

## ... Official Biographies Seem Larger Than Life



**FOUNDER**—L. Ron Hubbard bust in lobby of Scientology administrative building.

Times photo

## Scientology's L. Ron Hubbard ...

Like the Romanesque bronze busts of L. Ron Hubbard displayed in churches of Scientology, the official biographies of Scientology's founder seem larger than life.

Born in Tilden, Neb., on March 13, 1911, to Navy Comdr. Harry Ross Hubbard and his wife, Dora May, he is said to have spent his early childhood on the Montana cattle ranch of his maternal grandfather, "where long days were spent riding, breaking broncos, hunting coyotes and taking his first steps as an explorer."

Hubbard could "ride before he could walk," learned to read and write by the age of 3½, became the nation's youngest Eagle Scout at 12, and found himself accepted as blood brother of the Blackfoot Indians—the subject of his first novel, "Buckskin Brigades."

Between the ages of 14 and 18, when most youths his age would have attended high school, Hubbard traveled Asia with his father studying Eastern religions, according to church biographers. His encounters included, Hubbard himself later wrote, a magician whose ancestors served in the court of Kublai Khan and a Hindu who could hypnotize cats.

A biographical sketch published in 1976 by the principal U.S. Church of Scientology, in Los Angeles, said that he returned to the United States at the age of 19 and went on to graduate in mathematics and engineering from George Washington University's Columbia College, having taken "one of the first courses ever offered in what is now called nuclear physics."

A more recent, and conflicting, sketch provided by the church explains that his enrollment at George Washington in 1930 (at age 19) was preceded by a period of "intense study" in two Washington, D.C., preparatory schools. It does not say that he graduated, however.

Later, Hubbard claimed a D.D. (Doctorate of Divinity) and a Ph.D. He described himself in a 1951 letter to the FBI as "basically, a scientist in the field of atomic and molecular phenomena. At least, that was my course in college."

A transcript of Hubbard's brief career at George Washington, which became part of the public record in a 1967 federal tax proceeding against the church, shows that Hubbard did enroll in 1930 but failed calculus and beginning German, earned D grades in chemistry and ended his freshman year on probation.

The record shows that in his sophomore year he took a physics course that embraced atomic and molecular subjects but failed it and dropped out at the end of the year. The Ph.D. was an honorary degree awarded in 1950 by an unaccredited Los Angeles institution called Sequoia University. There is no record of his having earned a D.D.

Asked to explain these discrepancies, a Los Angeles spokesman for Scientology said only that "The church does not stand or fall on Mr. Hubbard's academic record."

His red hair and his restless energy earned Hubbard the nickname "Flash" in the 1930s as he developed a reputation as adventurer, mariner, barnstormer, author and explorer, his biographers

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say. His works include romantic adventure ("Hurling Wings") and science fiction ("Final Blackout" and "Typewriter in the Sky").

"Hubbard was one of the first writers to switch to an electric typewriter in order to keep pace with his own fertile imagination," one biographical statement from the church asserts. In addition to all his other activities, he is said to have found time to lead expeditions to Alaska and the Caribbean before the war.

Hubbard's war record is obscure. One recent church statement says that he was commissioned by the Navy before the war, at its outbreak was ordered to the Philippines and served later "in both the North Atlantic and North Pacific and rose to command a squadron."

He was said to have been "seriously injured at the end of the war" and "so critically injured that he had twice been pronounced dead."

Another statement says that "in 1944, crippled and blinded, he found himself in Oak Knoll Naval Hospital" in Oakland where he spent nearly a year. By 1947 he recovered fully.

Hubbard himself has written that he was among the first beneficiaries of therapeutic techniques he would later call dianetics.

"Blinded with injured optic nerves, and lame with physical injuries to hip and back at the end of World War II, I faced an almost nonexistent future . . . I yet worked my way back to fitness and strength in less than two years, using only what I knew and could determine about Man and his relationship to the universe."

A Navy spokesman confirmed that Hubbard had risen to the rank of lieutenant during World War II, but said that his service record did not show that he received a Purple Heart, a medal routinely given for injuries in wartime.

A Navy spokesman also said in response to an inquiry from The Times: "A review of L. Ron Hubbard's medical record by BuMed (the Navy Bureau of Medicine) does not indicate he was treated for any injuries sustained during his military career."

The spokesman added that this did not rule out the possibility that Hubbard had received medical treatment during "sick call" but noted that such treatment would have been for ambulatory, not bedridden, patients.

In 1949 Hubbard told a science fiction writers' meeting in Newark, N.J., that "Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wanted to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion."

Church spokesmen have not denied that Hubbard made the remark but insist that it was meant in jest.

Missing from Hubbard's biographies is a clear explanation for the deep antipathy he developed, and began expressing in the late 1940s, for the mental health professions, particularly psychiatry. This antipathy also pervades the doctrine of the church, its social reform activities and its publications.

"There are people who suppress," Hubbard

wrote in a 1969 statement that the church continues to circulate. "Such want position in order to kill. Such as Genghis Khan, Adolf Hitler, psychiatrists, psychopathic criminals, want power only to destroy."

His own personal encounters appear to have played a role in shaping this attitude. Hubbard has indicated in his writings that he observed people under psychiatric care while at Oak Knoll Hospital.

In an interview he gave to the FBI on March 7, 1951, according to the FBI's internal memo summarizing the conversation, Hubbard "advised that he had recently been psychoanalyzed in Chicago and was found to be quite normal with the exception of his current marital difficulties."

In the memo, which the FBI released recently under the Freedom of Information Act, the agent writing the summary said this was "an apparent attempt to give credence to his statements" that Communists had infiltrated his Dianetic Research Foundation.

Hubbard rarely has appeared in public in the last decade. His last known public appearance was in Clearwater, Fla., in 1976, as the church was establishing a new training center there. Time magazine described him as "portly, in apparent good health" and "flamboyant and authoritative" as he barked orders to a crew of young people.

Now 67, Hubbard is said by the church to be traveling in the United States and Europe looking for a place to settle for an active retirement.

—By Robert Gillette