

Paul Wellstone: The Plot Thickens

Jim Fetzer (READER WEEKLY, 2 January 2003, pp. 16-18)

In response to my analysis of the Wellstone tragedy (READER WEEKLY, 28 November 2002, pp. 18-19) and related discussion of this event, I have received quite a few emails, many of which have taken strong exception to the very idea that George W. Bush could ever have been involved in something of this kind. My suggestion that Republicans may have been motivated to take Wellstone out, alas, is not mine alone.

Michael I. Niman, a professor from Buffalo State College, for example, whom I quote in my column, has raised the same question. Control of the Senate was at stake, which is a serious business, not only regarding the President's policies--where I strongly suspect Wellstone would have filibustered the corrupt "Homeland Security Act"--but also billions of dollars in government contracts and appointments to the US Supreme Court. He was a thorn in the administration's side.

My approach, for those who missed that column, has been to take this event and subject it to scrutiny from the point of view of scientific reasoning. The most adequate model is that of inference to the best explanation, which characterizes science as a process or procedure involving four steps or stages, namely: *puzzlement*, *speculation*, *adaptation* (of hypotheses to evidence, excluding those that are inconsistent with the evidence and calculating the probabilities that the remaining alternatives confer on the evidence), and *explanation* (when the evidence warrants acceptance).

The basic elements of the Wellstone crash are rather puzzling. The plane was a King Air A100 (not an "Air King A100", as I previously reported), which is an exceptionally reliable and smooth handling aircraft. We might call it the Mercedes-Benz of small planes. Since it is such an expensive aircraft, it receives a thorough maintenance prior to every flight. As Bill Wilkerson, who has leased them for more than 30 years has explained, "the maintenance is rigorous, not just for safety reasons but because they cost as much as a mansion."

A recent article about the crash has quoted Jeff Johnson, an associate professor in the aviation program at St. Cloud State University, who said that he has flown about 500 hours in King Air 100s as a private pilot. He said the planes are forgiving, stable and reliable, and that the A100 has a flexible, boot-like device on the leading edge of the wing that the pilot can make "expand like a balloon to break off ice" (<http://www.scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/HL0210/S00206.htm>).

Wilkerson has also observed that this is not a plane that goes down in the freezing rain. The plane was also piloted by two pilots with extensive experience: "A pilot cannot fly this plane without a IFR (instrument flight rules) training and thousands of hours of experience." The plane was on straight final in, indicating no problems, traveling around 95 knots, with all flaps down 15 degrees (flaps slightly down), 7 miles or so from the touch down, when it veered off course and took a steep dive. The crash killed all aboard and a fire erupted, burning the passengers beyond recognition. They were identified by dental plates.

Perhaps the most important indication that something unusual was up, however, was the complete cessation of communications between the pilots and the airport. Local pilots were puzzled by the abrupt loss of control. The crab-like movement of the plane and the termination of communication has led some to speculate that whatever happened had to have happened very quickly, speculating that perhaps a propeller had failed or the plane had hit a gaggle of geese. Unless a prop had come off and slammed into the fuselage, the loss of an engine cannot not have caused the crash, since the plane can fly on only one engine.

An encounter with a gaggle of geese does not appear to be adequate to explain the cessation of communication between the plane and the airport. The copilot, for example, could have explained, "We have a hell of a mess of feathers up here and we're going down!", taking but a moment of time to explain the situation they were in. Instead, there was nothing but silence. Although it has now been discovered that a VOR (very-high frequency omni-range station) navigational aid, which assists in aligning planes with runways, was slightly out of adjustment, it was by a small tolerance and does not appear to be among the factors that caused the crash (*Duluth News Tribune*, 23 December 2002, p. 3C).

A pair of emails from Elizabeth Sirius (ESirius@aol.com) have suggested that there is a consensus among pilots in the Twin Cities area that the accident was caused by pilot error. "Apparently the pilot came down from the clouds and found that his approach was incorrect to line up with the runway. Instead of rising into the clouds again to turn and

organize another approach, he tried to do a power turn UNDER the clouds which caused a loss of airspeed and eventually a stall which he would not have had enough altitude to pull out of." Hence the crash.

She elaborates upon this position by maintaining that "The records are full of notable people who have died on these same aircraft. Most recently this includes another Senator, this time from Missouri, and Payne Stewart". But the plausibility of her contention depends upon the state of the weather, where Steve Filipovitch, who was in the area at the time but on the ground rather than in the air, has sent me two photos of the area along with the following important information:



"I was approximately 10 +/- miles from the Eveleth airport at the time of Senator Wellstone's demise. I was inspecting and taking pictures of some real estate in the area. I was outside for a good 15 to 20 minutes around that time. I am a pilot and have landed at Eveleth.



