Hearing Is Held on Crash That Killed Mrs. Hunt

By SETH S. KING

Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO, June 13—Sherman Skolnick, the freelance investigator who contends that the airliner on which Mrs. E. Howard Hunt Jr. died was sabotaged, was given a special hearing today by the National Transportation Safety Board.

Mr. Skolnick repeated his allegations that there was a conspiracy by air controllers and high Government officials to sabotage United Air Lines Flight 553 from Washington as it approached Midway Airport Dec. 8.

Mr. Skolnick said this was done to destroy evidence aboard the plane that Mrs. Hunt, the wife of a convicted Watergate burglar, Howard Hunt, had been given $2-million by the White House as money to insure the silence of the Watergate conspirators.

Mr. Skolnick contends he also has evidence that an official of the El Paso Natural Gas Company who died in the crash was carrying documents linking former Attorney General John N. Mitchell to a payoff from the company.

The hearing was requested by United Air Lines.

Mr. Skolnick, who calls himself a "legal researcher," in 1969 presented the evidence that linked two Illinois Supreme Court Justices to a Chicago bank stock case that caused their resignations.

Forty-five persons, including Mrs. Hunt and an official of the El Paso Natural Gas Company, were killed in the crash.

Mrs. Hunt was carrying $10,000 in cash in her purse.

Mr. Skolnick repeated today his assertion that the pilot of the plane was poisoned and that Mrs. Hunt had an additional $40,000 in marked cash and $1.9-million in negotiable securities with her. This money and the securities, he contended, were now being hidden by United Air Lines and the Federal Aviation Authority.

Mr. Skolnick produced no documentary evidence to support his statement.

But he brought as a witness Alexander Bottos, a private investigator who claimed he was a "fence" for stolen goods and had helped the Federal authorities solve an air piracy theft last August.

Mr. Bottos, who wore a bulletproof vest as he testified, said that two days after the Midway crash he had been shown stolen documents with Mr. Mitchell's name on them.

He testified he deduced they came from the crashed United Air Lines plane because he had checked and found that no other large-scale thefts of securities had occurred for two months before the crash, and reasoned it was the only place from which the documents could have been stolen.

Mr. Bottos also testified that he had been committed to the pshchiatric ward at the Federal prison hospital in Springfield, Mo., for 40 days this spring. He insisted he had been sent there illegally by Federal authorities after he began investigating the crash.

Mr. Bottos told the board that the marked cash and securities could have been thrown from th plane by parachute. He said he knew a witness who would so testify but said the witness was afraid to talk.

Another witness brought by Mr. Skolnick was Joseph Zale, who was indicted yesterday on an air piracy charge in connection with the August theft.

Mrs. Isabel Burgess, who served as chairman of today's hearing board, said the Skolnick testimony would be included in the full hearing record. The board made no comment on the testimony. The hearings will continue tomorrow.