

= Battle of Flores (1592) =

The Battle of Flores (1592) , also known as Cruising Voyage to the Azores of 1592 , or the Capture of the Madre de Deus describes a series of naval engagements that took place from 20 May to 19 August 1592 , during the Anglo -@- Spanish War . The battle was part of an expedition by an English fleet initially led by Sir Walter Raleigh , and then by Martin Frobisher and John Burrough . The expedition involved the capture of a number of Portuguese and Spanish ships including the large Portuguese carrack Madre de Deus , after a long naval battle off the island of Flores in the Azores . The expedition , particularly the capture of the great carrack , was a financial and military success . The rich cargo aboard the carrack , which at the time equaled nearly half the size of the Kingdom of England 's royal annual revenue , was subject to mass theft when it arrived in Dartmouth , England , followed by quarrels over the shares of the prize . The expedition had formative consequences for the English both financially and on the future of English exploration .

= = Background = =

By virtue of the Iberian Union that joined the crowns of Portugal and Spain in 1580 , the Anglo @-@ Portuguese Treaty of 1373 had fallen in abeyance . As the Anglo ? Spanish War was ongoing , Portuguese shipping was a fair target for the Royal Navy . Sir Walter Raleigh , having only just been released from the Tower of London , received a commission from Queen Elizabeth I for an expedition to the West Indies . He outfitted a sixteen ship naval squadron of which two , the Garland and Foresight belonged to the Queen .

= = = Expedition = = =

The expedition was a private venture much like the Drake @-@ Norris expedition , supported by limited assistance and subsidies from the crown . Its objective was to pillage Spanish and Portuguese ships within the Atlantic , off the Spanish coast or within the Caribbean and to make a profit from which the Queen 's portion would amount to a large sum .

Raleigh appointed Burrough as his vice @-@ admiral and was joined in commission with Frobisher , who had knowledge of maritime affairs . George Clifford , the Earl of Cumberland had the largest stake in the expedition and helped Raleigh to finance and gather the fleet . The majority of the fleet were owned by investors ; the ship Dainty for example was owned by John Hawkins , but was captained by John Norton . The fleet included notables such as William Monson , Robert Crosse , captain of the Foresight , Samuel Purchas , Richard Hawkins and Christopher Newport , captain of the Golden Dragon .

The expedition launched from Dartmouth , setting sail on 6 May 1592 after delays due to bad weather . The planned voyage to the West Indies was put on hold as supplies had already been depleted during the delay . Instead the fleet intended to head towards the Azores to intercept a Spanish treasure fleet or Portuguese carracks heading homeward from the East Indies . Initially Raleigh commanded , but on the following day , 7 May , the fleet was overtaken by Frobisher in the pinnace Disdain . Raleigh was given letters from the Queen ordering his immediate recall to England , and thus Frobisher took command . On 11 May a storm struck just off Cape Finisterre , scattering the majority of the fleet ; three small ships were sunk and Garland very nearly foundered .

Nearing Cape St Vincent on the Portuguese coast , the fleet split into two sections as ordered by Raleigh . One , under Burrough , headed to the Azores to lie in wait for Spanish and Portuguese ships . The other , under Frobisher in Garland with Clifford , cruised off Cape St. Vincent with the strategy to pin the Spanish fleet against their own lee coast .

= = = First engagements = = =

The fleet sailed further south , and by the end of May encountered the Santa Clara , an armed , 600 @-@ ton Spanish galleon , just off Cape St. Vincent . The English captured the ship after heavy

resistance , taking whatever goods the Spanish had failed to retrieve from her burnt @-@ out hull . She was carrying a large amount of ironware valued at £ 7 @, @ 000 and was sailing to Sanlúcar de Barrameda where further freight was destined for the West Indies . With the capture , the fleet separated , leaving the prize and goods in the hands of Frobisher and Clifford .

As the fleet continued south from the Cape in early June , Burrough in the Roebuck took a Spanish flyboat after a long chase that brought him near the Spanish coast . The flyboat 's master revealed that a great fleet was prepared at Cadiz and Sanlúcar de Barrameda . Having received intelligence that Raleigh was fitted out with a strong force for the West Indies , Philip II of Spain had provided a large fleet to oppose Raleigh and to escort the rich East India carracks to port . Don Alonso de Bazán , brother to the Marquis of Santa Cruz and Captain General of the Armada , was to pursue and intercept Raleigh 's fleet . As Burrough 's men were burning the flyboat , part of the Spanish fleet was spotted , and Burrough , having rejoined his own fleet , soon sailed to the Azores .

