



## ABOUT HERNANDO CORTES

During the 1500s, a Spanish ruler named Diego Velasquez heard stories about a huge and wealthy Aztec empire in Mexico.

He wanted to conquer the Aztecs and get their gold. He chose Hernando Cortes to lead the expedition.

In 1519 Cortes set sail from the southern coast of Cuba. He had 11 ships, 600 sailors, and horses with him. They sailed west through the Gulf of Mexico and landed on the eastern coast of Mexico. There, friendly Indians gave Cortes gifts, including gold.

These Indians sent a message about Cortes's arrival to the Aztec ruler, Montezuma. Montezuma was 200 miles away in the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan. Montezuma believed that one day a great white god would appear from the ocean to the east. Montezuma wondered if Cortes was the great white god. Montezuma sent gifts of gold to Cortes and asked him to leave. When Cortes saw the gold, though, he wanted more.

Cortes made plans to go to the Aztec capital. First, he and his crew started building a fort in a town they named Vera Cruz. To keep his soldiers from abandoning



him, Cortes had most of his ships burned. He loaded one ship with Montezuma's gold and sent it back to Spain. Cortes set off with his soldiers and a few hundred Cempoalan Indians, who didn't like the Aztecs, to capture the capital.

Finally, Cortes and his growing army reached Tenochtitlan. It was a beautiful city. Montezuma greeted Cortes at his palace. While there, Cortes's men discovered that the palace had a secret room filled with treasures. The Aztecs became worried that the explorers would take their gold. Montezuma also realized that Cortes was just a man. A bloody battle broke out. In the end, Cortes and his army won the battle and conquered the Aztecs. Cortes also got what he came after—gold.

Cortes renamed the capital Mexico City. They also renamed the country New Spain, and Cortes was appointed governor. The Spanish spread their Christian religion to the native tribes. By 1524 New Spain had become the richest and largest area owned by Spain. Spain was now the most powerful nation in Europe.