

## **The Mobilisation of Troops for Cross Channel Transportation. Norreys' men for Brittany, July – December 1592.**

David Parham.

A fatal flaw beset the plans of the Spanish Armada of 1588 (Loades 1992, 251). The lack of a deep water port in Spanish-controlled Northern Europe forced Medina Sidona to anchor in Calais Roads in order to embark the Duke of Parma's Army of Flanders. Here he was exposed to both the weather and the English, who were to drive him out of the Channel and into history.

The fear that such a port would fall into the hands of the Spanish contributed to an English army being sent to France in 1589 to support its Protestant King, Henry of Navarre, in his struggle against the Catholic League. From 1591 this was commanded by Sir John Norreys, a hotheaded and aggressively successful officer who was considered to be "England's most experienced soldier" of the time (Wernham 1984, 12). In May 1592 Norreys's men were part of a French army defeated at Craon, a loss that left the whole of Brittany open to the League. As Brittany is ideally situated as a point from which a sea-borne invasion of England could be launched (MacCaffrey 1993, 180) the stage could quite easily have been set for another Armada.

As Henry was tied up defending his northern borders from Parma, the defence of Brittany fell onto English shoulders. Henry asked Elizabeth for an army of 6000 infantry, 100 horse and seven artillery pieces. She offered 4000 infantry, 100 horse and seven cannon (Wernham 1984, 404) and set conditions: Henry should promise not make a separate peace with Spain, supply 4000 infantry, 1000 horse and agree to meet the costs of the entire campaign, in addition to helping capture a walled seaport to act as a base (*ibid.*, 412). The contract was sent to Henry on the 30th June 1592 and preparations began before a reply was received.

Sir John Norreys was appointed by the Privy Council to command the forces in the field with the rank of General Captain (PRO SP D Vol. 243 f 68). He suggested that the army should include cavalry and cannon in addition to the main force of infantry, and that two demi culverins be taken instead of the one heavier culverin made available to him (PRO SP D Vol. 242 f 102). For his staff he was to have his brother Sir Henry Norreys, as Lieutenant General; Sir Roger Williams as Marshall (PRO SP D Vol. 243 f 3); Peter Crisp as Provost Marshall (*ibid.*, f 68) and quartermaster (*ibid.* f 3); William Barker as commissioner for musters and munitions (*ibid.*, f 68) and Sir John Sherly as Treasurer at War. The force's senior field officer was to be Anthony Wingfield as Sergeant Major (*ibid.*, f 3).

There were to be 26 companies of 150 men apiece and one company of 100 (*ibid.* f 111). Commanded by a captain, each company had a lieutenant as second in command (*idem*) and an ensign bearer (*ibid.*, f 68) plus one surgeon. Below them came two sergeants, six corporals and two drummers (*idem*).

Each soldier was to be paid just over a shilling a day (*idem*), out of which he was expected to purchase his food, clothing and powder. It was paid only in part each week, with the balance being paid every six months at the issue of the clothing allowance (Cruikshank 1966, 174). As many of the captains had joined the army in order to make money, and as service abroad often meant difficult lines of communication, it was common for the soldier to be short paid either as a result of theft or lack of money (*ibid.*, 170). As the pay was really only a subsistence allowance this led to hardship; "A hungry man can neither observe discipline, nor perform any great enterprise", noted Barnaby Rich, a celebrated soldier of the day (*ibid.*, 76).

The army's cavalry force was a single *cornet* of 100 men – a cavalry cornet being smaller than an infantry company (Webb 1965, 113) due to a shortage of suitable men and horses; many men could ride a horse and many could fire a gun, but few could do both at the same time (*ibid.*, 113). The cornet chosen was to be either that of Sir John Pooley or that of Sir Nicholas Parker, whichever was most up to strength. The chosen cornet was to be made up to strength with men from the other. Both officers were warned that refusal of the order to go to Brittany would put them out of the

Queen's service forever (PRO SP DVol. 242 f117). English soldiers had been in the Low Countries for several years and many had married and started new lives there. The experience of service in France was that soldiers could expect long periods with little shelter or food and a high chance of dying from disease. When the order to go to France was announced, many of the men deserted (L&A IV, 113). The two captains had another reason not to go as, at their own expense, both had recently equipped their cornets with new horses. It was expected that the rigours of the passage to Brittany would kill a third of them, putting the officer concerned to great expense (*ibid.*, 97). In the event, Parker's cornet was chosen to go (APC XXIII, 243) as it was considered to be the better (L&A IV, 103). The married men in Parker's cornet were to be exchanged for single men in Pooley's, which caused delay as the two captains could not agree an exchange rate for the horses (*ibid.*, 97).

