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Miracle on the Hudson, or Pilot Skill?

An Interview With U.S. Airways First Officer Jeff Skiles of Flight 1549

By Dave Weiman

Airbus 320, U.S. Airways

Jeff Skiles got his start in aviation flying with his mother and father, and pumping gas at Dane County Regional Airport, Madison, Wisconsin (MSN). Skiles, seen here at Wisconsin Aviation at MSN, commented that the facilities at the airport have improved dramatically since then, as well as the aircraft.

On February 20, 2009, I had the opportunity to sit down with U.S. Airways First Officer, Jeff Skiles of Oregon, Wisconsin, and hear firsthand about his experience in successfully landing

Jeff Skiles Photos by Dave Weiman

Jeff Skiles took the time to meet emergency and airline personnel at Dane County Regional Airport, Madison, Wisconsin, following his successful landing of an Airbus 320 in the Hudson River.

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an Airbus 320 (N106US, Flight 1549) without power in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009 with Captain Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger of Danville, California. The event received international attention, and much more attention than the crew felt it deserved. Yet, the incident was positive for aviation and positive for Americans during a period of time, which has lacked good news.

Shortly after departing New York LaGuardia International Airport on a flight to Charlotte, North Carolina, at an altitude of 3,200 feet, the Airbus 320 hit a flock of geese, causing both engines to shut down. The events that followed have been called a "miracle" by the news media and general public. The crew and fellow pilots believe that "pilot skill" and "experience" played a more important role in reaching a happy outcome.

Too low to return to LaGuardia, or to land at nearby Teterboro airport, Captain Sullenberger made the command decision to land in the Hudson River, and all 155 passengers and crew were rescued without serious injury.

The Interview

DW: Dave Weiman, **JS:** Jeff Skiles

DW: Jeff Skiles, welcome home to Oregon, Wisconsin, which coincidentally has been home to *Midwest Flyer Magazine* since it began in 1978.

JS: Thank you, thank you. It's good to be here.

DW: I bet it's good to be anywhere.

JS: That's true, I suppose.

DW: Jeff, before we get into a play-by-play description of what happened that day, tell us about yourself…where you grew up…where you learned to fly…and a little about your family.

JS: I grew up in a suburb of Madison, Wisconsin…Monona, Wisconsin. Both of my parents were pilots. My father was a professor at the University of Wisconsin and got his pilot certificate in the 1960s, and my mother in the 1970s. I learned to fly when I was 16 or 17 at one of the FBOs in Madison, Wisconsin. My father owned a Tri-Pacer and a Cessna 182 Skylane for most of the time he was flying.

DW: What motivated you to become a pilot? Obviously, the influence of your father probably played a great role in that.

JS: Oh, definitely. I guess I never really considered doing anything else from when I was 5 years old. I remember when I was a kid, I don't think there was a type aircraft I could not identify. Now, of course, it has changed so much that I don't recognize most of the things out there on the ramp.

DW: How old were you when your dad let you take the controls and make your first landing.

JS: I don't remember him ever letting me make a landing. He wasn't a flight instructor. So I am sure I was 16 or 17 when I got to do that.

DW: Jeff, we all have our idols in life, and as pilots, we have people who we admire. Who inspired you the most to become a pilot?

JS: I suppose I would have to say my father. I was flying in his Tri-Pacer from my earliest memory.

DW: Was he a private or commercial pilot?

JS: He had a commercial pilot license, but he was a college professor, so actually never flew professionally.

DW: Outside of flying with your dad, what other general aviation experience do you have?

JS: Obviously, my background is all general aviation. I learned to fly, pumping gas at the local airport as a line attendant, became a flight instructor, and I flew for a cargo airline for awhile, and also for a commuter airline here in Wisconsin, before getting hired by U.S. Airways.

DW: What commuter airline was that?

JS: Midstate Airlines. They have been gone for 20 years now.

DW: They had Metroliners, didn't they?

JS: Yes, I flew the Metroliner.

DW: You were telling me earlier this week that you had glider experience. I think this is really pertinent in the case of the U.S. Airways incident, flying the Airbus 320 without any power. Please tell us about your experience as a glider pilot.

JS: Boy, I'm going back 30 years, now. But I did some gliding up at West Bend (Wisconsin). My instructor was a former Luftwaffe pilot during the 1930s. Back before they actually had powered airplanes in World War II, they started out with gliders, and he was part of that group. He transferred from West Bend to Morey Field (near) Madison (Middleton, Wisconsin). He had a Blanik glider, which was a Czechoslovakian (Czech Republic) glider, and I flew that for awhile.

