

## Douglas Bendell Award\*

### **Drake's Role in the Spanish Invasion of England**

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Opinions regarding Sir Francis Drake are almost never mundane. In the past, the English sentiment towards Drake has been very favorable, and understandably so; Drake was seen as a hero and an explorer. More recent accounts of Drake are much more objective. In Spain, Drake was hated, although it was admitted that he was an interesting historical figure, as well as clever and worthy of respect. Some accounts hesitate to use the word "pirate" to describe Drake, and yet, this is an accurate description of him. The purpose of this paper is to examine this uneasy relationship between Drake and Spain, and England and Spain, at this period in history. Did Drake's piracy on Spanish ships exacerbate conditions more than usual? Were Drake's actions a contributing factor to the attempted Spanish invasion of England in 1588? This question seems to be worthy of some study.

In seeking to understand Drake's motivations in plundering Spanish ships, aside from mere material gain, it would be useful to take some of his experiences with the Spanish into account. By Drake's own admission, his view of the Spanish was a hostile one. This was not, however, entirely unwarranted. Drake's personal feelings toward the Spanish were certainly influenced by the voyage that he participated in with Sir John Hawkins in 1568. This expedition was for the purpose of selling slaves to the settlements in the West Indies, although the Spanish governors in this area were strictly forbidden to trade with the English.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this decree, however, Hawkins says that the Spanish were usually pleased to trade with him, saving one instance in which he claims that the treasurer of Rio de la Hacha placed armed men at the entrances to the town in an attempt to starve the English sailors and force them into abandoning their cargo of slaves on the shore. At this point, Hawkins admits to forcing his way into the town, although he does say that none of the Spanish inhabitants were harmed.<sup>2</sup>

Feeling that he had done an adequate amount of trading, and also wanting to avoid the stormy season, Hawkins decided to leave the West Indies on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July. Unfortunately, fierce weather drove Hawkins back toward Mexico and the port of San Juan de Ulua. At this point, Hawkins only wanted to buy supplies for the journey back to England; his problems, however, were to become much more compounded. The inhabitants of the port town were expecting a Spanish fleet, complete with the new Viceroy of New Spain, to arrive soon, and even mistook Hawkins and his companions for this fleet. Hawkins assured the Spanish that he only wanted to trade for supplies, which eased their minds. Hawkins' uneasiness was mounted,

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<sup>1</sup> Sir John Hawkins, *The Third Troublesome Voyage Made with the Jesus of Lubeck, the Minion, and Four Other Ships to the Parts of Guinea and the West Indies, in the Years 1567 and 1568*, in *Francis Drake: Privateer*, ed. John Hampden (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1972), 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

however, especially with the arrival of the anticipated Spanish fleet the next day.<sup>3</sup> What happened next was disastrous for both sides.

Don Martin Enriquez, the new Viceroy, agreed to let Hawkins and his men buy supplies in San Juan de Ulua; or, at least, he pretended to. The agreement was even written down and both signed and sealed by Don Enriquez.<sup>4</sup> However, the Viceroy had no intention of honoring his statement; his own retelling of the incident indicates this.<sup>5</sup> Initially, Hawkins believed the Viceroy, but he began to grow nervous when the Spanish ships anchored next to his and seemed to be re-arming. Upon inquiry from Hawkins, Don Enriquez insisted that the English had nothing to worry about. Hawkins, still suspicious, sent Robert Barrett, a ship's captain who spoke Spanish, to again inquire of the Viceroy. Don Enriquez, at this point, apparently realized the game was up, and the Spanish acted, killing Hawkins' men who were on shore, and attacked the English ships *Minion* and *Jesus of Lubeck*. According to Hawkins, the suspicions aroused by the Spanish had given him enough time to prepare the *Minion* for an attack, enabling her to escape. The *Jesus*, unfortunately, was attacked by two ships at once and was not able to get free as quickly as the *Minion*, and most of Hawkins' smaller ships, except for the *Judith*, under the command of Francis Drake, were sunk. Hawkins also says that some of the Spanish ships, including the two main warships that had escorted the Spanish fleet, were possibly either sunk or burned.<sup>6</sup>

