

Transcript

They are calling it the miracle on the Hudson, an emergency landing on the Hudson River, along Manhattan's west side. But on this frigid afternoon that started out so wrong, it appears everything else went right.

3.26 p.m., US Airways flight 1549, running about 15 minutes late, takes off from New York's LaGuardia Airport heading to Charlotte, North Carolina, the plane is seen here on NY1, flying eerily low.

We understood that it was about six minutes on the air maybe less, the airplane took off to the North and apparently ran into, from my understanding, a flock of birds of some sort and at that point he had a problem with both engines.

Ray Montreal and Mane Williams were on there way home to Florida after their first trip to the Big Apple when the trouble started:

- When did you first know something was wrong?
- We heard a pop, and it went pop and we kind of ... God maybe it was a bird, then we started slowly turning around and we're thinking okay, cool, we are going to go back to LaGuardia and just land the plane or whatever and then all of a sudden next we hear the pilot say 'brace for impact'...

Bill Zuhoski was in seat 23 A

-On the plane there was a sudden jerk, you know, just felt like turbulence, it got everybody nervous for a second like, you know, any turbulence would, nobody thought anything of it until we started to slowly go down, but it seemed like the pilot still had control and then I noticed the stewardess in the back asking for a fire extinguisher saying there was a fire, you know once we saw panic with stewardesses then everybody started to panic, and within a minute everybody really knew, you know what was happening, it became real, we, you know the people sitting next to me we were you know, interlocked with our arms and the we just heard the pilot 'Brace yourselves for impact' you know how do you brace yourself for impact when you know your plane is about to crash? and then you know, the impact hitting the water was just, you know the most tremendous impact you could imagine, you know, I guess my head slammed into, I lost my glasses, and then the water came up immediately, like I said I was sitting towards the back, people rushed towards the back, you know, panicking, thinking that's where the emergency exits were, and as the plane got heavier on the back because of all the weight of the people the water came up, it started to get, you know, close to my neck under water and you know I just thought I was going to drown right there in the back of the plane 'cause you couldn't move. After really a minute, ah, it was amazing how fast people started to calm down, when they got the emergency exit doors open towards the center of the plane I think it was, people started to move you know, but the water was coming up so fast in the back I ripped all my clothes off, thinking, you know maybe later I might have to swim, and i think I was one of the last to get off the plane

Jeff Kolodjay was en route to a golf trip in Myrtle Beach South Carolina with his buddies

- and about 3 to 4 minutes into the flight, I was sitting in 22A and saw the left engine just blew, fire, flames went out of it as I was looking at it 'cause I was sitting right there, then it started smelling a lot like gasoline and a couple of minutes after that the pilot said you guys have to brace for a hard impact and then everyone started to be honest saying prayers ...

The pilot Chesley Sullenburger III, known as Sully made a split-second decision to land the plane on the water instead of attempting to make it to New Jersey's Teterboro airport, ABC's Robin Roberts witnessed the heroic landing from her apartment

- I was sitting in my living room, on the couch, looked out and I happened to see a jet, flying relatively low and there's is a fly pattern here so I wasn't too concerned but then I kept thinking it was going to gain altitude but it was just the opposite, it just slowly continued down the river and it was almost like he used the Hudson River as his runway

New York Waterway deckhand Cosmo Medina helped rescue 24 people

- I see people cry, I see people shaking by the cold, the water was about 35 or 36 degrees and it was very cold and one of the guys, his shirt, it was soaking wet and I gave him my jacket because he was ... he could endure no more.

To those watching from the ground concern for the passengers and echoes of the past

- I saw the plane, was coming down below the radar zone, I thought it might be a terrorist attack
- I just saw it hit the water, and just got it down you don't know how many people are on the plane ...
- was it scary?
- it is scary, you don't see ... I was on 9/11 ... you don't see ... things coming that close

And I saw people coming out, I saw throwing life preservers, life jackets. Many of them were already wearing their life jackets, they were calmly coming out, within 5 minutes there were at least 3 taxi waterways, waterways taxis, within minutes the plane was completely surrounded by these water-taxies, and the plane never, never completely submerged, I kept waiting i was like hurry, hurry, hurry get the people out I thought the plane was going to go under but gratefully never did

Steward Dallas was returning home to Charlotte from a business trip in Manhattan

- The initial shock of hitting the water and surviving that became a real question of everyone is in tremendous danger right because the water is freezing. A couple of people panicked and jumped into the water and we got most of the people out onto the wing, it was chaotic but orderly if you can believe that. A few people did try to jump into the boats, like there was a pontoon boat like the one that I was in and because people were, had hypothermia was difficult to control your motor function

Many believe there is one person in particular to be thankful for:

- You have to give it to the pilot he made a hell of a landing!

In order to make the decision to land on the water you got to actually be sure that you do not have the power to make it to an airport but that is a critical decision because in this particular case he had only one airport he might have made it to which was Teterboro which is on the other side of the Hudson on the eastern side and if he had committed to that you had to go far away from the water and then found he did not have speed and altitude to make it, he would have ended up landing on a bunch of houses and the results would have been catastrophic.