

AMERICAN ASSASSINATION: THE STRANGE DEATH OF SENATOR PAUL WELLSTONE
(Brooklyn, NY: Vox Pop, 2004), pp. xviii + 188.

by Bradley E. Ayers

Reviewer's Note: Soon after publication, Dr. James Fetzer suggested I write a "literary" review of the book, AMERICAN ASSASSINATION: The Strange Death of Senator Paul Wellstone (non-fiction, Vox Pop/DKMC, Brooklyn, NY 11218, trade paperback, \$14.00, ISBN 0-9752763-0-1) jointly authored by himself and Dr. Don Jacobs, aka Four Arrows, released in October 2004.

Somewhat humbled, I pondered Jim's invitation. I knew Senator Wellstone. As a veteran in distress, his office was hugely instrumental in helping me obtain the VA disability benefits I presently survive on. Quite aside from that, I also agreed with his populist socio-political philosophy, admired his vision, courage and activism.

Former Marine officer, now a tenured McKnight/U of M professor, Fetzer is a respected friend. My relationship with Jim developed when he came to recognize my military background and history of government service, especially the involvement in CIA's in Operation Mongoose (the Kennedy Administration's secret war against Cuba and the Castro assassination attempts in the 1960s) during the period of President Kennedy's murder and other domestic assassinations.

My credentials as a prospective book reviewer include that I've been licensed as a private detective in three states for more than thirty years; and, as a former, fully rated commercial air charter bush pilot had flown into Eveleth, MN, the site of the Wellstone plane crash, many times on instruments under all varieties of weather conditions.

But, could I maintain journalistic neutrality and objectivity as a reviewer given my strong personal feeling about Wellstone and my friendship with Jim Fetzer? Keenly aware of my own limitations and inadequacies, one of the most difficult tasks I know is to critique another writer's work. I told Jim of my reservations, talked with his publisher and felt encouraged to go ahead.

With that as a backdrop, I should make it clear I don't consider myself part of America's conspiracy theory subculture, nor am I even remotely involved in Internet chatter. I prefer gathering and evaluating information the old fashioned way, making sure that what I get is the real thing.

This review will avoid preempting reader curiosity by revealing sensitive details of the book's plot line, nor will it offer judgments about the credibility of the authors' sources, the legal viability of their views and conclusions. Readers will have to make up their own minds. I offer here only a personal opinion as to the composition and merits of the work as a contribution to the troubled history of our time. I have taken the Fetzer-Jacobs book at face value.

NO ACCIDENT

by Bradley E. Ayers

AMERICAN ASSASSINATION challenges the reader to render careful, critical judgment about the causation of Paul Wellstone's death, when his chartered plane impacted in a remote swampy, wooded area in northeastern Minnesota in October 2002. Was the crash an accident, a bizarre twist of fate on the eve of the fiery, outspoken liberal Democratic's predicted reelection to the narrowly divided U.S. Senate? Or was the plane's destruction the work of threatened right-wing dark forces determined to sabotage our country's elective process for political gain?

The book, in tone, theme and substance passionately assumes the later, but not without making a powerful case. The authors' thesis is structured around the fundamental, time honored considerations when appraising any crime: did a potential perpetrator have the means, motive and opportunity to commit the act; and is there human testimony, physical and circumstantial evidence to support each of these criteria?

The initial chapters of the book are devoted to building the evidentiary case for the opportune, sinister destruction of the airplane killing the Senator, his wife, daughter, campaign aides and pilots.

Fetzer and Jacobs meticulously piece together the events and identify personalities involved preceding the tragedy and those actions and developments, both official and unofficial following the crash. The authors' reach for information is extensive and goes well beyond that of the authorities. Many basic, logical questions are posed, contradictions and inconsistencies in the reactions and pronouncements of officialdom and first responders to the crash site, all suggesting a deliberate effort to tamper with or remove critical evidence from the scene.

It's primarily on the basis of this factual data, which includes verbatim quotations from local authorities, the FBI, NTSB and FAA as well as regional and national media reportage, that, an impressive scenario of a possible conspiracy and cover-up emerges. The accusative finger points to the Bush White House and the most powerful in the Administration, with the complicity of key Federal agencies.

I found the authors¹ brief early digressions comparing a possible Wellstone murder conspiracy and cover up with other controversial high profile deaths to be a minor distraction. All in all, this is gripping, goosebump producing reading for anyone with lingering suspicions about the performance and crash scene investigation by officials of the U.S. Government.