DW: That's interesting that you mentioned the pilot that you flew with over at West Bend, because some of the great air show performers of today…Oscar Boesch, he was a German fighter pilot, and Manfred Radius of Toronto. In fact, both Oscar and Manfred live in Toronto and both are superb sailplane pilots. Do you feel your experience as a glider pilot helped you with this incident?

JS: No, not really; no. We were just stretching the glide as long as we could with no engines.

DW: Okay, but that's what you do with a glider….you have no engines. But in the case of the Airbus, unlike a glider, you do not have any lift, or do you? Tell me about that. What is the relationship between the lift of a glider and the lift that you would get with an Airbus 320 (without power)?

JS: If you have ever flown a glider, you have a surprising amount of control, more so than you would think you would have flying powered planes, because they sail for so long. You also have "spoilers," and once you pull them, a glider drops like a rock. So you have a lot of control over your pattern when you are coming around to land, more so than you

would realize if you have never flown a glider. Obviously in this case, we were just flying on what is referred to as "green dot," which is our best lift over drag speed. It was probably giving us about a thousand foot per minute descent without any engines. We were going to go as far as we could, trying to restart the engines, and that's where we ran into the water.

DW: Jeff, let's talk about the flight more. I want you to take your fellow pilots on the flight with you, from engine start-up at LaGuardia to the moment the engines failed, and the events following touchdown on the Hudson River.

JS: This was the ending of a four-day trip for us, so we were going to fly from LaGuardia to Charlotte, and we were going to be done, and I was going to catch a flight to Chicago and take the bus to Madison to go home. It was uneventful up to that point. We started up, we taxied out, there wasn't a lot of traffic, we took off on Rwy 4 in LaGuardia, and they gave us an initial heading of 360 after takeoff. I was flying, so it was normal procedures up to that point. The Airbus actually flys with a side-stick; it doesn't use a yoke. And this is something totally new in my experience. I've never flown anything that did not have a yoke before. I only had 35 hours in the airplane. The vast majority of the time, it was on autopilot, because they encourage you to use the autopilot as much as possible. Ideally, they want you to takeoff and put it on at 100 feet, and don't take it off again until you are on short final. But I was hand flying it, because I still wasn't used to this side-stick very much, so I was using every opportunity to hand fly it that I could. And on this particular departure, it wasn't a nav departure, so it wasn't programmed into our computers, which in that case you have to put it on autopilot just to fly it. This was just a straight heading and altitude, so I was hand flying the airplane. So we took off, we cleaned up, turned to a 360-degree heading… I believe they gave us a heading that was even further to the left, and at about 3,000 feet, I looked up and out the windshield I suddenly saw a line of birds – and I always felt they were Canadian geese because they were all flying in a line like Canadian geese fly. Initially, of course, it looked like we were going to hit them. Our nose was up for the climb, and I saw the birds descending from my windshield just like you judge an approach for a landing. I thought, *"Oh good, they are going to go underneath us."* And while they went underneath the windshield, they impacted on the wings and the engines. I remember hearing about four thuds. Within moments after that, the right engine went to idle, followed by the left engine very closely after that. And for both of us, this is not something you are prepared for. It's not something you are trained for. To have a dual engine failure at low altitude is very

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unexpected. At that point, Capt. Sullenberger said, *"my aircraft,"* which is our normal terminology for it. I turned the ignition on and I started working on what is called a "dual engine failure" checklist, which is a physical checklist we call a "Quick Reference Handbook" (QRH). So first of all, I had to find it, because our QRH is about 105 pages. But fortunately, I was just out of training, so I knew what the procedures were and knew what to do. Capt. Sullenberger was just making a gentle turn to the south, and I think we both were thinking that the only place open was that river. And while we were evaluating things, I started running the checklist and he declared an emergency…they cleared us for landing back at LaGuardia, and I briefly asked them about (Rwy) 13… about landing on 13. It was on his side of the airplane, so I could not see LaGuardia, and he said, *"we can't make it."* He told that to the control tower and they said, *"what about Teterboro?"* And I kinda paused doing my procedures and kinda looked at Teterboro myself.

DW: And which direction was Teterboro?

