

RON



The L. Ron Hubbard Series

MASTER MARINER **AT THE HELM ACROSS** **SEVEN SEAS**

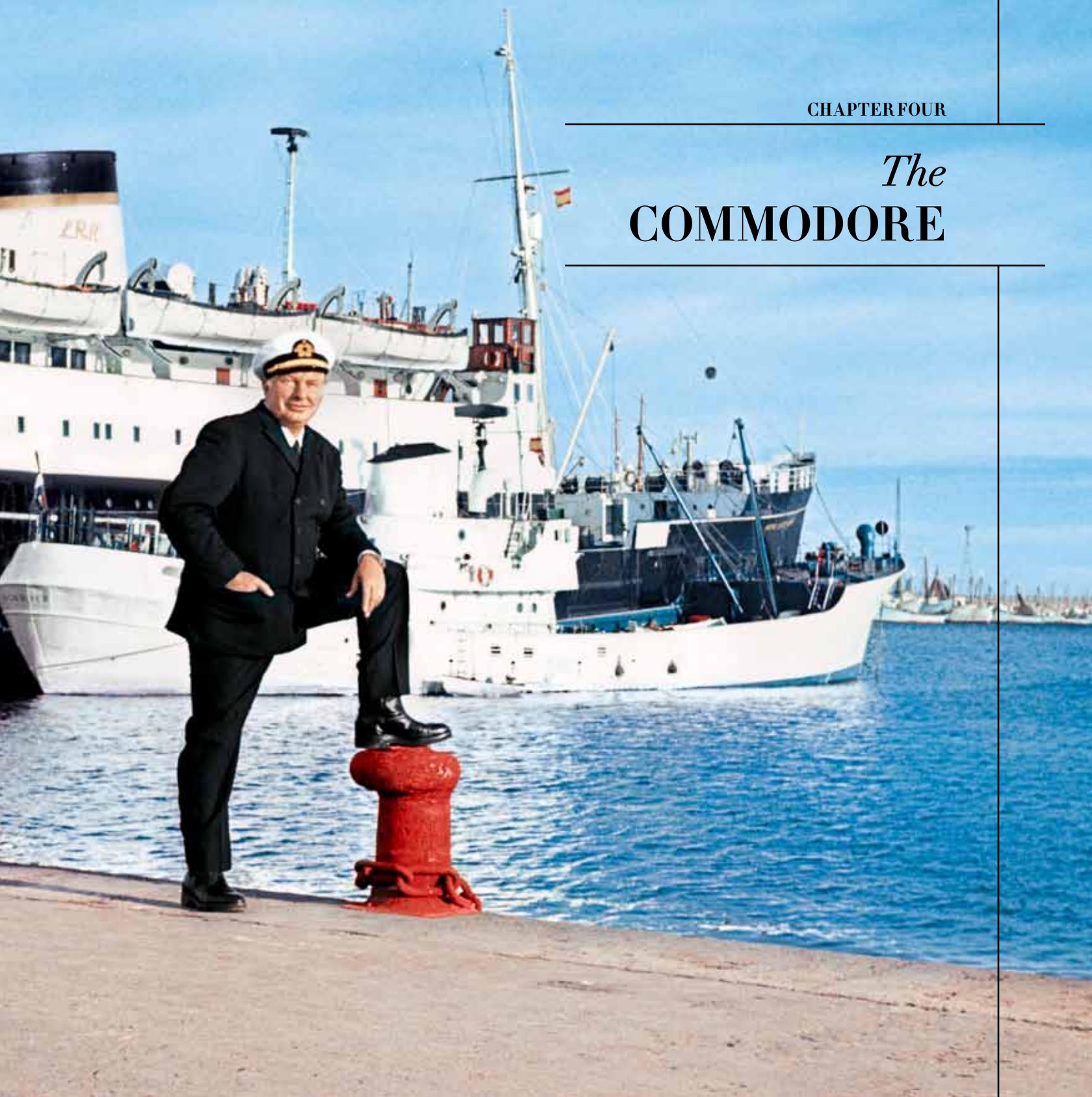


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CHAPTER FOUR

The
COMMODORE







The Commodore

WHILE MUCH HAS BEEN SAID ON L. RON HUBBARD'S greater progress beyond 1966 and his formation of a Sea Organization to safeguard Scientology far into the future, let us consider these matters from the purely nautical perspective. That is, let us leave his greater philosophic voyage (across those “tumultuous oceans

of data”) for another issue of this series and tell the comparatively simple tale of how he returned to the sea.

