

Chaper Two

English military interventions in the wars of the Spanish Monarchy, 1500-1600.

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Abstract

Since the end of the 15th Century until the crowning of Elizabeth I in 1558, the relationship between the English Crown and the Spanish Monarchy was friendly in spite of some aroused problems: the divorce of Henry VIII from Katherine of Aragon and the schism of the English Church from Rome. As examples of this alliance stand out two military interventions of English contingents in support of the Spanish troops. The first of them campaigned in the north of Spain with the aim of conquering the Gascony in 1512; the second fought in the Low Countries during St Quentin campaign in 1557.

Keywords

England, Spain, Spanish Monarchy, Army, International Relations, War, Alliances, 16th century.

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Development of Spanish-English relations during the 16th century

With the advent of the Modern Age, the balance of power in Western Europe changed substantially, especially the relations between France and its neighbours. Thanks to its victory over England in the Hundred Years' War and an early centralisation of the state, its dominance over the rest was evident².

For example, Castile, which had been an ally of France during the aforementioned conflict against England³, began to vary its coalition policy because of the needs of Ferdinand the Catholic after his marriage to Isabella. When the former –because of confrontations with Louis XI of France for possession of Roussillon and La Cerdaña – subordinated the interests of the Castilian Crown to those of Aragon, traditional alliances mutated⁴. Thus, when Henry VII came to the throne after the battle of Bosworth in 1485⁵, England went from being the enemy in fighting for control of the Atlantic⁶, to being an ally against the Valois monarchy⁷.

² On the military side of this process, see Contamine, Philippe, *Guerre, État et société à la fin du Moyen Âge. Études sur les armées des rois de France, 1337-1494*, Mouton, Paris-La Hague, 1972, in particular part four.

³ Classic works are: Suárez Fernández, Luis, *Intervención de Castilla en la Guerra de los Cien Años*, University of Oviedo, Valladolid, 1950; Russell, Peter E., *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1955. See also the article by José Luis De Mesa Gutiérrez in this same publication.

⁴ On Louis XI, see Sablon du Corail, Amable, *Louis IX o le jouer inquiet*, Paris, 2015. Regarding the French invasion of the two counties and their subsequent reconquest by Juan II of Aragon: Calmette, Joseph, *Louis XI, Jean II et la révolution catalane (1461-1473)*, Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1977, pp. 163-169, 348-378; Vicens Vives, Jaime, *Juan II de Aragón (1398-1479). Monarquía y revolución en la España del siglo XV*, edition by P. Freedman and J. M. Muñoz i Lloret, Urgoiti Editores, Pamplona, 2006, pp. 307-359.

⁵ Grummit, David, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2013, pp. 122-130.

⁶ For an introduction to the subject, see Suárez Fernández, Luis, *Navegación y comercio en el Golfo de Vizcaya. Un estudio sobre la política marinera de la Casa de Trastámara* CSIC, Madrid, 1959. For military actions: Fernández Duro, Cesáreo, *La Marina de Castilla desde su origen y pugna con la de Inglaterra hasta la refundición en la Armada española*, Editmex S. L., Madrid, 1995, pp. 99-108, 125-156; García de Castro, Francisco Javier, *La Marina de guerra de Castilla en la Edad Media (1248-1474)*, University of Valladolid, Valladolid, 2014, pp. 130-132, 169-171, 178-82, 187-189.

⁷ Diplomatic relations have been studied in depth thanks to two biographies of Catherine of Aragon, the cornerstone of the alliance: Mattingly, Garret, *Catalina de Aragón*, Ediciones Palabra, Madrid, 2000; Williams, Patrick, *Katherine of Aragon: The Tragic Story of Henry VIII's First Unfortunate Wife*, Amberley Publishing, 2014

During the Hundred Years' War and the final decades of the Middle Ages⁸, England had remained faithful to the Dukes of Burgundy. After the death of Charles the Bold at the Battle of Nancy (1477)⁹, this policy continued with his heir, Mary of Burgundy, and her husband, Maximilian of Habsburg¹⁰. English wool was sold at the markets of Antwerp, while the island was strategic for the defence of the English Channel and therefore of the Netherlands. These, among other reasons, led to the alliance being maintained, and confirmed during the Philip the Fair's reign of the Netherlands¹¹. Thus, when his son Charles inherited the Spanish crowns, a coalition system was already in place that would remain in force even after Henry VIII divorced his Spanish wife and broke with Rome¹².

However, everything changed definitively once Elizabeth I succeeded her half-sister Mary Tudor in 1558. From the more or less tense alliance, a state of cold war developed that would eventually lead to open warfare until its conclusion in 1605, once the two sovereign protagonists of the confrontation –Philip and Elizabeth– disappeared from the scene and gave way to new protagonists whose aspirations did not involve confronting each other¹³.

During the time the Spanish-English alliance lasted, two military events occurred that were milestones in the 16th century: the campaign of Gascony in 1512 and of St Quentin in 1557. In

⁸ For a military view of the Anglo-French conflict, see Prestwich, Michael, *A Short History of the Hundred Years War*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2018.

