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Homeward-bound aboard the Nitro

Licensed to captain vessels of any size on any ocean, the name L. Ron Hubbard has a long and distinguished association with things nautical. To cite but a few points of interest, there was his service at the helm of hard-pressed expeditionary vessels, his command of warships through the Second World War and his training of famously competent crews. In a very real sense, however, it all began when a sixteen-year-old LRH stepped aboard a Seattle-bound USS Nitro for a first taste of service at sea. In contrast to the outgoing Madison, the Nitro was a no-frills, battle-ready troop transport regularly plying between Asiatic Stations and the Pacific Northwest and Ron had only received passage as the able-bodied son of a naval officer. In addition to what is cited here, he would elsewhere speak of apprenticing at the navigator's desk and actually helping to work those new oil turbines. Not mentioned, but also of interest: the pages of this day-by-day account were typed on a borrowed Remington or Underwood and, as even the keystrokes suggest, composed through some fairly heavy seas. ■



Saturday 16, 1927. Aboard the USS Nitro.

Got up at six. Shot a roll on the way to Piti. Went aboard at 6:45 A.M. Breakfasted aboard.

8:00—Mother and Dad went ashore on Film boat. Weighed anchor and left Guam. Dropped Pilot Docker. Waves high on reef.

12:00—Luggage arranged to liking. My room-mates are Dick Derickson and Jerry Curtis. Nice chaps. Dick is from Seattle too. He was at Camp Parsons the same time that I was. In 1925.

4:00—Had a good sleep. Looked the bridge over. Dinner. Saw “Three Faces East.” Viewed a beautiful moon come up, and felt rather lonely. The cloud effect was gorgeous. The moon looked like an illuminated globe and then it dived under a cloud to begin its task of riding the sky. Bed, sweet bed. My foot looks better but it is still painful. Doctor said it would still be exposed to infection. It had better heal before I get to Hawaii.

Sunday 17, 1927. Aboard USS Nitro.

Got up though it is Sunday. That is not even regarded on this man's ship.

9:00—Straightened up room and visited sick bay. Lt. Com. Welden, the exec, told us to appoint someone to take charge of the quarters. We appointed Jerry or rather sentenced him. I'm on tomorrow. These Filipino hombres sure are nasty, but they won't stay that way long. Our floor is sadly in need of a mopping. I'll see to it tomorrow. Chow is good and the officers are nice though I see little of them. My foot is better. The Medic probed it again.

Our room is o.k. I slept below but tonight I'm going above. I take two baths a day so it takes a deal of bandage and alcohol. —Hard to keep the old place straight. Plenty of drawer space. Haven't read much. I'm going to study history tomorrow. —There is a soda fountain aboard though I don't inhabit the place. These sailors sure are “Acey Deucey” fiends all day long.

July 18, 1927.

Almost got rained on last night. Good sleep too. Broke out Blaz's fruit from the chill room. —The bananas are green but they'll ripen. The alligator pears are ripe, and very good. We brought up a small bunch of bananas, a cocoanut and a pear. Jerry is still in bed and it is ten. Dick and I were up at six. Sure miss Guam. Good show tonight. —My foot feels fine.

Left The USS Nitro, Puget Sound, Washington, circa 1925

July 19, 1927.

At six this morning we came below so the gobs could wash down the deck and as I had a headache I turned in down below. Dick was the "middie" for the day. (We have the title now.) And he did not wake Jerry or me for chow so we slept until eleven. Now, every day, we have had the room ready for inspection and not a soul has looked us over, but today at ten it seems the captain came poking around and found the room in terrible shape so he reported us to the exec who sent for Dick (who had been up since six). Then Dick came back and routed us out as the exec had ordered us to appear before him as soon as possible. He sure seemed mad. Jerry and I were respectful but he sure bawled us out. Then we came back and fixed the room to the guards. Sure did shine but he wouldn't even look at it. —My foot feels great. I can walk without limping, but it is still sore on top. —Played my sax but got no complaint. It is working nicely. (The sax.) The place sure looks nice now. —It turned a little chilly but not cool enough for blues. I've been up on the bridge several times. Jerry has atrocious manners and the Warrants don't like him. He's sloppy and so is his dunnage. —Awful movie tonight. Both Dick and Jerry are homesick etc., but they can be cheered up, which is something as neither is far from weeping. The Warrants have been kidding us that we stop at Wake Island so we'd better write. Ha. —To bed because of what the exec told us. I'm sleeping under a 5-inch gun tonight.

July 20, 1927.

