



Partly cloudy today with a high of 84, a low of 62. Details, 2A.

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Sect witnesses recount fear, deception, 'suicide'

By STEVEN GIRARDI
Sun staff writer

Teen-ager David Ray testified Friday he had a spectacular start with the Church of Scientology in California, but quickly became a rebel trapped in The Fort Harrison Hotel, relegated to cleaning rooms and stomping garbage.

Casey Kelly, 23, testifying for the second day, said he "wasn't a very good Scientologist," either. "One thing you don't do in Scientology is joke around, so obviously I didn't make out very well," he quipped.

Like one other witness called in the third day of Clearwater's Scientology hearings, Kelly and Ray spent time at the church's "Flag Land Base"—formerly The Fort Harrison Hotel in downtown

Hearings 'audit' Hubbard, 2A

Clearwater—and testified about deplorable living conditions and an instilled fear of breaking from the sect.

Ernest and Adelle Hartwell, of Nevada, had expected at one time that they too could have spoken about Clearwater Flag. But the Scientology-chauffeured trip they began three years ago with a promised destination of Clearwater wound up in the California desert where they said they were abused by "the boss," L. Ron Hubbard.

George Meister is not a Scientologist at all. But he testified about his daughter, Susan, found dead 11 years ago aboard

Hubbard's ship in a Morocco port. The church said the single gunshot wound in her forehead was self-inflicted. Meister said he is not so sure.

And Rosey Pace, a 17-year Scientologist, said she got to the point where she hoped she would die in order to finally leave the sect: "I was hoping when I went to the doctor (for eye surgery) he would tell me I had cancer so I could get out."

The first half of the hearings is expected to wind up today with the city's final seven witnesses taking the oath. The hearings begin at 9 a.m. at Clearwater City Hall.

The hearings have been criticized as being vague, a label with which the city's special consultant Michael Flynn dis-

agrees. Flynn, a Boston attorney who represents several former Scientologists, called some of Friday's testimony "compelling," especially in indicating "the realm of deception" practiced by the church.

The 18-year-old Ray joined the sect in San Diego in March 1981. A few months later, his mother said he "blew their minds" by recruiting his friends in a matter of three days.

He said he was rewarded by being posted in Clearwater within a week to begin auditing courses, but fell quickly into disfavor when he refused auditing, a sect form of counseling.

He said he was assigned to the Rehabilitation Project Force and worked 14-hour

(* See WITNESSES, next page)

* Witnesses recount fear

(from page 1A)

days cleaning 32 hotel rooms. He earned \$9.60 a week. He said he performed well and was promoted to head of housekeeping for the hotel, "which meant my room quota went from 32 rooms to 78 each day."

At other times he worked 18-hour days cleaning kitchens and toilets and had to stomp wet kitchen garbage into dumpsters, sometimes sinking to his waist.

RPF members ate leftover food which he said was so bad he mostly survived on cookies he bought across the street.

He called the hotel dirty and a fire hazard. It has no sprinkler system, he said.

Ray said he lived in a 12-by-16, insect-infested room, with 24 other Scientologists. They shared one bathroom and posted shower schedules which allowed each person five minutes, if he found time to shower at all. Conditions were the same, he said, on the third, fourth and fifth floors of the hotel.

He said he left the hotel without permission on occasion, once swapping punches with another Scientologist before leaping to a garage roof and then to the ground.

But he returned because "I was scared to death to be kicked out. I was led to believe I was doing something good for a lot of people, and I didn't want to lose that."

Mrs. Pace, the 30-year-old sister of Lori Taverna, who testified Thursday, said, "The worst part about Scientology is . . . you're brainwashed to the point you believe you can't leave."

She said she was in Clearwater from May to December 1979 and was told she would "be treated like gold. I later found out it was an absolute lie."

After living in ant-infested rooms, seeing her sister abused and being lambasted by some church officials, she began to doubt the purpose of the

church. "No one was getting any better," she said.

She quit two months ago.

In emotional testimony, the Hartwells said they turned to Scientology at the recommendation of Mrs. Hartwell's daughter, who suggested the church could cure Mrs. Hartwell's intestinal problem.

They were offered an escort to Clearwater in 1979 but ended up in the desert town of Indio, Calif., with the church's founder, Hubbard. The Las Vegas, Nev., couple said they do not know why they were chosen to meet Hubbard, a recluse few have ever seen, but said the church realized it was a mistake.

"We were not programmed into Scientology," the 62-year-old Hartwell said.

They were put to work, Mrs. Hartwell, 58, said, and at times worked through the night carrying buckets of water.

They tried to leave and did eventually, though separately because they were told Hartwell was the cause of his wife's sickness. They said they came close to divorcing and were harassed by church members after they left.

The church never cured Mrs. Hartwell, who later underwent surgery for colitis.

Meister, the day's final witness, said he went to Morocco in 1971 to identify his 22-year-old daughter's body after a Scientology minister notified the family she committed suicide.

But he said a picture he saw led him to believe otherwise. The .22-caliber, long-barreled pistol that killed her was tucked beneath her folded arms as she lay on a cabin bed aboard Hubbard's ship, he said. A bullet hole pierced her forehead.

"How do you do that?" Meister asked of the gun's position.

He said he battled with the church to have the body returned to his Colorado hometown for burial. But the church had buried her in a burlap sack in Morocco and had to be exhumed and shipped to the United States, he said.



Sun staff photos by HOWARD BALM

Death description

George Meister (right), of Greeley, Colo., describes how his daughter Susan, who reportedly committed suicide, was found. Anti-Scientologist attorney Michael Flynn

(left) holds photo of Susan Meister, who was a Scientologist aboard L. Ron Hubbard's yacht Apollo just prior to her death in Morocco.