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Billionaire Howard Hughes Dies at 70

Howard Hughes, an American legend because of the size of his fortune, the way he made it and the reclusive life it made possible, died yesterday while flying from Acapulco, Mexico, to Houston, Tex. He was 70.

First reports from Methodist Hospital in Houston did little to dispel the mystery that had surrounded the powerful ruler of a great, if troubled, business empire.

"Today at 1:27 p.m. en route from Acapulco to Houston by air Mr. Howard R. Hughes expired," hospital vice president Ed McLellan said. "Mr. Hughes was en route to Houston to the Methodist Hospital for medical treatment."

No other information could immediately be obtained except the fact that Mr. Hughes' body was said to be in Houston.

Although Mr. Hughes' empire has been embroiled in legal disputes, and the extent of his enterprises cloaked in controversy, his holdings have been evaluated as high as \$2 billion. He was said to be one of the half dozen richest men in the world.

His interests were in the areas filled with the romance of the American dream and the American legend—oil, Texas, Hollywood, aviation.

But despite the glamor that naturally adhered to his enterprises and exploits, he had in recent years shut himself off almost entirely from the world, living in a manner so reclusive as to raise serious questions as to whether he was, in fact, still alive.

Acapulco, where he reportedly began a flight to Houston yesterday, was the most recent of the hideaways in which he had shut himself off from a fascinated world.

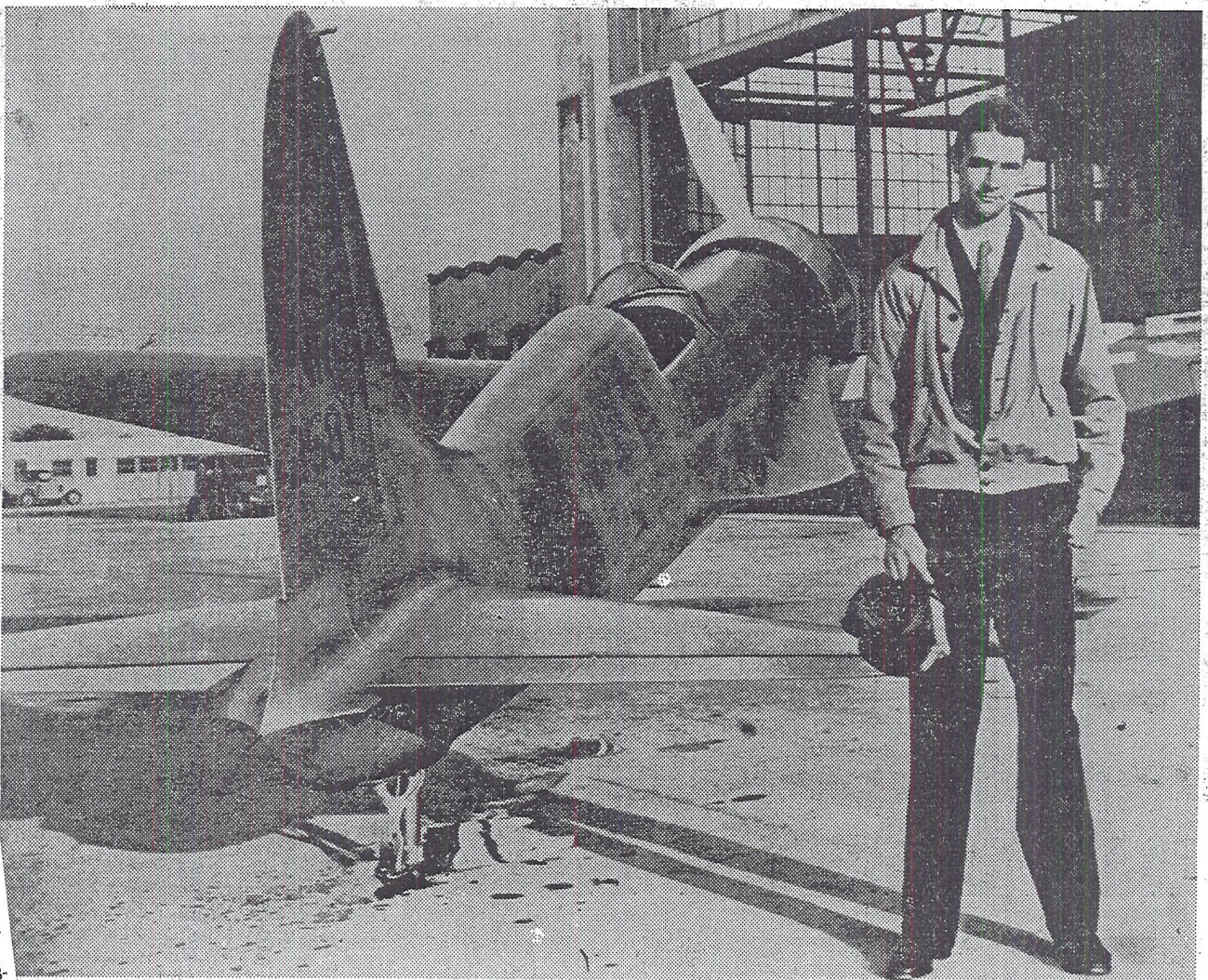
According to one report, Mr. Hughes was accompanied by a physician and was in a coma when he arrived at Houston airport in a private Lear jet.



