

Senate Spy Inquiry to Look for Hughes Links

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WASHINGTON, March 24—The investigation by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence into the attempt by the Central Intelligence Agency to salvage a Soviet submarine will lead the committee into the relationships between Howard R. Hughes and the Watergate case, former Watergate investigators say privately.

For some two decades Mr. Hughes and the vast complex involving the Hughes Tool Company, Hughes Aircraft and, later, the Summa Corporation have long been a major contractor of equipment for the C.I.A. This relationship fed speculation that the reclusive billionaire may have even more covert contacts with the agency.

But it was not until 1973 and the Senate Watergate investigation that a pattern of evidence suggested that divisions of the Hughes empire might in deed have been linked with the C.I.A. and political machinations of the Nixon Administration, including Watergate.

Several Watergate committee investigators said that the \$350-million C.I.A. contract with Mr. Hughes to salvage the submarine might well be part of an intriguing chronology of events that they encountered during Watergate.

Two Problems for Hughes

In 1968 Mr. Hughes, according to court testimony, appeared to have two major problems with the Government. The Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice had warned him not to buy any further casinos in Las Vegas.

And, second, the Atomic Energy Commission intended to conduct more nuclear tests in Nevada. Mr. Hughes, according to this testimony, wanted to change the Justice Department's mind and stop the A.E.C. tests.

He ordered a series of secret political contributions that culminated in the payment of \$100,000 to Charles G. Rebozo, the Florida banker and close friend of Richard M. Nixon, for the benefit of the then newly elected President. Mr.

Hughes's intention, according to the testimony of his former aide, Robert A. Maheu, in a trial last year, was to gain influence in the Government.

In late 1969 and early 1970, at the same time Mr. Hughes's \$100,000 was being delivered to Mr. Rebozo, the C.I.A., recent news accounts have disclosed, was looking for a company to recover a Soviet diesel submarine that had gone down some 700 miles off Hawaii.

The C.I.A., these accounts said, awarded a \$350-million contract to Howard Hughes's holding company, the Summa Corporation, to handle the recovery operation.

And, indeed, Global Marine, Inc., a firm controlled by Mr. Hughes, constructed the Glomar Explorer that tried to raise the sub. The construction and planning for this mission appears to have spanned the years between 1970 and 1973.

Other Hughes Links

During this same period other figures were taking their places at the periphery of what became known as the Watergate scandals. Lawrence F. O'Brien, fresh from the Presidential campaign of Hubert H. Humphrey (also a recipient of Mr. Hughes's largesse), joined a public relations concern that had a \$15,000-a-month retainer from the Hughes organization.

Robert Bennett, son of Utah's retired Republican Senator Wallace F. Bennett and Washington representative for Summa Corporation, bought into the Robert F. Mullen Company, an international public relations concern that was operating as a front for the C.I.A.

In August, 1970, E. Howard Hunt, a veteran C.I.A. agent, appeared to retire from the

C.I.A. and joined the Mullen Company.

In December, 1970, Mr. Hughes discharged Mr. Maheu, a former F.B.I. agent who had managed the Hughes Las Vegas interests. Mr. Maheu, testimony would later bring out, had put documents about Hughes political contributions in a safe owned by Herman M. Greenspun, a Las Vegas newspaper publisher.

Mr. Maheu was once alleged to have been involved in a 1960 plot, organized by the C.I.A., to assassinate Cuban Premier Fidel Castro. When asked in court about the allegations, Mr. Maheu declined to discuss them, citing national security considerations.

Material in Safe

Although the details have become blurred by contradictory testimony, in 1971 certain aides to President Nixon were told that Mr. Greenspun's safe contained materials that could be damaging to Senator Edmund S. Muskie, Democrat of Maine. Mr. Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, then the nucleus of the secret White House unit called the "plumbers," contemplated breaking into the safe. They were allegedly promised the assistance of officials of Summa Corporation. The burglary was not carried out, but Watergate investigators strongly suspected that the target was not memorandums about Senator

Muskie, but the Hughes memos hidden there by Mr. Maheu.

By the spring of 1972 the stage was set for the Watergate burglary. Mr. O'Brien was then chairman of the Democratic party with offices in the Watergate office complex. R. Spencer Oliver Jr., whose father was a Washington lobbyist for the Hughes organization, had an office in the complex as executive director for the Association for State Democratic Chairmen.

Meanwhile, the Soviet submarine project was under way, presumably with the approval of Henry A. Kissinger, who was then Mr. Nixon's adviser for national security affairs, of the secret 40 Committee and of the President himself.

Mr. Hunt and Mr. Liddy had formed a burglary team of Cuban-Americans and James W. McCord, a former C.I.A. security officer. The team was briefed and made its first entry in May, 1972. The Cuban members later said they were told to look for documents that might link the Democrats with money from Communist-bloc countries.

C.I.A. Concern

But the telephone upon which a tap was placed was R. Spencer Oliver's.

On June 16, 1972, the team re-entered the Democratic National Committee Headquarters to repair the tap and obtain more documents. Five of the

GARDENS

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to Watergate

burglars were arrested by the Washington Police early on the morning of June 17.

From the time of the break-in on, the C.I.A. appeared to show concern that the Watergate investigation might uncover its own secrets. It withheld vital evidence from the F.B.I., and in early 1973, Richard Helms, then the Director of Central Intelligence, ordered tape recordings of his calls over six years destroyed. The tapes included top-level conversations with the White House.

As the Watergate prosecutions bore in, several suspects insisted publicly and privately that the investigations could compromise national security.

At least the Watergate defendants linked the national security concern to Mr. Hughes.

In June, 1974, the Glomar Explorer, reliable sources have said, began its salvage operation in the Pacific. At almost the same time, on June 5, 1974, four burglars entered the Los Angeles office of Summa Corporation and stole papers concerning the secret project.

On July 9, 1974, an official of the Summa Corporation received a call demanding a \$1-million ransom, according to press accounts. This began an involved effort by the F.B.I. to get the materials back. By early 1975 facts about the secret attempt to salvage the submarine had begun to leak out.