



In 1947, Hughes smiled as he finished testifying before the Senate on his aircraft business

Dies

A Very Private Billionaire

Howard Hughes inherited millions and built them into billions until he became one of the richest men in the world. Then he retreated into such seclusion that for the last years of his life people argued that he had died years ago.

Hughes' obsession with privacy and secrecy in his personal life was such that only his closest aides saw him in his last years. He lived in heavily guarded hotel suites in Las Vegas, London, Vancouver, Nicaragua and the Bahamas.

The drive of the phantom billionaire persisted, however, and he bought airlines, hotels and casinos, silver mines and airports the way ordinary people purchase a family car.

In 1965, a respected business magazine estimated Hughes' wealth at between \$1 billion and \$1.4 billion. Next to oilman J. Paul Getty, Howard Hughes was probably the richest of all Americans.

The reputation of Howard Hughes Jr., first as a Hollywood playboy, then a controversial moviemaker, a daredevil pilot and finally an eccentric recluse, overshadowed his remarkable achievements in aviation and the postwar Hollywood film industry.

During his varied career, Hughes once owned or held controlling interest in Trans World Airlines, the biggest brewery in Texas, the RKO film studio and the Hughes Aircraft Co., which built the surveyor mooncraft and had annual sales of \$500 million.

The instrument through which he manipulated his vast empire, whether it was buying Nevada silver claims or airlines, was the Hughes Tool Co., later known as Summa Corp.

Hughes discovered and made movie stars of Jean Harlow and Jane Russell. His RKO films included "Hell's Angels," one of the screen's great air epics, and "The Outlaw," a film which featured bosomy Miss Russell and which touched off a long battle with Hollywood censors.



In 1941, Hughes (standing) directed 'The Outlaw', which starred Jane Russell and Walter Huston (left)

Playboy, Daredevil, Industrialist, Recluse

In 1966, Hughes sold his 78 per cent interest in TWA for \$546 million, traveled briefly to Boston — reputedly for an operation to bolster his failing hearing — then took a private train across the country to Las Vegas and secreted himself behind a barricade of guards and special passwords in the Penthouse of the Desert Inn, a hotel he later purchased.

From his heavily guarded Desert Inn headquarters, Hughes bought six other hotels and casinos plus more than 40,000 acres of land and scores of ore claims in and around Las Vegas. It only took two years before Hughes turned a tidy profit on Airwest, a losing Western States commuter airline when the billionaire bought it in 1970.

Hughes threw his organization into pandemonium when he swiftly and secretly departed from Las Vegas on the eve of Thanksgiving, 1970 ... just four years to the day after he arrived.



HUGHES, THE PILOT
The Harmon trophy in 1937

Upon landing in the Bahamas, he took over the top floor of a resort hotel then let his top aides bicker in public about replacing his top Nevada operations man, Robert Maheu.

Just as suddenly as Hughes appeared, he vanished from the Bahamas and isolated himself and his retinue in a Vancouver, B.C., hotel suite and then in the Intercontinental Hotel in Managua, chatting occasionally with the Nicaraguan president in utter secrecy until the disastrous earthquake that leveled that city on Dec. 23, 1972, forced him out.

Hughes divorced a Houston debutante after four years of marriage in 1929, then much later

began a ten-year courtship with a pretty young film actress, Jean Peters, marrying her in 1957. They divorced in 1971 without children.

For some years they had lived together in Hughes' ninth floor hideout in Las Vegas, and the second Mrs. Hughes was occasionally sighted around town. But it was impossible to track down anyone who had actually seen the "invisible" billionaire outside his lair.

There were weird stories that he was transported to and from the hotel in a refrigerator freezer and it was known he did spend some time on a ranch outside the gambling resort.

The tall, handsome young bachelor who in the 40s squired such Hollywood lovelies, as Lana Turner, Ginger Rogers, Ida Lupino, Ava Gardner, Paulette Goddard and Katharine Hepburn, had not granted a face-to-face interview since 1957.

Yet in 1972, Hughes emerged from 15-years of silence to hold a telephonic news conference to disclaim the authenticity of an alleged autobiography by Clifford Irving.

Hughes spent nearly three hours lamenting his self-imposed hermitage, reciting some little known details of his life, informing the reporters of his good health — reports of his death to the contrary — and denouncing the Irving "autobiography" as a fraud.

Last year, Hughes' name surfaced in disclosures that the CIA had used his mystery ship, the Glomar Explorer, in an attempt to salvage a Russian submarine from the floor of the Pacific Ocean off Hawaii.

Hughes turned on his former top aide, Maheu, during the rambling, lengthy interview, describing him as a "son of a bitch" who "stole

me blind," remarks which ignited Maheu to file a \$17.3 million libel suit.

The billionaire's closest aides kept mum about their employer's personal life and the reading public digested fact and myth with equal gusto — no one being absolutely sure that Hughes didn't shuffle around his hotel room in Kleenex boxes to prevent infection, or that he didn't disinfect his hands after he shook hands with an associate.

He won two of aviation's most coveted awards — the Harmon and the Collyer trophies — and a New York ticker tape parade for his record setting flights. Hughes, who insisted on personally testing every plane he designed, survived four plane crashes.

