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# **Ferdinand Magellan**

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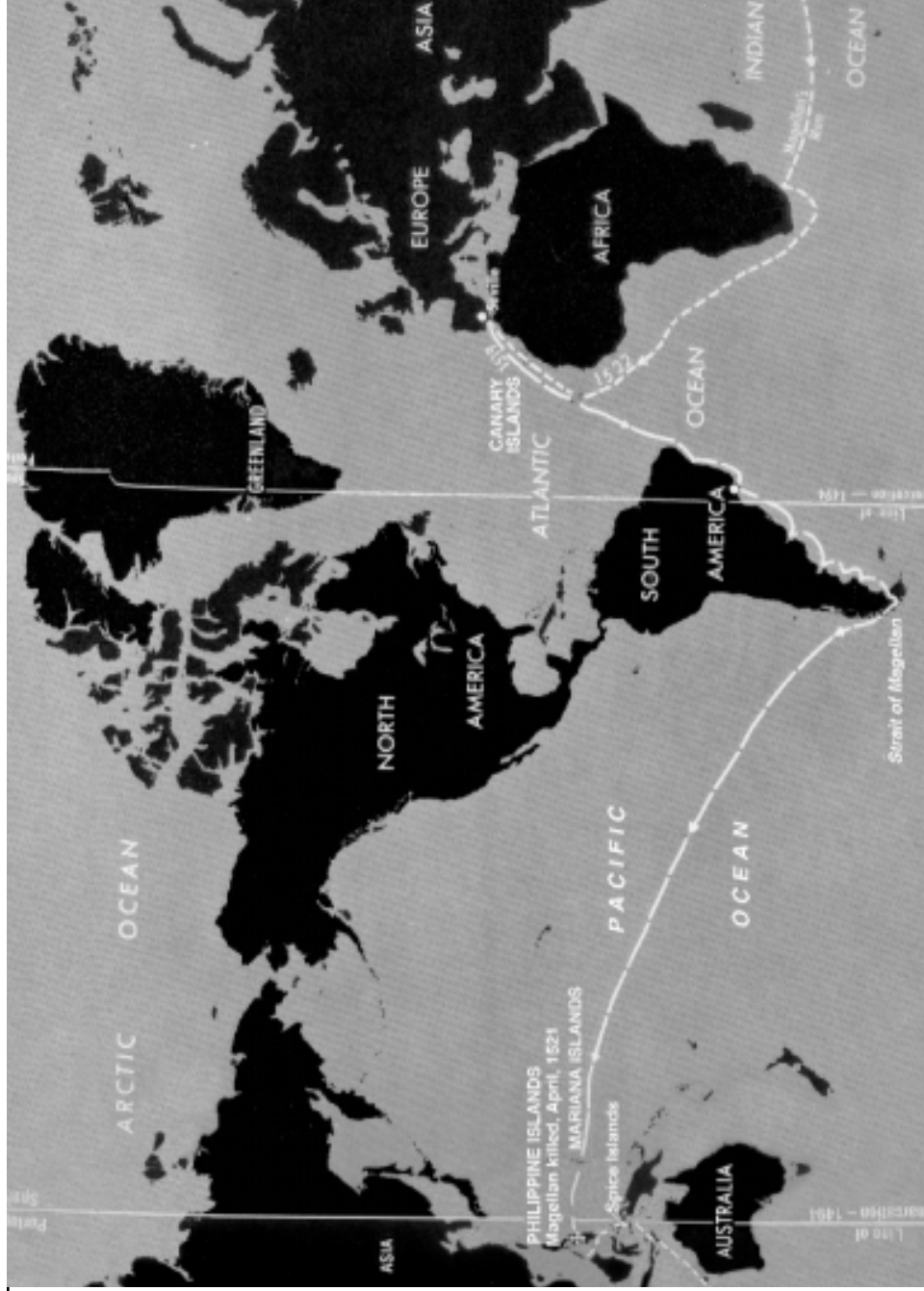
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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Magellan – The Boy**

His first name was Ferdinand. But as a boy, his friends and family called him Pedro. He was born into a noble Portuguese family in 1480. The Magellan family had once been rich. It still owned lands here and there. But it no longer had a great deal of money.

Pedro's father had great hopes for his son. He hoped that Pedro would rise to a high post in the government. To pave the way, he got the boy placed as a page at the Portuguese court. Pedro



learned he was to be page to the queen of Portugal. One might think that would be an honor. But it was not.

