

## Still clinging to a ‘Hudson miracle’



**Above:** The media mobs Flight 1549 survivor Jeff Kolodjay. One of the reasons the story has stayed in the public consciousness is that it occurred in the nation’s media capital.

**Bottom Left:** Sullenberger **Bottom Middle:** The emergency landing of US Airways Flight 1549 was caused by a flock of Canada Geese. **Bottom Right:** US Airways Flight 1549 is floating on the Hudson River.

Photo: GETTY IMAGES

Timeline of that miracle landing Jan. 15, 2009:

### **3:24 p.m.**

US Airways Flight 1549 with 150 passengers and five crew is cleared for takeoff from LaGuardia Airport.

### **3:25**

Pilot Chesley Sullenberger III tells controller he’s reached 700 feet and is told to climb to 15,000 feet.

### **3:27:01**

Radar shows the plane cross paths with an object — the flock of geese — between 2,900 and 3,000 feet.

### **3:27:32**

Pilot tells a controller: “This is Cactus 1549. We hit birds. We lost thrust in both engines. We’re turning back towards LaGuardia.”

**3:27:49**

LaGuardia told to halt departures for an emergency return to the airport.

**3:28**

Pilot says he can't make it to LaGuardia. "We may end up in the Hudson." A controller suggests Teterboro Airport in New Jersey. "We can't do it," the pilot replies. When a controller asks pilot what runway he can get to, the pilot says, "We're gonna be in the Hudson."

**3:30:30**

The plane lands on the Hudson River.

In a time of increasingly short attention spans, America has clung to US Airways Flight 1549 like a good luck charm. In the year since its extraordinary safe landing on the Hudson River on Jan. 15, 2009, there's been no shortage of articles, interviews, books, and celebrations of the event.

On Friday, passengers and crew gather on the Hudson to toast their survival. So will the rest of the country.

Professor Mitchell Moss of New York University's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service said several factors converged to make the event "one of those rare untarnished successes" for the American public.

First, there were no casualties. The rescue, which worked, began as a spontaneous civilian effort. It happened in the nation's media capital. The first reports were tweets and texts.

"It was one of the first examples where we got the info right from the people on the plane," he said.

And America needed a hero. Defaults on mortgages and credit cards were soaring with unemployment. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke had just announced banks needed even more bailout money and a federal judge had ruled Bernie Madoff could remain on bail in his Park Avenue penthouse. Obama's inauguration was still five days away.

Along came Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger III.

"This was a guy who was a career pilot who shows sheer skill," Moss said. "It's very rare you get Jimmy Stewart as the pilot."

Just as important as a good hero, there was no shadowy enemy to dampen the joy.

"Could you pick a better threat than geese?" Moss asked. "It's much easier to get rid of the geese than to go into the Tora Bora mountains and kill bin Laden."

Journalist William Langewiesche found himself mired in controversy last fall when news reports on his book “Fly by Wire” suggested he thought the safe landing of US Airways Flight 1549 was less about Chesley Sullenberger III’s extraordinary flying than the plane’s autopilot.

A reviewer wrote in The New York Times that the book “does bang a few light dents into Sully’s hero aura.”

An experienced pilot and international editor for Vanity Fair, Langewiesche said he wasn’t knocking the skill of Sully (who has remained modest about his safe landing of the plane) — he just wanted to give due credit to the “fly-by-wire” automation used in the Airbus 320 and its creator Bernard Ziegler for making safe flying nearly foolproof. The technology allows computers to take over in event of pilot error.

“Like it or not,” Langewiesche wrote, “Ziegler reached out across the years and cradled them all the way to the water.”

Sully has said Langewiesche gave too much credit to machine over man.