

ALVARO DE BAZÁN, PRIMER MARQUÉS DE SANTA CRUZ
DE MUDELA: CAPTAIN GENERAL OF SPANISH
ARMS AT SEA (1526-1588)

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | 111 |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Chapter | |
| I. THE EARLY YEARS | 14 |
| II. TURK AND SPANIARD IN THE MEDITERRANEAN | 36 |
| III. THE CAMPAIGN TO STOP THE TURKS | 61 |
| IV. THE BATTLE OF LEPANTO AND AFTERMATH | 82 |
| V. THE SHIFT FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE ATLANTIC | 108 |
| VI. DOM ANTÓNIO AND THE AZORES REBELLION | 133 |
| VII. THE STRUGGLE FOR THE AZORES | 160 |
| VIII. SANTA CRUZ AND THE ENGLISH ENTERPRISE | 188 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 208 |
| VITA | |
| ABSTRACT | |

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INTRODUCTION

The life of Don Alvaro de Bazán, first Marqués de Santa Cruz de Mudela (1526-1588), spans sixty-two years of the most exciting and crisis-filled epochs of Spanish history. On the one hand a heady optimism permeated the Iberian peoples, for they had recently finished the reconquest of their peninsula from the Moors and launched out in the discovery of new worlds, almost in the same breath. Spanish prestige was high in Europe and Spanish arms were widely respected as among the best in the world. On the other hand it was a time of shifting values, of royal struggle for more centralized control, of growing population, and of increased trade and industry. Spain was in a state of social, political, and economic flux. Bullion flowed in from the New World in such quantities that it altered the economy of Spain, and less directly affected all of Europe.¹

The Lutheran revolt raged over much of Europe, followed by the even more virulent Calvinism, undermining the old religious verities. Both were quickly and violently eradicated in Spain, but then Anglicanism emerged to strengthen the ranks of the heretics. It was also a time of doomsday prophets, and popular interest in the occult revived through much of Europe as often happens in unsettled

times.² Spanish mystics kept the Inquisition busy, as did Jews and Moors who had converted to Roman Catholicism in hope of avoiding persecution but who were harassed anyway.

Into this era was born Don Alvaro de Bazán, eldest son of a middle echelon noble family with a highly regarded military history. This study concentrates on Bazán's professional life and touches only occasionally on his personal and family life. Since he followed his father in a naval career and served under both Charles V and Philip II, his life merges with the obscure and uncertain milieu of sixteenth century Spanish naval history.

Don Alvaro's exploits as a naval hero enabled him to marry into the best families in Spain (his first wife died), and a combination of family, naval-military expertise, and good luck led to the title of Marqués and eventually ushered him into the elite circle of the grandees of Spain. He was also popular with the people, widely eulogized in story and verse and a national hero in his own lifetime. He was something of a John Paul Jones to his people and his name is widely known and respected in Spain to this day, although he remains unknown to most in the English-speaking world.

The road to greatness which Bazán followed was different from that of a parasite at the royal court, for life at sea was harsh and hazardous in the sixteenth century, no matter what king's vessels one served on. John Hawkins made

the following observations about divisions of labor and life on Spanish ships.

The Spaniards, in their armadas by sea, imitate the discipline, order, and officers, which are in an army by land, and divide themselves into three bodies: to wit, soldiers, mariners, and gunners.

Their soldiers ward and watch, and their officers in every ship round, as if they were on the shore; this is the only task they undergo, except cleaning their arms, wherein they are not over curious. The gunners are exempt from all labour and care, except about the artillery. And these are either Almaynes, Flemings, or strangers; for the Spaniards are but indifferently practised in this art. The mariners are but as slaves to the rest, to moil and to toil day and night; and these but few and bad, and not suffered to sleep or harbour themselves under the decks. For in fair or foul weather, in storms, sun, or rain, they must pass void of covert or succour.

The gunners fight not but with their great artillery; the mariners attend only to the tackling of the ship and handling of the sails, and are unarmed, and subject to all misfortunes; not permitted to shelter themselves, but to be still aloft, whether it be necessary or needless. So ordinarily, those which first fall are the mariners and sailors, of which they have the greatest need.³

English ships were also usually commanded in battle by nobles more familiar with land warfare than with the unique problems involved in fighting at sea. The sailors merely sailed the ships and left the fighting to the soldiers carried for that purpose,⁴ similarly as on the Spanish ships, except in the case of English corsairs. The English common seamen also led a difficult existence, in addition to being at the bottom of the pay scale and receiving the smallest share of the booty when a prize was taken.⁵ Discipline was harsh, as seen in A Book of Orders for the War both by sea

and land by Thomas Audley, Lord Chancellor, written at the command of King Henry VIII about 1530. For example;

If any man kill another within the ship, he that doeth the deed shall be bound quick to the dead man, and so be cast into the sea. . . .

If any man draw a weapon within the ship to strike his captain, he shall lose his right hand.

If any man within the ship draweth any weapon or causeth tumult or likelihood of murder or bloodshed within the ship he shall lose his right hand as before said.

If any man within the ship steal or pick money or clothes within the ship duly proved, he shall be three times dipped at the bowsprit, and let down two fathoms within the water, and kept on alive, and at the next shore towed aland bound to the boat's stern, with a loaf of bread and a can of beer, and banished the King's ships for ever.

If any man within the ship do sleep his watch iiii times and so proved, this be his punishment: the first time he shall be headed at the main mast with a bucket of water poured on his head. . . .

.
The fourth time and last punishment, being taken asleep he shall be hanged on the bowsprit end of the ship in a basket, with a can of beer, a loaf of bread, and a sharp knife, choose to hang there till he starve or cut himself into the sea.⁶

In Santa Cruz' day there were few standing armies or navies and both ships and seamen were impressed into service in a crisis to support a small force of crown vessels. In England the practice of impressing ships continued to the end of Tudor times, and the impressment of seamen continued into the nineteenth century. Philip II also impressed seamen and ships to meet emergencies, but carried the practice to such lengths that it dangerously weakened Spain's merchant and fishing fleets. Complaints against this practice increased greatly in the mid-sixteenth century. The following is typical.