JS: That would have been on my side of the airplane, and off in the distance. You know, when you have that river there, flying over a bunch of houses and buildings to get to Teterboro did not seem that viable of a possibility. It was one of those things… it was impossible to judge at that point, whether or not you could make it or you couldn't. At least, in doing it that fast. I'm thinking, *"Gee, I don't know about that. That doesn't look good to me."* Then "Sully" told the controllers, *"nope, we are not making it; we're going into the Hudson,"* and I thought that was the best possibility to me, so I went back to what I was doing, which was trying to restart the engines at that point. Obviously, that wasn't going to happen. For me, it was almost disbelief. The whole time, these engines are going to restart. This is going to happen. One of these engines is going to restart, and we are going to fly back and land at that airport. But obviously, that isn't what happened.

DW: Were you feeling anxious at that time, a little concern? You thought the engines were going to restart, so at that point, were you still pretty calm?

JS: Well, ah, having something to do helps you to fight down that fright instinct. It really wasn't that bad for us, because we knew what we were going to do. I can imagine with the people in the back…particularly the flight attendants, because they did not know what the score was here. They had nothing to do but sit there and think about it and not know what was happening. And in talking with the passengers, because I met quite a few of them, most of them didn't know what was going on… most of them thought they had lost an engine on their side of the airplane, but we were returning to land at LaGuardia. And even right when we came in and landed on the water, of course LaGuardia is surrounded by water on three sides, so the fact that you look out at low altitude and you see water out there, that's not a surprise for anyone who is familiar with LaGuardia. So pretty much for everybody in the back, until they got the *"brace for impact"* announcement, they thought that this was a normal return-to-field-and-land (exercise).

DW: At what point did you give up to try and restart the engines, or did you keep trying until you touched down on the water?

JS: I think it was when we were a couple hundred feet in the air that I decided that this was not going to happen.

DW: At that point, Jeff, is there a procedure that you have to shut off the fuel to the engines to avoid a fire, or what do you do in that case?

JS: Actually, they were running, both of them. I saw the Airbus memo… The left one was running at about idle power, the right one was running at something less than…I don't even know if the right one was running. I know the flight attendants say that they could hear the ticking of the turbine blades…the fan blades, when they do when you are sitting on the ramp and they are not powered. They will make a "tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick" sound with the wind turning the fan blades, and they said they could hear that. But supposedly, the left one was getting about 30-35 percent power, and the right one, only 15 percent, so that one was probably completely shut down. We don't do that (shut the fuel off) prior to the actual landing. But actually when we landed on the water, I did an actual evacuation checklist and part of that is pushing our fire buttons, which is preparatory in putting out an engine fire, and what that does is shut off everything to the engines: fuel, hydraulics, electrics, everything to the engines.

DW: You never did have a fire to the engines, did you?

JS: No, but using those buttons, even without a fire, is a normal procedure, because with one push of a button, it shuts down everything.

DW: I was glad – and I'm sure you were too – that you just got out of training, and you knew what chapter to go to in this thick checklist book, but how much of the checklist was done by memory? And is there an emergency memory checklist procedure you follow, or do you go strictly by the paper?

JS: Actually, in the airline industry, they try to get away from memorized checklists, and go to these QRH procedures. There are actually only two things which we actually have by memory on the Airbus, and they are minimal. They're just a couple of items, because they want us to use an actual physical checklist, as opposed to a parody of things by memory, as it was when I was first hired.

DW: Tell me what it felt like touching down on the Hudson River? Did it feel different than landing on a hard surface runway? And do you have a seaplane rating?

JS: I don't have a seaplane rating. Surprisingly, it wasn't that bad. I understand that in back of the cabin, it was bad. But up in the cockpit, we kinda just skipped on the runway and it just kinda settled in, and water came over the windshield, and I was thrown forward in my shoulder harness, but not particularly violently. I just remember moving forward, but it wasn't like I had any bruises or anything from the shoulder harnesses, and I'm sure it wasn't even close to being that bad. And then the airplane kind of bobbed back up, and as you probably saw from the pictures, the cockpit was way up out of the water and seemed to be floating there and perfectly stable, like a boat.

DW: As it should be, right?

JS: Yeah, yeah, everybody was surprised that it floats….even Airbus. Obviously, no one has ever done this before.

DW: Now, the airplane has come to a rest. Tell me what happened from that point on…what you did. In fact, before we go there, I want to ask you, did you brace for impact, and how do you brace as a crew member of an airliner for impact, if you do?

JS: No, we don't do that, but we have five-point shoulder harnesses up on our seats, which obviously, the people in the back have a car-like seat belt. So we do not have any procedure to brace for an impact.

