

F.A.A., UNDER FIRE, TO BE EVALUATED

Transportation Unit Plans
an 'In-Depth' Look—Search
for New Chief Pressed

By RICHARD WITKIN

Aroused by a recent House committee report assailing the Federal Aviation Administration's record on air safety, the Transportation Department announced yesterday that it had called an F.A.A. management meeting for Jan. 15 to take an "in-depth" look at the agency's operations.

The announcement from the F.A.A.'s parent department came as the White House stepped up its search for a successor to Alexander P. Butterfield, who has headed the agency for almost two years.

Mr. Butterfield—who in 1973 disclosed the existence of the White House tapes—was reported by well-informed Administration sources to be slated for departure by early March.

The former Air Force colonel has had a long record of friction with his boss, Transportation Secretary Claude S. Brinegar, who is due to leave office Feb. 1.

Dispute on Independence

The friction is reported to have had nothing to do with the revelation of the Watergate tapes. It is said to have centered on Mr. Butterfield's attempts, largely frustrated, to exert more independence, particularly through shuffling his organization and personnel.

There was immediate speculation that Mr. Brinegar's scheduling of the Jan. 15 meeting might be aimed in part at pre-empting new actions by Mr. Butterfield generated after the recent criticism from the House and other quarters.

The House Special Subcommittee on Investigations charged the F.A.A. in a report issued Dec. 27, with shunning leadership and showing signs of "sluggishness which at times approaches an attitude of indifference to public safety."

The report, based on a nine-month study, accused the agency of failing to deal properly with safety problems that led to the crash of a DC-10 near Paris last March and of "foot-dragging" on ordering use of a cockpit warning device designed to curb a series of landing accidents.

Safety Board Criticism

Over the weekend, the National Transportation Safety Board charged that the F.A.A. had refused to take action on a number of hazards that have led to injuries and deaths in evacuation of planes after accidents that were otherwise survivable.

The search for a replacement for Mr. Butterfield brought reports of at least three names under serious consideration. One was Samuel L. Higginbottom, a former president of Eastern Airlines and now head of Rolls Royce Aero Engines, Inc., in this country. However, Mr. Higginbottom was also said to be a likely possibility for a high-level position in the Transportation Department.

Two others being looked at for the F.A.A. post were George A. Warde, a former president of American Airlines and now a consultant, and Arthur D. Lewis, a former Eastern president and now chairman of the United States Railway Association, which has been commissioned by Congress to re-structure the bankrupt railroads in the Northeast.