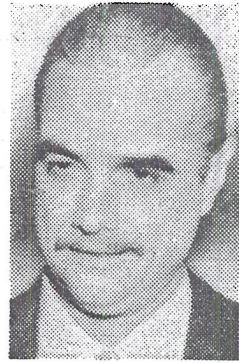


70 Years Old

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Howard Hughes Dies on a Plane



Howard Hughes

Report of A Stroke

Houston

Howard Hughes, the phantom financier who ruled a business empire valued at more than \$2 billion from a series of secret hideaways, died yesterday en route to a hospital here for treatment. He was 70.

The aviation pioneer died aboard a chartered ambulance jet half an hour before it landed in Houston, according to spokesmen at Methodist Hospital.

Hughes died of a stroke — "a cerebral vascular accident," according to Arelo Sederberg, spokesman for Hughes' Summa Corp. in Los Angeles.

No decisions have been made about the fate of Hughes' business holdings, Sederberg said. "I can't talk about that yet, not now." Funeral arrangements were pending, he said.

The hospital disclosed Hughes' death in a brief statement: "Today at 1:27 p.m. en route from Acapulco, Mexico, to Houston by air, Mr. Howard R. Hughes expired."

Hospital Vice President Larry Mathis said the hospital learned about 9 a.m. that Hughes was coming to Houston for treatment. A medical team in an unmarked ambulance met the jet when it landed at Houston Intercontinental Airport about 2 p.m., but Hughes was already dead, Mathis said.

Shortly before the plane landed, its crew alerted airport officials to get ready "to service a bed patient in a diabetic coma," U.S. Customs spokesman Charles Conroy said.

Customs agents did not know who the patient was until the plane landed and a doctor said the patient was dead and his name was Howard Hughes, Conroy said.

An unidentified Customs inspector caught a glimpse of the body as it was carried off the plane.

"She said he looked emaciated, thin and aged ... his hair appeared matted," Conroy said.

The pilots of the ambulance jet said it was chartered in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., late Sunday. But not until five hours after they arrived in Acapulco did they learn that their patient was Howard Hughes.

Copilot Jeff Abrams said Hughes looked "like a tired, worn-

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out old person" when he was carried aboard the plane on a stretcher.

Pilot Roger Sutton described Hughes as "very wasted" and "very, very pale." Sutton said Hughes had a thin beard and long, grayish hair.

"He moved his lips a little bit when they put him on the plane, but I couldn't hear anything," said Sutton.

In Beverly Hills, Hughes' second wife, actress Jean Peters, said simply, "I'm sorry; I'm saddened."

The story of Hughes' career on Page 4

upon learning of Hughes' death. She divorced Hughes in 1971 after 14 years of marriage.

The hospital did not disclose the reason for Hughes' need for medical treatment. The status of the health of the recluse has been unknown for years. Methodist, however, is the home hospital of famed heart surgeon Dr. Michael DeBakey.

Sources at the hospital said the staff was alerted shortly after 9 a.m. that an important patient, "J.T. Conover," would be arriving and within hours the building was being patrolled by numerous plain-clothes security guards.

Mathis said the hospital had received no instructions about disposing of the body, which was under guard in the hospital's pathology lab.