The army was also to contain two cannoneers, two labourers and one wheelwright (PRO SP DVol. 243 f68). It was contemporary practice to have a gunner (cannoneer) to each piece of artillery and this may confirm the presence of the two demi culverins that Norreys had asked for. The term cannoneer was also, however, used to describe what would now be called an armourer, i.e. a specialist in maintaining foot soldiers' weapons (Webb 1965, 85).

To enable him to capture a walled port, Norreys was to be supplied with a siege train. Seven cannon were to be sent from Dieppe (Wernham 1984, 412). Others were to be made available, for use against a walled port only, from Jersey (*ibid.*, 430). The number of guns to be taken from Jersey can be seen in the make up of the force sent to man them, which was to come from the garrison of Bergan-op-Zoom (PRO SP DVol. 243 f3). It was to consist of a master gunner, a gunner's mate, four quartermasters and twelve inferior cannoneers. The one gunner to one cannon standard suggests a total number of cannon of between twelve and fourteen, so between five and seven were to be sent from Jersey. Powder and shot were in short supply, Dieppe only having 650 shot and ten barrels of powder available (L&A IV, 168). Neither was available in Jersey, so Norreys had 10 lasts and 12 barrels of powder shipped from London (PRO SP DVol. 243 f119).

The 4000 men were to be amassed from undermanned companies serving abroad; sixteen from the Low Countries, six from Normandy and nineteen currently in Brittany, totalling 3100 men. To bring the Low Countries companies up to strength a further 600 were to be levied in England, increasing the total to 3700 men (plus the 10% permitted 'dead pays') (L&A IV, 226; PRO SP DVol. 243 f111). To organise these men into 27 companies would result in a surplus of officers, so the most experienced were to be retained and the rest discharged from service to return home (L&A IV, 220). Eight of the Low Countries companies were to be taken from the Bergan-op-Zoom garrison, including the cannoneers; seven from Vere's field army, including the cavalry and one each from the Brill and Flushing garrisons (Wernham 1984, 421). The troops were to meet at Flushing, some having sailed there from Vaart and Arnhem (L&A IV, 97). Here any shortages in numbers were to be made up by local troops before leaving for Caen on September 6th (APC XXIII, 139). The Normandy troops, with the cannon, were to be shipped from Dieppe to Jersey on the same date.

Men who were to be levied in England would usually be drawn from the areas nearest to which they had to serve. The country had, however, been at war with France for three years in addition to other commitments and some counties had given more than others. Already, 12,700 men had gone to France, 2,300 from London alone, whilst at the other end of the scale Rutland had only sent 50 (PRO SP DVol. 243 f74). Not only did the counties have to provide men but they were also required to provide them with weapons, armour from local stores (Cruikshank 1966, 117) and a percentage of their uniform (APC Vol. 23, 133). When a soldier left the county he therefore took with him a portion of the county's wealth as well as depriving them of a useful member of the community. In theory the man and his equipment would be returned at the end of their service but this rarely happened in practice (Cruikshank 1966, 112).

It was universally agreed that the harsh conditions of service abroad turned honest men dishonest (Webb 1965, 75), so even if a man returned he might no longer be an asset to the local economy. In the early years of the war some counties may have been keen to send their sons away on active service; but after three years the constant drain of men, equipment and money must have worn such enthusiasm thin.

It was against this background that on the 19 August 1592 the Privy Council asked for the 600 men to be provided for Norreys' force. These were to be divided into two groups of 300, each to sail from different ports. One hundred men of the first group were to be recruited from London, with Oxford, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Wiltshire supplying 50 men each. The second group was to come from Bedfordshire, Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire, Tunbridge, Huntington and Leicester, each of which was to supply 50 men apiece. The first group was to sail from Southampton to Jersey, the second from London to Caen (APC XXIII, 133).

