some amount of success had been reached. In the area around Lisbon several grain mills were destroyed along with storehouses. In fact, the Spanish were responsible for the destruction of the mills and storehouses—not Drake and Norris. Although they might have argued that their presence caused the Spanish to commit the act. What Drake and Norris failed to realize was that Elizabeth wanted the Spanish fleet crushed. The loss of grain hardly amused her. Elizabeth was not eager for war, and that certainly was evident due to her hesitation to allow plans for an expedition shortly after the defeat of the armada in 1588. Her instructions clearly resemble actions of a very cautious

---

<sup>192</sup> An Advertisement to the Right Honourable the Lord High Treasurer of England, 15 February 1591, *Ibid.*, pp. 296-299. This document provides us with some very important criticisms of several points of the expedition.

leader—not one looking to destroy the enemy. Elizabeth's request was no simple task, which is why she would be content if the fleet returned home intact:

And for that it may be also that the King of Spain upon knowledge he receiveth aforehead of the army by us prepared, upon doubt that somewhat will be attempted both upon Portugal and the forsaid Islands, will so provide for it as without great danger and hazard the same cannot be preformed, then do we refer it unto your own good judgments and discretions to attempt any other thing that you shall think most may annoy him [Philip], for that we hold it would greatly touch us in honour if you should return home without doing anything as the said King's army did last year.<sup>193</sup>

Elizabeth made it clear that she wished the generals to give their best attempt at completing the assigned tasks. However, she felt it would have been better for Drake and Norris to return home rather than proceed on a destructive path, similar to that of the Spanish a year earlier. Both Norris and Drake boldly challenged Elizabeth by blaming the expedition's failure on a lack of provisions and an adequate siege train. They must have felt pressure during their questioning after the expedition. In a rather pathetic attempt to convince Elizabeth of their undying loyalty, both men objected to accusations against their unwillingness to follow orders. They were bold in stating that it was their priority to follow their instructions. The facts, however, tell a different story. Through their self-absorbed ways Drake and Norris were able to convince themselves that no order was given to sail on to Santander.<sup>194</sup> This may in fact be true, but there was a passage in Elizabeth's instructions that specifically called for the fleet to sail on to Santander.<sup>195</sup> Most likely, Elizabeth was greatly angered upon learning that fewer than ten Spanish ships had been destroyed. The losses outweighed the gains considerably.

---

<sup>193</sup> Instructions for Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, 23 February 1589, *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>194</sup> The charges against Norris and Drake, and their answers, 23 October 1589, *Ibid.*, pp. 292-294.

<sup>195</sup> Instructions for Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake, 23 February 1589, *Ibid.*, p. 85. The passage is marked as having been crossed out. This might have enabled Norris and Drake to use this as an excuse not to head towards Santander.

The evidence presented has clearly shown the reasons for the expeditions failure. The study closely examines the various aspects that contributed to the failure. Additionally, the study discussed and analyzed Drake's mistakes in order to challenge the myth that he was a great English hero. Drake's inability to follow orders, or act selflessly, was a consistent theme throughout his life as a pirate and later as a "general." He rejected authority blatantly, and proceeded on the course that appealed to his liking. Although he was granted the title of general, Drake will forever remain nothing more than a pirate.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### Published Sources

- Brown, Horatio F., ed. *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in other Libraries of Northern Italy*. Vol. 8, 1581-1591. London: 1894/Kraus Reprint, 1970.
- Dasent, John Roche, ed. *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1588-1589*. Vol. 17. Norwich: Printed For Her Majesty's Stationary Office: By the Norfolk Chronicle Company, 1898.
- Klarwill, Victor von, ed. *The Fugger News-Letters*. Translated by L. S. R. Byrne. New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1926.
- Hume, Martin A.S., ed. *Calendar of Letters and State Papers Relating to English Affairs Preserved Principally in the Archives of Simancas*. Vol. 4, Elizabeth, 1587 -1603. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1899.
- Lemon, Robert, ed. *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1581-1590*. Vol. 2. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint LTD, 1967.
- Wernham, R.B., ed. *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal, 1589*. Aldershot, England: Temple Smith for the Navy Records Society, 1988.
- Wingfield, Anthony A *Trve Coppie of a Discourse written by a Gentleman, employed in the late Voyage of Spaine and Portingale*, London: Printed for Thomas Woodcock dwelling in Paules Churchyard, at the figne of the blacke Beare, 1589/Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm Ltd, 1972.