In the Cortes held in Toledo in 1559 the procuradores filed a complaint in the Book of Petitiones that the proveedores for the King's fleets caused great hardship and irritation to the owners and masters of Spanish vessels which were impressed to carry soldiers, supplies, artillery, and munitiones. . . . for they detain the vessels a long time without giving them any cargo, and often they embargo more ships than are needed, and they impede their voyages, forcing them to unload their cargo, and then they often fail to pay them for all this, and even when they do pay it is often so little and arrives so late that in the meantime the ship owners have spent much trying to collect their money, and have lost the profit from other business, their losses being more than the total of the money received from the crown.⁷

The administration of naval affairs was haphazard and usually received attention only in dire emergency. In addition, maritime affairs were subordinate to land warfare in the thinking of most sixteenth-century monarchs. England at least had a Lord High Admiral, Spain did not. Both Charles V and Philip II reserved this function to themselves. The English monarchs also kept their hand in the administration of naval affairs, however, and although there were innovators and very competent men involved, English naval administration was often a sorry record of chicanery and the triumph of patronage over ability.⁸

Little is known of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sailing ships as compared to their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century counterparts. Differences of opinion still exist among experts as to the accuracy of various "authentic" models of Columbus' three ships. The same is true of the vessels which took part in the 1588 Spanish

Armada. We do not know the exact specifications of a single vessel which fought in that epic battle. So much has been written about the Armada, the size of the ships, the kinds of guns used by both sides, and the tactics involved that it is difficult to realize that little more is known concerning the Armada ships. We know the approximate tonnage of many of the vessels and can thus generalize about their appearance, but we cannot with certainty describe any particular ship until the late sixteenth century.⁹

Santa Cruz' father, Don Alvaro the Elder, is credited with the development of the famed Spanish galleon, for a document dated January 15, 1550, in Valladolid granted him exclusive rights for ten years to build the new galleons "of his invention."¹⁰ Yet attempts to build an authentic scale model of Santa Cruz' flagship, San Martín, have failed for lack of a blueprint or specific details.¹¹

The tendency has been to assume that sixteenth-century galleons, including their rigging, heavy ordnance, sea-keeping capabilities and crews were much the same as the better-known eighteenth-century "ship of the line." They were not. The sixteenth-century vessels were wider in proportion to their length, still had high castles fore and aft (though they were growing smaller), were clumsier and unable to remain at sea as long, were more lightly gunned and armed with ordnance less reliable than usually imagined.

The sixteenth century was a time of experimentation and transition in naval architecture, cannon design, and naval tactics.

Spanish vessels and tactics were mainly defensive in nature. In the Mediterranean Spain had to defend her ports and shipping against Moorish and Turkish pirates. In the Atlantic Spain was forced to defend her colonies and commerce against first French, then English, and later Dutch corsairs. None of these latter three nations had any colonies as yet (indeed the Dutch Republic did not exist), and each resented the Iberian hegemony in the New World, sub-Saharan Africa, India, and Asia. When these countries acquired colonies of their own, however, they were quick to adopt many of the restrictive policies they had opposed earlier.

Spanish holdings were widespread but sparsely populated. Mexico City was the most populous of them all and it contained barely 2,000 Spaniards in the 1580s when Spain and England finally locked in war. Spanish sea power was spread extremely thinly, for Spain had defensive commitments literally around the world. Naturally isolated trading posts, islands, and even sizable colonies were vulnerable to hit-and-run tactics.

The biggest threat to Iberian commerce was from privateers. These sea raiders preferred ships that were fast, could sail close to the wind, and be fought by a relatively small number of men. Fewer men meant lower costs,

fewer supplies to carry, and greater profits for the "company" that outfitted the expedition. English corsairs thus gradually developed the sleek, fast vessels designed to meet their raider requirements.

The Spanish flotas carried on legitimate commerce and were escorted by galleons carrying crown soldiers. The ships traveled in convoy and were designed primarily for cargo capacity and seaworthiness rather than for speed. The king's galleons which escorted the convoys were designed to carry the crown's share of the bullion and to defend the other vessels. Their major concern was defense, not attack. Spanish galleons were dual-purpose cargo carrying and fighting ships, not single-purpose warships as those which emerged a century later.

Raiders had to fight at a distance. Because of their small crews they dared not close and grapple with a Spanish galleon loaded with the king's soldiers, and they developed their tactics accordingly. As to armament, the corsairs preferred long-range culverins for the same reasons. They learned to stand off and cripple their adversaries by damaging sails, rigging, masts, rudder, and killing personnel on deck before closing in. They became adept at picking off stragglers from convoys, much as German U-boats did in the Atlantic in the two world wars of the twentieth century. Most of the elements of sixteenth-century English "modern naval tactics" can be traced to the pirate mentality of the English "sea

dogs," and developed out of their experiences as smugglers, slave-runners, and raiders.

The "haves" were possessed of a different mentality than the "have nots." The nature of Spanish vessels and tactics may well have resulted from their defensive function rather than a clinging to the past as is so often asserted. The Spanish convoys were called "plate fleets" because they had the bullion everyone sought in staggering quantities. That fact plus Spanish trade restrictions made Philip II's vessels fair game on the high seas.

In 1588 Philip II was finally goaded into sending the famous Spanish Armada against England in an attempt to solve his problems at their source. The English "sea dogs" put their piratically developed tactics into practice on a large scale for the first time against the Armada. The innovations were significant but largely ineffective and did not stop the Armada. Philip II's plan was faulty but his fleet was destroyed by the elements, not English guns.¹² The English ships were better fighters and the superiority of English seamanship was marked, yet they could not break the Spanish formation or deliver a knock-out blow to the attackers.

The Armada's failure settled once for all, however, the question of whether Philip could rid himself of his antagonist at a single stroke. England was beyond his reach, and while that was true the attacks on his commerce

could not be prevented or the Dutch rebels subdued.

It is a myth, nevertheless, that the defeat of the Armada transferred command of the sea from Spain to England. No one commanded the sea in the sixteenth century. It is also a myth that the defeat of the Armada marked the decline of the Spanish empire and the rise of the British empire. No less an authority than Garrett Mattingly stated:

This is a handy way to round out the final paragraph of one chapter of European history and establish a transition to the next, but it is the complete reverse of what actually happened. . . .