⁹ Vaughan, Richard, *Charles the Bold: The Last Valois Duke of Burgundy*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2002, pp. 399-432.

¹⁰ For the difficult situation, see Sablon du Corail, Amable, *La guerre, le prince et ses sujets : Les finances des Pays-Bas bourguignons sous Marie de Bourgogne et Maximilien d'Autriche (1477-1493)*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2019, chapters 2-8.

¹¹ Cauchies, Jean-Marie, *Philippe le Beau : Le dernier Duc de Bourgogne*, Turnhout, 2003, pp. 104-109.

¹² The best biography of Henry VIII from the point of view of international politics, despite the years passed since its publication, is: Scarisbrick, J. J., *Henry VIII*, Eyre & Spottiswoodie, London, 1968.

¹³ Despite the vital importance of the confrontation between Philip II and Elizabeth I, it is striking that no monograph analysing the events as a whole has been published in Spain. Something that our English counterparts have done: Wernham, Robert B., *Before the Armada: The Emergence of the English Nation, 1485-1588*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1966; idem, *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe, 1588-1595*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984; and idem, *The Return of the Armadas: The Last Years of the Elizabethan War Against Spain, 1595-1603*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.

both cases, the Spanish armies were reinforced by contingents of English troops, although the result of their assistance was completely different in both cases, as will be described below.

The first joint action of the two armies should have taken place in 1511, when some 600 English archers arrived in Cadiz to cooperate with Ferdinand the Catholic during the ongoing conquest of North Africa¹⁴. But their poor discipline, as well as their weakness for Andalusian wine, caused the Spanish monarch to dismiss them even before aborting the operation on African territory¹⁵.

The campaign in Gascony (1512)

The origin of the expedition was the signing of the Holy League in October 1511 between Pope Julius II, the Spanish Monarchy and the Republic of Venice to confront the French expansionism of Louis XII¹⁶. Soon the Holy Roman Emperor, the Swiss Cantons and, in November, Henry VIII of England joined the alliance. The latter also signed an agreement with his father-in-law Ferdinand in which they agreed to invade Guyenne and Gascony from Guipúzcoa¹⁷. The English king wanted to recover the former Plantagenet possessions in France lost during the Hundred Years' War. The alliance stipulated that Henry would send some 6,000 men for the offensive, while the Catholic king would dispatch the same number of men, as well as deliver horses and artillery to the English, who would land on Spanish soil without either¹⁸.

¹⁴ For previous campaigns and future plans, see Alonso Acero, Beatriz, *Cisneros y la conquista española del norte de África: cruzada, política y arte de la guerra*, Ministry of Defence Publications, Madrid, 2005.

¹⁵ Floristán Imízcoz, Alfredo, 'Tres invasiones, una conquista: Navarra, Francia e Inglaterra en 1512-1513', in *En los umbrales de España. La incorporación del Reino de Navarra a la Monarquía Hispánica.*, Government of Navarre, Pamplona, 2012, p. 324. I would like to thank Professor Floristán Imízcoz for his enthusiastic help in preparing this paper.

¹⁶ See Doussinague, José M., *La política internacional de Fernando el Católico*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1944; and idem, *Fernando el Católico y el Cisma de Pisa*, Madrid, 1946.

¹⁷ For a brief account of diplomatic relations between the two crowns, see Sarrablo, Eugenio, 'Una alianza anglo-española del siglo XVI', Supplement to *Revista de Archivos*, Bibliotecas y Museos 57, Madrid, 1951, pp. 1-20; Terrateig, Baron de, *El Católico y la excomunión de los reyes de Navarra*, Imprenta y editorial Maestre, Madrid, 1954.

¹⁸ Santoyo, Julius-Caesar, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos. Historia de una expedición militar inglesa en Guipúzcoa (junio-octubre de 1512)*, Grupo Dr. Camino de historia donostiarra de la real sociedad vascongada de los amigos del país (CSIC), San Sebastián, 1974, pp. 7-9; Murphy, Neil, 'Henry VIII's first invasion of France: The

In April 1512, preparations in England were at their peak. The monarch had finally decided to send over 7,000 men under the command of some of the distinguished members of English nobility, while at least another 4,000 men would serve on ships as sailors, soldiers, etc¹⁹. However, most infantrymen were still armed with the longbow, while others were armed with *bills*, a weapon very similar to the halberd. In short, the contingent bore more similarity to the army that fought at Agincourt in 1415 than to those deployed in the Italian Wars at the same time²⁰. In early May, the second Marquis of Dorset, Thomas Grey, took command of the troops, and the services of the only non-English troops to take part in the expedition were accepted: 500 Landsknechts under the command of Burgundian Captain Guyot de Heulle²¹.

Around 100 ships gathered in Southampton, most of them Flemish or Cantabrian; they left port on 3 June and arrived in Pasajes on the 8. When the troops disembarked, they were received by the Bishop of Sigüenza, Fadrique de Portugal, who represented Ferdinand the Catholic. He gave them a letter from the Aragonese king, in which he explained that the second Duke of Alba, Fadrique Álvarez de Toledo, would soon be arriving in command of 6,000 infantry, 2,500 horsemen and the cannons and carriages needed for the invasion²².

