

What happened to Paul Wellstone?

Jim Fetzer (Duluth READER WEEKLY 28 November 2002, pp. 18-19)

Conspiracies are as American as apple pie. Does anyone doubt that the Enron debacle was a conspiracy? or that 9/11 was a conspiracy? or that, when two guys knock off a 7-11 store, they are engaged in a conspiracy? All it takes is two or more persons collaborating in the pursuit of illegal purposes, which could range from murder and rape to treason and bribery. They aren't always described that way or prosecuted under conspiracy statutes. When have you heard 9/11 depicted as "a conspiracy"?

Most American conspiracies are economic crimes depriving people of their property rather than political crimes that deprive them of their lives. But there are plenty of those, too. Abraham Lincoln, for example, was shot by John Wilkes Booth, while his Vice President and Secretary of State were simultaneously attacked. You can find photos of four of the conspirators being hung from the same gallows at the same time.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy appears to have been a large-scale conspiracy, involving elements of the Secret Service (setting him up), the CIA/Mafia/military (taking him out), and the FBI (covering it up), which was overseen by LBJ and J. Edgar Hoover. Evidence published in *Assassination Science* (1998) and in *Murder in Dealey Plaza* (2000) includes fabricated X-rays, the substitution of another brain for that of JFK, and extends to the alteration of photos and the Zapruder film.

Not every case involving the death of a famous person turns out to have been as the result of a conspiracy. John-John's death piloting his own plane to Martha's Vineyard accompanied by his wife and her sister, for example, appears to have

been a tragic accident brought about by a combination of poor judgment, lack of instrument training, personal physical impairment, and bad weather conditions.

What becomes most important about any specific event where conspiracy might be suspected is that it should be investigated thoroughly on its own terms. One of the most basic principles of scientific reasoning, for example, *the requirement of total evidence*, insists that, in the search for truth, all the evidence whose truth or falsity or presence or absence makes a difference must be taken into account.

The basics of the death of Paul Wellstone appear to be the following. His plane was an Air King A100, one of the most reliable small planes in use today. It was piloted by two experienced fliers, with strong aviation credentials and training.

The plane was approaching the Eveleth-Virginia Municipal Airport in overcast weather when it experienced a loss of control. It crashed and burned, killing all.

An article in the *Duluth News Tribune* (30 October 2002) states that, "Veteran pilots remain puzzled by the plane's bizarre path during the final moments of its flight Friday and theorize that a propeller failed or that the plane hit a flock of geese as it approached the airport. 'Something dramatic happened and--whatever it was--it happened very quickly,' said Bob Peasley, a longtime Northwest Airlines pilot, who has flown everything from two-seat Aeronca Champs to Boeing 757s."

The problem with these explanations is that communications between the pilots and the control tower were abruptly terminated as well when the plane went out of control. Not only could an Air King A100 fly on only one propeller, but the two pilots should have been able to notify the tower of their problem. If they had only said, "We've got a hell of a problem up here, with feathers all over the place!", then

we would have known what caused the plane to crash. There was nothing but silence.

Bill Wilkerson, who has been hiring pilots and leasing small planes for more than 30 years, points out in a posting on the NPR web site that A100s have the best avionics in the business and usually also carry black boxes because of the calibre of their customers: "The A100 is not only one of the most reliable in the air, they are complicated enough to require extensive checkouts before every flight and the maintenance is rigorous, not just for safety reasons but because they cost as much as a mansion"

(<http://Yourturn.npr.org/cgi-bin/WebX?14@134.E9mZapkTbDm.2@.ee7018e/73767>).

"This is not a plane that goes down in freezing rain", Wilkerson reports. "Visibility and conditions were not an issue in this accident. A pilot cannot fly this plane without an IFR (instrument flight rules) rating and thousands of hours of experience. IFR rating means the plane can be landed completely on instrument with no visibility at all--fog, freezing rain, driving snow, etc. Wellstone's plane had two such pilots, which is unusual in itself." This makes it very difficult to imagine how the pilots or the plane could have been responsible for the crash that killed Paul Wellstone.

Wilkerson has also been puzzled by the NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) investigators, who have been emphatic that a severe fire had begun after impact: "In fact, that's about all they had to say, other than describing a crash perimeter that was preposterously small for serious investigation. There was mention of witnesses that saw the plane on fire on the way down, but they were neither identified nor repeated later in the day". That suggests the reports were phony.

"Plain and simple", Wilkerson says, "based on my every experience with dedicated

pilots and precision aircraft, planes like the A100 do not catch fire in spotty, wet weather and two experienced pilots are extremely unlikely to agree to fly under conditions they can't control. They were not suicide bombers. This plane was destroyed intentionally from afar".

A colleague of mine, Tim Roufs, who is an anthropologist and used to making and maintaining records of observations, kept notes on national reports about the crash from Friday through Sunday and was struck by the extent to which misleading and false information was being disseminated as though it were true: "They were clearly planting little thoughts in peoples' minds that simply were lies, like 'The plane crashed in freezing drizzle'", more than a half-day after it was clear that this was not the case.

"They also repeatedly on national media lied about the visibility, in spite of the fact that it was well documented by a UPS plane of slightly larger size (flying in/out, I think from Bemidji) flying into the airport just before that visibility wasn't that great but that it was fine for professional pilots, that the airport manager who hopped in a plane when the Air King was overdue and flew to the wreckage, said the visibility was fine", where the FCC for the first few hours reported that the visibility had been fine but then--for reasons unknown--stopped reporting that.