. When the peace treaty was signed in 1604, the Spanish empire was as imposing in extent, in apparent strength, and in exclusiveness as it had ever been. And the British empire was still to be founded.¹³

Although attacks on Spanish shipping continued throughout the war, no important amount of treasure was captured by the English corsairs, and the total quantity of American bullion that reached Philip's treasury between 1588 and 1603 was greater than in any other fifteen years in Spanish history.¹⁴ Neither the Spanish nor English fleets could defeat the other decisively, but both remained a threat to the other. It is rarely mentioned in English works, but in 1590 a Spanish force seized Blavet in Brittany and based a squadron of galleys there which raided Cornwall. In 1596 the Spaniards also seized Calais. That same year Spanish corsairs, mostly Basques, plundered and burned English shipping as well as French and Dutch vessels "from Plymouth

to the Wash, sometimes in plain sight of the English coast."¹⁵

English raids on Spanish holdings in the New World during this period were occasionally successful, but more often were repulsed. The two most outstanding leaders, Drake and Hawkins, died in the West Indies. The general result of these actions was to demonstrate that the naval power of Spain was incapable of driving its enemies from the sea, and that England was as yet capable of little more than plundering raids and harassment of coastal cities.¹⁶

Not by chance was Spain able to fight England to a stalemate at sea in the last decade of the sixteenth century, and if Philip II deserves the lion's share of blame for the failure of the Armada, he also deserves credit for Spain's improved maritime strength in the years that followed.

"Philip profited from defeat; Elizabeth learned nothing from victory. In fact she never quite understood how she had come by it."¹⁷ Philip understood what happened in the summer of 1588, however, and from the Escorial he ordered the construction of a new fleet, patterned on the English model, more numerous and more powerful than the old. The failure of the Armada which Santa Cruz had labored so hard to plan and prepare had not been entirely in vain.

NOTES

¹The classic treatment of this subject is Earl J. Hamilton, American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501-1650 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934). See also by the same author, "American Treasure and the Rise of Capitalism (1500-1700)," Economica, N.S. IX (1929), 338-357. For criticism of Hamilton's thesis, see John U. Nef, "Prices and Industrial Capitalism in France and England, 1540-1640," Economic History Review, VII (1936-1937), 155-185. For Hamilton's rebuttal see his presidential address to the Economic History Association, "Prices as a Factor in Business Growth: Prices and Progress," Journal of Economic History, XII (1952), 325-349. An even more direct assault was made on the Hamilton thesis by David Felix, "Profit Inflation and Industrial Growth: The Historic Record and Contemporary Analogies," Quarterly Journal of Economics, LXX (1956), 441-463. Hamilton replied in "The History of Prices Before 1750," in XI Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Rapports, I (Uppsala, 1960), 144-164.

²H. R. Trevor-Roper, The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 90-192. See also Alan Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

³H. W. Hodges and E. A. Hughes, eds., Select Naval Documents (Cambridge, England: At the University Press, 1927), p. 22.

⁴Michael Oppenheim, A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of Merchant Shipping in Relation to the Navy: From MDIX to MDCIX with an Introduction Treating of the Preceding Period (London: Bodley Head, Ltd., 1896), p. 33.

⁵Sir Travers Twiss, ed., The Black Book of the Admiralty, I (London: Longman and Co., 1871), 13.

⁶Hodges and Hughes, Select Naval Documents, p. 4.

⁷ Cesáreo Fernández Duro, La Conquista de las Azores en 1583 (Madrid: Est. Tipográfico de Rivadeneyra, Impresores de la Real Casa, 1886), p. 21.

⁸ For good discussion of this, see Leslie Gardiner, The British Admiralty (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1968).

⁹ G. S. Laird Clowes, Sailing Ships: Their History and Development (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1930), pp. 63-70.

¹⁰ Revista General de Marina, Número extraordinario dedicado á la memoria de don Alvaro de Bazán, primer marqués de Santa Cruz en el tercer centenario de su muerte 9 de febrero de 1888 (Madrid: Dirección de Hidrografía, 1888), pp. 81-83.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 83.

¹² Michael Lewis, The Spanish Armada (New York: Macmillan Co., 1960), pp. 162-172. See also Garrett Mattingly, The Armada (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959).

¹³ Garrett Mattingly, The Invincible Armada and Elizabethan England (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1963), pp. 27, 29.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ David Hannay, The Navy and Sea Power (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1915), pp. 90-92.

¹⁷ Lewis, The Spanish Armada, p. 210.

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY YEARS

The French sailors scurried to their battle stations as the lookouts sounded the alarm. Led by the notorious corsair Monsieur de Sannes y Alabardos, the thirty French vessels, mostly galleys, had plundered weak points along the northwestern coast of Spain then followed the coastline south. The pursuing Spanish coast guard of Don Alvaro the Elder overtook them near Muros. Though his smaller force of twenty-five galleys was slightly outgunned, his disadvantage was more than offset by the momentum and fury with which the Spaniards fell upon the raiders. Spanish morale was high despite the oppressive summer heat. It was July 25, 1544, the day of Santiago, patron saint of Spain, a good omen and a good day to fight with heaven's help.¹

Don Alvaro led the assault from the deck of his capitana, or flag ship, and rammed the French capitana with such force that it immediately began to sink. By his side stood his sixteen-year-old son, the third to bear the name Don Alvaro de Bazán, a young man destined to gain even greater fame than his highly respected father. In the general mêlée which ensued between the French and Spanish galleys another

French vessel drew alongside its stricken capitana to rescue those aboard and was captured by Don Alvaro's forces. The battle had raged on at close quarters for almost two hours, when the French fleet finally surrendered, after the loss of many ships and approximately 3,000 men.² The Spaniards captured sixteen enemy vessels, a large amount of ordnance and ammunition, and many prisoners, including 500 arquebusiers from the French garrison at Bayonne.³ Don Alvaro took his prisoners and prizes of war to the port of La Coruña.

Don Alvaro the Younger remained in port in charge of the Spanish fleet, the prisoners, and the captured French vessels while his father went to nearby Santiago de Compostela to give thanks to the Apostle Santiago (St. James) for the victory won on that saint's day.⁴ The Archbishop received the grizzled old warrior before a great throng of local inhabitants with solemn demonstrations of faith and gratitude. The elder Bazán was admired both for his piety and his military-naval skill, and his disinterest in material gain was demonstrated when he used the ransom money obtained for the French prisoners to replace losses to the coastal villages victimized by the raids. Still leaving matters at La Coruña with his son, the elder Don Alvaro proceeded from Galicia to Valladolid where Prince Philip received him with honors. The good news of his victory was passed on to Charles V in Flanders.

The young Don Alvaro thus learned the rigors of life at sea, the ways of war, and the responsibilities of those who command, at his father's side. This battle was only one of many that contributed to the education and training of the young man who would one day be remembered as the Marqués de Santa Cruz, often acclaimed as the most outstanding naval commander Spain ever produced.