After a quick inspection, it was agreed that the English camp would be located between Renteria and Oyarzun, where the officers' tents were erected and around them the soldiers' bivouacs, all under a rain that did not stop falling for much of the summer²³. In order to maintain good relations between the population and the English,

Gascon expedition of 1512', *The English Historical Review* 542, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015, pp. 25-26.

¹⁹ Santa Cruz, Alonso de, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 2 vols., edition by Juan de Mata Carriazo, Escuela de estudios hispano-americanos de Sevilla, Seville, 1951, vol. II, p. 162.

²⁰ To study the British army that landed a year later in northern France and suffered almost the same problems, see Cruickshank, Charles G., *Army Royal: Henry VIII's Invasion of France, 1513*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969

²¹ Zurita, Jerónimo, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando el Católico. De las empresas y ligas de Italia.*, 6 vols., edition by Ángel Canellas López, Government of Aragon, Zaragoza, 1989-1996, vol. 5, p. 188; Murphy, 'Henry VIII's first invasion of France', op. cit., pp.33-35.

²² Sarrablo, 'Una alianza anglo-española', op. cit., p. 10; Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., pp. 18-19; Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando*, op. cit., p. 269.

²³ Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., p. 20; Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando*, op. cit., p. 270.

Dorset issued a proclamation informing any soldiers who dared to confront or insult the civilian population of their punishment²⁴. Even so, it was the Navarrese merchants who brought all kinds of food and necessary goods to the camp, following the order of the King of Navarre. Thus, John III of Navarre ingratiated himself with the English commander, who assured him that his goal was Gascony, not his kingdom²⁵.

However, soon after they arrived, the English soldiers began to show their discontent with their living conditions and how hard they found the climate, humid like in England but much warmer. In an attempt to satisfy them, the camp was dismantled and set it up again near Irun, on the border with France and 40 km from Bayonne, the capital of Gascony. Shortly afterwards, on 28 June, French forces appeared on the other side of the Bidasoa river, causing some of the English troops, without any order or discipline, to cross the river to face them. The enemy, taken by surprise, decided to retreat before coming to blows. Finally, Dorset, his officers and the rest of the army crossed the water to collect their men after imposing some order²⁶. As they raced madly across the river, these green troops had put themselves in great danger, as a surprise counterattack by the French cavalry would have wiped them out without help from their superiors. Such actions clearly showed that most of the English were not professional soldiers.

The British commander's lack of authority was evident, though it does not appear that he even attempted to impose himself. This was another problem that undermined the morale of the English contingent. In addition to the little patience the troops showed while waiting for the arrival of the army under Alba's command

²⁴ MURPHY, 'Henry VIII's first invasion of France', op. cit., p. 43. English armies often cried these proclamations, see Phillips, Gervase, 'To cry «Home! Home!»: Mutiny, morale, and indiscipline in Tudor armies', *The Journal of Military History* 65, Society for Military History, s. l., 2001, pp. 313-332. On war and English society during the reign of Henry VIII, see Davies, C. S. L., 'The English people and war in the Early Sixteenth Century', in A. C. Duke and C. A. Tamse (eds.), *Britain and the Netherlands, vol. VI: War and Society. Papers Delivered to the Sixth Anglo-Dutch Historical Conference*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1977, pp. 1-18; Gunn, Steven, *The English People at War in the Age of Henry VIII*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018.

²⁵ Sarrablo, Una alianza anglo-española', op. cit., p. 10; Santoyo, De crónicas y tiempos británicos, op. cit., pp. 21-22; Murphy, 'Henry VIII's first invasion of France', op. cit., p. 48.

²⁶ Santoyo, De crónicas y tiempos británicos, op. cit., pp. 25-26; Zurita, Historia del Rey Don Hernando, op. cit., p. 279.

with the promised horses, chariots and cannons²⁷. The Spanish general and his men were gathered in Vitoria awaiting the orders of the king, who wished to cross Navarre and thus ensure its neutrality. John's refusal to let the Spanish army pass through his territory, let alone give a number of strongholds, provided the perfect excuse for Ferdinand to order the invasion of the Kingdom of Navarre²⁸. Meanwhile, despite Ferdinand's pleas, the English commander refused to participate in the invasion of Navarre on the pretext that he did not have licence to do so²⁹.

At the same time, the inactivity of the soldiers and the onset of dysentery further strained nerves in the English camp. The situation finally exploded when a company rioted, shouting that they were being cheated by the captains, who were keeping part of their pay³⁰. This time Dorset reacted quickly, and together with the officers and a good number of loyal soldiers forced the insurgents to change their attitude. After a brief investigation, the ringleader was hanged, although it was suspected that the reason behind the confusion was Louis XII's money, which somehow found its way into certain pockets and incited insubordination³¹.

The only consolation in the midst of all this weariness was the alarms that were raised, almost daily, when French units appeared

²⁷ Sarrablo, 'Una alianza anglo-española', op. cit., p. 11; Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., p. 29.