"I know the possibility of icing when descending. The temperature on the ground was pleasant with my estimation of visibility was 3 miles with a 500 to 1000 (foot) ceiling. There was no ground wind. Experienced pilot(s) could handle these conditions very easily."

The plane crashed at about 10:20 AM, shortly after these photos were taken. This report and these photographs confirm the absence of bad weather, absence of ground wind, and lack of rain (freezing or not) and provide powerful evidence inconsistent with icing, with limited visibility, and even with pilot error. This evidence clearly contradicts *The New York Times* (18 December 2002, p. A28), which mistakenly reported, "Visibility was poor amid light snow and freezing rain. In such conditions, planes can quickly accumulate a thin layer of ice that reduces lift by disrupting the flow of air over the wings". This seductive depiction of the accident has many merits but not truth.

A preliminary report one day earlier from the NTSB has confirmed that the engines were intact at the time of the crash and that the pilots had received two weather briefings prior to their flight. It has also confirmed that the copilot's voice was heard "on nearly all radio transmissions", where the pilot working the radio is typically not the pilot flying the aircraft. A review of the aircraft's records, moreover, has revealed no maintenance problems (NTSB Advisory/ National Transportation Safety Board, released 17 December 2002).

The latest from the *Star Tribune* (29 November 2002) also has it that the crash was caused by a stall, where the air speed is supposed to have dropped to 85 knots and the wings could have lost their aerodynamic lift, causing a crash. But actual tests with King Air A100s have shown that they do not stall out until air speed falls below 70 knots, which suggests that the story's sources may have confused stalling with the loud warning alarm that stalling is about to occur, which triggers off at 85 knots.

The warning would do no good, of course, if it did not allow opportunity for the pilot to take corrective action. Although questions have been raised about his past, this pilot had 5,200 hours of flying time and the highest possible certification. Even if it had taken only 60 seconds from stall to crash, there would have been ample time to notify the airport they were in trouble. Just try counting out, "One, two, three, . . ."! How long does it take you to say, "We're in trouble!" Try it and time it. This appears to be another ad hoc hypothesis intended to bury the problem.

The stage of speculation--which considers the full range of possible alternative explanations--is perhaps the most crucial component of scientific reasoning, even if you might prefer not to consider some of them for personal, political, or ethical reasons, since otherwise you may exclude the true hypothesis from consideration. Neither pilot error nor mechanical problem nor weather conditions appear to be responsible for this crash. It had not thrown a propeller and both of its engines were intact. Geese are not a likely problem, especially at this time of year. None of the more obvious explanations will do.

That means we have to take seriously more sinister alternatives, such as a small bomb under the control panel, the use of an electro-magnetic pulse, or perhaps a canister of gas of the kind the Russians used to overcome the Chechen rebels in Moscow during the recent hostage crisis. They could be detonated by remote control. If any of these hypotheses were true, there are causal consequences that should be testable to confirm or disconfirm them, such as the presence of small shrapnel in the bodies of the pilots, which were not severely burned.

In the hope that I might elicit the judgment of the St. Louis County Coroner in this matter, I sent a copy of my earlier column to Thomas Uncini on 3 December 2002. My thought was that he might be able to confirm shrapnel in the bodies or residue from an opiate-derivative gas of the kind I had conjectured might be involved. He was not glad to hear from me, however, and, in a post of 3 December 2002, he told me that he had released all information the law requires, that he would not be offering any more information about the crash "at this time", that

I might contact the families for more, but I should not contact him again.

I have heard, but do not know, that toxicological tests have excluded the use of gas of the kind the Russians used, in which case that hypothesis has been disconfirmed. If there are no shrapnel wounds on the bodies of the pilots, which I do not know and have not heard, that alternative too will have thereby been disconfirmed. The use of an electro-magnetic pulse initially sounds exotic, but I have found several reports about EMP through a google search, including "Non-Nuclear EMP: Automating the Military May Prove a Real Threat" and "E-Bomb--Electro Magnetic Pulse Weapon", which are now at <http://milnet.com/milnet/e-bomb.htm> and www.fas.org/irp/agency/army/tradoc/usaic/mipb/1997-1/merkle.htm.

More disturbing than these studies by far, however, has been a contact I have received from a weather fanatic who records unusual weather patterns picked up on radar. He has send me links to his site, where I have encountered what may or may not be effects from the use of an EMP against Mel Carnahan in Missouri on 17 October 2000. Please go to <http://www.toledolink.com/~flash/CARNAHAN-CRASH.html>. (These same images are accessible via <http://www.assassinationscience.com>.) These images are accompanied by newspaper stories about the crash.