He was born on December 12, 1526, in Granada.⁵ His father, the second to bear the name Don Alvaro de Bazán, spelled Bazán in its more archaic form, served Emperor Charles V as Captain General of the galleys guarding the Spanish coasts. His mother, Doña Ana de Guzmán, was the daughter of Don Diego Ramírez de Guzmán, Count of Teba.⁶

The Bazán lineage dates from the thirteenth century in Navarre, and following the reconquest of the peninsula from the Moors the Bazáns appear as a leading family in the South. His grandfather, the first Don Alvaro, participated in the conquest of Andalucía. Young Don Alvaro heard the chivalric tales and heroic exploits of his ancestors from earliest childhood. He thus found in the stories and legends of his own family models of honor and heroism to emulate, and a noble tradition to uphold.

Don Alvaro was but two years old when Charles V bestowed upon him the habit of the Military Order of Santiago.⁷ This honor was intended to express the emperor's

appreciation for the services of his father Don Alvaro "el Viejo" (The Elder), but the lad would one day earn honors for himself, his sons and relatives because of his services to Philip II.⁸

He spent most of his childhood years at Gibraltar where his uncle, Don Rodrigo de Bazán, served as corregidor until his death in 1535. That year the young Don Alvaro, only nine years of age, was appointed alcaide of Gibraltar in perpetuity, an honorary title currently held by the house of Santa Cruz which he was to found. The royal cédula granting this title was issued in Madrid on March 2, 1535, at the command of Charles V, by the royal secretary Francisco de los Cobos.⁹

The young Don Alvaro was thus thrust quite early into contact with the Moors, who had used Gibraltar as a stepping stone in their invasion of the Iberian peninsula in the eighth century. As the southern gateway to Castile it was of vital importance to Charles V. Gibraltar served the Spaniards as an advance sentinel against Moorish corsairs and the guardian of the vital strait between Africa and Iberia.

Spanish naval power was in its infancy, and the coastal defenses of the peninsula left much to be desired. Local militia provided the primary defense for the coastal provinces. When the bells sounded the alarm all able-bodied

males were expected to rush to the nearest plaza de armas and form into militia companies under the banners of local nobles or royal officials appointed for the purpose.¹⁰

Don Alvaro the Elder exercised the authority granted to his young son and immediately initiated efforts to improve the defenses at Gibraltar. In 1539 he took leave from his command of the galleys and established his residence in Gibraltar, moving his entire family there, as well as the Moorish and Turkish captives taken in his sea victories and in the expedition against Túnez. He put the prisoners to work on the fortifications of Gibraltar.¹¹ Before the artillery could be placed and the defensive works completed, however, Don Alvaro was recalled to duty with the galleys. In his absence his servant Caramani led the captives in a rebellion and attempted to hand Gibraltar over to the Moorish leader Barberroja. Coordinating their attack with the uprising, the Moors penetrated the defenses of the city and looted it before withdrawing. The Spaniards reported that they drove them out, but the attackers probably withdrew when they were ready, though certainly under pressure. Apparently the raid was for booty and the freeing of Moslem captives. Before withdrawing the attackers cut loose Don Alvaro's "bastard galley" anchored in the port and attempted to tow it away as a prize of war. When their escape was jeopardized by the delay, however, they set it on fire and abandoned it.¹²

The obvious weakness of Gibraltar's defenses prompted Don Alvaro the Elder to re-emphasize its military importance and vulnerability to Charles V. The emperor finally commissioned the Milanese engineer Juan Bautista Calvi to plan and direct the construction of improved fortifications. As a result the Moroccan assault on Gibraltar in 1558 was repulsed with relative ease by the Spanish garrison, although Don Alvaro was again absent.¹³

Young Don Alvaro grew to maturity in the 1530's and 1540's, a time of rapidly accelerating change for most of Europe. The Spain he knew was no longer that of Ferdinand and Isabella, whose policies and goals were usually national. Emperor Charles V remained constantly at war with France to the north, the Moslems in the south and east, and German Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire. The era was also one of greatly widened horizons for Europeans in general.

Spaniards sought to explore and exploit the New World while simultaneously vying with Portugal for the trade of sub-Saharan Africa and the Far East. By Don Alvaro's day the globe had been circumnavigated and improvements in maps, charts, navigational instruments, rigging and ship construction had resulted from the voyages of discovery and trade. Deep-water ships and sailors were replacing the coastal traders and galleys in importance, though the realization that this was happening came gradually. New

social, economic, and political problems resulting from these changes became so numerous that they were difficult to identify and define, much less solve.

The nation's new role in international affairs required many basic adjustments. Spain had acquired by inheritance, discovery, and conquest vast territories throughout Europe, along the coast of Africa, in the New World, and the Orient. Spaniards had been at war with the Moors for centuries but the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, especially under Suleiman the Magnificent, posed a new threat from the East. Since Spain controlled most of Italy and Sicily, the Turkish expansion forced Charles V to give greater attention to the Mediterranean. A Franco-Turkish alliance to undermine Hapsburg power produced four wars between France and Spain, and continued Turkish harassment in the Mediterranean diverted Charles V's energies from pressing domestic problems. Young Don Alvaro de Bazán grew to manhood in those years of turmoil and uncertainty.

Don Alvaro married Doña Juana de Zúñiga y Avellaneda in 1550. Four daughters were born of this union: Doña María (who later married Don Bernardino Suárez de Mendoza, Count of La Coruña); Doña Juana; Doña Brianda; and Doña Ana Manuela.¹⁴ The last three entered convents and became nuns.¹⁵

Another marriage, that of Prince Philip of Spain to Queen Mary Tudor of England in 1553, would also affect Bazán's

life. This marriage, cementing the earlier friendship between the two countries, served as an informal alliance against France, temporarily prevented the Protestants from leading the English Church away from Rome, and gave support to the Spanish hold on the Netherlands. It also exemplified the Spanish Hapsburg policy of expansion through marriage, diplomacy, or bribery rather than war, whenever possible.

Don Alvaro the Elder commanded the Spanish fleet which escorted Prince Philip and his entourage to England.¹⁶ His two eldest sons, Don Alvaro and Don Alonso, accompanied him on the voyage.¹⁷ Sixty-eight vessels assembled at La Coruña in June, 1554; embarked on these ships were 4,000 experienced Spanish soldiers and the cream of Spanish nobility.¹⁸ This huge wedding party arrived at Southampton in July.

