

# An Easy Burglary Led to the Disclosure of

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LOS ANGELES, March 26—When a burglar thrust a gun in the back of a security guard at Howard R. Hughes's headquarters here last June 5, he set in motion a chain of events that breached one of the most tightly held secrets of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The burglary led to the publication, in February, of a newspaper article about a Hughes contract with the C.I.A. to raise a sunken Soviet submarine, and a month later, despite strenuous efforts by the C.I.A. to block it, the story of how the agency raised part of the craft but failed to find codes or nuclear missiles became known around the world.

The sequence of events has been pieced together in interviews with Federal and local law enforcement officials, private investigators, Hughes personnel and private individuals involved in the events.

The burglars gained entry into the billionaire defense contractor's headquarters at 7020 Romaine Street with an ease that has astonished police investigators.

Police investigators expressed the belief, several weeks after the burglary, that it was an inside job.

"It is the investigating officer's opinion," a followup police report declared, "that someone within the corporation set up or supplied the information for this burglary. It is not known at this time whether the purpose was for money or for certain documents."

According to police reports, the Hughes organization had only a single guard, Mike Davis, on duty at the building that houses the billionaire's confidential files. The reports also say that the building's electrical alarm system was not working and apparently had been out of order for some time. Only one other person, a telephone operator, was present in the two-story building.

The four-man burglar team, trundling a heavy two-tank acetylene torch on a steel dolly, went directly to the office of Kay Glenn after forcing the

guard to let them into the building.

Mr. Glenn is the assistant to Frank William Gay, a member of the executive triumvirate that runs Summa Corporation, Mr. Hughes's holding company for his many enterprises. The executive committee consists of Mr. Gay, Nadine Henley, Mr. Hughes's private secretary, and Chester Davis, a New York lawyer.

The Summa Corporation, it became known later, had a top-secret contract with the Central Intelligence Agency to recover the Russian nuclear-weapons submarine, which sank in 1968 after several explosions.

The recovery attempt was to be made by a purported sea-mining ship, the Glomar Explorer, and its companion barge, the HMB 1. Both were built for the Hughes organization with Federal funds, unofficially estimated as high as \$250-million.

## Took Footlockers

From its inception, the project was cloaked in tight security and its true mission concealed by a cover story—that Mr. Hughes had built the Glomar Explorer with his own money to mine mineral nodules from the ocean floor.

The burglars burned open Mr. Glenn's safe and a large vault in a nearby office and fled with two footlockers full of documents.

The original public announcement made no mention of any stolen documents. The police burglary bulletin, circulated among law enforcement agencies, listed only \$68,000 in cash, two Wedgwood vases, a ceramic samovar, two butterfly collections, three digital watches and an antique Mongolian eating bowl as having been stolen.

Ten days after the burglary, a man giving the name of Chester Brooks began telephoning the Hughes headquarters and demanding to talk to Mr. Glenn, Miss Henley or Mr. Davis on what he described as "urgent business."

When they declined to take his calls, he left a message.

He said that if a Hughes employe would go to a park opposite 16944 Ventura Boulevard in suburban Encino, he would find a white envelope on a green trash can. The park is only a short distance from Mr. Gay's office.

If the Hughes officials were interested in the contents of the envelope, Chester Brooks said, they should place an ad in The Los Angeles Times saying "Apex OK" with a telephone contact number written backward.

The envelope was retrieved from the trash can by a Hughes aide. In it was one of Mr. Hughes's handwritten memos, stolen from the Romaine Street building. Convinced that Chester Brooks was representing the burglars, Hughes officials began a brief abortive series of telephone negotiations.

"Brooks" demanded \$1-million for the return of the stolen files. He proposed that they be delivered in two stages of \$500,000 each, and declared that he wanted to deal with Miss Henley.

When he called again, at a prearranged time, he was told that Miss Henley was not available.

"Well, okay," he is reported to have replied. "Bye-bye to you."

That was the last known contact between the burglars and the Hughes officials.

Several weeks later, the case took a bizarre turn.

Among the Hughes documents in Mr. Glenn's custody was a memorandum spelling out to the billionaire the details of the C.I.A.-financed project to recover the sunken Russian submarine.

One day, Mr. Glenn discovered that the memorandum was not in a briefcase where he thought he had left it. Consternation ran through the top level of the organization when someone suggested that it might have been left in the safe that the burglars had looted.