²⁸ The bibliography on the conquest is extensive, including: Correa, Luis, *Historia de la conquista del Reino de Navarra por el Duque de Alba, General del ejército del Rey Fernando el Católico, en el año de 1512*, edition by José Yanguas y Miranda, Imprenta de Longás y Ripa, Pamplona, 1843; Boissonnade, Prosper, *Historia de la incorporación de Navarra a Castilla, ensayo sobre las relaciones de los príncipes de Foix-Albret con Francia y con España (1479-1521)*, Government of Navarre, Pamplona, 2005; Adot Lerga, Álvaro, *Juan de Albret y Catalina de Foix o la defensa del estado navarro (1483-1517)*, Pamiela, Pamplona, 2005; Monteano Sorbet, Peio J., *La Guerra de Navarra (1512-1529). Crónica de la conquista española*, Pamiela, Pamplona, 2010; OSTOLAZA ELIZONDO, María Isabel; Panizo Santos, Juan Ignacio and Berzal Tejero, M^a. Jesús, *Fernando el Católico y la empresa de Navarra (1512-1516)*, Government of Navarre, Pamplona, 2011; Floristán Imízcoz, Alfredo (coord.), *1512, conquista e incorporación de Navarra. Historiografía, derecho y otros procesos de integración en la Europa renacentista*, Ariel, Barcelona, 2012; Floristán Imízcoz, Alfredo, *El Reino de Navarra y la conformación política de España (1512-1841)*, Ediciones Akal, Madrid, 2014.

²⁹ Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando*, op. cit., p. 280; Boissonnade, *Historia de la incorporación de Navarra*, op. cit., pp. 418 and 459.

³⁰ Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., p. 31.

³¹ Sarrablo, 'Una alianza anglo-española', op. cit., p. 14; Murphy, 'Henry VIII's first invasion of France', op. cit., p. 43. Rioting for this type of reason was common in the Tudor armies throughout the 16th century, see Phillips, 'To cry «Home! Home!», op. cit., *passim*.

on the other side of the Bidasoa to observe the English camp. Once the voice was given, guard companies advanced rapidly towards the enemy, who fled as soon as they came dangerously close. Sometimes a party was ordered to go into French territory, which is why on more than one occasion it arrived at the very gates of Bayonne³².

Meanwhile, Alba's troops invaded and conquered Navarre with very little opposition: on 25 July he received the keys to Pamplona from its authorities³³. Once the situation was under control, both Ferdinand and Alba wrote to Dorset insisting that he should be patient as the joint invasion of Gascony could be carried out shortly. The king also thanked him that, due to the presence of the English army, the French had not dared to cross the Navarre border to disturb the operation, fearing that in their absence Dorset would advance towards Bayonne. But the silence between the two allies during the three weeks that the war lasted caused British officers to distrust the Catholic³⁴. Moreover, the chivalric code that imbued the military prevented them from breaking up camp without having fought the French. For them, the aim of the war was to conquer French soil³⁵.

However, despite the good words, unrest continued in the English camp throughout August. Fights and soldiers killing each other were common, exasperated by the lack of beer they made up for with huge quantities of wine and cider, which also increased the cases of dysentery. Midway through the month, the situation deteriorated even further: a confrontation between an Englishman and a Basque in Irun led to the death of the former and the escape of three of his compatriots who ended up half dead. The German Landsknechts were the first to hear of the scuffle as they were camped just outside the town, so they sounded an alarm and headed into the town, while the English followed closely behind. In the blink of an eye the village was looted and many of its inhabitants killed. At no time did the officers attempt to stop the soldiers, knowing that if they tried they would also end up dead. Therefore, they decided to wait for the troops to return to camp and, once there, forced them to return the stolen goods to the people³⁶.

³² Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., p. 33.

³³ Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando*, op. cit., pp. 284-287.

³⁴ Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., pp. 34-36; Murphy, 'Henry VI-II's first invasion of France', op. cit., p. 46.

³⁵ Murphy, 'Henry VIII's first invasion of France', op. cit., p. 49.

³⁶ Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., pp. 37-40.

As soon as the French learned of the confrontation between the allies, they decided to test the enemy and a column marched from Bayonne with the intention of launching a surprise attack. However, thanks to the Gascons who supported the return of the British government, Dorset was informed of the French intentions. After imposing some discipline among his men, he crossed the Bidasoa again, this time looking for battle. On seeing them, the French decided to withdraw but were pursued³⁷. The English, as they advanced, took and plundered Saint-Jean-de-Luz with fury, where they killed a good part of the population, and other nearby villages. In the search for a pitched battle, Dorset's troops reached the gates of Bayonne, but because they had not received the promised horses and cannons, they decided to return to Irun as they were in danger of being completely surrounded in enemy territory. Without horses the army had no 'eyes', as there was no light cavalry that could discover the enemy nearby. And without artillery, a walled city like Bayonne could not be taken. The situation finally led the officers to consider the unreasonableness of their mission and so they decided to return to the camp and, soon after arriving, fed up with so many setbacks, agreed to send the army back to England³⁸.

