

BRON



The L. Ron Hubbard Series

**EARLY YEARS OF
ADVENTURE
LETTERS &
JOURNALS**



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Asian Diaries

ALTHOUGH WHEN GENERALLY SPEAKING OF LRH adventures in Asia, one is typically referencing his travels across northern China circa 1928, his first taste of the Orient actually came a year earlier with his father's posting at the United States Navy's refueling station on the island of Guam. In consequence, the

sixteen-year-old Ron and his mother embarked upon a roundabout voyage to that "Asiatic Station." Also in consequence, and compiled from handwritten notes en route, comes Ron's typewritten journal of sketches from ports of call at Hawaii, Japan, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

If the Asia of his journal seems grim and dispirited, the view is fully accurate. Having leapt from stagnant feudalism to a furious capitalism in the space of two generations, Japan was indeed no longer "the happy land pictured so in stories." Better than half the indigenous labor force earned less than 48 cents a day, the great slums of Osaka could not even be ignored in the tourist guides, while the paupers Ron references in Kobe numbered more than twenty thousand. Likewise, China was no happy land in that summer of 1927. To put it very bluntly—and this from LRH friend

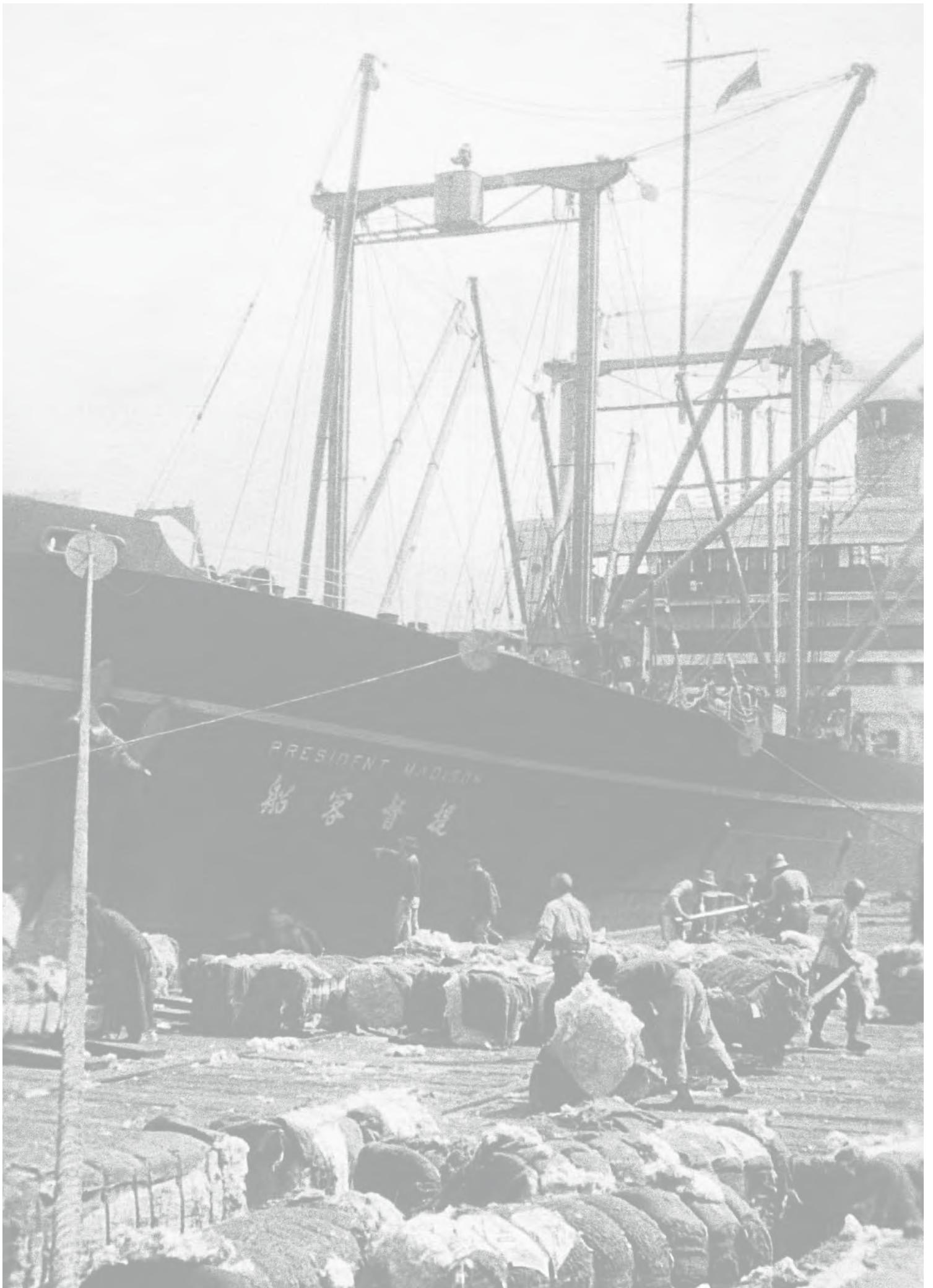
and author Will Durant—"the most powerful feeling in China today is hatred of foreigners."

