



*Pilipino Express • Vol. 3, No. 10  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
May 16, 2007*

Who was the first person to travel all the way around the world? Most people would probably answer, “Ferdinand Magellan” – and they would be partly correct. However, ask almost any Filipinos about Magellan and they could tell you that he died in the Philippines fighting Chief Lapulapu.

Magellan didn’t survive his expedition but eventually 18 members of his original crew of about 260 made it all the way back to Spain and, in so doing, completed a three-year voyage that took them all the way around the world.

However, one member of the crew might have accomplished this feat even before the voyage was finished. Some historians have speculated that Magellan’s Malay interpreter, known as Enrique de Malacca, was the first person to travel all the way around the earth – and some have even claimed that Enrique was a Filipino.

#### **Where did the first world traveller come from?**

Enrique’s origin is the subject of some debate among historians and it has a direct bearing on whether he was the first person to circle the earth.

Back in 1511, eight years before his final voyage began, Magellan had served his Portuguese king in battles of conquest that took him as far east as Malacca, on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. There he bought a young slave and eventually brought him back to Portugal. The slave, whose true name was never recorded, was baptized and given the Christian name Enrique de Malacca, or “Henry of Malacca.”

This was the name that Magellan called his slave but he might have just assumed that Enrique was born in Malacca because that was where he was bought. After all, Ma-

# First Around the World

*Was the first person to travel around the earth a Filipino?*

gellan’s main concern was that Enrique spoke Malay and could serve as his interpreter. Malay was the common language for trading throughout most of Southeast Asia at that time.

On at least one occasion, Magellan is known to have said that Enrique came from another place. In 1518 Magellan presented Enrique to some ministers in the court of the king of Spain as a native of the Spice Islands (known today as the Maluku Islands and formerly the Moluccas), about 600 km south of Mindanao. Magellan was trying to drum up support for an expedition to the Spice Islands at the time so it is quite likely that he was just using Enrique as a sort of promotional gimmick. Just a year later, Magellan wrote his last will and testament in preparation for his epic voyage. According to the will, Enrique was a beneficiary, approximately 26 years old and “a native of the city of Malacca” – not the Moluccas. The will also promised Enrique his freedom and the sum of 10,000 *maravedis* (about \$1300 Canadian today) upon Magellan’s death.

Regardless of where Magellan might have thought Enrique was born, the most reliable account of his origin is probably that of Antonio Pigafetta, an Italian scholar who served as the expedition’s chronicler. Much of what we know today about Magellan’s famous voyage has come to us from Pigafetta’s journal, including observations about the customs and languages of the people they encountered. Pigafetta wrote that Enrique was really from Sumatra, the home island of the Malay language, directly south of Malacca and now a part of modern-day Indonesia. Considering that Pigafetta and Enrique spent over a year and a half together on the voyage, it is quite likely that it was Enrique himself who told Pigafetta that he was from Sumatra.



*Ferdinand Magellan*

#### **The Philippine connection**

Magellan didn’t intend to “discover” the Philippines or even to sail around the world. His mission was to find a water route through the Americas (the Strait of Magellan), which would be a shortcut to their ultimate destination, the Spice Islands in Southeast Asia. At that time nobody in Europe knew that the Pacific Ocean, the largest body of water in the world, separated America and Asia. By the time Magellan’s armada got to the Philippines they had been away from Spain for over a year and a half and had survived countless storms, starvation, scurvy and mutinies – and they were still not sure how far they were from the Spice Islands.

Their first Philippine contact did not make things any clearer. The people from Suluan who met Magellan’s expedition on the Visayan island of Homonhon could only communicate with the Europeans through an improvised sign language and a few words, which they had taught to each other.

