Ferdinand Magellan Essay, Research Paper

Ferinand Magellan was a Portuguese sea captain who commanded the first expedition

that sailed around the world. The Voyage was the first positive piece of proof that the

earth is round.

Magellan was born around 1480 in northern Portugal. His parents were members

of the nobility, died when he was ten. He became a page at the Portuguese court at age

twelve to Queen Leonor. His position served as a means of education for sons of the

Portuguese nobility. While at court, Ferdinand learned about the voyages of such

explorers as Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama and how to navigate. He was promoted

to the rank of squire and became a clerk in the marine department where he helped assist outfit

ships for trade in 1496.

Magellan’s first voyage out to sea was with the fleet of Francisco de Almeida in 1505.

Then in 1506 he went on an expedition sent by Almeida to the east coast of Africa to strengthen

Portuguese bases there. In 1507 he returned to India and participated in trade and several naval

bases against Turkish fleets. Then in 1509 Magellan sailed with a Portuguese fleet to Malaka,

then a commercial center, but is now Malaysia. The Malays attacked the Portuguese who went

ashore, he helped rescue his comrades. In 1511, he was part of the expedition that conquered

Malaka. Portugal then claimed the Spice Islands. Francisco Serra helped Magellan try to locate

the Spice Islands, which later became the destination of his great voyage.

Magellan returned to Portugal in 1512 and fought on Morocco the next year. He was

wounded and petitioned the Portuguese crown to increase his pension. His request was refused,

and in 1517, he went to Spain to offer his services to King Manuel I for a voyage to the Spice

Islands. Manuel disliked Magellan and refused to support the proposed voyage. Magellan then

studied astronomy and navigation for about two years in Porto. He met Ruy Faleiro, an

astronomer and geographer who strongly influenced his ideas. From their studies, they concluded

that the Spice Islands lay in territory that had been awarded to Spain in 1494. Magellan decided

to seek the support from the king of Spain.

He presented his proposal for visiting the Spice Islands as part of a westward

circumnavigation of the earth. Magellan convinced King Charles I of Spain to support the

voyage. The king promised Magellan a fifth of the profits from the voyage, plus a salary.

Spaniards became suspicious of Magellan, mainly because he recruited many Portuguese

sailors. Therefore, the king forced Magellan to replace most of the Portuguese with Spanish

crewman.

On September 20, 1519, Magellan set sail from Sanlucar de Barrameda in southern

Spain. Magellan commanded a total of 241 of many nationalities and a fleet of 5 ships, the

Concepcion, San Antonio, Santiago, Trinidad, and Victoria. The fleet sailed across the Atlantic

Ocean to the coast of Brazil. They followed the South American coast to the bay where Rio de

Janeiro now stands. They stayed there for two weeks and then sailed south in search of a

passage to the Pacific Ocean. In late March 1520, the fleet anchored for the winter at Puerto San

Julian in what is now southern Argentina. Then in winter, a storm destroyed the Santiago.

Magellan and loyal crewmembers put down the mutiny, executed the leader, and marooned two

other mutineers when the fleet sailed again. They resumed their voyage in October 1520.

They discovered a passage to the Pacific- known as the Strait of Magellan. While sailing

through the fleet aboard the San Antonio mutinied and returned to Spain. The three remaining

ships continued. Magellan named the ocean the Pacific because it means peaceful and it

appeared to be calm. They were the first Europeans ever to sail across the Pacific Ocean. They

sailed for 98 days without seeing any land. Their food gave out and their water supply became

contaminated. They ate rats, ox hides, and sawdust to avoid starvation. Most of the crew

suffered from scurvy.

Magellan and his crew remained in the Philippines for several weeks. Magellan took

special pride in converting many of the people into Christianity. However, he involved himself

in rivalries among the people. On April 27, 1521, Magellan was killed when he took part in a

battle between rival Filipino groups on the island of Mactan.

Only about 110 of the original crew members remained. They abandoned the

Concepcion, and the two remaining vessels sailed southward to the Spice Islands where their

ships were loaded with spices. The Trinidad tried to sail eastward across the Pacific to the

Isthmus of Panama. Bad weather and disease cause more than half of the crewmen to die. The

remaining crew was forced to return to the Spice Islands where the Portuguese imprisoned them.

The Victoria continued westward back to Spain. It finally reached Sanlucar de Barrameda on

September 6, 1522, almost three years after the voyage had begun.

According to Antonio Pigafetta, a crewmember who was aboard the Victoria, the voyage

covered 50, 610 miles. Nearly everyone at the time gave Jaun Sebastian del Cano, the

commander of the Victoria, credit for the voyage. The Portuguese considered Magellan a traitor

and the Spanish condemned Magellan after they received reports of his harshness and errors in

the naviagtion.

Ferdinand Magellan was not successful in finding a short route to the Spice Islands but

his voyage contributed to the knowledge of the earth.