

## READING: THE VOYAGE OF MAGELLAN

Ferdinand Magellan was the greatest navigator of the Age of Exploration. His skill and accomplishments as a seaman are unmatched even by Columbus. Magellan became the first person to circumnavigate the earth. But unlike most heroes, he never lived to enjoy the fame of doing what no man had ever done before.



Magellan was born and raised in Portugal, the son of a well-to-do nobleman. While a young man, he served his country as a soldier in North Africa and India. But eventually he came in conflict with the Portuguese king. Magellan felt the king did not fairly reward him for his loyal service. And so he went to Spain -- Portugal's rival in the early 1500's -- and offered to help them grow rich from trade with the Indies. The "Indies" included India, China, Japan, and the Spice Islands.

Magellan approached King Charles V of Spain with an exciting plan. He told the king that he would sail to the Indies by rounding the southern end of South America and crossing the Pacific Ocean -- something no one had done before. Portugal already controlled the route to the Indies around Africa and through the Indian Ocean. Magellan told Charles that he would prove that some of the Spice Islands lay on the Spanish side of the Line of Demarcation and therefore belonged to Spain. The Line of Demarcation divided new territories around the world between Spain and Portugal. The line had been drawn on a map by the Pope in order to prevent Spain and Portugal from arguing over who owned what lands outside of Europe. Magellan claimed the Portuguese were using fake maps to show the Spice Islands were on their side of the Demarcation Line.

King Charles enthusiastically approved Magellan's plan. He provided the navigator with five ships and about 240 men. He told Magellan he could keep 5% of any profits from the voyage. And so the ships -- the "Trinidad," "San Antonio," "Santiago," "Concepcion," and "Victoria" -- set sail from Seville in 1519. The crewmen had no idea of the hardships and horrors that awaited them.

The expedition headed southwest across the Atlantic Ocean in the direction of South America. Two months later the fleet reached the coast of what is today Brazil. Magellan now had to find a passage through or around South America. He knew the Pacific Ocean was on the other side of South America and that the Indies lay across the Pacific. The small ships sailed south along the coast looking for a westward passage. Winter was drawing near and the days grew shorter and colder. Ocean breezes chilled the sailors and discouraged those who were already tired from the Atlantic crossing. These conditions, plus jealousy of Magellan by certain crewmen, led to a mutiny. Magellan forcefully ended the rebellion and put to death those who had dared oppose his leadership.

The first winter was spent along the coast of present-day Argentina. Here the Spaniards saw Indians called "Amerinds." Because the Indians were tall and had rather large feet, the crew named the area "Patagonia," meaning "land of the big feet." When spring arrived the voyage continued southward. Two hundred miles farther down the coast the sought after passage came into view. Celebrations broke out on deck. Magellan declared a day of feasting and told his men that this discovery would lead to fame and fortune. He hoped to excite the crew and encourage them to continue on to the Indies.

The westward passage that was discovered is today known as the Strait of Magellan. It is a 360-mile long channel between mainland South America and an island the Spaniards named Tierra del Fuego. The island was given this name -- which means "land of fire" -- because crewmen saw Indian campfires along the coast at night. The Strait of Magellan is a winding passageway noted for fog and stormy weather. Rough, choppy waters tossed the tiny ships about and forced Magellan to use all of his experience and skill as a navigator to guide his vessels safely through the strait. At the western end of the channel a great ocean came into view. This was the "South Sea," named earlier by Balboa who discovered it after crossing the Isthmus of Panama. Magellan was impressed by its calm waters and decided to call the sea the Pacific Ocean -- "pacific" meaning "peaceful."

Only three of the original five ships were now left. The "Santiago" wrecked on a scouting mission and the "San Antonio" returned to Europe. The remaining fleet of three ships steered north along the west coast of South America to a latitude Magellan judged to be that of the Indies. The captain calculated that a course due west would lead them to the Spice Islands. He guessed that the islands were only 2,000 to 3,000 miles away. But in the months ahead he discovered that he had greatly underestimated the size of the Pacific. The Indies were actually 10,000 miles away. The extra distance would take a heavy toll of human life.

The first month of the Pacific crossing went well. The weather was ideal for sailing. In the second and third months, however, conditions went from good to bad to terrible. It was beginning to seem like the Indies would never be reached, that the Pacific was an endless sea. Supplies of fresh food ran out. The men were forced to eat rotting biscuits filled with worms and the smell of rats. Ox hides that were used as part of the ships' rigging were eaten. So was sawdust. A few sailors were lucky enough to buy from their shipmates rats which they eagerly devoured. Water was drunk that was so unclean it had turned thick and yellow. But worst of all, some seamen suffered from a disease which caused the gums to swell up so much that eating was impossible. These men starved to death.

It took 98 days to cross the Pacific Ocean. Only two deserted islands were sighted along the way. Fortunately, no storms plagued the hapless fleet. One crewman predicted nobody would ever again attempt to sail the Pacific.

When Magellan reached the Philippine Islands, he was in a familiar part of the world. He had been to the Far East while serving the Portuguese king several years earlier. He knew he could now return to Spain by sailing through the Indian Ocean and around Africa.

While in the Philippines, Magellan converted a native chief to Christianity. The chief then persuaded Magellan to help him capture a nearby island inhabited by a rival tribe. When Spanish soldiers went to the island and set fire to a village, angry tribesmen swept down upon Magellan's band. Most Spaniards fled in small boats while some, including the captain, fought for their lives in knee-deep water. The screaming savages were armed with spears, bows and arrows, clubs, and rocks. Just after sinking his lance into a native, and while reaching for his sword, Magellan was clubbed in the leg and knocked down. A swarm of warriors quickly surrounded and killed him.

Those Spaniards who escaped returned to the island of the friendly Christian chief. Shortly afterwards, however, the chief turned on the Spaniards and killed seven of them. The remaining crewmen burned an unneeded ship and sailed off in their other two. On the way to the Spice Islands, one ship began to leak and had to be abandoned. Only the "Victoria" now remained.

Juan Sebastian del Cano took command following Magellan's death. He and his men gathered up a load of valuable cloves and set sail for home across the Indian Ocean -- waters belonging to the hated Portuguese. After successfully evading enemy ships, the "Victoria" rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the southern end of Africa and limped back to Spain. Of the more than two hundred sailors who left Seville three years earlier, only 18 suffering crewmen made it home alive. They had circumnavigated the globe and proved beyond a doubt that the world was round. Furthermore, their cargo of cloves easily paid the expense of the expedition. But although the Spanish had succeeded in finding a westward passage to the Indies, the distance was too great to make it a useful trade route.

- (1) Why do you believe Ferdinand Magellan deserves to be called "the greatest navigator of the Age of Exploration"?

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- (2) Do you think Magellan or Juan Sebastian del Cano should be given credit for being the first man to circumnavigate the earth? Explain your answer.

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- (3) If you had been among the 18 survivors who returned to Seville, what one memory of the voyage would stand out most in your mind?

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