

CX Sun-Times

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Did pilot aim to

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By William Braden
and Jerry DeMuth

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Eyewitnesses' reports suggest that the crash of a United Air Lines plane here Friday may have resulted from a power-on stall — a loss of lift despite full engine power.

A number of witnesses said they thought the pilot may have caused the stall intentionally—raising the plane's nose to cause a loss of lift under the wings—to prevent the plane from hitting a school.

They said the Boeing 737 was flying with its nose high, and its tail skimming trees and rooftops, when it dropped to the ground like a stone.

One witness was Roberto Villarreal, 25, of 1547 W. 17th, who said he saw the plane from the parking lot of the National Biscuit Co. at 73d and Kedzie.

"I had just parked and was going to work when I heard the plane coming," he said. "It

26 Sun-Times staffers covered crash of jetliner

The following Sun-Times staffers participated in the coverage of the United Air Lines crash near Midway Airport: Margaret Ahern, William Braden, Jim Casey, Jerry De Muth, Thomas J. Dolan, Dennis D. Fisher, Tom Fitzpatrick, Joel Havemann, Hugh Hough, Bruce Ingersoll, Patricia O'Brien Koval, Walter L. Lowe Jr., Dolores McCahill, Bob Olinick, Donald M. Schwartz, Roger Simon, Charles M. Smith, Larry Weintraub, Scott Zebbs and G. Robert Hillman.

The following Sun-Times photographers aided picture coverage: Bob Black, Larry Hoff, Jim Klepitsch, Joe Kordick, Gene Peck and Carmen Reporto.

was coming down through the fog, and it was really low. Then the plane accelerated its engines and started to go up. But it wouldn't go up. It had its nose up, but instead of going up it was losing altitude.

"There was a burst of power from the engines. The plane wanted to go up, but it wouldn't go up. It was going down, down. And then the sky turned red, and it crashed with its nose pointing up."

(A United spokesman said the pilot was informed he was not holding a proper glide path in his descent and was told by the Midway tower to apply full power.)

"My uncle and I were driving to work in Oak Lawn," said John Sokol, 22, of 5828 S. California. "We were stopped at a light on 71st when the plane went over, and its back end was dragging. The tail hit a line of wires. I saw a shower of sparks, and then the plane went down, just like a big bomb had dropped, and it just seemed to explode immediately. There were flames all over the place."

A 23-year-old salesman who also saw the plane crash from his car said:

"I saw the plane coming down, headed north, and then I just saw flames and smoke."

"There's the Hurley Elementary School about a block away, and a lot of people had the impression the pilot saw the school — and instead of hitting the school he just let it down right there. The plane was coming in low, and then it just seemed to drop.

Another witness, a woman, said she had the impression the pilot may have tried to avoid hitting the nearby Queen of the Universe Parochial School, 7114 S. Hamlin.

"He just missed the school," she said. "The front of the plane turned up a little. He tried so hard to miss it."

While such impressions could not be verified, a nose-up position would have been consistent with an effort by the pilot to stall the

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aircraft and cause it to drop vertically. An aircraft can stall and drop straight down, even with full engine power, if the nose is lifted high enough to cause the wings to lose their lift.

Another witness was 9-year-old Michael Bala, who was walking to his home at 68th and Hamlin from Queen of the Universe School.

"It was about 2:30," he said. "I was walking home with a friend. I saw the airplane coming down. I was by the Hurley School. I saw steam come from the airplane. It went over about half a block away from us, headed north.

"I went over there. I heard a baby yelling. And then it stopped, and I think it died. It was in the airplane, right by the pilot's seat. I couldn't see it, but I think it was a baby because it was just screaming and couldn't talk.

"The plane hit two houses first. Then it hit a

third house. Then it hit two more."

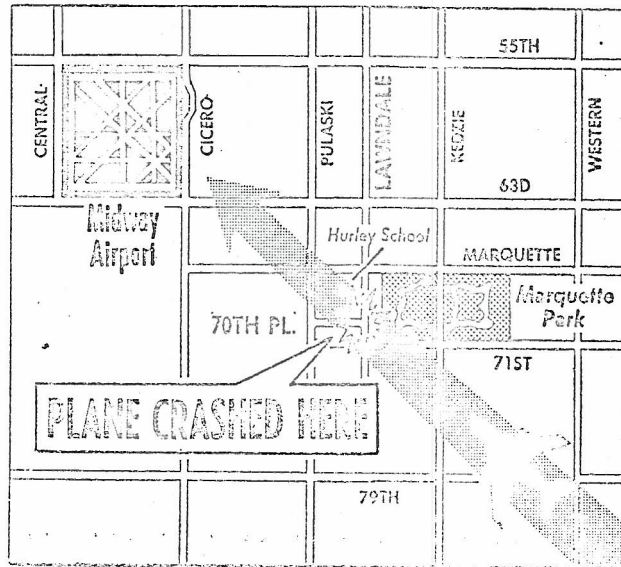
"I was in my bathroom," said a woman who lives at 72d and Millard. "I heard an explosion, and I opened the window and black dirt came in. Then I saw the plane, up about Lawndale. There was fire coming out of the left wing.

"I grabbed blankets and all my towels out of the linen cabinet and ran toward the plane

"I helped two stewardesses get out one family. I saw this man who was thrown out of the plane, and I put a towel under his head and covered him with blankets. I felt his pulse. It was normal. Then it sped up, and he turned blue."

Police took the man to an ambulance, said the woman.

She added: "One house was demolished. I heard screams from inside. The police lifted up some of the boards and took bodies out of the house."



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