The recruitment of men in London for shipment from Southampton, when others were being raised elsewhere to sail from London may at first seem strange, but it appears to have been contemporary practice to ship men from ports outside their home counties. As we shall see later, men raised in Dorset in October were sent 52 miles to Southampton although the port of Weymouth, only nine miles from the county town of Dorchester, was deemed adequate enough for the men of Somerset and Gloucester (APC XXIII, 233). The men were due to be in the port on August 31st and not to sail until September 6th, a date which would easily be delayed (APC XXIII, 133) leaving them in one place for a considerable length of time. It may have been that the authorities were not expecting the most willing of warriors and considered it easier for men to desert whilst still in their home counties than once they had left.

Norreys had stressed that care had to be taken in recruiting the troops, as inferior men would jeopardise the capabilities of the force (PRO SP D Vol. 243 f102). This ideal was repeated in the Privy Council's instructions that all the men must be "ready and willing to serve" and that any who were not would be returned (APC XXIII, 133). All of the counties, except Leicester, had supplied men and equipment before (PRO SP D Vol. 243 f74) and the cost of equipping their best men only to lose them would have been substantial. The opportunity to rid their parishes of vagabonds must have been very tempting. Indeed, both the counties of Oxford and Berkshire wrote to the Privy Council to say that their gaols contained men of "good credit and experience.. (with) able and strong bodies" all of whom had made assurances that they would not desert. They would, the letter assured "prove good members to the state" (APC XXIII, 151). Given the state of the country and the sacrifices that the counties had made so far this would seem to be a better description of the men made available for service in Brittany than those of high moral standards and modest living found in contemporary military textbooks (Webb 1965, 59).

The orders for men to be raised were sent out on the August 19th and they were expected to be at their respective ports on the 31st of that month, having taken six days to get there. Even if only a day is allowed for the messenger to reach the county it still allows only five days for the men to be levied, armed and trained. Previous drafts must have demonstrated that this was a realistic expectation and suggests the existence of an efficient recruiting system.

The Mayors of London and Southampton were instructed to arrange for shipping, at two shillings a head, with the men supplying their own food. In addition the Mayors were to arrange lodgings and to ensure that enough victuals would be available for the men in the town. The Mayor of London was also instructed to arrange for the lodgings to be near to the waterside, but out of the area infected by plague. If this could not be done, the men were to be lodged at Southwick. The Mayor of Southampton arranged for three "good ships" for the for this purpose (APC XXIII, 133). In London, the Lord Admiral was to arrange for ships to be made ready and to ensure that his officers did not hinder the proceedings in any way (APC XXIII, 133). Soldiers were unpopular amongst ships' masters as, at the best, they were an unprofitable cargo that often left disease behind. Transporting troops took the ships into dangerous waters away from their regular trade to ports from which they might not be able to obtain a return cargo (Cruickshank 1966, 66).

Transportation was no more popular amongst the soldiers, many of whom may never have seen the sea before, let alone travelled across it. Unsanitary conditions on board often had to be endured for some time. The prevailing southwesterly winds to which Britain is subject are not conducive to sailing across the Channel and, throughout history, have held British fleets in port for weeks, often months, on end (ibid., 76). A sudden increase in demand for the town's food supply would cause a rise in prices. As the men had to pay for their own food, this could cause hardship, with a resultant

drop in morale and an increase in desertions (ibid., 67). Norreys ordered that the men should have an advance of three weeks wages once they arrived in port (APC XXIII, 133) possibly to forestall this. He was to have sailed to France from Southampton on August 25th but was prevented by contrary winds. These appeared not to have shown any sign of changing, as he instructed the town's Mayor to arrange for extra stabling for the horses and lodging for the men (CSPD, 134) who were expected to arrive soon.

London's plague outbreak worsened and the men arriving there were refused entry into the town and instead were sent overland to Southampton for embarkation. Here the Mayor was asked to arrange for more ships, but he advised Norreys that none was available. Norreys therefore, at his own expense, hired hoys that were lying in the River Thames to sail to Southampton for use as transports (PRO SP DVol. 243 f5).

