

Wildland Fireline Leadership Challenge

US Airways Flight 1549—Competent Courage *Real-Life Case Study*

Few will forget events that unfolded on the waters of the Hudson River on January 15, 2009, when Captain Chesley B. “Sully” Sullenberger III safely landed his US Airways Flight 1549 jet on the Hudson River with no loss of life and few injuries.

This online case study is intended to share a successful true story of courage under fire and how experience plays a vital part in how individuals act and react under pressure. Feel free to lead yourself through this case study or partner up with other students of fire or wildland fire mentors.

Students should watch the videos and read the articles keeping in mind that the accuracy of the information has not been validated. The purpose of this case study is not to dispute accuracy but to analyze and synthesize information that can be applied to your personal leadership development as a wildland firefighter.

(Disclaimer: Some of the clips below may become outdated and unavailable. If you find an inactive link, please notify the Leadership in Cinema coordinator at leadership_feedback@nifc.blm. Realize that some videos may be blocked due to local IT security settings.)

Video Clips to Watch

- 1) Watch *I Was Sure I Could Do It* (a 60 Minutes interview of Captain Sullenberger by Katie Couric, February 8, 2009; the transcript is also available) at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/02/08/60minutes/main4783580.shtml>
- 2) Watch *Saving Flight 1549* (a graphical representation of crash with air traffic control radio communications with Flight 1549. CBS News, February 5, 2009) at <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=4777243n>
- 3) Watch *Saving 155 Lives* (a 60 Minutes interview with the flight crew of Flight 1549 by Katie Couric, February 8, 2009; the transcript is also available) at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/02/08/60minutes/main4783586.shtml?source=related_story
- 4) Review other items of interest found on the *Miracle on the Hudson* CBS Interactive Inc. website at http://www.cbsnews.com/elements/2009/01/16/in_depth_us/interactivehomemenu4726646.shtml

Articles to Read

Read the following articles:

- 1) *6 Lessons on Decision-Making from Captain Sully*. Lamar Hamilton blog site. February, 16, 2009. <http://www.lamarhamilton.com/2009/02/16/6-lessons-on-decision-making-from-captain-sully/>.
- 2) *Competent Courage from an American Hero*. Maness, Tom. Leadership Business blog site. January 20, 2009. <http://leaderbusiness.blogspot.com/2009/01/competent-courage-from-american-hero.html>.
- 3) *How Sullenberger Really Saved US Airways Flight 1549*. Newman, Rick. US News blog. March 10, 2009. <http://www.usnews.com/blogs/flowchart/2009/2/3/how-sullenberger-really-saved-us-airways-flight-1549.html>.
- 4) *Lessons from Flight 1549*, an article by John Hollon in Workforce Management at <http://www.workforce.com/section/09/feature/26/21/15/index.html>.

Questions to Answer

From the videos you have watched and the articles you read, answer or discuss in groups the following questions:

- 1) What type of leader was Captain Sullenberger? What did he do that contributed to his successful landing?
- 2) What Wildland Fire Values and Principles did he exhibit during this crisis?
- 3) What lessons learned from this actual event can be applied to fighting wildfire?
- 4) How did the flight crew's team cohesiveness affect the outcome of this event?
- 5) How did multi-agency cooperation "make or break" the rescue of passengers?

How is this incident similar to experiences you have had in your wildland firefighting career?