The *Minion* and the *Judith* were the only two ships from Hawkins' ill-fated voyage to ever return to England again. Many of the men who escaped from San Juan de Ulua did not survive the journey back home, dying of disease and starvation. Some of the Englishmen were left in San Juan de Ulua, while others chose to be put ashore on a different part of the Mexican coast.<sup>7</sup> Many of these men were forced into slavery or turned over to the Inquisition, with only a few of them ever returning to England.<sup>8</sup> One can imagine what effect the news of the fate of these men must have had on Drake; he certainly never forgot the behavior of Viceroy Enriquez at San Juan de Ulua. *Sir Francis Drake Revived* describes Drake as "grievously endamaged" by the incident, "not only in the loss of his goods of some value, but also of his kinsmen and friends" as a result of "the falsehood of Don Martin Enriquez. . . ." Drake also must have felt that something was owed to him, as the text goes on to mention "that no recompense could be recovered out of Spain by any of his own means, or by Her Majesty's Letters. . . ."<sup>9</sup> A letter by one Don Francisco de Zarate to Viceroy Enriquez written in 1579, well over ten years after the incident, mentions that Drake asked Zarate if he is acquainted with Enriquez, to which Zarate replied in the affirmative. Drake then told Zarate that "it would give me a greater joy to come across him than all the gold and silver of the Indies. You would see how the words of gentlemen should be kept."<sup>10</sup> Clearly, the events at San Juan de Ulua had influenced Drake's attitude toward the Spanish, and he kept these opinions for years afterward. It can be argued, then, that

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>5</sup> John Hampden, *Francis Drake, Privateer* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1972), 40-41.

<sup>6</sup> Hawkins, 36.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Hampden, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Nichols and others, *Sir Francis Drake Revived*, in *Francis Drake: Privateer*, ed. John Hampden (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1972), 51.

<sup>10</sup> Francisco de Zarate, Realejo, Nicaragua, to Don Martin Enriquez, Mexico, 16 April 1579, in *New Light on Drake*, ed. Zelia Nuttall (London: Hakluyt Society, 1914), 203.

revenge upon the Spanish was a motivating factor in Drake's piracy toward Spanish ships, perhaps as much as a desire for great wealth.

At this point, the reader should have some understanding of Drake's perception of the Spanish; therefore, the next task at hand is to provide the reader with a better understanding of Spain's attitude toward Drake. During the incident at San Juan de Ulua, Drake was probably unknown to the Spanish. Events had unwittingly been set in motion, however, that were to change this forever. Drake would soon be very famous, or infamous, as the case would be, in Spain and to Phillip II. He was to accomplish this in 1573, in a very daring and lucrative raid on a mule-train on its way to the Panamanian city of Nombre de Dios. Drake had been unsuccessful in previous attempts to take Spanish treasure, one a raid on the actual city of Nombre de Dios, and another on Venta de Chagra.<sup>11</sup> He did, however, succeed in frightening the Spanish enough to complain that "disaster is imminent".<sup>12</sup> After a year of failures, Drake was finally to succeed in carrying off a large quantity of Spanish gold and silver in April of 1573, a loss that the Spanish claimed amounted to 100,000 pesos in gold.<sup>13</sup> While the lives lost and the monetary losses of his subjects must have aggravated King Philip, the fact that Drake and his comrades made off with 18,373 pesos of the king's own money was something that may have seemed even more audacious. Drake's reputation amongst the Spanish was on its way to being well established; meanwhile Drake, now a wealthy man, headed back to England, although news of his exploits in Panama preceded him, and not altogether favorably. Although Drake had no official commission for his actions in the Indies,<sup>14</sup> and the British government could therefore deny any involvement, England and Spain were attempting to put together a peace treaty, and the possibility of Drake having to return his treasure and being brought up on charges of piracy forced him to hide for a couple of years.<sup>15</sup> Again, it is apparent that Drake had angered the Spanish. This raid, however, was only the beginning.