In September, however, Ferdinand informed the English commander that Alba's troops were ready to invade Gascony and were marching towards Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. Soon 400 Spanish light cavalymen arrived with the mission to guide Dorset and serve him in all his needs³⁹. When the news reached them, the officers met but before they could decide what to do, another mutiny broke out among the soldiers, who cried that they would return to England at any cost, before remaining in that place. The English commander was forced to write a letter to the Catholic king expressing his troops' intention to return to the island in less than 25 days –exactly for St. Michael's Day– and therefore begged him to grant him a license to rent the ships needed for transport⁴⁰.

³⁷ Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

³⁸ Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., p. 41; Murphy, 'Henry VIII's first invasion of France', op. cit., pp. 49-50.

³⁹ Santa Cruz, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, op. cit., pp. 216-217; Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., p. 44; Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando*, op. cit., p. 311. Santa Cruz echoes the rumours of the power of French gold over the decisions of some English military.

⁴⁰ Sarrablo, 'Una alianza anglo-española', op. cit., p. 13; Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., p. 46; Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando*, op. cit., p. 312; Murphy, 'Henry VIII's first invasion of France', op. cit., pp. 50-52.

Despite being surprised by the announcement, the Aragonese king gave his consent as everything pointed to several captains being bribed by Louis XII to dissolve the English army. From that moment on, events developed with unusual speed: 51 boats were rented and the necessary supplies for navigation were purchased, attempts were made to convince deserters to return to the ranks, and they were guaranteed that they would not be punished. Even so, most of them preferred to ignore the call and remain in the region⁴¹.

Ironically, the climate changed once they decided to return. To everyone's surprise, autumn was very mild, though dysentery remained active in the camp. When Dorset fell ill in October, it was his second in command, Lord Thomas Howard, who had to take charge of the retreating army. It was he who met with several of Ferdinand's emissaries, who asked him to have the troops spend the winter in the houses of the inhabitants of the cities, towns and villages of the region, so that the offensive could begin early the following spring. Howard reacted in the worst possible way, as he questioned the Aragonese monarch's sincerity and denounced the fact that he had made it seem as if the English inactivity had been caused by the officers. If they were to invade Gascony, why wait until spring? They could start at that very moment. This is why he made clear his intention to return to his homeland⁴².

After the Spanish emissaries withdrew, it was decided that the contingent would be divided into four bodies and each would embark from a different port: San Sebastián, Rentería, Guetaria and Fuenterrabía. However, as preparations for departure were being finalised, letters were received from Henry VIII ordering the Commander-in-chief to remain in Spain until spring, when he would receive reinforcements from England to invade Gascony. On hearing the news, the soldiers almost mutinied again so the officers decided to disregard the orders knowing the end they could suffer if they stood up to their subordinates. The ships finally left the aforementioned ports on 24 October 1512; of the almost 10,000 men who had arrived in Spain at the time, just over 6,000 returned, the rest had perished through illness or had deserted⁴³.

⁴¹ Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., p. 48; Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando*, op. cit., p. 354. On English defectors and their relationship with their superiors, see Phillips, 'To cry «Home! Home!»', op. cit., p. 321.

⁴² Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., pp. 49-51.

⁴³ Santoyo, *De crónicas y tiempos británicos*, op. cit., pp. 52 and 54.

After returning to the island an investigation was launched to find out exactly what had happened and the reasons for the failure. Despite Henry VIII's anger, none of the officers were punished for disobeying his orders, and it was as if nothing had happened⁴⁴.

The St Quentin Campaign (1557)

Hostilities between 1556 and 1559 were the last between the Habsburg and French Valois monarchies. Once again, the trophy for which they both fought was control of the Italian Peninsula. The efforts of Henry II of France were spurred on by the unreasonableness of Pope Paul IV, who wanted to see the Spanish out of Italy and his native Naples⁴⁵. But, unlike on other occasions, this time England was not going to remain a mere witness to the conflict⁴⁶.

Although the marriage treaty of Philip II and Mary Tudor agreed that England would not take part in the wars of the Spanish Monarchy, the phrasing was so vague that it was not clear whether it referred exclusively to the war between Charles V and Henry II at that time or, on the contrary, to any future war. In addition, Flanders had a mutual defence pact with England, so in case of attack, it had to be helped by England.

However, despite Mary Tudor's pressure on the Privy Council, the latter's position was clear that the treaties of mutual defence agreed in 1542, and ratified in 1546, had been rendered obsolete by the marriage treaty, so England was not morally obliged to help its ally until France attacked the Netherlands or the Iberian Peninsula and the Spanish monarch asked for their help. Furthermore, in an apostille to its reply to the Queen, the advisory body hoped and expected that Philip would not be able to invoke such aid, since Mary and her territories would not be

⁴⁴ Murphy, 'Henry VIII's first invasion of France', op. cit., pp. 52-56.

