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Last words *Last Edition* from jet:

'I'm sorry'

By Dennis Sodomka *CDM*

The last intelligible words on the cockpit voice recorder recovered from the jetliner that crashed Dec. 8 near Midway Airport were: "I'm sorry."

The dramatic final 19 seconds on the voice recorder were disclosed Tuesday during the federal hearings into the crash. Forty-five persons, including all three members of the flight deck crew of the United Air Lines jet, were killed in the crash.

The Boeing 737 was one minute's flying time away from Midway when it crashed into a row of bungalows at W. 70th Pl. and S. Hamlin.

NINETEEN seconds before the crash, the Midway control tower radioed the plane to cancel its approach and pull up to 2,000 feet because a small plane was in line to land ahead of the jet.

Just one second after the tower radioed its order, the recorder shows, the jetliner's stick shaker activated. The stick shaker is a device that sounds when a plane's air speed is falling and the plane is close to stalling in midair.

With the stick shaker rattling, the recorder picked up the

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voice of the plane's first officer, Walter L. Coble, acknowledging the tower's order to pull up and make a left turn. Also recorded were brief conversations about adjusting the plane's landing flaps.

The last intelligible words were recorded 12 seconds after the tower gave its "missed approach" order. An unidentified voice in the cockpit said: "I'm sorry."

Four seconds later — and three seconds before the crash — the recorder picked up the sound of the warning horn that blows when the plane is close to the ground and its landing gear isn't down.

The recording ends exactly 19 seconds after the tower order — with the "sound of initial impact and garbled voices from the plane."

THE FEDERAL hearings into the crash, conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board, opened Tuesday

in the Sheraton-O'Hare Motor Hotel near O'Hare Airport.

Witnesses at the hearing included eyewitnesses who saw the crash from the ground and some of the 14 persons who survived the crash.

Marvin Anderson of South Holland, a passenger who survived, testified Tuesday that he felt the plane's power increase and then saw the jetliner's nose "tilt up to an angle of 10 to 15 degrees," immediately before the crash.

After the impact, Anderson said, "My head practically imbedded itself" in the seat in front. The passenger sitting in that seat died in the crash.

THE ONLY survivor in the plane's first class section was the stewardess, Marguerite McCausland, who said in a statement prepared for the hearing that she was pinned in her front jump seat until other survivors rescued her.

"I felt the fire on my back and on my right arm," she said.

The plane burned after it plummeted into the bungalows.

In a preliminary investigation of the crash, federal officials have been unable to determine its cause.

IN ITS HEARINGS, the NTSB will concentrate on possible causes as well as trying to figure out why some passengers lived while so many others died.

The lead-off witnesses Tuesday were three persons who observed the crash from the ground.

One of them, William J. Simonini, 53, of 140 W. Wood, Palatine, was in a parking lot at W. 73d St. and S. Kedzie when the plane passed over just before it crashed.

Simonini, a former B-24 pilot who holds a private pilot's license, testified that he heard a "crackling, deafening roar" as the plane passed over him. He said he had never heard a similar crackling noise like that.

Simonini also said he saw the plane's nose go upward and that he then saw "black smoke coming out of both engines."

Among the persons who died in the crash of the Washington-to-Chicago flight were Rep. George W. Collins (D-Ill.) and Michele Clark, a former Chicagoan and a correspondent for CBS News in Washington.