DW: So, the airplane has come to a halt. What do you and Sully do… what's the first thing you guys do?

JS: Sully has to command an evacuation, and we don't have any electrical power at that point. So he had to open the door and say, *"evacuate!"* I was doing an evacuation checklist for a while afterwards. By the time I actually left the cockpit, half of the passengers had already left the airplane. They were enthusiastic about getting off the airplane. As you saw in some of the pictures, some of them just threw the emergency exit doors off and walked out onto the wings, and we had the escape slides on the front of the airplane, which are actual rafts. U.S. Airways has three different models of Airbus aircraft, and the 320 is the only one that is certified for extended (flight) over water, which means you can be 400 miles off shore. The escape slides double as rafts on those airplanes. They don't on the 319s and 321s. So it (A320) was the ideal airplane for this to happen on from that perspective. But I went back there, and the passengers were getting off the airplane just fine, but they were not taking any life vests with them because they are underneath the seats and of course no one was paying attention when the flight attendants were going through their announcements to know that's where they were. So I was in the back of the cabin getting life vests and these seat cushions, and tossing them out to the people on the wing so they could put them on. And I did that for some period of time. I don't really remember how long. After a while, there was no one left in the airplane and I was still doing it, and Sully came back and we were the only people left, and we were the only people left for a while, so he said, *"let's get out of here,"* and we did.

DW: I understand from one flight attendant back in the airplane, because one passenger tried to get out the rear exit door, that there was water coming into the cabin, and there was quite a bit of water still coming in when the flight attendant left. How many feet of water was there, and did you and Sully walk up and down the isle, but how far back did you go? Did you go back all the way to the tail?

JS: No, I didn't. I went back probably two-thirds of the way. I think probably when all the people rushed back to the tail, the tail sunk into the water. But once they got off the airplane, it kind of came back out, because it wasn't that deep in the back.

DW:: How badly damaged was the under-belly of the airplane? My understanding is that Airbus uses

a thinner aluminum than a Boeing aircraft, and I understand that some of that ripped off. Is that true?

JS: Well, all I know is what I've seen in the pictures, which anyone could have seen and frankly, there was a lot more damage than I would have thought having been there, living through the impact on the water. I was surprised how torn up the airplane was.

DW: How old was N106US?

JS: Actually, I don't know.

DW: We can look that up. Now, everyone has been rescued, you guys get on shore, all of your passengers are safe and your crew is safe, where did you go after that?

JS: You know, I don't think they knew what to do with us, because we were probably on that ferry dock for a couple of hours, and there were more police there than passengers and crew. Eight of our passengers actually got off at the ferry dock, went out to the street, hailed a cab back to LaGuardia, and got on the next flight to Charlotte, surprisingly enough. The rest of them were just milling about with Red Cross blankets on…I suppose we were there probably for a good 2 hours, and somebody decided that we absolutely had to go to the hospital, even though only one of our crew, Doreen, was injured and was taken to the hospital long before that. So we went to the hospital and they took our blood pressure and all of our vitals to check us in, and then they didn't know quite what to do with us, because no one was but a little bit wet. So we sat around there for another couple of hours and they decided to check us out, so they had to take all of our vitals again, which they had just done, because apparently it is a procedure they have to do with a check in and a check out. And then we went to the hotel that we were secluded in so we could stay away from the press.

DW: Was it a nice hotel?

JS: It was a Marriott.

DW: Let's give them a plug. I heard a story that someone ran into Sully at a café drinking a cup of coffee after the incident happened. And by the way, I refer to this as an incident and not an accident. But whatever.

JS: I don't really know anything about that. Do you mean a passenger ran into Sully?

DW: Not a passenger. Maybe the owner of the café, and Sully was said to be just sitting there, drinking a cup of coffee. We should really call Sully and ask if this actually happened, because a lot of rumors can start. He was supposedly drinking a cup of coffee and very calm, as he has been throughout this entire ordeal, as you have too, and I commend you for this. If he was, he was probably just trying to gather his wits and figure what to do next. But as you said, you had a couple of hours in which you were sitting there on the shoreline. But were you two together for that whole period of time.

JS: Oh yeah. We were together the whole time.

DW: Well, then, it never happened.

JS: I assume that someone recognized him…I assume that happened in the hotel. I don't think anybody knew who we were at that point.

DW: Well, we all know who you are now, Jeff. Now, as far as officials go, you said the police were there… the rescue people were there. At what point did the pilot union step in, and the FAA, and NTSB, and who was first?