#### Online Sources

- Fenner, Thomas d. *The copie of a letter sent from sea by a gentlemen who was employed in Discouerie on the coast of Spaine by appointment of the generals of our English fleete.....* London, England: Imprinted at London by Richard Field dwelling in the Blacke Friers, 1589. [http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full\\_rec?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99853162](http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99853162), October 10, 2006.
- Meteren, Emmanuel van. *A true discourse historicall, of the succeeding gouvernours in the Netherlands, and the ciuill warres there begun in the yeere 1565 with the memorable seruices of out honourable English generals, captaines and souldiers, especially vnder Sir Iohn Norice knight, there performed from the yeere 1577. vntill the yeere 1589....* London,



England: Imprinted [by Felix Kingston] for Mathew Lownes, and sold at his shop vnder S. Dunstons Church in the west, 1602. [http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full\\_rec?SOURCE=Config.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99841442](http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=Config.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99841442), October 10, 2006.

Monson, William, Sir. *A True and exact account of the wars with Spain, in the reign of Q. Elizabeth (of famous memory) being the particulars of what happened between the English and Spanish fleets, from the years 1585 to 1602.....* London, England: Printed for W. Cooke, and sold by W. Davis, 1682. [http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full\\_rec?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=BYID&ID=12185524](http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=config.cfg&ACTION=BYID&ID=12185524), October 3, 2006.

Roberts, Henry. *The Trumpet of Fame, or Sir Fraunces Drakes and Sir Iohn Hawkins Farewell, With an encouragement to all Sailers and Souldiers, that are minded to go in this worthe Enterprise: with the names of many famous ships.* Cambridge, England: Chadwyck-Healey 1992. [http://lion.chadwyck.com/searchFulltext.do?id=Z200474426&divLevel=2&queryId=../session/161034238\\_12699&trailId=10DB889C30F&area=Poetry&forward=textsFT&warn=Yes&size=17kb](http://lion.chadwyck.com/searchFulltext.do?id=Z200474426&divLevel=2&queryId=../session/161034238_12699&trailId=10DB889C30F&area=Poetry&forward=textsFT&warn=Yes&size=17kb), October 10, 2006.

## Secondary Sources

Andrews, Kenneth R. *Drake's Voyages.* New York: Scribners, 1967.

Burg, B.R. *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth-Century Caribbean.* New York and London: New York University Press, 1984.

Bromber, Robert Frank. "English Abandonados and Afortunados: Class and Spanish Justice in the Atlantic World, 1568 – 1576." Phd diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2004.

Bucholz, Robert and Newton Key. *Early Modern Britain, 1485-1714.* Malden, Ma: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Castro, Filipe Vieira de. *The Pepper Wreck: A Portuguese Indiaman at the Mouth of the Tagus River.* College Station, Texas: Texas A&M Press, 2005.

Corbett, Julian S. vol. 2, *Drake and the Tutor Navy with a history of the rise of England as A maritime power.* New York, NY: Burt Franklin, 1899.

Hume, Martin A.S., *The Year After the Armada.* London/New York: 1896/Kennikat Press reprint, 1970.

Jensen, De Lamar. *Diplomacy and Dogmatism: Bernardino de Mendoza and the French Catholic League.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964.

Kelsey, Harry. *Sir Francis Drake: the Queen's Pirate.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Mattingly, Garret. *The Armada*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959.

Nolan, John S. *Sir John Norreys and the Elizabethan Military World*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997.

Parker, Geoffrey. *The Grand Strategy of Philip II*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Webb, Henry J. *Elizabethan Military Science*. Madison, Milwaukee and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.

Wernham, R.B. "Introduction": *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain And Portugal, 1589* ed. R.B. Wernham. Aldershot, England: Temple Smith for the Navy Records Society, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_, *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe, 1588-1595*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Queen Elizabeth and the Portugal Expedition of 1589." *The English Historical Review*, No. 258 (1951): 1-26, <http://jstor.com>.