At first, only three pinnaces were available to escort the transports across the Channel but by September 13th it had been decided that this force was insufficient for the task (L&A IV, 232). A naval squadron of six ships, under Captain Fenner (APC XXIII, 255) was assembled from vessels already in service as an escort and support for the land forces (CSPD, 241). This consisted of the *Vanguard*, *Nonpareil*, *Tremain*, *Quittance*, and the pinnaces *Charles* and *Moon* (PRO SP DVol. 243 f36). The warships would appear to have been assembled prior to the bad weather setting in as the *Vanguard*, *Nonpareil* and *Quittance* were brought from Plymouth and the *Charles* from the Downs (APC Vol. 23, 281). In addition to these vessels the Dutch were to supply a number of warships (L&A, 141).

The men starting to arrive at Southampton were badly clothed, verminous (CSPD, 241) and many of their arms had been refused as unserviceable (ibid., 280). Even at that stage, it was not certain that the operation would go ahead. A reply to Elizabeth's original conditions did not arrive from Henry until September 24th. This delay caused trouble in Southampton, burdened by twice the number of troops originally planned for four times the length of time expected. Men started deserting, with their arms, and by September 30th, 51 men had slipped away (ibid., 233).

Norreys's commission allowed him to administer justice only in Brittany, not England, thus preventing him from taking direct action. All that he could do was write letters and remind people of what should be done (L&A IV, 233), so he contacted the counties asking them to catch, punish and replace their deserters (APC XXIII, 213). The men from Leicester had not even been up to strength when they arrived (CSPD, 280).

As the wait continued, many men were driven to open mutiny because of insufficient pay (ibid., 241) and some were imprisoned. Norreys requested more money in early September to ensure that he could pay his men in weekly amounts in an attempt to forestall this situation, but was refused. A suggestion was made that he attempt to seek credit with the merchants both abroad and at home, as was the custom in the Low Countries (PRO SP DVol. 243 f5). With his French money unacceptable, and running short of English money, he urgently requested more (CSPD, 283).

Norreys had little more success persuading the counties to return deserters or replace unserviceable arms (ibid., 280). He suspected local Justices of the Peace of aiding the deserters, gave up attempting to obtain replacements from the counties and turned his attention closer to home, where he might have more control of the situation. He suggested that Hampshire be forced to levy 100 replacements for his deserters (idem), an idea which failed. Unsupported by the Government and the counties, matters could only get worse for Norreys; the weather had been bad for five weeks and was showing no signs of improvement (ibid., 101).

The winds that kept Norreys and his men in port were also causing delays for the components of his force coming from Normandy and the Low Countries. The original plan had required these men to be ready to sail on September 6th, the same date as those from England. This plan did not allow for the objection of the Dutch, who at first were concerned that it would weaken their defences, so permission was not granted until September 8th (Wernham 1984, 422). After this date the troops were moved to Flushing as their port of departure (APC XXIII, 140). Here they were to stay on board ship for the next seven weeks, while the weather held them in port. In Normandy two ships and one hoy had been chartered but these were also kept in port by the weather (Wernham 1984, 443).

Norreys had not wasted the time spent in harbour: he had been considering his plans for the capture of St Malo. As long ago as August 24th, he had decided that he needed 1000 extra men to achieve this objective, even offering to pay for them himself (ibid., 427). At first this was rejected, but by October 1st it had obviously been reconsidered, as the Privy Council ordered that 1000 men were to be levied for service in Brittany. These were to form 10 companies of 100 men each and be led by the officers who had been selected to return home earlier (Wernham 1984, 231). Again it was stressed that all men were to be able and willing to serve (APC XXIII, 223) and 700 would be paid for by the Queen (CSPD, 274). The drafts were to be made up as follows:

100 from Cornwall and 200 from Devon, all to be shipped from Plymouth.

50 from Dorset, 50 from Wiltshire, 30 from Berkshire, 30 from Buckinghamshire and 40 from Oxford, all to be shipped from Southampton.

50 from Sussex and 50 from Kent to be shipped from Rye.

200 from Gloucester and 200 from Somerset to be shipped from Weymouth.

The men were to be equipped as before, but were not to be armed as weapons would be made available in Caen (PRO SP D Vol. 243 f32). The Mayors of the ports in question were instructed to supply shipping at 3 shillings a man. The rate had been forced up by 50%, perhaps by the earlier difficulty in obtaining shipping. It was claimed that storms had wrecked the shipping in Southampton and the Mayor of Poole was requested to supply the transport (APC XXIII, 233). When he attempted to do so, the masters of the ships involved took down their masts and rigging, and were abusive and threatening towards him (CSPD, 280). Norreys was outraged and had the masters' leaders sent to London for punishment (APC XXIII, 252). In addition, enough victuals were to be on sale in the town at "reasonable prices" for the troops' stay and provision to be made for the men's passage. Lodging was to be made available and everything needed to speed transportation arranged (ibid. 226). It would appear that efforts were made so that Norreys' troubles in Southampton would not be repeated.