JS: The NTSB and the FAA, we don't actually see until we give our testimony. As it turns out, one of the pilots – we actually have a LaGuardia base – and one of the reps for the LaGuardia base actually lives in Manhattan, so within 45 minutes, he was there and trying to coordinate things with the police. And by the time we got to the hospital, quite a few people had shown up by that point because there are standing committees, so whenever anything like this happens, everyone drops what they are doing, and gets on a flight – in this case, to New York City – and by 3-4 hours later, there were already six or seven union representatives, a lawyer had flown up from Charlotte….I was thinking, how did they get there so fast. But I guess they got on the next flight and got up there. By that evening, our accident investigation teams had shown up; and our critical response team, which is specially trained should we have an accident…they were there. They basically tell you, *"this is what is going to happen to you."* When we got to the hotel, they spent about 15 minutes with us, and said, *"you are not going to sleep tonight… you probably won't sleep tomorrow night…maybe after that, you will sleep an hour or two and you will wake up and relive the whole thing in your mind…you won't be able to turn your mind off…you will be exhausted...over time, it will get better…over time, you might actually remember details that you have forgotten now, because your mind has blocked them out."* They were there the whole time we were there if we needed to talk to somebody. They had further meetings with us later, but they are actually trained to help you get passed the post dramatic shock, is what it is. Any time you are in an accident, that is what you are going to suffer from.

DW: Did you and Sully and the rest of the crew suffer from Post Traumatic Syndrome?

JS: I don't know about the passengers, because we didn't have a lot of contact with them at that point. But all of us did. No one slept, probably for the first three days that we were there. I know that I didn't want to watch TV…I didn't want to sit around in my room, so I was out walking around New York City at 2:00 and 3:00 a.m., in the winter, just for something to do.

DW: You also said that you didn't want to watch TV, and apparently Sully felt the same way?

JS: I don't know if he was or was not. I just know that I didn't want to see anything about it.

DW: But you were also sequestered, and you were off in a private area. And you just knew that you landed in the Hudson River, but you didn't know what was going on nationally, apparently.

JS: That's true. We had no idea how this was being perceived. I mean, we're thinking we did this horrible thing, and we have this NTSB testimony coming up, and we are suffering from post traumatic shock; we had no idea how it was being perceived nationally. And some of our union guys – we would see them down at the restaurant or lobby – and they said that you have no idea how this is being played out in the press. And of course my initial reaction was, *"oh, it must be bad the way they phrased it,"* and they said, *"no, they are making heroes out of you guys."* (My Response): *"What, heroes? We just destroyed an airplane in the Hudson River."*

DW: You just saved 155 lives.

JS: Well, I suppose that's true, but as a pilot, you are focusing on the fact that if you didn't get it back to a gate, you obviously didn't do your full job. I think both of us felt that way at the time.

DW: What were some of the questions the NTSB investigators, or the FAA, asked you, and who asked you the questions first, the FAA or NTSB?

JS: The way it is set up, it is the NTSB's investigation, and they are not looking at putting you in jail. They are looking to find out what happened to prevent it from happening in the future. They have eight standing committees: powerplant, operations, human factors…there's a number of them anyways. They have a main investigator and he will basically get the story from you, and ask some questions – it takes about an hour – and then each committee has one member that does the actual interrogation of us, and they will have a number of questions to ask themselves; and there is also one member of the FAA there. My testimony took about 2 ½ hours, and maybe an hour or more with the main investigator telling the story. And then the human factors portion. They said, *"Let's start out with the trip: when did you start, how much sleep did you get that night, did you eat anything,"* and going through, basically creating a time line, seeing if you were tired or exhausted, or if you hadn't eaten anything that day, to see if that would have any impact on it. Of course the operations people were asking, *"Well, what did you do? You did this checklist…let's go through the checklist."* The FAA person was pretty much asking about the checklist as well. *"What did you do, why did you do this?"* That's pretty much what it entailed.

DW: Did you feel uncomfortable during any of these question periods that you had with the FAA and NTSB?

JS: Not really. They know that if it is a confrontational situation, they are not going to get the information they want, so they try to make it as comfortable as possible. If they are hanging a light bulb over your nose, you are probably not likely to tell them the full story, for instance. The main goal here is to find what happened, and make sure it doesn't happen again. It's not that the main goal is to throw you in jail.

DW: You stated on the David Letterman Show that you have had four engine failures before, and Sully never had one...this was his first time. Did all of these engine failures occur while flying an airliner or general aviation aircraft? What was the nature of each engine failure in the past?

