

Midway jet crash blamed on pilot

THE FAILURE of United Air Lines Pilot Wendell Whitehouse to react properly to the use of wing flaps and the absence of "good cockpit discipline" caused the Dec. 8, 1972 crash near Midway Airport which killed 45 persons, it was reported yesterday.

Deputy Coroner John Haigh, retired Air Force colonel, made the assessment to a Cook County coroner's jury.

Haigh said Whitehouse failed to retract the wing flaps, called "spoilers," which are used to retard the speed of the plane, when he was ordered to make a new approach landing.

THE JETLINER with passengers and crew from Washington aboard was at low altitude but could have recovered and made a safe landing if the "spoilers" had been returned to the original position before full power was put on the planes two jet engines, Haigh said.

The application of power with the "spoilers" on caused the nose of the plane to rise too sharply and allowed the plane to stall and land tail first on four houses near 70th Place and Hamlin Avenue. Haigh said. Forty-three of 61 persons aboard the jet, including Whitehouse, were killed, as were two persons on the ground.

Haigh's assessment was

similar to findings of the National Transportation Safety Board.

"THIS WAS probably the most investigated airplane crash in history," Haigh said. That probably was due in part, he said, to the fact that the victims include the wife of E. Howard Hunt, one of the Watergate break-in conspirators; United States Rep. George Collins, Chicago Democrat; and Michelle Clark, a Columbia Broadcasting System reporter.