Matters were soon to be made worse in an already overcrowded and undersupplied Southampton by the arrival of another 200 men. To relieve this it was arranged that these men be lodged in outlying villages, although they were to be kept in readiness for a speedy departure. In Southampton itself, infection had broken out and 100 men had deserted so far, although others had volunteered to serve (ibid., 150).

It was at this point that news was received from France. Plague had broken out in Caen, so all the shipping would have to sail to Jersey (ibid., 223). Norreys had earlier expressed concern that the delays were bringing them into Caen's cider-making season and he may not have wanted his men to come into contact with alcohol (CSPD, 234). An additional advantage of massing the troops in Jersey was that it provided a better assembly point for an assault on St Malo.

The change of plan was, however, to cause new problems. The masters of the Zealand shipping chartered to transport the Low Countries troops had been given a bond by the English that they would only have to go to Caen (L&A IV, 99). They complained that this bond was now being broken and that they did not know the waters around Jersey, which they considered to be dangerous. They were sent pilots from Dover "acquainted with the coast of Brittany" (APC Vol. 23, 240) but still refused to go, even when asked to name their price (L&A IV, 99). They now claimed that their ships were not suitable for the waters (Wernham 1984, 434) - true insofar that the ships chartered were coastal traders whose trade did not take them so far south and who were too small for the Channel Islands' winter seas (L&A IV, 131). The English were left with no option but to discharge them and charter English vessels whose masters knew the waters concerned. When the Dutch ships were discharged the soldiers were brought ashore, having been on board for ten weeks in conditions which had turned them into such a sorry state that the locals took pity on them and fed, clothed and housed them whilst they awaited three large hoys from London (Wernham 1984, 435).

The Royal Navy were becoming concerned at the delay: "Wynter dothe approche wherein the foul weather dothe increase" (APC XXIII, 255), they warned. The *Vanguard* was withdrawn from the squadron as she was not fit to be at sea in such a season, and Norreys was advised that the others

might only be used when it was safe to do so. They could not remain on station off the Brittany coast during the winter, although by February the winds might have abated enough to allow them to do so (CSPD, 241). This was a setback to the plan of assault on St Malo which was to receive a fatal blow with the next piece of news. The English forces in Brittany had left the French army in mid-September to march to meet the expected arrival of the other components of Norreys' force at Caen. At Ambries they had been attacked by a strong force supported by two cannon. A five hour battle had ensued which ended with the outnumbered English troops surrendering. The loss of so many experienced men, compounded by Norreys's other problems, led to the abandonment of the plan to capture St Malo (APC XXIII, 247).

Once this decision had been made, the size of the force for Brittany was reduced. The extra levy of 1000 was reduced to 550 as follows:

50 men from Cornwall and 150 from Devon, still to be shipped from Plymouth. 150 from Gloucester sailing from Weymouth

50 from Dorset and 50 from Somerset shipped from Southampton.

Drafts from the remaining counties were reduced to nothing. Any men above these figures were to be sent home on arrival at a port (APC Vol. 23, 249) and all volunteers were to be discharged. In addition to this, the men already in Normandy would stay where they were with the siege guns, as these were no longer needed.

Norreys objected to the reduction of his force. The volunteers, he claimed, were the best men he had and he needed the extra 1000 to complete his task in Brittany (CSPD, 241). The Privy Council pandered to him and allowed him to keep any of the men who had arrived at port, including some men at Rye, increasing the allowance for the new draft from 550 to 800 men (APC Vol. 23, 277). This gave Norreys a force of 1400 (less deserters, dead and dead pays) strung out in four ports along the English coast, plus another 1600 at Flushing, all held in port by the weather.

