



JEFF SKILES

Co-Pilot of U.S. Airways Flight 1549, "The Miracle on the Hudson"

On a bright, 20-degree afternoon in January, US Airways Flight 1549 accelerated down New York La Guardia Airport's main runway, loaded with 155 passengers and crew, headed skywards for Charlotte, NC. Everything was normal until First Officer Jeff Skiles spotted a formation of Canada geese almost directly ahead. In a matter of seconds, he heard numerous thunks as the birds impacted the aircraft. Both engines immediately failed. Captain Chesley Sullenberger ("Sully") took over flying the plane and lowered the nose down to retain airspeed. Within seconds, the pilots made the decision that returning to LaGuardia was simply not possible—they'd have to fly over densely populated areas and there was no guarantee that they'd make it. Surrounded by nothing but skyscrapers and neighborhoods, they decided to head to the only open, flat space available—the Hudson River.

Crisis Management at 3,200 Feet. Skiles tried to restart the engines. But the manuals are written for failures that happen at 30,000 feet, and the only training pilots receive for water landings is focused on ditching in the open ocean. Skiles and Sullenberger were truly in uncharted territory. As the passengers and flight attendants braced for impact, the plane descended 3,200 feet toward the river. Eye-witnesses in the surrounding buildings said it looked like a perfect three-point landing.

News of plane crashes and airline disasters usually hits the public hard. Yet those same accidents become the training tools and examples that help pilots avoid repeating those mistakes. But the exploits of the flight crew of U.S. Airways Flight 1549 are a rare example where future pilots learn from a resounding success rather than a failure.

Adapt, React, and Don't Fear a Change of Course. The son of two pilots, Skiles started flying at the age of 16 and has logged over 21,000 hours in the sky. Skiles has spent the last 30 years as a US Airways pilot and his lifetime of experiences contributed to the astounding outcome. The perfect landing was not a fluke; it was the result of intense training, preparation, and the lessons learned from other pilots' successes and failures.

Skiles believes that life changes all around you, and if you can't adapt and change with it, you can't succeed. He attributes the success of the emergency landing on the Hudson to the extensive training that all members of a flight crew experience. From the mechanics and the maintenance workers to the people who write the emergency protocols and the flight attendants, he believes that every level of the US Airways organization is responsible for the outcome on January 15, 2009. While he and Captain Sullenberger piloted the plane to a safe landing, the success was a group effort representing the contributions of an entire organization.