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On AMERICAN ASSASSINATION: The Strange Death of Senator Paul Wellstone

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The day of the crash, I was interviewed in my office at the University of Minnesota about the death of JFK by a reporter for a weekly alternative newspaper in Duluth, THE RIPSAW. We listened to intermittent reports about the tragedy, including that emergency workers had not had access to the plane, which was still burning hours after the crash. This led me to ask myself, "So how do they actually know that he is dead?" When we ended our conversation several hours later, he remarked that the contents of the "black box" should be important. I told him there wouldn't be one.

News reports that evening emphasized the weather, including snow and freezing rain--which some of us thought was a bit odd, since the weather had seemed no better or worse than usual for this time of year. The next day, Carol Carmody, the head of the NTSB team investigating the crash, would report that the FBI had advised her that there were "no indications of terrorist activity". I thought that was also odd: since the NTSB had yet to determine the cause of the crash, how could the FBI possibly already know? Surely you cannot know that there was no terrorist involvement when you do not yet even know the cause of the crash.

The NTSB would spend a day and a half searching for the black box, which, it would later conclude, had never been on the plane. Reports were circulating that the cause of the crash might never be known. But the circumstances of the death of the most outspoken progressive in the United States Senate, only ten days before an election whose outcome would determine the control of the Senate, was troubling to many

Minnesotans. A survey that evening by THE ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS would show that 69% of the respondents thought his death was the result of "a GOP conspiracy."

Others shared those sentiments. Michael I. Niman, a professor from Buffalo State College, would soon publish a column raising the possibility that Senator Wellstone had been murdered. Christopher Bollyn, of americanfreepress.com, observed that the FBI had arrived on the scene from the Twin Cities surprisingly fast, seemingly too fast in relation to what might have been expected. Using very minimal times, I would later calculate that, for its "rapid response team" to have arrived at the scene by noon, it would have had to have left St. Paul around 9:30 that morning, about the same time that the Senator's plane was departing for Eveleth-Virginia-- which would be an extraordinary feat of prognostication.

Niman was clearly right about the political motives of the White House for taking him out; the question was whether it was reasonable to suppose it might go that far. In this context, a report from Michael Ruppert, fromthewilderness.com, was especially disturbing, when he explained that he had been contacted by a former CIA operative familiar with the conduct of assassinations, who told him it had been a hit and "having played ball (and still playing, in some respects) with this current crop of reinvigorated old white men, these clowns are nobody to screw around with. There will be a few more strategic accidents. You can be sure of that."

If this meant the possibility could not be discounted, none of these circumstances, suspicious though they were, established what had or had not happened to Paul Wellstone. But local pilots and other experts were perplexed. Some observed that a King Air A-100 simply does not go down, even in snow or freezing rain, which were exaggerations of the state of the weather to begin with. Others speculated

that "something unexpected must have happened" to cause the plane to crash during an ordinary approach, possibly by something like impacting with a gaggle of geese or tossing a propeller into the fuselage.

Most significantly, there had been no call of distress. No goose parts or feathers were ever found and the propellers were still attached to the engines. According to an independent study conducted for the NTSB, they had been turning just at idle speed at impact. But engineers have explained to me that props continue to turn even after a loss of power from the pressure of air currents in the atmosphere. just at idle speed at impact.

The pilots soon became the focus of attention, where stories emanating from the NTSB suggested that they might have been at fault. The principal pilot, Richard Conry, however, had 5,200 hours of flight experience and the highest possible rating as an Air Transport Pilot. He had even passed his FAA "flight check" just two days prior to the fatal flight. By the government's own standards, Richard Conry was highly qualified to fly a King Air A-100.

Another oddity about the early reports is that they excluded information about the pilots, reporting only that there were two other crash victims apart from the Senator, his wife, his daughter, and three aides. If you thought about it, the two who were unidentified had to be the pilots. The co-pilot, Michael Guess, although not as highly qualified as Conry, was also instrument qualified, which meant that the probability of pilot error had to be substantially less than if only one pilot had been involved. Nevertheless, when the NTSB would release its report more than a year later, it would conclude that the crash had been caused by "pilot error".

In the meanwhile, I began authoring columns about the crash for **READER WEEKLY**, another alternative newspaper in Duluth. What had struck me about the crash was the apparent cessation of communication commensurate with the loss of control, an event that had happened shortly before the crash, which took place about 10:20 AM. The possible causes I considered were a small bomb, a gas canister, or some type of high-tech weapon in the RF (radio frequency) or EMP (electromagnetic pulse) family. One advantage of such weapons is that the public generally does not know they exist.

I received email about the crash from many sources, including two photographs from Steve Filipovitch, a pilot himself, who had been on the ground roughly 10 miles from the airport about 25 minutes before the crash. He described the weather as pleasant with visibility about 3 miles with a 500-1000 foot ceiling. There was no ground wind. He said that "experienced pilot(s) could handle these conditions very easily". He sent along two photographs he had taken, time stamped, "9:57 AM" and "9:58 AM". Other planes had landed at the airport earlier that morning with no difficulties. And the NTSB would eventually clear both the weather and the plane.

