
United Airlines Flight 553

United Airlines Flight 553 was coming in to land at Chicago Midway International Airport on December 8, 1972, when air traffic control asked it to circle back and make another approach. The pilot descended too rapidly with too low an airspeed, and the plane crashed into a residential area almost 3 kilometers (2 mi) short of the airport. Two people on the ground were killed, as well as 43 passengers.

The crash became notorious because one of the passengers killed was Dorothy Hunt, wife of one of the CIA agents convicted during the Watergate scandal. Her body was discovered alongside a handbag containing \$10,000 in \$100 bills. It's suspected she distributed cash to people connected to the Watergate conspiracy, and the incident became known as the "Watergate crash."

Conspiracy theorists have pointed to the unusually swift arrival of the FBI as evidence that the plane was brought down deliberately. Hunt was a CIA operative herself. Some theories have suggested that Hunt and her husband were threatening to reveal government secrets if charges against E. Howard Hunt weren't dropped. In 1974, Howard Hunt's superior, referring to the CIA, said "I think they killed Dorothy Hunt."

Cyanide was found in the bodies of many of the dead but was said to have been a result of smoke inhalation. One investigative author claimed to have found that a radio ham had called a Chicago talk show in the hours after the crash and reported hearing an exchange discussing sabotage. The National Transportation Safety Board investigation concluded that pilot error was the sole cause of the accident and that there was no evidence of sabotage.