

FERDINAND MAGELLAN



Ferdinand Magellan was born in Portugal in 1480. He led the first expedition to *circumnavigate* (sail around) the world. Magellan believed he could get to the Spice Islands by sailing west. He knew he would have to sail around or through the New World. However, he thought the world was much smaller than it actually is. The Portuguese king did not agree to sponsor Magellan.

But in 1518, he gained the support of the Spanish king, Charles I. Magellan convinced him that probably some of the Spice Islands were in the Spanish half of the New World. (The Pope had drawn up a treaty dividing the “unclaimed” world in half. This Treaty of Tordesillas gave one-half to Spain and one-half to Portugal.)

In September 1519, Magellan set sail with 270 men on five ships. From the beginning there were problems. Three of the ships’ captains were Spanish. They did not like the Portuguese explorer and plotted to kill Magellan. The ships sailed across the Atlantic to the coast of Brazil. They sailed south along the coast, but the weather got colder and colder.

Magellan decided to spend the next five months below 49°15' south latitude. During this time one ship shipwrecked and another was lost because of desertion. Magellan and his remaining crews sailed through the strait at the tip of South America. Later this strait was named after Magellan. It took 38 days to pass through! The weather and sea conditions were violent in the straits. Once on the other side, Magellan saw the more calm waters of a new ocean. He named it *Pacific*, the Spanish word meaning peaceful.

The three remaining ships continued their voyage across the Pacific Ocean. This voyage took about four months. The conditions were awful on the ships. The food supply was short, and the drinking water turned yellow and smelled. The crew ate sawdust, leather strips from the sails, and rats to survive. Because they had no fresh fruits and vegetable, the men came down with scurvy.

Finally in March, Magellan and his crew arrived in the Philippines. Magellan made friends with one of the islands’ kings. However, he got involved in a battle with one of the king’s enemies from another tribe. He was killed in April 1521.

One of the crewmembers took over. Almost three years from the day that Magellan began the voyage, only one ship and 18 crew members made it back to Spain. It was the first ship to circumnavigate the globe.