

Independence

by Nancy Mann

In the year of the Spanish Armada, 1588, one lone British sailor had a secret desire for independence. This year was a turning point for the entire world. Recall names such as Sir Francis Drake, Queen Elizabeth, Phillip II of Spain, and the great fighter and military man, Santa Cruz. Recall that two great nations, England and Spain, had prepared for a huge naval battle. The Spanish had 130 immense ships, the galleons, and the British had as many, but much smaller vessels. The preparations of outfitting these ships were extensive and detailed; the Spanish galleons carried 600,000 lbs. of salt pork, 11,000 pairs of sandals, 180 priests (ready to scourge the conquered non-Catholics, also using torture), 728 servants and 40,000 gallons of olive oil. That was just some of the supplies. Both navies had guns, gunpowder, swords and muskets, etc.

The Spanish held their ships in the shape of a crescent, close together, in an invincible shield. The British planned to send eight ships, emptied of personnel, but filled with gunpowder, called Fire Ships, into the Spanish. These English ships had long, lit fuses for the gunpowder to go off. Plans detailing the fire ship attack and time were intercepted by the Spanish.

But one simple sailor kidnapped his own small crew, and tied them into a lowered lifeboat, and set his own boat on fire, in the pre-dawn of battle. The weather was bad, there was a lot of fog, and no moon. He planned to join his crew in the lifeboat, after his torched boat would sail into the Spanish line of boats.

And, because his boat was alone, not with the eight other gunpowder-loaded ships, the enemy Spaniards, surrounded his boat and crowded their ships together, thinking they were getting the jump on the English, to keep their line of ships together, and, upon seeing this fire-lit boat sailing towards them, thought erroneously, that the actual battle had commenced. The Spanish changed from their crescent-shaped line of defense, navigated farther apart from each other, and the small, less-bulky English ships were able to get quickly in and around and in between the Spanish. Then the English harassed, attacked, picked off the vessels, and defeated their larger, formidable enemy.

The one sailor mutinied, and fled westward, to escape in a very small boat to America. He had heard about the land of opportunity. He had heard about self-sufficient people starting new lives in America. He strongly valued and desired independence.