Roufs also noticed that local news anchor Denny Anderson, a retired private pilot himself, tried to explain that visibility had not been a factor and the difference between IFR and VFR (visual flight rules) to his audience. "It was almost mildly comical", Roufs said, "that Denny would review the difference between IFR and VFR flight rules after national news segments tried to obfuscate the difference, implying the pilots should have been flying VFR rules, which is ridiculous", which he tried to

correct.

Roufs has extensive flight experience himself and has a son who is a professional pilot. "The plane was on straight final in, indicating no problems, going about 95 (or so knots), with all flaps set at 15 degrees (slight flaps down, but according to the Go Team all four working perfectly), 7 or so miles from touch down. Then, [according to the national media] 'for some mysterious reason that we may never know', the plane veered off course and took a steep dive."

He also noted several peculiar announcements from the NTSB, including an initial press conference during which the national spokesperson refused to confirm the identity of two other persons traveling with the party as *the pilots*, as though the plane could have been flown without them. Or another during which it announced that this Air King did not have a flight-controlled black box, then spent a day and a half search for the cockpit voice black box, which it subsequently reported did not exist either, something it should have known Friday from the plane's papers.

"The bottom line", in Roufs' judgment, "is that it pretty much looks like a small bomb to the controls. Probably remotely detonated. And, remember, a little over an hour or so, Wellstone and Kennedy were traveling together. That might also become a factor in the timing, should the investigation ever reach a higher level." The only alternative that fits the picture, in Roufs' view, is a suicide job by one of the pilots. "I would doubt that, but stranger things have happened."

That two experienced pilots should have decided to commit suicide at the same time, of course, defies belief. And it is difficult to imagine why, if one of them

had tried to take the plane down, the other would not have communicated the information to the tower. Under these circumstances, regrettably, more sinister motives have to be taken seriously, including the possibility the crash resulted from a political conspiracy. In that case, his death would be an assassination.

Michael I. Niman, a professor from Buffalo State College, has raised the specter that this may indeed have been the case. “In a senate that is one heartbeat away from Republican control, Wellstone was more than just another Democrat. He was often the lone voice standing firm against the status-quo policies of both the Democrats and the Republicans. As such, he earned the special ire of the Bush administration and the Republican Party, who made Wellstone’s defeat the party’s number one priority this year.” And it looked as though it wasn’t going to happen.

John Judge, an expert on the assassination of JFK, addressed the Wellstone crash during a recent interview on Black Op Radio. Judge opined that the loss of control might have been brought about by the use of an electro-magnetic pulse that would disable computerized components and render the aircraft out of control. Judge stated that devices of the kind are available to law enforcement authorities for the purpose of ending high-speed chases with hijackers with minimal loss of life. (Hear his interview at www.blackopradio.com under “Archived Shows 2002”, #100.)

The key to understanding the crash appears to be the complete cessation of communication between the pilots and the control tower. If the plane had lost a prop or hit a gaggle of geese, that could have been immediately reported to the tower. That did not happen. Something like a small bomb might have caused the crash, as Roufs suggests; or perhaps an electro-magnetic pulse, as Judge has

proposed; or possibly even opiate-derivative gas of the kind the Russians used to overcome the Chechen rebels during the recent hostage crisis. It had to be something that caused a loss of communication as well as of control.

The latest reports from the *Star Tribune* (24 November 2002) are not overly encouraging for those who would like to get to the bottom of this tragedy. The reporters on the story, Paul McEnroe and Tony Kennedy, are focusing on one of the pilot's lack of sleep the night before. This, of course, cannot explain why the co-pilot, who was also exceptionally well-qualified, would not have taken over, if the pilot had drifted off to sleep. Nor why the plane would have suddenly lost communication with the tower. But it does distract the American public.

And that is a bad thing. Reports about the weather and visibility problems that appear to have made no difference to the crash should not be advanced as explanations. The same goes for the pilots. It is difficult to deny that by concealing the presence of two experienced pilots, the NTSB's spokesperson prevented the nation from learning right off the bat that pilot error was an extremely improbable occurrence. These are acts that mislead the nation.

The latest from the St. Louis County medical examiner, Dr. Thomas Uncini, in the *Duluth News Tribune* (21 November 2002), reports his conclusion that the occupants died as a result of "traumatic injury due to, or as a consequence of, an aviation crash with fire". This inference, of course, does not explain why such a crash occurred nor whether it might have been caused by a small bomb, an electro-magnetic pulse, or an opiate-derivative gas. While the bodies of the family were severely burned, perhaps the bodies of the pilots can tell us more.

Indeed, the very occurrence of an extensive fire appears suspicious on its own.

Our government has been lying to us about practically every matter of moment in our lives, including the tax cut, the SEC, Homeland Security, 9/11, and even Iraq. Covering up a crime of this magnitude would be nothing new, as the case of JFK vividly displays. But in Minnesota we ought to be able to do better. We should not let the death of man who courageous spoke up for the little guy go without thorough and competent investigation. If the plane was sabotaged, as I also believe, we have to come to grips with that fact and do what we can to bring the perpetrators to justice. That is the least we can do for Paul Wellstone.

Jim Fetzer, a professor of philosophy at UMD, has edited two books on the death of JFK, *Assassination Science* (1998) and *Murder in Dealey Plaza* (2000), and maintains a web site devoted to current research on this and other issues of national and international significance at www.assassinationscience.com.