The most celebrated voyage of Drake's career is probably the one that he embarked upon in 1577. This expedition lasted for three years, in which time Drake circumnavigated the globe and possibly explored the Western coast of North America. This was also one of the first times that an English sea captain had sailed through the treacherous straits at the tip of South America that were named for Ferdinand Magellan. Historians have argued about the purpose of Drake's voyage. Zelia Nuttall claims that Drake's circumnavigation was planned, and that Drake was carrying out a scheme for revenge on the Spanish by looking for lands beyond their control in order to colonize them. Plunder, she says, must have been of "secondary importance."<sup>16</sup> Another opinion, put forward by E.G.R. Taylor, says that Drake's expedition was intended to go on to the Moluccas, a chain of islands controlled by Portugal that were famous for spices, or to find the Strait of Anian, the western entrance to the mythical Northwest Passage.<sup>17</sup> A new book by Samuel Bawlf even asserts that Drake was indeed trying to find the Strait of Anian, sailing as far north as present day Vancouver! K.R. Andrews, however, makes the most convincing, as

<sup>11</sup> Municipal Council of Panama, to Philip II, Spain, 24 February 1572, in *Documents Concerning English Voyages to the Spanish Main, 1569-1580*, ed. Irene Wright (London: Hakluyt Society, 1932), 48-49.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Royal Officials of Panama, to Philip II, Spain, 9 May 1573, in *Documents Concerning English Voyages....*, ed. Irene Wright, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, xlv.

<sup>15</sup> Hampden, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Nuttall, xxxiv.

<sup>17</sup> K.R. Andrews, "The Aims of Drake's Expedition of 1577-1580," *The American Historical Review* 73 (February 1968): 724-5.

well as the least fantastic, argument, refuting Nuttall and Taylor and insisting that Drake's voyage was primarily intended for piracy. The Moluccas route was only used when it became dangerous for Drake to take the Strait of Magellan on the return voyage home.<sup>18</sup> John Hampden is in agreement with Andrews. He cites the Draft Plan from the voyage, which is printed in his book *Francis Drake: Privateer*, and points out that it is very succinct in saying that Drake originally intended to return home via the Strait of Magellan. He also reminds us that the voyage was originally intended to last for only thirteen months, stating "there was no question at this stage of his searching for the Northwest Passage, or going to the Moluccas, or sailing round the world."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Drake clearly meant to sail along the coasts of Chile and Peru, most likely for the purpose of plunder.<sup>20</sup>

Exactly how much Elizabeth I knew about Drake's motives is also open to discussion. Drake himself claimed that the Queen and he had decided together to get back at Philip for wrongs committed against both of them, and that the way to do this was to rob Spanish ships in the New World. The original draft plan for this voyage, however, indicates that Elizabeth was not one of the original financiers; in fact, it says that Queen should be offered the chance to become involved, and that the voyage's true purpose she be explained to her. Drake's looting of Spanish ships, which was to occur on this voyage, also deviated from the draft plan. This seems to say that Elizabeth did not initially know Drake's intentions. Furthermore, at the time of Drake's voyage, Spain and England were officially "at peace." It does not seem conceivable that Elizabeth would intentionally pick a fight with Spain, especially since she was not known to be willing to take the blame for the actions of her subjects. With this in mind, Drake's suggestion that Elizabeth had instigated his plundering does not seem to be substantiated; only his words that this was the case exist to prove this.<sup>21</sup>

