1**) 30 Second Advantage Over the Whole World (1)**

On January 15, 2009, I sat at a caf&#x00E9; whose location is marked by the blue cross on the aeronautical chart shown here. As I worked on my brand new laptop, I noticed a curious sight over the roofs of waterfront condominiums: an airliner about half a mile north of me flew down the Hudson at the altitude of what looked like 500ft. Having <a href=../NewYorkFlyby/NewYorkFlyby.html>flown over the Hudson</a> myself (I have a private pilot license for single engine planes), I knew immediately that the plane was in trouble; airliners NEVER fly bellow 1300ft over the river, a space normally reserved for small planes and sightseeing helicopters (the “13” in the 70/13 fraction on the chart). After a few seconds of observation, I alerted the café’s customers that a plane crash was about to happen, most likely there would an explosion as well. Since the view of the river is obscured from the café’s location, two young fellows run towards the Hudson, a fifth of a mile away. I looked at my $1,800 laptop ... In a lapse of judgment resulting in a loss of time, I decided to quickly pack the laptop first, and then run to the river with the computer safely in my back pack. As I run, I expected to hear a thunder of an explosion. Strangely, it was not coming. When I reached the water, the plane was already on the river, a single ferry boat beside it. I did not see the landing ... <br>

2) **30 Second Advantage Over the Whole World (2)**

The phone camera I had with me was useless; the plane was &#x00BE; of a mile away and drifted down the river—too far for the camera’s low resolution. To get a reasonable one, I run back to my apartment, first reversing the fifth of a mile back to the caf&#x00E9, then up the 500ft cliff where I live. As a result, I took this and other pictures shown here about 10 minutes after the crash. It was a surreal spectacle; what you see on the picture is the full spatial extent of the drama—a circle of diameter no greater than 150 yards. Yet, throngs of people crowded both banks of the river for miles; especially so on the Jersey side where the rocky cliff offered far reaching views. A good hundred thousand must have observed the developments from the windows of their apartments or offices on both sides of the Hudson. TV, radio, and the internet brought the events instantly to the billions. On the one hand, the ice cold waters of the river kept the tragedy in full, unobstructed view. But, on the other, it also kept the curious at bay due to the river’s width of &#x2154; of a mile in that section; binoculars and telephotos were required to understand the situation. Wouldn’t the thousands of hungry cameras, eager to catch the littlest of developments, distort the happenings due to the shear disparity between the whole world of expectant rubbernecks, and the 150 yard circle that fed it? <br>

**3) 30 Second Advantage Over the Whole World (3)**

The time has come to clarify the title of this series. One conspicuous detail <em>missing</em> in the media coverage of the accident was the footage or pictures of the actual landing. After two days or so (of most likely frantic search), low quality Coast Guard’s 24/7 security videos surfaced showing a pier with a grainy silhouette of an airliner entering the top quarter of a static frame. While very valuable, the videos were too grainy to make out the plane’s wings, engines, or windows; the unclear smudge of the aircraft exited the frame at the moment of touchdown. The other few security videos were similarly lacking. &#x2666; How could it be that among the thousands upon thousands of people with an iphone camera in their pockets, not a single one of them made a clear picture of the landing? Most likely those who happened to be looking at the ailing Airbus A320 did not realize what they were seeing. In fact, thanks to my aeronautical knowledge, I might have been one of the very few who knew in advance that a major event was about to happen. Consistent with such moments’ rarity in my life was the length of the “head start” I was given: 30 seconds. <br>

4) **) 30 Second Advantage Over the Whole World (4)**

It is worth taking a second look at the aeronautical chart that starts this series. The red line depicts an approximate flight path of the US Airways’ flight 1549. It begins at LaGuardia Airport and reaches the Hudson River at which point, as we know, both engines of the plane were lost due to multiple bird strikes. The question mark indicates the terrible choice the pilot faced at that moment. On the one hand, the air-traffic controllers alerted him to Teterboro airport 8 nautical miles away where he could perform perhaps an emergency landing. Had the plane had enough altitude and speed, and managed to reach that airport’s runway without striking any building, there would have been no injuries; the landing could have even been comfortable. Had the speed and altitude been insufficient, however, everybody would have perished. The other alternative, on the other hand, was to land on the Hudson, in which case injuries were certain and deaths very likely. &#x2666; I believe that it would have been extremely difficult for an average person to choose that second option. The comfort of the previous hundreds of trouble-free flights would have whispered to their ears that despite the quiet engines, things were still ‘not so bad’; that following the path to Teterboro would have resulted in a gentle landing as it always had. To be able to make the decision Capt. Chesley B. ‘Sully’ Sullenberger made in a span of only a few seconds, a decision to actively choose guaranteed injuries and damage in the name of survival—that ability is a mark of highest distinction. A lifetime of training may not be enough to achieve it ...<br>

**5) 30 Second Advantage Over the Whole World (5)**

And so, the 30 second advantage I was given by the coincidence of my being at the right place at the right time resulted with “just” these pictures. What was needed, perhaps, was the ability to instantly abandon all the comfort one is so used to, and switch into an adrenaline filled, mortal danger handling mode. One had to do so, not on a sight of a raging bear, when instincts make them run for their life in a blink of an eye, but on the basis of a cold logical conclusion, with hardly any detail in the surroundings indicating a threat. In my situation, that meant dropping everything, including my brand new laptop, and running to the river like there was no tomorrow. Alas, I did not do that. It was the captain of the flight 1549 who did. Instantaneously switching into the crash landing mode, he saved the lives of everyone on board. &#x2666; But maybe I should not be so hard on myself; after all, my laptop has been serving me splendidly in the subsequent four years, even though I have almost run over it with my car on one occasion. In fact, these very words have been punched on that computer’s keyboard.<br> P.S. <strong>Challenge:</strong> except for the charts, there is a helicopter on every picture. Can you spot it?<br>

Below are the fragments of the letter I wrote to my family which was written on the day after the crash:

To be able to make the decision he made, two minutes after the take off,  within that little time is a mark of the highest mental proficiency.

I believe that an average person would not be able to make this kind of a choice even after a lifetime of training ...

Yes, you can "see" people on some of those picutres. "See" - meaning that you can barely recognize a silhouette of a person.

Comparison with the pictures in the press suggests that passengers have already been taken off the wings and those that one can make out on my pictures it either the crew or the rescuers. The former is quite possible (i.e. it's the crew). The press reported that the captain left the plane last. Could he be standing there? I don' know.

Returning to the captain. He refused to make any statements about the crash (and did say absolutely nothing). Based on what is known so far (not too much), I am VERY, VERY impressed by the decision he was able to make. I am attatching a picture of an aviation chart on which I marked the airport of origin (La Guardia (left circle)), the place where he landed (cross) and the possiblity he considered, the Teterboro airport (right circle).

The path of the flght I drew **is just my speculation** (I drew it before I saw the newspapers which had similar maps - by the way, the diagrams in different newspapers substantially disagreed!). However it does indicate what probably had happened.

I would imagine that the pilot had 15 seconds or so to make a decision - either 1) he flies to Teterboro  and if he does make it there everybody lives perhaps without a scratch  - but if he does not everybody dies, or 2)  or he lands on the river, in which case some casualties would most likely happen ...

To be able to make the decision he made, two minutes after the take off,  within that little time is a mark of the highest mental proficiency.

I believe that an average person would not be able to make this kind of a choice even after a lifetime of training ...

Jacek.

P.S. The accident affected my quite a bit (I lost one day). I returning now back to normal life ...

I will write soon.