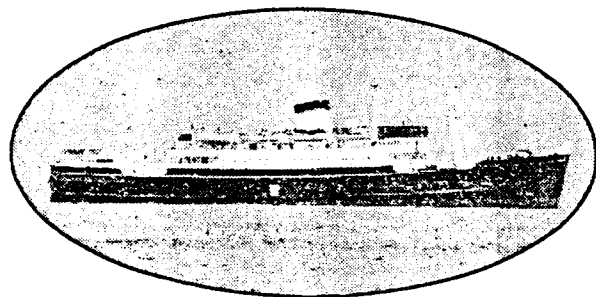


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# FARCE AND FEAR



## IN SCIENTOLOGY'S PRIVATE NAVY



Top brass: Hubbard (centre) and daughter, Diana. Just 17, she was a senior officer on the flagship.

# FARCE AND FEAR

## IN SCIENTOLOGY'S PRIVATE NAVY

**In the late 1960s, L Ron Hubbard was being hounded by the press, intelligence services and governments. To protect himself and his Church of Scientology, he left Britain to run the organisation from the freedom of the high seas. His ships roamed the Mediterranean in a bizarre search for buried treasure; on board, discipline was ruthless. In this final extract from the book *Scientists have tried to ban*, RUSSELL MILLER trails Commodore Hubbard on his fantastic voyage**

L RON Hubbard began making secret plans to set up the "Sea Organisation" in 1966 as hostility towards the Church of Scientology grew throughout the world. The whole operation — which became known in Scientologists' jargon as "Sea Org" — was shrouded in duplicity. His intention was that the public should believe he was returning to his former "profession" as an explorer, and, accordingly, in September 1966, Hubbard announced his resignation as president of the Church of Scientology.

This charade was supported by the explanation that the church was sufficiently well established to survive without his leadership. A special committee was even set up to investigate how much the church owed its founder; it was decided the figure was about \$13m, but Hubbard, in his benevolence, forgave the debt.

He set up the Hubbard Explorational Company with the aim of exploring "oceans,

seas, lakes, rivers and waters, lands and buildings in any part of the world and to seek for, survey, examine and test properties of all kinds".

But he had no more intention of conducting geological surveys than he had of relinquishing control of the Church of Scientology and its handsome income. His real objective was to shake off the fetters imposed by tiresome land-based bureaucracies on his activities and ambitions; his vision was of a domain of his own creation on the freedom of the high seas, connected by sophisticated coded communications to its operations on land. Its purpose would be to propagate Scientology behind a screen of business management courses.

Before the end of 1966 the Sea Org had secretly purchased its first ship, the *Enchanter*, a 40-ton schooner. The *Enchanter* went on extended cruises round the Canary Islands to search for gold Hubbard said he had buried in previous lives. "He would draw little maps for us," said Virginia Downsborough, one of the crew, "and we would be sent off to dig for buried treasure. He told us he was hoping to replace the *Enchanter's* ballast with solid gold."

In April 1967, a second ship, the *Avon River*, an old North Sea trawler, joined the *Enchanter* at Las Palmas. Apart from the chief engineer, the only professional seaman aboard was the captain, John Jones. "My crew were 16 men and four women Scientologists who wouldn't know a trawler from a tramcar," Jones said.

Jones was informed that he would be expected to run the ship according to the rules of *The Org Book*, a sailing manual written by the founder of the Church of Scientology and therefore considered by Scientologists to be infallible gospel. "I was instructed not to use any electrical equipment, apart from lights, radio and direction finder. We had radar and other advanced equipment which I was not allowed to use. I was told it was all in *The Org Book*, which was to be obeyed without question."

Following the advice of this esteemed manual, the *Avon River* bumped the dock in Hull as she was getting under way and had barely left the Humber estuary before the Scientologist navigator, using the system advocated by Hubbard, confessed that he was lost. "I stuck to my watch and sextant," said Captain Jones, "so that at least I knew where we were."

Meanwhile, two senior Scientologists were scouring European ports for a big ship, something like a cruise liner, which could be used as the Sea Org's flagship. In September 1967 they reported that they had found just the ship Ron was looking for, the *Royal Scotsman*, built in 1936 and most recently used as an Irish cattle ferry. It could be bought for about £60,000, an insignifi-

cant amount to Hubbard since his headquarters at East Grinstead, Sussex, was taking in some £40,000 a week in fees from aspiring Scientologists.