Enrique’s supposed connection to the Philippines is based on the story of Magellan’s second encounter with Filipinos. Schoolbooks tell us that Magellan’s armada went to

Limasawa, just off the southern tip of Leyte, and conducted the first Catholic mass in the Philippines with Rajah Kolambu. The location of this event has been refuted in recent years by solid research, championed by the historian Vicente de Jesus, which shows that it likely occurred in a place called Mazaua near Butuan in northern Mindanao. It was here that Enrique discovered that he could easily converse with the locals in his own language, Malay. This was a welcome surprise for Magellan and several other witnesses who wrote about the incident because it meant that they were getting close to the Spice Islands.

Some modern-day writers, such as Carlos Quirino, misinterpreted this story and have claimed that because Enrique and the Visayans could understand each other, Enrique must have been speaking Cebuano and therefore he must have been from Cebu. Also, because he was presumably captured in Cebu then taken to Malacca, sold to Magellan and eventually carried all the way from Spain, westward to the Philippines, Quirino concluded that Enrique – a Filipino – was the first person to travel all the way around the world.

Unfortunately, this interpretation does not stand up to the facts. None of the witnesses in the 1500s said that Enrique was from Cebu or that he spoke Cebuano to the people of the Visayas. Pigafetta said that Enrique was from Sumatra and another witness, Gines de Mafra, said that he spoke Malay to the islanders, which was the common language of trade in most of Southeast Asia. As Pigafetta wrote, “the slave [Enrique] spoke to the king [Rajah Siai], who understood him well. For, in that country, the kings know more languages than the common people do.”

#### **And the rest is history...**

After spending several days in Mazaua, Magellan's armada sailed on toward the port of Cebu where they planned to buy more food and



*A fanciful depiction of Magellan at the Battle of Mactán – Lapulapu's warriors resemble natives in a Hollywood western*



*A replica of Victoria, the first ship to sail around the world*

supplies. In Cebu, the now-familiar story took place. Magellan ordered a cross to be erected on a nearby hilltop. He then met with Rajah Humabon who, with some other local rulers, subsequently submitted to Spanish rule and allowed himself, his wife and about 2200 other Filipinos to be baptized as Christians.

However, Lapulapu, one of the rulers of the nearby island of Mactán, refused to submit even after Magellan had one of his villages burned to the ground. In the final showdown Magellan arrogantly refused the aid of hundreds of Cebuano allies who had to stand on the sidelines as more than 1000 of Lapulapu's warriors easily defeated Magellan's force of 49 European attackers. Magellan was literally hacked to pieces.

#### **Enrique's revenge**

After Magellan's death, the surviving members of his crew elected his brother-in-law, Duarte Barbosa and the Spanish captain, Juan Serrano as co-commanders of the three remaining ships of the armada. They planned to leave the Philippines immediately and head for the Spice Islands, but as far as Enrique was concerned, his slave days were done. According to Magellan's will, he was now free and 10,000 *maravedis* richer.

The co-commanders saw it differently though, and told Enrique that he was still a slave and that he now belonged to Magellan's widow back in Spain. Enrique refused to work or to leave the ship *Trinidad* to interpret on shore. Barbosa and Serrano bullied him and threatened to whip him until Enrique eventually caved in and stormed off the ship.

At this point Enrique apparently went directly to Humabon and persuaded him to turn against the Europeans – according to the Europeans' side of the story. At the very least, it is likely that Enrique told Humabon that the ships were about to leave. Humabon could not afford to lose his heavily armed Spanish protectors while Lapulapu was looking to take revenge on all of Magellan's allies in Cebu. Humabon had to either appease Lapulapu or he had to get Magellan's weapons.

On May 1, 1521, Humabon invited all the Europeans to a farewell banquet, promising a big feast and many more treasures to take home to the king of Spain. About 30 members of the crew, including the commanders, accepted the invitation. Once they were well fed, and probably drunk, Humabon's men attacked and slaughtered 27 of the guests. The three ships escaped Cebu and Captain Serrano was left on the shore, a hostage begging for his life while angry Cebuanos destroyed the cross that had been erected. (That's right. The famous cross that stands in Cebu today is not really Magellan's cross.)