Aboard Nitro at Sea. Calm, cirrus clouds on horizon. 2,276 to go last night at 8:00 Chaumont 602 miles astern P.S.C. 77 one hour advanced. —Sighted Wake Island about 10:30. Went fishing with exec. Many fish. That is the only reason we stopped. Very rough. We almost dove a few times. The punt that the whaleboat towed had trouble staying away from the ship's exhaust. Exec caught 8 fish, four of which got away. —The place is very low on the horizon, the highest point being 21 feet. The beach is very deceiving. It looks very gradual but is actually perpendicular. It is almost a horseshoe in shape as a big lagoon rests in the dip. Many strange and beautiful birds are in evidence. They are so tame that they will not move though they are sitting on their eggs. All the nests are on the ground as the highest shrub is 8 feet. There are about 8 square miles in the place. The fish look at you fearlessly and should you throw a rock at them, they would flock around it to see what it was. Mr. Borne caught a bird and had his picture taken with it, then he let it go. A Marine Lieut. named Edgar Allen Poe is aboard collecting material for a book. He went swimming in the lagoon. The Nitro stood on and

off about a mile out waiting for us all the while as it was too deep to anchor. The water there is so intensely blue that a jug of it is slightly tinted. The bottom was 30 fathoms down and it looked as though it were four feet. Very beautiful and covered with sea life; coral, (dead and living) and fish. Sharks and Barracuda are all around. —There are two houses for the shipwrecked and two water tanks which are filled by the geodetic survey every three months. The fish in the lagoon are plentiful and multi-colored. They looked like a Fourth of July parade. Lucky no ladies were around today. The exec sure can swear. —About twenty went ashore and most of the officers fished while the men towed them around. Sure is a desolate place. Nothing, not even a palm breaks the sky. Beautiful weird clouds are always upon the horizon and not a sail breaks its line. All day long the birds wheel but they rarely scream, as if they were afraid of breaking the gripping silence. A shipwrecked mariner would not be worth saving after two weeks of this. —Under weigh at 2:00.

July 21, 1927.

Nothing doing today except a fight over the Dempsey-Sharkey bout. Very dead and nearly everyone has lost the old gift of gab pro-tem.

July 22, 1927.

Today is Friday. This morning I got up early to study. Tomorrow will also be today.

July 22, 1927.

Bright cracks are floating around such as "What was I doing at this time today?" It seems queer to be seven days out of Guam but not to have had a week pass. We pass 180 degrees at 12:00 midnight, the INT.D.T.L. —A good many of the crew are out their pay for months to come because of this fight. —There is a fountain aboard and yesterday I saw a monster of a man, old navy style with all the brawn, licking an ice cream cone. Ha. Thus is the navy. The efficiency aboard is great, another ha.

July 23, 1927.

While I was on the bridge with Mr. McCrory today he sighted what turned out to be a spar. He thought it was a derelict and was all ready to throttle the engines. I went down into the engine room today where I received a very cordial welcome. These engines can

turn out 20,000 H.P. and then some. The revs. of the prop. are 105 p/m. on the average making a speed of 13.5 to 14.7. The engines themselves are the new oil turbines. The two huge condensers are larger than the engines, strange as it may seem. The ice plant is a marvel but I don't like the white, porous ice it turns out. It is clean and cold though so I should kick? The propeller shafts are larger than the Madison's. If this ship is the cream of the naval duty, I'll sure stick to milk. The officers work about an hour and then sit around and look bored. The enlisted personnel bear the brunt of the work. I guess responsibility offsets it though.

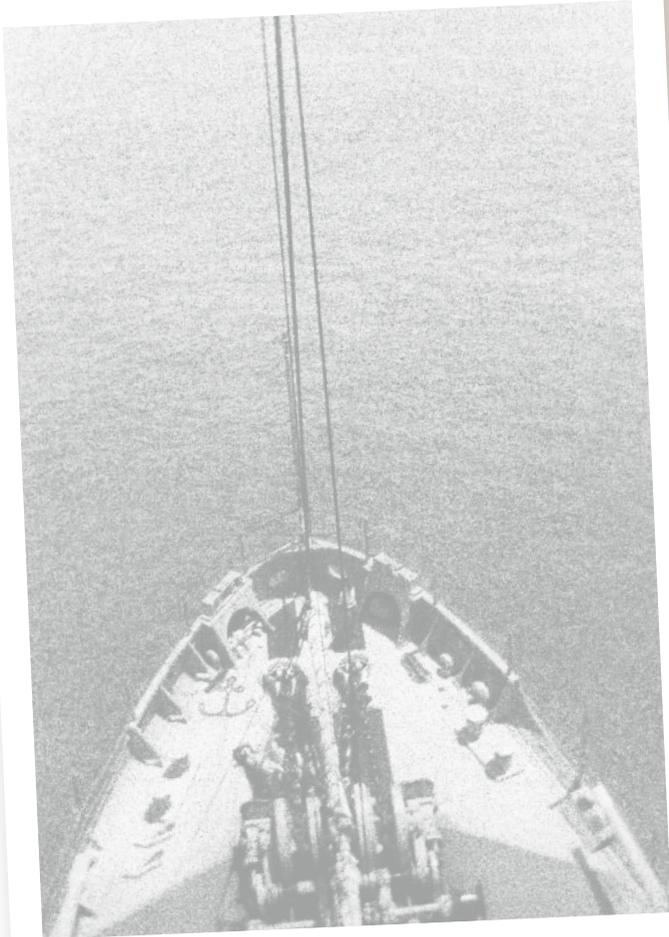
July 24, 1927.