Philip knew that many Englishmen opposed Mary's Spanish marriage and he did everything possible to calm their fears. He forbade the landing of Spanish troops on English soil, made a point of not interfering in the internal affairs of English government, and advised moderation in matters of religion. Spanish money found its way into English hands in high places and Philip was kept informed of the actions of the Privy Council, but he worked hard at not being obtrusive and domineering. The ultimate success of his plan depended upon the birth of an heir, however, and that was not to be.

Don Alvaro the Younger returned to Spain soon after disembarking his passengers at Southampton, and another trip to England did not figure in his plans until 1588.

The independent military career of Don Alvaro the Younger also began that year. In December, 1554, he was given command of a squadron of vessels by Charles V with instructions to patrol the coasts and seek out and destroy marauding corsairs. His coastal patrol force included two galeazas belonging to his father, four sailing ships of from 200 to 300 tons, two small zabras and 1200 men.¹⁹ With this command he began to move from the shadow of his father.²⁰

There were as yet no English "Sea Dogs" or Dutch "Sea Beggars" and the primary threat to Spanish shipping came from French corsairs in the Atlantic and the Moors and Turks in the Mediterranean. Don Alvaro distinguished himself in combat against both in a series of minor skirmishes and patrols in the 1550's which took him to the west coast of Africa, the Canary Islands, and the Azores. He captured a number of prizes in these waters, and the occupants of the Canary Islands enjoyed peace and freedom from pillage for the first time in many years while his forces patrolled the area.²¹

The Cape of Aguer fell within his area of responsibility, and in 1556 he received word that two English vessels

were approaching the coast of Marruecos. The English cargo included coats of mail, ammunition, and assorted firearms destined for the Moors of Fez. The English sea captains considered their role to be that of businessmen or traders, but the Spaniards considered them smugglers and gun-runners, and Don Alvaro began to search for them.²² The English ships managed to reach port and sought protection under the guns of a Moorish fort. When the Spaniards found them and attacked, the guns of the fort opened fire. Bazán was not intimidated by the lively salvos from their cannons, however, and penetrated the defenses.²³ He burned seven Moorish caravels and sloops in the harbor and towed the two English vessels back to Gibraltar.²⁴ Two hundred Englishmen and sixty pieces of artillery were taken.²⁵

Later that same year Don Alvaro captured a beautiful French galeaza of thirty-two oars, two men handling each oar, near Cape San Vicente. The vessel was fully manned and well armed. It carried five large cannons of bronze, fourteen lesser pieces made of iron, and many muskets. He presented this prize of about 200 tons²⁶ to Princess Juana of Portugal, acting head of state in the absence of Philip.²⁷

Meanwhile to the north the worst fears of many Englishmen were realized when Mary Tudor involved England in Spain's war with France, and lost Calais for her trouble. Philip became King Philip II in 1556 following his father's

abdication, and Mary died two years later without heir. The Anglo-Spanish alliance was ended. The two nations were still on friendly terms, but it became more and more difficult to keep it that way and to preserve peace and friendship.

The death of Mary brought Elizabeth to the throne of England. Philip contemplated renewing the alliance by marrying her but she played a waiting game and negotiations finally collapsed. Henry II of France also died in 1558, and his son Francis II married Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland. Alliances and loyalties were shifting in Europe, and in 1559 the Treaty of Cateau Cambrésis ended the war between Spain and France. The treaty confirmed England's loss of Calais and also posed the possibility of marriage between Henry II's eldest daughter, Elizabeth of Valois, and Philip's son, Don Carlos. Since the capacity of Don Carlos to rule and produce heirs was in serious question, however, Philip decided to marry the young French princess himself. After all, Mary Stuart of Scotland was also queen of France and the most likely heir to the English throne after Elizabeth. The thought of France, England, and Scotland united under one crown and hostile to him was not a pleasant one for Philip. His hold on the Low Countries was already difficult, and it would be nearly impossible for him to retain control there if the Dutch rebels received support from an Anglo-French alliance.

Philip II returned permanently to Spain in 1559. Elizabeth of Valois followed in January, 1560, and general festivity marked the marriage. The new queen was popular with the Spanish people and devoted to her husband. She was known as the Reina de la Paz, for her marriage to Philip sealed the peace with France.

Hostilities continued on the high seas, however, since the freebooters who preyed on legitimate trade were not affected by peace treaties. Don Alvaro was given command of eight galleys and one small sailing vessel in May, 1562, with orders to patrol the southern coasts of Spain and especially the Strait of Gibraltar.²⁸ His responsibilities included escorting to port incoming convoys from the New World and the Orient, for the vastness of these riches attracted a wide variety of adventurers, corsairs, and pirates. Some of them grew wealthy on captured Spanish and Portuguese treasure, but the men of Bazán's squadron also prospered for they were allowed to retain a share of the wealth recaptured from the raiders. Among the numerous interlopes Don Alvaro captured were English, French, and Ottoman corsairs as well as large numbers of "Barbary pirates."²⁹ He worked closely with the Casa de Contratación in Seville since it was the controlling government agency for the Indies commerce and knew the estimated date of arrival and departure of all ships trading legally with Spanish colonies.³⁰

In 1563 Bazán commanded one squadron of galleys in a force of forty-two sent to relieve the besieged Spanish garrison at Oran. Sailing from Cartagena the Spaniards took the enemy galleys at Oran by surprise and the Turks broke and fled with only token resistance. Five enemy galleys ran aground and their crews fled on foot. A sailing vessel was captured by Bazán as it attempted to retrieve Turkish artillery from the beach. Eight Spanish galleys from Oran joined Bazán's squadron and the combined force returned to Cartagena.³¹

Information extracted from some Turks captured at Oran indicated that the strategically important Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera was lightly defended. Philip II ordered that an attempt be made to take it. The Spanish assault force left Málaga under the command of Don Sancho de Leiva with Bazán commanding a squadron of galleys. For the mission to succeed the enemy would have to be taken unaware, and when the element of surprise was lost the attack failed.³²

Upon his return to Spain Don Alvaro was ordered to resume his coastal patrol. He spent most of the stormy winter months in Puerto de Santa María, however, and was there on November 20, 1563, when an urgent message from the Corregidor of Gibraltar informed him that a French merchant ship in the harbor was being attacked by eight English corsairs. Bazán immediately gave chase with five galleys and sighted the English vessels on November 23 three leagues east of the Mountain of Gibraltar.³³ The English seamen also saw him

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The English ships were sent to Gibraltar and the crews were imprisoned. Many masks were found on the vessels, and a young lad from one of the ships said that his companions wore them when attacking merchant vessels. A careful search by Spanish authorities also uncovered "pan de Caçavi" and "pan de azucar" from Santo Domingo. From his galley Bazán himself saw them throw "cochinilla" and other unidentified goods overboard shortly before their capture.³⁴ There could be little doubt that they were corsairs.

