

Y, DECEMBER 9, 1972 -

SCORES ARE KILLED WHEN JET CRASHES ON CHICAGO HOMES

United Liner Carrying 59
From Washington, D. C.,
Was About to Land

By SETH S. KING

Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO, Dec. 8—A United Air Lines jet carrying 59 persons slammed into a crowded neighborhood on Chicago's Southwest Side this afternoon, killing scores and injuring many others.

The Boeing 737, on Flight 553 from Washington to Omaha with a stop at Chicago's Midway Airport, was descending near 71st Place and Lawndale Avenue when it plunged to the ground, smashed through a row of one-story houses and burst into flames.

Four hours after the crash, 32 unidentified bodies were being held at the Cook County Morgue. Another passenger was dead on arrival at Vol Solbrig Hospital. Officials at the morgue said they had been told by rescue workers to expect at least 40 bodies.

Rescue workers were unable to determine exactly how many persons were killed aboard the airplane and how many may have died or been injured in the houses that were hit by the stricken aircraft.

United reported that at least 17 persons survived the crash, including all three stewardesses.

Two of the stewardesses, Dorothy Griffin and Cathy Duret, were seated in the rear jump seats that stewardesses occupy when a plane lands. Margarite McCausland, who was gravely injured, was seated in the front of the plane.

The crash was the first major one in the United States since Jan. 19, 1969, when 38 persons aboard a Boeing 727 were killed as the United Air Lines plane crashed into the Pacific after take-off from Los Angeles.

In today's disaster, the plane was approaching Mid-

way, the smaller of Chicago's two major airports, under a 500-foot ceiling with one mile of visibility.

The area had been covered with thin fog, rain and some snow all day. Witnesses said they heard a thunderous roar and saw a flash of flame as the aircraft plowed into the houses. The roofs of two bungalows on 71st Street were scraped as the plane skipped on the 3700 block of West 70th Place, where it demolished three other homes.

Mrs. Rosemary Cotter, who lived across the street from where the plane came to rest, was in her dining room when she heard a roaring noise. She looked up to see the tail of the plane flash by and knock off the corner of her garage.

Continued on Page 58, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

"It sounded like an earthquake," she said. "I saw this ball of fire and heard it hit. I ran out and headed down the street. I knew my daughter Christine was coming home from school just then. She was five minutes late leaving the school. I met her on the corner. If she had been there on time, she'd be dead now."

Mrs. Pat Kjos was in the basement of her home at 3703 West 71st Street when the plane apparently struck her house. Neither she nor her two small daughters were injured.

"I was in the basement and I heard the plane going over," she said. "I just knew it was in trouble. It was much too loud. Then all of a sudden the whole house shook and the electricity went. When I came up I looked across the street and just saw black smoke."

The shattered aircraft was jammed down over several of the smashed houses, its towering tail section resting on the sidewalk. The pilot's cabin was split in half, lengthwise.

Decorations in Wreckage

An hour after the crash, oily black smoke still hung over the area as firemen searched for bodies in the debris.

The street beside the tail section was clogged with plane wreckage and debris from the damaged houses. Sections of plaster walls were tossed into front yards. A rain gutter was twisted like tinsel. A Christmas tree was lying nearby, and beside was a smashed, partly burned Santa Claus.

Helen Pristage of 3711 West 70th Place was in her kitchen baking holiday cookies when she heard the crash.

"I grabbed my coat and ran outside," she recalled. "I saw



The New York Times/Dec. 9, 1972

Plane crashed (cross) as it neared Midway Airport.

Cindy Sladewski, my neighbor, crawl out on her knees from under the plane. She was kneeling on the grass. She was alive, though I don't know how she could have got out."

The 14 survivors of the crash were taken to Holy Cross Hospital. A spokesman there said several were gravely injured, with pelvis, back and leg fractures. But others suffered only lacerations.

No Trouble Noted

Federal Aviation Administration officials were on the scene within minutes after the crash, which occurred about 2:27 P.M.

The F.A.A. control tower in Aurora, Ill., said that its transmissions indicated that there were no "irregularities" reported in the plane's approach to Midway.

Witnesses who saw the plane just before it struck said it appeared to wobble as it neared the ground.

Classes at the Queen of the Universe School near the crash scene had finished shortly be-

fore the crash occurred and many pupils were on the nearby streets at the time.

John Kosar, 13 years old, of 7323 W. 70th Street, said he was standing on a small hill nearby then he saw the plane coming in about 500 feet off the ground.

"I didn't see any flames on the plane, but the nose was up and the tail down," he said. "It looked like it was out of control and I thought it was going to land in Marquette Park."

Among the passengers listed by United Air Lines on flight 553 was Representative George W. Collins, of the Seventh Congressional District in Chicago.

Mr. Collins, a Democratic leader in Chicago's 24th Ward, was said to have been on his way back to Chicago to attend his organization's annual Christmas party.

Michele Clark of the Columbia Broadcasting System's

Morning News show was also listed as a passenger. C.B.S. station WBBM here reported that she was aboard and the passenger list released by United shows a Miss M. Clark. She was not included among the survivors identified so far.

Marvin Anderson, who survived the crash with only minor injuries, said that the last words the pilot spoke to the passengers was to say they were at 4,000 feet and "everything is going well."

"I was sitting on the left side of the plane alone, near the wing and two rows from an emergency exit," he said.

"Just a few seconds after the pilot's announcement I knew something was wrong because he started to rev the engines.

The plane was only about one-third full, and when I heard the engines revving I thought, 'He's in trouble and I'm in trouble, but I didn't have time to think of much else.'"