

Paul Wellstone: what happened, once more, with feeling

READER WEEKLY (31 July 2003)

A retired Air Force pilot, William Rees, has taken me to task (*Reader* 24 June 2003) for my columns exploring the death of Senator Paul Wellstone, where I explain why the evidence supports the conclusion that this was no accident, that politics was probably the motivation, and that the White House may have been involved. He has raised several objections concerning my sources, what I say about the loss of communication between the aircraft and the tower, the use of simulation studies to draw inferences about the crash, and even the possibility that EMP weaponry may have been used to take him out.

In an earlier column, Rees explained that, in his opinion, “something unexpected happened”, which, as I observed at the time, is hardly news. Here he emphasizes the close margins within which pilots must operate, stating that a plane that might stall out at 80 knots may have a recommended final approach speed of 120 knots. What he says may be true in general, but appears to have scant relevance for the Wellstone crash, where the NTSB’s own simulation studies, which replicated the weather, the plane, and the pilots (by taking pilots from the same charter service), were unable to bring the plane down.

Rees says that his real bottom line is that my series should have ended with my first article, if not before. But that appears to be a difficult position to defend, especially given the abrupt cessation of communication, the odd cell phone experience of John Ongaro, the FBI’s extraordinarily rapid appearance on the scene, the exchange of roles between the FBI and the NTSB, the destruction of records of planes landing in Duluth that morning, the missing information from logs about those at the crash scene, the NTSB’s cancellation of a public meeting for comments from citizens, previous attempts on Wellstone’s life, the report of an insider that this had been a hit, and so much more.

Rees and I obviously have different standards of reasoning. I believe that the public interest receives substantial benefits by examining events of political significance where chicanery and wrongdoing may be taking place, if only to reassure ourselves that the government has not been lying to us, once again, in this instance. Frankly, it happens all the time—about tax cuts, the SEC, Homeland Security, 9/11, and Iraq—in case he hasn’t noticed. My opinion is that anyone who is still willing to take what the government, including the President, tells us at face value has simply not been paying attention. We live in another world.

Rees alleges that I haven’t actually talked with any pilots with experience flying in bad weather. So I have reviewed my columns and discovered that I have drawn upon plenty of experts who have all kinds of experience with planes, including Bill Wilkerson, who has been leasing these planes for 30 years; Tim Roufs, a pilot with a son who is a commercial pilot; Denny Anderson, local TV anchor and pilot; Jeff Johnson, associate professor in the aviation program at St. Cloud; local pilots who were quoted in newspaper columns and on TV; Steve Filipovich, a pilot

on the ground near the airport at the time; and Gary Ulman of the Eveleth-Virginia Airport, to mention only a few.

That does not include a former inspector general for the Air Force who used to supervise crash investigations. But I have also consulted with or drawn upon the research and opinions of many other, including Michael Niman, a professor from Buffalo State College; Thomas Uncini, M.D., St. Louis County Medical Examiner; Carol Carmody, the head of the NTSB investigative team; other articles by other reporters, such as Paul McEnroe and Tony Kennedy of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and Michael Ruppert and Joe Taglieri of *fromthewilderness.com*; John Judge, a JFK assassination expert; and Christopher Bollyn of the *American Free Press*. I am also drawing on studies conducted by the NTSB itself.

Other sources I have cited have included Sheriff Rick Wahlberg and Lt. Tim Harken of the St. Louis County Sheriff's Department; Paul McCabe of the FBI; Charles Laszewski, Rich Linsk, and Tom Webb of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*; deputies from the Eveleth-Virginia Sheriff's Office; multiple sources on EMP and RF weaponry, including an Air Force Lt. General in testimony before Congress; Paul McGeough of *The Sydney Morning Herald*; Air Force Colonel Eileen Walling; Police Colonel José Miguel Villar of Columbia; and local critics of my work, such as Elizabeth Sirius, Kathleen Banges, and now William Rees. I think it would be difficult to argue I do not have sufficient sources.