If plunder was indeed what Drake primarily sought, he was certainly able to realize this. Drake did overtake and rob several Spanish ships, including the one belonging to Don Francisco de Zarate, who is mentioned above. However, Drake's biggest prize was undoubtedly the cargo aboard the ship *Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion*, commonly referred to as the *Cacafuego*. The treasure ship's captain, San Juan de Anton, said in a deposition after the ship's robbery by Drake that all the gold and silver coins and bars aboard the ship totaled 362,000 pesos. In addition, the ship was also carrying a large amount of unregistered gold bullion. Anton claimed this bullion was worth about 40,000 pesos, although the actual worth was a great deal more than the figure he quoted.<sup>22</sup> Such a valuable prize is certainly remarkable in itself; however, the accounts of the robbery given later are also interesting. Anton stated in his deposition that Drake again mentioned Don Martin Enriquez, telling him that the Viceroy had not upheld his promise to John Hawkins. This, Drake claimed, had cost him seven thousand ducats. Anton also says that Drake "had come to recover this sum and carried an authorization from the Queen so that he could commit robberies for this purpose and all that he took over and above this was for the said Queen."<sup>23</sup>

The *Cacafuego*'s clerk, Domingo de Lizarza, said something similar in his deposition. He claimed to have overheard Drake saying "that he had come to rob by command of the Queen

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 727.

<sup>19</sup> Hampden, 117.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>21</sup> Andrews, 739-40.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Bawlf, *The Secret Voyage of Sir Francis Drake, 1577-1580* (New York: Walker and Co., 2003), 144.

<sup>23</sup> Gabrielle de Navarette, "Judicial Inquiry Made at Panama. Deposition of San Juan de Anton," in *New Light*, ed. Zelia Nuttall, 173.

of England and carried the arms she had given him and her commission."<sup>24</sup> It must be pointed out that we have, as mentioned before, only Drake's declarations to indicate that this was the case. However, King Philip certainly read these depositions; it is not hard to guess his feelings toward Drake and Queen Elizabeth at this time. The robbery of the *Cacafuego* marked the second time that Drake had taken a significant amount of gold and silver from the Spanish, a large piece of which was Philip's own personal income. Both Anton and Lizarza also said that Drake was commissioned by Elizabeth to commit robberies, of which she was also profiting from.

Such statements surely did nothing to help the already shaky relationship of England and Spain. Anton's deposition also describes yet another tirade of Drake's and the grudge he clearly had against Don Enriquez for San Juan de Ulua. Revenge was clearly something that Drake was holding onto, even after he had made back what money he had lost in that incident.

The voyage of 1577, in addition to making Drake famous in England, made him a very wealthy man. A large portion of Drake's spoils undoubtedly went to Elizabeth as well. Drake was also knighted after his return, a move that was meant to be in blatant defiance of Spain.<sup>25</sup> Tensions between England and Spain were certainly mounting. The 1580s were a troublesome decade in England. Several plots to murder Elizabeth and replace her with her Roman Catholic cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, were uncovered. At the same time, Drake led an expedition to the Caribbean, robbing the cities of Santiago, Santo Domingo, and Cartagena. Then, in 1587, Elizabeth finally allowed Mary, Queen of Scots, to be executed for treason. None of these activities improved relations with Spain; in fact, they helped the situation deteriorate even further. War with Spain was inevitable.<sup>26</sup>

In 1587, Philip was, once again, angered by the escapades of Francis Drake. This incident involved Philip's preparations for war. Drake's orders were to wreak havoc on the Spanish fleet in Cadiz, thus delaying the anticipated invasion of England. In two days, Drake had succeeded in his mission. Thirty-Eight ships were sunk or captured, and Spain's plans for invasion were severely hindered. After two successful days in Cadiz, Drake sailed toward Portugal, which at this time had become a possession of Philip's. Near the Azores, Drake took the ship *San Felipe*, which had a huge cargo of luxury goods in addition to some gold and silver.<sup>27</sup> Philip's frustration is apparent, although, writing to his ambassador in France, he downplayed the value of the plunder Drake obtained from the *San Felipe*. A few sentences later, however, he remarked upon the possibility of the Marquis of Santa Cruz encountering Drake, saying that he hoped that the Marquis would "give him what he deserves."<sup>28</sup> Philip's bitterness was understandable; Drake had delayed the Spanish invasion until the following year. It seems that Drake suddenly underwent a transformation; he was not merely an extremely daring pirate with an axe to grind. Drake's raid on Cadiz proved him to be an able seaman. In the conflict with Spain that was bound to come soon, Drake would probably be a major figure.<sup>29</sup>

1588 was, indeed, a fateful year for the English, and, perhaps, for the entire world as we know it. One can only speculate as to what the world have been like if the Spanish fleet had

<sup>24</sup> Gabrielle de Navarette, "Deposition of Domingo de Lizarza, Clerk of the Ship of San Juan de Anton, Taken Prisoner on March 1<sup>st</sup>", in *New Light*, ed. Zelia Nuttall, 179.