Having quite effectively made the evidentiary argument for post-crash concealment and deliberate spoilage of the scene, the authors¹ turn to the motive issue. I found these chapters to be most enlightening and absolutely essential to appreciating the breadth and intensity of the Bush cabal's animosity that may have led to Wellstone's elimination. AMERICAN ASSASSINATION brings together in its central chapters an extensive list of factors, some fairly obscure in public view, nevertheless important, clearly identifying the Minnesota Senator as a persistent and even greater future threat to the conservative Republican agenda thus becoming a target for removal at virtually any cost, even murder.

With the actual events, initial reactions and reports, documented physical aspects of the wreckage and crash scene observation and the possible motive for assassination and cover-up now before the reader, Fetzer and Jacobs offer a detailed retrospection of alleged "accidental" and "lone-gunmen" fatalities of key or high profile political figures in the U.S. over the past forty years. Comparison and parallels are drawn between these and the possible murder of Senator Wellstone. Thus, the authors¹ buttress their assassination conspiracy premise. They generously and fairly present and debate dissenting opinions from other contemporary scholars and observers.

At this point in the book, in their capacity as educators¹ the authors¹ step away from the specifics of the case and engage in serious tutoring. Several chapters of the book are devoted to a rather expansive, academic and slightly complex theoretical discussion of critical thinking. This is the methodology professors Fetzer and Jacobs applied in investigating the fatal Wellstone plane crash, and analyzing the events, circumstances, evidence and other factors surrounding it.

While sometimes a little heavy on classical logic process, the effort is well intentioned and, obviously, encourages the reader's appreciation for the authors' intellectual effort in researching the Wellstone tragedy and evolving their thesis as an alternative to the official causal determination.

The truly interested reader is now, hopefully, versed in the discipline by which Fetzer and Jacobs build their case for an assassination conspiracy in the downing of the Wellstone plane. The authors dissect, item by item, the government's handling of the event, from crash site response and investigation to the suspected manipulation of public information essentially illustrating how the Establishment system either failed or was perverted to facilitate a manufactured explanation for the crash.

A pattern of procrastination, obfuscation, buck-passing, unanswered inquires, procedural anomalies, policy circumventions, apparent incompetence, discreditation of witnesses and sources, ignorance and degradation of physical evidence value is thoroughly documented. Most disturbing is the assertion the FBI played a key part in the initial phases of the crash investigation, usurping the established role of NTSB as the responsible action agency in any fatal aircraft incident. The authors offer a compilation of peripheral testimony, qualified sources familiar with airplane crashes and standards for investigating them.

Most disturbing, the authors point out the Wellstone crash investigation was never subject to public hearing as mandated by NTSB regulation in any high profile case. Staunchly defending the assassination conspiracy argument, Fetzer and Jacobs, in full attack mode, rebut the final NTSB "accident" report with a vengeance. Sentence by sentence, they catalogue the reports' contradictions, lapses, selective use of evidence and testimony, manipulated phraseology, and ignorance of available information that might undermine the governments finding that crash resulted from pilot error. The authors' conclusion is that the NTSB report is a rather transparent effort to establish plausible denial and is bogus.

Finally, AMERICAN ASSASSINATION presents the reader with a variety of alternative explanations for the plane crash. Some tend toward the exotic, but are technically substantiated to a reasonable degree. Other, more conventional explanations are also posed for the reader's consideration.

Expert opinion is offered and expanded upon. The book concludes with a summary of the major points of argument, set forth in easily understood fashion.

The authors¹ conviction and ardency are apparent in their work, as is the thoroughness of their research. If the book has any weaknesses from a literary standpoint its the indulgent, redundant comparison of the postulated Wellstone assassination conspiracy with the murder of JFK and the questionable deaths of other major political figures in America in recent years. There is also repetitive overkill in citing the potentially compromising backgrounds of some of the key officials involved in the investigation and reporting of the Wellstone crash.

Finally, the astute reader will be a bit uncomfortable with a certain editing unevenness of the text, something that's very hard to avoid when combining the independent work of co-authors. The book also lacks a bibliography and index.

These shortcomings in no way detract from the substance and essential message of the book. Fetzer and Jacobs have produced an enormously provocative vital piece of work that should be of interest to anyone concerned that our Constitutional political process, our very lives, can be manipulated by evil forces hiding behind a façade of moral and ideological righteousness in America today. AMERICAN ASSASSINATION, if widely read, could well prompt a public outcry that might ultimately lead to a full exposition of the facts surrounding the strange death of Paul Wellstone. Fetzer and Jacobs argue convincingly that it was no accident. The book is a must read for all who search for the truth.

Editor's Note: The reviewer is a former Army special operations officer, CIA and DEA operative. He has logged more than 5,000 hours of flight time as a fully rated commercial air charter-bush pilot and is licensed as a private detective. He holds an MA in education and is the author of nonfiction books, including especially THE WAR THAT NEVER WAS on CIA operations against Cuba.