



Fly by Wire: The Geese, the Glide, the Miracle on the Hudson

By William Langewiesche

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In *Fly by Wire*, one of America's greatest journalists takes us on a "fascinating" (*The New York Times*) and sometimes humorous journey into the rapidly changing aviation industry. Langewiesche concisely and artfully renders forty years of history in the field by examining the financial problems, the unions, and ultimately the recent advances in technology. And he finds that aviation safety is a field in which machine has now surpassed man, but man still manages to find ways -- hubris, ineptitude -- to cause accidents. Advances such as fly by wire suggest that in some cases it may prove best to cede authority to the machines, even if it means questioning our assumptions about human beings and heroism in the process.

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Fly by Wire: The Geese, the Glide, the Miracle on the Hudson By William Langewiesche **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Much more than a straight retelling of U.S. Airways flight 1549's miraculous landing on the Hudson, Langewiesche's latest uses the story—and the heroism of pilots Chesley Sullenberger and Jeffrey Skiles—as a lens through which to examine the advances in and flaws of modern air travel and piloting. David Drummond delivers a solid reading, relaying the detail-laden text—the backstories of the pilots, the technical information, the gripping blow-by-blow—with clarity and careful pacing. A subtle performance that enhances and never overwhelms the material. *A Farrar, Straus & Giroux hardcover (Reviews, Nov. 9). (Jan.)* Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

Heroics take a backseat to analysis in this account of the January 2009 Hudson River ditching by an airliner disabled by a collision with birds. Without diminishing the flying feat of pilot Chesley Sullenberger, Langewiesche accentuates the attributes of the plane he flew, the Airbus A320. The first fly-by-wire passenger airliner, so called because the plane's control surfaces move by electronic command, not by direct mechanical or hydraulic linkages, the A320 also had a stall-proof design feature that Langewiesche says contributed to the successful outcome of the accident. To explain these technological matters, which the adulation bestowed on Sullenberger perhaps obscured, Langewiesche took a field trip to France to interview the brains behind the fly-by-wire innovation. Amid his interview with Bernard Ziegler, Langewiesche declaims on several airliner accidents—one involving a loss of engine power similar to Sullenberger's flight—that illustrate the author's theme: pilots' attitudes toward, and aptitude with, the computerized cockpit. Ziegler's engineering philosophy, which is to make commercial flying idiot-proof, is contrasted with pilots' attitudes, since they tend to resent technology that trumps their expertise. Langewiesche synthesizes everything into a breathtaking narrative of the now-famous landing in the Hudson. In contrast with Sullenberger's memoir, *Highest Duty* (2009), this work's discernment of underlying issues contributes depth to the feel-good story --Gilbert Taylor

Review

"If you think you know the story of Chesley Sullenberger's miraculous ditching of US Airways flight 1549 from the major media coverage, think again. In this short, tightly written yet expansive book, *Vanity Fair* correspondent Langewiesche (*The Atomic Bazaar*) weaves a page-turning narrative of the ill-fated, three-minute flight, crippled by a bird strike, with several finely honed elements of backstory (the day-to-day lives of airline personnel including Capt. "Sully" Sullenberger and his crew, an errant flock of geese, and a controversial French-built airplane) into a masterpiece of modern journalism. While most media coverage of the event has focused on Sullenberger's heroic actions, dubbing it the "Miracle on the Hudson," Langewiesche eschews such hyperbole and explores every detail of the day's fateful events. Sullenberger and his copilot, Jeffrey Skiles, do come off as heroic, but more for what they did not do--they did not panic, and they did not interfere with the Airbus A320's remarkable computer system controlling the airplane's glide into the Hudson. Just before impact, however, Sullenberger raised the airplane's nose gently, an action that bought time for all the passengers to escape the frigid waters. The sections of the book dealing with the flight itself are soberly rendered, yet gripping. But it is the backstory--including the economic, political, and engineering stories behind the airplane itself--that make this book a true achievement. In this expertly researched book, rendered in spare, pitch-perfect prose, Langewiesche has turned a feel-good tabloid story into an enduring work of literature." *?Publishers Weekly*

“The flight lasted for not much more time than it will take you to read this review. A minute and a half after takeoff, the US Airways jet engines ingested several geese and failed. A little over three minutes later, Capt. Chesley 'Sully' Sullenberger gracefully planted the Airbus 320 in the Hudson River, and everyone was rescued.

A short tale to hang an entire book on, but William Langewiesche is the best man for the job. "Fly by Wire: The Geese, the Glide, the Miracle on the Hudson" isn't a hero's story, with inspirational details from Sullenberger's life. Instead, Langewiesche gives us an insightful analysis of the changing world of commercial aviation.

As an author, Vanity Fair magazine editor and pilot, Langewiesche knows this territory well, and he approaches it with a sense of humor. There's a cleverly researched chapter about goose behavior near airports, including an explanation of the avian term "cluster-flocking." Langewiesche relies on cockpit transcripts, interviews and aircraft systems data to flesh out the minutest details surrounding the brief flight. You'll learn what Sullenberger ate for breakfast that morning and what movie his co-pilot watched the night before.” ?Phaedre Hise, *San Francisco Chronicle*

“A gripping, frightening and essential story.” ?John Freeman, *The Denver Post*, on *The Atomic Bazaar*

“One need read only the first three pages of *The Atomic Bazaar* to be reminded of William Langewiesche's formidable talent as a journalist whose cool, precise and economical reporting is harnessed to an invigorating moral and intellectual perspective on the world he describes . . . An important book.” ?Jonathan Raban, *The New York Times Book Review*, on *The Atomic Bazaar*

“Astonishing . . . As [Langewiesche] demonstrates time and time again in this brave, often electrifying book, [the sea] is a world that is both new and very old, and we ignore it at our peril.” ?Nathaniel Philbrick, *The New York Times Book Review*, on *The Outlaw Sea*

“William Langewiesche's enthralling study of the epidemic disorder of our oceans is hard to put down. His prose flows seamlessly and elegantly, effortlessly integrating investigative reporting, political analysis, travel writing and even film criticism.” ?Jesse Berrett, *San Francisco Chronicle Book Review*, on *The Outlaw Sea*

“Slim but powerful . . . One of the gifts of *American Ground* [is] truth, unclouded by sentiment. This book's other gift is its capacity to surprise: it is a work of original reporting, and its pages are filled with astonishing observations.” ?Jeffrey Goldberg, *The New York Times Book Review*, on *American Ground*

“Extraordinary . . . An amazing piece of journalism, full of colorful characters and astonishing scenes.” ?Peter Carlson, *The Washington Post*, on *American Ground*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

John McCraw:

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Paula Daniels:

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Roy Rogers:

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