



**NOAA Teacher at Sea**  
**Eric Heltzel**  
**Onboard NOAA Ship RONALD H. BROWN**  
**September 26 – October 22, 2005**

**Log 4**

Teacher at Sea, RONALD H. BROWN, September 30, 2005, Eric Heltzel

At 12:00 local time, we are sailing south towards the Panama Canal. To portside, mountains rise up directly from the ocean. Ahead is the isthmus lying low just above the horizon. As I watch the distant skyline, Captain Wright appears on the deck below. As he walks the decks of his ship, he stops to make sure that I am armored against the tropical sun. He sees that I am wearing long sleeves, a sun hat, and gloves and asks if I have on sunscreen, which I do. He then comments, "we don't have to worry about looking good at our age." He looks sharp in his khaki uniform, and those of you who have seen me in my sun clothes know what prompted his comment. Oh well.

As I scan the sea southward I can tell when the Canal begins because of the silhouettes of numerous ships. All through the morning we have seen other ships traveling headings that converge on the Canal. Captain Wright says that usually ships go through in convoys of four or five and the trip takes about twelve hours. We will be starting about 16:30 so most of our passage will be at night.

I'm sitting on the deck just below the bridge. This affords me a good view of where we are going. It's the rainy season in Panama and there are banks of cumulonimbus clouds over the land. Captain Wright cautions that I should be prepared for sudden downpours. Going through the Panama Canal is an experience I never expected having. I'm very excited.

Eric Heltzel