

Hughes Was Afraid



Jack Anderson

HOWARD R. HUGHES and his aides turned down a request to help finance the ransom of Patty Hearst, according to the late billionaire's private papers, because they feared Hughes might be kidnaped in retaliation by the gun-crazy Symbionese Liberation Army.

"This organization is a very dangerous, radical group," warns a staff memo, "and we are afraid that they might retaliate by trying to kidnap one of our executives, or even HRH."

The Hearst family had hoped Hughes would put up some of the \$4 million in food-for-the-poor that the kidnapers had demanded as a ransom. Reluctantly, Hughes declined.

Instead, Hughes impulsively put a plane at the disposal of Patty's father, Randolph Hearst, on a 24-hours basis. As it turned out, the plane wasn't needed.

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THE RELATIONSHIP between Hughes and the Hearsts is revealed in the cache of papers, which the Mexican authorities seized at our instigation after the dying billionaire was flown from Acapulco to Houston last year.

Hughes had always admired William Randolph Hearst Sr., founder of the Hearst newspaper empire and builder of the fabulous San Simeon castle. It is likely that the late publisher may have inspired some of Hughes' early dash.

Hearst's son, William Randolph, Jr., turned to Hughes in 1966 to save his struggling New York newspaper, the World Journal Tribune. Although Hughes dearly wanted a newspaper outlet in a major city, he dilly-dallied as the paper piled up losses.

Hearst finally heard from Hughes the same day he was forced to close down the paper. Recalling it all a decade later, Hearst said that Hughes probably would have kept on dawdling. "I liked him," said Hearst, "but he was tight as a sausage skin."

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AGAIN IN 1974, the Hearsts appealed to Hughes for part of the \$4 million ransom for Patty Hearst. The recluse's attorney, Chester Davis, reported that he and aide William Gay "both feel very strongly that it would be highly inadvisable for you to become involved."

Hughes, therefore, rejected the request, but left open the option "if at the last minute it appears that (the Hearsts) need immediate cash."

Still later in 1974, the Hearst corporation was buying back its stock from the foundations that held it. "The Hearst Corporation..." an aide advised Hughes, "is interested in borrowing \$100 million."

Once again, Hughes was tempted by the newspaper business, but once again he stalled. And Hearst went to conventional lenders.