By this time the Glomar Explorer had left his Long Beach berth and was creeping westward toward the site of the

sunken submarine northwest of Hawaii.

A Hughes official notified William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, that details of the enormously sensitive submarine recovery project might be in the hands of unknown burglars. Mr. Colby is reported to have relayed this information to Clarence M. Kelley, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with instructions to regain contact with the safecrackers.

A plan was devised to bait a trap with an offer of one million dollars in Federal funds for the return of the documents. Mr. Kelley relayed this proposal to William Sullivan, head of the Los Angeles F.B.I. office, who in turn passed it on to the Los Angeles Police Chief, Edward Davis.

At about the time the Glomar Explorer was positioned over the sunken submarine, a new figure appeared in the intense Los Angeles effort to recover the stolen files.

He was Donald R. Woolbright, an automobile salesman in suburban Canoga Park and a man with an extensive police record in St. Louis during the nineteen-sixties. He approached a television script writer, Leo Gordon, and told him he had access to the stolen Hughes files. Mr. Gordon later told a reporter. Mr. Woolbright obtained \$4,000 from Mr. Gordon to finance a plan to sell the files to Der Spiegel, a West German magazine, the writer said.

Representatives of Der Spiegel deny that any approach or offer of the files was made to them.

"I guess Woolbright just talked about Der Spiegel and didn't follow through," Mr. Gordon told a reporter when advised of this.

After obtaining the \$4,000, Mr. Woolbright abandoned contact with Mr. Gordon. Last week Mr. Woolbright was indicted by a Los Angeles County grand jury on counts of attempted extortion and receiving stolen property. He is now being sought by police.

In his discussions with Mr. Gordon, Mr. Woolbright de-

# Hughes-C.I.A. Plan to Salvage Soviet Sub

scribed the stolen files as containing documents dealing with the C.I.A. and "politically explosive" financial payments by Mr. Hughes to high political figures.

After Mr. Woolbright broke off contact, Mr. Gordon went to district attorney investigators and disclosed his conversations with Mr. Woolbright. The later's references to C.I.A. material in the stolen files intensified the covert police effort to recover the Hughes documents.

Mr. Gordon agreed to cooperate, and a trap was laid for the burglars, baited with an offer of a million dollars in Federal money. Discussions were held about granting Mr. Woolbright immunity if he would lead law officials to the stolen files.

But on Oct. 29, Mr. Woolbright sold his Canoga Park home, quit his automobile agency job and vanished. Several weeks later, a moving van loaded up his furniture, and his wife, Joan, and son, Keith, also disappeared from Canoga Park.

Law enforcement investigators now assert that Mr. Woolbright was not picked up last fall "because we wanted the files, not Woolbright."

At about the time the police trap failed, the Glomar Explorer malfunctioned while raising the submarine and dropped the major part of the vessel back to the ocean bottom. The Glomar Explorer returned to California for extensive repairs.

At this point, the cover story concealing the ship's sub-raising mission was intact and the mission was not known to the public.

But on Feb. 1, a New York Times reporter got a tip that the Romaine Street burglary had breached the Hughes internal security system and that the industrialist's personal files had been stolen by safecrackers who had then tried to blackmail him for a million dollars.

By Feb. 6, these facts had been confirmed from law enforcement sources and two Hughes employes. They were set forth in a story for publication in The New York Times on Feb. 9. The article contained

no reference to the Glomar Explorer project.

On Feb. 6, The Los Angeles Times heard that The New York Times had prepared an article disclosing the loss of Mr. Hughes's confidential files in the burglary.

Late that night, a Los Angeles Times reporter learned that Mr. Davis, the police chief, had told other law enforcement officials about the Glomar Explorer Hughes-C.I.A. contract and the effort to recover the stolen files.

"We assumed that The New

York Times had the submarine story and was going to print it," said one of the Los Angeles Times reporters who worked on the story.

In its final edition of Feb. 7, The Los Angeles Times published a major front-page article disclosing the C.I.A.-Hughes contract. But stated that a Russian submarine had been recovered "in the North Atlantic," rather than the Pacific.

The article led to investigations by other reporters and the story of what happened

was pieced together. The C.I.A., seeking to prevent publication, said that national security would be endangered because the agency wanted to try to raise the rest of the submarine this summer.

A number of publications and broadcasters held off, but by the night of March 18 the story was circulating widely in journalistic and Government circles in Washington and Jack Anderson, the syndicated columnist, broadcast the main elements of the story. Widespread publication followed.