

Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

Hughes' Final Years: Drugs, Movies

From secret daily logs kept by attendants, we have been presenting the strange saga of Howard Robard Hughes.

The late Billionaire spent his last years in a series of darkened penthouses, often groggy from drugs, watching a constant round of movies. He went months, sometimes years, without trimming his hair, beard or nails.

His greatest personal struggle apparently took place in the bathroom, where he spent an abnormal amount of time performing his ablutions. His bowel movements are triumphantly recorded in the logs.

The daily records also contain repeated, mysterious references to "20-1-1-1," "the item," "BB's" and "No. 4's." These appear to be code names for the drugs that his doctors reluctantly provided. Hughes started off New Year's Day, 1972, for example, with a dosage. A notation in the logs reports that "he took 6 of the 25 No. 4's" shortly after he awakened at 11 a.m.

He remained awake, typically, for 25 hours. He spent the time nibbling on chicken and watching "Gunfight in Abilene," "Midnight Lace," "Daring Game," "Once Upon a Time in the West" and "Topaz." He also watched one reel of "Breakfast at Tiffany's." Then this notation appears: "After one reel, HRH said we could return."

We got wind of Hughes' condition in 1970 and published an eyewitness report. The story caused shock waves throughout his \$2 billion empire. His aides responded with a frantic flurry of denials. Finally in 1972, he came out of seclusion twice within six months to

visit briefly with outsiders. They contradicted our description of the billionaire as a wildly shaggy apparition.

We speculated that they may have been greeted by a double; we even established that Hughes had used doubles in the past to deceive process servers. But the logs reveal that the visitors met the real Hughes; the logs also show that it took four hours to groom him for the confrontations. It was his first barbering in years.

His trim, new Van Dyke beard was just beginning to get ragged again when an earthquake shook him out of his penthouse at Managua's Intercontinental Hotel. The log has him lounging in his reclining chair at 12:25 a.m., Dec. 23, 1972.

There is no record of the quake, which caused the hotel to heave violently, except for this terse notation: "There was no log kept from the time of the earthquake in Managua, Nicaragua, until the arrival in Miami."

The next entry clocks his arrival at Ft. Lauderdale at 11:45 p.m. on Dec. 23. He remained holed up in his Lear jet for four hours, however, while his aides wrangled with Internal Revenue Service and Custom Bureau agents. They had anticipated his arrival and sought to serve him with a subpoena. But incredibly, the tax agents were called off by Washington after a few midnight phone calls to high places.

According to the logs, he spent a two-day Christmas holiday in his "Miami house" and then took off on Dec. 26 for London. He settled into the penthouse at the Inn on the Park and

immediately called for a screening of "The Deserter."

Hughes agreed, meanwhile, to see Nevada's Gov. Mike O'Callaghan and gaming chairman Phil Hannafin to resolve a stalemate over his gambling properties. The meeting was scheduled the night of March 17, 1973. At 11:35 p.m., Hughes' barber Mell Stewart, trimmed his beard down to a neat Van Dyke and tapered his unkempt hair. It was 1:15 a.m. before Hughes was ready to greet his Nevada visitors.

After the meeting, he shuffled into the bathroom at 3:05 a.m. and called for a screening of "Madam Sin" at 5:35 a.m.

Three months later, he made his last bid to return to reality. He announced to his startled aides that, despite his fragile health, poor eyesight and elapsed pilot's license, he would like to fly again. He didn't even own any street clothes.

His aides purchased clothes to his specifications and arranged for him to fly an H/S 748 private jet. On June 9, 1973, he watched a screening of "Strategic Air Command." Thus mentally conditioned, he had a long, 10-hour sleep.

The next morning, Mell Stewart came in at 8:10 and spent until noon grooming, dressing and readying the billionaire for the great event. He slipped out of the hotel shortly after 2 p.m. for a day of flying with an English jet pilot named Tony Blackburn.

Not long afterward, Hughes broke his hip in a bathroom fall and retreated forever into his gloomy penthouse.