Here it is Sunday. No church though, and though I rarely go, the fact I couldn't made me want to. I read the New Testament clear through. Mr. Mason (he's about 22nd ensign)

had me on the bridge at eight telling me all about the constellations. Never in my life have I seen such beauties. The sky is alive with them. The "Milky Way" looks like a white cloud. Tonight says goodbye to the moon. I wish it had waited until we get to Honolulu. I've never seen anything like it. The "Southern Cross" was wonderful, but not like I thought it would be. I think that the "Swan" is more like a cross. One gets sentimental over the stars without the moon anywhere.

July 25, 1927.

Today I was the first to sight port of the Hawaiian Islands. Lt. Brown said I might climb up to the lookout in the crow's nest. He also told me to wake the lookout up, as there was land off the port bow. I said "Aye Aye" and got off the bridge. A moment later found me staring up the forward mast which looked ungodly high. I overcame a nervous tremor and climbed a rope up to the steel ladder rather than get around the greasy stuff surrounding the mast. Nice prospect a fall was. Then I



View from the *Nitro's* crow's nest, 1927;
photograph by L. Ron Hubbard

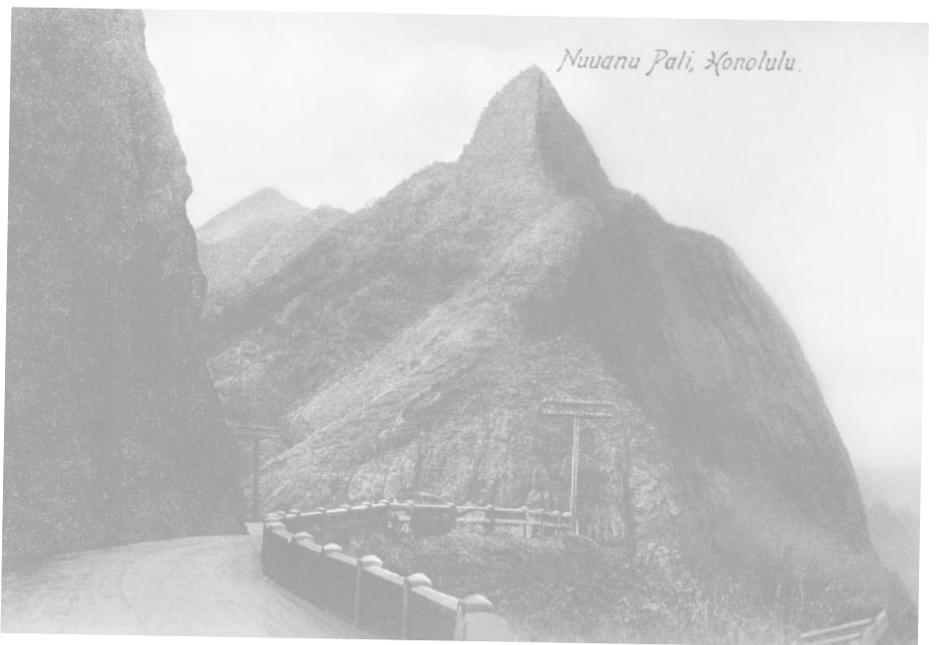
tackled the first fifty feet of ladder. It surely looked and felt unsubstantial. About halfway up I thought I'd never been so nervous before. After that ladder came an even smaller steel ladder. Up I went, all confidence by this time. In a moment I reached the nest and sure enough there was the lookout reading a "Western Story." He invited me to climb in. The last in itself is worse than the rest of it all put together. One has to dangle with nothing under him and work halfway around to the other edge. Over the side of the box I swung and then in. My God what a relief! The deck was doing all sorts of crazy things, as some sea was running. There had been quite a bit of breeze for days, but today it was awful. Going up it nearly blew me off twice. — Sure enough there was the land. I sighted it as 2 points off the port bow through to the bridge. Then I skiddled down. Scared? I hope to sneer. Then after I got down I really was *weak*.

July 26, 1927.