JS: I guess they would all be considered airliners, because my first was on a piston Convair – a long, long time ago. And then I had an engine failure on a DC-9, while with U.S. Air, but that was probably 15 years ago; and here I got two with one swoop on the Airbus, so I guess I have had a total of four.

DW: So on your next airplane, you will have four stars on the fuselage?

JS: I suppose that's what you would have. Four propellers!

DW: What recommendations or precautions can a pilot or mechanic take to ensure that they reduce the risk of an engine failure? Obviously with U.S. Airways, you have top mechanics, you guys are very experienced pilots, and you are going to do a thorough preflight and everything else, but is there any advice you can give to fellow pilots to try and avoid an engine failure?

JS: I guess, except for my Convair engine failure, I wouldn't say that the other ones were really mechanically related, so it's like this: what can you do about hitting geese that are flying along? There really isn't anything you can do.

DW: My experience has been that birds try to avoid aircraft, especially if you have your landing lights on, and you had your landing lights on and your strobes and everything else, so maybe they were trying to avoid (the aircraft). Is that your experience, too?

JS: Oftentimes you see them, they dive at the ground, when they get close to you, but obviously these birds didn't or they didn't care.

DW: It was reported in the media that this particular aircraft had engine problems in the past. What do you know about that?

JS: I know what I've read what the media has been reporting, and you have to remember that I almost don't have any more information than you do about this incident, except that I was there when it happened. But the fact that it had a compression failure the day before, or two or three days before, that was fixed, you know, frankly using my experience and knowing what goes on, the way I would explain it, let's say, your car… you start up your car one day and it's running really rough, and you take it to the shop and they say that one of the spark plugs' electrodes is gone and it's dead, so they replace the spark plug and the car runs fine, and you drive it off and two days later, you get rear-ended at a stop sign. The fact that your spark plug was bad two days before, then it was fixed, had nothing to do with being rear-ended at the stop sign, and that's really the case here.

DW: Yeah, the engines were running just fine prior to impact with the geese, so there was nothing wrong with them.

JS: The way they repaired them is that they changed the temperature probe. The engine had a compressor stall, apparently, and they changed a temperature probe, which is used by the computers to determine what the engine speed, what the fuel/mixture should be, and they fixed that, and it was running just fine after that.

DW: How has this experience changed your life, and your perspective on life?

JS: I guess it hasn't changed it a lot. I mean, I'm not 25 years old, so you are pretty much the person you are going to be at this point. Certainly I got to do a lot of interesting things in the last month or so that most people will never have the opportunity to do. I think the only thing I would take away from it is that maybe it is a renewed understanding that being an airline pilot is a pretty serious thing. It is a serious job for serious people. I guess that has been brought home to me.

DW: How has the incident affected your wife, Barbara, and your children; and by the way, how many children do you have and how old are they?

JS: I have three kids: they're 17, 15, and 12. They didn't even really know about it until I called them on the phone, so they knew that I was okay right from the start. So, I wouldn't say that it has really affected them at all, except that my son was big man on campus when he got to go to the Super Bowl and get his picture taken with Adam Sandler. He was flashing that all around school for the next day or two. But it really hasn't had any long-term effect on them.

DW: I met your wife, Barbara, the day after the accident and she seemed cool, calm and collected, and very thankful that everything worked out just fine. Do you think this incident has received too much attention or not enough, or just the right amount?

JS: Way too much attention, for what it was. We are surprised that it received any attention outside the industry, and certainly not what it's gotten. I think it is a fluke…people wanted a good news story and they made it into more than it was…that's all I can really say about it. It has gotten way too much attention.

DW: Who came up with the title, "Miracle On The Hudson?"

JS: It was the governor of New York State (David Paterson). While we were still on the ferry dock, actually Mayor (Michael) Bloomberg and he had shown up and they were doing a press conference and he coined the term there, and it sort of took off from there, I guess.

DW: Do you think it was a "miracle," or do you feel that it is more attributed to "pilot skill" that it all turned out all good, and safe and wonderful?

JS: What we have said all along is that there are a lot of people that deserve a lot of credit for this, and I'm not just saying Sully and I. The flight attendants – Sheila, Doreen and Donna – they were the actual ones that evacuated the airplane… the passengers themselves, who very orderly lined up, did what they had to do; no one was pushing or shoving; no one was saying "me first;" they helped each other out – they deserve as much credit as anybody else. And of course, we wouldn't have been no where – this was freezing cold water in the middle of the Hudson River – had it not been for the boats that immediately came to our aid… the captains and crews of those boats, and the first responders who met us when we got to the ferry dock. There are a lot of people that deserve a lot of credit for this.

