

Robert Aime Maheu

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LOS ANGELES, July 1— When Robert Aime Maheu finished his first interview as a fledgling agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, he left the subject's house and found that he had locked himself out of his automobile.

**Man
in the
News**

Mr. Maheu told this story about himself at the trial of his \$17.3-million dollar defamation suit against Howard Hughes's Summa Corporation. He told it so well that it brought a wave of laughter from the jurors, the judge, the opposing attorneys and provided one of the few light moments in a bitterly fought four-month trial, which Mr. Maheu won today.

The incident is typical of the man who was described by Judge Harry Pregerson as "an enigma, a puzzlement." Norbert Schlei, the head lawyer for Summa, the holding company that controls the Hughes financial empire, after spending months trying to convince the jury that Mr. Maheu "stole Mr. Hughes blind," grudgingly told the panel in his summation that Mr. Maheu was a man of "considerable charm."

He has fashioned a career that has aspects of a novel jointly written by Ian Fleming and Harold Robbins. In his wartime service with the F.B.I., he lived under the assumed name of Robert Marchand for two years while "babysitting" and supervising a French emigré who had come to the United States as a Nazi agent.

Mr. Maheu helped turn him into a double agent who deceived Hitler's intelligence organization with false radio messages.

Later Mr. Maheu performed chores for the Central Intelli-

gence Agency that an ex-convict, John Roselli, has testified included a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro. During the nineteen-fifties he worked for Stavros Niarchos on a mission to break an exclusive oil-shipping contract between Mr. Niarchos's brother-in-law, Aristotle Onassis, and the Government of Saudi Arabia.

These talents brought him to the attention of Howard R. Hughes, the billionaire industrialist, in the mid-fifties, when Mr. Maheu was operating an investigative and "problem solving" agency in Washington called Robert A. Maheu Associates. His first job for Mr. Hughes, for which he was paid \$100 a day and expenses, consisted of investigating the financé of a Hollywood star in whom Mr. Hughes was interested.

Mr. Maheu was soon handling larger problems for the billionaire, involving political and governmental matters. One of his first major political missions, he testified at the trial, was attempting to squelch an embarrassing story about a secret \$205,000 loan from the Hughes Tool Company to then Vice-President Nixon's brother Donald, during the 1960 Presidential campaign.

\$520,000 a Year

Mr. Hughes was soon assigning him so much work that he moved to Los Angeles, gave up his other clients, and devoted full time to the billionaire. In 1966, when Mr. Hughes moved secretly into the Desert Inn in Las Vegas, he took Mr. Maheu with him and swiftly made him his "chief Nevada executive" at a fee of \$520,000 a year.

For four years, until Mr. Hughes dismissed him in 1970, he served as the reclusive billionaire's eyes and ears under a bizarre arrangement in which he never met his

client race to race but communicated with him by telephone and long, hand written memorandums. He developed close contacts with a wide-ranging array of government officials, played tennis with Gov. Paul Laxalt of Nevada and entertained Vice President Agnew on his Newport-based yacht.

He is a devout Roman Catholic and surprised Las Vegans by opening his luncheon meetings by reciting grace. He has been married for 33 years to his wife, Yvette, who like Mr. Maheu, is of French-Canadian extraction. They met when he was 11 years old and she was 10.

They have four children, Peter, 32, a police officer in Tucson; Robert, 23, who works for a Las Vegas hotel; Mrs. Christine Jagers, 21, who is married to a Las Vegas baccarat dealer and William, 15.

Mr. Maheu was born Oct. 30, 1917, in Waterville, Me., where his father ran a small grocery store. He was educated in parochial schools and obtained a B.A. degree at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Mass.

Like James Bond, he has gourmet tastes, and founded a Las Vegas chapter of the ancient French gourmet society, La Confrerie de la Chaine des Rotisseurs.

He once flabbergasted Las Vegas by staging an international assembly of gourmets on the grounds of the Desert Inn, with a dinner served by Las Vegas waitresses garbed as medieval serving wenches. He is candid about his expensive tastes and his carelessness about bookkeeping and record maintenance. His tax lawyer once termed him a "walking disaster," a characterization that Mr. Maheu volunteered from the witness stand.

"Most people, I have observed, spend 90 per cent of their time scribbling notes and keeping records to justify their existence," he said. "I prefer to use that time getting things done. I've never kept a diary in my life and I don't even own a watch."