

Conflict had existed between Spain and England since the 1570s. During the eight hours of battle, the Armada drifted perilously close to the rocky coastline. Elizabeth I, Queen of England, encouraged her staunch admiral of the navy, Sir Francis Drake, to raid Spanish ships and towns. To satisfy his ambition and also to retaliate against England's theft of his gold and silver, King Philip II began to build his fleet of warships, the Spanish Armada, in January 1586. Though these raids were on a small scale, Drake achieved dramatic success, adding gold and silver to England's treasury and diminishing Spain's supremacy. On August 7, while the Armada lay at anchor on the French side of the Strait of Dover, England sent eight burning ships into the midst of the Spanish fleet to set it on fire. In addition to building new warships, he marshaled 130 sailing vessels of all types and recruited more than 19,000 robust soldiers and 8,000 sailors. Although some of his ships lacked guns and others lacked ammunition, Philip was convinced that his Armada could withstand any battle with England. England wanted a share of the wealth that Spain had been taking from the lands it had claimed in the Americas.