In fact, it was a lowly job. Pedro had to run errands. He had to clean the queen's rooms. He helped in the palace kitchens. He waited on tables. Worst of all, he was on call 24 hours a day. He was often waked in the middle of the night for some unimportant task. There was no point in complaining. There were many boys who would be more than happy to take his place.

The job did have one bright spot. A page was given a good education. He was taught to read and write and to do sums. He learned a bit of history. The study of geography did not take

much time because little was known of the world outside of Europe.

Pedro's father knew many important men. These good friends liked Pedro and often took him home with them for a weekend. If Pedro had wanted to be given a high place at court when he grew up, they would have been glad to help. But from an early age the boy had other ideas. Very big ideas!

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Five Ships**

Just 27 years had passed since Columbus discovered America. Now many men were eager to find other new rich lands. *Courage* was the key word. Life at sea could be a horror. Ships at that time were small. They did not have much space for food and water. Sailors looked on the wind as a friend. It had to blow them to a port before they died of hunger or thirst. They faced other dangers as well – storms, shipwrecks, rat-bite fever, getting lost at sea. It is a wonder that so many

brave men dared to risk their lives on the high seas.

Pedro Magellan had grown into such a man. His dreams were the dreams of a man who wanted adventure and excitement. Even at court it had been clear that his life would not be like that of most men.

He was lucky. In those days a man could join the military service as both a sailor and a soldier. That is what Magellan did just as soon as he was old enough. He wanted to see the world. This seemed the best way to do it.

He chose wisely. Year after year he was sent to foreign lands. His nimble brain and courage made him stand out from the rest of the crowd.

He was still quite young when he was made a captain. In a battle with the Moors he suffered a painful leg wound. It left him lame for the rest of his life. But it did not slow him down!

Magellan had an idea. He thought it was a good one. He could not shake it. He wanted to find a new route to the East Indies. Such a search could not be done without money. Lots of money. He went to see the king of Portugal. The king listened and then said no.

Magellan would not give up. If not Portugal, why not some other country? He moved to Spain. He was quite sure that the Spanish people would like to find a new route to the East Indies. The only known route at that time was under the

control of Portugal. A new route would mean that ships could reach the East Indies by sailing west instead of east through the waters of the southern tip of Africa guarded by Portuguese ships.

Why were the East Indies so important? Spices! They were in great demand all over Europe. And the East Indies were the main source of supply for many kinds of spice. Any ship loaded with spices was bound to bring its owners and crew a huge fortune.

The king of Spain said yes! Five ships and 270 men left Spain in the fall of 1519. The ships were the *Trinidad*, the *Santiago*, the *Concepcion*, the *Victoria*, and the *San Antonio*. The small fleet headed south and then due west. In time it



*Magellan's Ships*

reached South America and cruised down its eastern coast. Magellan explored every inlet. Somewhere there had to be a passage to a great ocean!

His crew worked hard. Each boring day was like the one before it. The food was bad and there was not much of it. The weather was cold and wet. And each inlet they followed came to a dead end. Then the ships had to turn back to the coast and start south again. The seamen and their officers were in low spirits. One day they began a mutiny. It did not last long. Enough men stood by Magellan to put down the uprising.

The next bitter blow came when one of the five ships, the *Santiago*, was wrecked. Now there

were only four ships. Magellan was still full of hope. And one lucky day he found a channel between high steep cliffs. It was narrow and winding. The small ships were lashed by strong winds and rain.

On a dark night one of the ships, the *San Antonio*, turned and fled. It headed straight home to Spain. Now there were only three ships. It took them a month to sail from one waterway to another and then another. But at last success! The ships came to a huge ocean. The chain of waterways through which the ships sailed is still known as the Straits of Magellan.

Magellan was thrilled. At last they were on their way to the East Indies! He called for a day

of feasting. He asked the ship's priest to lead the crew in prayer. He fired off the ship's guns to show his joy. He told his men fame and fortune would surely be theirs.

Not all agreed with him. The seamen thought they had done enough. They wanted to go home. The ship's astronomer was one who hated the thought of going on. The bitter cold made his bones ache. He tried to talk Magellan out of sailing at night. Sailing during the day held danger enough. Sailing at night – this was madness.

But Magellan was a stubborn man. He had found his ocean. Now he had to go on. Surely the worst was behind them. One of his officers wrote

down the words Magellan had said that day. “We are now steering into waters where no ship has sailed before. May we always find them as peaceful as they are this morning. In this hope I shall name this sea the Pacific.”

Would he have gone on had he known about the dark days that lay ahead?

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