There are aspects of these stories that trouble me. For example, one of the officials on the scene, Captain Ed Kemp of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, said, "We found wreckage in very small pieces spread over a large area." My expectation from a non-explosive and ordinary crash due to the weather, as this one is alleged to have been,

would be precisely the opposite, with rather large pieces spread over a small area. The reported effect thus appears to me to contradict the alleged cause.

Other email I have been sent has raised other alternatives, including the use of a deliberately misplaced VOR or the use of lasers. I have discussed the case with an acquaintance, who has 30 years of aviation experience, an Air Force military background, and who used to supervise air crash investigations. He agreed that these alternatives could not be ruled out, but said the same was true of a lucky rifle shot rifle that just happened to hit the control board the right way! Since the plane apparently only burst into flames after impact, however, perhaps the use of lasers can be ruled out, at least provisionally until the discovery of additional evidence.

For some time I was troubled by the prospects for testing the EMP hypothesis. But my military source pointed out to me that, while such a weapon would take out the computerized components of an air craft, it would not affect those that are not computerized, such as an eight-day clock all planes are required to have on board. It should be possible to compare that clock with others on board. And if residents of the Eveleth area noticed any oddities about their own time pieces or other computerized equipment, that would provide overwhelming evidence that the Wellstone crash was caused by EMP.

The alternative that an electrical problem might have brought the plane down--such as the result of frayed wiring--is undermined by the A100's extreme reliability and thorough maintenance. And, as my colleague, Tim

Roufs, has observed, it can also be discounted on the grounds that it would only affect an instrument landing. Since the plane was on final landing, the pilots would have been operating on the basis of visual flight rules, not instrument flight rules. Nothing about "frayed wires" applies here. And the photographs vividly support the conditions for a visual landing.

Hypotheses that explain more of the evidence are preferable to those that explain less. Hypotheses that are preferable become acceptable when sufficient evidence becomes available. We already have enough evidence to exclude pilot error, mechanical problems, and bad weather as adequate explanations. We also have enough to exclude a thrown prop or a gaggle of geese. We may or may not have enough to exclude a small bomb or a canister of gas. We do not have enough to rule out the use of EMP. Indeed, the use of a weapon whose existence is generally unknown is highly desirable, since usually no one will even consider the possibility.

It also bothers me that the member of the NC who was sent to cover this case is Carol Carmody, Vice Chairman and Acting Chairman. Nothing about her background and training recommends her for this task--from her B.A. from Oklahoma to her Masters in Public Administration to her service with the CIA and series of non-technical administrative positions. She appears to me to be a public relations type, yet she was assigned to the earlier crash of Mel Carnahan as well as the death of Paul Wellstone. (See her credits at http://www.nts.gov/Abt_NTSB/bios/carmody.htm.)

When you consider the alternatives, the assignment of Carmody becomes even more perplexing. Another member of the board, George Washington

Black, Jr., has an outstanding technical and engineering background, with a string of awards as long as your arm. He is a fellow of the Institute of Transportation Engineers, a member of the Society of Civil Engineers, of the National Society of Professional Engineers, the Society of Automotive Engineers--the list goes on and on. Why send a Carmody when a Black is available? (Compare his http://www.nts.gov/Abt_NTSB/bios/black.htm.)

A couple of college professors are not the only ones to suspect foul play in this case. A long piece by Michael Ruppert, "History Suggests It; Crash Inconsistencies Suggest It; Many, Including Some Members of Congress, Believe It", details the history of plane crashes involving politicians and that twice as many Democrats as Republicans have died in them. He reports that several members of Congress have confided that they believe the Wellstone crash was no accident. This column, which may be found at his web site, www.fromthewilderness.com, provides other reasons for suspecting the worst. This is a case that appears suspicious on its face.

Ruppert also reports that the day after the crash, he received a message from a former CIA operative who has proven extremely reliable in the past and who is personally familiar with these kinds of assassinations, who told him, "As I said earlier, having played ball (and still playing, in some respects) with this current crop of reinvigorated old white men, these clowns are nobody to screw with. There will be a few more strategic accidents, you can be certain of that." Which is more than just a little disconcerting.

Sometimes things are as they appear to be. When I suggest Republicans

may have been involved, however, I do not mean the average GOP voter. I mean the troika that runs the government, consisting of Dick Cheney, Karl Rove, and Donald Rumsfeld. I would put nothing past them. Those who think it outrageous to suggest that Bush may have been involved really should think a bit harder. Dubya admits he is an alcoholic, will not deny that he was a cokehead, and went AWOL from the National Guard for an entire year. This administration has lied to us about tax cuts, the SEC, Homeland Security, 9/11, and Iraq. This is not a stretch.

Jim Fetzer, a professor of philosophy at UMD, has devoted more than ten years to the study of the death of JFK and therefore may be more attuned to signs of deception, disinformation, and assassination. Visit his research web site at <http://www.assassinationscience.com>.