

## Loose ends in the Wellstone crash

Jim Fetzer (READER WEEKLY, 10 July 2003, pp. 18-19)

My columns on the Wellstone crash, which are archived at [www.reader-weekly.com](http://www.reader-weekly.com) and at [www.assassinationscience.com](http://www.assassinationscience.com), have now produced at least two substantial responses, one by Kathleen Bangs in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* (15 June 2003) and another by William H. Rees in the Duluth *Reader Weekly* (19 June 2003). In addition, Tom Bieter's threatened lawsuit proceeds apace, but with his now declared intention to include UMD, its Chancellor, Kathryn Martin, and the University of Minnesota as plaintiffs. He has most recently indicated that he plans to ask that Governor Pawlenty become involved in this case, but precisely what should be expected to come of this is open to speculation.

I shall begin with these critiques before addressing Bieter's latest moves. Both of the authors, Bangs and Rees, have aviation experience that greatly exceeds mine, which is limited to commercial flights, a few private plane rides, and a training ride on a T-34. Bangs, the mother of a student of mine, had her ask me to call her. During our phone conversation, Bangs told me she had served as an instructor for the copilot, Michael Guess, and that she was very confident the pilots had come out of the clouds, discovered they were too low and too slow, had challenged the law of gravity, and lost.

In her *Star Tribune* column, Bangs reiterates the same conception, explaining that "in the few seconds it took to plummet into the trees, the stunned pilots would not have had time to make a radio call". She says, "airplanes do occasionally fall out of the sky, and sometimes they do so for no immediately apparent reason", which is why official inquiries can be painstakingly slow. So we'll just have to wait and see what the NTSB has to say. Bangs has opinions but really doesn't know.

Rees, by his own account, a retired Air Force pilot with more than 5,500 flying hours, mostly in jet fighters, echoes her opinion of the crash with a few passing remarks about the pilots and the weather. He correctly observes that my inference to the possibility this may have been an assassination depends on ruling out the weather, the pilots, and the plane—individually or in combination—as causes of the crash. He says that they have to be ruled out "absolutely", which I have not done. Rees' bottom line, believe it or not, is that "something unexpected happened"!

That something unexpected happened, of course, is not news. The claim that the pilots, the plane, and the weather have to be ruled out "absolutely" goes too far, since in the real world it would be enough to rule them out as improbable rather than as impossible causes of the crash. Evidence presented in my columns had already done that, but you don't have to take my word for it. The NTSB itself has conducted its own studies, which undermine those possibilities.

An article published in the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* (30 April 2003) by Charles Laszewski explained, "pilots flying a simulator meant to duplicate conditions near the airport at the time of the crash of the Beech King Air A100 twin-engine plane were able to safely land, even after

coming in slower than normal, the National Transportation Safety Board said.” Because this information is crucial to understanding the case, I quote it here at length.

“Earlier this month, safety board investigators brought to Florida two pilots from Aviation Charter, the company that flew Wellstone’s party, and put them into a simulator similar to the King Air A100. The pilots were given three scenarios for approaching the Eveleth-Virginia Municipal Airport, with two of them duplicating the instructions given to Wellstone’s plane.

“The final of the three tests asked the pilots to wait longer than usual to extend the landing gear and begin their descent to the run way. That one significantly increased the workload for the pilots, according to the report. They also flew the plane at the unusually slow speed the Wellstone plane traveled at before the crash. However, the pilots were able to power up the engines and fly the simulator out of trouble.

“Charles Hvass, Jr., a Minneapolis aviation lawyer and pilot, said running the pilots through simulators is a normal procedure in accident investigations. Because the plane did not have cockpit voice recorders, the investigators are trying to figure out what happened by flying different scenarios, he said.”

The NTSB also tested a navigational aid, the landing beacon, and found that it had not contributed to the crash, either. A dozen tests conducted between 26 October and 23 December 2002 showed that the closer the plane came to the airport, the more accurate the signal became. Looking at both the beacon and the simulator, Hvass said, it’s clear the investigators are focusing on the pilots making mistakes because no mechanical problems have turned up on the plane or on the ground. “I don’t see anything in either of these that spooks me”, he observed. “You’ve got a working airplane. It shouldn’t be on the ground.”

The NTSB has also been investigating the pilots. Richard Conry, the pilot in command (PIC), had some 5,200 flying hours, primarily with small, private planes. According to employment records in the possession of Charter Aviation, he had over 4,600 hours as pilot-in-command (PIC), including 200 hours as PIC of King Air A100s. Rees cites some anecdotal reports from pilots who criticized Conry, which I discussed in the *Reader* (13 March 2003), but he ignores other evidence from the NTSB.

“Mr. Conry was described by several individuals as very meticulous and ‘by the book’. He was also described as calm and very ‘laid back’. One individual who made about 50 flights in a C-172 with Mr. Conry, described him as the most careful pilot he had ever flown with. Mr. Conry checked everything on every flight”, as the NTSB reported (see [http://www.wcco.com/content/local\\_file\\_052162555](http://www.wcco.com/content/local_file_052162555)).