Saw the city of Honolulu this morning as we went into Pearl Harbor Navy Yard. Very nice to see the place again. We could not go ashore until the customs came aboard and they never came so we



"I tackled the first fifty feet of ladder. It surely looked and felt unsubstantial."—LRH; photograph by L. Ron Hubbard



Nuuanu Pali, Honolulu, Hawaii: "Nobody hurries. There may be a law against it."—LRH

went at one P.M. A little later I found myself landing at the sub-base and walking to the train station. After a fifteen minute ride on the puffy little train we were in Honolulu. I went out to the Moana with Dick and Jerry. We went our ways.

July 27, 28, 29th.

Today all were back aboard ship by nine A.M. as we sailed at ten. I did not take many pictures in Hawaii as I found there are few to be taken. Compared to Guam the place is not tropical enough to be pretty or Northern enough to have beautiful scenery; hence I returned to the ship with the Kodak still empty. I did a lot of swimming and the Hass' took me around quite a little. I got to see the "Pali." It surely is awe-inspiring. A thousand feet straight down and such a wind! Glad we are under weigh again. Paid my mess bill, it came to more than I thought it would. However the chow is swell.

July 30, 1927.

I'm recuperating from my shore leave today. Hope I can recover.

July 31, 1927.

About ten I put some tennis shoes on and went up to the crow's nest. No sensation at all. In fact I never noticed the deck's antics. Dick and I had a lot of pictures to take up there and we took them. Hope they turn out good.

Aug. 1, 1927.

Here it is August and still at sea. We arrive Friday night the sixth. Shot a half roll this morn on the quarterdeck. Dick and I opened the breech of an "archie" because we thought the plug was out. It was not and we could not figure how the devil it went shut. The gunner's mate came up and showed us in detail. Very nice chap. So we learned about "archies" from him. There are a whole lot of guns on this boat. I saw a list of the munitions we are taking back with us. Ahem!

Aug. 4, 1927.

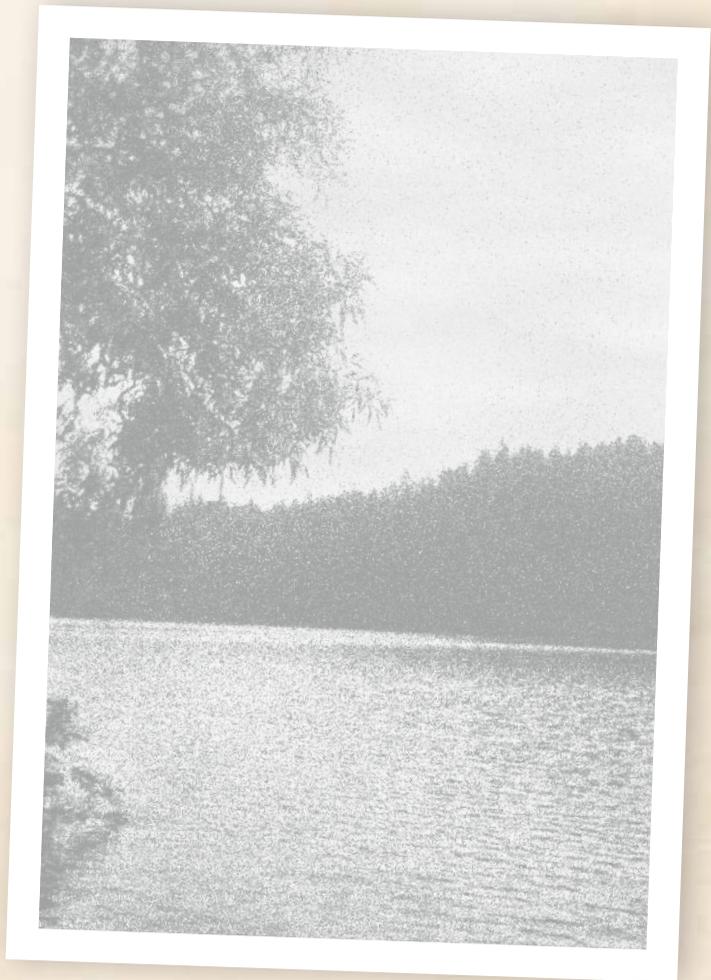
A Filipino died outside our door last night. Sure is good to be getting near home. Lots of sea gulls this morning. We're running abreast the Ore. Coast.

Aug. 5, 1927.

Dick is almost beside himself with the suspense. Jerry is getting that dreamy look in his eyes again. I'm not so calm myself. Went up in the crow's nest this morning, futile attempt.

Aug. 6, 1927.

We pull in tonight. This fog is awful. We almost hit Port Townsend because of it. Ships all around us. Seems like a ghost sea. Cannot see midships from the bridge. Thank the Lord there's Bremerton. *for*



Puget Sound, near Bremerton, Washington;
photograph by L. Ron Hubbard