

Being possible tie to crash: expert

By Long Hwa-Shu

A specialist in aeronautic icing conditions has testified that abnormal formations of ice may have caused the Dec. 31 crash of a United Air Lines 737 jet, which killed 45 persons near Midway Airport.

Vernon H. Gray, a National Aeronautics and Space Administration expert, told a National Transportation Safety Board hearing here Friday that several hundred pounds of ice may have formed on the tail section of the plane causing the craft's nose to pitch upward and the plane to crash into homes near the airport.

Earlier testimony established that as the craft was making an approach to Midway, the control tower instructed the 737 pilot to abort his landing and make another approach because another aircraft was landing on the Midway runway that had been reserved for the Washington-to-Chicago jet.

GRAY'S testimony was challenged by J. Richard Street, attorney for United Air Lines, who protested that Gray was not a qualified meteorologist and could not give adequate testimony on possible icing.

William K. Howell, an aerodynamics engineer for the Boeing Co., makers of the

plane, said that the craft had been tested under simulated icing conditions and no "unusual characteristics" were noted.

The hearing, which began Tuesday, concluded Friday, but Isabel A. Burgess, chairman of the hearing committee, said the inquiry would remain officially open to receive any further pertinent evidence.

MEANWHILE, legal researcher Sherman A. Skolnick Friday filed a \$2 million suit in Circuit Court charging that the board had refused to allow him to testify.

He charged that he had notified the board that he had evidence the crash was the result of sabotage connected with the Watergate bugging incident but they turned him away.

Mrs. Burgess, who had been served with a copy of the suit by a sheriff's deputy during the hearing Friday, responded saying that Skolnick had presented "no hard evidence" to back up his charges.

In related action, Mrs. Ellen W. Baldwin of Kerney, Neb., filed a \$5 million damage suit in Circuit Court as executor for the estate of her husband, Theodore, who was killed in the crash.

BACK PAGE