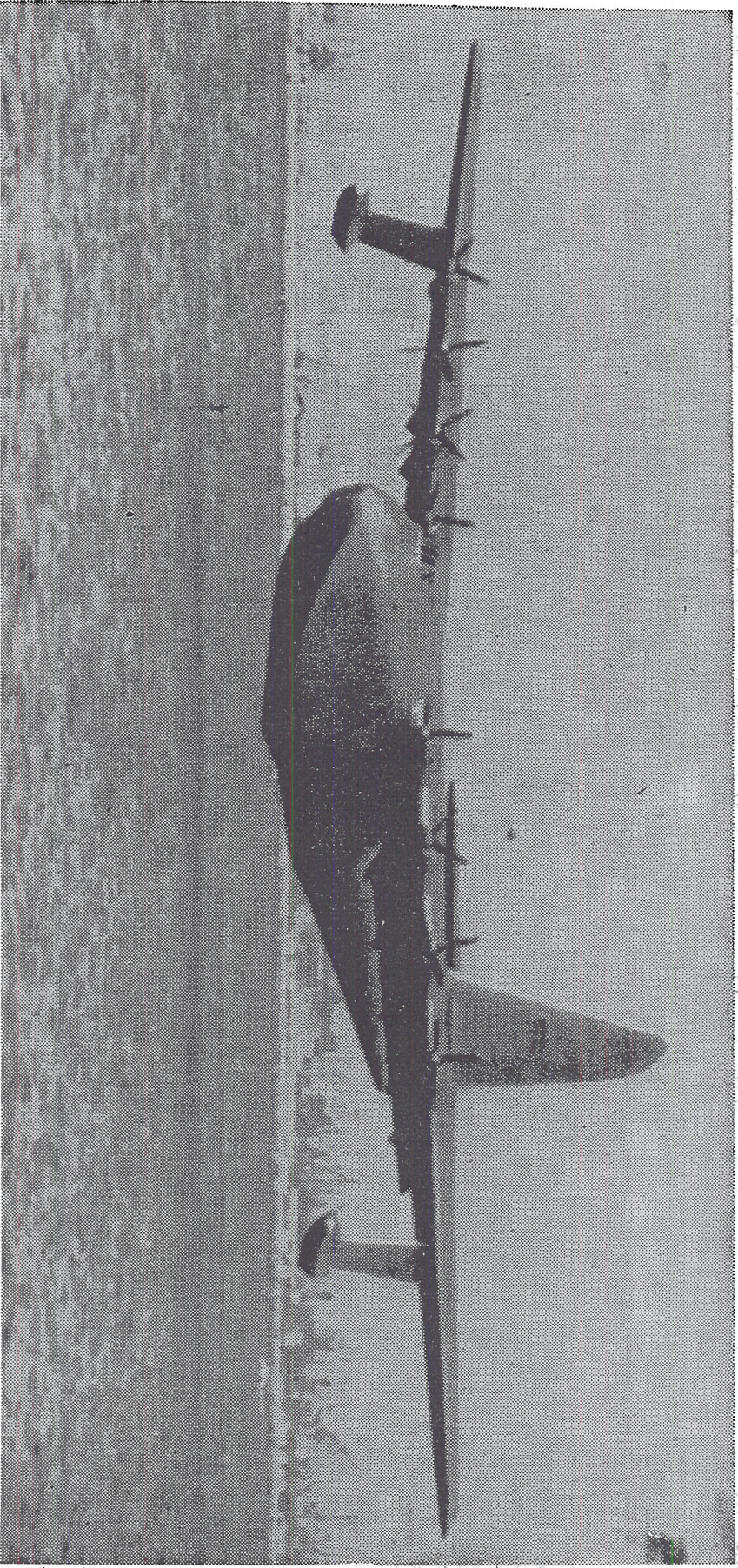
Associated Press

See HUGHES, A8, Col. 1

Howard Hughes arrives in Washington in 1947 for Senate hearings.