On October 22nd, the wind swung northerly and anticipating an improvement in the weather, the men boarded their transports (CSPD, 241). On October 28th the wind changed to westerly and that evening the ships sailed from Southampton (L&A IV, 242) to anchor off the Isle of Wight the next morning. The following day they set sail for Jersey, although the wind picked up and dispersed them, driving Norreys and some of his vessels into Guernsey. Here they anchored in the roads to await a change in the conditions, which came the following day and allowed the ships to sail on to Jersey. Some of the ships that had been dispersed rejoined Norreys at Jersey, as did the ships from Weymouth.

It was not until four days later, on November 6th, that Norreys attempted to sail on to Granville on the French Coast. That morning, the skies had threatened bad weather, but as soon as it improved, Norreys was keen to be off. His ships had been anchored in an area that dried out at low water, and not all managed to float off in time. Norreys, in his urgency to leave, left those that were not afloat to follow later under the escort of the *Charles*. One of these, a ship from Weymouth, struck a submerged rock and in the ensuing panic seven or eight of those on board jumped overboard and were drowned. The remainder, around 80 men, were taken off and put aboard other ships (PRO SP FVol. 78 f267). When the ships reached Granville it became apparent that two vessels containing apparel and baggage were missing and that the Low Countries soldiers had not yet arrived. It took a few days for all the ships to be unloaded, during which time the two missing ships arrived, having been delayed by their own negligence, or so the unsympathetic Norreys claimed. Once the unloading was complete the army was positioned two days march away from Granville, so to be nearer to Caen and the veteran English troops. Messengers were sent to Caen to contact these men and to request that arms and other provisions were hastily sent to Norreys's largely unarmed force.

When the army left Granville, the troops from the Low Countries had still not arrived, and word as to Norreys' whereabouts was left behind along with orders that the reinforcements should join him as soon as possible (PRO SP FVol. 78 f337). Even after he had been in France for two weeks, no word had been heard of these troops despite shipping arriving from London, Flushing and Southampton (PRO SP FVol. 78 f351). Norreys was becoming concerned as to their fate, fearing that the rigours of



a long passage would weaken the men so much that they would not be fit for action until some time after their arrival (PRO SP FVol. 78 f267). In fact, the hoys chartered in England had been prevented from leaving by contrary winds and would not depart until December 2nd. They arrived in Flushing on the December 9th to again be held in port by the wind. On December 20th they sailed (L&A IV, 101) only to have bad weather drive them into Portsmouth harbour. The hoys did not reach France until January 10th, when they landed at Caen on Norreys' advice.

Soon after Norreys landed, the Privy Council sent him dispatches and orders for musters (PRO SP F Vol. 79 m68) in an anonymous "shypp that was cast away about Alderney" (PRO SP FVol. 78 f351). No further mention is made of the dispatches but on 15 March 1593 Norreys acknowledged receipt of the orders for musters (PRO SP FVol. 79 f187), indicating that they at least survived the wreck (or had not been aboard). The type of ship lost is not mentioned, but in January 1593 the Privy Council ordered that a pinnace, a small dispatch ship, be fitted out to communicate with Norreys in Brittany (APC XXIV, 10). It would have been unthinkable to have sent an army abroad without some means of regular communication and this could have been a like-for-like replacement of the ship lost. His experience of a winter Channel crossing had convinced Norreys that ships could not come to Granville "without extreme danger in this winter time" (PRO SP FVol. 78 f351) - something that British and Dutch seamen had been claiming from the outset.

Norreys was left in a potentially hostile country with an army in which over half the soldiers were unarmed and only a few of the remainder were trained to use the weapons that they had (PRO SP F Vol. 78 m351). Men were still attempting to desert in large numbers, although in a foreign country this was proving more difficult. Soon, provisions were running low with no sign of any being forthcoming from the French. Norreys wrote to England for orders with the suggestion that the war should not have been started unless it could be properly managed (PRO SP FVol. 78 m285).

Concern was mounting about the threat of a Spanish assault on England. Williams, in Normandy, reported that Parma was moving towards the Channel coast and, in order to forestall this, English troops were diverted to Normandy to deny the coast to the Spanish. In consequence, no more soldiers were available to allow Norreys to carry out his aims (Wernham 1984, 460). Outnumbered by the Spanish, Norreys was forced to take his troops into Maine (*ibid.*, 480) on the outskirts of Brittany. Here they were out of the way of a direct Spanish threat, but remained close enough to deny the area to an invasion force. That winter they "continually walked about the country receiving every day alarm of the enemy's intentions" whilst losing men to skirmishing, disease and desertion (MacCaffery 1993, 175). Lacking aid from the French (*ibid.*, 176), by the end of the winter, Norreys had only 1,400 able bodied men left - too small a force to have been of use without reinforcements.

