

Stolen Files Said to Link Hughes, CIA

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LOS ANGELES, March 26 — The covert worldwide activities of billionaire recluse Howard R. Hughes on behalf of the Central Intelligence Agency are detailed in sensitive documents stolen from a Hughes office here last year, Los Angeles authorities have been told.

In addition to building secretly the unique mining vessel, Glomar Explorer, which the CIA used last year to salvage part of a sunken Soviet submarine, the Hughes organization was used as a "paymaster-type front" for undercover CIA agents around the world, the L.A. officials were told.

They heard one report that payments for undercover agents were sent by the agency to Hughes organizations around the world and that payments were then made to the CIA operatives either in cash or by checks drawn on Hughes accounts.

Spokesmen for the CIA and Hughes declined comment on the report.

The authorities also heard that the missing documents contain information on Hughes' relations with various political figures, the Nevada Gaming Commission, which controls gambling in the state where Hughes once owned casinos, and at least one organized crime figure.

The nature of the information was not revealed but it was believed to have no connection to the Hughes-CIA activities.

The burglary, which a county grand jury has been probing, occurred shortly after midnight last June 5, and netted the robbers more than \$250,000 in cash, not \$60,000 as had been reported, investigators were told. Also stolen were a rare butterfly collection, four 4-by-6-inch solid gold medallions, several expensive digital wristwatches with the initials "H.H.," engraved on the back, and several valuable oriental vases, the grand jury was informed.

On March 3 the grand jury secretly indicted Donald R. Woolbright, 36, on two counts

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of possession of stolen property and extortion. Woolbright is currently being sought in a nationwide manhunt.

One witness before the grand jury was Leo V. Gordon, 52, a television scriptwriter and motion picture actor. Gordon testified Feb. 13.

The Washington Post learned:

Gordon told authorities he first met Woolbright in January, 1974, at the jewelry shop of a former St. Louis bail bondswoman, Carol Yeskey. Over the next six or seven months, Gordon said, he saw Woolbright several times.

In August, 1974, Woolbright called Gordon and told him, "I have some stuff that is dynamite, and I want to talk to a writer about what to do with it." Gordon said he invited Woolbright to his house in the San Fernando Valley, where Woolbright described the stolen documents. I know Howard Hughes better than any man alive," Woolbright reportedly told Gordon.

Gordon said he immediately went to an investigator friend who is a member of the Los Angeles sheriff's department. Two days later, Gordon also met with two members of the District Attorney's staff and agreed to help law enforcement agencies in any way he could.

The next day Gordon and a lawyer he had retained met Woolbright. Together the three examined a sample of the documents Woolbright said had been stolen from the Hughes headquarters here. They saw handwritten notes on three pages of legal-size paper, addressed to Robert A. Maheu, who was Hughes' \$520,000-a-year chief of staff from 1967 to 1970. One note asked Maheu to get the Atomic Energy Commission to hold its testing in northern Nevada, instead of southern Nevada, where Hughes lived at the time, Gordon said.

Stapled to the yellow legal paper was a typed reply from Maheu, saying the matter was being taken care of, Gordon added.

With the knowledge of police, Gordon once secretly tape recorded Woolbright's voice so police could compare it with an earlier taped extortion attempt on officials of the Summa Corp., which Hughes owns. The voices matched,

Gordon said he was told.

During their meetings, Gordon said, Woolbright told him four men were commissioned by someone he (Woolbright) didn't know. "They torched it," Gordon said, meaning that the robbers used acetylene torches to cut open the huge walk-in vault.

"There were so many documents they didn't know what to take. They just grabbed all they could," Gordon said Woolbright told him.

The night of the burglary, the four thieves reportedly drove to Las Vegas with their haul. On July 29, Woolbright told Gordon, he called Nadine Hensley, Hughes' long-time secretary, and also an official of the Summa Corp., offering to sell back the stolen documents for \$1 million.

"But she took too long answering some questions he asked her," Gordon quoted Woolbright as saying, "such as what was the name of Hughes' first wife. The delay led him to think the phone was being tapped. He hung up and never called back."

Then Woolbright called Gordon.

Gordon said the Los Angeles police were hounding him to get the documents "any way I could," and, they told him that "national security" was involved, Gordon told investigators.

Gordon also said police officials had assured him any money he risked would be reimbursed. So gave Woolbright \$3,500 at 6 one p.m. one right early last Oct., he said. Woolbright told him he was going to take a 10 p.m. flight to Denver, Houston, and St. Louis. Gordon said Woolbright had told him the documents were in St. Louis.

At 8 that same night, Gordon said, he met with police, the sheriff, and FBI agents at the Los Angeles police academy, and told them of his actions. They approved, he said. Two days later Gordon delivered \$410 more to Woolbright's wife at the Woolbright's Canoga Park, Calif., home.

Gordon said he was shadowed during these and other activities by police.

But Gordon also told other investigators that he never saw Woolbright again and has never received any documents.