

SULLY – Film at CONCA VERDE on 09.01.17 - Talk by Peter Anderson

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The film

Sully (also known as *Sully: Miracle on the Hudson*) is a 2016 American biographical drama film directed by Clint Eastwood and written by Todd Komarnicki, based on the autobiography *Highest Duty* by Chesley Sullenberger and Jeffrey Zaslow. The film stars Tom Hanks as Sullenberger, with Aaron Eckhart, Laura Linney, Anna Gunn, Autumn Reeser, Holt McCallany, Jamey Sheridan, and Jerry Ferrara in supporting roles. The film follows Sullenberger's January 2009 emergency landing of US Airways Flight 1549 on the Hudson River, in which all 155 passengers and crew survived with only minor injuries, and the subsequent publicity and investigation.

Sully premiered at the 43rd Annual Telluride Film Festival on September 2, 2016, and was released in the United States by Warner Bros. on September 9, 2016, in conventional and IMAX theaters. The film received positive reviews from critics and has grossed over \$234 million worldwide, but created controversy by its portrayal of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). The film was chosen by American Film Institute as one of the top ten films of 2016.

Plot

On January 15, 2009, US Airways pilots Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger and First Officer Jeff Skiles board US Airways Flight 1549 from LaGuardia Airport to Charlotte Douglas International Airport. Three minutes into the flight, at an approximate altitude of 2,800 feet (approx. 850 m), the Airbus A320 strikes a flock of birds, disabling both engines. Without engine power and judging themselves unable to reach nearby airports (Teterboro Airport being the closest), Sully ditches the aircraft on the Hudson River. The crew and passengers evacuate without casualty. The press and public hail Sullenberger a hero, but the incident leaves him with PTSD, and he repeatedly imagines the plane crashing into a building. (**Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is a mental disorder that can develop after a person is exposed to a traumatic event, such as sexual assault, warfare, traffic collisions, or other threats on a person's life. Symptoms may include disturbing thoughts, feelings, or dreams related to the events, mental or physical distress to trauma-related cues, attempts to avoid trauma-related cues, alterations in how a person thinks and feels, and increased arousal. These symptoms last for more than a month after the event. Young children are less likely to show distress but instead may express their memories through play. Those with PTSD are at a higher risk of suicide.)

Sully learns that preliminary data from ACARS suggest that the port engine was still running at idle power. Theoretically, this would have left him with enough power to return to LaGuardia or land at Teterboro. The National Transportation Safety Board claims that several confidential computerized simulations show the plane could have landed safely at either airport with no engines. Sully, however, insists that he lost both engines, which left him without sufficient time, speed, or altitude to land safely at any airport.

Sully realizes that the Board believes the accident may have been pilot error, which would end his career. He arranges to have the simulations rerun with live pilots, and the results are relayed to the public hearing. Both simulations result in successful landings, one at each airport. Sully argues that they are unrealistic because the pilots knew in advance of the situation they would face and of the suggested emergency action, and were able to practice the scenario several times. The board accepts that in real life the pilots would have taken some time to react and run emergency checks before deciding to divert the plane.

The two simulations are rerun and relayed to the hearing, this time allowing a 35-second pause before the plane is diverted. The simulated diversion to LaGuardia ends with the plane landing short of the runway, and to Teterboro with a crash into buildings before the airport. The board announces that analysis of the port engine, now recovered from the river, confirms Sully's account that it was disabled by the bird strikes. The board concludes that Sullenberger acted correctly in selecting the best of the options available to him, which in the event saved the lives of everyone aboard.

The reviews

Sully received positive reviews from critics. On Rotten Tomatoes the film has an approval rating of 85% based on 271 reviews with an average rating of 7.2/10. The site's critical consensus reads, "As comfortably workmanlike as its protagonist, *Sully* makes solid use of typically superlative work from its star and director to deliver a quietly stirring tribute to an everyday hero." On Metacritic, the film has a score of 74 out of 100 based on 46 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews". Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A" on an A+ to F scale.

Peter Debruge of *Variety* gave the film a positive review, praising Hanks and saying, "This is Hanks' show, and he delivers a typically strong performance, quickly allowing us to forget that we're watching an actor. With his snowy white hair and

moustache to match, Hanks conveys a man confident in his abilities, yet humble in his actions, which could also be said of Eastwood as a director." IGN reviewer Simon Thompson awarded 9/10, writing: "*Sully* is a beautifully balanced, classily nuanced and hugely engaging film that avoids all the clichéd pitfalls it could have slipped into. Tom Hanks gives one of the best performances of his career and Clint Eastwood's direction is beautiful and rich. It's not just a great movie, *Sully* is one of the best pieces of cinema that a major Hollywood studio has released this year." Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* praised both the film and Eastwood's direction, saying the film is "economical and solid, and generally low-key when it's not freaking you out."

Todd McCarthy of *The Hollywood Reporter* praised the film by calling it, "[A] vigorous and involving salute to professionalism and being good at your job". Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* praised the film by giving 3.5 out of 4 stars and wrote, "the movie earns your attention and respect by digging deep, by finding the fear and self-doubt inside a man who'd never accept being defined as a hero. It's an eye-opener." Richard Roeper of the *Chicago Sun-Times* awarded it 4 out of 4 stars, praising the film as "an absolute triumph" and saying that Hanks "delivers another in a long line of memorable, nomination-worthy performances."

In a negative review, John Anderson of *Time* wrote, "Inevitable is how *Sully* feels. That, and a little soggy, given that the storyline is rooted not in the few seconds of Sullenberger's defining act of heroism, but in the way his conscience, and the National Transportation Safety Board, plagued him in its aftermath."

Controversy

The film generated controversy for its depiction of the National Transportation Safety Board as antagonistic. In a promotional video preceding the release, Eastwood claimed that the NTSB had "railroaded" Sullenberger by "trying to paint the picture that he had done the wrong thing." After its release, NTSB investigators objected to their portrayal. Christine Negroni wrote in *The New York Times* that "the film's version of the inquiry veers from the official record in both tone and substance", depicting the investigators as "departing from standard protocol in airline accident inquiries" and "prosecutorial and closed-minded". NTSB lead investigator John Balzano disputed the depiction, saying that investigators "weren't out to embarrass anybody at all", and a former NTSB investigator expressed concern that moviegoers would take it as evidence of "government incompetence".

While flight simulations depicted in the film by NTSB characters showed that the airplane should have been landed at an airport, in the actual public hearing, Investigator-in-Charge Robert Bizon said that "These flight simulations revealed that a successful return to LaGuardia or a diversion to Teterboro Airport was not assured." After the film was released Bizon said:

I do not know why the writer and director chose to twist the role of the NTSB into such an inaccurate depiction. Their treatment of the NTSB went very far beyond cinematic license into simple mean-spirited dishonesty. The movie may actually be detrimental to aviation safety. Pilots involved in accidents will now expect harsh, unfair treatment by investigators.

Hanks told the *Associated Press* that Sullenberger had reviewed an early draft of the script, which identified NTSB investigators by their real names, and asked that these be removed. According to Hanks, Sullenberger felt that the real-life investigators "were not prosecutors" and it was not fair to associate them with changes in the story to depict "more of a prosecutorial process."

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The film show

This is the first film in English this year. The next film will also be in English – the title being I, DANIEL BLAKE and followed by the film in French LA FILLE INCONNUE. There will be a staggering 21 films altogether till summer – 18 in English, 1 in French, 1 in German and 1 in Spanish.

Enjoy the film!