Hawaii, however, had still been a reasonably unspoiled paradise and following from Ron's description of surfboard riding at Waikiki, he would actually number among the first to surf Southern California waves. ■

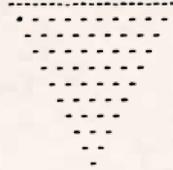
Below
Hangzhou,
China, 1928;
photograph by
L. Ron Hubbard



Left Photograph and caption by the sixteen-year-old L. Ron Hubbard, 1927



PROPERTY
OF
RONALD HUBBARD
736 - Fifth Avenue
Helena, Montana



June thirtieth came at last and we were eager to trade the humdrum life of Frisco for the quiet restfulness of thirty-four days at sea. When the President Madison pulled away from the pier, I felt a catch in my throat at leaving the United States for even a short space of time. The Ferry Building gradually receded and then the Golden Gate was gone from view. Miles of tumultuous water surrounded us and the great engines of the ship throbbed on into the west.

Even the deck stewards looked rather bleary next morning and a crowd of pale faces decorated deck chairs and the rail. Seasick? "Certainly not. How silly! Only something we ate!"

Mother felt fit as a fiddle and was tactless enough to show herself above. Thus making herself unpopular with the menu-broadcasters for the rest of the voyage.

I had fun playing a game called shuffleboard and another called deck golf. Some of the men kept talking of salt pork and slippery oysters, but I kept my colors flying through pitch and roll.

Six days later at dawn we hurried on deck to view Hawaii. Coming into the harbor at Honolulu, all the beach boys swam out to the ship to dive for quarters. It used to be pennies. Thus has the Hawaiian developed his commerce.

A Hawaiian princess aboard was received by the Royal Hawaiian Band, and a quartet of women greeted her with native songs. Friends greeted friends with leis of flowers.

Friends of ours showed us the town and country. The Pali is beautiful and historic. Two thousand warriors jumped to their death from this cliff rather than surrender to the king.

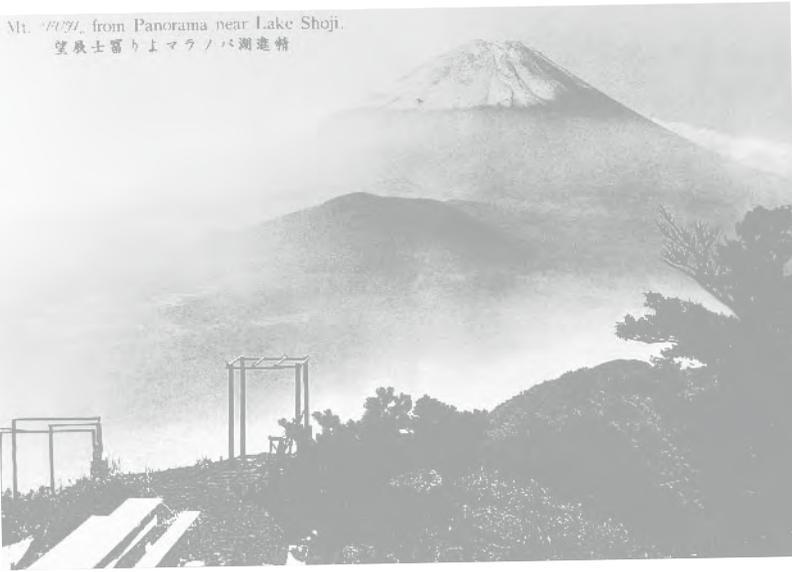
Hawaii is quiet, peaceful and interesting. Nobody hurries. There may be a law against it.

I swam at famous Waikiki and rode a surfboard. The waves here are much longer than those in



Along Tumon Beach, Guam, 1927

Mt. FUJI, from Panorama near Lake Shoji.
望巖士富士ヨマラノハ湖邊精



“Fujiyama came into view fifty miles at sea.... It has a celestial beauty that distinguishes it from all other mountains.”—LRH

great engines; the fireroom, so hot the plates were red and the oil fire white; the metal “Mike” which guides the ship by radio.