As a journalist investigating a suspicious crash that tilted control of the US Senate in the direction of the Republican Party and all this implies, it would be irresponsible not to review the evidence in a case like this. Because I have spent more than ten years conducting research on the death of JFK, where the FBI and the Warren Commission staff suppressed, distorted, and fabricated evidence in an extensive conspiracy to conceal the truth causes of death from the American people, perhaps I am more aware than most of us about how these things are done. From the start, it did not look right to me. And the evidence that I have encountered since has only strengthened my conviction. This was no accident.

I don't doubt that Rees is not the only one to be disturbed by the basic elements of my position, which include the suspicious behavior of the FBI in arriving at the scene too early to have come in response to requests after the crash and of the NTSB in deferring to the FBI about the absence of indications of terrorist activities, **WHEN THE CAUSE OF THE CRASH HAD YET TO BE DETERMINED!** In case Rees has overlooked it, the cause of the crash has still to be determined.

It is my opinion that the FBI arrived early in order to clean up any evidence, such as time pieces and clocks, that might contradict the official finding, which, by predetermination, is going to attribute the crash to pilot error—even though the NTSB's own simulations and the FAA re-

certification of Richard Conry, the pilot in charge, which occurred only two days before the crash, contradict it!

I have not covered all of these bases on my own but have also benefited from the research of others, including members of <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/0FETZERclaimsDEBUNK/>, the forum that Thomas Bieter created to assail my work. Considerable discussion has revolved about my use of the term “tower” and “communication”, insofar as the Eveleth-Virginia does not have a physical tower. I have explained that I was referring to the function, not the structure, but if there had been no genuine communication, it would have been impossible for there to have been “an abrupt cessation of communication” as my position implies. Since this became a hot topic on the forum, it would be a shortcoming of my research if I had this all wrong. Laura <twainable2@hotmail.com>, fortunately, has made several valuable discoveries, which she has posted on the forum that clarify this issue.

Ruppert and Taglieri, for example, quoted a piece from *The New York Times* (October 2002), where Carol Carmody, citing “air traffic control records”, reported, “At 10:18, he was cleared for an east-west approach to the runway, and, according to radar, the plane was lined up with the runway. ‘That was the last transmission conversation with the pilot,’ Ms. Carmody, a former CIA employee, said.” Laura also discovered an NTSB Report (February 2003), which has 1519:12 (10:19) as the last “co-pilot/control tower communication”. Both support my use of the word “communication”, but the difference in time between 10:18 and 10:19 requires further consideration.

Another difference Laura noticed is that both NTSB reports have the 10:19 radar returns the same—at 3500 feet. But the November 2002 article (quoting *The Times*) has the last radar return 2 minutes later: “Two minutes later, radar recorded the last sighting of the plane at 1,800 feet and a speed of 85 knots just northeast of the accident site.” The NTSB report (February 2003) says the last radar return was one minute later: “The last radar return was received at 1520:23. Radar data indicated N41BE was 4 miles southeast of EVM at an altitude of 2,300 feet with ground speed of 160 knots.”

Laura provides links for comparison, which are available at the forum, where the post from which I am quoting here is message #535. When a forum participant, Craig Lamson, asked for more supporting information, Laura was able to oblige.

In her message #544, she offered the following excerpts taken from an article published Monday, 28 October 2002, “Relatives visit Wellstone plane crash site”, which is situated at http://www.brainerddispatch.com/stories/102802/sne_1028020018.shtml, namely:

EVELETH (AP) — A makeshift memorial adorned with roses and a picture of a smiling Paul Wellstone rests in a clearing about 100 feet from where a plane crashed killing the U.S. senator and seven others.

“...Carol Carmody, acting chairwoman of the National Transportation Safety Board, said investigators reconstructed the flight based on information from radar, tapes and air traffic controllers.

“At 10:01 a.m., controllers cleared the plane to approach the Eveleth airport. The pilot was then advised of light icing between 9,000 and 11,000 feet. At 10:10, the plane began its descent. Controllers cleared the pilot for an east-west approach to the airport at 10:18—the last exchange with the pilot.”