In the H-1 racing plane that he helped design, he set a world speed record of 352 miles an hour in 1935.

He conceived two of the nation's most famous planes, the World War II fighter, P-38 Lightning, and the Constellation airliner which brought luxury to commercial air travel.

But those achievements were obscured by his great plywood flying boat fiasco. During World War II he embarked on the project to build the gigantic HKL flying boat, designed to carry 750 soldiers to overseas battlefields and to thwart enemy submarines.

Because of the war ban on metal, Hughes was forced to use plywood to construct his 200-ton, 219-foot long craft, powered by eight 3000 horsepower engines.

It was promptly dubbed the "Spruce Goose" and the "Flying Lumberyard" by critics who said it would never get off the ground. More than \$58 million was poured into the flying boat and it became a subject of a Congressional investigation.

On Nov. 3, 1947, Hughes succeeded in personally flying the craft at an altitude of 70 feet for about a mile. It was never airborne again but was kept in a specially built, heavily guarded hangar at San Pedro, Calif.

Many of the legends about Hughes sprang from his unorthodox business methods. He liked to conduct business at all hours of the day or night in public telephone booths, parked cars, hotel closets and airplane cockpits. He would work until he was exhausted and then catch a few hours sleep.

Hughes was born in Houston on Dec. 24, 1905, the only child of Howard Robard Hughes Sr. and Allene Gano Hughes. His mother's family belonged to the Texas social aristocracy. His father invented a revolutionary oil drill bit and founded Hughes Tool Co. to manufacture the bit, which was leased, not sold, and was used in most rock oil drills.

Early in life, Hughes displayed his mechanical aptitude. When his father refused him a motorcycle, he made a motor out of an auto selfstarter and hooked it onto his bicycle. It ran.

In the 1940s, Hughes escorted many glamorous film stars, including Ava Gardner

He was educated at preparatory schools in Massachusetts and California and attended Caltech and Rice Institute in Houston briefly.

The elder Hughes died when his son was 19, and the youth convinced a judge to allow him to take control of the tool company. Hughes spent a year at the company learning the business, then leaving his executives to run it, headed for Hollywood moviemaking.

His first wife, Ella Rice, was a member of the family for which Rice Institute was named.

So great was his fascination with flying that he worked as an American Airlines copilot in 1932, when he was already one of the country's richest men.

In addition to the 352 mile an hour record in 1935, Hughes flew from Los Angeles to New York in 7 ½ hours in 1937. In 1938, with a crew of four, he flew around the world in the then remarkable time of 91 hours.

In the test of another of his planes, the XF-11, a long-range photographic reconnaissance plane he designed for the army, Hughes



**EX-WIFE JEAN PETERS
A divorce in 1971**

crashed into a mansion in the Bel Air section of Los Angeles. He was listed in critical condition from multiple head and internal injuries, broken bones and burns, but the next day he was attempting to run his business from his hospital bed.

During his hospital stay, he designed and had built for him a special push button controlled bed with some 80 separate moveable sections.

His refusal to appear in a Los Angeles court in 1963 to give a pre-trial deposition prompted a federal judge to enter a default judgment against him in a \$115 million suit brought by TWA.

The battle was precipitated by the advent of the jet age in 1959. To finance some \$300 million worth of jets, Hughes had to borrow from a group of Wall Street interests, which forced him to place his TWA stock in a voting trust. The lenders controlled the trust, thus stripping Hughes of control of TWA. Finally, after seven years of legal maneuvering, Hughes sold his stock in 1966.

Some information about Hughes' life came to light in Maheu's \$17.3 million libel suit in which Maheu was claiming the huge damages because of Hughes' statement that Maheu "stole me blind" when the former FBI agent headed his Las Vegas and Nevada operations.

Although he was receiving a yearly salary of around \$500,000, Maheu said in court that he had never met Hughes face-to-face but only talked with him on the telephone and received instructions through intermediaries.

Hank Greenspun, publisher of the Las Vegas Sun, testified that shortly after Hughes moved into the Desert Inn hotel in Las Vegas in 1966 his aides called Greenspun's television station, KLAS, about the hours the station was on the air and its programs.

Greenspun said Hughes liked to stay up until almost sunrise watching television and wanted the station to stay on the air all night. The eccentric billionaire also asked for more cowboy and airplane movies.

Greenspun said he finally asked "why doesn't he buy the damned station then" and Hughes did so for more than \$2 million.

The Maheu trial also brought out that Hughes had been a lavish contributor to political candidates, Democrats and Republicans alike, and that the donations were usually made in cash.

Maheu said he personally put a briefcase containing \$50,000 in \$100 bills on the floor of a limousine alongside Hubert Humphrey outside a Los Angeles hotel during Humphrey's unsuccessful 1968 presidential campaign.

Humphrey denied ever personally receiving such a huge cash contribution but acknowledged that Hughes may have furnished substantial amounts for his campaign.

The Maheu trial and the Watergate investigation also revealed that in 1970 Hughes instructed his subordinates to make \$100,000 in cash available for President Nixon's campaign expenses.

The money was turned over to Mr. Nixon's close friend, Charles Rebozo who told investigators that he kept the money — again in \$100 bills — in a safety deposit box in a Key Biscayne, Fla., bank for three years and then returned it to Hughes' officials.