⁴⁵ Although there is no contemporary critical edition, the most complete account of this war is Andrea, Alexandro, *De la guerra de campaña de Roma y del Reino de Naples, en el pontificado de Paulo IV, año de 1546 y 47, Viuda de Querino Gerardo*, Madrid, 1589. It can be completed with the opposite vision: Nones, Pietro, 'Storia della guerra di Paolo IV, Sommo Pontefice, contro gli spagnuoli', in *Archivio Storico Italiano, ossia raccolta di opere e documenti finora inediti o divenuti rissimi risguardanti la Storia d'Italia*, volume XII, Gio. Pietro Vieusseux Editore, Florence, 1847.

⁴⁶ For the transition from the reign of Charles V to that of his son Philip II, see, Rodríguez-Salgado, María José, *Un Imperio en transición. Carlos V, Felipe II y su mundo, 1551-1559*, Barcelona, 1992.

able to carry it out with all their resources due to the fragility of the English Treasury. However, after Philip returned to England in March 1557, he again urged the Council to help him. Unable to continue to make excuses and contravene the wishes of the monarchs, its members finally reluctantly agreed to mobilise the infantry and cavalry units promised in previous treaties⁴⁷.

However, a month later, the situation changed unexpectedly due to a poor attempt by the French enemy. Thomas Strafford, an English nobleman exiled in France after opposing the Spanish-English marriage and seeking to expel the Spanish from the island, landed with a group of followers, took Scarborough Castle, north of London, and proclaimed himself 'protector, governor and defender' of England, although with France's support. The operation was soon neutralised as Strafford and his supporters, numbering less than a hundred, were arrested and several of them, including the ringleader himself, were executed.

The failed attempt caused the Privy Council policy to change course and decided to support Mary in her confrontation with Henry II of France; for this reason, it offered 5,000 infantry and 1,000 horsemen to reinforce Philip's army and 3,000 more men to secure Calais, the last English possession on the continent⁴⁸. War would be declared once preparations were completed, although neither the border with Scotland –France's ally– nor the Channel could be left undefended, placing a greater burden on the shoulders of the English Treasury. However, the military arrangement soon came to an end as, fortunately for the British military effort, the nobility had joined the expedition enthusiastically, which had made it easier to recruit and equip the troops for which they were responsible in their own districts. Once everything was ready, Mary made a solemn declaration of war with France on 7 June 1557⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ KELSEY, Harry, *Philip of Spain, King of England: The Forgotten Sovereign*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2011, pp. 129-130; DAVIES, C. S. L., 'England and the French War, 1557-9', in J. Loach and R. Tittler (eds.) *The Mid-Tudor Polity, c. 1540-1560*, The Macmillan Press, London, 1980, p. 161.

⁴⁸ To understand its military organisation in his last century as an English possession, see GRUMMIT, David, *The Calais Garrison: War and Military Service in England, 1436-1558*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2008.

⁴⁹ Kelsey, *Philip of Spain*, op. cit., pp. 130-131; EDWARDS, John, *Mary I: England's Catholic Queen*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 2011, p. 294; LOADS, David M., *The Reign of Mary Tudor: Politics, Government and Religion in Tudor England, 1553-1558*, Ernest Benn Limited, London, 1979, pp. 242-244, 365-371; DAVIES, 'England and the French War', op. cit., pp. 162-163.

Despite this frenzy, the British contingent that embarked for Calais was far from the level of the other forces involved in the conflict, many of them made up of true war professionals. The English infantry, in fact provincial militia, were still largely armed with longbows and *bills*, but pikes and arquebus –more modern weapons– were still not numerically relevant⁵⁰.

Despite this, Philip II embarked for Flanders with the idea of leading the English contingent as he intended to encourage the service of his new subjects even if he was only a consort king. Ironically, many English nobles who accompanied him had opposed the coronation of Mary and had even been part –themselves or members of their families– of plots against the Queen⁵¹.

In July, the troops –some 7,000 men: 1,200 riders, 4,000 infantry, 1,500 sappers and 200 miners– landed in Calais with everything needed for the campaign: artillery, mobile mills, furnaces, etc. While Philip, who had arrived a few days earlier, was already in Brussels to set up the affairs of the war⁵². However, English Commander-in-chief William Herbert, the first Earl of Pembroke – his seconds were Lord Grey and Lord Clinton– made it clear from the outset that he would not move from the fortress until he was provided with *limonero* horses for his artillery, wagons for the whole army and money in advance to feed his troops. In the end, and despite the pleas of the king's envoys and the king's own letters, Pembroke was late arriving in St Quentin, which spoiled the monarch's desire to fight at the head of the English. The nobleman preferred to look after his country's affairs and did not leave the city until her defence was more or less ready⁵³.

However, shortly after arriving on the continent, the group of miners and sappers, escorted by several infantry companies, was sent to reinforce the siege of the French city and approaching works. Ironically, they set up their camp right where, shortly after arriving, a contingent of troops under the command of Monsieur

⁵⁰ Davies, 'England and the French War', cit., pp. 163-164. For a study of the modernity of the English army during the first half of the 16th century, see Fissel, Mark Charles, *English Warfare, 1511-1642*, Routledge, London-New York, 2001, pp. 1-20; and Raymond, James, *Henry VIII's Military Revolution: The Armies of Sixteenth-Century Britain and Europe*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2007.

