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This image depicts a stone signal building, known as a "Beehive Beacon Hut," which Britain used to spread a warning about the approaching Spanish Armada. Photo by Tony in Devon; online via Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY 3.0

When the Armada was ready, it set sail from Lisbon in late May, 1588. The ships traveled together, which meant the entire group could only move as fast as its slowest member.

Medina-Sedonia, the admiral in charge, sailed in the *San Martín*. It was a galleon - a very large ship powered only by sail. Most of the Spanish ships were galleons.

A galleass has both sails and oars. The Armada also had some of those. With less firing power (since oars take the place of some cannon), galleasses also have an advantage: They can move even when there is no wind.

Contemporary sources describe the Armada:

*The saide [said] Spanish fleete, being the best appointed of men, munition, and all manner of provision of all that ever the Ocean saw, and called by the arrogant name of Invincible [likely an English description], consisted of 130 shippes. In which were:*

*Soldiours - 19299  
Saylors - 8350  
Galley-slaves - 2080  
Great ordinance - 1630*

(William Camden, *Annales Rerum Angliae et Hiberniae Regnante Elizabetha*, 1588, Section 15)

In the Account of the Spanish Invasion (included in John Pine's Tapestry of the House of Lords), we see a list of the Spanish ships and their captains. There is also a list for the "English Fleet."

As the Armada slowly made its way toward the English Channel, the fleet encountered unseasonably bad weather. Medina-Sedonia, who had never before been at sea and had never commanded soldiers in battle, was worried.

The King had ordered him to sail to - and cross - the English Channel, without stopping, until he reached Spanish-controlled Holland. There he would meet the Duke of Parma whose troops and ships would provide Spain with a large-enough force to invade England.

But ... most of Medina-Sedonia's ships only moved with the wind. When it came from the wrong direction - or not at all - what was the Admiral of the Fleet to do? How could he follow King Philip's directions - and not stop the Armada - when supplies (including food and water) were running out?

When storms battered and separated his ships, the Duke believed - as he had from the beginning - that the whole expedition was fruitless. On the 24th of June, he wrote to the King, advising His Majesty of their predicament and courageously asking a critical question:

*Well, Sire, how do you think we can attack so great a country as England with such a force as ours is now?* (Quoted in *With the Heart of a King*, by Benton Rain Patterson, page 275.)

Trying to convince Philip (now sixty-one years old) that the bad weather was providential, the Duke continued:

*Since this is a cause of our Lord to whose care it has been - and is being - so much entrusted, it would appear that what has just happened must be His doing, for some reason.* (Quoted by Patterson, page 275.)

The King, however, was unpersuaded and had an equally forceful response:

*If this were an unjust war, one could indeed take this storm as a sign from our Lord to cease offending Him, but being as just as it is, one cannot believe that He will disband it, but will rather grant it more favor than we could hope.* (Quoted by Patterson, page 276.)

With no choice but to keep going, the Spaniards reached the mouth of the Channel - about ten miles off Lizard Point - the evening of July 29th.

By dawn the next day, Medina-Sedonia could see the signal fires ablaze on Britain's shore. Faster than a horseman riding to the Queen, the fires (which could transmit a signal from Plymouth to Carlisle in about forty minutes) would alert everyone along the entire coast that a mighty Armada had arrived.

The Spanish ships moved into their seven-mile wide, crescent-shaped formation. Last-minute negotiations having failed, war was about to begin.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-ARMADA-SAILS-Elizabeth-I-The-Golden-Age>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-ARMADA-SAILS-Elizabeth-I-The-Golden-Age>

Media Stream

## English-Channel Signal System - 1558

If an enemy approached Britain by way of the English Channel, the country needed a fast-moving, effective warning system.

A series of signal stations, like the one depicted in this image, dotted the island's southern coast. Individuals manning the stations lit one or more fire baskets attached to a wooden pole which protruded through the roof.



When observers at the next-closest station saw the fire signal, they would immediately light their fire basket. Word of impending danger would quickly spread as each new signal operator lit his flame.

Historical records tell us it took about 40 minutes for all of the signal stations between Plymouth (in the south) to Carlisle (in the north) to have flaming fire baskets. That means about 40 minutes passed between the time the first observer saw danger until the ruling King or Queen could be informed.

The stone signal station in this picture still stands. Locals refer to it as a "Beehive Beacon Hut." Built in 1588, or perhaps earlier, it is located at Culmostock Beacon in Devon (a shire, or county, in southwest England).

Click on the image for a better view.

Image, described above, by Tony in Devon. Online via Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY 3.0

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/English-Channel-Signal-System-1558>



## Lisbon - Map Depicting Point of Departure, Spanish Armada

Image online, courtesy the University of Texas at Austin website.

PD

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lisbon-Map-Depicting-Point-of-Departure-Spanish-Armada>



## Tapestry Hangings - Account of the Spanish Invasion

From Pine's *Tapestry Hangings of the House of Lords*. Image online, courtesy the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Tapestry-Hangings-Account-of-the-Spanish-Invasion>



John Pine's Tapestry of the House of Lords

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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## Lizard Point

Image online, courtesy the [zetnet.co.uk](http://zetnet.co.uk) website.

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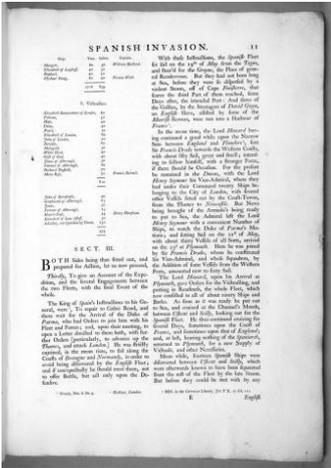
## Spanish Ships in Crescent Shaped Formation - 1588

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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## English Fleet, 1588 - Account of the Spanish Invasion

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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## THE ARMADA SAILS

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## Spanish Armada - Britain Warned of Impending Danger

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**Director:**

Bill Lyons

**Production Company:**

[Granada Television](#)

**Executive Producer:**

Liz McLeod

**Producer:** Bill Lyon

**Released:** 2003

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## Spanish Armada - Setbacks and Surprises

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