

Sherman Skolnick:

MURDER ON

The following article was written by Sherman H. Skolnick, Chairman of the Citizen's Committee to Clean Up the Courts, a Chicago-based public interest research group devoted to investigation and research into corruption and related matters. —ed.

THE PEOPLE

Upwards of twelve persons connected in one way or another with Watergate boarded United Air Lines flight 553 on the afternoon of Dec. 8, 1972. They had something in common. That week there had been a gas pipeline lobbyists' meeting as part of the American Bar Association meeting in Washington, D.C. The lobbyists' meeting was conducted by Roger Moreau. His secretary was Nancy Parker. Among those attending were Ralph Stodgett and James W. Krueger, both attorneys for the Northern Natural Gas Co., of Omaha, Neb. Associated with them were Lon Bayer, attorney for Kansas-Nebraska Natural Gas Co. and Wilbur Erickson, President of the Federal Land Bank in Omaha.

This was a belligerent group determined to blow the lid off the Watergate case. Reason: Former U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell, and his friends running the Justice Dept., were putting the spear into Northern Natural Gas. Some officials of that firm and its subsidiaries were indicted on federal criminal charges Sept. 7, 1972, in Omaha, Chicago, and Hammond, Ind. Charge: bribery of local officials in northwest Indiana and Illinois in order to let the gas pipeline go through. (Chicago DAILY NEWS, 9/8/72.)

To blackmail their way out of these charges, the Omaha firm had uncovered documents showing that Mitchell, while U.S. Attorney General in 1969, dropped anti-trust charges against a competitor of Northern Natural Gas—El Paso Natural Gas Co. The dropping of the charges against El Paso was worth \$300 million. A spokesman for Mitchell belatedly claimed, in March 1973, that Mitchell had "disqualified" himself in 1969, because Mitchell's law partner represented El Paso. The Justice Dept., under Mitchell, dropped the charges. Period. About the same time, Mitchell, through a law partner as nominee, got a stock interest in El Paso. Gas and oil interests, such as El Paso, Gulf Resources, and others, contributed heavily to Nixon's spy fund, supervised by Mitchell.

Pipeline official Krueger was carrying the Mitchell documents on the plane. He had told his wife that he had in his possession irreplaceable papers of a sensitive nature. For months after the crash, his widow demanded that United Air Lines turn over to her his briefcase. It later came out in the pipeline trial in Hammond that Stodgett had been browbeating federal officials to drop the criminal charges—just prior to the crash. (Chicago TRIBUNE, 5/18/73.)

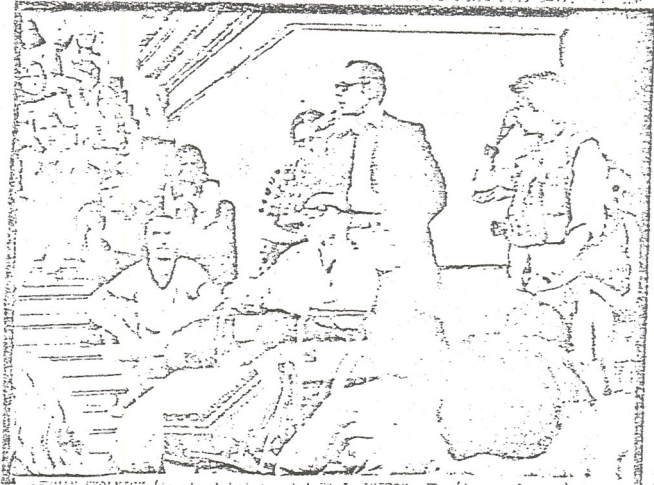
Dorothy Hunt, Watergate payoff woman, who offered executive clemency directly on behalf of Nixon to some of the Watergate defendants, was seeking to leave the U.S. with over \$2 million in cash & negotiables that she had gotten or stolen from CREEP (Committee to Re-Elect the President).

She and her husband, E. Howard Hunt, the Watergate conspirator, were a "C.I.A. couple"—two agents "married" and living together. Early in December 1972, both were threatening to blow the lid off the White House if (a) he wasn't freed of the criminal charges and (b) they didn't both get several million dollars. See: Memo of James McCord before the Senate Committee. (N.Y. TIMES, 5/4/73.)