⁵¹ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, op. cit., p. 372; Gunn, Steven, Grummitt, David and Cools, Hans, *War, State and Society in England and the Netherlands, 1477-1559*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, pp. 307-308.

⁵² Davies, 'England and the French War', op. cit., p. 165.

⁵³ Kelsey, *Philip of Spain*, op. cit., pp. 133-134; Edwards, *Mary I*, op. cit., pp. 303-304.

d'Andelot tried to break through the siege and help those who were besieged. Although most of his men were intercepted, killed or forced to return to the French lines, some managed to enter the city. The English, although determined to defend their positions, did not stand out for their discipline during combat⁵⁴.

The battle of St Quentin, which took place on 10 August 1557, St Lawrence's Day, meant the destruction of the French relief army under the command of the Constable of Montmorency. Over 5,000 Frenchmen perished in the battle while another 7,000 were taken prisoner. Since the battle of Pavia in 1525, the French army had not suffered a similar disaster: once again a large part of the French nobility died on the battlefield. Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy, Governor General of Flanders and Commander-in-chief of the Spanish Monarchy troops, won the victory thanks to an aggressive manoeuvre by his cavalry that took Montmorency by surprise and defeated the French army⁵⁵.

However, the chance for the English to excel in combat was ruined by Pembroke's slowness. Despite knowing that the English troops were going to catch up with him after the battle, Philip II waited for them in Cambrai. The king arrived at the Spanish camp on 12 August at the head of the English units –dressed entirely in blue clothes and red sashes– accompanied by German troops and artillery⁵⁶. Due to the lack of monetary resources and provisions, the council of war that met later, after debating what to do, decided that instead of launching a full offensive towards Paris, St Quentin would be taken after completing its siege, which had begun days before the battle took place.

Pembroke's artillery settled into a battery and began to bombard the enemy population, as did the rest of the Monarch's army's cannons. The general assault was finally ordered on the 27 of the same month. After a brief resistance, the garrison succumbed to

⁵⁴ MESA GALLEGO, Eduardo De, *La batalla de San Quintín, 1557*, Almena Ediciones, Madrid, 2004, p. 30; Cabrera de Córdoba, Luis, *Historia de Felipe II, Rey de España*, edition by J. Martínez Millán and C. J. de Carlos, Government of Castile and León, Valladolid, 1998, vol. I, pp. 134-135.

⁵⁵ FERNÁNDEZ SAN ROMÁN, Federico, *Batalla de San Quintín*, Imprenta de Vicente y Lavajos, Madrid, 1863, pp. 73-88; Mesa Gallego *La batalla de San Quintín*, op. cit., pp. 33-44; and Merlin, Pierpaolo, Manuel Filiberto. Duque de Saboya y General de España (Duke of Savoy and General of Spain), Editorial Actas, Madrid, 2008, pp. 104-105.

⁵⁶ Fernández San Román, *Batalla de San Quintín*, op. cit., pp. 99-100, doc. 2; Anonymous, 'Batalla de San Quintín', in *Colección de Documentos inéditos para la Historia de España*, vol. 9, Imprenta de la viuda de Calero, Madrid, 1846, p. 496.

the combined efforts of Spanish, German, Walloon and English soldiers –about 2,000 of whom intervened– deployed in different sectors so that each nation could show off its progress against the city. The English intervened in the attack on the main gate together with Julian Romero's troops. After being repelled once by the French and suffering 250 casualties, they finally managed to break through the defence and enter the city. The survivors, together with the Germans, set about looting the city despite the ban on doing so that both nations had received directly.

St Quentin's plunder was very rich as it was a population that lived from trade with Flanders and had a good number of merchants among its neighbours. The other side of the coin was that neither the elderly, nor women or children were respected. In the first moments after the assault, they were all killed without consideration. For their part, German mercenaries set fire to the main square when they received the order to withdraw outside its walls to stop the looting, so a third of the city's buildings were engulfed in flames. Interestingly, the English infantrymen filed a complaint with Emanuel Filiberto of Savoy in which they denounced the fact that the Germans, in groups of almost 100 men, had confronted and rob all the looters they came across, which had prevented the rest of the nations from taking what they considered to be fair by the laws of war.

In September, a muster of the Spanish army was carried out in the vicinity of St Quentin. The English cavalry consisted of four companies of heavy horsemen and another four companies of light cavalry, about 1,000 horsemen in all. The infantry was divided into 21 companies, with around 5,000 soldiers, as well as 12 artillery pieces and their equipment. The Spanish army totalled just over 43,000 men. Operations continued between September and October, before the arrival of winter, when Philip II's troops took the towns of Le Catelet, Noyon and Ham, in which the English contingent again intervened⁵⁷.

