

Howard Hughes Missing on Eve of TWA Suit Against Him

Editor's note - Eccentric and elusive Howard Hughes was ordered to appear in a federal courtroom in New York recently to testify in the \$115 million (M) damage suit brought against him by Trans World Airlines. His whereabouts for the past few months has been a complete mystery. The "will he appear or won't he" suspense is typical of this man about whom everyone knows-and who is really not known by anyone. The following dispatch goes into his background and troubles.

By ROBERT J. SERLING
UPI Aviation Editor

His full name is Howard Robard Hughes Jr.
He was born in Houston,

Texas, 56 years ago-the son of a man who became reasonably wealthy by founding a company that made oil drilling tools.

He was educated in preparatory schools in Boston and California. He attended the California Institute of Technology and Rice Institute.

His first wife was Ella Rice. They were divorced four years later, in 1928. Not until 1957 did he marry again-a former Ohio State beauty queen and promising actress named Jean Peters who still is Mrs. Hughes.

Those are the bare, basic facts about this man of mystery, a colossus of contradiction and controversy. Pick up any two well-researched articles about Howard Hughes and you will find them differing in vital points-which is natural because only Hughes himself could supply all the facts.

Much Is Legend

Much that has been written about him is legend, fiction or at best apocryphal. Such as a supposed fetish for wearing tennis shoes, or sneakers, on virtually all occasions. If one is to take Hughes' own word for it, he doesn't wear tennis shoes.

"I've never worn them," he told a United Press International reporter in his most recent interview-which happened to be 10 years ago.

"There is nothing mysterious about me," he insisted. "I have no interest in expensive clothes. Clothes are something to wear and autos are transportation (his explanation of why a man whose personal fortune is estimated high in the millions was driving, at the time, a rather battered 1950 Chevrolet). If they



AT CONTROLS—Howard Hughes is shown relaxing at controls of TWA Constellation after big ship landed at La Guardia airport in New York Feb. 15, 1946 to inaugurate non-stop flight service between Los Angeles and New York. Now, no longer a pilot, Hughes is involved in a legal battle to get back at TWA controls on ground. (UPI photo)

cover me up and get me there, that's sufficient."

Perhaps the most inaccurate picture of this complicated man is the idea that he's a daredevil, speed-loving playboy who adores fast airplanes like the late Aly Khan adored fast automobiles. Hughes may be a ruthless, cold-blooded, unemotional tyrant in his business deals-as a legion of non-admirers claim. But he also happens to be a legitimate expert on aviation and in many

facets of aeronautics an actual pioneer.

Item: Hughes holds two of the most coveted awards in aviation - the Harmon trophy in 1938 and the Collier trophy in 1939, both given him for flights that set speed and distance records.

Congress also voted him a special medal in 1941 for a record-breaking world flight he made three years earlier. It was typical of Hughes that he never bothered to come to Washington to pick it up. President Harry S. Truman mailed it to him years later.

Item: It was Hughes who furnished Lockheed with the basic concept of two of the nation's most famous planes-the World War II fighter known as the Lightning, and the triple-jet-tailed airliner called the Constellation.

Was Copilot

It is not widely known that Hughes was a copilot for American Airlines in 1932, even when he was well on his way to becoming one of the country's wealthiest men. Only a man whose heart and soul were in the air could have taken a comparatively menial flight job at a time when he probably could have bought the whole airline.

Hughes' frequently unshaven appearance was as much due to aviation as to his admitted lack of interest in sartorial neatness. His beard hides the scars from an air crash, residue of injuries received when he was testing a new type of plane in 1946.

Hughes, the movie-maker, is

a story of his own. "Hell's Angels," produced in 1928, still ranks as the best air epic ever filmed, although most people remember it more as the vehicle which made a star out of a blonde Jean Harlow (who later died).

In a way, it is too bad that Hughes ever entered the Hollywood movie jungle. Much of the derogatory items of the Hughes legend have a Hollywood locale. It is significant, for example, that the famous brassiere he designed for Jane Russell (one will find only an aeronautical engineer could have conceived it) is remembered more by the public than his contributions to aviation.

Also buried in the enigma of Hughes is the fact that he was one of the few men in history who not only survived a congressional investigation, but almost wrecked the committee investigating him.

Displayed Talent

The probe involved an eight-engine plywood flying boat which Hughes completed in 1947 at a cost to the government of \$40 million. A senate committee got Hughes to Washington for testimony. At the hearings, Hughes displayed a talent for rapier-like repartee that made many senators uneasy. They finally retreated bleeding from his verbal sallies, and nothing more was said about the flying boat which did get off the water a few times.

The current Hughes-TWA dispute is a tale of tangled finances, involving mostly Hughes' control over the airline's plane purchases. By the end of World War II, Hughes, through the Hughes Tool Co. (Toolco), had acquired nearly 80 per cent of TWA's stock. The financier became the airline's virtual boss, dictating equipment policy to such an extent that on one occasion in 1957-Toolco ordered 25 long-range Constellations for \$50 million (M) without TWA's own publicity department even knowing about it until it appeared in the press.

It was Toolco, not TWA, which ordered the carrier's jets from Boeing. It was Toolco, not TWA, which signed a contract with Convair for 30 jetliners known as the 880. TWA, in its suit against Hughes, charges that his interference put TWA at a competitive disadvantage. The airline claims Hughes' delays in ordering the Boeing 707, plus subsequent changes in the number of planes wanted, resulted in arch-rivals Pan American, and American beating TWA into jet service by many months.

Introduced Early Even the 880, which Convair built largely because of Hughes' interest in the design, was introduced by Delta nearly 10 months earlier than TWA. The airline says Hughes deliberately delayed 880 deliveries by taking Toolco inspectors off the Convair assembly line-just to make the financial institutions which had loaned TWA money for the new planes look bad.

It is these institutions - a bank and two insurance companies-with whom Hughes is locked in mortal combat as much as he is with TWA management. In 1960, TWA badly needed new financing to modernize its fleet. Hughes was unable to swing the loan. A group of Wall Street interests persuaded him to put his TWA stock into a 10-year voting trust. In return, Wall Street promised to finance TWA's equipment purchases.

Hughes literally was forced to agree-and in doing so lost control over TWA for the next 10 years. The \$115 million damage suit also involves a Hughes' contract with Convair for 13 jets known as the 990, a larger version of the 880. Hughes insisted the 990 contract was made before the voting trust agreement, leaving TWA with a moral, or even legal, obligation to honor it.

More at Stake

More is at stake than the millions of dollars in damage suits. If Hughes loses, TWA may merge with Pan Am. If

he wins, TWA probably will join with Northeast-a carrier over which Toolco recently won control with the blessings of the Civil Aeronautics board.

It has been said that Hughes loves TWA more than the rest of his enterprises combined. It figures, because he has loved aviation more than anything else-even though he no longer flies himself. Hard of hearing, aging and sometimes ill, Hughes has not taken a federal aviation physical for at least three years. He would be flying illegally the minute he touched the controls.

Figuratively, however, Hughes obviously wants back in the TWA cockpit. And nobody is making book that he doesn't achieve it.

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IN LEGAL BATTLE—Howard Hughes listens with earphones to testimony before the Senate War Investigating subcommittee in this 1947 photo. Hughes was asked to testify before the subcommittee over an eight-engine plywood flying boat that he completed at cost to U. S. government of \$40 million. Now, aging, hard of hearing and sometimes ill, Hughes is involved in legal battle to regain control over Trans World Airlines. (UPI photo)



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