Hubbard had the ship (pictured above left) registered in Sierra Leone to avoid British Board of Trade regulations, but when he received the new registration papers he noticed that an "s" had been missed out and the name of the ship was given as *Royal Scotman*. "Now the ship has a new name as well," he cried, grinning, and ordered painters to black out the second "s" in the name on the bows, stern, lifeboat and lifebelts.

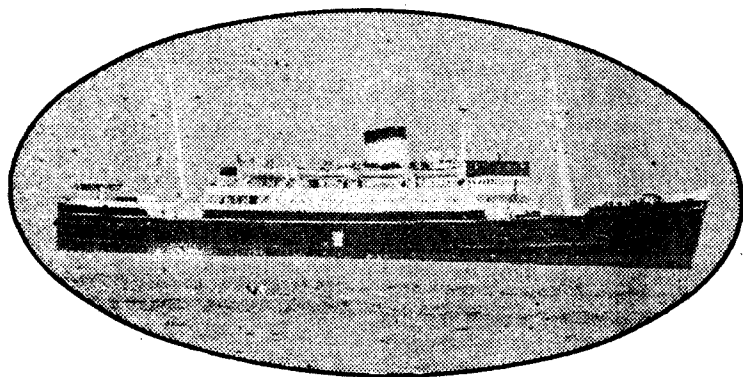
The ship was loaded with filing cabinets from East Grinstead and at the Southampton dockside, taxis disgorged eager volunteers clutching their bags and the "billion-year" contract which Hubbard had recently introduced as a condition of service in the Sea Org. His third wife, Mary Sue, and her children took over the upper-deck accommodation, which had been reserved for the Hubbard family. Ron now had his private navy.

ONE of three professional seamen aboard the *Royal Scotsman* was Stanley Churcher. On the ship's first voyage, he was "placed in a condition of doubt" for "defying an order, encouraging desertion, tolerating mutinous meetings and attempting to suborn the chief engineer". Churcher employed a few choice words to tell the Scientologist ship's officers what he thought of their "mumbo-jumbo" and was promptly sacked.

"There were seven officers of the Scientology lot," he recalled, "who used to swank about in blue and gold-braid uniforms, but I reckon they knew next to nothing about seamanship. Hubbard called himself the Commodore and had four different types of peaked cap. Hubbard's wife, who had an officer's uniform made for her, seemed to enjoy playing sailors."

"Every day they went below for lectures, but we seamen were never admitted. I offered to give them seamanship lectures and they were so pleased they gave me a free beginner's course in Scientology. I was

**INSIDE**



# FARCE AND FEAR

*continued from previous page*

told we were lower than cockroaches," said Maren. The working day began at 6am and ended at 11pm after a 90-minute lecture delivered by Hubbard. "We were terrorised," Maren said. "It was continuous stress and duress."

The course had not been going long before Hubbard decided that too many mistakes were being made and he announced that in future those responsible for errors would be thrown overboard.

Next morning, at the regular muster, two names were called out. As the students stepped forward, Sea Org officers grabbed them and threw them over the side. The two "overboards" swam around the ship, climbed stone steps on to the quayside and squelched back up the gangplank, gasping for breath. At the top, they had to salute and ask for permission to return on board.

"Overboarding" was thereafter a daily ritual. "I thought it was terrible, inhumane and barbaric," said Hana Eltringham, a member of the Sea Org. "Some of the people on the course were middle-aged women. Julia Salmon, the continental head of the LA org, was 55 years old and in poor health when she was thrown overboard. She hit the water sobbing and screaming. LRH [as Hubbard had become known] enjoyed it, without a doubt. Sometimes I heard him making jokes about it. Those were the moments when I came closest to asking myself what I was doing there. But I always justified it by telling myself that he must know what he was doing and that it was all for the greater good."

IN CORFU, Hubbard renamed all his ships in honour of his Greek hosts — the Royal Scotman, for example, became the Apollo. But in March 1969, after criticism of Scientology in the Greek press and official communications with the gov-

ernments of Britain and Australia, the Scientologists were ordered to leave Corfu. According to Kathy Cariotaki, a Sea Org member who was on the bridge with Hubbard when the news came, "The old man almost had a heart attack. He went absolutely grey with shock."