Hunt claimed, according to McCord, to have the data necessary to approach Nixon,

McCord said matters were coming to a head early in December 1972. Mrs. Hunt was unhappy with her job of going all over the country to bribe defendants and witnesses in the bugging case. She wanted out.

Mrs. Hunt was on the way to arrange to take her money out of the country, possibly to Costa Rica (Vasco), through Harold C. Carlstead, whose wife was Mrs. Hunt's cousin. Carlstead does accounting and tax work for mobster-owned businesses in Chicago. He operates two Holiday Inn motels in Chicago's south suburbs: at 174th & Lawrence, Lansing, Ill., and at 171st & Halstead, Harvey, Ill. Carlstead's motel on



SHERMAN SKOLNICK (in wheelchair) and ALEX J. SANTOS, JR. (in sunglasses), on the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building July 4, describe sabotage of passenger liner as part of Watergate cover-up.

Lawrence is a favorite hangout for gangsters and dope traffickers such as "Cool" Freddie Galt, Grover Barnes, and the late Cal DeStefano, to name a few. Mrs. Hunt had with her on the plane: (a) \$10,000 in untraceable cash, (b) \$40,000 in so-called "Barker" bills, traceable to Watergate spy Bernard Barker, and (c) upwards of \$2 million in American Express money orders, travelers checks, and postal money orders. (Testimony before the National Transportation Safety Board, June 13-14, 1973.)

Carlstead issued a fake "cover" story that had (only) \$10,000—a story swallowed by the establishment press. Mrs. Hunt got on flight 553 with Michele Clark, CBS network newswoman, going to do an exclusive story on Watergate. Mrs. Hunt, Mitchell, Nixon—the story could have destroyed Nixon at the time. Clark had lots of insight into the bugging and cover-up through her boyfriend, a C.I.A. operative. In the summer of 1972, prior to any major revelations of Watergate, Clark tried to pick the brains of Chicago Congressman George Collins regarding the bugging of the Democratic headquarters. (Testimony of Cong. Collins' public relations director, 6/14/73.)

After the crash, Michele Clark's employer, CBS network News, ordered and demanded that her body be cremated—possibly to conceal foul play.

Also on the plane were 4 or more people who knew about a labor union that had given a large "donation" to CREEP to head off an indictment of a Chicago labor leader (another currently being investigated by the Committee).

For many years, like clockwork, one Chicagoan went to Washington on Monday and one back Friday afternoon on flight 553

or its equivalent: Lawrence T. O'Connor, Apt. 5C, 999 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago. On Friday, Dec. 8, 1972, he received a call from someone he knows in the White House telling him not to take flight 553 but to go instead to a special meeting.

Also getting on flight 553 was a "hitman," pursuing Mrs. Hunt and others, and going under the "cover" of being a top narcotics official with DALE (Drug Abuse Law Enforcement). He used the name Harold S. Metcalf. He is an unusual "narc": He works directly for Nixon. Metcalf told the pilot he was packing a gun, and so Metcalf was armed with a .38 Smith & Wesson

revolver. Metcalf's statement about being a "narc" and his gun. (N.T.S.B. Docket SA-435, Exhibit 5(B), p. 17, surviving passenger statements.) Metcalf evidently supervised certain foul play, possibly cyanide, directed at certain passengers, but he didn't know of the overall plan. One of our staff investigators confronted Metcalf about a week after the crash.

(a) Metcalf, supposedly a government narcotics bighorn, knows nothing about dope. (b) In response to our question: "Did you know the plane was sabotaged?" he blurted out a sentence: "It was not supposed to..." and turning purple left the room. Evidently, Metcalf was a double cutout, an espionage tern for an operative to be himself eliminated by someone else. His survival was an oversight. (Testimony, N.T.S.B., 6/13-14/73.)

