

# St. Louis Hunts Hughes Theft Suspect

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LOS ANGELES, March 20—Donald R. Woolbright, indicted here in connection with the 1974 burglary of Howard R. Hughes's Romaine Street headquarters, was the subject of a police manhunt today in St. Louis, according to Missouri law enforcement sources.

Mr. Woolbright is a former California automobile salesman with an extensive police record in St. Louis. He was indicted Tuesday by a Los Angeles County grand jury, after a month-long secret investigation, on counts of attempted extortion and receiving stolen property, according to law enforcement sources. The indictment was not made public.

Mr. Woolbright sold his home in Canoga Park last October 29, resigned his job with a North Hollywood automobile agency, and vanished at the height of a clandestine effort by the police in Los Angeles to recover confidential files stolen from the Hughes headquarters.

Law enforcement officials who declined to be identified have said that the files stolen June 5, 1974 contained documents relating to a covert relationship between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Summa Corporation, Mr. Hughes' chief holding company.

### 'Armed and Dangerous'

The New York Times reported yesterday that the C.I.A. last summer used a vessel built secretly for it by Mr. Hughes in a partly successful effort to recover a sunken Soviet submarine, hydrogen warhead missiles and codes.

Early last year, Mr. Woolbright had told an acquaintance, Leo Gordon, that he had access to "two footlockers" of

"highly explosive" documents from the Romaine Street burglary, according to Mr. Gordon. Mr. Gordon, a television script writer, said in an interview that he had given Mr. Woolbright \$4,000 to purchase one of the files and that Mr. Woolbright had disappeared.

Mr. Gordon then advised an investigator for the district attorney of the approach to him by Mr. Woolbright.

The police in Los Angeles laid a trap for the burglars, baited by an offer of \$1-million, in an effort to recover the stolen files, but the plan failed.

Intelligence sources of the police in St. Louis said today that a widespread search for Mr. Woolbright was in progress there. They described him as "armed and dangerous."

Mr. Woolbright left St. Louis in 1971 and moved to the Los Angeles area, where he became a partner in a Woodland Hills jewelry store and a car salesman for the Cutter Ford agency in nearby North Hollywood.

### Burglary 'On Commission'

At the time of his departure from St. Louis, the Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit alerted the police in Los Angeles that he was moving to southern California. The bulletin described him as a "con man, burglar, and fence."

Police sources said that Mr. Woolbright had been arrested six times in St. Louis between 1964 and 1967 on charges ranging from counterfeiting to suspicion of burglary, but had only two minor convictions. They described him as an associate of organized crime figures in St. Louis, and as having been active in an Ohio gang war in 1967 in which several persons were killed.

Mr. Gordon told law enforcement investigators in Los

Angles that Mr. Woolbright was acquainted with those who had broken into the Hughes headquarters. He quoted Mr. Woolbright as saying that the safecracking had been done "on commission" by four men from St. Louis. Mr. Woolbright claimed to be serving as an intermediary for the burglary team, according to Mr. Gordon.

At one point, Mr. Gordon said, Mr. Woolbright produced a file of the stolen Hughes papers, and described others as dealing with the billionaire's relationship with the C.I.A. and with payments to high political figures.

Shortly after the Romaine Street burglary, a man describing himself as an "intermediary," made a series of telephone calls demanding \$1-million from the Hughes organization for the return of the files. The demand was rejected.

Mr. Woolbright was described as 36 years old, six feet tall, 144 pounds and with a circular white scar on his nose.

Car salesmen here described him as a skilled "turn-over" man—a salesman who takes over reluctant customers and concludes a transaction—who boasted that he was making \$40,000 a year at the time he disappeared.