<sup>25</sup> Hampden, 244.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 248-9.

<sup>27</sup> Bawlf, 226-8.

<sup>28</sup> Philip II, Madrid, to Bernardino de Mendoza, Paris, 28 July 1587, in *Calendar of State Papers, Simancas: 1587-1603*, ed. Martin Hume (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1899), 125.

<sup>29</sup> Harry Kelsey, *Sir Francis Drake: The Queen's Pirate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 304.

succeeded in invading England. Much has certainly been made of the success of the English in driving the Armada away. While debates have gone on about smaller, more maneuverable English ships, or the superiority of English seamanship, or bad weather, one thing seems abundantly clear: The Duke of Medina Sidonia was unable to rendezvous with the Duke of Parma. Well over half of Philip's invading army, then, was delayed. Lacking their escort and a harbor to anchor in, Medina Sidonia's fleet was driven against the treacherous coasts of Ireland and Scotland. Consequently, about half of Medina Sidonia's original fleet was able to return back to Spain.<sup>30</sup>

The defeat of the Spanish Armada was the last high point of Drake's career. None of Drake's final voyages would achieve the results that the previous ones had; in fact, all would end disastrously. A plan to follow the remainder of Medina Sidonia's fleet back to Spain resulted in failure and the deaths of half of Drake's men.<sup>31</sup> After this, and possibly because of it, Drake seemed to fall out of favor with the Queen. He departed from court and was not heard of in regard to the English Navy for three years.<sup>32</sup> This was temporary, however, and in 1594 Drake and John Hawkins planned an expedition to Porto Rico and Panama. Unfortunately for the English, however, the Spanish were ready for them this time, both in San Juan, whose defenses were prepared for the onslaught, and in Nombre de Dios, which had been evacuated. Drake died soon after this of dysentery and was buried at sea.<sup>33</sup>

The English view of Drake has, historically speaking, usually been a favorable one, painting him as a conquering hero. The Spanish view has understandably been more hostile, although sometimes tempered with respect and admiration. Regardless of what attitude one has toward Drake and his exploits, it is impossible to deny that he was one of the most charismatic, bold, and fascinating figures in English history. Perhaps the trait of Drake's that is most relevant here is his confidence. There never seemed to be any doubt in Drake's mind as to whether or not he is doing the right thing. His motivations for his actions never seemed to come under scrutiny by Drake himself. Drake certainly revenged himself upon Don Martin Enriquez several times over, yet he never seems to have a twinge of conscience over the amount of money he had stolen from Spain. His monetary losses were surely repaid, and yet he continued to raid Spanish ships and take whatever he could.

The audacity of Drake's actions were undoubtedly a constant source of irritation to the Spanish. Did his hotheadedness and bold exploits anger Philip II enough to start a war? While there were other considerations going on, one cannot help but wonder if other corsairs would have been as persistent and as daring as Drake. Such qualities enabled him to carry off some huge quantities of Spanish plunder. The religious clash between England and Spain was certainly a large deciding factor in the political relationship between the two countries, but Drake's "singeing of the king's beard" could have been the straw that broke the camel's back. While it was not, perhaps, the single most important factor in England and Spain's deteriorating relationship, it may have been just enough to tip the scales. Either way, a character as vivid as Drake is worth examining; whether you are for or against him, you cannot deny his appeal and the sheer fascination of his story.

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<sup>30</sup> Bawlf, 229-31.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-50.