Further north off Portugal , Frobisher 's position became untenable , although he captured a prize fresh from Brazil laden with sugar heading to Lisbon on 18 June and a few days later captured a Spanish caravel . Frobisher 's group returned to England from Cape St. Vincent having missed Alvaro de Bazán 's fleet further south .

= = Battle = =

Burrough did not have to wait long : on 25 June his scout ships spotted a large vessel approaching them near Corvo Island , the northernmost of the Azores .

= = = Santa Cruz = = =

The vessel , the 800 @-@ ton Portuguese carrack Santa Cruz , was pursued by three of Cumberland 's ships . A storm arrived and forced the English away from the lee shore , but Santa Cruz was beached on the coast of Corvo . The following morning , once the storm had passed , the Portuguese who had disembarked set up entrenchments nearby , taking off the cargo and burning the vessel . Burrough immediately dispatched 100 soldiers who waded ashore and easily dispersed those who guarded the shore ; after some resistance the site was captured , and the Portuguese fled . The cargo burnt inside the ship although some was salvaged by the English . Prisoners were taken , including the ship 's purser and two foreign gunners . Under threat of torture they confessed that within fifteen days , three other carracks would arrive at the island . The fleet of five carracks had departed from Goa and were headed for Lisbon and consisted of the Santa Cruz , Buen Jesus admiral , Madre de Deus , San Bernardo , and San Christophoro . Madre de Deus was the largest of the fleet , a thirty @-@ two gun vessel of 1 @, @ 600 tons and was one of the Portuguese crown 's greatest and one of the largest sailing ships ever built .

With the news , the English ships waited and raided the villages on Corvo for supplies . For the month of July the English ships formed a picket line spaced about six miles apart along a north / south axis . From the southern flank near Flores Island , the order of ships was Dainty , Golden Dragon , Roebuck , Tiger , Sampson , Prudence and Foresight . The Spanish fleet , which had been sighted briefly , seemed no longer a threat ; Alvaro de Bazan had made a major miscalculation : he disobeyed orders and headed further west , allowing the English to first reach the area of interception .

= = = Madre de Deus = = =

On 3 August Dainty sighted a large ship heading directly towards them and as it drew nearer , its enormous size became apparent . The carrack was far larger than Santa Cruz , fully three times the size of England 's biggest ship . Madre de Deus was attacked by the much smaller Dainty . Around midday Newport 's Golden Dragon , followed by Roebuck - bigger than Dainty , but only a fraction of the Madre , joined the fray . These were followed at two @-@ hour intervals by Foresight and Prudence in the evening . The Dainty had her foremast shot away and was out of the battle for five

hours .

The English hoped to avoid sinking their opponent and to prevent her from running aground . The damage on Madre de Deus 's defences was becoming serious . With her bow rigging all but disabled , Burrough sent Roebuck which then crashed into Madre de Deus , followed by Foresight . Both moved directly under her main guns . The English boarded her in the dark at 10 pm . Golden Dragon , Sampson and Tiger and the repaired Dainty came up in support . The English took the ship after a bloody hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat .

The bloody decks of Madre De Deus were strewn with bodies , especially around the helm . The carrack was nearly destroyed when a cabin full of cartridges caught fire , and only quick English action saved the prize . Burrough spared Captain Fernão de Mendonça and the rest of the wounded , sending them ashore . Burrough was trying to keep his own Roebuck afloat , as it had sustained damage when it crashed into Madre . Only when Burrough came aboard and claimed the prize in the name of the Queen did pillaging stop . Sailors were stripped of " stolen " goods ; however , this proved only temporary .

The carrack was quickly repaired , heavily guarded by all ships , and the expedition set sail for England . Bazan now closed in on the English but he was too late ; for a hundred leagues he pursued the English in vain before returning to Spain . The fleet reached the English Channel in early September without incident .

= = Aftermath = =

As the fleet sailed back to England , Burrough produced an inventory - the report mentions " Gods great favor towards our nation , who by putting this purchase into our hands hath manifestly discovered those secret trades & Indian riches , which hitherto lay strangely hidden , and cunningly concealed from us " .