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vizcaya with authority to embargo and otherwise obtain any needed vessels from that area, as well as from Santander, Asturias, Galicia, and Andalucía.³⁵ Later, upon hearing that the Ottoman fleet did not plan to move against the West in force, he ordered that most of the vessels be released. Not wanting to see all of the work and expense be lost, however, Philip again decided to attack the Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera, stronghold of the Barbary pirates. This time he sent a much stronger force commanded by one of Spain's ablest generals, Don García de Toledo.

Don Alvaro returned to Sevilla early in April, 1564, to obtain 400 rowers for the galleys and to arm thirty sloops for the expedition. In Sevilla he outfitted and repaired his galleys and prepared for the return trip to Barcelona to embark infantry units. The authorities in Sevilla, however, needing their supplies and funds for the Indies ships, hindered Don Alvaro's search for money and material for his war fleet. On June 6 he finally got under way for Málaga, and after taking on more food there he sailed for Barcelona on June 17.³⁶

Don Alvaro's squadron discovered and pursued a Moorish galeota on the way, finally capturing it after a sixty-mile chase and a brief skirmish in which the Moorish captain was killed and both sides suffered casualties. Don Alvaro took forty-five prisoners and released eighty-five captive Christians found on the galeota. He shared his part of the prize

with the crew of his galley since it was their first service under him.³⁷ A French spy found aboard the Moorish ship was sent to Cartagena and executed.³⁸

Don Alvaro and Don Sancho de Leiva picked up ten siege cannons in Barcelona and met Don García de Toledo in Málaga. A fleet of considerable might was assembled there, composed of the following contingents: five galleys from Malta; eight galleys, one galleon and five caravels from Portugal; Don Alvaro's twenty-two galleys; and fifty-seven galleys under Don García de Toledo.

This fleet sailed on August 29, 1564, and sighted the Peñón two days later. A meeting of the principal commanders was called and plans were made for the assault. The troops would land at the dismantled fort of Alcajá, as was done before, and the 16,000 man landing force would divide into two units. Don Sancho de Leiva would command one and the Portuguese general, Don Francisco Barreto, the other. Don García de Toledo and Don Alvaro de Bazán made separate reconnaissance reports concerning the Moorish fortifications and agreed that their assault troops would have to make a steep and difficult climb in order to penetrate the enemy defenses.³⁹ The Peñón was heavily defended though the construction of the fortress appeared to be inferior.

The commander of the Moorish garrison was given an opportunity to surrender, but he refused. On September 3

the Spanish siege guns began to pound the defenses, concentrating on the main tower of the fortress. Sensing that resistance was useless, eighty defenders swam to the mainland during the night.⁴⁰ The next day more of the Moorish soldiers made good their escape. When the garrison finally surrendered, only a handful remained, and they probably stayed from fear of swimming the treacherous channel separating the Peñón from the mainland. Those who escaped spread the alarm and a hastily gathered Moorish force tried to prevent the Spanish soldiers from returning to their ships. The Spaniards easily overpowered them, however, and, leaving a strong garrison to hold the vital Peñón, returned to Spain.

The most serious threat to Spanish shipping and fishing remaining in the area was the pirate base in the Tetuán River. Don García de Toledo suggested to Philip II that small ships filled with rocks should be sunk in the mouth of the river to block the channel and render the pirate base inoperative. After an exchange of correspondence between Philip II, Don García, and Don Alvaro, the latter was ordered to execute the plan when the necessary arrangements could be made.⁴¹ The men and vessels were gathered surreptitiously from various ports to keep the project a secret. Don Alvaro was in Puerto Santa María loading some old vessels with rocks and sand when officers from two English ships in the port heard of the plan and passed the information to the Moors,

though the English informants were uncertain about the details.⁴² Don Alvaro sailed in February, 1555, nevertheless, and after feigning an attack on another Moorish position arrived at the mouth of the Tetuán River and sank the ships there, effectively blocking the river as planned. Moorish horsemen arrived and skirmished with the Spaniards who had disembarked, but Bazán successfully retrieved his men and withdrew with the mission accomplished.⁴³

NOTES

¹ Martín Fernández de Navarrete, "Don Alvaro de Bazán, Primer Marqués de Santa Cruz," Revista General de Marina, Número extraordinario dedicado á la memoria de Don Alvaro de Bazán, primer marqués de Santa Cruz en el tercer centenario de su muerte, 9 de febrero de 1888 (Madrid: Dirección de Hidrografía, 1888), p. 24.

² Ibid.

³ Great Britain, Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers, relating to the negotiations between England and Spain, preserved in the archives at Simancas and elsewhere, Henry VIII, Vol. IV, Part I, ed. by Pascual Gayangos (London: Published by the authority of the Lord's Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury, under the direction of the Master of the Rolls, 1879), p. 463.

⁴ Fray Prudencio de Sandoval, Historia de la Vida y Hechos del Emperador Carlos V, Vol. III, published as Vol. 82 of Biblioteca de Autores Españoles (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1956), 209-210. A contemporary account.

⁵ Eduardo de Navascués, Coronas Heráldicas, Líricas y Épicas en Loo de D. Alvaro de Bazán, Marqués de Santa Cruz, con algunas Noticias y Documentos Históricas (Madrid: Imprenta de Fortanet, 1888), pp. 27-31. After the death of Santa Cruz a question arose as to his place of birth. Navascués gives the best discussion of this problem. There seems to be no compelling reason, however, to depart from the traditional birthplace of Granada.

⁶ Gonzalo Argote de Molina, Nobleza del Andalucía (Jaén: Instituto de Estudios Giennenses, 1957), pp. 156-157. First published in 1579, there were later editions of 1598 and 1866 before this latest edition of 1957 appeared.

⁷ "provisión del Emperador Carlos quinto, concediendo el hábito de Santiago al marqués de Santa Cruz, fechada en Toledo á 8 de marzo de 1529," MS reproduced in Angel de Altolaguirre y Duvalé, Don Alvaro de Bazán, Primer Marqués de Santa Cruz de Mudela (Madrid: Tipografía de los Huérfanos, 1888), pp. 155-157. Mudela is located in La Mancha, made famous by Cervantes.