DW: I'm glad to hear you say that. It was really a team effort. I was very impressed too, with the boat captains and the crew members, and how well trained they were. And they go through training for this sort of thing quite often, but probably not for an airliner, or do they?

JS: Not for an airliner, but I found all this out just in the course of this incident that they actually have to train once a month in some capacity for pulling people out of the water in just this circumstance.

DW: Fantastic! They are to be very much commended. Do you think people will be talking about the "Miracle on the Hudson" for quite some time, or do you think it is going to be forgotten, that it will just be a chapter in history…what's your feeling on that?

JS: I think it has already been pretty much forgotten. Certainly by another week or so, it will be. So yeah, it will be just a moment in history. As I said all along, I think my 15 minutes of fame is just about over here.

DW: I heard you and Sully mention that you were able to handle the situation the way you did because

(of your experience)...I mean, throughout your career…you have over 20,000 hours and Sully has a little bit less than that, apparently. He has a military background and you have strictly a general aviation background, isn't that correct?

JS: Yes, that is correct.

DW: You have a lot of experience behind you…20,000 hours. I can't even imagine ever having 20,000 hours of flying time, because you go to work every day and hop in the cockpit, and you fly all of the time. I fly once a week, for business or for pleasure. This kind of gets into another area…it's called the "Age 60 Rule," and you are probably quite familiar with that, aren't you?

JS: Oh, yes, we don't have an "Age 60 Rule" any more. We have an "Age 65 Rule," now.

DW: Right, and that's a great thing. But because of the experience required to handle this situation, as compared with a "rooky" airline pilot that may have had most of his flight training done on a computer, and all of a sudden he gets thrown into the right seat, do you feel that it is of benefit to the general public to have people with experience over the age of 60 in that cockpit?

JS: I think, probably, people can fly past 60 more now than they could when I was first hired. I know I was always amazed when I was first hired because I was in my 20s, but my dad was 60 at the time, and I looked around at the crews and they were just about ready to retire, and they looked like they were 20 years older than my dad. But I think life was a lot harder back then. Now people don't smoke, they don't drink, people just seem to be a lot more aware…I think that they can fly past 60 more now than probably they could 20 years ago. I guess it would be my hope and belief that anyone in that cockpit and in our seats would have done pretty much the same thing on that day. We are highly trained professionals…that's what airline pilots are. And I just feel that anyone would have accomplished the same things we had done.

DW: When do you expect to get back flying again?

JS: I'm going to get a couple of simulator sessions, because I hardly flew the airplane before this, and now it's been 5 weeks. But I'm planning to be back flying my trip that goes out in mid-March.

DW: Where does U.S. Airways have its sim flight training center?

JS: They have training centers in Charlotte and Phoenix, and I work with the Charlotte one.

DW: Jeff, you have been interviewed by Katie Couric, David Letterman, Larry King, and now *Midwest Flyer Magazine*. What's next on your agenda?

JS: Well, I actually have nothing on my agenda. Well, I guess I do…I have to testify before Congress for a Congressional Subcommittee next Tuesday, so I guess that's pretty big.

DW: Tell me about that testimony. What are you planning on telling them?

JS: At this point, I guess I really don't know what it's going to be about. Apparently, it's meet the Congressman, tell the story a little bit, get pictures taken with us…obviously, they don't actually make policy at that level. It's the FAA that makes all policy. The NTSB can suggest policy. But at that level, it is not like they will mandate two-engine failure training.

DW: Do you know if you are going to be meeting with Representative Jim Oberstar from Minnesota, by chance?

JS: I understand he is part of the committee, and we will probably meet him while we are there.

DW: He is a really good guy, and from what I know of him, and what he has done for general aviation and the airline industry, you would think the guy was a pilot. But I just found out this year that he's not.

JS: Certainly, you've heard his name. I think I've heard his name throughout my entire career. He has been an aviation advocate obviously for decades.

DW: Now, last night you called me and said that you just met with the Dane County Board here in Madison, Wisconsin, and you met the airport director, Brad Livingston, and you are going to be doing something right after our interview with Brad. Tell us about that.

JS: He asked me to come over, and I think he wants to introduce me

to the firemen there, and to the airport employees – the first responders that they have available at the airport. But I don't know other than that what exactly it is going to entail.