Equally striking was an email I received from John Ongaro, who works for the City of Duluth. Ongaro had been traveling to the same funeral that the Senator was flying in to attend and was only a few miles from the airport on Highway 53 when he received an odd cell phone call. "When I answered it, it sounded like a cross between a roar and a loud humming noise." The sound seemed to be oscillating. He asked if I thought it might be related to my EMP hypothesis, so I asked him if he could check his cell phone records. They confirmed the call had come at 10:18 AM.

Ongaro has now told me that there is a "dead zone" for cell reception in that area.

But contact was made as the records show. And, an expert on electromagnetism, John Costella, has informed me that strong interference such as he experienced indicates that there was a high level of electromagnetic radiation in the area at the time. The humming and oscillating indicate that the source was man-made and coherent. Given there are no obvious sources of high-level radiation in the area, he believes electromagnetic jamming or weaponry are very plausible explanations.

Gary Ulman, the Eveleth-Virginia Airport manager, had been present when the plane clicked on the airport lights to indicate it was coming in for a landing. It was about 30 minutes after its approximate time of arrival at 10:20 AM that a possible crash warning alarm sounded. He took off immediately, looking for the crash, which he located about 2 miles southeast of the airport in a densely wooded, swampy area. The smoke from the crash was bluish-white in color and indicative of an electrical fire, rather than coarsely black in color and indicative of a kerosene-fuel-based fire.

This lends further weight to the hypothesis of an electromagnetic attack, which can overload and literally fry the electronic components in an aircraft, in exactly the same way that microwaves heat a meal or a bolt of lightning can cook a tree. (Microwaves are simply electronic waves that are higher in frequency than radio waves.)

In a King Air A-100, it can take out the CDI (course deviation indicator) that the pilot uses to head the plane toward a homing signal, its landing gear (which could still be lowered manually), its stall warning system, deicing mechanism, and fuel heating process. Even without these systems, the plane might still be flown, with or without power.

However, if the radiation is strong enough to disable the pilots--think of sitting inside a microwave oven!--they could be rendered unconscious, incapable of voluntary muscle control, or even dead. The plane would simply continue to descend, effectively pilotless.

According to the NTSB's final report, the crash occurred because the pilots lost track of their airspeed and altitude and simply allowed the plane to crash. The NTSB even accused Conry and Guess of gross incompetence. "One of them should have been monitoring the instruments," said Bill Bramble, a human performance investigator for the NTSB. This assumes the pilots were not incapacitated. NTSB board member Richard Healing pointed out that the report did not say how the pilots missed these red flags or why they failed to make adjustments. "We don't know why," Healing acknowledged. "It's quite speculative."

Its conclusion was especially disturbing insofar as the NTSB's own simulations, which included flying a plane at abnormally slow speeds, had been unable to bring it down. That by itself should have forced consideration of other possible causes, including sabotage. But exploring non-accident alternatives appears to have been precluded by policies that require the Attorney General to declare a crash site "a crime scene" before it can be investigated as the scene of a crime. Indeed, it might come as some surprise that NTSB reports are not even allowed as evidence in courts of law. They appear to have no legal standing.

If the only alternatives under consideration were that the plane, the pilots, or the weather were to blame, then one would lean toward blaming the pilots. The plane is the "Rolls-Royce" of small aircraft and the weather was no problem. But the NTSB's own evidence contradicts its findings. The location and position of the aircraft show

the plane was on a path opposite to that of a runway approach. That could happen in more ways than one if the pilot's had lost control.

The NTSB concluded that the pilots had allowed the plane to stall. But the A-100 is equipped with a stall warning alarm that makes a very loud sound when the plane is at risk of stalling, which would only be ignored if the pilots were incapacitated. The NTSB conducted its studies using a simulator with a weaker engine than the A-100, using pilots from the same charter service, and duplicating its flight path.

Even when the plane was slowed to abnormally low speeds, the pilots were able to power-up and regain control. They were unable to bring the plane down. The NTSB's conclusions might still have been implausible if they had only replicated the crash using such very highly improbable scenarios. That they could not replicate it at all is damning. The NTSB's evidence contradicts its findings.

Altitude and flight speed are the most basic elements in the flight of any aircraft.

It is insufficient for the NTSB to conclude that two experienced and competent pilots simply failed to monitor them, especially given such planes only require one pilot.

And it is difficult to imagine why, if something unexpected happened, the co-pilot would not have sent a distress call, especially when they were over a wooded and swampy area, where a rapid response could make the difference between life and death. They were carrying six passengers, including a United States Senator.

Were the pilots still conscious? If so, had they lost control of crucial systems? Why was there no distress call? Why did they not respond to the stall alarm warning?

And why did the plane crash in a direction opposite to that of the runway? These

are the questions that should have formed the starting point for the NTSB's inquiry.