⁸ Carlos Riba García, ed., Correspondencia privada de Felipe II con su secretario Mateo Vázquez, 1567-1591 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1959), pp. 198-200.

⁹ "Cédula del Emperador, expedida en Madrid á 2 de Marzo de 1535," MS reproduced in Navascués, En Loor de D. Alvaro de Bazán, pp. 35-38. See also Ignacio López de Ayala, Historia de Gibraltar (2 vols.; Barcelona: Colección San Jorge, 1957).

¹⁰ Navascués, En Loor de D. Alvaro de Bazán, pp. 39-40.

¹¹ Alonso Fernández de Portillo, Historia de la muy noble y muy leal ciudad de Gibraltar (MS inédito de la Biblioteca de D. Juan Pérez de Guzmán), pp. 187ff. cited by Navascués in En Loor de D. Alvaro de Bazán, p. 40.

¹² Pedro Barrantes Maldonado, Diálogo . . . en que se cuenta el saco que los Turcos hicieron en Gibraltar (Alcalá de Henares: Sebastián Gutiérrez, 1566), cited by Navascués.

¹³ Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de España, XXXIX (Madrid: Academia de Historia, 1967), 342-344. Hereafter referred to as C.D.I.E.

¹⁴ Carlos Ibáñez de Ibero, Santa Cruz, Primer Marino de España (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1946), pp. 18-19.

¹⁵ Ignacio Bauer y Landauer, La Marina Española en el Siglo XVI; Don Francisco de Benavides, Cuatralvo de las Galeras de España (Madrid: Imprenta de Jesús López, 1921), pp. 140-141.

¹⁶ Great Britain, Public Records Office, Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, Series of the Reign of Mary, 1553-1558, ed. by William B. Turnbull (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), p. 106.

¹⁷ Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, p. 12.

¹⁸ Martin A. S. Hume, Spain, Its Greatness and Decay (1479-1788) (3d ed.; Cambridge, England: At the University Press, 1925), p. 116.

¹⁹ "Título fecha 8 de Diciembre de 1554 nombrando Capitán general de la armada que se juntó en Laredo á Don Alvaro de Bazán," MS reproduced in Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, pp. 158-166.

- ²⁰ Carlos Ibáñez de Ibero, Almirantes y Hombres de Mar (Madrid: Aguilar, 1960), pp. 60-61.
- ²¹ Carlos Martínez de Campos y Serrano, España Bélica: El siglo XVI (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966), pp. 265-266.
- ²² "Carta de Don Alvaro á la Princesa de Portugal," Museo Naval, Madrid, Colección Navarrete, XX, documento número 52.
- ²³ Gabriel Lasso de la Vega, Elógios en loor de tres famosos varones, Don Isme Rey de Aragón, Don Fernando Cortés Marqués del Valle, y Don Alvaro de Bazán Marqués de Santacruz (Çaragoça: Alonso Rodríguez, 1610), p. 101.
- ²⁴ Navarrete, Revista General de Marina, p. 25. See also by same author, Estado General de la Armada (Madrid, 1830) and Colección de Opúsculos de Navarrete (Madrid, 1848).
- ²⁵ Archives of the Marqués de Santa Cruz, cited by Navarrete, Revista General de Marina, pp. 22-23.
- ²⁶ "Carta de Don Alvaro de Bazán á la Princesa de Portugal, Cádiz, el 30 de octubre de 1556," Madrid, Museo Naval, Colección Navarrete, XX, documento 52.
- ²⁷ Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, p. 17.
- ²⁸ Bauer y Landauer, La Marina Española en el Siglo XVI, pp. 307-309.
- ²⁹ Navascués, En Loor de D. Alvaro de Bazán, pp. 72-73.
- ³⁰ "Instrucción dada por los oficiales de la Casa de Contratación de Sevilla, de lo que había de hacer el Señor Don Alvaro de Bazán," Madrid, Museo Naval, Colección Navarrete, XX, documento 70.
- ³¹ "Carta de Don Alvaro al Presidente del Consejo de Indias, 8 de Junio de 1563," Madrid, Museo Naval, Colección Navarrete, XX. Also MS reproduced in Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, documento 7, p. 176.
- ³² Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, p. 24.
- ³³ "Carta de Don Alvaro de Bazán á Felipe Segundo, Gibraltar, el 24 de noviembre de 1563," MS reproduced in Pelayo Alcalá Galiano y López, Palacio del Marqués de Santa Cruz en el Viso (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Portanet, 1888), pp. 29-30.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁵ Navarrete, Revista General de Marina, p. 26.

³⁶ "Carta de Don Alvaro al Rey, 6 de Junio de 1564," Biblioteca de Marina, Colección de Baranda, XXVII, cited by Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, p. 27.

³⁷ Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, p. 27.

³⁸ "Minuta de carta de D. Alvaro de Bazán a S. M. fechada en Cartagena a 21 de junio de 1564 dándole cuenta de haber apresado una galeota de turcos," MS reproduced in Ibáñez de Ibero, Santa Cruz, pp. 216-217.

³⁹ C.D.I.E., XIV, 528-530; and XXVII, 398-574.

⁴⁰ Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, p. 29.

⁴¹ C.D.I.E., XIV, 528-537.

⁴² Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, p. 32.

⁴³ "Minuta de carta dirigida á S. M. por D. Alvaro de Bazán fechada en Ceuta el 10 de Marzo de 1565 dándole cuenta de la jornada del Río de Tetuán," MS reproduced in Altolaquirre, Don Alvaro de Bazán, pp. 186-188.

CHAPTER II

TURK AND SPANIARD IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The empire of the Ottoman Turks had expanded spasmodically but unrelentingly since its fourteenth-century inception, and by the mid-sixteenth century was an unquestioned threat to Europe. The Turks controlled the Crimea,¹ the Balkan Peninsula, Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt, and North Africa almost to the Atlantic. After Mehmed II took Constantinople in 1453, that city became their capital and the former Byzantine Empire became the heartland of the Ottoman Empire. The Turks were the last people to attempt a reunification of the entire Mediterranean area into one Empire as in the days of Rome.² At the same time Iberian states at the western end of the Mediterranean were expanding to the East.

