

46 ABOARD JET DIE WHEN IT CRASHES ON CHICAGO HOMES

United Air Lines Plane
Carried 61 on Flight
From Washington

By **SETH S. KING**

Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO, Dec. 8—A United Air Lines jet carrying 61 persons slammed into a crowded neighborhood on Chicago's Southwest Side this afternoon, killing at least 46 persons.

The Boeing 737, on Flight 553 from Washington to Omaha with a stop at Chicago's Midway Airport, was descending near 71st Place and Lawndale Avenue when it plunged to the ground, smashed through a row of one-story houses and burst into flames.

Among those killed was Representative George W. Collins, a Chicago Democrat who was returning to the city from Washington to make a speech. Presumed dead was Michele Clark of the Columbia Broadcasting System's "Morning News" television program.

For nearly six hours after the crash, firemen dug into the wreckage and the demolished homes for victims. There were no reports of any neighborhood residents being found dead.

It appeared that 15 persons three stewardesses. Five persons on the ground were injured.

First Since 1969

Two of the stewardesses, Dorothy Griffin and Cathy Duret, were seated in the rear jump seats that stewardesses occupy when a plane lands. Margarite McCausland, who was gravely injured, was seated in the front of the plane.

The crash was the first major one in the United States since Jan. 19, 1969, when 38 persons aboard a Boeing 727 were killed as the United Air Lines plane crashed into the Pacific after take-off from Los Angeles.

In today's disaster, the plane was approaching Midway, the smaller of Chicago's two major airports, under a 500-foot ceiling with one mile of visibility.

The area had been covered with thin fog, rain and some snow all day. Witnesses said they heard a thunderous roar and saw a flash of flame as the aircraft plowed into the houses. The roofs of three bungalows on 71st Street were scraped as the plane skipped on to the 3700 block of West 70th Place, where it demolished three other homes.

United Air Lines officials said tonight that they had not confirmed the cause of the crash or whether the plane was functioning properly prior to the crash.

Jack Gamble, the airline's

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Firemen working at scene where a United Air Lines plane crashed yesterday in Chicago. The New York Times/Gary Settle

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46 Aboard Jet Die in Crash on Homes in Chicago

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sometimes months, to determine the cause."

Mrs. Rosemary Cotter, who lives across the street from where the plane came to rest, was in her dining room when she heard a roaring noise. She looked up to see the tail of the plane flash by and knock off the corner of her garage.

"It sounded like an earthquake," she said. "I saw this ball of fire and heard it hit. I ran out and headed down the street. I knew my daughter Christine was coming home from school just then. She was five minutes late leaving the school. I met her on the corner. If she had been there on time, she'd be dead now."

Mrs. Pat Kjos was in the basement of her home at 3703 West 71st Street when the plane apparently struck her house. Neither she nor her two small daughters were injured.

"I was in the basement and I heard the plane going over," she said. "I just knew it was in trouble. It was much too loud. Then all of a sudden the whole house shook and the electricity went. When I came up I looked across the street and just saw black smoke."

The shattered aircraft was jammed down over several of the smashed houses, its towering tail section resting on the sidewalk. The pilot's cabin was split in half, lengthwise.

An hour after the crash, oily black smoke still hung over the area as firemen searched for bodies in the debris.

The street beside the tail section was clogged with plane wreckage and debris from the damaged houses. Sections of plaster walls were tossed into front yards. A rain gutter was twisted like tinsel. A Christmas tree was lying nearby, and beside was a smashed, partly



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Plane crashed (cross) as it neared Midway Airport.

burned Santa Claus.

Helen Pristage of 3711 West 70th Place was in her kitchen baking holiday cookies when she heard the crash.

"I grabbed my coat and ran outside," she recalled. "I saw Cindy Sladewski, my neighbor, crawl out on her knees from under the plane. She was kneeling on the grass. She was alive, though I don't know how she could have got out."

The survivors of the crash were taken to Holy Cross Hospital. A spokesman there said several were gravely injured, with pelvis, back and leg fractures. But others suffered only lacerations.

Federal Aviation Administration officials were on the scene within minutes after the crash, which occurred about 2:27 P.M.

The F.A.A. control tower in Aurora, Ill., said that its transmissions indicated that there were no "irregularities" reported in the plane's approach to Midway.

Witnesses who saw the plane just before it struck said it ap-



Associated Press
Michele Clark of C.B.S. presumed dead in crash.

peared to wobble as it neared the ground.

Classes at the Queen of the Universe School near the crash scene had finished shortly before the crash occurred and many pupils were on the nearby streets at the time.

John Kosar, 13 years old, of 7323 W. 70th Street, said he was standing on a small hill nearby when he saw the plane coming in about 500 feet off the ground.

"I didn't see any flames on the plane, but the nose was up and the tail down," he said. "It looked like it was out of control and I thought it was going to land in Marquette Park."

Marvin Anderson, who survived the crash with only minor injuries, said that the last time the pilot spoke to the passengers was to say they were at 4,000 feet and "everything is going well."

"I was sitting on the left

side of the plane alone, near the wing and two rows from an emergency exit," he said. "Just a few seconds after the pilot's announcement I knew something was wrong because he started to rev the engines. The plane was only about one-third full, and when I heard the engines revving I thought, he's in trouble and I'm in trouble, but I didn't have time to think of much else."

"The next thing I knew I was in total darkness," Mr. Anderson recalled. "But I heard people moving around. I remembered where the emergency exit was. Another man and I jerked the door open. But just then a wave of flames swept over the wing and I thought I was gone for sure. We slammed that door."

"Then I saw daylight at the rear of the plane. A stewardess was shouting to get out that way. I got back and only had to jump over an open basement beneath the plane and I was out. I saw three or four other passengers there and then the police had men in an ambulance."

Mr. Anderson said he had flown back to Chicago today so he could attend an engagement party tonight for his son Doug, one of his three children.

"I'm still going—and I'm just grateful I can," he said.

Traffic at Midway Airport, once the world's busiest, has dwindled to a fraction of its peak volume.