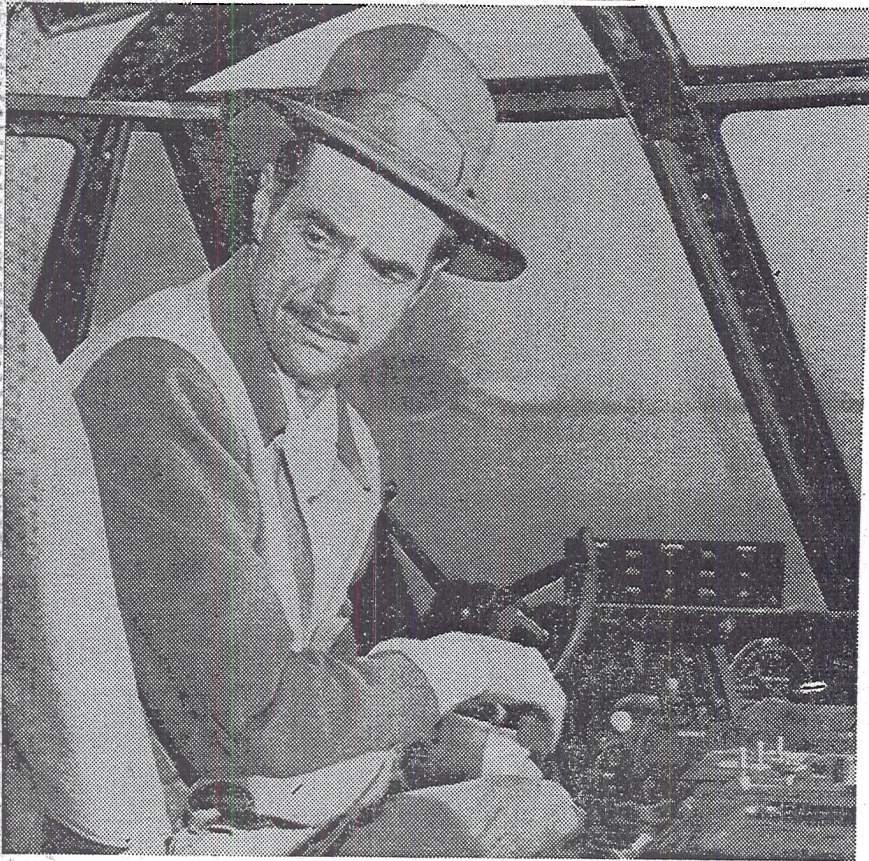


Record-setting pilot and winner of coveted trophies, a young Howard Hughes stands beside H-1 American Racer.



Designed to carry 740 soldiers into battle, the plane was flown only once. Hughes piloted the craft, 70 feet up, for about a mile.

United Press International and Associated Press



Hughes sits at controls of his controversial flying boat in 1947.



Howard Hughes testifies at 1947 Senate hearing.

HUGHES, From A1

The plane reportedly was met by a medical team in an unmarked ambulance.

Mr. 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, the younger Hughes displayed his mechanical aptitude. When his father refused him a motorcycle, he made a motor out of an auto self-starter and hooked it onto his bicycle. It worked.

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

The elder Hughes died when his son was 19, and the youth persuaded a judge to allow him to take control of the tool company. Mr. Hughes spent a year at the company learning the business. Then he left his executives to run it and 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. As a pilot, he set several speed records in the 1930s.

In addition to a 352-mile-an-hour record in 1935, he flew from Los Angeles to New York in 7½ 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, long-range photographic reconnaissance plane he designed for the Army, Mr. Hughes crashed into a mansion in the Bel Air section of Los Angeles. He was listed in critical condition with 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.

The billionaire's closest aides kept quiet about their employer's personal life and the reading public was left with a mixture of fact and myth—no one being absolutely sure that Mr. 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 Collier trophies—and was given a New York ticker tape parade for his record-setting flights. Mr. Hughes, who insisted on personally testing every plane he designed, survived four plane crashes.

He conceived two of the nation's most famous planes, the World War II fighter, Lightning, and the Con-

stellation 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, Mr. Hughes was forced to use plywood to construct his 200-ton, 219-foot long craft, powered by eight 3,000-horsepower engines.

It was promptly dubbed the "Spruce Goose" and the Flying Lumberyard" by critics who said it would never fly. More than \$58 million was spent on the flying boat, and it became a subject of a congressional investigation. The senators heard Mr. Hughes' caustic testimony, and the inquiry was dropped.

On Nov. 3, 1947, Mr. 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.

During his varied career Mr. 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 snapping up Nevada silver claims or buying airlines, was Hughes Tools Co., later known as Summa Corp.

Mr. 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 Jane Russell and which touched off a long battle with Hollywood censors.

In 1966 Mr. Hughes sold his 78 per cent interest in TWA for \$548 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.

Mr. Hughes threw his organization into pandemonium when he swiftly and secretly left Las Vegas the day before thanksgiving, 1970, just four years to the day after he arrived.

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 Mr. 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 earthquake that leveled that city on Dec. 23, 1972, forced him out.

Mr. Hughes' slim mustached features turned seamed and haggard in later years and he had not been recognized in public for years, although national magazines made lucrative offers for current photographs (at age 67 the world's wealthiest hermit was said to slip through London crowds unnoticed by becoming a master of disguise).

From his heavily guarded Desert Inn parapet Mr. 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 took only two years before he turned a tidy profit on Airwest, a losing commuter airline when he bought it in 1970.

Within three years of coming to Las Vegas, Mr. Hughes owned six casinos and hotels—the Desert Inn, the Sands, the Castaways, the Frontier, the Silver Slipper, the Stardust and the Landmark.

He made a bid to acquire control of ABC, the nation's third largest television network, by offering to buy 43 per cent of its stock for \$148.5 million, but the deal fell through.

Mr. Hughes married a Houston debutante in 1929, and divorced her four years later. In 1947 he began a 10-year courtship of film actress Jean Peters, marrying her in 1957. They were divorced in 1971.

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