I would suggest that a pilot who has flown with Conry about 50 times is somewhat better positioned to comment on his qualifications than others, such as Bangs and Rees, who have never flown with him. But, fortunately, there is objective evidence that Conry was competent to fly this plane, namely, that he had passed his FAA professional proficiency “check ride” on 23

October 2002, just two days prior to the crash. According to the FAA, Conry was qualified for the A100.

Other indications of Conry's prudence in taking the fatal flight were discussed in my column for 13 March 2003, which neither Bangs nor Rees appear to have read. It is striking to me that they would publish these criticisms on 15 June and on 19 June 2003 when evidence undermining their positions was published six weeks before based upon the NTSB's own simulation studies! They offer opinions they cannot substantiate that the NTSB has now disconfirmed, while they criticize me for exploring other alternatives.

Bangs and Rees both submit that the pilot would have had his hands full in attempting to control the aircraft and would not have had time to make a distress call. But this is more plausible in the case of a solo pilot than in the case of copilots. Even though Rees dramatizes the idea of going down—in a fashion that might fit fighter jets better than it does King Air A100s—I find it difficult to imagine that a pilot would not want the world to know where he was coming down. His life—and that of his passengers—might depend upon the speed with which first responders make it to the scene.

They also make the point that the Eveleth-Virginia airport does not have a control tower as such and that planes arriving under instrument flight plans are under the direction of Duluth Approach Control. There can be no cessation of communication, Rees asserts, if there was no communication to begin with. But Rees is playing games with words. The plane was in communication with Duluth Approach Control and had made contact with the Eveleth-Virginia airport by electronically activating its landing lights!

I cannot resist observing that something appears to be wrong with Bangs' signature in describing herself as having "agreed to serve as an expert witness on behalf of copilot Michael Guess' estate in litigation related to the Wellstone crash". If it is indeed the case, as she told me on the phone, that she served as an instructor for Guess, then she cannot serve as an "expert witness" in this case. Having a personal relationship with one of the deceased would compromise her objectivity. She may well have occasion to explain herself, perhaps in a court of law, but something does not add up here any more than her theory of the crash. I found what she had to say unbelievable based on my own research, but I was glad to have her opinions.

Bangs has now contacted me to clarify that, while she served as an advisor to Guess, she did not serve as a flight instructor for Guess. Her opinions about the case are therefore not based on personal experience as a flight instructor, but rather on her inferences about the "training philosophy" at the school where he trained. Since she knew him personally, she cannot be an "expert witness", but tells me she will be an "expert consultant" in this case. This clarification, I believe, considerably weakens her degree of expertise in this case.

She has also suggested that my position appears to be inconsistent, since I am citing NTSB simulation studies even while I suspect the NTSB of covering up the true causes of the crash. I am not taking for granted that the NTSB is covering it up, but I am very suspicious about what's

going on here. That the simulations look right, given the other information available, indicates that they are doing this part right. But no one who is not actually looking at the evidence and thinking about its relationship to alternative conjectures about the crash would simply be taking it on faith, not exercising reason. These studies support my position that this was not an accident.

My columns have been intended to lay out the evidence as it has become available and to explain what I take to be its significance from the point of view of basic principles of scientific evidence. Rees claims that I have failed to follow them myself, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to observe that there are many aspects to this case that neither his nor Bangs' account can explain, including the cessation of communication, the bizarre cell phone experience of John Ongaro, the FBI's early arrival at the scene, and the odd exchange of roles between the NTSB and the FBI.

Anyone who has actually read my columns will know what I am talking about. Bangs and Rees might also want to consider the incomplete state of the logs maintained by the Eveleth Sheriff's Department, the FAA's response to my request for information about private planes landing in Duluth on 25 October 2003, and the NTSB's decision not to conduct public hearings where input can be provided by the community. These are all peculiar circumstances that suggest to me—rather strongly—that something is being covered up and that the truth is being withheld.

As I continue to investigate this case, however, new hypotheses continue to emerge. Although I have devoted a column to the possible use of futuristic weaponry as the cause of the crash, there appear to be alternatives to electromagnetic pulse (EMP) weapons, especially in the form of high energy radio frequency (HERF) guns. HERF guns are focused beam transmitters that send a concentrated radio signal to the target, which could be a stationary network or mobile electronics, as in the case of a car or an airplane (see <http://www.pha.com.au/papers/emf/harden.html>).

Even more disturbing, a typical HERF gun “is backpack sized, costs about \$150 to build, and puts out an incredible 16 Megawatts of pulse”, where the US deployed them in Iraq already in 1991 (see <http://liun.hektik.org/hightech/herf/clip5.html>). A book about them, Winn Schwartz' Information Warfare, was published in 1996! Like EMP weapons, they are not really “futuristic” but are available now and might even have been a more suitable choice for use in the mucky terrain where the plane went down.