THE PLANE

To do a proper job in sabotaging a plane, you have to know its weaknesses. This particular Boeing 737, N90319, had chronic trouble in the month preceding the crash, with its Captain's altimeter and its air data computer—two of the most important instruments on the plane. (N.T.S.B. Docket SA-435, Exhibits 11(A), 11(B), 11(C), maintenance data.) The Captain's altimeter, for example, didn't operate at 23 volts D.C. (Exhibit 9(C), p. 7). An increase in amperage or voltage in the elect-

rical system would cause the instruments to malfunction.

The plane was delayed in departure by about 10 to 15 minutes. Enough time for a skilled person to strip down the bus bar at a certain point and install a device that shorts out 100% percent. The government's own records show the later manifestation of this. In the last 15 minutes of flight, circuit breakers began popping in the cockpit, causing the full flight recorder, the air data computer, and other instruments to abort out. The transcript of the sole surviving record, the tape of the Cockpit Voice Recorder, shows this from the Intra-Cockpit discussion. (Exhibit 12(A).)

Capt.: "Sounds to me a circuit breaker, perhaps."
2nd officer: "What?"
(Unidentified voice: deleted, probably by the FBI.)
Capt.: "Yeah, I just meant, I thought you'd better check everything, eh."
(N.T.S.B., Exhibit 12(A), p. 7, transcript.)

The Cockpit Voice Recorder, when found, was turned over to the FBI.

Flight 553 needed its instruments. Visibility was 1 to 2 miles. Ceiling varied from 400 to 600 feet. (Exhibit 5(K).) With some low clouds as low as 100 feet. As for the National Weather Service, their runway visual range recorder wasn't working. (Exhibit 5(K).)

A major radio navigational instrument in the airport outer marker, also called by the street name it's on, the outer marker at Midway is in the vicinity of 57th & Melrose, and is called by some the Eddie Localizer.

The Midway Airport outer marker stopped working as 553 approached it.

Capt.: "Is Eddie localizer off, off the air, is that it?"

1st officer: "I beg your pardon."
Capt.: "Is Eddie localizer off the air, there's an inbound on—ah, there's an inbound on 31—what's that?" (referring to jet runway 31 left, and a propeller-driven plane coming in ahead of them on the same runway. Propeller planes are supposed to land on 31 right.) (Exhibit 12(A), p. 3.) Capt.'s altimeter would not work below 3400 feet. (Exhibit 9(C), p. 8.)

An aviation expert saw 553 at about 450 feet near 73rd & Kedzie, to the far right of the outer marker. The N.T.S.B. tried to conceal this data by improper questions of their witness, William J. Scamini, who later became our witness. (N.T.S.B. reopened hearings, Scamini testimony, 5/13/73.) At the outer marker, 553 was supposed to be at about 889 feet above the ground. (Exhibit 2(L), Chart 11-2.)

SIZE OF THE DIRECTIONAL BLINDERS ON THE RADAR

(1) In the last 15 minutes of flight 553, its speed was erratic. (Exhibit 3(F).) It was being watched by some of the most highly sophisticated radar equipment and computer in the world: ARCC III. Yet, although they claim they told him to slow down, after 23 minutes of the radar he was still going 210 knots/hr. He was being watched by Chicago Approach Control, O'Hare Airport. (15 radar sweeps/min.)

(2) The approach controller later admitted he had forgotten to give 553 approach clearance. (Exhibit 3(A), p. 9.) The 553 crew thought they were in a holding pattern. (Exhibit 12(A), p. 9.)

(3) They cleared 553 in behind a propeller plane, Aero Commander N20495, and caused 553 to drastically close the gap between them.

FLIGHT 553

(4) They stopped watching 553 from O'Hare too soon (called a pressure hand-off). Midway does not have precision radar. (Exhibit 3(C), p. 15.) Violating O'Hare-Midway Letter of Agreement. (Exhibit 3(G), p. 2, par. 4.)

(5) They didn't tell 553 he was to the far right of the Midway outer marker.

(6) In violation of regulations, they were working 2 planes for the same runway at the same time—553 and the Aero Commander.

(7) Although there was only about a 6 mile/hr. wind, they told 553 to go to runway 31 left, having no glideslope, an important navigational aid giving altitude & azimuth. (See Intra-Cockpit discussion, Exhibit 12(A), p. 13.) (Runway 15(R), the other end, has glideslope.)