"Warres must be made by men and not by opinions" (PRO SP FVol. 78 f285) wrote Norreys from Brittany after his true situation there had become apparent. The importance of the French coast in general, and Brittany in particular, for the defence of England was universally acknowledged. With the contract of June 1592, England had attempted to ensure that it was secure from use by the Spanish. The plan depended upon the quality of the English army and the support of warships during the campaign.

Norreys' experience led him to foresee the problems that would be encountered and he suggested an appropriate force be assembled. He was particularly concerned that the new recruits be up to the task in hand. The Privy Council appear to have agreed with him, but direct control over the levying and equipping of the new recruits was in the hands of provincial government. It can be assumed that the counties did not wish for a Spanish invasion of England but, in their minds the need to keep the Spanish out of Brittany would probably have ranked behind more pressing local matters. They had already spent much on the war, which must have also had an effect on their finances. Refusing to comply with the levy would have been unthinkable, so it appears the counties sent the men and equipment that they least wanted.

Norreys had also foreseen the problems that would be encountered at the coast if any delay was met (which could readily be expected). He requested enough money to ensure that the men would not be subject to hardship whilst waiting for their passage. Here he was frustrated by the Privy Council, who

may not have wished to bear an expense which they considered to be Henry's. To begin an enterprise dependent on the weather so late in the season was to risk plans being frustrated – and this is exactly what happened. As the delays lengthened, it became obvious that the plan to capture a walled port was not going to work and it was sensibly abandoned. Norreys was still dispatched with his force, on the assumption that its presence would provide a deterrent to Spanish ambitions in Brittany.

As a professional soldier, Norreys had come up with a military solution to secure Brittany which, if successful would have removed the Spanish from the area. His plans had been frustrated by his own country's central and provincial government as well as by the weather. If this had remained fine until later in the season, Norreys might well have been able to put his ideas into practice – and might have succeed – but the opportunity passed.

By the spring of 1593, Norreys was left unsatisfied, with the problem of Brittany lacking a final solution. Stuck on a foreign shore in charge of a largely ill-equipped, undisciplined and inexperienced army, to Norreys it must have seemed that the summer's plans had failed. This was not entirely the case, as the strategic objective had been to prevent an invasion of England from Brittany. By their very presence, Norreys's men were acting as an impediment to any Spanish moves in the area. His army may not have covered themselves in glory but they succeeded in doing what was required. To these ends they had met the demands of the Privy Council and the counties at the least cost to the government of England.

Editor's Note: The above text is distilled from Parham 1995, completed prior to the publication of Nolan's military biography of Sir John Norreys in 1997 (see in particular Nolan 1997 pp. 195-201).

## **The Norreys Letters**

David Parham

Following an initial lead from David Keys, writing in the *Independent*, research carried out in the Public Records Office, London, turned up two references to a late 16th century shipwreck off Alderney. One was a letter from Sir John Norreys to Elizabeth I's Chief Minister Burghley dated 29 November, 1592 (PRO, SP78/29 f.351). The second was from Norreys to the Privy Council, dated 1 February, 1593 (PRO SP 78/30, f.68).

Both letters refer to the same incident, that of "*a shypp that was cast away about Alderney*" carrying dispatches to Norreys which had been sent after he left England on 27 October, 1592 (PRO SP78/29 f.267) and were obviously lost prior to the date of the first letter from Norreys just over a month later. The second letter refers to orders for musters that had not arrived, Norreys assumed that they had been lost on board the same ship. However, on the 13 March, 1593, he acknowledged their receipt (PRO SP 78/80 f.189) indicating that they had either survived the shipwreck or that they had never been on board in the first place.

Further to this, on 7 January, 1593, the Privy Council authorized a small pinnace to be fitted out to communicate with Norreys in Brittany (APC XXIV, 10). It is possible that this vessel was intended as a permanent replacement for the one lost off Alderney two months before. This assumption gave rise to initial suspicions that the Alderney wreck was also a pinnace, but subsequent research has thrown doubt upon this.