According to the official report, the plane was destroyed "by impact forces and a postcrash fire". Hitting trees on its descent, the wings separated from the fuselage. Most of the fuel is stored in the wings. Yet only the fuselage was destroyed by fire. The wings and tail section were not. Why not?

It would seem impossible to know from the wreckage, especially when it had burned for hours, whether an in-flight fire had started or not. Some witnesses reported a flash of light while the plane was in the sky, testimony that was disregarded in the NTSB's report. They were not allowed to comment at public hearings it never held. Moreover, the smoke was blue, consistent with an electrical fire, not with a fuel fire.

By its own account, the "airplane descended through the trees wings level and upright on about a 26° downward flight path angle on a ground track of about 180°." This angle is too steep to suggest anything but a very serious dive, one not likely to result from a low altitude stall but from a plane completely out of control very abruptly or all of a sudden. This should have been important enough for the NTSB to emphasize.

But it did not. The first responders on the scene were ordered not to take photos of the wreckage by the FBI. Why? Even the AP photographer who has asked us to remain anonymous had a very difficult time getting photos and was only allowed fifteen minutes at the crash site, something this person said was very, very unusual.

You would think that more photographs would be better, since they would provide a more complete record. According to the NTSB, "The cockpit instrument panel was extensively damaged by postimpact fire." But some of this damage might have been caused by a "preimpact" fire caused by an electromagnetic hit.

Consider the alternative that this plane was taken out by the use of an EMP-type weapon. That would explain the loss of communication commensurate with loss of control. It would explain a preimpact fire. It would explain the blue smoke. It could explain why the plane was facing the wrong direction at impact. It could explain the severe angle of descent. It could explain the engines on idle. And if a cover up was being implemented to conceal the true cause of the crash, that would explain the early arrival of the FBI. It would explain the prohibition against photographs. It would explain the reversal of roles between the FBI and the NTSB. It would explain the inadequacy of this report to reflect the evidence.

Another line of argument supports this explanation. Every aircraft has its own "glide ratio" of how far it will remain in flight horizontally as it loses altitude in vertical descent when it suffers a loss of power. The plane was at 3,500' above sea level when communications were last received. The altitude at impact was 1,350', for a vertical difference of 2,150'. Assuming a glide ratio of 15:1 for the A-100, this plane could have been in a glide for the last six miles, with a loss of power as early as 10:18 AM.

If an electromagnetic weapon had been used, its effects could well have been evident in the wreckage. These effects--including digital clocks, for example, that might have stopped at a time other than that of impact--would have to be obliterated and the surrounding area combed for incriminating evidence. As it happened, the fuselage burned for hours while the FBI had control of the scene and before the NTSB team arrived. Quite a coincidence, especially when they arrived so promptly on the scene. The bodies, which might have

displayed signs of electromagnetic exposure, were burned beyond recognition.

The FBI's assistance in this case was not acknowledged in the NTSB's report.

Scientific reasoning is a pattern of thinking things through that proceeds through stages of puzzlement, speculation, and adaptation, ending with tentative and fallible explanation. It should be applied in every context complicated and serious enough to require it, including the assassination of JFK and the death of Senator Paul Wellstone.

When we apply scientific reasoning, we discover that the truth may not be what the papers print or what our government tells us about such events. This appears to have been another assassination. The motivation to take him out must have been overwhelming. He was pulling away from Norm Coleman, the hand picked candidate of Karl Rove. He was defying the odds and threatening the vaunted Bush machine.

By October 25, 2002, Wellstone's lead over Coleman had grown to 6 or 7 points and was increasing. He had told others that Vice President Dick Cheney had warned him against opposing the administration on Iraq and that *the Bush administration will do whatever is necessary to get you. There will be severe ramifications for you and the state of Minnesota.* When he did, his popularity soared. Under these conditions, it does not appear to be especially difficult to imagine the following conversation:

Use a small bomb. Detonate it by remote control or a pressurized device. Better yet, use that new EMP thing. No one will ever think of that. Make sure you get the feds there right away to clean up the scene and secure incriminating evidence. Send someone unqualified to head up the NTSB. It has worked before. It can work again.

The situation was serious. To the White House, this guy was a menace. He might have filibustered the Homeland Security Act. He opposed them on tax cuts, the SEC,

and the war on Iraq. He wanted to investigate 9/11! In the Senate, he had become an obstacle to the exercise of power. Are there any conceivable ramifications that could have been more severe than assassinating the Senate's most liberal member?

Proof of assassination is not proof of conspiracy. But the existence of a cover up is a powerful indication of complicity in a crime. If the motive and the opportunity are evident, it may be worth observing that Raytheon not only owns Beechcraft, which manufactures the A-100, but also makes high-tech weapons of the kind that could have been used to take it down. Which means that this knowledge was accessible to the administration. Karl Rove, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld may not have executed this hit, but they were in the position to make it happen. It has taken 40 years to unlock the cover up in the case of JFK. We can do better for Paul Wellstone.

References

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