Still hale and hearty we began to anticipate Yokohama, the city of the earthquake. Fujiyama came into view fifty miles at sea, first seen above the clouds. A symmetrical cone, it has a celestial beauty that distinguishes it from all other mountains. The pink robe of snow suggests a garment for royalty.

Early in the morning we began to wind our way among the reefs that menace the harbor entrance to Yokohama. Japanese subs, seaplanes and destroyers gave us the lookover.

Guarding the harbor entrance at one time were two forts, for at the time of the quake Japan was all set for a nice, little war with someone. The South fort was hideously scrambled and seventeen hundred men within its walls were crushed. So shaken were the foundations that it cannot be rebuilt and the bodies of the soldiers could not be recovered. The other fort lost a thousand men in its falling walls, but it has been rebuilt.

Having passed quarantine, our ship went in alongside the dock. Only the huge concrete base was left after the quake and the warehouses were not rebuilt on the dock. After seeing Yokohama one can realize what a horror an earthquake can be.

On the seaward side of our ship the unloading took place in great lighters. Aboard those lighters families make their homes and the women work beside their men with babies strapped on papoose fashion.

California and sometimes attain the speed of sixty miles an hour.

Leaving Honolulu filled us with regret and we stayed on deck for two hours watching the city and Diamond Head fade into the distance.

Westward tugged the ship’s twelve thousand horses. Two days out of Honolulu summer clothes were replaced by winter overcoats.

The second engineer took me in hand and showed me over the ship, a complete city afloat; the galley, spotless with shining equipment and Chinese cooks who grinned and displayed blank teeth; the

Ashore we saw sights that make the slums of our own cities almost tolerable. So few of the poor were clean and many covered with sores. The rickshaw boys' clothing had a permanent cocoon look, but the rickshaws were clean with white laundered covers.

At nine o'clock the next night we reached Kobe. All the passengers went ashore, some to shop, others to go to eat Sukiyaki and drink Saki. (Incidentally we got stuck in a shopping party and it was not until after we were in Guam some time that we had our Sukiyaki dinner, cooked especially for us by the Japanese restaurant proprietor.)

Kobe's Main Street is a brilliantly lighted, highly pirated shopping district for the especial attraction of tourists. To purchase real Japanese articles necessitates visiting the dark narrow by-streets, and small upstairs shops where prices are surprisingly low.

The shoes worn by these people are heavy things made of wood, held on by clenching the toes. They are left on the outer step of the house or shop, so that the acquiring of a pair of new shoes is simplified.

The clothes of the men consist of a European felt hat, a gray cloak tied with a big sash containing pockets and a pair of shoes about four inches high. The women wear trousers, ankle length, a high-necked, loose-sleeved coat and slippers. Their hair is combed straight back and held with hairpins. The geisha girls wear the fancy headdress and the big bow decorated kimono and shoes five inches high.

Going back to the ship in our rickshaws about one in the morning, we saw many beggars bedded down for the night in the dirty streets. They lay down to sleep anywhere any time sleep overcomes them. They were a diseased looking lot.

Next morning we were steaming through the famous Inland Sea. Queer little boats were around us. The land each side rose in mountain terraces intensively cultivated. Water and sky were a deep blue. About four in the afternoon we passed two cities on opposite shores, about two miles apart. Ferries were plying back and forth, huge chimneys on factories smoking and evidence of great activity. Picturesque at a distance, the close-up was probably the usual congestion of population and the dirt.

The most impressive sight in all the ports was the great amount of shipping, all the commercial



A Grand Kabuki theatrical performance as depicted on a postcard purchased in Kobe, 1927

countries of the world were represented. Fishing is a great industry and in the Inland Sea there were thousands of fishing boats. Some of them were queer ones, with eyes carved in front and a little man with a big hat and a short coat worked the unwieldy oar that served as rudder. These boats carry the entire family. Cooking is done on a charcoal stove, the invariable meal boiled fish and boiled rice. Flour is unknown and other vegetables are too expensive.