Laura also offered a link to The New York Times article she had cited, which may be found at <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/28/politics/28CRAS.html>. And in her message #545, she posted excerpts from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, which may be found at <http://www.geocities.com/wellstonecrash/drifting.html>.

“Two minutes before crash, plane was already drifting”, by Hannah Allam, Todd Nelson, Phillip Pina, and Charles Laszewski, *The Pioneer Press* (Monday, 28 October 2002):

“...The flight, which left the Twin Cities at 9:37 a.m. Friday, had been routine until its final minutes, according to a reconstruction of the flight based on radar data reviewed by investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board.

“At 10:18 a.m., the pilot got clearance to land at the Eveleth Virginia Municipal Airport, lined the aircraft up with the runway and was heading straight west. Everything appeared routine, said Carol Carmody, acting NTSB chairwoman.

“‘There was no evidence on the controller’s part or from the pilot’s voice that there was any difficulty,’ Carmody said of the last conversation between the pilot and the ground. ‘No reported problems. No expressed concern.’

“Something changed in the next 60 seconds, because at 10:19 a.m. the twin-engine aircraft began drifting slightly to the south, radar showed. The last appearance on radar came about two minutes later, as the plane was just north of the crash site’s east side.”

If these references do not settle my use of the phrase, “cessation of communication” (and implicitly the use of the term “tower”), then I am at a loss as to what it would take.

The time differential might be explainable in several different ways. A cell phone listing of 10:18 could also have been 10:18:59 or anything in between. Clocks have been known to be 1 or 2 minutes off GMT, even though it would be reasonable to assume that the FAA would be accurate. The discrepancy between my inference that the cessation of communication was at 10:18 and the NTSB report that the last communication was a minute later at 10:19 thus appears to be more illusory than real. Nor is it difficult to imagine that a minor transcription (or rounding) error could have resulted in changing a "7" into a "9", which provides an alternative explanation. Neither precludes the possibility the plane was intentionally taken down.

As cover-ups go, this is not asking for much. In the case of JFK, autopsy X-rays were fabricated (to conceal a massive blow-out to the back of the head, in the case of the lateral cranial X-ray; and to add a 6.5 mm metallic slice, in the case of the anterior/posterior X-ray), someone else's brain was substituted for that of JFK; Lee Harvey Oswald was framed using fake photographs, among other phony evidence; and a home movie of the assassination was fabricated to conceal the crime. If I now suggest that the communication record may have been compromised by changing a single digit, no one should suppose that is asking a lot in covering up the death of a US Senator. But it does place emphasis on my reliance upon the anomalous cell phone experience reported by John Ongaro. This is especially the case since some of my critics, such as Josiah Thompson, have been adamant that John has "backed off" his original claim and now thinks it was nothing out of the ordinary. In the front-page story on Bieter's threatened lawsuit that appeared in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* (3 June 2003), he played down its significance, which both surprised and disappointed me.

He was even quoted as saying, "It's not unusual for cell phones to cut out, especially in northern Minnesota". That was most certainly not his response at the time, when he initially contacted me after I had published my first two columns on this subject and made a few appearances on radio talk shows. Here is the post that John Ongaro sent to me at the time.

Date: Mon, 13 Jan 2003 00:41:26 -0600
From: John Ongaro <email address omitted>
Subject: Wellstone Crash/ I was within a stone's throw of...
To: jfetzer@d.umn.edu

Professor-

I have both read your two stories in the *Reader* and also heard you on the Duke Show concerning the suspicious events surrounding Senator Wellstone's death. Although as a rule I am usually skeptical of conspiracy theories, etc, in this instance, I think you may be onto something...

The morning of Wellstone's crash, I too was on the way to the funeral of Benny Rukavina. In fact, after the funeral when we first heard about the crash and the approximate time of the crash was reported as 10:21, I immediately thought to myself, "Jeez, I was within a couple of miles of that airport (traveling north on Hwy. #53, due west of the airport) at almost that exact moment." The reason I was sure of this, was because I arrived at the church at exactly 10:35 after picking up my mother in law who lives just two short blocks away. Having driven this route hundreds of times, I know that it is exactly 10 minutes to Virginia from the Hwy #53 & #37 (to Hibbing) intersection. The airport is just a stone's throw from this intersection.