DW: That should be interesting. Now there's another invitation that I even have on my list…that you have been invited to EAA AirVenture (Oshkosh, Wisconsin) this summer, July 27 thru August 2. What do you expect to do during EAA AirVenture?

JS: I have a whole host of activities that Tom Poberezny has set up. One of the things he has set up, and a new one that he added yesterday, was apparently Jet Blue flys an Airbus there for promotional purposes, and he wanted me to basically tell my story in front of the Airbus. I know what is going to be the highpoint for me…I kind of hinted that I wouldn't mind getting a ride in a P-51 (Mustang), and he said that I can plan on a ride in a P-51. So that's gong to be the highlight of my decade, I can tell you that.

DW: So you suggested, or you asked Tom about riding in a P-51, and he said, *"yeah, I'll make it happen?"*

JS: Yup, that's pretty much the way it was. In an email I asked him if there would be any way I could get a ride in a P-51, and he emailed back, *"Plan on a ride in a P-51!"*

DW: That's great! I'm sure he is looking forward to having you up there, and all of the convention guests are going to look forward to it as well.

DW: Last question…. Where is your Airbus now, and where do you think it will end up?

JS: I have no idea. You emailed me those pictures of it passing through Rutherford, New Jersey, and that's the first I knew that it left whatever site it was (at). I really know nothing more about what's happened since then than you do.

DW: Jeff, it's been wonderful having you here this morning. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview…you are speaking with general aviation pilots…any final comments?

JS: I think I would just like to say what we have been saying all along – everybody associated (with this incident) did their jobs, and (it) had a positive outcome because of that…directly because of that. Sully and I, flight attendants, passengers, the first responders, the people that came to save us…that's the real story here, is that everybody did their jobs.

DW: And with that, we will end our conversation with Jeff Skiles of Oregon, Wisconsin, U.S. Airways First Officer, who flew the Airbus 320, N106US, Flight 1549, on January 15, 2009, that landed successfully in the Hudson River. Thank you, Jeff.

JS: Thank you. ❑

Listen To The Entire Podcast Of This Interview With U.S. Airways First Officer Jeff Skiles On The Midwest Flyer Magazine Website – www.midwestflyer.com

Wisconsin Aviation Conference

Jeff Skiles Invited To Speak At 54th Annual Wisconsin Aviation Conference

EAU CLAIRE, WIS. – U.S. Airways First Officer Jeff Skiles of Flight 1549 fame is scheduled to be the featured speaker at the Wisconsin Aviation Conference, May 4-6, at the Ramada Convention Center in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

The complete conference agenda, hotel information and registration forms are posted on the Wisconsin Airport Management Association website: www.wiama.org. Registration is $65 and includes all meals, receptions and events.

A reception and golf tournament will be held preceding the conference at Wild Ridge Golf Course, and a sporting clay shoot will be held at the Whispering Emerald Ridge Game Farm.

For additional information, contact Pete Drahn at 715-358-2802, or email daredem@verizon.net.

For hotel reservations, contact the Ramada Convention Center at 800-950- 6121 or 715-835-6121.

The Wisconsin Aviation Conference is cosponsored by the Wisconsin Airport Management Association, Wisconsin Aviation Trades Association, and Wisconsin Business Aviation Association. ❑

Iowa Aviation Conference

Acting Associate FAA Administrator-Airports To Be Featured At Iowa Aviation Conference

WEST DES MOINES, IOWA – The Iowa Aviation Conference, sponsored by the Iowa DOT Office of Aviation and the Iowa Public Airports Association, will be held at the West Des Moines Sheraton Hotel, April 22-23.

Confirmed speakers will include Kate Lang, Acting Associate Administrator, FAA Office of Airports (FAA Headquarters); Chris Blum, Administrator, FAA Central Region; Henry Ogrodzinski, President/CEO, National Association of State Aviation Officials (NASAO); James Coyne, President/CEO, National Air Transportation Association (NATA); Barb Fritsche, specialist on Economic Impact of Airports and Aviation, Wilbur Smith Associates; and Jim Johnson, Manager, FAA Central Region Airports Division.

The conference will include a "pilot safety seminar" beginning at 7:00 pm on Wednesday, April 22. Speakers will include Paul Berge (Indianola), Shane VandeVoort (Pella), and Chris Manthe (FAASTeam). There is no charge to attend the pilot safety seminar. (www.iowaairports.org/conference/)

Contact Sue at 515-727-0667 for registration. ❑