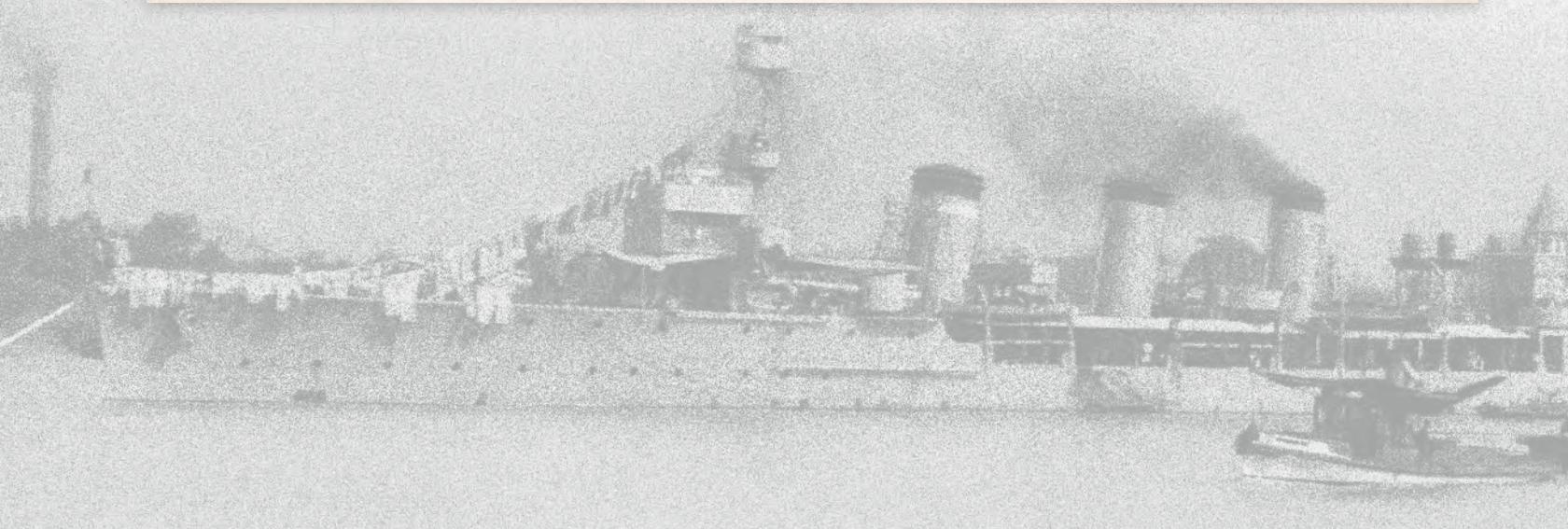
The whole channel is dotted with hamlets. In spite of the green, terraced hills, there is a dreary look to it all. It doesn't look the happy land pictured so in stories.

We knew when we reached the Yellow Sea for it is aptly named. We reached the Yangtze at nine in the evening and lay outside all night. At daybreak we sailed into the dirty but swift current. There is an enormous delta fast pushing out to sea. The mouth of the river is so wide and the shores so far away there is little to see. Where the river divides, entering the Wang Po, the real river sights begin with ships of every description and nation.

The first flag to greet us was the Stars and Stripes floating over the stern of a destroyer. Millions of fishing boats and junks caught our attention. Some of them were tied up to the wharves and had not been away from their moorings for three hundred years. They had eyes carved on their bows and a shark's tail on the forward mast. Some of the people on these river boats had never been ashore.

At the Dollar docks two miles above Shanghai we anchored. No customs to bother here and we went ashore at nine o'clock in the morning. Such a ragged, discrepant lot of Chinese were around the waterfront. They live worse than anyone in the world and earn about fifteen cents a day when a job can be had. (Fifteen cents Mex at that.) They can live on ten centavos a day, rather exist.

Such a racket unloading ship. Two coolies can balance five hundred pounds on a bamboo pole and trot off singing. One cries "Yahee" and the other in turn "Yoho," a



tone or so lower. Just those two notes over and over. It is weird as a death chant. It goes on from dawn to dark, all to earn fifteen cents Mex.

The puffy little "Billy Dollar" snorted up to the landing and took us over across the river to Shanghai, the "Paris of the Orient." The two miles down the river and across takes nearly an hour. A crumby Portuguese man-o'-war swung at her cable. Alongside was an American destroyer very smart and snappy. Farther down were the Pittsburgh and more destroyers and the transport Henderson. French, English, Japanese and Italian war vessels added to the formidable appearance.

Little fishing boats have an annoying way of rushing across the bows of the big liners. They do this to cut off the river devils, and often they barely miss being cut in two.

We took a French car through the Bund to the Palace Hotel in Shanghai. Mr. Moran of Seattle, chief officer of the Madison, borrowed a car from a friend in Shanghai and his chauffeur took us through the British and French Concessions, up Bubbling Well Road and across to a small part of the native city outside the barbed wire entanglements. Sikh policemen were everywhere. They are big dark bearded fellows and in their turbans and short trousers of khaki look picturesque. They carry great rattan sticks and a rifle slung across the back. Tommy Atkins was very much in evidence and the American marines, as well as Japanese and British marines.