If we proceed in stages following the principles of scientific reasoning, then when we encounter a puzzling phenomenon, such as the Wellstone crash, we have to consider all of the possible alternative explanations, not only those we may personally prefer! The weight of the evidence, at this point in time, suggests that the crash was not caused by the plane, the pilots, or the weather, as I have emphasized especially in my column of 2 January 2003, which included photographs of the weather in the vicinity at the time, which are available for viewing at <http://www.reader-weekly.com>.

The weight of the evidence suggests that this was no accident. Other information that simpler explanations cannot accommodate include Michael Ruppert's report that he has been told by

members of Congress that this was deliberate and that someone who is still on the inside doing wetwork (terminations) for the CIA called him the day after the crash to tell him this had been no accident, that a group of reinvigorated old white men were in charge and were nobody to screw with, and that other such events would occur.

Apparently, even thinking such thoughts has infuriated my one-time student, Thomas Bieter, a retired attorney and former prosecutor, who has announced his intention to bring a lawsuit against me, Tim Roufs, my colleague, Richard Thomas, the editor, and Robert Boone, the publisher, of the Reader, on the alleged ground that we have libeled the Republican Party by publishing my columns. The publisher and I have responded to Mr. Bieter in columns that appeared the issue of 12 June 2003, for those who may have missed them, which are also archived at the Reader's web site..

Mr. Bieter, who appears to be having a difficult time deciding what kind of lawsuit he wants to pursue, has announced that he is expanding his suit to encompass UMD and its Chancellor, Kathryn Martin, and the University of Minnesota, on the alleged ground, in his own words, "that the university had knowledge, rewarded, encouraged, financially supported, approved and condoned Professor Fetzer's investigations, research, and publications on assassinationscience.com and on the Wellstone crash", which may be found at his <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FETZERclaimsDEBUNK/message/317>.

Mr. Bieter explains this means that, when I published articles, statements, and other communications on the subject of the Wellstone crash, I was acting within the scope of my employment duties as a Distinguished McKnight University Professor, with the full knowledge, consent, and approval of Chancellor Martin, who was acting on behalf of the University of Minnesota. But Mr. Bieter commits an obvious fallacy, insofar as, while Chancellor Martin is of course aware of my appointment as Distinguished McKnight University Professor on her own campus, that does not imply that anything I may have written on this or any other subject was with her knowledge, consent, or approval.

Mr. Bieter may not understand that faculty at the University of Minnesota are given the academic freedom to investigate whatever subjects they choose by whatever methods they consider appropriate, without requiring the knowledge, consent, or approval of the Chancellor or other administrative officials of the University of Minnesota. She is no more responsible for my research on the Wellstone crash than she is for my research in philosophy of science or on the theoretical foundations of computer science, artificial intelligence, and cognitive science (see my vita at <http://www.d.umn.edu/~jfetzer/>).

The entire suit that Mr. Bieter proposes, moreover, requires the commission of what is known as "actual malice" by me in publishing these columns, which implies, among other points, that I did not believe what I was writing and nevertheless disseminated them in a deliberate effort to harm (in his opinion) the Republican Party! Not only is such a view unsupportable by the evidence but it completely disregards the obvious, namely, that I am expressing my personal conclusions, interpretations, theories, conjectures, and inferences. I do not claim to possess definitive knowledge of criminal activities.

My columns are not libelous because I have only said that these guys (Dick Cheney, Karl Rove, and Donald Rumsfeld) may have been involved. I have not asserted that they were involved. My columns are not libelous because Mr. Bieter has no standing, since he claims standing as a member of the Republican Party, when I have specifically stated that I am not talking about your average G.O.P. voter. Indeed, there are more than twenty-three other reasons why his proposed suit is frivolous or even malicious, as I have explained in an earlier column in the *Reader* (12 June 2003).

If there were any merit in implicating UMD, Chancellor Martin, or the University in these matters, then I suppose we could add that I was exercising academic freedom. But ask yourself, once again: Does anyone seriously doubt that what I am suggesting is a real possibility, especially in the political context of a tight election with control of Senate at stake? I mean in its general conception, not in its specific details, since anyone can be wrong about those. Because it should be borne in mind that no one, including the NTSB, has shown that what I believe may have happened to Paul Wellstone is not true.

There is no point in waiting for the NTSB to tell us, moreover, because the NTSB itself may be covering it up. Indeed, we won't know whether what we are told by the NTSB makes any sense if we don't have an understanding of the evidence and how it relates to alternative explanations. Every American should want to get to the bottom of what happened to our Senator, if only to seek assurance that this is not the latest act of a new fascist state. If we passively accept what our government tells us, we will never know.

*Jim Fetzer, a professor of philosophy at UMD, encourages his students to apply their critical thinking skills to problems of real life, such as understanding the war in Iraq and the Wellstone crash and how to deal with advertising and used-car salesmen.*