In an early statement of intentions, he spoke of a ship as a kind of retreat—a floating research base where work might progress undisturbed by all but lapping water on the hull. Home port initially lay at Las Palmas in the Grand Canaries and the vessel in question was a 60-foot Bermuda ketch—originally christened *Enchanter*, later rechristened the *Diana*. The next to appear was a seasoned North Sea trawler—then *Avon River* but remembered today as the *Athena*. She was dark and hulking. Ron himself would describe her as “fishmanned into a filthy mess,” with a hold and boiler house still reeking of cod blood and oil. She had additionally suffered a mishap

while making her way down from Aberdeen and so badly begged for new rear plates. But his first and keenest concern lay with the seventeen original Sea Organization recruits on the still blackened *Avon* decks—one formerly from the merchant marines, two more with a smattering of nautical experience, the remainder with barely a league of it.

As a word on what followed, we are told that to simply walk a deck with L. Ron Hubbard—to watch him inspect a frayed cable or fractured plate—was to watch a man who might have spent his whole life at sea. Similarly, we are told of his uncanny knowledge of all other things nautical—right down to the rusted railings and overworked engine bearings on the *Avon River* or a faulty rudder he eventually redesigned himself. Finally, we are told that while no nautical

Rechristening the *Royal Scotman*, whereupon she was ever after known as the *Apollo*, the Greek Isle of Corfu, 1968



Above
Early Sea
Org Motor
Vessel *Avon*
River, latterly
rechristened
Athena, 1968

college will certify a seaman as competent with less than four years of training, the texts upon which those colleges depend were then both incomplete and inadequate. Consequently, even the most diligent student might miss “essential bits” of nautical know-how, including the substance of this irreducible first lesson to the Sea Organization from its Commodore:

“The difference between sailors and landlubbers is as follows: The landlubber doesn’t have to put the land there. And so he very often comes to sea without an awareness that the platform on which he is standing has to be put there and continued to be put there, and he is there to move this platform around and keep it in place and keep it afloat.

“Now, when the landlubber goes to sea and doesn’t know this very important fact, that he now has an additional action which is ‘putting the land there,’ you get the damndest things you ever saw in your life. It is the most remarkable mess.

“If you look around very carefully in any yacht harbor, you will see some examples of it. Somebody has bought himself a boat and he is now going to put out for a cruise. Well, it is a very, very remarkable fact that the anchor goes down, won’t come up, won’t go down, the sails

won’t go up, won’t go down and the net result of it all is ‘Yacht in Trouble’ becomes a standard news story.”

To ensure no Sea Organization vessel ever became that standard news story, he next spoke of codifying all seafaring fundamentals. If the statement seems in any way pat, it is not. Indeed, when considering the contents of L. Ron Hubbard’s instructional materials, beginning with his illustrated *Sea Watch Picture Book* and *Ship’s Org Book*, one is looking at a most concise summation of all shipboard know-how—quite literally from swamper to skipper, from oiling main engines to washing clothing. Of special note is the LRH distillation of navigation (an essentially simple subject made complex, owing to an “assumption that one can’t confront where he came from or is going or where he is”).

No less significant was his Watch Quarter and Station Bill. It is fairly unique beyond naval circles and most simply defined as a system to indicate for every member of the company “where he berths, what his title and duties are as per the Ship’s Org Board, what his position and duties are for every evolution and activity and drill of the ship.” The point—and it’s particularly crucial on Sea Organization vessels—here was a system to ensure a sufficient complement

of crew-maintained ship operating systems, while the remaining filled administrative posts. Moreover, here was the assurance in times of threat, emergency or high activity that all hands were at the ready.