The weather, although not sunny and warm, was not freezing rain or snow either. Instead it was cloud, hazy, with little or no wind and just above freezing. An occasional mist fell. What was

happening 10,000 feet up, may have been another story, but at and near the surface there was nothing that appeared threatening in any way.

More than anything, what caused me to write you is your electromagnetic theory and how such an event could disable the plane. You see, just a few minutes prior to reaching the Hwy #53 & #37 intersection, I distinctly remember receiving a call on my cell phone. Although I have received calls on my cell phone before that have had bad reception and barely audible, this call was in a league of its own. When I answered it, what I heard sounded like a cross between a roar and a loud humming noise. The noise seemed to be oscillating and I could not make out any words being spoken. Instead, just this loud, grotesque, sometimes screeching and humming noise.

Since then, I have discovered that a friend of mine who I had tried to call earlier that morning, said he returned my call that morning and left me a message. He said his message was something like, "Another gloomy day in NE Minnesota!" Little did he know how gloomy it was about to get! Strangely, I never did receive his message on my voicemail, however, and to prove my point about receiving the call will go back through my old cell phone records to see the exact time when the incoming call came in, if you think there is good reason to do so. Could an EMP type event cause this to happen to a cell phone within a few miles of the immediate area?

Finally, I am also still troubled by an email that a friend of mine sent me the week after the crash. He said that several of his coworkers who are pilots, insisted that there was no way that the plane should have burned up the way it did. They said that someone in the immediate vicinity of the incoming plane (a nearby resident, I believe) had reported to the media that they thought they had heard a loud band, like a gunshot, just prior to the crash. My friends email said his coworkers theorized that a hunter (or sniper, if your at all in the ballpark) could have shot the plane and that leaking fuel could have ignited an engine. My friends coworkers said that, otherwise, it is unheard of for other plane crashes of this type of small plane to have a fire incident like this one connected with it.

Knowing Congressman Oberstar quite well, I decided to forward my email onto his Duluth office. Ironically, they emailed me back with a message that stated that the FBI had already informed them that they had already investigated any possibility of foul play and had ruled it out. Hmmmm...I wonder if it was one of their "early arriving agents?"

If you think there is any reason to further look into either of these two strange occurrences that I have presented you, please feel free to contact me.

John Ongaro

The remarks from his coworkers about the crash are interesting, but I find his experience with Congressman Oberstar, whom he knows personally, to be extraordinarily disconcerting. This is

very much like the announcements from Dallas that three shots had been fired by a lone gunman less than an hour after the event! Some reports are simply incredible on their face. So John Ongaro was not minimizing the importance of his experience at the time. Indeed, more than two months later, it was still very much on his mind. He sent me the following post on 16 March 2003. His suggestion was brilliant and right on the money. Ask yourself if this post comes from a man who does not believe something suspicious occurred in the death of Paul Wellstone—and admire, as I do, the clarity of his reasoning about this event and the context of its occurrence.

Date: Sun, 16 Mar 2003 00:39:09 -0500 (EST)
From: <email address omitted>
Subject: john ongaro has sent you an article from NPR Online
To: jfetzer@d.umn.edu

This NPR article was sent to you by john ongaro (email address omitted) with the following message:

This segment on EMP ran on “talk of the nation,” yesterday. I thought you would find it interesting...By the way, couldn't one of your colleagues in statistics rate what the odds were of two Democrat U.S. Senators getting killed in plane crashes in the final 10 days of a neck and neck election within 2 years of each other, then having Ashcroft directly and indirectly involved, the same former CIA, NTSB investigator, etc, etc? I bet one might have a better chance of winning the lottery, twice! Once people saw what the odds of this all happening were, maybe then this would be construed as perhaps more than the “mother of all coincidences.” Call me, I might have another lead for you.