For the next three years, the ship patrolled the eastern Atlantic, aimlessly sailing from port to port at the Commodore's caprice and rarely stopping anywhere for longer than six weeks. The main objective was to stay on the move.

"LRH said we had to keep moving because there were so many people after him," explained Ken Urquhart, the Commodore's personal communicator. "If they caught up with him they would cause him so much trouble that he would be unable to continue his work. Scientology would not get into the world and there would be social and economic chaos, if not a nuclear holocaust."

As official hostility towards Scientology grew, the need for security was made very real to Scientologists who flew to join the ship at its various ports of call. They were briefed and repeatedly drilled on their "shore stories" — that they were employees of Operation and Transport Corporation, a business management company. They were warned not to use any Scientology-speak on shore, to deny any link with Scientology and, in particular, to feign ignorance of L Ron Hubbard.

Hubbard reiterated that Scientology was beset by dark forces seeking to destroy anything that helped mankind. This fostered a siege mentality and provided spurious justification for the harsh conditions on the Apollo.

Aboard ship, no attempt was made to maintain the myth that Hubbard was no longer in charge of Scientology. Between 40ft and 50ft of telex messages arrived every day from Scien-

given a test on their E-meter, a sort of lie-detector, and a woman officer asked me a lot of personal questions, including details of my sex life.

"The oldest student was a woman of 75 who told me she was convinced that Mr Hubbard would fix her up with a new body when she died. I couldn't make head nor tail of it."

HUBBARD was deeply disappointed that his Canary Islands cruises had not resulted in replacing the Enchanter's ballast with gold bars. But now he had more time, more ships and more personnel at his disposal, and in February 1968 he asked for volunteers to accompany him on a special mission.

The Avon River headed for the southeast coast of Sardinia, where Hubbard mustered the crew and told them he was on the verge of achieving an ambition he had cherished for centuries.

The vast wealth he had accumulated in previous lives, he explained, was buried in strategic places. He recollected, as commander of a fleet of war galleys 2,000 years before, that there was a temple on the coast somewhere near where they lay at anchor. His intention was to put several parties ashore to search for the ruins and the secret entrance to his cache of gold plates and goblets.

The ruins of the temple at first proved difficult to locate until Hubbard realised that his recollection was based on ancient sailing instructions, whereas he had selected the search area using a modern chart. Now the ruins were soon discovered, along with the fact that the site was clearly marked as an ancient monument — it might have been more sensible to locate the temple by looking at a guidebook. No treasure was found.

The ship moved on to Tunis, where Commodore Hubbard said a Carthaginian priest had hidden a treasure trove of jewels and gold in a temple which he thought he could find. He made a clay model of what he could recall of the topography and told his search parties to scour the coastline for a "matching" landscape. Sure enough they found the site of the temple just as he had described it, but erosion had destroyed the secret tunnel where the treasure was hidden.

Then the Avon River went to Sicily, where searchers failed to find treasure in an ancient watchtower, and on to the coast of Calabria, which had been Hubbard's territory when he was a tax collector at the time of the Roman Empire and had hidden gold in sacred stone shrines along the coast. None of the shrines could be found. Hubbard concluded that the coast had been eroded and the shrines washed into the sea, along with the hidden gold.

The climax of the mission was still to come — a visit to a secret space station in moun-

tainous terrain on the island of Corsica. According to Hubbard, it occupied a huge cavern which could only be entered by pressing a specific palm print (the crew had no doubt it was Hubbard's) against a certain rock.

Sadly, the Corsican space station was to remain no more than a thrilling rumour, for an urgent radio message arrived from the Royal Scotman in Valencia asking the Commodore to return immediately. The Spanish authorities were threatening to tow the ship out to sea and deny her re-entry. Highly displeased, Hubbard moved his fleet.

WITH his three ships now in Corfu, Hubbard offered a course for advanced Scientologists to train as "operating thetans" at Level VIII, the highest that could be attained at that time. To become a Class VIII auditor was the ambition of every self-respecting Scientologist, although none of them was prepared for the autocracy that had developed in Sea Org.