As another word on shipboard operations in total, all was predicated on three degrees of operation: Dangerous, Threatening and Peaceful. To effect swift and smooth transitions from one condition to another, he conducted regular “billing and drilling” under a heading that read: “I don’t usually have emergencies, but I like to have drills for them just in case.” Said drills were routinely stopwatched to hone response time and performed with full simulation—hoses laid out, hydrants opened, fire suits donned—and all at a dead run.

With Watch Quarter and Station Bill in place and a refit of the *Avon* more or less complete, training continued across open sea. Specifically cited were the short sprints along a North African coast, where those demonstrating the most maritime promise were afforded opportunities to skipper the *Enchanter*. Although following a misadventure with her diesels and a tearing of the stern plate, the Sea Organization’s Commodore allowed only sails when he himself was not aboard. His



point here: inexperienced sailors “will take all kinds of risks with a sailboat if they think that at the last minute they can turn on the power and get out of there.” The greater point: In a world where advancement through rank is so often dependent upon seniority or favor, here was an organization of truly rare equality. Indeed, here was a maritime organization where one waited not ten or more years for retiring officers to vacate a post, but only long enough to master a skill and demonstrate competence.

Above
The 60-foot
Bermuda ketch
Enchanter,
latterly
rechristened
Diana, 1968

What amounted to the culmination of these days came with the purchase of a third Sea Organization vessel: the 3,200-ton *Royal Scotman*, remembered today as L. Ron Hubbard's Flagship *Apollo*. She boasted a long and distinguished heritage, replete with service as a British operations vessel through the Second World War. She featured what was described "a *very* thick hull of excellent hard steel," an "imposing bow" and her decks were of the finest teak. The Commodore himself received her at Southampton and set out with a skeleton crew for what amounted to a shakedown cruise on the 28th of November 1967. If her subsequent adventures were few and far between—and rightfully so on a vessel intended to provide a "distraction-free" environment—we might nonetheless recount a few sea tales of the era.

Somewhere off the Sicilian coast, a "dogwatch" espies a distress flare coursing through an otherwise blackened night. As noted in ship's log: "Swept into a streak by the growing wind, it seemed to come up from behind the ridge of rocks which stood to seaward of a narrow channel." To which the First Officer adds: "By chart reckoning, we knew a vicious series of rocks grew out of the choppy sea about three quarters of a mile ahead." Yet presuming a yacht indeed had floundered on said rocks, we

next hear tell of the Commodore steaming into that narrow pass "without a second thought."

In fact, however, he may well have entertained a second thought, or at least a fleeting memory of tales from the Cornish coast, where wreckers once lured ships to the rocks with terrible regularity. What the *Scotman* encountered was hardly less calculating: a Sicilian fisher boat, tucked into a rocky outcrop and fitted with lights atop spars to suggest a vessel in distress. If and when some Samaritan yachtsman grounded on the shallows, one can only presume the worst.

In reply—and one can hardly improve upon eyewitness accounts—we hear of the Commodore leaning from the bridge wing to better view a darkened pirate's vessel before ordering a deafening blast from his ship's resounding whistle. Whereupon: "As the echoes of that outsized blast faded into the night wind, panicked would-be pirates scrambled to their deck to see what had come up on them in the night. The sight of that giant bow so close to their hidden spot must have raised their survival level somewhat; and the sound of an electric bullhorn, blasting Italian at them, demanding to know what they were doing seemed to produce a sudden realization. They never answered the question, but the false lights blinked out and the

Right Rechristening ceremony, Corfu, 1968: "Goodbye old *Royal Scotman*. I finally learned your habits and then you disappear and become the *Apollo*." —LRH



APOLLO

puny one-lung diesel coughed into action for a fast retreat. And the small yachts who might have answered their treacherous signals cruised without incident that night, not knowing they had been helped—or by whom.”