Fortunately, after the violence came the calm. After the victory on 10 August and the fall of the city, diplomats from both sides met

⁵⁷ Lemaire, Emmanuel et al., *La Guerre de 1557 en Picardie :Bataille de Saint-Laurent, siège de Saint-Quentin, prises du Catelet, de Ham, de Chauny et de Noyon*, Imprimerie typographique Charles Poette, Saint Quentin, 1896, pp. 312-315 ; Redworth, Glyn, 'Where were the English? Antoon van den Wijngaerde, the evidence of visual culture, and the 1557 siege of Saint-Quentin', in A. Sáez-Hidalgo and B. Cano Echevarría (eds.), *In Exile, Diplomacy and Texts: Exchanges between Iberia and the British Isles, 1500-1767*, Brill, Leiden, 2020, pp. 15-31.

again to try to reach a compromise that would bring peace. As an act of goodwill, a good number of troops were demobilised⁵⁸. Those chosen by the Spanish Monarchy included the English, so that nation marched to Calais. However, unhappy with the loot obtained during the campaign, they would have stormed Ardres if the governor of the town had not been on his guard. Once at the English port, most of them were shipped back home. After their arrival, began to circulate the story that the English contingent had been the first to storm the walls and enter St Quentin, a claim that Philip II did not deny in order to flatter Mary and her subjects⁵⁹. However, the first nation to actually set foot inside St Quentin had been the Spanish⁶⁰.

Thus ended the participation of the English contingent in Philip II's first war. Mary died on 17 November 1558, although Calais was lost earlier after an attack by the Duke of Guise, which is why the English presence in France came to an end⁶¹. The subsequent enthronement of Elizabeth I, half-sister of the late Queen, brought about the end of the Spanish-English alliance, in force since the beginning of the 16th century, for political and religious reasons.

Conclusion

As we have seen in the previous sections, the presence of English contingents alongside the armies of the Spanish Monarchy during the first half of the 16th century was punctual and fleeting.

The Tudor army still had a markedly medieval character, so its troops were not levied to fight an entire campaign but did so for about four months, which made it impossible to carry out long operations and planning more ambitious objectives. Moreover, if the logistic lines between England and the areas of operation

⁵⁸ For the peace talks that culminated in the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, see Haan, Bertrand, *Une paix pour l'éternité. La négociation du Traité du Cateau-Cambrésis*, Madrid, 2010.

⁵⁹ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor*, op. cit., p. 372; Davies, 'England and the French War', op. cit., p. 166; Mesa Gallego, *La batalla de San Quintín, 1557*, op. cit., pp. 53-62; Kelsey, *Philip of Spain*, op. cit., p. 136; Cabrera de Córdoba, *Historia de Felipe II*, op. cit., p. 148.

⁶⁰ Pardo Canalís, Enrique, '¿Quién fue el primero que entró en San Quintín?', *Cuadernos de Historia Jerónimo Zurita 1*, Institución Fernando el Católico, Zaragoza, 1951, pp. 115-121.

⁶¹ Potter, David, 'The duc de Guise and the Fall of Calais, 1557-1558', *The English Historical Review* 388, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983, pp. 481-512; Durot, Éric, *François de Lorraine, duc de Guise entre Dieu et le Roi*, Paris, 2012, pp. 397-402; Grummit, *The Calais Garrison*, op. cit., pp. 165-186.

were to be kept open, the economic effort was beyond the country's financial possibilities. It is therefore not surprising that in 1512, Dorset and his men landed with their food supplies almost consumed and had to buy more in the area of operations. The circumstance was leveraged by the locals to increase prices which, in turn, made it economically exorbitant to feed the soldiers properly. Logistics therefore meant that Henry VIII subsequently concentrated all his operations against France in the north, with Calais always as the main base of operations. This decision was evident in the conquest of Tournai in 1513 or Boulogne in 1544⁶².

Despite the disappointing result of the intervention in Gascony, the positive side was the knowledge English officers acquired of the art of warfare in vogue on the continent and of new combat tactics with more modern weaponry, which enabled them to keep pace with other European countries.

For the Spanish Monarchy, English presence alongside its units meant the triumph of a tenacious diplomacy that managed to avoid any obstacle and achieve its objectives. From the military point of view, only the first expeditionary corps was decisive, despite the meagre benefit to Henry VIII. Ferdinand the Catholic would likely not have achieved such a successful invasion of Navarre if Dorset's troops had not forced the French to station a significant part of their men to defend Bayonne. As for the second expeditionary corps, although its presence was not essential to the development and end of the campaign, it did provide Philip II with political gains among his English subjects, although the disappearance of Mary Tudor prevented him from taking advantage of them. Professor Redworth, in the article cited in the footnotes, stressed the importance the Spanish monarch gave to the English contingent in deploying the military devices both in the attack on St Quentin and in the march to Ham. By putting the contingent next to him, very close, the king intended to establish strong links with its members, as well as to show the rest of the nations that he trusted the English military as much he did them.

⁶² See CRUICKSHANK, Charles G., *The English Occupation of Tournai, 1513-19*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1971; and Murphy, Neil, *The Tudor Occupation of Boulogne: Conquest, Colonisation and Imperial Monarchy, 1544-1550*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019.