At the end of August 1968, the first students arrived in Corfu from Britain, where Hubbard had recently been declared an undesirable alien. Many of them carried large sums of smuggled cash: the British government had recently introduced restrictions on the export of currency and it was causing cash-flow problems for the Sea Org, which routinely paid its bills in cash. "They gave me about £3,000 in high-denomination notes to take out to the ship," said one student, Mary Maren. "I hid it in my boots."

The new arrivals were given a sparse uniform of green overalls, brown belt and brown sandals and were humiliated at every opportunity. "We were

*continued over the page*

tology offices around the world and he received weekly reports detailing statistics and income from every org.

Money was, without question, one of the Commodore's primary interests, although he liked to profess a lofty disregard for such matters. Loyal members of the Sea Org, who were paid \$10 a week, believed the Commodore drew less than they did, because that is what he told them. The reality was that Hubbard was receiving \$15,000 a week from church funds through the Hubbard Explorational Company and that huge sums were being salted away in secret bank accounts in Switzerland and Liechtenstein. When one of

these accounts had to be closed in 1970, \$1m in cash was transferred on board the Apollo.

"The ship was a different world," said one Scientologist, Mike Goldstein. "It was supposed to run Scientology for the whole planet, but it was a world unto itself." It was also a world entirely of Hubbard's creation, and he added to it a bizarre new element - an elite unit made up of children and eventually known as the Commodore's Messenger Organisation. The CMO was staffed by the offspring of committed Scientologists and its apparently innocuous function was simply to serve the Commodore by relaying his

verbal orders to crew and students aboard the Apollo.

But the messengers, mainly pubescent girls, enjoyed their power as teenage clones of the Commodore. In their cute little dark blue uniforms and gold lanyards, they were trained to deliver Hubbard's orders using his exact words and tone of voice; if he was in a temper and bellowing abuse, the messenger would scuttle off and pipe the same abuse at the offender. Nobody dared take issue with whatever a messenger said; nobody dared disobey her orders. Vested with the authority of the Commodore they came to be widely-feared little monsters.

From 1970 onwards, mes-

sengers attended Hubbard day and night, working on six-hour watches. When he was asleep, two messengers sat outside his state-room waiting for the buzzer that would signal he was awake. Throughout his waking hours, they sat outside his office waiting for his call. When he took a stroll on deck they followed him, one carrying his cigarettes, the other an ashtray to catch the ash as it fell.

L RON Hubbard's eccentric idyll could not last. As stories about the strange practices of Scientology spread and intelligence agencies and governments began to investigate the activities of the church, the Apollo became a less and less welcome visitor to ports. Finally, Hubbard, after suffering a mild stroke, decided to return to the United States, where he was to spend the rest of his life in hiding while his messengers took control of the Church of Scientology. At the end of February 1980, he disappeared, never to be seen again.

On January 19, 1986, Scientologists around the world received their last message from L Ron Hubbard. In Flag Order number 3879, headed "The Sea Org and The Future", he announced that he was promoting himself to the rank of admiral.

Six days later, Irene Reis, the co-owner of a chapel in San Luis Obispo, California, received a telephone call asking if they did cremations. The body that arrived at the chapel was that of L Ron Hubbard, along with a death certificate giving

the cause of death as cerebral haemorrhage and a certificate of religious belief forbidding an autopsy. The body was cremated at 3.30 that afternoon.

On January 27, Scientologists were told that "at 2000 hours, Friday, January 24, 1986, L Ron Hubbard discarded the body he had used in his lifetime for 74 years, 10 months and 11 days. The body he had used to facilitate his existence in this universe had ceased to be useful and in fact had become an impediment to the work he now must do outside its confines."

There are those who believe Hubbard died years earlier and that his death was covered up by the messengers while they consolidated their control over the church. There are those who believe Hubbard will soon be entering another body, or might even have done so already, prior to resuming his position as the head of Scientology.

There are those who believe that, for all his faults, Hubbard made a significant contribution to helping his fellow men.

And there are those who now believe, sadly, that they were the unwitting victims of one of the most successful and colourful confidence tricksters of the 20th century.

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*Extracted from Bare-Faced Messiah, by Russell Miller, published by Michael Joseph price £12.95*

*A review of the book appears on page 60*



Sea Org lives on: Hubbard's portrait looms over a Scientology award ceremony five years after his death