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Crash killed 45

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Pilot error at Midway cited

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 27—

The National Transportation Safety Board today blamed failure by the pilot "to exercise positive flight management" during an instrument landing for the flaming crash of a United Air Lines jet plane near Chicago's Midway airport last Dec. 8.

The crash and subsequent fire killed 45 persons and destroyed five homes in a residential area about 1½ miles short of the airport runway designated for the Boeing 737. The dead included 40 of the 55 passengers, three of the six crew members, and two persons on the ground.

PASSENGERS killed included Rep. George Collins [D., Ill.] and Mrs. Dorothy Hunt, wife of E. Howard Hunt, the convicted Watergate break-in and bugging conspirator. Mrs. Hunt's purse found in the wreckage contained \$10,000 in \$100 bills.

The board determined that the probable cause of the crash was "the captain's failure to exercise positive flight management during the execution of a nonprecision approach which culminated in a critical deterioration of airspeed into the stall regime



Tribune Map

Where 45 persons were killed and five homes destroyed in a residential area.

where level flight could no longer be maintained" when the airport control tower aborted the approach to protect another plane.

The board repeated its "often-expressed concern about the apparent lack of crew coordination and cockpit disci-

pline during nonprecision approaches."

A nonprecision approach is an instrument approach to a runway not equipped with an electronic "glide slope" to guide the aircraft's descent. The pilot, Wendell L. Whitehouse, and the two other crew

members in the cockpit were killed.

AS RECOUNTED in the accident report, the pilot delayed ordering a landing checklist until after the plane, on a Washington - Chicago - Omaha flight, passed an outer airport marker 3.3 miles from the runway. Thus, it was determined, the first and second officers were executing the checklist when the former—the co-pilot—normally would have been monitoring airspeed and altitude.

The checklist delay caused an "increase in the cockpit workload and disruption of crew coordination during the most critical phase of the approach" and proved to be a key element in the crash sequence, the board found.

The report responded to rumors and speculation that foul play and sabotage linked to the Watergate conspiracy and Mrs. Hunt's death might have been involved in the crash.

The board said it found no evidence the plane was sabotaged or that the crew was incapacitated by "any medical condition." Elevated levels of carbon monoxide and cyanide in some of the victims "was consistent" with smoke inhalation deaths under the crash fire conditions, the report said.