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epic movie about Royal Air Force fighter pilots in World War I. The film was "Hell's Angels," which Hughes came to direct as well as produce.

Undeterred by the cost, he acquired the largest private air force in the world -- 87 vintage Spads, Fokkers and Sopwith Camels -- for \$560,000, then spent another \$400,000 to house and maintain them. He even bought a dirigible to be burned in the film. Hughes personally directed the aerial combat scenes over Mines Field (what is now LAX). Three stunt pilots died in crashes during the filming; Hughes also crashed in his scout plane and was pulled unconscious from the wreckage, his cheekbone crushed. With expenses already exceeding \$2 million, Hughes was forced to re-shoot large segments of the film with dialogue to accommodate the advent of talking pictures. And because the female star, Greta Nissen, spoke with a thick and inappropriate Norwegian accent, Hughes cast about for a replacement, finally deciding on a bit actress with platinum blonde hair named Harlean Carpenter, also known as Jean Harlow, the first Hollywood "Blond Bombshell."

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The film cost Hughes \$3.8 million, a record for the time. Released in 1930, "Hell's Angels" was a runaway success and set box office records, but it never recovered its costs. ("Hell's Angels" is now regarded as a Hollywood classic. Among the other films made by Hughes, two receive high marks from critics -- "The Front Page" and "Scarface." His most sensational film, "The Outlaw," starring Jane Russell, was described as "more to be pitied than censored.") In their 1979 book, *Empire: the Life, Legend and Madness of Howard Hughes*, Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steele summarize the typical Hughes movie as "rich in entertainment, low on philosophy and message, packed with sex and action."

A boyish Hollywood legend, these were halcyon years for Howard Hughes. As Otto Friedrich writes in *City of Nets*: "No photographic record of that period would be complete without a picture of the tall, scarred and inarticulate millionaire ambling into some neon-lit nightclub, outfitted in Hollywood's black-tie uniform and displaying a beautiful blonde on his elbow." Hughes kept company with such stars as Ava Gardner, Katherine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Jerry Moore and Lana Turner, who once described him as "likable enough but not especially stimulating." (He eventually married, and divorced, actress Jean Peters.)

see fig 2

Throughout his Hollywood years, Hughes maintained his passion for flying. Like the movies, aviation was booming in Southern California, making the region a center for new technology. Hughes was in the thick of it, but unlike other aircraft entrepreneurs, he preferred spending his time in a cockpit rather than a boardroom.

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In 1934 he won his first speed title flying a converted Boeing pursuit plane 185 miles per hour. He and a young Caltech engineer, Dick Palmer, then built a plane called the H-1 (featuring a unique retractable landing gear) which Hughes piloted to a new speed record of 352 mph near Santa Ana, Calif. This was in 1935, the year that Hughes founded Hughes Aircraft Company as a division within Hughes Tool Company, operating out of a hangar in Burbank, Calif.

In 1937 he flew from L.A. to Newark, N. J., in 7 hours and 28 minutes, a new coast-to-coast record. That same year he won the Harmon International Trophy as the world's outstanding aviator and was honored by President Roosevelt in the White House. The following year, 1938, he set an around-the-world record of 3 days, 19 hours and 17 minutes; in the process he cut Charles Lindbergh's New York-to-Paris record in half. (Radio equipment developed by Hughes Aircraft engineers for this flight would later serve as an entry into the electronics field.) Upon his return, Hughes was given a ticker tape parade down Broadway in New York City. He was at the height of his popularity.

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The years of World War II were frustrating years for Hughes, who hoped to transform Hughes Aircraft into a major airplane manufacturer after winning government contracts for two experimental aircraft. All around him, Southern California aircraft manufacturers were producing fleets of new planes. As it turned out, Hughes Aircraft produced armaments, but not a single plane for the war effort.

One contract was for a photo-reconnaissance plane, a prototype of which (the XF-11) crashed in Beverly Hills shortly after the war during a test flight with Hughes at the controls, almost killing him. The other contract was for a plane with which Hughes is forever linked in the public mind -- a troop and cargo carrier made of wood and known by various names (the H-4 Hercules, the Hughes Flying Boat, the "flying lumberyard"), but most popularly as the "Spruce Goose."

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When Howard Hughes thought he thought big and he never hesitated to take new directions. Conceived when German U-boats were ravaging Allied shipping in the Atlantic, the "Spruce Goose" was built primarily

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unit of Hughes Electronics Corp. Based in Westchester, Calif. [Hughes Space and Communications] is the world's largest manufacturer of commercial satellites, the designer and builder of the world's first synchronous communications satellite, Syncom, and the producer of nearly 40% of the satellites now in commercial service. Hughes Electronics is owned by General Motors. Hughes Aircraft merged with Raytheon Company in 1998 and is now called Raytheon Systems Co. Prior to the merger, Hughes Aircraft was a world leader in high technology systems for scientific, military and global applications.

All the technological prowess of these Hughes companies would almost certainly have pleased their founder, who always had a passion for building things.

Contributed by Albert Greenstein, 1999

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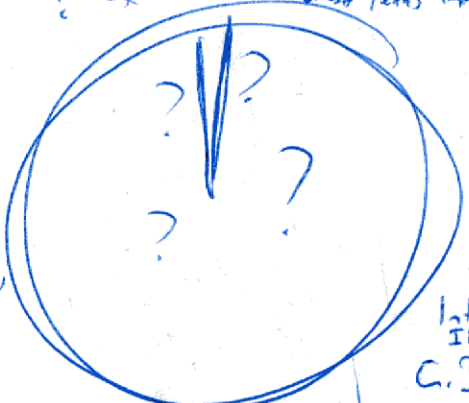
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0-7152
2517
U.S. 0-7144
0-7152
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36-26 (Feb)
41-49 (Jan)
46-28 (Jan)



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Pfizer 24-29
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Coq Loh 40-95
Ford 14-66
Int'l paper 41-11
IBM 96-55
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