(8) Within a few seconds, Midway told a different thing to O'Hare than it did to 553. (Exhibit 12(A), p. 13, compared to Transcriptions of Chicago Approach Control Exhibit 3(C), p. 14.)

The air traffic controllers paid no attention to the fact that 553 had (a) too much velocity, (b) too fast a descent, and (c) far off course.

With circuit breakers clicking, and instrument malfunctioning, the cockpit crew of 553 tried to switch to standby power. (Compare Intra-Cockpit discussion, Exhibit 12(A), pp. 10-11, with B-737 flight manual language, Exhibit 2(F), p. 4 (5)). Eleven witnesses on the ground said 553 had no lights. (Exhibit 4(B), statements of witnesses.)

In the first 5 minutes and last 5 minutes of flight, the pilot is supposed to be flying the plane. BUT: in the last few minutes before the crash the co-pilot (3rd officer) and 2nd officer were flying. This supports the contention that the pilot was dead or disabled (from poisoning or other foul play). Compare the Intra-Cockpit Discussion (Exhibit 12(A), pp. 13-15) with the flight manual challenge-respond language (Exhibit 2(F), p. 41.)

Because of the instruments malfunctioning and the attempt to use standby power, the speed brake apparently was triggered. (See speed brake light warning, Exhibit 2 (F), p. 1(C). Both witnesses' statements and testimony and circumstances show plane stopped dead in the air and then fell. (Exhibit 4(B)). (Note small area of ground damaged by plane—500' x 90'. Exhibit 7(A), P. 7.)

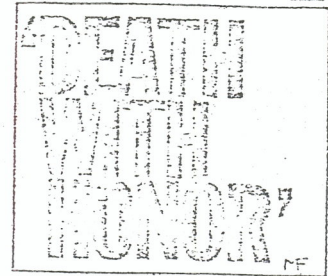
The pilot, prophetically named Capt. Whitehouse, and 6 of the Watergate passengers had a high cyanide content, higher than they could have gotten from a so-called aircraft cabin fire. Capt. Whitehouse had 4 times as much as necessary to kill him. (3.9 micrograms per milliliter. Exhibit 6(A), attachment III, p. 8). Michelle Clark's employer, CIO network News, wanted immediate cremation of her body. Foul play is evident, since how else were these people singled out for cyanide of the 43 that died in the crash? Remember, "hit-man" Harold R. Metzolf was sitting near the food galley.

F.B.I.
After the crash we made public statements that 200 F.B.I. and C.I.A. people, reporting to some other confidential source, had taken over the crash site, coincident with the crash or just shortly before. We were called "Witer." From, on June 19, 1973, Chairman John Reed, of the N.T.S.B., told the House Government Activities Committee that he sent a letter to the F.B.I., that: (a) never in living memory had the F.B.I. acted as in the flight 553 crash. Reed said 50 F.B.I. agents came into the crash zone shortly after the crash. (b) one F.B.I. agent proceeded into Midway Control tower and took over the tape relating to flight 553, without asking permission; (c) before the N.T.S.B. investigators could do so, the F.B.I. conducted 34 interviews, including of surviving flight attendants. The F.B.I. interviews were completed within 48 hours of the crash.

For 6 months, they claimed we were liars when we said 200 F.B.I. and C.I.A. were in the crash site coincident with the crash. Now they admit 50 were there. Witnessed living in the crash zone tell us that the F.B.I. types were there before the fire department. (See fire dept. response within one minute after the crash, Exhibit 6(E), p. 1.) The F.B.I. kept a radar team out of the crash zone, although one member of the team said he heard someone in the plane crash screaming. (Testimony offered, N.T.S.B., re-opened hearings, 6/19-19/73.)

