

Over a Statement By Howard Hughes

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LOS ANGELES, July 1— Robert A. Maheu won his defamation suit today against his former employer, Howard R. Hughes.

A Federal court jury decided here that Mr. Maheu had been damaged by defaming statements made by the billionaire. The money value of the damage will be decided in a hearing to begin Oct. 8.

Mr. Maheu heard the verdict impassively, then turned and kissed his wife, Yvette, who brushed tears from her eyes. He said, "I feel the verdict vindicates me. I'm quite pleased." His attorney stopped him from saying more.

Counsel representing Mr. Hughes's interests declined to comment, as did Richard Hannah, an employe of a public relations firm whose chief job is to answer questions about Mr. Hughes. Asked four hours later if Mr. Hughes had been told of the verdict, Mr. Hannah said, "I can't say anything on that."

Mr. Maheu had asked for \$17.3-million damages because

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Mr. Hughes, who was his employer from 1953 to 1970, told a telephone news conference in 1972 that he had dismissed Mr. Maheu because "he stole me blind."

A \$4.5-million counterclaim by the Hughes holding company, the Summa Corporation, was rejected by the jury.

The four women and two men on the jury were ordered by Judge Harry Pregerson not to discuss their decision because they must return in three months to consider the

amount of their award to Mr. Maheu.

The verdict came within an hour of their return to a fifth day of deliberation this morning, and after a weekend away from the case that began on Feb. 26.

The case became a confrontation between Mr. Maheu, who was always present in the courtroom, and Mr. Hughes, who was not present, and who was not a defendant, although his money will pay the judgment, if the verdict survives the appeal that is certain to be filed.

Mr. Maheu named the Summa Corporation as the defendant because its employes arranged the news conference at which the damaging statements were made and because it would have been almost im-

possible to serve legal process on Mr. Hughes.

The corporation is totally owned by Mr. Hughes and it holds title to most of his properties.

The jury was able to sample Mr. Hughes's personality and thought processes through scores of handwritten memorandums that passed from him to Mr. Maheu during the 1966-70 period when Mr. Maheu managed the Hughes Nevada properties and Mr. Hughes lived in seclusion in the penthouse atop the Desert Inn Hotel in Las Vegas.

Norbert Schlei, who represented Summa in the trial, described the man seen through those memos as "elderly, crotchety, with a one-track mind." Mr. Schlei also said that Mr. Hughes had "an ob-

solute phobia against personal appearances," and that this was why he did not appear to deny Mr. Maheu's explanations of the relationships between them.

Mr. Maheu has never seen Mr. Hughes face to face, although he saw a shadowy figure at a distance in darkness twice in their 17 years of association and talked with a man he thought was Howard Hughes countless times by telephone.

Nadine Henley, Mr. Hughes's private secretary for 30 years, testified at the trial that she had seen Mr. Hughes only three times since 1961.

With Mr. Hughes unavailable to them, the jurors seemed to have relied on their impressions of him as gained from the memos. Sources familiar with their actions during delib-

eration said the jurors spent most of their day on Friday reading the memos, and then asked to be excused until today when they quickly voted a verdict against Mr. Hughes's interests.

At one point in the trial, Mr. Schlei indicated that he hoped that Mr. Hughes might at least give written answers to written questions. But this was never done.

Further, Judge Pregerson was told at one point by Mr. Schlei that the defense expected to bring in Kay Glenn, custodian of the files of Mr. Hughes's memorandums, to answer questions about them. But when time came for Mr. Glenn's testimony, he was in the Bahamas, where Mr. Hughes now lives, and the trial ended without his testimony.



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