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Ex-Scientologist Says Quest Turned Sour

By MYRNA OLIVER, Times Staff Writer

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A disillusioned former member of the Church of Scientology, accused of taking documents belonging to the church and its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, testified Thursday that he had been lured into the organization by the "promise of truth" but repeatedly encountered lies.

Gerald Armstrong began what is expected to be several days of testimony in the non-jury trial of the church's civil suit to retrieve the documents, which is being tried before Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Paul G. Breckenridge Jr.

The suit claims that Armstrong invaded the privacy of Hubbard and his wife, Mary Sue Hubbard, and illegally converted the material to his own use by giving it to his attorney, Michael Flynn, as evidence in a number of civil suits against the church.

Armstrong has said he needed the documents to defend himself against the church, which declared him a "suppressed person"—a thief and rumormonger who wrongly said the documents proved that Hubbard had misrepresented his military heroism and scientific achievements.

The diminutive, mustachioed, 38-year-old Canadian native once broke into sobs Thursday as Flynn led him through a review of his 12 years in Scientology.

"The major thing that got me into Scientology was the promise of truth, the promise of honesty," Armstrong said. "It was in all his (Hubbard's) materials. Never could one glean from any of the materials that it was dishonesty that was looked up to by him (Hubbard) and the organization."

Armstrong said he had sold everything he had and left Canada to sign a "billion-year contract" with Scientology's Sea Organization, which worked directly with Hubbard and was then based on a ship called Apollo.

Armstrong described how he was first fascinated with Hubbard and worked to serve him, rising to impressive positions only to be repeatedly assigned to the group's punitive Rehabilitation Project Force and to undergo hundreds of lie detector-type "security checks."

While working at Scientology facilities in Culver City, Armstrong said, he was sent to the Rehabilitation Project Force for 17 months, doing "forced labor" 100 hours a week in Clearwater, Fla. The punitive assignment was given him, he said, because he swore at an aide of Mary Sue Hubbard, who dubbed him a security risk who might tell authorities the whereabouts of the reclusive Hubbard.

Working his way back to acceptance, Armstrong said, he next helped make Scientology movies in California, only to be assigned to the Rehabilitation Project Force for another eight months because Hubbard thought he "was joking about his film operation."

In favor again by 1979, Armstrong testified, he became renovation purchaser for Hubbard's house in Gilman Hot Springs near Hemet and eventually won Hubbard's sanction as archivist and researcher for the church founder's planned biography.

Armstrong said that a look at naval records convinced him that Hubbard was no war hero and that a "China diary" detailing Hubbard's two-week Young Men's Christian Assn. trip to the Orient disillusioned him about the leader's purportedly extensive Asian studies.

Armstrong said he left the church on Dec. 12, 1981, taking what he estimated to be 2% of all the accumulated biographical documents, the subject of the court suit.