NEW EVIDENCE
In-flight or post-crash, a highly sophisticated airplane robbery gang, never caught in 10 years of operation, came into the possession of (a) the hijacker documents and (b) rear main's valuables. Known as the Joseph Sorelli mob, they were arrested on or about Jan. 12, 1973, for another, unrelated in-flight plane robbery. (U.S. Magistrate Riegl's records, 72-41, U.S. Courthouse, Chicago.) They are made up of former aircraft technicians and "fences," those who handle stolen goods. The case was put together by Nixon's

Strike Force in Chicago, who didn't know that their star witness was also a staff investigator of ours: Alex J. Bottos, Jr. A few days after he surfaced, sitting at the N.T.S.B. hearings the week of Feb. 27, 1973, with Skolnick, federal marshals seized Bottos, without the formality of a hearing, trial, or conviction, and put him into a so-called Federal Prison Hospital, Springfield, Missouri, a maximum security dungeon. Jack Anderson describes it as a political prison. (Chicago Daily News, 4/9/73.) Bottos was released by public clamor, in Chicago and elsewhere, including picketing in front of United Air Lines offices, downtown Chicago. Bottos had been kept falsely imprisoned 40 days. The



Strike Force was fearful that their case against Sorelli at all would also extend to Watergate.

Bottos and a friend of his, Joseph Zale, both of Gary, Indiana, had infiltrated the Sorelli mob and purported to be their "fence." Both now samples of the items stolen from flight 553. The government wanted both silenced so they could not testify at the re-opened crash investigation June 13-14, 1973. Zale was indicted on a frame-up the day before the hearings. Both bravely came to the N.T.S.B. hearings, June 13, 1973—Bottos in a bullet-proof vest, and Zale fearful of being arrested at any moment.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

The Strike Force's own documents show that Hottel infiltrated the Sarelli mob. (Magistrate rec. 72-41.) The Strike Force however did not want their star witness going around saying the same mob also was involved with flight 553. The flight 553 valuables, connected to Watergate, have now apparently been "fenced" for about \$5 million. Who bought? Nixon? Mitchell?

WHY COVER-UP?

Note this chronology:

(1) Dec. 9, 1972, one day after the crash, White House aide Fred (Bud) Krogh Jr., also involved in the Ellsberg burglary, was appointed Undersecretary of Transportation, supervising the N.T.S.B. and the Federal Aviation Administration, the two agencies supposedly going to "investigate" the crash of flight 553.

(2) Dec. 9, 1972, White House deputy assistant to Nixon, and secretary to the Cabinet Alexander P. Butterfield, is appointed the new head of the F.A.A. Butterfield, an air force officer for 20 years, was also C.I.A.-aviation liaison. (See, for example, Jack Anderson's column, Chicago DAILY NEWS, 5/8/73.)

(3) Dwight L. Chapin, Nixon's appointment secretary, becomes, 5 weeks after the crash, a top executive with United Air Lines, at their home office in Chicago. Chapin has no previous business experience. At the original crash hearings in Feb. 1973, he threatened media people with reprisals if they mentioned sabotage; reprisals such as using Clay Whitehead, Nixon's communications czar, to seek the break-up of the networks on anti-trust charges.

(4) Even before the crash, Herbert W. Kalsbach, Nixon's personal attorney, was lawyer for United Air Lines and Marriot Corp., which has an airplane in-flight food service for airlines.

The original N.T.S.B. hearings on the 553 crash started Feb. 27, 1973. When they refused our documentation and testimony regarding sabotage and robbery, we sued them. The upshot was re-opened hearings, June 13-14, 1973. Skolnick produced over 1300 pages of documentation and five witnesses.

WHY MEDIA?

The establishment media has lied about the crash of flight 553 from the beginning. Several of the establishment papers, radio and TV told a monstrous lie: that we had no documentation at the re-opened hearings. Some smaller radio and TV stations have presented a more fair presentation.

WHO?

The highest level of the federal government, including Nixon, had an interest in the murder of Mrs. E. Howard Hunt and the other Watergate people on the plane. His Strike Force tried to sabotage their own case against the Sarelli airplane robbery gang--because it involved Watergate. The establishment media, interlocked financially with United Air Lines, has so far not told the truth about flight 553.

For more complete information, contact Citizen's Committee to Clean Up the Courts, 9800 So. Oglesby, Chicago, Ill. 60617. Tel: (312)787-8220. For the latest news on our research, call day or night at (312) 731-1100 (Hotline News).