Rickshaws were thick as sin. The drivers run or rather take a swinging pace. The Japanese rickshaw man does a bouncing trot.



Chinese coinage, colloquially known as "Mex"





Coolies, rickshaws and
THE INEVITABLE MARINE

Opening down the main avenue over which our car traveled were hundreds of narrow intriguing streets, teeming with life. Great fish floated here and there and paper banners hung overhead. The stores were stocked with every sort of junk. Dried fish rattled on strings in the wind. Queer looking foods and dry goods were side by side.

On the outside of the British Concession I saw a British Tommy take a Chinaman by the coat and knock him across the street. The unpoliced part of the native city is forbidden ground. On the Bubbling Well Road is the girl market, but this place is now used to quarter British soldiers.

On this road is a beautiful hotel once the home of a Chinese gentleman. The grounds are laid out with pergolas and fountains and the hotel has tapestries and mosaic tile floors.

The French Concession is untidy and the buildings are all behind high walls.

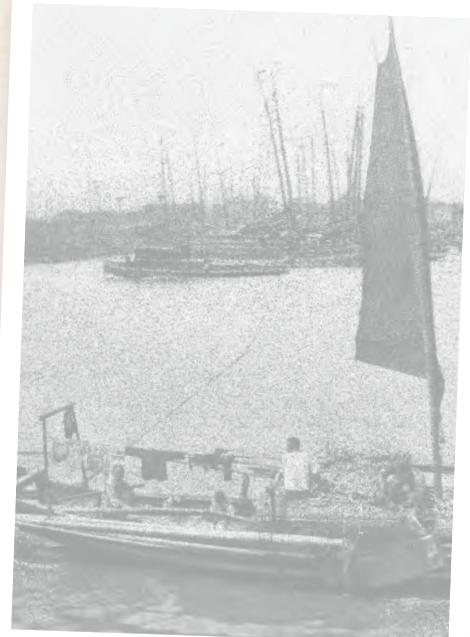
We joined the Madison crowd for the tiffin at the Palace Hotel and afterwards visited some of the shops. We saw flawless jade and wonderful tapestries and rugs. Only the junk was cheap and that was not worth carrying home.

Hong Kong came next. It is a city very British on the surface and very native underneath. Just off Queen Street the district is all native and very dirty. Beggars sleep on the sidewalk at night and all day cry for "cumshaw."

Hong Kong has an extremely low humidity and is very depressingly hot. We returned to the Hong Kong Hotel for refreshments as usual. A jolly lime squeeze suited our thirst. By that time I had purchased an elephant hat and was tempted to wear shorts and be as comfortable as Tommy.

Hong Kong is built on an island and the Dollar docks are on the mainland. The money is all Mex (worth one half U.S. gold). The ferry trip from Kowloon across to Hong Kong costs a nickel.

On the Kowloon side the walk to the Madison led through the inevitable mass of working coolies, very dirty and not caring where they spit. The heat was insufferable by afternoon and aided by our first tropical rain we were not sorry to leave.



Junks in Shanghai Harbor, 1927;
photograph by L. Ron Hubbard



Sikh policeman, Shanghai;
photograph by L. Ron Hubbard

Left "Coolies, rickshaws and THE INEVITABLE MARINE";
photograph and caption by L. Ron Hubbard

Two days later we arrived in Manila with very little ado. Manila Bay is a big body of water, very dirty. The tide was so bad we could scarcely dock. We had a struggle trying to unload our luggage.

Away from Hong Kong we rather regretted that our trip was so near an end. The dancing, the excellent cuisine and all of the pomp were things not easily discarded. However, I was anxious to “lamp” the “Gold Star” which was to take us to Guam.

Every ship we’d pass, some frivolous passenger would sing out “there’s the Blue Star.” They had the naval ladies worried sick telling them about the horrors of the Typhoon belt from Manila to Guam.

We weighed anchor the next afternoon aboard the “Gold Star” upon the last hop of our momentous journey to Guam. Then ensued seven days of rough weather and rotten grub.

Even my Uke and Sax failed to cheer me.

Late in the evening we sighted the isle of Guam. It was not much, in fact, just a low line on the dusky horizon. The navigator took his bearings, and we stood on and off all night.

When morning came we steamed cautiously up to the harbor and then in through the reef-bound mouth. A 6-80 came out to meet us and apparently no customs or medical inspection need be. Dad was on the next small craft, and we were sure glad to see him. *for*



Left Agana, Guam, 1927;
photograph by L. Ron Hubbard

Right Guam, 1927: “The island is rather unsettled”—LRH

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