

## CHAPTER

## 20

## HISTORYMAKERS

Ferdinand Magellan  
*Resolutely Pursuing a Dream*

## Section 1

*"We are about to stand into an ocean where no ship has ever sailed before. May the ocean be always calm and benevolent as it is today. In this hope, I name it the [Pacific Ocean]."—Ferdinand Magellan, addressing his crew before passing through the Straits of Magellan to the Pacific*

Ferdinand Magellan believed that he could head west and sail around the world. He was right, but the voyage took longer than he thought and involved hardships that required him to show great resolve. Ironically, he died not knowing that his dream would be fulfilled.

Magellan was born in 1480 to a local Portuguese official. At the age of 12, Magellan was sent to the Portuguese court, where he learned navigation, mapmaking, and astronomy. In his twenties, he served Portugal as a soldier and sailor. He traveled to the East Indies and fought in Morocco.

Magellan returned to Portugal in 1512 as an experienced captain with an idea. He heard from another sailor that there was a passage south of the Americas that would open to waters west of that land, just a few weeks sailing to the Spice Islands. Magellan tried to convince the king of Portugal to back the trip, but he refused. Frustrated, Magellan took his plan to Charles I, the king of Spain. He approved the plan the same day.

Magellan's five ships and crew of about 230 sailed from Spain on September 20, 1519. From the beginning, the Portuguese commander had difficulty with the Spanish captains of the other boats. In addition, storms rocked the ships during the trip down the east coast of South America. Magellan ordered his fleet into a safe harbor. The Spanish captains urged him to sail to the Indies by way of Africa, and the crew wanted to head back north. Magellan would not budge. The Spanish captains mutinied, but Magellan was able to maintain command. The party then waited seven months for the storms to weaken so that they could resume their journey.

Three days after setting out again, Magellan found a narrow passage. The crew thought the ships would be destroyed, but Magellan ordered them to enter it. Huge waves appeared and separated the vessels into two groups. Two boats were sucked inside the strait and assumed to be lost, while the other two were thrown back into the Atlantic. (The fifth ship had been lost earlier.) When the weather finally cleared, Magellan was able to sail through the entrance. He saw the two

ships presumed lost and had found the passage and the straits now named for him.

While the group explored their discovery, the largest ship, which had the most supplies, deserted the others for Spain. The crew begged Magellan to turn back as well, but he refused. As they left the passage, he named the massive calm body of water that lay in front of them the Pacific.

However, Magellan and his men had no idea about the size of this ocean. They also did not realize that their course led them away from islands that could have provided them with fresh food and water. They sailed for three more months. Starvation and scurvy killed half the remaining crew. On March 4, 1531, they ate the last of the food. Two days later they sighted the island of Guam, and landed on one of the islands of the Philippines.

Magellan tried to convert the people living in the Philippines to Christianity, and a battle followed between those native peoples and the outnumbered Europeans. In the fight, Magellan was killed. One of the crewmen wrote, "And so they slew our mirror, our light, our comfort and our true and only guide."

Though Magellan was dead, the voyage continued. One ship, a skilled navigator, and a half-starved crew of 17 were all that returned to Spain. They arrived on September 8, 1522, almost three years after they had departed. Though Magellan himself did not complete the trip, he had been proven right. It was possible to sail around the world.

## Questions

### Determining Main Ideas

1. Give two examples of Magellan's resolve.
2. What problems did the explorers have while crossing the Pacific Ocean?
3. **Making Inferences** Why do you think Magellan had problems with the crews of his ships?