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In 1588, King Philip II of Spain wanted the Duke of Parma (commander of Spanish troops in Flanders) to coordinate with the Duke of Medina-Sidonia (commander of the Spanish Armada) so the two men could jointly mount an invasion of Britain. Parma, however, had been busy with his own mission, depicted in this engraving by Bartholomeus Dolendo (a Dutchman). Created between 1600-01, it presents the artist's interpretation of "The siege of Bergen op Zoom by Parma, 1588." The original engraving is now maintained by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Image online via Wikimedia Commons. Click on it for a better view.

King Philip II conceived a plan which may have worked had all of its parts come together. Alexander Farnese, the Duke of Parma, was a key part of the operation's success.

When the Armada reached Dunkirk, Parma was to provide lighter, faster ships (in contrast to the slow-moving Spanish galleons) and an Army (to help invade, and conquer, Britain):

The Spaniards forthwith, as they had done many times before, urged the Duke of Parma, by messengers dispatched one after another, to send 40 fleiboates, that is, light vessels, without which they could not well fight with the English by reason of the over greatnesse and slownesse of the Spanish shippes and the singular agility of the English; and they most earnestly prayed him to put to sea with his Army, which the Spanish fleete would protect as it were under her wings (so it was resolved) till they were landed in England.

For various reasons, however, Parma did not fulfil his part of the mission:

But hee being unready could not bee present at their call, his flatt-bottomed boates for the shallow channells leaked, his provision of victualls was not ready, and his sailers, having beene stayed hitherto against their wills, had withdrawne themselves. (This, and the above quote by Camden, in the *Annales Rerum Angliae et Hiberniae Regnante Elizabetha*, 1588, Section 25)

Parma had other problems. At the time, Spain was an occupying power in Holland (The Netherlands). Dutch forces were rebelling against the intrusion. Helping Britain was a way to help themselves:

There lay watching also at the entrance of the havens [harbors] of Dunkirke and Nieuport, whence he [Parma] was to put to sea, the ships of warre [war] of the Hollanders and Zelanders, so strongly provided of great ordnance and musketiers that hee could not put from shoare, unlesse he would wilfully thrust himselfe and his upon present death. And yet he, a skilfull and industrious warriour, seemed to omit nothing, being inflamed with desire of the conquest of England. (Camden, *Annales Rerum Angliae et Hiberniae Regnante Elizabetha*, 1588, Section 25)

And then there was the wind.

Unseasonably strong, and usually coming from the wrong direction, bad winds dogged the Spanish fleet as the great ships slowly fought their way through the English Channel.

How could King Philip have anticipated that the wind would become such a significant player in the coming battles?

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

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Media Stream



Alexander Farnese

Image online, courtesy tudorplace.com website.

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Battle of Gravelines - Armada Reaches Dunkirk

The Library of Congress features this image, depicting an artist's interpretation of the Spanish Armada as it reaches Dunkirk (located in today's northern France), in its online Rare Book and Special Collections Reading Room.



The illustration depicts an engraving of the Armada battle from a Maurice of Nassau biography, 1612. Hans P. Kraus, in his pictorial biography of Sir Francis Drake [tells us more](#) about Maurice of Nassau in the section entitled *The "Invincible" Armada, 1588: The Dutch were just as interested as the English in the outcome of the Armada campaign, as an English defeat would have been followed speedily by the ruin of the Netherlands.*

In the biography by J. Orlers and H. de Haestens of Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange (1567-1625), the Armada defeat is described as one of the principal events of his life.

The engraving from that work shows the final battle between the English and Spanish fleets, off Gravelines. On the cliffs behind Dover we see the signal fires which warned of the Armada's passage along the coasts of England.

Maurice, one of the greatest military commanders of the house of Orange, was instrumental in securing Dutch independence from Spain.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

Image online, via the Library of Congress' Sir Francis Drake: A Pictorial Biography by Hans P. Kraus, The "Invincible" Armada, 1588.

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Holland - Occupied by Spain

Image online, via Library of Congress.

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Spanish Armada Era - Map Depicting Zeelant

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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