Among these riches were chests filled with jewels and pearls , gold and silver coins , ambergris , bolts of the highest @-@ quality cloth , fine tapestries , 425 tons of pepper , 45 tons of cloves , 35 tons of cinnamon , 3 tons of mace and 3 of nutmeg , 2 @.@ 5 tons of benjamin (a highly aromatic balsamic resin used for perfumes and medicines) , 25 tons of the precious red dye cochineal and 15 tons of ebony. An inventory was taken :

" spices , drugs , silks , calicos , quilts , carpets and colors , & c . The spices were pepper , cloves , maces , nutmegs , cinnamon and green ginger : the drugs were benjamin , frankincense , Galangal , mirabilis , aloes zocotrina , camphire : the silks , damasks , taffatas , alto bassos , that is , counterfeit , cloth of gold , unwrought China silk , sleeved silk , white twisted silk , curled cypresse . The calicos were book @-@ calicos , calico @-@ launes , broad white calicos , fine starched calicoes , course white calicos , brown broad calicos , brown course calicos . There were also canopies , and course diapertowels , quilts of course sarcenet and of calico , carpets like those of Turkey ; whereunto are to be added the pearl , muske , civet , and amber @-@ greece . The rest of the wares were many in number , but less in value ; as elephants teeth , porcelain vessels of China , coco @-@ nuts , hides , ebenwood as black as jet , bested of the same , cloth of the rind 's of trees very strange for the matter , and artificial in workmanship " .

There was also a rutter and a document , printed at Macau in 1590 , containing valuable information on the China and Japan trade ; Hakluyt observed that it was " enclosed in a case of sweet Cedar wood , and lapped up almost an hundredfold in fine Calicut @-@ cloth , as though it had been some incomparable jewel " .

Madre de Deus entered Dartmouth harbor on 7 September , towering over the other ships and the town 's small houses as it sailed by . The only vessel guarding the great ship was Roebuck , as the other vessels had slipped off to Portsmouth to sell off some of the plunder . Nothing like Madre had ever been seen in England - the frame from the beakhead to the stern was 165 feet long . The breadth at the broadest deck , was just over 46 feet and her draft was twenty @-@ six feet at her arrival in Dartmouth . Her several decks ; consisted of a main orlop , three main decks , and a forecastle and a spar deck of two floors each . The length of the keel was 100 feet , the main @-@ mast was 121 feet , and its circumference at the partners was just over ten feet . The main @-@

yard was 106 feet long .

= = = Mass theft = = =

Madre de Deus attracted all manner of traders , dealers , cutpurses and thieves from miles around , from as far as London and beyond . At seeing this huge vessel , pandemonium broke out amongst the townspeople ; they visited the floating castle and sought out drunken sailors in taverns and pubs , buying , stealing , pinching and fighting for the takings . Local fishermen as well ventured aboard , further depleting the cargo .

English law at the time provided that a large share of the loot was owed to the sovereign . When Queen Elizabeth discovered the extent of the theft , she sent Raleigh to reclaim her money and punish the looters . He swore , " If I meet any of them coming up , if it be upon the wildest heath in all the way , I mean to strip them as naked as they were ever born , for Her Majesty has been robbed and that of the most rare things . " By the time Raleigh had restored order , a cargo estimated at half a million pounds nearly , almost half the wealth of the English treasury at the time and perhaps the second @-@ largest treasure ever after the Ransom of Atahualpa , had been reduced to £ 140 @,@ 000 . Still , ten freighters were needed to carry the treasure around the coast and up the River Thames to London . In all the expedition as a whole yielded Elizabeth a 20 @-@ fold return on her investment .

Both Burrough and Clifford however were disappointed in what they were given and they and other investors contested their share . Clifford received nothing , although as special compensation , the queen allotted him a sum in consideration of his money venture . For Burrough there was no compensation , and bitter quarrels continued , leading to a fatal duel two years later .

= = Consequences = =

Alonso de Bazan , despite having a greater fleet , failed to intercept any English ship , lost two large carracks and was disgraced by the King of Spain for his negligence . By contrast the English learned that the fleet should not divide itself as had been done before capturing Madre de Deus , making a more effective force . When later ships were brought into the Thames for unloading , the dockers were made to dress in " suits of canvas doublet without pockets " to reduce opportunities for theft .

The taste of the riches of the East galvanized English interest in the region . Madre de Deus 's rutter from Macau was a forerunner to voyages that would end up establishing the East India Company in 1600 . By 1603 the newly formed company itself would end up with a trading factory at Bantam .