Additionally from these days when L. Ron Hubbard helmed his Flagship comes his altogether daring escape from high winds off the Azores. It was by then late October 1970. His yacht lay off Ponta Delgada and directly in the path of what is remembered in Atlantic annals as “Hurricane Ten.” As a wave-driven *Apollo* draws ever closer to a rocky shore, the Commodore directs his crew on raising the ship’s three anchors, without catching them in the propellers, while simultaneously heading out to open sea (a most delicate maneuver that requires playing out anchor chains like kite strings to yank the ship on course). If then reasonably safe at open sea, we next hear

of propellers actually lifting from the water when cresting thirty-foot rollers, i.e., “You’d hear the engines roar, feel the shudder and all of a sudden the bow would rise again.” Upon finally reaching the eye of the storm, she waited out the winds in an unreal calm and provided sanctuary to gale-tossed gulls. On returning to a devastated anchorage two days later, the docks were lined with villagers who turned out to marvel at a ship any lesser captain would have lost.

There is more and it tells us a lot. Notwithstanding her bold lines and proud heritage, the *Apollo* was nothing approaching a twenty-first-century vessel. She lacked modern storm-tracking equipment. Her propellers were fixed-pitched, which meant the shaft must come to a complete halt before reversing, so necessitating upwards of 1,500 feet to stop. In consequence, one had to stay at least ten

Replica of *Apollo*
presenting all
salient details



moves ahead of the game, which is why Ron established a tradition of billing and drilling quite unique in maritime realms. (As a matter of fact, only elite naval units are commensurately honed—carrier flight-deck teams, for example, or nuclear-submarine crews.)

Beyond 1969, Sea Organization signature drills were generally conducted in the evenings and from those evenings come quite specific memories of L. Ron Hubbard demonstrations: how one adjusted radar for detecting small craft at sea, how to take bearings on waves in blackened night and ways by which a Helmsman might steer without a compass, while bridge personnel steered with only engines. As a note on the brand of competence ensuing from such drilling, the Commodore directed that a long-stemmed glass, filled to the rim with water, be placed atop the radar. Thus, proud was the bridge watch team that

completed a voyage so free of “roll and pitch” nary a drop was spilled.

There is more still and it likewise speaks volumes of the Commodore: he could read wind and tidal changes as few can in this age of electronic dependency. Then again, he knew what clouds signaled, what barometric pressure foretold and even knew what knowledge gulls carried. But the summary point is simply this: In ages past, there may have been others of his ilk. Yet rare it is to find a modern mariner who lived on such easy terms with Old Man Sea—and rarer still that he imparted all he knew to leave an enduring nautical legacy. ■



As an introductory word to L. Ron Hubbard's own words on the Apollo, it might be further mentioned she originally entered British Admiralty service as a supply carrier in October 1940. By early 1941, however, she went entirely operational as an infantry transport for amphibious landings. In precisely that capacity she indeed served then British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill—specifically at the Allied liberation of Southern France in August of 1944. Upon war's end, she sailed the Irish Sea until November 1967; whereupon the Commodore took command of her helm and sailed her into history.





THE YACHT APOLLO

by L. RON HUBBARD

THE *APOLLO* IS THE third-largest yacht in the world. The *Britannia* is 12 feet longer and the *Atlantis*, launched in July '74, is 3,400 tons.

The *Apollo* is 3,278 gross tons, 320 feet, is powered with two Harland and Wolff diesels delivering 5,200 brute horsepower. She makes 19.5 knots but ordinarily cruises at 13. She carries from 300 to 350 crew.

The ship has a glorious history. Built in Belfast for Irish Sea service in 1936, the finest steel and workmanship were used. She was rebuilt in 1945 and again in the late '60s and has been kept modernized in every respect.

During World War II she took part in many campaigns over the world as an Operations flagship. She successfully carried US Rangers in the North African landings. At the Salerno landings she was the headquarters vessel in 1943. She was Sir Winston Churchill's command vessel for Operation Anvil in the Mediterranean.

Her captains and engineers were decorated for their service over the world.

In 1968 she was purchased by Operation and Transport Service and was used for a floating management center in the European area.

She has been chartered by the Church of Scientology of California.

A vessel with a brave and romantic past, her adventures continue in a modern world, serving the causes of humanity and peace. 