### Happily ever after?

Enrique's ultimate fate is not known. He did not leave Cebu with the armada and nothing of his life after the massacre was ever reported. But for those who believe that Enrique was a Cebuano who had circled the globe, his story did not end there.

Carlos Quirino concocted a whole life story for Enrique in 1995 in his *Who's Who in Philippine History*. Quirino claimed Enrique's birthplace was Carcar, Cebu and he recounted how pirates captured Enrique while he was fishing near Cebu and then sold him into slavery in Malacca. After the Cebu massacre he supposedly served Humabon as a Spanish and Portuguese interpreter, raised a family and lived past the age of 70 only to die just before the conquistador Legazpi could land in Cebu in 1565 to corroborate Quirino's story.

Quirino provided no specific source for his information about Enrique in the bibliography of his book. In March 2003, four years after his death, his son Richie Quirino claimed in a series of articles by Bambi Harper of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* that Magellan concealed Enrique's true origin so that he could claim to be the first person to have circled the earth. Apparently, every one of Enrique's contemporaries who ever wrote about him must have been part of the cover up, too, because none of them said he was from Cebu, either.

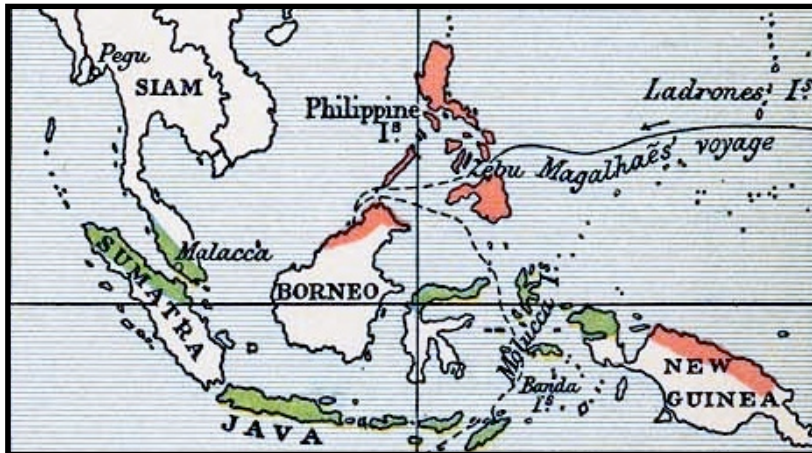
The younger Quirino also speculated that when Magellan was in Malacca in 1511, he sneaked away from the Portuguese fleet to explore the Philippines. His return to the Philippines in 1521 would have made him (and Enrique) the first person to travel around the world but his chronicler and number one fan, Antonio Pigafetta, never recorded Magel-

lan making such a claim – nor could he make the claim if he had been concealing the fact that he had already visited the Philippines 10 years before.

Quirino's assertion is doubtful for so many reasons, not the least of which is that Magellan never planned to circumnavigate the world. His intention was quite the opposite. The king of Spain had sent him to find a westward route to the Spice Islands so that they could avoid their Portuguese rivals who travelled the eastward route. Magellan especially wanted to avoid the Portuguese because he had defected to Spain and his former countrymen were out for his blood. Furthermore, even if Magellan did have a secret plan to circle the globe, Enrique still would have been the first to do it when they reached the Spice Islands, one of the places that had been documented as his place of birth.

Enrique was not a Filipino but he was a fellow kayumanggi. And since nothing is known about his life after Magellan's death, there is a possibility that he eventually returned to his home in Sumatra. And if he got there in less than 16 months, before Pigafetta and the other 17 survivors of Magellan's expedition returned to Spain, he might have actually been the first person to travel around the world.

Write to the author at [feedback@pilipino-express.com](mailto:feedback@pilipino-express.com) or visit [www.mts.net/~pmorrow](http://www.mts.net/~pmorrow).



*The Victoria's route through Southeast Asia*