

FBI found no sabotage in Midway plane crash

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By Larry Finley

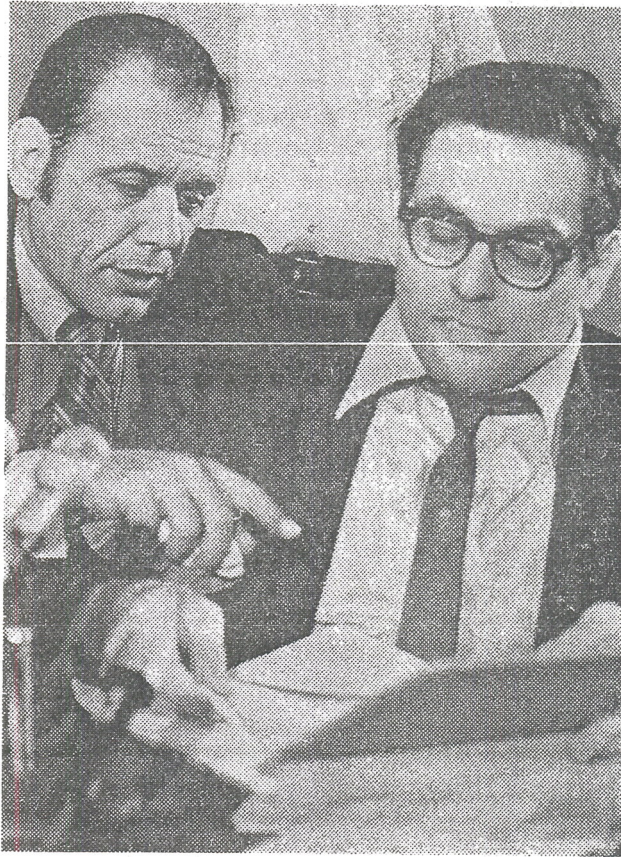
An FBI investigation into the Dec. 8, 1972, Midway plane crash determined that the plane wasn't sabotaged.

In a letter sent Tuesday to the chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), which is investigating the crash, acting FBI Director William Ruckelshaus, said his agents found no evidence that anyone tried to destroy the aircraft.

FBI agents concluded their investigation within 20 hours and turned over their records — consisting of 26 interviews with survivors and airport personnel — to NTSB investigators, he said.

RUCKELSHAUS' letter was in response to a June 6 letter from John Reed, NTSB chairman. Reed's letter pointed out that FBI agents at the crash scene took "non-typical" although not impeding actions.

"FBI agents went to the control tower and listened to tower tapes before our investigators did," said Lloyd Miller, deputy general man-



Legal researcher Sherman Skolnick (right) confers with Alex Bottos, one of his helpers, during special NTSB hearing at the Sheraton-O'Hare motel. (Daily News Photo/Bill DeLuga)

ager of the NTSB, in a telephone interview from Washington. "This is unprecedented.

"They also interviewed two stewardesses aboard the plane before we did. This is unusual but it has happened before."

LEGAL researcher Sherman Skolnick has charged that the United Air Lines plane was sabotaged to kill the wife of Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt because she had "documentation to impeach the President."

Skolnick testified Wednesday at a special NTSB hearing into the crash. He had been denied permission to testify at the regular hearings in February.

Skolnick did not supply any new factual matter, only his interpretation of the hearing record.

During his sworn testimony, Skolnick said 50 FBI agents were "waiting in the crash

zone almost coincidentally with the crash."

IN HIS LETTER, Ruckelshaus said FBI agents went to the crash scene under their statutory authority to look into possible willful destruction of aircraft or possible interference with the flight crew.

Ruckelshaus added that his men did not know who was on board the plane.

Skolnick also testified Wednesday that in addition to \$10,000 in \$100 bills found in Mrs. Hunt's belongings, she had \$2 million in travellers checks and money orders allegedly stolen from the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

"Within 48 hours of the crash, that money was fenced in the criminal underworld," charged Skolnick.

SKOLNICK HOPED the NTSB would allow two men who are working with him to testify because he said both had been undercover agents with governmental agencies and had been offered some of Mrs. Hunt's belongings to fence.

The men are Alex Bottos, who was put in a mental institution by federal agents because he knew too much about Watergate, Skolnick said, and Joseph Zayle, who was indicted Tuesday for allegedly stealing securities worth \$3.8 million from an airplane.



Joseph A. Zayle

Bottos wore a bullet-proof vest to the hearing.

Skolnick said there were 12 persons traveling on the plane who were related to the Watergate affair in some way. He added that some of them were lobbyists for gas companies who were "going to expose former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell," and his role in Watergate.

SKOLNICK SAID that the crash also was connected to a plot in which government officials received bribes from big business in exchange for political favors.