

Adventures on the American Frontier

EXPLORERS in a NEW WORLD

Part Three

De Soto and the River in the Wilderness



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The wind filled the sails of nine ships.

Like a flock of white doves, they moved
to the northwest, leaving the harbor of
Havana, Cuba, behind them.



Hernando de Soto, the man who was leading this expedition in the year 1539, had heard stories of the Seven Cities of Cibola, which were fabled to be cities of gold in what is now the American Southwest. Like many others, he was trying to find them. But de Soto was to give his life in the search.

On board the ship were hundreds of soldiers, eager to reach the shores of Florida and start on their great adventure. From the holds of the ships came the grunts and squeals of hogs and the whinnies of horses



just as eager to reach land. De Soto had brought with him hogs to feed his men and more than 200 horses for his soldiers.

At last the ships arrived at the place where Tampa, Florida, is now. The men began marching to the north. The officers and lancers of the company of soldiers rode horseback, banners flying and armor shining. After them marched 400 foot soldiers and 100 slaves carrying packs of goods. Last of all, driven along by some of the slaves, came the herd of hogs.

Soon a report came to de Soto from a scout who had ridden ahead of the rest of the group. There was a Native American village not far away.

“Does it look like a city of wealth?” asked de Soto.

The scout shook his head. “No. It’s a little camp of huts. But there’s a chief among them who may know where the wealth is hidden.”

“Get him,” ordered de Soto. “Bring him to me.”



So began the plan that de Soto used all through his travels. De Soto's men kidnapped the chief and held him prisoner to keep the braves from fighting. When de Soto was sure that there was nothing more he wanted from a village, he put chains on as many braves as he thought he could use as slaves. After he left the village, the chief was allowed to go back, and de Soto moved on to the next village. De Soto's men robbed villages all through Florida and as far north as North Carolina that way.