Under Selim I (1512-1520) the Turks crushed the Safavids to their east in 1514 and the Mamluks in Egypt in 1516,³ thus gaining control of the economic base of the Nile valley. When Mamluk Egypt, Arabia, and Syria fell into Ottoman hands, the Turks also became guardians of the holy cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. In 1519 the pirate chieftain Barberossa (Khairuddin) decided not to resist the Turkish tide and voluntarily committed his large domain on

the North African coast in allegiance to the Ottoman Empire.⁴

Selim I's son, Suleiman I, came to power in 1520 and pursued an even more militant policy. Known to his people as "The Lawgiver" and to the Europeans as "The Magnificent," Suleiman I was an exceptional ruler. During his reign (1520-1566) Ottoman expansion threatened Western Europe as never before.⁵ While Spanish, French, Italian, and Protestant problems clamored for the attention of Emperor Charles V, the Turks moved against Christian Europe. Suleiman's forces captured Belgrade in 1521, defeated King Louis II of Hungary at Mohács in 1526, besieged Vienna in 1528, and took Buda in 1529.⁶

The Turks and their seafaring allies also attacked by sea, taking the island of Rhodes from the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem in 1522. Barbarossa captured Tunisia in 1534 and defeated a Christian fleet under Andrea Doria in 1538 to tighten the Moslem grip on the Mediterranean Sea.⁷ With good reason Spain and the Italian city-states feared the growing threat from the East,⁸ and Spanish treatment of Moors still living in Spain was in part a reaction from mounting fear. Only the French remained calm for they feared Hapsburg power more than Ottoman expansion and were allied with the "infidel" Turks.⁹

Fortunately for its opponents the Ottoman Empire was not one great, unified, monolithic, militantly Moslem state.

Regional, ethnic, and sectarian differences within Islam were reminiscent of the divisions within Europe. The Berbers and Moors of North Africa were subjects of the Ottoman Empire but not Turks, and they maintained their own culture and regional military objectives throughout the period of greatest conflict with Catholic Spain.¹⁰

Intelligence reports submitted to Philip II early in 1565 indicated that the naval forces of Suleiman were again preparing for a major offensive against the Christian West. There was no way of knowing exactly where they would strike, but Don Alvaro de Bazán was ordered to transport supplies and additional troops to the Spanish enclaves on the coast of North Africa. Since Don Alvaro's galley squadron was primarily responsible for the protection of shipping along the coast of Spain and escorting the Indies fleets safely into Sevilla, the cost of maintaining his squadron was paid by a convoy tax called the avería. When the Prior and Cónsules of the Universidad de Mercadores of Sevilla learned that Don Alvaro's galleys had been assigned tasks which would take them far from the coasts of Spain, the merchants of Sevilla refused to provide him with the money and supplies necessary to prepare for the undertaking, obliging him to meet the expenses from his personal funds. He immediately informed the king of his problem and eventually received a subsidy to prepare the galleys and purchase supplies for North Africa.¹¹

Bazán sailed for Málaga on May 7, 1565, and from there made two trips to Oran. He departed later that same month on the first of these two voyages with provisions, returning to Oran in June with infantry to reinforce the Spanish garrison there.¹² From Oran he sailed to Palamós, where he joined Gil de Andrada. Their combined force of thirty-five galleys then proceeded to Baya, where 1,500 infantrymen came aboard. At Genoa five Genoese and papal galleys joined them. Moving on south to Naples they were joined by more galleys and the tercio (Spanish infantry regiment) stationed there. From Naples they proceeded to Messina, then to Catania, Carlentín, and Zaragoza (formerly Syracuse on Sicily), disembarking the infantry by units along the way.¹³

The Turks ignored these Spanish enclaves, however, and instead attacked Malta on May 18. The Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem, commanded by Grand Master Jean de La Valette, were besieged by a force of approximately 35,000 soldiers and a sizable fleet under two of Suleiman's ablest commanders, Piali Pasha and Mustapha.¹⁴ They were also aided by many veteran corsairs, among them Hassan of Algiers and the dreaded Dragut. The Knights of Saint John were avowed enemies of the Turks, and Suleiman the Magnificent had already expelled them from Rhodes and Tripoli. The capture of Malta by the Turks would likely be a fatal blow

to the Knights, and it would also open the very real possibility that Sicily and Naples would next fall to the advancing sons of the Prophet. The western basin of the Mediterranean Sea had been ravaged by Moorish pirates for decades, and now the Ottoman Turks appeared ready to enter that arena in strength, but Philip II could not make up his mind to aid Malta. Although prepared to defend his Spanish possessions, Philip was reluctant to risk his forces far from home when his interests were not clearly at stake. He apparently rejected any Mediterranean version of the "domino theory." He knew that the Knights were primarily French, however, and that France had usually been anti-Spanish and pro-Turkish in foreign policy. Philip also knew that if he risked a force large enough to stop the Turks as far away as Malta and lost, his coasts would be defenseless. While the Prudent King procrastinated the plight of Malta grew critical.

Don García de Toledo, the new Spanish viceroy of Sicily, was more concerned about the possible fall of Malta than the king, for he realized his position in Sicily would be compromised with Malta in Turkish hands. He sent urgent messages to Philip II requesting permission to aid Malta with his Italian and Spanish forces. Meanwhile he sent Don Alvaro de Bazán to procure galleys, supplies, and troops for the relief of Malta should permission be granted. Toledo's inspection of the defenses of Malta a few months earlier, at

the request of La Valette, had disclosed that of the approximately 8,500 armed islanders only 700 men were experienced Knights. The remaining defenders had no combat experience. The Knights sent urgent pleas for help to the Christian monarchs of Europe, but to no avail.¹⁵ Only Don García de Toledo seemed concerned.

Philip II finally agreed to send food and money to Malta from Spain, but not troops or galleys.¹⁶ When relief forces did not come the Turks besieged the small but vital fortress of St. Elmo, defended by 600 men. After twenty-three days of bombardment the walls were breached; the last inner stronghold fell on June 23 with only nine defenders left alive.¹⁷ The Turks lost about 6,000 men including the infamous Dragut; Piali Pasha was also wounded, but sheer force of numbers gained the victory.

In Sicily García de Toledo received the news of the fall of St. Elmo with great frustration and bitterness. He wrote again to Philip II pleading for permission to help the Christians on Malta. He even suggested that the aid of France might be sought since most of the Knights of Saint John on Malta were French, not knowing that Catherine de Medici was assuring the Sultan of her friendship.¹⁸

On August 20 permission from Philip II to send a relief force to Malta finally arrived; men and material were ready to go, thanks to the foresight of Don García de