The article title is “NPR : News Roundup: EMP Bomb” and can be found at <http://discover.npr.org/rundowns/segment.jhtml?wfId=1192402>

Portions of John's original post were published previously in the *Reader*, but the totality of his message—and his subsequent correspondence—have become of immense importance to understanding the case. I am not surprised that he has “backed off” recently as this matter has received more and more attention from the press and the public. John makes his living as a lobbyist for the City of Duluth, where he deals with members of both parties in the state legislature. I suspect that he has wanted to move off the hot seat on this one, because it is not a popular issue, especially with Republicans. Indeed, I can sympathize, because the verbal assaults to which I have been subjected on Bieter's forum—some of which even qualify as sadistic—have far exceeded the boundaries of civilized discourse. I can understand his current attitude.

That does not mean what he has had to say in the past is not the best evidence. As decades of research on the death of JFK have revealed, early—especially first day—eyewitness reports tend to be far more reliable than their later testimony, which has often been revised under pressure to conform to “official” findings. The FBI and the Warren Commission staff perfected a three-stage practice to obfuscate the evidence: if a witness was too close and knew too

much, you did not call them; if they were called by mistake, you did not ask them questions that would reveal their knowledge; if they were called and were asked questions that revealed their knowledge, the testimony would simply be changed! It is not difficult to find what John had to say in January and March is more credible than what he had to say in June.

I would like to believe that all of this now settles the matter regarding the phone call as well as the cessation of communication. I suspect the plane was probably taken down by the use of a weapon of a kind that most Americans do not know exists. There are whole families of new radio frequency (RF) and electromagnetic pulse (EMP weaponry, including high-energy radio frequency (HERF) guns, some of which have been around at least since the mid 1990s. Rees says, "I may be out of date, but last I knew a nuclear detonation is required to produce an Electromagnetic Pulse. I am unaware that such a force has been harnessed in an anti-aircraft weapon, especially one small enough for assassins to skulk around in swampy woods."

Actually, Rees is "out of date" with regard to EMP weapons. Historically he is correct insofar as EMP pulses are a by-product of nuclear explosions, but Time magazine and other nationally respected publications have released stories earlier this year describing one of our new EMP weapons, attached to non-nuclear cruise missiles, as having been available for use in our invasion of Iraq.

Others, such as Craig Lamson, want to discount the NTSB's own simulations on the grounds that they were not conducted under exactly the same conditions. Doing that would require using the original pilots, plane, and weather. Being that exact is obviously impossible, which suggests a standard of evidence that could never be satisfied. I take it that the simulations by the NTSB, which I discussed in my last column, are close enough to support the inference that the crash was probably not caused by the pilots, the plane, or the weather, which means we have to search elsewhere.

A whole column was devoted to "futuristic weaponry" appeared on 19 June 2003 in which, among others, I even cited a Lt. General's testimony to Congress on weapons of this kind (RF specifically rather than EMP). In my column of 10 July 2003, I suggested a HERF gun may have been a more practical weapon to employ in that terrain. If he had actually read my columns, it would have been appropriate to cite them or at least discuss what I had said about this subject, but he passed over them in silence.

His own methodology may have done him in. According to Rees, he has created a file on his word processor, where my articles (as of that time) "consist of 99,841 characters, 16,919 words, 424 paragraphs, and 27 pages." That is all well and good, of course, but it is no substitute for actually reading. While Rees may be adept at computer searches, which may support his claim that I have used the word "pilot" 97 times, searches like these can identify the use of words in certain strings of symbols but they do not reflect the meaning, content, or significance of what was written. Bereft of context, it is hardly surprising that he would not appreciate where I stand or the evidence that supports it. His approach was very unlikely to

induce real understanding. One of us may owe the other an apology, but it is not I who owes one to him.

Jim Fetzer, a professor of philosophy at UMD, maintains a web site on JFK and other issues of public interest at www.assassinationscience.com, where he recently posted a new, technically improved version of the Zapruder film.